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# Good Evening and Thanks for Joining Us Tonight, I’m a Black Female Journalist Struggling to Achieve and Ascend in a Television Newsroom Near You: A Qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study

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# Good Evening and Thanks for Joining Us Tonight, I'm a Black Female Journalist Struggling to Achieve and Ascend in a Television Newsroom Near You: A Qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study


## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the lived experiences of six Black female television journalists working in newsrooms throughout the United States. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select the participants, with half the participants coming from a Black online networking group, Black Girls in Broadcasting, and the other half coming from the snowball sampling. The data were collected via Zoom utilizing one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes. The qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology used in this allowed the participants to not only share their lived experiences but explain how they made sense of what happened to them. The research findings directly relate to the research question and purpose and produced raw and revealing lived experiences from the participants. The findings are significant because they not only show a pattern of racism and discrimination toward Black female journalists in the United States that has existed for over 80 years, but they also show there is a bias in the recruitment of Black female college students by television stations for television intern programs. The implications of this study are that Black female journalists are discriminated against long before they enter newsrooms; and without newsroom management understanding the social value and profitability of diverse newsrooms, Black female journalists will continue to struggle with upward mobility. Recommendations include targeted diversity, equity, and inclusion training for newsroom executives.



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# Good Evening and Thanks for Joining Us Tonight, I'm a Black Female Journalist Struggling to Achieve and Ascend in a Television Newsroom Near You: A Qualitative Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study

By

Carol Elaine Houston

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

EdD in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Daniele Lyman-Torres, EdD

Committee Member

Elizabeth Keida, EdD

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher University

August 2023

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2023

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my mom, Lizzie Fox, I thank you for the steadfast support, love, and encouragement that you gave to me, continually reminding me that I could achieve this major goal. We both knew it would not be easy to work as a full-time anchor/reporter in the stressful environment of a television newsroom while trying to earn this degree. However, you were a constant reminder that I had it in me to succeed.

To my brothers and sister, thank you for your love, support, and understanding that getting this degree was my top priority, and, as a result, I had to give up traveling home for birthdays, holidays, and celebrations. I will always love you.

A special thank you to my friend and classmate, Dr. Carolyn McLaughlin, who joined me on a journey few African American women have had the opportunity to take. We started this journey together in May of 2021, and we saw it to its conclusion 28 months later. It was tougher than we realized, but we persevered. We cried, we laughed, and we made it.

However, none of this would have happened without the wisdom of Dr. C. Michael Robinson. He recruited me for this program, and he was the first person who believed in me and convinced me I could accomplish this dream. I also want to thank Dr. Daniele Lyman-Torres for guidance and for being just a phone call, text, or email away. Thank you for always, always believing in me. Additionally, I want thank Dr. Elizabeth Keida for her valued suggestions, corrections, and support.

I would also like to dedicate this degree to Black women. To the Black women who feel a doctorate is a mountain too high to climb–lace up your hiking boots and start walking in this

direction. To the Black female television journalists, you are queens, you are warriors, you are the heroines. You fight in newsrooms every single day to tell the true stories of Black people, and you do so while enduring microaggressions, slights, and hypervisibility. I see you. I have been you. Never forget you follow in a long line of fearless Black female journalists, from Alice Dunnigan to Belva Davis to Carole Simpson.

To my aunt Minnie; my grandmother Goldie; and my great, great grandmother Jennie Caldwell, a former slave, you are all in heaven now, but I know you are smiling down on me with happiness and pride; proud that I carried out the dreams you could never have imagined for yourselves. I am not oblivious to your sacrifices or the blessings you were denied. I am humbled and remain in awe of your perseverance and grateful to be a part of your lineage.

Finally, to God. There are no words that suffice as I try to express my appreciation and gratitude to You for allowing me to have this gift of an education. I do not take it lightly and hope to do the work that is worthy of this opportunity.

Carol Elaine Houston

August 11, 2023

## Biographical Sketch

Elaine Houston is currently the Emmy award-winning reporter and co-anchor of the 5:00 and 5:30 news at WNYT-TV in Albany, New York. Ms. Houston graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in 1978 and graduated with a Master of Sciences degree from Empire State University in 2009. She came to St. John Fisher University in the summer of 2021 and began doctoral studies in the EdD Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Houston pursued her research in exploring the lived experiences of Black female journalists in television newsrooms in the United States under the direction of Dr. Daniele Lyman-Torres and Dr. Elizabeth Keida and received the EdD degree in 2023.

## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine the lived experiences of six Black female television journalists working in newsrooms throughout the United States. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select the participants, with half the participants coming from a Black online networking group, Black Girls in Broadcasting, and the other half coming from the snowball sampling. The data were collected via Zoom utilizing one-on-one, semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes.

The qualitative interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology used in this allowed the participants to not only share their lived experiences but explain how they made sense of what happened to them. The research findings directly relate to the research question and purpose and produced raw and revealing lived experiences from the participants. The findings are significant because they not only show a pattern of racism and discrimination toward Black female journalists in the United States that has existed for over 80 years, but they also show there is a bias in the recruitment of Black female college students by television stations for television intern programs.

The implications of this study are that Black female journalists are discriminated against long before they enter newsrooms; and without newsroom management understanding the social value and profitability of diverse newsrooms, Black female journalists will continue to struggle with upward mobility. Recommendations include targeted diversity, equity, and inclusion training for newsroom executives.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

She earned three Emmys, a Peabody, and two DuPont-Columbia awards, yet network executives refused to put her name on the show open to her newscast to identify the weekend broadcast as World News Sunday with Carole Simpson (Simpson, 2010). Simpson was ABC News' first Black female to anchor a major network newscast, and she commanded the weekend anchor desk for 15 years (Simpson, 2010). Along with the show open snub, Simpson noted instances of racism and microaggressions that she experienced as a journalist for the network. Those microaggressions included racial slurs from colleagues who addressed her as a chitlins and watermelon kind of woman rather than an accomplished journalist (Simpson, 2010).

Those microaggressions were words meant to denigrate Simpson's African American culture and were the result of her colleagues' negative gender perceptions of a Black women who they could only see through the eyes of the "white gaze." Simpson noted she was harassed daily by co-workers who assaulted her with sexually charged catcalls (Simpson, 2010).

During her tenure at two network positions, Simpson recalls having to constantly prove that she was as qualified for the job as her White male counterparts. One manager, she said, even told her, "You're not as good as you think you are" (Simpson, 2010, p. 95). For much of her career, Simpson experienced what is called hypervisibility. Hypervisibility is defined as the feeling of being overly visible because of one's ethnicity or race. Hypervisibility is an attempt to diminish a person, usually a member of a marginalized group, although they have the credentials, experience, and education equal or more substantial than a member of the dominant group. Routinely the member of the marginalized group is denied legitimacy and treated as if they lack

authority when they are actually on parity with the person who devalues them (Lewis & Simpson, 2011). Additionally, hypervisibility is defined as a person receiving scrutiny and treated as an outsider based on perceived differences (Lewis & Simpson, 2011; Lollar, 2015).

**Workplace Discrimination**

Simpson's lived experiences illuminate the difficulties many Black female journalists experience in television newsrooms in the United States. Simpson (2010) defined it as the double whammy; being Black and a woman. Black feminists identify it as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw first coined the phrase intersectionality in a paper where she examined three legal cases involving several Black women suing General Motors. The women asserted they were discriminated by the company's seniority policy based on their race and gender. The women lost the case and Crenshaw determined it was because the court had a narrow view of discrimination and determined the women could not combine both claims of racial and gender discrimination, but that the women would have to sue individually on race or on gender (Coles & Pasek, 2020). Despite the loss, Crenshaw determined that Black women are Black and female, and as a result, they are judged and subjected to discrimination based on both variables. Crenshaw (1989) asserted that race, gender, class, and negative perspectives all intersect in the lives of Black women.

**Black Women's Positionality**

In addition to intersectionality, Black women's location in society is often a deterrent to their success (Rabelo et al., 2021). Black women often are viewed as part of a lower class and face additional discrimination regularly in the workplace via wrong perceptions of them, negative thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors toward them or through policies, privileges, and systems set up to benefit their White female counterparts (Harts, 2019; Rabelo et al., 2021).

Those policies not only exclude Black women's lived experiences but make their success almost impossible (Crenshaw, 1989; Hooks, 1987). These negative gender perspectives include stereotypes, such as the *angry Black woman* label, which is used against Black women in the workplace. Additionally, that label could possibly hold Black women back from workplace promotions (Motro et al., 2022).

Anger in the workplace is common and can be seen exhibited by superiors, usually White males, and other women, on a regular basis. However, when expressed by Black women in the workplace, it is most often thought of as a flaw in their character or personality rather than a response to a negative incident that occurred to them (Motro et al., 2022). Black feminists assert that Black women are constantly having to defend themselves against tropes.

**The White Gaze**

The trope of the angry Black woman can be seen in most all professions that Black women enter into, and what Black women do for a living does not protect them from these negative gender perceptions. An example of this includes tennis superstar, Serena Williams, who is arguably the best female tennis player of all time. Serena Williams has 73 career titles, including 23 Grand Slam titles (Oddo, 2022). Yet, Williams, her tennis prowess, and even her passion for the game of tennis are often described by analysts and critics alike by her body image as being masculine, muscular, and strong (Rankine, 2014). These qualifiers have racial overtones that continue to relay the negative notion that Black women are man-like and unattractive (Rankine, 2014).

Some see this relentless, negative examination of the Black female body as the white gaze. Toni Morrison is credited as coining up with the phrase white gaze as she longed to write novels without having to respond to the White oppressor (Greenfield-Sanders, 2019). Morrison's

definition of the white gaze is of a little White man who sits on your shoulder and checks out everything you say and everything you do (Greenfield-Sanders, 2019). Morrison said that she was often questioned as to why she only wrote about Black people. She said the question creates the idea that Black lives have no meaning or depth without the white gaze (Greenfield-Sanders, 2019).

Sions and Wolfgang (2021) noted the white gaze traps Black people in White peoples' imaginations because in those imaginations, Blacks are seen as insignificant and as people with low expectations. While Morrison spoke in terms of Black literature (Greenfield-Sanders, 2019), Rabelo et al. (2021) noted the white gaze is ever present in the workplace, where Black women's bodies, culture, behavior, and work ethic are all seen through the eyes of White people. Rabelo et al. (2021) also noted when seen through the pervasive and racist lens of the white gaze, Black women find themselves having to endure racist body and beauty notions every day. Carroll (2021) noted that the white gaze is so overwhelming that Black women can, at times, only seek out and look for other Black individuals in their surroundings, be it at work, in school, or the doctor's office, to affirm themselves, and escape the gaze (Carroll, 2021).

Additionally, education and work experience are not a buffer that protects Black women from the white gaze, the microaggressions, or the blatant racism that comes with it, not even if that job is located within one of the oldest institutions in the country, the United States Supreme Court. Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson has made history, and her connection to one of the most elite judicial groups will be forever noted, but before she became the first Black female justice of the United State Supreme Court, she, too, experienced, in front of millions of people, in televised confirmation hearings, marginalization, hypervisibility, and negative gender perspectives

(Adeniran, 2022). Legal scholars note that Justice Jackson was asked more questions about crime than any other justice in modern history and it was because of her race (Cade, 2022).

This study centered inside the walls of the American news media, specifically television stations, in the United States. This study examined how Black female journalists, seen through the lens of the white gaze, get trapped at the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and negative images, and how they were perceived when trying to achieve upward mobility in U.S. television newsrooms. The context and setting of this qualitative study are explored and the data collection and analysis methods are explained through the research design. The methodology is outlined and aligned with the research context, data collection, and procedures for data analysis.

**Surviving the Newsroom**

Oppression and powerlessness are burdens Black female journalists have endured, yet they have persevered to prove to themselves that they could do the job (Simpson, 2010). Theirs is an unvarnished truth about the daily struggles they have faced in those newsrooms against negative gender and racial perceptions (Jackson, 2022). For Black female journalists, telling the truth about their lived experiences and being inside some of this country's newsrooms is something they could only discuss after leaving those organizations. Joining Simpson in discussing those experiences in books that they wrote were former Black female journalists, Belva Davis and Alice Dunnigan (Davis, 2012; Dunnigan & McCabe-Booker, 2015). Dunnigan would become the first African American in the United States to be granted a press pass and admitted into the White House press corps to cover Congress and the White House. Like Simpson, she faced numerous instances of discrimination on the job. The first of many incidents occurred in 1953, when she was barred—because of her race—from covering President Dwight

D. Eisenhower, who was giving a speech in a Whites-only theatre (Dunnigan & McCabe Booker, 2015).

During the 1960s, race, gender, and class prevented journalist, Belva Davis, from getting hired. Davis noted in her book that she went on a job interview at a White television station in San Francisco and was told they were not hiring "Negresses" (Davis, 2012, p. 91) but whenever they did, she would be the first "Negress on the list" (p. 91). She would eventually get hired at another station but faced similar backlash because of her race and gender from a White, racist mob, while out covering a political convention. The mob sent her running from the 1964 Republican National Convention in San Francisco after the mob spotted her in the arena. They threw trash at her and bombarded her with taunts and pelted her with the word "ni***r" (Davis, 2012, p. 4) as she desperately made her way out of the arena.

Dunnigan, Davis, and Simpson are journalists who lived decades apart, but their lived experiences reveal many of their experiences were the same. These Black female journalists all had to maneuver through racism, sexism, and negative gender perceptions as they tried to advance in their careers (Davis, 2012; Dunnigan & McCabe-Booker, 2015; Simpson, 2010). Today the discrimination may not be as overt, but the power and oppression that race, gender, and class play in the lives of Black female journalists still exists. The fact that it does exist illuminates just how intractable and systemic the problem really is. In 2017, NBC News gave the time slot occupied by Tamron Hall, an award-winning journalist and first Black female to cohost the third hour of the Today Show, to a White journalist and former Fox News anchor, Megyn Kelly (Yahoo News, 2017; Williams, 2018). The National Association of Black Journalists noted the replacement of Hall's show with Kelly's show was seen as "whitewashing" (Battaglio, 2017).

Low ratings generally result in a show's cancellation. However, Hall's former show, which she hosted with meteorologist Al Roker, was a ratings winner, while Kelly's talk show continually descended in the ratings and often garnered controversy. Some media watchdogs reported on the lack of diversity and inclusion in U.S. newsrooms. Schneider (2020) reporting for The Poynter Institute, a nonprofit media group that discusses journalism ethics, conducts polls on the media, and runs a media school, noted the whiteness of U.S. newsrooms, and illuminated how journalists from backgrounds routinely marginalized by the media rarely see stories done in their own newsrooms about the communities they come from. Additionally, The Objective, another journalism watchdog group, noted that newsrooms in America label themselves as objective, however their coverage is created by homogenous groups that fail to account for race, gender, class, disability, or sexuality (Schneider, 2020).This could explain, at least partially, how a popular, ratings-earning Black woman, like Tamron Hall, lost her position on a popular television news show (Yahoo News, 2017). Williams (2018) noted it is important for the Black community to see someone like Hall, someone like themselves, on television. Approximately, a year after Kelly was given Hall's time slot, Kelly's show was canceled when, in an episode of her show, she vigorously defended the wearing of blackface as appropriate Halloween attire (Battaglio, 2017; Staples, 2019; Williams, 2018). Once Hall was replaced, she left the business altogether.

**Hierarchy in the Newsroom**

While it may appear that this battle was between Hall and Kelly, it was orchestrated by someone with more power in the organization. In television news there is a hierarchy. There is a general manager who oversees the station and a news director who oversees the news department. When it comes to talent, anchors are considered at the top of the hierarchy, and

reporters are in the second tier. Normally, an anchor has experience, having worked their way up from a smaller television market into a medium- or large-sized market.

In addition to a hierarchy of jobs and positions in newsrooms, there is also a hierarchy when it comes to television size or news markets. To offer perspective, the Nielson Rankings (2021–2022) noted there were 210 designated market areas (DMAs) in the United States. DMAs are based on population. Albany, New York has a DMA of 60, while New York City has a DMA of 1. Los Angeles has a DMA of 2 and Chicago has a DMA of 3. Most reporters start out in markets with populations much smaller than Albany, New York, such as Fairbanks, Alaska, which has a DMA of 202 or Greenville, Mississippi, which has a DMA of 196. Reporters choose a smaller DMA to hone their craft as reporters with the ability to cover any news story. Most likely in those small markets, reporters will be given the title of general assignment reporter, where they do not have a specialty to cover, but they cover all news, from school board meetings to protests to train derailments to state fairs. These are called general assignment stories and by reporting on these types of stories, reporters prepare themselves for bigger assignments.

In a medium-sized market, a reporter may cover a beat, or specialty, or do some sort of investigative work. Then, in a large market, a reporter would know how to handle stories like plane crashes, prison breaks, kidnappings, and other stories that change quickly and where one is expected to step in front of a camera and spontaneously give a description of what the audience is seeing in the moment. There is no time to write eloquently or touch up lipstick. The urgency of the story requires the reporter to work extemporaneously and get it right (St. Bonaventure University Online, 2021).

It is those impromptu opportunities that prepare reporters for the anchor desk, where they are prepared to ask questions of political figures, law enforcement, and those in leadership

positions. As an anchor, a command of the anchor desk is essential to assist the viewers in understanding complicated issues or to provide them with instruction in the case of disasters, such as hurricanes, explosions, mass shootings, or breaking news (Stoler, 2016).

**History of Anchors in the Newsroom**

Historically, White male anchor teams, like Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, dominated the evening news. As in most all professions, men were seen not only as the superior sex but more capable, believable, and trustworthy by viewers. Bergman (2002) noted female inferiority was a logical conclusion of the Darwinian view, as men were considered more evolved than women. Management began to give women an opportunity at the anchor desk in the 1970s, with Barbara Walters becoming the first female to co-anchor the nightly news with Harry Reasoner. Jane Pauley, Katie Couric, and others followed. Simpson became the first African American woman to anchor a weekend show in 1988. However, she was not the only one to face challenges while seeking upward mobility.

Former CNN anchor Soledad O'Brien also knows what happens when management goes in a different direction. O'Brien, like Tamron Hall, left the business altogether. This is important to note because these were Black female journalists who were performing identical to their peers, yet both were replaced by non-people of color, who were touted as being more talented and influential than these Black female journalists. Yet, both replacements would eventually be dismissed from their positions for character flaws. O'Brien was replaced by Chris Cuomo (Bauder, 2021). As a replacement for O'Brien, Cuomo was hailed as an accomplished anchor with an established name who was passionate about every story. In 2021, Cuomo, the brother of former New York governor, Andrew Cuomo, was fired for allegedly helping his brother fight alleged sexual harassment charges (Steinberg, 2013).

**Power of the Media**

The U.S. journalism industry generated approximately 24.8 billion dollars in revenue in 2021. That number is a decrease from 2010 when the industry topped 49.5 billion dollars (Grandos et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, viewership soared with MSNBC increasing by 23% in 2019. CNN increased by 83% and FOX News viewership was up by 43%.

Those numbers demonstrate how powerful the media is in its reach and ability to have instant contact and connection with the American people—as well as its powerful monetary resources. The media also has the power to influence stereotypes. Research shows, repeatedly, that the use of race in news stories on such issues as crime, when noting racial identity does not aid in informing the viewer and only serves to perpetuate racism against minority communities (Torres, 2015). The lived experiences of Simpson in the workplace and the public spotlight cast on Hall and O'Brien demonstrate the power of media executives and their ability to elevate talent or dismiss it.

There is no readily available accurate list of the number of journalists in the United States. However, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) estimated there were 44,539 journalists. Gottfried et al. (2022) noted in a Pew Research Center study survey on the state of journalism in the country, that more than 12,000 journalists in the United States took part in that survey. Those numbers include print and broadcast journalists.

Therefore, the data had to be collected from various sources for this study. As of 2021, there were approximately 17, 218 news reporters in the United States, with 67% White and 6.4% Black (Zippia Data Sciences, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). When it comes to anchors, alone, there are approximately 8,502 anchors in the United States. The majority are White males and just 5.3%

are Black (Zippia Data Sciences, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). The Zippia Data Sciences database does not have demographics to determine how many of the Black journalists are Black women.

To arrive at some accurate data on the number of Black female journalists, multiple databases were explored. From the U.S. Census to databases like Zippia Data Sciences, to the Pew Research Center, which focuses on research and issues pertaining to journalism studies, ethics, and polls, as well as data-driven studies on the lack of diversity in U.S. newsrooms, and even with decades worth of data research, the Pew Research Center has not conducted a research study solely on Black female journalists or Black female anchors (Gottfried et al., 2022). The extent of Pew Research Center's (2023a, 2023b) studies on newsroom diversity was on race and not gender.

