CRANFIELD UNIVERSITY

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An examination of senior Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women and men's identity work following episodes of identity salience at work

School of Management

PhD
Academic Year: 2007 - 2011

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses methodological critiques of ethnicity research in organisations by combining intersectionality and identity work frameworks. Additionally, it extends intersectionality beyond its traditional focus on multiple disadvantage and demonstrates contextual sensitivity to ethnicity. Taking an individual constructivist stance, I examined ethnicity and its intersection with gender and seniority through an identity work lens. The research question was: *How do senior black, Asian and minority ethnic women and men make meaning of episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities at work?* The study investigated how 24 senior black, Asian and minority ethnic (BME) women and men constructed an understanding of their multiple-identified selves in response to affirming, contradictory or ambiguous identity-heightening work experiences. Respondents kept journals about episodes that raised the salience of their intersecting identities. Then, in interviews, they described the sense they made of the episodes and their responses to them. Following a template-based analysis of 101 accounts, a typology emerged of Accommodating, Refuting, Reconciling, Affirming and Exploratory identity work modes, describing senior BME individuals' identity construction in response to identity-heightening episodes. I introduce 'intersectional identity work' to illustrate how individual (e.g. cognitive effort to reconcile a paradox), relational (e.g. a sense of responsibility and affinity for subordinate minority colleagues) and contextual (e.g. visibility resulting from demographic distribution in one's immediate environment) factors influence intersecting senior, ethnic and gender constructions at work. Integrating intersectional and identity work perspectives to examine ethnicity demonstrates the dynamic interplay of multiple identity dimensions during meaning-making, the range of modes adopted and the intensity of effort expended by senior BME women and men during personal meaning-making. This approach makes a methodological contribution to ethnicity and intersectionality research. It also makes an empirical contribution to UK ethnicity and identity work research through the suggestive model of identity work modes and rich insight into senior BME individuals' experiences at the juxtaposition of disadvantage and privilege.

Keywords:

Intersectionality, ethnicity, diversity, micro-behaviours, individual constructivism

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter overview

This introductory chapter sets the context for my thesis. It offers insight into my personal and professional motivation for examining identities and difference in organisations. It then positions ethnicity research in organisations, by describing demographic and cultural patterns regarding ethnicity in the United Kingdom and by making comparisons with the United States (the main source of academic knowledge of ethnicity at work). Following this, I introduce the study's key concepts - 'ethnicity', 'gender', 'minority', 'seniority' and 'identity work'. I discuss their socially-constructed nature and define them as they are used in this thesis. I then outline the thesis' arguments and present how this document is organised.

1.2 Personal context

This thesis examines how senior black, Asian and minority ethnic (BME) men and women make sense of events that raise awareness of their identities at work. I begin this account of how others make sense of themselves by revealing my position in it first. This thesis, like many others, reflects its author's experiences. The question at its core, concerning issues of identity and difference in organisations, cannot easily be disentangled from my personal and professional experiences as a mid-30s, black, British Nigerian, female Occupational Psychologist.

I started this journey curious about self-knowledge and the supposed tensions between this and others' expectations regarding who one ought or could not be. I grappled with these issues personally and with my clients; dissatisfied with the overly-deterministic approaches offered by my psychological training, such as personality questionnaires and competency checklists, to predict performance and success in organisations. I was curious about how being different and not fitting the mould manifested itself, as I advised and trained clients about authenticity, self-awareness and personal development, group processes and leadership. Although the specific

questions and approaches to enquiry have since changed, my core interest remains the same. This thesis, then, examines how individuals who are 'different' make sense of this difference in their everyday working lives. Within the broad theme of understanding 'difference', this thesis, at its core, explores existentialist questions about identity and self-conceptualisation by examining minority ethnic professionals' attempts to resolve such questions as 'who am I?', and 'what is my place and purpose here?'. Simultaneously, it acknowledges powerful contextual influences on their capacity to respond as organisational and societal members whose 'place' and 'purpose' are somewhat already prescribed. Specifically, the research question asks how senior BME women and men make sense of events that raise awareness of their minority ethnic, gender and senior identities at work.

Acknowledging the fact that my life experiences and passions influence the perspective presented and the questions raised, I work from the viewpoint of my identity, a source of both insight and blind spots in research (Bell, 2009). I have endeavoured to keep my position and identity in this study explicit, practicing reflexivity. Reflectivity entails:

> *Thinking through what one is doing to encourage insights about the nature of social science, especially the role that language, power/knowledge connections, social interests and ideologies, rhetorical moves and manoeuvring in the socio-political field play in producing particular accounts* (Alvesson, Hardy & Harley, 2008:497)

I have sought to "*think through"* my role in presenting this account, making my voice explicit throughout as appropriate. I formally articulate this in three chapters - this Introduction, the Methodology (Chapter 3) and in the Conclusions (Chapter 7).

Having considered my position in this thesis, I introduce its main subject matter. The next section contextualises ethnicity in UK organisations.

1.3 Diversity and ethnicity at work

Immigration rates, population growth patterns, changing work practices in many Western economies and the contribution of emerging economies to global markets, all suggest that socio-demographic categories of difference and identity (e.g. ethnicity, gender, religion, age) will continue to influence workplace composition and practices in the future. Despite this, systematic differential outcomes for minority group members (compared to the normative group of middle class white heterosexual men) persist in the UK and other Western countries.

1.3.1 The UK context

Demographic and economic trends suggest that the contribution of minority ethnic women and men to the UK population and the workforce is increasingly significant. Since 1990, net migration patterns have contributed more to UK population change than natural increase (i.e. rate of births and deaths) (Office of National Statistics [ONS], 2008). The national average population growth rate between 2002 and 2009 was 0.6%, compared to 4.1% for the non-white population. The non-white UK population is currently approximately 12% by most recent estimates (ONS, 2011). This rises to 40.5% in London and is growing substantially in other parts of the country. The non-white British population in the North East and South West regions more than doubled between 2002 and 2009 (ONS, 2011). Leicester and Birmingham are projected to be 'plural cities' in the next 10 years (with no racial or ethnic group constituting a majority of the population) (Finney & Simpson, 2009).

Specifically considering work, the last 50 years have witnessed a significant change in ethnic make-up. The first wave of migration from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent in the late 1940s was followed by the migration of Indians from East Africa. Smaller but no less significant waves of recent migration, ranging from highly skilled migrants to refugees and asylum seekers, have significantly changed the demographic profile of the UK (Bradley & Healy, 2008).

Despite this quantitative growth, there are marked differences between the work experiences of minority compared to majority ethnic people in the UK. People from minority ethnic groups have higher unemployment rates than the majority white group, with black people having the highest unemployment rate at 17% compared to the white group's rate of 7% (Office of National Statistics, 2011)[1]. Once employed, there remain significant differences between majority and minority ethnic individuals in outcomes such as pay and representation at senior level (Race for Opportunity, 2008; Sealy, Vinnicombe & Doldor, 2009); young minority ethnic people's relative position in the workforce appears not to have changed since the 1970s (Blackaby, Leslie, Murphy, & O'Leary, 2002).

These trends suggest much remains to be done by organisational researchers, policy-makers and practitioners about addressing inequalities around ethnic diversity (and other dimensions of difference). This is particularly important in today's cost-conscious economic context, in which equality, diversity and inclusion[2] policy and practice run the risk of being perceived as 'tick box' compliance exercises or a 'fluffy nice to have', in the face of apparently more pressing 'bottom line' concerns.

Understanding processes and practices that sustain inequality remains a pressing concern. So is examining individual, interpersonal and group implications of interactions across ethnicity and other dimensions of difference, for majority and minority organisational members. Academic challenges and frustrations regarding this are discussed next.

[1] Detailed look at the figures show a more complex picture by ethnic group and gender. White women, then Indian men have the lowest unemployment rates at 6% and 7% respectively. The highest unemployment rates are for Pakistani/Bangladeshi women (19%) and black men (18%). These trends are further complicated by factors such as cultural norms, sector distribution, age distribution and qualification rates within groups.

[2] The terms 'equality', 'diversity' and 'inclusion' are relevant to the study and management practice of inequalities at work. They emphasise subtly different aspects of this issue. However, they are often used interchangeably, or in interrelated ways, and are thus theoretically and practically interconnected (Özbilgin, 2009).

1.3.2 Understanding ethnicity in organisations

A cursory search of academic and practitioner literature would reveal thousands of theoretical, empirical review and policy papers on demographic diversity in organisations. There is motivation to understand how to 'manage' diversity and a sense that this is 'a good thing'. However, individual and group outcomes of organisational demographic diversity are not always positive, and can lead to reduced trust and increased conflict. Management scholars lament that research on ethnicity appears not to have advanced within organisational studies (compared to gender studies for instance), despite its significance for understanding organisational behaviour (Kenny & Briner, 2007; Chugh & Brief, 2008; Holvino, 2010). Proudford and Nkomo (2006) suggest that the rush of publications in the last 30 years has been driven by demographic trends rather than a significant change in theorising or developing the understanding of ethnicity in organisations. Several authors urge more work on understanding workforce demographic diversity in order to develop theories and interventions to support organisations and their employees (Brickson, 2000; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Harrison & Klein, 2007). Specifically, there is deemed to be a dearth of good quality social research insight into patterns and causes of ethnic inequalities in the UK (Kenny & Briner 2007; Salway, Barley, Allmark, Gerrish, Higginbottom & Ellison, 2011). The challenge for ethnicity research (especially in the UK) is designing and conducting 'real world' research that integrates *"enhanced conceptual sophistication on the one hand* (with) *clarity on how to put the investigation of ethnicity into practice on the other"* (Salway et al, 2011:20). This argument for meaningful examination of ethnicity is advanced in the next section and developed extensively in the following Literature Review chapter.

1.3.3 Advocating research on ethnicity in UK organisations

For understanding ethnicity, scholars world-wide are likely to start with North American literature, the primary source of organisational research on ethnicity and diversity (Jonsen, Maznevski & Schneider, 2011). To some extent, findings will resonate with British researchers as there are broad similarities between both

countries. For instance, the US and the UK are very similar culturally (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Also, similarities in the social, political, legal and economic systems would indicate broadly parallel workplace patterns and experiences related to diversity generally, and ethnicity specifically. However, closer examination of their socio-political histories also suggests that how 'ethnicity' is experienced in these contexts may be quite different. Britain's relationship with its colonies provides a different setting for ethnic group relations, compared to the US's more visible legacy of slavery and history of mass immigration. Differences in terminology are also noticeable. For instance, 'race' is a critical feature in much cultural, political and social American discourse, and more likely to be a marker of tension and discord than 'ethnicity', (Frable, 1997; Brewer, Alexander, Mackie & Smith, 2002). In the US, 'ethnicity' is a narrower concept, comprising two categories – 'Hispanic/Latino' or 'non-Hispanic/Latino', generally identified through affiliation with a Latin American country (rather than skin colour). Additionally, ethnic group distribution differs between countries. The largest minority ethnic group in the UK, the Asian population (comprising 5.9% of the total population), is proportionally smaller to that of the US. In the US the largest 'racial' minority group is Black or African American (12.6%). Thus, UK and US differences in history, meaning of race/ethnicity and group distribution support the case for UK-specific research. Context-sensitivity is necessary for all national and cultural locations in which diversity management and research may be conducted (Özbilgin & Tatli, 2008; Özbilgin, 2009; Jonsen, Maznevski & Schneider, 2011). This issue is revisited in the following chapter. The study's key concepts are defined next. However, understanding what 'ethnicity' means and theoretical and empirical implications of this remain central themes throughout this thesis.

1.4 Defining key concepts

This thesis examines senior black, Asian and other minority ethnic (BME) individuals' identities, making it imperative to clarify what 'ethnicity', 'gender', 'minority', 'senior' and 'identity' mean. These terms are commonly used, yet academically contested across domains such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and politics. A glimpse of

the *socially-constructed* nature of ethnicity and race was offered in the discussion of ethnic group classifications in the UK and US in the preceding section. A social construct is a concept whose meaning shifts across time and location; it is a product of human talk and action rather than fixed in human nature (Berger & Luckman, 1966). The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how these terms are used in this thesis.

1.4.1 Defining ethnicity

'Race' and 'ethnicity' are primary bases for social differentiation and categorisation (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), particularly in the West; and central in everyday conversation. Defining them is a highly contested and complex issue (Jenkins, 2004; Proudford & Nkomo, 2006; Modood, Berthoud & Nazroo, 2002; Smith, 2002). Diversity and identity scholars tend to agree, however, that race and ethnicity are socially-constructed, relationally and socially-located; often used, with everyday consequences, and reflective of hierarchical and power relationships across the world (Gunaratnam, 2003; Jenkins, 2004; Proudford & Nkomo, 2006).

