

UNDERSTANDING CODE-SWITCHING OF BLACK BUSINESSWOMEN IN ARKANSAS:  
ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR A BETTER WORKPLACE

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## **Abstract**

This research study aimed to determine if code-switching in Arkansas workplaces helps Black women achieve upward career mobility, as their strategies might assist other Black women in advancing their careers in Arkansas workplaces. Code-switching, the practice of alternating between different languages, dialects, or cultural behaviors, is a common strategy among Black women in the workplace to navigate predominantly White or non-Black environments. Researching Black women code-switching in the workplace is important as it sheds light on broader issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and organizational dynamics and is crucial for understanding and addressing the complexities of their professional experiences. This research provides valuable insights that can drive systemic change, enhance workplace inclusivity, and support the overall well-being and career advancement of Black women. Employing conceptual frameworks grounded in Black Feminist Thought (BFT) theory and systemic racism theory allowed the assertion that Black women face unique challenges related to both racism and sexism in the workplace. While these theories offer a comprehensive understanding of Black women in workplaces generally, this research seeks to expand on these theoretical models to explore the specific impacts on Black women in Arkansas workplaces. Utilizing an exploratory case study methodology, the researcher interviewed Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces to explore their strategies for managing code-switching and determine if they work. This research unveiled three main themes revealing that the study participants learned to code-switch early in life, have challenging work environments, and need to prove themselves more so than others at work.

## **Dedication**

God, I thank You first and foremost for putting this dream in my heart and the ethics in my work. Without You, I am truly nothing! I owe this ALL to You! Good looking out, Big Sandals!

To my family, whose unwavering support and encouragement sustained me throughout this journey. Breannah and Bri'Elle, thank you both for being unselfish with Mommy while I completed this journey. I pray that my tenacity through this journey has shown you that your skin and your gender are your unmatched superpowers. LaTrell, Byron, and Shonnatta, my siblings, thank you for cheering me on as I walked this journey. To my favorite Aunt, Harriett, thank you for being you and encouraging me relentlessly. To my deceased Big Brother, Gerald I felt your love. To my Mother, Ruth, who left this world but never my heart: WE DID IT! Your baby girl is a DOCTOR! I miss you and love you tremendously!

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In today's interconnected and diverse society, individuals often maneuver within numerous linguistic and cultural landscapes in their daily interactions. One notable phenomenon that reflects this linguistic versatility is code-switching, the practice of alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a single conversation or interaction (Grosjean, 1982). In recent years, the concept of code-switching has evolved to encompass a broader range of behaviors and practices beyond linguistic switching. In addition to linguistic code-switching, scholars recognize that individuals engage in code-switching across multiple dimensions of communication and behavior. This engagement includes switching between registers, styles, or language varieties and adapting nonverbal cues, gestures, and expressions to suit different social contexts. According to Cassell (2021), code-switching is an adjustment in language, appearance, mannerisms, and behaviors to improve comfort in a group or other settings. Hence, a person can receive fair treatment and acceptance from their group.

### **Multimodal Code-Switching**

Multimodal code-switching involves switching between different modes or channels of communication within a single conversation or interaction (Bhatt & Bolonyai, 2019). The term is often used in the context of linguistics and communication studies to describe how people seamlessly integrate different forms of communication to enhance understanding, convey meaning, or adapt to different social contexts. Multimodal code-switching can involve adapting one's tone of voice, body language, facial expressions, and dress to align with the norms and expectations of a particular social setting.

### **Cultural Code-Switching**

Cultural code-switching involves navigating and adapting to different cultural norms, values, and practices in diverse social environments (Zakaria & Ab Rahman Mutoh, 2022). This navigation and adaptation may include adjusting one's behavior, beliefs, and social interactions to fit within the cultural context of a specific community, organization, or social group.

### **Professional Code-Switching**

In professional settings, individuals code-switch to navigate workplace dynamics, organizational culture, and professional relationships (Roach, 2023). This type of code-switching may involve adjusting one's communication style, dress, demeanor, and behavior to align with the expectations and norms of the workplace. Cultural identity also plays a role, as individuals balance their cultural background with workplace norms, switching languages or dialects to fit in while expressing their heritage (Roach, 2023).

### **Intersectionality and Identity Expression**

Intersectionality is a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It describes how various forms of social stratification, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, intersect and interact with each other, creating complex and interconnected systems of oppression and privilege (Aguilar, 2015). It emphasizes that individuals may experience multiple forms of discrimination or privilege simultaneously, and these intersecting identities shape their experiences and opportunities. Intersectionality theory highlights how individuals negotiate their identities and adapt their behavior in response to intersecting systems of privilege and oppression. Code-switching deeply intertwines with identity expression, particularly for individuals who navigate multiple social identities based on race, gender, ethnicity, class, and sexuality (Spencer et al., 2022). Intersectionality and code-switching intersect through the

identities and social contexts that influence language use and the power dynamics in a given situation.

### **Significance of Code-Switching Beyond Linguistics**

Recognizing code-switching as a multidimensional phenomenon sheds light on how individuals navigate social interactions, express identity, and negotiate power dynamics across diverse contexts. Code-switching plays a crucial role in shaping social interactions, identity formation, and cultural dynamics (Spencer et al., 2022). Its significance extends far beyond linguistic boundaries, influencing social cohesion, power dynamics, psychological well-being, economic opportunities, educational outcomes, and cultural preservation. Understanding code-switching in its broader context enriches our understanding of communication, culture, and social identity, highlighting the dynamic nature of human interaction and adaptation.

Code-switching is a multifaceted phenomenon that extends beyond linguistic behaviors to encompass various aspects of communication, behavior, and identity expression. By acknowledging the diverse ways individuals engage in code-switching, researchers can better understand the complexities of human interaction and social adaptation across different contexts. Code-switching is a timeworn method in the United States for many Black people (Barker, 2019; Christo-Baker et al., 2012; Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Macklin, 2021). When Einar Haugen, an American linguist, writer, and professor, forged the term in the early 1950s, code-switching proposed to describe a change in language or the mixing of two or more languages or dialects (Hall & Nilep, 2015). Linguists have examined the act of code-switching to gauge when and where it happens, while sociologists have investigated why and how it happens. As documented in a recent study, researchers defined code-switching as "a multilingual phenomenon" (Hamed et al., 2022, p. 72), allowing people who speak multiple languages to mix those languages in single

conversations. Notwithstanding, code-switching has taken on an entirely different meaning for members of marginalized, underrepresented groups attempting to harmonize with the more dominant environment surrounding them.

Code-switching occurs across various social settings, from informal conversations among friends and family to formal educational, professional, and community interactions. While the concept of code-switching received popularity in recent years, civil rights activist and scholar W.E.B. Du Bois hinted at this "double-consciousness" nearly 120 years ago in his book *The Souls of Black Folk; Essays and Sketches* (1903). Du Bois (1903) described how it is sometimes dismaying to be American and Black. Du Bois posited that, rather than Blacks seeing themselves as beautiful, amazing creatures, they had to beware that many non-Blacks did not see them that way (Thomas, 2021). His words explained that the identity of Black Americans suffered due to the right things in the development of American society and made mainstream by White Americans (Thomas, 2021). According to Du Bois (1903), this suffrage propagates the struggle for Black Americans to have safe places in a society free from prejudice, racism, and domination.

While code-switching can enhance communication and facilitate intercultural understanding, it also raises questions about identity, authenticity, and power (Davis & Jones, 2021; Holder et al., 2015). Code-switching individuals may face judgments, stereotypes, or scrutiny based on their linguistic choices, particularly when linguistic diversity is not fully embraced or valued (Banaji et al., 2021). Moreover, the motivations behind code-switching can vary widely, ranging from pragmatic considerations to social and cultural affiliations.

Researchers posit that it is an understatement to say that being a Black woman in America is arduous (Abrams et al., 2019; Davis & Jones, 2021; Holder et al., 2015). Cultural

capital is missing, but Black women are also considered inferior to White men, Black men, and White women in terms of pay (Banaji et al., 2021). According to the United States Census Bureau (2022), Black women face wage disparities in the United States. In the United States, Black women earn 42% less than White men (United States Census Bureau, 2022). These wage disparities worsen circumstances for Black families (Glynn, 2018).

Black women also have to pick and choose where to bring their unapologetic authenticity or culture, which sometimes includes the workplace (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, studied power dynamics in society and how our experiences determine how we navigate power dynamics in a structured way (Cartwright, 2022; Wallace, 2017). Bourdieu posited that cultural and social, along with financial capital, play a massive role in the inequality we see in the world (Cartwright, 2022; Wallace, 2017). When social class, race, and gender are studied independently, vital inequality trends are discovered (Cartwright, 2022; Wallace, 2017). Black women are changing the code to feel welcome in unwelcome, dominant spaces to dispel these unequal trends (Abrams et al., 2019; Davis & Jones, 2021; Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Holder et al., 2015).

Code-switching takes on particular significance in the workplace as employees navigate diverse professional environments characterized by varying cultural norms, communication styles, and power dynamics. For marginalized groups, such as Black women, code-switching may be a strategic tool for navigating workplace dynamics, mitigating bias, and negotiating professional identities (Cartwright, 2022; Wallace, 2017).

### **Statement of Problem**

Diversity in American organizations has increased recently, altering organizational members' interactions, communications, and mannerisms (McCluney et al., 2021). As an

example, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) found that non-White workers in the United States increased from 23% in 1979 to nearly 40% in 2019. However, while there have been improvements and developments in race relations, biases, prejudices, and injustices are still prevalent in American companies (Dickens & Chavez, 2018).

The coronavirus pandemic affected the world, leaving adverse effects still felt today. The pandemic indecorously affected Black communities in the United States because of what the World Health Organization described as impoverished living conditions, poor economic conditions, and unfair politics (Vasquez, 2020). Along with the COVID-19 pandemic, Black communities were affected by police murdering Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd (Toosi et al., 2021). The police murder tragedies sparked corporations to publicly state their support of the Black community and their commitment to improving racial justice and equity both in the walls of their companies and the communities in which they operate (Cunningham, 2021; Kerber, 2020). Nevertheless, despite these efforts, a lack of representation of Black women still exists (Singleton et al., 2021). Without solid allies and representation in these critical positions, Black Women mask their authenticity and feel compelled to conform to what is deemed appropriate in the workplace, espousing methods they hope will gain them the credibility needed to be considered professional.

The general business problem is that Black women are disproportionately underrepresented on leadership teams of American companies (Babarinsa, 2020). According to Bloch et al. (2021), Black women face more barriers preventing their promotion to management levels than women of other races and men of all races. Black women comprise 12.7% of the American population, but only 1.3% are in senior or executive leadership positions at Standard & Poor's (S&P) 500 firms (Bailey, 2022; Smith et al., 2019). Also, only 2.2% of Black women



occupy seats on Fortune 500 board directors (Bailey, 2022; Smith et al., 2019). Significant improvements have occurred with workplace diversity in America, but Black women are still grossly underrepresented at all management levels.

The specific business problem is that Black businesswomen employed in Arkansas workplaces may lack the strategies for code-switching, which might prevent their careers from progressing. Boekhorst (2014) posited that sharing workplace strategies cultivates an inclusive environment as workplace diversity grows. This research study aimed to determine if code-switching in Arkansas workplaces helps Black women achieve upward career mobility, as their strategies might assist other Black women in advancing their careers in Arkansas workplaces.

### **Purpose of Study**

Black women often face convoluted and unique experiences in the workplace tied to their intersecting marginalized identities related to their race and gender (Smith et al., 2019). Unfortunately, these experiences have largely been neglected in research, leaving little to no resources for corporations to decrease the instances of Black women feeling compelled to code-switch (Cartwright, 2022; Kerber, 2020; Singleton et al., 2021; Wallace, 2017). This research study aims to determine if code-switching in the workplace helps study participants achieve career advancement, as their strategies might assist other Black women in achieving upward career mobility in Arkansas workplaces. This research study also aims to investigate the strategies Black businesswomen employed in Arkansas used to demonstrate professionalism e.g., code-switching, mannerisms, and appearance. The results of this study may create objective guidance for Black businesswomen employed in Arkansas to learn successful strategies for managing code-switching in the workplace to become more effective leaders.

In 1962, Malcolm X spoke in Los Angeles, CA, about Black women being America's most disrespected, neglected, and unprotected people (Locke-Simmons, 2021). Black women endure attacks over their body shapes, features, and hair textures while forced to be strong because showing pain or emotions turns them into being labeled *angry Black women* (Locke-Simmons, 2021; Motro et al., 2022; Summers et al., 2022).

### **Research Question**

Using an exploratory case study methodology, the researcher answered the question: What strategies do Black businesswomen use to demonstrate professionalism, such as code-switching, mannerisms, and appearance, in Arkansas?

### **Significance of the Study**

While there is a growing body of literature on workplace communication, language, and diversity, there remains a paucity of research specifically focused on Black women's experiences of code-switching in professional settings. Existing studies often overlook the intersectional dimensions of race, gender, and language in shaping workplace dynamics and fail to capture the nuanced motivations, challenges, and outcomes of code-switching for Black women.

This dissertation seeks to address these research gaps by exploring the phenomenon of code-switching among Black businesswomen in the workplace, with a particular focus on Arkansas. By examining the intersection of race, gender, language, and professional identity, this study aims to contribute to our understanding of workplace communication dynamics, diversity, and inclusion. Ultimately, the findings of this research may inform organizational policies, practices, and interventions aimed at promoting equity and supporting the professional advancement of Black women in the workforce.

This dissertation research on Black women code-switching in Arkansas workplaces significantly impacts various Franklin University College of Business Doctor of Business Administration Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) by demonstrating critical thinking, advanced research skills, ethical reasoning, diversity awareness, leadership, and interdisciplinary integration. This research most directly aligns with the second PLO, which reads “apply and integrate current research and scholarly-based literature contributing to a major field of business administration” (Outcomes, 2024). By aligning my research with this PLO, I showcase the broader educational value of my work and its contribution to both academic knowledge and practical applications in organizational settings through the creation of a comprehensive guide that organizations can use to support Black women who code-switch in the workplace.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this qualitative study, the historical examination and discussion of Black women's workplace experiences in the United States, code-switching, Black Feminist Thought (BFT) theory, and systemic racism occur. Additionally, the results of this research study may create objective guidance for Black businesswomen employed in Arkansas to learn whether or not code-switching in the workplace can help them achieve career advancement.

