

Denison University

Denison Digital Commons

Faculty Publications

2023

Black Women's Relational Competencies and Ethical Leadership in the Workplace

S. Alease Ferguson

Toni C. King
Denison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.denison.edu/facultypubs>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ferguson, S.A., & King, T.C. (2023). Black Women's Relational Competencies and Ethical Leadership in the Workplace. *Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships* 9(3), 239-272. <https://doi.org/10.1353/bsr.2023.0012>.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Denison Digital Commons.



PROJECT MUSE®

Black Women's Relational Competencies and Ethical Leadership in the Workplace

S. Alease Ferguson, Toni C. King

Journal of Black Sexuality and Relationships, Volume 9, Number 3-4,
Winter-Spring 2023, pp. 239-272 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/bsr.2023.0012>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/885740>

Black Women's Relational Competencies and Ethical Leadership in the Workplace

S. ALEASE FERGUSON AND TONI C. KING

Abstract: Three qualitative case vignettes illustrate Black women leaders' application of relational competencies to assert culturally informed ethical values in organizational life. Theoretical frameworks of Patricia Hill Collins' (1994) theory of motherwork and Wilfred Bion's (1991) psycho-dynamics theory of group development guide the analysis of Black women's relational competencies. Methodologically, the data derive from the authors' use of phenomenological review of over three decades of corporate and non-profit consultancies. This methodology entailed uncensored story generation relative to the topic and culling of the story set guided by a rubric to screen for story features that exemplify group and relational competencies and ethical leadership. Findings identified recurring relational leadership themes of 1) Creating Safe Space for Breaking Silences, 2) Interrupting the Unsaid in Organizational Life and 3) Framing Organizational Dynamics within His/herstories of Injustice. Implications of these case findings for Black women's ethical leadership at the level of group relational competencies for 21st century organizations are shared.

Keywords: Black women, leadership, group dynamics, relational skills, workplace

Contact: Toni C. King, kingt@denison.edu; S. Alease Ferguson- dr.aleaseferguson@gmail.com

Connected Knowing and the Intimacies of Leadership: Black Women's Relational Competencies in the Workplace

It is our observation that today's labor market is in a state of peril. The COVID 19 Pandemic, the great resignation, gun violence, economic recession and wars on various continents, inflationary costs, supply chain issues, and the absence of skilled workers on the ground, the ripple effect of climate change conditions of commerce and industry, and other destabilizing conditions have ramifications on both the labor force as well as those who lead organizations today. Amid these increasingly turbulent conditions bearing down on organizations, we see an urgent need for ethical leadership. There is a need for leaders who can achieve the pragmatic purposes of the organization (e.g., profit, high quality of goods or services, etc.), but challenge organizational practices not aligned with the company mission, or ethical principles for achieving those ends. How can organizations find and cultivate leaders able to make complex decisions and usher through new approaches to new problems beyond the business-as-usual win-lose models? How can organizations develop, support and reward leaders able to withstand various forms of group-think in managerial suites? What are the skill sets that constitute leadership capacities so needed during this second decade of the millennium? And what are the ethical principles that inform models of leadership that generate and support human thriving vs. continuation of destructive, short-term profit orientations?

In this paper we argue that Black women apply practices that respond to those questions by incorporating ethical leadership principles in the workplace. We further assert that the practices Black women utilize constitute a well-honed relational skill set that we refer to as relational competencies. The purpose of this article is to provide examples that convey some of the complexities of this skill set. Because the skills Black women apply derive from their cultural socialization as Black women, they are not readily visible, recognized or understood in white normative settings and have not been consistently validated as forms of leadership. Through the presentation of three case studies, we intend to show the complexity of these skill sets in Black women's lived experience.

Finally, this article gives qualitative evidence of Black women's relational competencies as serving two purposes. First, they employ these competencies to uphold ethical values in the resolution of organizational issues. Second, they humanize the process of delivering on organizational goals so

that people thrive in the process. Here we refer to both the inward-facing (employees, co-workers, executive level professionals, etc.) and outward facing (e.g., customers, clients, communities affected by the industry, etc.) individuals and communities. The relational competency skill set we elucidate is informed by a cultural socialization centered in a womanist world view and a Black feminist politics that universally values human life (Myers et al., 2018; Walker, 1984).

Problem

The problem this article addresses is the dearth of attention given to the micro processes of Black women's relational competencies in the workplace. Leadership literature in general has historically taken a dichotomous approach to leadership. This vast body of work has for several decades created a binary between task achievement and interpersonal effectiveness. Task oriented success has been normalized and valorized. These behaviors and styles have been conceptualized as structural, instrumental, task and outcome oriented (Wren, 1995). This cluster of skill sets has also been assumed as the normal purview of male leaders. Such behaviors were first studied in organizations (e.g., corporations, industries and the military) in which males predominated as managers and executives. Hence, the frameworks that originally guided the study of organizational leadership were informed by male centered thinking and validated on disproportionately male populations (Bell, Denton & Nkomo, 1993; Wren, 1995).

In contrast, women's leadership has been associated with interpersonal behaviors and styles deemed: cooperative, collaborative, consultative, facilitative, interactive and the like (Wren, 1995). While research has shown that all genders can and do draw upon the full spectrum of human behaviors, this perceived dichotomy persists (Rosner, 1995) to some extent. Research has progressed in acknowledging the importance of relationships in such areas as Transforming and Transformational Leadership (Branche, 2014), in the exponential growth of such areas as Emotional Intelligence and Leadership (Porter, 2017) and in areas such as Critical Leadership Theory (Collinson, 2011). However, there is a dearth of attention paid to the everyday behaviors at the micro level of how leaders navigate work groups and particularly when seeking to alter the vision or goal of those groups toward ethical ends. Both vision shaping and influencing others—be it laterally (co-workers) or vertically (co-workers above and below that of the

leader) is understudied in general. In the case of Black women, this topic is sorely lacking in research and literature. This article seeks to reposition this kind of leadership as critically important to contemporary organizations.

Significance

As mentioned in our introduction today's organizations face severe competition for survival. As such their press to survive may supersede their ability to steer a clear course toward fulfilling their missions in ways that demonstrate ethics of humane care. Care that extends across the categories of employees and the clientele they purport to serve. Factors that undermine human thriving are often initiated at the macro level—precipitated by the executive class who hold the lion's share of the power. Yet, more often than not, the first appearance of dehumanizing behaviors and dynamics occur at the group level of the everyday. Organizational policies and dictates from the top, often show up in interpersonal relationships where they become normalized in group culture. Indicative behaviors include: silencing, lack of transparency—particularly regarding hiring, incentives and the doling out of rewards and punishments, excessive labor utilization, i.e., overwork, rigidity in implementing policies and procedures, over-policing of employee behavior, disrespecting professional standards, unnecessary pitting of employees against each other and other forms of win-lose competition, to name a few. Group dynamics are, therefore, a tale-tale sign of ethically dysfunctional organizational culture set in motion when there is a lack of care for the human implications.

Like many other highly sophisticated and nuanced areas, however, the group level of organizational leadership has gone understudied in organizational literature. One reason for this is the difficulty of researching the group level of organizational life via positivist research methods often deemed more valuable within masculinized hierarchies of knowledge and the business interests that often push for organizational research. The limited study of group level leadership practices reduces the knowledge available to us about leadership at the everyday level of relational practices. For Black women leaders who demonstrate efficacy at this level of competence (Parker, 2004; Hughes, 2014) their models of leadership practice remain even more invisible.

Beyond bringing the knowledge of Black women's relational leadership practices into the conversation, this article builds on the intellectual conver-

sation. This article also reveals ethical principles embedded in Black women's leadership. In a world plagued by individual leaders and/or leadership teams resolutely disregarding principles of care for human consequences, the need for leadership anchored in ethical values is dire. In this article, we draw upon theory that articulates the ways Black cultural socialization for Black women includes tutelage in ethical accountability for self and others (Hill Collins 1998; King and Ferguson, 2011). We take the opportunity in this article to illustrate the relationship between Black women's relational competencies in the workplace and their culturally informed values and ethical mooring. Ultimately, we assert that the kinds of competencies Black women are often taught to incorporate into their leadership forge the ability to stand in opposition to human disregard. The need for leaders who can hold an ethical commitment and shape the everyday workgroup toward outcomes that align with human thriving is one of the most far-reaching critical implications of this study.

