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Black women educators' stories of intersectional invisibility: experiences of hindered careers and workplace psychological harm in school environments

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ABSTRACT

Current research that specifically examines the racialised experiences of Black women school educators in England at different stages of their careers is scarce, creating a vacuum of understanding that can challenge barriers to their recruitment and retention. This article focusses on how race and gender identities mutually and simultaneously hinder and harm Black women as education professionals and sustain their inferiority in the eyes of whiteness through intersectional invisibility. Findings are drawn from personal stories of four Black women educators, shared through narrative inquiry methodology, to illuminate ways in which androcentric and ethnocentric prototypical social group members maintain dominant power structures and reinforce the subordination of Black women educators as non-prototypical to manifest as experiences of invisibility and harm. Individual stories illustrate experiences of the invisible/hyper-visible dichotomy impeding career progression, of undertaking invisible work, of assumptions about their legitimacy in school spaces and of wellbeing concerns. From the standpoint of intersectionality's ability to create critical citizenry, this article raises awareness of the need for action by senior leaders in English schools and beyond, to challenge and eliminate the intersectional invisibility experienced by their Black women staff. Conclusions signpost to actions that can shape localised policy and practices to improve Black women educators' experiences. As Black women educators contribute to the success of underrepresented learner groups, there are significant institutional benefits to reducing Black women educator attrition, increasing representation at all levels and improving their wellbeing.

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Introduction

In October 2018, the Department for Education (DfE) released their "Statement of intent on the diversity of the teaching workforce – setting the case for a diverse teaching

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workforce" to increase diversity within the profession. However, according to the 2021 School Workforce in England data, only 2.4% of all class teachers and 1.2% of all headteachers in state-funded schools are categorised by ethnicity as "Black or Black British" (not including "mixed heritage" groups which exist as separate data categories) and by gender as "female". In a landscape where race equality in education policy in England has been inconsistent, particularly over the last three decades (Warmington et al., 2018), representation of Black women educators remains an issue. Literature and empirical studies argue that schools are racialised spaces (see Maylor, 2009; Mirza, 1992; Tomlinson, 2019; Wright, 2010), yet the DfE's "Statement of intent" does little to acknowledge this. A joint Runnymede Trust and National Union of Teachers report (Haque & Elliott, 2017) identified the impact of racism on teachers in schools, revealing discrimination, microaggressions, unequal treatment, and being given stereotypical roles and responsibilities, such as responding to poor behaviour incidences and Black History Month. To challenge what is perceived as "the endemic racism that pervades the British educational system" (Runnymede Trust & National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers, 2017, p. 5), social justice, inclusive cultural practices and increased representation in the teaching workforce are key to improving the occupational experiences of Black women educators in schools.

The need for schools to be experienced as culturally inclusive spaces for minority ethnic teachers requires greater attention to understand and challenge the nuanced experiences faced in predominantly white school spaces by racialised practitioners at all stages of their careers. Scholars, such as Callender (2018, 2020) and Maylor (2018), examined the experiences of UK Black male teachers and trainee teachers, but equivalent current research on Black women educators in this country, beyond the leadership lens, is scarce. Instead, there is a tendency to group together and essentialise Black women within broader conversations about a much wider demographic of "minority ethnic" teachers. Further, Black women's experiences can be obscured by the academic discipline of "Women Studies" and "feminist theory", which remain focussed on white-dominated discourse (Carastathis, 2014). Intersectionality's broader use in feminist scholarship without acknowledging its anti-racist origins can render intersectionality "politically neutralized and undone" (Bilge, 2013, p. 408), diluting its radical vision for tackling social injustices experienced by Black women in society. This article, therefore, maintains the fidelity of intersectionality, avoiding appropriation away from Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) original deployment of a race-gendered analysis.

The "intersectional invisibility" model (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) illuminates experiences of Black women educators within power structures that oppress and harm, rendering them invisible yet simultaneously hyper-visible. Improving their social conditions within school environments requires "a clear attempt to explain and alleviate the challenges experienced by Black women and other marginalized groups" (Harris & Leonardo, 2018, p. 18). With the dearth of UK-based research specifically examining Black women educators beyond the leadership discourse, this article focusses on intersectional invisibility revealing ways in which oppression operates in school spaces and how Black women educators experience it. Sections from personal stories shared by four Black women educators at differing stages of their careers, drawn from a wider study of ten Black women educators (Ramdeo, 2022), were chosen to demonstrate examples of the hindrance and harm that oppression in the school workplace causes and its impact. Building on the work of Stanley (2022) by providing an England-based perspective, this article

presents “a nuanced understanding of these women’s daily existence” (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013, p. 22) in school spaces, to disrupt existing oppressive structures and systems, and to act as a catalyst for school leaders to consider how to implement genuine structural change towards more inclusive school environments that advocate for Black women educators rather than marginalising them.

Intersectionality as an analytical framework

Tefera et al. (2018) state that an “intersectional approach is fundamentally oriented toward analysing the relationships of power and inequality within a social setting and how these shape individual and group identities” (2018, p. viii). Black women’s experiences are erased if viewed through the lenses that privilege experiences of white women (privileged group members of “gender”) or Black men (privileged group members of “race”), thus contributing to Black women’s intersectional invisibility. This is the premise of Kimberlé Crenshaw’s seminal work “Mapping the Margins” (1991), where she states, “the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244).