### **Historical Examination of Black Women's Workplace Experiences**

The historical examination of Black women's workplace experiences in the United States reveals a complex narrative shaped by intersecting systems of oppression, including race, gender, and class. Throughout history, Black women have faced unique challenges and discrimination in the workplace, stemming from both racism and sexism. Scholars explored the historical and sociolinguistic factors contributing to Black women's codeswitching in the workplace (Boulton, 2016; Harris, 2019; Myers, 2020; Saeedi & Richardson, 2020). This research recognizes the influence of structural racism, stereotypes, and discriminatory practices that shape Black women's experiences. The BFT Theory and Systemic Racism Theory provide valuable insights into understanding Black women's motivations and challenges as they negotiate multiple identities (Jones, 2002). While progress is evident, much work remains to achieve true equality and inclusion in the workplace.

The historical experience of Black women in American workplaces provides evidence of discriminatory employment practices and government policies regarding race and gender (Jones, 2002). After the abolition of slavery, Black women, compared to other races of women in the United States, always had the highest employment rates. Still, despite ending slavery, Black women's jobs mainly comprised low-wage agricultural positions or domestic service (Boulton,

2016; Harris, 2019; Jones, 2002). Even when sales, clerical, and professional jobs became available to women, Black women were not welcomed as fervently as White women (Jones, 2002).

During the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and 1970s, Black women fought not only for the end of segregation and Jim Crow laws but also for better work environments and conditions and better pay (Mosnier, 2011). During this time, Black men also hesitated to support Black women's quest for leadership positions (Mosnier, 2011). The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) became law after the United States House of Representatives voted favorably for the 1964 Civil Rights Act (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d.). This new law allowed Black women to move from low-wage agricultural and domestic service positions to better-paying jobs like secretaries and typists (Dixon-McKnight, 2017). The new law also allowed Black women to pursue college educations and obtain managerial positions (Dixon-McKnight, 2017).

### **Code-Switching**

Code-switching is a common technique Black women sometimes use to emulate their White colleagues in many workplaces to feel welcomed (Rabelo et al., 2021). Black women often navigate predominantly White or mainstream professional environments where the dominant culture may differ from their cultural background (Rabelo et al., 2021). Code-switching can be a strategic tool for Black women to navigate these environments by adjusting their language and communication styles to fit the expectations of the workplace culture.

Code-switching among Black women in the workplace reflects their negotiation of cultural identity. They may switch between different linguistic and cultural registers to express different aspects of their identity, balancing their authentic selves with the need to conform to

professional norms and expectations (Boulton, 2016; Harris, 2019; Myers, 2020; Saeedi & Richardson, 2020). Black women may code-switch to signal workplace competence, professionalism, and leadership potential (Harris, 2019; Myers, 2020). Conforming to standard language and communication norms associated with White-collar professions can be perceived as a strategy for professional advancement and upward mobility.

Code-switching can also be a response to stereotypes and biases that Black women face in the workplace. By adopting mainstream communication styles, Black women may seek to counter negative stereotypes and challenge perceptions of incompetence or unprofessionalism (Boulton, 2016; Harris, 2019; Myers, 2020; Saeedi & Richardson, 2020). Code-switching includes altering appearance, mannerisms, and spoken and body language (Wingfield, 2012). Code-switching also includes switching back to normal appearance, mannerisms, and spoken or body language among other Black women and men inside and outside the workplace (Wingfield, 2012). Possessing the dexterity to code-switch from what many consider workplace professionalism back to what is most comfortable allows Black women to sustain a connection to their culture and language while simultaneously creating an environment of comfort, thereby forming workplace bonds with those who might not fully understand their struggles. Studies identified several motivations behind Black women's codeswitching in the workplace (Wingfield, 2012). These motivations include the desire to fit in, overcome stereotypes and biases, enhance their professional image, foster rapport, and alleviate the burden of representing their race and gender (Gamst et al., 2020; McCluney et al., 2022). According to a study conducted at Cornell University, most Black people, especially Black women, feel pressured to code-switch to succeed in workspaces where the White culture is dominant (McCluney et al., 2022). In this study, 64% of the Black women studied felt that code-switching was essential to

breaking through the concrete ceilings and challenges they faced in achieving career progression (McCluney et al., 2022). Careful examination of what companies constitute as professional and considerate of all organizational members gives employees confidence in bringing their complete selves to work without fear of being unintentionally penalized (McCluney et al., 2022; Nelson, 2022). Careful examination of what companies constitute as professional and considerate of all organizational members, as posited by many researchers, also allows organizations to see the lack of representation of Black people, namely Black women, in leadership positions and work towards ensuring all employees feel represented in organizational decision-making and policies (He et al., 2019; Holder et al., 2015; McCluney et al., 2022; Nelson, 2022; Smith et al., 2019; Wertley & Baker, 2022).

The assumption that people can be themselves and still be successful in the workplace encumbers connotations of privilege and power, implying that individuals have the freedom and support to express their authentic selves without fear of negative repercussions. This assumption also encompasses the cultural values and norms of American workplaces, which include White, cisgender males dominating the culture (He et al., 2019; McCluney et al., 2022; Nelson, 2022; Wertley & Baker, 2022). Black women in workplaces where representation is not typical may find it necessary to use code-switching to accomplish their career goals.

### ***Historical Context and Legacy***

The practice of teaching Black women to code-switch has historical roots in systemic racism, colonialism, and slavery. During slavery in the United States, Black people were forcibly separated from their African languages, cultures, and communities (Nagata et al., 2024). Many enslaved Africans were multilingual, speaking various African languages, but were forced to communicate in English or other European languages (Nagata et al., 2024). Code-switching, or

the alternation between African languages and English, became a survival strategy for maintaining cultural connections, resisting oppression, and communicating covertly within slave communities (Nagata et al., 2024). Understanding this historical context is essential for contextualizing contemporary experiences and strategies for navigating racialized and gendered spaces.

### ***Problems with Code-Switching***

While code-switching may help Black women cope with their work environment, it can also result in stress (Gamst et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2016). Stress can sometimes jeopardize Black women's emotional, physical, and spiritual health (Gamst et al., 2020). Switching between linguistic and cultural registers requires cognitive effort and mental energy. Juggling multiple communication styles and linguistic norms can be mentally taxing, leading to cognitive overload and increased stress levels (Johnson et al., 2022). Code-switching often involves managing emotions and projecting a professional demeanor that aligns with workplace expectations. Black women may feel pressure to suppress or modify aspects of their authentic selves to conform to mainstream norms, resulting in emotional labor and emotional exhaustion (Spencer et al., 2022).

Code-switching can also create a sense of identity conflict or fragmentation as individuals navigate between different cultural identities and social roles (Johnson et al., 2022; Spencer et al., 2022). This identity conflict might cause Black women to engage in hypervigilance, constantly monitoring their speech, behavior, and interactions to avoid stereotypes, microaggressions, or discriminatory treatment (Johnson et al., 2022). Heightened awareness of potential bias or discrimination can also contribute to stress and anxiety as individuals remain vigilant to navigate workplace dynamics and mitigate potential risks (Johnson et al., 2022). Black women may experience internal tension between their authentic selves and the personas



they adopt in the workplace, leading to feelings of dissonance and alienation, as Black women may feel disconnected from their cultural community or peers who share their linguistic and cultural background (Johnson et al., 2022). This sense of isolation can exacerbate feelings of stress and loneliness in the workplace.

Code-switching raises concerns about authenticity and self-expression. Black women may feel a sense of inauthenticity or disconnection from their true selves when they engage in code-switching to fit in or conform to workplace expectations (Gamst et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2016). This discrepancy between their authentic identity and work persona can be emotionally distressing. Over time, the cumulative effects of code-switching, emotional labor, and identity conflict can take a toll on Black women's mental and emotional well-being (Gamst et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2016). Chronic stress resulting from prolonged exposure to these stressors may increase the risk of burnout, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues (Gamst et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2016).

Code-switching takes effort and can negatively impact productivity, engagement, and workplace satisfaction (Gamst et al., 2020;). Code-switching also purports the absence of Black women's customs and values in the workplace. Black and White women face similar diversity issues regarding unequal wages, experiences of sexual harassment, and dissimilitude in promotions (Bailey, 2022; Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Singleton et al., 2021). However, unlike White women, Black women also face issues of racial inequality (Johnson, 2013). With membership in two groups facing oppression, Black women inevitably experience sexism and racism.

Code-switching might affect how others perceive Black businesswomen in leadership positions and their organizational influence. Code-switching can shape perceptions of

competence and professionalism. When Black businesswomen code-switch to align with mainstream communication norms, the perception is that they are more competent, authoritative, and capable of leadership roles (Johnson et al., 2022; Spencer et al., 2022). Conversely, failure to code-switch or deviations from mainstream communication styles may lead to negative perceptions of competence or professionalism, perpetuating stereotypes and biases (Johnson et al., 2022; Spencer et al., 2022).

Some researchers posit that code-switching can impact perceptions of leadership effectiveness and adaptability (Gamst et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2016). Black women leaders who demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in their communication styles are perceived as more effective leaders capable of navigating diverse organizational contexts and leading multicultural teams (Johnson et al., 2016). Effective code-switching enables leaders to bridge communication gaps, foster collaboration, and achieve organizational goals more effectively.

While it can be a strategic tool for navigating workplace dynamics and challenging stereotypes, it also highlights systemic inequalities and the ongoing need for inclusive corporate cultures that value diverse perspectives and contributions (McCluney et al., 2022). It is essential to recognize the potential challenges and complexities associated with code-switching, including concerns about authenticity, identity, and cultural assimilation (McCluney et al., 2022).

Organizations are responsible for creating inclusive cultures that value diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels (Johnson et al., 2016; McCluney et al., 2022). Recognizing and celebrating Black women leaders' unique strengths and contributions is essential for building a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace where all employees can thrive and succeed (Babarinsa, 2020; Bailey, 2022; Clemons, 2019). By fostering an environment that values linguistic diversity

and promotes inclusive leadership, organizations can create opportunities for Black women to excel and contribute to their fullest potential.

This exploratory case study investigates the code-switching strategies, or lack thereof, that Black businesswomen use in Arkansas concerning views of professionalism regarding appearance, speech/language, and mannerisms. These strategies may include the participants' experiences in modifying their appearance, speech/language, and mannerisms and whether these strategies aided in a more positive view of others' perceptions of their professionalism. This study also emphasizes the importance of promoting inclusive workplace cultures that value diversity and recognize Black women's professional contributions, underscoring the need for ongoing dialogue and action to address systemic barriers and promote equity and inclusion in professional settings.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework in this research uses the BFT theory and systemic racism theory. These theories combined affirm that Black women have unique endurances with racism and sexism in the workplace. While these theories provide a holistic view of Black women in workplaces everywhere, the researcher aims to build upon the theoretical models to explain the phenomenon's effects on Black women in Arkansas workplaces.

### ***Black Feminist Thought Theory***

The BFT Theory is a theoretical framework that emerged from the intersection of Black liberation and feminist theories. Scholar and activist Patricia Hill Collins developed it in her influential book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2009), which explores the unique experiences and perspectives of Black women and seeks to address the various forms of oppression they face, including racism, sexism, and

classism. The BFT Theory emphasizes the importance of analyzing the intersections of race, gender, and class in understanding Black women's social, economic, and political conditions (Rousseau, 2013). The BFT Theory also recognizes that these intersecting systems of oppression cannot be separated or understood in isolation.

Black women are successful in many ways and have achieved much despite inequality in society and workplaces (Caldera, 2020). However, research posited that Black women face more complex and worse experiences than any other gender or race of women (Babarinsa, 2020; Bailey, 2022; Clemons, 2019; Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Singleton et al., 2021). Black women have long strived for moral, trustworthy, and professional views in their workspaces. To achieve this, Black women often mirror their behaviors, language, and appearances to the views of their non-Black colleagues to avoid drawing negative attention to themselves. Mirroring is arduous, as it requires Black women to remain aware of their colleagues' perceptions while also attempting to maintain their identity (Bolino et al., 2016). Furthermore, the lack of diversity in the workplace often makes this task difficult. Black women may find themselves in a situation where they are the only person of their race and gender in the office, or worse, the only one in their department. This lack of representation can make it difficult for Black women to relate to their colleagues and understand the expectations.

There is importance in remembering that Black women come from various backgrounds and cultures, with their ancestors having suffered a disconnection from their native land because of slavery (Alina, 2015; Rousseau, 2013). Because of this disconnection and slavery, they may only sometimes be comfortable conforming to the expectations of their non-Black colleagues. Organizations should strive to create an inclusive and respectful environment for all races and genders (Babarinsa, 2020; Dickens & Chavez, 2018; McCluney et al., 2022; Nelson, 2022;

Singleton et al., 2021). More inclusive and respectful organizational environments may help Black women feel seen, heard, and valued in their workspaces.

Ultimately, the empowerment of Black women to be true to themselves and their cultures without fear of judgment or reprisal should exist in the workplace (Alina, 2015; Bolino et al., 2016; Clemons, 2019; McCluney et al., 2022; Nelson, 2022). With the proper support, Black women can thrive and become successful in their workspaces.

The lack of Black women in organizational leadership stems from historical stereotypes, biases, and discriminations that blocked opportunities to advance in their careers (Caldera, 2020; Macklin, 2021). Although racial and gender-specific discrimination is illegal, as a double minority, Black women still face both in the workplace and the world (Caldera, 2020). Black men are classified as men and receive the privileges men receive. White women are classified as White and receive the privileges Whites receive. Black women, being neither male nor White, are not often given a chance to change how others view them (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Clemons, 2019; Babarinsa, 2020; Singleton et al., 2021; Bailey, 2022). Understanding that the experiences of Black women are not the same as those of Black men and White women poses the opportunity for organizational leadership to develop safe workspaces for Black women to excel and grow (Babarinsa, 2020; Caldera, 2020; Clemons, 2019; Macklin, 2021; Singleton et al., 2021).

Overall, BFT provides a framework for understanding and challenging the intersecting forms of oppression Black women face. The BFT Theory provides a framework for understanding and challenging the complex ways that race, gender, and other social categories intersect and shape the experiences of Black women (Cooper, 2015; Griffin, 2016; Morgan, 2015; Sterling, 2015). The BFT Theory amplifies their voices, experiences, and knowledge while

promoting social change and inclusivity (Cooper, 2015; Griffin, 2016; Morgan, 2015; Sterling, 2015). The BFT Theory offers critical insights into the complexities of power dynamics and calls for social transformation that addresses Black women's specific needs and experiences within broader struggles for justice and equality (Cooper, 2015; Griffin, 2016; Morgan, 2015; Sterling, 2015).

