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# Cementing Success: The Impact that Mentoring Has on Women of Color Business Owners in the Construction Industry

## Abstract

The number of women of color entrepreneurs in the construction industry lags significantly behind that of their White women and male counterparts. The construction industry is one of the most gender-segregated industries in the world. Women of color entrepreneurs have encountered barriers to forming mentoring relationships, impacting their success in entrepreneurial endeavors. This qualitative phenomenological study examines how women of color entrepreneurs perceive the professional mentoring experience. This study examines women of color entrepreneurs' experience of professional mentoring and whether it contributed to their success. This study identified successful professional mentoring elements for women of color entrepreneurs and assessed professional mentoring's contribution to entrepreneurial achievement. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine women of color business owners in construction. Six themes emerged from the findings: access to capital, intersectionality, imposter syndrome, mentoring model and approaches, mentoring and business growth, and mentoring and networking. Professional mentoring provides practical guidance, emotional support, and resources for women of color to succeed in male-dominated industries. The knowledge gained from this study will better prepare women of color business owners in construction and help them understand what to look for when establishing professional mentoring relationships.

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Cementing Success: The Impact that Mentoring Has on Women of Color Business Owners in the  
Construction Industry

By

Nneka Bell

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Dr. Stephen Draper

Committee Member

Dr. Janice Kelly

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher University

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## **Dedication**

To my father who art in heaven, I thank you. Only you know how I struggled. The times when I felt like I was an imposter sitting in a room filled with brilliant, articulate women. Only you know how I cried when I stayed up at night trying my best to write scholarly when I am a creative writer. Only you know how I doubted myself constantly because I never held a position where I had to draft an agenda, take minutes for a meeting, or anything close. I never sat at a board meeting or any corporate meeting at that because of my choice of nontraditional blue-collar jobs. Only you know how I struggled to sound “smart” because I had no idea resources existed that could assist me. Yes, I struggled badly, but GOD, I made it! I made it because of your guidance in heaven, so for that, you get all of the Glory!! Now, to bring attention to my earthly peeps. My husband, my best friend, my rock, and the man who made me Dr. Bell, Ernest Lorenzo Bell, I love you so much. You have been supportive from day one and never made me regret taking on the hardest thing I have ever done in this life. You encouraged me to the finish line. You are appreciated. Thank you to my siblings, Shara, who was inspired to go back to school and is on her way to obtaining her bachelor's degree, and my oldest sister Katrice, you paved the way in my entrepreneurship journey. Thank you to my sons Shimel and Che who made me a teenage mother who now holds a doctorate. To my daughter Maddison, I pray that I have inspired you. Thank you for asking me, “What’s next?” after I graduated with my Master’s degree. Thank you for sneaking me into your school to use the library and sitting with me until we got kicked out. I love you so much. Virginia Giordano, my mentor, you have encouraged me, corrected me, told me off nicely, and were there from beginning to end. I couldn’t have asked for

a better professional mentor. Your mentoring cemented my success. I thank you. Dr. Lessie Branch, your brain is brilliant. I asked you one question, and your responses needed to be recorded because I couldn't keep up. I thank you for your time and patience. Commissioner Viviana DeCohen, as a fellow veteran, I thank you for encouraging me as you, too, navigate through this dissertation journey. I am so excited for us and where our accomplishments are taking us. To my cohort, the first all-female cohort that St. John Fisher has had—Team Bold and Bold to be Free—I thank you, ladies. You have pushed me beyond my limits, you have encouraged me, and most of all, you have inspired me. I look forward to working with each of you in the future. Go out and be great on purpose. To my Chair, Dr. Draper, and Committee member, Dr. Kelly, thank you for answering my texts, responding to my emails on Sundays, and giving me great advice and guidance. I appreciate you both. To my mother, my sis, as I call her Mildred Green, it is because of the hard work you have instilled in me that I have made it this far. A wife, a mother of three, a president of a thriving corporation, and now a doctor. You are the real MVP! Lastly, to all the women of color business owners who come behind me, my prayer is that you find your way in the construction industry and don't give up! Find other women of color to network with, share information, and uplift. We are already minorities within the minority; we don't need to compete, but we need each other so that we are complete. Remember, you got this, and GOD has us!

## **Biographical Sketch**

Nneka Bell is currently the President at Celebrities Quality Painting Inc. dba Celebrities Quality Construction. Mrs. Bell attended Mercy College from 1996 to 2016 and obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in 2017. She attended Mercy College from 2017 to 2019 and graduated with a Master of Science degree with distinction in 2019. She commenced matriculation at St. John Fisher University in the summer of 2021 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Mrs. Bell pursued her research on the impact of professional mentoring on women of color business owners in the construction industry under the direction of Dr. Stephen Draper and Dr. Janice Kelly and received the Ed.D. degree in 2023.

## **Abstract**

The number of women of color entrepreneurs in the construction industry lags significantly behind that of their White women and male counterparts. The construction industry is one of the most gender-segregated industries in the world. Women of color entrepreneurs have encountered barriers to forming mentoring relationships, impacting their success in entrepreneurial endeavors. This qualitative phenomenological study examines how women of color entrepreneurs perceive the professional mentoring experience. This study examines women of color entrepreneurs' experience of professional mentoring and whether it contributed to their success. This study identified successful professional mentoring elements for women of color entrepreneurs and assessed professional mentoring's contribution to entrepreneurial achievement. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine women of color business owners in construction. Six themes emerged from the findings: access to capital, intersectionality, imposter syndrome, mentoring model and approaches, mentoring and business growth, and mentoring and networking. Professional mentoring provides practical guidance, emotional support, and resources for women of color to succeed in male-dominated industries. The knowledge gained from this study will better prepare women of color business owners in construction and help them understand what to look for when establishing professional mentoring relationships.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The underrepresentation of women entrepreneurs within the construction industry is a worldwide phenomenon (Parker, 2016). According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data (2020), women comprise 10.9% of the construction industry. Fewer than one in 20 (3.4%) of construction trade workers in 2018 were women, according to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2019). Despite the increasing numbers of entrepreneurs in the US, female entrepreneurs of color still need to be more adequately represented (Parker, 2016). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013), European American women constitute 2.0% of the construction industry workforce, while Latin American women comprise 0.4%, African American women account for 0.2%, and Asian and Native American women collectively contribute to 0.1% of the female labor force within this sector. Boosting the involvement of women is essential in addressing the construction sector's workforce scarcity while nurturing a more equitable environment. As per the New York State federal guidelines, a women-owned business is defined as a business in which the majority (at least 51%) of the company is owned and run daily by a member (or collection of members) of four ethnic or racial groups: African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans (Code of Federal Regulations, 2023). In this study, the term "woman of color" refers to any woman who is not White. This study focuses on individuals who identify as women. Amidst the persistent challenges of growth for women, particularly women of color, in the predominantly male-dominated industry, the challenges to obtaining professional mentorship further exacerbate the difficulties faced by these female entrepreneurs (Ayman & Korabik, 2010).

This qualitative study contributes to the expanding body of knowledge on female entrepreneurship, specifically emphasizing the significance of professional mentorship for women of color entrepreneurs operating within the construction industry (Bengtsson & Hsu, 2015). Bozeman and Feeney (2007) define professional mentoring as “an intense developmental relationship whereby a well-informed mentor provides advice and counseling” (p. 72). In addition, developmental opportunities are provided to a protégé by a mentor, which, in turn, shapes the protégé’s career experiences. For example, professional support can be offered through in-person meetings, phone calls, Zoom videoconferencing, emails, or messaging. Research suggests that the advantages of professional mentorship extend not only to individual mentees and mentors but also positively impact their respective organizations (Noe et al., 2002; Wanberg et al., 2003). Organizations stand to gain from mentees’ professional mentoring experiences, as such guidance contributes to the development of a workplace culture that emphasizes support, thereby enhancing employee retention (Brooks, 2022). Bozeman and Feeney (2007) propose that when entrepreneurs receive guidance from accomplished mentors, they gain increased access to financial resources due to their mentor’s wealth of experience, connections to funding sources, and strategic implementation expertise.

As a result, women of color who receive professional mentoring may influence the economic growth and success rates of women of color in the construction industry (Allen et al., 2008). Despite surpassing the national average in starting businesses, women of color still experience a revenue gap compared to businesses owned by Black men and White men and women (Carter & Peters, 2016). According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2021), on average, women only earn about \$0.82 for every dollar that men earn. Hispanic or Latina women earn about \$0.58, and Black women earn about \$0.63 for every dollar White men

earn. Current research reveals that White women business owners are financially successful and contribute to the national economy because of their sophisticated networking and professional development organizations; this is not the case for women of color (Mee, 2012). Women of color are beginning to realize the importance of exploring professional mentorships and organizations to advance their profiles and build their company's capacity.

Finally, this research is a blueprint for potential and current women of color who want to expand their businesses and take their place in society as true business entrepreneurs (Steward, 2022). To attain these objectives, Kram's (1980) theory of mentoring and social capital theory was used to understand mentoring.

### **Problem Statement**

In the 2019 Annual Business Survey (ABS), it was revealed that minorities owned approximately 18.3% (1.0 million) of all U.S. businesses, while 19.9% (1.1 million) were owned by women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Studies also indicate that women of color represent the most rapidly expanding demographic within the female-owned business landscape, holding the highest proportion of business ownership (Buford, 2016). While those statistics suggest a positive step for women of color business owners, the problem that this study addressed is the need for more empirical research on how professional mentoring is contributing to women of color who own construction companies. The information obtained from this research serves as a roadmap to assist future women of color entrepreneurs with their journey and become a blueprint for policymakers to develop in-house programs to match senior entrepreneurs with individuals who are either new to their business or struggling to succeed in the male-dominated industry.

## **Theoretical Rationale**

Increased female ownership has been highlighted as necessary to promote equality. Despite initiatives to recruit women, the construction industry remains one of the most gender-segregated industries in the world (Norberg & Johansson, 2021). Leveraging professional mentoring relationships may lead the industry through the next several decades of its continued growth (Coers, 2021). According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2023), President Joe Biden signed the “Investing in America” agenda to provide economic opportunities for women in fields where they are historically underrepresented, helping to close the employment gap between women and men in the industry. The theory guiding this study is Kram's (1980, 1985) mentorship theory, which argues that professional mentors may provide four psychosocial functions: (a) helping the protégé develop a sense of professional self (acceptance and confirmation), (b) providing problem-solving and a sounding board (counseling), (c) giving respect and support (friendship), and (d) providing identification and role modeling (Ragins & Kram, 2007). Kram's theory is widely cited by researchers who aim to dive deeper into the core of professional mentoring and its impact on business outcomes.

Since the construction industry often requires two or more people to collaborate on a project, social capital theory (Portes, 2003) is also used as a theoretical framework for this study. Social capital theory posits that there is a set of shared values that allow two people to work together; it is a trusted relationship that both parties may benefit positively. Social capital theory examines how social relationships that are mutually formed can help individuals and organizations beyond their original context (Blair & Carroll, 2016). It is valid to state that mentoring has been studied extensively in corporate and educational settings (Wang & Millward, 2014). However, only in 2002 did mentoring begin to appear in empirical studies related to

construction business ownership (Davis, 2014). The survey conducted by Waters et al. (2002) reviewed the application of Kram's mentoring theory to new entrepreneurs. The results of Waters et al. (2002) research determined that Kram's mentoring theory applies to new entrepreneurs in terms of psychosocial support, which is proven to be necessary when entering a new venture (Davis, 2014). While the results showed the applicability of Kram's mentoring theory, the study was conducted on both males and females. Davis (2014) states that there still needs to be more research on Kram's theory of mentoring related to female entrepreneurs. The problem is the need for more pragmatic research concerning professional mentoring as a successful strategy for women of color entrepreneurs in the construction industry. Both theoretical perspectives provide a framework for this study.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of professional mentoring on women of color business owners in construction. This research study contributes to the current body of scholarly knowledge since there is still a need for further research on mentoring women of color. Additionally, the study examines the relationship between professional mentoring and women of color business owners in construction. Much of the existing research focuses on either men or women obtaining professional mentorship in executive positions or academia. The key objective of this research study is to understand the factors involved in women of color's mentoring relationships and how professional mentoring contributes to their business decisions, specifically in a predominantly male industry.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were:



RQ1. What are some of the structural barriers facing women of color business owners in the construction industry?

RQ2. What are some of the personal challenges facing women of color business owners in the construction industry?

RQ3. In what ways, if any, did professional mentoring help address any barriers and challenges faced by women of color business owners in the construction industry?

### **Potential Significance of the Study**

The construction industry needs to acknowledge and adapt to the increasing diversity of the U.S. population. By embracing inclusivity and promoting diverse representation within the industry, it can better serve its customers, improve cultural understanding, and capitalize on the benefits that diversity brings (Teague, 2015). Including women of color in the construction industry can have a positive impact on their economic empowerment (Parker, 2016). By providing equal access to job opportunities, training, and career advancement, the industry can contribute to narrowing the gender and racial wealth gaps. This, in turn, can lead to greater financial stability and upward mobility for women of color and their families. For these reasons, women of color may open a business in a non-traditional field, such as construction. According to Non-traditional Employment for Women (NEW) (1978), a non-profit organization that prepares, trains, and places women in careers in the skilled construction utility and maintenance trades, non-traditional occupations are careers in which less than 25% of the workforce is made up of one gender. The construction industry comprises several sectors: residential, commercial, industrial, and civil. Several trades are within these sectors, such as painting, electricians, carpentry, plumbing, brick masons, and laborers. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020), as of May 2021, the mean salary of a construction manager in New York is

\$98,890. Because of this, women of color may be attracted to this industry as a means of business ownership.

