



A Journey of Difference: The Voices of Women Leaders

Victoria Showunmi*

University College London, London, United Kingdom

This paper offers a view on narrative inquiries based upon leadership, in order to shed light on women's of color and multicultural groups experience and nuance understanding of their leadership career path. Since black and other ethnic group women are 'theoretically erased' (Crenshaw, 1989: 139), this empirical study offers an insight into how gender, class and race influence on women's leadership practices in three countries, while it adds to theorizing identity and leadership at schools in different international contexts. This paper intends to give voice to women leaders who are making a difference in their organization. During the past decade, interest in gender and leadership has grown to the extent that it is slowly becoming part of the leadership norm. Narrative inquiries are treated as a means of a systematic data gathering and analysis which challenges the traditional views of gender discussions (thus gender is predominantly about white women) and incorporating ethnic minority around leadership. Unfolding the stories of women—from multi-ethnic groups and mixed social class-higher education leadership positions in England, and Pakistan, may expose differences of interpretations offered by researchers from a racially and ethnically diverse background (black and white Europeans). Hence, an issue that arises is whether researchers' cultural background affects data interpretation of studies with a highly qualitative stance.

Keywords: gender, leadership, difference, leaders, race

I might not have much but at least I am an authentic leader. ... (Female Education Leader United Kingdom).

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal theorist, wrote two ground-breaking articles that sought to provide a place to theorize about the law's inability to make Black women's experiences of discrimination visible, which are intersectional (1989, 1991).

Black women's intersectional experiences of racism and sexism have been a central but forgotten dynamic in the unfolding of feminist and antiracist agendas (Crenshaw, 1989).

This paper sheds light on the experiences of Black women and women of color in the context of leadership. The intention is to gain a nuanced understanding of their leadership career paths, particularly within the field of education. Since Black and other minority ethnic groups of women are 'theoretically erased' (Crenshaw, 1989: 139), this paper offers an insight into how gender and race influence women's leadership practices in three countries: Pakistan, United Kingdom and Brazil.

The paper also adds to theories on identity and leadership in three international contexts. The aim is to give voice to women leaders who are making a difference in their organisations, such as schools,

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United Kingdom

*Correspondence:

Victoria Showunmi
v.showunmi@ucl.ac.uk

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higher education establishments, local communities and some private sector organisations. During the past decade, interest in gender has grown to the extent that it is becoming part of the language of leadership. Gender, race and class intersect to play a pivotal part in the leadership practices of Black and minority ethnic women in educational leadership. (Alston, 1997; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Fuller, 2013; Peters-Hawkins et al., 2018).

The initial section of the paper puts forward a contextual understanding of leadership, ethnicity and diversity. The first issue examined is the growth in female activism, specifically based on experiences in Brazil. This is followed by an examination of gender difference in leaders and the necessity to invest in diversity. Gender difference is exacerbated by the differing uses of terminology to describe color and ethnicity, which is examined in some detail. Despite the differences in terminology a number of major themes emerged as over 1,000 BME personnel involved in the Black-led program 'Investing in Diversity' graduated and moved into leadership careers. The second section presents a critical discussion of ethnic minority women's experience in educational leadership.

The section starts by looking at the shared experiences of Minority Ethnic women and the complexities they face in the workplace. This is followed by an examination of three research projects and the views expressed by those involved. The second section concludes with an explanation and review of Intersectionality in order to elucidate the findings.

CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF LEADERSHIP AND DIFFERENCE

In workplaces around the world, organizations are characterized by 'inequality regimes' (Acker, 2006), with '... loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and racial inequalities within particular organisations' (ibid: 443). Diversity as a science recognizes that individual attitudes and behaviors surrounding difference occur in the context of historically, culturally and socially embedded realities/beliefs and frameworks. Tackling these inequalities, scholars worldwide are likely to start with the North American literature. This is because US literature is recognized as the primary source of organisational research on ethnicity and diversity (Jonsen et al., 2011). In the US, there are differential social and economic experiences between Hispanic, African-American, Asian and White ethnicities. Typically, African Americans are disadvantaged with regard to employment, health, housing and education (Plaut, 2010). However, the ethnic group distribution differs between the US and the United Kingdom. In the US, one of the largest racial minority groups is Black (African-Caribbean, African or African American (12.6%). In contrast, the largest minority ethnic group in the United Kingdom is the South Asian population (5.9%).

