

# **Gaslighting Female Leadership: All Gas, No Brakes!**

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*In this study, we asked: Does female leadership style safeguard Black female leaders against gaslighting? Between September 2023 and December 2023, we read case studies, reviewed numerous government publications and documents, and read peer-reviewed published articles and scholarly books retrieved from Google Scholar and library databases. Burn's (1978) definition of a transformational leader is how we, too, define a leader. One definition of gaslighting stood out, and we used that definition to operationalize our investigation (Duignan, 2023). We found that when female leaders are exposed to gaslighting, they are less likely to participate in workforce leadership initiatives. Gaslighting negatively impacts female leaders' performance; nonetheless, a few female leadership styles safeguard female leaders from the drawbacks of gaslighting. We make four recommendations that will help Black female leaders avoid the pitfalls of gaslighting.*

*Keywords: Black female, CEO, color, gaslighting, leadership, minority, obstacle, race, silence exit, style*

## **LEADER AND FOLLOWERS—THE COMMON PURPOSE**

*“Leader and followers follow the invisible leader - the common purpose. The best executives put this common purpose clearly before their group. While leadership depends on the depth of conviction and the power coming from there must also be the ability to share that conviction with others and make purpose articulate. And then that common purpose becomes the leader.” Mary Parker Follett (2013).*

### **A Valid and Reliable Definition of Transformational Leader**

We accept Burn's (1978) definition of a transformational leader as valid and reliable for our theoretical purpose. Leadership is seen as the act of taking the lead of a group of people or organization. Leaders get

others to proactively pursue the leader’s vision. Specifically, groups of people in an organization are led with the purpose of galvanizing certain motives and purposes, whether “in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers” (Burns, 1978). Bell and Bodie (2012), in summary of a leadership definition wrote:

*Although there are many definitions of leadership, James MacGregor Burns (1978), in his classic b-book Leadership, provides a definition that is still relevant: “Leadership is the reciprocal process of mobilizing, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to realize goals independently or mutually held by both leaders and followers.” Apparently Burns perceived the ideal leader as “transformational.” Appealing to the followers’ values and a higher vision, transformational leaders encourage the followers to exert themselves in the service of achieving that vision (p. 49–50).*

Leadership gives an organization its vision and ability to translate that vision into reality (Schein, 2004). Schein said that “leadership can change culture but that leaders must have the ability to induce ‘cognitive redefinition’ by articulating and selling new visions and concepts or creating the conditions for others to find these new concepts.” Conversely, when considering women in leadership positions, Pepperdine University recognized that the multiple jobs women held at work and home can impact their ability to lead effectively (Heath & Weber, 2020). Table 1 shows that Bennis and Nanus (1985) condensed the common purpose of leader and followers [similar to what Mary Parker Follett advocated for as an invisible leader] into four themes that capture the sentiments of the 90 industry leaders they surveyed when gathering data for their famous book:

**TABLE 1  
FOUR THEMES OF THE LEADER AND FOLLOWERS—THE COMMON PURPOSE**

<b>Strategy 1 –</b>	Attention through Vision: The leader would need to establish a new vision for the future state of the firm/organization. This would help to unify the employees so that everyone is working towards a common goal.
<b>Strategy 2 –</b>	Meaning Through Communication: Once a new vision is determined, the leader would need to ensure he/she develops a commitment to the new vision.
<b>Strategy 3 –</b>	Trust Through Positioning: The leader's vision must be communicated in a clear, digestible, and attainable fashion. Trust can only be established through the following abilities: accountability, predictability, reliability.
<b>Strategy 4 –</b>	The Deployment of Self Through 1) positive self-regard and 2) the Wallenda factor: This will allow the leaders to acknowledge and accept their employees as they are and to stay positive and always focus on the future. Also, to apply the Wallenda factor and respond to his/her failures by taking accountability for any shortcomings in the ability to lead.

Source: Bennis & Nanus (1985). Leaders: Strategies for taking charge. Harper & Row, Publishers.

