An Exploration of Minority Ethnic Culture as a Professional Resource

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This qualitative study investigates how minority racial and ethnic individuals experience their ethnic identity in the workplace. The key contribution of this study is the development of a typology that identifies three distinct pathways through which an individual's heritage culture can intersect with race, class and professional identity to influence their work-based behaviours.

INTRODUCTION

Professions are important actors across a range of market sectors that support processes that shape the global economy (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012). The global professional services market has grown at an average rate of over 10% per annum for the past 25 years to an estimated current market value of $3 trillion (Riddle, 2002). The meanings of the terms profession, professional and professionalism are disputed, efforts to identity a series of formal traits in order to analytically distinguish professions from other occupational groups tend to be arbitrary, inconsistent and bound to value judgements (Macdonald, 1995). In this paper, a profession is broadly defined as an organised body of experts with esoteric knowledge characterised by elaborate systems of instruction, entry examinations, training and an enforced code of ethics (Abbot, 1988). Richardson (1997) judges the success of a profession by its ability to establish 'social closure', a process that ensures sustained and privileged access to a particular set of market opportunities for the purpose of securing economic and social benefits for its members. Larson (1977) argues that market monopolisation of this nature requires the acceptance of society at large and is therefore accomplished in part through claims of moral legitimacy.

Professional Legitimation

Abbott (1988) explains that legitimating the activities of a profession requires the diagnosis, treatment and results in a designated marketplace to be connected to the central values in the mainstream culture within society. For example, health, justice and accountability are culturally valued results that are produced by doctors, lawyers and accountants respectively, according to their legitimating claims (Lewis, 2011). This paper is concerned with the impact of professional legitimation processes in justifying who is able to do professional work. Professions actively construct professional identities based on meritocratic values in order to gain the trust of the public (Macdonald, 1995). For a profession to appear legitimate Larson (1977) suggests that entry must appear to be freely available to all who seek it. The claim to professional neutrality and the provision of an impartial professional service is essential to the legitimacy of all professions as are their claims to be disembodied, objective and disinterested professionals (Lewis, 2011). The orthodox view in professions is that an individual must suppress all aspects of one's identity

when performing their professional role (Wilkins, 1999). The embodiment of professionalism is based on the exclusion of race, gender and culture in what Levinson (1993) describes as 'bleached out' professionalism. It is through promoting a binary view of identity and professionalism; professions support their claims of meritocracy and perpetuate the bleached out professional narrative that views professions as being blind to the social identities of their members (Lewis, 2011; Sommerlad, 2007).

Professional Identity

Historically, social stratification along class, gender and ethnic lines has characterised boundaries to professions such as accounting (Kirkham and Loft, 1993), engineering (Hatmaker, 2013) and law (Sommerlad, 2012) establishing a normative professional identity that is white, male and middle class. The use of professional credentials as a mechanism of class reproduction and social exclusion indicate that the characteristics required for individual success in a profession are racialised, gendered and classed, reflecting the values of the dominant culture in society (Larson, 1977); evidently this undermines the meritocratic based claims of legitimacy by professions (Nicolson, 2005). Given the importance of the professions to the global economy (Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012), their claims of fair access and ethical integrity (MacDonald, 1995), combined with their processes to reproduce existing class structures and socially exclude minority racial and ethnic individuals (Kirkham and Loft, 1993), it is therefore pertinent to explore the experiences of minority ethnic workers in professional occupations given the increasing number entering the professions, discredited myths of meritocracy and the persistent white male normative professional identity (Lewis, 2011).

AIMS OF THIS STUDY

This study has two underlying aims. My first aim is to enrich theory around contemporary careers and to guide future research concerning how minority racial and ethnic professionals experience their heritage culture within the workplace. My second aim is to investigate how ethnic identity is enacted in a professional context and the influence this has on workplace behaviours. My intention is to re-examine the predominant conception of minority individuals' heritage culture as a burden that must be or actively reduced or eliminated in order to flourish in a professional work environment (Lewis, 2011; Pearce, 2005; Sommerlad, 2008). For this reason I have chosen to study black accountants in the United Kingdom. I focus on black professionals for several reasons: the first being that blacks are more likely to be employed in lower paying occupations than other ethnic groups (Elliott and Lindley, 2008). In the context of professional work, black identity may be considered to be a lower status ethnic identity than some other ethnic groups because negative stereotypes exist about the intellectual ability and competence of black people (Kenny and Briner, 2013). Accounting is a suitable location for this study because it is a form of social and organisational control (Moore, 1991), that has aided the construction of dominant class hegemony (Neu, Cooper & Everett, 2001) and grown in symbolic and material importance (Muzio and Tomlinson, 2012). Despite this growth, it has yet to implement any significant ethnic monitoring programmes (Johnston and Kyriacou, 2007) and ethnicity is notably absent from national membership data that include gender and age (Financial Reporting Council, 2016). Through a process of social exclusion, boundary manipulation and social stratification the professional identity of accounting has been established as being predominantly white, middle class and male (Anderson-Gough, Grey & Robson, 1998; Johnston and Kyriacou, 2011; Kirkham and Loft, 1993; Lewis, 2015)

Research Questions

This qualitative study explores the following questions:

- To what extent does the heritage culture of black professionals influence their professional careers?
- How does the heritage culture of black professionals influence their behaviour in the workplace?

What follows is a literature review, followed by research methods that include the selection of participants, measures and analytic procedures. Data is presented from a case study of an employee resource group in a professional services firm and this is followed by a discussion of key findings and limitations. Finally, the overall findings are presented as well as the theoretical and methodological implications and suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Accounting in the UK has developed from being an ill-defined group of commercial occupations in the late nineteenth century (Kirkham and Loft, 1993), to an occupational group with a membership of almost 343,000 members (Financial Reporting Council, 2016). Much of the power of the accounting profession has come from establishing a professional identity and determining who could and who could not become an accountant (Annisette, 2003; Bougen, 1994; Kirkham and Loft, 1993). Through a combination of stigma and impression management (Goffman, 1959 Jeacle, 2008) the accounting profession cultivated the image of the chinless, nervous, bespectacled pen pusher in order to construct an identity perceived to be congruent with conservatism, accuracy and competence (Bougen, 1994; Friedman and Lyne, 2001). This secured the trust of the public, legitimising the profession and over time establishing a normative identity that is white, male and middle class (Lewis, 2011; Lewis, 2015).

