

Understanding the Dialectical Tensions Negotiated by African American Female Minority Entrepreneurs

Presented By:*

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Abstract

In the area of entrepreneurship, several investigations have 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. Using Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics, this investigation explores the dialectical tensions experienced by African American, female entrepreneurs from a racio-ethnic and gendered perspective. Through at least 25 personal interviews, this project aims to contribute to the body of organizational diversity literature by understanding the tensions that are negotiated in the areas of business financing, securing a business location, management, and marketing from the perspectives of minority entrepreneurs.

Theoretical Approaches to Diversity

- 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 the racio-ethnic organizational diversity 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.

What Scholarship Reveals about Minority Entrepreneurs

- Self-employment provides economic growth in minority communities (Thomas 2009)
- The entrepreneur's educational background can be the start of their aspiration to become an entrepreneur. (Thomas, 2009)
- Learning proper management skills from textbooks and small business supporters is key to their success. Understanding day-to-day business operations is essential (Ekanem & Wyer, 2007)
- Culture plays a major role in the work-family conflict of minority entrepreneurs. The roles that entrepreneurs play in their family lives influence their business lives (Rogoff & Heck, 2008).
- Females experience a greater role demand in work-family situations. The tensions associated with this role is reflected in the efforts to advance their business (Shelton, Danes, & Eisenman, 2008).

Purposes of this Research Project

- Using Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics, a rarely used theoretical framework in diversity and entrepreneurship research, the purposes of this project are:
 - (1) to identify the dialectical tensions experienced by African American female entrepreneurs,
 - (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.

“Minority entrepreneurs have received very little empirical attention...As a result, the comprehensive study of both business and family is missing...We should and can do better.”

(Rogoff & Heck, 2008, p. 224-225)

Overview of Relational Dialectics and Research Questions

- 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 individuals who live in the same timeframe, but who occupy different spaces in time
- Dialectics are considered to be ever-changing, dynamic, contradictory, full of give and take, and riddled with simultaneous compromising.
- 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:
 - **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 securing a business location?**
 - **RQ3: What are the dialectical tensions that are negotiated in the area of business management?**
 - **RQ4: What are the dialectical tensions that are negotiated in the area of business marketing?**

Research Design & Methods

Personal Interviews

This investigation will employ personal interviews to answer the research questions posed in accordance with Briggs (1986). Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour.

Participant Recruitment

The participants for the interviews will be recruited through snowball sampling beginning with the investigator's (the investigator is an African American female) social network, the Oklahoma Urban League's social network, and the Small Business Administration's social network among others.

Interview Protocol

The questions asked in the interviews will explore the forces associated with negotiating the entrepreneurship as an African American female. The interview topics include: (a) business financing, (b) business location, (c) business management, and (d) business marketing.

Data Transcription & Analysis

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).

Anticipated Research Timeline

- *November-11* – After IRB approval, conduct 3 personal interviews; Attend Oklahoma Research Day.
- *December-11* - Conduct 2 personal interviews.
- *January-12* - Conduct 6 personal interviews; Work with Faculty Mentor to find help with transcribing interviews.
- *February-12* - Conduct 7 personal interviews; Begin transcribing interviews; Submit preliminary results or study in progress to the Southwest Business Symposium; Apply for new RSCA grant for 2012-2013.
- *March-12* – Conduct 7 personal interviews; Present research at the Southwest Business Symposium
- *April-12* – Conduct remaining interviews; Begin data analysis; Complete manuscript; Submit for conference.

Selected References (email authors for a complete list of citations)

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