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Re-Imagining Andragogy for Innovative and Inclusive Leadership Training for Minority Women in Higher Education

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Re-Imagining Andragogy for Innovative and Inclusive Leadership Training for Minority Women in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study undertaken in 2021 was to explore the different ways educators in higher education might implement innovative andragogical practices for inclusive leadership training for minority women. There is need for minority women to develop abilities to make personal adjustments as well as receive support from external structures if they are to benefit from leadership training programs and to be successful leaders (Flower, 2021). The potential for innovation to shift towards a more engaged form of teaching and learning is very important in the 21st Century especially for the inclusion of minority women in leadership in higher education. Trainers of minority women for leadership must reflect on their praxis and learn how to implement innovative and responsive andragogical practices that engage and empower minority women in higher education. This case study attempted to answer a critical question: How might educators in higher education implement innovative andragogical practices for inclusive leadership training for minority women? This study was anchored on transformative leadership theory which aims at building socially just systems in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world (Shields, 2018). Protagonists of transformative leadership theory urge educators to proactively initiate conversations and implement praxis that remove barriers that impede groups of learners, such as minority women, from thriving to their full potential. Researchers conducted online focus group discussions with eight minority women as tools to collect data for this study. More data was collected from participants' personal stories. Focus group conversations and participants' stories were recorded on Zoom. The data collected was analysed through the constant comparison of conversations and stories to distil common themes. Six common themes emerged as perceived

game changers in the implementation of effective andragogical practices for the training of minority women for leadership in higher education. The six themes include (a) positive self-worth, (b) effective mentorship and role modelling, (c) networks of supportive partner allies, (d) female models and styles of leadership, (e) mindset change, and (f) male positive perception of women as leaders.

Keywords: Minority women, inclusive leadership, higher education, innovative andragogical practices.

Re-Imagining Andragogy for Innovative and Inclusive Leadership Training for Minority Women in Higher Education

Introduction

Women who have succeeded in leadership attributed their success to training programs that have helped them to build their confidence as well as availed them opportunities for networking (DeFrank-Cole et al., 2016). However, extant leadership training programs have kept most minority women out of higher positions of leadership casting doubt on the effectiveness of the programs and questioning the responsiveness of the andragogical practices implemented to the needs of minority women. Alexander Kapp, a German high school teacher, authored the term “andragogy” in 1833. Andragogy is the development of human potential through deliberate interdisciplinary interaction between adults who are at various stages in their learning process. Andragogy is anchored on seven principles of adult learning including self-direction, transformation, experience, mentorship, mental orientation, motivation, and readiness to learn. Hence, the establishment of strong supportive networks of friends, families, and colleagues contributes to the success of minority leaders in higher positions of leadership. The COVID 19 pandemic opened more opportunities to develop what Bell Hooks calls the engaged pedagogy and made urgent the call to reimagine the possibilities for teaching and learning in higher education (Baker et al., 2022). This innovative form of teaching is more inclusive than the traditional approaches. For this study, researchers carried out online leadership training to explore the lived experiences of a particular disadvantaged cohort such as minority women leaders in Ireland and in the USA.

Literature Review

Minority Women Leaders in Higher Education

As minority women continue to rise to leadership roles, research on women leaders calls for more egalitarian leadership perspectives. The experience of minority women leaders remains subsumed within the larger traditional feminist discourse (Rosser-Mims, 2010). Research has shown that the leadership experience of minority women has not been strongly advocated within the broader discussion of leadership in higher education (Sims, 2018). This therefore creates the

dilemma for minority women leaders to either accept the assumptions of mainstream culture or operate in ways that conceal their distinctiveness or reject these assumptions as failing to represent their lived experiences and social identity (Dickens et al., 2019).