Key Concepts and Background

Before going further, it is important for us to define key concepts beginning with leadership itself. Our definition of leaders is: processes used by individuals or groups to influence the social world based on 1) an intention or vision, 2) an approach to influencing others, and 3) the agency to act. To further clarify, we define relational intimacies as: using interpersonal behavior to cultivate conditions for individuals and groups to thrive in the pursuit of collective goals. We view relational competencies as the set of interpersonal skills and that create intimacies (i.e., trust, openness, cooperation, shared goals and visions, etc.).

More specifically relational competencies are skill sets that result in group process that liberate people to be authentic in contexts that support fair and just human thriving (e.g., sufficient resources for everyone to thrive, fulfill their assigned responsibilities, and be treated justly, fairly and with respect). These skill sets foster open dialogue and truth-telling, personal and collective accountability, and an ethic of care within the immediate group or relational exchange. Moreover, these humanizing processes make resolution of ethical issues likely when combined with an ethic of care (Bass, 2009; Smit and Scherman, 2016) that seeks justice within the context of the existing power relations. All elements of our definition are informed by Hill Collin's canonical theory of a Black feminist epistemology (Hill Collins,

1989) widely used as an interdisciplinary framework that is highly regarded for its meaningful interpretation of Black women's relational practices. Key to Hill Collins theory is its rootedness in an individual and collective liberatory agency—an orientation by Black and/or Africana Diasporic women's agreement that the liberation of *all* peoples is paramount. Even with the emphasis on universal human liberation, this worldview is built on the cornerstone that it is important attend to the oppressed within our society and to be advocates and allies in their liberation efforts. Finally, this worldview gives Black women full credence to advocate fiercely for Black women, themselves.

Review of Relevant Literature

Black Women's Leadership in the Workplace

It is highly documented in the literature that Black women's presence is met with a range of potent and persistent stereotypes that affect them in society in general and in the workplace in particular. The stereotypes of the mammy, the matriarch or Sapphire, and the Jezebel have been shown time and again to afflict Black women in organizations with hostility, daily micro-aggressions and discrimination (Mullings, 1994; Harris Perry, 2011; Wingfield, 2007; Wingfield, 2020). Not only are Black women's daily work experiences affected by racist and racialized encounters, but their leadership is as well. All aspects of a Black woman's leadership presence are affected by the comprehensive reach of institutionalized racism into the realms of workplace participation—including hiring, promotion, and the daily execution of workplace responsibilities.

Despite the barriers to their inclusion and navigation of the workplace, Black women continue a work presence within the labor force and apply leadership in the workplace. Studies that corroborate Black women's leadership approaches and effectiveness cover a broad swath of research on organizations. Most commonly Black women's leadership is studied in social movement spaces, community development contexts, and the non-profit sector such as social services, education, and to a lesser extent the military, government and politics (Allen, 2017; Gause, 2021; Grillo, et al 2022). When these settings are studied—researchers have found Black women leaders incorporating the ethical principles that construct their leadership. Their leadership confirms the presence of cultural principles listed previously in this

article. The research show evidence that they intentionally express a vision to create conditions that allow individuals to thrive because the entire collective benefits. Research has variously referred to Black women's leadership along these lines as: visionary pragmatism (Hill Collins, 1998), the desire to "lift as we climb" and other notions of collective uplift (Gilkes, 2001). Other studies focus on the Black women's interpersonal skills and ability to create connections across various groups to develop community networks, build bridges between groups for resource sharing, and to mobilize groups toward a collective vision (Robnett, 1996).

When Black women's leadership in the private sector is studied the research tends to focus on Black women's abilities to balance interpersonal skills such as collaboration, connection, mentoring and developing others. A key study by Patricia Parker (2004) in which she interviewed fifteen Black women executives and their co-workers, found that Black women "embraced" dualities in their approach. That is, they could not be relegated to the binary of masculine instrumentality or feminine collaboration. Rather they had constructed their own approach that created a "both/and" practice of leadership. Parker's data revealed that Black women exerted "control" by empowering others and building community. Pertinent to this study is that both strategies are relational and require Black women's depth of interpersonal and group dynamics skills.

Another key study by Clareth Hughes (2014) found that Black American women in Fortune and non-Fortune 500 companies bring distinct interpersonal skills. Her data confirm that these skills are developed in Black family and community contexts. Moreover, her research lends further evidence to the ways Black women fulfill a both/and agenda of contributing to the financial success of their organizations while also helping others succeed, solving problems for the organizations, and enhancing the workplace culture and environment. Finally, her data reveal that Black women leaders demonstrated emotional intelligence in the implementation of their leadership by how they worked with others (Hughes, 2014).

Hughes' data also speak to undeserved challenges and barriers Black women encounter in the conduct of their leadership. Documentation of barriers to Black women's success are pervasive in studies over the past several decades (Smith and Nkomo, 2021; Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Wingfield, 2020, Erskine et al., 2021). Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this article to cover the pervasive documentation of barriers to leadership incentives and rewards (Frye, 2019; Guilane, 2021). Suffice it to say that

Black women leaders face a barrage of discriminatory dynamics that affect hiring and representation throughout the professions. Moreover, their leadership contributions are commonly met with backlash, and negative sanctions even when they have made documented contributions of excellence to organizational goals (Lloyd, 2021; Lean In, 2020; Wingfield, 2020).

Motherwork as Ethical Leadership Development

When research provides any contextual information about how Black women come to develop their relational approaches and the ethical leadership values that inform them, the primacy of the Motherline is apparent (Trotman, 2011; King and Ferguson, 2011; O'Reilly, 2004; Lee, 2021). The qualitative and quantitative data confirm the paradigm Hill Collins, bell hooks, Alice Walker, and other scholars theorize using interpretive methods. Black women's socialization transmits an ethical value set Black women apply in their leadership. Missing in the literature is qualitative data describing the demonstration of this ethical leadership model at the level of group relations. We contend that the group is the unit of analysis that reveals the skill set of relational intimacies and the consequent ethical aims and outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

In order to reveal and theorize the experiences of Black peoples, it is necessary to work with the theories that legitimize the self-defining knowledge productions of their making. For this reason, we draw on theoretical frameworks centered in Black women's experiences and informed by Black women's voices. A world view distinct to Black women has been theorized for many decades (Hill Collins 1989; Trotman, 2011). These scholars have established the ways Black women's positionality within at least two groups to which stigmatized status is ascribed—Blackness and womanness—compel them to develop survival skills in response to their marginalized status and its accompanying oppressions. One such skill set is the ability to perceive the world in ways that are informed by one's race, gender, and other dimensions of identity including class, sexual identity, ethnicity, able-bodiedness, nationality, religion and the like. This skill set has been previously theorized as a kind of double consciousness (DuBois, 1903), multiple consciousness (King, 1988), biculturalism (Bell, 1990), multi contextualism (Jackson, 2017). Often the concept of multiple consciousness is applied to Black women because it helps to explain how Black women's race and gender enhances

their capacity to understand the dynamics of oppression. King (1988) refers to this phenomenon as “multiple jeopardy,” and argues that those who experience multiple jeopardies often develop a “multiple consciousness”—a multivalent understanding and awareness that multiple systems of inequality work with and through one another (King, 1988, p. 42). All of these constructs when applied to Black women can be used to argue that a Black woman’s race and gender are likely to create life experiences that inform her understanding of her own and other’s lives.

In addition to the relationship between Black women’s identities and multiple consciousness, scholars theorize Black cultural approaches to the socialization of Black girls and women. Black culture within the U.S. and throughout the Diaspora have adapted mechanisms to counter colonization. One such mechanism is the customization of socialization for youth to make it gender specific. Ultimately the goal is to teach Black girls and Black boys respectively what they need to know to survive and engage in collective resistance. For Black girls, cultural knowledge systems take place in designated spaces, practices and traditions in which motherline tutelage is dispensed by a collective of mothers, othermothers, community mothers and the like (King and Ferguson, 2011). These spaces and traditions are variously described as: kitchen table discourse (Haddix et al., 2016), truth-telling othermothers who view all the children as “their own” (Story, 2014), sisterlocking discourses¹ Lee (2021) in which Black women bring a perspective that “has little to do with hair” and more to do with “whose standards . . . determine the technologies and economies of administrative arenas (p. 27).” In such spaces of socialization, Black girls are taught the idiomatic principles and values to undergird leadership and the skill sets that will prepare them to participate in organizational life as Black women. At the same time, they learn to question dehumanizing aspects of organizational life. And they are guided in developing generative or life-giving approaches to the work they are charged to complete.