Research into the impact of professional mentoring may prove helpful to women of color attempting to gain insight into what challenges they may face when trying to start a business in the construction industry. Access to such information may aid entrepreneurs through the journey to business ownership. The study's conclusion may also provide motivation and guidance for potential and current minority women business owners to understand behaviors affecting entrepreneurial success or failure (King, 2020).

This study aims to guide women of color in navigating their careers as business owners in construction. This study captured the voices of established women of color business owners and aims to help other women of color understand how having a professional mentor plays a role in their businesses. This research provides insight into how the construction industry may increase the representation of women of color entrepreneurs. The results of this study bring awareness to the relationship that professional mentoring has to their business outcomes (financial and capacity) and how receiving professional mentoring may influence business decisions in the industry.

### **Definitions of Terms**

The following terms are operationalized for this study.

*Construction:* The building of houses, factories, bridges, and roads (National Association of Women in Construction, 2023).

*Mentor:* A person who gives someone help and advice based on their experiences in that profession.

*Women of Color:* Women of color who identify themselves as African

Americans, Latinas, Asian/Pacific Islanders, Asian Americans, and Native Americans.

*Business owner:* Must control at least 51% of the business, be American-born or legal resident who manages day-to-day operations, and make long-term decisions (U.S. Code of Federal Regulations, 2023).

## **Summary**

Many women of color are determined to confront adversities and demonstrate an unwavering commitment to achieving success while embracing the challenges accompanying the pursuit of entrepreneurship within construction. They must understand that they may encounter structural barriers such as securing capital, making less profit, and hiring and retaining employees. However, obtaining a professional mentor may help mitigate the potential of failing for women of color by providing knowledge, connections, and expertise to the potential entrepreneur. The need for more professional mentorship poses a significant challenge for women in business, specifically women of color. Establishing more inclusive avenues for women of color will benefit women and the economy (Mukund, 2016). This study intends to identify how receiving professional mentoring may add value to their business outcomes.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on the history of women of color in the workforce. Research in the literature concerning women of color business owners in construction and the challenges and barriers. Understanding the literature helps to make a connection to the participants' lived experiences. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, the research context, the participants, and the data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this current research study. Finally, in Chapter 5, the researcher discusses the implications of the findings and offers recommendations on ways to support and promote the

success of women of color business owners in construction. Chapter 5 also discusses recommendations for creating a more positive and inclusive culture in the construction industry.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

The construction industry has traditionally been dominated by men, specifically White men, making it more difficult for women of color to enter and advance. In recent years, the construction industry has witnessed an increasing presence of women of color entrepreneurs navigating the historically male-dominated field (Langevang et al., 2015). This literature review delves into the experiences of these trailblazing individuals and the critical role professional mentorship plays in shaping their entrepreneurial journeys within the construction realm. The importance of embracing diversity and fostering inclusion in the construction industry cannot be overstated, as it not only contributes to social equity but also encourages innovation and enhanced business performance. By examining scholarly research, case studies, and theoretical frameworks, this comprehensive review provides a robust understanding of the obstacles and challenges faced by women of color entrepreneurs in construction and sheds light on whether professional mentorship has been an instrumental catalyst for their growth and success. This study aims to bridge the gap in knowledge regarding women of color in construction and the impact of mentoring on their professional development. Consequently, this analysis will shed light on potential areas for further study and generate valuable insights for policy recommendations aimed at promoting a more inclusive and equitable environment in the industry. The literature review gives a broad overview of research supporting the topic of how professional mentoring contributes to women of color entrepreneurs in the construction industry. More specifically, this study focuses on the lived experiences of women of color entrepreneurs

who receive professional mentoring at any time during their entrepreneurship journey. This literature review provides a summary, analysis, and synthesis of empirical research. The two theories framing this study—Kram’s mentoring theory and social capital theory—give the study context. This literature review examines some of the challenges faced by these women entrepreneurs in construction, and various forms of professional mentoring, such as formal, informal, and e-mentoring. Also addressed in this literature review is background information on mentoring, which supports further exploration of how professional mentoring can address the challenges that women of color face while they strive to be successful entrepreneurs in a male-dominated industry.

Professional mentoring has been suggested to address these challenges, but there is a lack of data on how it helps women of color build successful businesses. Women of color who choose to start their businesses in construction encounter several distinct difficulties and face numerous challenges. It can be posited that the advancement of minority women of color entrepreneurs within the construction industry may be significantly enhanced through the provision of professional mentorship. According to Parker (2016), having someone to talk to who has been through it all before and can give advice and encouragement is helpful. In addition, studies like the one conducted by Mukund (2016) demonstrate the importance of having a professional mentor in the construction business. Implementing professional mentorship may be one way to increase diversity in the industry. Many women of color entrepreneurs find it difficult to enter male-dominated industries like construction without the support of a professional mentor who can provide encouragement and point them in the right direction (Aneke, 2015).

This literature review also provides readers with an in-depth and objective evaluation of existing research on the effects of mentoring on women of color who start businesses in the

construction industry. This review introduces the research issue and defines some essential terms. It also brings awareness to the struggles and triumphs of women of color in construction throughout history and some difficulties women of color face when launching and expanding their businesses in the construction sector. This literature review also looks at how the Minority Women Business Enterprises (MWBE) certification program has helped women of color with their businesses. Lastly, this study examines the importance of receiving professional mentoring and how it can help women of color become successful business owners in the construction industry. The review of the literature lays the groundwork for the research approach taken in this investigation. Reviewing the prior literature on the subject illuminates any gaps in the literature and allows the crafting of relevant queries to address them. This research sheds light on how professional mentorship can help women of color succeed and recommends strategies for creating mentoring programs tailored to their specific requirements.

### **Mentoring**

The term *mentor* has recently gained currency in the professional world (Thompson, 2002). Drawn from Greek mythology, the word mentor is derived from the heroic age of Homer, who was the friend of Odysseus and adviser to Telemachus, Odysseus's son (Merriam, 1983). When Odysseus went to fight in the Trojan War, he entrusted Mentor to teach and guide his son in his absence. The name mentor means "adviser" (Russell, 2021). As a result, in modern times, we still refer to trusted advisers as mentors. Mentor has been adopted in Latin and other languages, including English, as a term meaning someone who imparts wisdom to and shares knowledge with a less-experienced colleague (Kowalski, 2019).

## **Benefits of Mentoring**

The value of professional mentoring can be overlooked if there is a lack of knowledge regarding how the role of a professional mentor can positively impact a mentee (Gardner, 2015). Laukhuf and Malone (2015) conducted a phenomenological study to present the benefits of professional mentoring through the lived experiences of women entrepreneurs. The study found that inexperienced entrepreneurs who were paired with successful entrepreneurs produced positive results, not only in their businesses but also in their decision-making. The mentees, consisting of 22 female entrepreneurs, expressed that having a sounding board as well as someone to help avoid making unnecessary errors helped dramatically. By using data coding, the findings also showed how mentored participants progressed in their leadership skills, as well as their self-confidence. Rollins (2017) also conducted a phenomenological study with 22 female entrepreneurs and explored their attitudes and views on establishing a mentoring relationship. The findings show that relationships are beneficial to the mentee, but only once the women were able to overcome the barriers to establishing mentoring relationships. To summarize, both studies concluded that shared decision-making with both the mentor and mentee would produce positive outcomes.

According to findings from a study done by Theaker (2023) about the roles of professional mentoring for women entrepreneurs, mentoring can give women entrepreneurs access to strong networks that can facilitate their connections with potential clients, suppliers, and business partners. Professional mentors can help entrepreneurs form relationships that may be essential to their success by introducing them to other industry experts. Theaker (2021) adds that many entrepreneurs battle with feelings of self-doubt and uncertainty and that starting and operating a business can be a difficult and isolating experience. Professional mentors can offer



mental support, assisting business owners in maintaining their motivation and goal-focused attitude. The same outcomes demonstrate how professional mentoring can assist female business owners in developing trust in their skills and enterprises, which, in turn, increases their self-efficacy. Professional mentors can also help entrepreneurs overcome self-doubt and take risks that can result in greater success by offering supportive criticism and guidance (Theaker, 2023). It appears that professional mentoring relationships can assist women of color entrepreneurs in staying on track and achieving their goals.

### **Types of Mentoring**

Aggarwal and Johal (2021) note that various mentoring models can help women's businesses. Traditional mentoring, in which a more experienced mentor is paired with a less experienced mentee, is one of the key types emphasized, according to the study. The mentor assists the mentee in navigating the difficulties of beginning and expanding a company by offering direction, counsel, and support. Peer mentoring, which includes a group of entrepreneurs who frequently meet to discuss their challenges and share their experiences, is another aspect highlighted by Aggarwal and Johal (2021). Women entrepreneurs can benefit most from this kind of mentoring because it offers a welcoming atmosphere where they can connect with others who are going through similar difficulties.

Reverse mentoring is another type of mentoring that Poggesi et al. (2020) discuss. They claim that in this type, the mentor is truly the individual with less experience while the mentee has more. Women entrepreneurs who want to learn from younger or less experienced pros, such as in technology or social media, can benefit from this kind of mentoring. The study's findings also point to virtual mentorship as another type. They discuss how this type is now a common choice for female entrepreneurs who might need access to mentors in their neighborhood

because of technological advancements. This kind of mentoring can be done via video conferencing, correspondence, or social media. Poggesi et al. (2020) also conclude that group mentoring is another crucial form of mentoring to consider. According to the research, a single mentor is assigned to a group of mentees as part of group mentoring. Women entrepreneurs who participate in this form of mentoring may gain from the group's knowledge and experience. In general, these studies demonstrate that each form of mentoring has benefits of its own and can help women entrepreneurs in various ways. Women entrepreneurs can select the sort of mentoring that best satisfies their needs and objectives by being aware of the various mentoring options accessible.

### ***Informal Mentoring***

Informal mentoring transpires when a relationship is established between two people, and one gains knowledge and support from the other (Inzer & Crawford, 2005). According to a study by Ragins and Cotton (1999), informal organizational mentoring can be more advantageous than formal mentoring in a workplace due to its unstructured nature. However, a formal mentoring relationship will benefit the mentee, as the relationship is highly structured. To understand the extent to which potential mentors and mentees agree that an actual relationship exists, Torney Welsh et al. (2012) conducted a quantitative study where they asked 376 individuals to identify their mentoring partners, then compared their responses to the list of mentors to determine whether there was a match. The responses were then analyzed to determine the level of matching. The findings showed that neither mentees nor mentors were accurate at identifying reciprocal informal mentoring partners. To determine the characteristics that might lead mentees to select informal mentors in addition to or in place of their formal mentor, Scandura and Graen (1984) conducted a quantitative study that consisted of a six-item scale that was used to measure

leader-member exchange. Three questionnaires were given to 338 supervisors, 224 mentors of the supervisors, and 75 informal mentors. The hypothesis was tested by comparing two groups of mentees who identified their supervisors as their mentors and those who identified them as informal mentors. The findings revealed that when the leader-member exchange (LMX) is low, the mentees identified an informal member, but when the LMX was high, mentees had a more positive exchange with their supervisors. The findings in both the Scandura and Graen (1984) and Torney Welsch et al. (2012) studies show that whether an organization or an individual has given guidance to someone, for both parties to have mutual identification in a mentoring relationship, communication is imperative. Without clear communication, individuals are likely to make assumptions about the relationship.

### ***Formal Mentoring***

Formal mentoring differs from informal mentoring as it is designed and implemented by the organization itself, providing a more engaging and structured approach to mentoring. In a quantitative study, Waters (2002) paired mentees who completed a training that consisted of the development of their business plan and developing skills in the areas of financial management and marketing research with mentors who were able to help the proteges. Using a sample size of 77 mentees and mentors for an average of 8.9 months, the mentees were asked to record the frequency with which they met with their mentors. The Mentoring in New Business scale (Waters et al., 2002) was used to evaluate if mentors and mentees have similar perceptions of the levels of career-related and psychosocial support. The findings showed mentors provided higher levels of psychosocial support than career-related support. Similarly, Waters (2004) did a study of the benefits of psychosocial support that a mentee receives from their mentor regarding job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and work self-esteem. The quantitative study consisted

of 166 mentees with their mentors. They were given a questionnaire that assessed the frequency of meetings, the personality of both mentor and mentee and their workload. The findings showed that mentees' and mentors' perceptions could not be correlated to one another. When mentors provide their mentees with what they need, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their mentors. The findings also suggest that a more comprehensive understanding of psychosocial support is only likely to come when the views of both parties are known. To conclude, preconditions of psychosocial support, such as trust and familiarity with mentors, may not develop if the mentoring relationship is in an organizational context; however, when the relationship is career-focused, formal relationships are more likely to occur (Raggins & Cotton, 1999).

### ***E-mentoring***

There are various forms of mentoring, among which is the conventional one-on-one form, as described above, where the mentee and mentor are paired either through a program or solely on their own accord. There is group mentoring, where a single mentor is matched with a cohort of mentees. Lastly, there is distance mentoring, where the two parties are in different locations. This type of mentoring is called e-mentoring. E-mentoring, the process of using computer-mediated communication (CMC) technology as the primary means of communication between mentors and proteges, has become widely used, especially since the spread of COVID-19 (Kacmar, 2012). The sudden transition from in-person to remote mentoring has altered the way mentoring had to take place. Technology such as the internet, email, instant messaging, and related technology has changed the way we communicate (de Janasz & Godshalk, 2013).

