

Doing what it takes: Black women surviving and thriving in academia

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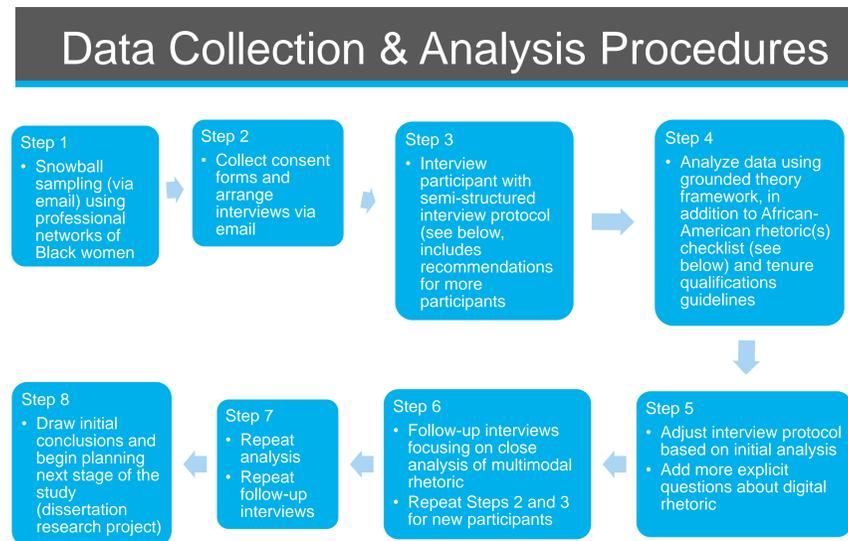
Problem	Research Questions
<p>Black women faculty face similar obstacles and microaggressions as their students.</p> <p>How are successful Black women in academia overcoming these barriers?</p>	<p>1) How do Black women use rhetorical strategies to succeed the three main (US) tenure categories: research, teaching, and service?</p> <p>2) How do Black women in academia use rhetorical strategies in the digital environment?</p> <p>3) How do Black women faculty use rhetoric to mitigate negative perceptions of their race and gender?</p>

Project Overview

Underrepresented minorities must endure obstacles and microaggressions to achieve success in academia (Gardner, 2008). They also have persistently small numbers across disciplines (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). To address this problem, many college students are demanding more underrepresented minority faculty. Most research projects focus on these obstacles, but I am instead investigating how minority faculty are overcomers. I chose Black female faculty specifically, because Blackness is often the negative standard to which other minority groups are compared in the United States (Lee, 2005), and women face different issues than their male peers (Gardner, 2008; Hazari, Sadler, & Sonnert, 2013). Thus, I investigate how Black women in academia cultivate professional identities, build coalitions, and share their research in both physical and digital environments (so effects of digital success in traditional academic situations can be assessed). The systematic study of these digital rhetorical practices would provide exciting avenues for teaching students to leverage their own success in academia.

Research Participants (N = 8)

Black Women	Success in Academia	Location
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Blackness was defined as anyone who identified as being part of the African diaspora Their specific nationality was not questioned "Women" was defined as anyone who self-identified as a woman. Due to the nature of their position as academics, all the women were over the age of 30 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tenure-track and tenured currently employed professors (because getting a tenure-track job in the US market is a marker of success) Published and cited in their field The women represent a wide range in rank: junior faculty, distinguished and endowed professors, chairs, and deans were all participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women were interviewed on both coasts and in the center of the United States. Specifically, faculty taught in CA (2), Tennessee (1), Connecticut (2), Washington D.C (1), and North Carolina (2). All faculty were at prestigious universities (US News Best Colleges rankings)



Sample Checklists

African American Rhetoric(s)	Tenure Guidelines
Griot (sage/prophet) techniques	Research and Publication
Survive/thrive/freedom	• Books and articles > digital pub.
Break expectations of Black women's personas	Teaching
Politics of respectability	• R1 or liberal arts schools
Creating commonality	Service
Remixing/Reimagining	• Committees, mentorship, outreach
Created using concepts from: Banks (2011), Royster (2000), Richardson, E. & Jackson R.L. (2007)	• Tends to be valued least by review committee

Sample Interview Protocol

- What rhetorical strategies do you use to shape your professional identity that you think have helped your success in academia, in regards to your:
 - Body: hair, clothes, body, demeanor
 - Words: speech, writing, etc.
 - Online identity and activity
 - Relationship building
- In what ways do these strategies extend into your teaching?
 - What other rhetorical strategies do you employ in the classroom?
- What advice do you have for Black women, or women of color in general:
 - Books: Written/unwritten: unspoken truth...tenure
 - applying for fellowships and post-docs?
 - about to start tenure-track positions in your field, especially in terms of making time for research and publication?

Results

Narrativizing: Imagery and storytelling in academic writing and public communication

Sounding: Displeasure with societal issues? Channel it into your work.

"Your best revenge is your paper": Saying no and prioritizing time to publish

Body rhetoric: Politics of respectability and self-care

Digital rhetoric: stay on message, post frequently, connect (with each other and to your scholarship)

Conclusions and Next Steps

Overall, Black women in academia may seem to be using a wide range of techniques for surviving and thriving in academia, but in reality they are using variations of a core group of rhetorical strategies that vary by personality, experiences, and current contexts.

- Next steps:
- Continued use of the networking recruitment technique
 - Adding target recruitment of women faculty at HBCUs
 - Use of social analytic software to more strategically target interviewees and to perform a deeper analysis of online content and connections across online platforms
 - Consider an international focus, given the porous borders of the digital environment

Works Cited

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