One distinction between both notions conceptualises 'race' as physiologically-based physical differences between people (in lay terms often determined on the basis of skin colour), and 'ethnicity' as differences based on cultural markers such as language, food and national origin (Kenny & Briner, 2007). Another approach (e.g. Cox, 1990) co-opts the term 'racio-ethnicity', to describe membership of biologically and/or culturally distinct groups, reflective of differences in societal privilege affecting performance, satisfaction or progress in organisations. This reflects the close and sometimes interchangeable nature of the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity'. However, there is growing critique of the term 'race', which is widely discredited as an objective category of 'real' biological difference (Modood, Berthoud & Nazroo, 2002; Smith, 2002; Gunaratnam, 2003; Helms, Jernigan & Mascher, 2005). This debate, however, lies outside this thesis' boundaries. This thesis focuses on how people who self-identify as black, Asian or minority ethnic individuals *experience* ethnicity (intersecting with gender in the context of seniority), rather than how they *define* ethnicity per se. This is because whether 'real' or not, human beings organise aspects of their lives *as if* ethnicity (and

race) were 'real'. In this thesis, 'ethnicity' is the preferred term, referring to membership of culturally distinct groups reflective of differences in privilege in society that affects performance, satisfaction or progress in British organisations (based on Cox, 1990). This includes 'white' and 'non-white' ethnic groups. I follow Kirton & Greene (2005), using the term 'minority ethnic' as employed by the Office of National Statistics and commonly used in Britain, to refer to 'non-white' individuals - 'Black', 'Asian', 'Chinese' and 'mixed' ethnicities. However, study respondents frequently referred to 'ethnicity' and 'race' interchangeably; I retained these terms when quoting directly from them.

1.4.2 Defining gender

This thesis adopts an 'intersectional' approach to ethnicity, acknowledging gender's connection with experiences of ethnicity. Intersectionality is discussed extensively in the Literature Review. While 'sex' refers to biological and physiological differences between men and women, 'gender' captures beliefs about how men and women (ought to) behave (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011). Gender concerns "*socially constructed differences between men and women and the beliefs and identities that support the difference and inequality*" (Acker, 2006:444). Although distinct terms, gender and sex interact to make the experiences of men and women in the workplace qualitatively different (Powell & Graves, 2003). Within the majority ethnic group, progress remains to be made towards attaining full equality between the sexes in organisations, particularly at the very top of organisations, where (white) women remain in very low numbers (Vinnicombe, Sealy, Graham & Doldor, 2010). The picture for BME women is more complex, with specific patterns for specific ethnic groups. However, Bradley and Healy (2008) identified several broad 'gendered ethnic employment gaps' between majority and minority women: BME women have greater difficulties in finding employment, are more likely to take jobs below their skill level and are confined to a narrower range of jobs than white women. White women are also more likely to hold management positions than BME women (Bradley & Healy, 2008). Bhavnani and Cole (2002) explain the segregation between BME women and

white men and women as caused by both 'structural and cultural' forces; reinforced by organisational practices and socio-cultural constructions of BME women's 'difference'.

1.4.3 Defining minority

Like ethnicity, the term 'minority' is contested, with its binary majority/minority assumption of associating privilege with majority and disadvantage with minority status (Gunaratnam, 2003). Women, however, are not a numerical minority in the population and many sectors. Also, some groups are significantly overrepresented in some occupations, such as Black Caribbean women in nursing (Bradley & Healy, 2008). Through considering power, privilege and disadvantage, one can adopt a more sophisticated consideration of 'minority' beyond numerical representation. This study's respondents' minority ethnic status signifies disadvantage in the UK. Respondents were also the numerical minority in terms of ethnicity and, in terms of gender, for women. Reference to ethnicity in this thesis implies *minority* ethnicity in the UK - 'non-white' individuals of 'Black', 'Asian', 'Chinese' and 'mixed' ethnicities. Respondents, their organisations, and their minority ethnic categories are described in the Methodology, Chapter 3.

1.4.4 Defining seniority

'Seniority' concerns being higher in rank or status compared to another. In organisations the term has structural (i.e. location/position) and personal (i.e. self-identity) implications. The theoretical relevance of 'seniority' for BME individuals and implications for organisational privilege are discussed in the Literature Review and Methodology Chapters.

1.4.5 Defining identity work

This thesis applies 'identity work' as a lens for understanding everyday experiences of minority ethnicity, gender and seniority in UK organisations. Identity work describes the effort individuals put into 'making sense' of themselves and of events that challenge what or whom they are (Burke 2007; Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008).

Identity work is defined as 'the (primarily mental) effort undertaken by individuals to construct self - understanding during the dynamic interaction with their environment,' (Alvesson et al, 2008; Beech, 2008). The concept emphasises the ongoing dialogue between self and environment and the effort that goes into meaning-making (Watson, 2008; Beech 2008). In this thesis, focus is on how individuals construct or make sense of their ethnic, gendered and senior identities in organisations. A more extensive discussion on identity work is presented in subsequent chapters. In the following Literature Review chapter, identity work is proposed as a useful lens for addressing key critiques regarding ethnicity and intersectionality research. Following the presentation of findings and the discussion, the limitations of combining identity work with ethnicity and intersectionality research are considered in the Conclusions.

1.5 Thesis outline

In this chapter, I have argued that issues surrounding diversity, and ethnicity specifically, remain pertinent for today's organisations. The persistence of unequal employment-related outcomes suggests there is still much to be learnt and implemented in organisations in working towards equal opportunity for all members of society. It is also important to develop understanding of ethnicity in organisations in the UK specifically, rather than rely on North American data, due to the differences in these nations' contexts. I also defined 'ethnicity', 'gender', 'minority' 'seniority' and 'identity work', acknowledging the socially-constructed and non-fixed meanings of most of these terms. This study examines ethnicity in UK organisations by investigating senior BME women and men's identity construction. To guide its development, a thematic review of approaches to examining ethnicity in organisations is first presented at the beginning of the Literature Review (Chapter 2) to scope the literature. This focuses on how ethnicity has been examined in organisations and the limitations therein, such as insufficient attention to context and other dimensions like gender, in examining ethnicity. Then, intersectionality, a perspective that advances meaningful examination of ethnicity in organisations, is presented. Intersectional perspectives respect the complexity of ethnicity by interpreting ethnicity in

conjunction with other socially-salient identity dimensions. A systematic review of studies examining ethnicity *with* gender in organisations is presented next. This ends with proposals for how intersectionality can further advance ethnicity knowledge, such as by utilising theory and adopting clearer methodology. To support a theoretically-informed understanding of ethnicity in organisations and address other methodological concerns of ethnicity and intersectionality research, I then propose examining senior BME individuals' 'identity work' in making sense of ethnicity as it intersects with gender and seniority. An identity work lens enables examinations of intersections by juxtaposing advantage (in senior status and male gender) and disadvantage (in minority ethnicity and female gender). It also enables examination of ethnicity from a micro-perspective, revealing how BME individuals experience and respond to identity-heightening encounters. The Literature Review leads to the study's purpose – to examine the identity work in which senior minority ethnic women and men engage in response to episodes that raise awareness of their intersecting identities. The study's research question is:

> ***How do senior black, Asian and minority ethnic men and women make meaning of episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities at work?***

Following the Literature Review, the Methodology (Chapter 3), introduces the study's individual constructivist assumptions and the methods used. Twelve senior women and twelve senior men recorded episodes that raised the salience of their identities as senior BME individuals in journals. After two to four weeks, they participated in interviews, elaborating on the sense they made of the identity-heightening episodes and their responses to them. Respondents described 101 moments of self-reflection or encounters with others that raised awareness of their intersecting identities. The Methodology Chapter also describes the analysis conducted. The data were categorised against the identity work model using data matrix display methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in Excel. Then, more fine-grained analysis was conducted with eight illustrative vignettes (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which became templates against which the rest of the episodes were analysed. Analyses revealed that respondents engaged in five identity work modes (Accommodating, Refuting, Reconciling, Affirming

and Exploratory work) to make sense of identity-heightening encounters. Findings also indicated how ethnicity, gender and/or seniority intersections were revealed in the meaning-making process. Findings are presented in Chapter 4 (including an illustrative episode for each identity work mode) and Chapter 5 (presenting the phases of each identity work mode). In the Discussion (Chapter 6), the concept of 'intersectional identity work' is introduced to describe the dynamics of senior BME individuals' identity work revealed in the findings. Intersectional identity work describes the individual, relational and contextual dimensions of the effort senior BME individuals undertook in constructing ethnic, gendered, senior selves, in interaction with their environment. I also discuss the implications for current understanding of ethnicity, diversity and identity construction in organisations. Finally, Chapter 7 (the Conclusions) presents the key contributions of this thesis. Primarily, the thesis makes a methodological contribution to examining ethnicity and intersectionality by adopting an identity work lens. This revealed the interplay of multiple dimensions in senior BME individuals' meaning-making. The study also makes an empirical contribution by introducing a typology of senior BME identity work and the phases therein. Implications for future intersectionality and identity work theorising are also considered. The thesis ends with reflections on the study limitations and considerations for future research.

1.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have contextualised this study on how senior black, Asian and minority ethnic (BME) men and women make sense of events that raise awareness of their identities at work. I first presented my personal interest in this topic. Then, I discussed the significance of continued research on ethnicity in organisations in the context of sustained inequalities between groups despite increased workforce diversity. I argued for UK-specific ethnicity research and defined the key concepts, 'ethnicity', 'gender', 'minority' 'seniority' and 'identity work', acknowledging the socially-constructed and non-fixed meanings of some of these terms. Following this, I presented an outline of the thesis. The next chapter reviews the phenomena of

interest in greater depth. Specifically, the Literature Review examines how ethnicity and ethnicity with gender have been examined in organisations. It ends with a proposal for integrating identity work with ethnicity and intersectionality, and then presents the research question guiding the thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter overview

Following the preceding chapter's discussion regarding the gap in UK research and practitioners' and scholars' frustration regarding inequality in organisations, investigations of ethnicity are reviewed in this chapter. This Literature Review chapter evaluates current approaches to investigating ethnicity, highlighting opportunities and questions for further examination that lead to the thesis research question. Section 2.2 describes how ethnicity has been examined in organisations and considers key critiques of this research. I emphasise *how* ethnicity research has been conducted rather than *what* ethnicity research has been conducted in organisations. This is because reviewers of ethnicity research in organisations often emphasise limitations regarding the means by which ethnicity is examined, in addition to identifying key questions yet to be answered (e.g. Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Roberson & Block, 2001; Proudford & Nkomo, 2006; Kenny & Briner, 2007). Their emphasis suggests that meaningful examinations of ethnicity would address methodological critiques as well as answer empirical questions. Following this overview of ethnicity research, *intersectionality* is introduced. Intersectionality is a perspective that acknowledges multiple identities, and its contribution to understanding how ethnicity is experienced in organisations is discussed. Next, Section 2.3 presents a critical review of literature examining intersecting ethnicity with gender in organisations and its contributions to ethnicity research in organisations. However, challenges of research intersecting ethnicity with gender (narrow scope, insufficient theorisation and unclear methodology), are also considered. To address these, I introduce *identity work* as a lens for examining organisational experiences relating to ethnicity (Section 2.4). The proposed approach for this and the study's research question are presented in Section 2.5.

2.2 Studying minority ethnicity in organisations

In this section, I present a thematic description of ethnicity research in organisations. I do this to set the scene for the critical review following, which focuses on studying ethnicity with gender in organisations. This thematic overview emphasises how ethnicity has been examined in organisations. Several reviewers in this field (e.g. Nkomo, 1992; Cox, Nkomo & Welch, 2001; Roberson & Block, 2001; Kenny & Briner 2007) comment on the limited and bounded explanations of ethnicity dynamics in organisations. This overview introduces what 'meaningful examination' of ethnicity in organisations may entail, by discussing three strands of ethnicity research in organisations. Later in the chapter (Section 2.3), I present a critical review of the literature that examines ethnicity meaningfully through its intersection with gender in organisations.

2.2.1 Approaches to studying minority ethnicity in organisations

This overview of research draws on empirical and review papers to describe recurring themes in approaches to studying ethnicity in organisations. First, I describe three strands of ethnicity research in organisations - examining differences in organisational outcomes between ethnic groups, examining the nature of stereotyping and bias, and investigating minority ethnic individuals' reactions to this. Then, I describe two suggestions for developing ethnicity research - consideration of context and going beyond essentialising differences between ethnic groups. This leads to the critical review of literature that examines ethnicity more meaningfully through its intersection with gender in organisations.

One stream of organisation studies on ethnicity focuses on elucidating differences between ethnic groups. Typically, such studies highlight 'main effects', such as differences between white and non-white employees in assessment scores and motivation. For example Greenhaus, Parasuraman and Wormley (1990) examined differences between black and white managers on organizational experiences, job performance evaluations and career outcomes. They reported that race had 'direct

effects' on job performance evaluations, career plateauing, and career satisfaction, derived from a regression analysis. Explanations of differences in outcomes between majority and minority ethnic groups have become more sophisticated with the introduction of intervening mediating and moderating variables. Thus, for instance, it is increasingly accepted that ethnic differences in performance cannot simply be explained by 'essential' differences between groups. Essential differences refer to assumptions that observed differences result from 'real' differences in ability between groups, without accounting for contextual or social factors. For example, performance differences can be partially explained by stereotype threat. Stereotype threat is the heightened awareness of the risk of being negatively stereotyped (Steele & Aronson, 1995). This fear of conforming to a negative stereotype can impair performance at work, for instance, through modifying minority ethnic individuals' propensity to seek feedback (Roberson, Deitch, Brief & Block, 2003). Documenting differences between ethnic groups and understanding *why* these differences persist in organisations is particularly useful where there is limited empirical data, to build a comprehensive picture of ethnicity-related patterns in organisations. However, this research stream is criticised for its 'deficit approach' towards minority ethnic group members, and limited explanatory power (Roberson & Block, 2001). For instance, the finding that Asian Americans do not attain proportional levels of organisational success (despite tending to score highly in tests) cannot be fully explained using this approach (Roberson & Block, 2001). Additionally, focusing on establishing differential organisational outcomes can occur at the expense of understanding the *processes* that lead to these differences. This limits the extent to which such work can contribute to advancing theory and practice. As such authors call for more process-based work to understand how individuals move from sensing threat to impaired performance (Cox et al. 2001; Roberson & Block, 2001; Schmader, Johns & Forbes, 2008).