Kyrgidou and Petridou (2013) conducted a qualitative study aimed at discussing the transformative potential of e-mentoring support on the learning and behavioral aspects of

mentors and mentees. The study was based on empirical data collected from rural women entrepreneurs in Greece. The study involved 60 female mentees who had initially expressed an interest in developing their skills related to entrepreneurship. The mentees completed questionnaires detailing their expectations for the e-mentoring relationship, including anticipated improvements in knowledge, skills, and attitudes resulting from the intervention. Upon completion of the e-mentoring relationship, both mentors and mentees fill out questionnaires about the degree of beneficial influence of e-mentoring. According to Kyrgidou and Petridou's (2013) study, e-mentoring is capable of acting as a dynamic, two-fold relationship that can significantly enhance the learning database of both mentors and mentees. The research utilized a 5-point Likert-type scale, with values ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*), to evaluate the effectiveness of e-mentoring.

Similar to Kyrgidou and Petridou's (2013) study, Leck et al. (2012) also conducted a qualitative study on e-mentoring. The research investigated the comprehensive efficacy of an online mentoring program with a particular focus on providing female mentees with psychosocial and career development support, cultivating trust in a remote setting, and matching mentees with mentors. The sample consists of six mentees and seven mentors. Telephone interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. As a result of the small sample size, there was no need for the implementation of qualitative software. The participants were presented with a series of inquiries, such as the difficulties they encountered before joining the program, the career advancement support provided and received, the psychosocial support given and received, as well as the effect of the mentee/mentor match, and ultimately, the overall assessment of the e-mentoring pilot program. The results of the study suggest that mentors and mentees differed concerning their perceptions of the amount of psychosocial support provided. Although mentors

expressed their support for providing psychosocial support, mentees raised concerns about their experiences with female and male mentors. Female mentors were perceived to provide too much support, while male mentors were perceived to provide too little support. The study additionally implies that despite the apparent effectiveness of e-mentoring in providing career-development support, mentors should be reminded that providing psychosocial support is also a necessary aspect of mentoring. Both studies find that e-mentoring appears to be effective, but establishing rapport in a virtual environment may pose a challenge. For this reason, both parties must express their expectations early in the relationship to achieve the best outcome and/ or experience. In other words, communication must come from both the mentor and mentee, not only in e-mentoring relationships but in relationships in general, for both parties to benefit.

### ***Kram's Mentoring Theory***

Kram, building on the foundations for understanding relationships, characterized a hierarchy of mentoring functions (Higgans et al., 2007). Kram's mentoring theory stemmed from her previous systematic study of the nature of relationships with peers. The earlier study of mentoring relationships strongly suggested the potential significance of peer relationships (Kram, 1980). The research consisted of interviews with 18 pairs of senior and junior managers who were actively involved in a mentoring relationship. It was during that study that peer relationships appeared to have the potential to serve some of the same critical functions as mentoring. The findings in the study suggest that there were a variety of peer relationships that offered a range of opportunities for growth amongst mentees. Coincidentally, some functions even resembled those identified in mentoring relationships. However, the study also identified several differences between peer relationships and mentoring, such as the age difference in conventional mentoring, but the most noticeable difference was the quality of the exchange (Kram, 1985).

Kram's theory is the most cited by researchers who aim to dive deeper into the core of what mentoring is (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007).

Mentoring relationships involve a one-way exchange, while peer relationships involve a two-way exchange (Kram, 1985). The findings of this study prompted Kram to do further research. She identified that there were gaps in the study and felt that a better grasp of the psychological and organizational factors that encourage or inhibit progress needed to be developed.

### ***Social Capital Theory***

Human capital theory was developed in the 1950s and early 1960s by Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz (Becker, 1994). They found that education and training were investments that could add to productivity. Social capital theory flows out of human capital theory. Social capital theory was introduced to the academic world in the 1980s by sociologists James Coleman in the United States and Pierre Bourdieu in France. It is through interpersonal relationships that effective functioning occurs. Social capital has been instrumental in shedding light on the enhanced performance of diverse groups.

Despite more women of color deciding to become entrepreneurs, they still face more challenges than their White counterparts (Curtis, 2022). There is still an 8% gap in business ownership between male entrepreneurs and female entrepreneurs. Barriers include limited funding and limited access to capital, to name a few. As stated above, Kram's mentoring theory proposes that mentoring provides four psychosocial functions: (a) helping the mentee develop a sense of professional self (acceptance and confirmation), (b) providing problem-solving and being a sounding board (counseling), (c) giving respect and support (friendship), and (d) providing identification and role modeling (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). If this is the case, this

theory may change the trajectory of women who take the plunge into entrepreneurship in the future.

Social capital theory contends that social relationships are resources (Dubos, 2017). This means that skills, knowledge, and expertise become an asset whenever a network is established. One of the reasons for the underrepresentation of women of color who are entrepreneurs in certain fields was their exclusion from social networks (Hezlett & Gibson, 2007). The inequity experienced by women of color, as per the research, and the researcher's lived experience is what led to the undertaking of this study.

### **Women of Color in the Labor Force**

As stated by Alfred et al. (2019), it has long been the case that women of color are underrepresented in the labor force. The history of working-age women of color in the United States is one of struggle and success. For instance, African American women experience double discrimination in the workplace due to their ethnicity and gender (Sims & Carter, 2019). Researchers found that these groups were disproportionately represented in low-wage occupations with few prospects for promotion (Alfred et al., 2019). Women of Hispanic, Native American, and Asian descent have struggled to break into male-dominated fields like construction. Yearby (2018) states that women of color in the United States have traditionally held low-paying and low-status occupations.

Black women were enslaved and made to labor alongside enslaved men in the fields; even after being freed, many remained in the agricultural, domestic, and other low-paying industries. In addition, the study found that Black women were compelled to work in the agricultural sector, the textile and garment sectors, and the domestic service sector (Yearby, 2018). Black women's main jobs historically have been in low-wage agriculture and domestic



service. Even after migration to the North during the 20th century, most employers would only hire Black women in domestic service work (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). Women of Asian descent worked in agriculture, as well as in canning factories and as household help in the southwestern United States. Dillard (2018) finds that, despite their many positive contributions to the workforce, women of color face many obstacles to advancement, equitable pay, and workplace safety. For instance, in 2019, African American women made \$0.63 cents for every dollar that White men did, and Hispanic and Latina women earned \$0.55 cents for every dollar that White men did (Harbin & Greene, 2022).

Dillard (2018), while concluding her study, highlights difficulties such as managing work-life balance by women of color in the labor force. In another study, Harbin and Greene (2022) note that historically, men have held most positions in the construction industry, and women of color have been less likely to be accepted into unions, training programs, and apprenticeships. The study found that this prevented them from gaining the expertise and knowledge they needed to launch their businesses in the sector. Yearby (2018) notes, however, that recent efforts have been made to increase diversity in the construction sector. The federal government recognizes the importance of empowering women to pursue careers outside accepted norms and has created initiatives like the Women's Bureau and the Women in Apprenticeship and Non-traditional Occupations (WANTO) program to help them do so. According to the results of his research, many states have established MWBE initiatives, which allow businesswomen of color to contend for government contracts. These studies demonstrate that, despite these initiatives, women of color who wish to start their construction businesses continue to encounter substantial obstacles. It can be difficult for them to access resources like funding, industry connections, and professional mentoring. According to the research, professional

mentoring can help women of color in business by giving them the advice, access to a broader network, and encouragement they need to thrive as they continually face difficulties as women of color in the construction industry.

### ***Women of Color in Construction***

Wang (2019) claims that nonwhite female construction workers remain underrepresented despite the Civil Rights Movement's successes. The research shows that women of color experience numerous challenges in the workplace, such as bias and discrimination, inadequate resources, and few opportunities for advancement. Additionally, there is a shortage of women of color in executive roles in the construction business, which limits their access to promotion. Carr et al. (2020) corroborate these findings by noting that racial minority women have made great strides in the building industry in recent years despite facing many obstacles. The research cites the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC), which reports that the percentage of women working in construction has increased to about 9% from 2% in 2003. Wang (2019) agrees, arguing that women of color are still underrepresented in the workforce. Researchers found that only 3.5% of the construction industry's population comprises women of color. Women comprise a disproportionately small percentage of the workforce in the construction industry. According to the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), one in 10 construction workers is a woman.

According to Ong et al. (2020), women of color who work in the construction business face numerous career obstacles. The findings suggest that these women may face bias and abuse from their coworkers, superiors, and customers. Also, they may have trouble getting the education and advice needed to move up in their chosen field through channels like internships and apprenticeships. The study's results illustrate that despite challenges, women of color have

succeeded in the construction industry, showcasing their determination and effort. For instance, Jacqueline Herrera started her building management firm in Texas after more than a decade of experience in the field. Herrera has stated that as a woman of color in the industry, she encountered many obstacles but overcame them by remaining dedicated to her goals and actively seeking out professional mentors who were experienced. According to research by Foster et al. (2019), professional mentorship has been highlighted as an important factor by other women of color entrepreneurs in the construction industry. One example cited in the study, Andrea Fuentes, who started a construction and remodeling business in California, credits her success to the guidance of other women of color in the field. These studies show that although women of color still face many obstacles in the construction industry, they have overcome them by building on their strengths and the support from their families and community.

### ***Challenges Faced by Women of Color Business Owners in Construction***

There are several obstacles that women of color who aspire to start their construction businesses may have to overcome. According to research done by Johnson et al. (2017), women of color in the construction industry are more likely to face bias and harassment on the job. The study found that this includes being underpaid, being subjected to verbal or physical harassment at work, and being passed over for promotions or career growth. According to the research, it can be difficult for women of color in the construction industry to gain access to the funding they need to launch or expand their companies. Krivkovich et al. (2017) corroborate these findings, arguing that women of color who start their construction businesses may have trouble getting loans from banks or other forms of financing because of their ethnicity, gender, or simply because they lack the network and resources to do so. Redmond's (2020) research suggests that women of color who start businesses in the construction industry face similar barriers to gaining

access to the necessary networks and connections for success. The results of the study indicate that these women might lack equivalent professional networks or experienced mentors, as compared to their male and White counterparts, potentially impeding their career progression.

Women of color may face additional barriers when trying to enter and advance in the construction business, as shown by Redmond's (2020) research. They may not have access to union training programs, certification programs, or apprenticeships because of their ethnicity or gender. Torres (2022) argues that minority women business owners in the construction sector may face additional barriers when attempting to win lucrative government contracts. MWBE programs have been created to help women of color who start their businesses compete for government contracts. Still, these programs are not always successful or easily accessible. Minority women in the construction industry experience unique obstacles that could hinder their business. Discrimination and bias, a lack of access to resources and networks, and other structural obstacles are all possible causes of these difficulties.

### ***Minority and Women Business Enterprises Certification***

Murrell and Bangs (2019) report that despite the obstacles faced, many women of color who run their building businesses have won contracts with the government through the MWBE certification program. The research shows that to succeed, many businesses rely on a combination of knowledge, network, and encouragement. According to the same research, the MWBE program was created to help more women- and minority-owned companies win contracts (Theodos et al., 2022). Therefore, obtaining the MWBE certification can aid women of color business owners as they strive to overcome the everyday challenges they face. The MWBE initiative in New York City was launched in 2013 to give 30% of all city contracts to MWBEs by 2021.

According to a study conducted by Holloway and Shatan (2019), it was found that MWBE participants in New York City boroughs were not receiving contract dollars in proportion to their demographic representation. The Bronx accounts for 29% of the Black population and 55% of the Latino population in New York City, while Central Brooklyn has a Black population of 59% and a Latino population of 22%. Both areas have a long history of disinvestment, segregation, and poverty, making them compelling subjects for engagement. In 2017, procurement dollars awarded to businesses coming from these areas amounted to just 0.023% of the total procurement spend of \$19.3 billion. However, further scholarly studies are required to investigate the reason behind the challenge that these businesses face in winning government contracts. Women of color who start their building businesses may have trouble breaking into the government contracting market. According to the research, minority women business owners in the building industry face difficulties locating and applying for available contracts. Reasons for this include a lack of linguistic competence and/or familiarity with relevant tools. According to Holloway and Shatan (2019), women of color in the construction industry may not have the same access to resources and networks as their White and male peers. This may make it more challenging for them to satisfy the requirements for government contracts, reducing their competitiveness in the market.

Consistent with these findings, Stringer (2021) suggests that women of color who start their businesses in the construction industry may also experience bias in the selection process for government contracts. Both subtle and obvious types of discrimination can play a role in the evaluation process. According to this research, women of color who are entrepreneurs in the construction industry may need additional help, such as how to respond to requests for proposals (RFPs) and requests for quotes (RFQs), how to read blueprints, and how to do take-offs (a

process where contractors determine how much material is needed to complete a project based on the specifications given in the proposal). These are all examples of knowledge that is necessary for women of color to bid and win government contracts.

### **Mentoring Women of Color in the Construction Industry**

Smith (2022) asserts that mentoring can be especially beneficial for women of color who are starting their businesses in the construction sector because they experience special difficulties because of prejudice, lack of resources, and lack of representation. These entrepreneurs can receive advice from mentors on dealing with these difficulties and access networks and resources that may not be immediately accessible to them. Mentoring can have a significant positive impact on women of color who are running their businesses in the construction sector and may encounter difficulties and barriers with which they need assistance. According to the research, a significant issue that women of color entrepreneurs in the construction sector deal with is a lack of representation. According to the NAWIC, women only comprise about 9% of the construction industry and are thus underrepresented, making it challenging to find mentors or role models who can relate to their circumstances and offer advice and support.

According to Awadzi's (2019) research, access to capital and resources is another issue that women of color business owners in the construction industry struggle with. When it comes to getting financing, women business owners generally encounter significant obstacles, and women of color business owners struggle even more. This can make it difficult for them to launch or expand their businesses, in which case professional mentoring can be especially beneficial. Mentors can help mentees navigate the financing process and link them with networks and resources to get the needed assistance. Professional mentoring can also be crucial for assisting women of color who are business owners in the construction industry to manage issues

with prejudice and discrimination. Awadzi (2019) also mentions that women of color may experience prejudice and discrimination at work, which can negatively affect their chances of success and well-being. Professional mentors can offer assistance and direction in overcoming these obstacles and methods for developing resilience and self-advocacy. In general, these studies stress that mentoring can be an effective tool for women of color business owners in the construction industry, assisting them in overcoming obstacles, gaining access to resources, and developing the skills and confidence necessary to thrive in a demanding and highly competitive industry.

