**10 - Exploring Sustainable Strategies of Black women Leaders in the UK**

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**1. Introduction**

The existing body of theoretical and empirical research on Black women and intersectionality is predominantly centered in the United States, with a primary focus on the social dimensions of both physical and mental health outcomes. This research has often been sector-specific, looking into areas such as Education, Police, and Prison Service. Within this context, empirical evidence shows a large correlation between gendered racism and adverse mental health outcomes among Black women. Moradi and Subich's (2003) investigation revealed a significant correlation between experiences of sexism and racism and heightened psychological distress among African American women. Notably, sexism emerged as a distinct factor contributing uniquely to psychological distress. Similarly, studies conducted by Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight (2008) and Szymanski and Steward (2010) found that, among African American women, increased experiences of sexism correlated with raised levels of psychological distress. It is noteworthy, however, that these studies did not incorporate intersectional measures specifically addressing gendered racism.

As women increasingly take on leadership roles, there is a growing push for more inclusive leadership perspectives. However, the experiences of Black women leaders are often overlooked in broader feminist discussions (Rosser-Mims, 2010). Scholars like Booysen (2014) and Sims (2018) have highlighted this omission, leaving a gap where the leadership experiences of Black women lack visibility. This gap puts Black women leaders in a challenging position, forcing them to decide whether to conform to mainstream assumptions, therefore concealing their uniqueness, or reject these assumptions as inadequate representations of their experiences (Dickens et al., 2019; Nixon, 2017).

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

**2. Literature Review**

Numerous metaphors such as the glass ceiling, glass cliff, maternal wall, glass escalator, and sticky floor illustrate the hurdles women encounter in advancing into leadership roles (Smith et al., 2012). These metaphors capture the diverse challenges women face at different stages of their careers. Eagly and Carli (2007) introduce the metaphor of the labyrinth, portraying a complex map of challenges that women navigate, with varying degrees of success, all leading toward the ultimate goal of achieving a leadership position. The labyrinth proposition is that though advancement is challenging, it is not insurmountable. Wyatt and Sylvester's research in 2015 focused on Black Minority Ethnic (BME) employees, and their findings indicate that, according to Black women interviewed, ethnicity takes precedence over gender as an issue for BME managers.

According to Davidson and Davidson (1997), Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) employees are more likely to face a 'concrete ceiling,' a formidable barrier that is both denser and harder to break through. In a study by McDonald (2011), it is noted that the relationship networks or 'ties' of BME employees at work tend to be concentrated at lower organisational levels compared to their white colleagues. This concentration is explained by the concept of homophily, which is the tendency for people to form network ties with those who are ethnically similar at work (Ibarra et al., 2005). Researchers argue that BME employees face a disadvantage in reaching leadership positions partly because there are fewer ethnically similar individuals in powerful positions with whom they can establish homophilous ties.

Alongside homophilous ties, Moody and Lewis (2019), explored gendered racial microaggressions and traumatic stress amongst Black women and concluded that a greater frequency of gendered racial microaggressions was significantly associated with greater traumatic stress symptoms. According to Crenshaw (1989), Black women do not experience racism because they are Black and sexism because they are women, but they experience a unique form of oppression at the intersection of their identities as Black women. An intersectionality framework in research allows exploration of the ways that interlocking forms of oppression, discrimination and/or privilege influence intersectionality identifies.

In examining this landscape, it is crucial to acknowledge and address the nuances of gendered racism and racial microaggressions, as they intersect with and impact the experiences of Black women in unique ways.

**3. Theoretical basis**

Attribution Theory, based on Heider's (1958) ideas, is central for understanding how people explain events. It involves two main types of attributions: dispositional (related to personal traits) and situational/environmental (related to external factors). For instance, if someone succeeds, a dispositional attribution might credit their skills, while a situational attribution might blame the task's difficulty (Wyatt and Sylvester, 2015). This theory facilitates understanding in how individuals interpret and assign causes to events in their surroundings.

Boundary Theory, Langley et al (2019) explores the ways different groups, occupations, and organisations define and navigate their limits and interactions. It is like mapping the borders between these entities and understanding how they actively shape and manage those boundaries. "Boundary work" implies the deliberate efforts and processes involved in maintaining, negotiating, or challenging these borders, contributing to a better understanding of how various entities coexist and interact.

**4. Research Design**

The study adopts a qualitative research approach with specific methodological focuses, notably ethnography and narrative research. Ethnography involves a meticulous examination of the culture within a particular community group, emphasising observation as a primary data collection method Denzin and Lincoln (2011). Narrative research, on the other hand, focuses on the interpretation of stories told by individuals Reisman (2007).

The data collection process aims to describe and interpret the narratives, providing insights into the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The population for this study is identified using a non-probability sampling technique ‘snowball technique,’ a method where initial participants recommend others for inclusion, allowing for a more natural and contextually relevant selection of participants.

Data analysis employs thematic analysis, as outlined by Brown and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis involves systematically coding and organising the data to identify key themes, providing a structured framework for interpreting the findings. Additionally, discourse analysis is employed to put the collected data into context. This approach involves analysing different levels of communication, including language, structure, and tone. Gillham (2005) suggests the use of open-ended questions and flexibility in allowing participants to elaborate, ensuring a rich and comprehensive exploration of the narratives.

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