**Bicultural Experience and Career Enhancing Behaviour in the Professions**

**Abstract**

**Purpose**

The proposed study explores how differences in the bicultural experiences of minority ethnic professionals affect the content and structure of their developmental networks and corresponding career outcomes

**Design/Methodology/Approach**

A mixed methods approach is proposed using semi structured interviews to collect qualitative data from 50 participants and an online survey to collect quantitative data from 100 participants: the survey includes scales to measure bicultural identity integration (BII), developmental network content and structure as well as objective and subjective career outcomes. The participants for the study are black African and black Caribbean accountants living and working in the UK

**Findings**

This study is yet to be conducted, however anticipated results include: Minority professionals with high levels of BII have a larger range of ties, receive more psychosocial support and have a greater number of low status ties than those with low BII

**Research Limitations**

The study relies on self-reported data that concerns bicultural ethnic and workplace experiences. Demographic intersectionality of is not addressed in the study; however gender and status information will be collected. The study is based within the UK accountancy profession and so there may be limits to the extent that any results can be generalisable to all organisations.

**Originality**

This research introduces bicultural experience to organisational studies by integrating the diversity and developmental network literatures. Moreover it answers the calls for more research to reveal the lived experiences of minority ethnic employees and the role ethnicity plays in influencing the content and structure of developmental networks. This study has emancipatory potential because its focus on a single ethnic group celebrates positive aspects of diversity such as resilience and generative attitudes as a distinct alternative to drawing attention to differences between minority and majority ethnic groups

**Keywords**

bicultural experience, bicultural identity integration, developmental networks, minority ethnic professionals,

**Introduction**

Research has found that in a corporate setting, minority ethnic professionals compete in a separate ‘career tournament’ to their non-minority ethnic counterparts (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999, Ibarra, 1995, Thomas, 1993). Central to this paper are two relationship spheres that are critical to positive career outcomes and where minority ethnic professionals have been shown to experience disadvantage: the first is the mentoring relationship and second are social network relationships. A mentor is an individual that uses their influence and expertise to advance the career of a protégé; the support provided by a mentor can be divided into two primary functions: career development and psychosocial support (Kram, 1988). The former reflects sponsorship, coaching and protection from the mentor while the latter includes counselling and friendship (Kram, 1988, 1985).The benefits of mentoring are well established, those with access to mentoring have been consistently shown to benefit from these relationships through higher salaries, increased rates of promotion and greater career satisfaction (Blake-Beard, 1999). However much of the literature has developed models based on white males and it has been suggested that outcomes associated with these models may not transfer to other demographic groups (Ragins, 1997). For instance, differences in the ethnicity of the mentor and protégé may act as a barrier which prevents minority ethnic protégés from enjoying the benefits of the mentoring relationship (Blake-Beard et al, 2006, Dickens & Dickens, 1982). In particular, minority ethnic employees have been found to encounter difficulties securing both career development and psychosocial support from their mentors (Thomas & Alderfer, 1989). A mentor-protégée relationship contains both career development and psychosocial functions and to some extent implies a greater sense of intimacy and leads to more positive outcomes. Sponsorship-protégée relationship have only career development and tend to be formal in nature with inferior outcomes to mentor-protégée relationships particularly if ‘cross racial’ (Kram, 1985, Thomas, 1993). However if mentor and protégée have the same attitude to diversity (regarding direct engagement or avoidance) then homogeneity of attitude leads to better outcomes, regardless of ethnicity (Thomas, 1993)

Social networks are important for career advancement and their utility is viewed as a function of two dimensions which act as a proxy for identifying the extent that the protégée has access to information and the type of information: network range refers to the different spheres of people that the network provides access to. A diverse range suggests that the network encompasses several spheres of people and this may lead to more valuable, less redundant information.). Density is measured by the extent to which your developers know or are connected to each other from the perspective of the protégée, high density suggests potentially high levels of redundant information, but it may also reflect a closed community, team or organisation (Higgins and Kram, 2001). Burt (1992) suggests that similar networks may not provide similar benefits to members of different groups. As a consequence minority ethnic employees may have different social network features to their non-minority counterparts (Ibarra, 1995).

Higgins & Kram (2001) integrated the mentorship literature with social network theories to reconceptualise the traditional mentor-protégée dyad as part of a network of developmental relationships. This is an emerging literature (Dobrow et al, 2012) and given what we know about the role of ethnicity in develop relationships and social networks, we know little about the role of ethnicity on developmental networks. Previous studies in both the mentorship and social network literatures often view ethnic minorities as a homogenous group (Thomas, 1993, Ibarra, 1993) or conduct comparative studies between minority ethnic professionals and their white colleagues (James, 2000, Blake-Beard, 1999, Thomas, 1990). These studies highlight differences between ethnic groups but not enough is known about potential differences that exist within ethnic groups in this context (Blake-Beard et al, 2006). This is important because large variations can exist in how minority ethnic individuals manage and experience the value systems of more than one cultural identity (Brannen & Thomas, 2010, Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). These differences may affect outcomes in the workplace. Biculturalism refers to the experience of people with more than one cultural identity and the way that they manage the meaning systems associated with each of those identities (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Dubois (1969) referred to this as double consciousness when discussing the experiences of African Americans in the United States. The dichotomous nature of the concept used reflects the location of this study in the workplace which makes it necessary to address workplace culture and non-workplace cultures and is not intended to ignore the multiplicity of cultures or subcultures to which an individual identifies.

