 ISBN-978-86-87043-95-4

Cultivating Brave Spaces for Diverse Academic Women in Higher Education Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Diverse women continue to be unrepresented in academia. Institutional structures and governance are strongly influenced by Eurocentric and androcentric worldviews. These ideologies construct, maintain, and legitimize biases, affecting the career progression of diverse academic women in senior leadership positions. This paper uses the intersectional theoretical framework (ITF) to inform how salient aspects of identity, such as race and gender, impact the lived experiences of diverse academic women (DAW). We draw from both empirical and conceptual discussions in the education, gender, and leadership literature to analyze relevant areas, such as the internal silencing of DAW and the need for us to move beyond inclusion to expansion in higher education. Attention is given to topical discourse surrounding gender and publication, conflict management, stereotypes, and cultural safety relative to DAW. Next, a discussion of the critiques and gaps in the academic literature is provided. Further, the Awareness, Rationale, and Choices (ARC) model highlights how leadership may be re-imagined by addressing matters of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) within academic institutions. The article concludes with the need to cultivate brave spaces in higher education leadership structures, whereby DAW can nurture their intersected identities and cultivate a sense of belonging.

KEYWORDS: Academic Leadership; Awareness, Rationale, and Choices (ARC) Model; Diverse Academic Women (DAW); Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI); Higher Education, Intersectional Theoretical Framework (ITF)

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Introduction

Academic leadership is governance that occurs in higher education (Saroyan et al., 2011). According to the literature, *higher education* describes a post-secondary education system that offers formal learning in universities, colleges and institutes of technology or art (Sheffield & Sá, 2013). In these training spaces, many diverse academic women are forced to navigate a "chilly" work environment with limited support from their male counterparts (Hughes et al., 2023, p. 473). We view *diverse academic women (DAW)* as individuals working in higher education institutions whose personal experiences, values and worldviews are impacted by their intersected sociocultural identities, such as race and gender. We recognize that although the above term might be a misnomer and does not fit everyone, it reflects the collective intersected racialized identities and lived experiences of the authors in White dominant spaces. While it is important to name the internalization and stereotype threat impacting diverse women in academia, we acknowledge the relevance of contextualizing our intersected identities (expanded on below), so that our social locations are not perceived as a cultural deficit but rather a strength in this discussion. *Social location* is a subjective concept that encompasses salient cultural factors including but not limited to gender, race, social class, age, ability, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic location (Brown et al., 2019). For many diverse women, such internalization can be viewed as a product of systemic oppression, which warrants attention. The use of "women" in this article in no way negates the subjective reality that gender identity is inherent in one's sense of being and that some might choose to self-identify as "girl", "female", or "non-binary gender" (e.g., genderqueer, gender-nonconforming, gender-neutral, a-gender, gender-fluid) (American Psychological Association [APA], 2015). To be consistent, women and females are used interchangeably in this paper.

In terms of our social locations, both authors work in Canadian academic settings and situate themselves differently in higher education. The first author self-identifies as an able-bodied, cisgender, heterosexual, Christian, Black Canadian immigrant woman. Embracing these intersected socio-cultural identities in her professional roles as an Associate Professor, a Registered Psychologist, and scholar provides her with a unique lens through which to conceptualize effective leadership in an academic environment. The second author positions herself as an able-bodied, cis-gender, heterosexual, Hindu, Indo-Canadian woman. She acknowledges her intersecting identities as a nondominant graduate student in academia who often struggles to create safety in White dominant spaces. We approach the leadership literature on DAW through the lens of their non-dominant intersected identities which are often invisible to the world. Collectively, our distinctive lived worldviews and intersected positionalities allow us to bring multidimensional perspectives to this paper across various cultural contexts.

Drawing from empirical data and conceptual discussions in the education and leadership literature, this article begins with a brief overview of the historical context of academic leadership. In this discussion, consideration will be given to key concepts and relevant demographic information. We then draw from Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theoretical framework (ITF) to inform the topic of leadership in higher education relative to DAW (Chliwniak, 1997; Crenshaw, 1989). Next, we examine the prevalence of White male dominant voices in institutional leadership positions and outline the under-representation of DAW in higher education. In our paper, the term *male dominance* describes the inequality of power relations between men and women. The internal silencing of DAW is addressed along with the proposition for us to move beyond inclusion to expansion when we consider equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles. Given the leadership challenges many DAW experience, we highlight the significant gender disparity in