Context-sensitivity is necessary for all locations in which diversity management and research is conducted (Özbilgin, 2009). In a Muslim society, cultural and belief systems emerge as a defining factor underpinning those deep structures or

cultural forms that determine female role and positioning (Shah, 2015: 2). Women have to face several formal and informal pressures from family and society, the political framework, social set up and 'professional pressure groups' where male dominance is a powerful image (Shah, 2015). Moazzam and Jabeen (2011), 3 stated that, "Despite the increased workforce participation, women continue to suffer discrimination in the job market and are more often represented at lower and middle management level or in so called women suited professions." Women have to fight this pre-conceived gender discrimination. Even though women are in the same workplace as men, women are not perceived as equally useful to organizations in comparison to men (Barnett and Hyde, 2001). In Brazil, there is a long history of Black inferiority in Brazilian society. Race and gender is an active conversation that dominates every aspect of life. Black Brazilian women's leadership is characterized by their status and life experiences at the complex intersections of class, gender and race inequality. They have to overcome obstacles of economic access and education.

The first issue to be considered is the intense and steady growth in female activism. This paper interprets activism as engagement with a struggle to engender change. In the case of Brazil, indicators show that the number of females who make up the Economically Active Population jumped from 28 to 41.7 million, their activity rate increased from 47 to 53% in 1997 and the percentage of women in the whole workforce rose from 39.6 to 43.5% in 2002. In 2005 more than half of the female population in the active age group searched for a job, or had a job, and more than 40 in 100 workers were females. In spite of this leap, women are far from reaching the same rate as men which in 2005 was above 70%, both in the number of men at work and the number seeking employment.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN LEADERS

The gender and ethnic profiles of leaders in schools and higher education demonstrates that career progression reflects ethnic and gender penalties. This is replicated in Parliament and FTSE 100 Companies. In the United Kingdom, Black Minority Ethnic (BME) members of parliament currently number only 27 out of 649 (4.2%). Of these, only eight are BME women—under a third of all BME Members of Parliament (MPs). In contrast to education and politics, there is cause for guarded optimism in the business sector in regards to women in the most senior positions in the largest companies. In 2012, 15% of directorships of FTSE¹ 100 companies were held by women (Sealy and Vinnicombe, 2012), representing a 2.5% increase from a three-year plateau. However, when taking into account gender, nationality and ethnicity of FTSE 100 company directors, only 9.9% of female directors were from minority ethnic groups, and only one of these was a

¹Definition of FTSE 100. The Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 share index; an average of share prices in the 100 largest, most actively traded companies on the London Stock Exchange.

United Kingdom national. The pattern evident in business and Parliament thus replicates the gender and ethnic profiles of leadership in schools and higher education.

Organisations are microcosms of the societies within which they are embedded, and “work cannot be understood outside the context of the socio-cultural arena in which it is enacted” (Dombeck et al., 2003: 352). Organisational dynamics often mirror societies’ structures, beliefs and tensions, including less favourable outcomes for minority ethnic individuals and women in many Western societies. As such, ethnic minority scholars are continuously urged to acknowledge the socially-constructed and contextual nature of ethnicity in organisations e.g., Roberson and Block (2001). Acker (2006) has noted that hierarchies are gendered, racialized and classed, especially when it comes to leadership in Europe and the United States.

Leadership theory, however, has traditionally suppressed and neutralized ‘difference’, including the gender and race/ethnic dimensions (Parker and Reynaga-Abiko, 2005). Much of the data collected on early leadership research was gathered in business, the military and government settings, from White, Anglo-Saxon men in leadership positions (Middlehurst, 2008). Leadership is saturated with studies which draw on constructs developed in Western contexts. This generalization also applies to studies of work values including (Hisrich et al., 2003) and leadership (Smith, 1997; Fikret Pasa, 2000). Many leadership publications have reflected this bias. Osler (2006) points out that textbooks aimed at aspiring school leaders published in the 1980s and 1990s in Britain rarely referred to equality, even though by then minority ethnic communities were well-established in this country. This was mirrored in academic journals and educational management courses, where race equality was rarely a topic of interest even though ethnicity was known to be a factor in student attainment.

More recently, research on social identity and group leadership suggests that the social identity group to which a leader belongs is considered to be a significant factor in leader effectiveness and the extent to which a leader may feel able to enact that identity (Van Knippenberg, 2011). From a sociological perspective, this is explained by the extent to which the leader and the group see themselves as part of a collective, or share the same social identity. Many leaders become enculturated into the social identity of the group which they lead or aspire to lead as a way to be accepted as the group leader. In other words, an aspiring leader may find it difficult to be themselves if their original and natural identity is at odds with the identity of the group they hope to lead. They have to assume what is ultimately an alien identity so they can be accepted and fit in. Showunmi et al. (2013) states that Black and Asian leaders felt they ‘needed to bleach their identity’ in order to succeed. Racial issues in educational leadership is an area on the fringes of receiving significant recognition.

