

Mission to Eradicate Misogynoir:

The application of positive leadership within communities to cultivate safety

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“The level of violence that black women face is such that it's not surprising that some of them do not survive their encounters with police. Black girls as young as seven, great grandmothers as old as 95 have been killed by the police. They've been killed in their living rooms, in their bedrooms. They've been killed in their cars. They've been killed on the street. They've been killed in front of their parents and they've been killed in front of their children. They have been shot to death. They have been stomped to death. They have been suffocated to death. They have been manhandled to death. They have been tasered to death. They've been killed when they've called for help. They've been killed when they were alone, and they've been killed when they were with others. They've been killed shopping while black, driving while black, having a mental disability while black, having a domestic disturbance while black. They've even been killed being homeless while black. They've been killed talking on the cell phone, laughing with friends, sitting in a car reported as stolen and making a U-turn in front of the White House with an infant strapped in the backseat of the car. Why don't we know these stories? Why is it that their lost lives don't generate the same amount of media attention and communal outcry as the lost lives of their fallen brothers? It's time for a change.”

- Kimberlé Crenshaw, *The Urgency for Intersectionality* (Crashaw, 2016)

The problem of violence against Black women and femmes is undoubtedly a product of a racist and sexist society which reinforces narratives stereotypically associated with Black womanhood (Crenshaw, 2016; Gaines, 2018). It is reinforced though racist cops who kill us and through misogynistic messaging from men we consider brothers, family (Gaines, 2018). As Crenshaw explains through a critical lens in her Ted Talk on intersectionality, there is a dire need for change in our material conditions, the narratives that are told about us, and the support we get

from our communities when we are harmed (Crashaw, 2016). This paper explores the application of positive leadership in cultivating spaces that support the safety and longevity of Black femme lives to combat the growing issue of misogynoir – violence against Black women and femmes (Gains, 2018). Positive leadership, as described in “Positive organizational behaviour: A reflective approach” consists of key markers (compassion, forgiveness, humility, and authenticity being four of them) that may have an impact resulting in safer environments for Black women and femmes (Pina et al., 2020). Through analysis of four key markers of positive leadership and community standards, the following is an expansion of these ideas as they apply to the solution of misogynoir.

Compassion, as a primary marker of positive leadership may play an important role in cultivating safe and inclusive environments (Pina et al., 2020). According to “Positive Organizational Behaviour”, the social architecture of compassionate organizations consists of six key factors – social network, culture, roles, routines, leadership, and stories (Pina et al., 2020, pp 229). Social network is when people in a community or organization share high-quality connections and know each other well (Pina et al., 2020, pp 229). Further, communities that isolate members and discourage outside relationships and connections do a disservice to the overall wellness of an community (Pina et al., 2020, pp 237). There are huge benefits in recognizing the contributions of outside parties and inviting growth of social capital (Pina et al., 2020, pp 237). Adaptable boundaries create an environment that promotes cohesion and rejects the notion that group think – or unilateral thought— global relations, then, are advantageous to the group (Pina et al., 2020, pp 239). “[V]alues that promote prioritizing people over efficiency and profits” cultivates a compassionate culture (Pina et al., 2020, pp 229). Social networks that are built on the basis of humanity—rather than obligation driven by profit—have the potential to

create compassionate community norms where the safety of all, in this case Black women and femmes—is essential to the wellness of an entire community. Roles within a community may vary greatly, however, there is potential for impact when autonomy is a staple and care for others in a group is a collective responsibility (Pina et al., 2020, pp 229). Consistent routines—such as the pursuit of justice for the murder of an individual despite their social identifiers—creates an environment where equitable compassion can be experienced. (Pina et al., 2020, pp 229). When leadership—such as political figures and judiciary parties—are held to a standard of alignment between action and words, compassionate leadership is tangible (Pina et al., 2020, pp 229). The stories told within a group are a profound reflection of a community (Pina et al., 2020, pp 229). When elements of compassion and care are consistently a part of a group's narratives, compassion can be observed rather than reported (Pina et al., 2020, pp 229).

Forgiveness, as a standard within a community, has the potential to create reciprocal positive relationships and may create a foundation for safety for Black women and femmes. According to Pina and other authors, forgiveness in an organization includes “interpersonal workplace forgiveness and the existence of a forgiveness climate” (Pina et al., 2020, pp 230). Forgiveness as an element of community is then both interpersonal and collective where leadership practices and facilitates an environment of forgiveness (Pina et al., 2020, pp 230). Within a climate of forgiveness, pain and suffering is acknowledged (Pina et al., 2020, pp 230). Within a forgiving climate, then, violence against Black femmes is not ignored and or pain is not belittled. Meaning, as a staple for a climate of forgiveness, is associated with sacrifices made by individuals as there is a focus on higher social purpose (Pina et al., 2020, pp 230). For Black femmes, violence associated with erasure is nullified and contributions to the collective by us are valued. In a climate of forgiveness, there are high standards of integrity that are intolerant of

harm and there is ample support for those that sustain injury (whether physical or otherwise) (Pina et al., 2020, pp 230). Language consistent with care and compassion provides a basis for responses to pain (Pina et al., 2020, pp 230).

