ADP

مجلة حوليات التراث

Revue Annales du Patrimoine



P-ISSN 1112-5020 / E-ISSN 2602-6945

The intersectionality of black women's leadership L'intersectionnalité du leadership des femmes noires

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Reçu le : 31/7/2023 - Accepté le : 5/9/2023

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Pour citer l'article :

* Dr Timothee Ouattara : The intersectionality of black women's leadership, Revue Annales du patrimoine, Université de Mostaganem, N° 23, Septembre 2023, pp. 255-274.





http://annalesdupatrimoine.wordpress.com

The intersectionality of black women's leadership

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Abstract:

This study explores the concept of intersectionality and its impact on black women's leadership. Intersectionality acknowledges the complex and overlapping nature of social identities and experiences, particularly focusing on how race, gender, and other intersecting dimensions of identity shape individuals' lives. Drawing on intersectional feminist theory, this study investigates how the Black Lives Matter movement has influenced the leadership roles and experiences of black women. It examines the challenges, opportunities, and strategies employed by black women leaders in navigating systems of oppression and mobilizing for social change. By analyzing the intersectional dynamics at play, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the unique leadership experiences and contributions of black women within the Black Lives Matter movement.

Keywords:

intersectionality, leadership, Black Lives Matter, racism, oppression.

L'intersectionnalité du leadership des femmes noires

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Résumé:

Cette étude explore le concept d'intersectionnalité et son impact sur le leadership des femmes noires à l'ère du Black Lives Matter. L'intersectionnalité reconnaît la nature complexe et chevauchante des identités sociales et des expériences, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur la façon dont la race, le genre et d'autres dimensions interconnectées de l'identité façonnent la vie des individus. En s'appuyant sur la théorie féministe intersectionnelle, cette étude examine comment le mouvement Black Lives Matter a influencé les rôles de leadership et les expériences des femmes noires. Elle étudie les défis, les opportunités et les stratégies utilisées par les femmes noires leaders pour naviguer dans les systèmes d'oppression et se mobiliser pour le changement social. En analysant les dynamiques intersectionnelles en jeu, cette étude contribue à une meilleure compréhension des expériences et des contributions uniques des femmes noires au sein du mouvement Black Lives Matter.

Mots-clés:

Intersectionnalité, leadership, Black Lives Matter, racism, oppression.

Introduction:

The concept of intersectionality has become increasingly relevant in the field of leadership studies as scholars seek to understand the unique experiences of individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups.

This concept was first developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar and civil rights advocate, in 1989⁽¹⁾. Crenshaw defines intersectionality as the interconnectedness of social identities and the ways in which they interact and intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. Initially, she used the term to describe the experiences of Black women who face both racism and sexism, but intersectionality has since been applied to other groups and identities as well.

Intersectionality also emphasizes the limitations of single-issue approaches to social justice and highlights the need to address multiple and intersecting forms of oppression⁽²⁾. For instance, a person who identifies as both queer and disabled may experience discrimination that is different from someone who only identifies as queer or only identifies as disabled. The concept of intersectionality recognizes the complexity of identity and the ways in which social categories overlap and interact to shape people's experiences.

Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality has had a significant impact on feminist and social justice movements, leading to greater recognition of the ways in which multiple forms of oppression intersect and affect people's lives⁽³⁾. Moreover, it has influenced legal theory and practice, leading to a greater understanding of the ways in which discrimination operates and how it can be addressed through legal frameworks that consider intersectional identities⁽⁴⁾.

According to Crenshaw, the concept of intersectionality is critical in understanding the unique challenges faced by Black

women in leadership positions due to the intersections of race, gender, and other social identities⁽⁵⁾. These challenges can include discrimination and the invisibility of their experiences within dominant leadership narratives. Black women in leadership positions have historically been excluded from traditional leadership definitions, which prioritize white, male, and individualistic models of leadership, leading to the neglect of their experiences and leadership styles⁽⁶⁾.

These challenges have been further highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement, which has brought attention to the systemic racism and discrimination that Black people continue to face in the United States. According to Collins⁽⁷⁾, intersectionality refers to the interconnectedness of these various forms of oppression, including but not limited to race, gender, class, and sexuality.

Black women's intersectional identities make them vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization, which can impede their ability to ascend to leadership positions. Despite these obstacles, Black women have been at the forefront of the Black Lives Matter movement, using their positions of leadership to advocate for social justice and equality.