The function of intersectionality is three-fold (Harris & Leonardo, 2018). Firstly, intersectionality illuminates how subordinate identities are marginalised or invisible. Secondly, intersectionality reveals the complexity of power structures (e.g. racism, sexism, patriarchy) to mitigate one as more important than others. Finally, intersectionality identifies the gap between subordinate identities (e.g. gender or race) and intersubjective experience of simultaneous identities, recognising that no single social identity (e.g. female or Black) is a complete explanation of an individual’s life. As such, intersectionality avoids reducing experiences of oppression to one explanatory category or identity, instead recognising and addressing inclusively all forms of oppression (Carastathis, 2014). Further, “intersectionality is the ability to name racism even while acknowledging that racism is not the only culprit in a particular crime” (Harris & Leonardo, 2018, p. 16). Therefore, these three functions allow intersectionality to be used to examine social phenomena at macro-, meso- and micro-levels, revealing the workings of power at all levels of social relations (Carastathis, 2014).

Intersectionality as an analytical tool has developed and been reimagined since its origins in Crenshaw’s seminal work (1991). Her analytic framework examines the experiences of Black women and issues of their identity through three dimensions. Firstly, *representational intersectionality* explores how Black women are culturally constructed through stereotypes and controlling images (Collins, 2000), like the “Mammy” stereotype that conveys Black women as defeminised and selfless nurturers who instil tough love, which shape their existence in society. Secondly, *political intersectionality* examines systemic oppression arising from policies and movements which have the potential to bring Black women to the centre but instead maintains them at the margins. Thus, political intersectionality demonstrates how social identities work against each other to ensure that Black women remain disempowered, marginalised, or excluded in comparison to white women through policy fields and projects at both national (macro-) and organisational (meso-) levels. Finally, *structural intersectionality* is concerned with how social groups are unequal (Walby et al., 2012). It enables Black women to articulate and confront

the multiple power structures (e.g. racism, sexism, patriarchy) responsible for their struggles, recognising how the intersection of these structures are different for white women and Black men, emphasising multiple forms of structural oppressions (Crenshaw, 1991; Haynes et al., 2020; Joseph et al., 2021).

How intersectionality is utilised in feminist research was later reframed through the work of McCall (2005), who addresses the complexity of women's multiple social identities from a methodological perspective. She proposes a continuum of three analytical approaches that manage this complexity. At one end of the continuum is the *anticategorical complexity* approach, assuming that categories, including race and gender, are too simplistic and reductionist to understand the complexity of lived experiences. At the other end of the continuum is the *intercategorical complexity* approach, which recognises a need for categories to expose the unequal relationships of social groups that create inequality. Located mid-way along the continuum is the *inracategorical complexity* approach, taking marginalised social identities as the starting point categories to expose under-theorised experiences of women. This approach recognises the dangers of categorisation but does not reject the different categories themselves (Nash, 2008).

There can be little doubt that intersectionality, as a field of study, has produced new knowledge despite the ongoing ambiguity of its definition (Collins, 2015) as the concept is developed, reframed and expanded. Collins (2015), therefore, suggests that "examining patterns of new knowledge that has been produced under the rubric of intersectionality as an analytical strategy may be more productive" (2015, p. 11) and pinpoints the complex social inequalities of the workplace as one area to analyse.

Intersectional invisibility

Intersectionality's development as an analytical tool continues through the model of intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Intersectional invisibility is defined as "the general failure to fully recognize people with intersecting identities as members of their constituent groups" (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 381). The model draws on concepts of androcentrism and ethnocentrism to define prototypes of hegemonic identity groups and societal standards, thereby defining which members are non-prototypical. Androcentrism is the tendency to define men as the prototypical example, meaning women are non-prototypical. Ethnocentrism in the UK and US is defined by white people being the socially dominant group, meaning non-white is non-prototypical. The intersectional invisibility model can also be applied to other intersecting subordinate identities, such as sexuality and disability, which are not features of this article. Therefore, Black women hold intersectional subordinate identities that do not match the prototypical woman (white women) and the prototypical Black person (Black men). Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) argue that "being a non-prototypical member of a social group results in an experience of social invisibility" (2008, p. 380). Hence, intersectional invisibility places a lens directly on how Black women, being non-prototypical of ethnocentrism and androcentrism, experience harm caused by the mutual interactions between racism and sexism in society.

In navigating the workplace, Black women face unique difficulties where they experience adversity and trauma because of intersectional invisibility (Johnson et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019) in ways that do not affect their white female colleagues. It should be noted that their

Black male colleagues “are more direct targets of prejudice and discrimination than less prototypical members” (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008, p. 382), making their experiences sometimes more oppressive than those of Black women (see Callender, 2020, as an example). Being non-prototypical to androcentric and ethnocentric concepts, Black women “are unrecognised as women, as well as less distinguishable than Black men” (Coles & Pasek, 2020, p. 7). In other words, Black women do not match the white women prototype of being more feminine. Instead, Black women tend to be seen through harmful stereotyping and controlling images such as “Mule” (bearing the burden of additional workloads) (Collins, 2000), “Mammy” (motherly, nurturing, yet strong disciplinarians), “Sapphire” (loud, dramatic), “Crazy Black Bitch” (angry, aggressive, unstable) and “Superwoman” (over-achiever, can handle large workloads without complaint) (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008), which continue to be pervasive in the workplace (Johnson et al., 2020). As such, Black women’s non-prototypicality creates invisibility that impacts on their career trajectories and wellbeing.