In light of the importance of both developmental relationships, social networks and the variety of experiences of minority ethnic employees; understanding how the bicultural experience of minority ethnic employees can affect their developmental networks may lead to a better understanding of the experience of minority ethnic employees in the workplace. This study aims to answer the following questions:

*How does the bicultural experience of minority ethnic professionals affect the structure and content of their developmental networks?*

*How does the structure and content of the developmental networks of minority ethnic professionals affect their career outcomes?*

*How do career outcomes affect the bicultural experience of minority ethnic professionals?*

**Figure 1: Proposed Causal Model**

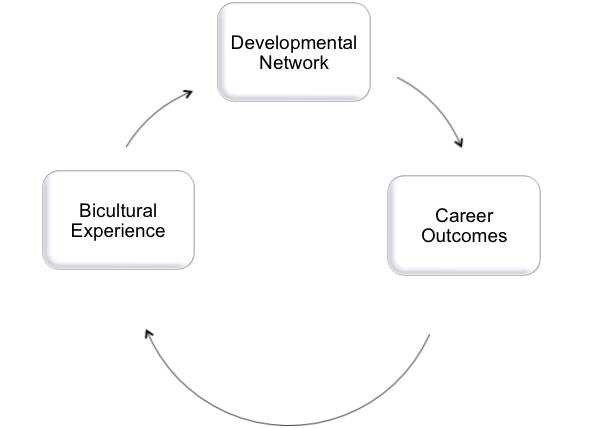


Figure 1 shows the key concepts to be explored in this study, originally conceptualised as a linear model, a premise of this study is that career outcomes help form the context of the workplace experience to define the bicultural experience of minority ethnic employees.

**Contribution**

This study is important because it integrates the diversity and developmental network literatures by answering the calls for more research to reveal the lived experiences of minority ethnic employees (Ozbilgin, 2009) and better understand the role of ethnicity on the content and structure of developmental networks (Dobrow et al, 2012). To date bicultural experience has not been as part of developmental network research and this research has emancipatory potential because of its emphasis on cultivating relationships and celebrating positive aspects of diversity such as resilience and generative attitudes as a distinct alternative to drawing attention to differences between minority and majority groups (Ramarajan & Thomas, 2010). In this respect, addressing the research questions contributes to a deeper understanding of the extent that ethnicity underpins the cognitive processes associated with career enhancing activities (Ibarra, 1993).

**Literature Review: Developmental Networks**

A developmental network is a career focussed subset of a social network and refers to the egocentric network of individuals who take an active interest in and perform actions towards advancing a protégés career (Higgins, 2001). Consistent with previous studies in the field the perspective explored is that of the protégé and not the developers. This emerging literature shares many constructs with the social network literature but this egocentric emphasis is a distinguishing factor between the developmental network and social network literature. Dobrow et al (2012) reviewed the existing literature and identified four fundamental attributes of developmental networks: the first was that developers must take an active interest in the careers of the protégé; this potentially excludes formally assigned mentors who do little to contribute to advancing the career of the protégé. Second are multiple developers, this moves the focus beyond the traditional dyad which often confined developers to senior colleagues with advanced experience in the work environment. Third is the inclusion of broad social spheres, this distinguishes a developmental network from mentoring networks or multiple mentors because they encompass a narrower range of people and may ignore friends and family who can play important roles in a developmental network. Finally developmental networks have varying amounts and types of support; it is a dynamic construct with the potential for members to change frequently and can include developers that a protégé has never met (Cotton et al, 2011)