### ***Systemic Racism Theory***

Systemic racism theory is a framework that examines how racism is embedded within social systems and institutions, perpetuating inequality and discrimination against certain racial groups. Systemic racism theory refers to the belief that racism is not just the result of individual prejudices or discriminatory actions but rather deeply embedded in the structures and institutions of society (Braveman et al., 2022). Systemic racism theory recognizes that racism operates at individual and systemic levels, with the latter having a far-reaching impact on various aspects of people's lives (Nyberg & Wright, 2015; Rawls & Duck, 2020).

Systemic racism theory represents racism that is omnipresent and ingrained in American systems, written or unwritten policies, and laws (Braveman et al., 2022). These policies and laws are rooted in beliefs and practices that contribute to, condone, and support prejudicial treatment towards Black people and women (Braveman et al., 2022). In the early beginnings of American society, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color have faced harmful, racist policies (Jones, 2002; Nyberg & Wright, 2015; Rawls & Duck, 2020).

At its core, systemic racism theory asserts that racial disparities and inequities are not accidental or isolated incidents but rather the product of historical and ongoing processes that advantage certain racial groups while disadvantaging others (Lee & Boykins, 2022). These

processes can include discriminatory policies, practices, and cultural norms perpetuating racial hierarchies and reinforcing unequal power dynamics (Lee & Boykins, 2022).

One of the critical elements of systemic racism theory is the concept of privilege. Privilege refers to the advantages and benefits that certain racial groups enjoy due to their social position and the systemic biases that work in their favor (Lee & Boykins, 2022; Nyberg & Wright, 2015; Rawls & Duck, 2020). Systemic Racism Theory argues that these privileges are often invisible or taken for granted by those possessing them while disadvantaging marginalized racial groups (Lee & Boykins, 2022; Nyberg & Wright, 2015; Rawls & Duck, 2020).

Systemic racism theory also emphasizes examining the historical context and structural factors contributing to racial inequalities (Reddick et al., 2014). It recognizes that racism is not solely a matter of personal beliefs or attitudes but rather a result of a complex web of historical, economic, political, and social factors that have shaped the distribution of resources, opportunities, and power along racial lines (Braveman et al., 2022; Caldera, 2020; Reddick et al., 2014).

Critics of systemic racism theory raise several objections, questioning its premises, methods, and conclusions. Some critics argue that it oversimplifies complex issues and that individual responsibility and personal agency overshadow a focus on systemic factors (Feagin & Elias, 2013; Orr & Conner, 2021). Some skeptics also claim that systemic racism theory can lead to a divisive and adversarial approach, potentially alienating individuals who do not perceive themselves as benefiting from systemic racism (Feagin & Elias, 2013; Griffin et al., 2023).

Conversely, supporters argue that Systemic Racism Theory provides a framework for understanding and addressing society's persistent racial disparities (Broussard, 2013; Schell et al., 2020). These supporters argue that it provides a crucial framework for understanding the

deep-seated and pervasive nature of racial inequalities (Broussard, 2013; Schell et al., 2020).

Supporters of Systemic Racism Theory believe that by acknowledging and confronting systemic racism, it is possible to create more equitable systems and institutions that benefit all members of society.

Organizations can take critical steps to be more inclusive and try to ease the hurts of the past Black people live with (Braveman et al., 2022; Caldera, 2020). Braveman et al. (2022) suggests that understanding the need to include Black women's voices in decision-making creates more effective organizational leadership. Awareness of inequities in workplace culture and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in professional constructs brings consciousness to systemic racism and builds the bridge to develop solutions to eradicate it (McCluney et al., 2021; McCluney et al., 2022; Rawls & Duck, 2020).

There is importance in noting that systemic racism theory is subject to ongoing debate and scholarly discussion. While systemic racism theory has gained significant attention in recent years, it has yet to be universally accepted, and alternative perspectives exist on the nature and causes of racial disparities (Feagin & Elias, 2013). Understanding and addressing issues of racism and inequality require ongoing examination of historical context, empirical evidence, and a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue.

Black women's codeswitching in the workplace is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by historical, sociolinguistic, and organizational factors (Caldera, 2020). While codeswitching can be a strategic adaptation to navigate cultural norms and biases, it also poses challenges to identity and well-being. Organizations must foster inclusive environments that embrace diverse linguistic and cultural practices, providing support and reducing the burden of codeswitching on Black women (Caldera, 2020; McCluney et al., 2021; Rawls & Duck, 2020). Further research is



needed to deepen our understanding of the long-term effects of codeswitching and develop interventions that promote equity and inclusivity in the workplace.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

According to Yin (2014), selecting a research methodology relies on the research question, the magnitude of regulation the researcher has over behavioral matters, and the research's focus on present-day happenings instead of past happenings. By carefully considering these factors, researchers can choose an appropriate methodology that aligns with the objectives of their study and facilitates the generation of meaningful insights. Aligning the methodology with the research questions and ensuring feasibility and validity helps researchers to choose an approach that effectively addresses the research needs.

#### **Quantitative Research Methodology**

The quantitative research approach focuses on quantifying variables and employing statistical analysis to identify patterns, relationships, and causal connections among them (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). Quantitative research typically involves the collection of numeric data through structured methods such as surveys, experiments, and secondary data analysis (Bryman, 2012). Researchers use these methods to test hypotheses and measure variables systematically, aiming for objectivity and replicability (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). The data collected is analyzed using various statistical techniques to draw conclusions that can be generalized to larger populations (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). Quantitative research is well-suited for studies requiring precise measurement and the ability to predict outcomes, making it a cornerstone in fields such as psychology, economics, and epidemiology (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014).

One of the primary strengths of quantitative research is its ability to produce reliable and generalizable results (Creswell, 2014). Large sample sizes and rigorous statistical methods help ensure that findings are not due to chance and can be applied to broader populations (Bryman,

2012; Creswell, 2014). This approach also allows for the examination of relationships between variables and the testing of theoretical models (Creswell, 2014). However, quantitative research can be limited by its focus on numbers and the potential for overlooking the context and complexity of human experiences (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014). While quantitative research provides a broad overview and can identify trends and correlations, it may not capture the depth and richness of individual experiences, which can be crucial for understanding underlying mechanisms and meanings (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2014).

Quantitative research approaches offer diverse methods for studying relationships, patterns, and trends in numerical data (Babbie, 2016). Researchers select an approach based on the research question, objectives, and available resources, aiming to obtain reliable and valid results (Babbie, 2016). Quantitative research approaches are essential for generating empirical evidence, testing hypotheses rigorously, and informing decisions across disciplines ranging from social sciences and healthcare to business and engineering. Quantitative research approaches provide a structured and systematic framework for understanding relationships, making predictions, and advancing knowledge in diverse fields of study.

### **Qualitative Research Methodology**

The qualitative research approach is a method used to explore and understand individuals' behaviors, experiences, and interactions within their natural settings (Creswell, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to measure and quantify variables, qualitative research aims to gain deep insights into the meanings, concepts, and contexts of phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Denzin et al., 2011). The qualitative research approach employs various data collection methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and content analysis of texts or visual materials (Creswell, 2013; Denzin et al., 2011). These methods are often flexible and

open-ended, allowing researchers to probe deeper into participants' perspectives and experiences (Creswell, 2013; Denzin et al., 2011). Through this approach, researchers can uncover rich, detailed narratives and identify patterns and themes that might not be apparent through quantitative measures (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research is particularly valuable in exploring complex social phenomena where the context and process are crucial to understanding the subject matter (Yin, 2018; Creswell, 2013; Denzin et al., 2011). Qualitative research allows researchers to capture the nuances of participants' experiences and the subtleties of their interactions, providing a comprehensive view of the issues at hand (Creswell, 2013; Denzin et al., 2011). However, the approach is inherently subjective, relying on the researchers' interpretations and interactions with participants, which can introduce bias (Creswell, 2013; Denzin et al., 2011). Additionally, the findings from qualitative research are typically not generalizable to larger populations due to the small, non-random samples often used (Creswell, 2013; Denzin et al., 2011). Despite these limitations, qualitative research offers a powerful means of gaining in-depth insights and developing theories that can inform further research and practice (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research encompasses a variety of approaches that share the common goal of understanding the complexities of human behavior, experiences, and social phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative research emphasizes the depth and richness of human experiences, perspectives, and meanings. Some of the most common types of qualitative research approaches include phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, case study, narrative inquiry, action research, and content analysis.

Phenomenological research aims to explore individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to those experiences (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenological research seeks to uncover the meanings that people attribute to their experiences and how these meanings shape their perceptions, behaviors, and interactions with the world. Researchers seek to understand the essence of phenomena as they are experienced by participants, often through in-depth interviews or focus groups (Creswell, 2013).

Ethnographic research involves the study of social and cultural phenomena within their natural settings (Creswell, 2013). Ethnographic research is rooted in anthropology but has been adopted and adapted in various disciplines, including sociology, education, psychology, and organizational studies. Ethnography aims to provide a detailed, holistic understanding of social practices, cultural norms, beliefs, and behaviors within specific communities or settings. Researchers immerse themselves in the social context being studied, often over an extended period, to gain a deep understanding of the cultural practices, norms, and beliefs of the community (Creswell, 2013).

Grounded theory is an inductive research approach focused on developing theories grounded in empirical data (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory was developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s and has since been widely used in various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, nursing, education, and management (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory is particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena and generating theoretical insights based on empirical data (Creswell, 2013). Researchers systematically analyze qualitative data to identify patterns, categories, and themes, which are then used to generate new theories or concepts (Creswell, 2013).

Case study research involves the in-depth examination of a particular case or phenomenon within its real-life context (Creswell, 2013). Case study research is used across various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, education, business, and healthcare, to explore complex phenomena and understand unique situations (Creswell, 2013). Researchers gather rich, detailed data from multiple sources to understand the complexities of the case and draw broader conclusions about similar phenomena (Creswell, 2013).

Narrative inquiry explores the stories or narratives individuals construct to make sense of their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Narrative inquiry offers a nuanced and empathetic approach to exploring individuals' experiences, identities, and social worlds through the power of storytelling. Narrative inquiry enhances our understanding of human lives and cultures by uncovering the diverse ways in which people construct meaning, negotiate identities, and navigate their social environments through narrative expression (Creswell, 2013).

Action research involves collaborative inquiry conducted by researchers and participants to address practical problems or improve practice within a specific context (Creswell, 2013). Action research involves collaboration between researchers and practitioners to identify issues, implement interventions or changes, and evaluate outcomes in real time. Action research emphasizes iterative cycles of reflection, action, and evaluation to generate actionable knowledge and promote social change (Creswell, 2013).

Content analysis is a systematic method for analyzing the content of textual, visual, or audio-visual data (Creswell, 2013). Content analysis can be applied to various types of media, documents, texts, or other forms of communication. Researchers identify themes, patterns, or meanings within the data to understand the underlying messages, representations, or discourses (Creswell, 2013).

These qualitative research approaches offer diverse methods and perspectives for studying human behavior, experiences, and social phenomena (Creswell, 2013). Researchers often select an approach based on the nature of the research question, the objectives of the study, and the characteristics of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2013). Each approach has its strengths and limitations, and researchers may employ multiple approaches within a single study to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic (Creswell, 2013).

### **Mixed Methods Research Methodology**

The mixed methods research approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative research techniques to provide a more comprehensive understanding of research problems (Creswell et al., 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Combining these methods allows researchers the opportunity to capitalize on the strengths of each approach while mitigating their respective limitations (Creswell et al., 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Mixed methods research typically involves collecting and analyzing both numerical data (quantitative) and textual or visual data (qualitative) (Creswell et al., 2017). This approach allows for the triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and robustness of the findings (Creswell et al., 2017). Researchers can use quantitative methods to identify patterns and generalize results to larger populations, while qualitative methods provide deep insights and contextual understanding of those patterns (Creswell et al., 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

One of the key advantages of mixed methods research is its ability to address complex research questions that cannot be fully explored using only one method (Creswell et al., 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). For instance, a study might begin with a quantitative survey to identify trends and then follow up with qualitative interviews to understand the reasons behind those trends. This approach facilitates a more nuanced analysis, where quantitative data can be

enriched by qualitative narratives and qualitative findings can be quantified to assess their prevalence (Creswell et al., 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). However, mixed methods research can be more time-consuming and require expertise in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (Creswell et al., 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Despite these challenges, a mixed method research methodology offers a powerful tool for gaining a holistic understanding of multifaceted research issues, making it particularly valuable in fields like social sciences, health research, and education (Creswell et al., 2017; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

### **Research Methodology for this Research Study**

For this research, I employed an exploratory case study methodology, a qualitative research approach. The exploratory case study methodology selection was suitable for this study because of its allowance of a focus on understanding and interpreting social phenomena from the perspective of the research participants. The exploratory case study methodology is an approach that allows an in-depth investigation of a phenomenon or topic, often in its real-life context, to get a better understanding of it (Yin, 2018). This qualitative research approach investigated the phenomenon of code-switching among Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces in its natural context, as little knowledge exists about this topic. This research methodology generated new insight and created a foundation for further research.

This exploratory case study utilized interviews with Black businesswomen in Arkansas in leadership and non-leadership positions to explore their strategies for managing code-switching in the workplace. The exploratory case made for the most suitable methodology because it acquires varying perspectives from study participants and aims to expand available literature on the effects of code-switching in modern business places in Arkansas. Using this methodology sheds light on similarities and dissimilarities between and within the study participants. These



similarities and dissimilarities may offer further insight into trends within industries and workplaces in Arkansas.

