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Danielle A. Jones

St. John Fisher University, daj06562@sjfc.edu

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The Mindful Way: An Explorative Case Study of the Transformative Effects of Afro Flow Yoga a Culturally Adapted Mindfulness Intervention on the Health and Well-Being of Black Women

Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological exploratory case study explored Afro Flow Yoga to evaluate its potential as a culturally adaptable mindfulness-based intervention for enhancing the health and well-being of Black women while addressing the historical ills and adverse effects of intersectionality. From its beginning, the United States has discriminated against and defeminized Black women while profiting from all aspects of their lives. To be Black and female in America is to experience perpetual racism, sexism, and other "isms" as forms of harm and oppression. Therefore, culturally adapted mindfulness interventions are essential to cater to the unique needs of Black women. The mindfulness exercises included in this model will provide Black women and facilitators with the essential tools to address their unique needs. Overall, this study will contribute to mindfulness-based interventions and research by highlighting the transformative effects of culturally adaptive mindfulness-based intervention Afro Flow Yoga on the health and well-being of Black women.

Document Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department

Executive Leadership

First Supervisor

Dr. Steve Draper

Subject Categories

Education

The Mindful Way:
An Explorative Case Study of the Transformative Effects of Afro Flow Yoga a Culturally
Adapted Mindfulness Intervention on the Health and Well-Being of Black Women

By

Danielle A. Jones

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

Supervised by

Dr. Steve Draper

Committee Member

Dr. Greta Strong

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher University

December 2023

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2023

Dedication

In profound gratitude, I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the Most High God, the source of all possibilities in my life. Your omnipotent and amazing presence guides my entire existence. May you continue to bless, guide, keep, and prosper me. I am the prayer, wish, and dream come true.

Thank you to My Heart Lovell for your consistent support, love, and care while I took this time out of our lives to pursue this dream. To my cherished trio—Makaya, Madison, and King your unwavering understanding and love have illuminated every step of this journey, I express my deepest gratitude. Special appreciation extends to my mom for her quiet but steadfast support and to my dad and brother for being my protectors.

To the present Queens who uplift and guide me—my cherished aunts, cousins, loving mother-in-love, beloved sisters-in-love, the ever-inspiring Mummy Elaine, Ms. Tesa and GodMummy Julie and family, irreplaceable Besties Kiszy, Marricka, and Mirtha, alongside my circle of friends and extended family—I am profoundly grateful for your unwavering presence and guidance. Gratitude extends to the treasured and protective Kings in my life—beloved grandfather, supportive uncles, Cousin Kevin, Dezzie, Ancel, and all those who uplift me. Your protective embrace and unwavering support mean the world to me. I love you all with my whole heart.

Deepest appreciation to my CoHeart 13 sisters, the Library Beauties, Alina and Kashonda, Mrs. Jackie and Mr. Lynford, Lady Nneka, Us “Husband,” and Madison for being among the most enriching aspects of this entire journey. I am truly honored to have shared this

transformative experience with you. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to Dr. Greta Strong and Dr. Lessie Branch for being more than mentors—their unwavering support, inspiration, and invaluable wealth of knowledge were instrumental in shaping my journey. Special acknowledgment to my committee chair, Dr. Draper, for trusting my process and guiding me to success. To Erin and my OSC family, your unwavering support has been invaluable. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Gina, Leslie, the remarkable Queens who participated in this study, and the embracing Afro Flow Yoga family for warmly inviting me into this enriching and transformative practice.

This dissertation is dedicated to all of you, the living embodiment of prayers, wishes, and dreams come true. To Black people—past, present, and future—who endured slavery, rais(ed) nations, and pav(ed) the way. Whose lives undoubtedly shap(ed) our future with the invaluable knowledge that we are capable of brilliance in all aspects and are the epitome of divine style and grace.

Biographical Sketch

Danielle A. Jones is currently the Assistant Comptroller at The Office of the New York State Comptroller Intergovernmental and Community Affairs. Ms. Jones attended John Jay College from 2000 to 2004 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminology in 2004. She attended Metropolitan College of New York from 2012 to 2014 and graduated with a master's degree in public administration in 2014. She came to St. John Fisher University in the summer of 2021 and began doctoral studies in the EdD program in executive leadership. Ms. Jones pursued her research on mindfulness interventions for Black women under the direction of Dr. Steven Draper and Dr. Greta Strong and received the EdD degree in 2023.

Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological exploratory case study explored Afro Flow Yoga to evaluate its potential as a culturally adaptable mindfulness-based intervention for enhancing the health and well-being of Black women while addressing the historical ills and adverse effects of intersectionality. From its beginning, the United States has discriminated against and defeminized Black women while profiting from all aspects of their lives. To be Black and female in America is to experience perpetual racism, sexism, and other "isms" as forms of harm and oppression. Therefore, culturally adapted mindfulness interventions are essential to cater to the unique needs of Black women. The mindfulness exercises included in this model will provide Black women and facilitators with the essential tools to address their unique needs. Overall, this study will contribute to mindfulness-based interventions and research by highlighting the transformative effects of culturally adaptive mindfulness-based intervention Afro Flow Yoga on the health and well-being of Black women.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Race and gender are intimately intertwined in the lives of Black women in America. Race constructs the way Black women experience gender, and gender constructs the way Black women experience race (Mansbridge & Tate, 1992). The intricate web of history, racism, sexism, and various barriers has had a tremendous impact on Black women, an impact that has often gone unrecognized. Recently, researchers have examined the challenges of racism and sexism through an intersectionality lens, arguing that African American women experience a unique form of oppression that is specific to this race-gender subgroup (Thomas et al., 2008). Evidence from multiple disciplines documents that racism is associated with indicators of poor health in African American women, including “general psychological distress, depression, cigarette and alcohol consumption, poorer perceived health status, lifetime history of physical disease and frequency of the common cold, adverse cardiovascular and reproductive health outcomes” (Brown et al., 2003, p. 27). Additionally, Black women historically and presently have endured and continue to “combat challenges of inequality, injustice, and socioeconomic and societal oppression” (Perry et al., 2013, p. 3). Presently, there are still significant challenges and disparities in the health and well-being of Black women in America, marked by elevated rates of heart disease, chronic stress-related illnesses, and the lowest life expectancy when compared to other demographic groups (Devakumar et al., 2020). Mindfulness-based interventions (MBI) can be used to navigate these challenges and unhealthy conditions. Mind-body therapies, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and yoga, have been scientifically demonstrated to reduce chronic stress, minimize inflammation, and promote overall well-being (Tenfelde et al.,

2017). Vreeling et al. (2019) found that “mindfulness has been demonstrated to reduce perceived stress, depression and anxiety, and to improve well-being and quality of life in healthy individuals” (p. 3). MBIs have begun to be adapted for marginalized populations (Biggers et al., 2020). However, since mindfulness practices have been westernized by various psychologists and meditation teachers, Black women are often left out of the positive impact of research studies (Spates, 2019). For example, Tenfelde et al. (2017) found that low-income African American women have positive perceptions of the physical and mental health benefits of mindfulness practices but express concerns about being excluded from mainstream spaces and the lack of representation of Black women in mindfulness media.

This study explores the impact of culturally adaptive mindfulness interventions on the overall health and well-being of Black women, specifically in coping with and managing the historical ills and adverse effects of intersectionality. Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality recognizes the interconnectedness of multiple social categories, such as race and gender, and emphasizes the need to address overlapping systems of discrimination and disadvantage to achieve a more inclusive and equitable society.

However, there is a lack of research addressing the unique needs of marginalized populations, including Black women, in the adaptation of MBIs (Biggers et al., 2020). To address this gap, this study focused on the lived experiences and needs of Black women to ensure that their lived experiences and needs are incorporated into the body of research and academic literature where they have often been excluded. By using Afro Flow Yoga, which combines elements of yoga, African dance, and healing music, this study explored the culturally adapted mindfulness-based intervention for the way that it is tailored specifically to the health and well-being of Black women. In 2008, Afro Flow Yoga was founded by Leslie Salmon Jones

and Jeff W. Jones. Inspired by their 2-year journey in Jamaica, Haiti, and West Africa, their vision was to create a welcoming and safe space where individuals of diverse ages, races, and abilities could connect through the power of movement and music. Integrating mindfulness techniques in Afro Flow Yoga can potentially cater to the distinct needs of Black women and support their overall health and well-being. Afro Flow Yoga offers a transformative experience that nourishes the body, mind, and soul, integrating mindfulness and meditation with the energy and joy of African dance (Afro Flow Yoga, 2023).

Drawing from Kemetic yoga rooted in ancient Egyptian spirituality, which aims to harmonize mind, body, and spirit, and the unique fusion of yoga and African dance in Afro Flow Yoga, the practice seeks to enhance the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of Black women (Siddiqui, 2021). By developing mindfulness exercises within this model, Black women and facilitators have essential tools to address their unique needs. This combined approach to the inquiry has the potential to be transformative, shifting the focus from solely documenting disparities to achieving tangible outcomes through the development of a mindfulness-based intervention catered specifically to the unique needs of Black women. Overall, this study seeks to empower Black women to reclaim their space and embrace mindfulness interventions that have been historically marginalized. Integrating their experiences and needs into a culturally adapted mindful intervention can equip Black women with the tools necessary to achieve their well-being and meaningful and implementable outcomes.

Problem Statement

Thirty years after the Heckler Report (1985), over \$200 billion has been spent in research and more than 2,000 scholarly papers have been written and published about the health of Black women in America. To date, very little progress has been made in improving health outcomes

(Evans et al., 2018). According to Chinn's (2021) research, poor health outcomes for Black women result from a complex array of factors, including limited access to quality healthcare, racism, and the stress of navigating Black womanhood in American society. Evans et al. (2018) also noted that Black women face more preventable and chronic diseases than White women, leading to a diminished quality of life and shorter lifespan, largely attributed to the stresses of racism and sexism.

Additionally, Evans et al. (2018) found that when research findings on these disparities fail to result in well-designed programs to improve the health of Black women, it sends the message that Black women's lives are disposable and that they are the problem. These findings show how the blame-the-victim syndrome can contribute to the ongoing health disparities experienced by Black women. Blaming the victim is a social psychological phenomenon that puts blame onto victims for harm caused to them, as it disregards the actions of the perpetrator and diminishes the damage inflicted on the victim (American Psychological Association [APA], 2023.) These are crucial factors to consider when comprehending the importance of a culturally appropriate mindfulness-based intervention for Black women. The model for cultural competence presented by Fenkl and Purnell (2019) emphasizes the importance of healthcare providers adapting tailored services to meet the unique cultural needs and perspectives of their patients, particularly in relation to the well-being of Black women who are impacted by the stressful intersection of racism and sexism. The exploration of Afro Flow Yoga, as a culturally adaptive approach to mindfulness-based intervention, may help Black women and providers minimize the detrimental effects of these stressors and produce positive health outcomes in a safe and supportive environment that acknowledges and validates the unique experiences of Black American women. The stress of being Black and female in America exposes these women to

health risks not experienced by other groups. Black women in America have had to “learn to find humor in heartache, to see beauty in the midst of desperation and have risen above centuries of oppression” (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 37). According to Evans et al. (2018), despite facing significant healthcare disparities such as higher rates of maternal mortality, breast cancer, mental health issues, and cardiovascular disease, Black women in America have demonstrated remarkable resilience in the face of adversity. Resilience has been conceptualized as the capacity to persist or bounce back through positive adaptation in times of stress or adversity (Nery-Hurwit et al., 2018). Further, the literature indicates that resilience is crucial to basic human existence and survival, which is particularly true for people of African descent in America (Babatunde-Sowole et al., 2016). It is a familiar adage that Black Americans must work twice as hard to get half as far as their White counterparts, and Black women, oppressed by the intersecting forces of sexism and racism, have to struggle even more (Caplan-Bricker, 2017). Few studies have explored how and with what tools Black women cope with their problems, experiences, and the oppression of sexism and racism. A culturally adapted mindfulness-based intervention has the potential to be a fitting tool for Black women to cope with and reduce the detrimental effects of racism and sexism.

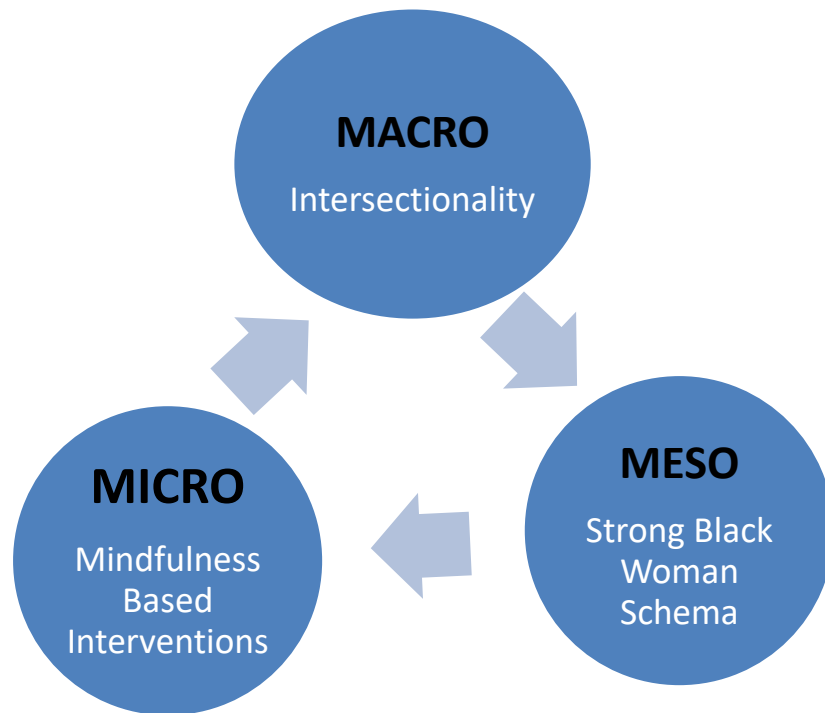
Theoretical Rationale

The value of a well-developed theory is the ability to adapt techniques to new problems, develop new techniques, and add coherence to applied psychology (Hayes et al., 1999). Examining the significant roles that culture, race, and gender play in the lived experiences of Black women today must be viewed from an intersectional perspective and within the context of the impact of historical trauma and social inequities on physical and mental health. As shown in Figure 1.1, this research utilized multiple frameworks to inform this study, namely

intersectionality as a macro theory (Disch & Hawkesworth, 2018), the Strong Black Woman (SBW) schema as a meso theory, and cognitive theory/cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) as micro theories to investigate how Black women's personal health and well-being can be supported through a culturally-adapted, mindfulness-based intervention in an academic context.