Mary Parker Follett espoused for 20<sup>th</sup> Century managers the common purpose of leadership. Still, from the perspective of 21<sup>st</sup> Century women of color in management, they are confounded by a double-edged sword. For them, gender and race appear to be a blessing and a burden. Conversely, White male masculine leadership styles appear to be the established corporate norms. White male behaviors can be construed as the poster child for acceptable forms; the masculine forms of leader and followers have become the invisible leader that is the common purpose in 21<sup>st</sup> Century corporate America. To the chagrin of women of color, those who adopt White male masculine leadership styles are viewed as less competent, less desirable leaders. It is difficult for women of color to emulate masculine leadership styles and be successful. For example, Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, and Harrison (2008) found the dominant feminine trait women in leadership possess is “the nurturing style,” yet when women exhibit warmth in the workplace they do not

benefit, especially when trying to attain an advancement in careers. Female leaders who try to find a balance between masculine and feminine styles while at the same time attempting to adapt to established White male leadership norms create role confusion for themselves.

Pay disparity, too, correlates with female leaders feeling less appreciated than their male counterparts. Wang et al. (2018) found limitations in the perceptions of women's roles and the jobs women are expected to perform, which has led to male versus female imbalance in compensation for female CEOs. Kalogeraki and Georgakakis (2022) discovered a significant pay gap between male and female executives in top management teams: for example, female executives were paid 5% to 45% less than their male counterparts. Women of color, therefore, tend to have a cloud overshadowing their perception when attempting to climb the corporate ladder. Although there is some evidence of pay equity in higher education institutions (Bell & Joyce, 2011; Bell, Sutanto, Baldwin, & Holloway, 2014; Sutanto, Bell, Fei, & Scott, 2014) a large number of women of color do not have a fighting chance for workplace advancement. These issues might arise from listening and feedback problems stemming from intercultural differences (Roebuck, Bell, Raina, & Lee, 2016; Roebuck et al., 2015). Erskine, Archibold, and Bilimoria (2021) determined women had to 'reimagine' ways to balance family and work, to account for the demand put on them when they "juggled the multiple roles in their lives." Furthermore, when considering the plight of women of color in leadership roles, gaslighting is an 'under-explored' topic in the academic literature. We, therefore, asked one research question.

### **The Research Question**

Our work set out to explore and synthesize the academic literature on gaslighting women of color and determine if gaslighting is a major drawback to Black female leadership. If there are solutions to help them avoid the pitfalls of, to safeguard against, gaslighting, what are they?

Therefore, we asked the following research question: *does female leadership style safeguard Black female leaders against gaslighting?*

### **GASLIGHTING IS A GENUINE CONSTRUCT BY DEFINITION**

Gaslighting has become an American societal norm. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, gaslighting was given a "free pass" because of the pressure to conform and fit into the normal work environment. It was used historically as a tactic to powerplay, to display hierarchal inequalities. Many overlooked gaslighting because it was hard to recognize or prove. Gaslighting weakens an employee's confidence level, which lowers employee performance. Low employee performance levels weaken the corporate structure, which in turn causes a high turnover. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines gaslighting as:

*(1) psychological manipulation of a person, usually over an extended period that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency on the perpetrator. (2) The act or practice of grossly misleading someone, especially for one's own advantage* (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gaslighting>)

Gideon (2023) wrote: "The term "gaslighting" originates in a British play-turned-film from the 1930s. Originating from the movie, "gaslighting" is a term used to sway one's thoughts and mental fortitude. The play was called 'Gas Light', and the plot is about a husband mentally and emotionally manipulating his wife into believing she is crazy by changing the intensity of the gas lamps within their home" (para). Gideon presents 6 types of gaslighting in modern times as: 1) Blaming type, 2) You're Crazy Type, 3) Denial Type, 4) you're Too Sensitive Type, 5) Joking Type, and 6) No One Will Believe You Type. Gaslighting is now seen as both a psychological and sociological problem. Sweet (2019) argued, "Gaslighting—a type of psychological abuse aimed at making victims seem or feel "crazy," creating a "surreal" interpersonal environment—has captured public attention". Hassan (2021) linked his conclusion about gaslighting to the

social conformity theory from Solomon Asch (1955), when referencing a definition from Duignan (2023) “Gaslighting Human Behavior,” who described gaslighting in the following passage:

*You think “gaslighting” someone has anything to do with emotional manipulation?! You are so crazy, that couldn’t be further from the truth. Just kidding! The term gaslight originates from the eponymous 1930s British stage play, in which a husband convinces his wife that she is going mad. Today, the term is used to describe a technique of emotional manipulation in which an individual “gradually undermine[s] the victim’s confidence in his [/her] own ability to distinguish truth from falsehood” (para).*