Race, Ethnicity and Accounting

Researchers have shown the salience of race in accounting is an international phenomenon; Annisette (2003) showed that accounting professions around the world have consistently excluded if not offered limited participation to persons socially defined as black arguing that the nineteenth century concept of race was widely implicated in the social functioning and organisation of accounting. This was evident from the racial closure policies that accompanied the professional closure policies of British accounting associations in Commonwealth countries (Bakre, 2005). A specific example can be found in Trinidad & Tobago where the influence of British accounting bodies effectively marginalised attempts of the emerging profession in Trinidad & Tobago to establish domestic education and certification of the country's accountants (Annisette, 2000). This locates the professionalisation of accounting within a wider context of imperialism that reflects deep influences of colonialism and the dominance of British based accounting institutions in Trinidad & Tobago, Jamaica and Nigeria (Annisette, 2000; Annisette 2003; Bakre, 2005). Much of the literature exploring the experiences of black accountants is centred upon the United States accounting profession (Hammond, 1997; Hammond, 2002; Hammond and Streeter, 1994). These take the form of historical accounts of the experiences of African American Certified Public Accountants (CPA's) pursuing a career in accounting in the midst of the legacy of slavery and the Civil Rights movement (Hammond, 2002). African American firms served as a vehicle for increasing the number of African Americans in accounting because of the difficulty experienced by African Americans in securing training contracts (Hammond, 2002). The US accounting profession actively excluded blacks from participation for most of the twentieth century through its restrictive practices; for example a number of states prohibited or discouraged blacks from taking professional examinations in their home states and aspiring accountants often had to travel hundreds of miles to take entry examinations (Hammond and Streeter, 1994). The growth and influence of the National Association of Black Accountants (NABA) was fundamental to the increase in the number of African American accountants, NABA had a significant influence on the United States accounting profession, lobbying for equality and diversity as well as working with the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (Hammond, 2002). There is a need for more research outside of the United States (McNicholas and Barrett, 2005). The literature regarding the experiences of minority ethnic accountants in the UK is limited, indicating that it is a neglected area of research (Hammond and Sikka, 1996). Johnston and Kyriacou (2007) suggest that the UK Accounting profession operates processes that are institutionally racist and sexist. Ram and Carter (2003) found that minority accountants excluded themselves from large firms choosing not to apply for roles as a consequence of perceived racism; this meant that small firms with minority ethnic

partners became important for developing accountants from these groups in the UK in a manner similar to that described by Hammond (2002) for African Americans. Lewis (2011) challenges notions of colour blindness in accounting arguing that the myth of meritocracy obscures the racialised reality of inequality experienced by black accountants. These studies highlight the necessity of examining the contemporary experiences of black professionals in accounting. The research has shown that counter to claims of a bleached out professional narrative, accounting is not a race neutral environment (Lewis, 2011; Lewis, 2015). Studies have shown that in recent years there has been a shift in the perception of accountants, the long established stereotype carefully developed to secure the trust of the public has reverted to some extent to the negative stereotypes of the nineteenth century. Recent studies exploring the representations of accountants in popular culture suggest that events such as Enron have severely tarnished the reputation of accountants (O'Connell, 2004). The portrayal of accountants in film has revealed several complex stereotypes that range from an everyday employee to a deceitful villain (Dimnik and Felton, 2006). In music, songs reflect a characterisation of accountants as perpetrators of fraud and deception who are willing to abuse their position of trust (Smith and Jacobs, 2011). The professional identity of accountants may be experiencing a shift that reflects changing public opinion (Jacobs and Evans, 2012). Understanding the experience of minority racial and ethnic members is pertinent given the international history of social exclusion in accounting (Annisette and Trivedi, 2013; Bakre, 2005), the increase in minority racial and ethnic individuals in the labour market and the necessity for accounting as a profession to manage the perception of its identity in light of recent crises and changing attitudes. Evidently the existing normative professional identity may no longer be appropriate in a contemporary workplace.

METHODS

In this paper I chose to use qualitative research methods in order to describe and understand the actual human interactions, meanings, and processes that constitute real-life organisational settings (Gephart, 2004). The use of qualitative research methods when exploring the experiences of minority ethnic accountants is prevalent (Hammond and Sikka, 2009; Johnston and Kyriacou, 2007). I chose grounded theory as a research strategy in order to better understand the unexplored dynamics of how accountants with a similar cultural background benefit from their heritage culture within their professional careers. Grounded theory is appropriate given my intention to build theory on complex, multifaceted processes because it enables me to develop a theoretical account that is firmly based in the data collected (Martin and Turner, 1986).

Case Study Approach
Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend case studies for their capacity to provide "thick descriptions" of the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 p.359) effectively communicate contextual information and demonstrate the reflexive interplay between the inquirer and the respondents. The case study approach is particularly suitable where there is little or no prior theory (Riege, 2003). Given the difficulties other researchers have experienced in collecting data in this field (Johnston & Kyriacou, 2007; Lewis, 2011) and the limited number of potential cases available to be studied, it seemed appropriate to choose extreme cases to study where I could ensure that the phenomenon of interest was "transparently observable" (Pettigrew, 1990, p275). Extreme cases facilitate theory building because the dynamics being examined tend to be more visible than they might be in other contexts; moreover the use of extreme cases in organisational studies is consistent with my grounded theory research strategy (Eisenhardt, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990). Purposeful sampling of extreme case studies is an integral part of this study that draws upon the constant comparison technique employed by grounded theorists (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In practice this meant an iterative process of simultaneously collecting data, analysing the data, and seeking new informants (Clark, Gioia, Ketchen, & Thomas, 2010). This process resulted in an evolving and increasingly focused sample comparing data across informants and over time.

