

Exploring Sustainable Strategies Adopted by Contemporary Black Women Leaders in the UK.

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LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

In Western contexts, leadership is often associated with being white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, and middle-aged, positioning others as "outsiders" and imposing additional barriers (Coleman, 2012). This favouritism towards those who resemble the dominant group hinders the acceptance of non-stereotypical leaders (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). Potential Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) leaders perceive indirect racism as a significant hurdle, with Black women facing additional gender-related complexities (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010).

Intersectionality acknowledges the expression of multiple, interdependent identities (Crenshaw, 1989), influencing how Black women perceive their leadership roles and interactions within organisations. An intersectional approach is essential to examining the experiences of Black women senior managers, addressing nuances of gendered racism and racial microaggressions. Critical Race Theory (CRT) helps understand structural and racial disparities and critiques colourblind approaches that undermine interracial interactions (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Apfelbaum et al., 2008).

Contemporary racism, often subtle, manifests as racial microaggressions, impacting Black women leaders psychologically (Capodilupo et al., 2007; Franklin, 1999; Holder et al., 2015). These leaders develop coping strategies through informal networks, providing essential support (Franklin & Boyd, 2000). The Strong Black Woman (SBW) stereotype, rooted in slavery, negatively affects emotional well-being, and fosters harmful coping strategies (Graham & Clarke, 2021; Hooks, 1981; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2008).

Black feminism posits interconnected race, gender, and class discrimination, calling for the articulation of unique experiences to challenge societal narratives (Hooks, 1981; Collins, 2009). Black women face significant career barriers, described as a "concrete ceiling," more impenetrable than the "glass ceiling" encountered by white women (Bagati, 2008; Ray & Davis, 1998; Catalyst, 1999).

This study aims to understand the leadership traits and qualities of Black women leaders, examining the intersectional and sociocultural influences on their leadership styles.

INTENDED CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND PRACTICE.

This research seeks to amplify the voices of Black women leaders, addressing a significant gap in existing studies that have focused on Black women and health outcomes predominantly within US based institutions. Previous research on women in leadership has disproportionately focused on white women, leaving little or no room to explore the nuanced journeys of Black women leaders. This absence in research on Black women leaders highlights a failure to consider intersectional organisational identities.

By exploring the intersection of racism sexism and social identity as experienced by Black women leaders, and examining the sustainable strategies they develop and adopt, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how Black women senior leaders, gendered and racialised identities have shaped their senior leadership experience and what it means being a Black woman and holding a senior leadership position.

This research aims to contribute to this gap by exploring the intersection of racism, sexism, and social identity, investigating the sustainable strategies adopted by Black women leaders in the United Kingdom.

RESEARCH QUESTION, AIM, AND OBJECTIVES

Research question - What are the sustainable strategies adopted by contemporary Black women leaders in the UK to overcome the intersectional challenges and barriers to leadership positions?

Research aim - To explore the mechanisms by which coping and sustainable strategies are developed by Black women leaders.

Research objectives

- Explore the historical context of leadership distinctions qualities and traits developed and adopted by Black women leaders.
- Explore the specific barriers and challenges faced by Black women in leadership positions.
- Critically analyse the coping and sustainable strategies adopted by Black women to survive and thrive in their given contexts.
- To create sustainable strategies for future Black women employees who are seeking to attain leadership positions.
- Provide recommendations for organisations, policymakers, and individuals to support the leadership development of Black women.

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

This research adopts an interpretive philosophical approach, where individuals create the meanings of reality (Saunders et al., 2019). Interpretivism focuses on in-depth variables and context-related factors. The ontological assumptions recognize that reality is intricate, complex, and has multiple meanings and interpretations influenced by one's experiences and practices. Language and culture play a significant role, suggesting there is no single true reality. Thus, this research amplifies the authentic voices of Black women leaders, providing a platform for their truths and contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of their reality. Epistemologically, this study draws from theories and concepts to allow participants to share and interpret their stories, aiming to capture the depth of their experiences while the researcher remains mindful of personal biases.

The axiological assumptions play a pivotal role in this research, the researcher is part of the research bringing unique lived experience perspectives and intrinsic value to the research. This can bring with its elements of subjectivity. Embracing and practicing reflexivity provides the researcher with opportunities to continuously examine and re-examine assumptions, perceptions and conceptional understandings as they affect decisions in the research process.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

This research will follow an inductive approach, emphasising an open and flexible process to uncover new insights and relationships. Using qualitative paradigms, the study will conduct phenomenological interviews, including in-depth (biogram) interviews and narrative analysis (Eichsteller, 2017), to explore participants' lived experiences. Initial pilot studies will refine the interview process to ensure clarity and focus. Interviews, conducted face-to-face or digitally, will be recorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo software. Data analysis will be interpretive, requiring sensitivity to the variability and complexity of contributions, and will aim to develop a conceptual framework through effective communication and empathy (Unterhitzengerger et al., 2020). The interpretive qualitative approach allows for a detailed exploration of the data's richness and complexity, with the researcher identifying codes and generating themes.

JUSTIFICATION OF RESEARCH DESIGN

As women take up more leadership roles, inclusive perspectives are increasingly called for. The experiences of Black women leaders have often been overlooked in broader feminist discussions, as highlighted by several studies (Rosser-Mims, 2010; Booysen, 2014; Sims, 2018). While UK organisations have made some strides in addressing workforce demographic imbalances, there remains a lack of thorough examination of the structural barriers, behaviours, and attitudes limiting the progress of Black women in leadership roles (Miller & Callender, 2019; Showunmi, 2020). Black women leaders often face the dilemma of conforming to dominant organisational cultures, potentially concealing their unique experiences, or rejecting these inadequate representations of their lived reality. This research focuses on exploring these barriers and examining the leadership qualities and traits of Black women leaders, investigating the sustainable strategies they develop to navigate intersectional challenges, and positioning their authentic voices at the forefront to provide a nuanced understanding of their leadership experiences.

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