For example, the space of hair care and styling is a space that goes beyond the materiality of hair. This intimate space whether commercial salon, big mama’s kitchen, or a college dorm room offers a multitude of cultural functions and values transmission to Black girls across the generational lines of sister friend peers to othermothers and elders. In the space of hair-care[ing], valuable support for individual wellness takes place in the company of other women and a context of deep care. This private space serves the psycho-social functions of a safe same race-gender sanctum for the dis-

penetration of wisdom, political strategies for navigating race and gender in the world, affirming of positive body image, crafting one's beauty aesthetic, decoding of gender and sexual politics across the spectrum binary or non-binary conforming intimate relations. "Doing hair" and other sites of Black woman-to-Black woman tutelage and support, prepares girls to internalize values that infuse their leadership. Within such spaces of cultural transmission, African American and Africana Diasporic cultures pass on worldview assumptions that bear the imprint of the culture's approach to knowledge, relationships, and ethics to name a few.

One underlying tenet within Black cultural epistemology that can shape one's ethical orientation is the notion of diunital thinking. In such a worldview, seeming opposites need not be approached as mutually exclusive. Rather—the union of opposites or diunital thinking is a necessary and creative approach to all aspects of life (Myers et al., 2018). Here it is important to emphasize research that documents Black women's ability to bring new insights to the workplace. We avoid the essentializing notion that all Black women bring "the same" distinct culturally informed skill set. Yet we do assert that shared cultural conditions mean that many Black women have been exposed to some common features of socialization. A both/and approach is common within Black cultural expressions of all kinds: art, language, artifacts, stories. Yet the main thrust of a both/and approach to thinking is that one tends to disrupt binaries of "either/or" with both/and. Issues and problems posed as win/lose or as dominant/subordinate or success/failure—can be reframed quickly into a new vision that seeks some ground between winning and losing or dominance and subordination. The implications of this culturally informed socialization to think beyond the binary are profound for those in leadership roles.

We share this information to set the context for one of the responses within Black culture to the ever-present specter of racism and its differential effects on Black boys, Black girls and Black queer youth across genders. One response from Black culture exists in the ways the culture has adapted the deep structure of its internal world view to support Black youth during early socialization through maturation into adulthood and across the life span to withstand racism in all its forms. Known in contemporary theory as cultural resilience (Walls, 2017; Chance, 2021; Dillard, 2016), these cultural forms have evolved across generations. The purpose of this socialization is to teach each generation how to withstand the ever-morphing racism of their respective era and find ways to lead healthy and agentic lives.

Among Black women there is a process of socialization that fulfills this cultural agenda for survival, efficacy and thriving that is geared toward Black women and girls. This gender specific socialization process includes a component that aims to develop the leadership of Black girls and women. Here the intention is to not only help Black girls and women withstand the ravages of intergenerational racism and its place in the larger matrix of oppressions, but to contribute to the survival of Black communities along with the survival of universal humanity. A Black woman's leadership that emerges from this philosophical worldview is always intended to humanize individuals, groups, and communities so that all benefit from fair and just social outcomes, and also experience foundational human care and regard.

Motherwork

The teaching of this world view is theorized and documented within the literature as motherwork and motherline tutelage. The motherline refers to the culturally specific genealogy of women past and present who collectively share in the socialization of each generation in ways specialized for their identities across gender, and sexuality, and tailored to their stage of life. Patricia Hill Collins (2019) offers three vital theoretical constructs that outline social support and guidance Black cultures provide to Black women. The constructs include: 1) Motherwork/Other mothering, 2) Resistant Knowledge, and 3) Relationality.

Motherwork, as defined by Patricia Hill Collins (1991;1994); Ruddick & Collins's (1994) discussion of maternal thinking, connects motherhood as an institution to resist manifestations of empire, racism, classism, and heteronormativity. Hill Collins expands upon understandings and meanings of motherhood as evidenced in concepts such as "othermothering" (1994, p. 178) and "mothering of the mind" (Hill Collins, 1994, p. 187; Washington, 1984, p.144). In her multifaceted analysis and reconceptualization of the institution of motherhood, she presents mothers in a national, transnational, and transformative context. Accordingly, Hill Collins describes how motherwork spans the settings of the family to develop community and communality. It also supports relationship-building and change activities that strengthen the social infrastructure and opportunity structure for the oppressed.

More recently, Patricia Hill Collins coined the term "Resistant Knowledge Projects" (Collins, 2019, p. 116). She theorizes that intellectual resis-

tance can never be devoid of experience, community, and relationships. Rather, the relationship-building and change activities that strengthen the social infrastructure and opportunity structure for the oppressed must be a part of the intellectual resistance knowledge production. Overall, subordinated and marginalized people develop the kinds of knowledge, discourses, and intellectual tools to oppose the social inequalities and injustices that target them. Such projects address their deep-seated concerns within the domestic and global expressions of racism, sexism, capitalism, colonialism, and similar political domination and economic exploitation systems. “Because Black women experienced race/class domination in gender-specific ways, they were better positioned to see how gender and sexuality affected their lives within intersecting oppressions of racism and capitalism” (Hill Collins, 2019, p. 159) and have actively participated in defining and creating forms of resistance to such oppression.

Hill Collins argues that the social action of Black women, arising from their positionalities in society is itself a “way of knowing” (Hill Collins, 2019, p. 156). She suggests that analysis of power relations and discrimination is a requisite aspect of what she refers to as intellectual resistance (Hill Collins, 2019 p. 86). In this article, we contend that Black women use the benefits of their cultural socialization to Black feminist ways of knowing in the service of intellectual resistance on the ground in group and organizational life.

As the leading scholar who has forged the foundational paradigm regarding Black women’s culturally informed leadership, Patricia Hill Collins, attests to the centrality of relationality in Black women’s leadership. She refers to Black women’s approach to leadership as a “visionary pragmatism,” a theory of justice that fosters an “intense connectedness” (Hill Collins, 1998). She writes about this visionary pragmatism as an approach based on a love ethic that aims for a universal humanism while simultaneously concerned with the communal and spiritual needs of oppressed people (Hill Collins, 1998; hooks, 2004; Walker, 1984, Trotman, 2011).

These worldview values include the following attributes that are confirmed repeatedly within worldview paradigms of Black feminist thought (Hill Collins, 1997, Myers et al., 2018) and Black womanist thought, and now emerging in Africana Diasporic feminisms are summarized below:

- Leadership that values dialogue to understand the needs of those affected by the leadership (e.g., co-workers above and below, all stakeholders, the public).

- Leadership that values truth telling and truth hearing so that there is open communication, breaking of silences that obstruct trust and necessary knowledge for problem solving and decision making.
- Leadership that foregrounds care and responsibility for human well-being, long-term thriving and just outcomes.
- Leadership that values holding self and others accountable.
- Leadership that is expressive, creative, generates innovation, open to risk taking, courageous or bold—particularly when the outcomes could have great benefit to the collective (e.g., the community, the corporation, humanity).
- Leadership that seeks to bridge divisions, reconcile ruptured relations between individuals and groups; or to restore lost trust, hope, belief that one can have human regard or justice within the context at hand.

These are prominent recurring themes in the literature on Black women's leadership. Succinctly summarized, Black women's leadership is commonly centered in relationships of authentic connection. Summarily, we argue that Black women's positionality and socialization cultivate an urgent ethical imperative that they bring to their leadership. However, there is a need to know more about how this ethical system plays out in Black women's workplace relations.

Group Dynamics Theory and Relational Competencies

The second part of our theoretical framework lies in group dynamics theory. It behooves all of us to understand group dynamics and yet few people are exposed to time-proven theories about group behavior. As credentialed clinical practitioners, we draw upon psycho-dynamic group theory in the tradition of Wilfred R. Bion, and Philip Slater. In general, the psycho-dynamic school of thought asserts that humans are often driven by unconscious thought and needs that arise from their earliest experiences of relationships—usually with their primary caregivers such as parents and family members upon whom they relied for care, upbringing and survival.

Our need to draw upon psychological theory creates an interdisciplinary contribution to the field of sociology. Sociology of groups often uses

the macro-unit of group belonging (e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, nationality) to predict and explain how external forces and structures influence the behavior of large demographics or identity groups (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; 1964; Guitart & Ratner, 2011; and Theriault, 2015) When the field of sociology examines intra-group behavior—it seeks to determine how external conditions shape such things as power, competition, affiliation and the like. Our study intersects the sociological study of groups by exploring how Black women respond to external conditions such as organizational policies, practices, culture and norms. More importantly, our study looks at how Black women’s leadership reveals itself within groups.

This work resides in the tradition of micro-group behavior studies within organizational sociology. We integrate the social psychology and the sociology of groups by drawing upon group psycho-dynamics theory to interpret the impact of Black women’s leadership on the work group and organizational culture. Our three case studies apply the lens of Bion’s group dynamics theory to explore: How do Black women frame and identify issues of responsibility and care arising in the everyday of organizational life? How do Black women navigate relationally to resolve ethical issues arising in organizational life?