A second stream of ethnicity research investigates the processes and perceptions that result in discrimination or unfair outcomes against members of particular groups. This strand is useful for developing models of prejudice and stereotype. However, this stream tends to only attend to the perceiver (typically the 'prejudiced white manager')

without fully engaging with the subjective experiences of being the target of discrimination, thus assuming a passive subordinate. Like research examining differential outcomes discussed in the preceding paragraph, focus often remains on the individual as the unit of, and the explanation for, group differences. This approach often equates membership of a dominant in-group to bias against a subordinate out-group, not fully accounting for subtleties in treatment towards out-group members proposed by other theories (as presented by Roberson & Block, 2001). For instance, identity development (e.g. Helms, 1984), social identity (e.g. Haslam & Ellemers, 2005) and modern racism theories (e.g. Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal & Esquilin, 2007) suggest individual variation in attitudes towards out-group ethnic members, due to maturity, identity salience and implicit biases respectively. More research into how bias and discrimination are experienced by the targets of these actions is encouraged (e.g. by Kenny & Briner, 2007), as is greater focus on everyday practices that reproduce underlying power relations (Nkomo, 1992).

A third approach to ethnicity research in organisations directly investigates minority ethnic individuals' experiences such as relationship between self-esteem, stereotyping and job performance. Some of this work draws on laboratory-based studies while others explore minority ethnic individuals' organisational experiences and perceptions more broadly. For example, in a British study, Ishaq & Hussain (2002) examined BME individuals' attitudes to military careers. By examining personal and family influences on perceptions and decision-making, they demonstrated awareness of the impact of social context on minority ethnic individuals' experiences. Although these approaches provide a 'voice' for minority ethnic individuals, much remains to be known about differences *within* and *across* ethnic groups and occupational *contexts*, such as experiences beyond selection in the UK (Kenny & Briner, 2007).

Overall, the view is that relatively little is known about the role of ethnicity in organisational behaviour, especially in the UK (Kenny & Briner, 2007) This is partly due to the low number of published articles (2% of the 7159 articles reviewed between

1952 and 2005) but also to the relatively narrow focus of studies. Specific empirical gaps identified by Kenny and Briner (2007) are:

1. Research on experiences beyond selection, paying greater attention to how organisational context influences BME career experiences
2. Focus on professionals, particularly in light of increasing numbers of minority ethnic graduates in the workforce
3. Qualitative methodology for richer, in-depth understanding
4. Focus on specific ethnic groups, as differing cultural and economic backgrounds are likely to mean different groups are prone to different forms of stereotyping

In general, reviewers recommend more focus on *process* over outcomes, *modern experiences* of bias and discrimination, and sensitivity to *within-group differences* (e.g. Nkomo, 1992; Cox, Nkomo & Welch, 2001; Roberson & Block, 2001; Kenny & Briner 2007). In addition to these specific recommendations for empirical work, broad considerations for researchers in this field are going beyond essentialism and paying greater attention to context, for more meaningful examination of ethnicity in organisations. This is discussed next.

2.2.2 Advancing minority ethnicity research in organisations

The preceding section briefly described themes within organisational research in ethnicity, drawing on empirical and review papers suggesting opportunities for meaningful examination. Simplistic assumptions of essential differences between groups to explain organisational outcomes are challenged. Linked to this is the insufficient articulation of contextual/socio-cultural influences that may explain the processes that contribute to observed differences. This restricts our understanding of experiences of ethnicity in organisations. These critiques suggest that more meaningful examination of ethnicity in organisations would adopt a complex, anti-essentialist stance, cognisant of context. The issues of essentialism and context are discussed next.

2.2.2.1 Beyond essentialism

Essentialist assumptions in ethnicity research are (often implicit) ways in which researchers infer 'real' value in attributes differentiating members of different ethnic groups. These are interpreted as absolute differences between groups, and nothing much beyond this. Essentialism is the assumption that an individual's ethnicity or gender constitutes them. Gunaratnam (2003:29, citing Werbner, 1997) describes:

> *To essentialise is to impute a fundamental, basic, absolutely necessary constitutive quality to a person, social category, ethnic group, religious community, or nation. It is to posit falsely a timeless continuity, a discreteness or boundedness in space, an organic unity. It is to imply an internal sameness and external difference or otherness.* (Werbner, 1997:228 cited in Gunaratnam)

Thus, essentialism categorises individuals' experiences, practices and thoughts in relation to their ethnicity without considering how other factors influence these (such as other identities, times, spaces, internal and external differences).

In British organisational research, ethnicity is predominantly treated as a single demographic variable and simultaneous consideration of multiple identities to facilitate understanding of the subjective experience of ethnicity in organisations is lacking (Kenny & Briner, 2007). Critical and feminist scholars (e.g. Holvino, 2010; Essers & Benschop, 2009) claim it is imperative that ethnicity is analysed and theorised in conjunction with other categories of difference, rather than treated as a single unit of analysis. Asking people to account for experiences based on one category (e.g. ethnicity) to the exclusion of the other (e.g. gender) (as required by previous UK anti-discrimination legislation[3]) is an invalid conceptualisation of experiences when membership of both is confounded in individuals (Cole, 2009). Additionally, as discussed in the Introduction, ethnicity's socially-constructed nature means its meaning shifts across time and location; it is a product of human talk and action rather

[3] The UK Equality Act (2011) combines previous anti-discrimination laws into a single act, covering nine protected characteristics. Prior to this, discrimination cases could only be made under single dimensions, such as sex discrimination or race discrimination.

than fixed. The American 'one drop rule' constituting what 'black' means, compared to the South African 'coloured' and 'black' categories is one example. In the UK, some people of South Asian origin respond in very different ways to being described as 'black' (Maylor, 2009). Ethnicity and other socially-salient identity categories ought to be conceptualised as a psycho-social process of construction and negotiation between multiple identities, resulting in *"fluid, multidimensional, personalised social constructs"* (Frable, 1997:139), shifting across time and place. For example, social class often closely intertwines with ethnicity, such that 'black professional' identities are as much about changing class status as ethnicity (Kenny & Briner, 2010). Going beyond essentialism entails rejecting assumptions that experiences of ethnicity are fixed, people can be easily categorised into these groups, and that predictions can be made about them based on their group membership. Advancing meaningful understanding of ethnicity thus requires examining how other identity categories intersect with ethnicity to produce qualitatively different subjective experiences of ethnicity in organisations. However, there appears relatively little integration of classed, or alternative, analyses for deeper understanding of ethnicity in organisations in organisational literature (compared to sociological literature). A second focus for ethnicity research, related to anti-essentialism, is the significance of context.

2.2.2.2 Attention to context

As discussed in the preceding section, time and place influence what ethnicity 'means'. Real progress on ethnicity research requires attending to individuals' responses to disadvantage, bias and discrimination as it interacts with organisational context (Roberson & Block, 2001). Socio-historical and organisational demographic contexts influence experiences relating to ethnicity in organisations, and attention is required to examine shared meanings and beliefs within the contexts that make these meanings relevant. For instance demographic representation influences women's attitudes to gender in different organisational contexts (Ely 1995). Organisational culture and strategy influence attitudes to ethnic diversity (Ely & Thomas, 2001) and intergroup conflict (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, Weber & Ernst, 2009). Additionally, as we work

towards comprehensive application of ethnicity and diversity scholarship to global/ multicultural/multinational organisational contexts, consideration of social-historical and cultural factors become more pertinent (Özbilgin, 2009; Jonsen et al, 2011). Although not often explicitly acknowledged by North American authors, organisational scholarship in general and ethnicity research specifically, is heavily influenced by the US context. An illustration is Thomas's (1993) fascinating psychoanalytical take on mentor/protégée relationships across gender and ethnicity which describes social interactional workplace taboos, with historical roots in slavery. However, (as discussed in the Introduction) it is important to consider how and whether differences such as history of race relations, population distribution of groups, and the impact of legislation on organisational practices influence ethnicity and inequalities across nations (Oikelome, 2010). At an even broader level, a post-colonial perspective reminds us that dominant approaches to ethnicity in organisations (incorporating this study) are influenced by Western philosophies (as pointed out by Özbilgin & Tatli, 2008, for example). This means that Western experiences of ethnicity (and associated beliefs about ethnic groups) are influenced by images and concepts with roots in colonial beliefs about the superiority of some 'races' over others. Thus it is likely that experiences relating to 'minority ethnicity' in Senegal, China or Argentina will be underpinned by different assumptions around 'difference'.

Therefore, anti-essentialist assumptions and sensitivity to context are key recommendations for meaningful examination of ethnicity in organisations. Intersectionality, a perspective that recognises this, is discussed next.

2.2.3 Towards meaningful examination: An intersectional approach to minority ethnicity research in organisations

This chapter began with an overview of how ethnicity has been examined in organisational studies. Broadly, research could more accurately reflect the complexity of experiences relating to this identity facet. This includes the socially constructed context within which ethnicity is experienced and the interplay of other identities (such as gender) with ethnicity. Advancing knowledge in this area could entail

investigating ethnicity as one of multiple, socially-constructed identity dimensions and acknowledging the role of context in this. One major way in which these critiques have been addressed is through 'intersectionality'. The term 'intersectionality' is often attributed to the black female legal scholar, Kimberle Crenshaw, who pointed out how "*race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences"* (Crenshaw, 1989:139). To intersect means to cross. The noun 'intersection' refers to the meeting point of two, or more identity dimensions. In this thesis, the adjective 'intersecting' emphasises that crossing one identity dimension with another alters the meaning of both.

This section presents how research on intersecting identities contributes to examining ethnicity meaningfully by rejecting essentialist assumptions and acknowledging context. Primarily, I focus on insight gleaned from intersecting ethnicity with gender, excluding other identity dimensions like class, sexual orientation and religion. The focus is on ethnicity's intersection with gender for several reasons. Both are the primary areas of focus on diversity management practice and research (Chugh & Brief, 2008). Gender and ethnicity are also highly salient and highly stable, thus potentially easier to theorise. Research examining ethnicity in conjunction with gender potentially offers a 'prototype' for developing more nuanced and sophisticated perspectives on ethnicity in organisations. However, due to its multiple boundaries, intersectional analysis may always be partial (Healy, Kirton & Noon, 2010). Focusing on ethnicity with gender represents a partial view. The implications of this are discussed in the section on conducting intersectional research in the Conclusions chapter (Section 7.3.1.1).

2.2.3.1 The significance of intersectionality in ethnicity research

Although ethnicity and gender are central to our self-concepts (Hogg & Abrams, 1988), research on each has traditionally run two parallel courses, considering ethnicity or gender as the determining feature of subjects' experiences, in isolation of other facets of identity. Consequently, ethnic minority women may be subsumed under categories that do not accurately reflect their perspectives and experiences. Minority ethnic

women's identities are not necessarily additive (i.e. Asian plus female) or separate (i.e. Asian / female) but likely to be distinct (i.e. 'Asian-female') (Settles, 2006). Like their white counterparts, many senior minority ethnic women have few role models and lack mentors; as 'outsiders' or 'tokens', they can be isolated from the influential networks required for progression (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006). However, minority ethnic women often face additional culturally-based gender stereotypical assumptions about the roles they ought to take on and behaviours expected of them at work (Gilkes, 1982; Johnston & Kyriacou, 2006; Fearfull & Kamenou, 2006). Their careers are characterised by 'job ghettoisation' (many in diversity-related HR functions) and blocked career progression, resulting in significant under-representation at senior levels in organisations (Davidson, 1997; Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006; Sealy, Vinnicombe & Doldor, 2009).