INVESTING IN DIVERSITY

The theoretical frameworks of Critical Race Theory, Whiteness Studies and intersectionality (Maylor, 2014) are drawn on to explore and better understand the experiences of Black and

minority ethnic women leaders. *Critical race theory* is a theoretical framework in the social sciences, developed out of epistemic philosophy that uses critical theory to examine society and culture as they relate to categorizations of race, law, and power. *Whiteness theory* is understood as a specific approach in Whiteness Studies, examining how white identity affects a non-exhaustive list of identities in an adult’s life. This list includes, but is not limited to social, political, racial, economic, and cultural identity. *Intersectionality* is a theoretical framework for understanding how aspects of a person’s social and political identities might combine to create unique modes of discrimination. Intersectionality identifies injustices that are felt by people due to a combination of factors.

There is a growing body of evidence examining diversity and leadership (Lumby and Coleman, 2007) but very little on gender, race and leadership. Work that is of note in this area was conducted by Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010) who designed and developed a program entitled ‘Investing in Diversity,’ which focused on BME educational leadership. The Black-led program was developed in 2004 to address the under-representation of Black leaders in London schools. In the design and conception of the program a lot of time was spent on defining and redefining the words Black, Black Minority and Ethnic (BME) to ascertain who should be included in the program. Having a clear understanding from the outset provided transparency and clarity which then dismissed the opportunity for challenges further on in the program. Global majority (Coleman and Campbell-Stephens, 2010) was the terminology settled on to illustrate the fact that Black people were actually in the majority and not the minority.

However, the terminology is used to describe people of Color, it has and continues to evolve over time. More recently the phrase Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) has dominated the vocabulary, however it has raised a number of interconnecting issues. One of these is the ‘invisibility of Blackness’ following the inclusion of Asian in the BAME terminology (Sopanrao and Deshmukh, 2018). Such ‘invisibility’ is problematic as BAME ignores differences inherent within the notion of ‘Blackness’. Notably, some Black leaders, whether consciously or unconsciously, aspire to the realms of Whiteness as a way of succeeding or progressing in their careers (Showunmi and Gooden, 2020). Second, BAME is used pejoratively as a label for different groups of people who are not white, but BAME is not inclusive of all groups (Sopanrao and Deshmukh, 2018). Third, over the years, ‘ethnicity’ has become a label used to define diverse identity groups. Importantly, the concept of ‘ethnicity’ is fluid. Its defining characteristics are not fixed. Research in places like Rwanda (Kubai and Ahlberg, 2013) has shown that ‘ethnicity’ is not static, it changes with time. At the same time, self-definition has gained currency thus making the assignment of ethnic labels problematic.

For the above reasons, this paper will use the terms ‘Black’, ‘BME’ (Black and Minority Ethnic) or ‘Minority Ethnic’ interchangeably to chart the experiences of Black women leaders.

Despite these various differences in terminology a number of major themes emerged from interviews with Black and South Asian women and male graduates. Recommendations on leadership development strategies were put forward to help

Black and global majority head teachers and aspiring head teachers to enable them to “bring who they are” to their leadership. During the span of the program over 1,000 BME leaders graduated and moved on to careers that reflected their skills and experiences.

As we continue the exploration, it is important to include the work of Judy Alston (1997). Alston’s work brings the challenges and pressures of Black superintendents in USA schools, into the discussion on educational leadership. Until Alston’s work there was very little mention of Black women’s experiences in educational leadership. There was, however, research conducted on White women and leadership by Shakeshaft (1989) who placed women’s experiences firmly onto the leadership agenda. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) breaking book, highlighted how difficult it was ‘when documenting women’s representation in formal leadership positions in schools, due to an absence of reliable and comparable data, either nationally or across states’. (p. 85–90).

SO WHAT IS ‘INTERSECTIONALITY’?

Intersectionality is the lens through which the data will be analyzed. The term was coined in the 1980s to address criticism that feminism was overwhelmingly White and Western in its outlook and philosophy. It was defined as:

“The view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of this include race, gender, class, ability, and ethnicity.”
(Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality, (depending on context) can be viewed through a broader lens still while taking into account the variety of identities and backgrounds of women, men and non-binary people so they can all benefit from feminism. Rather, it seeks, as a principle, to take all elements of diversity and identity into account in policy-making, management and leadership so a more ‘holistic’ approach is achieved. This is important as school leaders consider when staff and students are encouraged to bring the ‘whole person’ to work and study they are much more likely to have the best possible experience and, moreover, the leaders can benefit from this diversity, rather than implicitly encourage social conformism and the concealing of hidden identities.