Our analysis of the case studies that follow applies theory from a classic time-tested group framework by Wilfred R. Bion (1991; 1961; 2004 eBook). In his “Theory of Assumptive Cultures” he delineates some of the abiding features of group life and development. Using voluminous clinical data from Bion identified recurring themes indicative of the emotional states of groups. He called these largely unconscious states basic assumptions and found that they characterized the general tone and climate within a group at any given time.

Bion asserts that “inside every group are two groups operating first as the workgroup and secondly as the primary assumption group” (1961; 1991; 2004 eBook, pp. 146–155). The primary assumption group operates as an overlay of powerful group level, largely *unconscious* needs (e.g., to feel safe as a group, to feel trust in the leadership, etc.). The second group—the workgroup—are those same members and their *conscious* understandings and intentions. The work group is hired and assigned specific responsibilities to accomplish the company’s purpose.

Bion further theorizes that the group entity is often hierarchical—whether formalized or informally—and composed of both the leadership

and its regular members. Three basic premises of group life are described by Bion as characterizing the primary assumptions group: 1) dependency, 2) fight-flight, and 3) pairing. The stage of Dependency is often motivated by unconscious needs to belong, to perceive that there is strong leadership that provides clarity for how members can gain inclusion and be rewarded socially or materially. Conversely the leader is perceived as meting out sanctions and punishments. The Fight-Flight stage is based on the unconscious needs for group members to feel that the leader (whether formal or informal) is strong enough to protect members individually and collectively from perceived internal or external threats to the group. In the workplace this translates into a leader who can procure social and material resources and incentives. When anxieties arise in this group, members fight for power, dominance, or behave in “flight” to avoid conflict. Finally, the Pairing group emerges as a stage characterized by a motivation to achieve something bigger than any one individual. In this group collaboration is often high, and the hope for some great product, innovation, or achievement drives the group forward to become more than the sum of its parts. Groups—usually motivated by fears, anxieties or threats—succumb to these basic assumptions in ways that interfere with the tasks that the group is mandated to accomplish.

We view Bion’s work as particularly amenable to interpreting the subtleties of Black women’s navigation of intra- and inter-group dynamics. By taking courageous stances and persisting in the face of race-gender backlash, we have observed Black women ushering remarkable outcomes through the organizational chain of command. This entails a knowledge of deep seated conscious and unconscious within and between-group needs and motivations. Regardless of one’s ethical leadership vision—one has to influence others. Without relational skills applied at the level of the group—whether peer groups, subordinate groups, groups comprised of the power elites (e.g., upper administration, executive suite), there can be no leadership.

Methodology and Case Study Data

We draw upon over three decades of leadership development work with women and women of color, as well as our work as organizational consultants individually and together. Across the decades of our work, we have recorded auto-ethnographic notes and written extensively about

Black women's experiences in the professions and workplace (e.g., King and Ferguson, 2001; Diggs & King 2010; King & Ferguson, 2011; Ferguson & King, 2011). We have also developed qualitative approaches to the systematic excavation of organizational cases and individual sessions with our clients.

For this paper, we replicated a process has been documented in prior research (Ferguson & King, 2014). Our methodology is situated within the broader field of phenomenology. This area of study aims to systematically extract experiential data from either research participants or researchers themselves who have experienced or participated in an event or series of events. Autoethnography is considered to be one of the tools of phenomenology because the researcher reflects on the rich data of their own participant experience. We utilize the tool of autoethnography by reflecting on our work as clinical practitioners and organizational consultants. In addition to our autoethnographic reflections, our method utilizes the broader tradition of phenomenology by developing a process to extract our experiences and interpret them. Groundbreaking sociologist Laurel Richardson has pushed the envelope relative to autoethnography. She urges researchers to use and develop what she calls creative analytic practices in which they employ various forms of writing, mapping, dialogue and the like to unearth their experiential data or to interpret data they have accessed (Richardson, 2009). The method we developed for this study derives of the work of Richardson.

Our process entailed 1) uncensored story generation relative to the topic, 2) Systematic culling of the story set to narrow it down to those illustrating pertinent themes, 3) Creating a phenomenological rubric to use in our individual review of each story. For this paper, the rubric for the stories generated included querying: Which stories conveyed relational competencies and strategies? Which stories centered on Black women's leadership within and or between organizational groups? Within each story, which relational competencies are evident; and what are the characteristics of those competencies? Our final step was to share the stories we individually identified guided by these questions; then selecting from among that collection three illustrations of recurring relational competency themes. We have removed any information that might identify individuals or organizations from the case illustrations in this paper and have created pseudonyms for all organizational actors.

*Relational Competencies and Creating
Safe Space for Breaking Silences*

“When we dare to speak in a liberatory voice, we threaten even those who may initially claim to want our words . . .” (bell hooks, 1989, p. 18)

CASE STUDY 1: COSETTE LAWRENCE

Making Space for Breaking Silences is a dynamic that goes beyond speaking truths. It entails speaking in the right spaces to those who have the power to make changes to the system and speaking in the language that can be heard in such spaces. In this case, manager Cosette Lawrence uses her voice to ensure a silence was broken that would have resulted in health care inequity.

Cosette Lawrence is a senior manager for a large Medicaid Health Insurance carrier. Manager Lawrence identifies as African American, female, and heterosexual whose pronouns are she, her, and hers. She is a middle baby boomer with an MBA and is described by her as a “shelter in the storm” of their personal, professional, and organizational lives and that of many clients. Across the twenty-five years of her career, Wells has used herself as a morale builder and a bulwark against discriminatory hiring and promotional practices, ageism, racism, and trans-hate/discrimination. She has built a solid reputation for creating highly productive and top-grossing teams. Inside the corporation, she has often saved the day by protecting the company from costly discrimination suits and educating the management, the workforce, and network providers. In part, she attributes these successes to ensuring that her staff stays current and versed on all emerging client and community service needs

Jonathan P. is a trans male born as a female. J.P. just received a confirmed positive for pregnancy and was invited to join the plan by his Nurse Case Manager, Carmella. As she prepared the online enrollment application, the IT system kicked it back and disputed the claim on the basis of gender. When contacting IT she received a very curt response bordering on hostile and discriminatory (Obedin-Maliver & Makadon, 2016). Sensing the level of resistance Nurse Case Manager Carmella reported IT’s response to Manager Lawrence. After a brief investigation, she discovered that after providing the system with a user-friendly online tutorial and step-by-step screenshots on

the “HELP” Enrollment form, there was a system error. The program was not designed with a “pregnant male” applicant in mind. Lawrence notified the System’s Administrator and the national Case Management Team of the defect. As the Chair of Customer Service, she informed the President and Committee Leaders of the systems error and called for the Case Managers to submit all pregnant male applicant data to enable her to provide immediate enrollment and prevent discrimination lawsuits. The system’s administrator was enraged by Manager Lawrence’s calling attention to the system error and communicating this error to the upper reaches of management. The insult was furthered by Lawrence taking charge of the process including asking all Case Managers to go back over their service rosters to identify all pregnant males and assure their enrollment in the HELP Program.

As the internal watchdog and Customer Services Committee chair, Lawrence is a proponent of 1) Sex-specific preventive services, including shots and screening tests at no cost when delivered by a doctor or other provider within the plan’s network, 2) ensuring full access to “sex-specific” recommended preventive services regardless of sex assigned at birth, gender identity, or recorded gender. Recently, she designed the company’s established health incentives program for all enrolled pregnant female and trans male consumers to receive a courtesy package of \$600.00 a month called a “Help” stipend combined with various family and baby-friendly coupons. The stipend responds to the growing body of research that suggests that when pregnant individuals do not have to worry about finances, they have better health and birthing outcomes.

Relational Competencies and Silence Breaking

In our analysis, Manager Lawrence worked through the fight/flight stage of group reaction from both IT and upper management when she dared broach the issue of transgender persons exclusion from services. According to The Associated Press (2019), companies need to reduce and eliminate some of the insurance industry’s discriminatory offenses against transgender people. Common barriers to health care coverage can arise in multiple ways such as: Unfiled or denied claims due to transgender-specific exclusions for care related to “transsexualism,” “sex change treatments,” “gender identity disorders” or “transgender care”; Denied medical consultation on preconception counseling (e.g., stopping testosterone while trying to conceive) or pregnancy or post-partum needs (e.g., gender dysphoria during and after pregnancy); Variable prenatal, obstetrical, delivery, and post-

partum care relative to the mode and environment of delivery and potential effects. Care must be provided for such things as post-delivery gender dysphoria, postpartum consultations for chest (breast) feeding options, how and when to reinstitute testosterone. Overall, there must be an affirmation of gender diversity and access to continuing within the provider network's offerings of obstetrical care needs for transgender men and women.