Intersectionality theorising emerged from critical feminist roots in an effort to exhume the experiences of women traditionally silenced in gender research due to their position at the nexus of subordinate gender and ethnic status. Intersectionality is "*the mutual reproduction of class, gender and racial relations of inequality*" (Acker, 2006: 443) and sensitises us to "*the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations*" (McCall, 2005: 1771). Intersectionality acknowledges that multiple categories of difference, identity and disadvantage such as ethnicity, gender, social class and sexuality, depend on each other for meaning and consequence. Intersectionality creates a "*theoretical space*" for exploring interconnections and interdependence between socially constructed categories (Adib & Guerrier, 2003) and offers a framework, for example, for analysing ethnic women's positions within the "*gendered and ethnicised occupational hierarchy*" of organisations (Bradley & Healy, 2008:40). Intersectionality addresses the concerns raised in previous sections regarding traditional ethnicity scholarship by rejecting essentialism and acknowledging context. It rejects essentialism by challenging homogenous assumptions in liberal feminism of women's work experiences and acknowledges context by drawing attention to the history of particular groups. For example, intersectional theorising demonstrates how the notion of 'work' is different for

African-American and white women and offers "*a different consciousness and a different way of knowing*" (Holvino, 2010). From an African-American woman's perspective, 'women of colour have always worked' as domestic servants, slaves, factory workers and sold into prostitution, in contrast to their white counterparts (Holvino, 2010). Additionally, differences can be drawn between the importance of community work to minority ethnic women as a necessary means of supporting their own family/community where resources are scarce, compared to the white middle class conceptualization of 'charity work' and 'community work' activities (Holvino, 2001).

Intersectional studies often show awareness of context during analyses, highlighting structural and situational elements that influence experiences relating to ethnicity with gender. Examining the intersection of ethnicity with gender thus contributes to more meaningful understand of ethnicity.

So far, I have presented intersectionality as one approach for addressing ethnicity research critiques regarding essentialism and insufficient attention to context. Next, I review organisational literature that has adopted an intersectional approach.

2.3 Studying minority ethnicity with gender in organisations: A critical review

Following the presentation of intersectionality as an anti-essentialist perspective on ethnicity with sensitivity to context, a critical review of approaches to examining ethnicity with gender is presented. This review describes approaches through which ethnicity has been studied with gender in organisations, whether or not authors specifically used the term 'intersectionality'. Studies tend to adopt one of three approaches to investigating ethnicity's intersection with gender. These are 'ethnicity with gender' as a unit of analysis, as a subjective perspective and as an analytical framework. Although useful as a general route to navigate literature, I acknowledge that any broad classification of a wide array of studies is subject to oversimplification. These approaches demonstrate sensitivity to the complexity of studying ethnicity in

organisations. This thesis proposes building on this by expanding the scope of intersectional research, integrating theory and clarifying methodology. I propose expanding the scope of intersectional studies by looking beyond subjects of multiple oppression and applying methodological guidelines from the identity work model. At the end of this section, identity work is proposed as a theoretical lens through which intersectionality can further contribute to ethnicity research.

Considering ethnicity with gender moves away from essentialist assumptions of ethnicity, acknowledging that experiences of ethnicity are often influenced by gender. A relatively small proportion of management literature has considered how the intersection of gender with ethnicity shapes ethnic minority women's experiences, (as distinct from [white] women's experiences, or ethnic minority [men's] experiences). The systematic review I conducted of peer-reviewed articles of studies examining ethnicity and gender in organisations revealed 128 papers since 1973, from a handful in single years in the early 1980s to multiple publications per year since 2000 (Atewologun, 2008). Proudford and Nkomo (2006) also reported a significant change between 1995 and 2006, regarding the introduction of gender analyses to race/ethnicity research. The review of the three approaches to examining ethnicity with gender follows.

2.3.1 'Ethnicity with gender' as unit of analysis

In this first approach to examining ethnicity with gender, these identity dimensions are examined as something employees 'have', becoming a basis for comparison and differentiation. Here, some authors utilise multiple category membership as a unit for (often quantitative) comparison and for differentiation between organisational outcomes such as attitudes towards trade unionism or job satisfaction (e.g. Cianni & Romberger, 1997; Colgan & Ledwith, 2000; Chow & Crawford, 2004). These researchers often sample multiple groups (e.g. black men, black women, Asian men, Asian women) and adopt both qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach to examining group differences mirrors traditional organisational studies of ethnicity.

Here, 'ethnicity with gender' is another category against which employees can be counted, compared and measured.

This approach to intersectionality acknowledges heterogeneity within demographic groups, addressing a key limitation of generic ethnicity research. It sheds light on specific challenges facing certain groups, such as Australian minority ethnic women's increased likelihood of experiencing religious and pregnancy-based discrimination, compared to white women (Syed, 2007). This research also potentially makes it easier to synthesise findings across studies, and generalise effects across diversity dimensions, a parameter for quality within a positivist paradigm. However, one limitation of this approach to intersectionality is that numerical minorities may be excluded for statistical rigour. Additionally, investigating 'ethnicity with gender' as a single variable still leaves a gap in understanding the *processes* underlying the complexity of multi-dimensional identities in organisations. Intersectionality proponents such as Özbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli and Bell (2011), exhort research that engages more deeply with intersecting identities (beyond a unit of analysis) by focusing on how identities interplay with ethnicity to produce inequality of outcomes and sustain/maintain unequal practices in organisations. Such meaningful examination requires greater sensitivity to inter-dependence of different social categories and awareness of how socio-historical factors (re)produce power and privilege by focusing on individuals' structural positions (Özbilgin et al, 2011).

2.3.2 'Ethnicity with gender' as subjective experience

A second stream of research examines the intersection of ethnicity with gender to help account for differences in employees' organisational experiences. Here, lived experiences of minority ethnic women (and occasionally, men) are placed centre stage to gain insight into their perspectives on career and work (e.g. Gilkes, 1982; Bell, 1990; Hite, 1996; Davidson, 1997; Rana, Kagan, Lewis & Rout, 1998; Johnston & Kyriacou, 2006). This is the main approach adopted by organisational researchers examining the intersection of ethnicity with gender. Typically, such studies direct attention to the experiences of (a usually small sample of) minority ethnic women, highlighting how

their experiences differ qualitatively from white women and minority ethnic men. For example, Davidson (1997) details BME women managers' career challenges of cracking the '*concrete* ceiling'. Bell & Nkomo (2001) use life histories to describe the trajectories of executive African American women, comparing and contrasting their experiences with white counterparts. The purpose of these experiential studies reflects the original cause of intersectionality - filling in the gap in academic knowledge, placing the people who have usually been ignored through being 'placed at the margins' or having 'fallen through the fault-lines' of research, at the centre of the organisational study. Such studies raise awareness by offering insight from the 'outsider's view within', for the benefit of management scholarship as a whole (Collins, 1986). This literature contributes to culturally-sophisticated and nuanced understanding of ethnicity in organisations, often emphasising the structural (economic and institutional) location of minority ethnic women (e.g. Bell, 1990). This cluster fills an important gap in the literature. Conceptualising and investigating experiences relating to intersecting ethnicity with gender in this way highlights the barriers facing minority ethnic women as they attempt to advance through organisations, or manage public (work) and private (home or community) domains.

One prominent theme in this approach to studying ethnicity with gender (present to a smaller degree in the other approaches) is the notion of 'tensions' minority ethnic women experience when negotiating between majority (usually work) and minority (usually home) cultural contexts. A potential risk of this conceptualisation of ethnicity with gender is the temptation to position minority ethnic women as 'victims' of their structural location. Additionally, this literature often focuses on (a usually small number of) ethnic minority women, reinforcing subjects' positions as the 'Other' at the margins. Thus, whilst seeking to give voice to those who have previously been excluded, constructs to explain the tensions of multiple marginalisation - such as 'bicultural stress' (Bell, 1990; Hite, 1996), 'role stress' (Davidson, 1997), and 'invisibility as a form of institutional racism' (Johnston & Kyriacou, 2006) – may only serve to reinforce minority ethnic women as victims of their structural location struggling to manage their 'Outsider' status. While it is important not to dismiss these real aspects

of some minority ethnic women's experiences, the concept of intersectionality potentially has more to offer beyond describing the tensions of managing multiple oppressed identities. Care should be taken that these constructs do not limit intersectionality to predefined dimensions of difference, when non-traditional dimensions (such as investigating the emasculation of Asian men relative to white men) may contribute to knowledge on ethnicity in organisations.

2.3.3 'Ethnicity with gender' as analytical framework

Going beyond descriptive narratives of the previous approach, some organisational researchers adopt intersectionality as a framework for research. Here, the intersection of gender (and, often, other identity facets) with ethnicity is actively deployed to make sense of the processes in which participants (and researchers) engage with (women's) work experiences, often interrogated from multiple perspectives. We see how the interplay of race, class and sex influence one woman's socio-cultural practice as a teacher (Henry, 1997); how culture intersecting with gender informs career decisions of three generations of Latina women (Hite, 2007); and, how fused identities of ethnicity, gender, nationality and class in multicultural populations constitute fluid, simultaneously-shifting selves (Adib & Guerrier, 2003). When the intersection of ethnicity with gender is adopted as an analytical tool, researchers can also be involved in the analytical process, as featured in the reflexive accounts of Douglas (2002), Bell and colleagues (2003), Pio (2005) and Kamenou (2007). As discussed in the Introduction, this concerns self-reflections about one's role in the research process. Reflexivity *"goes beyond reporting facts and truth to actively constructing interpretations of the researcher's own experiences in the field and then questioning how these interpretations came about"* (Hertz, 1997:15). This perhaps reflects the legal, political and social sensitivity of 'researching diversity', relative to other management topics. Reflexive intersectional authors highlight the importance of being aware of researchers' reactions to data, and share personal struggles in navigating the research process. Bell, Meyerson, Nkomo and Scully (2003) elaborate on the complexities of conducting "*gendered and raced*" research in organisations, drawing

on sensitive issues such as trust, authority and 'silence vs. voice' as researchers of various backgrounds try to make sense of data. This approach to studying gender with ethnicity acknowledges the social construction of these identities and intersubjectivity of meaning generated in this research, involving both the researcher and the researched as they generate knowledge on intersecting ethnicity with gender.

This approach, actively using intersections to unpack and interrogate experiences relating to ethnicity, usefully illustrates how gender, culture and class, for example, may influence work-related ethnicity experiences. Additionally, such studies reflect the complexity of experiences and the systematic ways in which practices infuse with each other to account for differences within and between groups in organisational theory. However, there may be limitations to their collective impact on organisational studies. This is because intersectionality research remains at the margins of organisational research and somewhat fragmented, with contributions from assorted disciplines (e.g. medicine, communications, sociology) often published in specialist 'women's issues' journals or critical management publications (Atewologun, 2008). There is no consensus regarding exactly how one goes about conducting intersectional research. Compounding this, explicit methodological guidelines for analysing intersectionality are elusive (Nash, 2008) and conducting it is challenging (Browne & Misra, 2003; McCall, 2005). According to Healy and colleagues, "*while philosophically, the argument for intersectionality seems uncontested, 'doing intersectionality' is complicated and fraught with dangers*" (2010:4). This limits the potential for reproducibility and theory building, restricting the actual and perceived value of intersectionality research to mainstream management literature.

Three approaches to examining ethnicity with gender have been considered - 'ethnicity with gender' as unit of analysis, as individual perspective and as analytical framework. Contributions such as understanding heterogeneity within groups, giving voice to silenced organisational members and showing how ethnicity interacting with gender, culture, class and religion (for example) influences work experiences were discussed. This thesis proposes that intersectional perspectives could contribute

further to ethnicity research in organisations. Challenges associated with its narrow scope, insufficient theorisation and unclear methodology are considered, leading to the proposal for identity work as a lens to address these.

2.3.4 Advancing intersectional perspectives on minority ethnicity research in organisations

So far in Section 2.3, I have presented how intersecting ethnicity with gender has meaningfully contributed towards extending ethnicity research. Intersectionality offers additional sophistication for understanding ethnicity research by addressing challenges around essentialist assumptions and lack of sensitivity to context. Three approaches to examining ethnicity with gender were presented, and their contributions and limitations considered. Next, two overarching critiques of research intersecting ethnicity with gender in organisations, i.e. limitation of scope and insufficient integration of theory, are further discussed. Following this, meaningful examination of ethnicity intersecting with gender through an identity work lens is proposed.

2.3.4.1 The scope of intersectionality research

Intersectionality research was prompted by efforts to challenge implicit liberal feminist assumptions that women's organisational experiences were homogenous. Understanding experiences of gender in conjunction with ethnicity is becoming increasingly valued, with the notion of a single feminism rejected and the acknowledgement of multiple systems of privilege in organisations and societies. Early intersectional research may also be accused of homogeneity, with much work focusing on one group: African-American women. This is significant because African-American women's experiences of intersecting gender with ethnicity are intimately linked to their socio-historical locations. For instance, Bell & Nkomo's (2001) rich narratives of black and white executive women refer to stereotypes (e.g. 'Jezebel', 'Mammy') constructed within the context of African-American women's depictions and experiences in US culture, some extending as far back as the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

For instance, the 'Mammy' stereotype of a caring, loyal, maternal, self-sacrificing woman comes from images of the chief caretaker of the plantation master and his family. While such stereotypes negatively impact African-American professional women (e.g. Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) they have somewhat limited transferability to other parts of the world, such as the UK. Additionally, religion as a facet of ethnicity is relatively absent in the North American literature but salient in the work experiences of British BME women (e.g. Fearfull & Kamenou, 2006). While not disregarding the reality of African-American women's disadvantaged status, their experiences of ethnicity are highly context-specific.