### ***Description of Research Study Participants***

Purposeful sampling, also known as purposive sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). It involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research question, ensuring that the sample provides rich, relevant, and diverse data (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). This method is intentional and strategic, focusing on particular types of individuals who are most likely to provide the needed information due to their knowledge, experiences, or perspectives (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). Unlike random sampling, purposeful sampling does not aim to generalize findings to a larger population but rather to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Several variations of purposeful sampling exist, each tailored to different research needs. For example, maximum variation sampling seeks to capture a wide range of perspectives by including participants with diverse characteristics, while homogeneous sampling focuses on a specific subgroup with similar characteristics to explore a particular phenomenon in depth (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). Other types include criterion sampling, where participants are selected based on pre-determined criteria, and snowball sampling, where existing participants refer new participants who meet the study's criteria (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling is widely recognized for its effectiveness in qualitative research, where the goal is to achieve a comprehensive understanding rather than statistical representativeness until the point of saturation is reached (Patton, 2015; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Saturation in purposeful sampling refers to the point in qualitative data collection when no new information or themes emerge from the data (Fusch et al., 2015). It signifies that the researcher has collected a sufficient amount of data to thoroughly explore the research topic or phenomenon under investigation (Fusch et al., 2015). Saturation ensures that the qualitative data is comprehensive, rich, and exhaustive, providing a deep understanding of the research subject (Fusch et al., 2015).

One key aspect of saturation is the redundancy of information, where additional data collection does not contribute to new insights or themes (Fusch et al., 2015). It is often reached through iterative data collection and analysis processes, such as interviews, observations, or document analysis (Fusch et al., 2015). Saturation is crucial in qualitative research, particularly in purposeful sampling, as it indicates that the researcher has achieved depth and completeness in exploring the research question (Fusch et al., 2015).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2022b) estimates, Arkansas' population was 3,045,637, with 77.1%, or 2,348,518 persons aged 18 or older. Out of those 2,348 518 persons, less than 12% are non-Hispanic Black women (U. S. Census Bureau, 2022b). I interviewed 20 Black women in Arkansas who have worked in the same workplace for at least 1 year. I chose to keep the research study group small to allow for an in-depth understanding of the information collected from participants. The final determinant of my sample size was the point I reached data saturation.

The research participants also had to be at least 18 years of age and willing to have a recorded interview with me via Zoom. I utilized personal contacts, social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and referrals to gain the optimal number of research participants. Using the solicitation in Appendix A, I introduced myself and my study to potential participants.

Once referrals and contact information were received, I contacted potential participants with an initial questionnaire (Appendix B). The potential participants completed and returned the initial questionnaire, and we progressed to scheduling the interview, as shown in the questions in Appendix C.

### ***Trustworthiness, Rigor, and Accuracy***

Producing high-quality and reliable scholarly work requires prioritization of trustworthiness, rigor, and accuracy (Verma et al., 2023). Being aware of and transparent about the delimitations and limitations of my research study is crucial for maintaining the integrity and credibility of the research. These three aspects were fundamental to maintaining academic integrity and ensuring my research is valid, credible, and valuable.

Trustworthiness for qualitative research refers to the study's credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Amankwaa, 2016). Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research is crucial because it enhances the credibility and reliability of the findings and interpretations (Amankwaa, 2016). By addressing these four criteria in my qualitative research design, data collection, and analysis, I enhanced the trustworthiness and quality of my findings, making my work more valuable to the broader academic and practitioner communities.

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings, interpretations, and conclusions of a research study are trustworthy and believable while accurately representing the experiences and perspectives of the participants or the phenomenon under investigation (Wood et al., 2020). It addresses the issue of internal validity in qualitative research (Wood et al., 2020). To achieve credibility, I demonstrated that my interpretations and conclusions are well-grounded in the data and reflect the reality of the participants (Wood et al., 2020).

Dependability concerns the stability and consistency of the research findings over time and across different contexts (Armour & Williams, 2022). Dependability is the qualitative research equivalent of reliability in quantitative research (Armour & Williams, 2022). The procedures for this study, specifically data collection and analysis, were consistent and would likely yield similar results if repeated or observed by others (Armour & Williams, 2022).

Confirmability addresses the issue of objectivity in qualitative research (Nassaji, 2020). Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings rely on the data collected rather than the researcher's biases or preconceptions (Nassaji, 2020). Complete objectivity is challenging in qualitative research due to the subjective nature of human experiences, interpretations, and perspectives (Nassaji, 2020). I strived to minimize my influence on my research's findings and aimed for rigor, transparency, and reflexivity to mitigate the influence of subjectivity and bias.

Transferability, also known as external validity, refers to the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied or generalized to other contexts or populations beyond the study's participants (Nassaji, 2020). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies do not seek to establish statistical generalizability but can offer insights that may be transferable to similar settings or populations (Nassaji, 2020). This research can be helpful in the study of other populations such as Black men, White women, White men, or any other non-Black person.

Ethical considerations in qualitative research mean ensuring the research adheres to ethical guidelines and regulations (Armour & Williams, 2022). Before beginning any part of the study, obtaining informed consent from participants is a priority (Armour & Williams, 2022). I ensured the protection of participant confidentiality and handled sensitive data with confidentiality. Participation in this study was voluntary. Therefore, participants did not receive incentives or compensation and could withdraw from the study anytime.

Objectivity in this research study means an attempt to minimize bias (Armour & Williams, 2022). Objectivity also means acknowledging and addressing potential conflicts of interest and objectively analyzing data and findings (Armour & Williams, 2022). For this research, I maintained a neutral and impartial stance throughout the research process. I strived to minimize subjective factors' impact on the findings' validity and reliability.

Trustworthiness, rigor, and accuracy for my research study also meant that I was aware of the study's delimitations and limitations. To effectively address the delimitations and limitations in my research study, I included a discussion of these aspects describing the boundaries within which my study operates. In Chapter 4, there is also a discussion of potential biases, sample size limitations, data collection constraints, and other factors that may impact the validity of my results. Honesty about the shortcomings while emphasizing the strengths of my research suggests avenues for future research to address these limitations.

### ***Delimitations***

The first delimitation of this study was the intended scope of the sample. This delimitation focuses on Black businesswomen employed in Arkansas for at least one year. The sample size was also limited to this demographic to increase the likelihood of participants having more experience incorporating code-switching mitigation strategies into their work lives (McCluney et al., 2022).

The second delimitation was the choice of utilizing the exploratory case study methodology. As Creswell (2013) notes, case studies allow researchers to explore real-life situations in depth, uncovering new insights and generating hypotheses to further investigate the phenomenon. Using the exploratory case study methodology allowed me to deliberately restrict the scope of research to a specific case or a limited number of cases designed to deeply explore

the phenomenon of Black women code-switching in Arkansas workplaces within its specific context. This focus allowed me to gather detailed and nuanced data about the case under study. Choosing this methodology allowed me to intentionally limit the breadth of my investigation as well as prioritize the depth of understanding over the breadth of coverage, ensuring thorough exploration within a confined scope

Other methodologies also did not offer me the opportunity to identify critical variables and provide insights for further investigation into code-switching amongst Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces. Because of this delimitation of using the exploratory case study methodology, the findings of this study did not produce generalizable content beyond the study population, offering more credibility to the analysis and interpretation of the reality of Black businesswomen's lived experiences with code-switching in Arkansas workplaces.

### ***Limitations***

The first limitation was the lack of peer-reviewed studies on strategies used to mitigate code-switching among Black businesswomen in the workplace. This limitation refers to a situation where there is a scarcity of scientific research that has undergone peer review (Schoen, 2020). Peer review is a critical step in the scientific method, where research articles undergo evaluation by independent experts in the same field before being published in reputable scientific journals (Schoen, 2020). The process helps ensure the research findings' quality, validity, and reliability (Armour & Williams, 2022).

The second limitation of this study was that it may not represent all Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces. All Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces do not code-switch and may feel unrestricted to be themselves in their workplace. Also, Arkansas

organizations may encourage employees, regardless of their racial, ethnic, or cultural group, to be genuine and open to other cultures.

The third limitation of this study was the possible apprehension of the participants in sharing personal and sensitive information about their workplaces and strategies used to mitigate code-switching. Repelling this trepidation required that participants' identities be held confidential and all identifying information about the organizations they work for withheld. This confidentiality aided in increasing participants' compliance in being completely honest and transparent about their experiences using strategies to mitigate code-switching in Arkansas workplaces.

Another limitation of the study is that, as the researcher, I am a member of the study population. I did not discuss my thoughts and views as a study population representative. To limit any indication of personal bias in the study, I closely followed the interview question protocol without deviation and only used additional questions to provoke deeper discussions from the participants. I did not use verbal or nonverbal cues to agree or disagree with the study participants. Transcripts were also provided to participants to clarify and verify statements made in the interviews.

### ***Facilities and Equipment***

In addition to my serving as the instrument for data collection in this study, equipment and tools such as pens, paper, recording devices such as computers, iPads, and cell phones, and transcription software utilization also captured the speech from the interviews and converted it to text word for word.

The interviews took place remotely, where participants and I were anywhere there was an internet connection, and we could connect to the Zoom platform. The study participants and I

were in places where it was quiet, there were no distractions, and it was private to allow for candid conversations. The Zoom platform had the potential to positively and negatively impact safeguarding participant confidentiality. Therefore, I shared a few considerations with the study participants, including encryption and security, participant authentication, privacy settings, and recording and storage.

**Encryption and Security.** The Zoom platform offers encryption for data transmission, which helps protect the content of meetings from unauthorized access (Zoom, 2021). Encryption of the interview ensured that the communication was secure and not easily intercepted. I also used the most current version of Zoom to ensure I had the most up-to-date security features to help protect against known vulnerabilities.

**Participant Authentication.** I utilized Zoom's various authentication options, such as passwords and waiting rooms, to ensure that only authorized participants could join our interview. I used strong passwords and enabled waiting rooms to significantly reduce the risk of unauthorized individuals accessing the meeting (Zoom, 2023).

**Privacy Settings.** I used Zoom's privacy settings, which allowed me, as the host, to control all aspects of the meeting, such as screen sharing, chat, and recording (Zoom, 2022). I maintained participant confidentiality and prevented unintended disclosure by adequately configuring these settings.

**Recording and Storage.** Zoom allows recording meetings, which can benefit me and study participants to refer to discussions. I handled recorded meetings carefully to avoid accidental or unauthorized sharing of sensitive information. I also informed participants that the meeting was being recorded and securely stored the recordings. After the data transcription, the



study participants received a copy of their transcribed interviews. I will store the recordings and transcripts on the Franklin OneDrive for 3 years and then permanently delete them.

Although Zoom has implemented several security features, I was responsible for ensuring confidentiality. By understanding the risks and taking appropriate precautions, the study participants and I were able to mitigate potential privacy concerns associated with using the Zoom platform.

### ***Data Collection Plan and Procedures***

This study employed two methods for data collection, i.e., an initial questionnaire and a recorded interview. When the participants agreed to be part of the study, I collected their e-mail addresses so that I could deliver the initial questionnaire. However, the interview method served as the primary construct for this research. Therein, I gathered more from the lived experiences and emotions of the study participants as they relate to mitigating code-switching strategies among Black women in Arkansas workplaces. To further protect their confidentiality, I used initials for each participant, known only to the participant and me.

### ***Data Analysis Procedures***

In this dissertation, I aimed to explore the experiences of Black businesswomen's code-switching strategies used in Arkansas workplaces through a collective case study methodology. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity across industries and roles. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and anonymized.

Zoom was chosen as the data collection vehicle for the semi-structured interviews due to several practical and methodological advantages. Zoom facilitated the inclusion of a geographically diverse sample of Black businesswomen in Arkansas, overcoming the limitations

of travel and scheduling constraints. The Zoom platform's built-in recording and transcription features ensured accurate data capture and streamlined the transcription process. Additionally, the ability to observe non-verbal cues through video added depth to the qualitative data, enhancing the richness of the findings. Zoom's secure and user-friendly interface provided a comfortable and safe environment for participants, adhering to ethical standards of confidentiality and informed consent. Key reasons Zoom was chosen to conduct my interviews include:

### ***1. Accessibility and Convenience***

- **Geographic Flexibility:** Zoom allowed me to interview participants from different locations around the state of Arkansas without the need for travel, making it easier to reach a diverse and widespread sample.
- **Convenient Scheduling:** Participants joined interviews from the comfort of their homes or offices, making it easier to find convenient times for them and me.

### ***2. Cost-Effectiveness***

- **Reduced Travel Costs:** By conducting interviews online, I saved on travel expenses and time associated with in-person meetings.
- **Free:** Zoom offers free plans, which was beneficial for my limited research budget.

### ***3. Enhanced Participation***

- **Broader Participation:** Participants who were unable or unwilling to travel for an in-person interview still participated, potentially increasing the diversity and number of participants.

- **Comfort and Familiarity:** My study participants were familiar with video conferencing tools, making them more comfortable and willing to engage in the interview process.

#### ***4. Recording and Transcription Features***

- **Easy Recording:** Zoom has built-in recording features, allowing me to easily record interviews for later analysis. This ensured that I captured all details accurately without the need for additional recording devices.
- **Transcription Services:** Zoom offers automatic transcription services for recorded meetings, streamlining the process of converting spoken words into written text. While this service required some manual correction, they saved me considerable time and effort.

#### ***5. Real-Time Interaction***

- **Visual Cues:** The video interviews allowed me to observe non-verbal cues such as body language and facial expressions, which provided additional context to participants' verbal responses.

#### ***6. Flexibility and Adaptability***

- **Adaptable Settings:** Zoom allowed for flexible settings, such as adjustment of the video layout, enabling or disabling video, and using virtual backgrounds, which helped create a more comfortable environment for participants.

#### ***7. Safety and Compliance***

- **Health and Safety:** With COVID-19 continuing to cause health concerns, conducting interviews via Zoom reduced the risk of spreading illness and adhered to social distancing guidelines.

- **Data Security:** Zoom offers security features, such as end-to-end encryption and meeting passcodes, to protect the confidentiality and integrity of the interview data.

### ***8. Ethical Considerations***

- **Privacy Settings:** I used Zoom's settings to ensure that recordings are stored securely and only accessible to me, maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

These benefits collectively contributed to a more efficient, inclusive, and comprehensive data collection process. Leveraging the advantages of Zoom allowed me to conduct my dissertation interviews more efficiently and effectively, ensuring high-quality data collection while accommodating the needs and preferences of my participants.

The recorded interview method was valuable for gathering rich and detailed data about my study participants' experiences, opinions, and perceptions. Analyzing qualitative interview data requires a systematic and rigorous approach to identifying patterns, themes, and insights (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Accomplishing this requires data analysis procedures such as transcription, familiarization, coding, thematic analysis, interpretation and synthesis, and member checking. Each of these procedures is described in detail below.

