Resilience of the Black Woman: Thriving Through Storytelling

Kimberly R. Miller
University of the Pacific

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Resilience of the Black Woman: Thriving Through Storytelling.
A Narrative Inquiry Study

By

Kimberly Miller

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Kimberly Miller

APPROVED BY:

Dissertation Advisor: Fred Estes, Ed.D.

Dissertation Co-Advisor: Laura Hallberg, Ed.D.

Committee Member: Kathy Hart, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Lisa Cooper-Wilkins, Ed.D.

Department Chair: Associate Dean, Benerd College: Laura Hallberg, Ed.D.

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By

Kimberly Miller

Dedication

      I dedicate this dissertation to my loving and supportive parents Kemp and Sally Miller, my amazing daughters Maggie and Carly, and my tribe of family and friends that have supported and challenged me to become the best version of myself.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge all the Black women that have inspired me to become the best version of myself through self-love and acceptance, by sharing their stories of overcoming adversity to thrive.

I also acknowledge my dissertation committee and fellow classmates for their support on this dissertation journey.

Resilience of the Black Woman: Thriving Through Storytelling.
A Narrative Inquiry Study

Abstract

By Kimberly Miller

University of the Pacific
2023

The study explored how storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them

to thrive after overcoming adversity. Storytelling can be conducted in a variety of ways, such as

through writing, interaction with others, and self-analysis, however, this study will focus on the

value of informal oral storytelling through the interactions with others. Studies reveal that Black

women are disproportionately impacted by inequities concerning equal rights, employment,

equal pay, education, discrimination, affordable healthcare and housing, criminal justice, and

voting rights. Despite these inequities, Black women are significant contributors to the

workforce, economy, and society, demonstrating resilience. There is limited research that

includes Black women's voices in counter response to inequities and how storytelling increases

their resilience, enabling them to thrive. The study reviewed literature of Black women's history,

Critical Race Theory, intersectionality, adult personal resilience, Resilience Theory, storytelling,

and narrative inquiry.

I interviewed Black women and, in that process, invited them to share stories and artifacts

demonstrating their resilience. The study examined who shared stories with these Black women

and who they shared their stories with. The study explored whether Black women increased their

resilience to thrive through storytelling. The study applied the qualitative research approach

using narrative inquiry and Resilience Theory as the theoretical framework. The study aimed to

diminish the literature gap and provide a counter-narrative on how Black women increase their

resilience to thrive through storytelling.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The study explored how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to thrive after overcoming adversity. Storytelling can be conducted in a variety of ways, such as through writing, interaction with others, and self-analysis to help individuals process adverse experiences. Adversity can come from global, national, community, and personal crises, and nearly everyone experiences adversity of some type at some point in their lives. Black women have a history of suffering inequities in civil rights, employment, equal pay, education, discrimination, affordable healthcare and housing, criminal justice, and voting rights. These adversities can leave them physically bound, psychologically fragile, and financially insecure. However, one's ability to survive, recover, and thrive following adverse experiences can increase their self-resilience and that of others they influence (Ledesma, 2014). It is through the reflection on and process of sharing these adverse experiences that we process and understand how much we grew. Individuals at the time of adversity don't often recognize their thriving character traits, it occurs following the adversity and after they have time to process the experience in conjunction with their present situation and the lessons learned after they experienced the adversity.

Black women's history includes adverse events that cause emotional stress, and their voices describing how they overcome such adversity are often lost in historical narratives and social constructs as a result of White Supremacist translations. To understand how Black women's voices have been silenced, this study explored Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT challenges the status quo by examining the perspectives and lived experiences of non-White

Americans (Blessett & Gaynor, 2014,p. 456). CRT theory confronts views that see racism as ordinary: 'ordinary' in the literature refers to what is considered normal practice, or way of operating (Bell, 1992, 1992); as whiteness as the ultimate property (Harris, 1995); and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality is an analytical framework that evaluates discrimination and privilege through the following factors: gender, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, disability, weight, physical appearance (Crenshaw, 1991). This study will focus on the intersection of gender and race which is specific to Black women. CRT applies the lived experiences of people of color as another theoretical element that acknowledges their counter-narratives in historical and social constructs (Mastsuda, 1991). I used narrative inquiry as a qualitative method to discover how Black women increase their resilience to thrive through storytelling.

Background

As our world and nations become more complex and problematic, people encounter adversity on various levels. An individual's resilience is associated with their economic, environmental, social, physical, and psychological well-being (Building Your Resilience, 2021). Increased resilience enhances an individual's chances of surviving a hardship, recovering from it, and thriving as a result of them processing these experiences (Ledesma, 2014). The ability to increase resilience is crucial, as it gives people the courage and strength they need to process and overcome adversity. Individuals who lack resilience may encounter hardships that overwhelm them, causing delayed or inappropriate responses, unwise decisions, or even inducing trauma (Ledesma, 2014). Although everyone encounters adversity at some point in their lives, Black women have suffered an extensive history of oppression and discrimination linked directly to the intersection of their gender and race (Crenshaw, 1989).

The intersection of gender and race further complicates the adversity Black women have experienced: "These identities impact Black women's lives on different dimensions than white men, white women, or Black men experience" (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021, pp. 7-8). Studies have shown that Black women are disproportionately impacted by inequities concerning equal rights, employment, equal pay, education, discrimination, affordable healthcare and housing, criminal justice, and voting rights because of their intersection of gender and race (NCBCP, 2019). In spite of the inequities, Black women are significant contributors to the workforce, economy, and society, demonstrating varied resilience levels (Bozarth et al., 2020). According to McClish-Boyd and Bhattacharya, "no two Black women's stories can be assumed to be identical; their experiences, backgrounds, and family structures are unique and should neither be oversimplified nor overgeneralized."

Because Black women are a marginalized group, their unique experiences as related through storytelling are not elevated equitably in historical narratives to demonstrate their process of building resilience. Black women are often depicted in unflattering ways, as angry, irresponsible, unappealing, immoral, overbearing, excessively independent, and untrustworthy (Collins, 2000). These types of images diminish the value of Black women and their contributions to society. These images dominate media and literature, raising mistruths and controlling narratives that promote negative social constructs regarding Black women (Bobo, 1991; Chaney & Brown, 2015; Collins, 1989; Harris, 2015). There is limited research available that contradicts the historical literature that depicts Black women as resilient individuals who have overcome adversity through storytelling. However, "[a]s we uncover the experiences of the many individuals under the banner of 'woman,' we begin to discover new ways to lessen discrimination against them and to celebrate their unsilenced voices" (Nao, 2019,p. 5).

Storytelling may provide a counter-narrative that contradicts that in the historical literature and that offers inward reflection and processing of the personal growth experienced by the storyteller. A person hearing a story may experience growth in resilience. However, this study will focus on the storyteller. This study will focus on the empowerment of Black women, increasing their base of literature.

Through the process of storytelling, Black women have an opportunity to reflect and process their life experiences and to identify adaptive life skills they have developed because of adversity. Storytelling enables Black women to weigh the lessons they have learned from their adverse life experiences and evaluate how they have grown personally. In conjunction with processing these lessons learned and developing thriving character traits to weather through adversity with less negative impacts. By sharing their stories, Black women may recognize changes in their levels of resilience because they recognize through the stories that they have survived, recovered, and are thriving. Black women may conclude that through this storytelling experience they have built a persistent resilience enabling them to thrive. The figure below explains the storytelling process and how the experience can build resilience to thrive.

Figure 1

Storytelling Model
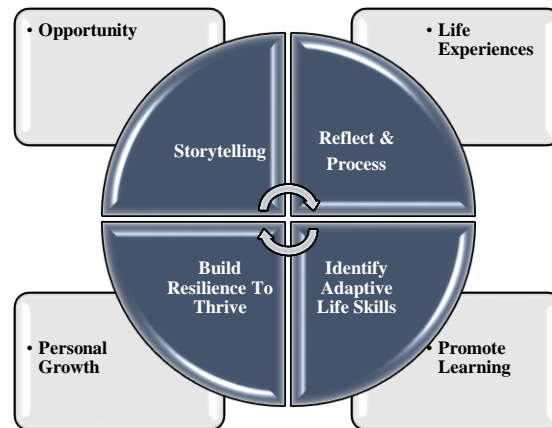
Narrative inquiry allowed me to explore how Black women adapt and rebound quickly

from adversity. By conducting interviews, the stories these Black women told provided a

counter-narrative to their adverse experiences. For example, Black women may experience

adversity as result of a socioeconomic system designed to reduce their power and limit their

voices (Bozarth et al., 2020). Interviews that involve storytelling provide Black women the

opportunity to explore a variety of adverse situations, the coping skills they developed, and their

levels of resilience. Through the interviews I conducted in this study, I investigated who Black

women shared their stories with and whose stories they heard. Individuals who have heard the

stories of others may feel inspired to share their own. In this way, this study elevates the voices

of this marginalized group, contributes a diverse perspective to historical narrative, and

celebrates their resilience: "While such narrative inquiry has been helpful in various types of

qualitative research; however, it lacks the nuance and cultural responsiveness needed to highlight

the storying structure of Black women's experience" (McClish-Boyd & Bhattacharya, 2021, p.

6). Narrative inquiry is a process used to elevate marginalized voices. It doesn't, however, train

the researcher on how to be culturally responsive and supportive when retrieving information from the research participants. Thus, I provided Black women with culturally sensitive questions to reduce the risk of trauma and to promote a safe environment during the interview process.

Problem Statement

There is limited literature regarding how Black women overcome adversity, as they are a marginalized group whose voices are often suppressed. Their history of oppression and adverse experiences are often narrated from non-Black perspectives due to historical contexts and social constructs. There is limited literature on liberating Black women's voices using the practice of storytelling to increase their resilience and ability to thrive. These literature gaps may be due to: a history of White supremacy, a lack of support for the traumas experienced by Black women, and limited platforms for Black women to safely narrate their personal stories to contribute to the historical narrative. Storytelling may be an important practice for Black women to use to increase their resilience and thrive after overcoming adversity.

Purpose of the Inquiry

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were the following:

- RQ1: Do Black women recognize by telling their stories of overcoming adversity they increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

- RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience from survival to recovery and thriving?

- RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize

  helped build their resilience to thrive?

Significance of the Study

This research study is significant because it focused on learning from resilient Black women who provided models and techniques to develop the skills to thrive. There is limited research on thriving, storytelling, and Black women. This study sought to remedy this knowledge gap to provide pathways to build resilience in Black women to enable them to thrive through storytelling. Storytelling is a pathway and a valid means for Black women to build resilience in order to overcome adversity. As the researcher, I planned to share this study with my daughters and Black women, particularly those who felt that their stories were not worth telling. Storytelling can also empower Black women to develop the skills to thrive and tell their stories.

Theoretical Framework

I used Resilience Theory as the theoretical framework for this study to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to thrive after overcoming adversity. Norman Garmezy, a clinical psychologist, is credited for being the founder of research in resilience and of Resilience Theory (Shean, 2015). Garmezy (1991a) defined resilience as "not necessarily impervious to stress. Rather, resilience is designed to reflect the capacity for recovery and maintain adaptive behavior that may follow initial retreat or incapacity upon initiating a stressful event" (p. 459). Garmezy (1991a) stated that an individual is deemed to be resilient not based on their courage despite the adversity, but because they demonstrate functionality and competence despite their emotional state after an adverse event. Garmezy (1991a) stressed that an individual who demonstrates resilience should not be considered better than a non-resilient individual, as

resilience is based on the continuous functionality of the individual after the adverse event. She

is simply more resilient.

Factors that could contribute to an individual's resilience include a positive attitude and

positive responses to others, reasoning aptitude, family structure, and external support systems

(Garmezy, 1991a). Black women may demonstrate varied levels of resilience after an adverse

event; however, they alone can identify their emotional states and whether they were able to

maintain their level of functionality despite that emotional state. The process of storytelling

provides an opportunity for Black women to identify their levels of resilience and whether they

deemed the adversity they experienced to be the sole contributor to their resilience or if other

factors contributed to their building of resilience to thrive. The stories of Black women and their

resilience levels will vary, as no two stories and no two Black women are the same. Resilience

Theory focuses on the idea of adaptation and perseverance during and after an adverse event. To

further connect resilience to the concept of thriving, an individual must adapt quickly and

function well despite repeated exposure to adversity (O'Leary, 1998). One way to measure an

individual's level of resilience and their ability to thrive is to evaluate their emotional state

before and after the adverse exposure. An individual can answer a series of questions regarding

their ability to maintain emotional stability before, during, and after an adverse event, to provide

a self-identified rating system for their ability to survive, recover, and thrive.

Figure 2

Resilience Theory and Challenge Model

Resilience Theory   Challenge Model
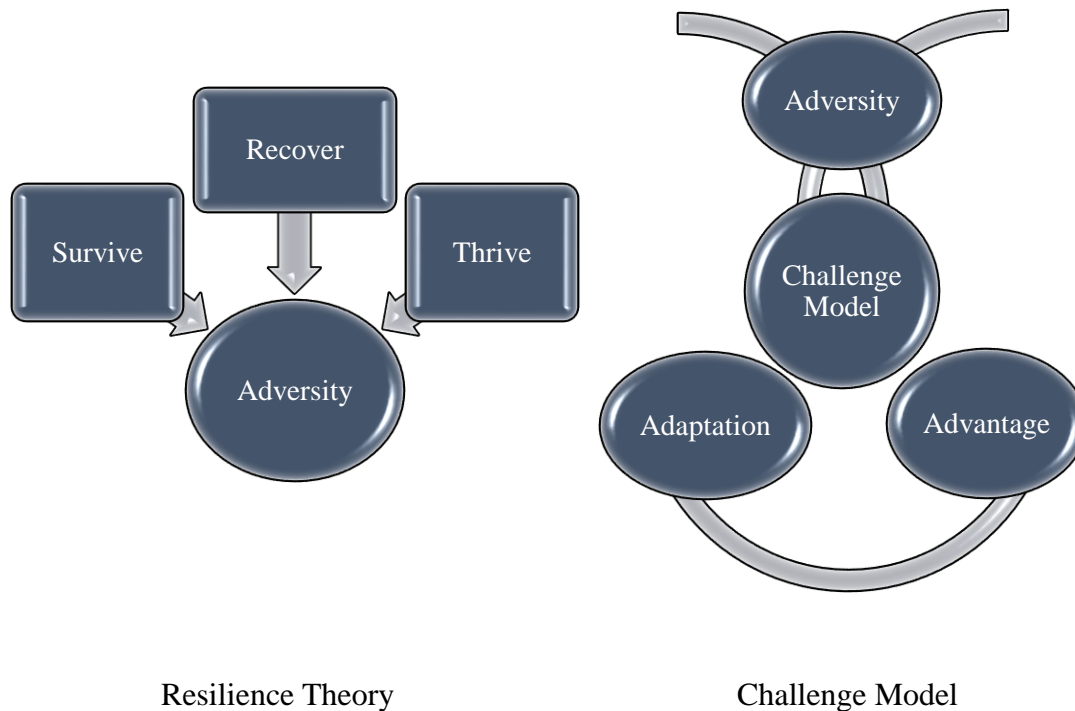
Resilience Theory and Challenge Model

  The models of Resilience Theory include the Compensatory Model, the Challenge

Model, and the Protective Factor of Immunity Versus Vulnerability Model (O'Leary, 1998). In

this study, I focused on the Challenge Model, which suggests that individuals who encounter

adversity have the advantage of adapting quickly to future adversity (Ledesma, 2014). The

Challenge Model is a concept used to describe a variable of Resilience Theory. I used Resilience

Theory to discover various types of adversity and the processes that shape Black women's

perspectives of their experiences. I used the Challenge Model as it directly correlates with the

fact that Black women experience challenges differently due to their intersection of gender and

race. Furthermore, Black women as a marginalized group experience a multitude of challenges

such as inequities in civil rights, employment, equal pay, education, discrimination, affordable

healthcare and housing, criminal justice, and voting rights. These types of challenges are vast

and compound a Black woman's ability to overcome average everyday challenges on top of

severe adverse events.

There are three concepts associated with Resilience Theory that describe what level of

resilience a Black woman may experience during or after adversity: "They may (a) survive the

incident, (b) recover from the incident, and (c) thrive as a result of enduring the hardship"

(Nishikawa, 2006,p. 27). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how storytelling

develops resilience in Black women to enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Description of the Study

The study aimed to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to

enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity. I selected participants for first-person

interviews to collect their stories of overcoming adversity and how the practice of storytelling

helped them develop resilience in themselves or in others (Creswell, 2012, 2013). I interviewed

select participants and asked them to share stories and provide an artifact that represented their

resilience. I then analyzed themes and identified patterns for each participant interview in order

to discover the lessons they had learned from the stories of overcoming adversity and how

storytelling increased their resilience. There were multiple opportunities for the participants and I

to develop further meaning regarding what the participants shared during the interview process.

The study summarizes my analysis of the data and identifies the key components and

presents a report of findings, suggestions for future research, and applications for helping

Black women to develop resilience after experiencing adversity.

Delimitations

This study took place from June to August 2022. It was limited to Black women who used storytelling to build their resilience to thrive. I used the snowball sampling technique to find eight participants through referrals. Snowball sampling is a method to gain access to a preliminary sample population. I then selected the study participants and introduced them to the research study (Naderifar & Goli, 2017). The study participants needed to be Black women who used storytelling to build resilience to thrive and who were over the age of 18. I anticipated that the study would require about eight participants to reach the point of saturation where no new information emerged from the interviews.

Definition of Terms

Adversity: A state of hardship, difficulty, or calamity that causes grief, anguish, and frustration (Ledesma, 2014).

African American: A person with African ancestral origins and a descendant of the trans-Atlantic slave trade between the 17th and 19th century. This has been the preferred term in the United States since 1970s (Agyemang, 2005).

Black: A person with African ancestral origins. This term can cover a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Black is used in everyday conversation or political exchange; however, it can be considered offensive (Agyemang, 2005). In this study, I prefer the term Black over the term African American to describe the sample population. I prefer to use the term Black because the literature will use varied terms. I personally identify as a Black woman, and the dissertation title refers to Black women. By using Black women opposed to African American women I will simplify the identification and context for the reader.

Challenge Model: References that provide that a risk is not too extreme and can enhance a person's adaptation to any given situation (O'Leary, 1998).

Hardiness: Synonymous with thriving. This term describes an individual's ability to make the best of difficult circumstances (Ledesma, 2014).

Recovery: A person's ability to make consistent progress after a hardship, difficulty, or calamity (Ledesma, 2014).

Resilience: The ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune, which is essential for an effective leader (Ledesma, 2014).

Self-Efficacy: Reflects a person's confidence in their ability to execute a plan (Bandura, 1977).

Survival: The state of an individual who continues to endure and live through a calamity or hardship (Ledesma, 2014).

Thriving: A person's ability to go beyond their original level of functioning and to grow despite repeated exposure to stress experiences (O'Leary, 1998).

Summary

In this study, I explored how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity. I used narrative inquiry as the qualitative method to understand Black women's experiences and explain how they survived, recovered, and were thriving after experiencing adversity. Research may create support pathways and networks for Black women to build their counter-narratives through the practice of storytelling. These types of support networks in the community provide an opportunity for connectedness and belonging, to enhance and develop community resilience (East et al., 2010). In Chapter 2, I review the literature on: Black women's history, Critical Race Theory, adult personal resilience, Resilience Theory, storytelling, and narrative inquiry.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is limited literature on Black women who have liberated their voices using storytelling to build their resilience which in turn helps them to thrive. Black women's voices are suppressed, as they belong to a marginalized group. As a result, their history of oppression and adverse experiences are often narrated from a non-Black perspective due to historical and social contexts. In this chapter, I review the literature on: Black women's history, Critical Race Theory (CRT), adult personal resilience, Resilience Theory, storytelling, and narrative inquiry to examine how Black women can create a counter-narrative through storytelling that develops their resilience, enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity. Black women have an extensive history of oppression, leaving them at times physically bound, psychologically fragile, and financially insecure. Black women represent 51% of approximately 13% of the U.S. Black population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Black women are significant contributors to the U.S. workforce and economy (Bozarth et al., 2020), yet they continue to experience adversity resulting from the intersection of their gender and race. Black women have historically performed low-skilled jobs for lower pay than white men, white women, and black men due to occupational segregation, stereotypes, and discrimination (Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati FDN, 2021): "As of July 2020, unemployment rates had declined for all groups, but declined the least for Black women" (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). This is well documented in the economics literature and explained in more detail in this literature review (Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati FDN, 2021). Black women have endured mental, physical, financial abuse, and shaming that are due to unethical and inequitable wage practices based on gender and race (McKenzie, 2021).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to enable them to overcome adversity and thrive.

The research questions that guided this study were the following:

- RQ1: Do Black women recognize that by telling their stories of overcoming adversity they increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

- RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience from survival to recovery and thriving?

- RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize helped build their resilience to thrive?

This chapter reviews the literature on storytelling and how it helps to develop resilience in Black women and enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity. The literature on storytelling begins with a brief description of Black women's history and traces how this marginalized group experienced government systems designed to limit its personal growth and resilience through oppressive socio-economic laws and practices. The review then turns to CRT and the main theoretical elements related to race, racism, and power systems through the concept of intersectionality of race and gender to inform strategies to elevate marginalized voices. The literature review describes how the intersection of gender and race creates differential treatment based on microaggressions and mischaracterization, resulting in unfair treatment and wealth disparities. These terms are defined in more detail later in this review. The review then identifies coping mechanisms that assist Black women with managing their overall wellness to develop and transfer intergenerational resilience. The review explores adult personal resilience as a new theory that may apply to Black women's experiences and adaptive coping methods. It also describes the theoretical framework of Resilience Theory, and specifically the Challenge Model,

to examine how storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them to overcome

adversity and thrive. The study employs narrative inquiry to examine this phenomenon through

the practice of interviews.

Figure 3

Model of the Literature Review
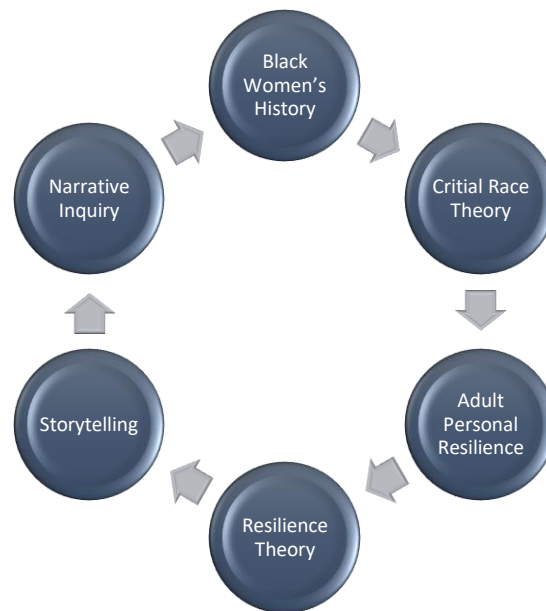
Black Women's History

The history of Black women in the United States reveals a complex, paradoxical

relationship that has repeatedly violated this group in order to maintain White supremacy (Berry

& Gross, 2020; Stevenson, 2021). Black women are a marginalized, ostracized group that has

experienced exploitation extending as far back as the 1500s and when European traders

kidnapped West African men, women and their children and transported them to the Americas

during the trans-Atlantic slave trade beginning in 1619 (Berry & Gross, 2020; Lerner, 1992;

Stevenson, 2021). Enslaved Black women who arrived in the Americas were degraded by

physical and sexual assaults from slave owners and forced rapes by enslaved black men as a

means to control Black women and reduce their humanness and gender identity. Slaveowners

demoralized enslaved Black women through forced labor equal to enslaved Black men reducing

their self-respect, respect from Black men, and by erasing their traditional values within their

communities (concept of less than and equal too, to be discussed more below)(Berry & Gross, 2020; Lerner, 1992; Stevenson, 2021).

Using distorted stereotypes (microaggressions), slaveowners sought to further discredit Black women's identities by characterizing them as strong workhorses and seductresses that lacked morality (Stevenson, 2021): "Today, this historical misrepresentation remains a common 'Justification' for the theft of our children; our physical, medical, political, and sexual exploitation; and our broad criminalization" (Stevenson, 2021, pp.19-20). Bozarth et al. (2020) have argued that the inequities Black women experienced, and continue to experience, include economic insecurity primarily because of the intersection of their gender, race, and the historical economic disparities that continue to deepen due to anti-Black policies. Bozarth et al. (2020) stated that our current governmental systems represent a deliberate failure designed to keep Black women without power. This situation has caused Black women to lack prosperity and intergenerational wealth due to inequitable wage gaps and other socio-economic indicators that limit their collective advancement in society.

Gender identities and socio-cultural roles have been contributing factors to the breakdown of family systems and structures that lead to further inequities. Black men and women were forbidden to marry under slave law "An Act Concerning Servants and Slaves" (1705) (Berry & Goss, 2020). Today, research contends that Black women are less likely to marry than White women, which affects their ability to obtain wealth and leads to financial inequities (Addo & Licheter, 2013). Black women are vital contributors to the labor force, yet they lack the financial investments to build resilient retirement reserves to counter financial inequities (Addo & Litcheter, 2013; Berry & Gross, 2020; Bozarth et al., 2020; Stevenson, 2021). Black women often work past the retirement age to compensate for the disparities in wage earnings in addition

to those of the current and past incomes of their spouses, which are significantly different for other groups of women (Addo & Licheter, 2013). For example, research suggests that Black women collect far less average retirement revenue than divorced White women (Addo & Licheter, 2013). Bozarth et al. (2020) have suggested that Black women, through their collective voices, can share a counter-narrative of the impacts of economic recovery efforts, the lack of equitable institutions, and what is needed to improve the support and increase the prosperity of this marginalized group. To do this, one suggestion is to create more opportunities for home ownership as it is a chief source of individual wealth and largely beneficial for those seeking to build equity for retirement purposes. Lerner (1992) argued that Black women are deprived of the opportunity to influence the history and knowledge passed down to future generations because the literature on enslavement and its impacts on Black women for centuries included racist propaganda of White male historians. Lerner contended that Black and White men and women embody distinct philosophies, which are contingent on utterly opposed traditions based on past experiences. Therefore, the need for Black women to contribute a counter-narrative to the historical record after overcoming adversity is imperative, as their contributions are different than those of Black men, White women, and White men in building and shaping US society (Lerner, 1992). Lerner also observed that there are limited sources written by Black historians that offer a counter-narrative of Black women's experiences. In the next section, I turn to CRT and how building a counter-narrative through storytelling can develop resilience in Black women to enable them to overcome adversity and thrive.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) focuses on the connections between race, racism, and the power of White voices in relation to the lived experiences of people of color (Kolivoski, 2020).

CRT challenges the status quo by examining the perspectives and lived experiences of non-

White Americans (Gaynor & Blessett, 2014). CRT uses the lived experiences of people of color

to acknowledge their counter-narratives in universal histories and social constructs (Mastsuda,

1991). The theory analyzes race, racism, and White privilege and power through seven elements:

(1) racism realism (Bell, 1992); (2) Whiteness as property (Harris, 1995); (3) intersectionality

(Crenshaw, 1991); (4) counter-storytelling (Delgado, 1989); (5) interest convergence (Bell,

1992); (6) critique liberalism (Gotanda, 1991); and (7) social change (Love, 2004; Smith-

Maddox & Solórza-no, 2002). CRT accesses racism to be a normal function of society that will

never be entirely eradicated due to policies and practices that create systemic disparities and

inequities (Conyers & Wright Fields, 2020). The theory identifies racism as fluid and notes that

it can be exposed in social, economic, and historical contexts (Kolivoski, 2020). CRT identifies

race as socially constructed and argues that it expands upon racial differences in society through

endorsement. Which means that some parts of society may support the racial differences

amongst individuals and will condone the ill treatment of others based on their race when it is

beneficial to that individual or group. The subject of racism is complicated and sensitive and is

promoted through stereotypes (microaggressions) against people of color and, in this study,

Black women specifically (Kolivoski, 2020).

CRT regards the power associated with "Whiteness" to see when and how situations are

managed and understood by society (Conyers & Wright Fields, 2020). Whiteness is an asset, as it

provides access to privilege and power. As such, those who have that power seek to protect it,

even at the cost of others (Burrell-Craft, 2020). CRT addresses how intersectionality exposes the

interconnected and complicated nature of gender, sexuality, class, and race and how they each

impact one another and should not be isolated when seeking to understand the lived experience

of people of color (Burrell-Craft, 2020). CRT recognizes the strength of counter-storytelling as it delegitimizes universal histories and promotes marginalized voices such as those of Black women who must provide an account of their lived experiences (Burrell-Craft, 2020). Black women who share their counter-narrative of lived experiences can expose the disparate treatments and the inequities they have suffered at the hands of dominant White voices and their racial unresponsiveness (Burrell-Craft, 2020).

CRT recognizes that interest convergence ensues when racial equality promotes the interest of White voices as the dominant group in power (Burrell-Craft, 2020). If racial equality is not in the best interest of the dominant group, the White voices in power will influence policies and practices to maintain the established systems that support inequity (Burrell-Craft, 2020). CRT indicates that a critique of liberalism challenges the concept of color blindness, which ignores the systemic impacts of racism by not recognizing the inequity and oppression associated with racism (Burrell-Craft, 2020). CRT provides a lens for systems to account for the role of racism and how it impacts people of color differently from those with dominant power. Further, CRT can be used as an accountability assessment framework to assist in the eradication of racism through education by elevating marginalized voices (Burrell-Craft, 2020). The next section explores the concept of intersectionality and how it relates to storytelling to build resilience among Black women, enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Intersectionality

Black women navigate systemic social processes in which their gender and race intersect and both are unapologetically on display, meaning that they are often judged based on those two factors alone. Crenshaw (1989) described intersectionality as the way race, class, gender, and other distinct features intersect. Black women's experiences with race and gender discrimination are uniquely different from White women's and Black men's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989).