This study explores the concept of intersectionality and its impact on Black women's leadership in the era of Black Lives Matter. It begins by providing a brief overview of the Black Lives Matter movement and its relevance to Black women's leadership. Then it examines the challenges that Black women face in leadership positions due to their intersectional identities. Finally, it highlights the contributions Black women have made to the Black leadership and discuss the implications of Black women's leadership and how their intersectional identities have shaped their leadership styles.

- 1 Intersectionality as a literary framework:
- 1. A theoretical framework for leadership research:

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that has gained popularity in recent years for understanding how different forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, interact and intersect to shape experiences of individuals and groups. To provide a foundation for this analysis, let's review the current state of research on intersectionality, with a particular focus on leadership research. By synthesizing and analyzing the findings of previous studies, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge on this topic and identify areas future research. This review examines the use intersectionality as a framework for leadership research and explores how it can enhance our understanding of leadership in diverse contexts.

Intersectionality has been used to understand leadership in a variety of contexts, including politics, business, and community organizing. One of the key contributions of intersectionality to leadership research is its emphasis on the ways in which multiple identities intersect to shape leadership experiences. Research has shown that Black women leaders face unique challenges due to the intersection of racism and sexism: "Drawing from Black Feminist scholarship, researchers highlight the importance of utilizing an intersectional approach in understanding Black women's experiences" (8).

Intersectionality has also been used to explore the ways in which different forms of oppression interact to shape leadership styles and approaches. For example, research has shown that women of color may adopt a more collaborative leadership style due to the ways in which they have been socialized to prioritize relationships and community building⁽⁹⁾. Additionally, research has shown that leaders from marginalized communities are more likely to adopt more transformative and inclusive leadership styles to challenge systems of oppression: "This intersectional approach shows that painful experiences with racism, sexism, and other forms of marginalization... provide wavs

of transforming obstacles into strengths and resilience" (10).

Using intersectionality as a framework for leadership can have significant implications for leadership practice. One crucial implication is that it underscores the importance of comprehending the multiple identities that shape leadership experiences⁽¹¹⁾. Leaders who understand how different forms of oppression intersect can be better prepared to address the distinct challenges faced by individuals and groups within their organizations⁽¹²⁾.

Another important study about intersectionality for leadership is its emphasis on creating inclusive environments that value diversity⁽¹³⁾. Leaders who adopt a transformative leadership style can create environments that challenge systems of oppression and provide opportunities for individuals from marginalized communities to excel⁽¹⁴⁾.

According to Anne Julia Cooper⁽¹⁵⁾, intersectionality provides a valuable lens for examining the leadership experiences of Black women. Cooper argues that Black women experience unique challenges due to their intersectional identities, including racism, sexism, and classism. By using intersectionality as a framework, scholars can better understand the complex ways in which these forms of oppression intersect and shape Black women's leadership experiences.

In a study of Black women, Shelby Billups also uses intersectionality as a framework "to examine prejudice and discrimination that is experienced within the context of membership in multiple disadvantaged social groups (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, class)" (16). She argues that Black women face unique challenges due to their intersectional identities, including microaggressions, stereotype threat, and tokenism. By using intersectionality to analyze the experiences of Black women, Billups provide insights into how "gender and race contribute to orthogonal dimensions of difference in the perception of persons" (17).

2. Intersectionality and the BLM movement:

The Black Lives Matter movement has been closely tied to intersectionality, as activists have sought to highlight the unique experiences of Black individuals with intersectional identities. According to Elizabeth Hordge-Freeman⁽¹⁸⁾, intersectionality is a key element of the Black Lives Matter movement also known as the BLM movement, as it recognizes the ways in which multiple forms of oppression intersect to shape the experiences of Black individuals. They argue that intersectionality provides a necessary framework for understanding the experiences of Black individuals in the context of police violence and other forms of racial injustice.

Intersectionality has several dimensions. It is a paradigm that considers various aspects of identity and social structures and how they intertwine and contribute to inequalities. According to Rosenthal, "emphases on intersectional identities have not been accompanied by activism to undo the systemic inequalities that create oppression" (19). However, "Contemporary research has focused on the ways that intersectionality contributes to social movements, using multiple forms of data to understand movement framing, collective identity formation, and coalitional mobilization" (20) For instance, intersectionality was used to explore the ways in which race, gender, and sexuality intersect to shape the experiences of Black Lives Matter activists.

Regarding the relationship between intersectionality and the Black Lives Matter movement, Choo and Ferree⁽²¹⁾ argue that intersectionality is a necessary framework for understanding the intersectional identities of Black individuals who are impacted by police violence and other forms of racial injustice. They argue that intersectionality provides a way to understand the complex ways in which race, gender, class, and other forms of identity interact to shape these experiences.