### ***Transcription***

#### **Process:**

- I recorded each Zoom interview using the platform's built-in recording feature.
- I used Zoom's transcription software to generate initial transcripts.
- I manually reviewed and corrected the transcripts to ensure accuracy.

**Output:** Clean, accurate written transcripts of all interviews.

Transcription is a crucial step in the data analysis (Cibils, 2019). Transcription involves converting spoken or recorded language into written text, capturing the communication's dialogue, non-verbal cues, and context (Cibils, 2019). I used transcription via the Zoom platform for this step. I also confirmed the transcripts for accuracy by listening to the recordings and correcting the transcripts where necessary.

The interviews required verbatim transcription, converting the video recordings into written text. Verbatim transcription allows the researcher to efficiently work with the data, analyze it, and identify key themes and patterns (Cibils, 2019). Verbatim transcription was a powerful tool for my qualitative research and provided a solid foundation for extracting valuable insights from participants' responses.

### ***Familiarization***

In exploratory case studies, familiarization refers to the researcher becoming familiar with the subject matter (Yin, 2018). This step allowed me to immerse myself in the data, deeply understand its content, and prepare for subsequent analysis. I read and re-read the transcriptions to become familiar with the data. I also took copious notes to aid in highlighting significant statements and identifying initial impressions or emerging themes.

#### **Process:**

- I read through each transcript multiple times to become thoroughly familiar with the data.
- I took notes on initial impressions, recurring themes, and significant statements.
- I highlighted key passages and made annotations directly on the transcripts.

**Output:** Detailed notes and a thorough understanding of the content and context of each interview.

## ***Coding***

Coding in research helps researchers organize, analyze, and make sense of qualitative data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Coding involves systematically categorizing and labeling segments of data to identify patterns, themes, and concepts that emerge from the data (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). I labeled data segments representing meaningful ideas, concepts, or themes to aid in organizing and categorizing the data. This allowed me to apply initial open codes to segments related to experiences of code-switching, challenges, and strategies for inclusion.

### **Process:**

- I conducted open coding by identifying and labeling significant phrases, sentences, or paragraphs in the transcripts.
- I grouped similar codes and refined them into broader categories or themes. This is defined as axial coding, the process of relating categories to their subcategories, refining and differentiating the categories (Phillips et al., 2024). It involves reassembling data that were fractured during open coding to give coherence to the emerging analysis (Phillips et al., 2024).
- I focused on core themes that were central to the research questions, known as selective coding, by integrating and refining the theory. This process involved selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development (Phillips et al., 2024).

**Output:** A structured set of codes and categories that represent key themes and patterns in the data.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

Thematic analysis is a crucial method in qualitative research that helps researchers deeply understand qualitative data (Jahja et al., 2021). Thematic analysis provides a systematic and rigorous approach to analyzing qualitative data and extracting meaningful themes or patterns. I conducted a thematic analysis by grouping similar codes to form overarching themes to help explore relationships between themes and sub-themes and consider the context and connections between codes.

#### **Process:**

- I reviewed the coded data to identify overarching themes that emerged from the categories.
- I defined and named each theme, ensuring that it accurately reflected the data it represented.
- I organized themes into a coherent structure and considered how they related to each other and the research question.

**Output:** A set of well-defined themes that provide a comprehensive overview of the data.

### ***Interpretation and Synthesis***

Interpretation and synthesis are also crucial in qualitative research (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Interpretation and synthesis are essential for making sense of qualitative data and generating meaningful findings. I interpreted the identified themes and patterns in the data by considering their significance and implications. I looked for connections and relationships between themes and my research question while considering how the findings aligned or diverged from existing literature or theories.

**Process:**

- I interpreted each theme in light of the research questions and theoretical framework.
- I considered the broader context and implications of the findings while exploring how they contributed to the existing literature.
- I used direct quotes from the interviews to illustrate and support the interpretation of each theme.
- I synthesized the findings by connecting the themes and exploring their interrelationships.
- I developed a narrative that weaved together the themes, highlighting key insights and contributions to the field.
- I ensured that the synthesis addressed all aspects of the research questions and provided a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under study.

**Output:** A detailed interpretation of each theme, supported by direct quotes and contextual analysis, and a coherent narrative that integrates the findings and provides a holistic view of the research topic.

***Member Checking***

Member checking in qualitative research refers to verifying the accuracy and interpretation of data collected from participants by allowing them to review and provide feedback on the researcher's findings or analysis (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). The member-checking process helps ensure the research findings' credibility, trustworthiness, and validity. The researcher can share the analysis findings with participants by conducting member checks to verify if the interpretations align with their experiences. Member checking enhances the trustworthiness and accuracy of the analysis (Kostere & Kostere, 2021). For this research, I



provided all study participants with my initial interpretations and invited them to review, comment on, and confirm the accuracy and relevance of the data and interpretations.

**Process:**

- I summarized the key findings and interpretations from the thematic analysis.
- I shared these summaries with the participants, asking for their feedback on the accuracy and resonance of the interpretations.
- I incorporated the participants' feedback into the final analysis, making adjustments as necessary to ensure the findings are credible and trustworthy.

**Output:** Validated findings that have been reviewed and confirmed by the participants, enhancing the credibility of the research.

In this dissertation, I explored the experiences of Black businesswomen's code-switching strategies in Arkansas workplaces using Zoom interviews. The data analysis procedures included transcription, familiarization, coding, thematic analysis, interpretation and synthesis, and member checking to ensure a rigorous and comprehensive analysis. Qualitative data analysis is an iterative process that involves going back and forth between different stages. The exploratory case study methodology required my careful attention to detail, reflexivity, and commitment to rigor to draw meaningful insights from the data.

The exploratory case study methodology offers a valuable qualitative research approach for the in-depth exploration of complex phenomena, uncovering patterns and themes, and generating rich contextual knowledge (Yin, 2018). The exploratory case study methodology also allows researchers to comprehensively understand the subject of study while recognizing the unique characteristics and dynamics within each case (Yin, 2018).

## **Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the strategies Black businesswomen use to demonstrate professionalism in Arkansas, such as code-switching, mannerisms, and appearance, and how those strategies support them to advance in their careers. The data was collected using a pre-interview questionnaire to collect demographic information and a semi-structured interview via the Zoom platform. This chapter presents the findings that emerged from analyzing the study's data.

The first section of this chapter provides a profile of each of the study's participants. Each profile provides basic demographic information such as age, industry of employment, education attainment level, and career level. The second section describes the themes that emerged from the data. Relevant direct quotes from the participants accompany each theme. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study findings.

### **Participant Profiles**

Twenty Black women employed in Arkansas organizations for at least one year participated in this study. The participants resided in different cities throughout the state of Arkansas and held different employment levels in various industries. The participants held at least a Bachelor's degree. Five participants were in the 25 to 34 age range, five were in the 35 to 44 age range, and 12 were in the 45 to 54 age range. Ten participants were married, three were divorced, eight had never been married, and one was a widow. The profiles of the study participants are shown in full detail in Table 1.

**Table 1***Participant Profiles*

Participant	City	Industry	Work Location	Highest Education Attainment	Marital Status	Age Group	Employment Position Category	Length of Employment with Current Employer	Race & Gender in Current Workplace	Total Time in Full-Time Workforce	Length of Time in Current Position
P1	Jonesboro	Manufacturing	Hybrid	Bachelor's in Engineering	Divorced	35-44	First/Mid-Level	10.5 years	Mostly White, Mostly Male	22 years	2 months
P2	North Little Rock	Elementary Education	In the Office	Bachelor's in Elementary Education	Married	25-34	Professional	8 years	Mostly White, Mostly Female	18 years	5 years
P3	Little Rock	Mental Health-Psychology	In the Office	Doctoral Degree in Clinical Psychology	Never Been Married	25-34	Professional	1.5 years	Mostly White, Mostly Male	1.5 years	6 months
P4	Alexander	Healthcare	In the Office	Master's degree in Public Health, Health Policy, and Mgmt	Married	35-44	Executive/Senior Level	13 years	Mostly Race Other Than Black or White	13 years	6 months
P5	Little Rock	Graduate Medical Education	In the Office	Bachelor's in Health Sciences	Married	35-44	First/Mid-Level	9 years	Mostly White, Equally Male & Female	23 years	2.5 years
P6	Conway	School District	In the Office	Master's Degree in Elementary School Counseling	Married	45-54	Professional	26 years	Mostly White, Mostly Female	26 years	21 years
P7	Jacksonville	Health & Education	Hybrid	Doctor of Education in Organizational Management	Divorced	45-54	First/Mid-Level	1 year	Mostly Black, Mostly Female	35 years	1 year
P8	Little Rock	Higher Education	In the Office	Doctoral Degree	Widowed	45-54	Professional	10 years	Mostly Black, Equally Male & Female		
P9	Russellville	Higher Education	In the Office	Doctoral degree in Curriculum Instruction w/Emphasis in Art Education	Never Been Married	45-54	Professional	5 years	Mostly White, Mostly Female	21 years	5 years
P10	Little Rock	Banking	In the Office	MBA	Never Been Married	45-54	None of the above	1 year	Equally White & Black, Equally Male and Female	30 years	1 year
P11	Little Rock	Management Consulting	Hybrid	Master's	Never Been Married	45-54	Executive/Senior Level	9 years	Mostly Black, Mostly Female	30 years	9 years
P12	Joiner	Elementary Education	In the Office	Bachelor's in Marketing Mgmt	Married	45-54	Professional	17 years	Mostly White, Mostly Female	30 years	17 years
P13	Little Rock	Manufacturing	In the Office	Master's Degree	Married	45-54	Executive/Senior Level	10 years	Mostly White, Mostly Female	29 years	Less than 1 year
P14	Fayetteville	Social Work	In the Office	Master's Degree	Never Been Married	25-34	Professional	3 years	Equally White & Black, Equally Male and Female	5 years	3 years
P15	North Little Rock	Higher Education	In the Office	Bachelor's	Never Been Married	45-54	First/Mid-Level	3 years	Mostly Black, Mostly Female	30 years	Less than 1 year
P16	Jacksonville	Telecommunications	Hybrid	Dual Master's Degrees	Married	45-54	Executive/Senior Level	16 years	Mostly White, Mostly Male	27 years	1 month
P17	Little Rock	Accounting Services	Remote	Bachelor's in Accounting	Married	25-34	Executive/Senior Level	2 years	Mostly Black, Mostly Female	11 years	2 years
P18	Little Rock	Construction/Heavy Machinery	Hybrid	Master's Degree in HR Mgmt and Organizational Development	Never Been Married	45-54	Professional		Mostly White, Mostly Male	27 years	8 months
P19	North Little Rock	Social Services	Remote	Bachelor's in Sociology	Married	45-54	Professional	1 year, 11 months	Mostly White, Mostly Female	21 years	1 year, 11 months
P20	Little Rock	Government	Hybrid	Master's in Public Administration	Married	35-44	Professional	15 years	Mostly White, Equally Male & Female	24 years	12 years

The participants were descriptive and open about how they believe the perception of Black businesswomen occurs within professional spaces in Arkansas. The participants described experiences in which they engaged in various code-switching strategies, and all recognized the pressures that stem from racial and gender bias in society and the state of Arkansas. The researcher assigned each participant a participant number.

## Theme Development

Theme development is a critical process in qualitative research, allowing researchers to organize, interpret, and make sense of the vast amounts of data collected (Nowell et al., 2017).

This process involves identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data to provide a coherent and insightful understanding of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Theme development is fundamental to qualitative research as it transforms raw data into meaningful insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It provides a framework for organizing data, enhances interpretation, ensures rigorous analysis, facilitates communication, supports theory development, reflects participant perspectives, and guides future research (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Through systematic theme development, researchers can achieve a deeper understanding and provide a richer, more nuanced analysis of their data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I reviewed each transcript of 20 participants and the remaining data post-reduction to analyze the experiences further. Responses were coded into themes. The data analysis was textual as it related to the patterns determined from reviewing the interview transcripts. The themes and subthemes were derived from patterns from the participant data:

1. Learned to code-switch early in life
  - a. Learned to speak/act differently in public versus at home
  - b. Some did not realize that they were code-switching or what it was
2. Challenging work environments
  - a. Not credited with work done and credit given to others
  - b. Have to choose words carefully
  - c. Faced racism and microaggressions
3. Need to prove themselves more so than others at work
  - a. Feels the need to perform better than others and cannot make mistakes
  - b. Feels that code-switching is necessary to advance

### ***Main Theme 1: Learned to Code-Switch Early in Life***

The first main theme that surfaced in the study is that many of the participants learned to code-switch early in life. This theme also produced two subthemes where the study participants learned to speak/act differently in public versus home and some of the study participants did not realize that they were code-switching or what it was. This theme and its subthemes indicate that the study participants learned a distinction between professional and social integration as children.

The theme of learning to code-switch early in life demonstrates that code-switching is often modeled and taught within the family and community as a necessary skill for navigating broader society. Out of the 20 study participants, 13 stated that they learned to code-switch early in life. When the study participants were asked about the first time they knew about the code-switching concept, Participant 4 said, “I’ve always been doing it since elementary school” and Participant 16 said, “I think that we were taught as Black girls, even watching our mothers talk when we were growing up.” These kinds of responses demonstrate that the theme of learning to code-switch early in life highlights the multifaceted nature of code-switching for Black women, particularly how early-life experiences shape their ability to navigate different social and cultural landscapes effectively. Understanding the multiple cultural contexts involving adapting their behavior, language, and mannerisms to fit different social environments among Black women provides insights into code-switching as a way to offer significance as a form of cultural expression, communication, and identity negotiation in diverse social and cultural contexts.

**Subtheme 1: Learned to Speak/Act Differently in Public Versus at Home.** In the subtheme of learning to speak and act differently in public versus at home. Learning to speak and act differently in public versus at home involved adopting different speech patterns, body language, dress styles, or cultural references when in public environments such as the grocery

store or church compared to when they are at home with family and friends. Eight of the study participants related to this. Participant 4 stated that she was taught that she had to behave differently “when I was at church or the house for all my family” and Participant 7 stated that her parents maintained that there was a difference in how she could act at home, “But when we go outside of the house, this is how we act.” This practice of code-switching is a complex and nuanced aspect of the Black experience, particularly for Black women, and it reflects broader issues of race, identity, and power dynamics in society.