Admittedly, intersectional approaches to ethnicity are increasingly applied to a wider spectrum of women (especially outside North America). Recent years have witnessed a rapid increase in studies embracing 'multiracial feminism' (taken from Pompper, 2007) representing a range of intersecting ethnicities with gender, such as Latinas in North America (Pompper, 2007; Hite, 2007), and Chinese, Indian and indigenous women in Australia and New Zealand (Kim; 2004; Pio, 2005; Syed, 2007). For instance, an examination of female Muslim entrepreneurs in the Netherlands revealed that religious identities were crafted in ways that pushed the boundaries of expectations of 'female entrepreneurs', while resisting traditional, dogmatic interpretations of Islam (Essers & Benschop, 2009). Intersectional perspectives have also been applied to a wider range of concepts. For example, intersectional research on 'whiteness' challenges the assumption that white individuals do not 'have' ethnicity (Heller, 2010; Levine-Rasky, 2011), and intersectionality in work-life theorising challenges assumptions that work-life concerns are limited to women in traditional nuclear family arrangements (Özbilgin et al, 2011).

Many of these studies acknowledge the cultural and politico-historical context in which ethnicity is socially-constructed at work across the globe. However, much work remains to be done. In the UK, there remains a significant gap in knowledge regarding experiences related to intersecting ethnic and gender identities in organisations (Kenny & Briner, 2007; Atewologun, 2008). The broadly similar colonial histories and

immigration patterns the UK shares with other EU countries (e.g. France), suggests similarities in experiences relating to intersecting gender and ethnicity, which may markedly differ from countries experiencing 'newer' forms of migration such as Italy, as suggested by Bradley & Healy (2008). Conversely, France's *'liberté*, *égalité*, *fraternité'* philosophy, translated into diversity practices of non-disclosure of ethnicity and other social identity dimensions, suggests additional complexities compared to the UK. Overall, there is still a gap in our understanding of how experiences related to intersectionality are comparable or different across European countries.

Another scope-related challenge is that, due to critical theory roots, intersectionality is often restricted to women's experiences to the exclusion of men, limiting understanding of experiences of ethnicity to female BME organisational members. Without dismissing valid contributions to management knowledge, we may be able to go beyond gap-spotting which under-problematises existing literature, to critiquing the assumptions of current intersectional approaches (as recommended by Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011). One opportunity for broadening intersectional perspectives is the focus on disadvantage. For instance, many authors (e.g. Epstein, 1973; Bell, 1990; Hite, 1997; Pak, Dion & Dion, 1991; Berdhal & Moore, 2006) consider African-American women's 'double disadvantaged' status. In general, the impact of ethnicity with gender is perceived as cumulative such as the 'bicultural stress' of navigating between professional and personal domains (Bell, 1990). It is posited that many (African-American) female professionals structure their lives such that there is a separation between their work lives (characterised by a culturally-distinct white world), and their home/social lives (comprising a distinctly different [African-American] culture). However, 'intersectionality' as a concept could be broadly perceived as highlighting one's location across a multiplicity of identity dimensions. This could mean focusing on location and experience of one's *juxtaposition* across identity categories, rather than the cumulative *impact* of straddling two worlds. There may be theoretical potential for intersectionality to explore multiple axes, including simultaneously disadvantaged *and* privileged locations for individuals for whom ethnicity may not *necessarily* constitute a disadvantage (perhaps due to their elevated gender status)

(Nash, 2008). Thus, I propose expanding the scope of intersectionality through its subjects (beyond African-American and female experiences) and its focus (from cumulative disadvantage to experiences of juxtaposition across different structural positions). The next section considers how theory could also advance intersectional research.

2.3.4.2 Integrating theory

Theory is central to advancing our understanding of the world, distinguishing between 'mere observations' of a phenomenon, and academic knowledge around which new information can be constructed. Theories offer explanations by establishing and describing connections between the subject of interest and other phenomena, offering "*an answer to a why question…an explanation of a pattern or regularity that has been observed, the cause or reason for which needs to be understood*" (Blaikie, 2000:143). However, studies on ethnicity with gender in organisations often lack theorisation. Several studies offer no generaliseable explanation of the patterns or behaviours resulting from their studies. Authors examining the intersection of ethnicity with gender often adopt a narrative-type analysis from life history, semi-structured interview, action research/co-inquiry and focus group methods, data from which are often analysed outside of theory. With these methods the focus is often not to illustrate how findings confirm or extended theories. Consequently there are limited opportunities to demonstrate transferability of findings to other contexts and reflect on usefulness or applicability to broader organisation studies. Additionally, significant academic contributions to intersecting gender and ethnicity are published in books (e.g. Davidson, 1997; Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Bradley & Healy, 2008). Although this is probably linked to the challenge of meaningfully capturing the richness of results in article-length journals, this limits the potential for building on this work in a field that places a premium on journal publications. Johnston and Kyriacou explicitly eschew the use of theory, arguing that "*richness and experience is better explored and interpreted by the reader without* (the authors') *major construction and reconstruction of the narrative*" (2006:56). They justify this approach where there is little known about the

phenomenon of interest, such as female minority ethnic accountants' experiences. They argue the importance of surfacing these experiences, and the academic and practical significance of "*research into the subjectivities of those marginalised in accounting… made visible*" (ibid: 81). However, they also accept that this is only 'scratching the surface' and that much remains to be learnt to advance our understanding of these subjectivities. While narratives offer epistemological congruence with research exploring how ethnicity with gender influences people's work experiences, (mere) narratives are criticised as "*ambiguous, idiosyncratic and imprecise ways of representing the world*" (Ewick & Silbey, 1995:198) and most useful as *starting* points for analysis and theory development (Langley, 1999). Where theories are referenced in research intersecting ethnicity with gender (e.g. Forbes, 2001; Fearfull & Kamenou, 2006), conceptual frameworks or theoretical perspectives could be applied more widely to explain observed patterns and propose connections between factors, rather than describe discrete findings. This would contribute to meaningful examination of ethnicity.

Although intersecting ethnicity with gender embraces non-essentialism and context sensitivity (thus advancing ethnicity research), developing a sound theoretical base could further enhance its impact. One useful theoretical framework for conceptualising intersectionality in organisations is Joan Acker's (2006) concept of 'inequality regimes'. Inequality regimes are *"loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender and racial inequalities within particular organisations"* (Acker, 2006:443). This sociological framework is useful for simultaneous conceptualisation of multiple inequalities and identification of barriers to equality at work. For instance, Healy, Bradley and Forson (2011) draw on Acker's framework to understand the interrelationship of ethnicity and gender in the UK public sector. They illustrate how formal and informal activities (e.g. after-work socialisation) can sustain religious, gender and racial inequalities even in public sector organisations with relatively progressive approaches for fostering inclusive and diverse working for Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. Such sociological perspectives are important as they consider structural and context-specific

contributions to inequality, addressing the narrow interpersonal focus of social psychological approaches (Zanoni et al, 2010). However, scholars also recommend examining micro-processes to understand employee experiences in diverse organisations. Power differentials linked to ethnicity and gender are present at every level – "*from identities and self-concepts, to interpersonal interactions, to the operation of firms, to the organisation of economic and legal systems*", yet how micro- or interpersonal processes, playing out through intersectionality affect differences in power and privilege, remains unclear (Browne & Misra, 2003:490). For instance, there does not appear to be any systematic theoretical model specifying *how* the intersection of ethnicity with gender may influence experiences of discrimination and stereotyping (Browne & Misra, 2003). Overall, these authors encourage theories and approaches that stipulate the mechanisms and conditions through which gender and ethnicity intersect, greater understanding of the impact of these effects and advocate greater link between the macro emphasis of sociological approaches to intersectionality and micro research on how this is played out in lived experience. The importance of multiple levels of analysis to contribute to meaningful understanding of inequalities at work has been raised (e.g. Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). Additionally, Zanoni and colleagues recommend greater focus on "*discursive micro-analyses*" which shed light on "*interstitial, every-day forms of resistance*" (2010:17). This requires moving beyond descriptive, personal narratives (which of course remain important in scholarship) to paying attention to ethnicity as "*an ongoing dynamic social practice, shedding light on the various ways in which individuals as agents relate to the structural restraints of multiple organisational inequalities*" (ibid:18). This suggests an agent-based perspective on ethnicity in contrast to the structural emphasis of sociological work. Agency refers to seeing humans as *"creative and probing creatures…actively engaged in and attempting to negotiate their social settings"* (Lofland, Snow, Anderson & Lofland, 2006:166).

Thus, despite insight gleaned from intersecting ethnicity with gender to illustrate the context-dependent and non-essentialist nature of ethnicity, there is potentially further opportunity for advancement. A lack of methodological guidelines and low application

of micro-level theorisation limit the opportunity to explain patterns and contribute broadly to organisational research. In the rest of this chapter, I propose that additional insight may be gleaned from adopting a micro-perspective on everyday experiences relating to intersecting identities. I draw on identity construction in organisations to provide a theoretical and methodological framework for this.

2.3.4.3 Towards meaningful examination: Minority ethnicity, intersectionality and identity construction/work

So far, the following arguments have been made. Meaningful examination of ethnicity in organisations needs to pay attention to context and reject essentialist notions of ethnicity. One response to this is examining ethnicity with gender as a socially-constructed, intersecting, context-dependent identity dimension. Research intersecting ethnicity with gender in organisations traditionally focused on the multiplicity of oppression faced by African-American women. Limited guidelines regarding analysing the complexity of intersectional identities probably contribute to its heavy narrative content, causing difficulties in comparing studies of ethnicity with gender against each other and gauging progress in the field. These factors limit the potential of intersectionality to contributing to meaningful understanding of ethnicity in organisations, and to the larger domain of organisational studies.

Browne & Misra (2003) claim there is limited theoretical leverage in highlighting the ubiquitous nature of gender and ethnic intersections; considering it more important to understand the conditions under which intersections would appear, and how these are experienced. In line with this, I propose that an intersectional perspective can add to management scholarship beyond empirical contributions regarding a specific group, towards understanding how identity intersections 'play out' in organisations. Not seeking to diminish intersectionality's original emancipatory purpose of giving voice to those at the nexus of multiple oppressed identities, one could consider applying the concept more broadly. Intersectionality could be examined at the juxtaposition of multiple identities, including individual experiences of simultaneous locations on axes of disadvantage *and* privilege. Although this positions the concept away from its

critical/political roots, it is pertinent for organisational studies within which 'minority' individuals are unlikely to be disadvantaged across *all* socially-salient identity dimensions. Rather, research could examine individual-level experiences of juxtaposition along various dimensions. Going beyond individual narratives of multiple disadvantage, research could examine personal meaning-making and self-construction across intersecting categories of disadvantage and privilege. What are individuals' experiences of intersections of high and low status identities in organisations? How do they make sense of, or construct themselves at these intersections? This study proposes a micro-level and agent-centred perspective on examining experiences of ethnicity at the juxtaposition of other identities.

How may this be done? For methodological insight, I draw on theory and research on identity construction and meaning-making, proposing these as lenses for advancing theorising on ethnicity and intersectionality. This leads to the thesis research question on how minority ethnic individuals construct simultaneously disadvantaged and privileged identity categories in everyday encounters at work.

2.4 Identification in organisations

Although intersectionality adds insight to the complex nature of ethnicity in organisations, opportunity for further development remains. One way this may be achieved is exploring individuals' accounts of experiences relating to the juxtaposition of ethnicity with other identities. Within identity theory, 'identity work' is proposed as a lens for examining intersections and ethnicity in organisations. This section introduces identity work, describing how individuals engage in meaning-making about themselves in organisation studies, leading to consideration of the implications for minority ethnic individuals.

2.4.1 Identity and identification

Identity is a boundary-spanning construct adopted across many domains, including psychology, sociology, philosophy, and political, cultural and organisation studies.

Identity is, simply, an individual's answer to the question "who (or what) am I?" In organisation studies, identity is a concept around which many constructs constellate, considered a "*master signifier*" (Alvesson et al, 2008), "*cohering and linking concept*" (Brown, 2001) and "*core construct*" (Ashforth et al, 2008), potentially a useful lens for also examining organisational experiences of ethnicity. Identity helps us understand how and why organisational context influences and is influenced by individuals' and collectives' self-conceptions and self-representations. A detailed consideration of the vast domain of identity research in organisations is beyond this thesis; relevant aspects of this field will be presented.

2.4.1.1 Approaches to identity in organisations

Traditional perspectives on identity in organisations (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989) are influenced by Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and Self-Categorisation Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). This approach to identities emphasises self- and other-categorisation processes whereby individuals practice in-group or out-group classification, self-identify or classify others into groups (by gender, department, profession, institution, etc.). A more recent perspective on identity in organisations focuses on roles and 'interpersonal' or 'relational' aspects of identity (e.g. in manager-subordinate relationships). In contrast to these approaches, this thesis' focus is on individual meaning-making, the process of 'identification'. Identification is an ongoing internal process, wherein personal meaning and significance are achieved as one locates one's place in a given social context (Whitbourne, Sneed & Skultety, 2002; Jenkins, 2004). Rather than examining self-categorisation in relation to others (in role or groups), the focus is on the effort put into constructing one's identity in relation to self, such as meaning-making around one's intersecting ethnic and gender identities. The focus here is on how identities are constructed and achieved. This assumes a dynamic perspective on personal meaning-making often underplayed in other approaches to identity that cast identities in simplistic, dualistic terms (as noted by Ashforth et al, 2008; Alvesson 2010; and LaPointe, 2010). This emphasises the process of *becoming* experienced by BME and

other organisational members, in contrast to *being*, often associated with the static categorisation of SIT.