This diminishes the empathetic acknowledgement or protections for Black women, which are limited to their intersectionality experience. Crenshaw explains that Black women are not treated equally compared to Black men or White women. For example, because a man is Black does not mean he himself is empathic to the complex experiences a Black woman encounters. This is also true for a White woman, regardless of her gender, on many levels she cannot relate to the complexities of the adversities that Black women experience. Thus, society as a whole struggles with being empathetic to the Black woman, because she is often compared to Black men or White women experiences in regard to adversity and how they respond to and overcome it (Crenshaw, 1989). According to Black Women's Roundtable, 70% of Black women face inequalities related to equal rights, affordable healthcare and housing, criminal justice, equal pay, discrimination, employment, education, and voting rights (NCBCP, 2019). These systems originated from the trans-Atlantic slave trade and were designed to keep Black women suppressed and impoverished. However, some Black women are thriving in the workplace, higher education, and larger communities despite these inequities, and they do so by managing the microaggressions stemming from this unjust and oppressive history. In the next section I discuss more about gender and how Black women manage microaggressions. In this study I explored how Black women's intersectional experiences contributed to a counter narrative which is storytelling. The next section delves into gender and race microaggressions and how Black women can build resilience that enables them to thrive after overcoming these types of adversities through storytelling.

Gender and Race Microaggressions

This section examines gender and race and how microaggressions affect Black women and serves as a background to the next section which explains how Black women can manage microaggressions through storytelling. Jerald (2017) stated that Black women in the United

States are physically and mentally impacted more than other groups by microaggressions. Root "identified 10 categories representing the most common symptoms likely to manifest in employees who experience chronic microaggressions: anxiety, paranoia, depression, sleep difficulties, lack of confidence, worthlessness, intrusive cognitions, helplessness, loss of drive, and false positives (person overgeneralizes negative experiences with others due to persistent feeling of harassment)" (Root, 2003). Hughes Jones (2020) researched Black women educators, who were stereotyped as "strong," and identified microaggressions that led to health challenges. Donovan and West (2014) found that moderate and high levels of Strong Black Woman (SBW) endorsement amplified Black women's vulnerability to depressive symptoms related to stress, whereas low levels did not. Madlock-Gatison (2015) stated that, "the SBW image presents a picture to the world that Black women are inherently strong, resilient, and self-reliant; have the ability to confront challenges, and provide encouragement to self and others during adversity" (p. 3). The SBW stereotype also cultivates a belief that vulnerability or weakness is equivalent to failure and does not offer women an opportunity to share feelings related to the trauma they have experienced (Madlock-Gatison, 2015).

Lewis et al. (2016) found that Black women's gender and race issues were specific to their oppressive history and personal experiences with discriminatory stereotypes. Black women endure discrimination, which is a social stressor related to their race and gender. According to Lewis et al. (2016), the "angry Black woman" and Jezebel stereotypes are identified as personal micro-assaults, insults, and nullification and represent Black women based on their race and gender. Jerald (2017) explored how these stereotypes contribute negatively to Black women's physical and mental conditions and to their overall well-being. Such negative stereotypes create

restricted access to critical networks and influence Black women's professional growth and

promotional opportunities (Holder et al., 2015).

Jerald (2017) suggested that Black women who perceive applied discrimination (which is

what the Black woman perceives as racism/discrimination that was directed toward her and she

was negatively impacted personally in some way) have higher rates of depression, anxiety,

substance abuse of alcohol and tobacco, and engage less in self-care. Managing

microaggressions can be difficult for Black women, especially in the workplace. Research has

found that because they experienced microaggressions, Black women often feel that others judge

them harshly and that they need to alter their personalities or code-switch to fit into the

workplace culture (Cheeks, 2018; Holder et al., 2015; Hughes Jones, 2020). Examples of code-

switching include changing their tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions: "This

behavior is also known as shifting (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) and can cause Black women

emotional and physical harm" (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 10). Researchers have

identified six themes that relate to coping strategies to help Black women confront

microaggressions: religion and spirituality, armoring (adaptive protective mechanisms), shifting

(shifts perception, body, speech, and attire), support network, sponsorship and mentoring, and

self-care (Holder et al., 2015). These coping strategies may prevent greater harm as they have a

cost to a person's identity, which can have physical and emotional consequences. Studies have

also found that Black women feel that office politics require them to seek out sponsorship for

validation purposes and for someone more knowledgeable and influential in the workplace to

advocate for their raises, projects, and promotions as they often lack the confidence to express

these requests on their own. Studies show that Black women feel that their voices are not valued

or heard in the workplace compared to their non-Black counterparts (Cheeks, 2018). This section

demonstrates that Black women can provide a counter-narrative to their experience to build

resilience, and that storytelling can assist Black women with that process. The next section turns

to how Black women cope with microaggressions to build resilience through storytelling.

Microaggression Coping Mechanisms

This section examines how Black women cope with microaggression and build resilience

to thrive through storytelling. Bradley and Sanders (2013) suggested that Black women can build

resilience by creating group counseling and support groups specifically for them. The research

suggests that groups facilitated by Black women strengthen their overall mental health and build

strong social networks (Bradley & Sanders, 2013). A sisterhood network allows Black women to

identify the intergenerational cultural roots that strengthen resilient behaviors (Bradley &

Sanders, 2013). Hughes Jones (2020) suggested a need for more platforms for sharing opinions

based on validating the lived experiences of the Black woman, noting that all people are

multidimensional and should be valued. Hughes Jones (2020) argued that celebrating different

leadership styles, wisdom, and pedagogical practices without requiring that Black women "code-

switch" would allow for the capitalization of unique experiences. Hughes Jones (2020) claimed

that prioritizing self-care focused on spiritual, mental, and physical well-being reduces an

individual's burden from feeling that they must be unreasonably strong in the wake of adversity,

all while upholding appropriate boundaries.

Cheeks (2018) showed that Black women valued providing their personal accounts

through interviews to bring awareness to the conditions and disparities they encounter. Thus,

providing platforms for Black women to share the issues that impact them and, in this way, to

promote solidarity and more conversations and actions to elicit the voice of Black women in the

workplace, can counterbalance the inequities that occur when their views are suppressed by

judgment and fear (Cheeks, 2018). Holder et al. (2015) suggested that the lived experiences of

Black women are a critical source of talent for leadership positions, as these experiences can cultivate adaptive skills.

Kilgore et al. (2020) uncovered how Black women cope by expressing their feelings through writing, which is a form of storytelling, such as by describing their experiences with gendered racial microaggressions, such as being stereotyped as "angry Black women." Kilgore et al. (2020) made two significant findings. Their participants found that writing about their experiences gave them a safe space to be honest, and they felt empowered by sharing their knowledge with others who could relate. As a result, Black women felt less silenced and marginalized (Kilgore et al., 2020). Writing about upsetting experiences improved their emotional well-being, and physical health" (Langen & Schuller, 2007; Prater, 2016). Lastly, Madlock-Gatison (2015) found that, "Black women are safe to believe no longer the lies that are killing us. We can remove our capes and rest for our recovery; we can create images of hope and strength that involve self-care first" (p. 4). This section exhibited how storytelling is a coping mechanism that enables Black women to develop resilience to thrive after overcoming adversity. The next section explores adult personal resilience and how storytelling about resilience can further develop resilience in Black women to enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Adult Personal Resilience

This section reviews adult personal resilience as it relates to how Black women develop resilience to thrive after overcoming adversity that they can share through storytelling. Black women who experienced and overcame adversity may have applied a new personal construct of adult personal resilience. This resilience may have assisted them in the adaptation to and recovery from future challenges. Taormina explored adult personal resilience and defined it as, "a multifaceted construct that includes a person's determination and ability to endure, adapt, and

recover from adversity" (p. 2). Taormina (2015) identified four dimensions to measure personal resilience: determination, endurance, adaptability, and recuperability. By streamlining the definition of resilience so as not to include external forces, such as environmental and social support as a contributing factor to resilience, this theory focuses solely on the internal characteristics of an individual (Taormina, 2015). Taormina concluded that measuring personal resilience through the four dimensions identified demonstrated validity and reliability, which study analyses that include external forces regarding personal resilience often lack. Taormina noted that this new theory of adult personal resilience is a positive, proactive approach. It identifies what makes individuals resilient without making them encounter personal adversity, and it provides the four dimensions for individuals to develop to manage adversity better when it does come.

Chance (2021) researched how the lived experiences of Black women with racism, sexism, and ageism helped them navigate adversity and build resilience in higher education leadership positions. Chance's phenomenological research discovered that overcoming adversity fueled participants' resilience and assisted in their development of leadership skills, which led to career advancement. Chance contended that there is a need to enhance leadership programs to empower Black women to use their voices to advocate for themselves, learn negotiation techniques, build confidence and self-esteem, establish personal brands, and outline career goals. Understanding one's personal resilience is paramount to their ability to process while sharing their stories of overcoming adversity.

Alim et al. (2008) studied Black adults who had been exposed to trauma and found a variety of coping mechanisms that led to resilience. Alim et al. sought to discover whether the participants were resilient and recovered from the trauma by identifying whether they had higher

levels of resilience through self-reporting tests to discover their optimism, mastery, and purpose

in life. Optimism evaluated the participants' anticipation of encouraging outcomes, purpose in

life assessed their alignment with their purpose in life, and mastery assessed their self-efficacy

regarding their control over their lives. Alim et al. discovered that purpose in life was strongly

connected to resilience and recovery. Those who were also more spiritual or religious had a

higher level of resilience or recovery. Optimistic participants were creative thinkers with positive

outlooks on the situation, which increased their resilience and recovery (Alim et al., 2008). In

addition, the participants who reported that they had experienced growth as a direct result of the

adversity also rated higher for resilience and recovery (Alim et al., 2008). The study

acknowledged the importance of social support for an individual to build resilience: "An

individual's ability to draw on relationships with others as a resource in time of stress is a key

component of social support, which has been found to buffer against the development of PTSD"

(Aim et al., 2008). According to (Atkinson, 2002) storytelling allows for individuals to share

negative aspects of their lives to garner a better sense of their experience and perhaps helps to

inspire others and themselves to build resilience to thrive.

Lemberger-Trulove's (2018) study of Black women connected social awareness through

the Adlerian theory of individual psychology by including their lived experiences. Lemberger-

Truelove (2018) identified three themes that emerged from the data collection: social

relationships with other Black women, family bonds, and friendships. Social connections with

other Black women allowed for a level of vulnerability and commonality that was not present

with different genders or races. Black women also received support from other Black women,

including advice on strategies for self-care and the ability to partake in candid conversations

regarding racism, family, and personal issues. Family bonds created deeper levels of

connectedness and provided reassuring support during adverse events: "A theme that continually arose was the depiction of Black women as resilient, strong, proud and capable of handling life's hardships" (Lemberger-Truelove, 2018, p. 10). Black women can gain perspective from storytelling, connecting them through their shared lived experiences and building an understanding of how to overcome systemic barriers to build resistance. According to Atkinson (2002): "Storytelling is in our blood. We are the storytelling species. Stories were once the center of community life. We are recognizing more readily now that there is something of the Gods and goddesses inside us, in the stories we tell our own lives. Life storytelling gives us direction, validates our own experience, restores value to living, and strengthens community bonds." Storytelling for Black women is beneficial, because it shifts the power dynamics of systematic systems to elevate the voices of those seeking to become resilient through healing, because some Black women may not have been provided an opportunity to safely offer their personal account of their lives before. According to Broussard (2013) "Black women's stories must be told in order to ameliorate some of the pressing physical, mental, and socio-economic problems which continue to plague Black women."

Joyce et al. (2018) conducted a systemic review and meta-analysis of a variety of interventions that assisted in building personal resilience. They found, after reviewing 111 peer-reviewed articles, that cognitive behavior therapy and mindfulness-based interventions were highly influential for the participants by increasing their overall wellness. Joyce et al. discovered that a combination of resilience training provided the following benefits for participants: "psychoeducation, mindfulness, cognitive skills, self-compassion skills, gratitude, practice, emotional regulation training, relaxation, and goal setting" (p. 7). Joyce et al. (2018) argued there is no "gold standard" to measure the personal efficacy of resilience. Nevertheless, through the

present study, Black women have an opportunity to identify their own levels of resilience by examining their experiences through storytelling. The next section examines intergenerational resilience to deepen the understanding of resilience as it applies to Black women and how storytelling can develop their own resilience and that of others. Referring to Chapter 1, storytelling can be conducted in a variety of ways, such as through writing, interaction with others, and self-analysis to help individuals process adverse experiences.

Intergenerational Resilience

This section considers the effects of intergenerational trauma and how Black women can build intergenerational resilience. Jackson et al.'s (2018) study suggested that Black men and women activate adaptive responses that build resilience from generation to generation due to the experiences of enslavement and the post-emancipation Jim Crow Era. Jackson et al. (2018) referenced a disorder they called post-traumatic slave syndrome (PTSS). It refers to the United States' legacy of enduring injury and healing, suggesting that chronic stress and trauma have the propensity to transmit intergenerationally (DeGruy, 2006). According to DeGruy (2006), "the syndrome is based on traumatic memories (long forgotten) and once successful coping behaviors practiced over generations" (p. 1487). Although PTSS is relevant today, the coping mechanisms practiced no longer apply to today's societal demands from the Black community, which include: Black-on-Black violence, colorism, internal discrimination, and anger (DeGruy, 2006). As the levels of adversity increase for the marginalized Black community so does the complexity of issues compounded upon layers and layers of negative race relations, prejudice and oppression; it is difficult to separate the causes of these adverse impacts and psychological conditions associated to have a clear distinction of the psychology of PTSS. Therefore, coping mechanisms

to treat the psychology of the Black community vary based on the individual's personal

experiences and levels of adversity experienced and their complications.

Jackson et al. (2018) suggested that resilience is an individual's defense against adversity

and life's challenges. Those who maintain high levels of resilience are better equipped to address

life's challenges. Jackson et al. suggested that Black men and women should explore and address

their mental health and stress levels, with the following treatments as recommendations: positive

behavior intervention, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and meditation to reverse the impacts

of stress. The intergenerational resilience of the Black community promotes the survival and

psychological and biological well-being of Black individuals (Jackson et al., 2018).

Although Black women have a history of oppression and intergenerational trauma, they

also have a history of intergenerational resilience. This section has demonstrated the

complexities of Black women's experiences and how storytelling can develop resilience in Black

women to enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity. According to Pearsall (2003), "We

thrive when we surpass and transcend our prior level of functioning, regain and even accelerate

our upward psychological trajectory, and seem to have mentally and emotionally benefited from

our suffering" (p. 17). The next section turns to Resilience Theory as the theoretical framework

for the study.

Theoretical Framework

This section examines Resilience Theory as the theoretical framework and explores how

storytelling in all of its forms develops resilience in Black women to enable them to thrive after

overcoming adversity. Ledesma (2014) studied Resilience Theory in accordance with leadership

development. Resilience Theory focuses on three concepts: survival, recovery, and thriving

(Ledesma, 2014). Ledesma (2014) described an individual's ability to thrive as the following: a)

the individual survived the challenge, b) recovered from the challenge, and c) as a result of the

challenge, they are now improved and thriving. An individual who *survives* a challenge

continues to function, but it could be a reduced function. An individual who *recovers* from a

challenge has returned to their original functionality. Lastly, an individual who is *thriving* has

enhanced their functionality because of the challenge (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Model of Resilience Theory
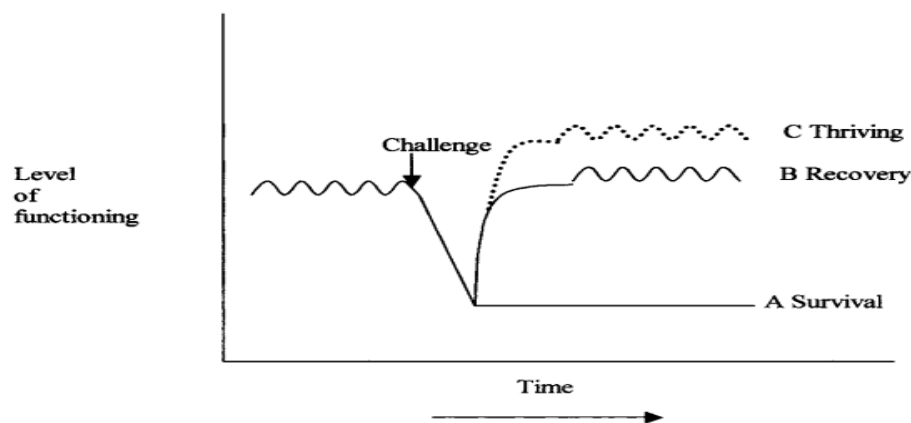
According to Ledesma (2014), Resilience Theory includes Compensatory, Challenge,

and Protective Models that are derived from developmental literature and systems theory. The

Compensatory Model defuses an individual's exposure to risk when the individual pro-actively

solves the problem, seeks the positive in any given situation, influences others to be positive, and

relies upon her faith to maintain a positive attitude. The Challenge Model argues that defusing

risk exposure can improve an individual's ability to adapt to adversity and prepares them for

future challenges. The Protective Model argues that defusing risk exposure equates to future

protections and decreases adverse outcomes to risk experiences (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Models Included in Resilience Theory
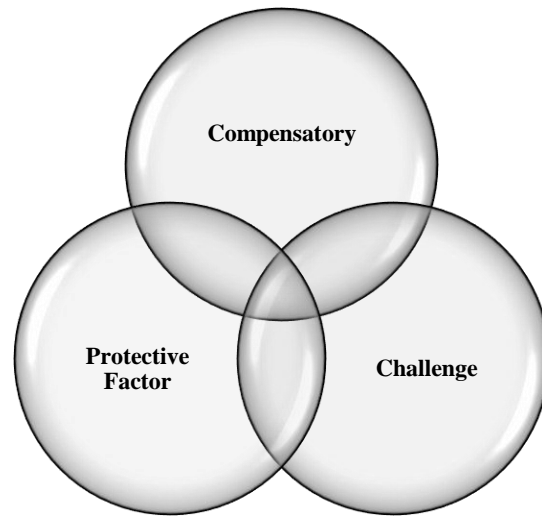
Thriving

According to Ledesma (2014), Constructivist Self-Determination Theory (CSDT) is connected to thriving as it explores the developmental perspective of an individual who experiences a challenge and examines whether it causes them personal harm or growth. Bhain and O'Leary (2006) suggested that thriving takes place in three psychosocial developmental areas: behavioral, cognitive, and emotional. Cognitive development is critical to thriving as it impacts how individuals observe risks: "Cognitive factors such as threat appraisal, perceived personal risks, generalized expectancies for good versus bad outcomes, and self-efficacy may all be critical personal resources" (Bhain & O'Leary, 2006,p. 157). Thriving allows for a cognitive transformation to occur in response to a challenge as an individual confronts their priorities and examines their sense of self, encouraging profound change (Bhain & O'Leary, 2006). When the outcome is thriving, this may promote an individual's sense of purpose, meaning, or self-identity.

CSDT suggests that the way in which an individual perceives the meaning of a challenge determines their response. Factors such as personality, history, and the challenge or traumatic event could add to the individual's unique response to the challenge or situation. CSDT can be applied to thriving in the following ways: "a) integrates nomothetic and idiographic injury focusing on process and context, b) it allows descriptive inquiry as well as moderator analysis, c) it allows complexity by offering multivariate hypothesis, d) it assesses both the automatic and intentional aspects of thriving and e) it allows for both gradual and abrupt steps toward thriving" (Ledesma, 2014, p. **3**). When individuals thrive, they enhance their personal values, efficacy, and energy to grow their capacity for adversity. According to Patterson and Kelleher (2005), "[a] four-cycle phase to resilience is defined and includes a deteriorating, adapting, recovery and growing phases" (p. 3).

Ledesma (2014) described "hardiness" as a characteristic that provides an advantage for rising above untimely organizational crises, and suggested that the hallmarks of thriving include the three dimensions of hardiness as defined by Bonanno (2004): a) the individual's ability to find meaning in the challenge or adversity, b) the individual's belief in their ability to influence the environment and the outcome of the challenge or adversity, and c) the individual's ability to learn and grow from positive and negative life experiences. Ledesma acknowledged that individuals thrive when they acquire new knowledge or skills they did not have before the challenge or adversity in order to pivot and to make well-informed decisions quickly. After review, I found that the CSDT model fit the present study. However, the Challenge Model was more aligned with the adverse experiences of Black women and the stressors they encounter through the intersection of their gender, race, and microaggressions. Further, the Challenge

Model supports the usage of counter-narrative storytelling for Black women so they can build resilience to thrive.

Challenge Model

  This section studies the Challenge Model and how Black women can build resilience to thrive through storytelling. The Challenge Model suggests that resilience caused by stress can enhance an individual's adaptation to extenuating circumstances, as long as the stressor is not excessive (Bhaiu & O'Leary, 2006). Also, it states that a little stress may not be challenging enough to promote change, while too much pressure may result in dysfunction (Bhain & O'Leary, 2006). Lastly, moderate stress levels offer a challenge to overcome that strengthens an individual's competence (Bhain & O'Leary, 2006). When an individual overcomes a challenge, the psychological outcome in response to resilience is thriving, which expands idea processing to grow by confronting challenges using coping mechanisms to aid in psychosocial transformation (Bhain & O'Leary, 2006). Individuals who experience adverse situations may be prompted with engagement and encouragement by others to access internal and external resources to aid them (Bhain & O'Leary, 2006). Intervention assistance may encourage the individual to overcome adverse situations, build resilience, and position them to adapt positively to future challenges in order to thrive (Bhain & O'Leary, 2006). See Figure 6 for two paths to resilience and thriving.

Figure 6

Model of Two Probable Paths to Resilience and Thriving
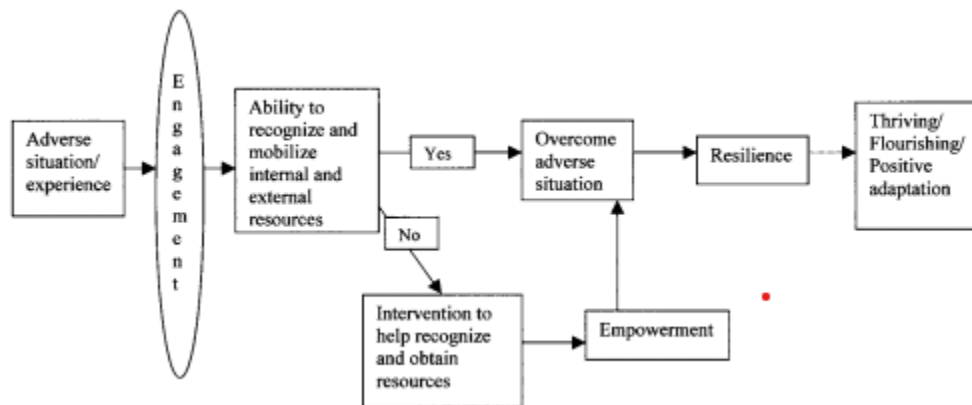
This section evaluates why some but not all Black women may benefit from storytelling as a practice to build resilience. Carver (1998) reviewed the conceptual distinctions of adversity and why some individuals may benefit from the adversity while others do not. The answer may lie in whether the individual was healthy before the adversity. Carver (1998) described three alternatives that may alter an individual's ability to discern if they are, indeed, thriving: desensitization, enhanced recovery potential, and taking it to a higher level. Carver (1998) suggested that after one or more traumatic experiences, the reoccurrence of the stressor may cause desensitization for individuals, enabling them to build a resistance to the adversity. Carver (1998) argued that the enhanced recovery potential refers to an individual's ability to bounce back faster despite the fact that the stress event may have caused disruption or was traumatic. Lastly, research suggests that "taking it to a higher level" refers to the comfort that an individual may experience by functioning at a higher level due to adversity.

This section explores how Black women can use storytelling to overcome their challenges and experience opportunities for growth and build resilience to thrive. O'Leary

(1995) researched the resilience of women and how challenges provide an opportunity for transformation and growth; this paradigm shifts the focus from a reactive treatment of illness to nurturing an individual's well-being and celebrating their strength. Thriving goes beyond the use of coping mechanisms to manage a challenge; instead, it promotes growth. As a result of the challenge, it improves an individual's chances of quicker adaptation during adverse situations (O'Leary, 1995). Thriving is not determined by physical recovery but by a psychological shift aligned with the purpose, the challenge present, and how the challenge adds value and meaning to an individual's life. Rutter (1987), suggested that "resilience has four functions: (a) to reduce risk impact, (b) to reduce negative chain reactions, (c) to establish/maintain self-esteem and efficacy, and (d) to enhance opportunities" (p. 1). Thriving is an outcome of an individual's ability to process interactively during a challenge to further development. Development is a cumulative process that encompasses the past influences of mini trajectories that have left impressionable memories prompting transformative change (O'Leary, 1995). O'Leary (1995) stated that a study that seeks to measure thriving for empirical evidence should consider a comprehensive approach to assessing the outcomes of a challenge. Future research may seek to discover life transition points to identify and test growth change and added responsibilities.

Resilience Theory

To understand Resilience Theory further and to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity, we must examine more studies. Zimmerman (2013) researched Resilience Theory as a strengths-based approach for researchers with a focus on positive aspects of youth experiences. Zimmerman (2013) noted that, "Resilience Theory focuses attention on positive contextual, social and individual variables that interfere or disrupt developmental trajectories from risk to problem behaviors, mental distress, and poor health outcomes" (p. 381). Zimmerman (2013) argued that there is a need to

reconcile Resilience Theory with existing public health education models to develop a mutual

language and systematic method, regardless of the issue being studied, to build knowledge and

enlighten practice using a strength-based model. According to Zimmerman, "[r]esearch that

applies a resilience framework will have common characteristics that can be replicated across

populations and contexts, and contribute more broadly to our understanding of the processes by

which you overcome adversity and develop into healthy adults; despite risk exposure" (p. 381).

Rose and Krausmann (2013) identified key indicators that currently measure economic

resilience, noting that they are limited due to the lack of empirical evidence and effective

analysis of various types of resilience. Rose and Krausmann found limitations in terms of the

effectiveness of economic indicators when determining whether developing countries are

resilient compared to industrialized countries. According to Rose and Krausmann, governments,

enterprise networks, and citizens all rely on complex systems to produce information and data

for evaluation to determine the necessary steps to engage in the recovery process after natural or

manufactured disasters. However, formulations to determine resilience tend to utilize familiar

data sources as opposed to innovating and creating new frameworks to glean strategies that

would produce actionable variables that could reduce risks and predict aligned trends to position

countries, businesses, and citizens with reliable data to improve their interdependent recovery

processes (Rose & Krausmann, 2013). This research supports the notion that indicators lack the

key data they need to identify whether governments, enterprise networks, and citizens are

resilient. Specifically, counter-narratives that demonstrate how citizens build residence through

storytelling can provide opportunities for marginalized voices to contribute perspectives that

would otherwise be dominated by those in power who shape the societal narrative. This directly

correlates with the plight of Black women and the importance for marginalized groups to contribute counter-narrative to balance the inequity of a limited evaluation system.

Afifi et al. (2016) explored the Theory of Resilience and Relational Load (TRRL), which was developed from a study of Latino and Caucasian families who experienced adversity due to economic uncertainty derived from the Great Recession of 2007 to 2009. The researchers discovered that social relationships are connected to an individual's psychological, behavioral, and physiological resilience and their ability to adapt to adversity. The participants demonstrated various forms of investment, such as speaking words of affirmation, physical touch (hugs, kisses, holding hands), and expressing gratitude. Individuals who focused on investing positively in relationships with daily verbal and non-verbal actions experienced a greater ability to become resilient and thrive (Afifi et al., 2016). This study supports the notion that Black women who use these types of coping mechanisms to overcome adversity can build resilience to thrive through storytelling.

Masten (2018) explored Resilience Theory and how it impacts human life and development through various events and systems. Masten explained that the concept of resilience continues to evolve as more systems develop models to become more adaptable and less vulnerable to risks and adversities. Unfortunately, the variations in definitions of resilience create difficulty in acquiring aggregate data in the form of meta-analyses to increase knowledge of how resilience measurements transform systems. Masten examined systems experiencing global challenges, such as climate change, natural disasters, war and terror, and pandemics. Masten presented a framework that includes the following core ideas: a) systems, although interdependent, interact with other systems and, by doing so, they often aid in the development and function of other systems; b) systems are evolutionary and require the capacity to adapt; and

c) systems change on all levels, including interchangeable functions. People are embedded in these systems, and their resilience is therefore personally affected and tested (Masten, 2018). According to Masten (2018), "[i]ntegrating models, evidence, and strategies across systems and sciences holds great promise for elucidating resilience and for translating this knowledge more effectively into practical action that will benefit individuals, families, community, and societies" (p. 24). This study suggests that the individual assessment of resilience provides an added benefit, as systems that evaluate resilience are highly adaptive and may take on a life of their own. Because systems are interdependent, they may include systemic racism and sexism diminishing the voices of those who are marginalized, such as Black women. Systems thrive on the interconnectivity of other resilient systems; therefore, it is assumed resilient groups build more resilience in the systems. A marginalized group such as Black women's voices are diminished because they lack system support to have their voices heard because they are not perceived as resilient; therefore, not a system's priority to address their concerns or issues to help them become more resilient.

Welsh (2013) studied the complexity of Resilience Theory and its application to socio-economic relations and how adaptive governments and political systems influence the resilience of their citizens. Welsh (2013) challenged the intent of the Resilience Theory as applied differently to states, institutions, and individuals during uncertain times, as systems may be interconnected and cause confusion when academics and politicians enforce a systemic understanding of the term "resilience" with various definitions. Welsh (2013) argued that Resilience Theory should be emancipated as a concept and simplified if researchers are to better understand and utilize the approach across multiple systems. Welsh (2013) questioned who is responsible for monitoring the concept in order to protect our citizens and to ensure that equity of

information is shared among all who choose to use Resilience Theory. Therefore, it is imperative

that Black women have opportunities to provide a counter-narrative through storytelling to

demonstrate resilience and an ability to thrive after overcoming adversity since there is no

agreed-upon monitoring system and systemic understanding of the term "resilience."