The mentorship and social network literature provide guidance about the content and structure of developmental networks respectively. Developmental network content reflects mentorship functions that include career development and psychosocial support. Developmental network structure is informed by the social network literature, network density and range. As an emerging area of study there is no recognised agenda for research in the field, however Dobrow et al (2012) review of studies in the field identified a number of key streams of current research, the most relevant for this study are antecedents and the structure and content of developmental networks. Regarding antecedents, Higgins (2007) suggested that a network was contingent on the needs of the individual and that this would dictate the network type (Chandler & Kram, 2005). Higgins, Chandler and Kram (2007) suggested that social economic status affected the types of developmental networks that people formed, for example senior ranking employees were attracted to high social economic status junior ranking employees. This may reflect homophily or social domination preferences. Homophily as an organising principle suggests that individuals are motivated to interact with others similar to themselves, this affects the structures of ties of every type (McPherson et al, 2007). This is often used to explain organising preferences of individuals; however these preferences may be moderated by status contests (Pearce & Xu, 2012). Human societies are structured as group based social hierarchies based on ethnicity, gender class and religion (Umphress et al, 2007). High status groups have a disproportionate share of positive social value and low status groups have a disproportionate share of low social value. Social Domination Orientation (SDO) is the degree that individuals support group based hierarchies and the domination of low status groups by high status groups (Umphress et al, 2007). This suggests that members of high status groups with high levels of social domination orientation are motivated engage in homophilous relationships with individuals from high status groups and avoid relationships with low status individuals. If minority ethnic employees are perceived to be members of low status groups then this has implications for those trying to benefit from mentoring relationships and social networks.

Regarding content and structure, Murphy and Kram (2010) found that support from work developers were positively related to salary and career satisfaction, also diversity of range was found to reflect professional identity exploration and was negatively associated with clarity of professional identity (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005).

Locating this study in a particular stream is problematic; it is concerned with antecedents and consequences of a developmental network.

**Diversity & Ethnicity**

Diversity is a disputed term that is often used interchangeably with equality and inclusion (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2009). This study relies on two conceptualisations of diversity: the first discussed here is an approach for managing differences in the workplace and the second is a social construct to describe the aforementioned differences. Diversity as a management approach recognises and values heterogeneity in the workplace for its potential to lead to better organisational outcomes (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2008, Thomas & Ely, 1996). This argument is often used to promote a performance driven business case for diversity, however in practice this ignores the consequences of group based disadvantages like sexism and racism (Kersten, 2000). In contrast, equality management addresses these group based disadvantages by attempting to remove the consideration of social differences from the decision making processes of organisations (Barmes & Ashtiany, 2003). The equality approach has proved problematic because it necessitates a demographically neutral standard as a benchmark for employee behaviour and overlooks the gendered and racialised attributes of the standard (Ozbilgin & Tatli, 2008). Inclusion straddles both the diversity and equality approaches because it refers to the removal of barriers that block employees from using their full range of skills and competencies (Roberson, 2006).

The meaning of diversity can be ‘stretched’, ‘bent’ or ‘shrunk’ according to the local context (Tatli et al, 2012). In France, diversity is debated in terms of gender and cultural differences (Al Ariss, 2010). In Germany the dialogue has been shrunk to focus on gender; ignoring problems of minority ethnic group discrimination (Tatli et al, 2012). In the UK, the meaning of diversity has been shrunk to exclude ethnicity and include gender and class. This individualised approach to managing differences has been stretched to encourage organisations to voluntarily take a proactive stance to promote diversity because it is seen to be good for business (Ozbilgin, 2009).

As a social construct, diversity refers to the distribution of differences among the members of a unit with respect to a common attribute (Harrison & Klein, 2007). The unit can be a team, organisation or a nation state. The attributes are not restricted to demography; it can also be applied to non-demographic attributes such as tenure, education or experience. This study is concerned with ethnicity as a demographic attribute defined as the collective identity of individuals that share a common ancestry, culture and language (Fenton, 2003).

Ethnicity has been selected as a construct in preference to race, this is because the term race is laden with the legacy of power, colonial domination and political oppression and suggests anatomical differences that may be considered to be unequal (Gilroy 1987). The central role of culture and its impact on the cognitive processes being investigated makes ethnicity an appropriate construct because of the concern with social meanings associated with ethnic differences. However the use of ethnicity as a construct is not without its problems; both ethnicity and culture are dynamic and contested terms that are often broadly interpreted (Fenton, 2003). A behavioural focused definition of culture is suggested by LaFramboise et al, (1993) which refers to cultural competence suggesting that individuals with cultural competence must possess an extensive list of attributes relevant to the culture including but not limited to a strong personal identity, knowledge of and facility with the beliefs and values of the culture, the ability to communicate clearly in the language of the given cultural group and to perform socially sanctioned behaviour as well as negotiate the institutional structures of that culture. The length of this list draws attention to the difficulty in attaining cultural competence. Moreover, these constructs are not conceptualised as fixed or stable but as on-going processes that are produced and reproduced over time.

In addition to ethnicity, the term minority ethnic is also grounded in power relations with implications for minority ethnic employees as a low status group (Ragins, 1997).