Paradoxically, intersectional invisibility renders Black women simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible, meaning that their accomplishments and potential are easily overlooked by the majoritarian group members, yet their minimal representation within the workspace places them under greater scrutiny than those around them (Smith et al., 2019). Nevertheless, intersectional invisibility allows for understanding how Black women are harmed when their unique experiences are not recognised and to critique how social institutions fail to address their distinctive concerns (Coles & Pasek, 2020). Therefore, it can be drawn upon to explain why Black women at work face more barriers and lack opportunities for career progression to middle and senior leadership positions compared with their white female counterparts (Johnson et al., 2020). Hence, the stories presented within this article were chosen as examples of intersectional invisibility, illuminating the ways in which prototypical group members maintain dominant power structures and reinforce Black women as non-prototypical, creating experiences of invisibility. Their stories illustrate the hindrance and harm caused by the invisible/hyper-visible dichotomy impeding career progression, how invisible work goes without recognition, the impact of assumptions made about legitimacy in school spaces, and the ways in which experiences impact on wellbeing.

Method

This article is drawn from a wider study of the experiences of ten Black women educators employed in predominately white school spaces. The research looked to examine the challenges these women faced in their work contexts and whether their experiences were underpinned by their racialised and gendered identities, addressing the research question: “In what ways do Black women educators experience their predominantly white school contexts as racialised spaces?”. In research involving racialised groups, robust ethical considerations and self-reflexivity on researcher positionality is needed alongside an appropriate methodological approach that provides a platform for the Black women educators to share their lived experiences. These are discussed later.

Personal stories as counter stories

Intersectionality centres Black women in research and is embodied in Black feminist theories, including Critical Race Feminism (Evans-Winters & Esposito, 2010; Wing, 2015) and

Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000), where voices and counter-stories provide a way of understanding Black women's experiences of being a racialised minority that challenge majoritarian views of them. Further, Lewis Ellison (2019) notes the importance of counter-stories, in that "counter-storytelling privileges the stories of those who are historically silenced and challenges stories of those in power in an effort to examine other ways of knowing and understanding" (2019, p. 1434). The formulation and exchange of stories about individual situations constructs social reality (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The importance of storytelling provides "racially marked communities with a critical space to write our own narratives, open up new questions, and unsettle essentializing discourses. Storytelling in this sense becomes ... a valuable political tool that speaks back at, challenges, and resists oppressive structures of whiteness" (Sian, 2019, p. 15). Further, storytelling provides a mechanism to appreciate Black women's dissimilar experiences and intersectionality that if we fail to consider creates "accounts of gender [that] will fall prey to exclusionary false universalism" (Mikkola, 2017, p. 176). Therefore, a suitable methodological approach was required to provide the Black women participants with a platform for articulating their personal stories fully and safely as a mechanism to counter majoritarian views of their position and experiences in school workspaces.

Using narrative inquiry

Using intersectionality relies on Black women's willingness to share their experiences of intersectional subordination, marginalisation, and erasure. This requires the use of an appropriate methodology that enables personal stories to be heard. Narrative inquiry was, therefore, utilised as a method to centre the lived experiences of those who chose to participate in this research. This methodology supports the gathering of counter-storytelling that underpins intersectionality, through interviews that move away from a question-and-answer format to provide participants freedom to narrate their experiences how they wished. Narrative inquiry allows storied lives, which frame lived experiences, to act as windows to comprehend individuals' social realities (Clark & Saleh, 2019), which additionally "represent an ongoing conversation and opportunity to converse about an experience while living through it" (Aujla-Bhullar, 2018, p. 65). Centring individuals' experiences rationalises the need to take an anti-essentialist approach, engaging with individuals' stories, rather than analysing participants' stories through common themes. The way in which essentialism constructs particular or stereotypical racialised narratives deserves continuous consciousness to resist homogenisation and prevent the erasure of nuanced differences within racialised and ethnicised categories. Hence, this article takes the approach of presenting individual stories. Anti-essentialist research involving counter-stories of individual Black lives is being utilised in a growing body of recent literature (as examples, see Callender, 2020; Doharty & Esoe, 2022; Moorosi et al., 2018), moving away from thematic homogenising approaches.

Participants

This article presents the voices of four Black women educators at various stages of their careers. Recruited through mutually known contacts who acted as trusted gatekeepers, the four participants met the criteria of defining as "Black or Black British", "female",

“qualified as a teacher” and “working in a predominantly white school staff demographic”. After being introduced via each gatekeeper, the four Black women educators were interviewed face-to-face between December 2019 and February 2020. Each participant chose where they felt comfortable and safe to be interviewed and speak freely, which in some cases was their home environment. Interviewing participants in their home was an immense privilege requiring increased sensitivity and robust consideration of ethical implications, recognising that their home is the place where they should feel safest but that sharing sensitive experiences can increase their feelings of vulnerability. Interviews were audio recorded with participants’ permission. Pseudonyms are used to present the four Black women’s stories to encourage readers to see the person behind the story, to value their realities and put a human face to their experiences.