One element of diversity is demonstrated by the fact that bullying and harassment exists across school and higher education communities and beyond, for instance in the City, the business quarter of London. There is evidence from Oplatka (2002) that women and in particular Black women are more likely to report being harassed or bullied. Thus, Black women, who are from both these groups, may be especially vulnerable. Bullying and harassment rely on the abuse of power and because women, and Black women and disabled people are underrepresented in

school management and leadership grades, they are statistically more at risk.

Actively preventing bullying and harassment is imperative in order to support equality generally, but it is also of particular benefit to those who are doubly or triply (or more) marginalized. The differences in representation, when considered with the issue that marginalized people may also be keenly aware that they do not ‘fit in’ and have internalized a sense of being ‘other’, means that tackling bullying and harassment is crucial to the retention of staff with intersecting identities. If you are the only person from your group in a school or business setting, you may often have a heightened awareness of any hostility in interpersonal interactions, even if it is not intentional or specific to you.

THE RESEARCH PROJECTS

This paper draws on three research projects focusing on gender and leadership that were completed in different contexts. All three research projects were designed to explore how gender and identity impacted on leadership.

The research design fuses together narrative and portraiture to portray the stories of my participants. The methods used in each of these projects consisted of either semi-structured interviews, focus groups and workshops as a way to collect data. Further detail on research design and data gathering (interviewers, identification of participants), and data analysis, etc. is supplied below for each separate project.

This next section will provide a discussion on the three research projects which underpin this paper. There were common features of shared research design for all three research projects. All applied Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to develop the methodological and conceptual framework for the study. Grounded theory is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the construction of theories through methodical gathering and analysis of data. This research methodology uses inductive reasoning, in contrast to the hypothetico-deductive model of the scientific method. Grounded Theory provides the basis for the development of narrative to elucidate and elaborate the theory which has emerged.

The research design emerged through a series of conversations, discussions and ideas which took place with a range of different people and organizations.

The research design interconnects with the blurring of a definition for autobiography and auto-ethnography. (Ellis and Bochner 2000) define auto-ethnography as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742). Similar to ethnography, auto-ethnography pursues the ultimate goal of cultural understanding underlying autobiographical experiences.

PAKISTAN

This was a capacity building project which spanned across two different countries the United Kingdom and Pakistan. The

project had two aims: to engage the Pakistani academics in research as a learning opportunity, and to use that research to explore and capture the experience of women academics in Pakistan. We investigated the number of women academics in Pakistan and their status and focused on their gendered experience, career progression and overall development. The PIs were located in two British universities and two universities in Pakistan. The research was co-designed with the participants, early career researchers and senior academics, through a series of workshops. The participants conducted the research in the four universities. The four universities in Pakistan selected the participants. The data was analyzed by the PIs and participants. A range of papers have emerged from this research. The overall aim of the research project was to promote collaboration among international and regional partners in the two countries, for research capacity building with specific focus on development of junior researchers, women researchers, early career scholars, staff and postgraduate students.

The project established sustainable collaboration between two United Kingdom and four Pakistani Higher Education Institutions. A study was conducted to contextualize the research, “Mapping Women Academics’ Careers in Pakistan”, which formed an integral part of the research training program. This project had two core elements:

1. The development of the research skills of both early career and established researchers from four partner universities. The aim was to enable them to become researchers of international standing.
2. The investigation of the experiences of women academic leaders in four universities based in Pakistan concerned thus making an original contribution to this field of knowledge.

I will focus on the second element of the project which explores gender and leadership in four universities in Pakistan.

The research project spanned over a three year period (2012–2015), the project initially brought together three female academics from the United Kingdom (United Kingdom) and 30 female academics from Pakistan, both early career and senior academics, with the intention of providing opportunities for their mutual professional development, research training, and international exposure. The research training took the form of active participation in a research project. The research was designed by the whole group of women with the guidance and mentoring of the United Kingdom team. This empowered the Pakistani participants who had no experience of qualitative research methods such as interviews. Their confidence grew visibly during the project as we built close relationships with them. We opened new aspects of gender and ethnic identities which engaged them in profound questioning and introduced them to the concept of intersectionality.

The methodological approach for this aspect of the research was the use of feminist and leadership theory. The method was interviews and questionnaire which was designed by the Pakistan and British team. There was a total of 400 women participants who took part across the four universities. A thematic approach to the analysis of the data following Braun and Clarke (2014) was

adopted. The ethical approval and consent had been achieved in line with British Education Research Association (BERA) and University of Leicester guidelines.

