

Proposal Title

Exploring the Tensions Negotiated by African American Female and Male Entrepreneurs

Overall Project Summary (Limited to 75 words, please provide a short and simple explanation of your project). wc=75

Using Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics, this investigation explores the dialectical tensions experienced by African American, female and male entrepreneurs from a racio-ethnic and gendered perspective. Through 50 personal interviews, this project will contribute to the body of organizational diversity literature by understanding the tensions that are negotiated in the areas of business management, business financing, and business marketing from the perspectives of minority entrepreneurs. This understanding will improve the future success of minority entrepreneurs.

Project Description/Narrative

(In your narrative be sure to address and identify the following in 1000 words or less: 1) goals/purposes of the project, 2) methods/processes/procedures and 3) anticipated contribution to the field/community. Figures and illustrations are acceptable; word limit does not include Citation/References section. For more information on writing the project description, refer to "hints on writing grant proposals" on page 8). wc=989

A variety of organizational and theoretical perspectives have been used to investigate organizational diversity including Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory (e.g., Brewer, 1995), Alderfer's (1987; see also Alderfer & Smith, 1982), embedded intergroup relations theory, racioethnicity and gender (Allen, 1995; Kossek & Zonia, 1993), and organizational demography (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Kanter, 1977). Much of this research has focused on the competing experiences and differing perspectives of African Americans and Caucasian Americans. Only one study (Hopson & Orbe, 2007)

has used a dialectical approach as the dominant mode of inquiry, and this investigation explored the tensions of Black men in organizational structures. However, this study was not associated with entrepreneurship.

In the area of entrepreneurship, research has explored the impact of education histories on the decision to become self-employed (Thomas, 2009), the learning experiences of ethnic minority entrepreneurs (Ekanem & Wyer, 2007), and the challenges of work-family conflict for minority entrepreneurs (Rogoff & Heck , 2008; Shelton, Danes, & Eisenman, 2008). However, no study has explored the tensions that minority entrepreneurs experience from a relational dialectics approach. This investigation aims to expand understanding about these tensions through interviews with African American female and male entrepreneurs.

Using Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics, a rarely used theoretical framework in diversity and entrepreneurship research, the purposes for this project are: (1) to identify the dialectical tensions experienced by African American , (2) to better understand how minorities negotiate these tensions, (3) to understand how dialectics are influenced by and influence interactions within small business development, and (4) to contribute knowledge that can enhance diversity and small business literatures.

Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics is based on the work of Bakhtin (1981), a Russian cultural theorist who believed that all meaning is derived from two individuals who may live in the same timeframe, but who occupy different spaces in time and thus have differing experiences. Dialectics are considered to be ever-changing, dynamic, contradictory, full of give and take, and riddled with simultaneous

compromising. Dialectics are not concerned so much with arrival at a destination as they are with understanding the interplay of the flux. This perspective of conflicting tendencies and opposing forces has great utility for exploring the experiences of minority entrepreneurs. Borrowing from relational dialectics as a foundation for inquiry, this investigation seeks to answer the following four research questions associated with key small business and organizational diversity focal areas:

RQ1: What are the dialectical tensions that are negotiated in the area of business financing?

RQ2: What are the dialectical tensions that are negotiated in the area of business management?

RQ3: What are the dialectical tensions that are negotiated in the area of business marketing?

RQ4: Are there differences in the dialectical tensions negotiated by African American female and male entrepreneurs?

Personal interviews with African American female (25) and male (25) entrepreneurs will be used to answer research questions similar to Briggs (1986). Through a 2011 RCSA funded grant, 15 interviews with females have already been conducted. A 2012 RCSA funded grant will be used to complete the remaining interviews with members of the African American racioethnic group. Allen (1995) contends racioethnicity is salient because it “usually is physically observable, its roots lie in affirmative action/equal employment opportunity programs, and it references the

fastest rising groups” (p. 144) likely to impact an organization. Also, Kossek and Zonia (1993) suggest most diversity programs center around racioethnicity.