### ***Programs for Women Entrepreneurs in the Construction Industry***

Dean (2016) asserts that a range of mentoring programs, including those tailored especially for women of color, are accessible to female entrepreneurs working in the construction industry. Participants in these programs may have access to resources, training, and mentors that will help them thrive. According to the study, mentoring programs for female business owners in construction have grown in popularity in recent years as more groups realize the importance of professional mentoring in fostering women's success in the sector. One-on-one mentoring partnerships, group mentoring programs, and online communities are all possible forms of mentoring. The NAWIC mentorship program, according to Dean (2016), is an illustration of a mentoring program for women of color business owners in the construction industry. This program pairs female professionals with knowledgeable mentors who can offer advice and support on various subjects, such as business growth, networking, and leadership abilities.

Another illustration, according to Beckett (2020), is the Associated General Contractors of America's (AGC) Women in Construction Mentoring Program. Through this program, women in the field can network with mentors and peers and gain access to various tools and

resources that will help them succeed. The study's findings also reveal several online communities and networks that, in addition to official mentoring programs, can offer assistance and direction to female contractors. For instance, the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) has an affinity group specifically for the construction business that offers networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities for women working in the sector. Lastly, the School Construction Authority (SCA), which is a New York State public benefit corporation that was created by the NYS legislature and which removed control of capital projects from New York City's Board of Education (BOE), offers a mentoring program to women of color in construction where they assist these business owners with acquiring the skills and knowledge needed to remain competitive in the construction industry. These studies show that mentoring networks and programs can be a great resource for business owners of women of color. Obtaining access to information, advice, and tools will help them thrive in a competitive and male-dominated field. These programs can allow women to network with one another and forge relationships that will be useful for them throughout their careers.

### ***The Value that Professional Mentoring Adds to Women of Color in Construction***

According to Keith (2020), mentoring has helped numerous women of color business owners in the construction industry. These entrepreneurs have overcome the difficulties they encounter by utilizing the information, assets, and networks that their mentors have provided. Keith (2020) provides evidence of the value of mentoring in fostering the success of female business owners in the construction industry. Case studies can be a potent method to demonstrate the effect that mentoring can have on women of color business owners in the construction field claim. Project Rebuild is a National Association of Minority Contractors (NAMC) program that, according to Cukier et al. (2022), offers mentorship and support to women- and minority-owned



companies in the construction industry. One participant, an Ohio-based, woman-owned construction company, claimed that the program's mentoring helped her boost sales by 50%.

The outcomes of a different study also demonstrate that Chicago's Women in Trades Training (WITT) program offers training and assistance to women pursuing careers in the building trades (Alleman, 2017). Mentors are assigned to program participants so they have someone to turn to for advice and assistance throughout the training process. According to the group, the program's mentoring element has been crucial to its success in keeping women motivated and engaged throughout their training. Hunter et al. (2021) describe how the New York State Mentor-Protégé program, which is run by the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), offers mentoring and support to disadvantaged business enterprises (DBEs), including women- and minority-owned companies in the construction industry. One woman-owned engineering firm participant claimed that the program's mentorship helped her grow her company and secure new contracts. These case studies highlight the concrete advantages of experienced professional mentoring for women of color business owners in the construction industry. Advantages such as increased earnings, better training results, and more business possibilities. They also emphasize how crucial organized professional mentoring programs and support networks are for assisting women in a male-dominated field regardless of what state these women of color are doing business in.

### **Summary**

This literature review emphasizes the significance of how professional mentoring plays a role in women of color business owners' construction businesses while navigating through such a male-dominated industry and describes the difficulties that women of color entrepreneurs experience in the construction industry. These difficulties include prejudice, stereotypes, and

restricted access to resources, networks, and capital. The MWBE program has effectively increased the proportion of women of color who own businesses and are awarded government contracts by setting aside a percentage of each contract that is to be awarded to a minority women's business enterprise. Additionally, the program has proven to be a successful strategy for assisting women of color businesses with mentoring. Additionally, it has been demonstrated that professional mentoring is a successful strategy for assisting women of color entrepreneurs, especially those from underrepresented marginalized groups. For women of color entrepreneurs looking for support and direction, the various available mentoring programs, including formal, informal, group, and peer mentoring, offer a variety of choices.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This phenomenological, qualitative research examines the professional mentorship experiences of women of color business owners in the construction industry in the United States. Groenewald (2004) highlighted that the phenomenological design requires evidence drawing from first-person perspectives of lived experiences. The process of qualitative research is a continuous one that leads to a better understanding of the scientific community by making significant distinctions that result from approaching the studied phenomenon closely. This formulation is developed as a tool to help improve research designs while stressing that a qualitative dimension is also present in qualitative work (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Participants selected for this research study included women who self-identify as women of color, own at least 51% of their business, are involved in the day-to-day activities of their business, and have had a professional mentoring relationship. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design elucidated the experiences of female entrepreneurs of color operating within the construction industry. The method for this research design included semi-structured, in-depth interviews via Zoom with nine participants who met the inclusion criteria for the study. Van Kaam's method (Anderson & Eppard, 1998), and also as described by Moustakas (1994), was used to analyze the qualitative verbal statements of research participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data on the women's lived experiences. Delve software was used to store and manage the qualitative data needed to identify codes, categories, and themes discerned from the analysis of participants' interviews.

## **Research Design**

For this study, the appropriate research design was a qualitative phenomenological study. Creswell and Poth (2018) described phenomenology as a qualitative research technique that explores the meaning of the individual experiences of each participant. The research questions and the contemporary phenomenon's focus determined the phenomenological design selection (Baskarada, 2019). Research questions are interrogative statements that narrow the statement of purpose to specific questions (Creswell et al., 2002). The interview questions were open-ended, and they guided the overall study (Appendix). Open-ended questions allowed the participants to reveal personal experiences while responding truthfully (Groenewald, 2004). Using this approach gave the data more diversity, which, in turn, helped in taking a holistic look at the issue being researched. One of the problems that initially affected the study was gaining access to women of color because they are a relatively small and dispersed group. In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher explored the impact that professional mentoring has on women of color business owners in the construction industry. The researcher investigated the impact of professional mentoring and how it contributes to professional development when running a construction company in an industry dominated by men. The qualitative research design aimed to illuminate a deeper understanding of the structural barriers and personal challenges faced from the lens of the participants who have personal experience with the phenomenon of interest (Babbie, 2010).

## **Research Context**

The setting for this research was a construction conference in New York. This location was chosen because women of color contractors from different states attend. Women of color

business owners commonly frequent these industry conferences to network and keep up with industry standards. All these conferences have the following characteristics:

1. Women who own their construction companies are in attendance.
2. Women of color who own their construction companies.
3. Women of color who have had professional mentoring.

### **Research Participants**

The target population was women who self-identified as being women of color business owners who owned at least 51% of their construction company and operated in the United States. The participant population was comprised of nine women of color. Selected women had to be actively involved in the day-to-day operations of the business in order to be considered to participate in the study. During the interviews, the participants were asked about the impact of professional mentoring on their respective businesses. Qualitative studies have sample sizes that yield relevant data to understand the phenomenon and are relatively small; therefore, it is believed that the sample size anticipated for this study is justified by Cleary et al. (2014).

To mitigate the occurrence of unforeseen or unethical events, obtaining informed consent was imperative. Safeguarding privacy and maintaining confidentiality was essential for the effectiveness of this research endeavor (Patton, 2002). Informed consent and privacy guidelines were given to participants who met the criteria of the sampling frame through a letter of introduction delivered via email. The participants reviewed and signed the consent form before the interview. There was a verbal conversation reviewing the form. The consent form was a detailed letter explaining the problem and purpose of the study. After the participants agreed, the participant moved forward with the interview.

Keeping in mind that protecting the confidentiality of participants was imperative, the study upheld the participants' privacy, ensuring that the researcher was the only one with access to identifiable participant information, and individuals were identified using pseudonyms to preserve anonymity (Patton, 2002).

### **Instruments Used in Data Collection**

Using the correct instrument was crucial to ensure internal validity and avoid misleading results. There were several instruments used to capture participants' voices, transcribe their responses, maintain confidentiality, and create codes, categories and themes. The instrument used was one-on-one interviews using Zoom software. Zoom afforded the researcher the opportunity to hear the participants' voices using video and audio.

### **Procedures Used for Data Collection**

The objective of this research study was to gain insight into the experiences of women of color who own businesses in the construction industry and to examine the impact of professional mentoring. The study of human or social problems can be explored through qualitative research, which incorporates interpretive and theoretical frameworks. This form of research involves data collection, inductive and deductive data analysis, and the identification of themes or patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify qualified participants at a conference that is attended by women of color contractors. Flyers were distributed to potential participants. A survey was distributed to women who identify as a woman of color and own at least 51% of their construction companies in the United States and are actively involved in the day-to-day operations. A pre-qualification questionnaire was given to ensure that participants fit the criteria. Once the quota was met, nine women were asked to participate and were interviewed via Zoom. The researcher focused on the participants' lived

experiences with their professional mentors. Interviewing the participants helped gather evidence that allowed for a deeper understanding of how professional mentoring added value to their business, if at all, as well as understanding the reasons that led them to acquire a mentor. The results from the findings contributed to developing knowledge building upon previous research.

As stated above, once the participants were selected and agreed to be a part of the study, the participants received a letter of introduction. They were also sent a consent form, which was signed before being interviewed remotely via Zoom videoconference. The consent form highlighted the study and notified them that their participation in the study was voluntary.

The researcher asked the participants to share their personal experiences as a woman of color in construction and how professional mentorship impacted their business. The Zoom interview lasted between 50-60 minutes. The aim was to hear their insights firsthand. During the semi-structured interview, the participants offered further information and responded to probes. Using this interview technique enabled the researcher to understand the participants' viewpoints, perspectives, and lived experiences. Employing this form of the interview process allowed the researcher to discover and evaluate relationships throughout the data.

The interviewer put into action the following guidelines to use before, during, and after interview sessions. She ensured that the study had been approved by the St. John Fisher Institutional Review Board (IRB), explained in detail the qualifying criteria for the research sample, selected participants through purposeful sampling, had the participants read and sign an agreement that granted permission for the researcher to use the findings from the interview as part of the study, ensured that the recording device used for the interview was working and that the participants were not inhibited by its use, reminded participants that participation in this study was voluntary and at any time, she may withdraw from the study. The interview questions

aimed to investigate the participant's experiences based on their lived experiences. The interview questions played an integral role in collecting data. Attentively listening to the answers from the participants in response to the research inquiries is a crucial element in conducting phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The interview process requires careful listening to participants as they describe their everyday experiences with the interview questions. The goal of the interview was to answer the research questions. Otter.ai software was used to transcribe the interview in real time so the interviewer could play back the interview to review it for clarity. The data are securely stored on the researcher's laptop, protected by a password for 3 years before being deleted.

The researcher concluded the study by sending an email to participants expressing gratitude for their willingness to share their lived experiences. The email acknowledged their contribution to women of color business owners in the construction industry. There was no compensation for participation in the study.

### **Procedures Used for Data Analysis**

After the interviews were completed, the researcher utilized Otter.ai to ensure clarity on participant responses. To quantify and analyze the presence, meanings, and relationships of words, themes, and concepts obtained from the participants' responses and content analysis, Delve software was used to identify emerging themes and subthemes. The software managed the data and allowed the researcher to create codes that converted the words into themes. This procedure helped to identify key concepts related to similar categories. The alignment of the research questions and data collected is instrumental to the data analysis process (Fowler, 2014).

Qualitative research emphasizes the significance of data analysis wherein the researchers construct and arrange data collected to facilitate the analysis process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).



The data groups comprise common constituents based on participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Wojnar and Swanson (2007) provided a comprehensive seven-step strategy for analyzing narratives, which includes the following:

(1) reading the interviews to gain an overall understanding; (2) writing interpretive summaries and coding for emerging themes; (3) analyzing transcripts to identify themes becomes engaging through a deep dive into the data; (4) returning to the text to resolve interpretative discrepancies and construct a comprehensive analysis for each; (5) identifying shared themes in different texts through comparison and contrast; (6) identifying patterns that link the themes; and (7) eliciting responses and suggestions on a final draft. (p. 177)

In interpreting and analyzing data, the researcher considered the influences of personal preconceptions and assumptions within the study. The researcher analyzed the data in different stages, beginning with reading the transcripts and highlighting phrases to indicate emerging themes. Lastly, Delve software was used to create the codes, categories and themes that stemmed from the interviews. Delve was also used to create the codebook, which helped to systematically identify, classify and interpret patterns in the data. According to Gibbs (2007), the coding process is "how you define what the data you are analyzing are about" (p. 18). The data were labeled and organized to identify the different themes and the relationships between them. The codebook can only be accessed by the researcher because it is password protected. Using this software helped to establish reliability and validity in the researcher's analysis. To ensure researcher objectivity and minimize potential bias, bracketing was employed throughout the data collection process, allowing the researcher to acknowledge and suspend their preconceived notions and personal experiences that might influence the interpretation of the participant's narratives (Chan et al., 2013).