A leader is an individual within a group or organisation who has the most authority and influence over other members through status, power, or expertise (Summerfield, 2014). Although this conceptualisation is gender and race neutral, there is a chronic underrepresentation of minority women in leadership positions across all industries, (Velarde, 2020). For example, this disparity is especially salient within higher education for minority women as they hold approximately five percent of presidencies within the US (Johnson, 2017). There are recent trends in examining leadership research to help leaders in higher education and those striving for leadership to thrive in the multifaceted global environment and effectively prepare for the challenge of leading complex institutions (Chance, 2022). Thus, focusing on minority women who serve in leadership roles at colleges and universities helps to expand the knowledge base on higher education leadership, resilience, and overcoming adversity, thus opening the door for more access for women in leadership. Hence, understanding the processes and strategies these women have implemented will help develop and provide training and mentoring programs for minority women seeking leadership and advancement in higher education.

Minority women leaders work towards inspiring change while simultaneously working to overcome stereotypes within the workplace (Dickens et al., 2019; Sims and Carter, 2019). However, minority women leaders experience dilemmas emerging from their social identity not experienced by white counterparts (Lanier et al., 2022). Studies suggest that minority women leaders are often tasked with addressing diversity issues, advocating for marginalised workgroups (Chance et al., 2017), or being selected as the token minority person in the room (Ruby, 2020). In some instances, they are selected after their roles due to the assumed positive impact created from their experiences living as marginalised individuals (Davis and Brown, 2017). Further studies show that minority women's lived experiences equip them to lead diverse groups from a survival instinct (Dickens et al., 2019) rather than from mainstream cultures and organisational support.

However, identity shifting, and avoidance behaviours practised by minority women leaders are relevant. Sometimes, these tactics can cause them to exhaust the energy to focus on fitting into the mainstream culture as an effort to overcome racial and gender injustices (Bell, 1990). Research has suggested that this can impede the progress minority women achieve for the organisations (Patton and Haynes, 2018). Identity informs leadership practice; thus, the cultural perspective should be considered for leadership strategy advancement (Santamar and Jean-Marie, 2014). Other challenges such as microaggression, fatigue and taking on a higher workload

to prove that minority women are capable of leadership are often referred to as working twice as hard to achieve the strategy than their counterparts (Generett and Welch, 2018). This does not guarantee the minority women leaders to get noticed or appreciated for their hard work. Unfortunately, this can be perceived that minority women who take on more workloads are happy to do so and that their well-being is not being compromised (Patton and Haynes, 2018). As this is discussed, there is need to explore new theoretical frameworks that represent the leaders' marginalised social identity and that support them in the navigation of mainstream cultures.

Furthermore, the levels of mental and emotional labor that is required for minority women in positions of leadership while maintaining their authentic racial and sexual identity have been identified as exhausting (Erskine et al., 2020). In some instances, once the hurdle of the concrete ceiling has been overcome for these female leaders, a new series of challenges present. Higher education's power structure, gender-pay gap, and the limited access to power and privilege can result in feelings of tokenism and isolation, leading to diminished resilience thus presenting unique challenges for minority women in senior higher education leadership (Becks-Moody 2004). Another area to be aware of is the discrimination that minority women face in higher education. This discrimination is referred to as the harmful and sometimes dangerous action of some based on negative prejudice that is expressed in escalating levels of violence to others, ranging from verbal abuse, according to the seminal research of Allport (1954). The discrimination that is discussed is fuelled by stereotype threats and fear as expressed through racism, sexism, ageism, classism, and unethical treatment based on race, age, religion, health, socioeconomic status, and class. Experiences of discrimination compounded with fear of real or perceived threat can lead to symptoms that mirror those posttraumatic stress disorder as suggested by Comas-Diaz et al. (2019).

The overlap or interaction of these categories of identity discrimination as discussed earlier is referred to as intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2018). Researchers have found that the intersection of racism and sexism in higher education can result in biases that alter the perceptions of minority women's competencies thus limiting their ascension into leadership (Moorosi et al., 2018). This intersectionality has led to more examination and critique for minority women in administrative and education leadership, making it more difficult for them to succeed (Hughes and Dodge, 1997). This paper discusses transformational leadership theory to situate the dynamics of minority women's interaction with racism, sexism, and discrimination in their efforts to ascend the leadership ladder in higher education.