Additionally, another media research outlet, the Radio Digital News Association (RTNDA), a membership organization of radio, television, and online news directors, producers, executives, reporters, students, and educators, also has not conducted data solely on Black female journalists. M. Sanserino (personal communication, February 17, 2022), Director of Communications and Strategy for RTNDA, indicated that detailed demographic data about the makeup of newsrooms are not collected by his organization. Only data on race, alone, are collected by the RTDNA.

M. Sanserino (personal communication, February 17, 2022) noted he had contacted a veteran researcher at RTDNA, Bobb Papper, who gave Sanserino an estimate of numbers based on data the organization had collected. Papper determined there were approximately 1,850 African American women working in local TV news in 2022 (M. Sanserino personal communication, February 18, 2022).

Several conclusions could be drawn from that email conversation with Sanserino. The first conclusion is that Black female journalists are considered so insignificant in newsrooms that these data organizations do not even believe research on the invisibility of Black female journalists is even warranted. Second, intersectionality is so pervasive that data organizations, which should be in the business of analyzing cultural and racial trends, shifts, and movements, may, themselves, be seeing underrepresented groups in the media through the eyes of the white gaze (M. Sanserino personal communication, February 18, 2022, Rabelo et al., 2021). Sanserino (M. Sanserino personal communication, February 18, 2022) also pointed out that the number of African American journalists on television is actually lower than previously thought and that discovery, itself, supports the need for this present study to explore why African American female journalists are nearly invisible in television newsrooms.

There was no discussion regarding how the researcher at RTDNA arrived at the numbers, and it was not noted if those numbers included Black female reporters and anchors, or just reporters (M. Sanserino, personal communication, February 18, 2022). To painstakingly investigate and use multiple data sources and snowballing techniques to try to uncover the limited data available to ascertain the numbers on Black female journalists is one of the many examples of the importance of this current study on the lived experiences of Black female journalists.

In an investigation of the Pew Research Center surrounding the issue of statistics, there was one recent poll that only slightly broached the surface of examining what Black female journalists deal with while seeking upward mobility in U.S. newsrooms (Gottfried et al., 2022). In February of 2022, research shows that 68% of the journalists surveyed said there was not enough ethnic and racial diversity in their newsrooms (Gottfried et al., 2022). It should be noted

these were journalists under 50 years old. Only 36% of those journalists over 60 years felt there was a racial and ethnic problem in their respective newsrooms. Even more important, only about half of those over 50 spoke about their company's racial and ethnic diversity to their colleagues several times a month. Of those, over 50—only 30%—said they spoke to their colleagues about racial and ethnic diversity within their newsrooms (Gottfried et al., 2022).

This cursory examination of the problem by the Pew Research Center demonstrates several things. First, the Pew Research Center is suffering from an inability to understand the emotions, lived experiences, or social dynamics of a group of people, who have repeatedly been marginalized by the broadcast industry. Like former journalists Belva Davis, Alice Dunnigan, and Carole Simpson, other Black female journalists are not keeping quiet about their lived experience (Cross, 2022; Hill, 2022). From books to social media posts to private professional groups, the microaggressions, slights, and instances of discrimination are being talked about by and among Black female journalists. Secondly, following the murder of George Floyd (Friedman, 2020; Harper, 2022) media companies are once again having to defend their lack of diversity, equality, and inclusion, with many promising to do better and that includes media outlets (Balakrishnan et al., 2023; Copat, 2023).

The Pew Research Center could certainly be called upon to answer why it is not being more of a watchdog over just how and if these media companies perform in keeping their promises about diversity among their ranks. Thirdly, the Pew Research Center, because of its clout and power, is positioned to present the issue of the lived experiences of Black female journalists in television newsrooms across the country to the people who make the decisions on hiring—the general managers and news directors. Fourth, the limited research done by the Pew

Research Center demonstrates what needs to be done to add to the discussion on race and ethnicity in U.S. newsrooms.

Most notability, in the Pew Research Center study (Gottfried et al., 2022) while 68% of journalists talked about race and ethnicity, none of those people were in management positions. Individuals in management are the ones with the influence and authority to hire and promote employees. Additionally, there needs to be comprehensive research regarding ethnicity and race in U.S. newsrooms with a breakdown by gender and position and the lived experiences of Black female journalists.

The Pew Research Center's (Gottfried et al., 2022) study, which is filled with data, is not just about statistics; the study represents the near invisibility of Black female journalists in the field and on anchor desks in the United States. Those research numbers from Pew show a great omission, and that incompleteness only leaves one wondering how Black female journalists maneuver in newsrooms and what their workplace experiences are like and how they press through those experiences as they try to achieve upward mobility. This omission supports the gap in the research and the need for an examination of the problem.

**Problem Statement**

Despite their experience, education, skills and accomplishments, Black female journalists in the United States struggle as they try to achieve upward mobility. They face discrimination because of their race and gender (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2012; Simpson, 2010). Their steadfastness and perseverance in attaining what they have accomplished in the face of tremendous odds, such as systemic racism and stereotypes, should be applauded (Lewis & Simpson, 2011; Motro et al., 2022; Stead, 2013). Yet, those Black female journalists face hypervisibility (Lewis & Simpson, 2011; Lollar, 2015; Shearer, 2021; Stead, 2013).

Black female journalists face microaggressions because of their culture (Simpson, 2010). Due to systemic racism in organizations and how these women are perceived by society, Black female journalists are seen as in a lower class than others and face negative gender perspectives that make it burdensome and difficult to rise above the racial fray (Hill, 2022). The scholarly literature on this specific phenomenon is nearly nonexistent and statistics explain the issue only in broad terms (Hill, 2022).

While some Black female journalists are telling of their experiences in newsroom after they leave, the fear of losing their jobs makes many Black female journalists in newsrooms across the country discuss their work life only in private professional networking groups online. Leaving one's job before being transparent about what happened to that person on the job does not eliminate the problem (Cross, 2022; Simpson, 2010.) Rather, it keeps the problem hidden, and because it is hidden, the real scope of the problem is minimized. Scholarly literature on the phenomenon not only brings analysis of the problem, but it also validates the problem because it provides a deeper, empirical examination of the problem and makes it available for others to continue that research. All the variables discussed above emphasize the need for research centering on this problem.

**Theoretical Rationale**

To investigate this problem, the research centered on the Black feminist theory (Hooks, 1989; Smith, 2001). The Black feminist theory examines the intersection of race, gender, and a combination of variables around discrimination and how these variables impact the lives of Black women. To understand how racism, gender, and classism operate, and, more specifically, how Black women in the workplace maneuver through these oppressive systems, a theoretical framework of the Black feminist theory was adopted. This theory presents itself as the most

effective theory to adopt, because it allowed for an understanding of these triad systems of gender, racism, and classism as well as the epistemological experiences of Black women.

Black feminist theory is suitable and works in examining the research problem because it ties into the “why” that this problem exists. The theory explains that to investigate the problem statement, there is a connection between these triad social issues, such as racism, sexism, and classism, along with other variables and one should not be examined minus the other (Crenshaw, 1989). This theory illuminates the problem and helps explain the enormity of it. With the gap in the research on the lived experiences of Black female journalists in newsrooms across the country, this theory helps to expand the discussion of race and gender discrimination in U.S. television newsrooms (Burton, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2023a, 2023b).

***Definitions of Black Feminist Theory***

The Black feminist theory examines the intersection of race, gender, and class in the lives of Black women, and it researches how those systems create oppression and give those who wield that oppression, power over Black women (Hooks, 1987). Black feminist theory also creates a space, a platform, and it can even be described as a home for Black women to discuss their true, unvarnished experiences as women living under this triad. It is a forum where Black women can receive validation and encouragement. It is a place where there is no marginalization of Black women. It is a place where they find kinship. It is a place where they can express anger over the constant maneuvering through this triad. Black feminist theory is a place where female Black journalists’ anger will not be used against them or serve to label them.

However, this triad that Black women face could not find a home in the mainstream feminist movement. The feminist movement of the 1960s asserted that it spoke for all American women. But the plight of the Black American women in America was not embraced by the

movement (Hooks, 1989). Friedan (1963) is often credited with starting the women's movement in the United States and received laudatory status for spending her energies fighting for causes of suburban women, such as legal abortions and contraceptives (Hooks, 1987). Friedan (1963) also began an awareness of White women's unhappiness with being homemakers and unable to have careers. Those homemakers bemoaned having to live vicariously through their husband's success (Friedan, 1963). The systemic problems faced by Black women, such as racism, gender, and sexism became front and center when Black feminists, themselves through activism, made those issues a priority.

***History of Black Feminist Theory***

The contemporary Black feminist theory started in the 1980s and 90s, with feminists like Walker (2018) and Hooks (1989) examining the impact of sexism on Black women during slavery and how this historic devaluation of Black women connects with Black women's oppression today. However, it was activists from the 1950s and 60s, like Ella Baker (Ella Baker Center for Human Rights, n.d.), who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, and lesbian feminist and socialist activist Barbara Smith, from the 1970s who noted how intersectionality kept Black women in a cycle of poverty, marginalization, and ill health. Additionally, Smith is applauded for creating Black feminist thought through her socialist feminist group's Combahee River Collective Statement (Eisenstein, 1978). That manifesto was a manifest of demands for the liberation and equality by Black women. Some Black women felt invisible in the Civil Rights Movement, and they felt as unwelcomed in the second women's movement as they had in the first (Breines, 2002; Hooks, 1987).

Critics argue that both women's movements neglected Black women's issues of racism, sexism, and gender bias, for fear Black women's issues would take away from the interests of

White women (Hooks, 1989). Smith (2001) forged a way for Black women to discuss their own oppression in America. Her manifesto was a precursor to intersectionality theory, which states that one cannot separate gender, race, and classism from the oppression of Black women. Activist Crenshaw (1989) developed the analytical connection of multiple factors that lead to the oppression of Black women and that cannot be looked at separately, like racism, sexism, and gender bias, and she coined the term *intersectionality theory* (Crenshaw, 1991).

Smith (2001) created a publishing house, Kitchen Table Press, so that Black women could write books about Black feminism, lesbian feminism, and identity politics. These leading scholars of the Black feminist movement also created a dialogue for those views to be discussed in a public forum (Taylor, 2020) In 2005, Smith was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

Black feminist theory strengthens the problem statement as to why Black female journalists struggle at the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and negative gender perceptions. It aids in researching how those variables create oppression and give those, who wield that oppression, power over Black women. This theory presented itself as the most effective theory to adopt because it allows for an understanding of the epistemological experiences of Black women.

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of Black female journalists at the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, and negative gender perspectives while trying to achieve upward mobility in newsrooms across the United States.

## Research Question

The data gathered during the semi-structured interviews was to answer this study's research question:

> What are the lived experiences of Black female journalists, working inside television newsrooms in the Unites States and who are trying to achieve upward mobility?

## Potential Significance of the Study

This research is important now because current research shows the same type of discrimination Black female journalists encountered 50 years ago is the same type they face today. Journalist Alice Dunnigan experienced racial and gender discrimination while covering the White House and President Dwight Eisenhower in 1953 (Dunnigan & McCabe-Booker, 2015). In the 2000s, journalist Carole Simpson faced similar racial and gender discrimination (Simpson, 2010). In 2022, young Black journalists also faced the same systemic social issues in the workplace and kept it hidden, discussing the problem in private conversations and in private networking groups (Black Girls in Broadcasting, n.d.). It is important that the phenomenon is discussed in empirical research.

Secondly, research shows a more diverse newsroom offers viewers varied perspectives rather than a constant thread of homogeneous perspectives. Diverse backgrounds in newsrooms help tell contemporary stories, such as what happened to Native American children who were taken from their families with the goal of being civilized by the Catholic Church. We now know those children were stripped of their culture, beaten, sexually assaulted, and many were killed (Gavshon & Roberts, 2022; National Museum of the American Indian ✹Smithsonian, 2020). Yet, like Black female journalists, Native American female journalists are nearly nonexistent in newsrooms across the country (Monet, 2019). Today, few people would believe that only the

White, mainstream media can tell the stories of people of color, better than people of color themselves. The White mainstream media has an obligation to hire people who can help tell these stories best.

This research will help to illuminate newsroom administrators to the added pressures Black female journalists experience in U.S. newsrooms that are directly related to racism, sexism, classism, and negative gender perspectives. Additionally, it may serve as a tool to make those administrators aware of how homogenous their newsrooms are and how that dynamic does not coincide with the current trends to make diversity in hiring and promotion more expansive in the workplace. Similarly, the research may help newsrooms develop a template to not only ensure that Black female journalists are recognized as welcomed, integral, and important members of the company workforce but also contribute to newsrooms' success. Additionally, the research can be used to demonstrate to non-Black employees that diversity, equity, and inclusion are important to organizations, and that inclusion will be carried out and tracked.

**Definitions of Terms**

A definition of the terms used in this research study gives a better understanding of the concepts that are discussed throughout this study, as well as how the conceptual information was used in this study.

*Anchor* – the talent known as the face and voice and recognized figure of a daily news broadcast (The News Manual, 2019).

*Black and African American* – used interchangeably to define the race of an individual.

*Journalist* – a member of the mainstream media working in television, radio, newspaper, or on a digital platform (The News Manual, 2019).

*Ratings* – specific shares or numbers of viewers of certain demographics who watch specific news programs that are essential for stations when selling advertising to potential clients (The News Manual, 2019).

*Reporters* – journalists who cover issues and events in communities and report the information they uncovered or witnesses or were told to by individuals on daily news programs (The News Manual, 2019)

*White gaze* – how White individuals perceive African American individuals as insignificant because African Americans are only seen through an all-White lens. This lens says that unless African Americans align their culture, thoughts, ideas, and ideology in line with the White population, they are less than Whites and are unimportant and without influence and power (Rabelo et al., 2021).

**Chapter Summary**

Television newsrooms are not as diverse as the communities they serve, with Black female television journalists being in the minority (Papper, 2018). Companies with diverse workforces reap numerous benefits (Eshegbe & Dastane, 2015; Tuor Sartore & Backes-Gellner, 2020). Additionally, companies that hire women experience advantages (Maurer & Qureshi, 2019). Yet, Black female journalists experience challenges when trying to achieve and advance in television newsrooms in the United States (Simpson, 2010). This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of Black female journalists working at television stations in the United States in an attempt to understand the circumstances that intersect and prevent Black female television journalists from upward mobility.

The literature review in Chapter 2 focuses on the American news media by examining how Black female journalists experience marginalization, stereotypes, and hypervisibility in

newsrooms. Chapter 3 outlines the research design, methodology, research participants, and the analysis of this study. Chapter 4 presents a detailed analysis of the results and findings, and Chapter 5 discusses the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research and practice.

# Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

## Introduction and Purpose

Current industry data suggest that Black female journalists struggle at the intersection of racism, sexism, and negative gender perceptions while trying to ascend in television newsrooms (Simpson, 2010). This phenomenon can be better understood by examining the literature surrounding how Black women are perceived in American society and in the workplace. The perception of Black women is often formed, not only as result of their race, but also because of their sex and negative gender perceptions (Crenshaw, 2013). That trio of intersectionality is developed by examining Black women through the eyes of the white gaze (Rabelo et al., 2021).

Research notes this albatross shows that social status, accomplishments, age, nor education, exempt Black women from the looming lens of this gaze and the micro- and macroaggressions that come with it (Stroshine & Brandl, 2011). The white gaze is a manifestation of whiteness, which research shows is entrenched in society through organizational systems that were designed and evolved through White male masculinity (Liu, 2017). Research notes it has been challenging for Black women to breach these organizations because of the white gaze and that their mental and physical health have also been jeopardized as a result (Gale et al., 2020; Spates et al., 2020).

This literature review focuses on the American news media to examine how Black female journalists, through the lens of the white gaze, experienced marginalization, stereotypes, and hypervisibility in newsrooms. Furthermore, it explores what, if any, challenges made it difficult for the Black women participants to achieve upward mobility.

There are approximately 17,536 television journalists in the United States; 70.8% are White and 6.3 % are Black (Zippia Data Sciences, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). Speaking of anchors, alone, there are approximately 7,485 anchors in the United States. The majority of them, 66.7%, are White and male and just 6.4% are Black (Zippia Data Sciences, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). The numbers become even smaller when speaking of the number of local Black female journalists in the United States. There are 1,850 Black female journalists in the United States, which includes reporters and anchors (M. Sanserino, personal conversation, February 18, 2022). These are not just statistics, but they represent the near invisibility of Black female journalists in the field and on the anchor desks in the United States.

**The Kerner Commission**

There was a need to examine the mechanisms in place that keep Black female journalists stalled at the intersection of racism, classism, sexism, and negative gender perspectives while not advancing, yet those same mechanisms allow upward mobility for White male journalists. There is a gap in the research regarding this phenomenon. A federal inquiry surrounding the problem occurred in 1968. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1967), known as the Kerner Commission, sanctioned by then-President Lyndon B. Johnson, concluded by recommending the media become more diverse (Oxford African American Studies Center, 2009; University of California, Berkley, 2023; Walker, 2018). This examination followed the 1967 riots across the country. The Commission not only blamed poverty, substandard housing, and police brutality for the riots, but they also faulted the media.

The Commission found less than 5% of newspapers had Black editorial staff, and there was only one Black nationally syndicated columnist in 1967. Television stations had similar dismal employment numbers, and the Commission noted that this fact exacerbated the frustration

of Blacks who seldom saw someone who resembled them on television in any high-profile position (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968).

This report was important because it was initiated by the executive branch of the United States government, giving the report validity. Additionally, the Commission not only collected data that supported the fact that social unrest was connected to systemic racism, but it sought to understand the lived experiences of Blacks who endured this systemic racism. It was also unique in its data collection because it delved into the organizations where racism was deeply entrenched, and it cited two powerful institutions in the country as evidence of racist systems: the media and law enforcement.

During a time of racial unrest, when law enforcement's initial response was usually reactionary in their dealings with Blacks, the Commission did something that most likely had never happened before. They recorded those lived experiences of Black people to understand what was at the heart of their anxieties. Along with the harsh treatment of Blacks by law enforcement, the Commission also found some of those anxieties faced by Blacks centered around how Blacks were presented in the media.

The Commission chided the media for its reputation in the Black community of being unresponsive in reporting how the communities maneuvered through poverty, substandard housing, and numerous other issues (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968). The Commission also noted several other problems: (a) the media was not living up to its standards and nearly always took the word of law enforcement regarding brutality and (b) Blacks viewed the media as working only in the interests of Whites (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968). Today, some of those same inequities still exist and not in small television stations with small demographic viewer populations but rather in network newsrooms in major

cities. The Commission's study is important to this study's research problem because it reinforces that very little has changed in newsrooms since the aftermath of the 1968 Kerner Commission Report (Somani & Hopkinson, 2018; Walker, 2018). The Commission's study called on newsrooms to create a more diverse workforce by recruiting and promoting more Black journalists and to promote more accurate coverage of race-related news (National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders 1968).

**Description of the Commission's Recommendations**

There were federal policies in 1967, such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which investigates complaints of job discrimination based on race, color, and religion, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, but there was no federal policy that mandated that media companies actively seek out minority journalists in the 1960s. Affirmative action policies, which specify a certain number of jobs must go to minorities and women, generally only involve companies receiving federal monies—not private companies, such as media companies.

The Commission did give several recommendations for the media. They included: (a) creating the Institute of Urban Communications, which would be a training center for prospective minority journalists; (b) provide professional journalists with courses and seminars on urban affairs as a way of giving White reporters, editors, and publishers background on how to cover urban areas; and (c) encourage media outlets and newspapers to look to Black newspapers and radio stations to find trained Black journalists as a way of immediately increasing the numbers of minority journalists in their ranks. President Johnson never adopted the recommendations. Political and social pressures following the Civil Rights Movement caused

some of those recommendations to be adopted, but without them becoming policy and federal law, Black female journalists are still struggling to advance in newsrooms and the research question is still valid (Simpson, 2010).

**Review of the Literature**

Research has identified whiteness as a racist and pervasive setting in many U.S. organizations (Kwate & Threadcraft, 2015; Melaku & Beeman, 2022; Pompper, 2011; Rabelo et al., 2021). That research suggests racism remains and thrives through daily practices such as the white gaze. The white gaze was defined by Rabelo et al. (2021) as seeing people's bodies through the lens of whiteness. When observing Black women through the white gaze (how they look, dress, carry themselves, etc.), those perceptions are seen through the prism of sexism and racism (Rabelo et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Rabelo et al. (2021) noted that the white gaze lens distorts the perceptions of those being observed and causes them to be subjected to control and bodily scrutiny. To better understand how the white gaze manifests itself in the workplace, the research included the narratives of 1,169 Black women who, through tweets, described how they experienced the white gaze enacted at work (Rabelo et al., 2021). The women said that whiteness was imposed, presumed, forced, and venerated upon their bodies through racial imaginary and scrutiny (Rabelo et al., 2021).