**Subtheme 2: Some Did Not Realize that they Were Code-switching or What it Was.**

The participants may not have consciously realized they have been code-switching since childhood, as evidenced by three of the study participants’ interviews. Unconscious adaptation is often a survival mechanism shaped by various social, cultural, and familial influences as portrayed by participants in the subtheme of not knowing that they were code-switching or what code-switching was, as described by two participants. During the same discussion where study participants were asked to explain their perceptions of code-switching and when they first time knew about the concept, Participant 19 stated, “I believe I’ve always known. But I didn’t realize I knew”. Over time, as conversations about race, identity, and cultural practices become more prominent, many Black women are beginning to recognize and reflect on their experiences with code-switching. This awareness can lead to a deeper understanding of how they navigate different spaces and the impact it has on their sense of identity and well-being.

***Main Theme 2: Challenging Work Environments***

Code-switching remains important for these Black women today as a strategic communication tool, cultural practice, and form of identity negotiation. Arkansas, like many Southern states, has a complex history of race relations that may impact workplace dynamics.

Black women may encounter subtle forms of racism and discrimination in Arkansas workplaces and may use code-switching as a strategy to navigate these dynamics. When asked about their experiences as a Black woman employed in an Arkansas organization, 10 out of 20 participants mentioned it as difficult, challenging, and uncomfortable, the second main theme in this study. Participant 7 stated that being employed as a Black woman in Arkansas is “Hard” and Participant 13 said “It’s been challenging”. Black women describing the work environment as hard, difficult, and challenging is often rooted in a combination of systemic and interpersonal factors that affect their daily experiences in the workplace. With these systematic and interpersonal factors in mind, three subthemes emerged in the study including some study participants not being credited for their work and the credit being given to others, having to choose their words carefully, and facing racism and microaggressions.

**Subtheme 1: Not Credited with Work Done and Credit Given to Others.** Black women often face significant challenges in the workplace, including not being given credit for their work. Within the subtheme of not being credited with work done and having the credit for their work given to others, four of the study participants mentioned the credit for their work being given to others. One participant, Participant 18, stated that the company’s Chief Executive Officer (CEO) was an “Indian gentleman” who “refused to believe that I did all the work myself”. Because the CEO felt that she was not capable of achieving so much, he gave the credit to “a White lady” and “until this day that man literally tells people I didn't do anything the year that I was there”. This lack of recognition can stem from various factors related to systemic bias, workplace culture, and interpersonal dynamics.

**Subtheme 2: Have to Choose Words Carefully.** Black women often feel like they have to choose their words carefully in the workplace due to various social and cultural pressures, as shown in the subtheme of the study participants feeling that they have to choose their words carefully when speaking in the workplace. This phenomenon, experienced by three of the study participants, is a form of code-switching and involves modifying their speech and demeanor to fit into the dominant workplace culture and to avoid negative stereotypes or biases. Participant 20 stated “you have to choose your words carefully” and “monitor your demeanor when you're in meetings”. Participant 7 states, “you gotta watch your tone” and that she’s “staying mindful of all these rules that you were given all these years so that you can be heard” because others are “quick to stop listening to you”. There is a pervasive stereotype that portrays Black women as overly aggressive or angry. To avoid being labeled as such, Black women may feel pressured to temper their tone and language, even in situations where assertiveness is warranted.

**Subtheme 3: Faced Racism and Microaggressions at Work.** Adding to the difficult, challenging, and uncomfortable work environments, five of the study participants have faced racism and microaggressions in the workplace, the third subtheme that surfaced. As Participant 3 states, many people at her workplace are older and “have their preconceived notions of what a Black woman should and shouldn't be doing, and what kind of title that she should have”. She goes on to state that those things are “microaggressions where they don't realize that they are being racist”. Participant 19 stated that she has “gone through a bashing from a White lady in front of a group of people that I had no work relationship with” while in the workplace and Participant 9, as the only Black person in her department and one of very few in the entirety of the employees at her workplace realizes that much of the difficulty in her workplace stems from her race. She asserts that, “It's racism, for sure”.



The Black women in Arkansas interviewed for this study demonstrated how they navigate the complexities of code-switching while pursuing their goals and aspirations. As Participant 1 stated, “It [code-switching] is necessary because if you don't act a certain way, or talk a certain way you will not be able to advance, regardless of what you know.” Participant 9 also stated, “I think part of the code-switching is to just kind of get into that door [that you otherwise might not have been able to get into had you not code-switched]”. Although these women are skilled at navigating these complexities, it is important to recognize that systemic change is also necessary to create more inclusive and equitable environments where they are not forced to code-switch to fit in.

***Main Theme 3: Need to Prove Themselves More So Than Others at Work***

Cultural dynamics explores the processes of how individuals and groups interact with and are influenced by cultural contexts, norms, and practices (Kashima et al., 2019). Cultural dynamics examines how cultural factors shape psychological processes, behaviors, attitudes, and identities, as well as how individuals contribute to the maintenance, adaptation, and transformation of culture. In investigating the experiences of Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces, several cultural dynamic lenses were revealed, including earning recognition and opportunities, stereotypical threats, and intersectional challenges.

Within environments where diversity and inclusion initiatives are lacking or ineffective, Black women may feel unsupported and undervalued. Ten of my study participants communicated a need to prove themselves in their workplaces, the third main theme prevalent in this study. This theme also produced two subthemes where study participants felt the need to perform better than others and not make mistakes in the workplace and felt that code-switching in the workplace was necessary to advance.

Black women often feel an intensified need to prove their competence and value in the workplace due to the intersectional challenges they face, combining both racial and gender biases. Participant 1 stated that while Black women can be successful in Arkansas workplaces, you have to prove your work” and Participant 13 stated, “I’ve had to prove my work more [than others]”. The absence of mentorship, sponsorship, and advocacy can exacerbate feelings of needing to prove themselves to gain access to resources and opportunities.

**Subtheme 1: Feels the Need to Perform Better Than Others and Not Make Mistakes.** Black women may feel pressure to excel in their work to counteract negative stereotypes and biases that suggest they are less competent or capable than their peers. This stereotype threat can create a constant need to prove oneself to dispel misconceptions and earn recognition, as shown in the first subtheme of this section where five study participants felt they had to perform better than others and not make mistakes. Participant 4 stated that she does not “have any opportunities to make mistakes”. She went on to state that she felt a constant “need to always show excellence or that they might be ready to give my role to someone else”. Black women may perceive that their work is subject to higher levels of scrutiny and skepticism compared to their White counterparts. As a result, they may feel compelled to produce higher-quality work, provide more evidence of their competence, and preemptively address potential criticisms.

**Subtheme 2: Feel That Code-Switching is Necessary to Advance.** The second subtheme of this section posits that nine of the Black women in this study feel that code-switching is necessary to advance in their current workplace. Participant 1 stated, “it is necessary because if you don’t act a certain way or talk a certain way you will not be able to advance”. Keeping with that same feeling, Participant 5 stated, “It’s beneficial for you to advance” and

Participant 7 stated, “That is the only way that I have advanced in leadership”. Many of the Arkansas workplaces of my study participants have dominant cultures that reflect White norms whereas code-switching helps them conform to these norms which makes it easier to fit in and be accepted.

The cultural dynamics surrounding Black women code-switching in Arkansas workplaces are rich and complex, influenced by historical, societal, and organizational factors.

Understanding these cultural dynamics is crucial for creating workplaces in Arkansas where Black women feel valued, respected, and empowered to thrive without the constant need to code-switch. Organizations that embrace diversity and inclusivity can harness the unique perspectives and talents of Black women, driving innovation and success in the workplace (Roberts & Creary, 2013).

### **Summary**

The code-switching experiences of Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces were explored using a qualitative exploratory case study methodology. I asked the participants nine interview questions to explore their experience. Three themes were identified: (1) Learned to Code-Switch Early in Life, (2) Difficult, Challenging, Uncomfortable Work Environments, and (3) Need to Prove Themselves. Each theme, along with subthemes, was described and discussed in detail as Black businesswomen in Arkansas recalled their workplace experiences based on their gender and race. Black businesswomen’s experiences of code-switching in Arkansas workplaces are multifaceted and deeply influenced by various factors, including societal norms, organizational culture, and personal identity. Code-switching may be seen as necessary for professional advancement, as these Black women navigate the expectations of predominantly

White leadership. Black businesswomen might feel compelled to adopt communication styles and behaviors associated with Whiteness to be perceived as competent and authoritative.

While many of the study participants found code-switching necessary to survive difficult workplace dynamics or to avoid racism, microaggressions, or stereotypes, other study participants described their workplaces as pleasant. Participant 2 stated, “I’ve never experienced any blatant discrimination, or been treated any certain type of way because of how I speak or how I may act” and Participant 3 described her work environment as “supportive”. Participant 5 said that she has had a “great” experience as a Black woman employed in Arkansas workplaces and that she has not “experienced any type of discrimination or any type of backlash because of my race”. These participants show the importance of recognizing that the experiences of Black women in Arkansas workplaces are diverse and not all of them face difficulties. While many Black women may encounter racism and microaggressions, others may find supportive and inclusive environments where they can thrive.

Overall, the experiences of Black businesswomen code-switching in Arkansas workplaces highlight the complex interplay between identity, power dynamics, and organizational culture. Constantly code-switching can be emotionally taxing for Black women, requiring them to continuously monitor and adjust their behavior (Roberts & Creary, 2013). This emotional labor can lead to feelings of exhaustion, frustration, and a sense of inauthenticity (Roberts & Creary, 2013). Understanding and addressing these experiences are crucial for creating workplaces in Arkansas where Black women feel empowered to be their authentic selves and thrive professionally. Chapter 5 will furnish a discussion of the research findings, the interpretation, and recommendations.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of Results, Implications, and Recommendations**

This exploratory case study research highlights the intricate nature of code-switching among Black women in Arkansas workplaces, showcasing how they adeptly navigate multiple cultural and social contexts to succeed professionally. Code-switching is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but a nuanced strategy shaped by intersecting identities, power dynamics, and organizational culture. Black women navigate a delicate balance between authenticity and conformity when code-switching. Black women adapt their communication styles and behaviors to fit into predominantly White workplaces while grappling with the pressure to stay true to their authentic selves. Code-switching emerges as a survival strategy for Black women facing discrimination, biases, and microaggressions in the workplace. Code-switching allows Black women to mitigate negative perceptions and gain acceptance while navigating professional environments. While code-switching is often perceived as necessary for Black women to thrive in professional settings, it underscores systemic inequalities and biases within workplaces that necessitate such adaptations. Constantly code-switching can exact an emotional toll on Black women, leading to feelings of exhaustion, frustration, and inauthenticity. This research highlights the need to address the emotional labor involved in navigating workplace dynamics.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Qualitative research offers valuable insights into individuals' experiences, perceptions, and behaviors, but it also has several limitations. Despite these limitations, qualitative research offers unique insights into individuals' lived experiences, perspectives, and meanings. Acknowledging and addressing these limitations allows researchers to enhance the rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness of their qualitative research findings. This research conducted on Black women code-switching in Arkansas workplaces, like any area of study, faced several

limitations.

### ***Transferability***

Qualitative research often explores phenomena in specific contexts. If the findings are deeply rooted in the unique characteristics of that context, such as a particular geographic location or organizational culture, transferring these findings to different contexts might be challenging. This qualitative exploratory case study research had a small sample size and limited diversity within the sample, which contributes to good transferability. This research study also offered detailed demographic and professional background information about the Black women participating in the study, including their age, educational background, job roles, and tenure in their positions. This helps others understand who participated and how their experiences might relate to those in different contexts. Additionally, this research provided comprehensive details about the workplaces in Arkansas, including the industries and specific dynamics that influence code-switching, highlighting unique aspects that might impact the experiences of Black women in Arkansas workplaces. It is important to note that my research might not directly apply to similar women in different regions or industries.

### ***Methodological Challenges***

This research on code-switching relied on interviews to provide rich, in-depth insights into individuals' experiences. The insights also subjected the gathered data to the researcher's interpretation and subjectivity. Additionally, this study faced challenges in operationalizing and measuring this complex social phenomenon.

### ***Self-Reporting Bias***

In this research on Black businesswomen code-switching in Arkansas workplaces, participants may have underreported or modified their behaviors because of social desirability

bias or concerns about stigma or discrimination. Although they were assured that the interview was a safe space, participants may have been reluctant to disclose instances of code-switching. Participants may have also downplayed its significance to conform to societal expectations or norms.

### ***Intersectionality and Complexity***

Research on Black women code-switching often intersects with other dimensions of identity, such as gender, class, sexuality, and nationality (Harris, 2019; Myers, 2020). However, the researcher struggled to fully capture the intersectional nature of Black businesswomen's experiences in Arkansas workplaces and the complex interplay of multiple identities, privileges, and oppressions. While some of the intersectional characteristics were obvious, the participants appeared guarded so as not to fully immerse themselves in their experiences, which may have affected the quality of the data.

### ***Practical Implications and Actionable Recommendations***

While this research on Black businesswomen code-switching in Arkansas workplaces can provide valuable insights into their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies, there could be limitations in translating the research findings into actionable recommendations for organizations, policymakers, and practitioners. Bridging the gap between research and practice requires collaboration, dialogue, and engagement with diverse stakeholders to develop contextually relevant interventions and initiatives.

Despite these limitations, research on Black women code-switching in Arkansas workplaces plays a crucial role in raising awareness, promoting dialogue, and advocating for greater equity and inclusion in organizational settings in the state. I acknowledged and addressed these limitations, and I was able to strive to enhance the rigor, validity, and relevance of my

work, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Black businesswomen's code-switching experiences in Arkansas workplaces.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the strategies Black businesswomen use to demonstrate professionalism in Arkansas, such as code-switching, mannerisms, and appearance as their strategies might assist other Black women in achieving upward career mobility. Through the use of a qualitative exploratory case study methodological approach, these study participants had their experiences brought to light in an attempt to make collective meaning of code-switching strategies. More importantly, it is what their contexts meant in the broader context of working in predominantly White workplaces in Arkansas. Their contexts and experiences have the potential to be powerful agents of change in Arkansas organizations. The interviews allowed me to capture the intense and unfiltered feelings that the participants were sharing. The following research question served as the main question that guided this study: What strategies do Black businesswomen use to demonstrate professionalism, such as code-switching, mannerisms, and appearance, in Arkansas? Three major themes with subthemes were uncovered:

1. Learned to code-switch early in life
  - a. Learned to speak/act differently in public versus at home
  - b. Some did not realize that they were code-switching or what it was
2. Challenging work environments
  - a. Not credited with work done and credit given to others
  - b. Have to choose words carefully
  - c. Faced racism and microaggressions



3. Need to prove themselves more so than others at work
  - a. Feels the need to perform better than others and cannot make mistakes
  - b. Feels that code-switching is necessary to advance

In my study, I employed an exploratory case study methodology to deepen our understanding of code-switching among Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces. This study advanced our understanding and highlighted code-switching as a strategy for success by demonstrating advancement of understanding, extension of understanding, and the utilization of code-switching as a strategy for success.