Figure 1.1

The Mindful Way Theoretical Framework



Note. Figure 1.1 depicts the theoretical frameworks of the study. Intersectionality, SBW schema, and MBIs are three interconnected frameworks that provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Black women.

According to Li (2012), using the macro, meso, and micro frameworks emphasizes the importance of considering the connection between people and their environment, which includes social structures and institutions, individual psychological processes, and broader societal and cultural aspects. Adopting this framework allowed for a more thorough understanding of the topic that can guide the research questions and interventions of this study.

Macro Theory: Intersectionality

In this study, intersectionality serves as a macro-level theory that highlights the ways in which various facets of an individual's identity, including race, gender, class, and sexuality, intersect and interact to create distinct experiences of oppression and privilege (Disch & Hawkesworth, 2018). For Black women, the intersection of race and gender leads to a unique challenge among marginalized groups, referred to as "double jeopardy" in this context (Rosette & Livingston, 2012, p. 1162). Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech "Ain't I A Woman" emphasizes the contrasting experiences between Black and White women, underlining the importance of intersectional feminist research in addressing the specific experiences faced by women of color (Smiet, 2017). Black feminist scholar-activists have expanded feminist theories by encompassing aspects such as race, class, sexuality, and ableism that were previously overlooked (Coleman, 2019). Intersectionality theory offers insights into the distinct experiences of Black women confronted with racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression that cannot be comprehended separately from gender and race (Crenshaw, 1989). Moreover, the theory demonstrates how Black women encounter increased levels of interpersonal trauma with negative consequences for their overall well-being, physical and mental health, and relationships (Danzer et al., 2016; Dutton et al., 2013). In order to effectively address and treat this trauma, it is crucial to develop a thorough comprehension of the multiple intersecting oppressive systems contributing to these

disproportionate experiences as well as implement culturally sensitive healing and treatment methods (Danzer et al., 2016; Hodson et al., 2021).

Meso Theory: The Strong Black Woman Schema

The use of the SBW schema as a meso-level framework in this study provides a relevant basis for understanding the cultural expectations placed on Black women to display strength and caretaker qualities while suppressing their emotions. This ideology has been shown to have negative impacts on the physical and mental health of Black women, similar to the effects of intersectionality. The SBW framework represents the intersectionality of race and gender for Black women and allows them to express their interconnected race-gender identity (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). However, previous literature on the SBW schema has produced mixed results, with some studies highlighting its detrimental effects while others suggesting it can be beneficial (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2007; Giscombé & Lobel, 2005).

Micro Theory: Cognitive Theory/Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Interventions

This study explored a well-developed culturally adapted mindfulness-based intervention for Black women's health and well-being, using Afro Flow Yoga as a case study. Several micro-level theories were used, namely cognitive theory and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and MBCT. According to Beck and Beck (2011), CBT is a structured and focused form of psychotherapy that focuses on the connections between thinking, emotions, and behavior. CBT aims to help people recognize and change thought patterns and behavior that may add to psychological problems. The basic principles of CBT include collaboration, active involvement, and empiricism. CBT identifies and challenges negative thoughts and behaviors that lead to distress, with MBCT integrated into CBT interventions. MBIs, such as MBSR and MBCT, are

psychological interventions that teach the deliberate nonjudgmental awareness of experiences in the present moment (Van Dam et al., 2018). These interventions typically involve various mindfulness practices such as breath awareness, body scan, and sitting meditation, as well as psychoeducation on the theory and application of mindfulness in daily life. MBIs have demonstrated efficacy in reducing symptoms of various mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and stress (Hofmann et al., 2010). These micro-level theories worked in conjunction with the macro and meso theories to guide this study's examination of developed culturally adapted MBIs for Black women.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand the need and impact of a culturally appropriate MBI for Black women. It first recognized and examined the historical context of disparities where they face the intersection of race, gender, and oppression. Vallier (2017) discovered that Black women kept working outside the home after being emancipated in 1865 while developing strategies for enhancing their lives and fighting for dignity. According to research by Krieger (2000), early life exposure to Jim Crow laws that legalized racial discrimination in the southern United States from the late 1870s through the mid-1960s had negative health effects decades later. Krieger (2000) also found that racial discrimination is a toxic, uncontrollable, or unpredictable stressor that is associated not only with poor physical health but also with psychological stress. Chronic stressors reduce coping resources and increase vulnerability to mental health problems (Chinn et al., 2021). Coping with chronic stress without support likely leads to finding solutions for unhealthy behaviors such as excessive drinking, taking drugs, or self-medicating through food. The study offers valuable scholarly support to assist Black women in managing and navigating the harmful consequences of intersectionality.

While the use of mind-body therapies as a clinical intervention treating stress and other psychiatric conditions has increased in recent decades, the specific psychological needs of Black women have been disregarded in this research and intervention (Nardi, 2021). Currently, there are few randomized controlled trials that investigate the efficacy of mindfulness-based treatments for Black women, although some qualitative data exists reflecting perceptions of mindfulness and recommendations for practice. This phenomenological study explored the impact that culturally adapted MBIs can have on this population. By providing coherent, constructed research surrounding the negative impact of racism and sexism on the lives of Black women in America, this body of research provides a way to improve their quality of life and create a means for Black women to take care of themselves.

Research Questions

Racism and sexism are stressors that affect the psychological and physical health of African American women (Woods-Giscombé & Lobel, 2008). Mindfulness meditation has been shown to be effective in managing stress and various stress-related health conditions (Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). Despite the significant research on the impact of MBIs in clinical psychology, there is a lack of studies involving mindfulness interventions for Black women (Biggers et al., 2020). This study elucidates the impact and effects of the historical ills of racism and sexism on Black women in America. More specifically, it explored a culturally adapted mindfulness-based practice as an intervention for Black women to cope with these issues and problems. The research questions that guided this study are:

RQ1: How do Black women perceive the use of culturally adapted mindfulness practices, specifically Afro Flow Yoga, in relation to their health and well-being?

RQ2: What are the perceived transformative effects of Afro Flow Yoga on the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of Black women?

RQ 3: What are the cultural and contextual factors that influence the adoption and utilization of mindfulness practices, such as Afro Flow Yoga, among Black women, and how do these factors contribute to their health and well-being outcomes?

Potential Significance of the Study

Black women experience a unique form of stress and other negative health ailments because of compounded pressures of the intersectional effects of sexism and racism (Nardi, 2021). A culturally adapted MBI can enable Black women to reflect on and learn from their past, thus allowing them to let go of things that do not contribute to their personal or professional growth and well-being. As the impact of mindfulness practices directly relates to Black women, Adkins-Jackson et al. (2019) found that “[Black] women who experience high stress, some forms of mindfulness and other approaches to self-care may reduce the impact of stress on their health” (p. 2). This study’s exploration of Afro Flow Yoga contributes to cultivating therapeutic services that are supportive of Black women rather than treatments that replicate oppressive systems that do not consider power, privilege, or intersectionality (Nardi, 2021). The model of this study effectively researches and acknowledges the intricate and adverse effects of intersectionality on the lives of Black women in America. It offers a thoughtfully crafted, culturally based MBI tailored to their needs. Furthermore, the study bridges the existing gap in scholarly research while enhancing awareness and acknowledgment of the abundant, multifaceted culture and historical roots of MBIs from the African continent, offering a valuable contribution to academic discourse.

Definitions of Terms

Afro Flow Yoga: Combines African dance movements with meditative yoga and live music, offering a holistic approach to physical, emotional, and mental well-being in an inclusive, safe setting (Afro Flow Yoga, 2023).

Black women: females who identify as Black, African, African American, and Afro Caribbean.

Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT): CBT is a form of psychological treatment that has been demonstrated to be effective for a range of problems, including depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and drug use problems, marital problems, eating disorders, and severe mental illness (Whalley, 2020).

Gendered racism: Gendered racism is oppression faced because of the dually marginalized status of both race and gender (Spates et al., 2019).

Intersectionality: The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise (Chandler, 2020).

Kemetic Yoga: Kemetic yoga, rooted in ancient Egyptian spirituality, aims to enhance physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being through postures, breathwork, and meditation. It focuses on harmonizing mind, body, and spirit while aligning with the universe's divine energy (Siddiqui, 2021).

Meditation: A practice that trains an individual to become familiar with their mind and thought patterns.

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT): Designed to help people who suffer repeated bouts of depression and chronic unhappiness (Kuyken et al., 2008).

Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR): MBSR is a stress-reduction intervention meant to improve immune system functioning and overall health through a combination of yoga, stretching, breathing, mindfulness meditation and martial arts exercises in an 8-week group format. It was designed by Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003) and is administered by licensed instructors.

Mindfulness meditation: Practice and training in nonjudgmental awareness of one's thought patterns.

Regular, long-term mindfulness meditation practice: Includes mindfulness meditation meetings approximately one time per week and approximately individual daily practice of at least 20 minutes or more for a period of 1 year or more.

Strong Black Woman (SBW): An African American female who identifies with the characteristics of the superwoman schema and possesses the strength characteristics of resilience, fortitude, and self-sufficiency (Woods-Giscombé, 2010). The terms *African American* and *Black* are used interchangeably.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 of this study presented an introduction, context, and support for the research questions. Additionally, the focus of the research highlighted the purpose of a culturally tailored, mindfulness-based model of care intervention that aims to enhance the physical and mental health of Black women. Chapter 2 reviews the literature that provides the necessary information to inform the proposed study's context, participants, and instruments used to address the research questions. Additionally, the chapter reviews the literature on the psychological experience of Black women, with a special concentration on mindfulness strategies and how they might be used to mitigate the psychological load on Black women and bolster their physical and mental well-being. Lastly, it emphasizes the need for culturally cognizant mindfulness and the potential

of these tailored interventions to target the unique stressors and promote adaptive coping tools for Black women. Chapter 3 outlines the research design, methodology, and analysis. Chapter 4 presents empirical findings, categorizing themes and codes derived from participant interviews. Lastly, Chapter 5 critically analyzed the findings, highlighting the transformative effects of mindfulness practices on Black women's well-being, emphasizing the importance of recognizing mindfulness roots in Africa, and offering recommendations for future research and actions.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

As per Guerra (2013), African American women make up 13% of the female population in the United States and are making significant strides in fields such as education and health. Additionally, Evans et al. (2018) report that approximately 9.5 million Black women are in good health, highlighting their resilience and perseverance. The 9.5 million Black females represent approximately 43.8% of the total Black female population. These findings, while not exceptional, highlight the strength and determination of Black women to maintain good health. However, despite these significant advancements, there remains much work to be done in addressing the harmful impacts of the intersectionality of racism and sexism on the health and well-being of Black women in America. The current health and well-being disparities among Black women in America demonstrate higher rates of heart disease, chronic stress-related illnesses, and the lowest life expectancy compared to other groups (Chinn et al., 2021). These disparities are rooted in systemic racism, limited access to resources, and challenges faced in marginalized communities (Beck et al., 2019; Oribhabor et al., 2020). Race and gender discrimination have profound impacts on Black women's health, leading to increased risk of conditions such as Type II diabetes, asthma, obesity, and uterine leiomyomata. Racial/ethnic disparities in maternal care still exist, but even as the science of medicine progresses in many domains, medical care continues to fail countless women each year, particularly minority women and women of color (Oribhabor et al., 2020). Orji and Yamashita (2021) found that higher

incidence rates and higher cancer-specific mortality rates are still evident among racial and ethnic minority women compared to White women. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed racial disparities in maternal health, with Black women disproportionately affected by maternal mortality and morbidity rates globally, emphasizing the need to address barriers to healthcare access and utilization to improve maternal health outcomes for all women, particularly women of color (Dayo et al., 2023). Addressing these health disparities necessitates evidence-based care models informed by equity and reproductive justice frameworks, tailored interventions, and diverse demographic and health data to ensure favorable outcomes for all women (Devakumar et al., 2020). The focus of this study on a culturally adapted MBI like Afro Flow Yoga will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences of Black women and foster opportunities to promote their well-being.

This literature review for this qualitative study synthesizes current research related to the impacts of the intersection of racism and sexism on the lives of Black women. The chapter illuminates the relationship between this study and previous work on this topic and is organized as follows: (a) examine the relationship between historical and current impact of intersectionality on the health and well-being of Black women, (b) summarize the theoretical frameworks utilized in the proposed study, (c) review the literature regarding intersectionality and the SBW schema, and (d) explore the theoretical motivations of Afro Flow Yoga, MBCT, and MBSR to serve as a guide towards creating an achievable and accessible mindfulness intervention that is culturally designed for Black women seeking optimal health.

Black and Female in America

Historical Trauma

The first documented arrival of stolen Africans in the Virginia colony occurred in 1619, with their population rapidly expanding throughout the 17th century (Boomer, 2023). Kendi and Blain's (2021) *Four Hundred Souls: A Community History of African America, 1619-2019*, is a comprehensive collection of scholarly essays written by 90 Black authors examining African American history from 1619 to 2019. The book covers various topics, including slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and modern-day issues, offering a diverse range of perspectives and voices. The anthology, which delves into the initial arrival of Africans to the colonies in 1619, serves as a crux to the literature review for this study, providing vital historical context to better comprehend the early stages of slavery as well as present-day racial inequalities. During this particular period, Boomer (2023) states that the Virginia Assembly enforced racial segregation through the implementation of laws that aimed to control labor and reproduction among women as a way of perpetuating the entrenched racism of the era. It is worth noting that the Assembly was cognizant of how women's reproductive processes could potentially impact the status of future generations. In light of this, three crucial laws were passed within the framework of these legislations, intentionally linking race and gender to slavery. This is significant to this study as it demonstrates the early weaponization of race and gender as means of oppression, which aligns with the modern concept of intersectionality and the theoretical frameworks of this research.