This approach is deemed the most appropriate design to adequately address the research questions and describe the phenomenon's essence, which is the lived experiences of women of color business owners in the construction industry.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

Women of color business owners have historically faced obstacles in male-dominated industries, including construction (Cardador et al., 2022). This chapter delves into a pivotal aspect of their journey and the role of mentoring in shaping and enhancing their businesses. This chapter explores the intricate relationship between mentorship and their business growth, resilience, and empowerment as women of color business owners in construction. The construction industry is known for its inflexibility and male-dominated culture (French & Strachan, 2017). For these reasons, it has presented unique challenges for women of color business owners who dare to enter into the industry. Their ability to navigate these challenges, however, is increasingly attributed to the guidance and support provided by others. In this chapter, the findings of this dissertation research study are presented, namely the specific mentoring experiences of women of color business owners.

This qualitative phenomenological study investigates the impact that professional mentoring has on women of color business owners in the construction industry and highlights the ways in which women of color business owners are overcoming the challenges and barriers they face. This study captured the lived experiences of nine women of color who own and operate their construction businesses in the United States. The findings from the analysis of the one-on-one semi-structured interviews yielded valuable insights for women of color in the construction industry, providing them with guidance on what to consider when entering a mentorship relationship.

## Findings

This chapter presents findings based on the analysis of data collected during semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with the participants. It is noteworthy to share that although my criterion called for women of color, the participants were all African American. The findings of this study answered the research questions. The findings have been categorized into themes that surfaced throughout the interviews. The following research questions (RQ) guided the interview questions used to gain insight into participants' lived experiences with a professional mentor:

1. What are some of the structural barriers facing women of color business owners in the construction industry?
2. What are some of the personal challenges facing women of color business owners in the construction industry?
3. In what ways, if any, did professional mentoring help address any barriers and challenges faced by women of color business owners in the construction industry?

Table 4.1 shows the alignment of the interview questions with the research questions. The findings for RQ1 revealed a significant structural barrier faced by these women of color business owners in construction. Limited access to capital, which hindered their ability to secure financing for projects, was the barrier that every participant highlighted as being one of their struggles. Having limited access to capital makes it challenging for women of color business owners to secure contracts and access market opportunities.

The findings of RQ2 revealed a range of personal challenges encountered by women of color business owners in the construction industry. These personal challenges were often rooted in the intersection of racial and gender discrimination. They included experiencing racial and

gender bias within the industry, navigating disparities within the industry, and coping with imposter syndrome.

The findings of RQ3 provided valuable insights into the ways in which professional mentoring played a pivotal role in addressing the barriers and challenges faced by women of color business owners in the construction industry. The findings demonstrated that professional mentoring facilitated access to influential networks; however, mentors should follow up after the introductions to ensure that something comes out of the introduction. Following up enables mentees to expand their connections within the industry. Moreover, mentors supported skill development, offered great advice, provided guidance, and were a sounding board for their mentees.

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the structural barriers and personal challenges faced by women of color who own businesses in the construction industry can be addressed with the help of professional mentoring. The study effectively answered the research questions by highlighting the crucial role of professional mentoring in overcoming these obstacles.

**Table 4.1**

*Interview Question in Alignment to Research Questions*

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Interview Question	Aligned Research Question
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Can you share some of the difficulties you have encountered as a woman of color business owner in a White male-dominated industry?	1, 2
Have you experienced financial hardship while owning your construction company?	1, 2
As a woman of color business owner in the construction industry, have you faced challenges finding and/or retaining employees?	1
Have you ever had a problem earning respect as a woman of color in construction?	1, 2
Can you share any instances where you believe that you were treated unfairly or differently based on prejudiced assumptions related to your race and/or gender while owning a construction business?	1, 2
How did you meet your mentor?	3
Did your mentor assist you with obtaining access to business capital?	3
Can you provide some specific instances or examples that demonstrate how your mentor has influenced your decision-making or business strategies?	3
What has your mentor done for you?	3
Has your mentor ever introduced you to his/her network? If yes, how has it benefited you?	3
Did your mentor help you build connections or networks within the industry?	3
Did your mentor help you build your self-efficacy?	2,3
How did your mentor help you overcome any challenges you faced?	2,3

***Research Question 1***

This section describes the findings and first emerging theme from participant responses to Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are some of the structural barriers facing women of color business owners in the construction industry?

**Theme 1: Access to Capital.** The participants attributed their inability to advance in the construction industry to structural barriers (Table 4.2). The lack of access to capital has been identified as a significant impediment to career progression in the field. The study’s findings underscore the importance of recognizing and addressing structural barriers in order to foster a more inclusive and equitable industry.

**Table 4.2**

*Theme 1: Access to Capital*

Code	Category	Theme
Money, credit, credit score, access to loans, finances, portfolio, bonding, banks, business, funding, grant, good credit, financial advice, difficulty raising funds, credit challenges, financial hurdles, limited funding opportunities, funding gaps	Financial Barriers	Access to Capital

Participant 5 stated:

Funding was a major hurdle that I had to deal with and [I] had to find creative ways to get funding and backing. I also had to learn how to effectively make sure that my financial portfolio was attractive to banks. Nobody told me that this was important when I first started my business.

Similar to Participant 5, Participant 7 said:

I was suffering just like other women of color in construction. I did gain access to some grants, but when I tell you it was my daily mission to apply for them, I probably received

four or five out of the 60 that I applied for, and I met all of the criteria. So, that's my experience with grants. As for banks, being Black, and especially being a Black woman, you can't go to a bank and say that you would like money for your small business. They just chuckle and send you on your way. This is not just me talking; this is the same story that I've heard from so many people that I know. I have a million dollars in my bank account, I asked for \$500,000 to acquire land to build a storefront, and the bank denied me. I asked them why, what is the reason? I have an 800 credit score. Their response was that we decided not to give you the loan.

When asked about her experience with gaining access to capital to fund projects for her business, Participant 2 shared that she, as well as her professional mentor, had the same issue. She said:

Unfortunately, he's Black also, so we both struggled when it came to accessing capital. They're not giving it to us, so we go out there and get it. We've had to create situations that allow us to be able to function. We're not growing as fast as we would like to be growing if we had capital. Gaining access to capital has definitely been something that has been a hindrance to the growth of my business. I've figured out how to get around it, but the amount of time has taken me to grow. Like I said, I've been in this industry for 14 years. The amount of time that's taken to grow is just unrealistic compared to some of my counterparts because of the lack of sufficient working capital.

Participant 8 decided to bootstrap her business because of all the stories she heard from her counterparts, stating:

I'm finally, after 12 years, applying for a line of credit. I didn't want to be denied or in debt, I didn't want to owe money, and, I wanted to make sure I had good financial



accountability, so when I received the money, I wanted to make sure we were properly using it and paying it back in a timely manner so we can keep using it.

Participant 4 also expressed her frustration, she said:

I felt that I couldn't really call myself a business owner because I wasn't paying myself. I had the LLC title but was unable to really fulfill all the LLC requirements which are to be able to pay yourself with a W-2 paycheck. Funding is very difficult to get because it's like a catch-22. The banks needed to see a history of projects completed; however, due to my limited experience and capital, it was difficult to fund a big job and pay out of pocket. If you are capable of funding a project yourself, then you only have that one project, which still doesn't give you enough experience to get a loan from a bank. So, in other words, we can't win.

Participant 3 also explained her disappointment as it pertains to receiving funding. She said:

When I initially began my business, I faced financial difficulties. You believe you have enough capital because you are informed that you will obtain a grant, whether it is a diversity grant, MWBE funds, or anything else. However, the time it takes to receive the funds is simply ridiculous. The wait is completely absurd. Consequently, keeping your business afloat from the promised time to the actual turnaround time poses a challenge.

Although Participant 1 stated that she did not encounter any issues in obtaining access to capital, it is noteworthy that she was the sole participant who had a male business partner. This finding suggests that having a business partner may have positively affected the participant's ability to secure capital. Nonetheless, further research is needed to draw any definitive conclusions regarding the relationship between having a business partner and accessing capital. Participant 6

affirmed that she did not solicit financing to support her business ventures. Instead, she relied on her personal earnings to fund her business growth:

When I began my business, I did not require any financing. Initially, I collaborated with someone on a project that needed additional work, including customization. The owner of the project remembered that I had welding skills and offered me some extra side work. This eventually led to me getting more work with the company, and that's how I started my business without applying for any funding.

Unlike any of the other Participants, Participant 9 stated that her major funding issue was getting bonded:

One of the challenges I had was getting to the next step with receiving bonding. Bonding is a big deal in my industry. Many minorities of smaller firms can get bonding, but it's really difficult to understand how the financial industry works. It's the financial company that gives bonding. It is the same as the financial companies that give you a loan. People keep encouraging you to keep going, but they don't know your tears at night, and when you step onto the job site, and you've done a great job on a small project and you know that you can do a great job on a million-dollar project but you can't get the project because you need to bonding that you can't receive. It's discouraging, and that is where you need your people to encourage you.

### ***Research Question 2***

Research Question 2 (RQ2) asked: What are some of the personal challenges facing women of color business owners in the construction industry? In the course of interviewing, a recurrent theme emerged pertaining to intersectionality. Each participant articulated her personal encounters with this phenomenon. The participants expressed that they encounter various

personal challenges due to the complex interplay of their gender, race, and ethnicity, first noted and coined by Crenshaw (2013). These challenges encompass biases based on both race and gender, difficulties in establishing industry connections, disparities in educational and training opportunities, the struggle to balance work and family obligations, imposter syndrome, concerns regarding mental health, feelings of isolation in a predominantly non-diverse industry, and the necessity to effectively navigate cultural differences. Effectively addressing these personal challenges is crucial for promoting diversity, inclusivity, and empowerment within the construction sector. It ensures that women of color can thrive as entrepreneurs and leaders in a traditionally male-dominated field.

**Theme 2: Intersectionality.** All nine participants emphasized instances where they experienced discrimination based on their gender and/ or sexual orientation (Table 4.3).

**Table 4.3**

*Theme 2: Intersectionality*

Code	Category	Theme
Good old boy network, denied, lack of leadership, discounted, challenged, exclusion, unequal treatment, work extra hard, gay, hairstyle, nail length, not capable, difficulty getting opportunities	Stereotypes	Intersectionality

Participant 3 said:

I have had difficulty in getting opportunities because of, let's say, "good old boy network," as opposed to my having skills, accolades, and experience, which should be what really matters. So, a lot of times, it's not what you know, it's who you know, and until there's a failure or setback on their first choice, you're not considered to be on a

project until something goes wrong with who they initially chose. This, unfortunately, happens a lot. So, a lot of jobs I've had have been awarded, has been the second go around because the first one they thought was better, didn't or couldn't complete the job.

Oftentimes, women of color feel the need to have to prove themselves or work extra hard to show that they are competent and belong in the space.

Like Participant 3, Participant 8 said:

Every time I start a new project, I always have to prove my company's capability because there's always doubt that my firm is capable and that we can do the work. It is a challenge because, in this area, we have a lot of "good old boys," so clients tend to go to who they know and what they know, and a lot of times, even though they may know us, they choose who they deem capable. Getting our foot in the door can be very challenging just because I am a woman. I would also like to add that the lack of resources and funding also makes it difficult to get and complete our projects. I also say when I finally started my company and went to work in the field, a lot of times they look at you as being incompetent and like you don't have the knowledge or skill set to be out there. They act as if you're working for them. And so, for me, anytime I get a new project, I get the plans, the specs, I read them; I go through them. When I'm on the site, I don't even have to look at the plans to tell you where something goes because I study. I've studied the project, and I know it. Yes, there are times that I have to refer to the drawings, but I do that because that's where the respect comes in. When the men know that you're knowledgeable of the project and they see that you're competent and if they see that you know your stuff, then that's where the respect comes in. I learned that knowing my stuff makes a difference in the respect that I receive.

Similar to Participants 3 and 8, Participant 4 said:

I have encountered challenges, such as being discounted for being a woman, being discounted for being a woman of color. I'm in Texas, so the "good old boys club," as we call it, is huge in this area. There is a culture of getting work and keeping it amongst a certain group. So, even breaking into large projects is a challenge. Yes, you can get the little bitty projects. They allow the woman-owned and the minority-owned businesses to get those, but it's just extremely challenging breaking into the industry and trying to get them to see that you're worth it. It's like we have to work extra hard for them to see that you are valued and worth being in this industry.

Like Participants 3, 8, and 4, Participant 9 also expressed she was turned down for a project solely because she was a woman. However, 4 years later, the company came to her for a job because the firm that was chosen could not complete the work.

Participant 2 said:

Getting in the room, you are usually not the one who they would consider. You are considered as the help, you're the secretary. At one point in time, I recognized that, and I used it to my advantage, but it's definitely a space that you are not seen and you are not heard. They talk and they speak as if you are not in the room, and that's okay because I've learned how to use that to my advantage as well.

Participant 5 also expressed that she has been faced with similar challenges as Participant 2:

I don't have any issues on the respect level. However, my counterpart's perceptions are what I had to deal with. I had to learn to adjust my presentation and reference to not come off as though I didn't need help or that I didn't need any assistance. I had to learn how to really pivot my posture for that, but I had no issue when I worked for a contractor.

However, when I was actually starting out with my own construction company, it was a huge issue. They were assuming I was the secretary or any other role other than the owner. I guess they found it easier to keep me in the image they had in their minds. Even to this day, when I deal with some individuals, and I come out to the job site, they're like, hey, who are you working for? And I have to let them know that I am the owner of the company, nice to meet you. I mean, I understand, it's a small percentage of women, a minority, at that, in the industry, and they're not used to us being in their environment. I will say, I don't have an issue once they get to know me because I'm pretty straightforward. I follow through and I give them quality, and I demand a level of reciprocity.