Researcher positionality and ethical considerations

Researcher positionality plays a central role in the willingness of marginalised groups and individuals to openly provide sensitive and personal information through the research process. As a racialised female researcher (and former schoolteacher) but not race-matched (Egharevba, 2001; Vass, 2017) to the four Black women educators, I cannot claim to know what it is like to be a Black woman, but the echoes of similarity in our experiences allowed me to stand in solidarity with them and want to expose their oppressions to drive for change. Self-reflexivity heightened my consciousness of my insider and outsider status and the researcher/researched power relations during the interview process and through to analysis and reporting. I acknowledge that phenotypically I look South Asian but with the hybridity of my ethnicity, cultural background and history being Indo-Caribbean, I assumed I would be granted access to Black women educators’ lives due to cultural commonalities with some participants. This was not necessarily the case. Presumption of insider status based on certain shared identities is not sufficient. Few et al. (2003) cite Nelson (1996) to draw on the concept of “gradations of endogeny” (2003, p. 207), described as being the emotional and psychological subjectivity that research participants use to determine the extent of legitimate researcher insiderness, acting as an internal gatekeeper to the level of access a researcher can gain to their research participants. Therefore, as a method of trust building, I shared my ethnic, cultural and employment background with participants, to circumvent scepticism and discover commonalities, in a hope to become an insider by negotiation (Beoku-Betts, 1994). However, I was acutely aware that I was racially an outsider to these Black women’s experiences, despite employment experiences placing me nearer an insider to their own racialised employment experiences. Self-reflexivity enabled me to recognise that I sit somewhere in between, or an outsider-within (Collins, 1986), as a conduit to provide a platform for these women’s voices, thoughts and ideas.

In researching Black women, it was important to reflect on and address specific nuances that may cause potential harm to enable trust and respect of the participants. Goddard-Durant et al. (2021) note the “need for transparency, reciprocity and emphasis on relationship building” (2021, p. 190) as central to ethical research with Black communities, in particular, to mitigate emotional harm. As Osler (1997) reiterates, interviews enabling Black women to share their personal stories can be painful as they recall incidents of perceived oppression. As such, I provided opportunities for the participants to take a break or to move their story on to mitigate any distress that may have arisen

from sharing personal stories, a practice particularly important where interviews were carried out in participants' homes.

As the gatekeepers had provided the participants with information about me in advance of the interview, putting a foundation of trust in place, the interactions were relaxed from the outset. Nevertheless, as a feminist researcher, I recognised the need to mitigate the adverse effects of power dynamics between the researcher and the researched and how researcher reflexivity shapes the structure of the research process (Haynes et al., 2020). Therefore, despite the four Black female educators knowing something of me from their gatekeepers, I still considered dress, hairstyles, make-up and jewellery, and language (which may be seen as symbolic power), as well as the technical preparations necessary for formal submission for ethical approval by the university's Ethics Committee and in the interview process (Few et al., 2003). Where interviews took place in the participants' home, it was particularly imperative to ensure that they were not left feeling a sense of vulnerability after the interview data were collected, so that power dynamics favoured the participants in their personal spaces. Therefore, I abided by any specific "house rules" (such as removing shoes), accepted kind offers of prepared food and beverages to avoid any potential offence and allowed additional time to continue rapport and relationship building (Goddard-Durant et al., 2021). This provided opportunities for the participants to ask me about my research and professional history, so revealing possible commonalities in our experiences. Bashir (2018) notes caution on researcher safety when conducting research in participants' homes, but the mutually known gatekeepers provided a useful connection to reduce risk for both the researcher and researched in this study.

Results and discussion

Invisibility and hyper-visibility impeding career progression – Lisa's story

Black women are subjected to heightened visibility (or hyper-visibility) in their workspaces as people with intersecting subordinate identities that are seen as non-prototypical so stand out (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Intersectional invisibility research also suggests that Black women are simultaneously invisible for the very same reason of non-prototypicality to their racial and gender subordinate identity groups making them unseen (Smith et al., 2019). Lisa's story illustrates how her simultaneous invisibility and hyper-visibility affected her career progression.

Lisa came into teaching eleven years ago and had been in her current role as a middle leader in a secondary school for three years. She worked in a Greater London school where the percentage of minority ethnic pupils surpassed the number of white pupils, yet this was not reflected in the teaching staff of the school. She had always wanted to be a teacher from a young age and saw her sister join the profession. Not wanting to be seen to follow her sibling, she chose to go into social work after completing her post-compulsory education. However, the desire to teach did not leave her and she eventually gained her teaching qualification as a mature student with a family and entered the teaching profession. She started her career as a supply teacher before gaining a permanent job in the school where she is currently employed.