Although 'identity' is often related to 'ethnicity' and 'gender', research has tended to focus on identity development and self-definition for women and BME individuals, rather than their ongoing self-construction. For example, developmental and clinical psychologists outline staged models of identity development (e.g. Cross, 1991; Phinney, 1990; Hoffman 2006). These models explicate stages through which individuals come to define themselves as members of social groups. Models of multiple (e.g. gender with ethnic) identity construction, or focus on dynamic, current self-perceptions, are less evident in psychology (Hoffman, 2006), and appear to be nonexistent in organisation studies. This focus on dynamic current self-perceptions regarding one's (intersecting ethnic and gender) identities, is where this thesis is positioned.

Identification emphasises tensions between structure and agency in self-definition and the on-going effort that goes into meaning-making of self. Sveningsson and Alvesson espouse a need for investigating how individuals 'become identified', which emphasises "*dynamic aspects and on-going struggles around creating a sense of self and providing temporary answers to the question 'who am I?'*" (2003:1164). This move from identity as noun to identification as verb emphasises the dynamic and ongoing struggle in personal meaning-making. The 'effort' of personal meaning-making is acknowledged in diversity research. For instance 'shifting', "*a sort of subterfuge that African-Americans have long practiced to exist in…society*" (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003:5) illustrates how black women often alter their true selves to survive and belong at work. Additionally, women often report on the effort that goes into self-presentation strategies and constructing professional identities at work (Ibarra, 1999; Singh, Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2002). This study's premise is that meaningful examination of ethnicity may be conducted through exploring how individuals engage in ongoing meaning-making of experiences relating to intersecting identities in

organisations. The following section describes identity work, the process and effort involved in making sense of one's identity.

2.4.2 Identity work

Identification involves creating congruence between how individuals see themselves and how they perceive others see them. To maintain self-esteem and a sense of coherence, individuals put effort into 'making sense' of events that challenge what or who they are (Burke 2007; Ashforth et al, 2008). The mindful (i.e. conscious) aspect of identification is 'identity work'. An early definition of identity work is "*the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept*" (Snow & Anderson, 1987:1348). These authors' conceptualisation of identity construction incorporates efforts to manage one's physical space and appearance, as well as specific behavioural and verbal assertions of identity. The focus of much contemporary organisational research on identity work is on the latter two behavioural and verbal aspects. Identity work has more recently been defined as "*the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in constructing an understanding of the self that is coherent, distinct and positively valued*" (Alvesson et al, 2008:15). Emphasis is on the activity required in "*forming, repairing, maintaining, and strengthening or revising"* one's self-constructions for "*coherence and distinctiveness"* (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003:1165). Identity work emphasises the dynamic interaction between an individual and their environment and the personal effort required to create congruence between the two (Watson, 2008; Beech 2008).

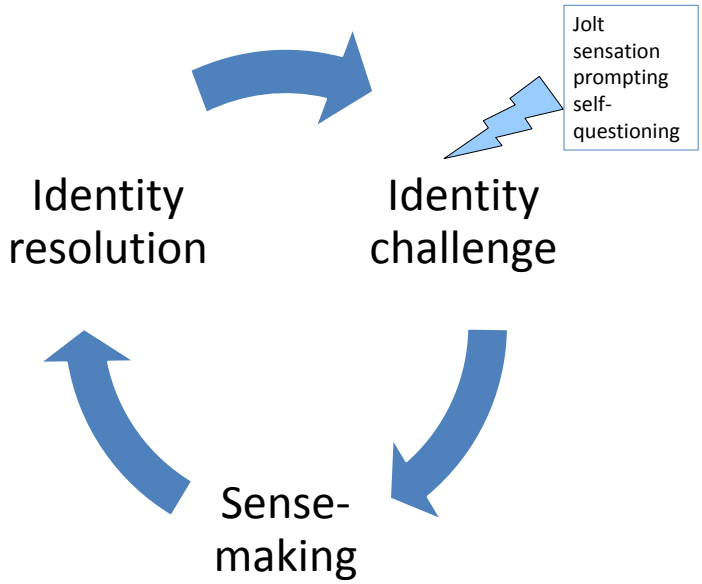
Within the field of identity work, some perspectives emphasise individual agency in self-construction, such as Ibarra's (1999) work on 'experimenting' with different identities, or 'provisional selves', when forming one's professional identity. This approach emphasises effort invested in constructing identities, with the implicit identity goal being to accomplish unification and coherence (e.g. Roberts, 2005; Kreiner & Sheep, 2009). In comparison, other approaches present the identification process as ongoing struggle, emphasising individual insecurities and external identity

controls. For instance, Alvesson and Willmott (2002) present identity work in the midst of organisational identity regulation in the form of titles, managerial objectives and role affiliations. This approach tends to emphasise opposing tensions, often revealing the role of language and discourse in how identities are shaped (e.g. Watson, 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), rather than explicating the steps for accomplishing a unified identity typical in the previous approach. Midway between these positions, identity construction occurs through "*active efforts…of fighting through…contradictions and messiness in the pursuit of a sense of self*" (Alvesson, 2010:200).

Regardless of differences in degree of emphasis of tension, there is a broad approach for examining identity work in organisations (Ashforth et al, 2008; Alvesson, 2010). As previously mentioned, individuals are motivated to reduce perceived incongruence between self and socio-structural context or 'identity gaps'. This discrepancy typically manifests as a 'jolt' sensation or 'top-down' disturbance in the environment like encounters, transitions or surprises (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) experienced as identity threats or identity challenges (Ashforth et al, 2008; Pratt, 2000). Identity threats comprise "*any thoughts, feelings, actions or experiences which challenge the individual's personal and social identity*" (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007:11). These disturbances challenge the individual's identity, prompting a questioning of who one is (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007; Ashforth et al, 2008). Any number of contexts or episodes could present as threats or challenges to identities, prompting an 'identity gap'. Suggestions range from moments of insecurity (e.g. Collinson, 2003), anxiety (e.g. Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007), newcomer transitions (Louis, 1980) or high-stake internal or external meetings (e.g. Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007; Roberts, 2005). Identity challenges often evoke powerful responses and are fertile ground for in-depth investigations into identity work, as during these moments individuals have a heightened awareness of how they are constructing themselves (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Such encounters or episodes trigger a process of meaning-making as individuals frame their experiences "*to comprehend, understand, and explain* (encounters) *in such a way as to*

give meaning, purpose, and direction to action" (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy & Quinn, 2005:716), working towards (temporary) identity resolution.

Thus, the perspective taken here is that identification is an ongoing meaning-making process of working out 'whom one is', and identity work is the mindful effort involved in achieving this. Identity work is the (primarily mental) effort individuals undertake to construct an understanding of self during the dynamic interaction with their environment (Alvesson et al, 2008; Beech, 2008). In the identity work model, the assumption is that individuals face encounters, experienced as a 'jolt' event or identity challenge, signalling an identity gap. This prompts sense-making as individuals 'work' towards resolution to close the perceived gap and attain coherence (even if temporary) (Figure 1).



[4]Figure 1: Identity work model

Thus far, approaches to ethnicity and identity work have been discussed independently. They will now be discussed together, and the potential contribution to advancing knowledge raised. The implications of identity work for examining ethnicity are described next.

[4] Model of identity work based on Pratt (2000) and Ashforth, Harrison & Corley (2008)

2.5 Combining 'intersectionality' and 'identity work'

Having presented identity work as a process of meaning-making about the self, I turn to its relevance to experiences of ethnicity in organisations. Identity research investigates how people respond to the question "who am I?", and, ethnic- and gender-based demographic differences are particularly salient bases for constructing a sense of who one/others is/are (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Identity is constructed as one's (social) context prompts self-evaluation and resolution of identity gaps compared against other individuals and groups. Thus, identity is constructed or 'worked' in the context of societal structure and power relations that trigger ongoing self-evaluation and resolution of identity gaps. The identity work model draws attention to the everyday, ongoing process of identification and the effort of self-construction during these everyday encounters. Although organisations are particularly appropriate settings for investigating "*how people deal with questions of who they are and who they might become*" (Watson, 2008:122), there are significant gaps in our understanding of what it means to be(come) a minority ethnic organisational member in the UK (Kenny & Briner, 2007). Therefore, as a model for understanding meaning-making and self-construal in everyday encounters, identity work can potentially enhance understanding of experiences of ethnicity at work.

Theoretical and empirical papers suggest the significance of ongoing, everyday identity construction in experiences of diversity and ethnicity in organisations. This focus is encouraged by several recent diversity scholars such as Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief and Bradley (2003); Kenny and Briner (2007), Cortina, (2008); Zanoni and colleagues (2010); Laer and Janssens, (2011) and Clair, Humberd, Caruso and Roberts (in press). Specifically, Clair and colleagues (in press) theorise on the psychological impact of 'identity ambiguous' encounters for 'demographically atypical' professionals. Identity ambiguity is the subjective sense that the nature or quality of one's identity and membership in the group is unclear or uncertain (ibid: 3). They propose that seemingly momentary interactions can have a powerful impact on the behaviour and engagement levels of demographically atypical organisational members. They

encourage research on the 'subjective experience' of these micro-encounters, that (in identity work terms), trigger identity threat. The importance of everyday encounters in understanding ethnicity is also raised by Zanoni and colleagues (2010). They argue the need to investigate everyday acts of agency or 'micro-resistance' as one area for the development of diversity literature. Rowe (2008) describes everyday positive and negative micro-behaviours that reinforce inclusion of similar others and/or sustain exclusion of those who are different. Positive micro-affirmations and negative micro-inequities are apparently small, ephemeral, often unconscious acts, in which individuals engage, that, over time, result in including and affirming people with whom one is familiar and likes, while excluding and discouraging those perceived to be different (Rowe, 2008). Cortina (2008) advances a theory of incivility in organisations which she describes as a manifestation of modern discrimination. Workplace incivility is "*low intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect*" (ibid:56, citing Andersson & Pearson, 1999) Cortina (2008) suggests that professionally and/or economically successful women and BME individuals are likely to be targets of workplace incivility, as their competence could threaten the dominant majority. Another study suggests that everyday cues, signalled by others during micro-encounters are significant sources of individual meaning-making in organisations (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Employees impute significance to others' actions and, from that, construct meaning for job, role and self. Taken together, these authors underscore the importance of everyday meaning-making and identity construction in the context of difference.

The preceding paragraph highlights the relevance of identity work for everyday meaning-making of dimensions of difference in organisations, such as ethnicity and gender. Identity work also draws attention to the effort of this self-construction. Individuals tend to seek to see themselves in a positive light, even with low-status identities. Literature on identity work has often focused on the effort of constructing positive self-views with identities assumed to be tension-filled and/or low-status, like homeless people (Snow & Anderson, 1987), lap dancers (Grandy, 2008) and homosexual priests (Creed, De Jordy & Lok, 2011). Research also demonstrates the

significance of identity construction for minority individuals in organisations. Demographic context influences the image management and identity construction processes that legitimise and reproduce certain organisational 'types' while discrediting others. According to Ibarra and Petriglieri *"the content of the role is shaped by the characteristics of the group that occupies the role in the largest numbers*" (2007:3). For example, Kanter's 'tokenism theory', derived from her organisational gender studies in the 1970s (Kanter, 1977), suggested identity-based implications for women in numerical minority positions. In small numbers, contrasts between gender categories were exaggerated, leading to the 'tokens'' isolation. Women either accepted the isolation (resulting in 'friendly but distant' peer relationships), or became insiders, shedding 'women's ways' and becoming 'one of the boys', suggesting significant identity work. Additionally, tokens were often seen as representatives of their group, stereotyped into 'mother', 'seductress', 'pet' or 'iron maiden' roles (Kanter, 1977). Stereotyping also happens to 'token' senior African-American women in organisations (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). In these contexts, it is likely that minority gender and ethnic individuals will expend effort in creating, sustaining and maintaining a coherent sense of self, minimising gaps between how (unfavourably) they perceive others see them and how they see themselves. For instance, junior female professionals are more likely than men to struggle with issues of identification and self-congruence during professional image construction (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007). In another study, young black British male professionals constructed identities by capitalising on the 'black male' stereotype of the social, extroverted, comic as a success strategy for negotiating workplace interactions (Atewologun & Singh, 2010). Another study identified strategies of professional identity construction to counter stigmatized cultural identity, in narratives of African-American journalists (Slay & Smith, 2011). However, focusing on image and self-presentation downplays the internal cognitive processes of identity construction, limiting our understanding of identity work (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Roberts (2005) also encourages developing this type of research going beyond 'what' people do to manage identities as minority professionals to understanding 'how' . She advocates isolating identity-

specific strategies individuals use, and considering the intersection of multiple identities such as race with gender in this process. She also recognises the need for research methods that capture the dynamic process of identity work.