Kwate and Threadcraft (2015) also looked at the perceptions of Black women's bodies, within a White dominant social frame, by analyzing public data of police stops by the New York City Police Department (NYPD). This 10-year study looked at data kept detailing body type, race, and gender. The researchers sought to define if the stereotype of Black women being fat, loud, and having facial expressions resembling caricatures could cause members of the NYPD to

incorrectly see Black women's bodies through negative gender perceptions and, therefore, stop and encounter more heavy Black women as opposed to the number of White women they encountered.

Kwate and Threadcraft (2015) were also interested in if those heavy Black women were stopped and frisked. The findings were that more Black women than White women were stopped, but there were no differences in the rate of being frisked because of the heavy body categorization. The study did not note the gender of the NYPD officers who stopped the women.

There were limits to the Kwate and Threadcraft study, such as the omission of the number of Black women who were stopped but that was due to the fact that the researchers did not conduct the research but, rather, analyzed it while specifically focusing on how police categorized those women they did stop in the context of race and gender. Another issue that was not discussed in the study was the locations where the Black women were stopped. The research shows they were stopped more often in the stairwells, hallways, and lobbies where they lived (Kwate & Threadcraft, 2015). That means police stopped them in the process of their everyday, normal female roles of being moms and not while committing crimes. One might infer this means the police were more than observers but were watchdogs over the comings and goings of these women and obstructing their freedom of movement in an area that surrounded their homes—something they may not have done to White moms.

Previous research studies relate to this research topic because it demonstrates the white gaze at work in the lives of Black women (Kwate & Threadcraft, 2015; Rabelo et al., 2021). In the Kwate and Threadcraft case, the inference was that police controlled areas in Black neighborhoods with the citizens who were being infringed upon in stairwells, hallway, lobbies, etc., but the question is: would police be able to patrol neighborhoods where White moms were

involved in their normal female roles and frisk, search, and pursue these women as they came and went throughout their day?

Melaku and Beeman (2022) said that as well as body image, the white gaze distorts Black women's beauty. Bryant (2013) asserted that Black women are forced to analyze their appearance in White spaces that cater to the White norms of beauty. What this then rejects is Black women's beauty, and it, instead, defines European concepts of beauty by emphasizing skin color and hair while systematically canceling out Black women's beauty.

**The Media: Racism, Sexism, and Negative Gender Perspectives**

There is research that supports that the American newsroom culture has been rooted in patriarchy and White masculinity since its inception (Freeman, 2016). Moreover, research is abundant for examining racial and gender inequities in news organizations that spring forth from those patriarchal structures (Cukier & Jackson, 2019; Douglas, 2021; Meyers & Gayle, 2015; Pompper, 2011; Shor et al., 2015; Somani & Hopkinson, 2018). It was not until 1965 that an African American was admitted to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (Mellinger, 2013). This includes the newsroom sports department as well. While the sports department may not have to report on crime, mishaps, tragedy, and they get to raise their voices and gesture and appear to have more fun on the air, research shows that not all Black sports reporters succeed when it comes to advancing to the anchor desk's news (Genovese, 2015).

Whites still dominate sports departments with 86% of sports anchors and 83.8% of sports reporters being White and get most of the first jobs (Papper, 2021). Hegemony still exists even in newsrooms where some diversity exists (Pritchard & Stonbely, 2007). As well, women are still underrepresented in sports anchors and reporters and Black women even more so. Women mainly do sideline work, which has been a way to bring more women into newsroom sports

departments. However, the type of tasks they perform are considered the most menial on the sports team (Genovese, 2015).

Women are still perceived as not being as credible as male sports reporters and anchors. Research has examined the influence of gender stereotyping and sexism (Mudrick et al., 2016). During an examination of 544 participants, who watched videos of a debate between a female and male sportscaster and assessed the credibility of both, the female was considered as less credible than the male (Mudrick et al., 2016).

For the Black female sports reporters and anchors, it was not just their credibility that was questioned because of their gender, racism, and stereotypes all converged when the sports fans were able to defend whiteness in sports and subjected three prominent female sports reporters to online bullying and abuse on social media (Peterson, 2019). Additionally, Black female sports reporters, Jemele Hill, Sarah Spain, and Doris Burke received copious amounts of racist and sexist statements in a public sports poll analyzing women sports reporters. The poll was conducted on a prominent news-sharing media platform called Reddit (Peterson, 2019). Reddit allows people to share and comment on videos and sensational information. Social norms play a role in maintaining racism by deciding which races can report on certain sports. For example, in the research, White reporters were seen as more credible when it came to covering what was considered a White sport like tennis (Mastro et al., 2012). Research shows sexism regarding gender remains the barometer by which female sports reporters are judged for competency (Peterson, 2019).

Somani and Hopkinson's (2018) research is important because in the absence of diversity in newsrooms, it uncovered how Black journalists felt forced to conform to hegemonic structures in their newsrooms to advance their careers. Somani and Hopkinson examined the lived

experiences of 23 Black reporters, some of whom invoked colorism to advance in the workplace. In other cases, some decided to change their hair styles after being told they were too ethnic or resorted to wearing weaves to have their hair appear more European and acceptable on air and less culturally identifiable.

**Hypervisibility, Visibility, and Invisibility**

A body of research shows that for many Black women, it does not matter how they altered their ethnicity to assimilate because they could not alter the way they were viewed when treated as a token, or when visibility and invisibility were connected to power or when a Black woman experienced hypervisibility from their supervisors and colleagues (Obasi, 2021; Settles et al., 2019; Shavers & Moore, 2019; Spates et al., 2020; Stroshine & Brandl, 2011). Through shared phenomenological experiences in workplaces, many professional Black women describe the feeling of invisibility when treated as if they do not matter or exist in an organization because of the intersection of gender and racism (Shavers & Moore, 2019). Additionally, Settles et al. (2019) found that those feelings are even more profound if that invisibility is tied to underrepresentation in an organization. That type of scenario then turns into *visibility* because, as contradictory as it seems, the fewer the number of minorities who are in an organization, the more visible it makes them seem, and it creates the potential for the minorities to be scrutinized and considered tokens (Settles et al., 2019).

Kanter (1977) set the backdrop for research surrounding this theory of proportional representation. The study looked at minority women in corporations where they made up less than 15% of the workforce. The study found those women endured more negative attention and stress because they were so few in number and they were easy to identify as opposed to most of

the women at the companies who were White. The visibility of the Black women was heightened because there were so few of them (Kanter, 1977).

Similarly, Shavers and Moore (2019) examined gender and race when looking at Black female doctoral students at predominantly White institutions. The study also tied experiences of race-related discrimination with the issue of the Black women being numerically in the minority, noting that because of the small number of Black female students attending predominantly White universities, many Black students were more visible (Shavers & Moore, 2019). Some of the lived experiences the women shared in the study included feelings of isolation and continued thoughts of being outsiders—even when they earned good grades and did well on exams. The study also identified the lack of an on-campus support system that also played a huge role in the students feeling like outsiders (Shavers & Moore, 2019).

The research of Kanter (1977) was later criticized because it focused tokenism on numerical representation, which, in turn, focused on visibility and isolation (Yoder, 1991). Instead, Yoder suggested that tokenism should have been based more on race and gender because the issues the minority women participants faced were based more on sexism and social context rather than numbers (Gustafson, 2008; Yoder, 1991).

Stroshine and Brandl (2011) examined gender and race as a more likely connection to tokenism by using multi-variate analysis and a large research group of police officers at the Milwaukee Police Department. Questionnaires were given to all 1,388 police officers and they were asked about their experiences at work and the research determined that gender and race played a large factor in the experiences of the Black female police officers (Stroshine & Brandl, 2011). Those feelings were substantiated through the sharing of their lived experiences on

questionnaires where the minority officers perceived they had fewer on-the-job opportunities than White officers. They also expressed feelings of tokenism and polarization.

However, the Stroshine and Brandl (2011) study found it was the Black female officers whose numbers consisted of 56, or 5.1% out of the 1,923 officers on the force, who faced tokenism the most. Despite the criticism of Kanter (1977), the study appeared to suggest that race, gender, and low minority representation all account for the feelings of tokenism expressed by minority women in predominantly White institutions.

Obasi (2021) spoke of visibility and invisibility in the workplace, as well, but in research and terms seldom seen. The research centered on when members of the dominant group recognize that, in a social setting, they, too, have experienced invisibility because they were the minority in that setting. In relaying that situation to other non-Whites in the workplace, their feelings of extreme distress and their emotions seem heartfelt and their reactions to the frustration that invisibility brings on seemed genuine (Obasi, 2021). Yet, after those feelings subsided, they remained unable to relate to that same sense of anguish minorities feel when they encounter invisibility at work on a daily basis. Furthermore, when the White participants discussed their occasional feelings of invisibility, they were discussed in the safe environment of their whiteness. However, when the Black participants discussed their feelings of invisibility, they were not ascribed value or validity, often going unnoted, and their feelings were deemed not surprising or interesting (Obasi, 2021).

**#MeToo: Invisibility, Hypervisibility**

It is not only in workplace settings that Black women feel they are invisible. Research surrounding the women's movements, attests to Black female activists' claims that there was no place for them in any of those movements (Hooks, 1987). In those women's movements, Black

women noted their concerns about racism and sexism were dismissed by White feminists (Hooks, 1987). In the 1960s movement, Black women noted White women prioritized their own suburban issues, such as the desire to be independent, forge careers, and secure healthcare issues, like the right of White women to obtain contraceptives, above the needs of Black women, which were always centered in equality (Friedan, 1963; Hooks, 1989).

The #MeToo movement of 2017 created a way for that invisibility of Black women to be highlighted again on a global stage when prominent White women saw their campaign to expose pervasive sexual harassment and assault, exploded on social media (Lenug & Williams, 2019; Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). The movement allegedly had more than 16 million people having conversations on most major social media formats. It was so powerful that it not only resulted in new attention being focused on sexual harassment but also policy changes surrounding criminality and prosecution of sexual harassers (Lenug & Williams, 2019). However, that jubilation was tempered in the Black community when Black women not only saw themselves excluded from the conversation of sexual harassment and assault but also witnessed the very title of the movement, created by a Black activist, years earlier, now being restored and claimed by contemporary White feminists and covered extensively by the mainstream media (Ohlheiser, 2018).

The phrase *MeToo* was coined by Tarana Burke, an African American activist who started the movement to sound the alarm, as well as to provide support, to the number of Black women being raped and assaulted (Ohlheiser, 2018). Unlike the campaign of the same name, which was launched in 2017, the response by the media before 2017 to Burke’s efforts to support Black female sexual assault victims was almost nonexistent (Ohlheiser, 2018). Watching events unfold in 2017, Black women immediately called attention to the intersection of race, gender,

and class playing out in their exclusion of the modernized movement of the same name. They denounced the silence surrounding their perpetrators of sexual harassment and sexual abuse (Mueller et al., 2021). Simultaneously, critics ridiculed what they determined were White women hijacking a hashtag (Corrigan, 2019). Others called the 2017 version of Burke's catchphrase, a refurbishing—taking someone else's idea and giving it a new coat of paint.

However, research documented the silencing of Black women's experiences as more egregious than that. By not acknowledging the history and narratives of Black female pain surrounding sexual harassment, assault, and rape, along with that of indigenous women or Latina women, in this 2017 #MeToo version, the message was similar to the early feminist movements that Black feminists say catered only to the concerns of White women (Corrigan, 2019; Hooks, 1989). An examination of over 6,000,000 tweets from over 250,000 Twitter users showed Black women had much to contribute to the movement (Mueller et al., 2021). The tweets by White women, which outnumbered those of Black women, simply highlighted the sexual harassment of public figures.

In contrast, the analysis showed that in tweets by Black women, those women noted the unequal representation of their stories, inequities in their treatment by police and the justice system, as well as the invisibility of their contribution in combating gendered violence (Mueller et al., 2021). This research points to the perception of Black women in society, even by White women (Friedan, 1963; Hooks, 1989). Counter to that perception is the standpoint theory that is centered in a feminist perspective and values the experiences of Black women as a source of knowledge (Collins, 2000). That is something these feminists argued that research and theory failed to do by ignoring and marginalizing Black feminists and their perspectives (Collins, 2000).

But the #MeToo movement was not the only entity that failed Black women. Of the tens of thousands of people who go missing each year, only a small number of them get media attention (Sommers, 2017). Research analyzing the characteristics of those who do get attention asks if that distinction primarily goes to White women and girls. Critics call this phenomenon the *missing White woman syndrome*, a phrase coined by former news anchor Gwen Ifill and the subject of numerous research studies (Allsop, 2021; Sarmiento, 2021; Slackoff & Fradella, 2019; Sommers, 2017).

Utilizing data from the FBI database and online media sources, Sommers (2017) detailed how race and gender disparities play a role in more media attention for missing White women and girls and less media attention for missing Black women and girls. The study looked at the extent of media coverage of missing persons for the year 2013. That information was then compared to the population of missing persons from the FBI. It showed that Blacks and men are less likely to receive media attention and missing White children were more likely than Black and Hispanic children to receive media attention (Sommers, 2017). The data went on to show White women make up one third of the U.S. population, but they make up almost half of the missing persons' cases covered by the media (Sommers, 2017). Intersectionality of race and gender were concluded to be connected to societal hierarches, meaning White women and children were accepted as needing to be saved, whereas Black women and Black children were seen as less valuable (Sommers, 2017).

While the Sommers synthesis of data and research on this issue was published in 2017, there was a more recent real-life example of the validity of this research and Black women's inability to be taken seriously—at their most vulnerable time—when they needed someone to show concern about them. That real life story centers around the disappearance of Gabby Petito

in 2021, a White woman. She made headlines following a domestic violence incident she was involved in. When she was later discovered missing, the news stories continued, and when her remains were found, more stories were done. When the remains of her boyfriend, who admitted in a diary that he killed her, killed himself, there were yet more stories about her (Slackoff & Fradella, 2021). Her story and all of the attention she received was scrutinized because it was an example of how missing White women get more media attention than Black women who disappear or are victims of domestic violence (Allsop, 2021). The study relates to this study's problem statement because it shows that the invisibility of Black women is systemic, meaning Black women are just as invisible and missing out in society as they are in the newsroom (Simpson, 2010; Slackoff & Fradella, 2019).

**The Media: Microaggressions, Stereotypes, and the Angry Black Female**

To offset the negative perception of Black women in society, some Black female journalists have chosen to resist the normative constructions of race in their newsrooms (Meyers & Gayle, 2015). They have chosen to use their work to tell positive stories and show inspiring images of Black people in their communities.

By going against racial norms in the newsroom, Black female reporters can get branded as biased advocates for their communities and unprofessional, which can impact their careers. However, the reasons these Black female reporters chose to go against the norms of the newsroom could be that they, themselves, saw issues and people in the Black community from the perspective of the standpoint theory of having value (Collins, 2000). It was inferred through their responses in the research interviews that they understood intersectionality because they lived with it, were judged by it, and did not want their female subjects in the Black community to be judged in relation to their race, gender, and class (Crenshaw, 1989).

In interviews with 10 Black female reporters, they noted that before they interviewed Black subjects, they would suggest those subjects comb their hair and take out curlers or straighten their clothing before their interviews (Meyers & Gayle, 2015). The Black journalists noted negative imagery and stereotypes because they, too, lived with intersectionality in their own lives (Meyers & Gayle, 2015.) Having understood the intersectionality of their lives in patriarchal and White masculine structures, which remain intact today, in their own newsrooms, they wanted to limit the pain of others having to be seen through the lens of the white gaze (Rabelo et al., 2021)). This research is invaluable to this study's problem statement because it shows the lengths Black women will go to cast off the shadow of the white gaze.

However, these actions may not be enough to change the perceptions of the non-Black leadership in the newsroom regarding Black female journalists. Spates et al. (2020) noted it is challenging for Black female journalists to go against the workplace racial construct norms because those norms are often ripe with stereotypes about Black women. Those stereotypes include the *strong Black woman* stereotype. This stereotype pressures Black women into enduring more hardships than others so as not to go against the perception that they are strong (Dow, 2014). So, they may do more work without asking or receiving assistance (Wingfield, 2007).

Another stereotype faced by Black women is the angry Black woman trope. Research notes that this particular stereotype, the angry Black woman has followed Black women into the workplace, and it may be a barrier to them advancing. This trope may also account for their inability to break the glass ceiling (Motro et al., 2022). Studies show that the angry Black woman stereotype depicts Black women as aggressive and antagonistic in their interactions with others

and that when others form an impression of Black women, that common stereotype is the one that is often considered (Miller, 2020; Walley-Jean, 2009).

To study the angry Black woman stereotype even further, researchers used parallel-constraint-satisfaction theory to examine the intersection of anger, race, and gender. Participants were told to listen to scripted recordings of supposed White and Black female leaders who had to solve problems that arose in a workplace setting. Participants who deemed the voice and name sounding African American classified the way that person handled the workplace situation as angry, while the White female counterpart was noted as sounding calm in the handling of the workplace situation (Motro et al., 2022). Researchers concluded observers were more likely to make internal attributions for expressions of anger when an individual was a Black woman. These stereotypes, Motro et al. suggested, better explains why Black women are underrepresented in leadership positions.

In addition to stereotypes, research also points to other barriers and challenges Black women face on the job, such as microaggressions, which are defined as subtle verbal, behavioral, and environmental expressions of oppressions based on the intersection of race and gender (Lewis et al., 2017). Using dimensional analysis, Lewis et al. examined three gendered, racial themes and several subthemes. The angry Black woman trope, which was addressed earlier in this research, was one of those themes, along with assumptions about style and beauty, also noted earlier in this research and projected stereotypes, which include the subtheme of Black females as *Jezebels*. The Jezebel cliché is used to define Black women as loose and hypersexual, and it is a microaggression commonly used against them (Collins, 2004; Lewis et al., 2017).

In the Lewis et al. (2017) study of 17 Black female college students at predominantly White universities, the women detailed, in focus groups, interpersonal phenomenological

experiences of microaggressions used against them and they identified them under the three themes. The students expressed how the microaggressions left them feeling marginalized, silenced, and disrespected by peers. They also spoke of having to constantly try to prove themselves to White individuals as being competent Black women (Lewis et al., 2017).

The participants also addressed a subtheme of invisibility, which was discussed earlier in this research, to describe how they felt walking across campus or while in a classroom. It is important to note that the recurrence of studies across a number of disciplines—all addressing similar themes—serve as a validation of the research regarding Black women and the challenges they face in the workplace and in organizations because of race, gender, sexism, classism, and negative gender perceptions.

To change the systemic racial policies in organizations, mid-level women of color have realized that they must try and change organizations from the inside out. However, that has proven to be easier said than done. Narratives from 36 midlife-aged, middle-class African American, Asian American, and Hispanic women argued that the road to middle management, like roads to other advancements sought by minority women, are almost impossible to obtain (Pompper, 2011). The same White masculine structures discussed throughout this research is once again the impenetrable fortress. Information from the narratives provided upper management with numerous ways of increasing diversity within these organizations, however, when positions were available, White males, who held most of the highest levels in management, would simply recommend other men, and minority women would once again be left out (Pompper, 2011).

Diversity in newsrooms, from more stories on underrepresented groups to the intentional act of hiring more African American journalists and women reporters to create more diverse

newsrooms, are challenges not limited only to U.S. newsrooms. Many parallels can be drawn among Black journalists, in the United States, and Black and brown reporters who cover the news for British news agencies. Moreover, in 2020, because they felt solidarity with Black journalists in the United States, over 100 British journalists of color condemned the arrest of a Black journalist, Omar Jimenez, of CNN who was arrested on live television while reporting on protests following the murder of George Floyd. His White colleague, who was also covering the protests, was not arrested (Douglas, 2021).

Like research on Black journalists in the United States, the experiences of British journalists have been researched. The phenomenological experiences of 26 Black British journalists were collected through interviews and all reported experiencing racism at work (Douglas, 2021). Unlike in the United States, fewer media outlets acknowledged there was a problem with diversity in British newsrooms, and even fewer fail to commit to the need to improve the numbers of Black employees in British newsrooms (Douglas, 2021). There is also less scientific research on this issue, and the profession has a higher degree of social exclusivity than in previous years, making it a profession of the socially elite and the highly educated (Milburn, 2016). Critics of the inequities in British newsrooms say that to approach the problem, management has to first look at the newsroom and see race (Eddo-Lodge, 2017).