One of the first laws, known as the Tithable Law, negatively impacted the freedom of African-descended people in the colonies by raising the price of being free and legislating greater control over their labor (Posner, 1996). The 1643 law established legal racial disparities by

rendering all Black women's labor, whether enslaved or free, taxable (Boomer, 2023). This legislation set the groundwork for legal disparities based on race that would expand over time and continue to exist today. Stevenson (2021) examines the labor practices of Black women in the early years of the American colonies. According to Stevenson (2021), by the 1630s, slavery was becoming increasingly institutionalized and Black women played an essential role in building the American economy, yet their contributions have been largely overlooked by historians. As slaves or indentured servants, Black women's labor was shaped by a complex web of factors, including race, gender, and class, and they were often subjected to physical and sexual abuse by their White captors. Additionally, Stevenson (2021) notes that Black women faced unique challenges in terms of reproductive labor, as they were expected to bear and raise the children of their White enslavers while also working long hours in the fields or in households. This was a time when slavery was being firmly established in the colonies, and the sexual exploitation of Black women was a common practice. This led to the legislation of 1662, which stipulated that children born in America would inherit the status of enslavement or freedom from their mothers, thus perpetuating intergenerational enslavement across generations (Boomer, 2023). According to Stewart (2017), this was a way to maintain racial purity and control over the Black population and was a reflection of the deeply ingrained racism that existed during this time period. By the close of the 18th century, institutionalized slavery and racially discriminatory legal codes had a profound impact on the lives of African American women (Boomer, 2023). The era marked a period of significant inequity for African American women residing in the Virginia and Maryland colonies. The regulation of women's intimate relationships by the Virginia Assembly aimed to maintain existing racial and social stratification and perpetuate

segregation, ultimately having a harmful impact on Black women, which continues to this day (Stewart, 2017).

By 1861 and the late 1910s, Black women in America continued to face the challenging intersection of race and gender, which prompted them to reassess their identity as women (Vallier, 2017). The struggle for emancipation in the United States lasted more than 100 years, from the American Revolution to the end of the Civil War (Bell, 2017). There were many barriers that stood in the way of achieving freedom and defining and claiming the rights and privileges promised upon the abolition of slavery. In the face of these challenges, Black women stepped up and became integral to the fight for liberation, using creative tactics to free themselves and utilizing alternative and unique methods to achieve self-liberation. Kendi and Blain (2021) highlighted the resilience and autonomy of enslaved Black women who, amidst adversities, harnessed their skills and labor to achieve better working conditions or even to obtain their emancipation. Today, “Black women no longer have to contend with institutionalized chattel slavery, but they do have to contend with such significant intersectional stressors as racialized sexism and gendered racism” (Donovan & West, 2014, p. 386).

Intersectionality

“Black women are in a perpetual state of healing from the specific experiences of trauma such as abuse and degradation as well as from the global experiences of racism, sexism, and economic disenfranchisement” (Evans et al., 2018, p. 6). Gendered racism is oppression faced because of the dually marginalized status of both race and gender (Spates et al., 2019). As this study examines the experiences of Black women, utilizing a lens that is specifically able to discern the unique reality of Black women is critical. Intersectionality is a major concept, and this lens is best suited for this study.

Intersectionality has become the dominant theoretical approach for examining the interconnectedness of gender, race, and oppression. Crenshaw (1989) coined the term “intersectionality” to address the marginalization of Black women within not only anti-discrimination law but also in feminist and antiracist theory and politics (Carbado et al., 2013). In 2015, Crenshaw’s theory went mainstream when it was entered into the Oxford English Dictionary (2023), which defines it as a sociological term meaning “the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage; a theoretical approach based on such a premise.” Merriam-Webster (2017) defines intersectionality less academically as “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, and classism combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.”

This study uses intersectionality as a macro theoretical framework to highlight the importance of the impact of overlapping systems of discrimination when examining the health issues of Black women in America. Crenshaw's (1989) framework on intersectionality has had a profound impact on understanding the health and well-being of Black women in America. By highlighting the intersection of historical ills, systemic oppression, and the intersecting discriminations faced by Black women as both Black and female, this framework reveals the complex and interconnected factors that contribute to health disparities in this population (Gueta, 2021).

Health disparities among Black women in America are deeply rooted and complex, and they face significant health disparities and inequalities (Donovan & West, 2014). The roots of these inequalities can be traced back to slavery when Black women's reproductive health was

disregarded, leading to limited access to healthcare and the current health crisis due to the lasting consequences of these historical disadvantages (Chinn et al., 2021). Further, Chinn et al. (2021) emphasize that Black women are subjected to high levels of racism, sexism, and discrimination at levels not experienced by Black men or White women. “Racial discrimination is a toxic uncontrollable or unpredictable stressor that is associated not only with poor physical health but also with psychological stress” (Chinn et al., 2021, p. 215). When combined with sexism, the intricate nature of these two issues illuminates the frequently overlooked and unacknowledged truth that Black women are disproportionately affected by pain, suffering, and unhealthy conditions (Evans et al., 2018). For example, Guerra (2013) found that one in four African American women lack health insurance, reflecting systemic barriers to accessing healthcare resources. This lack of insurance, along with other socioeconomic factors, contributes to the dire health issues faced by African American women.

Perry et al. (2013) emphasize that discrimination has the potential to significantly threaten the health and well-being of Black women. Studies show that Black women experience higher rates of anxiety and depression compared to other racial and gender groups (Adkins-Jackson et al., 2019). For instance, hypertension is more prevalent among African American women than any other group, affecting 46% of African American women over the age of 20, compared to 31% of White women (Guerra, 2013). According to Perry et al. (2013), discrimination-related stress can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as smoking or overeating, among African American women, which further exacerbates negative health outcomes. Similarly, breast cancer mortality rates are higher among African American women despite White women having a higher incidence of the disease (Guerra, 2013). Reproductive health is another area disproportionately affected by intersectionality. African American women

experience higher rates of unintended pregnancies and are four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than any other racial group. Furthermore, they have the highest rates of premature births and infant mortality, with African American infants being over 2.4 times more likely to die in their first year compared to White infants.

As noted by Chinn et al. (2021), the consequences of racism and gender discrimination on Black women are far-reaching and have significant effects on their health and well-being. For instance, the experiences of Black women at the intersection of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination have led to the adoption and perpetuation of the SBW as a coping mechanism for many Black women in America (Stewart, 2017). The exploitation and oppression of Black women over the last 400 years yielded the notion of the strong Black woman, who endures with resilience through adversity and arguably relieves the system of any accountability for the harms perpetrated. However, this coping mechanism also adds to the already existing stressors, poor health outcomes and challenges in the lives of Black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009). The detrimental impact of intersectionality on Black women's lives extends beyond health issues and includes the perpetuation of the SBW stereotype, a superhuman persona that arises from the historical context of Black women's intersecting experiences (Stewart, 2017). The SBW schema is the meso theoretical framework of this study, as it is a manifested byproduct of the unique challenges faced by Black women at the intersection of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination.

Strong Black Woman Schema

The SBW narrative, which can be traced back to the period of slavery, has been adopted by Black women as a means to cope with the oppression they face, compelling them to assume resilient and less conventionally feminine roles (Bailey, 1996). Kendi and Blain (2021) highlight

the resilience and strength of Black women in the face of these oppressions and further argue that Black women used their labor as a form of resistance, negotiating for better working conditions and using their wages to support themselves and their families. Some Black women were also able to use their labor to gain a measure of economic independence, eventually purchasing their own freedom or the freedom of their loved ones (Stewart, 2017). In a colonial context, the existence of Black women has been systematically structured in a manner that positions them as inherent bearers of stress and pain as they shoulder the burdensome consequences of society's oppressive systems. Hurston (1937) poetically stated in her novel, "The Black woman is the mule of the world as far as I can see, and she must mule alone" (p. 44). According to Stewart (2017), the severe traumatization experienced by Black women during the era of slavery rendered them vulnerable, compelling them to develop survival mechanisms in response to a life fraught with violence, exploitation, and subjugation. This interplay between independence and survival has given rise to the contemporary notion of the SBW. The correlation between the historical background and present-day SBW framework served as the driving force for the research of this study.

As a cultural expectation for Black women to be strong, resilient, and self-sufficient despite facing systemic racism and sexism, this schema can lead to mental and physical health challenges and social isolation for this population. Nelson et al. (2016) discussed the mixed perceptions of the SBW stereotype among Black women. This study's aim was to represent the multifaceted nature of Black womanhood through a single framework gathering Black women's roles, duties, and experiences with intersectional subjugation. In the review of the literature, different yet related structures emerged, including the superwoman schema, Sojourner Truth syndrome, Sisterella complex, and SBW schema. To provide more insight into the defining

characteristics of the SBW schema, thematic examinations were conducted through conversations from eight center gatherings with 44 Black women of diverse ages, religions, and educational backgrounds in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Iterative cycles were conducted by developing new codes and examining topics consistently. Prominent themes identified as characteristics of the SBW schema included embodying and displaying multiple forms of strength, having self and ethnic pride in spite of intersectional oppression, embracing being “everywoman,” and being anchored by religion or spirituality. The study also suggests the importance of the SBW schema as it correlates with mental and physical well-being outcomes such as mental pressure, symptomatic misery, weight problems, and cardiovascular sickness.

Black and Peacock (2011) evaluated the messages and themes African American women receive from media sources regarding their daily lives. The content promotes messages related to self-care, respectability, and interdependence. The study explores a range of topics related to managing daily life, including relationships, career, health, and finances. The researchers concluded that the themes presented in popular media sources provide African American women with crucial guidance for daily life management. The study examines how adherence to the SBW script affects the daily life management and health experiences of African American women. The authors analyzed content from 20 articles and 10 blogs related to the script and identified themes related to role management, coping, and self-care. The study revealed that adhering to the script led to negative health consequences, such as emotional suppression and postponement of self-care. The article suggests that healthcare professionals should consider the viewpoints expressed by African American women in media sources to reduce health disparities. The study explored the concept of strong Black womanhood in African American women's popular media sources, such as magazines and blogs. The sources provided a cultural context for the norms of strong

Black womanhood and first-person accounts of African American women's realities. The authors searched for articles containing the phrase SBW in the title or text, which produced 104 articles. The researchers then narrowed down the articles to 20 magazine articles published between 1996 and 2006. The study analyzed how adherence to the SBW script impacts the daily life management and health experiences of African American women, identifying themes related to role management, coping, and self-care. Results showed that adhering to the script led to negative health consequences, such as emotional suppression and postponement of self-care. The study suggests that scientists, activists, and healthcare professionals would benefit from forming initiatives to improve African American women's health. The article discusses gender differences in coping strategies, where women are seen as more emotional and less rational. However, African American women who adhere to the code of self-reliance may be less likely to seek support from others in stressful situations. This theme emerged in multiple studies on depression among Caribbean and African American women (Williams, 2018). According to Williams (2018), women respond to stressors with more emotion-focused coping strategies and seek support from others. However, African American women who adhere to self-reliance for coping may be less likely to turn to others for support in stressful situations. This was found in a study on depression among Caribbean women, where "dealing with it" was defined as "personal and autonomous proactivity, problem-solving, and mastery over life events and ongoing difficulties" (Black & Peacock, 2011, p. 145). Similarly, African American women who respond to stressors with self-reliance and self-silence are seen as strong Black women.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT continues to evolve from its early roots in behavior therapy, and it is often represented in summaries of empirically supported interventions (Hupp et al., 2008). Since the

emergence of behavior therapy in the late 1950s and early 1960s, cognitive and behavioral theories have merged to produce a theoretically complex combination of therapeutic approaches known today as CBT (Beidel & Turner, 1986; Reitman & Drabman, 1997). Cognitive theory provides an opportunity for its application in psychology and makes way for the emergence of guided studies in cognitive psychology, cognitive therapy, and CBT. It is important to emphasize that advances in CBT have been made based on both research and clinical practice, and there is ample scientific evidence that the methods that have been developed produce change in the health and well-being of those who use it (Whalley, 2020). Cognitive theory holds the major premise that people's contemplation processes primarily determine their conduct and emotions (Smith, 2001). Cognitive theory finds application in solving various problems in social development, behavioral psychology, and health irregularities. CBT argues that thoughts, emotions, body sensations, and behavior are all connected and that what people think and do affects the way they feel (Whalley, 2020).

CBT was largely developed by clinical researchers working with adult populations. Braswell and Kendall (2001) highlighted the importance and effectiveness of CBT; however, most of the research was conducted among White participants. This can be an issue for minority groups who understandably may not trust the healthcare system, particularly Black women (Zhou et al., 2022). CBT and MBCT are two methods on the cutting-edge of evidence-based psychotherapy today (Moran, 2022). Woods-Giscombé and Black (2010) assert that mindfulness practice can “enhance awareness of habitual patterns of responding to stress (e.g., worry, catastrophizing, rumination, and guilt) and can result in the interruption of psychophysiological processes that result from chronic stress, as well as health behaviors that are used to cope” (p. 122). Kuyken et al. (2008) define MBCT as a design to help people who suffer repeated bouts of

depression and chronic unhappiness. It combines the ideas of cognitive therapy with meditative practices and attitudes based on the cultivation of mindfulness. Together, the premises of the CBT theoretical framework and MBCT techniques can be highly effective for the professional growth and personal well-being of Black women in leadership positions. MBCT, which was developed by the cognitive behavior therapists Segal et al. (2002) based on MBSR, is often used to prevent relapse in depression (Chiesa & Serretti, 2011). In workplace settings, the focus is on distressing emotional states rather than on clinical depression (Ruths et al., 2012). Mind-body therapies, such as MBSR and yoga, have been shown to reduce chronic stress, decrease inflammation and improve overall well-being (Witek-Janusek et al., 2008). Although only a few studies have examined the effectiveness of MBSR and MBCT in minority populations, evidence suggests that mind-body interventions reduce stress and improve health in African Americans (Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014). Research into mindfulness practices infused with values and ethics in a culturally meaningful way is lacking despite the substantial interest mindfulness has garnered in the last 2 decades (Fleming et al., 2022). From the Buddhist perspective, one meditates to reduce suffering and enhance the well-being of everyone, including oneself (Walsh, 2015). Therefore, mindfulness practices can reduce outcomes disproportionately experienced by people of color, suggesting that they are promising tools for ameliorating untreated stress and chronic health conditions among African American women (Johnson et al., 2017).

Mindfulness-Based Interventions

MBCT and MBSR

MBSR is a technique developed by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn in 1979 (Niazi & Niazi, 2010). It was developed as an education and training vehicle for people with chronic health problems and those suffering from the mounting demands associated with psychological and emotional stress

to learn to relate in new ways to life challenges (Crane et al., 2017). According to Niazi and Niazi (2010), MBSR employs mindfulness meditation to alleviate suffering associated with physical, psychosomatic, and psychiatric disorders and other health-related disorders, including anxiety, depression, pain, immune disorders, hypertension, and diabetes. Further, it integrates CBT with MBSR in an eight-session group program (Sipe & Eisendrath, 2012). Over 200 medical centers across the world offer MBSR as an alternative treatment option to patients (Niazi & Niazi, 2010). Participants receive training in formal mindfulness meditation techniques involving simple stretches and postures. Research conducted by Sipe and Eisendrath (2012) determined that one of the primary aims of MBSR is to encourage patients to adopt a new outlook on life and their feelings/thoughts rather than focusing on changing or challenging certain cognitions. Additional research has demonstrated the effectiveness of mindfulness, MBCT, and MBSR in mitigating anxiety disorders, depression, and other chronic health conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity (Kriakous et al., 2020). However, most of this research fails to examine the impact of mindfulness on Black women. Nardi (2021) highlights that over the last few decades, the use of mindfulness practice as a clinical intervention treating stress and other psychiatric conditions has increased, though research and interventions continue to neglect the specific psychological needs of Black women.