Gaslighting in the workplace is documented as genuine abuse, a form of manipulation that ultimately leads victims to question their decision-making processes, how they perceive themselves, and their mental stability. Gaslighting, moreover, has been formally defined in the academic literature as (Abramson, 2014; Azarian, 2018; Saad, 2020 in Erkin et.al, 2022; Sarkis, 2017 in Erkin et.al, 2022; Sweet, 2019; Trader-Leigh, 2018):

“psychological or mind-manipulating tactics used by individuals and institutions to delegitimize and/or sow seeds of doubt in a person or group’s beliefs, experiences, perceptions, reality, and/or memory”

Gaslighting motifs can have many objectives; however, the main objective is to demean a targeted person to instill in that person self-doubt in his or her own capabilities. Potoski (2021) suggested that gaslighting is used to gain more power while simultaneously causing victims to question reality. Women tend to be more vulnerable to gaslighting because of their leadership styles. Gaslighting does not yield positive results in work environments. Moreover, it can cause high turnover rates, reduce diversity participation, and negatively impact an individual’s psychological and sociological well-being. Experiencing gaslighting can have one questioning their own experiences – Rodrigues, Mendenhall, and Clancy (2021) stated that “without sufficient social support, isolated faculty were more likely to internalize their colleagues’ gaslighting and question their experience.” Hassan (2021) determined that a person’s vulnerability to the *gaslighting effect* “is a reminder of the power we all hold over the people around us.” While social elements may intrinsically link our decision-making to each other, “it is important to remember that it is a uniquely human phenomenon to trend toward consensus” (Mallinson & Hatemi, 2018).

Because Gaslighting is a form of emotional manipulation, it focuses on one’s ability to manipulate another’s emotions, questioning their sanity, confidence, and memory. Anyone can gaslight anyone else. Gaslighting others does not appear to be dominated by any one race in receiving or being the victim of gaslighting. In the end, there is a level of resentment instilled within oneself, isolation, and detachment from others due to self-esteem manipulation. We asked the aforementioned research question because of the definition. Despite the term’s popularity, “sociologists have largely ignored the effect of gaslighting on Black female leadership, leaving the construct to be theorized by psychologists.” Consequently, this largely unexplored construct of gender bias has manifested, and it might be a root cause behind female leaders feeling inadequate, why they build walls and conform to lower expectations, all of which harm the workplace environment. The literature has no shortage of examples of gaslighting female leadership.

## **GASLIGHTING FEMALE LEADERSHIP**

It has been argued that women of color have been sat in a presumptive light that creates either negative leadership styles or a less desirable counterpart to engage with. Another piece of literature argues that women cope with gaslighting by creating less favorable styles, such as the queen bee syndrome, gender bias denial, etc. This is due to conditioning tactics and pay differentials between opposite genders starting early in their career. As gaslighting has been ignored for many years, we will explore some forms of

gaslighting tactics and how they affect Black females' leadership style. We investigated if gaslighting contributed to the negative leadership styles of Black female leaders.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are the main focal points in a corporate structure regarding race equity (Cooper, Purnsley, Washington, & Bell, 2023). And DEI programs are most effective when they come from the top leadership downward (Thibeaux, Tillotson, Falls, & Bell, 2006). Recognizing that diversification can bring a unique need to a business, including creating balance within one's organization, will create an advantage. However, DEI can also be a targeted tactic to recruit the "weak" and quickly "manipulated" candidates that allow gaslighting procedural practices and make employees easily conform to what is believed to be an everyday routine in the workspace. Gaslighting can make one entrap - Women are hired in leadership positions due to a company portraying the "diversity hire" incentive to include making them feel like they are a significant contributor in their field when they are not. Burns (1978) stated that many women saw their roles as representative and less independent. Women in leadership positions feel devalued, under surveillance, and scrutinized, especially women of color.

Intentional or not, there have been many situations where women of color are silenced in the workplace by others due to gaslighting, intimidation, discouragement, or harassment. These tactics distract, demean, or discourage women from maximizing their potential. Belasen (2017) stated women in leadership often suffer from a social identity to provide optimal performance due to the lack of resources. Women feel as if they have lost themselves or have a possible disconnect with who they are and their workplace goals. The repercussions cause many women in leadership to lose themselves in the process as it creates the "Queen B syndrome" and expectancy-confirming behavior. As a result, Wang, Markóczy, Sun, & Peng, (2018) argued that many women in leadership suffer from pay gaps due to being viewed as weak or inadequate. For this paper, we have interchanged the phrases women of color and Black female employees to mean the same demographic.