In addition to the lack of diversity in British news outlets, research shows Black women and other minorities are underrepresented as expert sources on television in Canadian Public Affairs shows (Cukier & Jackson, 2019). The Cukier and Jackson study, like the previous study on the lack of diversity in British newsrooms, is important because it speaks to the lack of perspective on television, which is due to a limited number of voices, that, in turn, allows viewers to only hear from the most dominant voices. Like the lack of diversity in British

television news, there is limited attention being given to the problem of the lack of diversity by the media when using expert sources in analysis of issues in television news (Cukier & Jackson, 2019).

For a clearer understanding of the importance of expert sources, it needs to be noted what expert sources accomplish. Expert sources are selected by journalists to bring perspective to complex issues, increase credibility to newscasts or public affairs shows, and offer facts (Kruvand, 2012). As mentioned, the lack of diverse perspectives means only the dominant voice is being heard by viewers, and it also means marginalized communities are silenced. Equally important is that the lack of diversity in expert sources puts in the mind of the viewers that certain marginalized groups are not intelligent enough to have a person of color, or marginalized member of the community appear as an expert on television to discuss complex issues (Hooghe et al., 2015).

In reference to women, an inability to see Black and other minority women on television could limit women from thinking of themselves as possible experts, and it could prevent them from attempting to inquire about how to become an expert (Hooghe et al., 2015). To gather research to explore media representation of Black women and other minorities as experts on public affairs shows, 251 episodes of three Canadian public affairs shows were viewed. The findings were that women were represented on those shows less than a third of the time, 22.9 %; while White men appeared nearly 69% of the time (Cukier & Jackson, 2019). The importance of this research, in connection to this study, is that it continues to explain the power and control patriarchy still holds onto women's agency, disallowing them the ability to reach their full potential.

Even when research examined increasing the number of women to serve as managers and serve on editorial boards in newsrooms so as to discover if those positions would change the newsroom culture, the findings of a 6-year study proved the theory of just having more women in the room was not enough (Shor et al., 2015). Women also need to be in managerial positions to set policies that change workplace environments (Shor et al., 2015).

While more women in newsroom management increased more positive coverage of women, it did not decrease the coverage of men, which was at a higher rate because many of the stories involved more men than women in leadership positions. The conclusion was that further study and more interviews with male and female journalists and editors might bring a better understanding of the constraints and omissions in news organizations. While it is possible that more females in a newsroom could change the climate, Shor et al. (2015) noted that the process to do so would be slow and gradual.

**Discrimination and Toxic Work Environments**

The challenges faced by Black women in newsrooms where they are seen through the eyes of whiteness are noted throughout this literature review (Kwate & Threadcraft, 2015; Melaku & Beeman, 2022; Rabelo et al., 2021). Additionally, the tactics some of those journalists used to maintain their cultural identity and to try to advance in those organizations can also be seen (Meyers & Gayle, 2015; Somani & Hopkinson, 2018).

Whenever an employee is struggling to maintain their self-esteem and confidence, or fight off harassment and incivility, the research shows they were working in a toxic work environment (Abbas & Saad, 2020). Toxic workplaces can be places where there is sexual harassment, bullying, sexism, racism, ostracism, employee tardiness, absenteeism, and burnout (Anjum et al., 2018).

Some workplaces are viewed by workers as so hostile that it creates persistent employee turnover, which leads to low productivity and real costs for employers whose staff rapidly and voluntarily leave the company (Haney, 2018). Research in this literature review about Black women reporters leaving the business, shunning their cultural identity, using their work to constantly produce stories and images that go against the newsroom White masculinity and racial norms, as well as observing their White counterparts being promoted while they struggle to advance, fulfills the definition of working in toxic work environments (Abba & Saad, 2020; Anjum et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2020).

Research identifies the leader, and not the employee, for creating this type of work environment (Wang et al., 2020). Toxic workplaces are often led and created by toxic management, absent leadership, and toxic leaders (Milosevic et al., 2019). Through quantitative exploration, researchers sought to ask employees how they believed these toxic workplaces were created and thrived. The employees attributed it to those in power striving to maintain power at the expense of the employees and that the show of power was a way of maintaining and reminding employees they were subordinates (Abbas & Saad; 2020; Wang et al., 2020). This behavior by leaders supports the research that patriarchy, power structures, and an inability to bring change to organizations are what keep Black women and minorities underrepresented in media organizations (Cukier & Jackson, 2019; Douglas, 2021; Meyers & Gayle, 2015; Pompper, 2011).

**Racism and Women's Health**

Research shows that Black women experience numerous health difficulties because of *gendered racism* (Spates et al., 2020). Gendered racism is defined as racial and gender oppression that creates specific and more challenging encounters for Black women in their

everyday lives. It is often referred to as the double jeopardy Black women live with by having to live with two marginalized identities (Stead, 2013). It is associated with mental and physical health implications, including infant and maternal morbidity and mortality, cancer mortality, hypertension, high blood pressure, and stress (Jerald et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2022; Williams & Williams-Morris (2000). Research shows, because of the inequities, women endure the risks to their health to advance in their careers and obtain income opportunities that benefit them and their families (Harts, 2019).

In some cases, women have what is referred to as *low-powered mindsets* from working in environments that cause severe mental distress so that they no longer have the resolve to advocate for themselves (Miller, 2020). The research in this literature review identified Black female journalists having to face gendered racism in their jobs where they were seen in structures of whiteness through the lens of the white gaze and, as a result, faced racism, sexism, classism, and negative gender perspectives. All these variables can lead to health difficulties Jones et al., 2022).

Similarly, in attempting to handle the pressures of this marginalization, many Black women turn to the strong Black woman schema (SBW schema) to keep up appearances and perform as if the pressures they face are not affecting them. This gives Black women the illusion of control, but research suggests this coping mechanism is impacting the physical and mental health of Black women (Liao et al., 2019). In an online survey of 222 African American women, researchers uncovered the many misunderstandings Black women held about the SBW schema (Liao et al., 2019).

One of the misunderstandings of the participants was the unrealistically high standards they felt they had to uphold for themselves and those whom they supported and who viewed

them as perfect. The participants of the study equated these high standards with their self-worth. Loneliness was also associated with SBW schema because those who valued being strong also thought they had to combat the pressures of gendered racism alone. While the Liao et al. (2019) study did not recommend Black women reject the SBW schema, because it was associated with their resilience, which was beneficial, the recommendation did suggest interventions and mental health treatment.

Additionally, in a study of the relationship between internalized racial oppression and health related outcomes (Gale et al., 2020), it was noted that Black women in the longitudinal analysis had a higher rate of depression than men. The authors of the study reviewed 29 studies on the relationship between internalized racism and negative physical and mental health outcomes. The study was based on the multiple oppressions women face because of their gender and their race (Gale et al., 2020).

The aspect of racism, known as *internalized racism*, which is defined as being accepting of stereotypes and discriminatory beliefs that point to one's own racial group as inferior, less intelligent, and less capable than the racial majority group has also been researched among Black journalists (Somani & Hopkinson, 2018; Williams & Williams-Morris, 2000). Working in newsrooms where anti-Black cultural norms were reenforced, some of the journalists took to erasing their African American identity and conformed to the hegemonic White norms regarding culture, hair, and skin color (Somani & Hopkinson, 2018). One light-skinned African American female journalist, when answering the research question of how she presented herself as African American in the newsroom noted that she did not. She noted she worked hard at not identifying with her race and her goal was to assimilate and make her life much easier by trying to get people to forget she was Black and just see her as a human being. She acknowledged her remarks

appeared as if she were distancing herself from her race, however, she did not see it as that (Somani & Hopkinson, 2018). This type of mental racial separation is another example of the mental anguish Black female reporters deal with while working in predominately White newsrooms where they are seen through the infrastructures of systemic whiteness and are imposed upon and judged through a lens that only sees them in comparison to whiteness.

**Chapter Summary**

The abundance of research in this literature review supports the need to examine this research problem and explore the lived experiences of the Black female journalists facing the intersection of race, sexism, and negative gender perspective while trying to advance in television newsrooms in the United States. The research pinpoints how Black women are viewed in society by police, in education, by the media, when they have gone missing, and by corporate America. Additionally, this research illuminates how that narrowness spills over into the hiring and advancement of Black female journalists in television newsrooms. Perceptions of African American female journalists render the mechanisms that allow White male journalists to advance in their careers, inoperable when it comes to African American female journalists.

In television newsrooms, those same systemic mechanisms do not allow Black female journalists to advance in their careers. Data, research analysis, narratives, and personal lived experiences of Black female journalists detailed in this literature review demonstrate that, for them, White masculine systems built on patriarchy collide with the intersectionality attached to the lives of Black female journalists. When Black female journalists head into newsrooms, intersectionality, which includes racism, sexism, and negative gender perceptions, go with them (Crenshaw, 1989). Furthermore, Black female journalists are up against a constant white gaze where their bodies, looks, speech, culture, mannerisms, hair, and complexions are judged

through the *lenses of whiteness*. Research in this literature review shows this constant imposition and judgment causes Black female journalists to suffer from mental and physical health problems and, in some cases, a denial of their own racial identity. This egregious act of deny oneself was the only way some Black female journalists could try and escape the pressures of being Black, a woman, and a journalist. Further research was warranted to examine—even closer—the inequities Black female journalists face as they attempt to advance and accomplish their career goals.

In Chapter 3, the methodology used in this study is examined to explain how the study was researched. A qualitative interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology was used because this method helps to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (Smith & Osborn, 2010). IPA was best suited for exploring the lived experiences of the Black female journalist participants in newsrooms in the United States.

# Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

## Introduction

Companies benefit from having a diverse workforce (Adekiya, 2023; Dike, 2013; Eshegbe & Dastane, 2015; Tuor Sartore & Backes-Gellner, 2020), and companies that hire women experience numerous advantages (Maurer & Qureshi, 2019). Yet, Black female journalists experience challenges when trying to achieve and advance in television newsrooms in the United States (Simpson, 2010). There is also an advantage for organizations that support women in leadership and executive positions (Matsa & Miller, 2013). Yet, Black female journalists are not equally represented in local and national anchor positions in newsrooms across the United States, even though the position of television anchor is one of leadership, experience, and intelligence (M. Sanserino, personal communication, February 18, 2022).

There is a gap in the research that does not explain why Black female journalists are nearly omitted from these leadership positions. Data to understand this phenomenon are not readily available (M. Sanserino, personal communication, February 18, 2022). This study examined the lived experiences of Black female journalists who attempted to ascend in newsrooms across the United States. The research question that guided this study is:

> What are the lived experiences of Black female journalists, working inside television newsrooms in the United States and who are trying to achieve upward mobility?

## Research Design

The qualitative methodology using IPA aligned with the aims of the researcher to gain knowledge from the human experiences of the participants. This study centered on Black

feminist theory to examine how Black female journalists, seen through the lens of the white gaze, get stalled at the intersection of racism, sexism, classism, negative images, and negative gender perceptions when trying to achieve upward mobility in U.S. television newsrooms.

A qualitative methodology was used because this method helps to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions (Smith & Osborn, 2010). Qualitative methodology generates nonnumerical data to understand those experiences, opinions, and concepts, as researchers study elements in their natural settings and they try to make sense of or interpret the phenomena and the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Fleck (2015) stated that unstructured interviewing and group discussions are essential in answering one of the most important questions in qualitative research: "Why?"

This study used IPA because it is centered in ideography, phenomenology, and hermeneutics to explore an individual's meaning-making of their world (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA was best suited to explore the lived experiences of Black female journalists in television newsrooms regarding issues of racism, sexism, and classism because it sought a richer and deeper understanding of the phenomenon and it sought to gain new knowledge of participants' lived experiences in the world (Smith & Osborn, 2010).

The IPA approach allowed the participants to narrate how they understood what they felt while trying to navigate barriers and tell their own true stories. Additionally, because an IPA approach is participant focused, the interviewees could express themselves without following a preconceived or stereotypical line of questioning. The participants were able to share this kind of deep, rich, knowledge because IPA allows researchers to create bonds with their participants. Those bonds are made through an interpersonal relationship (Alase, 2017). IPA gives researchers

an invaluable opportunity to understand the most private and deeply felt lived experiences of research participants.

To be completely transparent, the researcher is a Black female television journalist with 30 years of experience in the profession as an anchor and reporter. She is also a two-time Emmy nominee, and an Emmy award-winning reporter. The researcher has worked at three network affiliates starting in the small-sized DMA market of Greenville, Mississippi, to the medium-sized DMA markets of Peoria, Illinois, and Albany, New York. It should also be noted that the researcher is a member of the private networking group entitled Black Girls in Broadcasting.

**Research Context**

Nielsen rankings (2021–2022) lists 210 DMAs in the United States. The smaller the designated market number, the larger the news market. For example, Albany, New York has a DMA of 60, whereas New York City has a DMA of 1. The diversity of size and geography for market areas provides a context for having a broad outreach for the participants of this study. The goal of this study was to have representation from a variety of market sizes. This variety allowed for a richer and fuller understanding of the lived experiences of each participant in their own respective workplace environment.

**Research Participants**

The participants from the various designated market areas were recruited from the group, Black Girls in Broadcasting. Black Girls in Broadcasting is a private networking platform that consists of over 1,000 members. It is made up of Black female television journalists, and it is exclusively for Black female television journalists. Journalists are vetted before they are accepted into the group and onto the site, which is a social media site. Given to the nature of

online networking groups, these journalists have the potential to come from across the country and work in television stations from any of the 210 television markets in the United States.

This is important because locating and selecting participants with extensive work experience could provide richer research content because those individuals potentially have more knowledge and experience regarding the profession and could possess fuller lived experiences than individuals who are just starting out in the profession. This section includes the location of the study and situational demographics and other descriptors inherent in the setting and important to the study.

The participants of this study consisted of six Black female television journalists who had at least 2 years in the profession. Journalists with at least 2 years in the business, as opposed to someone who has been in the profession a shorter time, would have more diversified living experiences that may provide a better understanding of the research problem.

Additionally, while phenomenological research tradition suggests the participant pool should be between 2 and 25 participants, and IPA studies have been published with four to nine to 15 participants, these larger numbers are not common (Alase, 2017). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) noted having a sample of between six and eight participants provides an opportunity to examine the differences or similarities between individuals and, at the same time, that number of participants helps ensure the data are not overwhelming. For this study six participants were chosen and allowed for regional- and market-size stratification and support diversification of the data.

An initial demographic study of the participants allowed for an important, demographic view of the participants, as well as to understand for future analysis, if some of the lived workplace experiences faced by Black female television journalists in newsrooms in the United

States are generational. The lived experiences described by Black female journalists since the 1940s suggests the similarities in the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classism that they experienced in the workplace was generational (Davis, 2012; Dunnigan & McCabe-Booker, 2015; Simpson, 2010).

The sample of prospective participants for the research study were recruited through a recruitment post made by the researcher on the private networking site of Black Girls in Broadcasting. Following affirmative responses from prospective participants, the researcher selected them through two types of sampling: purposive and snowball sampling.

Purposive sampling is deliberate sampling that is not a nonprobability sampling method, meaning it is not random but, rather, specific to the group of participants to be explored in the research (Campbell et al., 2020; Palys, 2008). This type of sampling is well suited for survey research, as a way of looking for a specific area of interest such as examining the lived experiences of a specific group of people, like Black female journalists in the United States. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to use her own judgment when choosing the population of participants to be in this study (Palinkas et al., 2015). The characteristics for purposive sampling were Black female television journalists in the United States (Smith & Osborn, 2010).

Snowball sampling was used as a secondary sampling method. Snowball sampling is a commonly used sampling method in qualitative research (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). Snowball sampling allowed the researcher to generate a pool of participants through referrals made by Black female journalists of other Black female journalists who may have met the criteria of this research study.

Six Black female working journalists participated in this study. This group of Black female journalists represented all the major television news affiliate networks. As depicted in Table 3.1, the participants had between 2 to 30 years of experience in the profession and have covered topics, discussions, and issues focusing on protests surrounding police brutality, to natural disasters, to murder trials.

At the time of their interviews, the journalists ranged from cub reporters to experienced veteran journalists, with four participants ranging in age from 22 to 31 years old. One participant was 34 and one was over the age of 50. All the journalists, at the time of their interviews, were college graduates and two were married. One of the participants had worked at just one television station. Three of the journalists had worked at three different television stations and two had worked at two different stations. The salaries were low for all but one of the journalists, considering the years the journalists had been in the business. For example, four participants earned between $35,000 to $45,000 per year, and the one participant who had over 25 years in the business, was making just over $60,000. None of the journalists reported working on the West Coast.

**Table 3.1**

*Participant Demographics*

| Participant | Age Range (in Years) | Years in Field | Location | Highest Level of Education Attained | Salary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 28–35 | 3 | East Coast | College | $35–45,000 |
| 2 | 22–27 | 4 | East Coast | College | $35–45,000 |
| 3 | 22–27 | 2 | South | College | $35–45,000 |
| 4 | 22–27 | 2 | South | College | $35–45,000 |
| 5 | 28–35 | 4 | East Coast | College | $45–55,000 |
| 6 | 33–55 | 30 | East Coast | College | $65–75,000 |

## Instruments Used in Data Collection

There were three primary instruments used in this study: (a) the interview protocol, (b) the researcher, and (c) the field notes. Once the study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. John Fisher University, the interview protocol (Appendix A) was piloted with a Black female journalist who was not a participant in this study. The researcher acted as the instrument of data collection because it was the researcher's responsibility to do so (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Bracketing is not used with qualitative IPA methodology. IPA allows the researchers to put themselves in the shoes of the participants to understand and interpret the participants' lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Semi-structured interviews were used because they are one of the most beneficial means of collecting data for IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). These types of interviews allowed for a few predetermined questions, but they did not contain rigorous questions where the participants might lose the natural flow of their narrative, and these interviews allowed the interviewer to ask follow-up questions (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews of no longer than 60 minutes enabled the participants to cover any or all aspects of their experiences that they, themselves, deemed relevant and allowed new ideas to be brought up because of what the participants said and how they responded to the questions (Smith & Osborn, 2010). The researcher's role was to act as an interviewer and interpreter, to engage in double hermeneutics, and make sense of the participants' making sense of this phenomenon, which is the central idea of IPA (Tuffour, 2017). Field notes were taken during the face-to-face interviews. The handwritten notes were reviewed by the interviewer to note interview situation interactions, as well as verbal and nonverbal gestures and to provide immediate feedback to improve the process (Esin et al., 2014).

Triangulation methods using different data sets, interviews, field notes, and observations were used to maintain validity in the research (Mohamed et al., 2015). Data tables were used to establish and maintain reliability of the data and to compare the data with the seven stages used in the data analysis process. Two processes were done with the data analysis, not after it, to provide an extra layer of authenticity to the research. Finally, a statement of validity of the research was created, stating that the two processes were conducted (Golafshani, 2003). Ensuring the quality and rigor of the findings of the research involved the researcher incorporating the best practice methods in sampling. In the data collection processes, to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative research, the researcher had a clear rationale for sampling the design decisions, determined the data saturation, used an ethical in research design, and performed member checking (Cypress, 2017). Creswell (2013) noted that the researcher needs to follow five systematic steps:

1. Identifying the research topic: formulating a research question and creating a framework to center the study.
2. Qualitative study design to minimizes bias.
3. Data analysis for triangulation.
4. Drawing valid conclusions.
5. Reporting the research results.

**Procedures Used for Data Collection**

Following IRB approval and completion of the consent forms by the participants, the researcher sent a recruitment post to the recruitment group, Black Girls in Broadcasting. The researcher then sent an email notification directly to prospective participants who responded to the recruitment post, explaining the research purpose, and inquired if the prospective participants

were still interested in taking part in the study. A demographic profile sheet was made of each participant to collect information, such as age, education, assignment beat or reporting specialty and how many years they had worked in the profession. Having at least 2 years in the profession was important, as it allowed participants to compare experiences and have diversified perspectives. The research study was conducted via the Zoom meeting platform (Pro version) with six journalists. Zoom has transcription capabilities and was enabled during the interview.

Three primary procedures and methods of data collection were used for this qualitative research study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

1. Demographics: a demographic survey was sent to participants via email. The survey asked: Age when participants joined the profession, location, ethnicity, education, marital status, income, network affiliation, years in the profession, current job title, number of markets worked in and locations.