Lisa recognised that her hyper-visibility suited the needs of the school, through being a high-quality classroom practitioner, but how that high quality teaching kept her in the

classroom and prevented her career from progressing. She felt strongly that she was seen for the sole purpose of being an excellent classroom teacher with effective classroom management strategies. Lisa explained that as the only Black member of staff within a department of nine, she was given classes with learners who displayed the most challenging behaviours, and she would not be offered A' level classes. With this pattern of class allocation repeated in consecutive years, Lisa requested a meeting with her Vice Principal to discuss a fairer distribution of classes. She recalls,

I made a bit of a fuss about it and said, “look, I don’t want these groups [every year]” and the response from the Vice Principal was that I’m a victim of my own success. I was really quite disgusted with that. I thought, okay I can handle the classes, but it was so tiring. It was very exhausting ... but I persevered.

Lisa went on to explain that a senior position with responsibility for the two subject areas she had been teaching, in which she had high student success rates, became available in the department. She was approached by the Head of Department, who clarified that these were the subject areas with which she needed help. Lisa applied for the role and interviewed for it but was not offered it. She says,

I didn’t get it. They gave it to a white male who had experience in one of those areas but not the other. For many years, other positions that arose in the school I went for. I didn’t get them, and the excuses were absolutely horrendous. “We just don’t think you’re ready”. “You need to have a little bit more experience behind you”. Or they would say, “I don’t really think this role would suit you in your career progression” ... “I didn’t think you really wanted it”.

Despite being overlooked for promotional posts, Lisa’s recognised capabilities were called upon for lesson observation during the external national inspection process (Ofsted inspection) when the school wanted to demonstrate a very good lesson. The quality of her teaching made her hyper-visible, in terms of results and pupil outcomes, thus suiting the needs of the school to want to showcase this, but those skills and knowledge were not valued and were invisible when it came to gaining promotional posts. Lisa reflects on that experience,

... they said, “oh right, do you mind if they [Ofsted inspectors] come and see your lesson because we need to have a good to outstanding lesson?”. So, they know my worth then, but when it comes to progression it’s not going to add any value to my progression, to me moving on and upwards.

In sharing her thoughts about her career progression and where she currently was in her career, Lisa demonstrated a palpable frustration and disappointment in her own career development and progress. When she did finally get a promotional post, it was as Behaviour and Pastoral Lead, a role that epitomised the “Mammy” stereotype (Collins, 2000) and one not uncommon for Black women educators to be expected to take up, reinforcing the findings by Haque and Elliott (2017). Nicole’s story later shows that she was also expected to take on behaviour and pastoral responsibilities. Lisa went on to compare how her career progression had stalled in comparison to white women and men (both white and minority ethnic men) as well as relatively inexperienced teachers.

... where my career is now, I’d rather be in SLT [Senior Leadership Team], so I’m not where I wanted to be. I’ve seen people around me, white women, men, NQTs [Newly Qualified Teachers] just go up the scale so quickly and I just feel I have to keep on applying, keep on, and I get silly excuses for reasons why I don’t get jobs.

Concepts of simultaneous invisibility and hyper-visibility of Black teachers and learners in a range of contexts are not new in the research literature (see Callender, 2020; Haque & Elliott, 2017; Lander & Santoro, 2017; Tuitt, 2010). Hyper-visibility is often referring to surveillance and scrutiny. Within this article, hyper-visibility is also presented as experiences that Black women educators perceive as being conveniently seen when it serves the needs of the school yet become invisible in attempts to progress their career, resonating with Haque and Elliott's (2017) discussion of the invisible and visible nature of barriers to career progression. Lisa's non-prototypicality making her hyper-visible resulted in being appropriated as both the "Superwoman" stereotype when allocated workload deemed undesirable by prototypical colleagues (behaviourally challenging classes) and the "Mammy" stereotype in eventually gaining the Behaviour and Pastoral Lead role.

Lisa's story also illustrates how prototypical group members hindered her career trajectory in recruitment and progression processes, echoing the barriers experienced by Black and minority ethnic leaders in schools (Bush et al., 2006). Her story suggests that Black women educators who want to progress their career can face being treated as invisible when applying for senior roles. Culturally determined bias, where Black staff are overlooked for promotional positions within white institutions, is embedded in the unconscious view of organisational leadership that these staff do not match a leader prototype (Lowe, 2013). In the UK, the most common leader prototype is the white male. Whilst the gender prototype is changing within education, with more women in leadership, the lack of progress in terms of ethnicity leaves leadership a predominantly white activity (Lowe, 2013). Further, a DfE (2018) report confirmed the white male leader prototype remains, in that white men still dominate school leadership and are being promoted more quickly than women and any ethnic group. So, Black women are seen as non-prototypical on several levels to render them invisible to the possibility of progressing to leadership positions.

In addition, unhelpful and unconstructive feedback provided by prototypical group members following internal interview processes further hindered Lisa's career progression, reinforcing her subordinate social identity and non-prototypicality. Negative or unconstructive feedback following either shortlisting or interview experiences for new or promotional internal posts are integral in the perception of low interview justice, consequently perceiving a high possibility of unfair discrimination, so influencing job and organisational attractiveness and applicants' future behavioural intentions (Nikolaou & Georgiou, 2018). Hence, when applicants experience negative selection and interview processes, it has a detrimental effect on applicant welfare, long-term health and future job performance. These detrimental effects are often hidden to minimise further oppressions that maintain Black women in positions "that marked the bottom rung of the employment ladder" (Branch, 2011, p. 8), thus rendering the Black woman educator silent and unable to request the assistance and support they need.