Some in the literature argue that gaslighting results in negative connotations for women of color in the workplace. Kim and Meister (2022) argued that microaggressions can threaten a woman's identity. Thus, making them feel as if they were less important or contributor in the workplace. Erskine, Archibold and Bilimoria (2021) stated the term "White gaze" was coined by Frantz Fanon in 1967 and further theorized by George Yancy in 2016. The white gaze refers to a historical and global practice of solipsistic hegemony. It hurts the advancement of African American women. While Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, and Harrison (2008) stated like other women of color, Black females also face the intersection of sexism and racism in the workplace. Due to their dual status as gender and racial minorities, they have unique barriers that prevent them from developing their leadership and career. McCaffrey (2022) discussed how the dominant leadership model in most organizations can make women feel like they do not belong. This has led to several psychological outcomes in their personality that leads to negative leadership styles, as many women of color want to feel like they are important contributors to a larger cause.

The modern American public has devolved into *gaslighting*, ignoring or pretending the truth is not apparent. Gaslighting has caused damaging effects on many workforce members' performance levels, whether managing a team or communicating with others. Over the years, management has used this tactic to make employees feel like they are "owed" something because they should be "thankful" they have a job. This has resulted in a negative outcome where hostile work environments are created, and employees are devalued, overworked, and overlooked. According to Reciniello (1999), women in organizations experience significant pain and disappointment, evident in not being consistently ignored.

For many women leaders, especially women of African American descent, gaslighting is a tactic to limit or deter their capabilities. Women of color face tribunal obstacles while climbing the corporate ladder all while being criticized and trivialized. It puts women of color in a lackluster light, therefore, highlighting them as women who are hard to work with, have poor management skills, are confrontational, and bossy. The importance of understanding why women of color are viewed negatively due to years of gaslighting and stereotypes. Thus, causing women of color to develop negative leadership styles as it is evident when analyzing how they are viewed and cope with daily stressors in the work environment.

Gaslighting and gender bias can also affect their coping mechanisms. McCaffrey (2022) discussed how women are treated differently because of their gender. This has resulted in women of color experiencing

pay gaps, glass ceilings, and policies that would normally hold all genders accountable; however, it puts women of color at a disadvantage while climbing the corporate ladder. Parker & dt ogilvie, (1996) stated that a gender-centered workforce fails to recognize the effects of racism and sexism in the work environment that contributes to negative leadership styles. Women in a predominately White culture that must consistently fight with being accepted to find ways to make sure that their voice is heard tend to become more stressed than usual. This is because women of color must struggle with their mental stability when establishing their own identity but battle with their coworkers' perceived conception. Majority of the time, this comes from White counterparts of the opposite sex as they already have a preconceived notion of how women of color are "supposed" to act. This preferential treatment can lead to resentment and build negative leadership styles towards the other sex leading to the negative connotation that women of color have at present day.

Powell and Butterfield (1984) discussed the characteristics of good managers as possessing only masculine traits while their counterparts possess only feminine traits. Thus, causing many women to adopt the masculine traits of "good leadership" to be seen in the positive eye. However, being a woman, especially a woman of color, counts against you because the adaptation technique puts women of color in a negative playing field as they already have two strikes against them: their color and gender.

## **STIGMAS AND STEREOTYPES OF BLACK FEMALE LEADERSHIP**

Christensen and Evans-Murray (2021) find bullying to be a measurable construct regarding gaslighting as a form of bullying in nursing. Gaslighting is also perceived as a form of incivility among women of color scientists (Rodrigues, Mendenhall & Clancy, 2021). Gaslighting appears to be also happening in medical communities (Jedick, 2022); Bhatti, et al (2021) approached the topic from a clinical perspective in Pakistan, whereby the victim gaslighting questionnaire has been developed to give more reliability and validity to actual victims of violence being denied their actual victim status. Even women of color who are CEOs appear to be suffering from some form of gaslighting (Storm & Muhr, 2022). Dimitrova (2021) made the claim the gaslighting effect can be identified as a "real risk among women" in the work environment, finding that among 2000 working women in Bulgaria surveyed:

*Gaslighting can lead to a lack of confidence, clinical depression, distress, and related physical illnesses. Early risk detection provides advantages for early reduction and optimization of the corporate culture of the department and the institution and in favor of building a risk reduction program (p. 463).*

Young and Young (2019), citing (Davis & Ernst, 2017) from their book *The Politics of Protest*, defined: "Gaslighting is a process through which an abuser-often someone in a position of power-manipulates the physical or mental state of a victim-often someone not in a position of power in a way that makes the victim question his/her perceptions of reality." This definition appears to be succinct in its depiction of female groups (Garret, 2022; Pohlhaus, 2017). The victim is construed in this case as the recipient of gaslighting as an abuse tactic across racial lines (Davis & Ernst, 2020) and cultures (Ruiz, 2020); and sometime women of different colors imposing it gaslighting on other women of a different color can happen (Berenstain, 2020): "a form of structural gaslighting that fails to treat women of color as knowers and exemplifies the strategic forgetting that is a central methodological tactic of White feminism" (para). One writer believes gaslighting to be an act of manipulative misogyny, a form of collective and psychological oppression (Stark, 2019). One author takes it as far as to claim gaslighting as epistemic violence (McKinnon, 2019; McKinnon, 2017).

Erskine, Archibold, and Bilimoria (2021), as cited in Parker and dt ogilvie (1996) defined Black females from the African diaspora from indefinite identities: African, West Indian, African American, Afro-Latina, Afro-Asian, biracial, multiracial, and speak several languages. Afro-Diasporic women navigate extant stigmas around Blackness and immigration, and their intersectional identities may further compound and

complicate their access to the power and status that would allow them to acquire positions in C-Suites and the upper echelons of corporations.

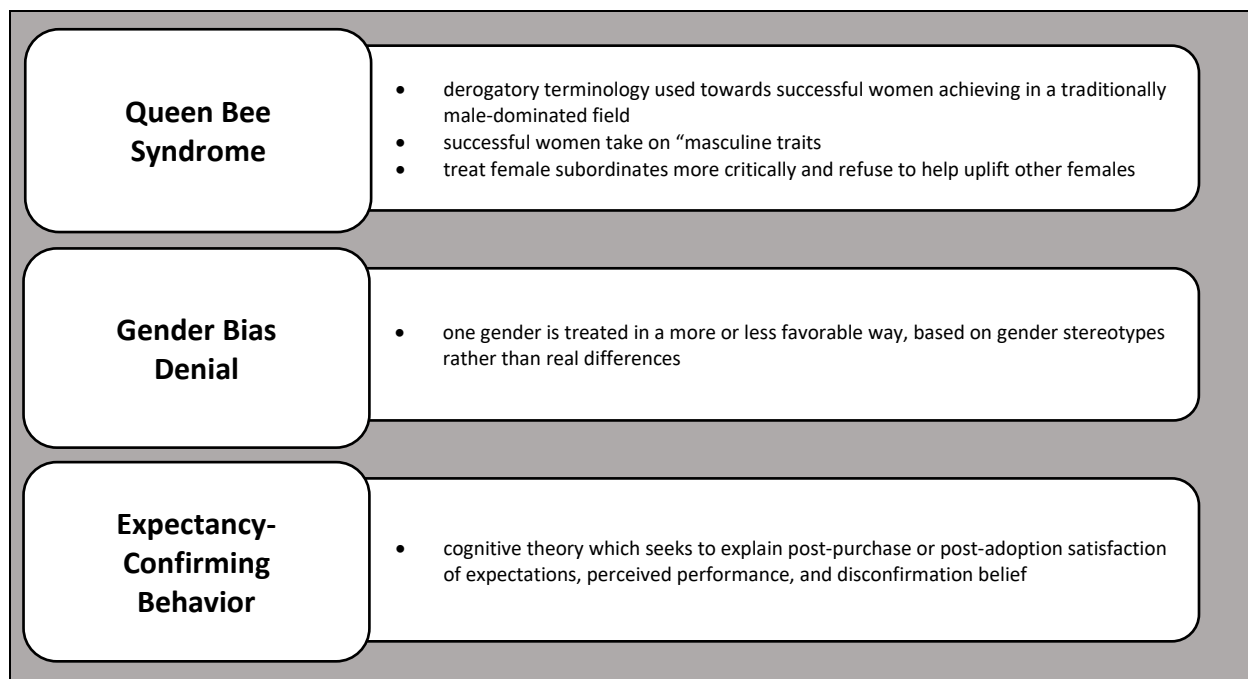
### **Queen Bee Syndrome, Gender Bias Denial, and Expectancy-Confirming Behavior**