Mindfulness therapies, like MBCT and MBSR, are effective treatments for conditions like chronic pain, anxiety, and depression. These therapies aim to increase awareness and acceptance and develop more skillful ways of responding to both internal distress and external stressors through the practice of mindfulness. Recently endorsed as an effective treatment for preventing relapse in depression, MBCT can also support individuals with various mental health conditions. Research by Teasdale et al. (2000) shows that MBCT can reduce the risk of relapse

for people experiencing recurrent depression by an average of 43%. Mindfulness practices are being explored in multiple settings as an approach to address stress and improve self-care due to their effects and benefits (Lê Cook, 2017). The benefits of mindfulness in various areas of life, such as mental, physical, emotional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal, make it an interesting topic of research.

Black Women's Perceptions of MBIs

Mindfulness-based practices have gained significant attention for their potential to improve mental health and overall well-being (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). However, most of the research in this area has focused on predominantly White populations, leaving a critical gap in understanding the experiences and perceptions of mindfulness among Black women (Biggers et al., 2020). The case study highlights the inadequate representation of African Americans in academic research on MBIs, as only 24 out of 12,265 citations between 1990 and 2016 were identified as "diversity-focused" studies that incorporated minorities or examined outcomes for different ethno-racial groups (DeLuca et al., 2018, p. 2). The underrepresentation of African Americans in mindfulness research is due to several factors, including mistrust, limited opportunities for participation, conflicts with religious beliefs, homogeneity in messaging, and a lack of African American mindfulness instructors. Whaley (2001) found that mistrust of healthcare providers, stemming from historical and contemporary experiences of racial discrimination and disparities, may contribute to African Americans' hesitancy to engage in research. According to Watson et al. (2016), the lack of representation of African American mindfulness instructors also contributes to the lack of engagement and underrepresentation of African Americans in such practices, as individuals from the same ethnic background can facilitate a sense of cultural relevance and trust.

Some argue that MBIs might downplay their Buddhist roots to appeal to a broader audience, potentially disguising the religious or spiritual aspects (Selva, 2017). However, this study recognizes the significance of the Buddhist roots of MBIs while also highlighting the need for a culturally adaptive model. Further, it aims to shed light on alternative interventions such as Kemetic yoga, rooted in African heritage, and advocates for culturally adaptive mindfulness practice (Siddiqui, 2021). This study recognizes and asserts that cultural adaptation is not about diluting or diminishing the Buddhist roots of mindfulness but rather about respectfully honoring, acknowledging, and including the existing diverse cultural mindfulness-based perspectives and practices of Africa.

Siddiqui (2021) discusses the historical exclusion of Africa from the narrative and practice of mindfulness and argues for the incorporation of African spiritual practices into yoga as a means of promoting a more comprehensive understanding of mindfulness. The author emphasizes the importance of recognizing Africa's diverse cultural contributions to mindfulness and rectifying its removal from the broader history of the practice. The article also addresses the impact of Western media and culture in perpetuating exoticized views of Africa. Overall, the intersection of yoga and Africa serves as a platform to challenge stereotypes and promote inclusivity in mindfulness. By exploring and embracing culturally adapted mindfulness practices like Afro Flow Yoga, this study addresses this issue by emphasizing the importance of cultural heritage and acknowledging the diverse origins of mindfulness interventions and the impact they can have on the health and well-being of Black women. Braxton (2017) delved into the unique influence Kemetic yoga has on helping trauma survivors, providing insight into the terms, postures, and principles adhered to in this yoga style and explaining how it can heal participants both mentally and physically. For Black female abuse survivors, Kemetic yoga gives an outlet

for healing and has been shown to positively change thought processes. These barriers must be understood and addressed to promote inclusivity and culturally adapt mindfulness practices for diverse populations (Biggers et al., 2020).

While there is limited research on mindfulness interventions tailored to African Americans, existing evidence from studies on general adult populations suggests there is potential to address health disparities (King, 2018). Tenfelde et al. (2017) aimed to explore the perceptions of low-income African American women towards yoga. The study found that most participants had limited prior knowledge of yoga but were interested in trying it out. Participants recognized the potential physical and mental health benefits of yoga but expressed concerns about cultural barriers and feeling unwelcome in predominantly White yoga spaces. Additionally, the study highlights the need for culturally tailored yoga programs that are accessible and notes the desire for yoga classes that incorporate music and movement that resonates with their cultural background and are led by instructors who understand and respect their experiences. The study's participants also expressed a desire to see more African American yoga instructors and more diverse imagery in yoga marketing and media and noted that this could help to break down stereotypes and create a sense of belonging for African American women in yoga spaces. The overall findings of the study suggest that low-income African American women are interested in yoga but face barriers to access and inclusion. The findings of these peer-reviewed studies demonstrate that culturally tailored programs and increased representation in mind-body therapies and interventions can help to make yoga more accessible and welcoming for this population.

The intersectionality of race and gender exposes Black women to unique stressors and challenges, making it crucial to explore their perspectives on mindfulness-based practices. By

considering the intersectional experiences of Black women, we can better understand the role of mindfulness in their lives and the potential benefits it may offer in navigating these distinct challenges (Evans et al., 2018). Race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status interact to predict higher exposure to chronic stress, associated behavioral and biological stress processes, and ultimately poor health outcomes (Biggers et al., 2020; Covassin et al., 2018; Myers, 2009), aligning with the meso, micro, and macro theoretical frameworks of this proposed study. Biggers et al. (2020) suggest that African American communities could benefit from greater promotion of mindfulness meditation, as it could potentially reduce the health effects of chronic stress and enhance overall well-being.

Watson et al. (2016) highlight the critical role intersectionality plays in culturally responsive mind-body interventions for African American women. To achieve improved health outcomes, interventions need to consider the specific experiences and needs of marginalized populations while dismantling barriers. Gueta (2021) likewise highlighted the importance of an intersectional approach in understanding the complex experiences of justice-involved women, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive interventions developed with input from the population itself.

Gueta's (2021) research highlights the significance of intersectionality in studying the health of justice-involved women, recognizing the interconnectedness of various marginalized identities and their impact on unique health needs. The term "justice-involved women" refers to women who have interacted with the criminal justice system, including those who are incarcerated, on probation, or on parole. This term recognizes the diverse experiences and challenges faced by women within the context of the criminal justice system, moving beyond a narrow focus on their status as offenders or inmates. The framework permits a better

comprehension of how justice involvement intersects with other forms of marginalization, enabling targeted interventions and tailored approaches. Additionally, Gueta (2021) found an intersectional viewpoint shifts the attention from individual factors to the structural barriers contributing to health inequities. By addressing these problems, policymakers and researchers may enhance outcomes and promote health equity. These studies illustrate how intersectionality is a crucial aspect to consider when conducting research, developing policies, and implementing interventions to promote the health and wellbeing of marginalized populations, such as Black women in America, thereby positively contributing towards not only equity and inclusion but academic and scholarly research.

One model that aligns with the focus on justice and well-being is the BREATHE model developed by Evans et al. (2018). The BREATHE model is a comprehensive framework aimed at promoting holistic well-being among Black women by addressing their unique challenges and offering strategies for self-care and resilience. It highlights the importance of nurturing physical, emotional, and spiritual health, as well as fostering community support and engaging in activism. The ultimate goal of the BREATHE model is to empower Black women to prioritize their well-being and advocate for social change. To understand the psychological experience of Black women, it is important to delve into seven components outlined by the authors, each of which represents a crucial value for effective mental health interventions for this group.

The BREATHE model proposes a comprehensive framework for enhancing Black women's mental health, focusing on principles that encompass balance, reflection, energy, association, transparency, healing, and empowerment. It emphasizes the importance of balance in prioritizing self-care to prevent mental health degradation. Reflection encourages contemplation and emotional audits, acknowledging the significance of meditation for overall

well-being. Energy involves revitalizing goals and celebrating achievements to sustain inner peace. Association emphasizes the creation of supportive social networks, whether through therapeutic groups or kin-by-design friendships. Transparency urges openness about painful experiences, rejecting the stigma attached to mental health in favor of truth and vulnerability. Healing is a constant process, essential for wellness, acknowledging the perpetual state of recovery from trauma and systemic challenges. Empowerment encourages Black women to access internal power sources, taking ownership of their well-being and moving beyond scholarly critique to guide them towards empowerment and self-authorship in mental health. With its seven principles, this model acknowledges the unique experiences and challenges faced by Black women while culturally empowering them to cultivate resilience, self-care, and self-advocacy (Evans et al., 2018). The BREATHE model serves as a strong foundation for supporting the overall well-being of Black women by acknowledging their unique disparities and needs. The BREATHE model provides a basis for promoting the holistic health of Black women, as it recognizes their distinct experiences and requirements of the impact of the historical ills and trauma they face.

Chapter Summary

This literature review provided a thorough investigation into the intricate experiences of African Americans, specifically Black women, across American history. The review addressed the significance of historical examination when creating a culturally sensitive mindfulness intervention while addressing the lasting impacts of racism and sexism. Kendi and Blain's (2021) edited anthology proves particularly valuable as it offers insights into different historical eras such as slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Movement, and contemporary issues. The positioning of contemporary African American women's experiences

and needs within the historical context of enslavement, oppression, and stereotypes emphasizes that when the harm was driven by a long historical context, perhaps so much the healing. The research aligns with the effort to synthesize MBIs with cultural and traditional values and practices to create a rich and thorough healing experience for Black American women.

The literature review highlights the potential benefits of culturally adaptive MBIs in improving the health and well-being of Black women. It demonstrated the impact and shared evidence showing that MBIs can be an effective intervention that yields positive health outcomes for Black women. It highlighted the essential need to create culturally adaptive practices to meet the specific needs of Black women while maintaining the core principles of established mindfulness techniques aligned with a comprehensive understanding of the unique experiences and perspectives of Black women. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Afro Flow Yoga is utilized as a case study in this research to evaluate its capacity as a mindfulness-oriented approach for enhancing the health and well-being of Black women. This research is guided by Algozzine and Hancock's (2017) work on comprehending and executing case study research methodology. Their work offers practical advice and knowledge on numerous facets of case study conception, data gathering, analysis, and reporting, presenting a complete structure for conducting thorough and significant case study research. Consistent with their recommendations, the research methodology for this study employed an exploratory case study design. "Doing case study research means conducting an empirical investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its natural context using multiple sources of evidence" (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017, p. 15). This design was ideal for addressing the study's research questions, as it permitted an in-depth examination of cultural and contextual factors influencing the adoption and utilization of MBIs like Afro Flow Yoga among Black women. The exploratory case study design allowed for acquiring rich and detailed data that led to a better understanding of the complex interactions and experiences of Black women in relation to mindfulness practices. It also offered flexibility and adaptability in data collection and analysis while permitting new themes and insights to emerge during the research process. By implementing this design, the study sought to reveal the subtleties of cultural and contextual factors affecting the health outcomes of Black women.

Research Design

Following Algozzine and Hancock (2017), the research design of this proposed study is an exploratory case study, which aligns with the principles outlined by Creswell (2018) and Saldaña (2013). A qualitative phenomenological exploration design method (Moustakas, 1994) was employed to assess the views of Black women about mindfulness practices to gain a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences and perceptions. The study also examined the disparities faced by Black women, considering the negative impact of racism on their lives (APA Working Group on Stress and Health Disparities, 2017) while developing tangible outcomes through a tailored MBI.

Creswell (2018) and Marshall and Rossman (2010) found that qualitative research methods are effective in exploring phenomena in depth and investigating participants' perceptions and experiences. In this study, a phenomenological case study approach was used to analyze the transformative effects of Afro Flow Yoga on Black women's health and well-being. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the nuances of Afro Flow Yoga and how it is perceived by Black women. Additionally, the case study approach helped identify the features that contribute to the program's success and any challenges encountered, facilitating modifications to culturally adaptive MBIs.

Research Context

The study was conducted virtually on Zoom with a focus on the impact of the practice on the health and well-being of Black women, with key members such as Afro Flow Yoga creators, instructors, and participants serving as significantly involved parties. By examining the benefits of Afro Flow Yoga as a mindfulness intervention specifically tailored for culturally diverse groups, this study aimed to provide important insight into supporting the mental and emotional

well-being of Black women and aspired to add to the growing body of literature on MBIs for Black women.

Research Participants

In an exploratory case study research design, the selection of research participants followed specific rules and considerations. The sample size in exploratory case studies tends to be relatively small, with a focus on depth rather than breadth (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). The adequacy of the sample size can be determined based on theoretical saturation, where data collection continues until new information or insights are no longer emerging. As a case study, the best number of participants for this study depended on the depth of understanding that the researcher aimed to achieve. Participants were based on their relevance to the research topic and possession of firsthand experiences, knowledge, or perspectives that were directly related to the phenomenon under study (Tenny et al., 2021). Typically, case studies involve a small sample size, ranging from one to several participants. According to Creswell (2018), a case study with a single participant can provide rich and detailed data on the phenomenon being studied and qualitative investigation involves small, purposefully selected samples (Tenny et al., 2021). Qualitative sampling allows for collecting rich, detailed, and thick data (Patton, 1990). Using Afro Flow Yoga as a case study, a sample size of two to five participants was optimum, as this allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of Black women who have experienced the historical ills and adverse effects of intersectionality and who engage in Afro Flow Yoga as a mindfulness-based practice to cope with and manage their overall health and wellness.

The primary participants of this research included the creator and one facilitator of Afro Flow Yoga who were knowledgeable and experienced in the implementation of MBIs. They hold firsthand knowledge and experience with the practice and its effects on Black women's health

and well-being. They provided valuable insights into the development and implementation of the practice, as well as any challenges or successes they had observed in its use with this population. Exclusion criteria excluded individuals who had not completed the required Afro Flow Yoga training program or had limited experience in facilitating mindfulness-based practices (Afro Flow Yoga, 2023).