Storytelling

This section examines how storytelling in all its forms develops resilience in Black

women to enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity. Storytelling allows people to convey

their values and emotions while identifying personal resilience characteristics (East et al., 2010).

This is because "[s]tories bring meaning into our lives, convey values and emotions, aid in

reaffirming and validating our lives and experiences, and can connect us with our inner selves,

with others and with society" (Atkinson, 2002, p. 127). A person's willingness to share their

stories of defeat and triumph over adversity can build their self-resilience and that of others (East

et al., 2010). However, people may not always share their stories of resilience with others, which

is a missed opportunity for personal growth and deepening resilience (East et al., 2010). Those

who share their personal stories with others may foster connectivity through the differences and

similarities of their experiences. Individuals who share their personal stories may form bonds

with others and create supportive networks for information sharing (East et al., 2010).

People who share their personal stories of overcoming difficult situations or adversity

"are influenced by environments, social situations, changing perspectives, audience, and the

purpose of relating the story" (Chase, 2005; Sandelowski, 1993). People's storytelling

experience may focus on more desirable details, and they may omit information they feel is less

relevant to the story and to their resilience (East et al., 2010). The process of telling a story can

develop personal resilience and promote the hardiness of the individual (East et al., 2010).

Hardiness is the ability to rely upon support systems and positive emotions that encourage wellness, despite adversity, reflexivity, and negative feelings (Jackson et al., 2007). Hardy individuals realize that adversity is a part of life and can provide meaning and purpose for them as they embrace their life's journey (Bartone, 2006; Bonanno, 2004). Those who assess their experiences from various perspectives can understand their circumstances and emotions to grow personally and move forward with their lives (East et al., 2010).

This section examines cultural changes and how storytelling today may impact Black women differently than it did yesterday. Carter-Black (2007) explored the art of storytelling through the lens of Black culture by today's standards. Storytelling for Black people is a way to connect the old to the young through narrated events. These narratives often describe stories of survival, of a triumphant spirit overcoming hardships, and of adversity: "Telling ourselves our own stories—interpreting the nature of our world to ourselves, asking and answering epistemological and ontological questions in our own voices and on our own terms—has as much as any single factor been responsible for the survival of the African-Americans and their culture" (Carter-Black, 2007, p. 44). Enslaved Africans endured horrific physical, mental, and emotional traumas, and they encapsulated survival mechanisms to pass on intergenerationally (Carter-Black, 2007). Storytelling provides a level of intimacy that offers a stage for information sharing, community understanding, and, in response, empowerment. Storytelling offers strategies for creating a space for socialization and building identification.

Black women who desire to learn alternative storytelling techniques to develop resilience to thrive after overcoming adversity can do so from Black South African women. Van der Merwe (2017) explored a community-based embroidered story cloth project that encouraged Black South African women to document their stories within the story cloths to aid in creating an

inclusive recording of historical events, past and present (see Figure 7). Black South African

women are considered marginalized due to their high rates of illiteracy, oppression of tradition,

and colonialism (Van der Merwe, 2017). These women lack the opportunity to express their

experiences, values, beliefs, and overall perspectives regarding historical and present-day events.

The women demonstrated that they could articulate their experiences and contribute to the

national narrative, despite cultural differences and language barriers. Their contribution to the

historical narrative confirmed their value, encouraged their sense of belonging to improve their

overall social standing, and deepened their sense of having an influence on their communities

(Van der Merwe, 2017).

Figure 7

Sample of Embroidered Story Cloth Project by Black South African Women

This section examines how storytelling traditions enhance the storytelling process for

Black women who can use this method to develop resilience and thrive after overcoming

adversity. Banks-Wallace (2002) researched the benefits of utilizing the oral traditions of Black

Americans to enhance storytelling in qualitative research. Stories are often used to align common

experiences and preserve the history of a culture that is passed down intergenerationally. Stories

are the pathways and instructional guidelines that help us explore the purpose of our lives

through our lived experiences and those of others. While *storytaking* involves a person's ability

to listen to a story, *storytelling* provides them a chance to articulate their faith, fears, and

ambitions (Banks-Wallace, 2002). The story exchange creates an emotional connection between

the teller and the listener, and this is often accomplished by the teller mentioning touchstones

when storytelling (Banks-Wallace, 2002). Stories shared in a safe space may promote healing on

a subconscious level.

For centuries, African cultural storytelling has passed down African values, traditions,

and rituals to future generations so that they may flourish, and storytelling is known as a

significant tradition (Banks-Wallace, 2002). African American oral tradition uses the following

factors in story creation and storytelling: cultural values and norms, the immediate storytelling

environment, and historical context (Banks-Wallace, 2002).

Storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them to thrive after

overcoming adversity by elevating their voices. Broussard (2013) researched the contributing

factors that have led to the silence of Black women and argued that the trauma and suffering

caused by enslavement created an inequitable societal structure and discriminatory laws that

have promoted intergenerational trauma passed down to Black women through the silencing of

their voices. Research on the impacts of enslavement, the Jim Crow Era, and systemic racism

often refers to the effects on Black men instead of on Black women: "Black women have

survived by keeping quiet, not solely out of shame, but out of need to preserve the race and its

image. In our attempts to preserve racial pride, we Black women have often sacrificed our own

souls" (Charlotte Pierce-Baker, 2000, p. 84). As such, the analysis and reporting of those

historical events and systemic impacts often exclude Black women's narrated perspective.

Broussard (2013) has noted that, "Black women are strong, industrious, and survivors of

a system that would have destroyed a less-enduring people. But they have been victimized, and

arguably society owes them space to heal from the past and present pain they suffered" (p. 8).

For centuries, Black women practiced silence as a defense mechanism for their protection and

survival (Broussard, 2013). According to Broussard (2013), "[t]he silence that this article

references are three-fold: 1) silence of Black women stemming from the vestiges of enslavement

and their societal status; 2) silence of a legal system that has ignored them, and 3) the silence

implicit in the failure of today's society to fully tell her story" (p. 9). Black women today remain

vulnerable to society's inequities as they are the least protected and often find themselves in the

lower socio-economic spectrum. Broussard (2013) contended that Black women who share their

stories should be offered a safe place to explore therapeutic interventions through assessments

and coping resources and skill development to build resilience.

As we can see, the practice of sharing stories is linked directly to the Black woman's

lineage and how her ancestors' experiences were shared intergenerationally. Storytelling is a

practice that Black women can use to pass their resilience or traumas on to the next generation.

Storytelling can empower Black women to thrive, despite a history of slavery, intersectional

discrimination, and persistent institutional racism. However, it is imperative that Black women

are supported when applying self-care to recognize their vulnerability and strength equally and to

balance their expectations of self and others during the resilience-building process. Lastly, Black

women desire safe environments in which to share stories and to develop coping strategies that

promote their ability to thrive. The active ingredient in storytelling is that it helps people identify

their personal characteristics that help them thrive. Storytelling is a process of reflection and self-development.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is the qualitative research method I used for this study. Narrative inquiry explores how storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity, through the practice of conducting interviews. Qualitative research is "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 520). "Qualitative research is related to anthropology, sociology, journalism, education, social work, medicine, and law" as these fields seek to discover deeper understanding of individuals through the sharing of stories" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 19) Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method that guides researchers to listen to and to understand the context of a participant's story (Hickson, 2016). In relation to the impact of stories, narrative inquiry allows researchers to analyze their own understanding based on the participants' experience and to challenge their own thinking (Hallberg & Santiago, 2021). Stories in all forms reflect how people perceive their experiences, align their lives after certain experiences, and how they identify the purpose or meaning of life after difficult experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Narrative inquiry uses stories to make sense of people's personal experiences and how they communicate these experiences to others, which provides insight on how we understand and adjust to the world around us (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The key to this type of qualitative research is the use of stories as data, and, more specifically, of first-person accounts of experience told in story form having a beginning, middle, and end" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016,

p. 34). These first-hand accounts can utilize any of the following in data collection: autobiographies, life histories, interviews, journals, and letters, which the researcher evaluates to identify meaning (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, I used narrative inquiry as the research method and interviews of study participants to learn more about storytelling as a coping strategy for Black women to develop skills to thrive.

Mello et al. (2016) explored the individual journeys of three researchers who confronted three tensions that caused challenges during their narrative research studies. The three tensions were "engaging at the beginning of the autobiographical narrative, shifting from field texts to research texts and conducting narrative investigations made purposive for personal, theoretical/practical and social justifications" (Mello et al., 2016, p. 1). Tensions are how we, as individuals, live among other people, events, and things that draw our attention to situations that are not right based on our individual perception. In response, we inquire to learn more about the situation (Mello et al., 2016). Mello et al. (2016) sought a clear understanding of the participants' relationships and how they impacted their stories. Mello et al. (2016) argued that the ability to switch from field test to research text, which may include transcripts, field notes, and artifacts, also proved to be challenging for the following reasons: the composition of a narrative account in coordination with a participant, or without them, could both cause issues regarding freedom of expression when writing the narrative, or result in a lack of communication that can ensure validity due to the lack of involvement from a participant. Mello et al. (2016) confirmed that the justification of a narrative personally, practically, and socially was difficult because of the researcher's self-interest in the outcome. As researchers, it is important to recognize that the justification of narrative inquiries, whether personal, practical, or social, should be narrated with attention to why the narrative inquiry matters, as supported by evidence.

O'Grady et al. (2018) contended that researchers who utilize narrative inquiry to leverage power dynamics in this politicized world have an ethical responsibility not to fall into the trap of replicating power abuses with the framing of narratives. The proper identification of study participants and a clear understanding of their vulnerability as subjects is imperative to how a researcher's interpretation may impact the narrative by unintentionally minimizing the complexity of their shared stories and lived experiences (O'Grady et al., 2018). Narrative inquiry is a platform to make people visible by sharing their stories because they also matter (O'Grady et al., 2018). Digital storytelling is an innovative practice that may deepen reflections and make the knowledge shared more visible to affect change (O'Grady et al., 2018). Digital storytelling uses multiple media platforms to creatively share stories, such as audio, images, and video clips. O'Grady et al. (2018) identified narrative inquiry as a research method that can enhance women's history and elevate marginalized knowledge.

Savin and Van Niekerk (n.d.) reviewed narrative inquiry as a research method and provided suggestions for researchers to consider when conducting interviews with study participants. To provoke meaning from the stories the participants share, a researcher may try adopting the following approaches: 1) asking open-ended questions or questions that encourage the participant to provide multiple details in response to the question(s) at hand; 2) asking directly for the participant to share stories related directly to the subject matter; 3) avoiding asking "why" questions, which may threaten the participant and cause them to become defensive, as they may feel the need to justify their motives instead of sharing their lived experience; and 4) following up on participant responses with additional questions or rephrasing what was communicated to ensure that the researcher perceived the information shared correctly (Savin & Van Niekerk, n.d.).

Researchers who use interviews and storytelling can choose other data sources to corroborate their participants' perspectives of their lived experiences. When conducting interviews, the researcher should actively listen to the participants' stories, acknowledge a mutual relationship focused on sharing stories, recognize that the stories the participants share are evolving as the participants express themselves and that, as they share, they may have an epiphany and gain perspective on their story or its meaning, outcome, and their personal growth or change (Savin & Van Niekerk, n.d.). The researcher should anticipate that the participant may tell their story using different sounds and voices (Savin & Van Niekerk, n.d.). As such, storytelling may also be used as a mechanism to discover, confirm, or defend truths (Savin & Van Niekerk, n.d.). Therefore, the researcher should clearly understand that the stories shared can be used as a means of control, thus placing the participant in a vulnerable position (Savin & Van Niekerk, n.d.). It is essential for the researcher to avoid projecting their biases or judgment on a participant's story (Savin & Van Niekerk, n.d.). An interview that involves storytelling must remain open for personal development and change, in response to the stories being shared.

Savin and Van Niekerk (n.d.) suggested that the benefits of using narrative inquiry as a qualitative method are as follows: 1) most people enjoy sharing stories about themselves; 2) it is easier to garner more information or dive deeper to retrieve data when there is a narrated conversation; 3) participants may be able to construct meaning from their lived experiences as they share accounts of their stories at a later date; and 4) participants will likely be more truthful as they share their accounts of the lived experience. Savin and Van Niekerk (n.d.) argued that the challenges of using narrative inquiry as a qualitative method are as follows: 1) it may be difficult to decipher stories to find meaning and present the story as data; 2) at times, the interpretation and reinterpretation of stories may conflict between the researcher and participant; while the

researcher has an ethical obligation to protect the participant, at times they may not agree on what that level of protection is; 3) distinguishing between the participant's narrative, the researcher's interpretation, and the story retold can be problematic for the study; and 4) there is an ability to confirm and negotiate data and its interpretation related to the presentation of the overall story and meaning. Another challenge to consider is the credibility, validity, and trustworthiness of the method and whether the information is presented with shared truths and shared values. The complexity of negotiating these interpretations can be time-consuming (Savin & Van Niekerk, n.d.).

Stocchetti (2016) explained how the introduction of narrative inquiry using storytelling influenced undergraduate methodology students. Stocchetti (2016) suggested that, as researchers, we may struggle to understand concepts, apply them, and find meaning in our data analysis. As such, Stocchetti (2016) argued that allowing students to participate in the discovery of their knowledge by sharing stories enhanced their learning experience and made it more "fun," "interesting," and "informative." The students were able to identify the value in each other's experiences and improve insight into technical theories and methods that were difficult to understand without the lived experiences of their peers (Stocchetti, 2016). Through storytelling, the students were able to discern which data collection methods would best suit a research study (Stocchetti, 2016). The students also demonstrated a strong understanding of reliability, validity, and ethics in narrative inquiry (Stocchetti, 2016). The study therefore suggested that researchers who use narrative inquiry should focus more on ethical considerations when adopting the storytelling method. Because the participants in storytelling are revealing of themselves researchers have increased responsibility to not cause further harm or trauma to those sharing their stories.

Wang and Geale (2015) noted that John Dewey influenced Clandinin and Connelly, who introduced the method of narrative inquiry: "As a philosopher of experience and an education theorist, Dewey based his principles on interaction and continuity, theorizing that the terms personal, social, temporal, and situation were important in describing the characteristics of an experience" (Wang & Geale, 2015, p. 196). Clandinin and Connelly advanced three aspects of the narrative approach: personal and social (interaction); past, present, future (continuity); and place (situation) (Wang & Geale, 2015). For more on this, see Table 1.

Table 1

Aspects of the Narrative Inquiry Approach

Term	Definition
Personal	Looks inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetics, reactions, and moral disposition.
Social	Looks outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view.
Past	Looks backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times.
Present	Looks at recent experiences, feelings, and stories relating to the actions of an event.
Future	Looks forward to actual and potential experiences as well as plot lines.
Situation/Place	Looks at context, time, and place in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters in purposes and different points of view.

Wang and Geale (2015) contended that narrative inquiry using the storytelling perspectives of participants provides the researcher with an objective insight on life experience and viewpoints to assist them with applying the meaning of storytelling to participant health and health care services: "Stories heal and soothe the body and spirit, provide hope and courage to explore and grow" (Wang & Geale, 2015, p. 198). Narrative inquiry focuses on the meaning of

the stories as the participants share their truth about the situations at hand (Wang & Geale, 2015).

Researchers involved in narrative inquiry should identify and embrace the subjective truth

essential in the storytelling process (Wang & Geale, 2015). The current study added to the

literature by examining storytelling as a coping strategy for Black women.

Summary

Black women exhibit resilience through their ability to develop coping skills to combat

microaggressions stemming from their oppressive history and the intersection of their gender and

race. By sharing stories, Black women can change the intergenerational dynamics they inherited

through observed behaviors and the historical narrative written from a non-Black female

perspective. This practice can therefore provide Black women a chance to align themselves with

purpose and clarity on the meaning of life's challenges to strengthen their core and pass on their

strength and resilience to others. By acknowledging their lived experiences and proudly

displaying their achievement of overcoming adversity as a personal development strategy, Black

women can empower others to be courageous and to recognize their truth. Resilience Theory and

narrative inquiry offer qualitative research approaches to better understand Black women's

resilience processes and to share stories that honor their experiences without exposing them to

oppressive and exploitative research results based on microaggressions and a limited vision of

their potential.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity. I used narrative inquiry to process Black women's experiences regarding how they survived, recovered, and thrived after adversity. Black women were the participants who provided first-person accounts of their experiences overcoming adversity during interviews.

Key Inquiry Questions

The research questions that guided this study were the following:

- RQ1: Do Black women recognize by telling their stories of overcoming adversity they increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

- RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience from survival to recovery and thriving?

- RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize helped build their resilience to thrive?

This chapter outlines the study's narrative inquiry approach, methodology, the methods, the participants, data collection, data analysis, limitations, positionality and reflexivity, trustworthiness and credibility, and a summary of the methodology.

Inquiry Approach

In this study, I used narrative inquiry to answer the research questions regarding how storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity, which is inevitable in their lives. I utilized narrative inquiry as the qualitative method to capture research data and information (field texts) of individual experiences: "In narrative

research designs, researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people's lives, and write narratives of individual experiences" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Using narrative inquiry, I interviewed the study participants to learn about their personal life experiences and how they contributed to their ability to thrive. As Denzin (1989) observed, "[a] personal experience story is a narrative study of an individual's personal experience found in single or multiple episodes, private situations, or communal folklore" (p. 19). Narrative inquiry relies on interviews to collect descriptive, non-numerical data from the study participants.

I requested that the participants share stories regarding how they developed coping skills that enabled them to thrive and how sharing their stories impacted them and others. "A story in narrative research is a first-person oral telling or retelling of an individual. Often these stories have a beginning, a middle and an end" (Creswell, 2012, p. 74). In addition to oral storytelling, as previously explained in chapter 1, this study uses all forms of storytelling. Participant interviews can provide connections based on personal experiences through more profound conversations: "Thus, narrative researchers focus on understanding individual history or past experiences and how it contributes to present and future experiences" (Creswell, 2012, p. 74). In this study, I also provided the participants an opportunity to present an artifact that represented their resilience. For example, a participant who had experienced a major educational milestone could choose to present a graduation photo or certificate and share the story of the artifact.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry is the qualitative research methodology I used for this study. Narrative inquiry is the process by which the researcher gathers stories lived and told by the study participants based on their experiences of the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). The researcher should recognize that "narratives incorporate temporality, a social context,

complicating events, and an evaluative conclusion that together make a coherent story"

(McAlpine, 2016,p. 2) to deepen the understanding of the participants' perspectives. Narrative

inquiry captures participants in a place or series of places over time in relation to social

interactions and environments (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Narrative inquiry assisted me in

identifying the character traits of thriving Black women, which include "positive self-esteem,

hardiness, strong coping skills, a sense of coherence, self-efficacy, optimism, strong social

resources, adaptability, risk taking, low fear of failure, determination, perseverance, and a high

tolerance of uncertainty" (Ledesma, 2014, p. 1) through the stories they lived and told. I applied

the narrative inquiry research method to provide an alternative lens through which to examine

inequities concerning Black women and how they build resilience that enables them to thrive in

their communities, using Resilience Theory as the theoretical framework.

Qualitative research identifies the problem and assumptions that inform a study from a

social or human perspective: "Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of

interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the

meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013, p. 44).

Qualitative research provides an observer in the world the opportunity to provide perspective to

make the world more visible to those who are generally less exposed (Creswell, 2013). These

perspectives provide the researcher with representations of the world through the practice of

collecting field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and the researcher's

memos to self (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research relies upon the natural setting and

interpretation to make sense of meanings and complexities behind lived perspectives (Creswell,

2013). Qualitative research can significantly impact the world as it relies on data collected from

people's lived experiences, thus providing information for others to relate to and identify with (Creswell, 2013).

To study a problem, qualitative research relies on data to uncover themes to interpret a larger significance or discoveries (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2013) stated that, "[w]e use qualitative research to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for certain populations and samples, or existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are examining" (p. 23). The researcher is key to the qualitative research process, as they must ask open-ended questions, collect data, analyze the data, and observe participant behavior during interviews to identify patterns and sequences to discover deeper meanings to conversations or theories.

Qualitative research also allows for a flexible writing style that convey stories, without the rigid structures of academic writing. Creswell (2012) observed that, "[t]hrough the report writing process, qualitative research is flexible and allows for evolving assemblies to assess criteria which could include the researcher's individual ideas and bias" (p. 44). Qualitative research provides the researcher with the opportunity to explore a phenomenon without a predetermined outcome and without relying on literature or other research studies (Creswell, 2013). Thus, qualitative research provides the latitude to discover new understandings of complex problems from individuals sharing their stories. Creswell (2013) noted that, "[w]e conduct qualitive research when we want to empower individuals to share stories, hear their voices, and minimized the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (p. 45). Qualitative research was the best methodology for this study because I was interviewing a small sample of Black women in various stages of resiliency. Qualitative research is the best method for answering the research questions and validating the

study through in-person interviews. Qualitative research allowed for the fluidity I needed to

understand the complexities of Black women's experiences and the coping strategies they had

developed to help them thrive.

Narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research that involves collecting and analyzing

stories. What's different and special about narrative inquiry are the deeply personal and moving

stories of the participants. These stories typically center around individuals' experiences and the

researchers aim to understand how people are making meaning in their life by telling their

stories. The primary data of narrative inquiry are the stories. Narrative inquiry acknowledges and

values the subjectivity of the storyteller. It understands that these personal stories are influenced

by perceptions, beliefs and emotions. Narrative inquiry often deals with personal transformation

as is true in this research.

Method

The study aimed to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women,

enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity. This section explains the process through

which I conducted the study. This process was snowball sampling, which required identifying

participants for interviews in order to collect their stories and the lessons they learned as a result

of story sharing (Creswell, 2012, 2013). "Snowball sampling is applied when it is difficult to

access subjects with the target characteristics. In this method, the existing study subjects recruit

future subjects among their acquaintances" (Naderifar et al., 2017, p. 2). I used a criterion (see

Appendix B) to recruit and interview participants until the point of saturation was reached and no

new information came from the interviews. I interviewed the participants and ask them to refer

others for the study. I then created a contact list of referrals and randomly selected participants

and recruited them through an email invitation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I interviewed the

selected participants and asked them to share stories they had heard or told that had further

developed their resilience. I audio-recorded the interviews and transcribed them through the

Zoom platform. I then coded the transcripts and identified patterns and themes for each

participant interview. I worked in tandem with the participant to discover the lessons they had

learned from the stories they told and heard, and especially to uncover how the stories increased

their personal resilience. I summarized the key components after analyzing the collected data and

prepared it for presentation. I concluded the study by sharing the lessons learned from these

thriving Black women.

Participants

I conducted this qualitative research using seven participants who were Black women

who had overcome adversity and practiced storytelling, collecting data through first-person

account interviews. I chose seven participants to allow for ample time to recruit, interview, and

collaborate with them. The limited number of participants ensured the validity of the information

shared and honored the experiences of these Black women by not rushing the data collection

process. I encouraged the participants to communicate openly about their experiences and to

share stories of how they built resilience to thrive after overcoming adversity, exploring whether

the practice of storytelling enhanced their resilience and built resilience in others. The goal was

to select a group of participants regardless of social, economic, cultural, and political agendas.

This study took place from June to August 2022. During this timeframe, I selected and

interviewed the participants, collected the data and transcribed and analyzed it. I then created a

report for presentation and reviewed the data collection, analysis, and research presentation.

Data Collection

I collected the data through first-person interviews. I had a fixed script that included open-ended questions for the participants. I also utilized a flexible responsive interview format that allowed for deviation from the script to follow a particularly interesting response (see Appendix C). I conducted the interviews via the Zoom platform. I sought permission from the participants to record interviews. Audio recordings of interviews enhance the accuracy of the research. I then transcribed the audio into transcripts and analyzed the data collected, omitting participant names during the recordings to ensure confidentiality. I assigned a letter or number to each participant. After the transcription process was completed, I provided a copy of the recorded transcript to each participant for review to ensure the integrity of the data collected.

I developed a note-taking system as an observer to further stimulate critical thinking and ideas to categorize the storytelling during the interview process. I used my memos and notes to connect ideas and revelations during the interview and the data collection process. My observations included the physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, conversation, subtle factors, behaviors, and reactions.

Data Analysis

I utilized a step-by-step process to analyze the data. After the participants shared their stories during the interview process, I reviewed the transcripts and notes I had collected during the information sharing process (Creswell, 2012, 2013). I identified critical elements of the participants' stories and organized the data collected by codes (themes) related to the element in sequence (Creswell, 2012, 2013). Creswell (2012) stated that, "researchers incorporate these themes into passages about the individual's story or include them as a separate section in a study" (p. 184). I created a system to code, organize, and manage the interview notes. According

to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "[c]oding is nothing more than assigning some sort of short-hand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (p. 186). I created an inventory of all the data collected, organized, and categorized by themes. To make sense of the data, I used a constant comparative method to evaluate and identify patterns among the participants. I refined the interview questions during the data collection process to pursue deeper connections to patterns; at this juncture, comparative interviews with similar backstories uncovered the emerging themes.

I analyzed and recorded the chronological experiences of the participants to identify patterns and to emphasize sequences to deepen my understanding of the meaning of the participants' shared experiences through their stories (Creswell, 2012, 2013). I then re-told the stories in my own words to provide a chronological order of data collected and to sequence the stories to identify patterns, close gaps, and expose deeper layers of meaning (Creswell, 2012, 2013). "Narrative researchers typically present these themes [in their research write ups] after retelling the story" (Creswell, 2012, p. 187).

I analyzed my transcription of each person's interview using three dimensions noted by Clandinin & Connelly (2000). The three included the following information: the participants' emotional and social interaction; continuity; and situation; as they applied to their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2012). Interaction outlines the participants' emotions and social interactions as they applied to the purpose of conversations and perspectives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2012). Continuity outlines the participants' experience as they apply to the past, strengths in the present, and their hope for their future experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2012). Situation outlines the point in time, the context of the experience, physical setting, and any other characteristics that further differentiated

perspectives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2012). Once I collected and coded the

themes of the participants' experience, I began writing and re-telling their stories. Following that,

I then shared these re-told stories with each participant. I collaborated with each of the

participants during the narrative writing process to validate the integrity of the narrative: "This

collaboration may include many steps in the research process, from formulating the central

phenomenon to deciding which types of field texts will yield helpful information to writing the

final re-storied story of individual experiences" (Creswell, 2012, p. 74). Collaboration between

the researcher and participant may expand the participant's purpose by rearranging information

through illuminating fact-finding discussions (Creswell, 2012). A good working relationship

between the researcher and participant is essential for verifying the validity of the retold

participant's story.

I used friend review groups (explained in more detail below) to discuss the data analysis

and its impacts on the overall research. Friend reviews provided constructive and honest

feedback on the data collection, analysis, and reporting processes. Through open communication,

peer review also challenged any biases I may have had in the analysis process.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study. One limitation of this study was the small

participant sample size, which is true for many qualitative studies. Also, I used a snowball

sampling to gain the participants' cooperation and limit the information shared based on the

sample size (Creswell, 2012). Since the participants were connected as acquaintances, there was

a possibility of overlap in experiences and data. Therefore, the study did not include all the

perspectives of all Black women in various stages of resiliency. Qualitative methodology is

subjective because it is based on the individual participant's perspectives and motives. The

researcher then presents the data collected, which can create further bias based on the researcher's subjective ideas on the information collected (Creswell, 2012). I took the steps listed in the next section, on "positionality and reflexivity," to address the inevitable bias. Stories can be challenging to understand, as is the role of the storyteller.

Another limitation is that I may have assumed that I understood a participant because I shared similar backgrounds and/or experiences. It was important that I recognize this and continue to ask follow-up questions to check those assumptions. Thus, the interpretation and negotiation of the data collected could have been difficult to analyze when preparing the data to be presented. I checked with the participants during multiple stages of the research for clarification to improve my understanding. Narrative inquiry allows for long, descriptive quotes from participants to allow their stories to speak for themselves.

This qualitative methodology relied on my own writing skills to convey the participants' stories as I understood the intended meaning of the story, while preserving the anonymity of the participants. I followed all Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines and best practices to protect the anonymity of the participants. Although I was not a professional writer, my positionality improved my understanding and deep interest in the research topic. Because I was impacted personally by the research topic, I put forth effort to tell the stories the participants shared clearly and meaningfully. Recognizing the limitations of the study enabled me to manage them and to minimize their impact.

Positionality and Reflexivity

With regards to my positionality, I am a Black woman with a rich history within my community dating back 20 years. There is a possibility that my perspective may have influenced the narrative of the findings. To facilitate my own reflexivity, conscious examination of my own

process, I kept a research journal, and practiced member checking along with continually going

back to the participants' own words. However, the credibility guidelines listed below in the

section on "trustworthiness and credibility" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) provide additional layers

of support that I have developed a sound discovery process and analysis based on the interviews

I transcribed and interpreted. My connection to the study allowed for in-depth conversations that

positively impacted the study subjects and their communities.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To promote trustworthiness and credibility and limit the perceptions of the researcher,

this study relied on seven strategies: participant review, data collection, the researcher's

reflective position, peer review, audit trail, rich descriptions, and diverse sampling (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). I used participant review during the data collection and analysis process to review

the participant transcripts and narratives to ensure their validity. I collected data up until the

point where there was no new information coming in and I was retracing ground already covered

by the participants to ensure the credibility and adequacy of the data. I also ensured there was

ample time for the participants to share their stories. So that they were not rushed I allowed

larger time blocks, beyond what was scheduled. If the participants require additional time to

share information, I scheduled additional time slots to collect data. I used critical self-reflection

regarding my assumptions, perceptions, and biases in relation to the study to reduce the negative

effects on the investigation process. To aid this, I kept a research notebook of my thoughts,

emotions, and reactions following each interview and during the collection of data.