This study will focus on a single minority ethnic group in order to explore differences in experience within that group and to avoid differences in status associated with ethnicity. Black Africans and Black Caribbean’s have been selected because they are conceived in this context as a low status group. They experience a high ethnic penalty: after controlling for differences like location and age, they are paid less than all other ethnic groups when compared to white counterparts in the UK (Hoque & Noon, 2004). In this study they are treated as a single ethnic group, but there is still considerable heterogeneity to be found regarding culture and language. However research suggests that they have similar experiences in the workplace (Brynin & Guveli, 2012). Other studies have successfully focused on black managers with little distinction within the group (Blake-Beard et al, 2006, Thomas, 1993). However the data will be monitored carefully to identify any remarkable differences that manifest as part of the study. The use of the term black is used to denote those of Black Africans and Black Caribbean heritage and is to be distinguished from the political term ‘black’ which often includes South Asians and has been used in several qualitative studies of accounting (Lewis, 2011, Johnston & Kyriacou, 2007, 2006).

**Culture Acquisition**

Bell (1990) and Blackwell (1981) highlighted two behaviours adopted by blacks that were mainstreaming: moving professionally, economically and politically into the fabric of American society. The first was assimilation based on Park’s (1950) theory of assimilation, where minority ethnic groups shed their identities as they are integrated into the majority culture, the second was compartmentalisation: the establishment of rigid boundaries between the cultural contexts of the workplace and an individual’s personal life. There are clear parallels between the model of assimilation and pluralism as strategies available for minority ethnic professionals engaging with social networks (Thomas and Gabaarro, 1999, Thomas, 1993, Ibarra, 1995).

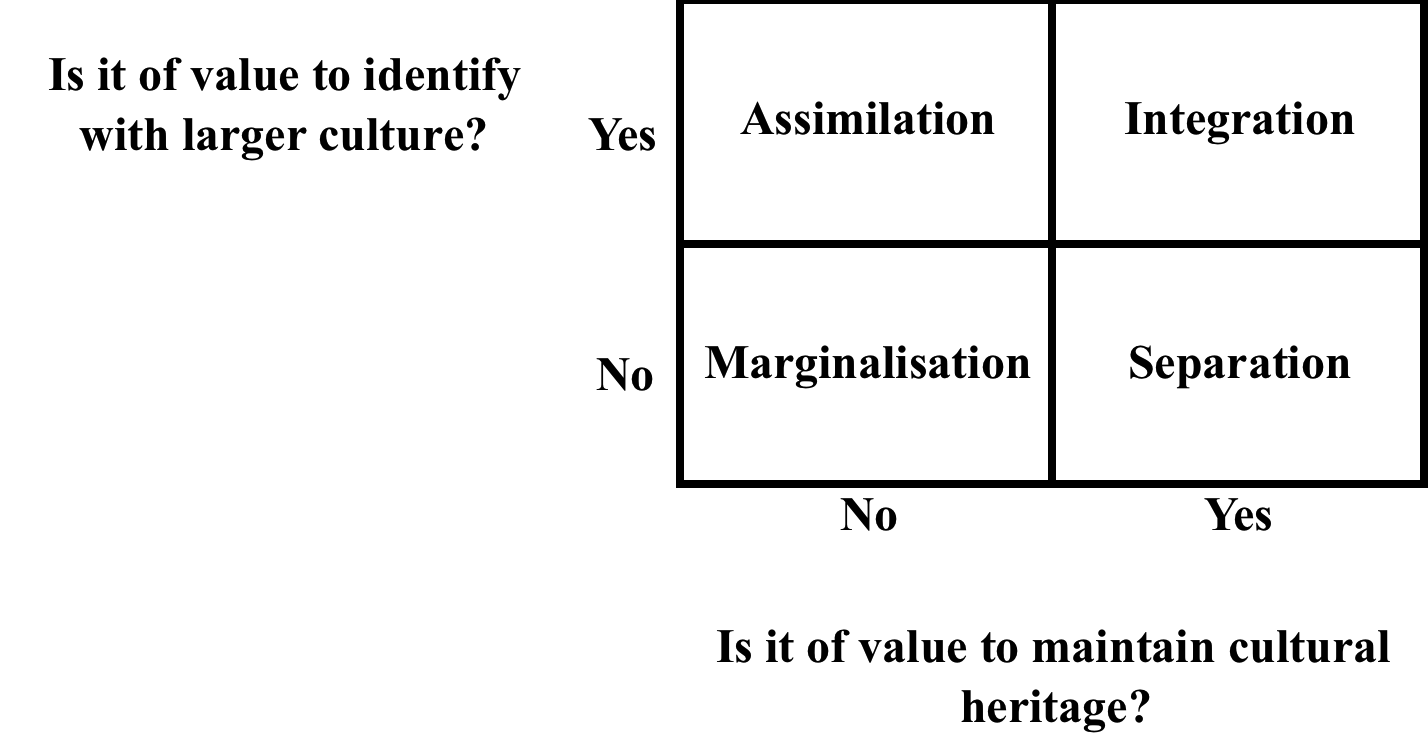
Research on culture acquisition focuses on five models that have been used to understand the process of change that occurs in transitions between cultures: assimilation, acculturation, alternation, multiculturalism and fusion (LaFramboise et al, 1993).