Participants

I chose to study black African and black Caribbean participants working in the United Kingdom. All of the participants had parents born in Africa or the Caribbean or were born in Africa or the Caribbean themselves. I also included participants of mixed heritage who had one parent born in Africa or the Caribbean. I chose to study individuals who were qualified with any of the accounting bodies recognised by the Financial Reporting Council (Financial Reporting Council, 2016). I did not privilege any of the accounting bodies in terms of participation within the study and no specific assumptions should be drawn about the accounting bodies that are represented here. I also chose to include individuals who were qualified but were not working in a professional capacity within their chosen profession. For example, a qualified accountant currently working as a teacher would be allowed to participate in the study. This followed the logic of choosing extreme cases and my concern with different outcomes for individuals from similar cultural backgrounds.

Widening the Scope

Consistent with traditional grounded theory approaches, I engaged in an iterative process that involved travelling back and forth between the data and an emerging theoretical structure (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As part of this process it became apparent that my research goals could be better achieved by widening the scope of the study to include informant interviews with participants who were members of the legal profession. Several respondents cited the legal profession as an acceptable alternative career when discussing the influence of their heritage culture on their career choices. Specifically, in terms of their heritage culture it was equally acceptable for them to have become lawyers as it was for them to become accountants (See Results section). Moreover the descriptions of professional service firms, relationships with partners and training contracts given by accountants resembled the career tournament in law firms described by Galanter and Palay (1991). This career tournament metaphor is applicable to both accounting and law because of the professional service firms at the heart of each profession. Consequently, I chose to include a number of informant interviews. I interviewed 4 lawyers as part of this study and like their counterparts in accounting, they were individuals working in the UK with parents born in Africa or the Caribbean or were themselves born in Africa or the Caribbean. I also included participant's of mixed heritage who had one parent born in Africa or the Caribbean. These individuals also held a recognised qualification for reasons previously explained.

Reflexive Considerations

In grounded theory, researchers must account for their positions in the research process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In this study it is relevant for me as a researcher to engage in ongoing self-reflection to ensure that I take personal biases, world-views, and assumptions into account while collecting, interpreting, and analysing data (Suddaby, 2006). My personal experience as a black professional of West African heritage makes my role as a researcher in this study uniquely valuable and well informed. During the project it helped to build rapport with respondents quickly and develop social bonds that may have resulted in responses that may not have been received by researchers unfamiliar with professional service firms. I do not have to consider issues of white privilege (Wellman, 2001) in explaining the experiences of groups disadvantaged in this field but I do need to consider my privilege as a researcher to shape research experiences (Anderson, 1993). I perceive my role in this research process as an opportunity rather than an intrusion (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Data Collection

Given, that my participant population of interest is small and hard to reach, I recruited participants using a snowball approach. This has been successfully employed in similar studies when access to the population has been difficult (Hammond, 2002; Johnston and Kyriacou, 2007). I asked acquaintances, colleagues and other well-situated individuals if they knew people that met my participant requirements for both accountants and lawyers. All participants agreed to take part in a semi-structured interview that lasted approximately one hour on average. I recorded the interviews as well as took notes; all interviews were transcribed verbatim. Table 1 contains the participant pseudonyms, their current occupations and if they are currently employed within their chosen profession.

TABLE 1
LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Number	Pseudonym	Job Title	Sector	Profession	Qualification	Employed in Profession	Gender	Heritage
1	Beatrice	Art Curator	Arts	Accountancy	ACA	No	Female	Ghanaian
2	Chantel	Project Manager	Public Sector	Accountancy	ACA	No	Female	Guyanese
3	Denise	PhD Student	Education	Law	LLB	No	Female	Nigerian
4	Daniel	Property Developer	Property	Accountancy	ACCA	No	Male	Nigerian
5	Edward	Gym Owner	Leisure	Accountancy	CIMA	No	Male	Nigerian
6	Anne	Senior Manager	Accounting	Accountancy	ACA	Yes	Female	South African
7	Erica	Solicitor	Legal	Law	LLB	Yes	Female	Jamaican
8	Andy	Senior Manager	Accounting	Accountancy	ACCA	Yes	Male	Nigerian
9	Bill	Senior Associate	Accounting	Accountancy	ACA	Yes	Male	Sierra Leonean
10	Charles	Business Partner	Banking	Accountancy	ACA	Yes	Male	Ghanaian/Jamaican
11	Frank	Accountant	Recruitment	Accountancy	ACCA	Yes	Male	Ugandan
12	Gavin	Senior Audit Manager	Accounting	Accountancy	ACA	Yes	Male	Ghanaian
13	Henry	Partner	Accounting	Accountancy	ACA	Yes	Male	Jamaican
14	Ian	Associate	Accounting	Accountancy	ACA	Yes	Male	Nigerian
15	James	Senior Associate	Accounting	Accountancy	ACA	Yes	Male	English/Zimbabwean
16	Gail	Barrister	Law	Law	LLB	Yes	Female	English/Jamaican
17	Florence	Senior Associate	Law	Law	LLB	Yes	Female	Nigerian
18	Gemma	Manager	Accountancy	Accountancy	ACA	Yes	Female	Nigerian

ACA: Associate Chartered Accountant
ACCA: Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
CIMA: Chartered Institute of Management Accountants
LLB: Bachelor of Law

Data Summary

My participant sample was approximately 52 per cent female, and the majority of participants were in their late twenties to early thirties. I began by interviewing 21 professionals (17 accountants, 4 lawyers). I dropped participants who did not hold any formal qualifications. This omitted 3 participants resulting in a final sample of 18 individuals. Participants represented a broad spectrum of experience from entry-level associates to partners. This was essential to ensure that the sample would reflect varied tenures and functions within the professions explored. Tenures varied from 3 years to 20 years. The industries represented here are professional services, finance, local government, charity sector, leisure, arts and education. In total I collected approximately 24 hours of recorded interviews.