2. In-depth interviewing using Zoom for the interviews. An interview of each participant verbally asking participants open-ended questions in individual interviews. The form of the questions was centered around the participants expressing their lived experiences while working at their respective news stations.

3. Observation: Observing facial expressions, sadness, joy, or hesitation on the part of the participant when recounting their lived experiences, as well as making brief notes on the thoughts, ideas, or questions that came into the researcher's mind while gathering the data.

The researcher successfully had each participant complete the Statement of Informed Consent of Adult Participants form required by St. John Fisher IRB. The application to the IRB contained copies of communications and consent forms for the planned study. The consent forms

detailed the purpose of the research, which was to understand the lived experiences of Black female journalists in newsrooms in the United States.

The time commitment for the Zoom interviews with each participant was listed as up to 60 minutes. The benefits were described as numerous to society and the profession of journalism, and the risks were described as minimal, as the probability of and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research were not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during routine tests. There were no additional anticipated emotional or physical risks associated with participating in this study. By participating in this study, the participants contributed to the study results, which added to the current, limited research on Black female journalists and the challenges they face while attempting to advance in U.S. newsrooms.

The consent form for the online survey informed the participants that all consent was voluntary. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants and their employers/former employers. The participants' names and identifying information will remain confidential and will not appear in transcripts, analysis, or the final study. All key codes linking names to data are stored in a locked file cabinet and they are only accessible by the researcher for a period of 5 years after successful dissertation defense, and then all data will be destroyed.

The consent form for the Zoom interview included information about a face-to-face interview and the plan for the researcher to record the interviews to be transcribed most accurately. The participants were not asked to identify themselves or their organizations on tape. All digital audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews are maintained using a password-protected computer, which is stored securely in the private home of the researcher. Electronic files will include assigned identity codes and pseudonyms; they will not include actual

names or any information that could personally identify or connect the participants to this study. Other materials, including notes or paper files, relating to the data collection and analysis, are stored securely in unmarked boxes, locked inside a file cabinet in the private home of the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to electronic or paper records. The digitally recorded audio data will be kept by the researcher for a period of 5 years following publication of the dissertation. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for 5 years after publication. All paper records will be shredded. Electronic records will be deleted.

**Procedures Used for Data Analysis**

After reviewing the transcriptions and notes several times, a systematic approach was taken to analyze the data. Appropriate themes and categories were created to align with the research questions. Seven stages were used to center the analysis process: (a) organizing the data, (b) immersion into the data, (c) generating preexisting codes, (d) applying codes to data, (e) interpreting the data, (f) developing alternative understandings, and (g) writing a report or presenting the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

While the seven stages served as the framework regarding how to start and end the analysis, research offers other important details that were considered in the analysis such as utilizing interview processes that ensure the transcriptions were verbatim accounts of the interviews (McCracken, 1988; Patton, 1990). Additionally, becoming immersed in the data, which is the second stage of the analysis process, meant having to continually read the transcripts and listen to the audios to recall the environment and possibly reignite the interviews and settings and possibly create new insights and observations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The phenomenological approach is designed as a way for participants to describe the meaning of their lived experience in relation to a specific phenomenon. Finally, to prepare, the

researcher kept a notebook as a reminder of the goals, research approach, data collection, and data analysis before the first interview. Memoing was done as ideas and thoughts about codes or relationships between codes came up, and questions that might arise that should be answered for further investigation. To improve on the interviews after the first interview, the interviewer wrote retrospective notes of the goals, plans, and thoughts as soon as each interview is done.

# Chapter 4: Results

## Introduction

This study explored the lived experiences of six Black female journalists working in television newsrooms in the United States. As presented in Chapter 1, Black women have a unique experience with discrimination (Collins, 2000), with Crenshaw (1989) noting that Black women seldom face discrimination based on a single act of bias. Crenshaw (1989) called this phenomenon intersectionality and said that along with racism, Black women simultaneously also face sexism, classism, and other biases.

Rabelo et al. (2021) noted that intersectionality happens to Black women in the workplace daily when these women are seen through the eyes of the white gaze. The white gaze is defined as the judgmental or critical eye of the White population toward Black women in the workplace because of their culture, ethnicity, or body image. Black female journalists are not exempt from the white gaze in the workplace (Simpson, 2010). In the workplace, when seen through the eyes of the white gaze, Black women cannot fully be themselves and have agency over their thoughts, opinions, and assertiveness because their beauty, their bodies, and their culture are constantly being judged through distorted images (Rabelo et al., 2021).

Not only are Black female journalists not exempt from the white gaze but the experiences of Black female journalists in the workplace can be traced back to the 1940s (Dunnigan & McCabe-Booker, 2015; Simpson, 2010). Today, Black journalists continue to tell of their lived experiences inside the workplace through books, social media posts, and private networking groups. In this study, six Black female journalists noted they, too, faced intersectionality and the

white gaze. In riveting, raw, and powerful detail, these participants discussed how they made sense of the racism they faced and the overlapping prejudices they encountered, daily, in television newsrooms across the country.

**Research Question**

The research question that was the thread throughout this study was:

What are the lived experiences of Black female journalists, working inside television newsrooms in the United States, who are trying to achieve upward mobility?

The literature review presented the major obstacles and contributing factors of the existing research studies and served as a backdrop for this robust study and data analysis. The interview questions posed to the participants were intended to investigate the current workplace environment in television newsrooms and to allow Black female journalists, working in those newsrooms, to share their unique, lived experiences. As a result of this investigation, it allowed for an unrepenting discourse regarding this topic, as well as to open an avenue to new and previously unexplored themes surrounding the obstacles Black female journalists experience as they seek upward mobility.

**Data Analysis and Findings**

Chapter 4 presents the data and findings, which are arranged in four major themes (Table 4.1). Each theme describes the lived experiences of the study participants who are Black female journalists in the media in the United States and who had experienced an intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and negative gender perspectives. The purpose of this study was to explore and identify the unique set of struggles Black female journalists face in television newsrooms, and how those struggles intersected to create numerous obstacles for the journalists as they endeavored to achieve success, status, and promotions in their workplace. Each theme

was explored to address the study's research question. A summary, along with the research findings is given at the conclusion of Chapter 4.

**Table 4.1**

*Themes and Subthemes*

| Theme | Subtheme | Subtheme | Subtheme |
|---|---|---|---|
| Entering Into the Gate | Getting Your Foot in the Door | Lying, Crying & Depression | Perseverance |
| Racism | Racism-Subtle & Overt | Racism-Trauma & Stereotypes | Diversity, Social Justice, Invisibility |
| Emotional Rollercoaster | Physical Emotions | Mental Emotion | |
| Workplace Environment | Organizational Structure | Dissatisfaction | |

### *Theme 1: Entering Into the Gate*

Black female journalists make up less than 5% of journalists in this country (M. Sanserino (M. Sanserino, personal communication, February 18, 2022; Zippia Data Sciences, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). The themes and subthemes of this study show why increasing those numbers is so challenging. The study data show why it can be hard for Black females to break into the business, and that is because they do not have the proper guidance on the prerequisites necessary for getting into that business.

For example, none of the participants in this study said they were recruited during college by television stations to join their newsroom staff after graduation. None of the participants said they were advised in college by a college counselor to get into an internship position at a television station. Only one participant took part in a television internship during college. Participant 4 started an internship but quit after she said she was marginalized by the young White female reporter she was shadowing. She noted,

> I felt tried because she came from a school that didn't have a journalism program. . . . I'm at a school with the best professors, with the best journalism programs. I'm doing live shots three times in our student broadcasts. . . . I'm gonna be honest . . . my ego could not handle that. (P4)

These lived experiences are important because they show that what one does not know can hurt them, and for these young college seniors, not understanding the importance of networking, or where to go to network, or having no media contact set them back, some of them—by years. That early access would have not only provided them with real-life experience to complement the theory they learned in class, but it would also have given them an advantage when trying to acquire their first job in the profession. Entering into the gate of the newsroom was made even more difficult for these Black females because they not only lacked school connections, but they had no family connections, either, to help them enter into the gate of the newsroom. However, some of the participants' White counterparts had both and, therefore, the White counterparts had jobs simply because they had access to the newsroom. As Participant 3 noted, she did think she was kept in the dark about these career essentials for no other reason except that she was Black.

The lived experiences of these Black female college students also support the literature that Black women endure numerous social challenges, often simultaneously (Crenshaw, 2017). The data show those social challenges, like racism, classism, and sexism, for these young ladies, started early. This interconnectedness of social categorizations like race, gender, and class relegated the Black female journalists to undesirable work assignments, prevented them from being envisioned as the face of their respective news outlet, and did not position them as candidates to be groomed for executive or management positions within television stations. This

intersectionality of challenges resulted from systemic social structures and economic systems that marginalized and omitted the Black female journalists, which made them invisible in television newsrooms and made their ascension into this field frustratingly difficult.

**Subtheme 1: Getting Your Foot in the Door.** While the subtheme of getting your foot in the door did not consume the bulk of the research with the participants, it is extremely important because it directly relates to the study's research question regarding the lived experiences of Black female journalists, working inside television newsrooms in the United States, who were trying to achieve upward mobility.

For half of the participants, their lived experiences began during their senior year in college. Including what happened to these Black females in college as they attempted to get into the business is vital for several reasons. First, it demonstrates that intersectionality rests upon the shoulders of young Black women—even before they enter the workforce and become professional female journalists. Second, it shows the degree of the struggles they faced, and these early lived experiences also explained how these young Black women persevered, became journalists, and because of their presence in the business, they have changed the type of content presented on television newscasts, as well as whose voice it comes from. Participant 1 spoke of taking her 9 years after college to get into in television news. She remembered she had experience in college working for the college station and accumulated an audition reel of her work. She noted, "Looking back at my reel . . . at the time for my skill level, it was pretty decent. I wasn't trying to get to a big market. I was literally like sending DVDs everywhere. I was willing to go anywhere." Participant 1 persevered and at the time of her interview she was an Emmy-nominated reporter.

**Subtheme 2: Crying, Lying, Desperation.** Half of the participants in the research data said they experienced racist innuendos as they sought assistance from faculty to help them enter the profession upon graduation from college. Turning to faculty at this time in higher education is not unheard of. Senior year is the time when students are getting selected for internships at television stations and are turning to faculty to help them craft resumes and campus work samples.

In 2013, a decade ago, students mailed news directors a DVD of their audition tape. Before that, they sent a cassette tape. Today, work samples include a student-developed YouTube page with copies of audition videos of their work as student journalists on campus. A link to the YouTube page is sent to a station if an opening exists. Having a professor write a letter of recommendation was, and is, still considered a bonus when trying to find that first job. So, it was not unheard of for a student to seek a recommendation from a professor. Participant 3 recalled she was snubbed when she asked for a recommendation letter from her professor. She felt that rejection was connected to her race. Participant 3 said,

> I told her I went to the website station index.com . . . to see a view, a list of all the stations . . . I wanted to see if she . . . could write a recommendation for me. But when I went up to her and told her about it, she had a weird look on her face. . . . It's vibes, it's attitudes towards us. It's facial expressions. All of that really plays a part in our experiences as Black women in this industry. (P3)

Those negative memories were still very vivid in the minds of the participants during this research study as they noted that their White college classmates did not have the same difficulty and, in most instances, the professors were actually helpful and mentored by White faculty on how to get their foot in the door. Participant 3 said,

> There was another girl . . . she wanted to do sports reporting. I wanted to do regular general news, and they were very open to her. She was a White girl. I saw the difference. . . . After we graduated, she immediately got a job. I really felt . . . kinda like I was on this island all by myself not knowing what to do or how to do it. (P3)

Getting into the newsroom would be the first major challenge for half of the participants.

**Subtheme 3: It Started with a Lie.** "I lied; you know. I lied because I was very desperate, at that point, to get in. Get my foot in the door." Participant 3 who was without contacts from her college became panicked when you could not find a job on television news after graduation. After becoming aware there was a position as an editor at a television station an hour and 35 minutes away from her home, Participant 3 lied and said she had experience as an editor when she did not. It was the only way she said to get her foot in the door and, hopefully, work her way up and, one day, become a reporter. She went on to say, "It took me about 2 years to not only get into this industry, but also to become reporter and an anchor."

Participant 1 also lied to get her foot in the door. There was an opening for a producer, and although it was not the job she wanted, and she never worked as a producer, Participant 1 decided to pursue the job, strategizing that it could lead down a road that would one day get her into the newsroom and a job as a reporter. After years of looking for a job, she was willing to do almost anything. However, Participant 1 failed the test for producers and broke down into tears. She noted, "I broke down and cried in front of him . . . . I was like, 'I finally got an interview, and I blew it' and I cried." There was another position at that same television station for a technical director and she lied, again, and said she had experience as a producer and this time it worked. Participant 1 got her foot in the door.

Participant 1 added, “I just said, ‘yes,’ . . . I wanted to get in.” During her interview, she reached back to her experience as a member of the video ministry in her church to answer the interviewer’s questions, but she got in the door and eventually she did get to the newsroom as a reporter. Her story, and several of the other participants’ stories, show the desperation these Black women felt. Lying was a sign of hopelessness and a result of the constant self-judgment and imposter syndrome these women felt over why they could not step foot inside a television newsroom without being regularly turned away. This desperation connects to the research question and presents an authentic picture of how challenging it is to become a Black female journalist.

**Subtheme 4: Perseverance.** Like Participant 3, Participant 1 did not receive support from her professors, either, but her extensive experience in college should have helped her get a job in television. She worked on the school’s student-run television station, the student-run newspaper, the student-run sports broadcasts, and she had an opportunity to be among the students who worked for ESPN. She was certain this mountain of experience would be her way to get her foot in the door. But for her, doing all the things a student is advised to do, in the end, she said, they did not help her. “I didn’t get a job after college, so it didn’t help. I saw it helped some of my other classmates, but it didn’t help me.”

Like little girls who grew up wanting to be a gymnast, an actress, or a singer, the participants in this study grew up wanting to be on television. None of them aspired to have a career doing anything other than being on television. Participant 1 noted,

> When I would watch TV shows like *The Cosby Show*, *Full House*, *That’s So Raven*, *The Olsen Twins*, I never looked and said, “I wouldn’t be them.” At a young age, I understood

> they were working, and I wanted to do that. . . . When I got to college, I thought, maybe, I could get on television by telling stories. (P1)

Therefore, Participant 1 persevered, and foremost in her mind was the desire to live her dreams. However, it would take her 9 years after graduating from college to get her first job in television. She said,

> I literally was, like, sending DVDs everywhere. I was willing to go anywhere. I didn't even have to be a reporter. I just wanted to be in the newsroom, and I could not get anything. My first job was at a gas station. (P1)

Many Black female journalists have discovered that to even have an opportunity at getting their foot in the door would mean they might have to lose some of themselves. For one third of the participants, they would have to give up a part of their identity. Participant 1 said she had an ethnic-sounding name, so after searching for a job in television news using the name her parents gave her, she changed her strategy. Feeling that her envelopes containing her cover letter and her DVDs were being thrown in the trash without ever being opened, she decided to stop addressing the envelopes containing her audition tape with her full name. Instead, she just used an initial for her first name and wrote out her last name. It still did not work. She noted, "You don't want to say it's all about race, but that is something that played a part because I had the experience."

Participant 4 also had an ethnic sounding name, and after getting her first job in the business, she says some of her colleagues took to calling her by another name because they said it was easier for them to pronounce. However, Participant 4 openly confronted them, told them how her name was pronounced, and demanded that they call her by her given name.

As Participant 5 prepared to get her first job in television, although she was biracial, she did not have a problem with being seen as something other than Black. She said early in her career, she did not identify as Black. While she never used the phrase "passing for White," she said that as a biracial person, she embraced her features that made her look more White than Black, if that is what the television station administration wanted to identify her as. Again, she never used the words passing as White, but chose, instead, to identify herself, if need be, by the part of her ethnicity that was not Black. She noted:

> I have found that I've had this chameleon-like ability to move through different ethnicities . . . I knew that because of my multiethnic background, I kind of looked Native American too . . . and I also knew that by being both . . . I was approachable. So, I knew that my ethnicity was actually a benefit. . . . I fit into a variety of ethnicities and that made me an easy hire for them . . . and maybe not be a threat. . . . I think a lot of time, people hire people that they identify with. (P5)

Image is extremely important on television, as noted not only in the context of the research and review of the literature, but also in the way Participant 5 explained how she made meaning of her ethnicity and how far she was willing to discuss it or not, to get her first job. However, her decision raised questions to the researcher. By believing that her ethnicity was a benefit, was she worried that openly embracing her Black heritage might make her co-workers or boss discriminate against her? Did she wonder why her race factored in in any way? And why did she consider herself Black, now, after being in the business for nearly 30 years? Yet she did not identify as Black when she started her career? These were questions not asked of this participant because she was adamant in expressing that she chose to embrace her "White side" early in her career, and it felt like prying to the researcher to ask her more about her "race

gaze”—a lens that sees things from a White perspective and sees Black women, when seen through that lens, in a harsher light, especially in the workplace, where the gaze is a reality and not just a theory. The balance of the participants experienced that gaze where they were constantly being judged negatively from their hair to their bodies to their speech to their skin color (Rabelo et al., 2021).

Additionally, the participants’ opinions were scrutinized and invalidated daily. All this indifference toward Black women has a strong connection to the negative image of Black women, which was grounded in slavery and racism and has been controlled through the media images of Black women as Mammies and Jezebels (Lewis et al., 2017). Still today, those images and stereotypes transcend the status or positionality of Black women in professional fields, including the profession of television journalism (Myers & Gayle, 2015; Salerno et al., 2019). With the Black feminist theory serving as the framework, this study presents how difficult it is for Black female journalists to enter the profession of television journalism.

Participant 1, who searched for her first job for 9 years noted, “I don’t know. I guess it’s the nature of the business. What is it? They have an idea of what they want and who they want, and I didn’t fit into that.”

In addition, the darker their skin color meant some Black women had to deal with colorism before they could command the anchor desk. One third of the participants spoke of colorism and the role it plays in some Black female journalists getting into newsrooms or finding upward mobility once they get in. Wearing their hair naturally, the image of darker-hued women sitting at an anchor desk and reporting out in the field, are not the images television news stations have always wanted to embrace. Colorism is generally exhibited among one’s own race to maintain hierarchy in that race.

Colorism stems from slavery when children of slave masters, who were identified by the term *mulattos*, were given chores in the slave master's home because they were considered somewhat privileged over children birthed by two slave parents (Reece, 2018). This divisive ranking system remains today. Some of the participants of this study said they had witnessed Black women use colorism to get their foot in the door, as a means to gain upward mobility, as well as have it used against them by their employers. Participant 3, a darker-skinned Black female journalist, felt colorism played a role in her not getting into the profession as soon as she wanted to and for her having to lie to finally get her foot in the door. Once she got in, she felt it also plagued her. But she felt it was not the only barrier she faced on her journey to live her dream. She felt there were numerous challenges she faced. She noted, "I think it was racism. I think it was colorism, and I think it was sexism."

Participant 3's lived experiences mimic what the literature describes as the ubiquitous intersectionality Black women must constantly push back against (Crenshaw, 2017). Additionally, her lived experiences contributed to the uniqueness of Black women's struggles and helped to underscore why this study is important in making Black women's struggles transparent to others.

***Theme 2: Racism***

The research findings of this study show that the Black female journalist participants experienced many levels of racism once they finally entered their television newsrooms. Not one participant said there was no racism in their newsroom. Participant 2 said that in every newsroom she worked, there was racism and discrimination. She had worked in three different newsrooms and said things got so bad that she had to start tape-recording racists' conversation made toward her. She said things got so bad at one station that she wanted to leave that station. When she was

not allowed out of her contract, she said she mentioned the racist things that were said to her and she also mentioned she had tapes of those conversations, and then she was let out of her contract.

**Subtheme 1: Subtle and Overt.** Some of the racism came in the form of microaggressions. Participant 2 said she was taking a new job as an anchor and on her first day, she walked into the newsroom, and she was ignored by two colleagues. They were women who were hoping to be promoted to the job she had been hired for. She noted, “On my first day of walking into the station, I was scolded by two White women . . . no one said good morning. They looked at me nasty, and I said, ‘good morning!’ They were [expletive] that I was there.” Participant 2 said the women who were White had been at the station for years and their microaggressions continued until those women left the station.