Transformative Leadership Approach as a Pathway for Minority Women Leaders

Transformational leadership and servant leadership are traditional leadership approaches that consider the needs of the individual. The transformational leader is driven by an urgency to arouse, stimulate, and redirect the needs of the follower (Bass and Avolio, 1994). The servant leader has the instinct to serve and to prioritise others' needs as the ultimate concern (Greenleaf, 1998). Both approaches can serve as a guide for minority women whose leadership is defined by their social identity and a legacy of survival. Scholars claim that traditional leadership theories seem to be lacking in addressing the challenges of minority groups in a chaotically volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world (Sheilds, 2018; Wheatley, 2006). Wheatley (2006) draws our attention to a new consciousness that we need in our times - a consciousness that believes in the fact that organisations are capable of self-renewal even in a world of constant change and unpredictability. Wheatley (2006) argues that "the layers of complexity, the sense of things being beyond our control and out of control, are but signals of our failure to understand a deeper reality of organisational life" (p. 5). Leaders need to refocus their energy on renewing organisations to address the deep human longings of community, dignity, love, meaning, and purpose. (Wheatley, 2006).

Transformative leadership is a more recent approach to leadership that promises effective organisational change especially in educational environments. Shields (2018) describes transformative leadership as the kind of leadership that addresses the inequitable distribution of power in organisations. Transformative leaders pay attention to questions like; Who makes the decisions? Who is represented at the decision table and who is not? Whose voices are heard and who are not? Transformative leaders take the risks and embrace uncertainties and uncharted spaces to advance meaningful changes in the organisational status quo (Generett & Welch, 2018; Shields, 2018). However, there is no standardised formula or approach for the achievement of the desired organisational change, as Generrett and Welch point out. The same scholars note that change in favour of underrepresented groups is even harder to achieve when it comes to higher education environments because of their notoriety for resisting change (Generett & Welch, 2018). For minority women in higher education the journey to removing barriers out of the way to getting seats at the tables where decisions are made is winding and daunting. Scholars underscore the need for prospective women leaders to participate in networks that are informal and formal, social, and professional, for mutual support and relationship building if more women are to get more places at tables where decisions are made (Generett & Welch, 2018; Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008). The question on how successful minority women leaders might have differed from successful male leaders has attracted the attention of renowned academic writers. This is evident in the work of Powell (1990), where the author investigated how gender differences amongst male and female

leaders might have influenced their abilities to governance and managerial responsibilities (Powell, 1990). Powell's work opened the floodgate that supported subsequent developments designed to challenge the status quo in the order of leadership, which had been prevalently of male dominance (Stelter, 2002). Consequently, the past two decades have taken a dramatic turn, thus showing prospective future female leaders contesting elections and becoming good leaders alongside male leaders in the contemporary world's government. Furthermore, extant literature shows that the assumed differences in leadership behaviour(s) and effectiveness is subject to individual perception and thus a question of stereotype, organizational culture, perception of subordinates, and inferiority complex (Merchant, 2012; Stelter, 2002). In comparison, leadership amongst female minorities has proven just as good and even better than some past previous male administrations. For instance, one of the areas where men and women differ in their approaches to leadership is found in how they relate with their followers and interact with them (Merchant, 2012). Although men's status and communication style suggest they are controlling and authoritative in their leadership approach, this is because men are naturally power-oriented (Merchant, 2012). While it has been argued that there are no gender differences in leadership abilities between male and female minority leaders, Foels et al., 2000 show that leadership is contingent on situational factors. Hence, to further the agenda of removing the extant barriers for more minority women to access leadership in higher educators and leaders must initiate conversations that are anchored on tenets of transformative leadership.