Participants will be recruited through snowball sampling beginning with the investigator’s (the investigator is an African American female) social network, the Faculty Mentor’s social network, the Oklahoma Urban League’s social network, and the Small Business Administration’s social network. After the investigator initially contacts individuals obtained through these networks, participants will be asked to either participate or to recommend additional participants.

Each interview will last approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes. All interviews will be audiotaped, transcribed, and conducted in a private, quiet room agreed upon by the interviewer and interviewee. Participants will be verbally instructed to obtain informed consent. Then, participants will be informed (a) of the purpose of the study, (b) of the procedures involved, (c) that their participation in the study is voluntary, (d) that they may choose to withdraw from the study at any time, and (e) that they may request study results from the researcher.

The personal interviews will be conducted by the principle investigator. The questions asked in the interviews will explore the forces associated with negotiating entrepreneurship as a minority. The interview topics include: (a) business financing, (b) business management, and (c) business marketing. The same Interview Protocol (see Appendix A) will be followed for each of the personal interviews. However, the interviewer will listen for inconsistent comments during the interview interactions and will probe for clarification and greater understanding of participant meanings. Follow-up

questions will be asked in an effort to clarify participant responses and to enable the researcher to have more valuable information for answering research questions.

Personal interview transcripts will be analyzed for key themes and for any information which may shed light on the research questions posed based on grounded theory, a constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). Grounded theory focuses upon a constant interaction between investigative purposes, data collection, analysis, and theory development which are grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed (Glaser & Strauss, 2006).

The literature review and design of this investigation will be shared at Oklahoma Research Day. Results from this investigation will be submitted for conference presentation as co-authored research with my faculty mentor, and the final manuscript will be submitted for journal publication. Along with contributing to the organizational diversity and small business bodies of knowledge, this investigation will assist racioethnic minorities by acknowledging and documenting their experiences in entrepreneurship. The overall benefit to entrepreneurs is in providing a road map to successfully navigating the tensions and challenges of new business ownership in an effort to avoid duplicating the same mistakes and to ensure greater minority business success.

Appendix A

Sample Treatment Protocol for African American Females Entrepreneurs

- I. Interview Introduction (3-5 minutes)
 - A. Interview Preliminaries
 1. Ground rules (not fishing for any particular type of response, just want to get your opinions, thoughts, feelings, etc. about a variety of topics)
 2. Interviewer's primary objective is to simply facilitate a conversation about a variety of topics
 3. Re-confirm the aim of the study and have the interviewee sign the informed consent form.
 - B. Participant Introductions (get a snapshot of the interviewee's cultural background, business, and length of time the business has been established through the brief demographic questionnaire)
- II. Interview Body (1 hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes)
 - A. Entrepreneurship Overview – The first set of questions have to do with your early decisions and experiences associated with beginning a new business (5-10 minutes)
 1. Why did you choose to become an entrepreneur? Why this profession or industry?
 2. How did you come up with the idea for your business?
 3. How has entrepreneurship been similar and/or different to what you expected?
 4. What has surprised you most about entrepreneurship?
 5. What has helped you learn how to be a successful entrepreneur?
 6. How do you feel you have changed since becoming an entrepreneur? (Examples of before and now)
 - B. Management of the Business as an African American Female - The next set of questions concern the day-to-day management of your business (15-20 minutes)
 1. Tell me about your daily responsibilities as an entrepreneur or business owner.
 2. What tools or resources do you use for the daily and weekly tracking of expenses, purchases, invoicing, people, and/or projects, etc. associated with your responsibilities?
 3. How would you describe your current working environment?
 4. What do you think about the people you work with? (Provide examples)
 5. What do you think your employees, colleagues, clients, or others you work with think about you? (Provide examples)