I utilized peer reviews to discuss the findings, raw data, and interpretations to ensure the

credibility of the study. I selected peers that had a similar status, training, and educational

experiences. I selected peers who were academically oriented with the dissertation process and

who had experience with, or who had completed, a doctoral degree program. Peer review can motivate the researcher to produce quality data collection and analysis. It provides an additional layer of scrutiny to assist the researcher in focusing on the data collected from the participants and not on the researcher's personal ideas and perspectives. I used a friend review group to analyze my lens to ensure that what I interpreted could be challenged by a different perspective. I may have had some assumptions regarding the participants' intended meanings during the interviews; however, a friend review group could challenge those perceptions and provide alternative lenses through which to view the participants' responses.

I assembled this friend review group once I had collected and analyzed the data. I presented the information in stages via email and Zoom meeting to my peers for evaluation and critique to improve the analysis. I used an audit trail to account for the methods and procedures I used throughout the study. I did this by providing a separate process of documentation to record descriptions of the steps I took from the beginning of the research through the development and reporting of the findings. The audit trail consisted of keeping a data log of the processes during the research study. I described the research context and situations to help the reader identify the findings. I also sought a diverse sample selection to allow for a larger application and variation in the findings. Applying these seven strategies improved the trustworthiness and credibility of this study.

Summary

This qualitative study explored how storytelling empowers Black women in various stages of resiliency after overcoming adversity. I used the narrative inquiry method to interview a snowball sampling of Black women participants to elicit their stories and learn what these experiences meant to them relative to overcoming adversity. I collected the participants' stories

and then retold the same stories to the participants. I collaborated with the participants in the re-

storying process through an authentication process to ensure accurate data collection and to

illuminate the participants' deep connections during the data collection process. Further, I

created a descriptive narrative using a three-dimensional approach to include the participants'

stories: interaction, continuity, and situation. Finally, I collaborated with the participants once

more to check the report's credibility for submission. The use of narrative inquiry provided the

Black women participants the opportunity to write their own narrative, which could contradict

the historical context and diminish the literature gap related to research on thriving and the

impacts of storytelling as a means to build resilience in Black women and others.

CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Problem Statement

There is limited literature focused on Black women thriving, because as a marginalized group their voices are often suppressed. As a result, their history of oppression and adverse experiences are often narrated from non-Black female perspectives in terms of historical context and social constructs. There is limited literature focused on liberating Black women's voices using the practice of storytelling to increase their resilience and ability to thrive. These gaps in the literature may be due to a history of White supremacy, a lack of support for the traumas experienced by Black women, and limited platforms for Black women to safely narrate their personal stories to contribute to the historical narrative. Storytelling may be an important practice for Black women to use to increase their resilience in order to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Purpose of the Inquiry

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were the following:

- RQ1: Do Black women recognize by telling their stories of overcoming adversity they increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

- RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience from survival to recovery and thriving?

- RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize helped build their resilience to thrive?

Overview of the Study

To conduct this study, I used narrative inquiry, a qualitative method, to answer the research questions regarding how storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity, which is inevitable in their lives. Narrative inquiry provided an alternative lens to examine inequities concerning Black women and how they build resilience to thrive in their communities, using Resilience Theory as the theoretical framework. In this study, the participants shared stories regarding how they developed coping skills to thrive and how sharing their stories impacted them and others. In this study, I also provided the participants an opportunity to present an artifact that represented their resilience. The artifact helped the participants recall the emotional context of the lived experience. The following is an overview of the 10 research study steps:

1. I recruited participants through individual selection and referrals.

2. I interviewed the participants.

3. I audio/video-recorded the participant interviews through the Zoom platform.

4. Participants shared a story where they overcame adversity and were asked subsequent questions to help illuminate the story.

5. I coded the participants' transcripts to identify patterns and themes.

6. The participants and I worked together to discover the lessons learned from the stories told and how the stories increased their resilience.

7. I summarized the key components after analysis and retold each participant's story.

8. I submitted the retold story to the participant for review and critique for accuracy and presentation.

9. I discussed and evaluated the participants' stories and their levels of resilience

through a peer review.

10. I united the participants together in a Zoom meeting to discuss their individual stories

and study experience.

Participants

I selected seven Black women to participate in this study through recruitment and

referrals. The participants resided in the following states: California, Alabama, and Texas. The

participants' professions ranged from healthcare administrator to airline pilot, marketing

consultant, educator, retired county administrator, education administrator, and entrepreneur. The

participants' highest levels of education ranged from Bachelor's to Master's degrees. The marital

status of the participants included single, married, and divorced. Below is the list of the

participants, which includes their pseudonym, story title, state of residence, marital status,

highest level of education, and profession (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Story Title	State	Marital Status	Level of Education	Profession
Reggie	Brave in Every Attempt to Thrive	Texas	Divorced	Bachelor's Degree	Healthcare Administrator
Jacklyn	Determination Over Fear to Thrive	Alabama	Divorced	Bachelor's Degree	Airline Pilot
Zella	Storytelling Saves Lives and Helps You Thrive	Texas	Single	Bachelor's Degree	Marketing Consultant
Belle	Learning Contentment to Thrive	California	Single	Master's Degree	Educator/Retired County Administrator
Lady T	Overcoming Disappointment to Thrive	California	Single	Master's Degree	Education Administrator
Melanie	Learning to Accept My Divine Assignment to Thrive	California	Married	Master's Degree	Education Administrator/ Educator
Koralee	Learning to Build Confidence to Thrive	California	Married	Master's Degree	Entrepreneur/Retired County Administrator

Data Collection

I collected data through first-person account interviews of participants who shared stories

of how they overcame adversity from June 2022 through August 2022. I created a fixed script

that included open-ended questions for the participants. I also utilized a flexible, responsive

interview format that allowed for deviation from the script to follow up on any particularly

interesting responses. I conducted the interviews via the Zoom platform, and I obtained

permission from the participants to record the interviews.

I observed that the participants appeared comfortable in their physical surroundings as the interviews were conducted. They seemed relaxed and prepared to share their stories and artifacts representing how they overcame adversity. All of the participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their stories, enthusiasm for the study topic, and were honored to be selected to be a part of the study. Each participant provided thoughtful responses to the interview questions and asked for clarification of questions when needed. The participants were vulnerable during the interviews and often shared more about other life experiences and their stories of overcoming adversity. The other shared stories demonstrated that the participants felt safe during the interview process.

As an observer, I developed a note-taking system to stimulate my critical thinking and ideas to categorize the storytelling during the interview process. The note-taking system that aided me in the data collection process included the following 10 procedures:

1. Prepared electronic notes in Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, and Outlook Calendar to schedule interview dates and follow-up notes, and reflective notes in my research journal. These reflective notes helped me organize my thoughts and emotions regarding the study, the participants' stories, and my personal experiences as a Black woman.

2. Created a three-column Microsoft Word document outline that included: interview questions, participant responses, memos to self, notes, and observations.

3. Recorded and categorized the participant responses based on the interview questions.

4. Highlighted and bolded specific words and themes discussed in the literature review that directly corresponded with the participant responses, and noted any outliers.

5. Drafted memos and notes to connect ideas and revelations during the interviews and data collection process.

6. Observed participants by noting their physical setting, activities, interactions, conversation, subtle factors, behavior, and reactions.

7. Reviewed the audio and video recordings of the interviews often to review the participants' responses, memos to self, notes, and observations to enhance the accuracy of the research.

8. Transcribed the audio into transcripts that the participants reviewed for errors and clarification.

9. Omitted participant names on the transcripts to ensure confidentiality and used pseudonyms for each participant. Each participant selected their own pseudonym for their re-told story, and I used that pseudonym to describe the data for analysis. This process created a connection with the participants and their re-told stories and empowered them to seize the opportunity to identify themselves, shifting the narrative to no longer allow others to label them.

10. Participants reviewed and approved transcripts I analyzed during the data analysis process.

The data collection process evolved as I interviewed the participants and managed the research. It became evident during the data collection process that I needed to organize my thoughts and notes to be clear and concise. I needed to separate my thoughts from the participants' stories; in response, I added procedures 1, 2, 4, and 9, which were not originally part of the research methodology outlined in Chapter 3. Because of my connection to the study subject matter, I found it important to use my research journal to write ideas, thoughts, questions,

concerns, and emotions as a therapeutic way to compartmentalize my perspective from the

researcher lens. I then used electronic tools such as bolded text and highlighting to identify key

themes and to categorize the information captured in the stories chronologically. This process

helped me identify and highlight specific words and themes connected to the literature review to

draw correlations among the participants. I often referred to the audio and video recordings to

ensure that I understood the participants' perceptions, as opposed to projecting my own

perception on to the participants' stories. The participants assisted with the review and approval

of transcripts, which improved their re-told stories. The participants selected their own

pseudonyms for their data collected and the re-told stories. I believe this action created further

trust between myself and the participants as I demonstrated that I cared about how they were

portrayed in their story and in this study. These procedures positively impacted my ability to

analyze, write, and retell the participants' stories.

Re-Told Participant Stories

It was my honor to be present for and to listen to the participants as they shared their

stories of overcoming adversity. I found their stories to be profoundly powerful and inspiring. I

chose not to analyze the participants' stories or to write them for one week after the interviews.

That time allowed me to process each interview and my thoughts, with the assistance of my

research journal. That process allowed me to redirect my focus to the participants during the data

analysis process. Once I had completed the data analysis, I used that data to guide me when I re-

told the participants' stories. After the transcription process was completed, I provided the

participant with a copy of their re-told story for review to ensure the integrity of the data

collected. Each participant expressed feelings of appreciation for the opportunity to share their

story and the ability to read their story in print. The first draft of the re-told stories included the

participants' initials to personalize the stories so that participants would recognize themselves in

their story. Once the participants provided feedback, I incorporated that feedback and changed

the name in the story to the participant-selected pseudonym and provided a second draft to the

participants for final approval.

The participants shared stories of bravery and overcoming fear, the importance of

storytelling and how it saves lives, learning to be content in situations outside of their control,

and overcoming life's disappointments through acceptance and building confidence. I used

themes I identified during the coding and analysis processes to elevate the experiences, patterns,

and lessons learned in the re-told stories. The participants' stories focused on the following six

themes of wellness: spiritual, emotional, physical, financial, professional, and relational, as

shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Six Themes of Wellness
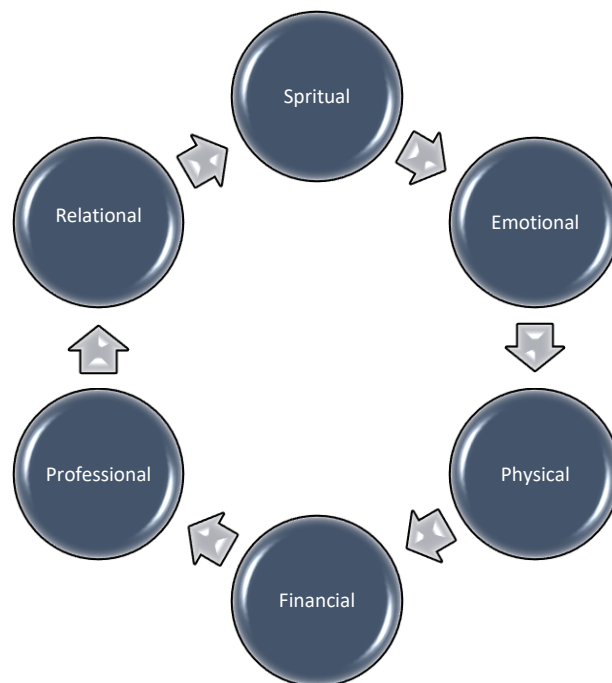
I used the themes of wellness in the study to understand the connections between the

participant stories, as described in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes of Wellness

Characteristics of Wellness	Definition
Spiritual	Enables one's expansion of a set of beliefs that helps them pursue meaning and purpose in life. Spirituality can be obtained through relaxation, meditation, or religion.
Emotional	Correlates with realizing one's feelings and managing stress effectively.
Physical	Conveys the importance of maintaining a strong body and pursuing support when necessary.
Financial	Entails the knowledge of how to oversee finances effectively.
Professional	Encourages a person's growth in education and career endeavors, so that they feel satisfied with and appreciated for their contribution through work.
Relational	Is supported by healthy networks of peers, personal relationships, and romantic partnerships.

These themes, when fully realized for an individual, represent thriving. The re-told participant

stories are briefly summarized in Table 4 below. See Appendix F for the full versions of the

participants' stories.

Table 4

Participants' Stories Summarized

Pseudonym	Story Title	Story Narrative
Reggie	Brave in Every Attempt to Thrive	In this story, a heartbroken daughter achieves forgiveness for her mother during an adverse life experience, freeing herself from intergenerational trauma.
Jacklyn	Determination Over Fear to Thrive	In this story, a determined woman learns to face her fears and overcome challenges to experience the freedom of flight. Fear is a natural emotion that everyone experiences at some point when they identify a threat of something dangerous or feel pain. Jacklyn shares stories of overcoming fear through the necessary life lessons that aligned her with a purpose.
Zella	Storytelling Saves Lives and Helps You Thrive	In this story, a young woman shares overcoming a toxic and abusive relationship with a narcissist, and how therapy and storytelling helped her develop skills to thrive.
Belle	Learning Contentment to Thrive	In this story, a single mother motivated by financial security and professional growth returns to college to improve her chances of success, only to learn that her level of contentment determines success in any given situation.
Lady T	Overcoming Disappointment to Thrive	In this story, a motivated woman discovers that closed doors to employment opportunities were necessary disappointments that aligned her with a divine appointment. Disappointment is sadness one can feel when something they hoped for doesn't come to fruition. Lady T overcame the disappointment of not being selected as the final candidate for multiple employment searches. Those rejections prepared her for a leadership role that was beyond her expectations.
Melanie	Learning to Accept My Divine Assignment to Thrive	In this story, an elementary school principal reluctantly returns to the classroom and finds her identity. Motivated by her love of teaching children, Melanie discovers that she is the one in need of learning some valuable life lessons.
Koralee	Learning to Build Confidence to Thrive	In this story, a woman finds her strength and confidence by overcoming devastating financial adversities during a national recession. Koralee fought to recover from financial ruin, while providing service to others in similar situations with empathy.

I requested that the participants provide an artifact that demonstrated their resilience related to how they had overcome adversity. Many participants found the act of offering an artifact challenging and rewarding. For example, some participants found providing such an artifact challenging because it was the first time that they had shared their story and tied it back to their resilience. In contrast, others had a more direct link to how they overcame adversity, such as receiving a certificate of completion for a graduate program. All of the participants shared an artifact and its significance to their resilience and found the exercise rewarding. Table 5 lists the participants' pseudonyms, story titles, artifact significance, and image of the artifact.

Table 5
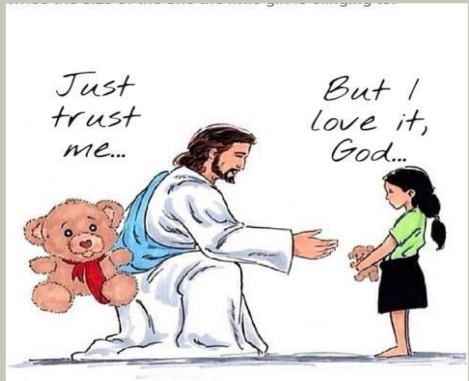
Description of the Participants' Artifacts

Pseudonym	Story Title	Artifact Description	Artifact
Reggie	Brave in Every Attempt to Thrive	Reggie shared a symbol of her bravery, a bracelet that said, "Let me win, if I cannot, let me be brave in the attempt."	

(Table 5 continued)

Pseudonym	Story Title	Artifact Description	Artifact
Jacklyn	Determination Over Fear to Thrive	Jacklyn shared an artifact that represented her determination over fear. The photo captures the uncommonness of a duckling sitting on the back of a chihuahua. The duckling exhibits no fear, while the chihuahua supports the duckling's determination.	
Zella	Storytelling Saves Lives and Helps You Thrive	Zella shared an artifact that represents her level of resilience, a "Girl Power" snow globe. "Looking at it calms me, and it kept me motivated to press forward."	
Belle	Learning Contentment to Thrive	Belle shared an artifact, an image of her Master's degree certificate, symbolizing the importance of running her own race, maintaining faith in herself, never giving up on her goals, and learning to be content no matter where she is in the process.	

(Table 5 continued)

Pseudonym	Story Title	Artifact Description	Artifact
Lady T	Overcoming Disappointment to Thrive	Lady T shared a picture of God, holding a big teddy bear behind his back and a little girl holding the tiny teddy bear, with the caption beneath: (God says) "Just trust me…." (Little girl says) "But I love it, God." For Lady T, "this photo symbolizes that God has something better for me if I'm willing to work through my disappointment and trust him."	
Melanie	Learning to Accept My Divine Assignment to Thrive	Melanie shared an artifact which is her daily affirmation: "Your journey isn't going to be perfect and that's ok. This is your gentle reminder that you are amazing. Smile. Keep your head up. Stay in faith and keep going". This photo symbolizes the importance of self-love and patience.	

(Table 5 continued)

Pseudonym	Story Title	Artifact Description	Artifact
Koralee	Learning to Build Confidence to Thrive	Koralee shared a picture of the sun-glistened pool in her backyard from her bedroom window. "Every morning, when I open my blinds, I think about the struggle and painful path that led me to this place. I never want to take it for granted or forget where I came from."	

Data Analysis

I used a step-by-step process to analyze the data obtained from the participants. After the participants shared their stories and artifacts during the interview, I reviewed the audio and video transcripts and notes collected and identified the key themes of their stories based on the interview questions. I coded the key themes using an Excel spreadsheet to plot the participants' responses to the interview questions. I also made sense of their chronological experiences collected by utilizing a comparative method to evaluate and identify patterns. I used the emerging themes as a pathway to retell the stories, exposing deeper layers of meaning.

I examined the interaction, continuity, and situation of each participant's storytelling during the interviews. Interaction outlined the participants' emotions and social interactions as applied to the purpose of their conversations and perspectives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2012). Continuity outlined the participants' experiences as applied to the past, strengths in the present, and their hopes for future experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000;

Creswell, 2012). Situation outlined the point of time, the context of the experience, the physical

setting, and any other characteristics that further differentiated their perspectives (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2012). I described the participants' experiences chronologically and

narrated their stories emphasizing the key themes. I then represented the stories to the

participants and collaborated with them during the review process to validate the integrity of

each narrative.

Lastly, I coded their stories using the thriving character traits to identify whether the

participants were thriving. The character traits I applied to code the data I collected from the

participants' stories were "positive self-esteem, hardiness, strong coping skills, a sense of

coherence, self-efficacy, optimism, strong social resources, adaptability, risk-taking, low fear of

failure, determination, perseverance, and a high tolerance of uncertainty" (Ledesma, 2014,p. 1)

through the stories they lived and told. Figure 9 outlines the thriving character traits described by

Ledesma (2014), which I used to assess whether the study participants were thriving in response

to the stories they shared of how they overcame adversity.

Figure 9

Thriving Character Traits

In Table 6, the thriving character traits are defined to aid in the discovery of whether the participants in the study were thriving as described by Ledesma (2014).

Table 6

Thriving Character Trait Definitions

Character Trait	Definition
Positive Self-Esteem	An individual's ability to respect and admire their personal qualities and character traits.
Hardiness	An individual's ability to cope and respond to adverse life events with approaches that turn possible adverse situations into learning opportunities.
Strong Coping Skills	An individual's ability to adapt successfully to stressful environments based on their conscious or unconscious behavioral choices, which provides emotional relief to the individual.
Sense of Coherence	An individual's ability to reason and logically make overall sense of the interconnections of information with understanding.
Self-Efficacy	An individual's belief in their own actions in activities to achieve goals or overcome challenges.
Optimism	An individual is positive and confident about the future and believes their outcomes will be successful.
Strong Social Resources	An individual has specific or symbolic elements to discuss and/or exchange among their people systems.
Adaptability	An individual's ability to change according to different situations or environments.
Risk Taking	An individual's action or circumstance of doing something that entails danger or threat in order to attain an objective.
Low Fear of Failure	An individual's ability to not avoid situations where there is a potential risk of not being successful, with an attempt to accomplish an objective.
Determination	An individual's ability to focus on a particular outcome with a fixed and unwavering pursuit of it.
Perseverance	An individual's ability to move forward in action to accomplish an objective despite challenges or interruptions in attaining success.
High Tolerance of Uncertainty	An individual's ability to make decisions securely, even though the exact probability of the outcome is unknown.

Friend Review

The friend review group consisted of 10 diverse colleagues, including eight women and two men. This group provided a safe sounding board for me to discuss the resilience of Black women thriving through the process of storytelling and my personal responses to the study. I used the friend review to discuss the findings, raw data, and interpretations to ensure the

credibility of the study. I selected the friends to have similar status, training, and/or educational experiences to mine. I also selected friends who were academically oriented to the dissertation process and had experience with, or who had completed, a doctoral degree program. My friends motivated me to produce quality data collection and analysis. They provided an additional layer of scrutiny to assist me in focusing on the participants' collected data, not my personal ideas and perspectives. I used friends to review and analyze my perceptions and to ensure that what I interpreted could be challenged with a different perspective. I had some assumptions regarding the participants' intended meanings during their interviews; however, my friends challenged my perceptions and provided alternative lenses through which to view the participant responses through the stories they had shared.

I presented my friends with the participants' stories via email and scheduled a Zoom meeting to evaluate and critique my data analysis. The friend review found that all of the participants had amazing stories of overcoming adversity. My friends discussed each participant's story, which at times gave rise to questions, suggestions, resources, personal reflections, and conflicting ideas. Table 7 offers some discussion regarding each participant's story in the friend review discussion table.

Table 7

Friend Review Discussion

Pseudonym	Peer Review Group Discussion
Reggie	• The friend reviewers found that Reggie's story of facing fears of having hard conversations and uncomfortable situations and working through depression after her mother's death was brave. • One friend stated, "there were just so many positive things that came out of Reggie's story. I hope she reads it, and it helps her gain perspective on how far she's come. I saw a lot of bravery." • The friend reviewers suggested that personal relationships are difficult to manage but felt that Reggie demonstrated great strength in managing her mother's care and the act of forgiveness. • All identified with the loss of someone significant in their life and how impactful that is for a grieving person.

(Table 7 continued)

Pseudonym	Friend Review Group Discussion
Jacklyn	• The friend reviewers found Jacklyn's story of becoming an airline pilot to be unique and remarkable. • One friend had some questions about connections within Jacklyn's story. They wanted to understand why exactly Jacklyn chose to abandon law school and if there was any significance regarding that decision. The friend also wanted to know if there was another lesson learned from deciding to switch careers that weren't in the story. • Another friend responded, "I liked how she drew strength almost in a contrarian way, like, 'oh, you're telling me I'm not going to be able to do this kind of stuff. I'm not worried about what you think.'" • The friend identified Jacklyn as self-confident with a strong support system that helped her accomplish her goal of becoming a pilot. • Another peer responded with the idea of system barriers and questioned if they impacted Jacklyn on any level. • That friend also stated, "so I loved Jacklyn's agency, and that concept of the only person standing in my way is myself right, and I do think that's powerful and empowered her. She felt agency to act in certain situations, but I also think systemic barriers are real simultaneously, right?" • "I wonder if systemic barriers played a part in her decision to quit law school and or impacted her airline pilot journey. Her story is so important about self-empowerment, and it's maybe a little dismissive of systemic barriers that often exist for people as well." • "I think her story is even more powerful because her self-empowerment allowed her to leverage that agency to take on those systemic barriers. I think that university example is emblematic of that."
Zella	• The friend reviewers recognized that Zella had experienced trauma from an abusive relationship and applauded her bravery in seeking outside help from family and therapy to achieve wellness. • A friend responded, "Zella had a horrible experience; she learned from it, walked away from it, and realized what to look for regarding red flags the next time. Zella did not see herself as a victim; she could identify her part and make changes for her future. That is key to her thriving, which is her ability to see herself." • Another friend identified personally with Zella's story.: "I connected to this story a lot, and it's very similar to my own story, and the part that resonated with me the most, I think, was how she talked about storytelling and communication was the key to her being able to own that story. She wasn't a victim because it became her story to tell." • "It's really hard for people in that situation to share the things that have happened to them because there is so much shame associated with being in a relationship like that and walking away from it, and so I love the way that she uses both herself reflection and storytelling, whether it be talking to a therapist or someone else. It's how you shine a light on those things, and not let that shame own you. You can take control of your life back from it."

(Table 7 continued)

Pseudonym	Friend Review Group Discussion
Belle	• The friend reviewers celebrated Belle's persistence to further her education to break down systemic barriers.
	• The friend reviewers agreed that education is a way out of poverty and can provide opportunities to become financially secure.
	• The friend reviewers agreed that money isn't everything, but it's difficult to survive without it and the necessary resources.
	• One friend resonated with Belle's story and appreciated that she understood the value of receiving an education. The friend stated, "Belle didn't give up before trying something new, and that reminded her of a story she shared with the group."
	• "I thought back to when I was placed in a college preparatory class. I was placed there in Junior High School because I was advanced, but I didn't know that at the time. I was afraid and didn't do the work, so I failed because I didn't do anything, and the teacher didn't come and say, 'hey Mary, you were placed here because you are capable of this work.' So, I didn't even try. I actually succeeded at failing."
Lady T	• The friend reviewers identified with Lady T's experience of disappointment and missed opportunities.
	• The friend reviewers agreed that it's difficult to pick yourself up when you go through these types of challenges again and again.
	• One friend stated, "when one door closes, another door will open; I guess a lot of doors closed because the BIG door opened. You don't give up; you keep persevering."
	• The friend said, "Lady T kept a positive attitude despite the doors closing, with the thought that someday another door would open, and then it did."
	• Another friend questioned what it means to have a prayer life, as stated in Lady T's story, and requested that more be shared.
Melanie	• Melanie received a strong reaction from the friend reviewers as she was overcoming current workplace adversity.
	• One friend questioned a particular statement in Melanie's story: "Melanie talked about being snatched away from her principalship, but also, in the paragraph above, she mentions that God put her in this position for a reason." The friend wanted to know; can you feel both of these emotions at the same time?
	• Another friend responded, "it probably allowed her to become more productive from what I read, with her faith, and she's going to make the best out of the situation that sometimes she doesn't think was the best thing. If Melanie were to focus on the other part, then she would be unhappy and not very productive."
	• Another peer shared, "I think the strongest thing in her story was that she believed in herself enough to say…. You can try to demote me, you can try to take away compensation, you can try to do all those things, but I know my heart is in this work to serve, and I will continue to do it, no matter what is done to me. That was powerful for me in this story."

(Table 7 continued(

Pseudonym	Friend Review Group Discussion
Koralee	● The friend reviewers praised Koralee for her willingness to not give up no matter how bad her circumstances became. ● Another friend recognized that Koralee sought resources to help herself no matter how difficult and painful the process was. ● The friend review agreed that there was persistence, resilience, and thriving despite the adverse situations. ● A friend acknowledged Koralee's artifact, a picture of her backyard pool, with excitement for reclaiming her rightful place in society. ● A friend admired how Koralee realized that she played a part in the adverse experiences and provided herself with a back-up plan. ● However, another friend discussed that although Koralee stated having options as back-up plans, Koralee felt that her progress could be taken away at any moment. The peer stated, "Koralee is suggesting as the reader that this couldn't happen again, but then out of fear, she says it could. There is some disconnect for me."

The friends read the re-told participants' stories and rated the participants based on their re-told story using the thriving character traits. The friend review group collectively ranked the participants to be 84% thriving. The participants were ranked highly for perseverance (100%), determination (98%), self-efficacy (97%), and strong coping skills (90%). The participants' lowest rankings were for low fear of failure (65%) and positive self-esteem (61%). Figure 10 demonstrates how the participants ranked overall using the thriving character traits.

Figure 10

Thriving Character Traits
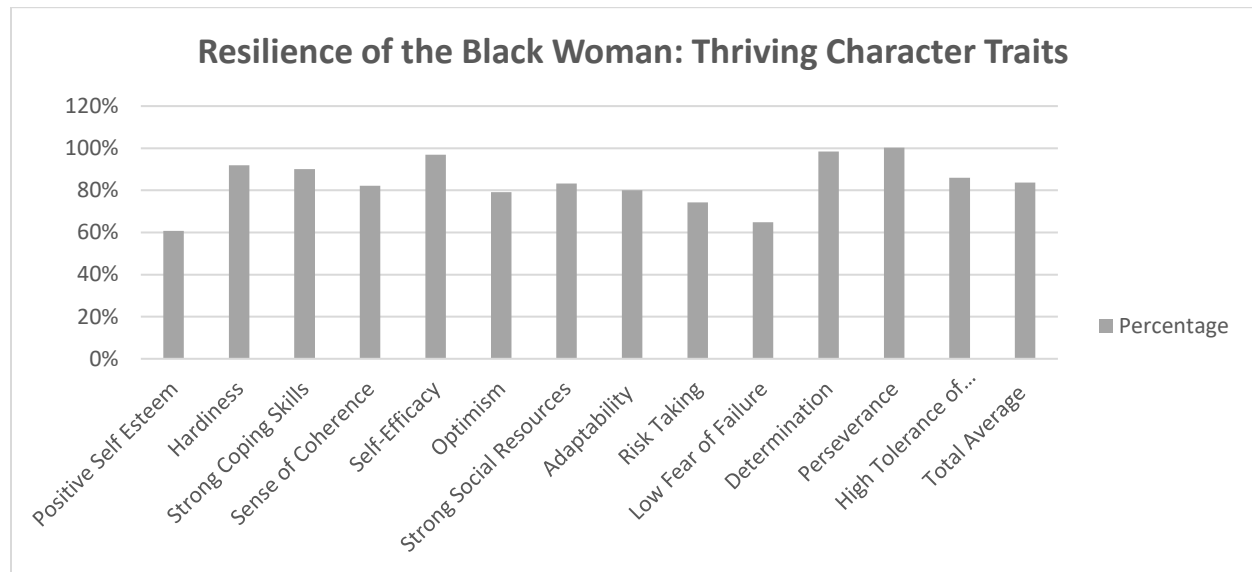
I reviewed the thriving character traits after my friends' assessment and discussion of the participants' stories. I asked my friends to consider the following question: "Did you struggle with any thriving character traits during your rating of the participants' stories?" The friend reviewers identified two traits they had difficulty with: strong social resources, and positive self-esteem. Strong social resources provoked the strongest response for the following reasons:

1. The friends needed clarification on the definition of strong social resources. They needed to understand if strong social resources meant the people around them, the symbolic element they chose for themselves, or social systems such as accessing public resources.