Description of Leadership Training Module

Eight minority women from different cultural backgrounds including Irish/African, Asian, Indian, African/American, Mid-Eastern, and Irish took part in this study. Participant women included graduates and postgraduates. Participants brought to the group rich experiences not only from their cultures but also from their different areas of expertise including business, engineering, entrepreneurship, education, psychology, and tourism. Using personal experiences in a feminist reflective way, the study focused on the development of minority women's leadership roles, gender, inclusive values, mindset change, and transformative andragogy. Facilitators implemented the module through a combination of presentations and focus group discussions on a weekly basis. Each participant chose a topic related to minority women's issues on leadership in higher education and wrote a ten-page paper which they presented to the group. Facilitators and participants had focus group discussions of each paper presented while offering feedback and reflections.

Participants and facilitators also focused on developing critical research skills, creative writing skills, presentation skills, and offering feedback through dialogic conversations. At the end of the module, each participant had gained considerable knowledge on several important topics that were relevant to their academic and professional concerns. Participants also gained insights in the changes that needed to happen at the personal and systemic levels for inclusion of minority women for leadership in higher education to happen.

Methodology

Researchers undertook the study online via [Zoom.com](https://zoom.us). The study took eight weeks, from the beginning of March 2021 to the end of April 2021, during the COVID19 pandemic lockdown. One of the researchers was based in Ireland and the other in the United States. Majority of the participants (seven) lived in Ireland while one lived in the United States. The study employed the case study design described as self-ethnography of lived experiences (Yin, 2009). Facilitators of the training used participatory andragogical practices that included sharing of individual stories and experiences and a focus group discussion on each participant's story and experience. Each participant shared her story and experience on (a) how they perceived themselves as leaders (identity), (b) how they navigated the challenges of their leadership roles as caregivers and professionals (social identity), and (c) how the kinds of challenges they encountered impacted their journey of becoming leaders in their areas of expertise.

Participants selected their topic for presentation in consultation with the module facilitators and developed their papers over the course of eight learning sessions. After each presentation at a learning session, participants engaged in open whole group discussion and received feedback from other participants. All presentations and focus group discussions were audio recorded via Zoom. Participants also offered feedback during formative review sessions. With the support of facilitators, each participant wrote a paper anchored on a) the topic of their choice related to leadership, b) their area of expertise c) insights from their respective presentation, and d) feedback from the group. This dynamic gave participants the opportunity to explore a particular area of concern in greater depth. Presentations and focus group discussions generated data that informed the insights that we share in the findings of this study. The analysis of data resulted in common questions and themes that highlighted concerns for minority women's perception of themselves

as leaders and what they needed to change and to do to become successful leaders in all spheres of their lives.

Target Group

The target group are individuals directly affected by the impact of a project (Forster & Osterhaus, 1996). This case study targeted graduate and post-graduate minority women from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. Participants' responses helped with understanding how they perceived their problems and the changes they desire and the necessary action to be taken (Forster & Osterhaus, 1996).

Sampling

Although many sampling strategies exist in qualitative research approach sampling can change during a study (Creswell and Poth, 2016). The process of selecting a small number from a bigger group that represents the research population with the idea of estimating or predicting the prevalence of an unknown piece of information, outcome, or situation regarding the bigger group of individuals is known as 'research sampling' (Kumar & Singh, 2005). Researchers employed snowball sampling through women's social networks to recruit participants. Similarly, snowball sampling is mostly used in research topics considered sensitive or because the population under investigation is hidden due to low number of participants (Browne, 2005). The review of the literature shows that the term 'snowball sampling' appears informal, which predates Coleman (1999) and Trow (1957), Handcock and Gile (2011). Furthermore, the adopted snowball sampling was useful because various aspects of the relationships present in the research population were identified through statistical inferences (Goodman, 1961). Also known as a chain-referral sampling, snowball sampling is defined as a non-probability sampling technique in which existing subjects provide referrals that facilitate recruiting the required sample for the study (Bhat, 2018).