Thus, empirical and theoretical work on women and BME professionals suggests that the identity work model describing the effort of everyday meaning-making is likely to be relevant for examining ethnicity and gender in organisations. However, it is currently unclear how individuals make sense of multiple, intersecting identities during everyday work experiences. Drawing on identity work models and integrating intersectionality, to investigate how BME individuals make sense of their gendered, ethnic identities could contribute towards meaningful understanding of ethnicity in organisations. Before describing how this could be achieved in the present study, the broad implications of applying identity work as a theoretical lens for understanding experiences relating to intersectionality will be discussed.

2.5.1 Implications of combining perspectives

In the previous section, I described theoretical and empirical links between demographic difference and identity work. In this section, I draw particular connections between intersectionality and identity work.

Due to the relative youth and complexity of organisation studies, management researchers are likely to draw on, and benefit from, adopting a combination of different perspectives and lenses (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011). When combining lenses within organisation theory, it is useful to consider proximity and compatibility (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011). Intersectionality is a lens for simultaneous consideration of multiple identity categories and identity work represents the process through which individuals construct a sense of self in response to external cues. The intersectional perspective adopted in this thesis focuses on the 'crossing' of minority ethnicity, gender and seniority in individuals. It also emphasises the juxtaposition of privilege and disadvantage that reflects the experiences of many BME and non-BME organisational members (as individuals are unlikely to be advantaged or disadvantaged

on all identity dimensions). However, the juxtaposition also draws attention to the perceived incongruence between 'opposing' identities, and therefore suggests a degree of effort required for working these intersections out. I believe there is close proximity, or low conceptual distance, between intersectionality and identity work. Both are broadly concerned with the phenomenon of identity, or how individuals make sense of whom they are. Additionally, both identity work and intersectionality are recognised separately as useful attempts for addressing limitations of diversity literature, many of which were raised earlier in this chapter (Zanoni et al, 2010). The potential of identity work for unpacking how disadvantaged members "*construct, maintain and/or disrupt (multiple) identities favourable to them*" (Zanoni et al, 2010:15) is recognised, if not yet attained. Researchers have examined issues of resistance and control (e.g. Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and identity construction in low-status populations like homeless people (Snow & Anderson, 1987), in developing scholarship on identity work. However, this literature tends to ignore issues of power or resistance in relation to identity construction of historically-disadvantaged socio-demographic group members or how intersections play out in this.

Despite their conceptual proximity, intersectionality and identity work differ, somewhat, in their assumptions regarding the nature of identity. Emphasis on the social construction of ethnicity and gender is contrasted with assumptions about cognitive and internal meaning-making processes of identity construction. Combining theories with differing underlying assumptions requires clear identification of personal ontological positions (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011). These authors also encourage researchers to present solutions that bridge different conceptual approaches through a coherent explanation of the phenomenon under consideration. The perspective adopted is of identity construction as an ongoing process during which external interruptions momentarily raise awareness of self-identity. Simultaneously, identity facets such as ethnicity and gender are identity cues by which individuals locate themselves and others in socio-cultural and organisational context. The role of the individual and context in constructing gender, ethnicity and identity is emphasised in

this study. The philosophical perspective supporting this approach, individual constructivism, is discussed in the following Methodology chapter.

This study focuses on experiences related to ethnicity and salient intersecting identities by examining identity construction at the individual level. It aims to contribute to knowledge by placing ethnicity and its intersection with other identity dimensions in the foreground, examining this through the lens of identity work. My focus is on how individuals construct an understanding of their multiple-identified selves in response to affirming, contradictory or ambiguous identity-heightening experiences during identity work. Overall, I believe that applying identity work as a theoretical lens for understanding experiences relating to ethnicity as it intersects with gender will enable deeper understanding of ethnicity in organisations (potentially extending identity work research as well).

The next section introduces the study and discusses how an identity work lens adds insight to intersectional perspectives on ethnicity in organisations.

2.6 The study

As discussed so far in this chapter, this study seeks to address some of the critiques of organisational research on ethnicity and its intersection with gender. In this section, I propose examining identity work concerning intersections of ethnicity, gender and seniority in organisations. Extending the scope of 'intersections' attunes us to the juxtaposition of high and low status identities. As organisational context influences the social construction of ethnicity with gender, examining the intersection of ethnicity with gender and senior status potentially offers insight into identity construction and meaning-making of ethnicity in organisations. Seniority as a proxy for status and privilege in organisations and its intersection with the typically devalued status of ethnicity and gender (for women) are considered next.

2.6.1 Seniority and organisational privilege

Organisations are microcosms of the societies within which they are embedded, and, "*work cannot be understood outside the context of the socio-cultural arena in which it is enacted*" (Dombeck, 2003:352). Organisational dynamics often mirror societies' structures, beliefs and tensions, including less favourable outcomes for minority ethnic individuals and women in many Western societies. As such, ethnicity scholars are continuously urged to acknowledge the socially-constructed and contextual nature of ethnicity in organisations (e.g. Kenny & Briner, 2007; Roberson & Block, 2001).

Organisational context is of particular interest in this study because organisational structures impose hierarchy and infer power, privilege and status. This power can be structural (e.g. wielded through professional expertise or departmental group membership) or personal (e.g. wielded through the interpersonal skills) (Buchanan, 2001). In management research, attention is often paid to 'managers' and 'leaders' as organisational identity positions presumed to wield power and influence. Rather than merely signify organisational status, contemporary research focuses on defining the content of these identities, challenging underlying assumptions, and evaluating various constructions of 'management' or 'leadership' (e.g. Ladkin, 2010). As well as being salient identity labels in organisations, 'manager' and 'leader' also emphasise *relational* dimensions of organisational power (e.g. Klein & House, 1995). That is, leaders and managers exist in relation to followers who are led and subordinates who are managed. 'Managers', 'managing' and 'management', and, 'leaders', 'leadership' and 'leading' also have specific implications for diversity (typically gender) (e.g. Powell, Butterfield & Parent, 2002). Thus, although theoretically rich sites for understanding minority experiences, the constructs 'manager' and 'leader' go beyond being just signifiers of organisational status, to questions surrounding the nature of management or leadership, the doing or embodiment of management or leadership practice (e.g. Ladkin & Taylor, 2010) and the implications for atypical managers or leaders (e.g. Powell et al, 2002). As this thesis focuses on intersections and juxtapositions, the

structurally-specific term 'seniority' is proposed as a 'purer' form of organisational privilege.

Seniority refers to an individual in higher rank or standing, compared to another. It also indicates one's privileged location in a hierarchy (a socially-shared structure favouring higher organisational levels) (Peiro & Melia, 2003). Thus, the mere nature of 'being senior' denotes organisational privilege and power. The assumption in this thesis is that one's socio-demographic identity (e.g. ethnicity) is likely to be experienced in the context of its wider societal position and one's position within the organisational status hierarchy. Thus, minority ethnicity, gender and seniority are viewed as intersecting identities for senior BME women and men.

2.6.2 Intersecting minority ethnicity, gender and seniority

This thesis proposes applying identity work as a lens for understanding experiences relating to intersectionality. It advocates examining intersections of high and low status in organisations. The location of minority ethnic men and women in senior (i.e. privileged) positions in organisations can meaningfully contribute to understanding experiences relating to ethnicity in organisations.

As presented in Section 2.5, identity work is likely to have particular significance for organisational members who may be constructed as 'demographically atypical' (Kanter, 1977; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007; Clair et al, in press). Generally, as one progresses up the organisational hierarchy in Western economies, visible minority ethnicity is likely to increase in salience, constituting 'demographic atypicality'. Minority ethnic individuals are significantly underrepresented at senior levels in UK organisations (Sealy, Vinnicombe & Doldor, 2009), and trends indicated a fall in minority ethnic individuals' share of management posts between 2001 and 2008 (Race for Opportunity, 2008). This juxtaposition of organisational status/privilege against socio-structural disadvantage suggests the potential for identity gaps (Ashforth et al, 2008; Clair et al, in press) triggered by perceived dissonance/incongruence between identities, prompting identity work. Kenny and Briner (2007) also present the

potential for investigating the experiences of BME individuals who straddle two conflicting worlds (the privilege accorded by their organisational status, juxtaposed against the less privileged position of ethnicity [and gender for women]). They suggest that investigating how such individuals navigate the work environment provides a valuable starting point for understanding how ethnicity might impact on how organisations are experienced. Similarly, Ibarra and Petriglieri (2007) advocate research on how minority status influences the identity strategies employed to adapt to demands of organisational roles. Roberts (2005) showed that minority ethnic professionals consciously monitor the environment, employing multiple strategies to (re)construct others' image of them as low-status group members. However, I have not come across research examining how senior BME women and men make meaning of their ethnic, gender and senior intersections. Examining this will give insight into experiences of ethnicity in organisations, acknowledging its anti-essentialist, socially constructed and context-dependent nature. Identity work offers a theoretical and methodological lens for doing this, through exploring jolt events that raise salience of intersecting identities, triggering meaning-making.

A recap of arguments made in this chapter follows, leading to the research question.

2.6.3 The research question

So far in this chapter the following case has been made:

1. Ethnicity in UK organisations could be more meaningfully examined by going beyond essentialism and acknowledging context (Section 2.2).
2. Intersecting ethnicity with gender in organisations addresses these concerns. However, this research tends to have limited scope, few methodological guidelines and limited reference to organisational theories (Section 2.3).
3. For further meaningful examination, researchers could extend the scope of intersections to a broader population (beyond minority ethnic women), and broaden conceptualisation of intersectionality (beyond multiple disadvantage), while adopting a clear methodology for this (Section 2.3).

4. One way to address this is by applying identity work as a theoretical lens for understanding experiences relating to intersectionality (Sections 2.4 and 2.5). Examining identity work in response to episodes that raise salience of intersecting ethnicity, gender and seniority may address the following critiques:
   a) Going beyond essentialist assumptions of ethnicity, by examining it through dynamic identity work in conjunction with gender and seniority in organisations.
   b) Paying attention to context, by examining a UK population with assumptions that seniority represents a contextual (i.e. structural) source of meaning of ethnicity in organisations.
   c) Drawing on identity theory and methodology suggested by the identity work model. This presents identity construction as heightened following a 'jolt' experience signalling an identity gap that triggers the personal meaning-making process of identity work.
   d) Extending the scope of 'intersections' by examining women and men's experiences at the juxtaposition of privilege and disadvantage across the dimensions of ethnicity, gender and seniority.

I seek to contribute to knowledge about ethnicity at work by examining individuals' self-constructions as gendered, ethnic, organisational members in senior positions. The study seeks to achieve this by investigating senior minority ethnic individuals' identity work in response to episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities.

The specific research question guiding this study is:

How do senior black, Asian and minority ethnic men and women make meaning of episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities at work?

To remain sensitive to the intersection of identities under consideration, the sub-question guiding this research question was:

How are intersections of ethnicity, gender and seniority revealed in their accounts of these episodes?

2.7 Chapter summary

In this chapter I reviewed approaches to examining ethnicity in organisations. I did this because a recurring challenge of ethnicity research concerns how researchers conduct meaningful examination, going beyond essentialism and acknowledging context in experiences of ethnicity in organisations. Although intersecting ethnicity with gender addresses these critiques, this research stream arguably has tended to focus on multiple disadvantage and minority ethnic women. Additionally, scholars discuss concerns about how exactly to study intersections. These drawbacks contribute to critiques that there is little meaningful understanding of ethnicity. To address some of these concerns, I propose applying identity work as a theoretical and methodological lens for understanding experiences relating to intersecting ethnicity, gender and seniority. The identity work model suggests that personal meaning-making identity occurs following a 'jolt' experience in the environment. The steps taken to investigate senior black and Asian men and women's responses to identity-heightening episodes, and how they make sense of intersecting identities in the process, are described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter overview

Having proposed identity work as a lens for examining senior minority ethnic women and men's identity construction, in this chapter I describe how I conducted the research to answer the question:

> ***How do senior black, Asian and minority ethnic men and women make meaning of episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities at work?***

The sub-question to support this was:

How are intersections of ethnicity, gender and seniority revealed in their accounts of these episodes?

I discuss assumptions of the individual constructivist approach taken, the research design, journal and interview data collection methods, and the abductive analytical process I followed. In presenting the philosophical assumptions of this research, I describe the alternative perspectives I considered and discarded. I present the case for qualitative rather than quantitative inquiry; I discuss the focus on individual rather than social constructionist perspectives on meaning-making and I present how the study is influenced by critical perspectives on management.

With regards to method, I conducted a first round of data collection in the second year of my PhD and a second round in my third year. I thus refer to each round separately in the chronological description of the analysis later in this chapter. However, in general, I describe the steps taken in designing and conducting this study as one research project, and treat both rounds and both data sets as part of one study in subsequent chapters.

3.2 Philosophical assumptions of the study

3.2.1 Ontology, epistemology and reflexivity

The nature of any study and the bases upon which it is evaluated are heavily dependent on the researcher's assumptions about 'truth' and how to examine it. Being aware of one's position in relation to knowledge generation is an established tradition in areas such as feminist scholarship and critical theory, and management researchers are increasingly being explicit about their underlying assumptions (Alvesson et al, 2008).