UNITED KINGDOM

This research project developed from an initial idea presented to the Leadership Foundation in 2011. I was interested in whether one’s identity impacted on leadership style. My ideas were well received at the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS) Conference (2012) which led to the award of BELMAS research project funding. ‘Race in the Community’ also provided initial funding.

I chose to explore how far identity impacted on leadership style. This research used semi-structured interviews, expert conversations, focus group and documentary evidence. This particular method was chosen as it provides flexibility. Interviews also have a better response rate than mailed questionnaires. I conducted the interviews myself as my personal interaction with interviewees was significant in enabling me to gain deeper insights into their utterances. I was also able to interpret the non-verbal communication of respondents which helps to provide more insights. The participants for this project were BME women leaders working across private, public and voluntary sectors. They were selected through Race in the Community and word of mouth (snowballing or chain referral). The data was analyzed using a thematic approach. The data informed two other publications ADD Refs (Showunmi 2016; Showunmi 2018).

A total of 130 Black, Asian, and white women leaders in public and private sector organisations in the United Kingdom took part in the study. The aim was to gather their reflections on; 1) how they defined leadership, 2) how their identities as leaders had developed and 3) their experiences of enacting leadership. Both focus groups and interviews were recorded for ease of transcription and data analysis. I used a thematic approach to the analysis of the data. The ethical approval and consent had been achieved in line with British Education Research Association (BERA) and University College London (UCL) guidelines.

While white women academics have written extensively on women’s position in the labor market and within the gender division of labor, this has been primarily from the position of disadvantage in relation to patriarchal power (see for example Rees 1992, Walby 1990, Cockburn 1991). Ethnic minority women are rarely included within these analyses and when they are, the analysis tends to focus on the ‘double disadvantage’ of sexism and racism, such as the ‘concrete ceiling’ facing black female managers. White women (researchers or organisational leaders) have seldom reflected on their own ethnic privilege including how this has impacted on their work (McIntosh, 1992 being a notable exception).

BRAZIL

The third project was based in Brazil.

The main aim of the study was to explore women's leadership in a community context. The research design and data gathering were community-based. A collaborative approach was adopted, involving the director of a women's center and the women who assisted in the center. The design was grounded in the needs, issues, concerns and strategies of the community and the community-based organization I worked with. These informed the topics (such as domestic violence, childcare and group activities for young people) to be explored through the research into leadership.

We had eight weeks to plan and deliver the project. I used the community-based idea as a framework to design this project. Data was gathered through workshops, interactive conversations, a conference and focus groups. A total of 300 women participated in the project. In the first instance the project lasted for two weeks in November 2018 and then another ten days in 2019. This longitudinal study was to continue in 2020, but the Covid-19 pandemic prevented further research from taking place.

Audio-visual techniques were used to capture the data. Audio-visual data (e.g., video recordings, You Tube clips, etc.) has become a popular research method, but it can raise ethical issues. Audio-visual data collected under certain conditions can be used to understand behavior, and can thus enhance understanding of societal issues. Ethical approval was secured in accordance with British Sociological Association guidelines. I used a thematic approach to analyze the data through the audio-visual lens.

More detailed information on this project is provided below (See Community based Leadership, p. 17).

CRITICAL DISCUSSIONS

The next section of the paper will focus on presenting a critical discussion of ethnic minority women's experience in leadership. The themes which have emerged from all three projects will be explored. The aim is to analyze the co-construction of ethnic minority women leaders using their own narrative. As mentioned, this research adheres to the BSA and UCL ethical guidelines. All participants have given their consent for the data to be used in this paper. A general overview of the experience of Black women leaders is presented to underpin quotations from interviews/focus groups with female leaders.

A JOURNEY OF DIFFERENCE

Three research projects are examined to provide an insight into women leaders' shared experiences. Interestingly, some of the initial findings stemming from each of the projects were similar. For example discussions on the lack of support with responsibilities such as caring for children and or family members, no recognition or value given, for the work completed as a women leader. The conception of a women leader was different from that of a male leader. A women in leadership was perceived to relate to a pastoral role, nurturing staff. Ultimately, the dominant place of women in society is

regarded as 'Mother.' As much as the previous list is of interest, the following themes will be explored in this paper. They are unconscious and conscious bias, stereotypes, stereotype threat, community based leadership and recognition of pain.

SHARED EXPERIENCES FROM MINORITY ETHNIC WOMEN

"I think that minority women's experiences as leaders challenges them physically and emotionally. They experience stereotypical perceptions which is an emotional challenge. I believe there is another point, which is that people feel threatened if you appear too intelligent or you know, they feel threatened, especially if for whatever reasons they haven't got the same qualifications." (Minority leader in education, London).