2. After reading the stories, the idea of systemic barriers and how much participants considered what was outside versus inside their control became a concern for my friends.

3. The friends questioned how much the participants internalized those barriers.

4. Although the participants were still able to overcome adversity and move beyond it, a friend questioned the correlation between strong social resources and the idea of coherence, questioning whether participants could identify why they were experiencing all of these challenges.

5. A friend stated, "the idea of coherence is logically being able to see the reason that I'm having all of these challenges is that the system is not built for me; it's not built for a Black woman to succeed in this area."

6. A friend stated, "Lady T mentioned that I'm not going to internalize all of this, but I am going to be humble enough to take constructive criticism." That whole idea of how much they are aware of and cognizant of the systemic barriers matters when they take it upon themselves to succeed and feel the burden is theirs in a world that is not built for them.

7. Another friend suggested asset-based community development to further build the definition of strong social resources. Asset-based community development reviews community wealth and different forms of how community wealth moves that are not traditionally recognized as wealth in an economic sense.

8. Asset-based community development is more about things referenced in terms of a network of people, a network of social and community-based resources that prop people up in the absence of actual resources.

A friend struggled with the fluidity of self-esteem and how it changed for each participant while sharing their stories. The peer shared that, "as they were going through each of their experiences, challenges, fears, challenging the fears, challenging the disappointments, they ended up developing the self-esteem they may not have started with. They had enough self-esteem to challenge the systemic barriers to succeed."

Lastly, my peers offered some closing thoughts regarding the participant's stories, their

participation, and the study, which are depicted in Table 8.

Table 8

Friend Review Final Thoughts

Number	Final Thoughts
1	"I really enjoyed reading different perspectives and having some insight into the journeys of women thriving."
2	"Koralee, who had the issue with housing, is near and dear to my heart because of the work I do with families; their stories are very similar to Koralee's."
3	"For African American women in our current context, thriving is a form of resistance. I thought this study was a cool angle and sort of consensus, or a thread that seemed to weave all their stories together. Institutions and systems were never built for Black women in the U.S. And yet all these women have found ways to succeed and thrive, and, to me, their thriving seems to voice a form of resistance in and of itself."
4	"The thing that first occurred to me was just gratitude that you were uplifting these women and their stories, and not just their struggle but their joy."
5	"I wanted to know what thriving character traits did they have in the beginning and what thriving character traits did they gain along the way. Through their struggles and successes, what were the things that they started out with that was critical, what were the things that they built through challenges, and what were the things they built through their own self efficacy. That was an interesting reflection for me."
6	"I can relate so much to every single one of these women."
7	"I'm amazed by Reggie; she took the time to try and understand her mother's past and why she was treated the way she was, to forgive."
8	"I resonated with Jacklyn, who stood up for herself and challenged the professor. Sometimes with authority, we, as women and people of color, find that hard to do. I could relate because I had to do that myself."
9	"Remarkable how these women can overcome and continue to grow, thrive, risk take, persevere, and succeed."
10	"I really enjoyed reading all these stories and appreciated how different they were. It was a good sample of women represented."
11	"In the world, we can think thriving might look like how much money you earn or what kind of job you have. I loved that so many aspects of thriving went beyond that criteria."
12	"The participants were thriving in so many ways because they were different people."
13	"I'm grateful for you asking us to contribute this way."
14	"Please pass on my gratitude to the participants for sharing their stories with us."
15	"Thank you for letting me be a part of this study."

The friend review consisted of individuals from my diverse friend groups. These friends patiently and delicately provided valuable feedback based on their interpretation of the participant stories and the thriving character traits. They articulated their questions, responses, suggestions, and concerns with respect and an eagerness to share knowledge in exchange for a broader counter-narrative. According to the friends, these participants demonstrated how they could improve and grow in a variety of ways in their life. The friend reviewers also determined that it was equally important to recognize the participants' struggles with systemic barriers that impeded expedited progress. They found that the participants were not responsible for all of the adversity they had experienced and that they should not bear these systemic burdens alone. My friends, many of whom had not met before this study, found the participants to be resilient and thriving. The friend reviewers determined that Black women thrive because of their contribution to themselves and to others, which adds value to our society, even though our systems are not designed for Black women to thrive.

As I listened to the friend reviewers, I felt a sincere validation and appreciation for the support expressed regarding the systemic barriers in systems that impede the success of Black women. I was also moved by the admiration expressed by the friend reviewers for the resilience these participants displayed in spite of the microaggressions and low self-esteem they personally may have experienced. As a Black woman, I often focus on the things that are wrong with me, what I need to fix, owning the weight of the world's inequities and unjust actions as my personal responsibility. When a group of strangers randomly selected were willing to come together to discuss the impacts of race, gender, agency, and social impacts as it relates to Black women, these individuals were compassionate and honestly expressed their perspectives that Black women should feel more empowered based on what they have overcome and give themselves

credit for being resilient. This is a stark contrast from the negative messages we hear which

suggests that we are not enough, that we should be working harder, and that our experiences and

voices don't matter as much as other's experiences and voices. If we are forced to listen to the

negative messages about ourselves from people who don't know us and lack understanding of

what we overcome daily, then we should have the opportunity to listen to the positive messages

about ourselves from people who don't know us but have been exposed to our narrative an how

it has positively impacted them as they increase their knowledge about us. If we are willing to

listen to the negative messages, we must be willing to listen to the positive messages. The truth

is, we care about what others think of us. Black women are community-oriented people, we love

and support others, and we need love and support also. We need to hear we matter; we are valued

and that we are resilient. It may seem trivial to some, but because we are not often celebrated for

who we are and what we offer, these kinds of interactions where friends can sow seeds of love,

support, and compassion, create further opportunities for Black women to safely discover

themselves through storytelling. Though storytelling Black women are able to align

responsibility where it should be placed, which is not always on her shoulders to bear; therefore,

she is able to focus on the things that are within her control so she can continue to heal and

develop skills to thrive.

Participants Connecting and Conversing

The participants expressed enthusiasm to me about reading each other's stories and asked

whether they could meet one another. I coordinated a one-hour meeting for the participants to

gather, with their consent to maintain each other's confidentiality. Five of the seven study

participants attended a virtual meeting on the Zoom platform to meet one another. The

participants who attended were Reggie, Zella, Lady T, Melanie, and Koralee. Those who were

not in attendance were Jacklyn and Belle. At the beginning of the meeting, the participants in

attendance introduced themselves using their pseudonyms and shared some interesting facts

about themselves; all were very excited to meet one another and to be selected to participate in

the study. I facilitated the meeting by asking a series of questions to the participants, who took

turns responding to the questions and building context to their counter-narratives. Table 9

presents the questions I posed and the participants' organic responses.

Table 9

Participants Connecting and Conversing

Pseudonym	Questions and Responses
Question 1:	Reflecting on the storytelling process, what were some of your takeaways from sharing your story?
Zella	• Storytelling helped me to realize I had a story to share. • Storytelling was another step in the healing process. • I shared my story from a good and happy place; I realized the experience wasn't an open wound anymore. • I felt good sharing my story, and I hope to do it some more.
Lady T	• I was impressed with myself by seeing my story in writing. • Storytelling helped me to reflect on my journey, accomplishments, challenges, and where I am now. • Storytelling helped me realize that I was thriving. • It felt nice to tell myself that I was indeed thriving.
Koralee	• Storytelling confirmed my journey and my deliverance from one place to another. • Storytelling motivated me to keep moving forward and work on new projects. • Storytelling helped me think of new creative ideas.
Reggie	• Storytelling helped me to heal even more. • I realized that I was in a place of thriving despite my state of grief. However, as it applies to my grief, it's okay to be at a different level of resilience.
Melanie	• I realized I had a story to share, and this story could be of interest to someone else. • By sharing my story, I learned more about myself and my science. • I appreciated someone being willing to hear my story. • There is power in storytelling that helped me heal.

(Table 9 continued)

Pseudonym	Questions and Responses
Question 2:	What were your thoughts after reading each other's stories?
Koralee	• Reading the other stories, I realized how much we all share. I could relate to some parts of everybody's story. The stories reinforced how connected we are.
Reggie	• I understood there to be a thread or tapestry woven by each story that links us together in some emotional connection.
Question 3:	Did your idea of thriving change after the storytelling process?
Lady T	• I thought thriving was associated with monetary value, but now I understand it to be more about my mental health. • I realized that when I have peace and I'm healthy, that's thriving.
Zella	• I figured out that thriving has levels. I can thrive a little bit, and I can thrive a lot. • I understand now there are many ways I can thrive.
Koralee	• I realized that thriving is a fluid process because every day is different. Something might happen today where I am knocked down, but I am still thriving if I can deal with the situation and effectively overcome it.
Reggie	• Some days I feel like I'm thriving, while others feel like I'm not. • When I'm going through an adverse experience, I know I can get to thriving. I know things will get better. • Storytelling helped me better understand the experience versus the emotions of going through the experience. • I realized there is a bigger picture down the line; regardless of the pain of the heartache, whatever I am going through will get better.
Question 4:	Before sharing your story, what was your perception of how others perceived you as a Black woman?
Zella	• Through my social media presence, I have received feedback that I have inspired and motivated others by sharing stories. • Through others' reactions, I can see how I am showing up by how people interact and engage with me on social media. • When my family says they're proud of me, happy about this, or congratulations, I understand how I'm presenting myself to them also. • These interactions help me gauge whether I am thriving and how I feel personally; combined are indicators of whether I'm thriving.

(Table 9 continued)

Pseudonym	Questions and Responses
Question 4:	Before sharing your story, what was your perception of how others perceived you as a Black woman?
Koralee	• I have been told that I am a fighter, which I interpret as having a strong forward-facing persona, but, on the inside, I am a marshmallow. Not many people know that about me, but it came out during my storytelling. • As a Black woman, I know there is this perception that I am strong and tough, and people treat me that way. • There is always the struggle of how people perceive me and who I truly am. • I want somebody to love me and hug me.
Lady T	• I have two levels of how people may perceive me: 1) the workplace professional, and 2) myself. • Because I am in a management position and a woman, I have to go by the book and be more aware so that the perception I demonstrate is educated and professional. • When I am with my peers, I can be myself, warm and bubbly, with rainbows and unicorns. I have a friendly personality, and I am inviting with positive energy. It is easier for me to be this person when I am not in the workplace.
Melanie	• People on the outside looking in would think that I was thriving. They may make comments such as, "oh, you know she has it together, and she might have gone through this ordeal, but it obviously didn't have an impact on her." • At times, even my own family is unaware of what's going on with me internally because they only judge what they can visibly see. My family views me as physically and psychologically strong, and they are waiting for me to make a comeback. • After my experience, I don't feel that I am thriving yet, because this challenge hurt me to my core, so it's going to take me a little while to recover, and that's okay. • As a Black woman, I must keep going; I must continue to be strong. • Unfortunately, as a Black woman, I get labeled this strong person; even when I am not, I know what I have to be for others.
Reggie	• My family, friends, and peers would probably see me as strong because they tell me that I am strong all the time. • Some days I could use a big hug. • Sometimes, I want to tell people while I am a strong Black woman, it's not because I want to be. It's because I have to be, and sometimes I don't want to have to be.

(Table 9 continued)

Pseudonym	Questions and Responses
Question 5:	What are your thoughts concerning Black women seeking outside help (therapy)?
Zella	• Therapy saves lives for people who are open and vulnerable enough to want help. • There is such a taboo regarding therapy. Admitting that I need to go, sharing with people that I go, or even setting up an appointment and go. • Early in college, I went to therapy to help me get through some stuff with my brother. I was like, "wow! Therapy is like medicine. Therapy is life-changing for people that go and put in the work afterward." • If I don't do any of the exercises, or I don't actively try what I discussed in therapy, I won't experience the benefits from it. • Therapy is a powerful tool and resource. I encourage everybody to try therapy, whether they are going through something or not, because eventually, we will all go through something. It's good to go to therapy before something happens to access tools and resources for when life happens. • Therapy prepares me for those ups and downs in my life. I love it, and it's amazing. Everybody should experience it.
Koralee	• Everyone should have access to therapy. It should be a part of our benefits package: medical, dental, and mental because it's part of our overall wellness. • I understand now that if I'm not mentally well, I'm not doing well. • My therapist has been a lifesaver for me. I like having an unbiased person I can talk to and confide in. This person is not judging me and is there for support. • Therapy is invaluable to a person's wellness.
Reggie	• Therapy is a privilege, necessary, and a great life tool.
Lady T	• I ended up in therapy, navigating a life experience, and needed help from a therapist because I had never been in that place before. • I needed someone to help me process what I was experiencing. • Choosing a therapist based on my personal preference and the necessary credentials helped me to trust the process. • I need to go and find a therapist again to help me navigate some things right now—no matter who or what, talk to someone.

(Table 9 continued)

Pseudonym	Questions and Responses
Question 6:	Since sharing your story, how have you continued to thrive?
Melanie	• I am on vacation with my family and friends in Jamaica. I am enjoying the time off and learning how to be content.
Koralee	• I put myself first to add balance to my life. • I retired at the age of 54. I transitioned out of a toxic work environment and felt a weight lifted from me. • I took a few weeks to decompress and started eating better and dealing with my physical and mental health. • I have lost 10 pounds by eating clean homemade meals. • I am discovering new ways to be the best Koralee I can be.
Zella	• I am only allowing people with positive energy to have access to me. • I am making the best use of my time and energy. • I am overdoing it with self-care, and that's okay. • I am eating better and working out because I make better decisions when I do these things. • I am enjoying the little things and doing my best not to stress over things outside my control.
Lady T	• I am learning I cannot be in control of everything. There are some things I have to relinquish to God and go to bed. • I am learning to release more and more to God as I gain more responsibilities. • I am learning I cannot be everything to everybody. • Although I am blessed with the ability to multitask, people-pleasing has disadvantages because I am not taking care of myself. • I am learning to reel it back, take a chill pill and do things Lady T enjoys doing. • I am single, unmarried, have no kids, and don't even own a hamster or a fish. Why do I need to be at home? I am getting out there and living my best life!
Reggie	• I have incorporated more self-care by incorporating little yoga breaks in the middle of my day. Whenever I feel like it's getting more stressful than it needs to be, I will go outside on my patio, tell Alexa to throw on some meditation state, and do a little yoga practice and get me a Zen moment with my bamboo plants and my orchids. • I am planning a trip to Bali; I feel it calling my soul to go. I want to connect with nature and live in a tree house for half of the time, and the other half, stay in a high-end luxury hotel with amazing spas and massages and practice mindfulness.

As a Black woman and the researcher for this study, I was grateful I selected a vulnerable, intelligent, graceful group of participants to share their experiences of how storytelling helped them overcome adversity. The participants' enthusiasm for the study prompted me to provide an opportunity for them to meet, which I had originally not planned in the Chapter 3 methodology. This addition further supported the data analysis of the study. The connection between the participants was instantaneous; although they came from different backgrounds, a synergy connected them through their experiences. As they each took turns answering my questions and building upon each other's responses, I could sense the pride each felt for one another in how they could thrive despite their challenges. Each participant provided a more profound lens to the counter-narrative that Black women are not only thriving, but that they graciously accept the challenge and strive to continue to build upon their foundations. The participants smiled, laughed, and nodded in approval with each response. They acknowledged their collective strength, courage, and resistance to unfair circumstances, societal norms, and microaggressions that distract from their unique contributions to society. The participants did not focus on the systemic systems designed for them not to thrive. Instead, they focused on sharing their knowledge and solutions to gain strength to overcome adversity no matter the circumstance.

The participants experienced the power of their storytelling in this unique situation, which was magical and beyond exceptional. The participants were grateful that they had the opportunity to meet and put a face and voice to the stories they read. This exercise provided richness to their participants' experience because they bonded with other women with similar experiences. The participants now understood that other Black women empathized with their daily struggles and celebrated their pursuit and joy of thriving.

Key Findings

From the stories the participants shared with me, I derived 15 key lessons about how they overcame adversity. The participants shared lessons they had learned from how they overcame adversity through emergent investigation (ability to make sense of complicated issues through interviews):

1. The participants acknowledged that everyone experiences some level of difficulty; however, they recognized that the hardships they experienced were more intense due to their gender and race.

2. The participants shared how they relied upon their spirituality (God) and the importance of having faith in the face of the negative impacts of adversity.

3. The participants shared how fear and low self-esteem impacted their ability to have faith during adverse experiences and often caused paralysis in decision-making.

4. The participants shared how communicating their doubt, confusion, frustration, and anger with their negative experience did not diminish them spiritually but empowered them to humanize their situations and to be vulnerable when expressing the impacts of the adversity concerning their overall wellness.

5. The participants found that communication helped them acknowledge their own contribution to the hardship, ask questions to solve problems, and align with the appropriate resources to overcome adversity.

6. The participants found that overcoming adversity rejuvenated their faith and confidence in their faith (God) and in themselves. Nevertheless, the participants expressed the importance of positive self-talk and a willingness to learn new theories of achieving success and overcoming adversity.

7. The participants sought guidance through various social and professional resources, such as continued education, professional development, mentorship, family and friend support, and therapy.

8. The participants learned to accept and apply suggestions to overcome adversity from others without fear of judgment.

9. The participants shared the importance of not giving up based solely on hardship.

10. The participants explored the variables that made the adversity possible and focused on the solution rather than the problem.

11. The participants found value in experiencing the adversity, but only after they had time to process it and contribute to solutions that impacted their outcomes.

12. The participants agreed that challenges provided more opportunities for personal growth.

13. The participants shared that they may not have identified or developed skills that better positioned them to overcome future adversity without the experience of navigating troubled times.

14. The participants expressed the importance of preparation and how conquering the adversity described in their stories prepared them to overcome the intense emotions associated with hardship.

15. The participants described the need for balance in their lives and the importance of not attempting to overcome adversity alone based on the stereotype that Black women are strong and do not require additional support from others. The participants shared that this stereotype specifically caused them further harm because of the emotional

burden of portraying strength despite the need for emotional support during their

adverse experiences.

How This Experience Helped the Participants Overcome Other Challenging Experiences

The participants shared their stories of overcoming adversity and how they helped them

navigate other challenges successfully. Jacklyn shared in her story that she learned to face her

fears and overcome challenges to experience the freedom of flight. Fear is a natural emotion that

everyone experiences when they identify a threat of something dangerous or experience pain.

Jacklyn turned her fear into an opportunity to pursue becoming a pilot for a major airline.

Jacklyn a college graduate was young, impressionable, and searching for her inner greatness, and

was on a fast track to become a lawyer when she decided to drop out of law school, because she

wasn't enjoying the experience and was only pursuing law to please her father. After making this

major decision, she worked a variety of jobs and landed as an airline customer service

representative. Jacklyn wanted to earn more money and felt strongly that she had more to offer

herself regarding growth potential. Jacklyn started to seek out other employment opportunities

within the airline industry such as flight attendants and was turned down several times. Jacklyn

recognized that pilots traveled the world and had great earning potential. Jacklyn shared her

aspiration of becoming a pilot with her colleagues, they didn't take her seriously and laughed at

her goal.

The participants realized that life is not always fair and that no one is immune from

experiencing challenging circumstances. The participants learned to evaluate challenges to

identify their role and responsibility in the challenge and to take accountability for their

contribution to the challenge. The participants were then able to release their ownership of

elements of the challenge for which they were not responsible. The participants accepted the

challenge early as a potentially positive experience that offered some level of personal growth.

Jacklyn understood flight aviation was a white male dominated field, she decided to pursue it in spite of those doubting her ability to be successful. There were some lonely times in her life, as becoming a pilot requires rigorous training and thousands of inflight flight hours. Jacklyn didn't personally know any pilots, nor had any of her friends or family pursued this kind of endeavor; regardless, Jacklyn was determined to reach her fullest potential and gave herself a chance to be successful regardless of the microaggressions she endured or the disadvantages or inequities she encountered. Jacklyn shared that, "there will always be challenges; we must 'embrace the suck,' which means we must embrace the challenging times in our lives as part of the journey, as part of the process to get us where we are destined to be." Jacklyn has soared amongst the clouds for the past eighteen years as a pilot. Jacklyn shared there are an estimated 121,000 airline pilots worldwide; of those, about 700 are black, and 150 are black women. However, Jacklyn acknowledges that she was the first black woman pilot she ever saw and questioned whether 150 black women pilots exist. Jacklyn attributes this accomplishment to her determination and willingness to face her fears. The participants focused on the challenge as a temporary experience and as part of life's journey.

The participants' stories of hardship had a beginning, middle, and end. This three-part storyline suggested that the participants adjusted quickly to circumstances, discovered how to transition during the uncomfortable segments while keeping an emotional balance, and evaluated actions during the challenge to increase successful efforts to produce a positive outcome. However, these participants held themselves to greater expectations emotionally, often accepting accountability for elements outside of their control. The participants admitted that whether the hardship was due to a poor decision or extenuating circumstances, it was essential for them to

extend grace or an act of kindness to themselves by forgiving themselves for whatever part they had contributed to the challenge.

Zella, shared her story of how she overcame a toxic and abusive relationship with a narcissist; and how therapy and storytelling helped her develop skills to thrive. Through therapy, Zella recognized that navigating relationships is part of the journey as a young adult. Zella was in an abusive relationship for five years, and she was finally able to successfully leave the relationship with the help of a family member and start her healing journey. Zella shared "I just learned a lot about myself and what I contributed to that relationship, and also how to tell I was in a situation that wasn't healthy for me and what to do to get out of it." Zella experienced growth by conducting internal research; she learned about her anger and how she channeled a lot of masculine energy trying to be the hero. Today, Zella notices red flags, knows when something isn't right and is reminded of that experience, and is thankful for it. Zella can now understand her emotions and how to handle situations better, especially since she's healed from the experience. Zella accepts that she will always be connected to this story, which is the tension she uses to keep herself safe.

After overcoming adversity, the participants found comfort in letting go of negative experiences and intentionally creating mindfulness moments to reflect positively on the adverse situation and themselves. The participants experienced concern when faced with new challenges yet attempted to find adequate solutions to the problems created by the challenge, despite the surge of emotions they may have been experiencing. The participants acknowledged their lived experiences of overcoming adversity and drew upon that hope and strength to assist them with the next challenge.

The participants learned to humble themselves and not to take themselves too seriously. By doing so, they felt at ease seeking additional resources and guidance earlier in the adverse experience process, which provided more favorable outcomes to challenges. The participants routinely evaluated their thriving character traits as applied to challenges that positively led to successful results. By doing so, the participants realized that they had developed skills and inner strength they did not recognize before the adversity that would aid them with future challenges.

Zella shared that storytelling is a form of therapy. "Telling your story can help you grow, release in so many ways, and build resilience. Your story has a beginning, middle, and end". Zella shared that storytelling helps you reflect, heal, forgive, and look at the situation from outside the trauma of the experience. According to Zella, "Storytelling saves lives and helps you thrive." When Zella was going through her experience, she initially said, "I'm not telling anyone about this situation"; however, Zella experienced something miraculous, which was the power of healing through storytelling. Zella shared, "You realize you are not alone, and there is no need to be embarrassed because our experiences connect us through sharing our stories."

The Emotions Participants Experienced When They Shared Their Stories

The participants experienced a variety of emotions when they shared their stories. They often expressed the emotion of gratitude, which is a feeling of being thankful and appreciative of an experience and possessing a willingness to give back kindness. The gratitude the participants experienced stemmed from having opportunities others may not have been provided to overcome their adversity. The participants expressed gratitude for overcoming their adversity and for how the past experiences and the adversity ultimately led to positive outcomes.

Melanie shared her story of being an elementary school principal and reluctantly returning to the classroom, after experiencing a traumatic work experience. Melanie proudly served as a principal for an elementary school and provided her community a Black woman role

model in education for children to aspire to which was something she didn't experience growing

up. After three years, Melanie was moved to an alternative high school that had preexisting

challenges with student attendance and overall funding issues, as a result the school closed

shortly after her arrival. Once the school closed Melanie was suddenly out of her principal

position and the school district was not offering a similar position at another school. Melanie

applied for several Vice Principal and Principal positions, but the district refused to place

Melanie even though she successfully passed the interviews.

Melanie had a stellar performance record and was now faced either unemployment or

demotion by returning to the classroom. Melanie chose to return to the classroom while she

pursued legal action against the school district. Melanie shared "If it takes everything I have, I'm

going to fight and expose what is taking place. A lot of times, what we experience is not upfront

discrimination; it is back-door discrimination. As a woman of color, I have to work harder, be

smarter, and do everything ten times better than the other person." Melanie shared that she

sacrificed so much to become a principal; it was heartbreaking to have it stripped away from her

based-on discrimination.

When the participants shared their stories, they felt other emotions, including sadness,

anger, embarrassment, denial, frustration, caution, pride, contentment, optimism, and joy. It

appeared that, as the participants shared their stories, they were experiencing the emotions they

felt during their adverse experiences. At times, the participants would pause and breathe in

deeply before continuing with their stories; at other times, the participants' facial expressions or

the tone of their voices would change based on the emotions they were experiencing.

Melanie shared "It's heartbreaking because the children and the district lose out." Melanie

expressed how she is working through the hurt of the experience:

I'm here to do the best job possible. It's hurtful, and they make you feel like you did

something wrong. I was starting to ask myself, what's wrong with me? This experience

reminded me of going through my own K-12 system. Peers and teachers trying to make

me feel as if I was not good enough? That's why I came back to my city. As I never had a

principal or teacher that looked like me. The resilient part of myself reflects and knows

that there is something more; my faith helps me understand that these doors only opened

because of God, so if God says I need to be still for the moment, then I have to trust that.

All of the participants said how proud of themselves they were for how they handled the

adversity and for not giving up on themselves despite the emotions they experienced. Melanie

shared:

I don't feel sorry for myself anymore; I used to say why me? But now I say, why not me?

This is just the season God has for me to toughen and thicken my skin. I have changed

my thinking, a total paradigm shift; that working with children is my divine assignment; I

can't allow others to take that away. I'm going to experience joy; I have to thrive despite

this experience.

Did the Participants Realize That They Had Grown Personally in Areas They Had Not Recognized Before, and How Did They Share This?

The participants appreciated the storytelling experience, which allowed them to reflect on

how they overcame adversity and how they had grown personally because of the adverse

experience. Each participant experienced growth differently. Reggie understood forgiveness

better and how to receive it and give it, which positively impacted her relationships. Jacklyn

recognized how her public speaking to elementary school children enhanced her sense of

gratitude by sharing her story of overcoming adversity to become a pilot. Zella shared that her

proudest area of growth was owning and changing her part in a toxic relationship: "It's one thing

to recognize it and call it out, but to be able to actively heal it and change that behavior and grow

in that area is different. I'm proud of that progress." Belle shared how she applied newly

developed skills and tools to accomplish new goals without fear of the outcomes. Lady T

recognized through her storytelling that she had much to offer others and herself because she

now understood her worth, which was not contingent upon how others felt about her but how

she, in turn, accepted herself. Melanie described her growth as, "I have changed my thinking, a

total paradigm shift; I'm going to experience joy; I have to thrive despite this experience."

Koralee shared, "I have matured going through this experience, which lets me know, whatever I

need to take on, I can, and I know I'll be ok, regardless of the outcome." The participants

recognized the power of their perseverance, determination, and that they uniquely grew in areas

not recognized before the storytelling.

RQ1: Did Storytelling Help the Participants Identify Their Level of Resilience as One of Surviving, Recovering, or Thriving?

The study sought to identify whether storytelling helped the participants identify their

level of resilience. I explained Resilience Theory to the participants and the three levels of

resilience: surviving, recovering, and thriving. After the participants shared their stories, they

identified their levels of resilience. Each participant identified themselves as thriving initially.

However, two participants, Reggie and Melanie, identified alternative resilience levels based on

current circumstances outlined in their stories of overcoming adversity.

Reggie shared her story of how she achieved forgiveness for her mother during an

adverse life experience, freeing herself from intergenerational trauma. Reggie's mother suffered

from blindness and Alzheimer's and a series of medical emergencies thrusted Reggie into the

role of caregiver. Reggie and her mother's relationship was intense, because of how Reggie's

mother was raised and the trauma both she and her mother experienced at different points in their

lives. Reggie began her journey providing additional support out of a dutiful spirit, but as the two navigated each health crisis, Reggie began to let the pains from the past fall away and embraced forgiveness to cherish the moments she still had the opportunity to enjoy with her mother. Reggie lost her mother to cancer two years ago.

Reggie shared that by sharing her story she was able to take the time to identify her feelings around losing her mother and her current state of emotions. Reggie shared that she would identify herself as "thriving," but as it pertains to this adverse event, she's still surviving and moving closer to recovery. As Reggie reflected during her story, she acknowledged that for months she couldn't go a day without crying, that she sees progress in that area, but is still grieving and understands it will take time to recover but is hopeful it will happen. Reggie shared that she experienced emotions of sadness and gratitude.

The participants identified their resilience based on the hardship they were presently experiencing: Reggie (surviving) and Melanie (recovering). The participants were thoughtful in their responses. The participants paused and thought about how the question and the explanation of the resilience levels applied to them personally. The participants found that the explanation of Resilience Theory and the levels were helpful in making the determination for themselves.