### ***Advancement of Understanding***

This study confirmed existing literature by validating that Black businesswomen frequently engage in code-switching to navigate workplace dynamics influenced by systemic racism and sexism. Rabelo et al. (2021) posited that Black women are often operate within predominately White workplace environments, necessitating their need to code-switch to counteract pervasive negative stereotypes and biases. Altering their speech, behavior, and appearance to conform to the dominant cultural norms assists Black women avoid being unfairly perceived as unprofessional, confrontational, or incompetent (Boulton, 2016; Harris, 2019; Myers, 2020; Saeedi & Richardson, 2020). This adaptation is crucial for professional advancement, as fitting into the dominant corporate culture often opens up career growth opportunities and access to valuable resources and networks (Boulton, 2016; Harris, 2019; Myers, 2020; Saeedi & Richardson, 2020). As Participant 8 stated in her interview “you have to play to the stereotype to be taken seriously or perceived as professional”. This further solidifies the need Black women feel to engage in code-switching in the workplace.

Additionally, code-switching helps Black women navigate social interactions and build relationships in environments where they are often seen as outsiders. Aligning more closely with the cultural expectations of their White colleagues assists Black women in fostering acceptance and reducing the likelihood of facing overt or subtle forms of racism and sexism. However, this constant adjustment comes at a significant emotional and psychological cost, leading to stress, identity conflict, and feelings of inauthenticity. These challenges underscore the need for more inclusive workplace cultures that value and respect diverse backgrounds and experiences.

This study also identified common patterns and triggers for code-switching behaviors, such as in professional settings where cultural norms favor mainstream communication styles. In these environments, Black women often feel pressured to adjust their speech, behavior, and appearance to align with the expectations of their White colleagues and supervisors (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). This need to conform is driven by the desire to fit in, avoid negative stereotypes, and navigate the professional landscape more effectively (Abrams et al., 2019; Davis & Jones, 2021; Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Holder et al., 2015). Participant 7 stated, “I believe that that is the only way that I have advanced in leadership is by code-switching.” Participant 1 also stated, “if you don't act a certain way, or talk a certain way you will not be able to advance”. Participant 5 noted “I feel like it's beneficial for you to advance”. This study showed that code-switching among Black women is seen as necessary for career advancement and social acceptance in predominantly White workplaces.

This research also challenged stereotypes by illustrating that code-switching is not merely about assimilation but is often a strategic adaptation to assert professional competence and build rapport in diverse organizational contexts while uncovering nuanced motivations for code-switching beyond assimilation, such as maintaining authenticity while strategically adjusting

communication to optimize career advancement opportunities. Participant 9 stated, “It’s a necessary time to make sure your [code] switch is on especially when you’re interviewing for places where no one looks like you”. Black women have consistently aimed to be perceived as ethical, reliable, and professional in their workplaces (Bolino et al., 2016; Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Clemons, 2019; Babarinsa, 2020; Singleton et al., 2021; Bailey, 2022). Accomplishing this often requires Black women to adapt their behaviors, language, and appearance to align with the norms of their non-Black colleagues, thereby minimizing the risk of attracting negative attention (Bolino et al., 2016; Caldera, 2020). Participant 18 notes “I am very mindful of how I would be perceived [in the workplace] and then how other people who look like me would be perceived”. This highlights the complex interplay between identity and professional dynamics, demonstrating that code-switching is a multifaceted strategy employed to navigate and succeed in environments that may not fully embrace cultural diversity.

### ***Extension of Understanding***

Focusing on Arkansas workplaces, this study extended the understanding of how regional cultural dynamics shape code-switching practices uniquely for Black businesswomen in this geographic context. This study highlighted the specific challenges and strategies these women employ to navigate professional environments where local cultural norms and expectations influence their need to adapt behaviors, language, and appearances. These women employ various strategies to navigate professional environments effectively, often having to adapt their behaviors, language, and appearances to meet the implicit and explicit expectations of their colleagues and organizations.

This regional perspective provides valuable insights into the intersection of race, gender, and local culture in shaping workplace experiences and professional interactions for Black

businesswomen in Arkansas. This regional perspective also closely aligns with perspectives from various other regions in the United States. Research indicates that Black women in New York City often use code-switching as a strategy for career advancement--they found it necessary to adjust their speech, behavior, and appearance to conform to predominantly white corporate norms, which can lead to professional success but also significant stress and identity conflict (McCluney et al., 2022). Despite many companies' emphasis on diversity and inclusion, Black women in studies in West Coast San Francisco and Silicon Valley workplaces often felt compelled to adopt the informal communication styles and dress codes prevalent in tech, while also dealing with racial and gender biases (Scott et al., 2022). In Chicago, according to Wingfield (2019), Black women highlighted the contrast between their corporate environments and personal communities. For those women, code-switching was used to navigate predominantly White corporate spaces while maintaining cultural identity in personal spaces. This dual navigation can be mentally taxing (Wingfield, 2019). Across regions, just as in Arkansas, Black women expressed that while code-switching can be a valuable tool for professional success, it also leads to significant mental and emotional burdens.

This research study also provided intersectional insights by exploring how race and gender intersect with other identities, such as professional status and organizational culture, to influence code-switching strategies. The study examined the unique ways in which Black businesswomen in Arkansas navigate their professional environments, considering the layered impacts of their multiple identities. This comprehensive approach reveals the complexity of their experiences and highlights the specific adaptations they employ to succeed within the regional cultural dynamics of their workplaces.

The study contributed to theoretical frameworks, such as Black Feminist Thought and systemic racism theory, by applying them to a specific regional context and uncovering new dimensions of their applicability. This study also demonstrated how these frameworks could be utilized to understand the unique experiences of Black businesswomen in Arkansas, revealing new insights into the intersection of race, gender, and regional cultural dynamics. This study generated hypotheses about the effectiveness of code-switching as a strategy for navigating workplace challenges and advancing career goals, paving the way for further empirical testing.

### ***Code-Switching as a Strategy for Success***

This research study highlighted code-switching as a strategic navigational tool that Black businesswomen use to overcome barriers, gain acceptance, and advance within organizational hierarchies in Arkansas. As Caldera (2020) ratiocinated, code-switching can play a significant role in helping Black women navigate diverse workplace environments. This study underscored how adeptness in code-switching can enhance professional visibility, networking opportunities, and leadership potential within diverse workplace environments. Through a showcase of the benefits of authentic, yet adaptable communication styles, this research supported the need for organizational practices that foster inclusive cultures where diverse linguistic and cultural expressions are valued. The study also suggested practical implications for organizational policies and practices, recommending initiatives that recognize and leverage the strengths of code-switching to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The results of this study enforced that code-switching is not a simple phenomenon to describe. Code-switching is a complex and nuanced phenomenon that encompasses various dimensions, including cultural context, psychological impact, strategic use, intersectionality, power dynamics, social relationships, institutional expectations, and authenticity versus

adaptability (Morgan, 2015; Sterling, 2015). Understanding the intricacies of code-switching requires a holistic perspective that considers these dimensions.

It is essential to recognize the skill involved in code-switching, the challenges it poses, and the broader societal implications that influence how individuals navigate their identities in various contexts (Cooper, 2015; Griffin, 2016; Morgan, 2015; Sterling, 2015). In reality, code-switching is a complicated and convoluted tool of workplace navigation that is both accepted and rejected by members of the Black community. These Black businesswomen in Arkansas, who have matriculated unfair systems of power and privilege, oftentimes accomplish this by adopting strategies such as code-switching in the workplace. However, the very act that is used to matriculate in Arkansas workplaces stems from White, male-dominated power where negative stereotypes of Black people have been used to describe all Black persons' behaviors as inappropriate. This creates workplace environments where Black people feel the need to adjust their speech and or appearance to be accepted.

My research study advanced the understanding of code-switching among Black businesswomen by confirming and extending existing knowledge. In addition, my study affirmed prior research by demonstrating that Black businesswomen commonly employ code-switching strategies to navigate workplace dynamics shaped by systemic racism and sexism. My research study also highlighted code-switching as a strategic pathway for success in navigating and thriving within Arkansas workplaces and beyond.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

For future research on Black businesswomen code-switching in Arkansas workplaces, several avenues of inquiry could be explored to deepen our understanding of their experiences and inform efforts to promote equity and inclusion.

### ***Longitudinal Studies***

My first recommendation for future research is to conduct longitudinal studies to examine how Black businesswomen's code-switching behaviors in Arkansas workplaces evolve over time and how they are influenced by changes in organizational culture, leadership, and external factors. Longitudinal studies track the same subjects or participants over an extended time period, observing changes and developments across multiple time points. These studies are crucial for understanding how phenomena unfold and change over time. Longitudinal research can provide insights into the trajectory of code-switching experiences and the long-term impact on career advancement and well-being. Longitudinal research's ability to track change, establish causality, and inform predictive models makes them indispensable for understanding the complexities of human behavior and development over time.

### ***Intersectional Analysis***

My next recommendation for future research is to explore the intersectional dimensions of Black businesswomen's code-switching experiences in Arkansas workplaces, considering how factors such as race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect to shape their identities and workplace interactions. Intersectional analysis is essential for understanding the complexities of human experiences and social phenomena and can illuminate the complexities of code-switching behaviors and highlight the unique challenges faced by Black women with multiple marginalized identities. Intersectional analysis is crucial for advancing social justice, promoting inclusivity, and addressing the complex realities of human diversity and inequality. Centering intersectionality in research, policy, and practice affords researcher the ability to work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

### ***Organizational Climate and Culture***

My next recommendation for future research is to investigate the role of organizational climate and culture in shaping Black businesswomen's code-switching behaviors in Arkansas workplaces. This future research should emphasize the exploration of how organizational norms, values, and power dynamics influence the prevalence and acceptance of code-switching, as well as the extent to which Black women feel supported and included in the workplace. Overall, the organizational climate and culture play critical roles in shaping Black businesswomen's code-switching behaviors, highlighting the importance of creating inclusive and equitable workplaces where authenticity is valued, and diverse perspectives are embraced. Through fostering a culture of inclusion and respect, organizations can empower Black women to thrive and succeed without sacrificing their cultural identities or professional authenticity.

### ***Leadership and Professional Development***

Another recommendation for future research is to examine the impact of leadership and professional development programs on Black businesswomen's code-switching experiences and career advancement in Arkansas workplaces. This research should investigate how mentorship, networking, and skill development initiatives can empower Black women to navigate workplace dynamics authentically and assertively. Leadership and professional development programs can play a transformative role in Black businesswomen's code-switching experiences and career advancement in Arkansas workplaces. Equipping them with the skills, support, and opportunities they need to thrive authentically, these programs can contribute to greater diversity, equity, and inclusion within organizations and society at large.

### ***Organizational Policies and Practices***

My final recommendation for future research is to evaluate the effectiveness of



organizational policies and practices in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion for Black businesswomen. Evaluating the effectiveness of organizational policies and practices in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) for Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces involves assessing their impact on various aspects of their experiences, opportunities, and outcomes. This should involve assessing the impact of diversity training, inclusive leadership practices, and anti-discrimination policies on reducing the need for code-switching and fostering a more inclusive work environment. Evaluating the effectiveness of organizational policies and practices in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion for Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that considers multiple dimensions of their experiences and outcomes. Assessing the impact of DEI initiatives on recruitment, workplace culture, professional development, compensation, accountability, feedback, and community engagement, can assist organizations in identifying areas for improvement and drive meaningful change to create more inclusive and equitable workplaces for all employees.

Pursuing these additional avenues of research can aid scholars in contributing to a deeper understanding of Black businesswomen's code-switching experiences in Arkansas workplaces and generate actionable insights to support their professional advancement and well-being. Additionally, involving Black businesswomen as collaborators and co-researchers in the research process can ensure that their voices are centered, and their perspectives are valued in shaping future research directions.

### **Practical Implications**

The practical implications of research about Black businesswomen code-switching in Arkansas workplaces can inform various stakeholders and lead to actionable steps for creating

more inclusive and supportive environments. Some practical implications include organizational awareness, training, and accountability, policy review and revision, leadership development and mentorship, support networks and affinity groups, community engagement and advocacy, and research knowledge sharing.

A guide designed to assist Arkansas organizations can be found in Appendix D. By implementing the strategies presented in the guide, organizations can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Black women who code-switch. This not only enhances their well-being and professional success but also contributes to a more innovative, equitable, and successful workplace. The guide can be customized to align with an organization's specific goals and culture, ensuring that the strategies effectively address the challenges faced by Black women who code-switch.

### ***Organizational Awareness, Training, and Accountability***

The findings in this research can raise awareness among Arkansas organizational leaders and employees about the challenges faced by Black businesswomen in code-switching. This awareness can lead to the development and implementation of training programs focused on cultural competence, diversity appreciation, and inclusive communication practices.

Organizational leaders in Arkansas can also be held accountable for fostering inclusive environments and addressing instances of discrimination or bias. This may involve establishing mechanisms for employees to report incidents of discrimination confidentially and ensuring swift and appropriate action is taken.

### ***Policy Review and Revision and Leadership Development and Mentorship***

Arkansas organizations can use the insights from this research to review and revise policies and procedures to mitigate biases and promote equity. This may involve revisiting hiring

practices, performance evaluation criteria, and promotion processes to ensure fairness and transparency. Doing these things can aid Arkansas organizations in creating more equitable and inclusive workplaces that support the well-being and success of Black women and other underrepresented groups.

Organizations in Arkansas can invest in leadership development programs and mentorship initiatives specifically tailored to support Black businesswomen. These programs can provide opportunities for skill development, networking, and career advancement to aid Black women in navigating the workplace more effectively.

### ***Support Networks, Affinity Groups, Community Engagement and Advocacy***

Creating support networks and affinity groups within Arkansas organizations can provide Black businesswomen with a sense of belonging and solidarity. These initiatives can address various challenges faced by Black women entrepreneurs and professionals, including access to resources, mentorship, and opportunities for collaboration. These groups can serve as safe spaces for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and advocating for each other's advancement.