The first is assimilation as previously discussed; the second is acculturation where an additional culture is acquired. However the individual is not considered a full member of the acquired cultural group. They remain a minority; the third is alternation assumes that it is possible for an individual to navigate between two cultures with no hierarchical assumptions about the relationship between the cultures. Multiculturalism is the fourth and reflects a pluralist approach to cultures, several cultures coexisting. Fusion is the final model and reflects the melting pot theory to form a new culture, like multiculturalism there is no assumption of superiority between members of the old culture

Acculturation is the most appropriate model of culture acquisition for this study. Like assimilation it assumes a hierarchical relationship between the two cultures with the acquisition of the majority culture by the minority member. However assimilation emphasises full membership of the majority culture for individuals while acculturation implies competent participation while remaining a minority. This is salient because research shows that minority ethnic professionals have a different experience in the workplace (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999).

Figure 2 shows Berry’s (1990) widely accepted acculturation framework that suggests that minority ethnic individuals have two primary concerns regarding their acculturation strategies. The first is the extent that the individual is motivated or allowed to retain their minority identity and the other is the extent that the individual is motivated or allowed to identify with the majority culture.

**Figure 2 Acculturation Model (Berry 1990)**



Bicultural identity integration (BII) is the construct used to capture the degree that an individual sees their cultural identities as being compatible and integrated or oppositional and difficult to integrate (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Individuals high on BII find it easy to integrate both cultures and are described as having compatible identities. They do not perceive their cultures to be mutually exclusive or conflicting and see them themselves as part of a hyphenated culture (Phinney & Deviche-Navarro, 1997). This suggests an integrated pluralist approach (Ibarra, 1995, Berry, 1990). In contrast, individuals low on BII have difficulty incorporating both cultures into a cohesive identity. Although they identity with both cultures, they feel as if they should just choose one, as implied by an assimilation approach (Berry, 1990).

BII does not define a unitary construct but involves two distinct psychological constructs: cultural conflict and cultural distance, cultural conflict is a product of perceived contextual pressures, intercultural relations and discrimination domains that may challenge an ability to maintain consistent self-image and group affiliations. Cultural distance refers to the extent that cultures are non-overlapping or disassociated. BII should be understood as emerging from variations in cultural distance and cultural conflict.

**Professional Identity**

Previous studies of minority ethnic employees in a corporate setting described them as professionals; however the scope of their experience and education often varied (Blake-Beard, 1999, Thomas & Gabarro, 1999, Bell, 1990). Raider & Burt (1996) argue that social networks account for performance differences among similarly educated and experienced individuals. To better understand how developmental networks are associated with intra minority ethnic group differences, this research will focus on employees that share the same profession. For the purposes of this study, a profession will be defined as a body of experts with esoteric knowledge of a particular field, characterised by elaborate systems of training, entry examinations and an enforced code of ethics (Abbott, 1988).

“The UK professions are world leaders” (Cabinet Office, 2009 p.5) and are central to the growth of the post-industrial economy fuelled by a growing service sector. Accountancy has benefitted from the growth in the service sector, its membership has grown by 60% since 1996 (Financial Reporting Council, 2012). The accounting profession has been selected for this study for a number of reasons: first it is actively involved with identity management as part of its professionalisation processes (Jeacle, 2008). This has strong implications for the bicultural experience of minority ethnic accountants which will be discussed. Second, accounting is under researched regarding diversity compared to professions like law and medicine despite its purported support for diversity (Ashley & Empson, 2012, Johnson et al, 2000). Finally, as an accountant myself, I am curious about the underlying processes that define minority experience in a professional environment and I am motivated to use my knowledge and experience as part of the research. Through a series of mergers and acquisitions, particularly over the past 20 years accounting in the United Kingdom is now dominated by four large multinational networks known as the Big 4 accounting firms, (Ernst & Young, KPMG, Deloittes and Price Waterhouse Coopers). The profession is governed by six professional bodies (See Appendix 1) that have established credentials in order to control access to market opportunities (Richardson, 1997). These credentials go further than establishing core competencies and adherence to ethical guidelines: in professional services the professional is the service (Larson, 1977). Research shows that accountants collectively use impression management to cultivate the image of the chinless, nervous, bespectacled pen pusher to promote the idea of a disinterested impartial professional (Jeacle, 2008, Bougen, 1994). This identity is normatively white, middle class and male (Lewis, 2011, Kirkham & Loft, 1993). The notion of being a professional accountant requires the exhibition of ‘front stage’ and ‘back stage’ behaviours particularly regarding clients (Goffman, 1959 cited by Grey, 1998 p. 576). Professional self-conduct is less about examinations and more about simultaneously reinforcing collective professional identities and creating boundaries for group members (Anderson–Gough et al 1998, 2000). This is encouraged through numerous formal and informal processes that enable individuals to become functioning members of the collective (Cooper and Robson, 2006). The research suggests that there is a distinct cultural identity produced and reproduced at the local level (Anderson et al, 2007, Anderson-Gough et al, 2000).