Did the participants describe why they had chosen their resilience level after the adversity? The participants described why they had chosen their resilience level after the adversity. Reggie's mother died two years, so Reggie identified as surviving. As the days passed, Reggie was less sad, experienced fewer lows, and no longer cried daily. Before Reggie shared her story, she assumed she was thriving overall. But, after sharing her story about her mother's death, Reggie found that she was predominantly thriving but realized she was still grieving; by this acknowledgment, Reggie identified herself as surviving as it applied to this adverse event.

Jacklyn (thriving) overcame the obstacles of becoming a pilot and recognized that there was always some area in which she could improve but believed that she was remaining open and teachable, which was vital for balance, longevity, and thriving. Zella (thriving) had ended a toxic relationship, and shared, "I feel I'm thriving now because even though I'm on the struggle bus with dating, I'm having fun dating and enjoying the ability to date, especially in a healthy state. I'm disconnecting from people I see aren't for me, and I'm nurturing relationships that I feel could be something."

Belle (thriving) overcame the obstacles of continued education and building a professional career and identified herself as thriving because she accomplished more than she ever thought possible. Lady T (thriving) overcame the disappointment of not achieving professional advancement and acknowledged the positive season she was currently experiencing professionally. Melanie (recovering) was overcoming an unfair situation and outcome she experienced in her workplace: "I'm recovering from a very traumatic experience; I feel that I'm on the upswing to thriving." Koralee (thriving), who overcame adversity that helped her build confidence, shared, "I am thriving with the caveat that I'm still working some things out, but I'm still thriving." The participants seemed empowered by the chance to identify and apply the appropriate level of resilience according to their personal experiences (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Participants' Self-Identified Resilience Level

Surviving
- Reggie

Recovering
- Melanie

Thriving
- Jacklyn
- Zella
- Belle
- Lady T
- Koralee
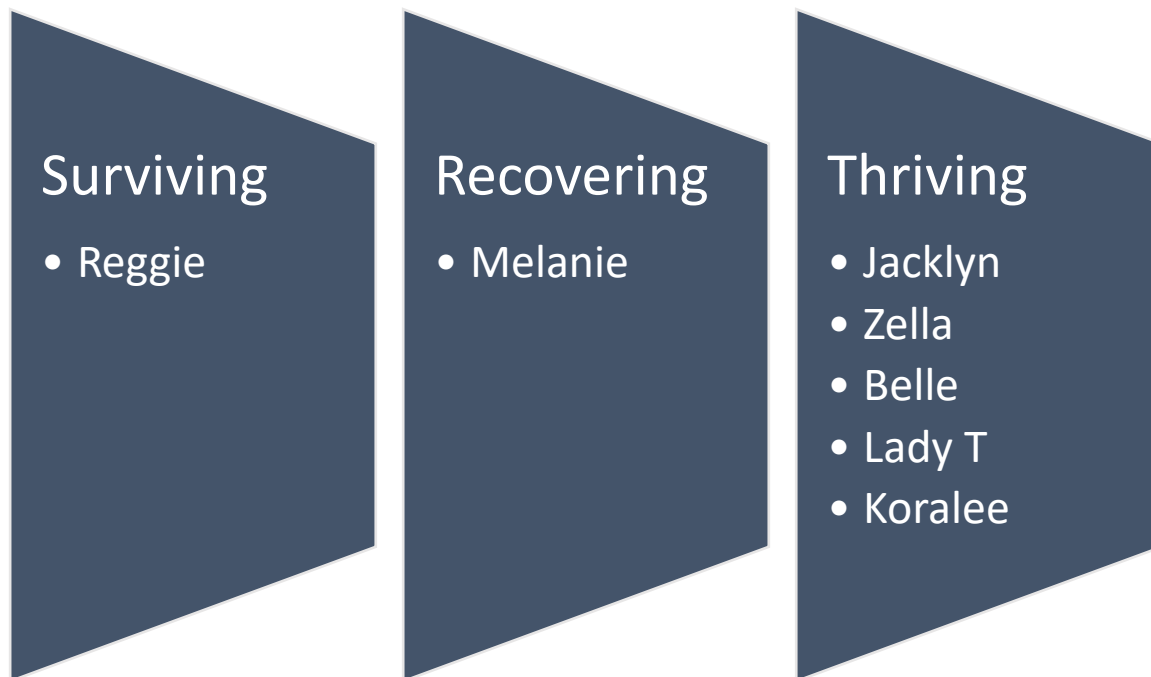
Before sharing their story, would the participants have considered a different resilience level? If so, why? The participants' responses varied as to whether they would have considered a different resilience level before sharing their stories. After thoughtful consideration, most of the participants maintained that they would not have changed their resilience level before sharing their stories. However, two participants considered that they would have identified with different resilience levels before sharing stories. Reggie shared she would have identified with thriving instead of surviving based on the current adverse event. Reggie shared that she changed her determination because she now understood what the term thriving means and that she was improving but still healing from the grief she experienced from her mother's death.

Koralee shared her story of how she found strength and confidence by overcoming devastating financial adversities during a national recession and shared that she would have

identified between survival and recovery as opposed to thriving based on a recent work

challenge. After 17 years of gainful employment Koralee found herself unemployed and

homeless. The emotional turmoil of that experience left Koralee desperate for compassionate,

emotional support, but Koralee's immediate family were unwilling or unable to provide it.

Therefore, Koralee was forced to develop the skills that built resilience on her own, through

therapy and taking action in her life. Koralee recently retired as a county administrator and

purchased a beautiful home with a pool. Koralee shared "Ten years ago, I didn't have confidence;

I have a level of confidence now that makes me feel empowered." Koralee shared that she has

grown in many ways and says "I feel like I'm a different person". Koralee shared, "my resilience

level changes daily and sometimes moment by moment, but overall, I'm thriving." Koralee

shared "I am thriving with the caveat that I'm still working some things out, but I'm still thriving.

I have a therapist; I'm not ashamed I have a therapist; I talk to her every other week. I always

want to be a better version of myself".

The participants found it helpful to apply the explanation of the resilience levels when

considering whether they would maintain the resilience level before sharing their stories.

However, the participants shared openly that their resilience levels could change based on what

had occurred at the time of the assessment. Nevertheless, all of the participants agreed they were

thriving overall but could struggle in an area of their life that would identify them as surviving or

recovering at the point of assessment.

RQ2: In Their Stories, What Were the Personal Qualities/Life Skills That Helped the Participants Overcome the Adversity?

The participants shared the personal qualities and life skills that helped them overcome

adversity. Lady T shared her story of how she discovered through storytelling that closed doors

to employment opportunities were necessary disappointments, that eventually aligned her with a

divine appointment. Lady T, a highly educated professional, experienced repeated

disappointments when seeking employment opportunities that would increase her earning

potential and challenge her. However, it seemed for some time that each leadership position she

applied and interviewed for, resulted in rejection. Lady T recalls, "the door kept getting

slammed. After getting so many of those rejections, you get discouraged." Lady T applied for a

position with the County Office of Education in the Bay Area. "This is where the breakthrough

came. I know God opened this door; all the other positions I had applied for were $80-90k

salaries. When I landed with the County Office of Education in the Bay Area, the salary and

benefits were greater than all the other positions I applied for, and I'm in a better organization

overall. Now, I can see why those doors were closed." Lady T expressed the importance of

developing resilience, patience and not giving up: "Just because you experience a no could mean,

not right now." This experience helped Lady T overcome other challenges that came afterwards:

"Challenges are how we grow, and that's how we thrive. If everything were easy in life, there

would be no purpose and no reason to trust God. Challenges allow us to develop a relationship

with God and trust and rely on him."

   Most commonly, the participants communicated their emotions with their support

systems and requested additional resources to assist with the hardship. The participants valued

the importance of increasing their knowledge to help inform decisions as they navigated

adversity. The participants welcomed constructive criticism and suggestions regarding the

adversity and took ownership of their part in it. The participants analyzed the adversity they had

experienced, identified the lessons learned, and outlined preparedness plans to address the

potential for future hardship and what their response to them would be.

Of the personal qualities/life skills you mentioned, were any of the new skills you developed because of this adversity? The participants developed new personal qualities/life skills because of their adversity. Belle shared her story of being a single mother who was motivated by financial security and professional growth to return to school to obtain both Bachelor's and Master's degrees. Having grown up with a single mother herself, Belle understood that she would need to develop new skills to help break generational poverty for her family and she was confident that continued education would provide some of the opportunities she was seeking to build a sustainable future for herself and children. Belle learned resilience, discipline, and standing strong through her biblical principles, faith, and prayer. Belle shared, "we can accomplish anything we put our minds to if we have faith. You can do it, but if you tell yourself you can't do something, you won't do it." Belle was able to overcome other challenges also because of this experience. This experience taught Belle not to give up before trying. Belle accomplishing her education goals increased her confidence that she could achieve what's was in front of her. Belle shared, "Start trying things; if I tried something and it didn't work out, that's ok because at least I tried it."

The participants developed life skills to process and confront complex relationships and situations by exhibiting rare qualities of courage and effective communication techniques to express their emotions. The participants developed an evaluation process to manage difficult situations by addressing their unrealistic fears and setting realistic expectations for themselves and others. The participants developed their listening skills to accept constructive criticism and suggestions and applied actionable steps without a predetermined outcome. The participants enhanced their personal qualities to be open-minded and willing to explore new opportunities

and to try different methods. The participants, at some point, sought support from mental

health/wellness professionals to learn additional life skills to assist with their overall wellness.

Were there any personal qualities/life skills the participants desired to develop to

help them thrive if they were to encounter similar adversity again? The participants desired

to develop more personal qualities and life skills to thrive. Reggie desired to feel worthy,

confident, good enough, and to fully accept the value she offered to the world. Jacklyn desired to

enjoy life by engaging in fun and creative projects to maximize her potential. Zella desired to

recognize "red flags" and to have the courage to not override her instinct in any situation. Belle

desired to be content in all areas of her life, regardless of the risk or outcome. Lady T desired to

build effective communication skills by becoming a stronger listener to provide herself with

more growth opportunities. Melanie desired to become less sensitive, to establish stronger

boundaries, and to take situations less personally to reduce unnecessary risks of harm. Koralee

desired a positive body image as she embarked upon new business opportunities. The

participants acknowledged there was always room for improvement, and although they were

thriving overall, there were personal qualities and life skills that could increase their thriving

characteristics.

RQ3: Are There Any Additional Thoughts the Participants Would Like to Share
Regarding the Topic of Storytelling and Building Resilience to Thrive?

The participants recognized that everyone has a story that could be helpful to someone

experiencing an adverse event. In particular, the participants believed that more Black girls and

women should hear stories of Black women overcoming adversity and thriving. The participants

shared the importance of not being afraid to share their stories; by sharing their stories, they

could help the other person, but, more importantly, they were helping themselves. Melanie

shared that, "[o]ften, as Black women, we don't get to share our stories with anyone. It's a

validating experience, sharing how you overcame an experience. Sharing your story allows you to take the time to learn and grow." The participants engaged in the process of sharing their stories, which empowered, validated, and liberated them. The participants acknowledged the storytelling process as a form of therapy that built their resilience. The participants agreed by sharing their stories that one can encourage, build confidence, and reassure others that they are not alone in overcoming adversity.

Was there anything participants thought the researcher should know to help them better understand how Black women can use storytelling to develop resilience to thrive?

The participants were invigorated and excited to share their stories with Black girls and women, which they believed could help others develop resilience to thrive. The participants' ability to share their stories empowered them to thrive by changing the narrative that is ordinarily constructed when microaggressions are intentionally or unintentionally used by society and culture to diminish the power of Black women. Jacklyn shared that, "the only limitations you have are the ones you recognize." The process of storytelling provides an opportunity to recognize the problem, solution, limitations, and outcomes and to prepare for a similar adverse experience. Storytelling releases the individual sharing the story of guilt and shame associated with new knowledge, understanding, and expertise, empowering the storyteller to account for their part in the adversity, thus redistributing power to themselves by accepting ownership of what they can control.

Zella shared that when she was going through her adverse experience, she initially said, "I'm not telling anyone about this situation." Out of embarrassment, however, Zella experienced something miraculous, which was the healing power of storytelling and that "storytelling saves lives and helps you thrive." The participants agreed on the importance of supporting Black girls

and women with resources to help them thrive, whether through storytelling or by sharing

information. Black girls and women are often compared to and described using negative images

and stereotypes to increase their competitiveness and break down their threads of unity.

Storytelling allows Black women and girls to focus on the similarities they share with empathy

and compassion while celebrating the vast differences that make them unique. Belle shared,

"let's not be selfish and competitive with our knowledge and experience. It's essential to help

share information and networking opportunities; there is enough for everybody to be successful."

Providing safe spaces for check-ins for Black girls and women to share stories is a type of

therapy. Lady T shared, "as Black women, we manage so much. We wear many hats; we take off

one, then we still wear 15 others. Sometimes we need to be able to release with those who can

truly understand the pressures we experience daily as Black girls and women." The participants

believed that the negative stereotypes and microaggressions they contended with routinely

harmed them psychologically. They often heard negatives regarding Black girls and women and

felt demonized as habitual survivors instead of those that thrived. Koralee shared, "I think

storytelling is essential, especially for Black women, because we don't often hear the positives

about ourselves; we get beat down with the negatives. We don't hear how we can overcome, do,

or be better!" The participants recognized the power of changing the narrative in their

community and in larger society regarding how they portrayed themselves as thriving.

Storytelling supports this exploration by assisting in the identification of the thriving

characteristic traits and how to further develop and define who Black girls and women are as

thriving contributors to society.

Summary

In summary, there is limited literature focused on Black women thriving, as Black women's voices are suppressed due to their status as a marginalized group. This study provided a platform for Black women to safely narrate their personal stories of overcoming adversity through the practice of storytelling. The data analysis confirmed that storytelling can be a valuable practice for Black women to use to increase their resilience to enable them to thrive after overcoming adversity.

In this study, I identified, recruited, and selected participants. I audio and video recorded the participant interviews using the Zoom platform, and collected, synthesized, coded, and analyzed the data to produce the participants' re-told stories. The re-told stories included lessons learned from their adverse experience. I collaborated closely with the participants to ensure that their stories aligned chronologically and that I had maintained their intended integrity.

A peer review group, which consisted of a diverse circle of my colleagues and friends, read the participants' re-told stories I had written and rated the participants' level of thriving using the thriving character traits. The peer reviewers found the participants to be thriving at an average of 84%. The peers participated in a meeting on the Zoom platform to explore and discuss their questions, concerns, ideas, and suggestions regarding the participants' re-told stories and the study.

The participants read each other's stories, met one another, and answered questions collectively regarding their experience in the research and their thoughts regarding storytelling in conjunction with thriving. The participants seemed to enjoy connecting with the identifier of being thriving Black women. The participants focused on their experiences as individuals and on

how storytelling positively impacted their recovery from an adverse experience, enabling them to thrive. The participants valued storytelling for their own benefit and to help others to thrive.

The participants highly suggested therapy as a tool and resource to acquire the skills to thrive before, during, or after adversity or challenges. The participants found that having an outlet to discuss life's problems before, during, or after they occurred with an unbiased, non-judgmental professional assisted them in processing the adversity. Through therapy, the participants were able to identify their contribution to the adversity and what contributors were outside of their control, such as systemic barriers, systems, and/or the acts of others. The participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their stories of overcoming adversity and the value of someone being willing to listen to their story.

Lastly, the participants shared that the burden of being a Black woman lies in the illusion that they are always strong and do not require empathy, compassion, support, and love. For some reason, society identifies Black women as exempt from the need to be vulnerable, encouraged, loved, and even hugged when experiencing adversity. The counter-narrative is that Black women require more but ask for less regarding support and resources. The support needed is not always monetary. It comes in the acknowledgment that there are exceedingly fortunate Black women who beat the odds to thrive in a systemic system designed for them to barely survive.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This study was an exploration of thriving Black women and the practice of storytelling to increase their resilience in order to thrive. There is limited literature available regarding Black women thriving and how they develop skills to thrive, which inspired me to explore the lived experiences of thriving Black women and the lessons they learned after overcoming adversity. Furthermore, there are limited safe spaces for Black women to narrate their personal stories to increase resilience in order to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were the following:

- RQ1: Do Black women recognize by telling their stories of overcoming adversity they increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

- RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience from survival to recovery and thriving?

- RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize helped build their resilience to thrive?

The findings supported the literature that Black women who overcome adversity experience additional complexities because of the intersectionality of their gender and race (Crenshaw, 1989). The findings maintained that Black women benefit from opportunities to

share their stories in safe spaces, which builds their resilience to thrive. This chapter discusses

the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research to increase Black women's

resilience to thrive.

Summary of Findings

Applying the findings from Chapter 4, this chapter discusses and answers each of the

three research questions and connections to prior research to this study.

RQ1: Do Black Women Feel That Telling Their Stories of Overcoming Adversity Increases Their Resilience and Ability to Thrive?

This study discovered that Black women who shared their stories of overcoming adversity

increased their resilience to thrive. The practice of storytelling helped the participants identify

their level of resilience. There are three concepts associated with Resilience Theory that describe

what level of resilience a Black woman may experience during or after adversity: "They may (a)

survive the incident, (b) recover from the incident, and (c) thrive as a result of enduring the

hardship" (Nishikawa, 2006, p. 27). I provided the participants with information regarding

Resilience Theory prior to our meeting and during the interview, along with the three levels of

resilience: surviving, recovery, and thriving. After the participants shared their stories of

overcoming adversity, they identified their levels of resilience. The participants often noted that

they originally did not realize that they had a story to share, underestimating the meaning or the

value of their lived experience, as they were accustomed to enduring adversity and considered it

part of life's journey. However, after sharing their story, the participants recognized: 1) that they

had a story to tell, 2) how and why the adversity occurred, 3) the life skills they developed as a

result of the adversity, and 4) the lessons learned from overcoming the adversity.

Although all of the participants ultimately identified as thriving, two participants also

identified alternative resilience levels based on the current circumstances outlined in their stories

of overcoming adversity: Reggie (surviving) and Melanie (recovering). These participants agreed that they experienced different levels of resilience as they compartmentalized various types of challenges they had experienced, while still thriving overall. This study found that each participant ultimately identified herself as thriving. Ledesma described an individual's ability to thrive by the following: a) the individual survived the challenge, b) recovered from the challenge, and c) as a result of the challenge, they are now improved and thriving (2014). An individual who survived a challenge continues to function, but it could be a reduced function. An individual who has recovered from a challenge has returned to their original functionality. Lastly, an individual who is thriving has enhanced their functionality because of the challenge. Although all of the participants identified as thriving, two participants also identified alternative resilience levels based on the current circumstances outlined in their stories of overcoming adversity: Reggie (surviving) and Melanie (recovering). These participants agreed that they experienced different levels of resilience as they compartmentalized various types of challenges they had experienced, while still thriving overall.

However, Koralee changed her perspective and stated that she was not surviving but thriving after sharing her story. Koralee acknowledged that she was currently working through a challenging work situation not related to her story of overcoming adversity, and she originally thought of herself as surviving because of the impact of that one situation. However, after sharing her story, she opted to identify herself as thriving as she was empowered by her own story and satisfied with her overall wellness. All of the participants shared that they could, at any time, experience an adverse event that could significantly impact their wellness and that, depending upon the adversity or challenge, they might experience a shift in their resilience level in that particular area, while still maintaining their overall wellness and ability to thrive.

The study revealed that the participants realized more about their levels of resilience when they shared their stories of overcoming adversity and were provided with ample time to unpack and analyze their own stories to identify their resilience levels. The participants shared barriers that prevented them, at times, from sharing their stories and recognizing their resilience levels on their own outside of the study. Those barriers included the following:

1. The participants did not feel safe enough to be vulnerable to share their stories without fear of judgment because of their gender and race.

2. The participants questioned whether they had a story that was considered meaningful and that added value to others.

3. The participants did not receive requests to share their stories.

4. The participants with challenging schedules did not feel that they had enough time to share their stories and or process the impact of overcoming adversity.

5. The participants normalized their adversity or challenges. They did not stop to recognize their success of overcoming adversity because they were often focused on the next challenge based on their life's complexities.

The participants who identified as thriving resonated with the Challenge Model. The Challenge Model suggests that resilience caused by stress can enhance an individual's adaptation to extenuating circumstances, as long as the stressor is not excessive (Bhaiu & O'Leary, 2006). The Challenge Model supports why participants build up resilience to assist with overcoming adverse events. When an individual overcomes a challenge, their psychological outcome in response to resilience is thriving, which expands the idea of processing to grow by confronting challenges using coping mechanisms to aid in psycho-social transformation (Bhain & O'Leary, 2006). These participants were able to compartmentalize their adversities to manage multiple

challenges at any given time. The challenges instilled these participants with the confidence that they could manage future adversity because they had learned to overcome the frequency of adverse experiences in the past. The participants found that the exploration of Resilience Theory and the levels of surviving, recovery, and thriving helped them determine for themselves whether they were thriving after sharing their stories of overcoming adversity. Resilience Theory also helped them explore some dimensions of thriving not recognized due to the overall complexities of the challenges the participants managed at any given time.

RQ2: During Storytelling, Do Black Women Recognize Changes in Their Levels of Resilience from Surviving to Recovery and Thriving?

The study found that, during the practice of storytelling, Black women recognized changes in their levels of resilience from surviving to recovering and thriving. Once the participants increased their knowledge of the resilience level terms regarding survival, recovery, and thriving, they were able to recognize when and how their levels of resilience changed. After the participants shared their stories of overcoming adversity, they were able to identify factors such as personal qualities and life skills that contributed to them overcoming adversity and building their resilience.

The study found that the participants often described what they experienced after overcoming adversity as personal growth. O'Leary researched the resilience of women and how challenges provide an opportunity for transformation and growth; this paradigm shifts the focus from reactive treatment of illness to nurturing an individual's wellbeing and celebrating their strength (1995). Melanie shared a statement about challenges regarding growth and experiencing a paradigm shift: "I don't feel sorry for myself anymore, I used to say 'why me,' but why not me. Everything does happen for a reason; this is just the season God has for me to toughen me up and to thicken my skin. I'm having to change my thinking, a paradigm shift, this is the role I am

serving in right now. I'm going to experience joy; I have to thrive in spite of adversity." Thriving

goes beyond using coping mechanisms to manage a challenge; instead, it signifies growth and

promotes it. The participants shared the levels of resilience they experienced while telling the

story of overcoming their adverse event. The participants appeared empowered during the

practice of storytelling when they explained the psychological shift they experienced by

overcoming adversity to thrive.

Thriving is not determined by physical recovery but by a psychological shift aligned with

the purpose, the challenge present, and how the challenge adds value and meaning to an

individual's life. Rutter "suggest[ed] that resilience has four functions: (a) to reduce risk impact,

(b) to reduce negative chain reactions, (c) to establish/maintain self-esteem and efficacy, and (d)

to enhance opportunities" (1987, p.1). During the practice of storytelling, the participants were

able to recognize the purpose of the challenge and how they provided value and meaning to their

lives. The participants were also able to (a) recognize risk, (b) reduce negative experiences, (c)

establish self-esteem and efficacy, and (d) increase growth opportunities because of overcoming

adversity.

**RQ3: What Adaptive/Life Skills Exemplified in Their Stories Do Black Women Feel
Helped Them Build Resilience to Thrive?**

The study found that some adaptive life skills helped the participants build resilience to

thrive. Most commonly, the participants communicated their emotions with their support systems

and requested additional resources to assist with the adversity. The participants valued the

importance of increasing their knowledge to help inform decisions as they navigated adversity.

The participants welcomed constructive criticism and suggestions regarding the adversity, and

they took ownership of their part in it. The participants analyzed the adversity they had

experienced, identified the lessons learned, and outlined preparedness plans to address the potential for future adversity and what their response to it would be.

Interpretation of Findings

The results of this study contributed to the existing body of literature that supports the practice of storytelling for Black women to increase their resilience to thrive. Many Black women struggle to find safe spaces that support their vulnerability. They find that when they share stories of overcoming adversity they begin to heal and thrive. Black women have a history of suffering inequities in civil rights, employment, equal pay, education, discrimination, affordable healthcare and housing, criminal justice, and voting rights. As such, they are often inundated with adversities and/or challenges. The frequency of adversities and/or challenges can cause Black women emotional stress. The practice of storytelling empowers Black women to process the adverse experience, to assess their resilience levels, to develop life skills, and provides opportunities for Black women to build their resilience to thrive. A Black woman's ability to increase her resilience is crucial as it provides her with the courage and strength needed to process and overcome adversity so that she can thrive. Black women who lack resilience may encounter hardships that could overwhelm them, causing delayed or inappropriate responses, unwise decisions, or even inducing trauma (Ledesma, 2014).

As explained earlier, I used Resilience Theory as the theoretical framework to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity. This study was rooted in the participants' willingness and ability to share their emotional states after adversity.

To understand the emotional state of the participants, this study used narrative inquiry as the research method. Narrative inquiry provided the flexibility the participants and I needed to feel comfortable discussing the practice of storytelling and the participants' levels of resilience by incorporating interviews as a method to communicate and extract data that supported or opposed Resilience Theory.

I found that the participants recognized through the interviews that everyone has a story that could be helpful to someone, including themselves, experiencing an adverse event. I realized that the participants were able to relate to Resilience Theory and apply its principles to their lived experience. They appreciated the opportunity to select their resilience level as they reflected on their stories. Their reflections and identification of their resilience levels resulted in their conclusion that more Black girls and women should share and hear stories of Black women and girls overcoming adversity. That common denominator allows Black women and girls to share experiences and for Black women to take accountability for their part in the adversity while focusing on the solutions with pride and dignity. Melanie shared how, "[o]ften, as Black women, we don't get to share our stories with anyone. It's a validating experience, sharing how you overcame an experience. Sharing your story allows you to take the time to learn and grow." The participants engaged in the process of sharing their stories, which empowered, validated, and liberated them. The participants acknowledged the storytelling process as a form of therapy that built their resilience. The participants agreed that, by sharing their stories, they could encourage, build confidence, and reassure others and themselves that they were not alone in experiencing adversity, which provided them support to overcome adversity.

The process of re-telling the participants' stories illuminated the fact that Black women do not often see their stories in written form. Each participant was deeply moved by reading her

story and by the opportunity to critique and add clarification to her story. The transition from not believing that they had a story to reading their story appeared to represent a paradigm shift for many of the participants. For some, it was the first time they were able to comprehend their full value and contribution to society based on their demonstrated ability to overcome adversity. The participants were able to reflect on the many dimensions and layers of their stories to discover more inner strength than they had originally recognized. The retelling of their stories provided the participants with an opportunity to offer, in their own words and voices, a counternarrative regarding their level of resilience, which increased their resilience to thrive.

The participants often reflected upon the strength of their ancestors who provided them with the genes, courage, and discipline to continue working through the process of overcoming adversity no matter how much disappointment they experienced. The participants exulted in the importance of the intergenerational resilience that was passed down to them. The struggles the participants experienced signified a connection to their past and a foreshadowing of their future. All of the participants acknowledged that the pain and suffering they experienced would pass and that they would move beyond it in due time. All the participants commented at some point during their interview that, "and this too shall pass." I found it fascinating that all of the participants, who lived in different cities and states, utilized the same phrase when describing their overcoming of adversity. This simple phrase is what was passed down to them and, in no uncertain terms, the participants believed that there was more available for them than experiencing the struggle and suffering of overcoming adversity. The participants had unfathomable faith that things would get better, and this faith gave them hope. The participants acknowledged that adversity, no matter how devastating, builds character and resilience. While no participant desired to endure the adversity they had overcome, they did discover that, by

enduring the adversity, they were prepared for greater positive experiences that they could celebrate in the future.

The peer reviewers provided insight into the participants' levels of resilience by reading the participants' re-told stories and applying the thriving character traits to rate the participants' levels of resilience. The peer review provided an outside perspective concerning the participants' re-told stories and what thriving character traits they demonstrated in overcoming adversity. The peer reviewers rated the participants an average 84% thriving, based solely on the re-told stories. The peer reviewers provided thoughtful discussion regarding the systems designed to keep Black women undervalued and without power. The peer reviewers found the participants' stories to be inspiring and agreed that Black women encounter varying degrees of adversity based on the intersection of their gender and race, and that, by sharing their stories, they increased their own perception of their value and were empowered.

A sense of community was established when the participants united via Zoom to discuss their stories and participation in the study. Each participant shared how grateful they were to connect with the others. The participants were able to build their resilience to thrive by bonding over a common experience of being Black women and participants in the study. Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses how intersectionality exposes the interconnected and complicated nature of gender, sexuality, class, and race, and how each impacts the other and should not be isolated when seeking to understand the lived experience of people of color (Burrell-Craft, 2020). The participants were able to navigate through their intersectionality and negotiate a counter-narrative that demonstrates what it takes to build resilience to thrive. Because they felt safe, the participants were vulnerable and expressed openly how this study increased their resilience to thrive. The participants were similar regarding their intersection of gender and race,

but their adversities varied, as did their responses to how they overcame them. Despite their

differences, the participants were able to relate deeply to each other's lived experiences,

including microaggressions, racism, unfair situations, systemic barriers, and disappointments.

The participants appreciated having a safe space to communicate openly without judgment and

to learn from each other how they were able to survive, recover, and thrive despite adversity.

Limitation of the Study

The limitations of the study included a small sample size of seven participants. The study

did not include all of the perspectives of Black women in various stages of resilience. The

participants ranged in age from 30 to 60 years, so not all stages of life were represented.

However, this is a fairly broad range and age did not seem to be a factor in their stories.

However, this study recognized that all of the participants identified as thriving, and two also

associated themselves as surviving and recovering in relation to a current situation they were

managing that was not reflective of their overall wellness to thrive. This study used a qualitative

methodology to gain individual participants' perspectives and motives; the data collected was

subjective based on the participants' lived experiences. As the researcher, my interpretation of

the participants' stories was challenging at times. Often the participants provided large amounts

of detail in their stories, and I was challenged with organizing and re-telling their stories. The

participants were helpful and understanding with this limitation and provided additional support

when requested to validate their re-told stories for accuracy.