Participant 3 noted she was hired by an assistant newsroom manager for the digital online section of the newsroom, and the news director, who was White, refused to welcome her for 3 months. She was told by a fellow coworker to take the initiative and introduce herself. She disagreed, saying,

> In the back of my mind, I’m like “I really don’t think this is going to work. If you haven’t introduced yourself to me by 3 months and in 3 months, you really don’t care.” That really set the tone for the rest of the relationship. There was a lot of [expletive], a lot of [expletive] at that station. The dynamics were very weird. (P3)

The abuse the participants went through did not only consist of microaggressions, but Participant 4 also remembered when several of her White coworkers culture-shamed her for the time it took to get her ethnic hair braided. She noted the conversation,

> “You really sat in the chair for 8 hours just for your hair?” . . . and I’m like, “you don’t sit for 8 hours to get your hair whitened.” It’s like the same thing. I remember how I had to

> explain how much time it saved me . . . how much lighter it is . . . and it was just irritating to have to do stuff like that. (P4)

The microaggressions also manifested themselves in the form of micromanagement. Participant 3 said she never felt she was good enough in her job as a reporter because management consistently made a point of obsessing over her work specifically, and her anxiety would heighten when management would blame their micromanagement on complaints from others after the fact, but never at the time of the so-called "mistake" and correct Participant 3. She said,

> I felt I had a target on my back. . . . from the way I wrote things and how I did things. I did not have a moment of peace there because someone was always doing things underhandedly . . . would tell me that a producer had asked questions about something I wrote. If you don't simply come to me, how I would know that I messed up something? It got to the point, I was not doing things because it was my job, I was doing things so . . . [they] wouldn't say something. (P3)

There were also those microaggressions that took the form of cultural aggravations but yielded the same mental toll on the Black female journalists as the physical encounters they maneuvered through daily. These aggravations center around having to educate the White employees in the newsroom on the need to cover stories on important issues impacting Black people. It is false to believe that this only happens in smaller markets where it is harder to localize a national event. This invisibility toward Blacks happens in most newsrooms and Black reporters consistently have to school their White counterparts on the relevancy of covering an issue that is causing harm or disenfranchising Blacks. The reason Blacks have to teach cultural competence to Whites in newsrooms can be found in Chapter 1 where the data show that the

people who decide what goes on air on a daily basis are generally all White, yet they have little connection, if any at all, with the Black community (Zippia Data Sciences, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). So, the burden of making sure the Black community is represented on television news shows falls on the shoulders of the Black female reporters. Participant 4 noted her frustration at having to be a journalist/current affairs teacher. She said,

> I had to explain the significance of covering a rally here in . . . for the George Floyd protest. It was like. "Oh, that's not happening here. It'll never happen here." Well, it has happened before, and explaining that telling these kinds of stories are just as important as running every single teenager's mugshot who gets involved in drugs or has a gun. (P4)

**Subtheme 2: Overt Racism.** Much of the racism experienced by the participants in this study was overt, and it went unaddressed by the leadership at the respective newsrooms. Participant 1 vividly remembers being made to work inside a closet after she and her coworkers returned to the office following the pandemic. She said that it was her first time dealing with overt racism in the newsroom, but the incident she said left her traumatized. While participating in the interview for this study, the trauma of what she endured was visible through her facial expressions and by how her voice dropped as she relived and seemingly tried to make sense of how something like that happened to her. Suddenly, she started crying and excused herself from the interview to get some tissue. There was silence and an unsureness of whether she would return to the conversation. She did return to explain that the staff in her newsroom only consisted of five reporters, and each one was made to sit in the far corners of the newsroom. Participant 1 picked up what happened when she walked into the newsroom,

> We got back to the office . . . they wanted to separate us . . . I went to where my seat used to be, . . . and he said, "no, no, that is not your seat. I got you a seat here," and it was like

> the closet, the closet! It didn't . . . even have a light yet. He is still running around trying to find a lamp and you know . . . I'm like "I'm not gonna." Sitting in there, that's not where I want to sit, and I told him I didn't feel comfortable being in there. But he told me that was my office . . . that was probably my office for a week.

She mentioned that when she left the closet to go out into the newsroom to talk with her colleagues, her news director would come over to her and tell her to return to the closet. She said her coworkers were speechless as they tried to make sense of why she was directed to stay in the closet. She said she was only allowed to leave the closet after she sent an email to the general manager and human resources (HR). In her email she said she told the general manager, as the only Black person in the building, she found it degrading to have to be in the closet. The next day she was allowed out of the closet and sent an email from HR. She said the responding email said: "The space used to be an office but over the years, it was kind of turned into a place where people dumped their stuff off, but it used to be an office . . . and that the intention was not to make you feel isolated. We thought you might want privacy."

To make any excuses to explain why management thought it was a good idea to put Participant 1 in a closet is just that: an excuse. But, to say it was anything other than the idea was marinated in racism would be untrue as well. This was a racist act toward Participant 1, and she was not unique in her experience. Participant 1 posted her experience on the same private online networking site that some of the participants of this study were selected from, and other Black female journalists said they, too, were forced to work out of closets. She noted: "One girl actually said she just accepted it because, you know, this is a job she wants to be in."

As openly racist as Participant 1's experience was, other participants of the study said they also were victims of racist names. Participant 5 said she was hoping for a promotion from

morning show reporter to morning show host, but what she feels was a trope and a stereotype about Black women was used against her, and that caused her to lose that promotion. The trope was that of the ABW. That myth characterizes Black women as hostile, aggressive, consistently having a negative attitude, and angry without cause or provocation (Ashley, 2014). Not even the Black, former First Lady of the United States could escape this burdensome, racist moniker. In her memoir, Michelle Obama noted that the hardest chapters to write were the ones where she responded to being labeled an ABW (Obama, 2018).

The ABW trope has been used to label Black women who are opinioned, intelligent, and who show they have agency over their thoughts and ideas—all the traits that Participant 5 possessed. Participant 5 said those traits were used against her when she was given a chance to substitute anchor the morning show that she was hoping to get promoted to. On the show, she advised a guest not to provide a litany of dates for upcoming events for her agency until the end of the interview. However, the guest started providing those upcoming events at the beginning of the interview, and Participant 5 reminded her to wait. After the interview, Participant 5 was ushered into her boss' office and told that she was rude for interrupting the guest and, in the end, she never got promoted.

The accusation seems to go against the very skills television anchors and co-hosts are celebrated for and that is the ability to get to the facts regarding an issue and that sometimes involves interrupting the guests who ramble on, leaving viewers confused and uninformed. Participant 5 felt her boss was interpreting her interview and communications skills incorrectly. She also felt she was judged that way because of racial bias and the intersection of race and sex. She noted:

> I really do feel like . . . a lot of times, being a woman of color, we are often interpreted that we communicate differently, like we're either rude or angry, you know, like those things really do . . . resonate with us, and if you don't have somebody who understands your ethnicity, sometimes they perceive you in a way. (P5)

While the lack of cultural competence can explain the ignorance surrounding not knowing how to be sensitive when listening to someone share how they maintain their ethnic hair, for those Black women journalists who have ethnic hair, not transforming their hair into "anchor hair" can keep them from getting the coveted seat at the anchor table.

Several participants spoke regarding how their natural hair was used as a weapon to keep them from the anchor desk. Participant 2 said she went to her first television news job as a reporter wearing a long flowing wig. After expressing her desire to substitute anchor, she started wearing her hair "big and curly." She said it was then that her news director approached her and said,

> "You're brave for that in here." He was saying you're brave for your natural hair . . . I have not, like, always been smart, and I'm like "I wonder why he won't let me anchor?" And as soon as I straightened my hair, he said in the middle of the newsroom, "now that's anchor hair," then I became the weekend anchor. (P2)

Utilizing the Black feminist theory, and incorporating the literature of Black feminists and Black female activists, presents a clearer understanding of why the incidents mentioned earlier of the participants being prevented from anchoring until they straightened their hair or being chided for the length of time it takes to braid ethnic hair, or for making a Black female journalist work out of a closet, still exists. One of the most traceable reasons is what the data show in Chapter 1—that is that only White men's opinions in the newsroom are valued because

those are the predominant voices heard in the newsroom (Zippia Data Sciences, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

These egregious acts continue to happen because, unlike the #MeToo movement, racism toward Black women in the media has not garnered public support nor the support of mainstream media. Black female journalists also do not have the same positionality as their White female counterparts, because there are not many Black female anchors, news directors, or general managers.

In fact, many Black female journalists go into stations as an "only." They take the place of the only Black female journalist who has since moved on as Participant 4 discovered, "At the time I started . . . I quickly found out that I replaced the previous Black reporter." Participant 2 remembers she, too, was an only, "I was the only Black reporter until closer to the end of my contract, and then they brought in another Black reporter."

The participant who was made to sit in the closet during the pandemic spoke to the same problem of the lack of diversity in most newsrooms. She noted that when she sent a letter to HR informing them of what she had been reduced to doing, she mentioned her ethnicity in correlation to how she was being treated. She noted, "I said 'as the only Black person in this building it is very degrading to have me in the closet. I don't want to be in there.'" In fact, five of the six participants in this study were the only Black reporters or anchors at their first and/or second news station.

Asking the Black reporters or anchors to help recruit other Black newsroom employees may not seem like overt racism, but some of the participants saw it that way. They felt it placed the responsibility of creating a diverse workplace on them instead of on the management. Participant 2 said she went online to the website of a news station that was courting her and saw

only two Blacks in the news department. She said it made her nervous. However, the news director assured her that he was new to the job and one of his priorities was to work on diversity.

When she arrived, the news director told her he was hoping she would help him improve diversity in the newsroom. She noted:

> I didn't look at that as a red flag, and I should have . . . because now that I'm in it, I don't want to go to another station where they're struggling with diversity or struggling to understand the concept of diversity and the importance of a diverse team. I don't want to help build a diverse team because: why isn't it already diverse? (P2)

All six participants described their newsrooms as lacking in diversity.

A similar burden and sign of overt racism seen by the participants was the burden of having to teach ethics in journalism to their White counterparts. Participant 2 said, as a reporter, whenever she attempted to bring context to a story involving race or remind her coworkers of the journalistic ethics of presenting both sides of story, she was shut down by the White anchors at the station who held a great deal of power there. She said a very vivid example of this occurred when the protests that sprang up across the country, following the murder of George Floyd, occurred in her city too. Once again, she asserted her White coworkers would take sides and engage in a debate in the newsroom over whether the protesters' side of the story needed to be included along with the actions of police. She felt the protestors had to be included in her piece to make it fair and accurate, but she was overruled.

Ultimately, the story belongs to the reporter, because they were the eyes and ears on the scene of the story. So, despite objections, Participant 2 included the protestors' point of view in her story, and she said that resulted in a hostile newsroom environment, which, in turn, caused the powerful anchor to not only refuse to support her work, but refuse to speak to her as well. It

was an act of making her invisible, thereby quashing her perspective to force her to quash the voices of the protestors.

Daily, reporters need to collaborate with their anchors on the most basic stories to the more important ones. Anchors are the powerful faces for the station and in the newsroom, and they may be the more senior journalist in the newsroom. In this instance, the anchor reminded Participant 2 of that fact. She explained:

> After our first debate, he completely stopped speaking to me, which I was okay with that . . . however . . . it's good to be able to ask the anchor . . . refer to him like, "hey can you do that?" But it was none of that. He would walk past me like I didn't exist, which, of course, caused tension. (P2)

**Subtheme 3: Racism Trauma.** The microaggressions and overt acts of racism toward these journalists cannot be minimized. The trauma they experienced could be witnessed on their faces during their interviews, even though years had passed since the events they described had taken place. Several of the participants spoke not only about how toxic their newsrooms could be but how quickly microaggressions and overt acts of racism quickly turned into traumatic displays of cruelty toward them and the people in the stories they covered.

One such incident occurred on the day that the Attorney General in Kentucky made the announcement that none of the officers in the Breonna Taylor murder would be charged. Participant 2 described how her newsroom colleagues, who prided themselves on being unbiased, searchers of the truth, turned into a partisan mob. She explained:

> It was cheering in the newsroom. It was loud . . .. People were excited. People were clapping. They were jumping up and down because no one would be charged in the murder . . . it was anchors mocking the protesters. They would walk around the

newsroom, mocking the well-known chants made by protestors. It was toxic. It was racist. (P2)

The participants also reported they faced pressures and trauma while covering stories where they were put in danger because their newsroom managers did not protect them. Participant 1 said it happened twice to her. One occasion involved her covering a Trump rally. As the result of the vitriol surrounding the followers of former President Donald Trump, many news stations either took precautions by making sure their journalists always went out in twos or threes, or they advised their reporters and photographers to be vigilant and protect themselves.

Participant 2 said when former President Trump came to her town, she was not given a photographer and was sent to the rally alone. Afterwards, she said she questioned herself whether bringing it up would mean she was saying to her boss that she was not capable enough of handling a big story. But she also grappled with whether not being assigned a photographer had racial connotations. She said she questioned if her boss thought she was important enough or worthy enough to have a photographer with her. She noted:

> It is still kind of, like, as a Black girl going to a Trump rally . . . anybody [would] think that, you know, "let's look out for her well-being because this is a Black going to a Trump rally." So, it's weird because I just don't think they think about stuff like that. I don't know, I guess White people aren't as, maybe, we look at race more than they do. I don't know. I still don't know what to think about it. (P2)

However, the second incident did cause her to confront her boss. She said she was sent to a storm an hour away, again, without a photographer. The storm worsened and the public was advised—by her own news station—to stay off the roads. Yet, she had to go live and in a violent storm. It was a storm that continued to worsen, so much so that the live shot was frozen and

eventually had to be abandoned. Similarly, she felt it abandoning, too, and attributed it to her skin color, and she called up her boss to complain. She noted, “After the live shot, I called him, and I went off. . .. I feel it had to be . . . I was, like, ‘I guess he feels like, you know, the strong Black woman, she could handle it.’”

For many of the participants the trauma they experienced came from within and from the outside. Participant 2 said the trauma she faced did not always come from inside the newsroom. She said that because most stories impacting the lives of Black people are pitched by the Black journalists in the newsrooms, she unapologetically sought out stories about the lived experiences of Black people. She said, “I called myself the ‘reporter of the people,’ and so that was just kind of my role.” She said she carried out and coveted that role at every television station where she worked. But she said she always faced trauma from the viewers in whatever city she worked. Participant 2 said,

> I got a lot of messages from viewers saying “you only do stories on Black people. You need to go back to where you came from.” I got a lot of those “you would never fit in here” [comments] . . . it was just a lot of that. So, I immediately knew that our viewers were not used to seeing Black excellence, and so it was making them uncomfortable.”

Participant 4 also received calls from viewers spouting racists vitriol. She said:

> I let . . . comments roll off my back because I got my fair share of “oh, my God!” I got my share of just evil evilness. I have gotten countless emails of people just saying the most vile things . . . especially when I started as a nightside reporter at 22 years old. I’m, like, “I’m 22 years old, and you are a grown person. What are you doing? Let’s break it down. What are you doing?” (P4)

Besides hurling the vilest insults at Black female journalists, another way to devalue, dismiss, and cause trauma to them is by stereotyping them. Participant 4 said the stereotypes began with her name, which is ethnic. She discovered her coworkers would not attempt to learn how to pronounce her name but would instead, jokingly, call her by the name of the Black female reporter she replaced.

While Black female reporters must learn to pick their battles, upholding her identity through her name was a battle she felt was worth fighting for. She explained,

> So, it was very quick, like, "please, you're not gonna get my name incorrect. You're gonna pronounce it correctly. You're gonna call me by my first name. You're not gonna call me nicknames," and I set those boundaries pretty quickly, because I very quickly learned that my new role would be to teach people certain things, what to say, when not to say, what stories are relevant to the Black community. (P4)

**Subtheme 4: Diversity, Invisibility, Social Justice**. "I have deal with a diversity problem in every single market, it's like, every single market I've worked in, management struggles to deal with Black people," said Participant 2. She had worked in a total of three television markets. Participant 2 said that once she worked with an Asian journalist but often there were no Asians, there were no Indigenous Americans, no Africans, no Haitians, and no Puerto Ricans at any of the television newsrooms of the participants who were a part of this study. Participant 1 noted: "There was one Cuban journalist at one station I worked at."

The majority of the journalists in the newsrooms of the participants were White. Chapter 2 noted, through the literature review, that 60 years ago, Black female journalists valiantly entered into newsrooms that lacked any diversity (Davis, 2012; Dunnigan & McCabe-Booker, 2015). Today, the data show that the majority of journalists started working around 2016

and through their lived experiences, newsroom diversity has not improved as much as these women would like, and inequality remains.

Four of the six participants said they were the only Black women in their respective television newsrooms when they got their jobs. Participant 4 said she was the only Black reporter but there was also a Hispanic female anchor at her station. Participant 5 got her first job in 1993, and she was the only person of color, then, and the environment in her newsroom with no Black journalists proved her mixed ethnicities worked out the best for her. She noted: “My thought was I bring a multi-ethnic view, and I’m chameleon, like, and people will identify. Yeah, that was my view. It’s like I can be whatever the person wants me to be when they’re at home watching me.”

Participant 1 said she was the only Black person in the entire company when she was hired. Participant 6 noted there was one Black female anchor at her station when she arrived, and that anchor had been the first Black anchor at the station—25 years earlier.

These current realities of some news stations employing one or two Black female journalists and perhaps one person of color, show that the lack of real diversity has been consistent in these companies for a long time and these work environments maintain a well-established status quo.

***Invisibility.*** The lack of diversity in the newsrooms of the participants, however, did not enrich those newsrooms. The participants of this study consistently spoke of facing microaggressions, racism, and trauma, which, in turn, led them to feeling invisible inside these companies. Participant 2 spoke about that invisibility manifesting itself in the number of meetings where she was invited, while her White co-anchor was invited. She said the meetings sometimes centered around her White co-anchor being presented as the more prominent face of their show, even though they were a team. She noted: “They’re checking off boxes, and it’s just

for a look . . . a month ago, we had a debut on the network, and I wasn't even asked. My co-worker was on it, and I wasn't even asked."

That invisibility led to doubts by these journalists as to whether they should even remain in the business. Several participants said the emotional trauma they faced forced them to ponder a series of questions, such as, "how much is too much?" and "is this psychological trauma what it takes to keep a job in television news?"

Participant 1 noted after she was banished to a closet during the pandemic, she posted her lived experience to a private online networking site for Black female journalists and discovered what had happened to her had happened to other Black female journalists. She noted, "One girl actually said she just accepted it because, you know, this is a job she wants to be in."

Participants 2 said, by her second job in television, she had faced so much racism, that she was often exhausted and at the time of her interview, she was at her third station, but she had decided to get out of the profession. She said:

> I know that all of the issues I have dealt with at all the stations, I'm going to continue to deal with. I have come to the conclusion that I am going back home after this contract is up, because I think it is easier to deal with issues like this if I can just go back home to some love.

Another troubling issue Black female journalists face surrounding hiddenness is how far they can go when defending themselves or speaking up about the race-related problems they face. Participant 1, the Black female journalist who was put in a closet, not only spoke up during that incident, but she also spoke up again, in a very pointed and frank way to a boss she felt did not protect her when she was forced to cover a Trump rally where agitated followers attended—

without her photographer as a back-up. But she said she was later cautioned by a Black male anchor at her sister station, to tread lightly. She said:

> The Black anchor, you know, told me that I shouldn't talk to my boss that way. He told me, as a Black woman, I have to be careful what I say, and he wasn't wrong, but at the same time . . . at what point do we speak up for ourselves? (P1)

She was very emotional when she relived this event in the interview process and later tried to explain her emotions—not only to the interviewer but to herself as well. Her face showed her frustration and confusion as to why her boss never apologized. She said:

> That would have been nice. It did not happen. I think we just get so used to it that I wasn't really expecting it, but it should have happened. . . . I didn't expect to get emotional talking about this, but I think just saying it out loud, it's just like a game. We go through a lot. (P1)

Participant1, who also persevered for 9 years to get into the profession before she finally got a job, said she was also frustrated with constantly having to prove her worth at her job, while her White colleagues did not. She said:

> You finally get a job, so you're trying to prove that you can do a good job, . . . I don't want to discredit the people that I work with, but I feel I have a different dedication than they do . . . they just graduated from college, so they are all excited, but they got it immediately. . . . It took me so long. You know, I want to make sure that I couldn't mess up.

***Social Justice.*** After the murder of George Floyd, many in the United States, from individuals to institutions to corporations, took an internal look at themselves to examine where they stood on social justice. Some companies discovered that the lack of inclusion in their

workforces impacted their businesses in adverse ways. First, the lack of inclusion had a direct correlation to companies bottom line (Balakrishnan et al., 2023). Research shows those companies with serious diversity issues following Floyd's death saw a 0.7% decrease in their stock price (Balakrishnan et al., 2023).