publication. We further shed light on effective ways women can manage conflict to thrive in male-dominated environments. Attention is also given to stereotypes this group faces in academic leadership spaces dominated by men. Following an exploration of women's leadership styles, we discuss the cultural safety of women in academic spheres. Moreover, we address significant gaps in the leadership literature focused on diverse women faculty. Of significance in this context, the Awareness, Rationale, and Choices (ARC) model explores culturally appropriate ways to mobilize and sustain equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) changes for leaders through governance and accountability. We conclude with useful insights for consideration as we work collaboratively in higher education to cultivate brave academic spaces for DAW to progress and thrive as effective leaders.

Academic Leadership in the Canadian Context

Historically, there has been a gender imbalance in academic leadership; diverse women remain under-represented in higher education institutions (Chliwniak, 1997; Hearn, 2005; O'Connor, 2018; Johnson & Fournillier, 2021). There is limited Canadian research on the experiences of DAW in leadership positions, with fewer studies on the roles and representation of this group in higher education (Johnson & Fournillier, 2021; Madsen & Longman, 2020). A recent Canadian study with 244 self-identified academic women that investigated their experiences with gender-based harassment and discrimination revealed three categories worth mentioning: (1) overt practices, (2) covert practices, and (3) a systematic effort to silence the reporting of these experiences (Hughes et al., 2023, p. 473). First, *overt practices* may include discrimination and harassment, uneven distribution of the workload and responsibilities, and inequitable pay. Second, *covert practices* tend to be subtler and may emerge as scholarly isolation (e.g., lack of mentorship), barriers to promotion, and racially oriented microaggressions. Described as "subtle speech" and acts with "imperceptible delivery," *racially oriented microaggressions* can characteristically denigrate key dimensions of one's social identity (Testa, 2023, p. 2). Lastly, institutional policies and practices need to move beyond the outward appearance of equality and focus on addressing the covert harassment faced by women academics, in addition to overt discriminatory practices (Hughes et al., 2023). The outcome of this investigation speaks to the continued need for greater gender equity in higher education, particularly among DAW.

Similarly, current research from Canada shows women are under-represented in higher academic leadership positions; the roles of dean, president, or chancellor are predominantly filled by men (Cafley, 2021). Canadian data also indicates that men hold approximately 69% of presidential posts; this lack of gender representation extends to the international context, as only 20% of the world's top 200 universities have women presidents (Cafley, 2021). In cases where women are in top leadership positions, this generally occurs in smaller institutions that are considered less research-intensive and prestigious (Bilen-Green et al., 2008; Dunn et al., 2014). Women occupy fewer positions at higher ranks and are "even more scarce on the administrative career ladder" (Bilen-Green et al., 2008, p. 3). This reality is more pronounced for academic women who identify as Black, Indigenous and Women of Colour (BIWOC) and from other minoritized communities. In academic realms and other management contexts, factors like systemic inequalities, oppression, and marginalization group individuals into "minority" status categories rather than acknowledging their unique characteristics (Sotto-Santiago, 2019). To illustrate, the Corporations Canada (2020) Annual Report reveals that while women hold 25% of senior management positions, members of non-dominant groups hold only 9% of those positions. Here, *non-dominant* populations describe "those groups who are commonly marginalized in society by virtue of their differences from the dominant Anglo-Saxon, male, heterosexual culture" (Arthur & Collins, 2010, p. 16). In Canada, women hold

only 17% of board seats compared to members of non-dominant groups, who only hold 4% of seats (Corporations Canada, 2020). This finding is staggering and suggests that Eurocentric and androcentric discourses about gender, race, and class may continue to influence who gets nominated to serve in leadership positions. In this article, *Eurocentrism* denotes a phenomenon that views non-Western societies' historical and cultural contexts from a European viewpoint (Pokhrel, 2011). Additionally, *androcentrism* signifies a way of thinking that assumes maleness as normative and relegates women's needs, priorities, and values to the periphery (Hegarty & Buechel, 2006). The limited representations of women from non-dominant groups in academic leadership positions affirm the notion that Eurocentric and androcentric discourses "construct, maintain and legitimize" biases (Wright, 2021, 30:23). This proposition is a clear indication that systemic prejudices impact the career progression of DAW in senior leadership positions.