Cherríe Moraga's book⁽²²⁾ is also a powerful exploration of intersectionality, examining how various dimensions of identity,

such as race, gender, sexuality, and class, intersect and shape the lived experiences of women of color. It critiques and challenges the dominant narratives of feminism, which often overlook the unique struggles faced by women of color and calls for an inclusive and transformative feminism that accounts for the diverse perspectives and histories within marginalized communities.

Patricia Collins and Sirma Bilge⁽²³⁾ research expands on the concept of intersectionality, highlighting the interconnectedness of various social categories and the ways they mutually constitute individuals' experiences and identities. Their contributions have enriched the discourse on intersectionality, shedding light on the complex and multifaceted nature of social inequalities and the importance of considering the intersecting axes of power and identity in understanding social dynamics.

With regards to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, Christina Greer⁽²⁴⁾ provides valuable context for understanding the diverse perspectives within the broader Black community. She highlights the fact that the Black population in the United States is not monolithic and that the experiences and struggles of Black immigrants differ from those of African Americans with deep-rooted histories of racial oppression in the country.

She provides an essential perspective on the complexities of racial identity and the pursuit of the American Dream for Black immigrants. Her work contributes to a broader discussion of racial justice and solidarity, allowing us to recognize the diverse experiences of various Black communities and the importance of acknowledging and addressing their unique struggles in the pursuit of social equality and racial justice.

Vivian May⁽²⁵⁾ also delves into the concept of intersectionality and its application in understanding social and political dynamics. Intersectionality as a theoretical framework recognizes how different dimensions of identity, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and more, intersect and interact to

create unique systems of oppression and privilege.

With regards to the Black Lives Matter movement, Vivian May's exploration of intersectionality is highly relevant. BLM emerged in response to the persistent issue of police violence and systemic racism disproportionately affecting African Americans. By engaging with intersectionality, the movement recognizes that race intersects with other social categories, shaping the experiences of Black individuals in multifaceted ways.

Understanding the intersectional nature of Black lives and the various forms of oppression they face enriches the BLM movement's analysis and objectives. It acknowledges the experiences of Black immigrant communities and other Black ethnics, as highlighted in Christina Greer's work, and emphasizes that addressing racial justice requires recognizing the unique challenges faced by different segments of the Black population.

While there is no known collaboration between Vivian May and Christina Greer, their individual works on intersectionality and the experiences of Black ethnics offer important insights that can contribute to a deeper understanding of the issues faced by Black communities within the context of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Intersectionality plays a critical role in the Black Lives Matter movement, allowing a nuanced understanding of the systemic oppression faced by Black people with multiple marginalized identities. By centering intersectionality in activism and research, the movement has expanded its focus to address the unique challenges faced by all members of the Black community. The literature reviewed here highlights the importance of intersectionality in addressing the intersections of racism, gender, sexuality, ability, and other identities in the fight against systemic oppression.

The Black Lives Matter movement has also brought issues of police brutality and systemic racism to the forefront of public discourse. The movement has also drawn attention to the ways in which racism intersects with other forms of oppression, such as sexism and classism. Intersectionality has been used as a framework for analyzing the experiences of Black people, particularly Black women, in the Black Live Matter movement.

It has highlighted the ways in which their experiences are shaped by multiple intersecting identities and has provided insight into the unique challenges that they face as leaders and organizers within the movement. Moving forward, it will be important to continue to use intersectionality as a tool for understanding and addressing the experiences of Black women in the Black Lives Matter movement and in society more broadly because it has proven to be a useful framework for studying Black women's leadership experiences.

Scholars have used intersectionality to analyze the unique challenges faced by Black women in leadership positions and to understand how their intersectional identities shape their leadership styles and approaches. These studies provide important insights into the experiences of Black women in leadership and highlight the importance of considering intersectionality in leadership research.

2 - Challenges of black women in leadership:

1. The implications of intersectionality:

The implications of intersectionality in Black women's leadership are significant. To fully understand and discuss the issue of women's leadership within the context of intersectionality, it is crucial to first examine the significant obstacles that women face in accessing to life basic levelers such as education increasing differences in social status, wealth, opportunities, or other aspects that create disparities among between men and women.

In the context of education, intersectionality can help us understand how different identities and social positions shape access to and experiences of education. Before analyzing the implications of intersectionality in Black women's leadership, it is important to examine the role of intersectionality as a barrier for women's education, with a focus on the ways in which race, class, and other intersecting factors impact access to education.