Analysis

The analysis procedure followed the grounded theory approach formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967); I analysed the data by taking iterative steps between the data and developing set of theoretical ideas. This approach requires that the data and theory be constantly compared and contrasted throughout the data collection and analysis process (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In particular in the tradition of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and used a 3 step coding system. The purpose of the coding was to extract or abstract the most relevant themes from the data in order to document their precise meanings and record their relationships for data analysis (Kreiner et al., 2006).

Step 1 Preliminary Analysis

I initially selected 5 transcripts and reviewed these line by line within each paragraph in keeping with the tradition of Strauss and Corbin (1990). I assigned codes when I identified a phenomenon that represented a theme. This coding process was initially performed in Microsoft Word and I continually modified these initial codes adding new ones to account for newfound evidence.

Step 2 Creating Provisional Categories and First-Order Codes

I used NVivo 10.2.2 software program to code and analyse the themes in the data. For each code I tried to use brief sentences or three word codes to signify the phenomenon. For instance, one of the codes that was used 'Accepting Cultural Difference' relates to the text below:

> *"We're not all the same, people have different personalities. I don't expect everyone to behave the same way that I behave. But what makes, when you have to apply what you call emotional intelligence, whereby you understand everyone is different and how do you manage people who have different personalities, how you deal with them. And that's one of the things they teach you, is to maintain your cool."*

Following the recommendations of Turner (1981), all codes were clearly defined in order for me to recognise further instances of the phenomenon in question and stimulate further thinking. For instance, the code 'Proactive Behaviour' was defined as "Refers to when an individual proactively acts to secure support, resources or preparation for their benefit". When the data from participants did not fit a previously identified theme, I created a new theme based on the words of participants. After coding 10 interviews, I did not identify any new themes in the remaining 8 transcripts that I analysed; this included the 4 informant interviews that were included in the study. This absence of novel codes provided considerable support to suggest that I had achieved theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Stage 3 Higher Order Codes

Much of the stage 2 and stage 3 coding took place simultaneously and informed one another; this meant that the higher order coding did not take place in a discrete sequential procedure as this section may imply. I followed the approach of Miles and Huberman (1994) who suggested that identifying phrases or words used repeatedly by informants could point towards regularities in the data. I also looked for frequently used anecdotes or stories in order to identify a group of themes. As I consolidated codes,

they became more theoretical and more abstract. I kept notes similar to the theoretical memoranda recommended by Martin and Turner (1986) and used these as part of my iterative process of reviewing and comparing the existing first order codes and higher order codes that emerged. These codes that emerged were fascinating because as abstract concepts they directly and indirectly addressed the research questions of this study. The next section will focus on the results of the analysis discussing the implications of my findings.

RESULTS

The findings show that participants believed that their workplace behaviour was influenced to a large extent by their heritage culture. I identified three distinct pathways that emerged from the data: professional attributes, cultural performance management and cultural inspiration. I present a typology in Table 2.

TABLE 2
TYPOLOGY FOR HERITAGER CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON PROFESSIONAL CAREERS

Theme	Sub Theme	Explanation	Example
Professional Attributes	Importance of Education	Education is considered important as a path to future success	"They were strict parents, very keen on education, which a lot of African families are" Daniel
	Postgraduate Achievement	There is a clear expectation of academic and career success	"I feel like there's maybe an inherent or maybe an emerging pressure to succeed" James
	Professional Membership	Individuals are encouraged to enter a prestigious profession	"I think there's an element of, or an expectation that you will go to school, you will go to university, you will choose a profession that's decent according to, I guess, whatever the paternal people in your life believe is the best profession at that point." Denise
	Strong Work Ethic	Hard work is necessary and may mitigate potential discrimination	"My mum said "you're going to have to work twice as hard as anyone else" Beatrice
Cultural Performance Management	Self-Knowledge	Culture provides a way for individuals to learn about themselves	"I was certainly very aware of my culture and of maybe how it determines or it tells or informs someone else of who or what I am. It's difficult not to be, " Anne
	Cultural Performance	Culture must be performed subject to the social context	I have to manage culture all the time you, just depending on what the situation is you know...if I blurt out something, I may then go on to explain, I try and make it relatable for other people" Florence

Theme	Sub Theme	Explanation	Example
Cultural Inspiration	Culturally Inspired Interests	Interests pursued as a consequence of culturally specific knowledge	"My destination has always been push for the best and see what happens, but now its push for the best in Africa." Bill
	Cultural Values & Wisdom	Culture as a source of values and wisdom	"Just knowing where you're from, where they say--in English it will sound bad--but where your umbilical cord is buried. That is important and that kind of helps or influences" Anne

Professional Attributes

Professional attributes describe how participants identified their heritage culture as providing them with the resources to build a successful professional career. This pathway was the most supported by the data and was common to individuals regardless of their heritage culture or where they were born. Four themes emerged from the data analysis that participants described as shaping their behaviour: importance of education, postgraduate achievement, professional membership and strong work ethic. In the following subsections, I characterise these themes as individual attributes and explain how for participants the cultivation of these attributes is synonymous with their heritage culture and career success. Illustrative examples are provided in Table 2.

Importance of Education

The importance of education to the life chances and opportunities of individuals was identified as being a strong culturally influenced attribute. Participants described how their parents encouraged and supported them to perform to the best of their ability throughout their formal education. This point is well illustrated in Table 2 where Daniel, a property developer of Nigerian heritage who previously worked in a professional services firm, describes having strict parents who were very keen on education suggesting this attitude is typical of African families. Participants described how they were expected to perform well in school and accepted this as a feature of their heritage culture and upbringing. Participants had an implicit understanding of the perceived importance of education that was portrayed as being culturally relevant and self-evident. This persistent message was communicated to the participants via a strong parental influence. Charles, a Business Partner of Ghanaian and Jamaican heritage currently working in a large bank in the City of London, further explains how the strong parental influence of African parents was a feature of his heritage culture.