Women in leadership positions are more transformative and adaptive. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) presented the case that the “male style of leadership has been deemed to consist of “command and control,” whereas the female style is viewed as “facilitative and collaborative. “Transformative women leaders are the exemplar of support. Jahan (2000) stated, “Simple efficiency considerations do not necessarily drive the “transformative” leaders... For example, in Bangladesh, women garment workers spend 56 hours (about two and a half days) a week in paid employment and additional 31 hours in unpaid work, a total of 87 hours (about three and a half days), as opposed to only 67 hours (about three days) for men.”

Figure 1 shows examples of the psychological and sociological damage that gaslighting develops; they can create hostile work environments, high turnover rates, and a toxic corporate structure. Employees can be conditioned to exhibit the same toxic work habits, which creates a sense of normalcy. Adaptive women leaders assess the entire situation before finalizing their decisions. Walker (2004) stated that the impact and influence are significant when African American women utilize their adaptive skills in leadership positions. We have stated the origin of gaslighting and its impact on people in the workforce. To include the impact it has on women of color in leadership positions.

Acceptance by one’s peers is one of the many things that bring value; however, women in leadership suffer from the lack thereof, thus creating devaluation in one’s identity. Social discrimination and economic disadvantage are outcomes (Gilrane, McCausland, & King, 2011). Women leaders can create a work-life balance between personal life and work. Women are more likely to be successful when they multitask and juggling multitask and juggle roles that have produced more satisfaction for them (Heath & Weber, 2020). The negative connotation forced upon women in leadership creates a coping mechanism; McCaffrey (2002) stated that the implications can have a further impact on the leadership style the woman then exhibits at work. Figure 1 illustrates three examples.

**FIGURE 1  
IMPLICATIONS OF IMPACTING LEADERSHIP STYLES**



Similarly, the coping mechanism developed in women in leadership when gaslighting has devolved into the “Queen Bee” syndrome and gender bias denial, which keeps women in leadership boxed in and hard to work with, and a desire for less of a preference because of said stereotypes and continuous manipulation tactics. The lack of recognition that gaslighting is not getting as an abusive strategy will continue to overshadow women of color in leadership positions and invalidate the value of what women in leadership bring to corporate businesses.

Organizations tend to stigmatize women in leadership positions. Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, and Harrison (2008) stated that due to their multiple minority status, Black females must continuously tackle racism, sexism, and colorism to improve their workplace image, which affects how people perceive them. The perception of how a woman of color will act or presumed to have created a dark cloud over the head of a Black female and put more pressure on them in the workplace as women must consistently prove themselves daily to coworkers. Some of these negative stereotypes are Mammy, Resting Bitch Face, Jezebel, and Sapphire, Crazy Black Bitch, Super Woman to name a few Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison (2008).

The Queen Bee syndrome is another leadership style that is viewed in a negative light. Kalogeraki and Georgakakis (2022) defined the concept of queen bee syndrome as ways in which female leaders can evaluate their less favorable subordinates. These include adopting a leadership style that favors men, stereotyping against women to justify their minority status, and reinforcing gender inequality within the organization to maintain social order and traditional approaches. Brown (2023) stated that there have been psychological studies showing that women who possess the Queen Bee syndrome intentionally damage the careers of other women they deem as threat in career advancement. Overall, conditioning female leaders to devalue women and their importance. Kalogeraki and Georgakakis (2022) stated that women in leadership positions are less likely to be favorable toward their subordinates. This is done to signal their assimilation with the dominant culture.

Powell and Butterfield (1984) suggest that one of the many traits of bad leadership comes from feminine characteristics. The feminine characteristics are empathy, sympathy, and sensitivity. To provide a (n) example, the authors provided examples of two women of color with stellar accolades; however, according to previous literature reviews, they are considered bad leaders, according to the text. Regardless of what previous literature has stated, the authors do not agree. For instance, Susan Rice, Director of the United States Domestic Policy Council, known for her strong, charismatic, and empathetic qualities, has made her successful in her current position. However, according to Powell and Butterfield, she is a bad leader. Burns (1978) stated that transformational leaders are those who focus on the essential needs of others. Which is what Susan Rice qualifies as?