The secondary participants of the study included three Black women who had participated in Afro Flow Yoga for 1 year consistently as a coping tool and were willing to share their experiences in a semi-structured interview. The inclusion criteria for participants focused on self-identified Black women aged 25-60 who have experienced significant relief from symptoms such as stress, pain, anxiety, depression, and other medical and mental health conditions through the transformative effects of Afro Flow Yoga. It was crucial to select individuals who have already witnessed the impact of Afro Flow Yoga on their health and well-being. By including participants who have experienced these transformative effects, the study aimed to gain deeper insights into the specific benefits of Afro Flow Yoga and its potential to enhance the overall health and well-being of Black women in this age group. Exclusion criteria for these participants included individuals who did not self-identify as Black women, those under 25 years old or over 60 years old, and those who had not actively participated in Afro Flow Yoga nor had significant relief from stress, pain, anxiety, depression or any other medical or mental health conditions. Table 4.1 displays key participant demographics, including their age and years of engagement in mindfulness interventions.

No specific materials or tools were used to canvas and recruit participants, as the researcher relied on personal networks and relationships with the Afro Flow Yoga community to identify potential participants. The primary focus was leveraging existing connections and

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Age	Mindfulness Intervention
1	40-45	5+ Years
2	40-45	3+ years
3	25-30	5+ years
4	30-35	5+years
5	45-50	25+ years

relationships to identify potential participants (Saldaña, 2013). Snowball sampling was used to identify secondary participants who were interested in participating in the study based on recommendations from the primary participants. This allowed the researcher to access a population that was not easily reached without the intervention of the primary participants.

Based on the literature, the study took into consideration the impact of intersectionality with social identities, including race, gender, and socioeconomic status, as articulated by Crenshaw (1989). The study recognized the potential effects of the SBW schema on participants, leading to a lack of self-care and increased stress and anxiety (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009), as well as historical ills of systemic racism, oppression, and discrimination inhibiting the mental well-being of Black women (Jones & Guy-Sheftall, 2015). These factors were considered when recruiting and selecting participants. The impact of these factors was significant and essential to the study's focus on exploring culturally adapted mindfulness interventions for Black women. Those who did not meet the proposed study's requirements were informed in writing and thanked for their interest, while those who were eligible were given information about the research and

the invitation to participate. Utilizing these inclusion and exclusion criteria ensured that participants were able to fully engage and contribute to the research outcomes.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

In an exploratory case study research design, careful consideration must be given to the selection and use of instruments for data collection (Algozzine & Hancock, 2017). Several procedures can be used for data collection to gather rich and in-depth information about the phenomenon under investigation. The specific procedures may vary depending on the nature of the study and the research questions. However, some common procedures include interviews, observations, and document analysis. This case study of Afro Flow Yoga presented a distinct opportunity to evaluate the adaptability of mindfulness practices to meet the cultural and social needs of Black women. Therefore, the use of 60-90-minute semi-structured interviews helped to achieve this by allowing for more in-depth insight and understanding of the perspectives and experiences of participants (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher utilized an interview protocol script, which included semi-structured questions that guided the interviews (Appendix D). Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with the creator, facilitators, and Black women who participated in an Afro Flow Yoga program. As one of the primary data collection instruments of a qualitative phenomenological research study, semi-structured interviews are a useful data collection method as they allow for flexibility in the questioning and can lead to more in-depth and personalized responses from the participants (Saldaña, 2013). The questions allow participants to share their personal stories and narratives. The questions were tailored according to the study's research objectives and were subject to review by the dissertation committee and research team to guarantee their appropriateness, relevance, clarity, and reliability.

To ensure convenience, anonymity and encourage open responses, the study utilized the online platform Zoom for conducting interviews. The interviews were one-on-one sessions with various participants, including creators, facilitators, and Black women who have participated in an Afro Flow Yoga program. Ruggiano and Perry (2017) found that online interviews have become increasingly popular in qualitative research due to their ease of use, availability, and cost-effectiveness. Additionally, online semi-structured interviews may elicit more open and honest responses from participants (Gaiser, 2019). The questions were carefully crafted to elicit participants' experiences with Afro Flow Yoga and the potential impact of the practice on their overall health and well-being. Prior to the semi-structured interview, the participants were verbally asked to reconfirm their consent and express any concerns or conflicts of interest they may have (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). This procedure ensured that the participants were well-informed about the purpose of the study and could provide informed consent before proceeding with the interview.

Procedures Used for Data Collection

The data collection instruments included an invitation letter to participants (Appendix A) and a thank you letter (Appendix B). As part of the data collection process, the researcher developed and provided a consent form to all participants (Appendix C). The consent form outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The consent form was reviewed and approved by the St. John Fisher Institutional Review Board (IRB) before being distributed to participants. The use of a consent form is an important ethical practice in research, as it ensures that participants are fully informed of the study's purpose and procedures and have given their voluntary and informed consent to participate (Saldaña, 2013). Additionally, Saldaña (2013)

notes that it is crucial to protect the privacy and confidentiality of research participants and ensure that participants' identities and sensitive information remain secure throughout the research process. Saldaña (2013) suggests that researchers should take appropriate measures to de-identify data and remove any identifying information from transcripts, audio recordings, or other data sources. Therefore, the study used pseudonyms and codes to represent participants, locations, and other identifiable information. By doing so, the study and the research maintained the anonymity of participants.

As part of the ethical procedures for data collection, obtaining permission to conduct research, along with IRB approval, was secured to ensure the protection of the participants' rights and well-being (Saldaña, 2013). Given the historical ills Black women face and the pressures inherent in the SBW schema, it was crucial to ensure that the interview process was non-threatening, non-judgmental, and non-retraumatizing (Collins & Cooper, 2014). The data collection procedure prioritized the participants' well-being and ensured the ethical and unbiased collection of data. It is important to prioritize the participants' well-being in any research study to ensure that they are not subjected to any harm or discomfort. As noted by Babbie (2016), researchers have a responsibility to prioritize the ethical treatment of research participants and ensure that they are not subjected to any harm or discomfort during the study. According to Morse et al. (2002), ensuring the well-being of research participants is crucial to maintaining ethical standards in qualitative research. This helps to maintain the ethical standards of the research and prevent any negative consequences for the participants. Additionally, the unbiased collection of data ensures that the findings of the study are reliable and trustworthy. The importance of unbiased data collection has been emphasized by many researchers, as it helps to enhance the validity and reliability of study results (Creswell, 2018; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Therefore, active listening, minimal interaction, and observation were employed to ensure the collection of data was as unbiased as possible (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Procedures Used for Data Analysis

The study aimed to explore the impact of a culturally adapted MBI and focused on the use of Afro Flow Yoga as a primary intervention and examine its impact on the health and well-being of Black women. The qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews with participants were analyzed using transcriptions of the interviews, familiarization with the data, coding of themes, theme development, review and refinement of themes, and interpretation (Saldaña, 2013). Thematic analysis was also used in conjunction to analyze the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis is a commonly used qualitative data analysis method that involves identifying patterns or themes within the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), the process of thematic analysis involves familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report. The use of thematic analysis provided a structured approach to identifying and analyzing patterns within the data and will help to ensure that the findings are grounded in the experiences and perspectives of the participants. This verification process was particularly important in this study as it aimed to explore the transformative effects of Afro Flow Yoga on Black women's health and well-being within the context of the culturally adaptive mindful model of care.

Although discussed in separate sections, data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For this study, a recursive approach to data analysis was utilized, whereby data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. Swanson and Holton (2005) highlighted the benefits of this approach, including

the ability to narrow or widen the scope of the study in real time, the creation of meaningful metaphors, and the ability to increase the breadth of the literature review. To facilitate this process, the researcher employed both inductive and deductive thinking, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2015). Initially, the process was predominantly inductive, with the researcher examining the data to create tentative themes, categories, and codes. As the analysis progressed, both inductive and deductive reasoning were used to consider the data, with deductive reasoning taking precedence in the final stages of analysis.

Qualitative data analysis is a complex process that involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories in the data that can help generate a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. The qualitative data collected from the participant interviews were transcribed through the Zoom platform. The Zoom software offered accurate and efficient transcription. Once the interviews were transcribed, the qualitative software Delve was used for coding, developing themes, and analyzing data. The researcher found the software user-friendly, making it easier to discover and organize the voices and experiences of the study's participants. The intuitive interface minimized the learning curve associated with using the tool, allowing the researcher to focus on more accurate data finding and analysis (Delve, 2023). Research analysis is an iterative and evolving process of identifying, grouping, and refining themes. Delve's analysis interface, which allows for code merging and hierarchical organization, proved to be adaptable to the researcher's evolving insights. It effectively represented the participants and their perspectives. For instance, it facilitated the categorization of quotes and enabled the researcher to examine the data based on code, pattern, and demographic information. Furthermore, Delve's backlink feature assured the researcher of always knowing the source interviews of the quotes and data, thus ensuring traceability to the raw data.

Delve provided a range of features for coding, including the ability to generate codes and sub-codes. These codes were used to categorize the data into themes and subthemes, which provided a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. The process involved iterative analysis, which allowed the researcher to refine and revise the themes and subthemes as new data was collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Emerging themes in the study were coded from reading the transcripts. As part of this process, an electronic codebook was used to document themes, categories, and codes. The process involved reading the transcripts line by line to find these codes. Read-throughs were conducted several times to ensure that all the codes were recognized. Codes were categorized into larger themes. The coding process includes identifying and recording codes and then categorizing or developing the codes into clusters of meanings or themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Charts and tables were developed to report major themes and direct quotes from the participants. The codes and themes generated from the software analysis provided a clear and comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon, which was then detailed in narrative form to reflect the voices, experiences, and perspectives of the participants of the study. The results of the coding were shared with the participants to allow them to review and update where necessary.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter is not just a presentation of data; it is an exploration of the voices, stories, and perspectives of the participants, honoring their resilience, wisdom, and unique journey toward well-being. It unfolds the rich tapestry of narratives, insights, and perceptions shared by the five participants. As the chapter navigates the landscape of Afro Flow Yoga through the eyes and words of these remarkable women, it uncovers the profound impact of mindfulness practices in their lives, providing insights that can inform culturally adaptive interventions, promote well-being, and contribute to a more inclusive approach to mindfulness in the context of Black women's experiences.

The findings presented are a testament to the significance of cultural adaptation in mindfulness interventions and the unique journey of Black women in their pursuit of holistic health and well-being. Through meticulous coding, categorization, and thematic analysis, meaningful patterns, insights, and emergent themes are extracted from the participants' narratives. Each code, category, and theme represents a thread in the tapestry, weaving together the lived experiences, challenges, and transformations of Black women who have engaged with Afro Flow Yoga.

Research Questions

The findings of this study were presented by addressing the following research questions.

- R1. How do Black women perceive the use of culturally adapted mindfulness practices, specifically Afro Flow Yoga, in relation to their health and well-being?

R2. What are the perceived transformative effects of Afro Flow Yoga on the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of Black women?

R3. What are the cultural and contextual factors that influence the adoption and utilization of mindfulness practices, such as Afro Flow Yoga, among Black women, and how do these factors contribute to their health and well-being outcomes?

Quotes from the interviews were selected and used to represent the voices of the participants in response to the research questions and to provide evidence of the themes.

Data Analysis and Findings

The findings of this study are organized by key themes, subthemes, and alignment to the research questions, highlighting commonalities, differences, and the overall impact of Afro Flow Yoga on the health and well-being of Black women. The aim was to capture the meanings of the participants' authentic experiences and present them in a way that connections are clearly established. The four key themes that emerged from the research were (a) perceptions of mindfulness, (b) coping strategies and mechanisms, (c) enhanced mental health and well-being, and (d) embracing cultural adaptation. The subthemes that emerged from the themes were (a) mindfulness practices and techniques; (b) daily life and emotional regulation; (c) overcoming barriers through social support and community, (d) stress reduction, empowerment, and self-compassion; (e) empowerment in racial and gender identity; (f) reclaiming cultural practices, and (g) inclusion and belonging. The table below is organized by key themes and subthemes related to each research interview question. The aim was to capture the meanings of the participants' authentic experiences and present them in a way that connections are clearly established.

Theme 1: Perceptions of Mindfulness

One of the empowering themes that emerged from the study is the perceptions of mindfulness. This theme delves into participants' diverse perceptions of mindfulness and how these perceptions relate to their overall well-being. It aligns with the research question: "How do Black women perceive the use of culturally adapted mindfulness practices, specifically Afro Flow Yoga, in relation to their health and well-being?" This section explores the nuanced ways in which participants understand and engage with mindfulness within the context of Afro Flow Yoga. Participant 5 emphasized the lack of representation of Black women in traditional spaces where yoga and mindfulness were practiced before joining Afro Flow Yoga. Participant 4's

Table 4.2

Research Questions (RQ), Themes, and Subthemes

Themes	RQ	Subthemes
1. Perceptions of Mindfulness	1	Mindfulness Practices Techniques Daily Life and Emotional Regulation
2. Coping Strategies/Mechanisms	2	Overcoming Barriers through Social Support and Community
3. Enhanced Mental Health and Well-being	2	Stress Reduction, Empowerment, and Self- Compassion
4. Embracing Cultural Adaptation	3	Empowerment in Racial and Gender Identity Reclaiming Cultural Practices Inclusion and Belonging

perception was that mindfulness is a relatively new concept for African American women, especially considering the historical challenges they have faced and the focus on survival. This

perspective suggests that mindfulness may not have been a widely explored practice within this community until more recently. Participant 1 initially associated mindfulness with middle-aged, affluent White women in affluent communities. Participant 1 describes a distressing incident at a yoga studio, highlighting the challenges Black women may face in predominantly White yoga spaces. She recalls a situation where another student essentially attempted to push her to the back of the room, implying that certain spaces were reserved for White practitioners. The participant's response to this was firm; she did not yield to this act of discrimination:

I brought it to the teacher's attention afterwards because it got to a point where I said I'm not moving and the other student actually took her mat and put it on top of mine. I was not budging like fully Rosa Parks mode that day and the teacher just acted like it was nothing. Like she couldn't recognize that it was a situation where it's, you know, kind of like being bullied in this space. And even when I brought it to her attention, there wasn't even an awareness that racism can happen in the room, and how to be able to deal with it when it shows up. Her reaction was more like oh no, it couldn't be that and this is a safe space. And in that moment, I felt like, it's a safe space for y'all, not me! I felt so discouraged. So, then, I think that those situations kind of prompted me to find a safer space for me to practice.