Internal Silencing and Moving Beyond Inclusion to Expansion

The absence and silencing of diverse women in academic leadership is an enduring social justice issue. Internal silencing has a negative impact on the career trajectories of diverse women in academia, many of whom are struggling to carve their path to succeed in a male-dominated milieu (Wright, 2021). *Internal silencing* refers to the inner voices or 'internal barriers' that manifest themselves in various ways (e.g., an unease in saying no, a fear of failure, etc.), which have a silencing effect (Aiston, 2019). Internal silencing tends to be a consequence of socialization and gender stereotyping, and it plays a key role in how diverse women view themselves as academic leaders. Rowe (1990) discusses how many academics who are women of colour consciously make the decision to remain silent, even when subjected to discriminatory comments and *micro-inequities*. This concept is viewed as small events that are covert, hard to prove and often unintentional (Rowe, 1990). For many DAW, remaining silent or not speaking out is a strategic decision to safeguard future career prospects. Being too vocal is considered a career risk and an obstacle to acquiring leadership positions in the future.

In recent years, universities have encouraged faculty to be at the forefront of demonstrating a commitment to EDI efforts. That said, western epistemic dominance and colonial structures still influence higher learning and reflect the "bastions of male power and prestige" (Aiston, 2019, para. 1). The guiding principles of EDI can shape effective leadership in safe and successful academic environments and implementing them can help foster effective change (Henry et al., 2017). Gill (2019) defines equity, diversity and inclusion as follows: *equity* is a process that results in the equal, fair, and respectful treatment of everyone; *diversity* focuses on the rich and unique representation of equity-deserving groups; and *inclusion* reflects the creation of culturally brave environments where all people are welcomed, valued, and empowered.

Given our current socio-cultural landscape, we argue that higher education should now move beyond inclusion initiatives to expansion efforts that generate transformative change. This *expansion framework* would involve the practice of co-constructing community across differences by broadening and deepening social networks in higher education to benefit the needs of DAW (Alduais & Deng, 2022; Miller, 2020). We support Miller's (2020) stance that, "[t]he era of inclusion might [have ran] its course" (para. 22). This argument is valid in higher education settings that tend to be performative when addressing inclusion issues. In such cases, diverse faculty members are just superficially represented as a form of tokenism and not authentically valued and embraced for their unique contributions to the institution. Through expansion, non-performative actions can be taken that afford DAW the freedom and flexibility to engage in "equitable, diverse systems" (para. 17), whereby credence is given to their ideas and lived experiences. This form of deliberate expansion constitutes to the co-creation of brave

spaces, which can allow the full participation of DAW without judgement and otherization. As we consider facilitating systemic change through expansion, an ITF provides a unique lens through which to comprehend the leadership roles of DAW in higher education.

Intersectionality Theoretical Framework

The term *intersectionality* was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and describes how discrimination due to different facets of people's sociocultural identities can overlap and impact their lives. Crenshaw (1989), an African American scholar, suggests that "because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (p.140). The foundational premise of ITF centred on the multidimensionality of Black women's experiences, which is a complex phenomenon (Crenshaw, 1991). Although popularized in the United States of America (U.S.A.), the Intersectionality Theoretical Framework (ITF) can be extended to the Canadian setting. Liu (2020), a Canadian scholar, has also written extensively on intersectionality and leadership. In her work, *Redeeming Leadership: An Anti-racist Feminist Intervention*, the scholar offers a critique of masculine and White approaches to leadership. She indicates that anti-racist feminism can challenge conventional leadership models and practices of power that are influenced by westernized views. Her study of leadership from various socio-cultural and intersected perspectives demonstrates how the intellectual and activist elements of feminist movements provide remedies to contemporary leadership research and practice (Liu, 2020).

We also argue that ITF can provide a unique lens through which to understand the ways that deep-rooted colonial practices are affirmed and perpetuated in academia, particularly pay gaps related to race and gender (Kerr, 2014). When academic women belong to diverse identity groups, lived experiences and leadership prospects are impacted; diversity contributes to unequal outcomes in ways that cannot be attributed solely to one dimension (Bagalini, 2020). The multilayered effects of intersectionality impact the workplace, and women who belong to two or more under-represented groups experience oppression and lack of opportunity in distinctive ways (PayScale, 2022). Intersectionality creates larger pay gaps for women of colour because race and gender overlap to create wider pay gaps in various fields, including educational leadership.