According to Crenshaw, when two identities are present, law or policy is designed to see either one identity *or* the other, rather than the distinct needs produced at the intersection of both (e.g., race and gender or gender and transsexuality or socio-economic class and disability, etc.), such laws and policies fail to consider and serve identities representing such intersections (Crenshaw, 1989 p.139–145). In this case, making space for breaking silences has the additional characteristic Collins (2019) theorizes as “Resistant Knowledge Projects” that address intersectionality. This concept illuminates how critical race studies, feminism, and decolonial knowledge projects oppose the social inequalities affecting their lives as Black people and women.

Lawrence spoke truth to power and stood on principle throughout the phases of group dynamics in which new information might destabilize the implicit consensus of powerholders that they were adequately serving their childbearing clientele. Destabilizing the group dynamic of power holders was fraught with both possibility and threat. Confronted with such dissonance, the top decision makers might regress into Bion's fight/flight group dynamic. According to Bion (1991) this dynamic is characterized by a feeling that something must be met with fight and behaviors of zero-sum/win-lose dominance; or, met with flight and behaviors of avoidance, and non-confrontational passive aggressiveness.

Fortunately, Cosette Lawrence's relational competencies grounded her in the strategy of speaking the truth, holding her ground during the group phase of destabilization and disintegration by upper management, and continuing to focus on and advocate for mission aligned systemic change. While not all advocacy ends in desired outcomes, nor does such breaking of silences guarantee safety from organizational repercussions (e.g., backlash, labeling as difficult, being blackballed from opportunities, or even terminated from one's position)—in this case, the outcome led to desired change. Overall, we use this case to elucidate use of relational competencies bilaterally to understand the subordinate group (trans clientele) and the dominant group (upper management). Armed with an understanding of both groups, Lawrence effectively applied the relational intimacy competencies of silence

breaking by brokering information that was not rising to the level of legibility within the organization's decision-making body. By brokering this information until it could be heard and absorbed, she gave top management an opportunity to close the gap between the stated purpose of the organization (to serve childbearing clients) and learn what kinds of changes must be made to meet the needs of their trans clientele.

Relational Competencies and Interrupting the Unsaid

“. . . and when we speak, we are afraid / our words will not be heard / nor welcomed.” (Lorde, 1997)

CASE STUDY II: LUCINDA DIAMOND

Experientially, most western organizations are white male-driven profit-making structures designed to be antithetical to women and African American women's developmental, inclusion, and advancement needs. Inside the organization, intentional barriers are erected in the form of “what is left unsaid.” When those unsaid and unspoken subject, norms, and assumptions might lead to perpetuation of barriers for women and other minoritized groups, Black women seek to discern what is unsaid within inter or intra group relations and its implications.

Supervisor Lucinda Diamond works for an international religious and charitable organization. Diamond responded to a supervisee's need for assistance in applying “up” for a position within the division. The supervisee—Jeanette Reynolds works in a Human Services capacity and holds an Associate of Arts Certificate and State Licensure in Chemical Dependency Treatment Services-Level II. Throughout her six-year tenure at the agency, she has consistently received high annual performance ratings. As a bonus for optimal performance, she has the opportunity to sign on for additional weekend PRN (“Pro re nata” or “as-needed”) therapy group work during weekends and staffing shortages. When Jeanette decided to apply for the promotion, she found a staunch advocate in Lucinda who believed in cross-training the members of her staffing team to cover all service bases and to keep staff stimulated in the course of their workdays. Knowing the agency's penchant for touting employee credentials, Lucinda realistically prepared Jeanette that the educational requirements gave preference to candidates who had attained master's level credentials and minimally the completion

of a bachelor's degree. Yet, she assured Jeannette of both her advocacy, endorsed her application, and lobbied for her hire into the new role.

Nevertheless, Jeanette's candidacy met pushback from higher-ups who felt she was perfectly placed in her current role and there was no need to tamper with success? Rather than relinquish the goal, Supervisor Diamond advocates in the private chambers of the search process to higher ups in the organization. She speaks to Diamond's on-the-job training preparation, business acumen, and maturity as an internal candidate, using her own credibility to confidently affirm that Jeannette had what it took for the job. Ultimately Jeanette was granted the promotion! This was the first time in memory for the Division that a line staff was promoted up. Subsequently there was a positive residual effect on Jeanette's colleagues who saw first-hand that ascent up the chain was possible.

RELATIONAL COMPETENCIES AND INTERRUPTING THE UNSAID

We use this case to refer to the supervisor's dynamic of interrupting the un-said because of Lucinda's connected knowing at the level of group culture. In this organization as is true in organizations in general, unspoken norms and prior practices carry the day and are assumed normal (Goffman, 1959). When these unspoken norms are explicitly expressed, they are characterized by disaffection often expressed inside conversations in break rooms, at the water cooler, or offsite over a beer. Dialogue to the effect of: "Did you hear that [x] was promoted?" Typical response: "We all knew that was a done deal" are typical of the Dependency stage of group dynamics in which members

Leah Wing (2019), founder of the Social Justice Mediation Institute at UMass Amherst refers to such unspoken narratives that embody the implicit assumptions, expectations, and ideologies of organizational life as "ghost narratives." These narratives are often shared in the form of stories, incidents, or examples that convey knowledge of organizational life and how individuals and groups fare with respect to such things as: Age grading and the removal of Black women and women of color managers over 50 years of age from corner offices or other hard-won attainments 2) Physical appearance, body type, preferred appearance, colorism and other unspoken features desired by organizations, 3) Qualifications, both official and unofficial and the degree to which demonstrated high-level competencies for doing

the job matter, 4) Organizational Support for promotability, the extent to which organizations invest in training, developing and mentoring to promote from within, and 5) Access to resources in terms of who gets what or inclusion with respect to social invitations, mentoring opportunities, and access to news and updates?

Here, supervisor Diamond 1) interprets the unsaid organizational norms and practices including the ghost narratives they produce; and 2) interrupts the unsaid “norms” by advocating for a candidate whose qualifications do not neatly comply with those norms. By advocating for in-house talent, Diamond interrupts the unspoken age ceiling and overvaluing of credentials “on paper” vs. those earned on the job.

In our view, Diamond’s revelation of unspoken norms and intervention to reshape them had group level impacts. The residual heightened morale and hopefulness that emerged in the division are reflective of the Bion’s pairing group. During this stage groups feel that their work is meaningful and a climate of hopefulness that they belong to a community in which their work is valued pervades the group. Sometimes group members move into more autonomous collaborations at the peer level, able to work effectively and find intrinsic motivation for their work because they have sufficient trust that they will be treated fairly, and recognized for their contributions (Bion, 1961, 1991, 2004 eBook, p. 98–102). Thus, Diamond built more functional relational competencies paralleling that of the pairing group’s ethos of hope rather than dis-affectation with the organization.

Framing the Unjust Dynamics within His/Herstories of Injustice

“A keen understanding of history presents solutions to problems’ that the public should know about.”

—Jacqueline Jones, Committee on Women Historians

CASE STUDY III: CORREY WELLS

Director of Nursing, Correy Wells, an African American woman and thirty-year veteran of the field, comes to the support of a young white, first-generation nurse Bethany McConnell. Bethany is in her early thirties, works at a large regional hospital conglomerate and has a decade of specializing in bedside nursing. She began her career as a BSN graduating with a GPA of 3.68. In her most recent pursuit of a master’s degree, she earned a 3.8 GPA, going on to become a Certified Nurse practitioner.

Recently McConnell applied for a supervisory position. After three rigorous two-hour virtually held interviews, she received word that she had not been selected. This was her third trial of being passed over for a supervisory post and a significant pay increase. In each instance Bethany felt the sting of social injustice and the primacy of white male nurses in the field. Her immediate supervisor told her not to worry as she was still young and there would be many opportunities ahead. For Bethany, the decision smacked of gender discrimination. Her seniority and tenure, performance record, preparation, and credentials, far outstripped the white male promoted into the position. Butting up against systemic racism was a difficult battle to fight alone. In response to Bethany's disillusionment, Correy Wells and a village of mentors guided Bethany through this dark moment of her career that threatened to derail her belief that she might attain upward mobility across the career trajectory of a vocation she loved. Wells also prepared her for the challenges and critical choice points ahead and discusses a strong resistance and self-advocacy approach to the situation.