> "It might be cultural to the extent that... it's a bit controversial saying this as well, but... the way I see things, African parents, African dads, it is like education, education, education"

The experience of Charles is similar to that described by Daniel, however it is distinguished by the insight provided into the gendered nature of the support that he received. The experience was shared by several participants and reflects the active interest and corresponding actions of the fathers of participants regarding the education of their children. The data revealed that fathers of the participants were involved in promoting academic achievement, this occurred even when the father was not living in the family home during the period when the participant was being educated (as a consequence of divorce or separation). The active interest of the father took three primary forms illustrated in Charles' explanation: the first was an explicit instruction that consistently communicated that high performance was expected at school, the second was practical assistance in developing the skills perceived to be important for academic achievement, e.g. teaching a child to read, informal tutoring by a parent or setting additional homework assignments; the third form of active support was to pay for additional tuition or enrolling the child in a fee paying school. Performing well at school was part of the way in which children deferred to

the authority of their parents in making decisions on their behalf, which they accepted was in their best interests. The participants described education as the foundation on which their other achievements rested.

Postgraduate Achievement

Participants described how this cultural attribute was unambiguously intended as a path to prepare for career success. In this role, the cultural importance of the extended family is apparent because the extended family collectively encourages career success through more implicit methods than previously described in the first theme. Chantel, a Project Manager of Guyanese heritage working for the local government, describes how the example of her extended family influenced her own behaviour in seeking career success:

> *"I'm fortunate that my family are... in terms of my wider family.... they're quite educated and very academic and career-focused and I've always had that instilled in me so that's kind of what I see."*

In her description, Chantel connects the idea of being educated and academic with being career focussed. This was common among the participants and reflected the principle that education was a vehicle for professional success. Chantel emphasised that the example of her extended family regarding their attitude towards education and their careers influenced her own behaviour. Her description highlights two important points: the first is that this behaviour was instilled in her; this approach is similar to the direct approach described regarding the importance of education. However Chantel also refers to her environment. When she explains "that's kind of what I see" she refers to the indirect approach of the environment created by her extended family and implies that her aspirations were aligned with the norm that they established. The influence of her extended family was more persuasive and less overt than that used in promoting education.

Professional Membership

Given the high standards of success that participants were expected to meet, many participants described how entering a profession was recognised by their family and their heritage culture as an accomplishment of success. The data revealed that families often had traditional attitudes towards education and careers with strong preferences for established professions such as accounting, law and medicine. The preferences of the family are important in choosing a career and participants understood that they were required to cooperate with these preferences. In Table 4.2, Denise a lawyer of Nigerian heritage, currently completing a PhD builds on the previous theme about the expectation of achievement and the importance of choosing subjects that are likely to lead to professional membership. Interestingly, Denise does not refer to her family directly but to "paternal people ". This is a reference to not only her direct family members but also the extended family (who are influential in her culture). Florence a senior associate of Nigerian heritage currently working in a professional services firm describes how desirable it is for members of her ethnic group to enter a profession:

> *"What people say about Igbo is that in Igbo families, all parents want their children to be either a lawyer or a doctor. So from there, you have to succeed."*

Florence describes how it is desirable within her ethnic group (Igbo) for parents to have children who become lawyers or doctors. These were perceived to be high status occupational groups with high educational achievement and postgraduate study as barriers to entry. For an individual to successfully negotiate these barriers was a signal of success. Florence implies that success is inevitable once you have entered these professions.

Strong Work Ethic

Along with a focus on education and achievement, the data revealed the importance and necessity of a strong work ethic. This embodied the concept of the heritage culture as a practical resource to be utilised for the benefit of the individual and was encouraged through a strong parental influence. A strong work ethic was presented both as a positive attribute but also as a potential solution to negative circumstances in the future: Specifically the data revealed that a strong work ethic was purported to perform three key tasks: the first was to help individuals to achieve success in the present, the second task was to help individuals to achieve success in the future, the final task of the work ethic was to mitigate the impact of any potential discrimination that was likely to be encountered. The message from their family and heritage culture for participants is that the attributes that helped them to enter the profession are the ones that are going to help them succeed within the profession. Andy describes how his heritage culture informs him of the benefits of hard work.

> *"When my culture tells me that hard work does pay off, and when you believe in something endlessly, you channel your energy into it, into that process, the process will surely reward you. And I've seen that. I don't need to read a book, I don't need to watch TV, I don't need someone to tell me. I've lived it and I've seen it."*

Andy describes his lived experience, explaining how consistent hard work is rewarded after time and that this requires belief and consistent effort on the part of the individual. The data suggested that participants believed that diligence and resilience were required to achieve the goals described. Participants believed that the workplace would reward them at some point in the future as a consequence of their efforts. In Table 4.2, Beatrice describes how her mother told her that she was going to have to work twice as hard as anyone else. In this sentence Beatrice is explaining that her mother believed that she would be required to work harder than her counterparts not because of her heritage culture and the ethnic identity associated with it but because of her racial identity. Based on these observations I propose that these traits encouraged by their cultural heritage prepare individuals for a competitive career tournament, which may not be fair in the short term, but cultural expectations suggest that they will be rewarded in the long term. For participants this perceived discrimination was a consequence of their perceived racial identity and not their heritage culture. The notion of being black in the workplace was perceived by participants to have negative connotations for career success.