Invisible work, invisible value – Afia's story

The idea of invisible work describes how Black women educators are expected to undertake activities and responsibilities "orchestrated by White colleagues without compensation or recognition of these practices as part of their real, official workload as teachers" (Milner, 2020, p. 403). Afia's story illustrates the way in which Black women educators are expected to take on additional work, often influential roles within their school,

but remain invisible as additional work often comes without additional salary uplift or alternative form of recognition.

Afia was the youngest of the four participants featured in this article, being in her late twenties. She started her journey to becoming a teacher as a teaching assistant before gaining her teaching qualification six years ago. She works as a class teacher with subject responsibilities in a primary faith school in South East England, in an area which is highly diverse, particularly with large African heritage communities. However, as in Lisa's school, this was not represented in the teaching staff demographic. She identified as being of African heritage but said, "I don't see my face in that staffing", indicating the under-representation of Black women educators within her school and reflecting an existing discourse in school leadership (Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010). Her drive to become a teacher stemmed from being one of only a few Black children in her class when she was growing up and the lack of representation in her teachers. She reflected on her own childhood and her reasons for entering the profession.

I don't think it's right that there are some children that will never see a teacher that looks like them and I didn't understand why I'd never seen a teacher who looked like me.

Despite showing her competence in a middle-leadership role, leading a year group, Afia did not receive financial or progressive benefits. Afia explained that she had been teaching in a primary year group for several years when her school expanded from a two-form to three-form entry school (admitting an extra 30 children per year group) and required a new interim year group leader until a formal recruitment process took place.

... they had unofficial year leaders ... I became the [unofficial] year leader, so I'm responsible for data, I'm responsible for reporting to governors, I'm responsible for leading assemblies, leading school plays, leading masses, organising trips, the list goes on. So that was my first taste of leadership, but it wasn't with a TLR [Teaching and Learning Responsibility payment] and it wasn't with the official role of "you are a year leader" or "you're going to be middle leader".

Afia continued in this role for two years without formal recognition. She noted the resistance by her white school leadership to acknowledge her leadership responsibilities for the year group with financial remuneration, often claiming that the school did not have the budget when she questioned various members of the leadership team about the allocation of the Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payment. A later restructuring of staff and governance within her school resulted in her being moved to an alternative year group and losing her leadership responsibilities, whilst the role she was formally doing without financial benefit became recognised with an appropriate TLR pay uplift and with a white colleague appointed into it.

I was given those roles and responsibilities without the actual accolade of the pay and now I'm in another year group and I'm being led by someone else, so I've been demoted, essentially. So, it's like you can have a bit of leadership, we'll dangle it over you a little bit - there you go - but actually you're not good enough to be on a school website or be officially given the TLR [payment].

Afia took on this additional work for two years to demonstrate her suitability for a permanent promotion to middle management. However, she became unseen in the restructuring, losing her leadership responsibilities and eventually being overlooked when the role

carried an official TLR payment, where a white colleague took up the position. Her intersectional invisibility led to her feeling undervalued and taken for granted, impacting on her wellbeing and ability to trust her colleagues, specifically those in management. Afia made her intentions clear, stating “I’m itching to leave [the school]. I’m looking to leave”.

The prototypicality of group members in senior positions resulted in decisions that rendered Afia invisible for remuneration for the additional workload she undertook, placing her at financial and progressive detriment, and benefitted the newly appointed white prototypical colleague as year group leader who received the accolades (title and pay). Afia’s experience illuminates how Black women educators can be expected to take on more work without suitable remuneration and recognition, resonating with the stereotype of the “Mule” (Branch, 2011; Collins, 2000). As such, Black women educators take on greater workloads, visible and invisible to other colleagues (Milner, 2020) but their contributions are taken for granted and their efforts underappreciated (Wu, 2014). Afia was also appropriated the “Superwoman” stereotype in expectation that she will handle the additional workload and non-recognition without complaint. This experience of intersectional invisibility positioned Afia to essentially play a game of “Snakes and Ladders” with her career progression, having climbed the ladder to unrecognised and unremunerated responsibility only to slide down the snake when her labour was no longer required at the more senior level. Her experience also resonates with the “labyrinth” metaphor (Wyatt & Silvester, 2015) faced by Black and minority ethnic employees, being “the elaborate maze that individuals must navigate in order to reach the prize at the centre: achievement of a leadership role” (2015, p. 1245).

Assumptions about legitimacy – Nicole’s story

To show that they legitimately belong within the school space, intersectional invisibility can place Black women in a power struggle for respect (Lewis & Neville, 2015). Nicole’s story talks of feeling that her credentials must become public knowledge to justify being within the education profession.

Nicole graduated from university with a degree in Law. Working with young people in the criminal justice system for several years made her reflect on how she could steer their life paths in different directions at an earlier age. With the desire to mitigate young people entering the criminal justice system, she pursued a path towards gaining her teaching qualification, although through a less traditional training route. Bursaries for teacher training did not exist at the time, but she eventually worked towards gaining relevant qualifications to enable her to teach, despite taking longer to reach her goal. Nicole had been an educator for ten years, teaching in the secondary age phase and being in senior leadership for two years. Her school was in an urban area of South West England, with a diverse pupil body, but she was one of only two Black members of staff in the school (the other being a Black male) and the only Black member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). She subsequently left the school because of her experiences there.