6. Have you felt your being an African American female has influenced the ways you interact with your colleagues or the ways you have handled your business? Why or why not?
 7. Do you feel that your peers had a preconceived notion about you as an African American female entrepreneur? Why or why not? How did it make you feel? How did this affect your identity?
 8. As an African American female, do you feel that you had to change the way you presented yourself in front of your colleagues in order to fit the industry? Can you give an example? How did you feel about it afterwards?
 9. Overall, how well do you think you have handled the day-to-day processes of managing your business? Do you feel you have been successful? Why or why not?
- C. Business Financing as an African American Female – The first set of questions have to do with the challenges associated with financing your new business (15-20 minutes)
1. Tell me about the processes, factors, and steps that are or were associated with financing your business.
 2. Which financing sources (e.g., financial institutions or other sources) were the best to pursue for finding the lowest rates, minimal finance charges, sufficient grace periods, and/or grants to help you when you started your business? What steps did you take in choosing from among these financing sources?
 3. Have you felt your being an African American female has influenced your ability to receive financing for your business? Why or why not?
 4. Overall, how well do you think you have handled the processes of business financing? Do you feel you have been successful? Why or why not?
- D. Marketing of the Business as an African American Female - The next set of questions concern the decisions you have made in marketing your business including the processes associated with securing a business location (15-20 minutes)
1. Tell me about the processes, factors, and steps that you have taken to market your business.
 2. How have you made decisions about pricing, location, and the types of products/services that you provide?
 3. How has being an African American female enhanced or impeded your marketing efforts? Provide examples.
 4. Overall, how well do you think you have handled the processes associated with marketing your business? Do you feel you have been successful? Why or why not?
- III. Interview Conclusion (3-5 minutes)
- A. Do you feel that I have left anything out of our discussion that you would like to share? Is there anything else you would like to add?
 - B. Thank you for participating.

Citations/References

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Time Line (Action Plan)

(All projects funded by this program must be completed by May 1, 2013)

The project timeline reflects a continuation of data collection from a funded 2011 RCSA funded grant in which IRB approval was achieved and 15 interviews with African American female entrepreneurs were conducted. This 2012 Grant timeline reflects the completion of 10 more interviews with African American females along with IRB approval and participant recruitment to conduct 25 interviews with African American male entrepreneurs.

| <u>Grant Month & Year</u> | <u>Research Activity</u> |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| August-12 | Continue participant recruitment and interview three (3) African American female entrepreneurs. |
| September-12 | Continue participant recruitment and interview (3) African American female entrepreneurs; Revise 2011-approved IRB application to include African American male entrepreneurs. Have faculty mentor order equipment, tapes, and batteries for conducting more interviews. Work with faculty mentor to identify student to assist with transcribing interviews. |
| October-12 | Finalize the revised IRB and submit for approval. Continue participant recruitment and interview two (2) African American female entrepreneurs. Begin participant recruitment of African American male entrepreneurs and interview (2) African American male entrepreneurs. |
| November-12 | Conduct remaining two (2) interviews with African American female entrepreneurs. Continue participant recruitment and interview three (3) African American male entrepreneurs. |
| December-12 | Continue participant recruitment and interview three (3) African American male entrepreneurs. |
| January-13 | Continue participant recruitment and interview five (5) African American male entrepreneurs. Work with faculty mentor to identify new student to assist with transcribing interviews (if same student is unavailable). Submit poster abstract for 2013 Oklahoma Research Day. |
| February-13 | Continue participant recruitment and interview four (4) African American male entrepreneurs. Continue transcribing interviews. Submit preliminary results or study in progress to the Southwest Business Symposium. Apply for new RCSA grant that can fund my ability to continue transcription and data analysis for project completion. |
| March-13 | Continue participant recruitment and interview four (4) African American male entrepreneurs. Continue transcribing interviews. Present research at the Southwest Business Symposium and at the 2013 Oklahoma Research Day. |
| April-13 | Conduct the remaining four (4) interviews with African American male entrepreneurs. Make-up any interviews that were cancelled by participants and continue transcribing interviews. Begin to analyze interview transcripts for common themes and dialectical tensions. Ideally, the final project can be completed with an additional RCSA grant that could be used to finalize research results, to submit for a national conference presentation, and to submit as a journal manuscript submission. |