This experience reflects a common stereotype associated with mindfulness practices but also underscores the need for dispelling such misconceptions and making mindfulness more accessible and relatable to a broader and more diverse audience. What's particularly disheartening in these circumstances is the lack of recognition and acknowledgment from facilitators and mindfulness studios. For Participant 1, it became very evident that there was an absence of awareness about racism within the studio, leaving her feeling unsupported and

unheard. While this incident encouraged her to seek a more inclusive and safer space for her yoga practice, it reflects the need for mindfulness environments to be truly welcoming, supportive, and free from racial discrimination. For example, Participant 2 noted a striking lack of diversity in the yoga classes in their community. They emphasized being consistently the only Black individual in these classes. Participant 5 shared similar sentiments:

When I started back in the 90s, there was no representation. In fact, there were very few people of color. There weren't a lot of Black women. In fact, when we would invite Black women into our Afro Flow Yoga practice, we were first teaching it at a yoga studio. And there were issues with that because even though they're coming into Afro Flow Yoga, there might be a macro microaggression at the front door. So we had to take our practice out of a traditional yoga studio because we actually had to be in environments that were welcoming 100% where people felt Black women particularly felt welcomed into a safe space.

Participant 5 highlighted the significance of developing and supporting culturally adapted mindfulness interventions like Afro Flow Yoga, which aims to make mindfulness practices more inclusive from its teachers and facilitators to its overall practice as a tool that can be used by Black women. According to Participant 5, “We had to really break through and share the practice of Afro Flow Yoga because we knew that this is medicine that our women needed and so we started a training program for that reason.”

The theme perceptions of mindfulness emerged as a powerful testament to the evolving understanding of mindfulness within the context of Afro Flow Yoga. Participants' perceptions showcased a diverse spectrum, from stereotypes associated with mindfulness practices to the critical need for creating inclusive and culturally relevant spaces. Participant 1's experience in a

predominantly White yoga space highlighted the challenges faced by Black women, emphasizing the importance of welcoming and supportive environments. The incident underscores the need for greater awareness of racism within mindfulness settings. Evidence suggests that factors such as stereotyping and implicit bias on the part of healthcare providers may contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in health (Smedley et al., 2003). Additionally, Participants 2 and 5 underscored the prevailing lack of diversity in their yoga communities, further advocating for culturally adapted mindfulness interventions like Afro Flow Yoga. The study showed that such adaptations not only create safe and welcoming spaces but also serve as a form of healing medicine for Black women. Participant 5's initiative to develop a training program for Afro Flow Yoga further demonstrated the commitment to making mindfulness more inclusive. This theme set the stage for further exploration into the coping strategies and mechanisms Black women employ, as discussed in Theme 2.

Theme 2: Coping Strategies/Mechanisms

Theme 2, coping strategies and wellness, delves into how Afro Flow Yoga influences the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of Black women. This theme demonstrates how this practice positively impacts the participants. It unveils the ingenious and effective approaches these women employ to deal with life's challenges and bolster their overall health. In particular, the subtheme "overcoming challenges with support from inner circle and community" highlights the significance of friends and a sense of belonging. These accounts provide valuable insights into how Black women confront difficult situations and cultivate their well-being. This section emphasizes the various tools and tactics these women use to navigate life's obstacles and improve their health and happiness.

Participant 1 detailed the challenges of coping with societal and personal pressures, highlighting the common struggle of managing high expectations and responsibilities:

So I think, half the time you're in survival mode, half the time you're in anxiety because you're working twice as hard because you're not enough. And then, God forbid, you're the one that made it out, and everybody else is looking at you. It's like, you're responsible for the family now because you've been able to push through these hurdles. And now we can add more responsibility to your plate. So not only is there pressure professionally, but now there's personal, and half the time, you know, more often than not, you neglect yourself because you're on the lower end of the priorities.

She goes on to share how coping strategies and tools like self-care and mindfulness, to help manage some of their pressures and hurdles, while sounding appealing in theory, lack resonance or acceptance in certain communities:

So, when you hear self-care and mindfulness, it sounds like a cute theory. God forbid you say you want to go to therapy in certain communities. So, all the things that you have to cope with, you actually end up also suppressing.

She shared how when she shared with her family her attendance in therapy: “Now everybody's like walking on eggshells, because now basically they think I'm schizophrenic, and nobody knows how to talk, you know.” This narrative reflects the cultural stigma and misconceptions around mental health practices like therapy. The insights provide an illustration of the struggle and the efforts to encourage diverse coping strategies, fostering an environment that supports different approaches to mental health and well-being.

Participant 4's reflection on this theme resonates with the SBW theoretical framework, highlighting the pressure and challenges they face in daily life:

I think because I look like the way I look. I have to go to work every day, ready to go to war to a certain degree. I can't afford to be slouchy. I can't afford to not be cute. I can't afford to not be sharp. I can't afford to take things personally; I can't afford to have a visceral emotional reaction. I can't afford to do those things at work. I can't afford to do those things when I leave the house.

The narrative reflects the expectation to maintain strength, resilience, and emotional containment, suppressing personal emotions to adhere to societal standards and professional expectations. Participant 4 goes on to express using Afro Flow Yoga as a coping mechanism to counterbalance the societal expectations of constantly maintaining resilience and strength. She describes the significance of Afro Flow Yoga as a space that allows her to experience vulnerability, authenticity, and support. In this environment, she feels the freedom to shed societal pressures, unveiling her true self, highlighting the importance of creating intentional spaces that foster comfort, recognition, and support, aspects that she rarely encounters elsewhere:

So, and I can be imperfect, I can take the wig off. I can listen to Meek Mills, I have that blessing, that privilege in a communal space where I'm recognized and seen as supported. And I have all these moments of vulnerability, and someone encourages my vulnerability and my comfort. I think it is the most crucial thing because it doesn't happen anywhere else. Yoga is really helpful in letting me know that I don't have to be strong. I feel like Afro Flow is intentional about cultivating spaces like that. It is crucial and Afro Flow does that.

Participant 3 shares similar sentiments about having to present as an SBW and reflects on her experiences with Afro Flow Yoga and how this has influenced her professional life. She

emphasizes the profound impact of Afro Flow in developing her resilience and preparedness to confront challenges faced by Black women:

I couldn't, there's no way that I could be at the level that I'm at today. Even within my own job or within my business without the Afro Flow experience, without going through that course, without taking those classes, without being immersed and learning about all of the beautiful, tough experiences that we go through as Black women My whole cohort with Afro Flo was all Black women. And I know there's no way that I could sit in the spaces I now sit in doing the equity work for our district. In all transparency, I would be angry. Not that I'm not angry now, but there's no way, I wouldn't have been ready for that. And I definitely feel like it probably would have put me more in a space of unhealthy behavior. All those microaggressions, all those things spill over into unhealthy behaviors, and it spills over when we leave those spaces, into our homes, starts to spill over into our everyday lives, and so I believe without having that space without having Afro Flow without really coming into communion and learning how we can heal what we can do, practicing those practices. I wouldn't. I don't think I would be where I'm at now, emotionally, physically, and spiritually, to be able to show up how I'm able to show up in these spaces.

This reflects the SBW theoretical framework by illustrating the societal pressures and expectations imposed on Black women. Her narrative highlights the coping mechanism of Afro Flow Yoga in managing these challenges, which aligns with the theme of coping strategies and mechanisms. The culturally adaptive therapeutic space created by Afro Flow Yoga allowed her to confront the struggles of equity work and education with a more balanced emotional, physical, and spiritual stance, preventing potential unhealthy behaviors. Her story underscores the

importance of this practice in supporting emotional resilience and enhancing the capacity of Black women to face professional and personal challenges.

Theme 3: Enhanced Mental Health and Well-being

Theme 3, enhanced mental health and well-being, explores how Afro Flow Yoga profoundly impacts the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of Black women, directly addressing the RQ2. This theme delves into sub-themes such as stress reduction, empowerment, and self-compassion, providing a deeper understanding of Afro Flow Yoga's influence on participants' lives. In alignment with the previous themes, this section offers a comprehensive view of how culturally adapted mindfulness practices, specifically Afro Flow Yoga, shape the experiences of Black women. Through these practices, participants share their experiences, the challenges they overcome, and the sources of empowerment and support they discover. This theme provides valuable insights into the mental well-being of Black women, contributing to a deeper understanding of their health and overall wellness.

Participant 5's reflections highlighted the harrowing historical journey from Africa to America during the slave trade. This narrative revealed the unimaginable hardships and trauma of the Middle Passage, with vivid descriptions of the struggles endured, particularly the separation, confinement, and disconnect from spiritual and cultural roots. She highlighted the substantial burden of transferred trauma she witnessed in her 20-plus years of teaching and healing within Black communities, evidenced in numerous disparities, from childhood obesity to cardiovascular disease and mental health issues. She said, “And so, in learning about all of that, it really set us off on a journey to heal the ancestral, the legacies of trauma that actually could be felt, but often ignored in the body.” For Participant 5, Afro Flow Yoga is positioned as a means

of awakening, enabling a reclamation of self and providing essential spiritual practices, dance, and music to support mental health and well-being. She explained:

Through prayer and meditation, I had a vision of Afro Flow Yoga that came through really through the ancestral realm as a download. And the vision was to combine Afro-Caribbean dance and yoga, and live music, and my husband was a big part of bringing in the live music aspects because there's certain vibrations of the music that really helped heal the different chakras and speak to different parts of our energy systems.

This embodiment of ancestral connections and rhythmic vibrations in the practice resonated with many of the participants of the study. Participant 3 expressed the profound impact of Afro Flow Yoga on personal transformation and stress reduction, associating it with enhanced mental health and well-being. She described her experience after her first class as more than just a class:

Let me say that I knew it was going to be a great class based off of what I saw, but nothing could have prepared me for the experience and what I felt and what I released, that what I still—I call it an experience, to me, Afro Flow Yoga is an experience.

The class she continued left her feeling open, filled, and liberated as she unexpectedly confronted and released pent-up emotions and tensions. Participant 1 sheds light on the transformative and lasting impact of Afro Flow Yoga on participants' mental health and well-being. She highlights the practical application of the practice's vibrational healing in everyday scenarios, empowering individuals to confront challenges with newfound confidence. She shared an anecdote of walking into a boardroom, once anxiety-ridden, and leaving with a sense of liberation and ancestral support, demonstrating how Afro Flow Yoga extends its influence beyond the class, fostering mental resilience and self-assuredness:

You may walk into a boardroom where you felt shy and anxious and move towards liberation and say what needs to be said with full confidence, knowing that you're supported not only by your peers, but your ancestors. I have to believe that what we do in Afro Flow, that you're taking that magic with you.

Her joy of witnessing participants pushing through personal boundaries and echoes the notion of spiritual awakenings through the practice showcases its potential for enhanced mental health and well-being, signifying an unexpected but deeply enriching journey facilitated by Afro Flow Yoga. She continued:

I guess one of my favorite things is to see somebody battling with themselves and witnessing the amazement at how they push through something. And then coming back and processing like, wow, that was amazing, almost as if, you know, just like a spiritual awakening at times, where it's like, I didn't even know I could do something like that and how freeing it was.

These rich reflections provide a profound illustration of Afro Flow Yoga's transformative influence. Through its profound recognition, honor, and adaptation of cultural elements, this practice significantly supports and elevates emotional well-being and mental health. It illuminates the unique position of Afro Flow Yoga as a distinctive form of mindfulness practice. These reflections demonstrate the theme of enhanced mental health and well-being, emphasizing the practice's powerful capacity to unlock and release pent-up emotions, thereby fostering improved mental health and overall well-being.

Theme 4: Embracing Cultural Adaptation

Theme 4, embracing cultural adaptation, delves into the cultural and contextual factors influencing the adoption and utilization of mindfulness practices, particularly Afro Flow Yoga,

among Black women. This theme directly aligns with the RQ3, exploring how these factors contribute to health and well-being outcomes. Through the narratives and experiences shared by participants, insights emerge regarding the importance of cultural relevance in mindfulness practices. These experiences highlight how cultural adaptation fosters a sense of belonging, identity, and empowerment, ultimately enhancing the overall well-being of Black women. This theme offers a unique perspective on how Afro Flow Yoga, as a culturally adapted MBI, positively influences the health and well-being of participants.

The founders of Afro Flow Yoga delved deeply into their cultural heritage and ancestry, emphasizing a meaningful connection to roots. The co-founder shared a personal reflection on her multicultural background, underscoring the importance of acknowledging and embracing roots:

Growing up from a multicultural family of parents, my grandparents, three of them are Jamaican, and my only grandparent I knew was my Scottish-Irish Canadian grandmother. And I knew a lot about my ancestry on my European side and unfortunately, because my grandparents had passed, we didn't know a lot about the Jamaican side, but I would always feel my ancestry very strongly.

Another crucial aspect was their commitment to understanding and integrating ancestral wisdom, which was often overlooked in mainstream narratives on mindfulness. For instance, the practice entailed healing work rooted in Kemetic spirituality principles, deeply grounded in African philosophies. The founders' journey encompassed more than 30 years of immersive healing research:

Nineteen-ninety-four was the time I was doing a lot of deep healing work with a woman named Karina Fua, looking at working through ancient Kemetic spirituality practices that

were really deeply rooted in African philosophies. So we set out on my journey to Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and Benin. So, we started exploring and we went on another 2-year journey. We went to Haiti, we went to Jamaica, throughout the diaspora to really do our own personal healing work and uncover a lot that has been stolen, a lot of knowledge and wisdom. We work with Shaman healers, one from Burkina Faso, named Melodrama Swami. He's now an ancestor. Also, another Shaman from Zimbabwe named Mondasa is a peacemaker, and he really helps restore some of the knowledge, and also a woman from Haiti, who's a Mambos. She has a Vodun Priestess on this; she's a dear friend and also a social worker and a mentor. Her name is Maude Marie Evans, and so they all helped us come back to some wonderful wisdom from that. We went to the slave dungeons—they call them castles, we call them dungeons. And when we went there, we were answering the prayers of my ancestors.

This account emphasizes the significance of recognizing the need for a culturally adaptive MBI and practice that is specifically tailored to Black women.

To embrace one's culture is not to "go back to the 1500s." It is not to reject technology. It is not to reject appropriate social and cultural change. It is not to reject categorically "Western Civilization." It is not to disrespect the culture of anyone. To embrace one's culture is to do merely what any healthy group does." (Hilliard, 1995).

Even in this Afro Flow Yoga's approach embraces inclusivity, honoring the diverse roots and traditions associated with yoga, highlighting it as an inclusive practice. This dedication to cultural adaptation and inclusivity aligns with the study's thematic focus on embracing cultural diversity. According to Participant 1, Afro Flow even respects, recognizes and includes cultural aspects of other cultures with the diaspora, not just Africa:

And even that is unity, because now there's room for Haitian rhythms in Afro flow yoga, understanding that there's just a different stop and, and recognizing how this voyage has, you know, spread out through country to country and making room for all of that to be a part of it. So, although there are African contributions to the foundation of Afro for yoga, I would say, all over the Caribbean, and they're looking at all indigenous populations from all over and incorporating that as well.