Cultural Performance Management

The participants provided evidence that indicated that their heritage culture provided benefits beyond competency-based skills. Participants described the influence of their heritage culture on their attitudes towards themselves as individuals and the meanings associated with this in the workplace. Two themes emerged from the data: self-knowledge and cultural performance. In the following subsections, I characterise these themes as behaviours driven by their heritage culture. The participants provided evidence that indicated that their heritage culture motivated them to manage their cultural identity within a professional context. Illustrative examples are provided in Table 4.2

Self-Knowledge

Self-knowledge refers to the inherent personal value and self esteem that individuals experienced as a culturally influenced attribute. The heritage culture of individuals provided a means through which they could find meaning. This pathway revealed how participants perceived their heritage culture to provide two important functions in this context. The first is to promote self-esteem for the individual; the second is to provide practical resources to engage with others in a mutually beneficial and respectful manner. Florence describes how learning more about her heritage culture helped her to have a greater understanding of her family and their influence in her life. She explains the importance she places on the meaning she draws from heritage culture:

"So it's I think very hard to imagine where you can go if you don't know where you're coming from. So that's why I was saying that one of the biggest chance I have is that I – I had the chance to be sent back to my parent's country to understand where they are coming from, and even though I don't speak their language, I have the same memories as they had in some certain terms of you know food, and music and stuff, so it creates bonds."

The opportunity to travel to her parent's country of origin was particularly important for Florence to understand her heritage. Florence, acknowledged that she did not understand the language of her heritage, however the shared experiences and collective memory of food and music helped to create bonds with her family. Florence describes the personal significance of cultivating a relationship with her heritage culture as a way to share a collective identity with her family. Florence is not claiming to be culturally competent, however she values the experience of belonging to this ethnic group.

Cultural Performance

In this theme participants actively managed their heritage cultural influences in the workplace and this manifested in two different ways. In the first instance, cultural performance was described as a consequence of the heritage culture, in the second instance, it was described as a feature of the heritage culture. First I will address cultural performance as a consequence of heritage culture. The general opinion of participants was that racial identity was salient within the workplace, however cultural identity was not. In this sense, individuals experienced their racial identities based on how they were perceived within the workplace; however their cultural identities was something that they experienced as individuals. This important distinction revealed a rift between individual perceptions of culture, which were generally considered to be positive and generative; and the perception of others regarding racial identity which was considered to be potentially negative. When asked directly if their heritage culture influences their outcomes in the workplace, participants agreed that their culture was not relevant in the workplace, despite the role that it played in motivating their entrance into the profession. Chantel exemplified this point when asked if she thought that her culture influences her career outcomes. She explains below:

"There's an underlying sense of difference, but I wouldn't say it was really relevant because at the same time I'm British, I'm English. Obviously I'm very clear about my heritage but I'm British, so can relate on that level and you kind of leave other things at the door. It's not really relevant at work."

Chantel acknowledges an underlying sense of difference between herself and her colleagues, without explicitly describing the nature of the difference. Chantel actively excludes her heritage culture from the workplace and in doing so makes two points that are worth exploring in more detail: First, Chantel acknowledges that she is different to others, this is not explicitly presented as a disadvantage, however it is clear that minimising this perceived difference provides benefits for her in the workplace. This is evident by her choice to separate her heritage cultural identity from the workplace. Second, Chantel's description assumes that individuals have the ability to separate these identities when and if appropriate. Chantel makes no reference to her professional cultural identity or her organisational cultural identity. Chantel asserts her British identity as being both relevant and appropriate for the workplace. In contrast, her heritage culture is discarded from the professional environment as unsuitable. Herein lies the implicit assumption that many participants were unable to articulate: i.e. the professional cultural identity was British. Although Chantel identified being British as part of her identity, it was the only cultural identity that she chose to exhibit at work. This draws attention to the performative nature of the heritage culture in the workplace. The normative identity in the workplace creates a need for Chantel to perform her identity while excluding her heritage culture. This is a challenge for individuals because it can be observed that the heritage culture enables entry into the profession but the heritage culture itself must be excluded from the workplace. This implies that there is a requirement to conform to a professional norm that favours some cultures in preference to others.

In summary, it appears that the heritage culture of the participants can provide a sense of self and inherent self-worth, particularly given the role of heritage culture in bringing participants into a profession, however there may be tensions between the traits that brought an individual into the workplace and those that will allow them to thrive there. The heritage culture of participants was acknowledged as having racialised meanings to others and there was a need to manage the opinions and behaviours of others as a consequence. The expectation of having to manage their identity and the apparent irrelevance of their heritage culture in the workplace contradicted their experience of having to present a British cultural frame in order to relate to others in the workplace.

Cultural Inspiration

Participants described how their culturally motivated interests encouraged them to pursue activities or modes of thought that supported their professional aspirations; this had the potential to accelerate professional development to the benefit of the organisation and the individual. In this theme the heritage culture of individuals provided an alternative lens to observe phenomenon within the workplace. The data analysis revealed two types of attributes that participants describe as being of long-term benefit to the individuals: culturally inspired interests and cultural wisdom. Illustrative examples are provided in Table 2

Culturally Inspired Interests

The data revealed that participants were able to leverage their cultural knowledge in order to cultivate opportunities for their personal benefit and that of their organisation. These opportunities appeared in two primary forms: the first was the exploration of existing products and services through a cultural lens in order to reach a new audience or solve an existing problem. The second was to consider problems in environments where their heritage cultural knowledge provides a competitive advantage. Bill had a similar experience that exemplified the second type of cultural inspiration: his cultural knowledge helped him to gain access to organisations and public figures that his employers could not provide. Bill was able to form relationships and use his expertise to help organisations across the African continent.

> *"I thought to myself innovation technology Africa, what does that mean, what does that look like? I need to meet the actual people who are making these changes and could be changing the forefront of Africa in Africa... So we decided we wanted to go to South Africa, Kenya , Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, which we did over six months, hardly any money, managed to complete three different entrepreneur workshops in three different countries, put together a documentary....we saw several African President including, Rwanda and Kenya, Uganda was there."*

Bill's example was typical of participants who developed their ideas as part of their extracurricular activities and over time this formed an important part of their career. Participants were willing to leave their lucrative jobs in order to pursue these opportunities. Bill describes how his personal interest in business start-up culture and his own knowledge of the African continent provided an opportunity for him to share his expertise and benefit others. Given the role that an cultural heritage plays in bringing the participants to their chosen profession, culturally inspired interests appears to be an attempt to seek congruence between their professional work identity and their heritage non-work identity. Underpinning this approach was an inherent sense of value in their heritage culture and this was expressed as a resource and a source of wisdom and knowledge.

