Listening to What Has Been Missed: Voice, Story, and Leadership Among Global Majority Women Leaders.

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LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Feminist and leadership scholarship have made significant contributions and insights into gendered inequality; however, feminist frameworks have not always reflected the diversity and complexity of women's lived realities. While gender has often been positioned at the centre of feminist inquiry, scholars caution against treating women as a homogeneous group, as this can obscure difference, hierarchy, and power (Spelman, 1990; Hesse-Biber, 2014). Critiques of mainstream feminism further highlight how Eurocentric, white, and middle-class traditions have shaped feminist knowledge production, resulting in the partial visibility of some women's voices and the marginalisation of others (Hooks, 1984).

For many racialised women, feminism has therefore not consistently functioned as a space of recognition or belonging, not through deliberate exclusion, but through knowledge systems that privilege particular standpoints while rendering others marginal or unintelligible. This paper responds to that absence through reflexive engagement with how feminist and organisational knowledge has been constructed, whose voices it has amplified, and whose experiences remain unheard.

The study is grounded in Black feminist thought, which understands knowledge as situated, relational, and produced through lived experience (Collins, 2000). Drawing on the concept of the outsider within, it examines how Global Majority women leaders may operate within organisations while remaining marginal to power, legitimacy, and epistemic authority. Leadership is framed as socially and historically produced rather than neutral, shaped by intersecting relations of race, gender, and power. Storytelling is positioned as a political and epistemic practice through which Black women reclaim voice, resist misrepresentation, and challenge dominant narratives (Griffin, 2012). Ubuntu-informed leadership further contributes an ethical and relational perspective, framing leadership as interdependent rather than individualised (Ncube, 2010).

INTENDED CONTRIBUTION TO THEORY AND PRACTICE

The paper contributes to leadership and Human Resource Development practice by challenging decontextualised and individualised leadership models that continue to dominate mainstream leadership development. It focuses on voice, story, and collective care as legitimate developmental resources, highlighting how leadership is sustained through relational, culturally grounded practices rather than solely through formal roles or competencies.

By centring the lived experiences of Global Majority women leaders, the study offers insight into the emotional, relational, and intellectual labour involved in navigating leadership within racialised and gendered organisational systems. It points to the value of collective and reflective spaces, such as peer networks and relational leadership communities, as sites of sustenance, meaning making, and resilience, with implications for more inclusive leadership development approaches.

RESEARCH QUESTION, AIM, AND OBJECTIVES

This paper focuses on the leadership experiences of Global Majority women leaders in the UK and is guided by three reflexive research questions:

1. How do leadership moments shape identity?
2. How are intersectional challenges experienced and navigated?
3. What practices, relationships, and collective spaces sustain leadership over time?

The study aims to centre the lived experiences and voices of Global Majority women leaders as legitimate sources of leadership knowledge. The objectives are to:

- Examine leadership through an intersectional and reflexive lens.
- Challenge gender-neutral and decontextualised leadership models.
- Contribute to more inclusive leadership scholarship and leadership development practice.

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

The study is underpinned by an interpretivist and Black feminist epistemological position that understands knowledge as socially constructed, situated, and relational (Haraway, 1988; Collins, 2000). It rejects assumptions of objectivity and neutrality in leadership research, recognising that knowledge production is shaped by power, positionality, and historical context (Harding, 1991). Reflexivity is positioned as an ethical commitment rather than a methodological add-on, requiring the researcher to account for how knowledge is produced, interpreted, and represented (Finlay, 2002). This perspective aligns with Black feminist commitments to voice, accountability, and standpoint (Collins, 2000).

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Using an inductive qualitative approach, the study explores the lived leadership experiences of Global Majority women leaders in the UK. Data are generated through phenomenologically informed, narrative interviews that prioritise participants' own sense-making around leadership, identity, and sustaining practices. Participants are Global Majority women who currently hold, or have recently held, senior leadership roles across a range of organisational contexts.

Interviews are structured around three reflective prompts: *a leadership moment that shaped me, a challenge I faced, and what sustains me,* shared in advance to support reflection and participant-led storytelling. Analysis is interpretive and narrative, illustrating how leadership experiences are understood, narrated, and situated within intersecting social and organisational contexts. An optional follow-up allows participants to reflect on how leadership experiences may continue or shift over time.

JUSTIFICATION OF RESEARCH DESIGN

This research design reflects the study's interpretivist and Black feminist orientation, which understands leadership knowledge as situated and shaped through lived experience. Phenomenologically informed narrative interviews are well suited to exploring leadership where experiences are influenced by intersecting relations of race, gender, and power, and where dominant leadership frameworks have often marginalised the voices of Global Majority women.

An inductive narrative approach enables participants to shape the meaning of their accounts, supporting reflexivity and agency rather than imposed or deficit-based framings. Overall, the design maintains coherence between the research questions, theoretical framing, and methodological choices, while upholding an ethical commitment to voice and care.

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