Intersectionality plays a significant role in the experiences of women of color in the construction industry (Crenshaw, 2013). Throughout Participant 6's experience, she describes constantly dealing with the complex interaction of various marginalized identities, including her gender, race, and sexual orientation. These intersecting identities have a profound influence on how she navigates a predominantly male industry characterized by pervasive discrimination, stereotypes, and biases. In addition to facing gender and racial biases, she also encounters homophobia and heterosexism, which further compound the challenges she faces as an entrepreneur.

Participant 6 said:

One of the challenges that I have experienced while being a business owner in the industry is people trying to delegate even though I was the person who owned the business. I've had people who I subcontracted work to and men who worked for me, actually try to delegate their authority over me, solely because of me being a woman, and their inability to accept that I know what I am doing. Oftentimes, I had to have

conversations reminding them of my position. Because of my gender, I have also been overlooked quite often. Being a woman, a minority woman, and also a gay woman, I had what they consider three strikes against me. It was a triple whammy, but I never let that deter me. I stayed focused on the project and made sure that the work I provided was quality work. Unfortunately, I have had to deal with this my entire career.

Women of color business owners in the construction industry navigate a complex web of identity factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, and perhaps even non-conforming fashion choices, which intersect to shape their unique entrepreneurial journey. In a field where conformity to masculine norms is often encouraged, their presence challenges stereotypes and confronts biases. They face barriers related not only to race and gender but also to perceptions of their appearance. Nonetheless, they persevere, leveraging their diverse backgrounds and experiences to bring fresh perspectives to the construction industry, proving that one's attire and appearance should never overshadow one's competence, skills, and potential for success.

Participant 7 said:

One of the difficulties I face is how I present myself. I don't try to adhere to what would be typically seen as a person in construction. I don't wear hard hats or construction clothes because I don't do the actual physical skilled labor, I hire subcontractors for that. So, I'm the person that goes to the meetings, I'm the person who's setting up the deals, I'm the person talking to the agency. So, I present the way that I am, nails, hair, whatever. That is very off-putting to a lot of people in construction and to agencies. I know they may think to themselves, "How can she come here, do this work, and look like that?" I understand that most women who are in construction don't just subcontract work out. So,

I guess it's an uncomfortable feeling for a lot of agencies. I know this for sure because they often make comments to me.

Like Participant 7, Participant 5 shared:

One thing I learned is to show up authentically as myself because going in the field, even down to appearance, I learned to say this is who I am, I look like this. I do my hair this way. I had to learn this from my mentor. She was able to be an example of how to show up authentically for myself because I would go into different meetings and I didn't know if it was ok for my hair to be in an afro or if I would be judged for my hair being bald, or if my dress code was appropriate for being out in the field. I didn't know if I could wear heels if that's what I chose to wear that day. I needed help with my self-image because I was too afraid of the backlash I would receive.

**Theme 3: Imposter Syndrome.** Women of color business owners may experience imposter syndrome at some point during their business journey, doubting their abilities and feeling that they do not belong due to a lack of representation and persistent biases (Table 4.4). These feelings may occur despite their expertise, qualifications, and achievements. Many women find themselves questioning whether they truly belong in a male-dominated field.

Participant 8 said:

There are days when I'm like, girl, what are you doing? For instance, I've grown and entered into the commercial real estate development sector. I'm in that space now and we're working to build some affordable housing and also do some other things. Sometimes I step back and I'm like, girl, what are you doing? Why aren't you staying in the lane they keep telling you have to stay in? I post a lot on social



media. Sometimes I might share my insecurity, and the community will be like girl, you got this, you know this, what are you talking about? You better go get it, and that's what inspires me to keep going. I do the same to other people, I guess that's why they give it back.

**Table 4.4**

*Theme 3: Imposter Syndrome*

Code	Category	Theme
Self-doubt, insecurity, lack of self-confidence, get out of my head, what am I doing here, underestimated, disregarded, the system isn't built for us	Self-Esteem	Imposter Syndrome
Difficulty getting opportunities, not considered, I have to prove myself, second option, work extra hard, not seen, not heard	Frustration	

Participant 7 also said something similar:

I never feel like I'm doing enough, or I never feel like I'm good enough, so when I hear people saying positive things about me in the programs that I am a part of, like, girl, you can do this, I say, "Thank you." I appreciate it. It makes me more confident in everything I do. I am not cocky at all or boisterous, but more like, I have a whole enterprise over here, I may not have a whole lot of money, but it's an enterprise because people depend on me for their livelihood. I have to often remind myself of things like that.

Participant 6 shared:

Sometimes I get in my head a little bit, but then I snap out of it. Whereas before, it would be like, oh, well, I'll do this later. I'll do this later. It's like no later, there's no later. A lot

of times we ourselves are always the ones that will talk ourselves out of doing stuff. The reason why people are not where they need to be is because they're in their head with all of the chatter, what is the chatter saying, why is it saying that? Oh, you can't do it. Oh, you're going to fail. Oh, you're going to mess up. You're not that good. Yes, I go through that self-doubt sometimes. Do you know the funny part? When you talk about it, if you suppress it and suppress it or hold it in and don't let it out or try to keep it in, to me, it's like I'm putting on a mask. When you put that mask on and try to hide it, you still have those same feelings inside of you, but once you release it, it's like, man, what a release.

Participant 3 also shared:

My mentor definitely gave me some intel on mindset and how other people think versus how I should think. So, that really changed the game on my thought process because sometimes I defeat myself with my thinking. Of course, there are instances where I am defeated by default, but sometimes I make that the first thought for how to go about things, but that's not the case for everybody. I have to remind myself that everybody doesn't think like that.

Participant 1 mentioned how her mentor helped her with her imposter syndrome. She said:

I have a degree in interior design. I'm in school for construction management, and I'm also taking courses. I take the test for my real estate license next week, and then I'm taking the builder's license exam. I attend training on Saturdays in carpentry. So, it wasn't the experience that I was lacking. It was the confidence piece that I was lacking. My mentor spoke those things into me that gave me the confidence to keep going. She reminded me that Google and YouTube are the masters of all things. The one thing that I was kind of afraid of was leading. Although I already led. She reminded me that I had

already done the things that I was afraid of, so I would say that she built my self-efficacy. She would say, you got it. What are you doing? You got this!

Participant 9 also shared:

I think it's a community that helps me. You know what they say, it takes a village. It's a combination of my mentor and my clients. I think when I do a good job, I build up my own self-confidence. In this industry, I think we think that we have to be perfect, but if we don't have to be. I remember there was a time where maybe 8 years ago. I stepped into a room with other construction management companies and I remember thinking that I couldn't fathom how did I get here? I was so intimidated because I had no idea. I was like, oh my God, how did I get here in this room? It is full of Italian and Jewish guys. I'm like, this is not an industry that I can be in, but I knew I wanted to do this. I knew I could do a great job, but it seemed very intimidating in that room. I believe that if I were in a different industry, I would feel the same way in the beginning. I would lack confidence, but I believe that confidence is built from the people you surround yourself with. I grew up in a construction family. My mother was a builder and my father was also a builder, so I have always been in the construction industry. I saw my mother go to work every day and she wasn't scared, so I'll never quit. I was a little bit intimidated by the fact that this is such a massive industry; it was so massive. You just sort of continue to perfect it. I believe in the saying: it takes a village in order to be successful.

Like Participant 9, Participant 4 feels like it takes a village. She said:

I would say it's probably more family that pushes me and keeps me grounded and keeps you going. They are my supporters. Business is almost like raising kids because your business is your child. It takes a village, you need help. So, of course, when you are

feeling discouraged, you need them. That's when others become your mentors. This is why you need friends who are in business, they're the ones who will most likely pour into you, and in turn, when they are having a bad day, you pour into them. Those relationships work because you understand each other. Entrepreneurs understand each other. So, that support is, I mean, oh God, it's priceless. So, it's just a lot of other women business owners feeding into me that helped me to stay grounded and help me to stay sane when I have self-doubt.

### ***Research Question 3***

Participants were asked about their mentoring relationships to gain insight into Research Question 3 (RQ3): In what ways, if any, did professional mentoring help address any barriers and challenges faced by women of color business owners in the construction industry?

. They revealed the transformative power of mentorship, shedding light on how it shaped their strategic decisions, fostered leadership development, and bolstered resilience. Mentorship is supposed to stand as a guiding light in the entrepreneurial journey, illuminating the path to success with wisdom, support, and invaluable insights. However, not all of the participants spoke highly of their mentoring relationships. Several recurring themes appeared during the interviews.

**Theme 4: Mentoring Models and Approaches.** Women of color business owners in construction have utilized various mentoring models, including traditional one-on-one mentoring, peer mentoring, and virtual mentoring (Table 4.5). Participants were asked about their mentoring relationship.

**Table 4.5**

*Theme 4: Mentoring Models and Approaches*

Code	Category	Theme
Connected through corporate, same gender, same race, began at a program, formal, connected through an organization, served on same board, informal, business partner, friendship, community, formal one-on-one relationship with other contractors	Professional Relationship	Mentoring Models and Approaches

Participant 5 said:

My first mentoring relationship was a formal one. I was fortunate enough to have a mentor who was connected to me through the corporate company where I was initially employed. They thought she would be a good fit for me based on us being the same gender and same race. They thought the relationship would be a good one and it would work out perfectly. I thought the same thing. Unfortunately, I had to do a lot of healing from that particular incident. Just imagine starting out and being ready to grow and learn, you team up with someone that you feel has your best interests at heart, and then you realize that she wasn't who I thought she was. I had to learn not to take it personally because that was just one instance. I had to remember that a mentoring relationship is not a forever thing. I believed that a mentor was supposed to be someone to help me navigate through the industry and I wouldn't have to always look over my back and have a sense of ease in my process. So, my first mentoring relationship wasn't a good one.

Participant 7 said that her initial mentoring experience took place within a program, which is similar to the experience of Participant 5:

When I was going through my first experience of being awarded a new government contract while attending a program, I felt like I was sinking in quicksand, and then some of the people who were in this particular program didn't necessarily know about government contracting to that degree, but they mentored me through the experience. There was just so much encouragement and so much good advice given that I successfully made it through my first contracting experience. One of them became one of my dear friends to this day, all because of that program. She is a marketing specialist. Although that had nothing to do with what I was doing, she advised me that I needed to consider marketing to build my brand. It was because of her advice that I was able to attract people to hire for the contract. I wouldn't have known the importance of marketing without her advice. It really helped me grow my business.

Participant 4 also met her mentor through a program. She said:

The mentor that sticks out in my mind came from an organization called Score. They provided me with guidance for my business. I signed up for the program and was paired up with a business mentor. He had 30 or 40-something years in business and was retired. He was a huge wealth of information. To this day, I can still email him if I have questions, which range from the smallest to the most technical thing. So, a mentor has definitely played a big part in me trying to rearrange my thought patterns. He also gave me so many ideas and advice on what we should or shouldn't do with the business.

Participant 2 found her mentor through traditional means. She explained:

I met my mentor during my separation. I was in the process of building my real estate business because I'm also a commercial realtor and I just started building that business. He called me on the phone and was looking for a realtor. He explained that he was a part

of the Georgia Black Constructors and Contractors and said that they needed some people to come and represent. They also needed properties and spaces to actually hold events. He found my name in the directory, picked up the phone, and we haven't stopped talking since. That was 2020-something. He has been someone that I could call on for anything. He gives me great advice. He is a 62-year-old man who has given me an understanding of what it means to be in the room. He has mentored me on my ability to be in the room as a Black woman.

Similar to Participant 2, Participant 3 said:

I met my mentor when I was working for a new construction home builder. He was the supervisor for the VP of the department and he basically took me under his wing and helped me. My other mentor also worked for the same board. I met her there as well. They both have taught me so much. One mentor is for architecture and construction, and the other mentor is for real estate.

Two participants begin their mentoring relationships the traditional one-on-one way. Participant 8 said:

I watch how other people operate in the community and in their construction companies. I look at them. If I get to team up with a company and get to know the guy who's over the project, I'll watch him, I watch how he responds, how he handles his projects, and who the key people are to talk to. So, I'll just say, my old boss has been like a mentor to me, but I have never had anybody to hold my hand and walk me through. I guess it was an informal relationship. I have had people who have supported me, who have presented opportunities to me, or who have spoken about me in a room that I'm not in so that I can gain an opportunity. I've had people like that, and I have also had people give me advice.

Participant 8 was asked a follow-up question: do you know that what you just described was informal mentoring? She was baffled and responded:

I've had people who have invested, given me advice, or sowed a seed into my business, but they wouldn't say they were my mentor. However, now that I look back at it, it was a form of informal mentoring.

Similar to Participant 8, Participant 1 also found her first mentor after separating from her business partner, who was also her fiancé. She also had a one-on-one mentoring relationship:

Besides my ex-business partner, I would have to mention one person: she was the administrator for the company that hired us to remodel apartments. It wasn't necessarily her words that kept me going because, by that time, I decided to go on my own. She reminded me of all the things prior to the partnership as well as so many other things that I've done by myself as it pertains to construction.

**Theme 5: Mentoring and Business Growth.** Research has shown that there is a correlation between mentorship and business growth for women of color business owners (Turner-Moffatt, 2019) (Table 4.6). The participants explained their unique challenges and barriers and how their mentors helped them to overcome them directly or indirectly.

Participant 2 explained:

My mentor put me in touch with a number of contractors. I actually have the contracts I have because of his connections. He has given me so much business advice because he's also a consultant by trade. Unfortunately, he's Black as well, so we have the same issues and struggles when it comes to obtaining capital. They're not giving it to us, so we go and get it. We've had to create situations that allow us to be able to function. We're not growing as fast as we would like to be growing if we had capital, but we're still growing



and we're still going. My mentor taught me to shut up. Shut up and listen. He always said you have two ears and one mouth, and believe it or not, I talk less now than I used to. He said that when you talk too much, it just generates more questions. You keep digging a hole and then you have to explain.