This quote summarizes the complexities that minority ethnic leaders face in the workplace. Initially, they are selected and recruited for their experience, knowledge and qualifications and then are subjected to conscious and or un-conscious bias. Research suggests that women tend to adopt leadership styles that are particularly well suited to the complexity of contemporary organizations. This translates well and they are able to demonstrate enhanced institutional effectiveness (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Eagly et al., 2014). Additionally, women can bring unique and important perspectives and priorities that serve to promote positive social outcomes and greater ethical accountability (Eagly et al., 2014). Disappointingly, these potential advantages are hampered by the disadvantage female leaders experience as the target of negative stereotype-based expectations. Over time, there have been a myriad of differing explanations as to why women have difficulty reaching top leadership positions; the main school of thought centers around the stereotypical view that there is a lack of fit between women's characteristics, skills and aspirations and those deemed necessary for effective leadership.

The perception of threat is real and it has serious consequences in terms of a negative impact on performance. The work of Steele and Aronson (1995) showed that when the stereotype of African American intellectual inferiority was "in the air" and students were asked to take part in a diagnostic test of their abilities, Black students underperformed compared to their White counterparts on a standardized test. Interestingly, when the relevant stereotype was removed by framing the same task as an exercise of problem solving, rather than an assessment of their intellect, there was no difference in the performance of Black and White students. The effects of stereotype-threat on academic underperformance has been widely documented across various groups (Steele and Aronson, 1995; Nguyen and Ryan, 2008; Spencer et al., 1999). Stereotype-threat can appear across different domains including academic tests, where it is known that a particular stereotype of an ethnic group is made salient (Aronson et al., 1998). There are further studies that highlight stereotype-threat in mathematics where the researchers examined two intersectional identities. The

studies show the prevalence of conflicting stereotype-based expectations in relation to race and gender performance. For example, Asian women mathematicians who were confronted with their stereotypical representations of their gender underperformed, compared to situations where they were assessed based upon their Asian identity, where they were found to perform better (Shih et al., 1999).

Stereotype and Stereotype-Threat

The consequence of stereotype-threat is the decrease in motivation and engagement and overall performance. Understanding the impact of stereotype-threat is fundamental to ensuring that women leaders and particularly minority women leaders achieve success.

“You have to work twice as hard to prove yourself. You face barriers from Asian men, you face barriers from colleagues [Black] and you face barriers from White colleagues as well. I have experienced it all.” (Black Leader in the Midlands).

Black women and women of color are expected to conform to cultural norms such as social prejudices, racial and gender stereotypes, and androcentric notions of leadership that help to restrict the movement of minorities and women in educational leadership. (Osler and Webb, 2014). This is a reification of the very barriers associated with oppressing women of color. “Voice is meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community . . . the struggle for voice begins when a person attempts to communicate meaning to someone else” (p. 20). Oplatka (2002) suggests that “the denial of emotions has been premised upon the gendered divide between emotions, as being irrational and subjective (Blackmore, 1999) and school cultures which supported the idea that good ‘professional’ behavior is rational and carefully emotionally controlled (Beatty, 2000).

Over the last few years there has however, been a shift toward the view that there is a need to incorporate emotional voices into the research on educational leaders (Hargreaves, 1998; Blackmore, 1999; Beatty, 2000; Tooms et al., 2010). Including the emotions of educational leaders enables us to gain a better understanding of the behavior and thoughts of the leaders.

The following quote taken from research conducted by Showunmi and Kaporou (2017) and it makes reference to cultural stereotyping in leadership:

“I mean I think being an Asian woman, plus I wear a headscarf, I think people do find it difficult to relate to that. It is their problem not mine, but they do make you feel uncomfortable and I think once you know what you are talking about, and you have to try hard to gain their respect, but once you have got it, then people will come to you and say, ‘well she knows what she is doing’. But it is breaking through that barrier and the challenges.” (Public Sector, Senior Asian Woman leader United Kingdom).

A more recent area which has been given more thought is the way in which inclusive leaders are being valued when recruited into an organization. In the same study carried out by Showunmi and Kaporou (2017) women expressed the following:

“Being valued, I think it is about respect really, and acknowledgment”. (Pakistani Women Leader in the private sector)

Another women leader made the following comment;

“. . . I hope to think that everyone in the organization values each other. If you ask me, if it is important to me as a leader, then yes. . . I don’t want to be devalued I don’t want to be not valued.” (Pakistani Women Leader Pakistan)

Diversity is regarded by many senior leaders to be a strategic priority that provides important contributions, including increased levels of creativity and innovation. Unfortunately, much of the evidence suggests that the efforts given to recruit, develop and promote individuals from under-represented groups do not guarantee that these individuals’ abilities are fully utilized or that their voices and perspectives are fully heard and taken account of in organisational decision-making in order to benefit institutions.