Research has shown that intersectionality can be a significant barrier to women's education reducing their potential to occupy leadership positions. For instance, women who belong to multiple marginalized groups may face unique challenges related to their identities. Dawn Hutchinson "uses the tools of the arts, humanities, social sciences, and other fields to address challenges faced by women and girls around the world, both historically and in modern day, with an emphasis on intersectionality" (26). She explores how different systems of oppression and discrimination affect women's access to leadership opportunities, representation in leadership positions, and their experiences as leaders.

Besides, intersectionality expands upon the foundations of the waves of feminism, which predominantly centered on the perspectives of white, middle-class, and gender. It encompasses a wider range of experiences by incorporating the unique challenges faced by women of color, economically disadvantaged women, immigrant women, and various other marginalized groups.

The goal of intersectional feminism is to distinguish itself from a singularly white-focused feminism by recognizing and validating the diverse challenges and experiences of women. Crenshaw, "over the last two decades, women have organized against the almost routine violence that shapes their lives. Drawing from the shared experience, women have recognized that the political demands of millions speak more powerfully than the pleas of a few isolated voices" (27).

The statement highlights the purpose of intersectional feminism, which aims to differentiate itself from a form of feminism that solely centers on the experiences and perspectives of white women. It does so by acknowledging and affirming the

multifaceted obstacles and life journeys that women from diverse backgrounds encounter. Kimberlé Crenshaw's quote further emphasizes that over the past twenty years or so, women have united in opposition to the pervasive violence that shapes their existence. By uniting under the banner of shared experiences, women have come to realize that the collective political demands of numerous individuals hold greater sway than the appeals made by a handful of isolated voices.

This commentary underscores οf the importance intersectional feminism as a response to the limitations of a white-focused feminism. Intersectional feminism recognizes that women's challenges are not homogenous and that various social identities intersect to create complex and unique By acknowledging these intersections. movement becomes more inclusive and representative of the diverse array of women's struggles. Crenshaw's quote highlights the power that emerges when women come together to address common issues, reinforcing the idea that solidarity and a multiplicity of voices can effect meaningful change.

Crenshaw investigates two forms of male violence against women, domestic violence, and rape, to demonstrate how the experiences of non-white women differ significantly from those of white women due to factors such as race and class. This highlights the challenge of expressing and amplifying the distinct experiences of non-white women⁽²⁸⁾.

Crenshaw highlights the importance of recognizing the intersectionality of race and gender when discussing issues of oppression and discrimination. It is not sufficient to address these issues in isolation because they are interconnected and have an impact on each other. Black women's experiences of oppression cannot be reduced to a single factor, such as race or gender, because the two intersect and create a unique form of discrimination. This intersectionality produces a different experience of oppression that must be recognized and addressed

if we are to effectively combat discrimination and promote social justice for all.

These challenges can result in the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership positions, which can have significant implications for diversity and decision-making. It is important to recognize and address the intersectional nature of these barriers in order to promote greater diversity and inclusion in leadership positions.

Despite the recognition of the intersectionality of Black women's experiences, they are still frequently excluded from leadership narratives. This invisibility feeds stereotypes and biases that limit Black women's ability to lead and to create a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion.

However, contrary to Crenshaw's perspective, Lisa Downing⁽²⁸⁾ argues that intersectionality places excessive emphasis on collective identities, potentially overlooking the crucial aspect that individuals possess distinctiveness rather than solely existing as part of a particular group. Neglecting this facet can result in oversimplified interpretations and erroneous presumptions about the factors influencing an individual's beliefs and outlook.

2. Black women's experiences in leadership narratives:

Black women have been historically marginalized in leadership roles, resulting in their experiences often being omitted or invisible in leadership narratives. This literature review aims to explore the invisibility of Black women's experiences in leadership narratives, identifying the contributing factors and implications of this phenomenon.

One of the earliest studies on this topic is by Bell Hooks. Her criticism is "to decolonize the mind of the dominant group's white "supremacist capitalist patriarchal values". The colonized mind is self-oppressing, viewing the minority group's sex, gender expression, race, culture, sexual identity, class and so on, as inferior, and the dominant group's characteristics as an ideal to

emulate"(30).

Hooks critiques the dominant group's adherence to what she terms "white supremacist capitalist patriarchal values." Her central argument revolves around the idea that the minds of the colonized, including those who belong to minority groups, internalize these dominant values, resulting in self-oppression and a skewed perception of their own identities and characteristics.

