

Chapter 11

Intersectionality in Leadership: Spotlighting the Experiences of Black Women DEI Leaders in Historically White Academic Institutions

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ABSTRACT

Due to their multiple identities, Black women navigate gendered and racialized pathways to leadership in the US education industry. The journey for Black women in and en route to positions of academic leadership is even more nuanced and multiplicative. Little, though, is known about the effects of their intersecting identities and the structural barriers they encounter in this sphere. To deepen our communal understanding of this phenomenon, this chapter highlights the existing theories and research on the race-gender dyad in the context of academic leadership. Examining the individual and layered effects of race and gender on the professional realities of Black women leaders in higher education, the author spotlights the unique experiences of Black women DEI practitioners and leaders in historically White academic institutions. Given the numerous components at play when Black women lead in predominantly White institutions and settings, this chapter concludes by discussing opportunities to advance relevant research and practice in this arena.

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, Andrew Sherrill, Director of Education, Workforce, and Income Security, United States Government Accountability Office (GAO), provided testimony before the Joint Economic Committee, US Congress, on women's representation, pay, and characteristics in management positions. In his statement, he discussed "issues related to women in management. Although women's representation in the workforce is growing, there remains a need for information about the challenges women face in advancing their careers" (Sherrill, 2010, p. 1). In their more comprehensive report, the Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-3564-9.ch011

Chair of the Joint Economic Committee, United States Congress, and the Honorable John D. Dingell, House of Representatives, echoed similar sentiments. Based on their estimations,

Female managers earned 81 cents for every dollar earned by male managers in 2007, compared to 79 cents in 2000. The estimated adjusted pay difference varied by industry sector, with female managers' earnings ranging from 78 cents to 87 cents for every dollar earned by male managers in 2007, depending on the industry sector. (US Government Accountability Office, 2010, p. 3).

According to the Center for American Progress, women constitute a majority, at 50.8 percent, of the US population, earning roughly 57 percent of all undergraduate and 59 percent of all graduate degrees (Warner et al., 2018). Yet, although American women hold about 52 percent of all management- and professional-level jobs, they lag considerably behind men in leadership positions across every sector (Dezső et al., 2016; Goethals & Hoyt, 2017; Warner et al., 2018).

What is absent from this body of literature is the consideration of context. Contextual factors, or in this case, the intersection of race, gender, and leadership in traditionally patriarchal spaces, speak to the multiple identities of Black women in varying US educational settings (Evans, 2008; Johnson, 2021, 2022). Without accounting for context, a proper understanding of gender and racial inequities in education leadership remains elusive. An example of this is the consideration of the 'leadership divide.' Burke and Collins (2001) found that despite the notions of political correctness prevalent in North American corporations, the old boy network continues to thrive. The authors also discovered that male employees purposefully generate institutional impediments to freeze women's advancement. At a cultural level, the dominant male network fosters solidarity between males and sexualizes, threatens, marginalizes, controls, and divides females through organizational power structures (Burke & Collins, 2021). Specifically, Burke and Collins (2001) found that male managers tend to perceive the characteristics needed for managerial success as being associated with those generally attributed to men.

This leadership divide is particularly apparent in the field of education large-scale, a sphere in which women comprise a majority of the workforce (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). For Black women in the United States of America, another layer of incongruity lies in the fact that despite their relatively heightened levels of educational attainment (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010; Helm, 2016), they generally find themselves at the lower tiers of the organizational pecking order (Betters-Reed & Moore, 1995; Davidson & Burke, 2000; Eagly et al., 2007). This incongruence, coupled with Burke and Collins' finding that male managers may not consider female characteristics essential for managerial success, can negatively influence institutional cultures, climates, and promotional decisions.

Historically, White institutions have worked on actively advancing their focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in their respective organizations (El-Amin, 2022; Showunmi, 2021). Numerous organizations support and even feature diversity practitioners within their workforce. Despite this growing trend, still many traditionally White organizations and institutions still grapple with longstanding, systemic inequities stemming primarily from within. In the aftermath of the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and systemic racism (Johnson, 2023), it is vital for academic institutions to better understand Black women's experiences in and en route to leadership so that they may implement the needed changes to promote more diverse, inclusive, and equitable environments (Johnson, 2023). In light of this, it is increasingly essential to center Black women's paths large-scale – before, during, and after the noted pandemics – across all institutional sectors, public and private (e.g., academia, corporate America, healthcare, public service, etcetera). It is necessary to consider how these spaces converge and continue to impact their

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