Known as "the big boss," Nursing Director Wells was concerned about retaining such an exceptional nurse who might be discouraged to the point of leaving the field altogether. Wells was aware of the worldwide factors of a nursing shortage, the post-pandemic "Great Resignation," and the collective awareness of what discriminatory rejection does to the heart.

Awareness of this kind of recurring historical workplace discrimination informed Bethany's group level intervention. She asked Bethany to provide her with a three-month window to initiate change and make inroads on organizational equity in hiring and promotions that might shift the repeated factors that appeared to create a wall to Bethany's opportunity. Second, Well's developed a presentation to the hospital's Personnel Committee to create shared knowledge about equity and upward mobility in nursing and how it played out in the current corporate setting. In her presentation, she presented company statistics and the real impact of talent attrition on the aggrieved workers, the system, and the surrounding service communities. Beyond providing this learning context for the company, she sought and received approval for the Associate Director of Nursing position and hand-picked McConnell as her assistant. As her protégé, Bethany attains a significant pay increase, management experience, training opportunities relative to student nurse education, exposure to equitable hiring practices, and patient diversity concerns.

This case exemplifies the appropriate relational competencies for Bion's early stage of group development—the Dependency. This stage is characterized by intense dependent attachment to the group leader as an authority figure. It goes without saying that there are appropriate levels of dependency on designated leaders. At the same time, when leaders are seen as incapable of providing resources—whether material, intellectual, emotional—morale and group climate can dissolve. The skillful leader draws upon their connected knowing to assess and gauge what members of their group require and what the group (e.g., department or unit of the company) as a whole needs to feel that leadership both “has their back” while simultaneously setting firm boundaries as they learn the ropes. In many organizations, the formulation of a professional career will only be successful if one is “picked up” by an insider with the power to mentor one through the early years. In the case of talented professionals on the rise, this early mentorship can be crucial in setting that individual on a course of upward success. Correy Wells's identification of Bethany as a mentee interrupted the potential risks of career shut down or exit from the profession.

Interestingly, cases that appear to be individual outliers are often part of a larger workplace pattern, particularly for members of minoritized groups. Literature documents the critical role that mentoring plays in the careers of women and BIPOC employees, particularly in health care professions (Pfifer, 2022). It is likely Wells drew upon her multiple consciousness to understand and cultivate relationships with women and other minoritized groups. Through her own identity she was able to leverage knowledge about the experiences of those who fall between the cracks and who do not have access to the same race or same race-gender mentors, and sponsorship.

Whether Wells verbalized the injustice of minoritized women's workplace experiences, her from the positionality of Blackness and womanhood made her aware of the cost to Bethany's psyche of becoming invisible in her quest for career mobility. Moreover, the history of unjust hiring, employment, and promotion practices allowed her to see not only how Bethany might feel observing other less credentialed employees be promoted, but the macro trends of hiring discrimination that minoritized groups have experienced. Wells' awareness of this history of injustice gave her a heightened sense of the consequences for women, first gen college degree earners, and other groups at risk for occupational discrimination. The labor markets' larger history

informed her quick action. In her actions one can see both an ethic of care at the individual level, and an intellect of resistance at the institutional level regarding gender discrimination.

Implications

Resocialization, Support, and Reconciliation the Workplace

“Separation weakens. It is the main way we are kept (and keep each other) in conditions of oppression.”

—adrienne maree brown

In this article, we argue and illustrate Black women’s relational competencies enliven and humanize organizational life. When individuals have the skills to understand what is occurring at the dynamic level of group life, they can use relational knowledge to promote workplace intimacies. Anchored in ethical principles that uphold human thriving along with organizational purposes, Black women demonstrate both/and or diunital thinking. These group level relational skill sets are not typically discussed with nuance in our U.S. culture that valorizes individual attainment, and hero/sheroism. When they are discussed, they are relegated to the reductionist discourse of “team-oriented” or “interpersonal skills.” These competencies are all too commonly seen as “soft skills” devalued by organizations as somehow mutually exclusive of the “hard skills” of task orientation and goal achievement (Wren, 1995). Such devaluation renders the work of Black women leaders invisible. It damages their perceived contributions to the enduring purposes of the organization by both demanding their emotional labor and then excluding them from recognition for it. Finally, such devaluation makes their culturally relevant diunital thinking and approaches illegible within organizations and discomfiting to those in power who are socialized to see and value only behaviors viewed as normative within the dominant white paradigm.

In contrast, we reclaim and resituate the relational labors of Black women within the discourses of leadership theory. We add further nuance that qualitative data brings to the study of Black women’s leadership (Parker, 2004; Iheduru-Anderson, Okoro & Moore, 2022; Jang & Alexander, 2022). The cases in this paper illustrate Black women’s relational competencies to effect ethical outcomes while simultaneously serving organizational aims (e.g.,

serving clients, selling products, increasing profits). In contrast, we assert that Black women's relational leadership competencies integrate both tasks and relationships to ultimately resolve disruptive relational dynamics, diminish the likelihood of discrimination, harassment, bullying of employees and prevent the need for legal action against the organization. Such leadership is grounded in culturally relevant ethical values that show up in how Black women incorporate humanizing norms in their mentoring, coaching, and education of colleagues, co-workers, subordinates, and administrators. They commonly engage in intra-organizational resistant knowledge projects that education organizational groups about who is not being seen, heard or enriched.

We argued and illustrated that African American women's cultural socialization can predispose them to core relational competencies that include but are not limited to 1) Creating Safe Space for Breaking Silences, 2) Interrupting the Unsaid, 3) Framing Organizational Dynamics within Histories/her stories of Injustice. We further theorize the leadership implications of these core competencies of relational leadership have even broader impacts on organizational life and provide mechanisms that consistently support group psychodynamic development. One effect on group dynamics is the way that Black women's relational leadership opens spaces for resocialization. Just as Black women experienced motherline tutelage in women centered spaces. Black women play a leading role in organizational socialization processes. Commonly one finds Black women opening spaces where dialogue across differences leads to "ethical, principled, coalition building" that enables the emergence of "new versions of truth" (Collins, 2019, p. 38).

Second, Black women's motherwork aptitudes awaken rituals of support and reconciliation. Here Black women bring competencies that repair the relational ruptures created by race and gender discrimination. Qualitative evidence from our work shows Black women drawing upon their multiple consciousness to understand others across intersectional differences in identity. They often translate their direct experience of race-gender discrimination into their awareness and decoding of the exclusionary dynamics for other identity groups. In this way their world view and positionality put them in a position to push for ethical outcomes for individuals facing organizational injustices. In short, they commonly advocate for and with others in the spirit of Black feminist author, Audre Lorde's statement that "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives" (Lorde 1984, p.133).

To remain viable as organizational citizens and avoid harsh penalties for their liberatory consciousness, Black women have developed skills to navigate their roles. While Black women may summon the courage to speak truth to power alone or collectively—they are also skillful builders of reconciliation. Here, their relational competencies bridge truth-telling and peace-making—characteristic of both/and epistemology that resonates within all African Diasporic cultures (Collins, 2000; King & Ferguson, 2011; Myers et al 2018,). Once uncomfortable issues are raised, Black women function in multiplicative leadership directions (King & Ferguson, 2001; King et al., 2002; King & Ferguson, 2011; Horsford, 2012;). They interact laterally with peers to open the kinds of dialogue and relational interactions that permit the healing of injuries and resolution of offenses that occur when working across cultural differences and identity politics. This skill set has been called bridge leadership (Robnett, 1996). It consists of interactions with those above and below in rank to heal intra- intergroup ruptures and promote healthy relationships (Horsford, 2012).

Conclusions and Future Research

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the accompanying proliferation of the plague of racism have created a collective trauma for people of color and all Americans. Thus, corporate leaders must directly engage with the issue of racism and discrimination because it affects employees' abilities to demonstrate their genuine commitment to diversity and human rights (Ruggs & Avery, 2020; Ruggs et al., 2020). African American women in leadership are instruments of anti-racist role modeling, mentorship, personal, social, and occupational development, and advocacy for other African American women and diverse subordinates, and co-workers.

Our future research will focus on the ways that Black Women's Leadership continues to make its presence felt at the group level. Questions such as: How do Black women help groups move from one phase of group development to another when ethical issues are at stake? During the current troubled times when leadership often sacrifices human care, how does Black women's leadership influence a both/and approach (Organizational goals and human well-being)? How can principles from Black women's relational competencies contribute to organizational leadership that pursues its aims without exploitation and disregard for stakeholders (employees, customers, clients, or the global public)?