Additionally, nearly 30% of companies surveyed in a (Copat, 2023) research paper noted following Floyd's murder, they needed to hold discussions regarding diversity at their companies. However, many companies did more than talk about diversity in their organizations, they pledged more than 1.7 billion dollars to increase racial equity (Martinez & Flecher, 2021). Those companies included Google, Nike, Comcast, and Warner Music Group Corp.

Societal pressures regarding racial diversity in companies changed following Floyd's murder, so some of those companies increased their numbers of people of color. Research shows that after Floyd's death, 46% of S&P companies expanded their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) incentives (Copat, 2023). DEI alludes to a company's vision of having an organization that promotes fairness to all employees, enabling them to thrive and be promoted to their highest ability. However, creating DEI programs and hiring more Black employees does not mean racism in companies has vanished. To the contrary, Simpson (2010) found that intersectionality, the overlapping of societal constraints surrounding race, class, and negative gender perceptions of Black female journalists persists in television newsrooms.

In the 3 years since Floyd's murder, Black female journalists are finding some of their companies have become aggressively more biased when it comes to their news coverage, and they mimic those in society who have conservative viewpoints. That attitude resulted in some newsrooms wavering over whether should cover protests by Black Lives Matter groups. Participant 2 remembers vividly having to convince her news director that covering those

protests was not only important but their journalistic duty, and to not do so would mean that, as journalists, they were faltering in their commitment to include more social justice stories in their newscasts. She noted, “We didn’t cover the first couple of protests . . . until I spoke up one weekend, and I was, like, ‘this is big,’ like, ‘we need to cover this.’”

She added, though, that the news director monitored what the journalists said about the protestors and when the journalists posted their digital stories on the company Facebook and other social media platforms with the headlines “Black Lives Matter,” he became furious. She said:

> He flipped out . . . and put us in a group message and told us to delete it. It was inappropriate. Then he sent out . . . an email saying it was inappropriate putting the hashtag Black Lives Matter, and we are not allowed to do that and the people who put it on their pages, they need to delete it. Well, we chose not to delete it. (P2)

Participant 2 also said she and the other few Black reporters in the newsroom were called into a meeting the next day where they formed a united front against the news director, and the question became whether their lives mattered because they too were Black. She said that, after that, the newsroom became a tension-filled environment, and she lost faith in the news director’s judgment. She noted, “I continued to cover all of the protests as I wanted to. I was checked out, and I wasn’t gonna allow him to put his opinion in my unbiased coverage.”

Like Participant 2, Participant 4 also refused to back away from stories impacting the Black community. She said those stories fueled her and gave her a sense of her value and self-worth. She noted: “Those kinds of stories in the African American community, those brought me life, those just, really, those will keep me in this industry. To be honest they . . . lift me up.”

### *Theme 3: Emotional Rollercoaster*

Half of the Black women journalists who participated in this study said they constantly faced a range of emotions, daily, because of the toxic environments they have worked in. Those emotions ranged from low self-esteem to insecurity, rejection, fear, regret, anger, and depression. The journalists said the root cause of their troubles was racism.

**Subtheme 1: Physical Emotions.** Participant 2 remembered how emotionally disgusted she was to find out that one of the co-anchors openly spread the word to other reporters at the television station that she considered Participant 2 a bi**h. However, Participant 2 said it was just the latest in a series of hateful language and behavior used against her by her colleagues. She said she was yelled at, ignored, marginalized, discriminated against, and faced passive aggressiveness—all at the hands of her coworkers and managers. She said all of the newsrooms she has worked at have been toxic work environments that have left her so traumatized that she began secretly recording hate-filled conversations with coworkers and managers. She explained, “Every time I sit at my desk, and someone begins to talk to me, I immediately start recording on my phone. I have lots of recordings of inappropriate conversations, racist conversations, and then there is that co-anchor.”

Participant 2 said at one of the stations she worked at, she encountered so many racist-filled conversations that she became physically ill. She said, “I went through my first, like, major depression . . . and so I was just kind of, like, this cannot be life.” Participant 2 also said she persevered for 10 years to get a job in television and when she finally got one, she was elated. She said:

> I was loving it because it’s like I finally, you know, this took me 10 years . . . people ask you what you [went] to school for . . . so, I was, like, I finally get to say . . . broadcast journalism” . . . and [it] makes sense of what I’m doing. (P2)

However, after her boss left the station, and a new boss arrived, she said the job she always wanted turned toxic, and she experienced a sea of emotions after that new boss forced her to move into the closet following the pandemic. She noted:

> I remember that day being mad, and I left. I picked a story where I would have to go to the beach just so I can get my mind off of that and then I tried to make light of it.

**Subtheme 2: Mental Emotions.** Discrimination in the workplace is a vivid reminder of what the participants encountered most of their lives. However, their accomplishments, education, and experience made them prime candidates for positions in television news, but they said racism still finds them and just rekindles the painful treatment and emotions they have experienced for years. Participant 2 noted:

> I got called the n-word in the second grade. I went to a predominantly White middle school and was fighting as a child just to be seen. . . . now I am in my career, finally at the anchor desk . . . I always have to do the most . . . my White colleague gives five, and I have to give 500, and I’m still not seen . . . I’m still not heard. (P2)

Participant 4 said that daily she’s unsure which of her emotions will come out in reaction to the microaggressions she faces in her newsroom, but she knew she wanted out. So, she tried to make sure no one would find out that she was secretly going to work on the weekends to shadow a reporter, so she could get a certain reporter position at a new station. She said:

> I have heard them talk so much [expletive] about people. They’ve even talked [expletive] about me within earshot . . . when you feel you are targeted and . . . like, people are trying

> to stop you from being successful . . . sometimes you have to sneak and do things on your own to get to where you need to go. (P4)

### *Theme 4: Workplace Environment*

Half of the participants in this study felt the newsrooms they had worked in were toxic. That toxicity centered around the racism, marginalization, stereotypes, and the intersectionality of social categories, such as gender and classism, that they experienced while working in their respective newsrooms. The racism that was able to thrive, this study shows, because the leadership in those places, allowed it to flourish by not having rules and structures or a vision in place to combat it.

**Subtheme 1: Organizational Structure.** Participant 1's story of being put in a closet during the pandemic is not only horrifying but speaks to a corporation having no understanding of the importance of creating a work environment where everyone has a sense of belonging. As a news organization, that company was privy to the raw emotions of the country, as they watched in horror, daily, the death toll of victims of COVID-19 because it was the conduit by which viewers got their information. There was no escape from the fact that the Black population was being disproportionately impacted by the virus. So, ostracizing its only Black employee, who also happened to be the only Black reporter, signaled any number of negative connotations to her coworkers, was discriminatory and was just poor optics.

At the same time, George Floyd's murder sent thousands of angry citizens onto the streets, protesting, and illuminating that certain groups in this country still experience racism, discrimination, and police brutality. That shift against business as usual in organizations should have sounded the alarm for that company that a new type of leadership was being demanded.

Brown (2019) noted that the needs and struggles of certain individuals should be considered when companies are making decisions.

There appears, however, to have been no realization about the importance of DEI and the need for all employees to be supported. In this case, it was Participant 1 who sounded the alarm, herself, to her bosses that by making her sit in a closet they were discriminating against her. She said, “I’m, like, I’m not gonna sit there, and that’s not where I want to sit, and I told him I didn’t feel comfortable being in there, but he told me that was my office.”

“I would never tell a Black woman or man to come to this station because this station isn’t for us.” Those were the words of Participant 2. She went on to say there was no inclusive leadership at any of the three news stations where she worked. She said the volatile behavior that included mocking and racist chanting was exhibited by her White, conservative coworkers toward the Black reporters. Those Black reporters felt it was their journalistic obligation to report on and include protestors rallying against police brutality in their reports, following George Floyd’s murder. Participant 2 felt the situation was allowed to become so fiery because management did not set a tone of tolerance in the newsroom. She noted:

> My news director was in his office when I told him about it, and he said, “wow, I didn’t even hear that,” and I was, like, I don’t know how, because it was right there by your office . . . in every station I’ve been in . . . yes, I think a big part of it is management. I think it starts at the top. So, what everyone at the bottom sees, . . . that’s how they’re gonna act. (P2)

Participant 6 had a much different thought on station leadership because her station was owned by a corporation and decisions were made for all stations owned by that corporation minus the day-to-day operations. She said that means there was not the ability to express personal opinions

to an individual. She noted: “My place is a corporation, you know, like our morning meeting is with people all across the entire state.” Participant 6 went on to say that in her corporation there were not a lot of Black employees until recently when she got her first Black manager. Under his leadership, she said she has found the courage to speak up and be authentic in her ideas. She noted:

> I communicate my thoughts. I bring him concerns that previously would just be no, nothing would get done . . . I know he can’t change the world. I think he needs to be aware of things and hear from someone who has experience because he has experience. He is great at listening, and he was not threatened by my communication. (P6)

Participant 6 was one of the few participants who faced nothing more than microaggressions in the three stations where she had worked. She spoke of being a chameleon because of her dual ethnicities and how her hard work allowed her to be promoted and moved up in the ranks. Participant 4 spoke of having a solid relationship with her boss. While she did face microaggressions, hair shaming, and identity shaming by her colleagues, regarding her ethnic name, she said that on certain occasions, she relished educating her White colleagues on what stories were relevant in the Black community. She felt her boss respected her for that and began to see her as an asset and was willing to bring in more reporters who looked like her. She noted:

> From that point on, I think my news director learned that there’s a lot of value in bringing in more women of color, that having this, I hate to say, this having the same copycat White, blond girl . . . is not going to get the job done, is not going to do the community justice.

**Subtheme 2: Dissatisfaction.** Participant 4, who had worked at two stations, said that when she left her first news station, she had a huge sense of disgust and dissatisfaction, and the

treatment she experienced from management made her believe that this business would always be difficult for Black women journalists and she would have to develop a tough skin. She noted:

> Hard, hard, hard, hard, hard, hard, hard, hard, hard, hard, nothing soft, nothing soft. You know that type of thing. You know that type thing, you know what I'm saying. That's the vibe I'm definitely getting . . . . they always say you have to work twice as hard to get half, you know, because I feel like, especially some of the things that I go through at this station, you know, we can't have an easy day, it seems. (P4)

Participant 2 was equally dissatisfied with the profession. She noted that she had always experienced racism at the three stations where she worked—even those professing to be concerned with DEI. However, she said no one in management ever approached her on her impressions on diversity, and her boss never questioned whether the company was doing it right. She noted:

> He's never talked about . . . Are you okay? Are we handling diversity, correct? Is there anything you want to share? How do you feel about that? How do you feel that we don't have any Black managers? Does that bother you? (P2)

While three participants in this study felt their journey into the business and struggle to thrive was met by unbearable discrimination, racism, and constant battles to prove their worth, three other participants did not feel that way. All acknowledged that racism and discrimination existed in their newsrooms and that the profession, itself, was highly competitive and lacked diversity. However, the data show they appeared to have been happier, they were promoted, and they did not have to alter their identity. The common thread among them all seemed to be that most had their self-worth nurtured before getting into the business. Most had mentors before and

during their careers, and most had a Black female journalist already in the field who they admired and wanted to emulate. Participant 6 noted,

> You know, if it wasn't for . . . I would have had no idea where to start. I still call her about my career. I still call her, and . . . I'm a pretty resilient person, but I don't think that I would have been able to navigate through a career and build up my confidence as quickly as I have without them. (P6)

Participant 4 made a similar observation. She said attending an historically Black college (HBC) was the perfect training ground for understanding racism and the impact it would have on her career. She said at her HBC, not only was her culture and value emphasized, but she had the support of her college teachers in school and after she graduated. She explained:

> I am so grateful for that experience 'til this day because it really taught me to be confident with who I am and not let the outside noise of people, who are ignorant, penetrate you. You know, you leave that campus with a lot of bravado. If I did not go to . . . I don't think I would be in journalism today. (P4)

For Participant 5, there was no mentor mentioned although she did talk of admiring Oprah Winfrey. There was also no talk of having great self-esteem or self-worth, but what there was, was a clear understanding that television news was a unique industry that only a few people will ever get a chance to become a member of. As mentioned earlier, her identity as a biracial woman worked well for her. Participant 5 also got an internship at a television station and realized who she could become and when that internship ended, she showed tenacity by telling management she would even volunteer to stay at the station. It worked. She got a job there and within a week she was promoted to weekend reporter. She noted: "I'm hard working. I was determined not to let that door shut. I couldn't."

## Summary of Results

The research from this study parallels the literature that Black females have a unique set of challenges, and the struggles they must maneuver around are connected to intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is defined as biases that are interconnected, such as racism, sexism, and classism, and are used against Black women to obstruct and oppress them. For Black women journalists, this intersectionality, according to the data, begins to manifest when they are 18 or 19 and graduating from college and who are trying to enter the field of television news.

As the participants noted, some of them received little, if any, support from school counselors to guide them on the prerequisites needed to get into the field. Yet, their White peers acquired that assistance and entered into the business swiftly upon graduation. Many of these young women, according to the data, flounder and struggle for years trying to get access into a newsroom, and through perseverance and discipline and strategies, some made it in. But they did not make it before giving up a piece of their identity and their culture, and, when they made it in, in vivid testimony, through their lived experiences, they articulated that intersectionality was waiting for them. So, after straightening their hair, they walked into newsrooms and were at the bottom again. They got the night-time shooting assignments and the courtroom sentencings.

The study findings were rich, deeply rooted, personal, and powerful because the research question, "What are the lived experiences of Black female journalists, working inside television newsrooms in the United States, who are trying to achieve upward mobility?" allowed for the journalists to tell their own stories. The theoretical framework chosen, Black feminist theory, coupled with the literature review, allowed for an understanding of why the women struggled so severely.

The purpose of this study was initially to glean if perceived racism really existed in the lived experiences of the participants. The data show it racism really exists—and in a more brutal fashion than expected. For example, Participant 1 noted that she was placed in a closet during the pandemic. She was not only the only Black in the newsroom, but she was the only Black in the entire station. All her colleagues were distanced at 6 feet apart, but she was made invisible and humiliated by being put into a closet. Participant 2 spoke of being bullied by her colleagues for wanting to tell stories of social injustice and, in both these instances, management failed to hold people accountable, leaving the women to feel unseen and unheard.

As noted in Chapter 1, most of the management in television newsrooms, from the general managers to the news directors to the executive producers are White men (Papper, 2018). The research shows that all these men, in all six of the newsrooms, were culpable in the biases the women experienced because, as the data showed, they operated under a type of leadership that was not inclusive, did not promote a sense of belonging, and was steeped in racism. The only way from up under this oppression, said some of the participants, was to quit their jobs, but some feared intersectionality would be waiting for them at their next newsroom. Chapter 5 examines the implications of this study and gives recommendations for policy makers, practitioners, and future research.

# Chapter 5: Discussion

## Introduction

There are not a lot of public, mainstream conversations going on about the unique challenges that Black women face in the workplace; however, Black women, through their own research and literature, are talking about the microaggressions, and the invisibility, they are forced to endure and the imposter syndrome they face and must defeat daily. Farmer (2021) summed up the situation with precision and pithiness. She wrote:

> Black women enter the workplace with various gifts to share and unique hurdles to overcome. We need leadership texts that speak to the duality of our existence—highly educated yet falling behind on key indicators; highly talented yet fighting to be seen and valued. (Farmer, 2021, p. 7)

Current research shows Black women are not being seen or valued in numerous professions and careers. From jobs in predominantly White institutions of higher education to jobs in executive leadership, jobs in applied behavior analysis, careers in the field of nursing, in positions of leadership in the California state government, in the wine industry, in fashion design, in executive healthcare leadership, and in STEM (Alfred et al., 2018; Bax, 2022; Benson, 2017; Burgess, 2021; Camp-Fry, 2021; Carroll, 2020; Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020; De La Cruz, 2022; Dymond, 2019; Gordon et al., 2021; Iheduru-Anderson, 2020; Jefferies et al., 2022; Mitchell, 2021; Ojediran et al., 2022; Sendze, 2022; Wright Watson, 2021). Additionally, Black women in the field of broadcast journalism can also be added to the list of professions where Black women struggle to be seen, heard, or valued as they attempt to advance in the workplace.

Crenshaw (1989) gave a glimpse into the unique set of challenges Black women face in the workplace. It is never a single challenge, but, rather, multiple challenges that befall Black women, forcing them to have to daily maneuver their way through workplaces and overcome numerous obstacles (Rabelo et al., 2021). Crenshaw (1989) defined it as intersectionality. She noted gender and race, and other social characterizations, often intersect for Black women, forcing them to have differing negative experiences than other women, like White women, do not face in the workplace.

Research shows diversity in the workplace is not only profitable (Herring, 2009) but diversity also brings about various perspectives. Additionally, diversity creates a positive workforce environment (Bax, 2022). Yet, a 2020 survey showed nearly 60-percent of Black women have never had an informal interaction with a senior leader and for every 100 white men promoted only 58 Black women move up (Saddler & Thomas, 2020).

Additionally, inclusivity does work when employers understand and value the differences in individuals (Kiradoo, 2022). Yet, Black women journalists still struggle to see equity and inclusion and feel a sense of belonging and value in newsrooms.

The purpose of this study was to explore and better comprehend the lived experiences of Black women journalists who struggle to ascend in television newsrooms. That purpose was initially derived from a desire to simply support a perceived reality that racism and discrimination exist in television newsrooms. However, the data from this study show that racism not only exists, but that it is likely unique to Black female journalists and is manifested through intersectionality, which relates to the literature and the theoretical framework, which was Black feminist theory. Black feminist theory notes the connection to the problems Black women face, which are unique unto them. Black feminist theory ties together the why of this problem of

discrimination against Black female journalists in television newsrooms. The research question that guided this study was:

> What are the lived experiences of Black female journalists, working inside television newsrooms in the United States, who are trying to achieve upward mobility?

The research paradigm of this study was a phenomenological, qualitative approach to exploring the experiences of Black women journalists as they navigate their way through newsrooms trying to attain achievements and advancements.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion and interpretation of the results found in Chapter 4. There are four major sections of Chapter 5. The first section discusses the implications of the findings from the six semi-structured interviews of the Black female journalist participants in the field of broadcast television. The second section expresses the limitations of this study. The third section presents recommendations for future research, recommendations for inclusive leadership education for broadcast management and recommendations for Black female journalists in broadcast television. The last section concludes with a summary of the study.

## Implications of Findings

The implications for research for entering the confines of a television are discussed in the first section. The second section discusses the findings of this study in the context of racism in broadcast journalism. The third section discusses the implications for the range of emotions the participants dealt with as Black journalists working in newsrooms, and the last section speaks to structure and workplace environment.

### *Entering Into the Gate*

Research has found that it is extremely difficult for Black women journalists to get into television news for several reasons (Simpson, 2010). First, it is a competitive field that requires

candidates to be personable and confident on camera and not fear confronting people to get at the truth. However, for Black women trying to get into the field, the data show it is not the job requirements that are making it hard for candidates to getting hired.

The findings of this study suggest that the problem stems from them not being prepared while in college because they do not have access to knowledge of what they must do as a prerequisite to getting into the field. They are unaware of the importance of obtaining internships at television stations, which for many students serve as a ticket into business. Even more difficult for them is sometimes getting college staff to support them with letters of recommendation.

This study data show this is sometimes the result of discrimination, and that discrimination can follow them well after college, when they realize their ethnic-sounding names give away their race. However, to counter this discrimination, candidates have used their initials in resumes and cover letters, and some have even taken other jobs inside newsrooms to get their foot in the door. For some, it took years of perseverance before they finally made it to the newsrooms. Yet, the struggle made them want to work harder at their craft.

***Racism***

The data in this study imply racism is prominent in television newsrooms, and Black women journalists have a unique connection with racism. Like the problems they face trying to get into the business, like camouflaging their ethnic sounding names, these participants found that their physical features, culture, and even their natural hair contributed to some of the microaggressions and racism they endured in the workplace.

Those are long-standing problems. Even veteran Black female journalists have stories to tell about the edicts from their respective media executives about what is expected when it comes to Black hair. In 2021, Emmy-award winning journalist, LaToyia Edwards, of NBC News

Boston, wrote an article in the opinion section of the Boston Globe Magazine about how much it cost Black females to be broadcast journalists. She noted she was advised in college by her journalism professors not to use her first name when she became a reporter and, instead, use her middle name Simone, as it would be more palatable to television viewers (Edwards, 2021) Edwards declined.