Cultural Values and Wisdom

The cultural heritage of participants did not just provide competence based skills and attitudes, it also provided wisdom in the form of proverbs and metaphors. These were indicative of some of the values held in the heritage culture. The widespread use of proverbs was not observed among the participants and this to some extent may reflect the efforts of individuals to exclude their heritage culture from the workplace. However there were a couple of interesting examples that I will discuss. The first example

was provided by Bill, who intimated that his actions were influenced by some of the values of his heritage culture, when explaining his activities to develop his social network in order to further explore potential opportunities, he drew on his heritage culture to express his opinion:

"So it finally came to the old African proverb of "If you want to fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together" and one of the things I wanted to achieve out on the trip was to really change the perception of the continent in terms of how everyone sees AIDS, to business, just the reality.... how it was on the ground. "

Bill is describing his ambitions to contribute to Africa as a continent and to collaborate with others in order to do so. He recognises that this is something that he cannot achieve alone and seeks to achieve more through cooperating with others. This example was suitable given the context of what Bill was trying to achieve. This also showed that the values to which he adhered were universal and could be translated across cultural boundaries. Moreover it an example of a practical maxim that can benefit individuals careers because it highlights the importance of collaboration, teamwork, shared resources and a shared vision. In contrast to this example, there are other cultural artefacts that may not traverse cultural borders as easily. As discussed earlier, the heritage culture of individuals was something that could be used for self-knowledge and self-development and a source of self-esteem. In this regard Anne described the benefits of understanding her heritage culture (See Table 4.1) In doing so Anne used a culturally specific metaphor to explain the value of an individual's heritage culture to their wellbeing and overall sense of self. In doing so she referred to knowing "where your umbilical cord is buried". The use of the example by Anne is interesting because it represents a practical resource of the heritage culture in informing individuals about the principles important to their culture.

In summary, cultural heritage can influence individual aspirations and provide opportunities, strength and wisdom that are useful in the modern workplace. There is evidence to show that an individual's heritage culture can benefit them as individuals and can benefit their organisations.

DISCUSSION

My aim in this paper was to explore the extent to which the heritage culture of minority racial and ethnic individuals shaped their workplace behaviour in a professional context. Upon reviewing the data, it appears that the typology that emerged may not be the exclusive result of the influence of the heritage culture as initially conceptualised; but the intersection of race, ethnicity and class within a professional context. The term intersectionality is attributed to Crenshaw (1991) in a study that investigated the dilemma of varied experiences of discrimination due to the demographic heterogeneity of the female participants. The notion of intersectionality introduced here is used to address multiple forms of identity and inequality in different contexts and at different times (Rollock, Gillborn, Vincent & Ball, 2015), consequently intersectionality draws attention to multiple category memberships and avoids the issues of attributing social experiences to a single identity category. I propose that the research findings that emerged from the data can be explained as the behaviour of members of a black middle class pursuing their class driven professional aspirations within a racialised labour market. What follows is an intersectional analysis of the research findings, first I will explain why the participants are members of a black middle class, this will be followed by an explanation of the emergent typology (See Table 4.1) through an intersectional lens.

Defining a Black Middle Class

Research on minority racial and ethnic middle classes have received little attention to date and this reflects the wide disparity in the way the term 'black middle class' has been conceptualised (Maylor and Williams, 2011; Rollock et al., 2012). Researchers have found attaching the term 'black' to 'middle class' can create anger and hostility in participants who feel that the concept is incompatible with their established notions of self (Maylor and Williams, 2011). Defining a black middle class is therefore

challenging, however I am going to characterise the study participants as black middle class using criteria from the existing literature. The first criterion is based upon their occupation, the second is based upon their occupational earnings, the third is based upon educational achievement and attitudes and the final criteria is based upon self-identification of being black.

Occupational Criterion for Black Middle Class

In a study of the black middle class in the UK, Rollock et al. (2012) used Office of National Statistics socio economic classifications NS-SEC1 and NS-SEC2 to define members of the black middle class. NS-SEC1 includes professionals and those in management posts (Rose, Pevalin & O'Reilly, 2005). In the US, Pattillo (1999) included individuals working in clerical and skilled manual roles in their definition of black middle class. Given these definitions in the literature, the qualified accountants and lawyers in this study satisfy the occupational criterion for belonging to the black middle class in the literature.

Earnings Criterion of Black Middle Class

The benchmark for middle class earnings used by Pattillo (1999) was at least two times the poverty line in the United States. This was deemed inappropriate for the United Kingdom by Rollock et al. (2015) who suggest that this would equate to a salary of £23,000 per annum. In contrast, the lower end of earnings of the black middle class participants in the Rollock et al. (2015) study was £36,000. Given that newly qualified accountants and lawyers can expect to make £48,100 and £59,000 per annum respectively (Hudson, 2016; Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, 2016) the participants in this study satisfy the earnings criterions for belonging to the black middle class in the literature.

Educational Criterion for Black Middle Class

With respect to the educational achievement and experiences of the black middle class, by definition, participants in this study held postgraduate vocational qualifications (See section 4.3.4.2). Archer (2010) suggests that black middle class parents are involved and engaged in their children's' education. This behaviour could be observed in the typology for professional attributes that had a sub theme that highlighted the importance of education (See section 4.4.3.1). If defined in terms of professional aspirations and attitudes towards education, then the participants appear to have parents that were involved and engaged in their education. Archer (2010) posited that "minority ethnic families must work disproportionately harder to achieve success" Archer (2010, p.466). This phenomenon can be observed in the data under the strong work ethic sub theme (See Table 4.4.3.4). In terms of the criteria I suggested to define black middle class membership, given their, occupation, earnings and educational achievement and attitudes, the participants satisfy each of the criteria according to the literature.