The choice of the accounting profession further supports the acculturation model of culture acquisition Berry (1990). A preference for ‘old’ universities, the significance of personal relationships and networking outside of the firm privilege white middle class males and remain key barriers to career progression for minority ethnic groups (Weisenfield, 2001). The number of minority ethnic accountants is unclear because the accountancy profession has yet to implement any significant ethnic monitoring programmes (Duff, 2010, Johnston and Kyriacou, 2007). Black African and Black Caribbean accountants have been actively excluded from participating in the accountancy profession (Lewis, 2011, Hammond, 2002, Hammond & Streeter, 1994),

Little is known about how developmental relationships are formed for minority ethnic accountants; however Viator (2001) found that African American certified public accountants are more likely to leave the profession than their white counterparts because of the difficulty in finding a mentor. An assumption of this study is that black accountants are motivated to identify with the majority culture. Professional closure is characterised by elaborate training and examinations which require discipline and commitment. This suggests a motivation to identify with the culture but does not constitute an ability to do so. Under these conditions, the model in Figure 2 indicates that assimilation and integration are the only available acculturation strategies available for black accountants (Berry, 1990).

**Hypotheses**

A premise of this paper is that individuals with high BII are able to integrate their cultural identities where low BII individuals are unable to do so; the assumption here is that they assimilate by accepting the workplace culture and following the behavioural norms of the majority. This may have profound effects on their developmental networks. Thomas (1990) found that black professional’s proactively sought developmental relationships with other black professionals and leads to the first Hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1a: High BII black accountants will have a higher proportion of homophilous (same ethnicity) ties than low BII black accountants*

High potential minority ethnic professionals form ties with more minority ethnic professionals and white professionals than their low potential or white counterparts Ibarra (1995). This reflects a pluralist approach that may be distinguished from low BII accountants who try to mimic their white counterparts:

*Hypothesis 1b: High BII black accountants will have a greater range of ties than low BII black accountants*

Access to same ethnicity ties is not as accessible for minority ethnic groups as it is for whites without crossing boundaries such as location and team (Murrell et al, 2005). Black protégées build developmental relationships outside of traditional boundaries and areas of specialisation (Thomas, 1990) this also creates less scope for redundant ties (Burt, 1992)

*Hypothesis 2a: High BII black accountants will have a higher proportion of inter organisational support ties than low BII black accountants*

*Hypothesis 2b: High BII black accountants will have a lower density of ties than low BII black accountants*

Formally assigned mentors are less likely to be part of developmental network (Shen & Kram, 2011) so minority ethnic groups cultivate two parallel systems of development, career development is focused within the organisation and psychosocial support is primarily sought externally (Thomas, 1993). Conceptually psychosocial support is essential for people of colour (Blake-Beard et al, 2006). Given the greater number of same ethnicity inter organisational ties for high BII black accountants:

*Hypothesis 3: High BII black accountants will have a higher proportion of psychosocial support ties than low BII black accountants*

Difficulties arise for minority ethnic employees because access to same race mentors is difficult because of the low numbers employed at high levels in organisations

People are more likely to be in a developmental relationship with someone of similar gender or race (Turban et al, 2002, Viator, 2001). Subject to their social domination orientation (Pearce & Xu, 2012) the benefits of high status contacts may compete with psychosocial support more easily obtained from interaction with others (Ibarra, 1995, Thomas, 1993)

*Hypothesis 4: High BII black accountants will have a higher proportion of lower status ties than low BII black accountants*

**Methods**

**Participants**

The goal in recruiting participants for this research is to identify a minimum of 100 black accountants living and working in the UK. The size of the sample reflects the anticipated difficulty in finding participants. Studies looking at minority ethnic experiences in UK accounting have encountered difficulties obtaining data because there is no complete or reliable dataset that contains the ethnic composition of UK accountants (Lewis, 2011, Duff, 2010, Kyriacou, 2000). Ethnicity is notably absent from the professional regulators annual report of key facts and trends in the UK accounting profession despite including gender and age (Financial Reporting Council, 2012). My preliminary enquiries revealed that the information in the report was obtained directly from the professional bodies. Ethnic composition is unknown because the data collection fields that for ethnic identity are non-compulsory components of the subscription process, as a result they remain incomplete. My intention is to recruit participants from the following sources:

*The National Association of Black Accountants:* (NABA) has assisted studies of black accountants in North America (Hammond, 2002, 1997, Viator, 2001). In 2012, NABA UK was formed; it is independent from its US counterpart; however they have agreed to provide access to their members. They have less than 100 members comprising primarily Black African accountants. *Accounting firms and Professional bodies*: The incomplete data at the institutional level (Financial Reporting Council, 2012), implies that there is data available. I intend to contact each of the professional bodies and ask for access to the data they have as well as contacting the top 100 accounting firms by employee size in the UK (Accountancy Age, 2012). Ernst & Young is the only Big 4 firm to have a black employee network in the UK; it has over 200 members however it is unclear how many of these individuals are accountants because it includes non-accountant members of staff like security officers and janitors.