**Table 4.6**

*Theme 5: Mentoring and Business Growth*

Code	Category	Theme
Business advice, speak less, don't give up, you got this, know my worth, position yourself, look from a different perspective, voice of reason, positionality, don't settle, don't quit, gave me corporate backing, provided me with resources	Empowering	Mentoring and Business Growth

Participant 5 shared:

My mentor taught me to not give up and to look at opposition as opportunities. She taught me how to look at things from a different perspective. She believes that everything aligns at the right time. I know I'm not ever going to quit, so it doesn't matter if I have to pivot. It doesn't matter if I have to pause and change because I'm a serial entrepreneur. I maneuver accordingly. I'm just in a place where I need to grow and do what I need to do to align with the timing. So, she definitely has inspired me to not give up because I know it can be done and there is still a need for me and my services. I just need to align with the right opportunity. I'm grateful for the representation because it's everything.

Participant 6 said:

One of the things she has taught me is to know my worth. Another thing I'm going to add, is, don't settle for less than what you asked for. Having a mentor has benefited me because she forces me to keep moving, to keep growing. It's because of her that I am not at a standstill. Sometimes I get inside my head a little bit, but then I snap out of it, whereas, before, it would be, like, "Oh, well, I'll do this later." With her, there is no later, do it now. I'm fortunate to have somebody in my life that I've met, and it seems like we have known each other for years, and I'm so grateful. It's like God placed her in my life.

Similar to Participant 6, Participant 4 explained:

Getting a mentor is almost like buying a house. You need to make sure that they are the right fit for you. In business, you have to get your affairs in order before you go to the bank. It's almost like you need a class to know how to approach the lender and what to expect. My mentor helped me with things like that. Mentors come in and are that voice of reason. When you are really passionate about your business, you may not see certain things that someone else might. So, it helps to have that outside opinion but get an opinion that's not your friend or family member. Ask someone who's not connected to your business at all. You need a mentor who wants to see you succeed but is going to tell you the truth. So, it's been beneficial to have one.

Participant 3 explained how both of her mentors helped her business grow. She said:

Both of my mentors indirectly helped me gain access to capital. The male mentor put me in a position to do work on a subdivision, new construction subdivisions for different people. This gave me the opportunity to make my own money. The first week, I got contracts. The female mentor helped my business to grow by consistently giving me

things like reference letters and recommendations to different boards and different departments, either upon request or just on her own.

Participant 7, who receives group mentoring, explained how attending several programs has helped her business:

I have definitely been put in a position to understand how to present myself like a large company. I would say that the Goldman Sachs program was the absolute best, hands down. Next was the Morehouse Innovation program, which was my second best as it pertains to forgetting all the talk, let's focus on getting the contracts and giving me the money. Those two are the really closest that I would say to getting me to the presentation stage. Similar to Goldman Sachs, the SBA Drive program helped me to figure out where I was going, and what is my angle. I had problems. Of course, when you go through these programs, you're still a business owner, so you're still going through things while you're attending the program. The people in your cohort help you to resolve your issues. They will say things like, try these steps, try these strategies and you come up with a resolution based on your specific situation.

Participant 8's experience with mentoring has been informal. She explains how most of her mentors do not know that they are her mentors. She explained:

I receive informal mentoring. All I need is to see how they (company) are operating and how they're working. I pay attention, so I am always ready. If someone calls and says I have an opportunity, even though it may not be a lot of work for you, do it and don't say they're giving me the crumbs. Take the crumbs because you're now able to put that on your capability statement. This is what I learned throughout my years in the industry. This is how I built my business.

Participant 1 expressed:

My informal mentor, who was also my ex-business partner together, was like yin and yang coming together and it just flowed and meshed perfectly. It was like you couldn't tell the beginning from the end. All you know is that the end result was magnificent. Like, it didn't matter. So, I always credit him for teaching me when it comes to building the business. I don't want a man to build me a house; I want them to teach me how to build a house so that I can build the house myself from the ground up. As for my other informal mentoring relationship, I have a group of people who I bounce things off of, especially now since I'm new in business for myself. Since they have been in the same industry for a long time, I look for their guidance because I don't want to just look successful; I want to be established. There's a difference between being successful and being established. Success sometimes happens by a fluke, but when you're established, you have a firm foundation because it's planned. I want to make sure that I'm sticking to the plan because I can do a lot of things and I can do those things great, but I want to make sure that I'm focusing on the things that I want to do great, which are the things that God has gifted and called me to do. So, my mentors keep me grounded.

**Theme 6: Mentoring and Networking.** Mentors who actively introduce their mentees to their professional network play a pivotal role in the career development of women of color business owners in the construction industry (Table 4.7). This practice is often regarded as a strategic and invaluable aspect of effective mentorship (McCarty Kilian et al., 2005). By facilitating introductions and connections, mentors can help their mentees expand their reach, access valuable resources, and establish new partnerships within the construction sector (Turner-Moffatt, 2019). Such mentor-initiated introductions not only enhance the mentees' visibility

within the industry but also provide opportunities to learn from experienced professionals and gain insights that can be transformative for their businesses.

**Table 4.7**

*Theme 6: Mentoring and Networking*

Code	Category	Theme
Industry connections, building network, sent an email, introduction, collaborative partnerships, industry circles, reached out to his network, leveraging contacts, networking event	Professional Relationship	Mentoring and Networking

Participant 2 said:

My mentor has put me in front of a lot of contractors. He is a consultant, so he has connections with a number of different people in different industries. He's put me in contact with people that he has known most of his life. I have to say, I don't think or know of a lot of people who have a mentor who would back them as hard as my mentor backs me without paying them. I am blessed in that aspect. He has definitely encouraged me and has supported me in a lot of stuff. He is the one who introduced me to the person who gave me my first \$500,000 contract. He said, "Go do your thing." I did, and here we are. We've been going ever since. It's giving me credentials; it's giving me an understanding of business. What can I say? He's invaluable.

Participant 6 had a similar experience as Participant 2, saying:

My mentor introduced me to her network. She introduced me to someone that I added to my team. We are currently working on a project at a church. The person that she connected me to did such a great job that the pastor and everybody in the church came in

and were like, wow! I wouldn't have been able to complete the project if it had not been for my mentor connecting us. So, because of her, the business is actually growing. She provided us with a skillful player to be on my team.

Participant 3 explained:

The interesting thing is that we're all kind of in the same network since we are in the same state and in the same industry. However, I think my female mentor has grown to the point that if I am not selected for a project and a firm that is less qualified is awarded, I have been using her as my endorsement basically.

Participant 7 said:

As for introducing me to their network, I'm coming from the perspective of the programs that I am a part of, because of the SBA Pride program, one of the participants actually subcontracted some work to me. As for one of the more recent programs I participated in, I also have done business with a couple of participants in the program. I have actually done direct business transactions. They have partnered with me, they have given me loans, which is unpopular, there are a lot of these good-old-boy-type companies, and they borrow money from their friends all the time. Being a part of these programs has helped me to connect with so many great people.

A few of the participants had unfavorable reactions toward their mentor and the process of being introduced to their professional network. Participant 4 said:

I wouldn't say that my mentor introduced me to his network. I would say he introduced me to his resources, such as education and how to promote my business. He helped me with marketing with things like social media. He didn't introduce me to his network connections, but I needed marketing to grow the business, which is what we were

struggling with. We have such a niche type of business. So, he provided us with more resources than opening up their books because maybe they're not in the same line of business. As I said, the mentors gave us corporate backing and different things like that. He wasn't in the construction and striping business so he couldn't give us their customer base.

Participant 5 explained:

My woman mentor has introduced me to her network. I get introduced; however, there was no follow-through. There was no direct connection. She sent them an email but no actual conversation happened. So, although there was an introduction, there was no follow-through. There was no meeting or project match, nothing that led to something fruitful. As for my male mentor, he put me in a great position in business. He introduced me to other builders which gave me more opportunities to do work with him and other builders. From that first opportunity, it was the blueprint for other opportunities. I was able to build my company's capacity, which gave me references that I can use to gain other projects.

Participant 8 said:

Anytime I step into a room [it] is all about networking. It's all about getting to know the people who are in the room, and how can we help each other. I want to understand the specifics of their services and how they can benefit my company. I'm really good at building relationships. I'm a people person. I will say a mentor never really helped me do that. However, they help me when it comes to getting referrals. My business is based on referrals so I am grateful.

## Summary of Results

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of nine women of color who own businesses in construction. This study revealed how professional mentoring affects the business decisions of women of color business owners in a predominantly male and non-diverse industry while dealing with a complex web of challenges stemming from gender, racial, and industry-related biases. This included barriers to accessing capital, mentorship, networking, and navigating cultural and gender expectations. Using semi-structured interviews that aligned with the research questions, the researcher was able to capture the participants in their own words. The design of the interview required the participants to answer 12 open-ended questions. Upon completion of the interviews, the interviewer meticulously examined the respondents' responses and subsequently established congruent themes that reflected the participants' feedback. Furthermore, the results divulge previously unexplored perspectives regarding the obstacles and challenges encountered by women of color entrepreneurs within the construction industry. The findings of this study include responses from nine participants who are business owners and self-identify as women of color. The three research questions that were central to this study were:

1. What are some of the structural barriers facing women of color business owners in the construction industry?
2. What are some of the personal challenges facing women of color business owners in the construction industry?
3. In what ways if any, did professional mentoring help address any barriers and challenges faced by women of color business owners in the construction industry?



Chapter 4 presented each of these research questions with their subsequent findings based on the interviews with participants. Emerging themes and subthemes from the research are derived from participant responses. The themes that emerged were (a) lack of access to capital, (b) intersectionality, (c) imposter syndrome, (d) mentoring models and approaches, (e) mentoring and business growth, and (f) mentoring and networking. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the conclusion of the study, including any implication of findings, limitations, and recommendations for guidance of future studies.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

In the preceding chapters, the challenges faced by women of color who run businesses in the construction industry were described, examining the structural barriers, challenges, and personal obstacles they encounter. The transformative potential of professional mentorship as a catalyst for their growth and resilience was also examined. This chapter discusses actionable recommendations and strategies to overcome obstacles, how to identify and take advantage of mentorship opportunities, and promote success among women of color business owners in the construction industry. The objective of this study was to highlight the role of professional mentorship in building resilience and empowerment among women of color business owners and to underscore the importance of mentorship as a means of overcoming obstacles. The 2019 Annual Business Survey (ABS) reveals the significant presence of both minorities and women in the business landscape. Wilson-Buford (2016) highlights the dynamic growth and prominence of women of color as a rapidly expanding and influential demographic among female business owners. These statistics and references provide a valuable foundation for understanding the evolving landscape of entrepreneurship amongst women in the US, particularly within diverse and underrepresented communities. However, although there is a positive trend in the increasing presence of women of color among business owners in the industry, it also underscores a critical research gap, which is the need for more empirical studies specifically focusing on the role of professional mentoring in supporting women of color who own construction companies. This research gap signifies a significant area of inquiry, as understanding the impact of professional

mentorship can provide valuable insights into the experiences and success of this particular demographic within the construction industry. This chapter not only serves as a culmination of a research journey but also as a call to action. This research aims to translate knowledge into meaningful change, offering concrete recommendations and strategies to empower women of color business owners and contribute to a more diverse and inclusive industry. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of the women who have entered into a mentoring relationship and understand the impact that the relationship had on their business decisions while navigating such a non-inclusive industry. The research questions that guided this study were: What are some of the structural barriers facing women of color business owners in the construction industry? What are some of the personal challenges facing women of color business owners in the construction industry? In what ways, if any, did professional mentoring help address any barriers and challenges faced by women of color business owners in the construction industry? The research paradigm of this study was a phenomenological, qualitative approach.

### **Implications of Findings**

Mentorship is found to foster empowerment and resilience that can inspire women of color business owners to seek mentors and ultimately become mentors themselves. Their decision contributes to a more supportive and empowered community within the construction industry. Professional mentoring is essential for women of color as it offers a combination of practical guidance, emotional support, and access to resources that can help them succeed in a challenging and often male-dominated industry. Professional mentoring plays a pivotal role in addressing structural and personal challenges in their careers and business decisions. Hoffmeister et al. (2014) postulated that women who have received mentoring have experienced more success with career advancement versus women who have not received mentoring. The results

from this study provide several implications related to the lived experiences of women of color business owners in construction who own businesses in different States in the United States. This study is beneficial to all women, and specifically women of color who are currently business owners in the field, as well as women who are considering a career in the field of construction. The findings of this study may help women understand the crucial role professional mentorship plays and cultivate an understanding of the dynamics of mentorship as well as the expectations pertaining to their relationship with a mentor.

### ***Theme 1: Lack of Access to Capital***

While women of color represent a vital and growing demographic among small business owners, research indicates that they often encounter significant barriers in accessing capital. These hurdles, in turn, restrict their potential for growth and innovation within their business ventures (Aini et al., 2023). This study revealed that all of the participants had faced a challenging journey marked by a determination to succeed in the face of the most significant hurdle: the lack of access to capital. Despite their vision and ambition, securing the necessary financial resources to fuel the growth of their businesses has been a constant struggle. This lack of access to capital not only constrains their ability to take on larger projects and expand their business operations but also perpetuates the cycle of limited opportunities for them. It is a reminder of the systemic disparities that persist in the industry and underscores the urgent need for change and support to level the playing field. Organizations that aim to support women of color business owners in the construction industry must intentionally acknowledge that having access to capital is needed for them to succeed. These actions can be accomplished by ensuring adequate representation of diverse individuals, including women of color, in decision-making

roles as they pertain to women of color obtaining loans, bonding, and lines of credit to achieve business success.