Co-modeling relationships between leaders and other members of an organization or community create environments that are open to the complexities of humanity (Pina et al., 2020, pp 233). Humility on the part of leadership is necessary to facilitate an environment where everyone can learn from each other (Pina et al., 2020, pp 230 & 315). Humility in leadership is consistent with three primary dimensions: self-awareness, appreciation for others, and teachability (Pina et al., 2020, pp 314). Self-awareness in leadership is demonstrated through an overall willingness to see oneself consistent with reality (Pina et al., 2020, pp 314). An environment which accurately assesses its responsibility to provide safety for Black women and femmes would be consistent with this element of self-awareness. Further, leadership that own this responsibility provide the means to establish safety across all identities. Humble leadership expresses appreciation for others that sourced genuinely and can be demonstrated through valuing the contributions, efforts, strengths and abilities of others (Pina et al., 2020, pp 314). Teachability is a profound element of humble leadership demonstrated but a willingness to receive feedback (Pina et al., 2020, pp 314)—in this case being open to hearing about the reality that Black femmes face profound risk to our safety. With leadership dedicated to humility, asking for help within a community becomes a welcome behavior that is seen as a collective benefit rather than an admittance of ineptitude or failure (Pina et al., 2020, pp 233).

Authenticity in leadership leads to positive outcomes within a group and promotes an environment consistent with honesty and integrity (Pina et al., 2020, pp 329). Authenticity within leaders can be identified through four primary traits: self-awareness, relational transparency,

balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective (Pina et al., 2020, pp 328). Self-awareness, as mentioned above, is an alignment between how one views self and how others perceive them (Pina et al., 2020, pp 314 & 328). In addition, a self-aware leader makes accurate assessments of their own strengths and weaknesses and that of the community (Pina et al., 2020, pp 328). An Authentic leader, then, has the potential to prioritize strength building in the area of public safety in way that create equitable access to safety instead of ignoring the cries of community members speaking out about violence. Relational transparency can be observed in the ways that leaders are open and honest about information and a divestment from wearing masks or presenting false personas (Pina et al., 2020, pp 328). Leaders that are dedicated to relational transparency have potential to take seriously evidence that supports the claims of scholars, such as Kimberle Crenshaw, when it comes to their findings around the experiences of Black women and femmes and would not reject data on the basis of disagreeing with basic claims (such as the discrepancies in access to safety across racial and gender identities). Relational transparency demands of leaders to be active in critical thinking and seek fact-based evidence to support policies and procedures (Pina et al, 2020). Balanced processing is present in a leader when they are diligent to evaluate all relevant information before making decisions or coming to conclusions (Pina et al., 2020, pp 328). In addition to seeking fact-based data, an authentic leader would be dedicated to the collection of all relative information to inform decision making processes (Pina et al, 2020). Leadership with balanced processing as a motivator could create environments where community members felt heard and considered with their needs reflected in policy. When community experience violence, an authentic leader would potentially have the proclivity to act on the information equitably, despite social identifiers. Leaders who practice balance in their processing are not quick to coming to conclusions based

on their own strongly held perceptions or opinions but instead seek ideas that challenge them (Pina et al., 2020, pp 328). A leader who engages in ethical considerations that align with internal convictions and values can be seen to have an internalized moral perspective—that is that they do not rely on external policies or assertions to navigate ethically (Pina et al., 2020, pp 328). Leadership with a firm sense of internally motivated morals, would not have to be convinced to action the behalf of all community members to secure their safety and livelihood. Instead, an authentic leader, would be internally motivated by their own ethical standards to create care standards across communities (Pina et al, 2020). Authentic leadership has the potential to than cultivate safety within communities.

In conclusion, positive leadership and community standards present a compelling argument for application in the pursuit of the eradication of misogynoir. Across all lines of difference, action where compassion, forgiveness, humility and authenticity are applied reflect a potential for equitable community safety. Inclusive standards that consider those most impacted by racist and sexist realities are required to address the problem of violence. Leaders who are dedicated to answer calls to enforce anti-racist and anti-sexist policies, procedures, and standards may align with the above elaborated key markers. Further, community members – including Black femme relationship with self (Gaines, 2018)--who value compassion, forgiveness, humility and authenticity and hold leadership accountable to upholding these ideals have the potential to influence public safety beyond the call to lawmaking and cultivate spaces where Black women and femmes are safe to exist. Further research and testing of these theories is essential to establishing a fact-based analysis of potential. However, the call to action regarding solutions is urgent in that Black women and femmes are at high risk for experiencing violence. (Crenshaw, 2016; Gaines, 2018)

References

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