*Snowball Sample:* As a purposive sampling method, this has been successfully used in studies of minority ethnic accountants (Lewis, 2011, Johnston and Kyriacou, 2006, Hammond, 2002). To date I have confirmed 35 participants using this method. The use of snowball sample comes at the expense of reducing the likelihood that the sample will represent a good cross section from the population; with an unknown population and no accessible sample frame. The difficulty of creating such a sampling frame means that this is the only feasible approach (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

All participants must be qualified accountants living and working in the UK with black African or black Caribbean heritage. Being UK born is not a requirement. There are no restrictions on employment in the private or public sector, organisation size or tenure.

**Data Collection: Interviews**

Interview based case studies have been chosen as the research strategy with 50 participants. The interviews are intended to last no more than an hour and will be used to create career biographies looking for information about their developmental experiences, critical relationships and bicultural experiences. The data collection methods for the study are semi structured interviews; these will be used flexibly to omit, elaborate and adapt questions to the demands of the context this is suitable for the exploratory nature of the study and potentially widens the scope of the research.

There is a growing body of research that has used oral history to look at issues of gender and ethnicity in the accounting profession to present another version of reality, that may not have been documented (Johnston & Kyriacou 2007, Kim, 2004; Hammond, 2002;).

**Data Collection: Surveys**

The purpose of the survey is to capture information on bicultural experience, developmental network structure and career outcomes. All of the information collected refers to the participants themselves with the exception of the development network questionnaire which captures subjective opinions of their network. The survey is anticipated to take 15-20 minutes to complete and will be administered online.

*Bicultural Experience:* this will be measured using the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale – Version 1 developed by Benet-Martinez & Haritatos (2005). This uses a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The median score will be used to distinguish between high and low BII (Ling, 2009). See Appendix 2

*Developmental Network:* Higgins (2001) developmental network questionnaire captures information for up to 6 developers including ethnicity, gender, density, types of support, psycho social or career development. Additional information is required to address the hypotheses, in particular status (superior, peer or subordinate) (Ibarra, 1995) and participants organisation.

*Career Satisfaction:* Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormley (1990) have a widely used career satisfaction scale originally used in their survey on the effects of race on organisational experiences, job performance evaluations and career outcomes. This uses a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). See Appendix 3.

*Career Commitment:* Blau, (2011), this scale contains 8 to measure career commitment. This uses a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). See Appendix 4

*Salary* Respondents will have 9 categories, starting at 0- £30,000, £30,001-£40,000, increasing in £10,000 increments to £100,000, then a final category for above £100,000.

*Status:* Participants will identify themselves as one of four broad categories: Accountant, Manager, Senior Manager, Partner/Director to establish how they identify themselves

**Analysis**

The interviews serve two primary purposes, first is the collection of data regarding the lived experiences of the accountants, it helps to answer the questions raised and addresses the aims of the research. Understanding how their network influences their career outcomes may also suggest primacy of the benefits received. Second, it helps to triangulate the data collected in the surveys by adding context that might not be obtainable by other means. The “thick descriptions” of the case study strategy make it suitable for the in depth requirements of the oral history approach selected and allow the analytical level of the data content to be factual, interpretive and evaluative (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Thematic Analysis has been selected to interpret the interview transcripts because of its ability to identify, analyse and report patterns within the data and its use as a foundational method for developing the core skills useful for conducting qualitative research (Braun and Clarke 2006). Alternatives analytical methods like narrative or conversational analysis were not chosen because the study is more concerned about the underlying themes and concepts of the data than the actual words used or the syntax. Codes will be based on the research questions as well as trends emerging from the data. Thomas & Gabarro (1999) use career biography codes that can be used as a point of reference for developing my own codes

Regarding quantitative analysis, further work is required to ensure that the preliminary suggestions are appropriate measures before analyses can be made. In particular I need to check for internal consistency among the scales, this rose as concerns by Greenhaus et al (1990) and Benet-Martinez & Haritatos (2005). ANOVA regression analyses have been used in recent bicultural studies (Ling, 2009) will be investigated.