On gaining her senior leadership position, Nicole faced scrutiny by colleagues about her legitimacy in her new role, being challenged by other teachers who felt that she had in some way circumvented the system. Taking a less traditional path to teaching placed her in a position where she felt that her credentials must become public

knowledge to justify being within the educational space in her role. Nicole reflected on her experience of public credentialisation.

I didn't do a traditional route but here is my qualification from university, here's my observation from the National Teaching College, here's my reference from my CEO, here's my confirmation that I legitimately was interviewed for my job twice. Here's my individual assessment proving that I teach, and observations done on me. I've had to, and you're always having to walk around with this life record that justifies why I'm here, all of the time.

Here, Nicole felt that she was positioned as having to prove her place and position in her school. Acosta (2019) also notes this experience in her interview findings with Black women educators.

Despite Nicole demonstrating her credentials to justify that she had the qualifications, knowledge, and skills for her role, she felt that her legitimacy to be involved in institutional-wide matters as part of the SLT still seemed undervalued and unwanted, making her feel that her authority in high-quality practice for school improvement was unseen. She explained how her professional knowledge about and experiences of raising attainment and enhancing classroom pedagogy appeared to be not taken seriously, with the school favouring her taking up pastoral responsibilities despite that not being a specific part of her job in her senior position. This, again, is an example of Black women facing the "Mammy" stereotype (like both Lisa and Afia) and being seen as having inferior intellectual qualities to prototypical colleagues.

I'm automatically deemed more softer and more approachable ... you're the big momma in the house ['Mammy' figure] and you're safeguarding, you're nurturing, you'll look after the children. Even though, I am not in charge of behaviour, if there is a behaviour concern, I will be the person tannoyed ... If there's a child having a meltdown, I will be the one that's called and I go back time and time again and I say [to line management], "but that's not my job role. That's not my position. That's not what I've got responsibility for, as a senior leader", and yet I'm still the one that's constantly called. I'm not valued or wanted in discussions on teaching and learning, or into raising attainment, but you want me to continue to do these types of [pastoral] roles. I think that the intellectual side of me isn't valued. The intelligence I could bring to the table is not valued and so, therefore, conversations around, like I said, raising attainment or teaching and learning, it's often like, "well don't worry if you can't make it [to the SLT meeting], you can deal with that safeguarding concern", and "you can come to the meeting later", and I think that rhetoric continues time and time again.

Nicole's intersectional invisibility comes from her legitimacy as a practitioner and leader being both scrutinised (her hyper-visibility) and disregarded (her invisibility). Her story of her legitimacy being in the gaze of prototypical group members epitomises that Black women in the workplace are "marginalized group members, as outsiders, [who] are frequently invisible in terms of being recognized as legitimate authority figures ... thus seek to gain visibility as professionals" (Smith et al., 2019, p. 1709). Despite their androcentric and ethnocentric non-prototypicality, Black women educators, particularly those who reach leadership positions, defy stereotypical race and gender-based expectations of educational, income and occupational status (Smith et al., 2019) to be in the profession, again spotlighting their place in schools and the legitimacy of their credentials to be there. In many cases, like Nicole's, assumptions are made about the professional standing of Black women in school environments (Johnson et al., 2020), reinforcing intersectional invisibility.

The need to manage wellbeing – Erika's story

There is a well-established discourse about teacher mental health and wellbeing linked to bureaucratic expectations, increased workloads and changes to the curriculum (Skinner et al., 2021). However, intersectional invisibility can have an additional detrimental impact on Black women educators' wellbeing. The result of simultaneous invisibility and hyper-visibility can create moments of emotional and psychological harm for Black women educators. As moments of oppression accumulate through their careers, Black women educators can reach points where accessing formal professional support mechanisms becomes necessary for their wellbeing and survival, as also found by Everett et al. (2010) in their research with Black women. In Erika's personal story, the toll of intersectional invisibility had a severe impact on her mental health. She concealed her trauma from her prototypical white colleagues to protect herself from perceptions of incapability as she accessed the support mechanisms needed.

Erika was the most senior and the most experienced of the four participants, being a principal with twenty-two years' experience in the profession. She led a diverse secondary school in an urban area in North West England. From the beginning of her career, she deliberately chose to work only in highly diverse multicultural and multi-ethnic inner-city schools due to her own childhood experiences of urban schooling and "miseducating minorities" (Tomlinson, 2019) under education policy in England during the 1970s and 1980s. Erika successfully navigated her compulsory schooling when many of her peers from Black communities had been excluded or educated in schools for the "educationally subnormal" (ESN), a category used until 1981 for labelling children (Tomlinson, 2019). Her success was a motivating factor in her decision to become a teacher and work solely in inner-city multicultural and multi-ethnic schools.

