

## Abstract

This thesis draws on action research methods to explore the following questions:

*Are we, as Black women managers, surviving or thriving?*

*If surviving, what changes would have to take place to enable us to experience ourselves as thriving?*

The themes of surviving and thriving emerged from Maya Angelou's statement (1987) that the issue facing us is not how to survive but how to thrive.

Intending that this should be research *as*, rather than *about* social change, it was important that the research methodology should challenge rather than perpetuate oppression. Collaborative Inquiry/Action Research with their values of wholeness, participation and researching with rather than on people seemed most appropriate. Within this broad frame there were a number of cycles, and methods in which I:

- Inquired into my personal history and work experience and explored the experience of moving from surviving to thriving.
- Generated information about the experiences of Black women managers and observed common patterns of response (our survival strategies) from four cycles of Action Inquiry.
- Tested information gathered from the Action Inquiry with two women with whom I contracted to dialogue about key issues from the research and also in a number of situations where opportunities for participative inquiry arose in my consulting practice.
- In a Collaborative Inquiry with peers I explored our survival strategies and possibilities for thriving.

In making sense of, and theorising, from the material gathered I drew on theories of liberation, personal development and change, addiction, paradigmatic transformation, and systemic thinking.

The research identified Black women's experiences to be deeply shaming, negating, double binding, frustrating, and alienating. All women in the study perceived themselves to be surviving. Our exploration of the experience of surviving identified that it is constructed from the incidents encountered in and out of organisations. An important aspect of the research was a living inquiry into moving from surviving to thriving.

Link to:

[http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc\\_theses\\_links/c\\_douglas.html](http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/c_douglas.html)