Additionally, Canadian data focusing on academic spaces denotes a significant wage gap between White males and all other populations (Canadian Association of University Teachers [CAUT], 2018). This research reveals that the biggest wage gap exists for women of colour faculty members, who only earn an average of $0.68 cents for every $1.00 earned by men (CAUT, 2018). To support this claim, according to 2016 census data gathered by Statistics Canada (2018), racialized female faculty earned an average salary of $77,908, which is 32% less than male faculty from the dominant group (CAUT, 2018). Canadian research also revealed that in 2017-2018, female professors earned an average salary of $155,520 compared to the average salary of $162,880 earned by their male counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2018). This data shows major pay discrepancies in academia that impact diverse women who are often at the lower end of the pay hierarchy. In addition to significant pay discrepancies, many DAW are impacted by the pressure of publication which determines their career progressions.

Gender and Publication

One of the most important competencies for senior faculty positions in higher education institutions is authorship and publication. Publishing in academia can be seen in terms of challenge, risk, and reward (Llorens et al., 2021). Diverse women on faculty can be

risk averse when sharing public commentary; they sometimes fear their criticism will be interpreted as more adversarial than similar scholarly contributions made by men (Wu et al., 2020). This double standard requires women to be more knowledgeable and accurate than their male counterparts. For DAW in competition with men to publish, there is a possibility that their credibility could be ruptured. Due to this heightened risk, many minoritized women in higher education often wait until they are more seasoned and known in their fields to comment and engage in scholarly debate (Llorens et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). DAW are more often employed in junior and mid-level positions in postsecondary institutions, while their male peers in more senior positions provide debate and critique of their scholarly work (Wu et al., 2020).

Additionally, cultured gender expectations impact and perpetuate stereotypes. As such, we see fewer DAW as first authors in scholarly commentary, less engagement from these women in scholarly debate and a lower ratio of these individuals willing to enter a debate with their male counterparts in public forums (Odic & Wojcik 2019). A key challenge when trying to understand scholarly decisions to make public commentary is determining whether the lack of female voices is due to risk aversion, a preference for collaboration or whether it is due to cultured gender norms affecting editors' decisions when compiling publications (Llorens et al., 2021). The psychology field is unique, with women making up more than two-thirds of undergraduate and graduate students; however, only a third of their female faculty are full professors (Eagly & Miller 2016). Despite encouraging numbers at the student body level and in hiring practices, multiple researchers conclude that female authors continue to be less published and cited across all branches of psychology (Eagly & Miler, 2016; Odic & Wojick 2019).

The gender gap is also demonstrated between female and male faculty published in high-impact, peer-reviewed journals. This disparity is greatest when looking at first-author to last-author positions (Odic & Wojcik 2019). Possible reasons for these discrepancies include: fewer women choose to work at high-calibre research institutes, and thus the gap is a result of hiring practices rather than publication; women publish less of their work, choosing to do so only when they think their work would have significant societal impact; thus they focus less on the quantity of publications; or, women may choose to work collaboratively with less emphasis on author position (Duch et al., 2012; Eagly & Miller, 2016). Given these ongoing publication challenges, it is not surprising that many aspiring academic women leaders face conflicts in higher education.

Diverse Women Managing Conflicts in Academic Contexts

Holt and DeVore (2005) indicate that for many DAW their ability to manage conflicts is influenced by socially constructed gender norms. *Conflict management* is the process of recognizing, identifying, and resolving conflicts in a fair and efficient manner (Mckinney & Scalia, 2015). Higher education institutions continue to be gendered when examining the division of labour and the location of power (Sallee, 2012). These inequities are evident in the disproportionate number of clerical positions for women in contrast to leadership advantages for men. Another area of disparity is the gender gaps that exist between women and men when comparing full and assistant professors (Sallee, 2012). Power inequities are often sustained due to men and women's varying approaches when managing conflict. *Conflict style* is a term that describes how individual parties engage to resolve disagreements and navigate emotional reactions during a conflictual interaction (Hammer, 2009). The five main conflict styles evident in leadership literature based on the Thomas-Kilmann model (2008) include collaboration, avoidance, competition, accommodation, and comprise. Although individuals can use all five approaches of conflict management and may naturally

prefer a specific style, individuals often consider the contextual factors as well (Folger et al., 1993; Thomas & Kilmann, 2008). For example, individuals may consider the goal, situation, existing relationships, and consequences for the parties involved (Folger et al., 1993).