### ***Theme 2: Intersectionality***

The participants expressed that they encounter various personal challenges due to the complex interplay of their gender, race, sexual preference, and ethnicity (Crenshaw, 2013). These challenges encompass biases and difficulties in establishing industry connections, and disparities in growth opportunities. The struggle to balance work and family obligations while dealing with these challenges brings feelings of isolation in a predominantly non-diverse industry. These personal challenges, deeply rooted in intersectionality, underscore the critical importance of exploring strategies and solutions to empower and support women of color business owners. To mitigate and eliminate these disparities faced by women of color in construction, there should be strict policies in place that protect women who are faced with these challenges. To ensure that women of color are not subjected to these issues will require a multi-faceted approach and commitment from all stakeholders. Construction companies should establish and actively support diversity and inclusion initiatives, but doing so should not just be a perfunctory or symbolic effort but should be embedded in a company's culture. Providing training and awareness programs in an attempt to sensitize people in the industry may also reduce unconscious biases and foster a more inclusive workplace.

### ***Theme 3: Imposter Syndrome***

The third theme emerging from the study's data—imposter syndrome—was first researched by Clance and Imes (1978). The study argued that the phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phoniness that appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high-achieving women. Despite outstanding academic and

professional accomplishments, women who experience the impostor phenomenon persist in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise. Despite having many accomplishments that should clearly show high intellectual ability, the feeling of being an impostor doesn't seem to be dissuaded. Three participants mentioned that they have dealt with periods of imposter syndrome. To combat the feeling when or if it may occur, women of color should regularly reflect on their achievements and the skills that got them to where they are. They should also surround themselves with like-minded individuals who may understand from experience what they are going through and have the ability to provide guidance and reassurance.

#### ***Theme 4: Mentoring Models and Approaches***

Various mentoring models and approaches exist, each with its own structure and goals. The participants in this study chose the mentoring model that best fit their goals, needs, and preferences. Traditional one-on-one mentoring is the most common mentoring approach (Yun et al., 2016). However, one of the participants chose the group mentoring model; she felt working with a small group allowed for collective learning, networking, and shared experiences. This form of mentoring provided her with the desired outcomes that she needed. Another participant chose the peer mentoring approach, which afforded her the opportunity to be mentored by peers with similar levels of experience. This approach was effective because this form of mentoring allowed for skill sharing, problem solving, and emotional support when needed. The participant expressed that the aforementioned mentoring model was beneficial for her. It is recommended that women of color carefully select a mentoring model that is best suited to their needs as they embark upon their entrepreneurial journey in construction.

### ***Theme 5: Mentoring and Business Growth***

Mentoring plays a pivotal role in the business growth and professional development of women of color in the construction industry (Torres, 2022). For these entrepreneurs, mentorship goes beyond traditional guidance; it serves as a catalyst for breaking down barriers and shattering the glass ceiling. Through mentorship, they gain access to valuable networks, industry knowledge, and leadership skills that are often elusive due to systemic challenges. These professional mentoring relationships provide a safe space to navigate the complexities of the construction industry and combat imposter syndrome. As a result, women of color business owners find themselves better equipped to secure contracts, scale their businesses, and make a lasting impact in an industry where they have historically been underrepresented. As a result of the findings of this study, it is plausible that women of color who decide to enter into the industry should equip themselves with experienced professional mentors. All nine of the participants have shared that their mentors have played a pivotal role in their business decisions that are resulting in positive results.

### ***Theme 6: Mentoring and Networking***

Mentoring and networking are invaluable assets for women of color in the construction industry (Beane-Katner, 2014). Professional mentoring relationships offer a safe and supportive environment where they can acquire industry knowledge, leadership skills, and guidance from experienced professionals (Zachary, 2011). Many women in the study acknowledged that their professional mentors often introduced them to crucial networks, which opened doors to opportunities and partnerships. The connection allowed them to expand their connections and build relationships with peers, potential clients, and industry leaders. Two of the women expressed disappointment that their mentors introduced them to their network but failed to

follow up, which resulted in a missed opportunity. Overall, it is clear that together, mentoring and networking serve as a dynamic duo, providing access to resources, knowledge, and influential contacts that women of color in construction can leverage to advance their businesses, break through the barriers they face, and collectively drive a more inclusive construction industry.

### **Limitations**

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of nine women of color who own construction businesses within the United States. The study examined their professional mentoring relationship and the impact that the relationship has on their business decisions which led to business growth. Blumberg et al. (2014) noted that limitations would include any potential weaknesses, such as a small sample size or lack of participants in a particular location. Two potential limitations with the study capacity that might impact the result. Due to the underrepresentation of women of color in the construction industry, the researcher faced challenges in identifying eligible study participants. The study revealed that the number of years in business or the profitability of the business did not matter; the narrative was the same. The lack of access to capital is the reason women of color are unable to thrive in the industry. Due to the inability to have working capital, which, in turn, leads to the inability to hire a full staff, the study did experience limited time and availability of the participants to participate because of their need to be active within the daily operations of the business. Some participants had to reschedule days and times because of their professional obligations. Two participants had to do the scheduled virtual meeting in their cars because of their limited time.



## **Recommendations**

Women, particularly women of color, have historically faced—and overcome—challenges of discrimination, racism, sexism, and stereotypes. Unfortunately, most continue to experience barriers in the overall decision-making of policy changes in their fields of work (Hoffmeister et al., 2014). Women of color are deciding to open businesses in the construction industry, but they are still massively underrepresented. This determination to break barriers and venture into a male-dominated field reflects their resilience and entrepreneurial spirit. While their presence is a testament to their ambition and capabilities, it also highlights the need for greater inclusivity and support within the industry. Women of color entrepreneurs bring fresh perspectives, innovation, and diversity to the industry, enriching the ecosystem and paving the way for a more equitable future. Their success is not only a personal triumph but a catalyst for positive change, inspiring the next generation of underrepresented entrepreneurs to follow in their footsteps.

### ***Recommendations for Women of Color Business Owners in the Construction Industry***

The findings of this study support the need for women of color to practice effective time management. Women of color in the construction industry often find themselves navigating a demanding and challenging schedule. Time management is paramount as they juggle the demands of their businesses, family responsibilities, and the persistent barriers they face. This delicate balancing act requires precision in scheduling, setting priorities, and optimizing productivity to make the most of their limited time. An increased allocation of time dedicated to their entrepreneurial endeavors will provide women of color in the construction industry with greater opportunities to implement and leverage the insights acquired through their professional mentoring relationships. Additionally, women of color business owners should recognize that

time management is not just about productivity but also taking time for self-care. It is about finding moments for rejuvenation and mental well-being amidst a busy schedule.

Self-care should take on a critical role in the lives of women of color business owners in construction. As they strive to overcome structural and personal challenges, they need to understand that maintaining their physical and mental health is essential. Self-care involves setting boundaries, recognizing when to delegate tasks, and finding time for activities that promote well-being. It is about acknowledging that they cannot pour from an empty cup, and taking moments for self-renewal is an act of self-preservation and resilience.

Mindfulness practices need to be embraced by women of color in construction as tools for managing stress and maintaining mental clarity. Mindfulness, whether through meditation, yoga, afro flow yoga or other techniques, enables them to stay grounded amidst adversity (Stoddard, 2020). It will help in overcoming imposter syndrome, dealing with bias and stereotypes, and facing isolation in a predominantly non-diverse industry. Mindfulness practices will empower them to confront challenges with a composed mindset, making these women more resilient in the face of adversity and poised for success in the construction industry.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research***

Given that the scope of this study was limited to business owners who are women of color in the construction industry, it is advisable for subsequent research to investigate their counterparts, specifically White women. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics within the industry. Such a study would be instrumental in comparing how professional mentorship relationships impact business success for these women navigating a traditionally male-dominated industry like construction. This research could yield valuable data and compelling insights, as well as offer a comparative analysis of career outcomes for all women in the construction sector. It would thus contribute to a more nuanced

understanding of the varying experiences and trajectories within this industry. Further investigation into the obstacles encountered by White women in the field could provide significant insights into how professional mentorship can shape their career achievements. Such research could illuminate the particular dynamics and strategies that can be leveraged to foster success, thereby enriching our understanding of diverse experiences within the industry.

Regardless of age, it appears from the research that most of the study's participants were single and African American. Further studies might give insight into whether marital status and/or race correlate with career advancement in the construction industry.

### ***Recommendations for Economic Development Policymakers***

Policymakers play a significant role in creating an environment where women of color can thrive and succeed in industries that have traditionally been male-dominated, such as construction. This is an important issue that deserves attention and support. By enacting policies that foster an inclusive and supportive environment, policymakers can empower women of color entrepreneurs to thrive. As the findings of this study have shown, access to capital remains a fundamental challenge for many women of color business owners. Policymakers can bridge this gap by creating financial programs, grants, microloans and loan opportunities tailored to the specific needs of these business owners. These initiatives should not only provide funding but also offer financial education to ensure sustainable growth.

Additionally, policymakers can champion supplier diversity initiatives, encouraging government agencies and corporations to engage women and minority-owned businesses in construction projects. By adopting fair procurement practices, policymakers should ensure that women of color entrepreneurs have an equitable opportunity to bid for and secure contracts, contributing to the growth of their businesses. Women of color are the minority within the minority; this makes it even more difficult for them to successfully bid and win on projects. By

creating an opportunity for them to bid against each other, the bidding process may give them a greater chance of successfully winning. Furthermore, professional mentorship and training programs specifically designed for women of color in the construction industry will equip these women business owners with the skills, knowledge, and guidance needed to navigate the field successfully.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined the lived experiences of women of color business owners in construction who received professional mentoring. Professional mentors can offer mental support, assisting business owners in maintaining their motivation and goal-focused attitude (Bird & Markle, 2012). Keith (2020) asserts that mentorship has played a pivotal role in aiding numerous women of color who own businesses in the construction industry. These entrepreneurs have successfully navigated various challenges by leveraging the knowledge, resources, and connections provided by their mentors. Keith (2020) provides evidence of the value of mentoring in fostering the success of female business owners in the construction industry. Mentoring is a vital means of helping members of marginalized groups navigate and survive a system in which they are significantly underrepresented (Brown & Montoya, 2020). These mentoring relationships can have a profound impact on women of color and their business decisions. Mentoring provides opportunities for skill development, networking and access, confidence building, navigating bias, professional growth and emotional support. Women of color in the US have pursued economic prosperity through entrepreneurship for centuries. However, overall outcomes for women-of-color-owned businesses compared to other racial and ethnic groups continue to lag because of the legacy of exclusion and discrimination in access to opportunities (Bates & Tuck, 2014).

This study explored how receiving professional mentoring has played a role in the business decisions of women of color business owners who operate in the construction industry. This study addressed the research gap that explicitly highlights the challenges for women of color and how they overcome the barriers they face. The findings of this study address the following research questions: (a) What are some of the structural barriers facing women of color business owners in the construction industry? (b) What are some of the personal challenges facing women of color business owners in the construction industry? (c) In what ways, if any, did professional mentoring help address any barriers and challenges faced by women of color business owners in the construction industry? The literature review included theories about mentoring and social capital. The research encompassed in the analysis contributes to the existing body of knowledge concerning the impact of mentoring and the role professional mentoring plays in the guidance and expertise of women of color business owners' business. However, none of the studies took a comprehensive approach to investigating how professional mentoring plays a role for women of color business owners in the construction industry. This phenomenological study was conducted to capture women of color business owners' lived experiences and how their professional mentoring relationship has impacted their business decisions, network expansion, and confidence building, all while navigating the challenges that come with being a woman of color in a White-male-dominated industry. This study consisted of nine women who self-identified as women of color business owners. This sample of women of color business owners is appropriate owing to the historical biases and exclusion that women have faced in business and the underrepresentation of their experiences in business literature. Each participant met the selection criteria, which included (a) owning at least 51% of a business, (b) actively involved in the day-to-day business decisions for the business, (c) the business

owner identified as a woman of color, and (d) the place of business is located within the United States.

The findings underscore a call to action for women of color business owners with support from government agencies and policymakers to acknowledge the enduring impact of the underrepresentation of women of color in the construction industry. Women of color business owners should also maintain their sense of agency by embracing their cultural and ethnic identities and drawing upon their strengths. These elements have historically aided women of color in navigating and succeeding within oppressive systems, all while identifying specific support for their individual and collective growth, leaning into professional mentors for support. Through unwavering advocacy, progressive policy changes, steadfast commitment to diversity and inclusion, and an unyielding pursuit of continuous improvement, these key stakeholders hold the power to shape an environment where women of color business owners not only survive but thrive. In this changed environment, innovation thrives, and their unstoppable efforts drive economic growth and social progress, leading to a profound shift toward a future of boundless opportunities and equity for women of color who want to own and operate a construction business in the United States.

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## **Appendix**

### Interview Questions

1. Can you share some of the difficulties you have encountered as a woman of color owning a business in a white male-dominated industry?
2. Have you experienced financial issues?
3. As a woman of color business owner in the construction industry, have you faced challenges finding and/or retaining employees?
4. Do you have a problem with earning respect as a woman of color in construction?
5. Can you share any instances where you believe you were treated unfairly or differently based on prejudiced assumptions related to your race and gender within the construction industry?
6. Did your mentor assist you in obtaining business capital?
7. Can you provide some specific instances or examples that demonstrate how your mentor has influenced your decision-making or business strategies? What has your mentor done for you?
8. Has your mentor ever introduced you to their network? If yes, how has it benefited you?
9. Did your mentor help you build connections or networks within the construction industry? If so, how did that support your business?
10. Did your mentor assist you in obtaining business capital?
11. Did your mentor help you build your self-efficacy?
12. How did your mentor help you to overcome the challenges you faced?