Recommendations

This section provides recommendations for future studies based on the findings of this

study. Black women experience adversity and/or challenges differently at least in part because of

the intersectionality of their gender and race. Because there is limited literature and resources

available regarding the practice of storytelling as a way to develop skills for Black women to

thrive, I suggested the following recommendations for future research:

1. Studies on the benefits of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) for Black women;

2. Community, Connect, Communicate storytelling sessions;

3. Developing a thriving character traits assessment tool;

4. Identifying on a greater scale what barriers exist for Black women who desire to share

    their stories but who do not do so;

5. Publishing more literature (i.e., books, journals, pamphlets) that teach Black women

    and girls how to develop skills to thrive.

First, I recommend that more research be conducted regarding Black women and the

benefits of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) to increase their resilience to thrive: "CBT is a

type of psychotherapeutic treatment that helps people to identify and change destructive or

disturbing thought patterns that have a negative influence on their behavior and emotions"

(Nakao et al., 2021,p. 1). Black women experience stress and are challenged with solving

problems and overcoming adversity regularly due to the intersection of their gender and race.

This study discovered that some of the stress that the participants experienced was due to their

overcompensation and taking responsibility for circumstances that were not in their control.

Once the participants were able to communicate their adversity and how they overcame it, they

were also able to clearly articulate their contribution to the adversity. This clarity often came

through individual therapy that promoted balanced thinking for the participants and that

improved their ability to cope with stress and to build resilience to thrive.

Second, I recommend that more research be conducted to learn how Black women and

girls can form independent and safe community circles to connect and communicate through the

practice of storytelling to increase their resilience to thrive. The study discovered that Black women crave community, connection, and communication. This study found that the participants appreciated having a safe place in the community to connect and communicate with other like-minded individuals who had experienced similar challenges and who had increased their resilience to thrive. The participants shared that they wanted to be able to provide the knowledge that was bestowed upon them to others, as well as acquire new knowledge, to increase their level of resilience. The participants found value in sharing their commonalities and found strength in each other's storytelling. It was not important for the participants to have met before communicating. Therefore, further research could also be based on the randomness of building community for Black women as their level of acceptance varies because their responses to adversity differ on many levels. Community, connection, and communication among randomly-selected individuals could provide a unique richness to the discussion and lessons learned to increase resilience to thrive.

Third, I recommend the development of a thriving character traits assessment tool specifically for Black women and girls to build their resilience to thrive. This study provided the thriving character traits for the peer reviewers to use to rate the re-told stories. However, I recommend the development of a thriving character traits assessment tool to help Black women and girls identify their own overall resilience level. Black women and girls can use the tool to identify specific thriving character traits and what is weak or lacking, and to implement methods to increase those traits to build their resilience to thrive. Part of the research for this assessment tool could involve determining whether women could objectively assess themselves without the storytelling and the communication.

Fourth, I recommend more research be conducted to identify on a greater scale what barriers exist for Black women who desire to share their stories but who do not do so. This research included a small sample size of seven participants. I suggest a research study that includes a larger sample size that focuses on why Black women who desire to share their stories are often unable to. This study provided a variety of reasons as to why some participants may not share their stories, such as time management and doubts as to whether their stories would add value to themselves or to others. Because of the small sample size, further research may discover there are additional barriers that prevent Black women from sharing their stories and provide recommendations on how to further support Black women to share their stories to build their resilience to thrive.

Lastly, I recommend more published literature, such as books, journals, and pamphlets, that shares stories of Black women and girls overcoming adversity and how they developed skills and discovered lessons because of the adversity. I suggest providing more Black women and girls with the opportunity to narrate their own stories of overcoming adversity, and to share them with larger audiences. The participants in the study suggested that part of rebounding from adversity is the ability to share with others that this can be done. For these participants, identifying the meaning as to why the adversity happened to them was connected to their ability to share how they survived, recovered, and/or thrived. Sharing stories of overcoming adversity builds resilience in Black women, enabling them to thrive. Additionally, the counter-narrative from a non-White perspective regarding Black women's resilience can inspire other marginalized groups to mobilize and possibly mimic this study to discover how they can also increase their resilience to thrive.

Summary

This study explored how storytelling develops resilience in Black women, enabling them to thrive after overcoming adversity. I used narrative inquiry, a qualitative method, to capture and analyze the stories of seven Black women's lived experiences that illustrated how they survived, recovered, and thrived after an adverse event. I reviewed Black women's history, CRT, adult personal resilience, Resilience Theory, storytelling, and narrative inquiry in conjunction with the data collected and analyzed from participant interviews. This study incorporated a peer review session to examine the data collected from the participants in the form of their re-told stories. The peer reviewers used the thriving character traits to discover the participants' resilience levels. The participants in this study used their own words and voices to identify their resilience levels and through the practice of storytelling to provide a counter-narrative of what resilience meant to them. This opportunity to provide a non-White counter-narrative increased the study participants' self-confidence and overall wellness. This study discovered that the participants felt encouraged, validated, and liberated by the experience of sharing their stories. This study provided recommendations for the research community regarding how we can continue to support Black women through future research and resources to help Black women continue to develop the resilience to thrive. The next section concludes by discussing my journey throughout this study.

CHAPTER 6: MY JOURNEY THROUGHOUT THE STUDY

This topic was not my initial study focus. I originally planned to research the City of Stockton and its financial recovery after bankruptcy. I presented the first three chapters of that study to my dissertation advisor and, to my disappointment, it was rejected. My dissertation advisor shared that they did not like the topic because the content was not clear or organized. Simply put, they communicated that I could do better and suggested that I select a topic that I resonated with and could write passionately about. My dissertation advisor suggested that I consider a study on Black women. To be honest, it appeared that every Black student in my cohort was researching Black people and/or the Black community. I wanted to research something different and not draw attention to how marginalized we were in society. To say I was disappointed is an understatement. For the first time, I questioned my ability to research something others found valuable and whether I could accomplish what felt like a monumental task of writing a successful study.

After a few weeks of sulking, I decided that I would explore what my advisor had suggested. I started to research Black women, Black culture, and the Black community, and I began to organize my thoughts, collaborating with the Dissertation Boot Camp professor to come up with a new idea for a study. As I continued to research, I began to recognize the true reason I had opposed conducting a study on Black women. Quite frankly, it felt too personal, and I thought I would be vulnerable to critiques as a Black woman. I did not want to address the traumatic experiences of my past, nor did I want to research the pain and suffering of my ancestors through the atrocities of slavery and political systems designed to keep them subservient. I also did not desire to feel hopeless, marginalized, and undervalued.

I explored these emotions with the Dissertation Boot Camp professor and confessed my concerns. The professor listened to me and my concerns and asked me what I felt comfortable researching. I replied that I wanted to learn more about how Black women thrive. I wanted to write something I could be proud of as a Black woman and to share it with my daughters. I wanted to provide a counter-narrative to mainstream media and institutionalized educational materials that depict Black women as victims, and at most as survivors. The Dissertation Boot Camp professor agreed that this would be a good topic to research, and it was at that point that I felt empowered to research more, no matter where the research led me. By addressing my fears and insecurities and working toward a solution, I felt invigorated to continue my research with renewed passion and an optimistic outlook on the study.

I narrowed my research to Black women's history, CRT, adult personal resilience, Resilience Theory, storytelling, and narrative inquiry, and I realized I had experienced microaggressions, racism, unfair situations, systemic barriers, and disappointments. I discovered that I had a predisposition for adversity because of the intersectionality of my gender and race and became conditioned to expect adversity. To me, managing adversity was just a part of life's journey. I did not allow myself, before this study, the opportunity to deeply examine the types of adversities I had experienced or how systems outside my control impacted my ability to survive, recover, and thrive. I was able to reflect upon my past adversities and view them differently as a result of conducting this study. I was able to better identify what I contributed to my adversities and what solutions I invoked to overcome adverse situations. I believe time was the best counselor to help me better understand how my actions impacted my outcomes. I understand now, while I was experiencing traumatic events, it was difficult for me to think abstractedly and

focus on future outcomes, because I was in survival mode. I aligned with the participants when they shared of that difficulty.

Over the past 2 years, I have experienced significant adverse events. During this study, I navigated our nation's civil unrest, a pandemic, a layoff, financial insecurity, new employment, and a family crisis. The family crisis pertained to my oldest daughter who survived a murder attempt by her ex-boyfriend. One of these adverse events is enough to put anyone over the edge of insanity. However, this study allowed me to have purpose and meaning despite my adverse circumstances. I was able to broaden my knowledge of how Black women overcome adversity to thrive through storytelling with the assistance of the Black women who participated in this study.

The data collection and analysis phases of the study were transformative for me as a researcher and as a Black woman. The participants in this study, who were randomly selected, shared their stories of overcoming adversity to thrive with admiration and grace. Through storytelling, the participants were transparent and vulnerable regarding their resilience and how they overcame adversity to thrive. At times, it was difficult to be the researcher because I connected to the participants and their stories, but their stories encouraged me to keep pressing forward as the researcher and as a Black woman.

The participants' willingness and courage to acknowledge their fears and insecurities and the lessons they had learned and how they triumphed over difficult events inspired me to listen to their stories intently and to passionately write their stories. The more I learned about these women overcoming adversity, the more I learned about myself and how I could overcome my own adversities. Through this study, I connected with the core of who I am and what I can accomplish despite adversity. I learned from these women that all hell can break loose in my life and I can still thrive. I learned that it is not necessary to stay in an uncomfortable place of

disappointment and suffering. I can pick myself up and move forward if I do not give up, even though there are times when it is difficult to pick myself up when I feel broken and discouraged. I realize the importance of having a strong support system and asking for help when I need it. Asking for help does not make me less strong or resilient; it simply acknowledges that I am only human and that I, too, require respect, love, and support. Over time, this study became a love letter to myself, to my daughters, and to the participants in the study. I am grateful for the collective voices and strength of the participants and myself to write this testament to Black women's resilience. I am also grateful for my dissertation advisor and the Dissertation Boot Camp professor that advised and supported my unrealized potential until I brought it to life through this journey.

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Appendix A: Participant Information

My study seeks to better understand how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to thrive after overcoming adversity. As a Black woman who uses storytelling to develop resilience to thrive, I desire to help other Black women develop coping strategies to thrive. I also desire to provide a platform to elevate Black women's voices through storytelling to build their resilience to thrive.

The research questions that guide this study are:

● RQ1: Do Black women recognize by telling their stories of overcoming adversity they

increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

● RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience

from survival to recovery and thriving?

● RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize

helped build their resilience to thrive?

My study will use "snowball sampling" as a method for participant selection to collect stories from diverse participants. I will locate participants who meet the criteria of being a Black woman who uses storytelling to develop skills to thrive for the study. I will interview the participant and will ask them to refer other participants for the study. I will create a contact list of referrals and randomly select sampling and solicit participation for interviews. I will interview the participants in the research study and will audio-record and transcribe the conversations through the Zoom platform. The participant interviews will be scheduled for (1) hour with a possible follow-up interview for 30 minutes. All participant documents that have identifiable private information will not be shared beyond the purposes of this research study, and all participant identification will be anonymized. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the doctoral dissertation requirements and has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of the Pacific. Please see a copy of the "Informed Consent" form below (APPENDIX D)

As a token of appreciation, all participants will receive a $25 gift card for their participation.

Introduction to Recruitment Letter (Email)

I need your help. I am completing my doctoral degree in education and need participants for a very important study. My study seeks to better understand how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to thrive after overcoming adversity. There are three concepts associated with Resilience Theory that describe what state a Black woman may experience during or after adversity to (a) survive, (b) recover, and (c) thrive. As a Black woman who uses storytelling to

develop resilience to thrive, I desire to help other Black women develop coping strategies to thrive. I also desire to provide a platform to elevate Black women's voices through storytelling to build their resilience to thrive.

I would be honored to hear your story and how you developed coping strategies to thrive, and whether sharing your stories has built resilience in you and others. In this study, participants will also be provided an opportunity to present an artifact that represents their resilience. For example, a participant that accomplished a major educational milestone, may choose to present a graduation photo or certificate, and share the story of the artifact. The goal is to provide Black women the opportunity to write her counter narrative, which may contradict historical context and diminish the literature gap as it applies to thriving and the impacts of "storytelling" to build resilience to thrive in themselves and others.

The study interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed through the Zoom platform. The interviews will be scheduled for (1) hour with a possible follow-up interview for 30 minutes. All documents that have identifiable private information will not be shared beyond the purposes of this research study, and all identification will be anonymized. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the doctoral dissertation requirements and has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at University of the Pacific. As a token of appreciation, you will receive a $25 gift card for your participation.

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Strategy

Recruitment Strategy

I am affiliated with professional contacts and networks that can refer me to interested Black women who use storytelling to develop resilience to thrive. Upon obtaining IRB approval, I will reach out to these networks and send the "Introduction Recruitment Letter" (APPENDIX B) to selected referrals. A link to complete the informed consent will be included in the initial email. I will then select about eight participants from those who have completed the "Informed Consent" form and begin scheduling Zoom video conferencing interviews for May 2022.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Purpose:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black

women to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Research Study Questions:

- RQ1: Do Black women recognize by telling their stories of overcoming adversity they

  increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

- RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience

  from survival to recovery and thriving?

- RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize

  helped build their resilience to thrive?

Introduction:

- Here is why I am doing this research……

- Here is a story of how I overcame adversity…

Interview Questions:

  a. RQ1: Do Black women recognize by telling their stories of overcoming adversity

     they increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

  b. Tell me a story where you overcame adversity.

  c. Do you have an artifact that connects you to this story?

  d. What are some of the lessons learned from your story?

  e. How has this experience helped you overcome other challenging experiences?

- RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience from survival to recovery and thriving?

    f.   What were some of the emotions you experienced when you shared your story?

    g.   During the storytelling, did it occur to you that you had grown personally in areas you had not recognized before? If so, can you share how you have grown since the adverse experience?

    h.   Did sharing your story help you identify your level of resilience? If so, what level of resilience do you consider yourself to be after sharing your story: surviving, recovering, or thriving?

    i.   Describe why you have chosen this resilience level after the adversity?

    j.   Before sharing your story, would you have considered a different resilience level? If so, explain why.

- RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize helped build their resilience to thrive?

    k.   In that story, what are the personal qualities/life skills that helped you to overcome the adversity?

    l.   Of those personal qualities/life skills you mentioned, were any of the new skills you developed because of this adversity?

    m.   Are there any personal qualities/life skills you desire to develop to help you thrive should you encounter a similar adversity again?

Wrap Up

Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share regarding the topic of storytelling and building resilience to thrive?

Is there anything you think I should know to help me better understand how Black women can

use storytelling to develop resilience to thrive?

How has this interview experience changed the way you view storytelling, thriving and yourself?

Thank you for you for participating in this important study. I appreciate your willingness to meet and share stories of your experiences. You may be invited to take part in a follow-up interview for clarity of information shared. If you think of anything else you would like to share with me related to our conversation today, please feel free to reach me at k_miller@u.pacific.edu or 209-518-2788.

Appendix D: Informed Consent Document

RESILIENCE OF THE BLACK WOMAN: THRIVING THROUGH STORYTELLING.
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY STUDY

Lead Researcher: Kimberly Miller
Dissertation Advisor: Fred Estes, Ed.D.

You are invited to participate in a research study, and your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may stop at any time.

Description of Research

The research study seeks to better understand how storytelling develops resilience in Black women to thrive after overcoming adversity. The participants will provide a first-person account of their experience of thriving after experiencing adversity. The researcher will request the participants use storytelling to demonstrate how the develop resilience to thrive. Participants in a research study will be interviewed, and conversations will be audio-recorded and transcribed through the Zoom platform. The participant interviews will be scheduled for (1) hour with a possible follow-up interview for 30 minutes.

Description of Identifiable Information

Documents that have identifiable private information will not be shared beyond the purposes of this research study, and all participant identification will be anonymized.

Duration of Storage, Maintenance, Use

Storage of digital information will be on institutional Google Drive and destroyed within two years of the study's completion date. Data collection may be used for research purposes only.

Foreseeable Risks

While there are minimal risks, participants will be asked to voluntarily share about past experiences of overcoming adversity which may cause some stress.

Benefits

Benefits may come from the reflective nature of this research study for participants to share about how they overcame adversity and are thriving as a result. The researcher will share the results of as summary of results so participants can learn from each other. As a token of appreciation, all participants will receive a $25 gift card for their participation.

Confidentiality

Any information obtained in connection with this study and can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to ensure your confidentiality are that you will not be identified in any reports on this study. Pseudonyms will be used to protect you. Audio recordings of the interview will be deleted once transcripts are recorded. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and destroyed two years after the study is completed.

Participation

Your decision whether to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your experiences as a Black Woman, overcoming adversity, thriving, and storytelling. Your participation in this study will include a (1) hour interview with a possible follow-up interview for 30 minutes.

University Contact Information

I am the lead researcher in this study, and I am a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd School of Education. This research study is part of my thesis for my doctorate in Education.

If you have any questions about your rights and about the storage and use of your identifiable private information at any time, please contact me Kimberly Miller at (209) 518-2788 or by email at k_miller@u.pacific.edu, or Dr. Fred Estes at festes@pacific.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in research project or wish to speak with an independent contact, please contact the Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, University of the Pacific at (209) 946-3903 or by email at IRB @ pacific.edu.

Notification of Research Results

Participants will have the research study finding disclosed to them.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information provided above, that you have been afforded the opportunity to ask, and have answered, any questions that you may have, that your participation is completely voluntary, that you understand that you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Research Study Participant (Print Name):_____

Appendix E: Coding Outline

Purpose:

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how storytelling develops resilience in Black

women to thrive after overcoming adversity.

Research Study Questions:

- RQ1: Do Black women recognize by telling their stories of overcoming adversity they

  increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

- RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience

  from survival to recovery and thriving?

- RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize

  helped build their resilience to thrive?

Introduction:

- Here is why I am doing this research……

- Here is a story of how I overcame adversity…

Interview Questions:

- RQ1: Do Black women recognize by telling their stories of overcoming adversity they

  increase their resilience and ability to thrive?

  a. Tell me a story where you overcame adversity.

  b. Do you have an artifact that connects you to this story?

  c. What are some of the lessons learned from your story?

  d. How has this experience helped you overcome other challenging experiences?

B. RQ2: During storytelling, do Black women recognize changes in their levels of resilience from survival to recovery and thriving?

   a. What were some of the emotions you experienced when you shared your story?

   b. During the storytelling, did it occur to you that you had grown personally in areas you had not recognized before? If so, can you share how you have grown since the adverse experience?

   c. Did sharing your story help you identify your level of resilience? If so, what level of resilience do you consider yourself to be after sharing your story: surviving, recovering, or thriving?

   d. Describe why you have chosen this resilience level after the adversity?

   e. Before sharing your story, would you have considered a different resilience level? If so, explain why.

- RQ3: What adaptive/life skills exemplified in their stories do Black women recognize helped build their resilience to thrive?

   f. In that story, what are the personal qualities/life skills that helped you to overcome the adversity?

   g. Of those personal qualities/life skills you mentioned, were any of the new skills you developed because of this adversity?

   h. Are there any personal qualities/life skills you desire to develop to help you thrive should you encounter a similar adversity again?

Wrap Up

Are there any additional thoughts you would like to share regarding the topic of storytelling and building resilience to thrive?

Is there anything you think I should know to help me better understand how Black women can

use storytelling to develop resilience to thrive?

How has this interview experience changed the way you view storytelling, thriving, and

yourself?

Appendix F: Participants' Stories

Brave in Every Attempt to Thrive

In this story, a heartbroken daughter achieves forgiveness for her mother during an adverse life experience, freeing herself from intergenerational trauma.

Relationships are complicated, and Reggie shares her story of overcoming a complex relationship with her mother that increased her connection through communication. Raised by her grandparent, Reggie always felt like the odd one out. Reggie had two younger sisters who created a bond with each other and a mother who often treated her differently due to unresolved feelings for her biological father. "Sometimes it worked out well, sometimes not so well," Reggie recalls. There were times when Reggie remembers her mother being mean towards her and learned later in life why she responded the way she did.

Now, an adult woman, Reggie received a call that her mother needed her assistance. Reggie's middle sister had passed away, and Reggie recalls "her younger sister was not a caregiver, more so the taking advantager." Reggie's mother was blind and had Alzheimer's. Reggie was thrusted into the role of caregiver with duties including paying bills, grocery shopping, and taking her mother to doctor's appointments. The relationship was intense, and Reggie was functioning with a dutiful spirit. Then the time came for Reggie to place her mother in 24-hour care facility. Reggie worked full time and lived in an apartment. Reggie couldn't take on this responsibility full time. However, this was an emergency, and placement needed to occur immediately. Reggie struggled with placing her mother in a facility. Reggie agonized about whether this was the right choice; there was so much pressure to make all her mother's medical and life decisions.

Reggie eventually worked up the courage to take her mother to the facility. This was heartbreaking; although her mother was blind and suffered from Alzheimer's, she was aware that something was changing; and was resisting. Reggie, with the assistance of her aunt, was able to convince her mother to go to the new facility. Because Reggie hadn't seen the facility firsthand, as it was an emergency placement, Reggie was disappointed with the facility. The facility did not meet Reggie's standards, yet Reggie needed to leave her mother there. Reggie cried when she left her mother in the facility and sought to find a facility, they would both be proud of; within a couple of weeks, Reggie's mother was in a new facility and doing well.

Reggie's mother became sick with Cancer, yet her health improved; then the COVID-19 pandemic shut down visitation to care facilities. Reggie couldn't visit her mother for months due to COVID-19 restrictions; however, they spoke often on the phone. Soon Zoom visits were introduced, and shortly after that, Reggie could visit outside her mother's window. Reggie gained perspective regarding the "Big Picture" over the five years of caring for her mother. At first, the caregiving was out of an obligation, and then it transitioned to caring for her mother out of love. When Reggie started her journey, she appeared on the outside to be fine; everything was good, and she had it all together. However, on the inside, she was angry, hurt, and felt alone in this journey.

Through Reggie's acts of service for her mother, Reggie learned to forgive. Reggie learned more about forgiveness and why she needed to be brave. Reggie realized that forgiveness is more for herself than the other person, yet in this case, her forgiveness benefited her mother also. Reggie noticed that patients in the care facility who didn't have family or friend visits were not treated well. Reggie's presence, whether by phone calls, Zoom, or in-person visits, improved her mother's quality of life and thus may have extended it.

March 2021, Reggie planned to vacation in Hawaii. Although Reggie needed the respite time to rejuvenate, she was concerned about her mother's care while she was away. Reggie and her mother talked about the trip and all of Reggie's plans while on vacation. Reggie's mother suggested she needed her to be safe and return to her. As reluctant as Reggie was to go, she went on the trip, and upon her return, Reggie called the facility to check in. Reggie was advised to come in as soon as possible as her mother's health had declined. Reggie and her youngest sister were there for her mother in her final days. The evening Reggie shared her story was on the eve of her mother's 1st anniversary. "Prior to this, I didn't believe in depression; afterward, I went into a big depression. I felt like everything was so heavy, my life stuff, mom, pressure, I wanted to check out and leave everything," Reggie recalls. Reggie shared how she needed to find the strength to take care of things that no one else could take care of and how today, she's still recovering and working through her emotions and grief.

Reggie shared that she would identify herself as "thriving," but as it pertains to this adverse event, she's still surviving and moving closer to recovery. As Reggie reflected during her story, she acknowledged that for months she couldn't go a day without crying, that she sees progress in that area, but is still grieving and understands it will take time to recover, but is hopeful it will happen. During Reggie's share, she experienced emotions of sadness and gratitude. Reflecting on the past, Reggie acknowledges she and her mother were not alone on this difficult journey; they had each other.

Reggie shared a symbol of her bravery a bracelet that said, "Let me win, if I cannot, let me be brave in the attempt." This saying encouraged Reggie to forgive and face her fears. Reggie learned to be brave and to communicate with her mother in uncomfortable situations. By not avoiding confrontation, these interactions provided the necessary healing and increased the connection between the mother and daughter. Over time, both hearts healed. Over time, both found peace. Over time, both learned to appreciate each other and accept the past, but were brave enough to forge a new imperfect future with each other.

Determination Over the Fear to Thrive

In this story, a determined woman learns to face her fears and overcome challenges to experience the freedom of flight. Fear is a natural emotion that everyone at some point experiences when they identify a threat of something dangerous or feels pain. Jacklyn shares stories of overcoming fear through the necessary life lessons that aligned her with purpose.

Jacklyn, a recent high school graduate, was hanging out with a friend when a woman walked up to her and asked, "what do you want to be"? Jacklyn responded enthusiastically, "I want to be a lawyer," smiling. The woman replied, "ok, you can be 40 years old and be a lawyer, or you can be 40 years old and not be a lawyer, but you're going to be 40 years old"! Jacklyn had received an important message: we get to choose who we want to be and who we are not. Jacklyn also realized that time was of the essence, and it's never too late to start anything.

Jacklyn went on to attend the University of Arizona. Jacklyn, who stands 5 ft tall, was bullied most of her childhood because of her size. Her mother protected her and often fought her battles. As a young adult attending college, Jacklyn struggled in one class. No matter how hard she worked, spending days writing papers, she could never get a grade higher than a C. Jacklyn called her mother complaining about how the professor won't give her more than a C. Jacklyn recalls her mom saying, "I've fought your battles your entire life, now you have to learn how to fight your own." Jacklyn realized she needed to take matters into her own hands and went to the Dean of the University. Jacklyn asked the Dean to read all her papers and to tell her if they were all C papers. They were A and B papers, and Jacklyn finished the class with a B. The professor was angry because Jacklyn went over his head to the Dean of the University. Jacklyn didn't mind the uncomfortableness between her and the professor; the lesson learned was more important than his insecurity. "That experience taught me that even though the person may seem like a giant, you have to take it on and not have fear."

As time went on, Jacklyn adjusted to her new confidence. A friend suggested she participate in the University of Arizona – Miss Campus Rainbow pageant. Jacklyn had never participated in a pageant before but entered the pageant with her friend. Jacklyn soon realized that the most popular female student on campus was in the pageant. The other students were also tall, beautiful, and talented. Jacklyn decided to play to her strengths and wrote a speech. Jacklyn's mother purchased a gorgeous gown for the special occasion; Jacklyn started to experience fear and self-doubt and shared with her mother, "there was no way she was going to win." Jacklyn recalls her mother saying, "you're going to win if you believe in yourself." Jacklyn was introduced first in the pageant to display her talent. Jacklyn recited her speech in English and Spanish and went on to win the pageant. Jacklyn shared, "Life determination comes from little successes along the way that give you courage; one day, it will translate into a big success."

Little did Jacklyn know that these confidence-building steps would catapult her into a career that less than 1% of Black women achieve. After completing her degree at the University of Arizona, Jacklyn went to law school. As a youngster, Jacklyn wanted to follow in her father's footsteps and become a lawyer; however, once in law school, she realized quickly she didn't like it. With her father's blessing, she dropped out of law school and started working as a reservationist for a major airline. While working as a reservationist, Jacklyn decided she wanted to apply for a flight attendant position. Unfortunately, she was not selected to move on in the process. Jacklyn thought, if not a flight attendant, maybe I can become a pilot; the prospect of traveling the world interested her. Jacklyn shared her hopes of becoming a pilot, and everyone laughed at her in an office of 500 reservationists. They thought she was crazy; they told her she would never be a pilot. Questioning herself, Jacklyn told her mother that she wanted to be a pilot, and in good form, Jacklyn's mother responded, "you can do anything you set your mind to, baby," and those words gave her determination. Jacklyn shared that if her mom and dad believed in her, she didn't

care what anybody else said. Her parents have always had her back, and if they believed in her, she knew she could do it.

Jacklyn has soared amongst the clouds for the past eighteen years as a pilot. Jacklyn shared there are an estimated 121,000 airline pilots worldwide; of those, about 700 are black, and 150 are black women. However, Jacklyn acknowledges that she was the first black woman pilot she ever saw and questions whether 150 black women pilots exist. Jacklyn attributes this accomplishment to her determination and willingness to face her fears. Jacklyn always keeps a vision of an eagle in her mind, the eagle experiences freedom, and soars, which is why she's a pilot. "I think we as humans have lost our way; we live in this paradigm of fear, which is not real; if we can get past the fear in our head and not worry about what people think or say, that's when you soar like an eagle." Jacklyn also shared "what keeps us small and not achieving our goals is not anyone else, it's 100 you".

Jacklyn shared there will always be challenges; we must "Embrace the suck," which means we must embrace the challenging times in our lives as part of the journey, as part of the process to get us where we are destined to be. Jacklyn shared, "we all come in equal with the same amount of brain cells and time each day. The difference is what we do with those 24 hours we have in our day. That's what separates the winners and the losers." Jacklyn identifies that she is thriving today; Jacklyn also recognizes that there is always some area she can improve but believes strongly that remaining open and teachable is vital for balance and longevity. Jacklyn shared the importance of being a lifelong learner by embracing new hobbies and challenging herself to learn 12 new things daily. By setting goals and accomplishing them, we build resilience and confidence by facing our fears. It's also important to enjoy life, have fun, to create balance and synergy for new ideas and creativity to flow out.

Lastly, Jacklyn believes that everyone has a story and should share it. The encouragement of her mother planted seeds of confidence and reassurance. However, sharing her story with others allows Jacklyn to experience gratitude for how far she's come. Jacklyn recalls, "I was that person people said would never amount to anything, and well, here I am." As a pilot, Jacklyn has traveled the world and been a motivational speaker for elementary schools. Jacklyn's core message for young impressionable minds is this "the only limitations you have are the ones you recognize." Jacklyn shared an artifact that represents her determination over fear. The photo image captures the uncommonness of a duckling sitting on the back of a chihuahua. The duckling exhibits no fear, while the chihuahua supports the duckling's determination.