Being different and needing to adopt whiteness is something that the women felt was not taken seriously by their employers. Women from the study stated that in order to be accepted they needed to ‘bleach their identity’ to progress in the organisation.

Undermined and Not Valued

My research reveals another area which women leaders openly speak about. This is the constant feeling of being undermined and used, for the purposes of the ‘wider good’ of the organization in the context of diversity. Many employers know that they need to change so they select and recruit women leaders with a difference, however there is often a hidden agenda. These agendas create confusion among staff and the leaders. This is often as a result of inherent contextual issues and power relations that frame existing contributions in the work of diversifying the workforce (Ahonen et al., 2014).

“They think you are not intelligent; they think you are just there to advise them on culture and tell them what to do so that they can get on with it and say bye bye to you. They think they are doing you a favor by giving you a platform to speak to them on issues for nothing”. (Black female Leader in the United Kingdom).

Community Based Leadership

The final voices that contribute to this paper are Brazilian women leaders. This stems from recent visits to Rio de Janeiro and Recife between 2017 and 2019. During the most recent visit I received funding to develop an educational workshop—‘Strengthening Leadership and Empowering Community Women for Local Action’.

The workshop took place in May 2019, in conjunction with the Associação de Mulheres de Bairro. I conducted a workshop with 20 women from the community of Córrego do Euclides on the importance of strengthening local leadership and empowering Black women for local action. The methodology was a group discussion in a circle, where the women were asked questions about leadership. The following discussion took place through the use of a translator:

Focus Group Leader: please write down on a piece of paper your thoughts on this question - “Do you see yourself as a leader?”

Women: “what do you mean? Write what down . . .?”

Focus Group Leader: “your thoughts to the question asked. . .”

Women: “we are not leaders; we work in the community”

Women: “We are here to help and make sure things happen.”

Focus Group Leader: Can you say more about this? Do you see yourself as a leader in the community?

I realized there was a need to change the style of what I was doing. The responses took me by surprise. I had not factored in the stark difference between me and the women. I understood that their physical environment was totally different due to their social-economic backgrounds. However, for some reason I had not made the connection with the way in which this could have contributed to their emotional growth. The women all identified as Black and innocently, I thought my Blackness would give me an automatic pass into their world. In many ways it did, and my genuine humbleness helped. However, I forgot that I was steeped in privilege which would and could have been a problem if I had continued with this delivery. In addition to this there was a language barrier, they spoke Portuguese and I English, everything required translation. I knew if I was to engage these women in the workshop, I needed to use a different method. So, I scrapped my plan and quickly scanned the room to see what resources I could use for the session. I asked the project director if she had some large sheets of paper and some pens. She invited me into the training/resource room, and it was there that I saw what I needed—a large roll of paper and some pens. I asked if this was something I could use, and I was told ‘everything is yours’. I took the paper and proceeded back to the group.

This time I asked the women to sit in groups of three and I gave them a sheet of paper. (I know that I was up against the clock as the session was being recorded as part of the project). I asked the women to draw their community and then I asked them to draw the different leaders of the Favela community. It was fascinating, the pictures included everything—community shops, homes, association’s police, nurseries, schools, doctors etc. I then asked the women the following question:

Focus Group Leader: “who are the leaders in the community?”

Women: “So Many People Including Us. . .”

Focus Group Leader: “so tell me more, what are you leaders in? “

Women: “we are the leaders in our homes, we also are the ones which lead change in the community. For example, this Center where we are today, came about because of us women. It is a very famous Center which was put in place as a refuge for women and their children who had or were in violent situations. We lead this

across the community. We also provide basic education for the children along with a hot meal”.

Focus Group Leader: this is leadership, you are leaders in the community.

One of the women began to cry and I asked the translator had I been responsible for her tears. She gave the following response:

“no, it was the first time she had been asked and she had never considered herself as a leader. She was so happy to see someone like me as no-one comes to this area and we need more people like you. Thank you”.

The focus group continued as the women sketched out their concerns and issues raised in their community, and ideas for reaching more women to grow a network of solidarity and local action. For many of the women this workshop had been the first time that they had received any form of development which took me by surprise.

Importantly, this was the first time the leadership role of these women had been recognized. They initiated activities to enhance life in their community but failed to appreciate that they were leaders in their own right. This process was affirming for them, and it was also emotional for them to be empowered in this way.