Sample

In determining sample size, studies show that broader research questions take longer before saturation can be reached (Morse, 2000). In the work of Israel, determining research the sample size requires three criteria: (a) the level of precision; (b) the level of confidence or risk and (c) degree of variability (Israel, 1992). The study further shows that it is fundamental to identify the

appropriate individuals who are taking part in every empirical research. This is further known as the operational definition of the research population. As an important step in every research, there is a need for adopting an efficient method when determining the sample size needed to represent the research population (Krejcie, & Morgan, 1970). Applying the formula for determining a research sample size, eight minority women participated in the study and in the leadership training module. Although qualitative research has been criticised for not justifying sample size (Boddy, 2016), the adopted method took adequate measure to enhance quality outcome. For instance, the decision on sample size was informed by personal experiences of the authors of undertaking academic qualitative research over the last seven years. In this regard, determination of sample size is arguably contextual because it is partially dependent upon the scientific paradigm underpinning the research investigation (Boddy, 2016). The sample for this study consisted of eight women from diverse minority backgrounds as shown in Table 1. The names of participants in Table 1 are pseudonyms for privacy protection.

Table 1. Profiles of Focus Group Participants

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Country of Origin	Education	Career
1	Aisha	32	Mid-East	PhD	Engineering
2	Betty	28	Irish	PhD	Anthropology
3	Julie	50	Irish/African	PhD	Education
4	Kate	34	African/American	Bachelor	Entrepreneur
5	Kendra	40	Asian/Indonesia	PhD	Psychology
6	Kim	31	Asian	Masters	Business
7	Rebecca	35	Mid-East	PhD	Marketing
8	Sandra	30	Irish/African	Bachelor	Business

Source: Current Study.

The total duration was 1 hour and 40 minutes. All the participants had certain characteristics in common that related to the leadership program, such as the following: They were all minority women with different cultural background; all participants had experience in higher education, they were all interested in building their competences, attitudes, and skills in organizational leadership. Although there were differences in the sense that some of the participants had left the higher education and started their own business, they were leaders of their businesses. The focus group questions were designed based on the gaps in information in leadership and to gather more detailed information regarding the respondents' lived experiences and the reasons for joining the leadership training program. The questions asked during the focus group discussions were as follows:

- (a) How did you get to where you are? What is your personal story?

- (b) Why did you want to be trained in a leadership program?
- (c) Are you happy with your leadership position: if yes, why? If no discuss.
- (d) Why do you think there are few minority women in higher positions of leadership?
- (e) What are the barriers that prevent minority women in taking up leadership in higher education positions?
- (f) Do you feel that you have adequate opportunity and support to progress in your career as a minority woman leader at your university/business?
- (g) Do men and women have a different experience in terms of career progression?
- (h) What could be done better to encourage minority women leaders in Higher education?

All questions listed above were answered by the participants during focus group discussions. During the discussion, contributors shared their lived experiences, and they were very open and honest on how they struggled to access jobs in higher education institutions.

Findings

The analysis of data from participants' personal narratives and from focus group discussions generated six key themes that minority women perceived as game changers on their journey of becoming leaders in higher education. The themes are a) self-worth, b) mentorship and role modelling, c) partner allies, d) female style of leadership, e) mindset change, and f) male negative perception. In presenting the findings we have used pseudonyms to protect the privacy of participants and to ensure confidentiality.

Self-worth

The notion that most women are socialised in various cultures as people who need to be better than others to attain the good things in life featured a great deal. In theory, the concept of 'self-worth' claims that achievement is subject to a person's ability to protect personal value or sense of worth (Covington, 1984; Covington, 2009). This is important following participants' observation that this dynamic denies women the opportunities to appreciate their self-worth and to identify and use their gifts and talents to develop themselves. In one of the focus group discussions, Julie said, "Comparing oneself to others is a socialisation. We were all taught that you got to look better to get a man, to be married." Hoobler et al. (2014) highlighted the impact of gender socialisation as a key inhibitor of women's aspirations for powerful jobs in general.