Storytelling Saves Lives and Helps You Thrive

In this story, a young woman shares overcoming a toxic and abusive relationship with a narcissist; and how therapy and storytelling helped her develop skills to thrive.

Learning to navigate relationships is part of the journey as a young adult. As Zella recalls, the relationship was "built off of the wrong foundation; it was just fun." The relationship lasted five years, a few years were long distance, but it wasn't until they lived together for seven months that

the relationship became "ridiculous" meaning highly abusive, according to Zella. A family member intervened, and Zella was able to leave that relationship successfully and start a healing journey. "I just learned a lot about myself and what I contributed to that relationship, and also how to tell I was in a situation that wasn't healthy for me and what to do to get out of it." Zella experienced growth by conducting internal research; she learned about her anger and how she channeled a lot of masculine energy trying to be the hero. Today, Zella notices red flags, knows when something isn't right and is reminded of that experience, and is thankful for it. Zella can now understand her emotions and how to handle situations better, especially since she's healed from the experience. Zella accepts that she will always be connected to this story, which is the tension she uses to keep herself safe.

Zella learned from her experience "that it's ok to not to be ok," and some good came from that experience. Zella learned more about herself because of the healing work she completed in therapy. "I was able to connect a lot of dots and see the roles I played in the relationship; it's not always what the other person did to me; I had a part." Zella also learned to communicate with her tribe when she was going through something, even if she felt she might be judged. Zella shared the importance of communication with yourself, people that love you, and your significant other, even if it's a bad situation.

This experienced helped Zella overcome other challenging experiences because she knew she could get through it. "The healed version of myself processes and understands things differently than the version of me before where I thought everything was roses and perfect and you can trust everybody. This experience has taught me to really get to know someone and ask the right questions". Zella shared the importance of going with your gut instincts and applying these lessons learned in other challenges you experience, including "AKA dating." Zella experienced joy during her share, "I'm so proud of myself for making it through that. Before, the emotions I experienced were embarrassment, denial, and frustration; no one wants to be wrong. Joyful that she can live a healthy version of herself after that experience, Zella shared, "I love who I am now; this experience helped me grow up and be proud of my change. Good change."

Zella's proudest area of growth was owning and changing her part in the relationship. "It's one thing to recognize it and call it out, but to be able to actively heal it and change that behavior and grow in that area is different. I'm proud of that progress". Zella describes herself as thriving today and feels completely ok, she forgives him, and there are no hard feelings; they were both young and inexperienced. "I feel I'm thriving now because even though I'm on the struggle bus with dating, I'm having fun dating and enjoying the ability to date, especially in a healthy state. I'm disconnecting from people I see aren't for me, and I'm nurturing relationships that I feel could be something."

Qualities and life skills that helped Zella overcome were her ability to communicate and a strong connection with her family. Zella shared the importance of listening to advice and suggestions and realizing that receiving help is not a sign of weakness. Listening, processing, and communicating those skills helped Zella overcome that adversity. Zella learned to act on the advice or suggestions through therapy which helped her develop more skills and heal. "I don't want to walk around and be bitter from this and hate men. I want to be able to recognize my

wrongdoings, actively change them, and grow from that experience. I think that's, no, I know that's what I did".

 Zella will continue to work on recognizing when something isn't for her and when it's time to separate herself from situations that aren't serving her or helping her to grow in any way. Situations such as jobs, friendships, and unhealthy connections to food and alcohol exist outside of relationships. Zella plans to continue not questioning herself when there's a red flag and having the courage and ability to make a change and or move in any given situation.

Zella shared that storytelling is a form of therapy. "Telling your story can help you grow, release in so many ways, and build resilience. Your story has a beginning, middle, and end". Zella shared that storytelling helps you reflect, heal, forgive, and look at the situation from outside the trauma of the experience. According to Zella, "Storytelling saves lives and helps you thrive." When Zella was going through her experience, she initially said, "I'm not telling anyone about this situation"; however, Zella experienced something miraculous, which was the power of healing through storytelling. "You realize you are not alone, and there is no need to be embarrassed because our experiences connect us through sharing our stories." Zella provided an artifact that represents her level of resilience, a "Girl Power" snow globe. "Looking at it calms me, and it kept me motivated to press forward."

Learning Contentment to Thrive

In this story, a single mother motivated by financial security and professional growth returns to college to improve her chances of success. Only to learn that her level of contentment determines success in any given situation.

Belle experienced firsthand her mother's struggle to manage a household of six children with the help of her grandmother. Belle recalled her mother's Associate in Arts degree and her expectations around education, desiring her children to go further than she had in education. "My mother was a strong believer in education. It was instilled in us; whether you slowed down or took a break, you were finishing your education. My mother didn't want us to struggle." Belle, a single parent working full-time for the Department of Probation, decided the only way to advance her career and create financial security was to return to college and complete her Bachelor's degree. With the support of her mother and grandmother, Belle enrolled at the University of Phoenix and attended classes two nights a week. Belle recalled thinking, "That would be the ticket to a better life, not only getting jobs but choosing a career." Returning to school was no easy task because of her son's age. Belle line up babysitters and other resources to accomplish this goal. "I knew I had to do what needed to be done to finish."

Belle learned resilience, discipline, and standing strong on her biblical principles, faith, and prayer. Belle shared, "we can accomplish anything we put our minds to if we have faith. You can do it, but if you tell yourself you can't do something, you won't do it. If you tell yourself you can do it, then ask God if this is something I should be doing, is this something I can do, then ask God will you allow me to do this?" When Belle embarked on her academic journey, she lacked

confidence. "In high school, Belle was a C student. "I was afraid of whether I could do this; I feared not having the discipline working full-time and parenting a young child." In addition, Belle was told "you don't need to do that" by people, to which she replied, "no, I'm going to do this." Despite the fear Belle felt, she leaned into her education. Belle kept her bible close by when she studied; she encouraged herself with scriptures and prayed for guidance and understanding. "I had to talk myself through, getting through, and once I got through the Bachelor's program, somebody told me, if you can get through this, you can get through the Master's program." Belle realized it was the same concept, just more work. Belle grasped she had conquered the fear, developed more confidence, and accomplished her goal. Belle went on to complete her Master's program by applying the skills she developed during her Bachelor's program and by increasing her level of faith in herself.

Belle was able to overcome other challenges also because of this experience. This experience taught Belle not to give up before trying. Accomplishing Belle's education goals increased her confidence that she could achieve what's in front of her. Belle shared, "Start trying things; if I tried something and it didn't work out, that's ok because at least I tried it." Belle later applied for an instructor position with San Joaquin Valley College. "I didn't think I could present as an instructor, but I did it for five years." Belle feared the unknown; however, the fear disappeared once she learned how to prepare for her classes and increased her knowledge of the subject matter.

During Belle's storytelling, she experienced memories of the struggle. "The struggle is real, we can make things look easy, but it's not easy." Belle shared her obstacles, illness, work demands, and work-life balance. "It taught me things will happen regardless of whether I do this or not. You might as well do it. You can think of all the reasons you should do something, but the reality is life is going to keep moving forward". Belle went on to explain "that things happen all the time and to stop doing things just because something happens is not sustainable for personal growth. However, if you need to take a break, permit yourself time to regroup so you are not overly stressed and feeling out of control".

Belle is grateful for the development experiences and tools she applies to accomplish new goals. Belle identifies herself as thriving because "I've accomplished a lot of things; I didn't realize I was going to do." However, Belle wouldn't have thought she was thriving before sharing her story because some goals haven't been accomplished. Belle shared, "But thinking in retrospect and listening to myself, maybe I haven't accomplished all my goals in order, but the reality is, yes, I have accomplished my goals ."Belle goes on to explain that "in my brain, I have an order that I want things to take place in, and when they don't take place in that order, then I feel like, not a failure, but I haven't arrived." Belle's ultimate goal was to make "a lot" of money and be "self-sufficient." Because Belle hasn't met certain levels, she's still trying to get there, but when is enough, enough?

Then the reality struck Belle when she didn't receive jobs or promotions. "I was like hey, I'm not supposed to be here; I'm supposed to be over there when it didn't happen, then I had to think why it didn't happen because it was something superficial that I was focusing on, I wasn't focused on the meaning." Belle explained that she was solely focused on the financial aspect and not her alignment with purpose. Belle is back in the classroom working with students. "I'm learning to

find happiness in the little things. In the little accomplishments. Just like what I'm doing now working with the students, I'm finding joy in that which I never thought would be something that would make me happy."

Belle shared, "I race against myself; I tell myself, if I don't learn how to be content, then I will always be chasing something. And I don't know if that something is going to make me happy. I'm learning contentment. I have some friends who are earning big money and doing big things; from the outside looking in, they have made big strides, arrived, and accomplished their goals, but can I say they are happy? No. They are still chasing and wanting more; they haven't found contentment. I think the key is to stop chasing certain things and find contentment where you're at. I've learned to be open, and try different things, and not to be afraid of not being where you're supposed to be, but to embracing where I'm supposed to be."

Belle shared, "I was raised to tell my story to those ready to hear it. Not everybody is ready to hear your testimony or needs to hear your testimony. But we need not be afraid to tell our story if someone needs it. I can't be afraid that someone will be more successful than me by helping them. Just be willing to help each other so we all can do well. Let's not be selfish and competitive with our knowledge and experience. It's essential to help with information and networking because there is enough for everybody to be successful." Belle shared an artifact, an image of her Master's degree certificate, symbolizing the importance of running her own race, maintaining faith in herself, never giving up on her goals, and learning to be continent no matter where she is in the process.

Overcoming Disappointment to Thrive

In this story, a motivated woman discovers closed doors to employment opportunities were necessary disappointments, that aligned her with a divine appointment. Disappointment is sadness one can feel when something they hoped for doesn't come to fruition. Lady T overcame the disappointment of not being selected as the final candidate for multiple employment searches. Those rejections prepared her for a leadership role that was beyond her expectations.

Lady T shared, "it hasn't been easy to get to where I am today." After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Business from the University of the Pacific, Lady T began her career as an Auditor with the Bureau of State Audits – California, auditing state government agencies. Lady T continued her career as an Auditor with a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) firm that audited K-12 schools, school districts, community colleges, and nonprofits. "That's where I got my foundation in educational finance." Lady T then pursued higher education and obtained a Master's degree in Business Administration from the University of Phoenix. Lady T accepted an Account Specialist role with the County Office of Education in the Central Valley, providing fiscal oversight for over 80 grants and Programs. Lady T now had the education and professional experience to launch her to the next level.

Lady T started to apply for leadership positions internally and externally. Lady T recalls, "I would submit the cover letter and resume and pass the initial screening. In the first interview, the

panel would inquire about the technical aspect of the position. The second interview focused on my qualifications. The third interview centered on whether I was a good fit. I would do so well in the interviews, but I would always get canceled out on the third one, and it was disheartening. I would say to myself; God, I know I have the knowledge, the skill; what's going on?"

In 2 years, Lady T applied for different positions, including Chief Business Officer, Director of Finance, and Compliance Manager. Lady T recalls, "the door kept getting slammed. After getting so many of those rejections, you get discouraged". It got to the point where Lady T thought, "Ok, maybe I'll just stay where I'm at and continue to learn. However, where I am, either somebody would have to die or leave a position for me to move up". Lady T had the management capabilities and educational finance experience and understood school district finance regarding compliance. "I have a Bachelor's and Master's degree; what's wrong? Is it because I'm black, is it because I'm a black female? You always think about that".

Lady T applied for a position with the County Office of Education in the Bay Area. "This is where the breakthrough came. I know God opened this door; all the other positions I had applied for were $80-90k salaries. When I landed with the County Office of Education in the Bay Area, the salary and benefits were greater than all the other positions I applied for, and I'm in a better organization overall. Now, I can see why those doors were closed."

Lady T shared, "I was recently promoted to Chief Business Official (CBO) for two school districts and twelve charter schools. I was also selected to participate in a highly competitive CBO program parallel to my position, providing additional support and training needed to succeed. It's such a blessing; it's amazing how God will order your steps; things are not going to happen the way I want them to most time; they are not going to be in order; it's all about his timing. I need to remember who is in control and that God has my best interest at heart; he can see farther down the road than I can. Those other positions were closed for a reason. Sometimes we think we're ready for an opportunity, but we are not. To learn, we need to experience things, endure trials, get beat up, deal with difficult bosses, and fail on a few projects. I want to go higher, and when the next plateau comes, I know I will learn, act, and improve, and if doors get slammed, that's fine; it means it wasn't for me. It's about timing".

Lessons from Lady T's experience also included the importance of resilience and not giving up. "Just because you experience a no could mean, not right now". This experience helped Lady T overcome other challenges that came afterwards. "Challenges are how we grow, and that's how we thrive. If everything were easy in life, there would be no purpose and no reason to trust God. Challenges allow us to develop a relationship with God and trust and rely on him".

The emotions Lady T experienced while sharing her story included gratitude for past experiences and her current leadership role. Lady T shared how she empathized with women of color who have experienced disappointment and frustration because of institutional racism. "The positions I applied for were predominately white and male-dominated; therefore, when you notice that an educated and qualified black woman was not selected for a position, the fact she's a "black woman" could be a contributing factor. The playing field is not level, and there is still discrimination in every area: health care, education, and the justice system; it's sad that racism

still exists in 2022. I'm not saying I didn't get those other jobs because I am a black woman, but it could have been a factor".

As a result of this challenge, Lady T developed a stronger prayer life, refocused, and developed more skills based on interview feedback. "I couldn't be too prideful; I had to humble myself to accept constructive criticism. We all have room to grow". Lady T learned new skills to "think outside the box" and introspection to identify ways to improve professional and interview presentation skills. Lady T desires to continue building her communication skills by becoming a better listener.

Lady T identifies herself as thriving today. "I've been in the trenches; it's a good season. It's a relief, and I'm humbled because God is orchestrating my life, and I'm taking advantage of opportunities. I like the word thriving; I'm learning that thriving is not attached to monetary values. If I have peace and my mental state is good, that's thriving. If I am focused amid adversity when everything is going crazy, that's thriving."

"As a little girl, I always envisioned the type of woman I wanted to be. I wanted to be a businesswoman, who wore a suit, carried a briefcase, and used a laptop. A couple of weeks ago, I remembered this vision, and I told myself, I'm her, so walk in it. Sometimes you get to the place you've been desiring, and you're shocked because you are there". Lady T shared that she desires to become a philanthropist to help young girls realize their visions of themselves. The artifact Lady T shared was a picture of God, holding a big teddy bear behind his back and a little girl holding the tiny teddy bear, with the caption beneath, (God says) "Just trust me…. (Little girl says) But I love it, God". This photo symbolizes that God has something better for me if I'm willing to work through my disappointment and trust him.

Learning to Accept My Divine Assignment to Thrive

In this story, an elementary school principal reluctantly returns to the classroom and finds her identity. Motivated by her love of teaching children, Melanie discovers that she is the one in need of learning some valuable life lessons.

Born and raised in the Central Valley, Melanie attended public K-12 schools.
After completing high school, Melanie attended a Historically Black College or University (HBCU), Dillard University, located in New Orleans, Louisiana. Melanie completed her Bachelor's degree in Education and served New Orleans as a teacher and instructional coach. During her graduate studies and fellowship, Melanie witnessed blatant challenges in the classroom, in particular, how poor black children were treated by some of the white teachers in the public school. "I thought, how can I truly make a meaningful difference?" As a first-year teacher, Melanie completed her Master of Education degree and considered becoming a principal, administrator, or district leader. While establishing a career, Melanie fell in love with New Orleans and married her high school sweetheart.

After the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, Melanie and her husband moved back to the Central Valley to their hometown. Melanie served as a teacher for a short time until she accepted a leadership role with a different school district. It was a great experience for Melanie; unfortunately, she was laid off due to a teacher shortage in 2009. Not deterred by the layoff, Melanie focused on her career and continued her Education journey, obtaining an Administrative Services Credential. Soon after, Melanie secured an Assistant Principal position. "I thought I could not have the impact I wanted without being the administrator. I wanted to become a principal; Melanie had no desire to go beyond that point. Beyond a principal, she was away from kids, and at a district office. She never wanted that; She wanted to be in a building where she could see and hear children."

Melanie shared that "about four years ago, I received a promotion; it was my first principal position. I loved it; I was the principal of an elementary school in my hometown." Melanie described how the school had challenges, yet the kids were resilient. "They were my kids; those were my babies." After three years as a Principal, a decision was made that Melanie would be moved to be Principal at an alternative school. Unbeknownst to Melanie, the alternative school would close the following year. "It was a much-needed program. It was the school serviced students who were expelled within the district. Once COVID-19 hit, the kids were moved to virtual instruction, and getting alternative kids online regularly was a challenge." Melanie was told that due to the lack of enrollment, the district planned to close the school. Melanie however knew that there were other motives involved in the closing of the school.

"For me, it was ok, no problem; where am I going next, I asked. Sorry, you're not going anywhere, I was told. I was going to be laid off, most principals get moved to another school, I'm not tied down to this one school, I serve the district." Melanie believes there were politics at play as to why she wasn't moved to another school, and why the district she worked for didn't want her as an administrator. "Any other time, I would be fine with that change if there was evidence that I wasn't doing a job. I would be the first to fire myself if I am not doing what I'm supposed to be doing, which is serving students and families." Melanie shared there was no reason given for her layoff; there was no explanation other than she could apply for another principal position. "This was strange; unless there were some derogatory evidence in a principal's personnel record, the superintendent would move a principal from one school to another. All my evaluations were excellent; I knew it wasn't performance-based." Despite this inconsistent action from the district, Melanie applied for multiple principal positions. "I never received a follow-up email or interview or heard back at all."

As a result of the layoff and Melanie 's seniority, the district offered her a teaching position in the classroom. "I also had colleagues reach out and ask if I wanted to apply for an Assistant Principal position. Why don't you apply? We would love to have you. So, I applied for the assistant principal position, interviewed, and was selected. The HR department called me the following day and formally offered the position. I accepted. The next process was for the school board to approve and ratify the position. Unfortunately, they denied it. No reason was given; they just denied it. Not only did they eliminate me from my position, which was my love, but I began to wonder what was really going on. So I requested a meeting to find out more and my superintendent denied a meeting with me. He stated in his last email to me, "good luck on your journey."

Melanie considered positions elsewhere but ultimately decided against that idea. "This didn't just happen to me; in a one-year period (and several years prior) it happened to 9-10 other African-American administrators of color and several African American Directors. Thankfully, they were all able to find administrator positions elsewhere, but why should they have to?" Melanie learned from a very credible source that the district was engaging in illegal and discriminatory practices. "People have to be held accountable when there is outright racism. This happened because I am an African American woman and my family affiliation with our local civil rights organization. I'm not crazy; it's not in my head; and this is not ok. If it takes everything I have, I'm going to fight and expose what is taking place. A lot of times, what we experience is not upfront discrimination; it is back-door discrimination. As a woman of color, I have to work harder, be smarter, and do everything ten times better than the other person." Melanie shared that she sacrificed so much to become a principal; it was heartbreaking to have it stripped away from her based-on discrimination.

Melanie decided to take a $60k pay cut and she accepted the teaching position. "I feel to whom much is given, much is required, and much is expected". The emotional toil of going back to the classroom was difficult for Melanie. "It was hard going back into the classroom watching brand-new administrators come into positions that they were not qualified for and lacking the Administrative Services Credentials, (which is illegal). It's heartbreaking because the children and the district lose out." Melanie expressed how she is working through the hurt of the experience. "I'm here to do the best job possible. It's hurtful, and they make you feel like you did something wrong. I was starting to ask myself, what's wrong with me?" MELANIE shared, how her experience living and working in Louisiana shaped her work ethic. "For thirteen years working in Louisiana, not only did I see people that looked like me, but they expected excellence, and they expected me to perform. In my undergraduate experience, my university expected excellence, and that's what they got.

This experience reminded me of going through my own K-12 system. Peers and teachers trying to make me feel as if I was not good enough? That's why I came back to my city. As I never had a principal or teacher that looked like me. The resilient part of myself reflects and knows that there is something more; my faith helps me understand that these doors only opened because of God, so if God says I need to be still for the moment, then I have to trust that."

Melanie shared, "I had an amazing school year; I love children and serving children. I had the 1st graders who due to COVID-19, spent their kindergarten year doing virtual learning. So they were unable to hold a pencil, write their names, read on grade level, or count. But by the end of the school year, they could do all the above, and most of the students were also reading and writing on grade level; they worked their butts off. I know that God put me with those children for a reason. In addition to my administrator experience, I have also served as a reading specialist and reading intervention teacher. So I was able to use my skills and talents to serve students. As my other passion is teaching children to read and write; I love it."

Even though Melanie experienced an amazing school year, she also experienced shame and sadness. "This had been the most shameful experience, being a principal that stepped into a teaching role. I have no way to explain why I feel that way because being a teacher is a highly respected position. I think that there is no better position to be in to impact the lives of children,

day in and day out. I always knew eventually that I was going back into the classroom; however, I should have been the person to choose when. I wanted to be the one to say; I'm done with this principal thing; I'm ready to go into the classroom now. I wanted to do that, but I didn't have the opportunity to do it; it was just snatched away. I'm learning; I have to be humble; I'm learning to embrace whatever role, position, title, and be ok."

Melanie shared the importance of never getting caught up in a title or position. "I lost my power when I allowed the school board to make me feel less than when they took my title away. I've learned to take ownership of my feelings and not blame how I allow others to make me feel. I have joy and peace that no man can take away." Another lesson that I learned is to never put a job above family. "There were times, I was working so hard, and sacrificing my family. I now know that if I don't have my family, then I don't have anything." This experience has helped Melanie overcome other challenges by learning the steps of the journey and working through the process. Melanie recalled thinking, "how do I go from being upset, unhealed, and sad to healing? It takes time, therapy, and positive self-talk. Whatever comes my way, there is a way out, so when the next challenges come, I know what to do."

Melanie shared, "I don't feel sorry for myself anymore; I used to say why me? But now I say why not me? This is just the season God has for me to toughen and thicken my skin. I have changed my thinking, a total paradigm shift; that working with children is my divine assignment; I can't allow others to take that away. I'm going to experience joy; I have to thrive despite this experience." Melanie shared that she's in between recovering and thriving. "I'm recovering from a very traumatic experience; I feel that I'm on the upswing." Melanie shared that it's essential to have an outlet and the importance of talking with a professional. "In the African American community, we don't think we need outside help; I knew I did. Life goes by so fast we don't often take the time to dig deeper and ask those reflective questions that are so important. This experience has also helped me reflect deeper on my ancestors that came before me, who had daily struggles and challenges beyond my comprehension."

Melanie will continue to establish stronger boundaries and foster healthy relationships. "It is important to have that small circle of people you can trust and count on. However, only another black woman can truly understand the experiences of black women; we shouldn't compete; we should do whatever we can to help, make connections to resources and share our stories.

Melanie provided an artifact which is her daily affirmation. Your journey isn't going to be perfect and that's ok. This is your gentle reminder that you are amazing. Smile. Keep your head up. Stay in faith and keep going.

Learning to Build Confidence to Thrive

In this story, a woman finds her strength and confidence by overcoming devastating financial adversities during a national recession. Koralee fought to recover from financial ruin while providing service to others in similar situations with empathy.

After 17 years of working for a Police Department, Koralee accepted a new position with a County DA's Office in August 2007. Unfortunately, the nation was embarking upon a recession, and in October 2007, the County DA's office eliminated Koralee's position. Koralee attempted to return to the Police Department; by then, the intuition had established a hiring freeze. Koralee recalled, "I was out of work, I just bought a new car, and I had a house payment." Koralee quickly jumped into action and accepted a temporary receptionist position. Koralee's husband's company shut down also because of the economic downturn. Koralee's financial situation became desperate which required her to seek resources and services to help. "It was my first experience going into the welfare office; I never dreamed, thought, imagined, crossed my mind ever, that I would be going into the welfare office. I walked in there balling; I could not see where I was walking, I was crying so hard." Koralee learned she and her husband only qualified for food stamps because they didn't have children. Koralee recalled her thoughts at the time "we won't have any place to live, we will have food, but we won't have a place to cook it." Koralee shared they eventually lost their home to foreclosure "We waited it out as long as possible before the bank foreclosed on the house."

Koralee's parents owned two homes, Koralee recalled "my parents let us rent one of the houses, but we didn't have any income to pay the rent." At one point, Koralee's mother accused her of elder abuse because she couldn't pay the rent. "I told her if she wanted us to move, we would move, but I couldn't afford to pay the rent." Koralee was doing her best applying for employment while her husband went back to driving truck. Koralee recalled "my father was the one who would tell my mother, they don't have it," referring to the money. Koralee's mother struggled to understand that, when Koralee's home was foreclosed upon, the amount still owed to the bank was charged to Koralee and her husband as income on their tax return. On top of not having enough livable income, they were now saddled with a $200,000 IRS tax debt." Any money earned was garnished because of the tax debt, which left little money for food, gas, rent, and other living expenses. "At one point, we couldn't pay the water bill, and we had to fill up water bottles to flush the toilets and wash the dishes." Koralee strived to improve her circumstances by completing her Bachelor's degree along with seeking permanent employment. "While my dad was alive, he said… I can see that you are trying."

Koralee's father passed away in 2017, at which point the relationship between Koralee and her mother declined drastically. Koralee recalled, "My mom told me she was selling the house. Mom was also telling everyone that would listen that we would be homeless because she was selling the house, and we would not have a place to go." By this time, things had come full circle for Koralee, who now worked for the Human Services Agency as an Eligibility Worker providing welfare benefits for those experiencing financial and food insecurity. Although Koralee struggled financially, she continued to fight for her survival from this experience.

Koralee reflected, "my grandmother would always tell me to keep the fight in me. When I feel like something is morally and ethically wrong, I will fight, and I don't care who you are; I will fight you. This was not a fight against my mom; this was a fight for survival, dignity, an internal fight." Koralee recalled how her grandmother kept her and her sister in church growing up; one lesson learned was the power of prayer. "One day, I prayed and turned my situation over to God. Then one of my girlfriends called unexpectedly and needed a place to stay. I found an apartment,

and she rented a room, and we rented the other room for six months. Then we rented a house; things started falling in place."

Koralee shared, "all we needed was a little more time to get from under the IRS tax debt, and we were within a year of making it happen when my mom went crazy on us." Koralee's mother sold her home in 2017, and the IRS debt was paid off in 2018. "Now we both have good paying jobs and degrees and are earning mid-six figures. All my mom had to do was have some faith in her daughter. Last year, we started getting our credit back on track and researching how soon we could buy a house, putting money aside. We closed escrow on August 17, 2021; I got my house with a pool in the backyard, which I always wanted, and in the desired area. It was ten years of struggling, fighting, and tears."

Koralee learned that she never wants to be in a position where she's unemployed and not in control of her housing situation. Koralee recognized her part in the adverse experience, that she was not prepared and did not have a backup plan. Koralee shared, "if I were to get laid off right now, I could substitute teach or sell insurance policies. I have options I didn't have before; this house note will get paid!" Koralee shared this emotion she felt while sharing her story. "I feel I'm in flux. I'm enjoying being able to say we did overcome, yet I'm cautious because I feel it can be taken away at any moment." Koralee is focused on financial literacy and stability while building wealth for herself and the next generation. Koralee shared she also learned empathy through the welfare experience she didn't have before the adverse event. Koralee shared that "everything isn't about money; I needed to understand that on a deeper level. I'm thankful for going through that experience, it was not fun, but I'm thankful for having the testimony on the other side.

Koralee shared this experience will help her overcome other challenges because "I found strength that I didn't realize I had, now I have more confidence in my abilities to do things that I never thought I could do, such as pursuing a doctorate. I never saw myself as smart or intelligent enough to accomplish something like that. Ten years ago, I didn't have that confidence; I have a level of confidence now that makes me feel empowered." Koralee shared that she has grown in many ways "I feel like I'm a different person; I am a mature ass woman! Emotionally, I think I was more fragile then. I believe I was fearful and dependent on my parents, husband, and employment; I was more dependent then than I am comfortable with now. The maturity of going through this experience lets me know whatever I need to take on; I can, and I know I'll be ok, regardless of the outcome.

Koralee shared that her level of resilience today is thriving. "I am thriving with the caveat that I'm still working some things out, but I'm still thriving. I have a therapist; I'm not ashamed I have a therapist; I talk to her every other week. I always want to be a better version of myself. I don't think I'll ever reach that self-actualization point, and I don't want to. I always want to have that one little thing I can do better and try to reach that. That comes from my grandmother saying never be satisfied. If you are satisfied, what else is there?" Before sharing her story, Koralee would have identified herself between surviving and recovering based on some work challenges. "My resilience level changes day by day and sometimes moment by moment, but overall, I'm thriving."

Koralee shared that she identified skills that helped her overcome, leadership being one of them. "I was told very young that I was a natural born leader. I never wanted to own that idea because I didn't feel worthy of leading other people and didn't want the responsibility. I started to lean into that skill and take on responsibilities. I understand that being a leader is a gift. I need to use my gift, own it, be responsible, and do something with it. God gives you all that you need to be successful. We need to nurture our gifts and pull them out of ourselves. God puts us through situations that pulls our gifts out of us, if we don't do it ourselves." The skill that Koralee will continue to improve upon is self-confidence. "The one thing that I've always struggled with and I still struggle with is my self-confidence around my body image. That is something I need to work on; that's the one thing that I need to overcome."

Koralee shared, "I think storytelling is important, especially for Black women, because we don't often hear the positives about ourselves; we get beat down with the negatives. We don't hear how we can overcome, how we can do better, how we are better; I think that's important for young girls coming up to hear stories about Black women in a positive way. We are not getting the message through to them; I think we need to do a better job of reaching out to them and sharing our stories of resilience." The artifact Koralee shared to represent her resilience was a picture of the sun glistened pool in Koralee's backyard from Koralee's bedroom window: "Every morning, when I open my blinds, I think about the struggle and painful path that led me to this place. I never want to take it for granted or forget where I came from."