On the other hand, transactional leaders are self-serving leaders that may display some Queen Bee Syndrome qualities. An example is Ayesha Curry, a successful entrepreneur with talent in several areas of life that makes her look confident, ambitious, and proud. Seemingly taking on some masculine traits. However, does that make her a bad leader as well?

## **NEGATIVE VIEWS OF BLACK FEMALE LEADERS**

The first negative impact is the wage gap experienced by women CEOs when salaries are compared to male CEOs. Even though there are more women CEOs than male CEOs in China, the disparity in pay when comparing male CEOs to women CEOs is substantial (Wang, Markóczy, Sun, & Peng, 2018). While there can be many contributing factors to the pay disparity, colleagues’ perception of female leaders may be less aligned with behaviors displaying agentic traits or in contexts where communal traits are valued, but not both. This also includes the negative effects of women in leadership, clouding the issue of disparities in pay within the population of all women CEOs’ salaries (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). On average, African American leaders’ Salaries across races in female leadership have been used to obscure the fundamental problem of lack of equal pay in African American women. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) said: “The concern raised among all women CEOs and their income covers the disparity of low pay experienced by



African American women compared to their White counterparts. Overall, making African American women feel less important.”

The second negative impact of gaslighting in the corporate sector is the limitations placed on women in leadership by their colleagues and other leaders (Embry, Padgett, & Caldwell, 2008). When women leaders have the same qualifications as their male counterparts, the expectations of women leaders can be less than what the female leader can do. This is attributable to the variety of leadership styles exhibited by women. These include an expressive leadership style and a transformational leadership style. When these expectations are challenged, the woman leader’s perception can impact how their colleagues interact with them.

The third negative impact of gaslighting is PTSD. As stated before, gaslighting is a form of manipulation, concerning that, Ahern (2018) stated there is mounting evidence that trauma is experienced, which explains a great deal as to why there is long-term PTSD symptoms that stem from retaliation for negative job performances, blacklisting, micromanagement, and isolation.

Table 2 is adapted from Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison (2008), who characterize a Crazy Black Bitch as crazy, unstable, and aggressive and familiarized as avoiding social outings with their peers due to negative experiences where we added the final column image Exemplar. While Sapphire is pinpointed as mean, direct, and “tell you off” (Reynolds-Dobbs, Thomas, & Harrison, 2008). Women in leadership positions are targeted to be the “bad guy” more than often because of societal norms. The woman is more of the disciplinarian at home, so why not carry that same view at work? The woman is more vocal in group settings so why not get her to express her thoughts? Let us not forget the “Superwoman” label as it signifies as being an overachiever, assertive, etc. (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). All these point to how Black females in leadership are held under a negative microscope of preconceived notions and gaslighting, which leads to negative leadership styles.

**TABLE 2**  
**ADAPTION – STEREOTYPICAL IMAGES OF BLACK FEMALES, EXEMPLARS**

<b>Images</b>	<b>Characteristic Stereotypes</b>	<b>Quotes</b>	<b>Image Exemplars</b>
<b>Mammy</b>	Motherly, loyal, self-sacrificing, servant, nurturing, available	“Black female managers have a tendency to be a little more demonstrative in style. I’ve watched how the senior women look out for the younger Black females and men in the company.... She is always available for consultation and willing to lend a hand if needed. Management looks to her when there are minority problems – A White female respondent (Bell & Nkomo, 2001, p. 245)”	Stacey Abrams (Politician) Oprah Winfrey (Former talk show host, actor) Octavia Spencer (Actress)
<b>Jezebel</b>	Seductive, flirty, promiscuous, hypersexual, manipulative	“I remember all the negative things people used to say about Ann, a Black female manager, when she was out in the field and moving up. People thought she must have been sleeping her way up. Now those of us who know her realize how full of ___ that was” (Thomas, 1989, p. 194)”	Grace Jones (Model, Music Actress) Pam Grier (Actress)