Along with being faced to consider changing her name to get her first job in television, Edwards also noted in her article that she did not go against what for years had been an unspoken rule for Black female journalists and that was to alter her hair. For these Black female journalists, that meant they would have to straighten their kinky, curly, and wavy hair with hot irons and harsh chemicals, to transform themselves and their image into someone on par with a more European beauty standard who viewers would be more comfortable watching.

This egregiousness is not unheard of. There are records and documentation of this behavior being carried out among other marginalized groups, like the children of Indigenous Americans, who were forcibly taken and had their hair cut off by White missionaries to civilize them in an attempt to gain power over their race (Smithsonian, 2020). Also, using a Black person's hair as a weapon of hiring has been done by executives in newsrooms for decades (Somani & Hopkinson, 2018). Those executives have tried to repress the culture of Black females for them to be accepted, look more like a White standard and image of beauty, and most expressly, as the first door that has to be opened in order for Black female journalists to get into the newsroom.

This study also suggests racism can come in the form of innuendos to blatant racist acts to being uninvited to meetings while their White counterparts were invited, to being bullied by coworkers, to humiliating assignments and unfair treatment at the hands of management. The

reaction of some study participants had been to move on to other television stations, but some found that racism was present wherever they went. The dilemma for these journalists was if living their dreams of being journalists was worth the discrimination and racism they consistently encounter.

These findings are important because as a result of what they endured in newsrooms, the majority of these journalists spoke of agonizing over whether they were competent, capable, fitting, or adequate for the positions they hold. However, what these findings showed is that not only were they equipped for their positions, but they are agonizing over attitudes they themselves cannot change. In the eyes of their colleagues and news managers, these journalists will never be equal to their White colleagues as long as these women are seen through the eyes of the white gaze or the prism that can only see them from the perspective of the White majority (Rabelo et al., 2020).

***Emotional Rollercoaster***

The data from this study show the Black women journalists faced a rollercoaster of emotions, daily, in their jobs as journalists. The angst came from the intersectionality of having to contend with racism, but also to contend with sexism and classism (Crenshaw, 1989) and many other biases in the newsroom environment. These findings have a direct connection to literature. That literature noted that Black women face multiple societal and systemic biases, which occur simultaneously in the workplace (Rabelo et al., 2021). But the mental anguish not only came from their colleagues and bosses, but it also came from viewers and critics who used email and voicemail as a format for spewing hatred and racism toward the Black female journalists. The data show it was difficult for these journalists to be on the receiving end of another person's hatred multiple times and sometimes from multiple people.

***Workplace Environment***

The implications of the data show that more than half of the participants worked in toxic work environments. One participant noted when she covered stories that were clearly race related and involved police brutality against Blacks her White colleagues would deride her. But the situation turned even worse when her White colleagues actually turned against her and, in full view of everyone in the newsroom, clapped and chanted on behalf of the police after several judicial rulings were decided favoring the police officers and not the protesters. Often managers were aware of the toxicity in the newsroom but did nothing to alleviate it. This inaction contributed to the distress most of the journalists constantly felt and it also was a signal to the journalists that they were invisible and unheard and had no recourse to the aggressive behaviors exhibited by co-workers.

**Limitations**

This section describes the limitations that may have impacted the results of this study. The scope of this study was focused on six of Black female journalists. One participant worked 30 years in the business; however, more than half of the participants started their career the year before the murder of George Floyd. Following Floyd's death, news organizations slightly increased the numbers of Black female journalists by hiring a small number of Black women journalists (Zippia Data Sciences, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). Instead of the one Black female journalist, the participants noted there were now two or three Black female journalists in their newsroom. Research on this topic might provide richer and deeper knowledge if it was conducted on recent Black female journalists who were still in the field 10 years after Floyd's death. Was the diversity continuum stopped? Were the Black female journalists hired and never

promoted? Did they have a sense of belonging and were they allowed to feel they were integral to the success of the company?

## Recommendations

The findings of this study provide several recommendations that relate to the lived experiences of Black female journalists struggling to advance in television newsrooms. Based on the results of this study, further research should be considered on recommendations for Black female broadcast television students, professional Black female journalists, and management leadership development.

### *Black Female Broadcast Television Students*

Based on the results of this study, Black female students majoring in broadcast television should be informed of several recommendations. The first is that expectation is not equal to the reality of working in a commercial television station newsroom. As stated in transcripts from the participants of this study, when journalists enter working newsrooms, it will not be the fundamentals of writing and gathering both sides of an issue that will be the most challenging for broadcast television students. Based on this study findings, what will cost these students immeasurable suffering will be the constant dismissal of their culture and the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and other social biases toward them by their colleagues.

Black female students majoring in broadcast television must develop a strategy that includes taking part in a newsroom internship program so they can begin understanding the environment in a newsroom, the tremendous responsibility that accompanies being a television journalist, and gain work experience that will make them viable candidates for a job in the field. The importance of these internships, however, should not be left up to television journalism students. A partnership should be created between institutions of higher learning and television

stations to recruit college television journalism students. As an added benefit to all, these internships should be a requirement for graduation.

As a mandatory program, the onus for getting experience in a newsroom before entering the field would not be placed solely upon the students. This requirement would also ensure that all television students have some experience, allowing them to be potential candidates for their first professional job in the field. A partnership must also be developed between television stations and state broadcasters' associations to increase the number of students of color in their internship programs.

State broadcasters' organizations are located in every state. The one in New York State is called the New York Broadcasters Association. They offer internships to all member stations and those internships are generally paid summer internships. The Association provides the station with a list that comes from colleges and universities of students who have majored in broadcasting or communications and are working in the student-run television stations on the campuses. The professional commercial stations usually select four students, and the television station pays the students at minimum wage.

The television station is then reimbursed by the Association. This internship is an important avenue for students to go on and obtain a job at a local television station. Few students of color, however, are ever chosen by upstate New York television stations. Is that because of the selection pool? Are most of the students selected from private colleges instead of public universities? Should students attending colleges in urban areas be recruited? These are all questions for the Association and television stations to decide as they purposely seek out students of color for the internship programs.

Students also need to decide what they want from the profession. To say they want to be a reporter, or an anchor is not enough. The most successful and independent journalists develop a specialty they want to focus and report on, such as social justice or health science or judicial journalism. Having a specialty will not prevent Black graduates from facing discrimination or racism, but it will serve as a constant reminder of why they do the hard work they do. It is recommended, too, that Black female students majoring in broadcast journalism try to maintain their authentic selves and their culture. Being true to oneself will be the thread throughout their career in broadcast journalism that helps them succeed in the industry. Finally, it is recommended that students find a mentor in the profession, as well as join a professional organization, such as the National Association of Black Journalists, which has a student affiliation.

***Professional Black Female Journalists***

Based on the findings of the data in this research, the recommendations for Black female journalists center around increasing their knowledge to help them understand why they face what they face in the workplace. The first recommendation would be for Black female journalists to comprehend that they are not lacking in any area that would cause them to have to struggle to be seen or heard or promoted in television newsrooms. The data from this research shows that all of the participants had college degrees, half had video audition tapes of their work, so that television managers were aware of their talent before they were hired. It is because of their respective individual talents that these Black female journalists were hired and added to the newsroom staff.

Three of the participants in this study, although they did not have audition tapes, showed promise when they took writing tests or when they were interviewed for their respective

positions. Thus, management hired these Black women because they showed skills that suggested they had the potential for being a good reporter or they were already good reporters.

The data from this study also show that these Black women journalists were articulate, professional, dedicated, and courageous at finding the truth when it came to corruption or government malfeasance. They were also capable of building relationships with members of the community, government officials, activists, advocates, and leaders of the church—relationships that, in turn, led to contacts, which can be invaluable when crafting big stories. All these reporters were assets who created news content and reported on the top news stories, and there was nothing they could have done to change the racism and other biases they faced.

The second recommendation for these journalists is to comprehend that there is research that supports the multiple biases being leveled against them, and that research calls this phenomenon, intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989). The participants often noted they understood that they were facing abuse, but they had trouble identifying it because the abuse was multilayered, and these journalists had no name for it. The literature shows and does support, however, that it is not only a real phenomenon, but it is the reality of societal systemic biases and that Black women do not face these biases independently. These biases coalesce. That means Black women journalists may be experiencing racism along with sexism and classism, which Rabelo et al. (2021) said happens to Black women in the workplace on a daily basis.

The participant interviews supported this intersectionality. The journalists spoke of being judged by their hair, placed in a closet during COVID-19, not invited to meetings while their White counterparts were invited, and of being berated over the phone and through emails by White viewers for doing stories on issues that impacted African Americans. While four of the participants faced overt racial trauma, the other two were privy to microaggressions, although

those microaggressions were not leveled directly at them. While there were degrees of discrimination, all the participants encountered biases.

These findings are important because of what these journalists endured in their newsrooms. The majority spoke of agonizing over whether they were competent, capable, fitting, or adequate for the positions they held. What these findings showed, however, is that not only were they equipped for their positions, but they were agonizing over attitudes they, themselves, could not change. The final understanding for these journalists had to be that in the eyes of their colleagues and news managers. They will never be seen as equal to their White colleagues, because some of those in management members see Black female journalists only through the eyes of the white gaze—a prism that only allows Black women journalists to be seen from a negative perspective of some (Rabelo et al., 2021).

Along with these knowledge-based recommendations, it is also recommended that professional journalists join a professional journalists association, such as the National Association of Black Journalists. This organization has an annual conference for professionals, and the organization also holds a unity conference, periodically, combining groups of other journalists of color, such as the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, the National Association of Asian Journalists, and the National Association of Native American journalists. The comradery and shared lived experiences of these organizations and events is not only uplifting, but they allow for networking, idea sharing, and nurturing. It may also be possible to find a mentor at these conferences to share ideas and give and receive support. Finally, a private networking organization, like Black Girls in Broadcasting, is a recommendation to Black female journalists where Black women from the same profession and like mindedness have a private space to vent and seek friendships.

### *Management Leadership Development*

Based on the findings of this study, management in television newsrooms need targeted and annual training that ensures they understand the importance of DEI for all employees in the workplace. This type of training must be mandatory and included in departmental budgets. The recommendations for this type of diversity that does not end with just the hiring of Black female journalists. It must include an understanding of how much Black female journalists suffer from intersectionality in newsrooms, an understanding of how important the contributions of Black female journalists are in newsroom. and why training in inclusive leadership is so dire for newsroom management.

Perhaps a personal recommendation can be suggested for the White men in management in television newsrooms: this study can turn your newsrooms into establishments that young journalists will flock to get into, and veteran journalists will not want to retire from. But you must read this study with an open mind and want to learn about the lived experiences of the Black women in your newsrooms. You must also make a commitment, before reading this work, to fully embrace the data and findings and have the courage to stay with this study, finish reading if—even when it criticizes your leadership. Minus these changes, Black women journalists will continue to serve as window dressings and simply a box checked off for television stations to insinuate that they are diversity compliant. The findings of this study provide knowledge for newsroom management regarding how to create an environment of DEI for Black female journalists.

**The Contributions of Black Female Journalists in Newsrooms.** First, there needs to be an understanding by newsroom managers of the importance of the mindful contributions that Black female journalists make in newsrooms. Those contributions include providing powerful

knowledge for television viewers surrounding topics so important that they remain at the heart of the division and discussion in this country. Those topics include race, critical race theory, affirmative action, reparations, racial equity and parity, police brutality, Black maternal health, mass incarceration, the Black wage gap, Black health disparities, inner city poverty, and the continuing unaffordable housing crisis in urban areas, along with other pressing issues.

Second, Black female journalists bring credibility to news stations because when some viewers see news programming that takes on these aforementioned topics, they credit the television station as being courageous and forward thinking. However, in reality, these topics are so polarizing that most White reporters in newsrooms do not suggest them as doable stories, they do not care about them, or they are afraid to tackle them. So, it is the Black female journalists who pitch those topics in newsroom meetings under silent and, at times, not-so-silent derision.

Finally, even though it is not true, as the findings of this study reveals, having Black women journalists among the news staff gives viewers the impression that the news station supports diversity, thereby giving the news station credibility.

**Why Training in Inclusive Leadership Is So Dire.**

> I've been asking myself; I've been wondering why [there] is so much discrimination newsrooms . . . discrimination has happened in every single station. I think a big part of it in every station that I have worked in . . . I think it starts at the top. I think a big part of it is management. (P1)

These are the remarks of Participant 1 who said she was emotionally drained by the racism and discrimination she encountered on a daily basis in all of the newsrooms where she had worked. She put the blame on newsroom management for allowing it to happen, by not stating—clearly and loudly—that discrimination of any kind is not part of the company's

mission statement, and that blatant disrespect and bullying among coworkers will not be tolerated.

Based on the findings of this study, it is imperative for newsroom management to make sure Black female journalists have a voice in the newsroom and they are treated as integral to the success of the newsroom. Therefore, a new type of leadership must be adopted in newsrooms for Black female journalists to advance in the workplace. Inclusive leadership is how Brown (2019) defined it. Inclusive leadership can be transformative because it is an understanding by companies that the former ways of treating people are not only obsolete, but that they were wrong, discriminatory, and created isolation and injustice for the Black and brown employees who worked at those companies.

Today, companies must create a sense of belonging for all their employees, and situations that happened to Participant 1, who was placed in a closet during COVID-19, cannot ever happen again. That scenario was not only traumatic and humiliating for Participant 1, but it was discriminatory behavior on behalf of the television management at that station. Additionally, in light of COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd, which both illuminated the disparities and injustices still faced by Black and brown people in this country, it would be akin to neglect for newsroom management to continue to allow Black women journalists to struggle against microaggressions, racism, and discrimination and to practically have to wear garments emblazoned with the words “human being” on them to be seen and heard in newsrooms.

**The Suffering of Black Female Journalists in Newsrooms.** The key findings of Chapter 4 are that the number of Black female journalists is small in television station newsrooms, and one of the reasons for this is the Black female journalist students do not have proper guidance on breaking into the industry. They do not always have access to supportive

college counselors who assist them with letters of recommendation. They are not privy to the same type of knowledge as their White counterparts on the importance of internships, or, in some cases, how to get into an internship, or that is it imperative they contact newsroom managers before leaving college.

None of the Black female journalists in this study had relatives or influential family members who could assist them in getting the contact information of a professional journalist, which we understand the families of their White counterparts may have been able to do. Black students, for the most part, are on their own without help from their school counselors. With no one to put in a good word for them, or map out a strategy for them, regarding how to get into a newsroom, some of the participants of this study floundered for years trying to get their foot in the door.

That was not their only challenge. Some of the participants had to worry about the connotations of having an ethnic-sounding name and then having to camouflage their given names so as not to "give them away" as being Black. This denying of oneself marked the beginning of the imposter syndrome for these young women. Once they finally made it into a newsroom, they would face judgment about their natural hair, the makeup of their bodies and features, and their culture.

Rabelo et al. (2021) called it being seen through the white gaze. The humiliation they faced would intensify as they came face to face with intersectionality and found themselves battling against racism, sexism, classism, and numerous other biases. These lived experiences are why it is imperative for Black female journalists, coming into the field, to have a mentor. If that mentor cannot be found in the field of journalism, then a Black female executive leader would be a suggestion as a mentor. That person would, most likely, have worked in companies where she

battled sexism, racism, and classism. Though not a reporter, she perhaps could share ideas on how to maneuver through a company hierarchy while working in a toxic environment.

**Conclusion**

The data from this study shows Black female journalists are at a disadvantage in television newsrooms because they are discriminated against. An analysis of the discrimination was identified clearly and profoundly through the detailed and emotional testimony from conversations with six Black female journalists. Those journalists spoke of daily incidents of microaggressions, hierarchical bullying by television anchors, omissions from meetings, and traumatic discrimination, including one incident that centered on one Black female journalist being required to work out of a closet during COVID-19.

The research question: "What are the lived experiences of Black female journalists working, inside television newsrooms in the United States, who are trying to achieve upward mobility?" had a profound impact by serving as a thread throughout this study identifying the objectives and allowing for a clearer and deeper understanding, through personal interviews, of why Black female journalists are being discriminated against.

Initially, the purpose of this study was to explore a perceived reality that racism and discrimination exists in television newsrooms. However, the data from this study show that racism not only exists, but it is unique to Black female journalists and that it manifests itself through intersectionality. The data also revealed a connection to discrimination and illness among Black female journalists. One participant interviewed in this study noted that by the time she got to her second television newsroom, she experienced her first bout with depression. However, one of the most illuminating findings of this study was how complicit newsroom

managers were in perpetuating, enabling, and, allowing to continue the discrimination enacted upon the participants of this study.

There were several ways in which those newsroom managers were complicit, but, first, a demographic backdrop needs to be established. Those newsroom mangers, which included general managers, news directors, and executive producers were all White men, noted in Chapter 1, as the primary ethnicity of newsroom managers. Research studies also give a glimpse into the worldview of what some Whites think about racism in the workplace.

In a 2016 study by the Pew Research Center, Blacks are more likely than Whites to say Black people are treated less fairly in the workplace, with only 22% of the White participants agreeing to that statement, and 64% of the Black participants agreeing to the statement. In that same study, only 53% of the White respondents said the country needs to continue making changes for Blacks to have equal rights with Whites, while 88% of Black respondents said the country needs to continue working to make changes for Blacks to have equal rights with Whites.

Comedian Chris Rock jokes about how all his White friends know only one Black person. But a 2014 article by The Washington Post noted that this is true, and that three quarters of Whites do not have any non-White friends (Ingraham, 2014). While the survey above could not determine to a certainty if the White newsroom managers at the news outlets where the participants of this study work, had an understanding of the history of discrimination against Blacks, or had Black friends, or believed that Black people are treated fairly in the workplace, what it does show are the challenges the Black participants of this study could be up against when they complained to White management in their respective newsrooms. What is known is that when the Black journalists complained to management about discrimination, their management never responded, and the discrimination continued.

**Executive Leadership**

Anyone in executive leadership reading this study should be crestfallen, reading the lived experiences of these participants. The questions they should be asking themselves after reading this research are:

1. Am I an inclusive leader?
2. Does my leadership style reflect any of the negative styles I see reflected in this study? If so, how do I begin to change the workplace environment?
3. How do I make sure the diversity continuum does not stop at my place of business and that I do more than simply hire people of diverse backgrounds? How do I start to promote them and make sure they feel a sense of belonging in my organization?
4. Do I understand diversity can be profitable too?

These are questions that this study can provide answers to for those who lead newsrooms and for those who do not. When leaders turn newsrooms, businesses, or corporations into a place where all ethnic groups are welcomed and feel a sense of belonging, all ethnic groups will want to work there, and retention will not be a problem. When leaders embrace differences, it will unleash people to be creative and present news stories, or any idea from their perspective, giving companies a plethora of solutions, they otherwise would not have. The job of television news is to educate and inform, and diversity among journalists does just that. Diversity must be purposeful for companies. It does not happen unless leaders understand it, recruit for it, and embrace it. Black and brown women continue to be left out. Leaders must give them a seat at the table because when they are not in the room where it happens, they are forgotten, and perspectives and money will be lost.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol Piloting

The interview will begin with the researcher having a 5-minute social conversation with the participant to build rapport. That conversation will center around inquiries of if the participant grew up wanting to become a reporter, if they had a favorite professional reporter or anchor, they watched and admired on television, and if they went around the house or neighborhood trying to interview imaginary people.

Once the social conversation ends, the interview will start and be recorded on Zoom. A demographic questionnaire will have already been sent to the participant, and the researcher will begin by using some of that information to start the interview. Interview questions will be opened ended to allow the participant to speak about their interactions, feelings, memories, and how they understood what they saw and experienced in a newsroom. An in-depth conversation is hard to create on paper because of follow-up questions by the researcher and because an actual pilot study did not taken place. The interview questions will resemble the following:

Q—So, your first television job was in Mississippi. Was it a great market? What kind of stories did you cover? Were you received well by the public and in the newsroom? If so, explain, and if not, explain.

Q—Were you in a hurry to leave that market because it was a smaller market, and you didn’t have the helicopters and fancy toys the larger stations have, or did you want to leave for other reasons? If so, why? If not, why?

Q—Was there diversity in the newsroom? Could or should there have been more? Did you personally experience any issues surrounding race?

Q—Were there opportunities for you to fill-in anchor or cover investigative stories, opportunities that could help establish you and make you better prepared for a larger market? Were there any Black female anchors there and what roles did they play in the newsroom?

Following the interview, the interview will be transcribed and coded to see if the researcher needs to change strategies, whether the researcher is getting the type of rich, heartfelt responses needed, or whether they should stay the course going in the direction they have chosen.