This act of embracing other cultures while revering and requiring an understanding of its own cultural roots is recognized as a profound and commendable attribute of Afro Flow Yoga, aligning with the theme of cultural adaptation. The practice goes deeper in its respect and recognition of the diversity of mindfulness practices.

Participant 5 shed light on how Afro Flow Yoga introduces a distinctive and ancestral approach to mindfulness practices, notably through the formation of participants in a circular configuration. This design goes beyond a mere physical arrangement; it profoundly engenders a sense of community and interconnectedness. The significance of this shift lies in its ability to foster heart-to-heart connections among participants. In the context of Participant 5's commentary, the linear grid system employed in traditional yoga classes is likened to a method of division and separation. This metaphorical reference to urban planning, such as projects and apartments, highlights the grid system's historical role in segmenting and isolating individuals, ultimately impeding their ability to trust and engage with those around them. Afro Flow Yoga's departure from this grid system, favoring a circular communal arrangement, represents a meaningful departure from this conventional model. It signifies a return to a more ancestral, community-oriented, and inclusive approach that embodies the core values of mindfulness practices. Adding to this is the use of drums and rhythms. Most, if not all, the participants noted

that the use of drums and familiar rhythms are welcome and makes them feel more connected to further embrace this Afro Flow practice. According to Participant 5:

The drums and the rhythms just naturally speaks to the heart and the breath, and it speaks to our ancestral wisdom. The drums is a call that, you know, our first drum is our hearts and that's the rhythms that the drum in Afro Flow is calling for, there's a remembrance . . . of particular rhythms. So, there's particular rhythms that are connected to, whether it's Orishas and elemental flows of water, the incorporation of drums and rhythms adds further depth to this connection, evoking ancestral wisdom and deep healing.”

Participant 1 highlights how Afro Flow Yoga embodies cultural adaptation, fostering a strong sense of community and inclusivity in its mindfulness practices. She shared that participants actively engage with one another, sharing wisdom and acknowledging the presence of everyone's ancestors, which fosters a nurturing communal bond that extends beyond class activities. She noted that Afro Flow Yoga infuses cultural influences such as the healing power of drums, the use of the circle formation and an emphasis on acknowledging Africa's powerful contributions, counteracting narratives that often begin with enslavement. According to Participant 1, Afro Flow Yoga emphasizes:

The greatness of Blackness and that Africa’s history does not begin with enslavement, but really recognizing the powerful contributions of Africa. Afro Flow looks back at histories of yoga, the parts of the story of yoga that you don't hear often. It proudly presents all the receipts of Africans doing yoga while acknowledging India's contributions as well, but just not leaving Africa out of the equation.

Participant 1’s rich context of Afro Flow’s embracement of Africa’s contribution sheds light on the diverse history of yoga, emphasizing African engagement in yoga's origins. Participant 2

shared similar sentiments of the deep healing and transformative impact, meaningful inclusion and culturally adaptive practices of Afro Flow Yoga, “Language aside, philosophical foundations aside, with Afro Flow, the way that you move your body, the way that you connect, the way that you activate yourself and become mindful of who you are, nobody can argue that it's real.” She further eloquently elucidated how Afro Flow Yoga integrates elements of yoga philosophy and foundational training. This is particularly noteworthy, as the practice of Afro Flow necessitates a robust foundation, including a 200-hour baseline of yoga knowledge. This requirement is viewed as an acknowledgment and honoring of the intrinsic value embedded within mindfulness practices, emphasizing that this practice transcends semantics and philosophical distinctions. Participant 1 gave a great example of this:

So we'll do a vinyasa flow in the beginning. And it's combined in a very beautiful way. So, somebody who's knowledgeable of this, you'll know the flow when you come as well. So those things are similar. And they're incorporated. So you're not completely lost. If you've been taking yoga classes for the last 10 years and you come to Afro Flow, you're not completely lost. You're surprised at the other elements that are woven in, but it's also a part that's familiar to folks that have been taking regular yoga classes.”

Participants 2, 3, and 5 shared similar sentiments that while Afro Flow Yoga respects the foundational concepts of yoga, it simultaneously enriches this discipline by incorporating diverse cultural elements.

These sentiments resonate with the perspectives shared by all the participants of this study, emphasizing Afro Flow Yoga's ability to transcend conventional boundaries and foster a holistic, culturally diverse, and inclusive approach to mindfulness practices. The researcher found that Afro Flow Yoga's emphasis on physical embodiment, mindful connection, and self-

awareness underscores its unique universality and inclusion and the successful way it has made cultural adaptation and relevance a pivotal part of its practice. Its tangible outcomes and benefits remain indisputable.

Summary of Results

This phenomenological explorative case study delved into the lived experiences of five Black women, aiming to unveil the profound impact of the culturally adaptive mindfulness practices of Afro Flow Yoga on the health and well-being of this demographic. The resounding sentiments expressed by these women collectively underscored Afro Flow Yoga's remarkable ability to transcend traditional boundaries, championing a holistic, culturally rich, and inclusive approach to mindfulness. This study demonstrates how Afro Flow Yoga has successfully integrated cultural adaptation and relevance, producing undeniable, tangible benefits.

Engaging in semi-structured interviews, the participants offered insights addressing the study's research questions. The researcher followed an extensive iterative analysis process involving individual exploratory notes, statements, and themes from participant responses. These findings accentuate the need for cultural and intentional representation in mindfulness practices and interventions. These results shed light on the racialized and intersectional experiences of these Black women and the subsequent impact of their interaction with Afro Flow Yoga. Each of the five participants, self-identified as Black women, shared testimonies of significant relief from symptoms such as stress, pain, anxiety, depression, and other medical and mental health conditions after engaging with Afro Flow Yoga. The study addressed three central research questions. The three research questions that were central to this study were:

1. How do Black women perceive the use of culturally adapted mindfulness practices, specifically Afro Flow Yoga, in relation to their health and well-being?

2. What are the perceived transformative effects of Afro Flow Yoga on the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of Black women?
3. What are the cultural and contextual factors that influence the adoption and utilization of mindfulness practices, such as Afro Flow Yoga, among Black women, and how do these factors contribute to their health and well-being outcomes?

Each of these research questions addressed in this chapter outlines the process for data analysis as well as document themes and subthemes arising from the data analysis. The four themes and subthemes identified during the analysis process were: (a) perceptions of mindfulness (mindfulness practices techniques in daily life and emotional regulation); (b) coping strategies and mechanisms (overcoming barriers through social support and community); (c) enhanced mental health and well-being (empowerment in racial and gender identity reclaiming cultural practices inclusion and belonging); and (d) embracing cultural adaptation (stress reduction, empowerment, and self-compassion). Chapter 5 of this study offers further insight, discussing the implications of the findings, acknowledging limitations, offering recommendations, and presenting the study's conclusion. The journey through Afro Flow Yoga, as witnessed in this research, elucidates the transformative potential of culturally adaptive mindfulness practices in enhancing the health and well-being of Black women.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This study underscores the significance of creating culturally adaptable mindfulness interventions tailored specifically to meet the distinct needs of Black women. The study emphasizes the importance of maintaining the core principles of established mindfulness techniques while adapting them to align with the cultural nuances and experiences of Black women. Known for her work in health disparities, stress, and resilience among Black women, Woods-Giscombé's (2010) research on the impact of mindfulness practices emphasizes the need for culturally adapted and context-aware interventions that address the unique challenges and strengths within this demographic. Mindfulness, as seen from Woods-Giscombé's perspective, encompasses a range of practices designed to facilitate stress reduction, foster resilience, and promote overall well-being, specifically tailored to the socio-cultural context and experiences of the individuals, particularly focusing on the needs and nuances within Black women's lives (Woods-Giscombé & Lobel, 2008). Her research emphasizes the significance of culturally adapted mindfulness interventions that acknowledge and address the specific stressors, historical factors, and unique strengths within this demographic, aiming to create effective and meaningful strategies for well-being and resilience (Woods-Giscombé & Gaylord, 2014).

This study endeavors to not only understand but also address and promote inclusivity and culturally adapted interventions for diverse populations and aims to contribute to the growing body of research that highlights the need for cultural adaptation in mindfulness interventions. The research of this study supports the development of MBIs that resonate with and are relevant

to specific populations, such as Black women, while still acknowledging the broader historical and philosophical underpinnings of mindfulness. By embracing the developed culturally adapted practices of Afro Flow Yoga, this study fosters and promotes a more inclusive and empowering mindfulness-based intervention that aligns with the diverse backgrounds and experiences of Black women.

Adding to the research on MBI, this chapter delves into the transformative effects of culturally adapted mindfulness practices on the health and well-being of Black women. This approach aligns with Woods-Giscombé's (2010) emphasis on stress reduction and resilience-building within a socioculturally sensitive framework, addressing the specific challenges and strengths of this demographic. By recognizing and addressing these needs, the study echoes Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Hale et al., 2018), which posits that individuals must have their fundamental physiological, safety, and esteem needs met before progressing to higher levels of well-being and self-actualization. This research emphasizes the importance of fulfilling these foundational needs within a culturally relevant context, contributing to the comprehensive well-being and healing of Black women.

While the primary aim of this chapter is to translate the learned insights into practical implications, the discussions in this section will delve into the nuanced implications of these transformative experiences in Afro Flow Yoga and how these insights could be utilized in various settings, including health, mental health, wellness interventions, community support, and culturally adaptive mindfulness practices. Furthermore, this chapter explores the limitations encountered during the research process and how these limitations affect the generalizability of the findings. It also suggests strategies to mitigate these limitations in future studies or interventions. This chapter is not only a culmination of the study but also a stepping stone for

future research and the application of Afro Flow Yoga and other similar culturally adaptive MBI in enhancing the health and well-being of diverse communities, especially Black women. The conclusion will summarize the key takeaways, offering a comprehensive understanding of the impact and the lessons learned. This section aims to leave the reader with valuable insights and actionable recommendations for future exploration and practice in the field of culturally adapted mindfulness interventions.

Implications of Findings

The implications of the findings section in this chapter serves as a bridge from the findings described in Chapter 4. Chapter 4 detailed a comprehensive examination of themes and subthemes extracted from the qualitative exploration of Black women's experiences with culturally adaptive mindfulness interventions, particularly Afro Flow Yoga, in the context of enhancing health and well-being. Through an in-depth analysis of participant interviews, several key facets emerged, providing profound insight into the transformative potential and intricate nature of these mindfulness practices for Black women.

The qualitative data uncovered in Chapter 4 shed light on four pivotal themes: (a) perceptions of mindfulness, encompassing everyday techniques and emotional regulation; (b) coping strategies and mechanisms, elucidating the resilience developed through community and social support; (c) enhanced mental health and well-being, underscoring the empowerment in racial and gender identity and the sense of inclusion and belonging; and (d) embracing cultural adaptation, focusing on stress reduction, empowerment, and self-compassion. The narratives shared in Chapter 4 represent a vivid portrayal of the lived experiences of the study's participants, shedding light on the instrumental influence of culturally adapted mindfulness practices on their emotional, physical, and mental well-being.

From the data, the findings were that Afro Flow Yoga serves as a transformative space where Black women find solace and empowerment through a sense of belonging and connection to their cultural roots. Throughout the narratives of participants, a consistent and prevailing theme was the profound significance of experiencing visibility, safety, and a remarkable positive transformation as a direct result of their engagement in Afro Flow Yoga. Participants 1, 3, and 5 shared that they had so much trouble finding a truly inclusive mindfulness space, and when they found Afro Flow Yoga, it felt so rejuvenating, and they often left a practice filled with hope to continue dealing with the ups and downs of life without letting it consume them. They shared that they felt a sense of community in a space that was designed with them in mind. Participants 1 and 5 expressed immense joy in witnessing individuals' transformation during Afro Flow Yoga sessions. They described the transition of participants from feeling anxious and self-conscious to a state of liberation, observing them gradually shedding inhibitions and feeling completely free by the session's end. Their belief in the participants carrying this liberated spirit proved by Afro Flow Yoga into the world reflects the belief that what this practice offers “on the mat carries over into daily life,” fostering a sense of inner freedom and empowerment that is needed beyond the class. These findings underline the vital role of Afro Flow Yoga in cultivating, through its cultural adaptation, a sense of belonging and promoting self-actualization among Black women. By creating a nurturing environment rich in cultural authenticity and shared needs of these women. The sense of community, cultural inclusivity, and opportunities for self-expression provided by the practice remarkably mirror the principles outlined in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, pointing towards a holistic approach to fostering emotional and mental well-being among participants (Braxton, 2017; Evans, 2021; Hyde, 2012).

The theoretical frameworks that guided this study and the literature review emphasized that a culturally adaptable mindfulness-based practice should cater to the distinct historical and sociocultural challenges faced by Black women. The findings of this study underscore the significance of Afro Flow Yoga, which, from the findings, creates safe spaces, addresses disparities, and acknowledges the ramifications of historical trauma within the Black community. For instance, the macro theoretical framework of this study, intersectionality, highlights the essential nature of culturally adaptive mindfulness interventions and the need to meaningfully recognize and address the multifaceted challenges that stem from the intersecting societal factors of race and gender that affect Black women. The lived experiences shared by the five women in this study vividly demonstrated the efficacy of Afro Flow Yoga in acknowledging these intricate identities and their associated challenges. It illustrates that Afro Flow Yoga meaningfully and intentionally recognizes and tailors culturally adaptive mindfulness practices that promote holistic well-being and resilience for Black women.

The findings of this study shed light on the need for broader research and serve as avenues to improve health outcomes and develop actionable intervention strategies to address health disparities. The findings of this study, guided by the research questions and informed by the literature review around the study's meso theoretical framework, SBW highlights the need for culturally adaptive mindfulness practices like Afro Flow Yoga. Historically, the SBW concept has been embraced as a coping mechanism by Black women contending with the intersection of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination (Stewart, 2017). This study challenges the efficacy of the SBW and suggests that Afro Flow Yoga might serve as a more effective mechanism. Unlike SBW, which masks issues through the expectation of perpetually demonstrating strength (Watson, 2013), the study found that Afro Flow Yoga creates a pathway

to enhance overall health outcomes and provides practical insights for interventions, offering a more holistic approach to addressing health disparities.