The five conflict management styles will be considered, specifically in regard to DAW. *Collaboration* involves working together to determine mutually beneficial solutions and depends on the level of trust, respect, and communication between the parties involved (Jugenheimer et al., 2014). While collaboration is the desired strategy to manage conflict in many environments, including academia, other strategies may also be useful in certain situations (Coburn, n.d.; Jugenheimer et al., 2014). For instance, *avoidance* may be used for issues that are considered trivial. This strategy may be used by some DAW in lower power positions who want to reduce tension, especially with their White male colleagues.

Additionally, *competition* is prevalent in many institutions as it relates to power which is often attributed to the dominant culture. This strategy tends to be adopted by individuals who are privileged with power and can negotiate in a manner that gets results quickly. Further, *accommodation* may be beneficial when the relationship with the other party is highly valued. For example, this strategy may be used to maintain positive relationships, especially with individuals in positions of authority. Lastly, the *compromise* strategy is best used when time is limited and when dealing with trusted individuals. This approach might be adopted by DAW when in conflict with a powerful party with opposing views to reach a middle ground and end the conflict.

Building on these ideas, Holt and DeVore (2005) reveal that women are more likely to endorse a compromise style when resolving conflict, while men are more likely to resort to using a competing style. Since collaboration generally provides the best outcomes (Jugenheimer et al., 2014; Women in Research, n.d.), women and men should engage in more collaborative interactions when navigating conflict to ensure mutual gain. A collaborative style involves individuals working together and exchanging insights to find solutions that address concerns which may otherwise have been disregarded using a competing or compromising style (Women in Research, n.d.). By understanding the different ways men and women manage conflict and recognizing gender differences in the leadership discourse, DAW may be better prepared to address stereotypes as well as navigate challenges in male-dominated environments.

The complexities of intercultural conflict must also be considered. Few researchers (Hammer, 2009; Thomas & Kilmann, 2008) have examined the complexities of conflict styles between individuals from diverse cultures (AFS Intercultural Programs, 2012). Intercultural conflict styles differ depending on the individual and are shaped by cultural influences (AFS Intercultural Programs, 2012). The Intercultural Conflict Styles (IFS) model developed by Hammer (2009) recognizes four conflict styles: accommodation, dynamics, discussion, and engagement. The IFS model considers styles of conflict along two continuums: (a) direct/indirect (i.e., preference for a direct or indirect approach in response to conflict) and (b) emotionally expressive/restrained (preference to manage conflict by expression or restraining emotion) (Hammer, 2009). The accommodation style uses indirect strategies with an emotionally restrained approach and can typically be seen among Native American, Mexican, Somalian, and Japanese individuals. The dynamic style uses indirect strategies with an emotionally expressive approach and can often be seen in Middle Eastern and Pakistani cultures. The discussion style includes direct strategies and emotionally restrained approaches for conflict and is a common style among individuals in the U.S.A., Australia, and Eastern Europe. Lastly, the engagement style consists of direct strategies and emotionally expressive approaches, which can be typically seen among African Americans and people from southern Europe, Nigeria, and Russia (Hammer, 2009). We posit that

increased awareness of the typical cultural patterns of conflict management styles can provide insight on the patterns of intercultural conflict, especially in the diverse context of academia.

Alongside conflict styles, the inclusion of varying leadership and communication styles adopted by DAW beyond traditional Eurocentric expectations is questioned. Academic spaces continue to demonstrate resistance to varying leadership styles and instead continue to push an ethnocentric leadership model (Motapanyane & Shankar, 2022). When Black women take on leadership roles in predominantly White, male-dominated universities, the typical traits associated with leadership often clash with the stereotypes about Black women (Rosette et al., 2016; Showunmi, 2023). For example, the racist stereotype of the leadership and communication style of Black women as angry, blunt, and volatile perpetuates racial microaggressions (Flowers-Taylor, 2021; Motapanyane & Shankar, 2022; Showunmi, 2023). The leadership and communication styles of Black women, as well as women academics from other racialized groups, continue to be compromised to conform to the expectations and comfort of their colleagues from the dominant group and institutions (Flowers-Taylor, 2021).