For minority women, feelings of low self-worth for leadership in higher education are exacerbated by significant people around them such as their bosses who perceive them as individuals that cannot be trusted with higher positions of leadership. Personal feelings of low self-worth amplified by subcultures of mistrust and low expectations for leadership within work environments disable minority women's efforts to ascend the leadership ladder (Hoobler et al., 2014). Participants underscored the need for instruments that can measure women's self-worth to support them in gaining insights into their capabilities as prospective leaders. On this issue, Kate asserted "*We need to design instruments that measure women's self-worth to support our journey into self-discovery.*"

Mentorship and role modelling

Participants in the study acknowledged the power of mentorship in supporting women to become leaders and to develop as leaders. According to Mullen (2005), the concept of mentorship has two types (a) technical mentoring (i.e., managerial efficiency, hierarchical authority relations and structure) and (b) alternative mentoring (i.e., critical democratic orientation, power-sharing professional relations and structure). As such mentoring has mythological, metaphorical, historical, cultural, corporate, and philosophical influences on human subjects. This is evident in the real-world application where those who availed themselves of such opportunity hold their self-worth higher compared to those who did not.

Women grow more within groups and within networks of support. Minority women who have succeeded in becoming leaders highlight the importance of support from significantly supportive people in their lives. The lack of mentorship groups that are geared toward developing women as leaders is a disservice to society in the sense that women do not develop to their full potential for leadership. Similarly, it has been argued that mentorship into education has perpetuated significant barriers against women using limiting structured hierarchical dyad (Mullen, 2005). In a focus group discussion, Kendra also observed that "*women are not necessarily known to be mentors of other women.*" Participants in the study underscored the need to intentionally form informal mentorship networks that empower minority women with knowledge, skills, and attitudes that provide strong foundations for successful assumption of higher positions of leadership in higher education learning environments. Hoobler et al. (2014) found that extant mentorship programmes employed male-oriented principles that some women perceived as repugnant. This could partly explain the persistent failure for some women mentors to break the leadership ceiling for minority women.

On the issue of role modelling, this study shows that role modelling plays important roles to both individual career development and success (Gibson, 2004). Participants acknowledged the contribution of famous minority women to the cause of inclusion of women in higher positions of leadership by sharing their stories and encouraging other women. This was confirmed that role modelling is a cognitive construction based on an individual's needs, wants and ambitions Gibson, (2004). However, most minority women do not have access to role models from whom to learn what it takes to shape a leader.

Supportive partner allies

The issue of partner allies arose from the dynamic of support that women need to accompany them on the journey to becoming and developing as leaders. Women need to develop the ability to identify and seek out supportive allies that help them navigate the currently predominantly male-dominated area of leadership. In this regard, Sandra wondered, "I need allies to support me on this journey. Who are they? How do I know them? Hoobler (2014) and colleagues found that the exclusion of women from informal networks helped men to access promotions to higher managerial positions. In the absence of informal networks that prepare women for leadership in higher education learning environments, women tend to rely on formal processes of accessing higher managerial positions such as attaining higher degrees. However, the attainment of advanced degrees does not necessarily guarantee requisite preparation and networking for successful positioning for leadership in higher education. In a focus group discussion, Kim observed that "working around a solution through organic networking rather than complaining about our problems is the way forward. We are stronger together."

Female models and styles of leadership

The critique and analysis of extant models of leadership indicated that what is considered as leadership is geared toward masculine ways of appropriating leadership. To fit into leadership positions some women have tried to mirror masculine behaviour to pass for effective and serious leaders. This dynamic denied women to use their feminine capabilities and styles as leaders. Participants observed that women do not have to behave like men to be successful as leaders. On this dynamic Kim said: "Accepting oneself is the beginning of the freedom to be who I am. Use your style, use your womanhood to be a leader. You do not have to behave in a certain way (like a man) to be a leader. You do not need to be anything but who you are.' Kendra also commented thus, "*No matter how you show appreciation, how you show the human face men look at you as less able.*" Betty added: "*We want women not to fit in male models of leadership but to bring forth*

the female models.” However, Griffin (2010) and colleagues found that the most successful women leaders in organisations combined transactional behaviours associated with male leadership with transformational ones associated with female leadership.