This research's findings can also empower community organizations, advocacy groups, and individuals to advocate for systemic change and raise awareness about the unique challenges faced by Black businesswomen in Arkansas. This may involve organizing community forums, hosting educational events, and collaborating with stakeholders to drive positive change.

### ***Research Knowledge Sharing***

Continued research and knowledge sharing are essential to deepen our understanding of the experiences of Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces and identify effective strategies for promoting equity and inclusion. This may involve conducting further studies, disseminating research findings through publications and conferences, and engaging with diverse

stakeholders to solicit feedback and input. Conducting ongoing research and sharing insights can aid in identifying effective strategies to promote equity, inclusion, and empowerment within organizational settings.

Leveraging research insights and taking practical steps to address the challenges identified can aid organizations, policymakers, and community stakeholders in working together to create more equitable and inclusive workplaces for Black businesswomen in Arkansas. Identifying key challenges and understanding intersectional experiences of Black women in Arkansas workplaces creates the leverage needed to review and revise policies and implement diversity initiatives. These efforts are essential for promoting diversity, fostering innovation, and driving organizational success.

### ***Intellectual Merit and Broader Impacts***

Understanding whether code-switching in Arkansas workplaces helps Black women achieve career mobility might assist other Black women to achieve upward career mobility in Arkansas workplaces. Much of the current literature has focused on Black women nationwide and worldwide rather than a specific focus on Black women in Arkansas. Using Arkansas as the singular focus, I aim for results that shed light on similarities and dissimilarities of code-switching strategies, or lack thereof, utilized both between and within the study participants to potentially offer further insight into trends within industries in workplaces in Arkansas where Black women are employed.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Research about Black businesswomen code-switching in Arkansas workplaces has several theoretical implications that contribute to the broader understanding of organizational behavior, cultural dynamics, and intersectionality. Exploring code-switching among Black

businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces aids researchers in contributing to theoretical insights that inform organizational practices, enhance cultural understanding, and promote equitable opportunities for diverse professionals. This research not only enriches academic discourse but also guides practical strategies for fostering inclusive and supportive organizational cultures.

### ***Intersectionality Theory***

Intersectionality theory is a framework for understanding how various aspects of social identity, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability, intersect and interact to shape individuals' experiences of privilege and oppression (Ruiz et al., 2021). Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, intersectionality theory emerged from critical race and feminist scholarship as a response to the limitations of single-axis approaches to social justice (Ruiz et al., 2021). This research contributes to intersectionality theory by exploring how multiple intersecting identities, such as race, gender, and professional status, shape the experiences of Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces. Understanding how these intersecting identities influence code-switching behaviors can deepen our understanding of the complexities of identity in organizational contexts.

### ***Social Identity Theory***

Social identity theory is a social psychological theory developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s that seeks to understand how individuals define themselves and others based on their group memberships (Steffens et al., 2021). SIT, at its core, posits that people categorize themselves and others into social groups, and this categorization influences their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Steffens et al., 2021). This research sheds light on how Black businesswomen in Arkansas navigate their social identities in the workplace and how these identities influence their behaviors and interactions. Examining the role of social identity in

code-switching assists the research in contributing to our understanding of how individuals manage their identities to fit into social groups and achieve social acceptance.

### ***Organizational Culture Theory***

Organizational culture theory is a framework within organizational studies that focuses on understanding the shared beliefs, values, norms, and practices that characterize an organization's culture (Isensee et al., 2020). Developed primarily by scholars such as Edgar Schein, Deal and Kennedy, and Cameron and Quinn, organizational culture theory posits that organizational culture plays a critical role in shaping employee behavior, organizational performance, and overall effectiveness (Isensee et al., 2020). This research highlights the role of organizational culture in shaping code-switching behaviors among Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces. Exploring research surrounding the ways organizational norms, values, and power dynamics influence code-switching practices contributes to our understanding of how culture impacts individual behavior and organizational dynamics.

### ***Critical Race Theory***

Critical race theory is a framework within legal studies and social sciences that emerged in the late 20th century, primarily in the United States (Busey et al., 2023). The critical race theory originated from critical legal studies and the civil rights movement and seeks to understand and challenge how race intersects with systems of power, privilege, and oppression (Busey et al., 2023). This research aligns with critical race theory by examining how race and racism intersect with other social structures to produce inequality in the workplace. Research focusing on the experiences of Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces highlights how systemic racism manifests through code-switching practices and organizational dynamics.

Overall, research about Black businesswomen code-switching in Arkansas workplaces

has theoretical implications that extend beyond the specific context of the study. These theoretical implications contribute to broader theoretical debates in organizational behavior, cultural studies, and social theory. These insights not only enrich academic knowledge but also inform practical interventions aimed at creating more inclusive and supportive work environments for all employees.

## **Conclusion**

Code-switching is often a response to societal expectations and stereotypes, with Black women adjusting their behavior to counteract negative perceptions (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Within the Black community, there may be different cultural norms and ways of expressing oneself. At home, Black women might feel more comfortable using African American Vernacular English, more widely referred to as Ebonics, and engaging in cultural practices that are not always accepted or understood in mainstream society.

At first glance, this dissertation discusses the lived experiences of Black businesswomen and their use of code-switching strategies in Arkansas workplaces. With a focus on a deeper level of analysis, it is evident that a more intricate understanding of the systems that Black businesswomen navigate in Arkansas workplaces during their careers is important. Nonetheless, rather than focusing on the code-switching strategies that they had to utilize in Arkansas workplaces, there should be a larger focus on the systemic changes needed in Arkansas organizations. This study serves as a continuation of needed conversations to move the state of Arkansas toward implementable transformation and practical improvement.

As previously stated, there is a growing body of literature on workplace communication, language, and diversity, yet there remains a paucity of research specifically focused on Black women's experiences of code-switching in professional settings. The studies available often

overlook the intersectional dimensions of race, gender, and language in shaping workplace dynamics and fail to capture the nuanced motivations, challenges, and outcomes of code-switching for Black women, especially Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces.

This research study highlighted the lived experiences of Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces. Highlighting their workplace experiences is only the first step in the process of creating fair and equitable change in Arkansas organizations. The Black businesswomen represented in this study, as well as others who have shared their stories with me, have not fully experienced their well-being being a priority in Arkansas organizations as evidenced by their experiences and the lack of Black women in leadership positions of major Arkansas corporations. This research study aims to serve as a tool in beginning that change.



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## **Appendix A: E-mail, Facebook, and LinkedIn Solicitation**

Hello,

My name is LaTrice Small, and I am pursuing my Doctor of Business Administration degree at Franklin University. My research investigates the strategies Black businesswomen in leadership roles use to demonstrate professionalism (e.g., code-switching, mannerisms, appearance) in Arkansas. I am searching for Black women in Arkansas who meet my study criteria to participate. I aim to build my study with 15 to 20 Black women aged 18 or older employed at least one year in an Arkansas organization.

If you fit the criteria mentioned, please complete the attached informed consent and pre-interview questionnaire, and return it to me by (insert appropriate date) at [small21@email.franklin.edu](mailto:small21@email.franklin.edu). If you have questions or concerns, please contact me at [small21@email.franklin.edu](mailto:small21@email.franklin.edu). Thank you so much for your time and consideration. I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,

LaTrice Small,

Doctor of Business Administration Candidate

Franklin University

**Appendix B: Demographic Pre-Interview Questions**

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Location (City and State): \_\_\_\_\_
3. E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Current Industry of Employment: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Do you currently work:
  - ☐ In the office
  - ☐ Remote
  - ☐ Hybrid
7. Highest Education Attainment:
  - ☐ Less than high school
  - ☐ High School diploma/GED
  - ☐ Some college
  - ☐ Associate Degree (specify Major)
  - ☐ Bachelor's Degree (specify Major)
  - ☐ Master's Degree (specify Major)
  - ☐ Doctoral Degree (specify Major)
  - ☐ Other: Please specify
8. Current Marital Status:
  - ☐ Married
  - ☐ Widowed
  - ☐ Divorced
  - ☐ Separated
  - ☐ Never Been Married
9. Age
  - ☐ Under 18 years old
  - ☐ 18-24 years old
  - ☐ 25-34 years old
  - ☐ 35 – 44 years old
  - ☐ 45 – 54 years old
  - ☐ 55 – 64 years old
  - ☐ 65 years old or older

10. Does your current employment position fall within any of the following categories (check all that apply):
- Executive or Senior Level Official or Manager (senior level within an organization that plans, strategizes, directs, and/or formulates policies)
  - First/Mid-Level Official or Manager (group, regional, divisional level management of the organization)
  - Professional (typically requires a territory qualification or certification such as a bachelor's degree or master's degree)
  - None of the above
11. Length of employment at the current employer:
12. Length of total employment in the workforce full-time (number of years):
13. Length of time in current position:

### Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. Describe the gender and racial composition of your current workplace.
2. Describe your experience as a Black woman employed in Arkansas.
3. How would you describe the work environment as a Black woman employed in Arkansas?
4. Explain your perception of code-switching. How did you learn about code-switching, or when did you first know about the concept?
5. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being not at all and 5 being all the time, how often do you code-switch in your current workplace?
  - a. What led or contributed to your decision to code-switch or not code-switch at work?
  - b. If you code-switch in the workplace, do you perceive specific code-switching strategies as more beneficial than others? If so, what are they and why?
6. Describe a time when you felt conflicted about code-switching in your current workplace.
  - a. How did this conflict with your personal values?
7. Describe a time you ever felt it was necessary for you to code-switch to advance in your current workplace.
8. When buying clothes or considering a hairstyle, was how others would perceive you at your current workplace considered? Why or why not?
9. If there is something more you would like to add about being authentic as a Black woman employed in Arkansas workplaces or code-switching in general that I have not asked, please do so now.

Appendix D: Organizational Training Guide

# **An Organizational Guide to Supporting Black Women Who Code-Switch in the Workplace**

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction

Understanding Code-Switching

Assessing the Workplace Culture

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Creating Supportive Policies and Practices

Promoting Authenticity and Inclusion

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Resources and Further Reading

Action Plan Template

Conclusion and Commitment Statement

## **Introduction**

This workbook is designed to help organizations in Arkansas create supportive and inclusive environments for Black women who code-switch in the workplace. It provides practical tools and strategies for fostering an atmosphere where Black women can thrive authentically without the need to constantly navigate different cultural expectations.

This workbook is intended for Human Resource professionals, managers, Diversity Equity and Inclusion officers, and organizational leaders who are committed to creating an equitable workplace for all employees.

Each section of this workbook includes exercises, assessments, and action items. Work through the sections sequentially and use the Action Plan Template at the end to develop a customized plan for your organization.



## Understanding Code-Switching

Code-switching is the practice of alternating between different languages, dialects, or cultural behaviors depending on the context. For Black women, code-switching often involves modifying their speech, appearance, or behavior to conform to the dominant workplace culture, which is typically centered around whiteness.

While code-switching can help Black women navigate professional environments, it can also lead to stress, burnout, and feelings of inauthenticity. Understanding this practice's emotional and psychological toll is essential for creating a supportive work environment.

### Exercise: Reflecting on Code-Switching Experiences

**Objective:** To help participants understand the concept of code-switching and reflect on how it might manifest in the workplace.

**Instructions:** Think about a time when you or a colleague may have altered speech, behavior, or appearance in the workplace. Take a few minutes to write about what prompted this change. How did it make you feel?

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**Group Discussion:** Share these experiences to the group and discuss the impact of code-switching on authenticity and professional identity.





## Creating Supportive Policies and Practices

Develop guidelines for inclusive communication that encourage authenticity and reduces the need for code-switching. Promote the use of language that is respectful of all cultural backgrounds.

Establish programs that pair Black women with mentors and sponsors who can advocate for their career advancement and help them navigate workplace challenges.

Create Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) that focus on the experiences and needs of Black women. These groups can provide a safe space for discussing challenges, sharing strategies, and offering support.

## Exercise: Policy Review

- **Objective:** To ensure organizational policies support Black women and reduce the need for code-switching.
- **Instructions:** Review existing policies on diversity, inclusion, and employee support. Identify any gaps or areas for improvement.
- **Outcome:** Updated policies that better reflect the needs of Black women in your organization.

### Notes:

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### Books, Articles, and Research Papers:

- ## Organizations and Support Networks:

- ## Exercise: Resource Compilation

- ### Notes:

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### **Conclusion and Commitment Statement**

Supporting Black women who code-switch in the workplace is essential for fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and productive work environment. By understanding the unique challenges, they face and implementing the strategies outlined in this workbook, your organization can make meaningful strides toward greater diversity and inclusion.

**Commitment Statement:** We, [Organization Name], are committed to creating a workplace where all employees, particularly Black women who code-switch, feel valued, respected, and empowered to bring their authentic selves to work. We will continually assess and improve our policies, practices, and culture to ensure that we support the well-being and success of all our employees.

## Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter

**Date:** September 29, 2023

**PI:** Latrice Small

**Department:** Doctor of Business Admin, DBA

**Re:** Initial - IRB-2023-103

*Black Businesswomen's Strategies for Managing Code-Switching in Arkansas Workplaces*

The Franklin Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Black Businesswomen's Strategies for Managing Code-Switching in Arkansas Workplaces*.

**Decision:** Exempt

**Category:** Category 2.(ii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

**Findings:** The PI will conduct interviews with Black businesswomen in Arkansas workplaces (in leadership and non-leadership positions) to explore their strategies for managing code-switching.

**Research Notes:**

The IRB determination of exemption means:

- You must conduct the research as proposed in the Exempt application, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent if stated in your application or if required by the IRB.
- Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB prior to implementation to determine if the study still meets federal exemption criteria.
- You are responsible for notifying the IRB Office with any problems or complaints about the research.

**Students**, please note the following:

- You must use only the approved consent and assent forms (as applicable).
- Prior to graduation, you will need to complete a Closure submission for the IRB Office to close the study. To do this, you will need to open your study in Cayuse and look for the blue '+ New Submission' tab on the righthand side of your screen. From there, click on 'Closure' and complete the submission.

Any modifications to the approved study or study closures must be submitted for review through Cayuse IRB. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

You may contact the IRB Office at 614-947-6037 or [irb@franklin.edu](mailto:irb@franklin.edu) with any questions.

Sincerely,

Franklin Institutional Review Board