Stereotypes of DAW

Gender stereotypes are prevalent in higher education and, as such, can be punitive for DAW in male domains (Hughes et al., 2023). For example, women in academia are more likely to perform supportive functions, which are given a lower value and perceived as "women's work" (Acker, 1990; Dengate et al., 2021, p. 2). Additionally, they are often labelled as passive and disproportionately responsible for helping with students' personal problems (Dengate et al., 2021, p. 4). These factors can inadvertently result in negative career consequences for DAW around tenure decisions and leadership positions, which can impede their career progress. In addition to Canada, we review research generated in other geographical contexts. For instance, the persistent under-representation of diverse women in higher education institutions is also prevalent in the U.S.A., wherein positions of power and prestige reflect systemic gender inequalities and gender stereotypes (Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022). DAW compete with the intersecting effects of both sexism and racism because of their "double minority status" (Walkington, 2017, p. 52). The construct of *double jeopardy* was invented by the Black feminist activist Frances M. Beal (1969, 2008) to illustrate the concurrent forms of sexism and racism experienced by Black women and, more broadly, other women of colour. Beal's work examined the economic exploitation of Black women and exposed the ideology that the more one is marginalized, the more likely they are to be exploited. In the same vein, Berdahl and Moore (2006) conducted a study on the construct of investigating workplace harassment among minority women. The scholars found this research group's compound experiences of racism and misogyny contributed to lower-paying, less prestigious, and less powerful jobs than White men (Berdahl & Moore, 2006).

From the above outcome, it is apparent that double jeopardy negatively affects the professional lives of women of colour, which includes to DAW. They continue to be under-represented in the following areas: research (e.g., the publication process, citation rates, professional recognition, and funding); teaching (e.g., student evaluations and student-teacher interactions); and service (e.g., service loads) (Casad et al., 2021; Fox Tree & Vaid, 2022; Hughes et al., 2023). Eaton et al. (2020) explore the influence of race and gender stereotypes on the advancement of faculty in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). They show that faculty in physics departments present a gender bias, favouring male candidates as they are deemed more competent and hireable than female candidates with identical profiles and experience. These findings persisted even though women were rated as more likeable than men in their research (Eaton et al., 2020). Furthermore, physics faculty rated Black and Latinx women lowest in terms of hire-ability in comparison to all other

candidates. These findings reinforce the idea that gender and racial stereotypes persist within academia and contribute to the exclusion of DAW in recruitment and career advancement processes.

Racial and gender stereotypes among DAW also contribute to *unconscious bias* in academic spaces. This term refers to social stereotypes individuals hold outside of their conscious awareness about different groups of people (University of California San Francisco [UCSF], n.d.). Unconscious bias works against women by limiting advancement opportunities and maintaining historical patterns of men holding leadership positions in fields including higher education (Filut et al., 2017). Eaton et al. (2020) also examined U.S.A. data that uncovered persistent biased perceptions that Asian and White candidates are more competent and hireable than Black and Latinx candidates. Negative outcomes resulting from unconscious gender bias must be addressed in a culturally safe manner, starting with understanding and interrupting the systems that perpetuate these disparities.

Ensuring Cultural Safety for DAW Leaders

Given the many hurdles DAW face in higher education (e.g., racism, gender, and sexism), it is evident they need help with a sense of belonging to advance in leadership roles in academia (Opie & Livingston, 2022). The academic world has typically been catered towards and continues to support the progress of male scholars (Hughes et al., 2023). Academic culture is unsafe when it does not cultivate brave spaces for DAW to voice their concerns and prove their worth and capability in a male-dominated environment. In academic leadership, *cultural sensitivity* focuses on basic awareness and willingness to learn about cultural differences (Foronda, 2008). *Cultural safety* involves the recognition of disparities resulting from systemic oppression and denial of equality based on such intersected dimensions as race, gender, and sexism. A focus on intersected identities is paramount when discussing cultural safety for DAW, many of whom are marginalized and burdened with increased workloads (Pluta & Rudawska, 2021). These individuals are often viewed as tokenistic, put into positions of little authority or consequence just to fit a quota (Jaschik, 2007; Niemann, 1999). Much of the discrimination DAW face is subtle and not immediately visible. It is, therefore, imperative to shed light on their lived experiences in higher education to bring greater awareness to their plights.

