**Intersectional Identity Work: Making sense of intersecting ethnicity, gender and seniority**

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Autobiographical note: Doyin Atewologun obtained her PhD from the International Centre for Women Leaders, Cranfield School of Management, titled ‘An examination of the identity work of senior minority ethnic women and men following episodes of identity salience at work’. Her research papers won awards from the Academy of Management and British Academy of Management in 2011. She is now a Lecturer at City University, London on the MSc in Organizational Psychology.

Key words: Intersectionality, identity work, leadership, ethnicity, gender

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Purpose: This paper draws on identity construction literature to offer a franework for understanding how black, Asian and minority ethnic (BME) women and men construct themselves as minority ethnic leaders. The paper integrates the perspectives of intersectionality (the mutual independence of multiple identity dimensions [Crenshaw, 1989]) and identity work (the effort in which we engage to construct self-understanding in dynamic engagement with the environment [Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008]). The paper contributes to understanding how intersecting identities, involving the juxtaposition of privileged (leader and male gender status) with less-privileged (minority ethnic and female gender status) are constructed.

Methodology: Twelve senior BME men and twelve senior BME women from two major UK organizations participated. They kept journals over a period of one month and discussed in interviews, episodes that prompted them to think about their identities as senior, gendered and minority ethnic individuals at work. Episodes were analyzed using an identity work lens to examine contextual identity triggers and individual sense-making responses, and to elucidate how intersecting gender, ethnic and leader/senior identities played out in individuals’ identity work responses to the episodes.

Findings: One hundred and one identity episodes were elicited from the data. Analyses revealed that intersecting identities were constructed in five main ways, reflecting a range of reactive to agentic sense-making responses to intersections. Additionally, within each response pattern (referred to as ‘identity work modes’), gender, ethnicity and leader/senior identities were adopted as cues by minority ethnic individuals and their associates in the construction of intersecting identities. A framework of identity work modes, comprising the initial jolt sensation, the sensemaking tactics in response and the outcome for intersecting identities was developed following analyses.

Limitations and Implications: The paper adopts an in-depth interpretive approach to a limited number of episodes experienced by minority ethnic leaders. It offers insight into subjective experiences, but makes no claim about causality or predictability. The typology of intersectional identity work offered illustrates the complexity and fluidity of making sense of intersecting identities.

Originality/Value: The study contributes to leadership literature by focusing on an under-studied sample of senior, professional men and women from different minority ethnic groups in large UK organisations. It integrates identity work and intersectional perspectives to examine the lived experiences of minority organisational members at the intersection of privileged gender/leadership and less privileged gender/ethnic identities. It also applies a unique methodology (journals with interviews) to understand identity work in contemporary organisations.