Like Kabat-Zinn's mindfulness-based approaches, Afro Flow Yoga offers strategies to address these challenges by advocating for present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acknowledgment of experiences, aligning with the need to create spaces in interventions that encourage self-care and community support (Kabat-Zinn, 2003). This synthesis paves the way for more comprehensive and effective interventions that honor strengths while addressing critical needs for the health and well-being of Black women. By embracing these complex and multi-layered identities, the practice fosters a more comprehensive approach, addressing well-being, resilience, and mental health support within the distinct, intersecting societal realms that influence the experiences of Black women. The findings and implications of this study, through the case study approach, rooted in the lived experiences and testimonies of these women, reinforce the relevance and importance of a culturally adaptive mindfulness intervention such as Afro Flow Yoga for the well-being of Black women.

Limitations

Despite the compelling strides made towards increased inclusivity, equity, and the transformation of the yoga landscape, there remain underlying challenges and constraints faced by Black women. Stephanie Evans perceptively notes that despite their pivotal role in shaping yoga's future and advocating for more inclusive practices, Black women persistently grapple with various obstacles and limitations within the domain of yoga and mindfulness practices (Evans, 2021).

This section seeks to delve into the limitations present within this study and recognize the complexities that might have influenced the findings and their interpretation in Chapter 4. The

exploration aims to outline three primary limitations associated with the context and scope of the research conducted with Black women engaging in Afro Flow Yoga.

Firstly, the study was geographically confined to a specific region, thus potentially limiting the diversity of experiences observed within various cultural and regional contexts. The participants were predominantly from urban settings, and the findings may not fully represent the broader spectrum of Black women's experiences in more rural or suburban areas. This geographic constraint might have restricted the generalizability and applicability of the findings to a wider demographic of Black women, whose experiences within these different settings could vary significantly.

The second limitation is the absence of archival data and in-person observation of Afro Flow Yoga. This absence restricts a holistic understanding of the practice's contextual nuances and its full impact on participants' well-being. For instance, some of the participants mentioned that it is welcome for them to see Black women on the signage and promotional products of Afro Flow Yoga. The researcher, through limited research, acknowledges seeing such images. However, a deep dive into the use of such images can add to the limitations of this study. Moreover, the predominant use of semi-structured interviews, while allowing for rich qualitative insights, inherently holds the potential for bias through participants' subjective self-reporting. Such subjectivity might confine the depth and scope of experiences, impacting the comprehensive comprehension of Afro Flow Yoga's effects on Black women's health. Furthermore, the limited sample size might not adequately represent the diverse range of experiences and viewpoints within the community, constraining the study's capacity to capture the full spectrum of impacts and perceptions.

Lastly, the study may encounter limitations owing to the absence of a longitudinal analysis. Conducting a qualitative study limits the ability to explore the long-term effects of Afro Flow Yoga on Black women's health and well-being over time. Longitudinal studies can provide essential insights into changes or developments in participants' experiences and the sustainability of the intervention (Roberts, 2010). They allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the permanence of outcomes or shifts in participants' well-being through a particular intervention, a valuable aspect considering the depth and complexity of well-being changes. Research spanning an extended duration enables researchers to observe the patterns of change, adaptation, or regression that might occur in the journey toward self-actualization and well-being resulting from Afro Flow Yoga or similar practices. The lack of long-term data in this study prevents a robust assessment of the stability and ongoing impact of Afro Flow Yoga on participants' health and well-being, thus highlighting a potential area for future research.

While these limitations impact the scope and depth of the study, they provide valuable insights into the multifaceted challenges within the realm of yoga practices for Black women. Recognizing and understanding these limitations is pivotal to building a more robust foundation for future research and action and leads to the recommendations section of this study. By leveraging the lessons learned from these limitations, this study aims to pave the way for more inclusive, equitable, and culturally adaptive mindfulness approaches in future studies and interventions concerning yoga practices and Black women's well-being. The next section will provide valuable strategies and suggestions to enhance the relevance and applicability of such studies, offering a blueprint for a more inclusive, comprehensive, and culturally sensitive approach to address the multifaceted challenges faced by Black women within mindfulness practices and interventions.

Recommendations

Afro Flow Yoga, as a culturally adaptive mindfulness intervention, stands to make a substantial difference in the health and well-being of Black women. The transformative insights of the lived experiences of Black women in the context of Afro Flow Yoga present an immersive understanding of the impact of culturally adaptive mindfulness practices. The Afro Flow Yoga model, as depicted by the participants, functions as a reflective representation of inclusive and culturally attuned mindfulness, providing a community-centric space for the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of Black women. The critical findings spotlight the essence of Afro Flow Yoga as a catalyst for empowered, culturally aware, and holistic well-being for Black women.

Formal Validation and Recognition

Official listing and documentation of Afro Flow Yoga as a culturally adaptive mindfulness intervention holds the potential to present a crucial milestone in acknowledging the value of this practice for the health and wellness of Black women. Such formal validation and acknowledgment provide an essential step in establishing the credibility and effectiveness of this intervention within the healthcare system, wellness programs, and the sphere of mindfulness practices. By gaining official recognition, Afro Flow Yoga could acquire the due acknowledgment that serves as a validation of its significant impact on the well-being of Black women, potentially increasing its integration into healthcare and social welfare structures. This recognition would likely encourage the inclusion of Afro Flow Yoga as a recommended practice, allowing it to be used in clinical, therapeutic, and wellness settings. Consequently, such official recognition could broaden its reach and availability, enhancing accessibility and potential support for Black women seeking culturally relevant wellness practices.

Enhanced Accessibility and Inclusivity

Recognition of Afro Flow Yoga as a mindfulness intervention stands to significantly enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of health and wellness programs for Black people, encompassing women of all ages. By embracing this practice, health professionals and practitioners can expand their services, providing a culturally relevant and inclusive option for supporting the emotional and mental well-being of Black individuals. This integration addresses unique challenges in stress management, self-care, and overall health maintenance faced by Black people. Acknowledging the increasing longevity of Black women (Roberts, 2010), future studies aiming to replicate this research may consider widening the demographic age group from 25-60 to 18-70. Such an adjustment accommodates diverse experiences across various life stages, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Afro Flow Yoga's effects on well-being. As a recognized practice, Afro Flow Yoga becomes an inclusive resource within the spectrum of wellness options, ensuring access to supportive methods aligned with the diverse experiences and needs of Black individuals. This recognition fosters a culturally sensitive approach to mental health and emotional well-being tailored to specific backgrounds and challenges, reinforcing the inclusivity of healthcare, and promoting overall well-being.

Research Opportunities and Funding

The official recognition and documentation of Afro Flow Yoga as a mindfulness intervention may catalyze new research initiatives and funding opportunities. Such acknowledgment could pave the way for comprehensive and in-depth studies exploring the lasting effects of this practice on the mental, emotional, and physical health of Black women. The backing of formal recognition may attract additional funding streams, potentially leading to increased financial resources for research. This increased funding would empower researchers,

practitioners, and healthcare professionals to collaboratively refine, validate, and expand the application and efficacy of Afro Flow Yoga. This collective effort might explore its impact in clinical settings as well as community-based environments, ultimately contributing to a more profound understanding of the practice and its potential to support the mental and emotional well-being of Black women.

These recommendations echo the importance of retaining cultural authenticity and the participatory essence within Afro Flow Yoga while also advocating for increased accessibility and relevance to the well-being of Black women. By centering on these directions, future research can further contribute to the ongoing evolution and refinement of Afro Flow Yoga, ensuring it remains an empowering and culturally responsive mindfulness practice for Black women. These recommendations seek to build upon the foundation laid by the current research, urging a focus on more holistic, culturally sensitive, and community-engaged yoga practices. They call for a concerted effort towards understanding, respecting, and incorporating the diverse needs and identities of Black women within the broader landscape of yoga and mindfulness practices.

Conclusion

Through this study, an in-depth exploration was undertaken to understand the transformative impact of Afro Flow Yoga as a culturally adaptive mindfulness practice for Black women. The narratives of the participants underscored the significance of Afro Flow Yoga in promoting mental, emotional, and physical well-being, offering a powerful space for healing, self-expression, and stress reduction. The findings illuminated the need for culturally adaptive and inclusive mindfulness practices, emphasizing the value of cultural authenticity in nurturing a supportive and relatable wellness framework. Afro Flow Yoga's emphasis on embracing cultural

elements, such as dance, music, spirituality, and communal engagement, emerged as a vital component in shaping the mental health and well-being of Black women. Moreover, the study revealed the interconnectedness between cultural authenticity within Afro Flow Yoga, Kemetic Yoga practices rooted in ancient Egyptian philosophy, and the BREATHE model's psychological dimensions, hinting at a potential comprehensive approach to enhancing emotional and mental well-being in Black communities. The researcher found that Afro Flow Yoga's emphasis on physical embodiment, mindful connection, and self-awareness underscores its unique universality of inclusion and the successful way it has made cultural adaptation and relevance a pivotal part of its practice and the tangible outcomes and benefits remain indisputable.

The limitations identified in the study within the yoga community, such as issues related to representation, cultural appropriation, and access to resources, signal the need for a more equitable space within the realm of yoga, specifically for Black women. Despite these limitations, the Afro Flow Yoga experience provided an environment for healing, self-awareness, and personal transformation. The implications of this study suggest a critical need for future research to delve deeper into Afro Flow Yoga's cultural elements and how these impact the well-being of Black women. Recognizing and studying the specific cultural components integrated into Afro Flow Yoga can offer a deeper understanding of the practice's efficacy in promoting mental health and wellness. Such research will pave the way for the development of culturally relevant, inclusive, and supportive mindfulness practices for Black women.

This study underscores the pivotal role Afro Flow Yoga plays in fostering holistic well-being by weaving cultural authenticity into a space that offers Black women a means for healing and wellness. Afro Flow Yoga stands as a beacon of hope, providing a culturally adaptive platform that not only fosters physical movement and mindfulness but also honors and celebrates

the cultural richness embedded within the practice. The findings of this study acknowledge and recognize the transformative power of Afro Flow Yoga as a culturally adaptive mindfulness practice and intervention, significantly shaping the health and well-being of Black women.

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Appendix A

Invitation Letter to Participants

Danielle A. Jones
Doctoral Candidate

Date

Participant's Name
Participant's Address

Dear _____,

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Research Study - The Mindful Way: An Explorative Case Study of the Transformative Effects of Afro Flow Yoga a Culturally Adapted Mindfulness Intervention on The Health and Well-being of Black Women.

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to invite you to participate in an important research study titled "The Mindful Way: An Exploration of Culturally Adapted Mindfulness Practices for Black Women." This study aims to investigate the transformative effects of the culturally adapted mindfulness impact of Afro Flow Yoga on the health and well-being of Black women. Your valuable insights and experiences as a Black woman are highly valued and sought after for this study.

By participating in this study, you will contribute to a deeper understanding of the potential benefits of culturally adapted mindfulness practices for Black women's health and well-being. Your participation will help inform future interventions and support systems tailored specifically to the needs and experiences of Black women.

Participation in this study involves sharing your experiences and perspectives through semi-structured interviews via Zoom. The estimated time commitment for your participation is approximately 60-90 minutes. Rest assured that all data collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. Only aggregated results will be reported, ensuring that your privacy is protected.

Your involvement in this study is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. Your decision to participate or decline will not affect your relationship with the research or St. John Fisher University.

To further ensure the protection of your privacy and confidentiality, all data collected will be securely stored and accessible only to authorized researchers. Any personal identifiers will be removed, and all findings will be reported in a manner that ensures your anonymity.

If you choose to participate, please complete and sign the enclosed consent form, indicating your informed consent to take part in the study.

Thank you for considering this invitation. Your participation will make a valuable contribution to our research on the transformative effects of Afro Flow Yoga on Black women's health and well-being. We sincerely appreciate your time, insights, and support. If you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher Danielle A. Jones daj06562@sjfc.edu. Or 914.305.0905.

Yours sincerely,

Danielle A. Jones
Research Doctoral Candidate
St. John Fisher University
daj06562@sjfc.edu | 914.305.0905

Appendix B

Thank You Letter

Dear: _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study *The Mindful Way: An Explorative Case Study of the Transformative Effects of Afro Flow Yoga a Culturally Adapted Mindfulness Intervention on The Health and Well-being of Black Women*. Your position and participation in this practice make you an ideal candidate for this research. As a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College, Rochester, NY, I have received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study as part of my dissertation.

The primary focus of this research is to explore the impact and transformative effects of Afro Flow Yoga on the health and well-being of Black women. The participants of the study will include Afro Flow Yoga owners, facilitators, instructors, and participants. Through this study, we aim to gain valuable insights into the ways in which Afro Flow Yoga, as a culturally adapted mindfulness practice, can positively influence the lives of Black women.

By examining the experiences of individuals involved in various roles within Afro Flow Yoga, we seek to uncover the potential benefits of this practice in promoting mental, emotional, and physical well-being for Black women. Your unique perspective in Afro Flow Yoga will be invaluable in contributing to our understanding of its transformative effects.

I am grateful for your participation in this study, and I would like to schedule a Zoom interview at a time that is convenient for you. We will work together to select a comfortable and suitable meeting location that best aligns with your preferences.

Once again, thank you for your willingness to be part of "The Mindful Way" study, which promises to enrich our knowledge and advance the well-being of Black women through Afro Flow Yoga.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]

Appendix C

Letter of Support from Afro Flow Yoga

Dear Danielle A. Jones,

I am writing this letter in enthusiastic support of your proposed research study, *The Mindful Way: An Explorative Case Study of the Transformative Effects of Afro Flow Yoga a Culturally Adapted Mindfulness Intervention on The Health and Well-being OF Black Women*. As you conduct this study in partial fulfillment of your requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership, I am confident that your research will make a meaningful contribution to the field of mindfulness practices and Black women's health.

Your study aims to understand the intersectional experiences of Black women, considering the impact of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination on their health and well-being. By exploring the transformative effects of Afro Flow Yoga, you seek to address the unique challenges faced by Black women and promote overall well-being. I believe that your research has the potential to shed light on the profound impact of intersectionality on the health of Black women and the significance of adopting culturally adapted mindfulness practices for their care.

I am pleased to support your research efforts, and our organization is fully committed to assisting you in this important endeavor. To facilitate your study, we will collaborate by emailing qualifying Afro Flow Yoga instructors and participants who have been engaged in our program and/or our subsidiary programs, providing a brief explanation of the study, and attaching your flier.

Rest assured that we understand and respect the importance of confidentiality in research. We trust that you will not disclose any identifying information about our organization or the women you interview without written consent from both the women and the organization.

Please feel free to contact me for any further communication or assistance related to your study. I can be reached at [your email address] or [your phone number]. Once again, I extend my wholehearted support and best wishes for the success of your research study.

Sincerely,

[Your Name] [Your Title/Position] [Your Organization]