Racial Criterion for Black Middle Class

Each of the criteria relates to membership of a black middle class but makes no reference to race. A defining characteristic that I do not want to overlook is that individuals within the black middle class must identify as being black which for the purposes of this study includes those who are black African or black Caribbean or have at least one parent who is black African or black Caribbean. Using these criteria, this places the participants and their parents as members of the black middle class.

An Intersectional Analysis of the Typology

Viewed through an intersectional lens, the participants are members of a black middle class seeking to benefit from their class resources by reproducing existing class structures from one generation to the next. In this regard, the goals of accounting and law are congruent with the participant's personal goals. As discussed, professions have been shown to reproduce existing class structures and social stratification (Kirkham and Loft, 1993). As members of the black middle class, participants can be described as seeking to benefit from the social closure of professional membership in obtaining social and economic benefits (Larson, 1977, MacDonald, 1995, Richardson, 1997). Viewed through an intersectional lens, access to the professions was granted to participants through their middle class aspirations and attributes

discussed, however within the workplace they are required to remove elements of their identity that correspond with their racial identity. The need for individuals to perform their identity was a consequence of the intersection of race, ethnicity and the classed professional environment. The experience of race was something that participants raised only when considering the perceptions of others. This is indicative of a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903), as part of their negotiation through a racialised professional environment, the participants are describing their attempts to view themselves through the eyes of a member of the majority group to avoid reinforcing negative stereotypes. In contrast, their personal experience of their heritage culture reflected knowledge, pride and self-esteem regarding their ethnic identity. Participants were so familiar with the necessity to perform their identity that participants identified it as both a feature and consequence of their heritage culture.

Race and ethnicity were dismissed as irrelevant to the workplace, however the attributes of being middle class meant that the participants were able to exhibit traits consistent with the professional identity through their attempts to bleach out their own racial identities (Levinson, 1993). This requirement also explains why so few participants were able to enjoy the cultural inspiration pathway in the workplace.

The Complexity of an Intersectional Approach

In addressing the research questions, it seems that the extent to which the heritage culture of black professionals shapes their behaviour is great, however it is mitigated by the role of class and race, which may influence behaviour to a greater extent. This is achieved through the pathways identified in the typology and suggests that black professionals have a complex and often contradictory experience within the workplace. This may be alleviated over time by the extent to which the normative professional identity remains white, male and middle class. However given the history of professions reproducing existing class structures (Hatmaker, 2013; Kirkham and Loft, 1993; Sommerlad, 2012). I suggest that the extent to which the normative professional identity remains intransient is itself influenced by the general identity of members of the middle class in the UK. This may be possible as a consequence of social mobility and the professions themselves may have a role to play. Research has found that the UK professions have become increasingly social exclusive over the past thirty years, in particular accounting was identified as the most socially exclusive profession in the UK, second only to journalism (Cabinet Office, 2009). This suggests that in the foreseeable future existing normative identities and the challenges of being a black professional may persist.

Key Contributions

This paper made several important contributions to several different bodies of literature. First, this study contributes to the diversity literature by exploring the lived experiences of minority ethnic professionals without characterising them as being inherently disadvantaged (Ramarajan and Thomas, 2010). Second, I addressed a limitation in the professions literature by focusing my attention away from normative experiences in the workplace, which are characterised as being white, male and middle class (Hatmaker, 2013; Kirkham and Loft, 1993; Sommerlad, 2012) and focusing on the experiences of minority ethnic professionals as they manage their careers in the face of social closure that has been shown to be racialised (Annisette, 2003; Lewis, 2011). Third, in this study I contribute to the professional literature by challenging the binary view of identity and professionalism as separate and distinct constructs and builds on prior research that addresses professional claims of neutrality (Lewis, 2011; Wilkins, 1999). Finally, this study responds to calls for more qualitative research on specific ethnic groups in order to understand the multiple identities possessed by all individuals (Kenny and Briner, 2013).

Limitations
Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged.

Commercial Professionals
The first limitation of this study is the choice of commercial professionals as participants. Accountants and lawyers both share similar professional experiences regarding training contracts, professional exams and the importance of professional service firms as an organisational structure. These attributes make them suitable for this study but the research findings in this study are limited to the extent that they may not be appropriate for professions not associated with these organisational structures.

Future research should consider doctors, dentists and other high status professions that are not organised through professional service firms. Future research should also consider occupations where the social closure attempts of its members may be focused on securing social benefits (Richardson, 1997).

Intersectionality
This study employed an intersectional approach to analyse the data that emerged from employing a grounded theory approach. The analysis considered the role of several identity categories: race, ethnicity, class and professionalism. However there was no analysis on the role of gender or other potentially salient identities such as sexual orientation. Class emerged as being an important source of identity and inequality that was not originally considered in this study. Future research should consider using an intersectional approach that does not exclude gender or other potentially salient identities from their analysis.

Case Study Approach
I chose an extreme case study approach because I was concerned with generating theory, however the nature of the study means that it is unclear if the conclusions drawn from these particular cases will apply elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to examine the role ethnicity plays in shaping the work-based behaviour of minority racial and ethnic professionals. In this study I used a grounded theory approach to focus on extreme case studies of black accountants and lawyers and identified a typology of three distinct pathways through which participants believed their heritage culture influenced their behaviour: professional attributes, cultural performance management and cultural inspiration. The grounded theory approach was useful in guiding the study as a consequence of the emerging results of the data. The approach enabled me to widen the scope of the study to a broader range of commercial professionals, furthermore the grounded theory approach led me to use an intersectional lens to analyse the findings. Consequently, it is likely that the typology identified in the study is not exclusively a function of ethnic identity as initially anticipated but an intersection of a complex process of race, class, ethnicity and professionalism. Through an intersectional lens the data revealed that the participants were members of a black middle class, this was exhibited in their attitudes towards education, professional membership and general career aspirations. This had contradictory implications which meant that their collective experience was characterised by their class driven aspirations for professional membership and the associated social and economic benefits and recognition of their ethnic identity in terms of self-knowledge and esteem for their heritage culture. However this was mitigated by their experiences in a profession in which they believed it was necessary to exclude their racial identity.

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