**Reflexive Considerations**

Researchers and their subjects are interactively linked; knowledge is value laden regardless of the methodological framework (Riege, 2003). As an accountant I have tacit knowledge of the profession and my ethnicity may help me to build rapport with respondents quickly and develop social bonds that may result in responses that may not have been received by researchers unfamiliar with the schemas of the field (Kyriacou, 2009, Hammond and Sikka, 1996). This makes my role as a researcher uniquely valuable and well informed and I perceive my role in the research process is an opportunity rather than an intrusion (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This research has potential opportunities that may not exist with a researcher with a different background and may reduce the potential for respondents to be treated as ‘minoritised’ subjects in a process of benign inferiorisation (Kim, 2004). In order to moderate potential over identification with respondents I intend to meet with colleagues engaged with diversity research to discuss my observations about specific interviews and informants and discuss this with my supervisors as suggested by Thomas (1993).

**Limitations**

The focus of the study is ethnicity; however gender is not explicitly acknowledged or investigated. In particular, black women are at the nexus of multiple inequalities (Lewis, 2011, Bell, 1990) and the intersectionality of their experiences may influence the BII score. It may be unclear which of their cultural identities are being observed, particularly if they have a strong gender identity and work in a male dominated profession (Cheng, Sanchez-Burke & Lee, 2008).

25 participants have already been recruited. To my knowledge the suggested sample size is larger than any previous study exploring minority ethnic experience in the UK accounting profession, (Lewis, 2011, Johnston & Kyriacou, 2007, 2006). Recent studies of bicultural experience have used samples smaller than of approximately 100 (Cheng, Sanchez-Burke & Lee, 2008). Every effort will be made to increase the survey sample size.

It is anticipated that a large number of participants will come from NABA UK, which may indicate a desire to proactively seek other black professionals for psycho social support (Thomas, 1990) which may be considered to be high BII behaviour. Recruiting from other sources can help to mitigate this risk.

The research is based within the accountancy profession and so there may be limits to the extent that any results can be generalizable to all organisations. The data is not taken from a closed group but from a number of organisations. For this reason it is hoped that the results may be generalizable to professions with similar socialisation processes. Increasing the scope of the study to include similar professions like law may be useful in this regard. In particular Law satisfies the definition of profession suggested by Abbott (1988) and has similar concerns to accounting. An increase in the proportion of minority ethnic lawyers to 11.9% in 2011 (Law Society, 2012) has accompanied by suggestions that minority ethnic lawyers leave the profession in disproportionately high numbers, the legal profession remains segmented and stratified on lines of gender, ethnicity and class, (Ashley and Empson, 2012, Sommerlad, 2008).

**Summary**

The purpose of this research is to examine how different bicultural experiences of minority ethnic professionals may be associated with different behavioural strategies and career outcomes. Many of the constructs such as culture and ethnicity are disputed terms that will require further consideration as part of the study (Fenton, 2003). The on-going processes that characterise these constructs may indicate that this research may benefit from a longitudinal study. An additional benefit of this proposed study is to set an agenda for future research and potential publications, there is scope to explore other cultural identity including gender, disability and class as well as other potential influences like self-monitoring behaviour.

The focus on understanding intra minority differences within the workplace reflects my emancipatory aspirations to celebrate the positive aspects of minority ethnic achievement (Ramarajan & Thomas, 2010). In particular exploring the lived experiences of a low status minority ethnic group (Hoque & Noon, 2004) within a highly selective profession (Anderson-Gough et al, 2000) is intended to challenge the deficit model of diversity research that is focused on how minority ethnic groups are lacking in resources or opportunities.

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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1: UK Accounting Professional Bodies**

ICAEW: Institute of Chartered Accountant in England & Wales

ACCA: Association of Chartered Certified Accountants

ICAS: Institute of Chartered Accountant in Scotland

ICAI: Chartered Accountants Ireland

CIMA: Chartered Institute of Management Accountants

CIPFA: Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy

**Appendix 2: Augmented Bicultural Identity Integration Scale – Version 1**

I am simply a Black person who lives in Britain

I keep Black/African and Britain cultures separate.

I feel Black British

I feel part of a combined culture

I am conflicted between the British and Black African/Caribbean ways of doing things

I feel like someone moving between two cultures

I feel caught between the Black African/Caribbean and British cultures

I don’t feel trapped between the Black African/Caribbean and British cultures

**Appendix 3: Greenhaus et al (1990) Career Satisfaction Scale**

1. I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career.

2. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals.

3. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for income.

4. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement.

5. I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills.

**Appendix 4: Blau (2011) Career Commitment Scale**

1. " If I could get another job different from being an accountant and paying the same amount. I would probably take it';

2. ' I definitely want a career for myself in accounting";

3. ' If I could do it all over again, I would not choose to work in the accounting profession ';

4. ' If I had all the money I needed without working I would probably still continue to work in the accounting profession

5.' I like this vocation too well to give it up ';

6.' This is the ideal vocation for a life of work ';

7.' I am disappointed that I ever entered the accounting profession';

8. ' I spend a significant amount of personal time reading accounting -related journals or books'.