RECOGNITION OF THE PAIN

These three interwoven research projects reveal that there are many challenges that Black women leaders face in educational institutions. Some of these will be outlined in this section. The list is endless; therefore this section will focus on the following; stereotype, lack of visibility, micro-aggression (which includes sexual and racial incidents), isolation, the notion of color blindness and unequal pay and career progression. Starting with stereotypes, Black women leaders may be recruited in the first instance to fulfill diversity targets and/or to ensure that the school has the perception of being a diverse workplace. If one takes a look through a critical lens it could be described as window dressing which is problematic for both the school and the Black women leaders. The lack of visibility for Black women leaders creates an environment of stress and racial anxiety which in the long-term can have a profound effect on the Black women leader’s mental health and well-being. Black women leaders suffering in silence will compensate for the ongoing barriers by working harder and internalizing the pain.

Many Black women leaders will experience fatigue and or burnout during their teaching career. Having daily accounts of micro-aggression is something that can contribute to the breakdown of their mental health and well-being. Following their recruitment, they often experience isolation in the workplace. It is a very difficult challenge to accept that their recruitment has resulted in professional jealousy. The lack of attention to supporting Black women leaders contributes to the revolving door scenario. In many cases the appointment of Black women leaders could be the first time that the school has risked recruiting somebody that does

not look like most in the school community. Once the honeymoon period is over, the Black women leaders are expected to achieve and fit into the school environment which has quickly become hostile, with Black women leaders facing treatment which reflects perceptions of their racial inferiority among White colleagues. Racial inferiority is a term used to justify the unequal treatment of the Black women leaders in the workplace. Experiencing any or all of the above is a barrier for Black women leaders, and will erode their confidence and ability to succeed in their careers. Something which attracts very little discussion is ‘color blindness,’ Maylor (2014). In her book ‘Teacher Training and the Education of Black Children’ Mayor examines notions of colour-blindness and colour-consciousness. Colour-blindness is considered to be an instrument of Whiteness.

Whiteness is a slippery ideology that operates and tolerates its own contradiction in order to maintain its dominance (Bonilla-Silva, 2001; Gallagher, 2003). In her book Duster (2001), suggests that like race, colour-blindness is multifaceted. While producing a dominant social and at times political hierarchy, depending on how it is operated, race is visible in its solid and interchangeable (fluid) state or it takes on the form of ‘non-existence’ (colour-blindness). This invisibility or perceived non-existence results in color blind racism forming ‘an impregnable yet elastic wall that barricades whites . . . from racial reality, a racial reality whereby minority ethnic groups ‘lag behind whites on almost every measure of quality of life’ (Gallagher, 2003: 17) The biggest barrier facing black women leaders in recent years is unequal pay and lack of career progression. Unequal pay and career progression have been the focus of discussion for many years; however, in recent years it has been viewed in terms of the impact on the lives of Black women leaders. Despite many initiatives such as positive recruitment drives, BME leadership development programmes, conscious bias training for line managers and senior leaders, and coaching, the lives of many Black women leaders have become a constant battle for survival.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to present a perspective on the way Black and other minority ethnic women experience leadership, as leaders in education, business, and the community. It is intended to enable the reader to better understand the challenges BME women have to grapple with in order to survive their working lives. Because racism is complex, endemic in society, and shielded by White

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privilege, ethnic minority leaders often suffer in silence and face invisibility. Franklin et al. (2006) assert that the invisible syndrome of emotional abuse and psychological trauma caused by racial stress is common for non-white people. There must be a concerted effort to support the mental and emotional health of Black women leaders in order to retain them in education.

The paper presented contextual knowledge relating to the literature on gender inequalities. It is noticeable that the data shown across each of the three research projects indicated a similar story of difference. The journey of difference it portrayed demonstrated some movement for some women but very little for women from ethnic minority backgrounds. It is clear that there is a strong perception that leaders are stereotypically older middle-class white males who then tend to recruit in their own image. Where diversity becomes an issue, white women are often then recruited to fill the gap. An interesting aspect of this paper is the use of narrative inquiry as a way to illustrate how women leaders make sense of their roles as leaders. Capturing and sharing the women’s stories through an intersectional and sociological lens helps to make sense of the complexity concerning difference. Researchers gathering data through field work need to be critically reflective about their own hidden assumptions. I experienced this in Brazil. The final section collectively brings together the suffering and pain that some minority ethnic women face, as they embark on their leadership journeys. It does leave us with the question—What has been the cost paid by members of the Black and ethnic minority community in pursuing leadership roles?

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by UCL IOE. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication.

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