



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

## 1. Background

- Western leadership often favours white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, and middle-aged individuals, creating barriers for others (Coleman, 2012).
- Indirect racism is a significant obstacle for potential BME leaders, with Black women facing additional gender-related complexities (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010).
- Intersectionality highlights how multiple, interdependent identities affect Black women's leadership experiences (Crenshaw, 1989).
- Contemporary racism, often subtle, manifests as racial microaggressions, impacting Black women leaders' psychological well-being (Capodilupo et al., 2007; Franklin, 1999; Holder et al., 2015).
- Black feminism addresses interconnected race, gender, and class discrimination, challenging societal narratives with unique experiences (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).

## 2. Intended contribution to theory

- Exploring what it means to be a Black woman in a senior leadership position in the UK.
- Amplifying the authentic voices of Black women leaders.
- Providing a deeper understanding of how gendered and racialised identities shape the senior leadership experience of Black women.

## 3. Research gap

- Contributing to the existing research by focusing on the unique challenges and strategies of Black women leaders in the UK.
- Despite progress in UK organisations, there is still a lack of thorough examination of structural barriers, behaviours, and attitudes limiting Black women's leadership progress (Miller & Callender, 2019; Showunmi, 2020).
- Addressing the failure to consider intersectional organisational identities in previous studies.

## 6. Proposed methodology

**Inductive Approach** - Emphasises an open and flexible process to uncover new insights and relationships.

**Qualitative Paradigms** - Utilises phenomenological interviews, including in-depth (biogram) interviews and narrative analysis (Eichsteller, 2017), to explore participants' lived experiences.

**Data Collection** - Interviews will be conducted face-to-face or digitally, recorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo software.

**Data Analysis** - Interpretive approach, sensitive to the variability and complexity of contributions.

**Outcome** - Allows for a detailed exploration of the data's richness and complexity, with the researcher identifying codes and generating themes.

## 4. Research question, aim and objectives

### Research Aim

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

### Research Objectives

- **Historical Context:** Explore the historical context of leadership distinctions, qualities, and traits developed and adopted by Black women leaders.
- **Barriers and Challenges:** Examine the specific barriers and challenges faced by Black women in leadership positions.
- **Coping Strategies:** Critically analyse the coping and sustainable strategies adopted by Black women to survive and thrive in their contexts.
- **Future Strategies:** Develop sustainable strategies for future Black women employees seeking leadership positions.
- **Recommendations:** Provide recommendations for organisations, policymakers, and individuals to support the leadership development of Black women.

## 7. Justification

- As more women assume leadership roles, inclusive perspectives are essential.
- Black women leaders' experiences have been overlooked in broader feminist discussions (Rosser-Mims, 2010; Booysen, 2014; Sims, 2018).
- The intersectional framework helps to understand how race, gender, and other social identities influence the leadership paths and challenges of Black women.

## 5. Literature and framework

- i. Crenshaw, (1989): In her seminal paper, Crenshaw illustrates how legal and social systems often overlook the specific needs and experiences of individuals who face intersecting oppressions, particularly Black women, leading to inadequate responses to their issues (Crenshaw, 1989).
- ii. Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013): This work further elaborates on the evolution of intersectionality as a critical analytical tool, highlighting its significance in feminist theory and social justice activism (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013).
- iii. Collins, P. H. (2000): Provides an in-depth analysis of Black feminist thought, including leadership that is deeply rooted in community and social justice (Collins, 2000).
- iv. Hooks, B. (1984): Hooks' work on Black women and feminism highlights their roles in advocating for social change and addressing intersectional oppressions, crucial elements of their leadership (Hooks, 1984).