<b>Sapphire</b>	Loud, over assertive, talkative, dramatic, bossy, angry, wisecracker, complainer	“Because of my position and I’m a Black female, they think Okay let’s ask her to do it because she can be mean she can be hard.... they want me to be the person who is saying I’m going to tell you off if you don’t do it right (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 161)”	Ida B. Wells (Journalist) Angela Davis (Activist)
<b>Crazy black bitch</b>	Crazy, unstable, angry, vindictive, aggressive, defensive, untrusting of others	“Black females avoid social outings with peers due to the threat of negative experiences...Anna Small’s experiences when she joined a colleague at a bar only to be called a Black bitch (Bell & Nkomo, 2001, p. 153)”	Shirley Chisolm (Politician) Maxine Waters (Politician)
<b>Superwoman</b>	Overachiever, intelligent, articulate, professional, assertive	“I have to dress better, act better, do my job better, and more efficiently just to be deemed equal to a Caucasian coworker at the same level (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p.158).”  “As a Black female, I constantly have to prove myself in the workplace – I have to be twice as smart and twice as savvy (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 158)”	Cathy Hughes (Mogul & Entrepreneur) Coretta Scott King (Activist) Michelle Obama (First African American U.S. First Lady)

*Note.* Table 2 is an adaptation which gives a descriptive characteristic of the stereotypical characteristics of Black female, with quotes from “Stereotypical Images of Black females,” by Wendy Reynolds-Dobbs, Kecia M. Thomas, and Matthew S. Harrison, *From Mammy to Superwoman, Journal of Career Development*, 35(2), (p.136), 2008, SAGE Publications.

## THE RESEARCH QUESTION ANSWERED

Our findings contribute to the literature by helping managers minimize the negative effects of stereotypical leadership styles in women of color, including increased morale, retention, and diversity. All effective leaders are trained, and they are not magically burned as leaders (Brown, Njouondo, Viltz, & Bell, 2023). Black female leaders can learn leadership styles best suited for themselves. We suggest that future studies utilize our findings in analyzing how preventive gaslighting can assist corporations in providing useful information in overlooking stereotypes about women of color and how they are depicted to include developing positive leadership examples for women of color.

Previously, we asked the following research question: *does female leadership style safeguard Black female leaders against gaslighting?* Answer: **Yes.**

### Putting on the Brakes When It Comes to Gaslighting Black Female Leadership

Based on what we learned from our literature review, we conclude that to reduce gaslighting Black female leadership in industry, the following four (4) recommendations are needed. Implementing all of these recommendations will allow for an inclusive work environment for ALL employees. The

recommendations will help organizations to avoid the drawback of “all gas, no brakes”. They will help managers to put on the brakes when they witness gaslighting happening to Black female leaders.

- **Recommendation 1:** Our first recommendation highlights the need for a standard definition of leadership that defines behavioral characteristics and strategic values for Black female leaders. A standard description would help firms create a framework based on the leadership qualities it seeks, such as empathy, problem-solving, knowledge, and numerous others needed for their unique workplace. This framework helps establish a more diverse pool of leaders based on the firm’s skills required.
- **Recommendation 2:** Our second recommendation highlights the need for a shared understanding of recognizing and mitigating gaslighting against women of color in corporate settings. A firm can use various methods to voice its stand against gaslighting in the workplace. One approach is using employee resource groups (ERGs), which can share the experiences of women of color and encourage other employees to be allies against the devices of gaslighting in the workplace. This approach can help create an atmosphere for unique dialogue and education among colleagues.
- **Recommendation 3:** Our third recommendation highlights the need for a common understanding of ethical Black female leadership regarding representation and decision-making standards. Firms should continuously look at the diverse nature of their leadership within their hierarchy. A firm’s human resources (HR) should look at the company’s makeup annually to ensure that various departments have a balanced representation of diverse leadership and employees and help a firm to be more varied by intentionally seeking diverse candidates that align with the framework of unique skills needed by the firm. A firm can have the advantage of viewing various perspectives, which could elevate more Black female leaders and their decision-making that will cater more to their workforce and customers.
- **Recommendation 4:** Our fourth recommendation highlights the need for standardized methods to avoid stigmas and stereotypes of Black female leadership in corporate settings. One of the first steps is identifying the stigmas and educating on how these stigmas affect the leadership of women of color. ERGs, as stated in Recommendation 2, are vehicles used to involve and educate employees about stigmas. However, this is only one method that the firm can use with various approaches to inform employees on how to demystify the stigmas and stereotypes and that firm stance against them. Do not attempt to emulate White male leadership styles. Techniques such as seminars and company policy should be used to understand the firm’s perspective against these stigmas and how the company will proceed in tolerance for employees to understand.

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