Despite being a principal now, Erika shared her trauma of experiencing persistent microaggressions and an episode of outward aggressive behaviour from a senior white female colleague (acting head teacher) at a previous school earlier in her career. Her hypervisibility as a Black woman educator manifested in experiencing microaggressions which undermined Erika, such as the acting head teacher redeploying key tasks that Erika had competently managed for several years to other prototypical personnel without consultation with her. This microaggression by the acting head teacher rendered her capabilities and existence in that role invisible. Erika chose to remain silent about her negative experiences, cognisant that challenging the microaggressions and outward aggressive behaviour of her prototypical white colleague would present her as the aggressor, which resonates with the appropriation of stereotypes of either the "Sapphire" or "Crazy Black Bitch" (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008), that comes with being non-prototypical. Erika's intersectional invisibility made her feel undermined and undervalued, as well as feeling that her simultaneous hyper-visibility made her an easy target for attack through persistent microaggressions. The impact on her mental health led to her seeking professional support.

At one point this woman [acting head teacher] had come up to my office and had shouted at me, lost it completely, had stormed out of the office and was just so unprofessional. It was just unbelievable. I was at the mercy of [her aggression] and I felt like that's where it went. I felt trapped in this horrible situation where these people were not supporting me, this woman had issues and that was coming out on me. So, I ended up going to the doctor. I think I

ended up seeing a therapist or a counsellor for a few months, just a community-based talking therapy thing for a few months ... that was like a really, really low point.

Emotional and psychological distress is recognised as linked to the impact of micro-aggressions in the workplace (Smith & Griffiths, 2022). Erika's non-prototypicality positioned her as a target for aggression and microaggression, which she was expected to tolerate. Erika's story is an example which illuminates how "many Black women have mastered the art of portraying strength while concealing trauma" (Abrams et al., 2019, p. 518) in the guise of the Black woman stereotype of "Superwoman" or "Strong Black Woman" schema, which is an overwhelming and unrelenting expectation that Black women face to maintain. Black women have to appear "strong, unfazed and non-threatening in order to survive" (Johnson et al., 2020, p. 167) in their workplaces. The pressure to appear strong and conceal their trauma makes capable and professional Black women educators consider their positions in the teaching profession, as articulated by Afa and Erika making decisions to move on to another school.

Where Black women educators' wellbeing is not catered for, there is a risk of attrition and loss of highly capable staff members (Milner, 2020). Nicole left the teaching profession but still works in the field of education. Further, Black women educators can hold key knowledge and understanding related to local minority ethnic communities (including and beyond Black communities), which when lost can potentially diminish trust and confidence between school and minority ethnic communities. When a Black woman educator is sufficiently harmed by structurally derived oppressions within her school that results in her leaving, it harms the minority ethnic communities that turned to her as a racialised advocate for their children.

Conclusion

This article provides a platform for four Black women educators from various parts of England and at differing stages of their careers to share examples of intersectional invisibility they experienced in their schools. The stories identified in this article powerfully illustrate how the actions of prototypical social group members within school environments manifest in these four Black women educators' everyday workplace experiences of hindrance and harm due to their non-prototypicality. The Black women's individual stories illuminated experiences of the invisible/hyper-visible dichotomy impeding career progression, undertaking invisible work, assumptions about their legitimacy in school spaces and wellbeing concerns. Despite this, Lisa, Afa, Nicole, and Erika continue to work in education, although not all of them in schools, demonstrating their commitment to the field and to children's learning in the communities in which they work.

Organisations consistently perform better with a diverse and developed workforce (McGregor-Smith, 2017). Intersectionality as an analytic framework provides a rationale to change the status quo (Stockfelt, 2018) through critical citizenry (Harris & Leonardo, 2018), where school leaders can drive for structural and cultural change within school spaces to be more inclusive of their Black staff. To improve the experiences of Black women educators in the workplace, there must first be acknowledgement that their

experiences are different to other social groups, leading to intervention strategies that include and support Black women in their roles and aspirations. In signposting school leaders towards ways of making genuine structural changes within school environments to become more inclusive for their Black women educators, the work of Tereshchenko et al. (2020) provides recommendations that can shape localised policies and practice to support the recruitment and retention of racially minoritised educators more broadly. These recommendations are therefore useful to consider in addressing the intersectional invisibility experienced by Black women educators specifically. Firstly, they suggest that school leaders demonstrate experience, training, and skills to develop equitable environments. By undertaking training in race equality and social justice, school leaders are better able to address the existence and impact of microaggressions and stereotypes on their Black women staff. Secondly, they recommend racially minoritised staff are developed and supported through high-quality mentoring schemes, improved working conditions and opportunities for career development, echoing the recommendations by Young and Easton-Brooks (2020). Finally, they suggest that progression into leadership by racially minoritised staff is placed on the policy agenda. This action should enable school leaders to consider how to conduct more transparent promotion practices and provide robust and supportive feedback to guide Black women educators to future success.

Advocacy for Black women educators is more likely to be derived from those school leaders who are prepared to step away from the headteachers' prototypical group values (Elonga Mboyo, 2019) to combat the behaviours that manifest in the intersectional invisibility experienced by Black women educators in school spaces. Adopting leadership characteristics that are transformational, mitigate against stereotyping, foster inclusive environments where everyone feels welcome, practice democratic leadership, and cultivate trust are key to equitable and fully inclusive schools (Vassallo, 2022). As Black women educators contribute to the success of underrepresented learner groups (Samuels et al., 2021), there are significant institutional benefits to reducing Black women educator attrition, increasing representation at all levels, and improving their wellbeing, given that pupil bodies, particularly in urban schools, are becoming increasingly diverse.

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