The previous questions are the questions for 21st century organizations if they wish to resist the crippling leadership models stripped bare of integrity and regard for the very humanity they rely upon. At such times exploitative power arrangements rule the day without checks and balances. According to Hill Collins (2019) “Projects of antiracism, feminism, and decolonialism are called **resistant knowledge projects** for a reason . . . the guiding question is less whether to resist prevailing power arrangements and more what forms such resistance might take” (p. 116). Our data tell us that Black women creatively forge forms of resistance with diurnal or both/and possibilities. Possibilities that permit them to *both* fulfill the charge of their organizational responsibilities *and* offer leadership that promotes thriving human relationships and justice in organizational life.

.....
Sheila Alease Ferguson, PhD., LPCC is the Director of Community Based Services and Child Welfare programming for the Fatima Family Center of the Diocese of Cleveland’s Catholic Charities Corporation. Over the course of her career, she has served as a therapist, social services program administrator, evaluation researcher, organizational change consultant, adjunct professor, Subject Matter Expert, and curriculum designer. Her research and practitioner efforts focus on cultural diversity, relational psychology, and African American women’s mental health concerns and resistances to social oppression. To date, her co-authored works have been widely anthologized in the feminist press. In 2011 she and Dr. Toni C. King co-edited: *Black Womanist Leadership: Tracing the Motherline* (SUNY Press, 2011). In her leisure, she is dedicated to the arts of grand mothering, gardening, playwriting, and community activism.

Toni C. King, PhD. is Professor of Black Studies and Women and Gender Studies at Denison University, and Director of the Center for Black Studies. She is current holder of the Charles and Nancy Brickman Distinguished Leadership Chair. Her widely published works include a co-edited book: *Black Womanist Leadership: Tracing the Motherline* (with Dr. S. Alease Ferguson, SUNY Press, 2011). King’s work centers on the relationship between recovery and wholeness of women of color, and marginalized groups and leadership. Expertise includes diversity and anti-racism in higher education, academics of color, and women’s leadership. She uses performance ritual, organizational play, and social justice theatre to design environments of deep learning, and institutional change.

Notes

1. Valerie Lee signifies Black women’s hair with the term “Sisterlocking Dis-coarse.” Here she refers to Black women’s navigation of their hair (and it’s perceived “coarseness”) and body politics as a requisite skill set for leadership within the global system of racialized capitalism Black women inhabit. Lee springboards from this symbolism to theorize Black women’s leadership in academe and beyond. See:

References

- Allen, A. L. (2017). *When I See My Face: Painting the Portrait of Black Women Leaders in the U.S. Federal Government* (Order No. 10620735). Available from GenderWatch; ProQuest & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1975445674). <https://denison.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.denison.idm.oclc.org/dissertations-theses/when-i-see-my-face-painting-portrait-black-women/docview/1975445674/se-2>
- The Associated Press (2019, May 16). Blurred lines: A pregnant man's tragedy tests gender notions. *NBC News: Out Health and Wellness*. <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/blurred-lines-pregnant-man-s-tragedy-tests-gender-notions-n1006466>
- Bass, L. (2009). Fostering an ethic of care in leadership: A Conversation with five African American women. *Advances in developing human resources*, 11(5), 619–632. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422309352075>
- Bell, E. L. (1990). The bicultural life experience of career-oriented Black women. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 11, no. 6, 459–478.
- Bell, E. L., Denton, T. C., and Nkomo, S. (1993) Women of color in management: Toward an inclusive analysis. In E. A. Fagenson (Ed.) *Women in management: Trends, issues, and challenges in managerial diversity* (Volume 4 Women and Work, pp. 105–130). Sage.
- Bion, W. R. (1961). *Experiences in groups and other papers*. Tavistock. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203359075>
- Bion, W.R. (1961;1991). *Experiences in groups*. Routledge.
- Bion, W.R. (1961; ebook March 8, 2004) *Experiences in groups and other papers*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203359075>
- Bion, W.R. Group dynamics—The “basic assumptions.” https://www.liquisearch.com/wilfred_bion/group_dynamics_-_the_basic_assumptions
- Branche, D. (2014). *Transformational leadership and resilience, African-American female nonprofit leaders: A mixed methods study* (Order No. 3672527). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1655588258). <https://denison.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/transformational-leadership-resilience-african/docview/1655588258/se-2>
- Brown, A.M. (2016, March 12). Excerpt from sublevel report. *Fantastic Life*. <https://adriennemareebrown.net/2018/03/12/excerpt-from-sublevel-report/>
- Chance, N. L. (2021). A Phenomenological inquiry into the influence of crucible experiences on the leadership development of Black women in higher education senior leadership. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(4), 601–623. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211019417>
- Collinson, D.L. (2011). Critical leadership studies. In A. Bryman, D. Collinson, K. Grint, B. Jackson, and M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.) *The Handbook of leadership* (p. 5 and pp.179–192) Sage.

- Cooley, C. H. (1902). *Social organization*. Scribner.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 89(1/8), 139–167. <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>
- Diggs, R. C., and King, T.C. (2010). Breathe! Victory model of diversity and development for African American women scholars in higher education. In S. E. Moore, R. Alexander, Jr. and A. Lemelle, Jr. (Eds.) *Dilemmas of Black faculty at U.S. predominantly White institutions: Issues in the post-multicultural era* (pp.1–28). Edwin Mellen.
- Dillard, C.B. (2016). To Address suffering that the majority can't see: Lessons from Black women's leadership in the workplace. *New directions for adult and continuing*, 2016: 29–38. <https://doi-org.denison.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/ace.20210>
- DuBois, W. E. B. (1903). *The Souls of black folk*. A. C. McClurg.
- Erskine, S. E., Archibold, E. E., & Bilimoria, D. (2021). Afro-diasporic women navigating the black ceiling: Individual, relational, and organizational strategies. *Business Horizons*, 64(1), 37–50. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.10.004>
- Ferguson, S. A. and King, T. C. (2014). Dark animus: A Jungian psychoanalytic and womanist interpretation of the consequences of diverted mothering among African American daughters. In P. Bueskens (Ed.), *Mothering and psychoanalysis: Clinical, sociological and feminist perspectives* (pp. 177–196). Demeter.
- Frye, J. (2019, August 22). Racism and sexism combine to shortchange American black women. *Center for American Progress*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/racism-sexism-combine-shortchange-working-black-women/>
- Gause, S. A. (2021). White privilege, black resilience: Women of color leading the academy. *Leadership (London, England)*, 17(1), 74–80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742715020977370>
- Gilkes, C. (2001). *"If it wasn't for the women—": Black women's experience and womanist culture in church and community*. Orbis Books.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of self in everyday life*. Doubleday.
- Grillo, L. M., Jones, S., Andrews, M., & Whitehead, L. (2022). A pouring into: Theorizing black women's educational leadership through the afrocentric epistemological lens. *Educational Foundations* (Ann Arbor, Mich.), 35(1), 33.
- Guilaine, K. (2021). *Living while Black: The Essential guide to overcoming racial trauma*. Ebury.
- Guitart, M.E. and Ratner, C. (2011). A Macro cultural psychological theory of identity. *Journal of Social distress and Homelessness*, 20 (1–2):1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1179/105307811805365016>
- Haddix, M.M., McArthur, S.A., Muhammad, G.E., Price-Dennis, D., & Sealey-Ruiz, Y. (2016). At the Kitchen Table: Black Women English Educators Speaking Our Truths. *English in Education*, 48, 380.
- Harris-Perry, M. V. (2011). *Sister citizen: Shame, stereotypes, and black women in America*. Yale University Press.
- Hill, C.P. (1997). Comment on Hekman's "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited": Where's the Power? *Signs*, 22(2), 375–381. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175278>

