

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: "THEY ASK, WHY DO YOU TALK LIKE THAT: I ASK WHY DON'T YOU WANT TO TALK LIKE THAT?": BLACK WOMEN UNDERGRADUATES ON LANGUAGE IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Erin Berry-McCrea, Ph. D., 2018

Directed By: Dr. Christine Mallinson, Professor
Language, Literacy, and Culture Program, and
Jason Loviglio, Associate Professor
Media and Communication Studies

This interdisciplinary project explores attitudes, beliefs, and experiences about language use on social media among Black women undergraduates. Via in-person ethnographic interviews with 24 Black women undergraduate students at Historically Black Colleges (HBCUs) and Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) in Maryland, I investigated participants' impression management strategies and ideologies about the role of language in how they construct and negotiate their identities as Black women millennials in and outside of the social media landscape. Drawing from sociolinguistics, media & communication studies, Black feminist standpoint, womanism, and double-consciousness, I asked participants to share and discuss examples of social media posts that they feel best exemplify the relationship between race, culture, and language in their lives. I further analyze the role of sociolinguistic identity practices in their use of social media and their day-to-day lives. Finally, I explore how these participants talk about language use on and offline in relation to the concept of professionalism, as they begin

to transition from college to post-graduate careers. The significance of this study is two-fold as it illuminates how Black women undergraduates utilize social media and talk about their sociocultural lived experiences and observations while also bringing awareness to the complex identity negotiation practices that they initiate, respond to, and redefine in and outside of the digital landscape.