For many DAW, although critical, advocacy is strategically avoided in higher education institutions. The reason is that those who dare to advocate for themselves and challenge the status quo tend to be labelled as "'aggressive' or 'bitches'" (Aiston, 2019, para. 10). From this perspective, we assert that asking DAW to 'lean' into environments that are culturally unsafe can be highly problematic and potentially traumatic. In fact, there tends to be a deliberate effort on a systemic level to silence the reporting of such discriminatory experiences (Hughes et al., 2023). Davidson (2017) proposes that the definition of *trauma* is as simple as "any experience in which a person's internal resources are not adequate to cope with external stressors" (p. 4). At times, DAW do not feel they have the resources to cope with external stressors, and thus it is logical to conclude that in the workplace, traumatic experiences can occur. Quite often, these individuals are placed in a "delicate position" to present their views and are singled out due to their intersected racial and gender identities (Zamudio-Suarez, 2020, para. 2). This form of othering can result in imposter syndrome, which encompasses feelings of stress, loneliness, isolation, and alienation. These prolonged issues can lead to growing resignations and attrition rates for DAW in leadership roles (Flaherty, 2020). From this discussion, we can determine that fostering cultural safety in brave spaces with DAW is critical to mitigating potential traumatic experiences. This form of intentional action is useful in cultivating a sense of resiliency and agency for these individuals to thrive in leadership domains.

 ISBN-978-86-87043-95-4

Critiques and Gaps in the Leadership Literature

The literature addressing the experiences of DAW in leadership is still focused on binary gender distinctions: male and female (Christman & McClellan, 2012; Fagan & Short, 2023) There is little to no information about the integration of non-binary gender identities into research regarding power imbalances in academia (Fagan & Short, 2023). More research is, therefore, needed to follow societal leanings toward more inclusive understandings of gender identity and expression (Shea & Renn, 2017). According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (n.d.) in Canada, an individual's *gender identity* "may be the same as or different from their birth-assigned sex," while *gender expression* is how one "publicly presents their gender" relative to "behaviour and outward appearance like dress, hair and makeup" (para. 6, 8). Those who identify as men (and in the majority of White heterosexual males) still hold institutional power, publication power and commentary power in academic settings. While women, particularly BIWOC populations, are under-represented in academia, our *non-binary* colleagues are even less represented (Ranganathan et al., 2021). This umbrella term represents persons who do not fit into the categories of "man" or "woman," or "male" or "female" (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2023, para. 1). Consequently, non-binary individuals warrant further attention and research exploration in academic leadership discourse.

Critical race and feminist scholars (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Snaggs-Wilson, 2021) have rightly critiqued traditional leadership theoretical frameworks (e.g., great man, behaviour, contingency, and transformational theories). Essentially, the underlying tenets of these traditional frameworks were grounded in the patriarchal belief that White, upper-class heterosexual males are the leaders (Ladkin & Patrick, 2022). These leadership theories were also rooted in Eurocentric and androcentric principles that created sociocultural and institutional barriers for diverse groups in academia. In the current socio-cultural climate replete with systemic discrimination and prejudice (Miller, 2020, para.13, 19), DAW encounter a *concrete ceiling* (instead of a *glass ceiling*). The former term was conceived by Jasmine Babers (2016), specifically for women of colour, to underscore the insurmountable barriers to success they must overcome to advance in their professional lives. The latter concept addresses the invisible obstacles impeding the progress of women in their careers. These systemic barriers make it difficult to see what the height of the hierarchy even looks like for DAW (Chance, 2022; Davis, 2012). Another obstruction for DAW is the *glass cliff phenomenon*, which means that women of colour are likely to be promoted to higher positions in times of disruption or scandal (Morgenroth et al., 2020; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The term *glass cliff*, coined by Michelle Ryan and S. Alexander Haslam (2005), describes the invisible barrier DAW experience when appointed during challenging organizational situations, making them more precarious. We support Hughes et al.'s (2023) statement that "At the heart of [diverse] women's experiences are issues of equality and striving for equality, inside a system that was built by and for male academics" (p. 492). In this vein, Whelp (2019) argues that "success in creating equity in organizations is linked to the ability of White men to move toward awareness, action and advocacy in supporting inclusion and equity" (para. 34). This means that men from the dominant culture need to contribute to this work of expansion in higher education, wherein the differences of DAW are embraced, and their capabilities collectively supported. These highlighted arguments demonstrate a dire need for effective culturally appropriate leadership models of change that cater to the lived realities of DAW.