Hooks' viewpoint centers on the observation that the colonized mind tends to view attributes associated with the dominant group (white, male, capitalist, patriarchal) as superior and worth emulating. Simultaneously, the attributes of minority groups (related to sex, gender expression, race, culture, sexual identity, and class) are often seen as inferior. This dynamic perpetuates the marginalization of these minority attributes and upholds the dominance of the white, male-centered power structure.

In essence, Hooks' analysis underscores the insidious impact of internalized oppression within marginalized communities. This process reinforces the status quo and sustains the dominance of certain groups, leading to a cycle of self-deprecation, imitation of dominant values, and the marginalization of one's own identity traits.

By advocating for the decolonization of the mind, Hooks aims to challenge these deeply ingrained perceptions and beliefs. The goal is to foster an environment where individuals from marginalized backgrounds can recognize the value and legitimacy of their own attributes, identities, and experiences. This process involves questioning and unlearning the notions of superiority associated with dominant group characteristics and critically evaluating the oppressive power dynamics at play.

Hooks' perspective is significant in discussions about social justice, identity politics, and power structures. Her work prompts readers to consider how systems of oppression are not only

external forces but also internalized by those who experience them. Her call for decolonization encourages self-awareness, critical consciousness, and a collective effort to redefine norms, values, and perceptions to create a more equitable and inclusive society.

Some recent studies have built on Hooks' work, providing more analyses of the issues at play. For instance, study conducted on Black women leaders showed that they faced other challenges related to stereotyping and their physical appearances: "there is no such standard for men. Although men are expected to conform to a standard that is well groomed and often uniformly clothed, women are to dress in a way that is not only professional, but also conforms to an institutionalized standard of beauty" (31).

The excerpt highlights the ongoing development of the discourse initiated by Bell Hooks and expands upon her insights through these recent studies. They delve deeper into the complexities of the challenges faced by Black women in leadership roles. The analysis particularly focuses on how these challenges extend to stereotyping and societal perceptions of physical appearance. This commentary showcases the evolving nature of the examination of intersectionality, gender expectations, and racial dynamics within leadership contexts.

The study mentioned underscores the notion that Black women leaders experience unique obstacles compared to their male counterparts. It points out the double standards related to appearance that these women encounter. While men may face expectations of being well-groomed and presentable, women, especially Black women, confront the additional pressure of conforming to both professional attire and a beauty standard that is institutionally imposed. This suggests a heightened level of scrutiny and the imposition of a narrow and often Eurocentric ideal of beauty on Black women in leadership roles.

The significance of this analysis lies in its revelation of how

systemic biases and societal norms intersect to create specific hurdles for Black women leaders. It highlights the intersectionality of their identities, where both their gender and racial backgrounds contribute to a complex web of expectations and biases. By pinpointing the imposition of particular beauty standards, the study raises awareness about the intersection of race, gender, and appearance as critical factors in leadership evaluations.

This also showcases the continuous development of the conversation initiated by Hooks, emphasizing the need to delve deeper into the experiences of individuals occupying marginalized identities in leadership roles. It reflects the evolution of academic inquiry into intersectionality, institutional biases, and societal expectations, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by Black women and others facing similar intersectional dynamics in leadership contexts.

It is crucial to explore how these dynamics of intersectionality and biases extend beyond leadership roles and impact broader aspects of society. By doing so, we can uncover how similar intersectional challenges manifest in academic environments, shaping students' experiences and opportunities. Conclusion:

Analyzing intersectionality within the context of Black women's leadership reveals the intricate set of challenges they navigate. The discourse, evolving from the foundational work of scholars like professor Kimberlé Crenshaw and Bell Hooks sheds light on the complex interplay of gender, race, appearance, and societal expectations.

Recent studies have deepened our understanding of the unique obstacles faced by Black women leaders, highlighting the disparities in how they are evaluated and how their appearances are scrutinized against both professional and beauty standards.

The concept of intersectionality reminds us that individuals do not exist within isolated categories, but rather at the

crossroads of various identities that influence their experiences. For Black women, this intersectionality exposes them to a multiplicity of biases and stereotypes that can hinder their advancement in leadership roles. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, we take a significant step towards fostering a more equitable and inclusive society.

As we continue to examine the complex threads of intersectionality and Black women's leadership, it is important that both academia and society at large actively work to dismantle the systemic barriers that perpetuate these disparities.

Embracing diversity in leadership requires a collective effort to challenge preconceived notions, confront biases, and redefine the standards of evaluation. By doing so, we pave the way for a future where everyone can fully thrive and contribute their invaluable perspectives to shaping a more just and equitable world.

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