Mindset change

One of the participants presented a paper about mindset change. The conversation on the subject highlighted the great need for women to change their mindset from a socialised one to a free one. Mindset change in the way minority women perceive leadership and themselves as leaders would help them leverage their lived experiences for their good. One of the changes that needed to happen was for women to know they have acquired some leadership skills through their lived experiences. To underscore this notion, Mariam opined, *“We (mothers) are beasts of time management. We are highly trained domestic engineers. We need to transfer those skills into our professional lives.”* At the micro level, minority women needed support to acknowledge the issues, ideas, and feelings that impeded their journey to mindset change. Participants highlighted the need for mutual support rather than struggling on one’s own to overcome the seemingly insurmountable process of changing mindsets of leaders in higher education environments. Some of the ways of addressing the challenge of mindset change among leaders are (a) building support networks geared toward learning from each other and (b) developing intentional mitigation approaches that acknowledge and challenge institutional systems that dismiss minority women as incapable for leadership in higher education (Generett & Welch, 2018; Shields, 2018). Participants observed that women do not have to mimic agentic or stoic male leadership styles to be effective. Women need to be comfortable with their leadership styles. Sandra opined *“Your leadership style is different because you are female.”*

Male negative perception of women as leaders

Participants highlighted the negative effects of yet another barrier on women’s path to positions of leadership in higher education - male negative perception of women as leaders. Studies have shown that men, more than women, believe that to be an effective leader one must have masculine qualities (Atwater et al., 2004; Shein, 2001). There is also evidence of men’s prejudicial perception of women leaders (Eagly et al., 1992; Koenig et al., 2011). In narrating her experience as a female engineer among male colleagues during a focus group discussion, Aisha reported, *“Men see women engineers as a threat. They do not take me seriously. They think I am too emotional, too sensitive to be a leader.”* Leadership, in the women’s view, should be open to care, warmth, and sensitivity for people’s growth and development to their potential. Studies have

shown how male negative perception of women as leaders affect their decisions to exclude women in their networks and in leadership mentorship programs in various industries (Ballaro and O'Neil, 2013; Generett & Welch, 2018; Silva and Mendis, 2017). Using the transactional lens of agentic leadership in managerial spaces that are competitive, men regard women's sensitivity to the human needs for communion and collaboration as weakness or softness. Women that are regarded as effective executive leaders have tended to develop the male transactional outlook to leadership to fit in the male-dominated managerial spaces. This dynamic among women leaders denies organisations the use of the transformative lens that critiques the status quo and initiates meaningful organisational change especially for minority women. Participants underscored the need to mitigate male negative perception of women as leaders through networks of knowledge, dialogue, and collaboration. There is more evidence that as more women take up top leadership positions in various organisations a more androgynous perception of leadership is emerging thereby reducing prejudice toward current and future women leaders (Koenig et al., 2011).

Discussion of Results

For decades, men have generally been perceived as more agentic than women when it comes to leadership. Leaders are considered agentic if they are authoritative, dominant, and assertive. Women have been perceived as communal, that is, warm, supportive, and kind (Koenig et al., 2011). The notion of leadership as agency, as some participants in this study observed, is based on the extant male-oriented models of leadership that are prejudiced against women as leaders. Minority women who took up leadership positions in predominantly male organisations mirrored the agentic behaviours (dominance and authoritarian) as observed among men. The tendency to mirror male leadership behaviour took away the caring aspect of leadership that women would bring to the leadership arena. Organisational scholars underscore the impact of several barriers on women's ascendance to top leadership in different contexts.