- Hill, C. P. (2000). Distinguishing features of Black feminist thought. *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, pp. 21–44. Routledge.
- Hill, C. P. (2019). How power matters: Intersectionality and intellectual resistance. *Intersectionality as critical social theory*, pp. 87–120. Duke University Press. <https://doi-org.denison.idm.oclc.org/10.1215/9781478007098>
- Hill, C.P. (1998). It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation. *Hypatia*, 13(3), 62–82. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810699>
- Hill, C.P. (1994). Shifting the center: Race, class, and feminist theorizing about motherhood. In E. Nakano Glenn, G. Chang, and L. Forcey (Eds.), *Mothering: Ideology, experience and agency*, 45–65. Routledge.
- Hill, C. P. (1991). The Meaning of motherhood in Black culture and Black mother-daughter relationships. In P. Bell-Scott, *Double stitch: Black women write about mothers and daughters*, (pp. 41–60). Beacon.
- Hill, C. P. (1989, summer). The Social construction of Black feminist thought. *Signs, Common grounds and crossroads: Race, ethnicity, and class in women's lives*. 14(4) 745–773.
- Hooks B. (1988). *Talking back: thinking feminist thinking black*. Between the Lines.
- Hooks, B. (2004). *The will to change: men, masculinity, and love*. New York: Atria Books.
- Hooks, B. (2015). When I was a young soldier for the revolution: Coming to Voice. *Talking back: Thinking feminist, thinking Black*, p. 18. Routledge.
- Horsford, S. D. (2012). This bridge called my leadership: an essay on Black women as bridge leaders in education, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 25(1) 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2011.647726>
- Hughes, C., & SpringerLink (Online service). (2014; 2015). *American black women and interpersonal leadership styles*. SensePublishers.
- Iheduru-Anderson, K., Okoro, F. O., & Moore, S. S. (2022). Diversity and inclusion or tokens? A Qualitative study of Black women academic nurse leaders in the United States. *Global qualitative nursing research*, 9, 23333936211073116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23333936211073116>
- Jackson, J. L. (2017). “Black studies, multicontextualism, and the discourse of ‘diversity and inclusion.’” In R. Brock, D. Nix Stevenson and P. Chamness Miller (Eds.), *Critical Black studies reader* (pp.116–125). Peter Lang.
- Jang, S.T. and Alexander, N. A. (January 28, 2022). Black women principals in American secondary schools: Quantitative evidence of the link between their leadership and student achievement. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 1–37.
- Jones, C., & Shorter-Gooden, K. (2003). *Shifting: The double lives of black women in America* (First ed.). HarperCollins.
- King, D. K. (1988). Multiple jeopardy, multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black feminist ideology. *Signs*, 14(1), 42–72. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174661>
- King, T. C., Barnes-Wright, L., Gibson, N. E., Johnson, L. D., Lee, V., Lovelace, B. M., Turner, S., and Wheeler, D. I. (2002). *Third shift: The invisible work of African American women in higher education*. In A. Keating and G. E. Anzaldúa (Eds.), *This Bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation* (pp. 403–414). Routledge.

- King, T. C. and Ferguson, S. A. (2001). Charting ourselves: Leadership development with African American professional women. *National Women's Studies Association Journal*, 23(2) 123–141.
- King, T. C. and Ferguson, S. A. (2011). *Black womanist leadership: Tracing the motherline*. SUNY.
- Lean In. (2020). *The State of Black women in corporate America*. <https://leanin.org/research/state-of-black-women-in-corporate-america>
- Lee, V. (2021). Sisterlocking discourse: Or how is leadership supposed to look? *Sisterlocking discourse: Race, gender, and the twenty-first-century academy*, pp. 17–27. SUNY.
- Lorde, A. (1984). Learning from the 60s. *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*, pp. 130–140. Crossing.
- Lorde, A. A litany for survival. (1997). *The Collected poems of Audre Lorde* by Audre Lorde. Copyright © 1997 by the Audre Lorde Estate. Used by permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/147275/a-litany-for-survival>
- Lloyd, C. (2021, March 5). Black women in the workplace. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/333194/black-women-workplace.aspx>
- Mead, G.H. (1964). *George Herbert Mead on social psychology: selected papers* University of Chicago Press.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mullings, L. (1994). Images, ideology, and women of color. In M. B. Zinn & B. T. Dill (Eds.), *Women of color in U.S. society* (pp. 265–290). Temple University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bsvwr.18>
- Myers, L.J., M., Lodge, T., Speight, S., Queener, J. E. (2018, November 1). Optimal theory's contributions to understanding and surmounting global challenges to humanity. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 44(8) 747–771. Sage. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0095798418813240>
- Obedin-Maliver, J., & Makadon, H. J. (2016). Transgender men and pregnancy. *Obstetric medicine*, 9(1), 4–8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1753495X15612658>
- O'Reilly, A. (2004). *Toni Morrison and motherhood: A Politics of the heart*. SUNY.
- Parker, P. S. (2004). *Race, gender and leadership: Re-Envisioning organizational leadership from the Perspectives of African American women executives*. Routledge.
- Pfifer, (2022, February 8). Black women disproportionately concentrated in low-wage, hazardous, health care jobs, study finds. *Healthcare Dive*. <https://www.healthcarediver.com/news/black-women-disproportionately-concentrated-low-wage-hazardous-health-jobs/618471/>
- Porter, L. (2017). *Emotional Intelligence of African American Women in Higher Education Administration* (Order No. 10274036). Available from Ethnic NewsWatch; Gender-Watch; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1916590293). <https://denison.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/emotional-intelligence-african-american-women/docview/1916590293/se-2>
- Richardson, L. (2009). Writing theory in(to) last writes (2009). In Puddephatt, A. J., Shaffir, W., & Kleinknecht, S. W. (Eds.). *Ethnographies revisited: Constructing theory in the field*. Taylor & Francis Group.

- Robnett, B. (1996). African-American women in the Civil Rights movement, 1954–1965: Gender, leadership, and micromobilization. *American Journal of Sociology*, 101(6), 1661–1693. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2782115>
- Ruddick, S. and Hill, C.P. (1994). Maternal thinking: Toward a politics of peace. *Hypatia* 9(2), 188–198.
- Rosner, J. B. (1995). Ways women lead. In J. T. Wren (Ed.) *The Leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages*. The Free Press.
- Ruggs, E. N., and Avery, D. R. (2020, June 10). Organizations cannot afford to stay silent on racial injustice. *MIT Sloan Management Review*. <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/organizations-cannot-afford-to-stay-silent-on-racial-injustice/>
- Ruggs, E.N., Summerville, K.M., and Mashburn, C.K. (2020). “The Response to social justice issues in organizations as a form of diversity resistance.” In K. M. Thomas (Ed.) *Diversity resistance in organizations*, 2nd ed., (pp. 123–148). Routledge.
- Simons, T., Friedman, R., Liu, L. A., & McLean Parks, J. (2007). Racial differences in sensitivity to behavioral integrity: Attitudinal consequences, in-group effects, and “trickle down” among Black and non-Black employees. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(3), 650–665. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.3.650>
- Smit, B., & Scherman, V. (2016). A case for relational leadership and an ethics of care for counteracting bullying at schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 36(4), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v36n4a1312>
- Smith, E. B., 1949, & Nkomo, S. M., 1947. (2021). *Our separate ways: Black and white women and the struggle for professional identity*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Story, K.A. (2014). Motherhood as praxis, institution, and lived experience: A Brief introduction. In K.A. Story, *Patricia Hill Collin: Reconceiving motherhood*, (pp. 1–12). Demeter.
- Therault, C.L. (2015). Lessons learned through double dutch: Black feminism and intersectionality in educational research. In V. E. Evans-Winters & B. L. Love (Eds.) *Black feminism in education: Black women speak back, up, and out* (pp.183–189, p. 18). Peter Lang.
- Trotman, F. K. (2011). Legacies from our mothers. In T. C. King and S. A. Ferguson (Eds.), *Black womanist leadership: Tracing the motherline* (pp. 27–44). SUNY.
- Walker, L. A. (1984). Battered women, psychology, and public policy. *American Psychologist*, 39 (10), 1178–1182. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.39.10.1178>
- Walls, T. E. (2017). *Race, resilience, and resistance: A culturally relevant qualitative examination of how black women school leaders advance racial equity and social justice in U.S. schools*
- Washington, M.H. (1984). “‘I sign my mother’s name’: Alice Walker, Dorothy West and Paule Marshall.” In R. Perry & M. Watson Broronley (Eds.), *Mothering the mind: Twelve studies of writers and their silent partners* (pp. 143–163). Holmes & Meier.
- Wing, L. (2019). Social Justice Mediation Institute, Denison University, August 16–21, 2019.
- Wingfield, A. H. (2007). The Modern mammy and the angry Black man: African American professionals’ experiences with gendered racism in the workplace. *Race, Gender & Class*, 14 (1/2), 196–212. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41675204>

- Wingfield, A. H. (2020, October). Women are advancing in the workplace, but women of color still lag behind. Brookings Institute, 19A. *The Brookings Gender Equality Series*. <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/women-are-advancing-in-the-workplace-but-women-of-color-still-lag-behind/>
- Woodard, J. B., & Mastin, T. (2005). Black womanhood: "Essence" and its treatment of stereotypical images of Black women. *Journal of Black Studies*, 36(2), 264–281. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40034332>
- Wren, J. T. (1995). *The Leader's companion: Insights on leadership through the ages*. The Free Press.