Culturally Appropriate Model for Leadership Change

The sparsity of diverse women in leadership positions in academia points to a need for culturally appropriate leadership models. One such approach is Dr. Snaggs-Wilson's (2021) *Awareness, Rationale, and Choices (ARC)* model for organizational change. This approach challenges leaders to consider their biases and advocates for transformative change to create inclusive, equitable, diverse workplaces. The ARC model proposes three key domains for leaders to consider when addressing their biases against DAW: (1) awareness, (2) rationale, and (3) choice to change (Snaggs-Wilson, 2021; Wright, 2021). First, leaders must gain *awareness* of existing unconscious and conscious biases within their organizations. Continued diversity and inclusion training programs in higher education institutions may support these efforts and minimize conflicts related to race and gender. Next, leaders are urged to challenge the *rationale* associated with these biases by comparing them to the true reality and actual experiences of individuals, including colleagues. Gender constructs can be challenged by receiving and offering feedback to individuals resisting efforts toward diversity and inclusivity. Lastly, leaders are encouraged to make hard *choices* and to take actionable steps toward changing the culture within the workplace. For example, leaders may end professional relationships with organizations or individuals that do not support diversity and inclusivity (Snaggs-Wilson, 2021). Based on the domains of the ARC model, we assert that greater work is necessary to circumvent ingrained race-related biases and pervasive gender discrimination encountered by DAW. Adopting this framework in higher education is a step in the right direction to ensure greater diversity and expansion of ideas in academic leadership.

Re-visioning leadership in this culturally appropriate way levels the playing field for non-dominant groups in academia. The ARC model attempts to deconstruct age-old patriarchal leadership standards that were developed and influenced by Eurocentric and androcentric ways of knowing to inform research, teaching, and policymaking (Snaggs-Wilson, 2021). The above traditional frameworks were undertaken without the consultation or participation of DAW leaders who were pushed to the margins (Hughes et al., 2023). Arguably, the ARC framework allows leaders to collaborate in the co-creation of change so that a new way of thinking can arise. By adopting this framework in higher education institutions, leaders can better understand that systemic change is the way forward. By moving forward, we are then able to co-create brave spaces for all voices, including DAW who are often dismissed from the leadership discourse.

Conclusion

Mobilizing and sustaining systemic change in higher education requires that all play an active role in reimagining a better future for collective leadership and learning. As such, cultural shifts should be explored in academia to assess the influences of longer-term individual, structural, and institutional changes that can lead to measurable outcomes. We strongly believe that addressing power imbalance that might result in fear, backlash, and resistance among DAW (Brown, 2023) can achieve this form of progress in academic settings. Attention should also be given to the endemic othering and silencing of many diverse women in educational leadership. Seeking allyship from more dominant White male voices (Hughes et al., 2023) in higher education institutions is a unique way to ensure non-performative action in brave spaces for DAW. All voices are, therefore, required in academia to ensure continued sustainability, participation, action and ultimate stability.

Notably, non-Eurocentric theoretical advancement is long overdue in higher education and leadership governance. Such alternative frameworks as the ARC model can help to disrupt institutional power imbalances as we strive to expand EDI principles (Snaggs-Wilson,

 ISBN-978-86-87043-95-4

2021). In higher education, we reason that best practices and accountability should take precedence for the betterment of the collective.

As DAW, the strength of our togetherness and resiliency lies in our ability to build solidarity across many complex and multidimensional sociocultural identities (Nguyen, 2020, Opie & Livingston, 2022). We need to continue to reflect upon our own assumptions and biases to bridge the divide through authentic relationships within the collective. When everyone is involved in working towards the goals of EDI, women in the academic leadership sector and beyond will benefit and experience greater sustainability in higher education (Opie & Livingston, 2022). This transformative progression will occur without any form of exclusion, othering, or alienation.

To this end, our intention with this article is to invite further reflection and stimulate a much-needed dialogue that is long overdue in higher education leadership. No longer should the lived experiences of DAW be ignored. Rather, their unique realities need to be centred in brave academic spaces as we work harmoniously to integrate EDI and expansion measures into institutional structures and practices.

 ISBN-978-86-87043-95-4

Acknowledgements: The authors thank Drs. Heather Macdonald and Dung Jidong for their editorial review and conceptual assistance with this article.

Funding: The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by the Western Canadian Research Fund, City University of Seattle, Calgary Campus.

Conflicts of Interest:
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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 ISBN-978-86-87043-95-4

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