In professional contexts where women are the majority such as nursing and elementary education, female leadership styles are effective. In environments where men are still a greater majority, women leaders struggle against many odds to ascend to top leadership. This is mainly because masculine criteria are used to measure the performance of successful and effective leaders. As evidence from this study shows, prospective women leaders do not have to rely solely on formal networks and mentorship programs to prepare them for leadership. New approaches and informal networks must be explored and navigated to support especially minority women in higher

education in their efforts to ascend the ladder of leadership in their various areas of expertise. As noted earlier, higher education environments are notoriously rigid to mindset change and andragogical praxis (Generett and Welch, 2018). In this paper, we argue that educators and managers in higher education environments must explore and implement innovative and inclusive andragogical practices to mitigate the status quo for minority women.

Creating platforms and forums where men and women share knowledge, attitudes, and skills that listen to minority women's voices and concerns is critical on this journey. Establishing formal and informal mentorship networks for minority women will go a long way in addressing the gaps in extant leadership training programs for more innovative and inclusive ways. Participants in this study listened to each other's stories as well as offered feedback and mutual support. The Zoom online platform offered minority women a safe space to navigate issues that they had not shared in real life given their busy lives as professionals and caregivers. Organising learning experiences around work schedules accorded women flexibility to manage their learning with minimum stress. Presentations and conversations in our leadership training module were enriched by the fact that participants came from different cultural and professional backgrounds. This dynamic added value to the women's knowledge of the impact cultural biases and prejudices had on their development of self-worth and of their attitudes and skills for leadership.

Research Limitations and Implications

Studies have shown that limitations in research are matters and occurrences that are beyond the control of the principal investigator (Simon and Goes, 2013). Similarly, study limitations consider the scope of the study under which the study will be operating. Consequently, every study has its limitations and shortcomings. In some cases, research limitations may be too remote to identify because they take various forms. In the current research the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic influenced the data collection approach. This is evident given that data was collected using online means due to COVID-19 restrictions. Arguably, this could have affected the quality of the data collected because the principal investigator could not conduct a face-to-face interview with participants. Hence, participants could not avail themselves of the advantages of focus groups interviews. A good example would be where participants were unable to participate in the research in person but through virtual means, the principal investigator will not be able to read participants' body movement and gestures. As a result, the quality of the data can be compromised subject to the means used in gathering data. The locations of the research participants can affect data quality

to some degree (for instance, the data was collected between March and April 2021 through www.zoom.com). Studies show that the quality of data collected from participants during focus group or one-on-one interviews are more reliable than data collected through online platforms. This is evident given that during one-on-one interviews with participants, the principal investigator can interpret meanings following follow-up questions. Also, participants' behaviours and body language during interviews can help the researcher to arrive at a different conclusion(s) during data cleaning and analysis. Undoubtedly, this can further influence data interpretations and results. Although research limitations are unavoidable, these are some of the shortcomings that can be identified with the current study. However, the principal investigator took all these into account when interpreting data to ensure that data quality was not compromised.

Further Research

Studies on minority women leaders in higher education are still scarce. Scholars need to further explore this population in contexts of higher education to inform policy, andragogy, and leadership praxis. In addition, further research needs to examine the tenets of transformative leadership to determine their impact on the process of deconstructing and reconstructing knowledge frameworks and andragogical praxis for deep and equitable change to happen. Scholars need to do further research on extant leadership training programs and mentorship programs for minority women in higher education to examine their impact and effects.

Conclusion

The search for innovative and inclusive approaches to preparing minority women for leadership in higher education continues. Scholars and managers at higher institutions of learning have the onus to innovate through research and conversations that inform the creation of environments for the advancement of minority women as leaders. This study has added to the lean body of knowledge and literature there is on minority women leaders in higher education spaces. This case study has shown that intentionally creating safe, respectful, caring, supportive, and dialogical spaces where minority women can share their lived experiences and stories might be helpful in the design of new andragogical practices for leadership training for minority women in higher education. We hope insights from this study will trigger further thought, conversation, and research in this area.

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