Articulating one's assumptions about what constitutes 'truth (or 'reality' or 'identity') and how to study it requires consideration of two related concepts - ontology and epistemology. Ontology refers to the nature of what exists (i.e. what is the nature of social reality?) (Blaikie, 2007). Epistemology refers to how we come to have knowledge about the world around us (i.e. how can social reality be known?) (Blaikie, 2007). It is important to consider the assumptions and perspectives surrounding the nature of one's phenomena of interest and how they may be investigated. To obtain personal clarity around these issues, I read several recommended methodological texts (e.g. Blaikie, 2007; Gunaratnam, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln 2000). In conjunction, I reflected on my phenomenon of interest (the individual construction of intersecting identities) as well as my personal world views and assumptions. Management scholars are urged to be explicit about their role in the research process (James & Vinnicombe, 2002; Singh & Dickson, 2002). I adopt a 'multi-voicing' perspective on reflectivity (Alvesson et al, 2008). This acknowledges that I am a 'subject' of the research, constructed in and through it, and involves declaring 'myself' in the work and being explicit about how I sought to make this work meaningful (ibid.).

Over the following pages, I describe the assumptions around reality and knowledge that form the basis for this thesis. I begin with a discussion on qualitative social inquiry, and then discuss interpretivism as a paradigm affiliated with qualitative inquiry. Following this, I introduce individual constructivism as the epistemology

underlying this study, and end with a commentary on the post-modern and critical influences on this research.

3.2.2 The case for qualitative inquiry

At a broad level, this study, which seeks to describe and explain the identity construction processes of senior minority ethnic men and women, appeared suited to a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research entails "*capturing the actual meanings and interpretations that actors subjectively ascribe to phenomena in order to describe and explain their behaviour through investigating how they experience, sustain, articulate and share with others these socially constituted everyday realities*" (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell & Symon, 2006:132). Arguably, this mode of inquiry is suitably positioned to address the challenge of meaningful examination of experiences relating to ethnicity in UK organisations (Kenny & Briner, 2007). Additionally, as discussed in the previous chapter, the perspective on identity adopted is that of ongoing construction. Qualitative approaches are useful for focusing on every-day events (Miles & Huberman, 1994), such as ongoing identity construction. Additionally, a qualitative approach helps us go beyond the snapshots of what and how many (Miles & Huberman, 1994) fitting with assumptions of identity in this thesis as a dynamic process. The research question, beginning with 'how' suggests a process, rather than variance, perspective (Van de Ven, 2007). This is because it explores how ethnicity, intersecting with gender and seniority is constructed over a (temporary) period of time, rather than exploring the antecedents or consequences of identity structures or categories. Process data are, on initial viewing, messy, difficult to manage as they are associated with "*fine grained, qualitative data*" (Langley, 1999:691). Qualitative data however tune us into naturally-occurring events that give us a "*strong handle*" of what "*real life*" is (Miles & Huberman, 1994:10). According to these authors, qualitative approaches emphasise lived experience and are useful for understanding the meaning people place on events of their lives. In contrast, quantitative modes of inquiry (e.g. surveys) are unlikely to provide sufficient depth of understanding for meaningful examination of intersecting identities. Gunaratnam (2003) presents a natural

alignment between research on minority ethnicity and qualitative approaches. Describing the historical context of researching race relations in England, she explains the concern with "*getting close to what minoritised people think and feel, and with discovering the links between thoughts and behaviour*" (ibid: 16). Bowleg (2008) suggests that the very nature of intersecting identities (being independent, multidimensional and mutually constitutive) precludes the positivist assumptions associated with quantitative approaches. Additionally (and of particular relevance to this study), qualitative inquiry provides the opportunity for local groundedness. This means that findings from data collected become embedded into a local context to enhance our understanding of the issue (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This further supports the case for a qualitative approach, considering previous discussions regarding the role of context in the meaning and construction of socially-salient identity categories.

3.2.3 An interpretivist paradigm

For the reasons described in the preceding section, selecting a qualitative methodology for this thesis therefore seemed straightforward. Qualitative approaches are broadly grounded within the interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivism as a research paradigm focuses on "*understanding the social world that people have constructed and which they reproduce through their continuing activities"* (Blaikie, 2007:124). Investigating social reality requires understanding the meanings produced and reproduced by social actors in their everyday activities. Contrasted with positivism (which is closely associated with the methods of natural sciences), interpretivism proposes that social phenomena are studied from the 'inside', whereas nature is studied from the 'outside'. Specifically considering identity, interpretivist research adopts a "*meaning-centred*" stance that views identity as vital to understanding the complex, dynamic relationship between self, work and organisation (Alvesson et al, 2008: 9). Integrating identity work with experiences relating to intersecting ethnicity and gender, this research explores the identity work through which individuals make sense of themselves as senior minority ethnic women and men. Identity work is

applied as a theoretical and methodological lens for understanding experiences relating to ethnicity as it intersects with gender and seniority. The focus here is on understanding human cultural experiences and how individuals engage with others to generate and transform meaning (of themselves and others) (Alvesson et al, 2008). This paradigm assumes a relativist ontological stance that acknowledges multiple constructed realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The epistemological assumptions of individual constructivism are described next.

3.2.4 Individual constructivism as a way of understanding social reality

In this thesis, the epistemological stance adopted within the interpretivist paradigm, (i.e. the process by which reality and identity can come to be known) is individual constructivism, which falls within the domain of constructionism. Constructionism is "*the view that all knowledge, and therefore, all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context*" (Crotty, 1998: 42). Thus, constructionist approaches to social inquiry reject the notion that interpretation and meaning can be 'objectively' understood. Rather, the aim of inquiry is understanding and reconstruction (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). In the next section, I distinguish the approach taken here (individual constructivism) from the broad constructionist approach.

3.2.4.1 (Social) constructionism and (individual) constructivism

Several authors acknowledge the ambiguities and overlap in the literature on constructionism and constructivism (e.g. Crotty 1998; Young & Collin, 2004; Czarniawska & Czarniawska-Joerges, 2008). Constructionism may be taken to focus on the process of interpretation while constructivism emphasises building or synthesis (Sharpe & McMahon, 1997). Fitting with this, 'constructionism' is often qualified with the word 'social'. Adding 'social' to this term draws attention to the fact that meaning-making and interpretation occur in the context of the (social) world into which we are born, including its historical and cultural influences. Crotty (1998) suggests that

constructionism focuses on *collective* generation and transmission of meaning and constructivism (the approach taken here) on *individual* meaning-making. While the difference is one of emphasis (on individual or collective meaning-making) both approaches recognize the interplay of society, culture, politics and history in how we construe reality. Broadly, both social constructionism and individual constructivism:

> *(R)ecognise that construction is an active process, that individuals acting together in large and small groups, and in concert with history, culture and other broad factors, jointly construct the world in which they participate.* (Young & Collin, 2004:383)

Young and Collin (2004) differentiate the constructivist (referred to here as *individual constructivist*) focus on how individuals cognitively engage in knowledge construction from the social constructionist claim that knowledge and meaning are constructed social processes and actions in historical and cultural contexts. Specifically, they make the following differentiation between the two:

> (Constructivism) *focuses on meaning making and the construction of the social and psychological worlds through individual, cognitive processes while* (social) *constructionism emphasises that the social and psychological worlds are made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction.* (2004:375).

Social constructionism, which goes beyond asserting something is socially constructed to demonstrating the historical and cultural location of that construction (Young & Collin, 2004), was discounted. The approach taken here is individual constructivism, focusing on the person while being cognisant of their location in the situation. Individual constructivism privileges the individual's mental representation of his/her experiences. Contrasted with positivism, the emphasis is that the world or reality cannot be known directly, but through the construction imposed on the world through the mind (Young & Collin, 2004). A limitation of taking an extreme perspective of constructivism is the assumption of dualism between mind and culture, that it is (only) the mind that constructs reality. However, Young and Collin acknowledge that in some approaches to constructivism (such as the one taken in this thesis) *"individual constructions take place within a systematic relationship to the external world"*

(2004:376). Thus the focus in this thesis is on individuals' effort into constructing and (re)arranging (during meaning-making of self as a senior BME woman or man).

Constructivism is considered a particularly relevant perspective for this thesis, as it focuses on the interaction of self and social experiences from the perspective of the individual, with a particular focus on the construction of meaning (Young & Collin, 2004). Constructivism embraces relativist ontology, acknowledging multiple realities (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 2000). This research recognises no single 'truth'; accepting that the experiences of particular individuals or groups (e.g. senior Asian women) can serve as one source of knowledge regarding the identity work of organisational members. In this perspective, knowledge consists of individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus; knowledge is accumulated, not by generalisations and cause-effect linkages or building blocks adding to the edifice of knowledge, but by increasingly sophisticated reconstructions and through vicarious experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 2000), such as extending ethnicity literature by examining intersecting advantage and disadvantage through identity work. Additionally, this approach acknowledges that the researcher and researched are jointly represented in the creation of knowledge, that is, they engage in an intersubjective experience. Intersubjectivity is the "*apparent ability of one person to herself subjectively understand the subjective experience and state of another*" (Witz & Bae, 2011:433). Thus, adopting a constructivist perspective within the interpretivist paradigm acknowledges that findings reported and discussed are concepts I have developed based on respondents' construction of past events in their discussions with me. In so doing, I am also a member of a particular culture at a specific moment (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a Psychologist, I acknowledge that I am privileging (out of expertise and out of interest) the individual in this study. By asking respondents what sense they make of identity-heightening encounters, this research is, arguably, explicit about its individual constructivist assumptions. I believe this represents a useful way of exploring the potential identified in the previous chapter for meaningful examination of experiences relating to ethnicity at work (Kenny & Briner, 2007). However, I also sought to remain cognisant of the socio-structural context in which

respondents were located, as they constructed their identities. This research also has critical influences, discussed next.

3.2.5 The influence of critical perspectives

Having described the individual constructivist epistemology of this research, I also acknowledge the study's critical leanings. This study examines identity construction at the level of individual meaning making. I position this research at the critical edge of Alvesson and colleagues' (2008) interpretivist framework of orientations to identification in the identity work literature for the following reasons. I believe investigating the individual construction of multiple identities that have differing values in organisational and social contexts, would do well to recognize power and status differentials. In the Literature Review, analysis of findings and Discussion, I acknowledge the context in which minority ethnic identity construction occurs and the roles that gender and senior status privilege may play in this. As discussed in the Literature Review, the juxtaposition of privilege and disadvantage in the intersection of ethnicity, gender and seniority is the focus of interest in this study. Critical management theorists aim to "*de-reify extant organizational practices through developing a self-conception in which members are knowledgeable subjects who are able to change their situation, as opposed to powerless objects determined by an immutable situation*" (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell & Symon, 2006:142). Within diversity studies, critical scholars "*contest the instrumental view of difference inherent in the diversity paradigm*" (Zanoni et al, 2010:9). This "*instrumental view*" is the assumption (or rhetoric) within management that diversity management is positive and empowering, with positivist assumptions about identity that do not sufficiently account for context and power. One strand of critical diversity scholarship is post-structural feminism. Post-structuralism emphasises the fluid, loose and dynamic nature of power and privilege (Calas & Smircich, 1999). This has some implications for the perspective on intersecting identities adopted, which emphasises a fluid, loose dynamic approach to constructing multiple identities. I however differentiate this study from pure critical research. First, feminist research goes beyond focus on

women as a less privileged gender group, to raising organisations' complicity in creating and sustaining inequalities (Calas & Smircich, 2009). This requires the feminist researcher to have critical awareness of instances of subordination in their research, with the aim to create social change. Additionally, post-structural feminism holds an ontological assumption of gender as a discursive process and practice, an epistemological strategy of post-modern feminism, and its aim is the deconstruction of given, assumed knowledge (Calas & Smircich, 2009). This goes beyond the remit of this research. Additionally, Gunaratnam (2003) warns that a perspective on ethnicity that wholly embraces post-structuralist thinking may have limitations. First, this is because personal experience (including mine) suggests that race and ethnicity *are* significant categories of meaning and experience for individuals in UK organisations in 2011. She warns that complete de-construction and disruption (often the aim of post-structuralism) of concepts like race and ethnicity can lead to the invalidation of experiences like racism. Overall, ethnicity researchers need to care about *and* acknowledge lived experiences but challenge the temptation/appetite for essentialism in research (Gunaratnam, 2003). I thus believe an individual constructivist perspective is fitting as it acknowledges individuals' feelings, thoughts and experiences and uses that as the location for investigation, while demonstrating awareness of the fluidity of construction and the role of shifting context in giving meaning to these identities. Clair and colleagues (in press) adopt a similar stance. They integrate an interpretivist perspective on minority professional identity construction with radical humanist assumptions to challenge marginalisation inherent in questioning minority members' professional status. The limitations of this approach are considered next.

3.2.6 Limitations of the current paradigm

The preceding sections described the research approach of qualitative inquiry undertaken within an interpretivist paradigm. It adopts a relativist ontology and draws on individual constructivist epistemology, although it is influenced by critical perspectives on identity. As previously stated, a limitation of this approach is its incapacity to be an overt force for social change, unlike critical organisational

scholarship. Secondly, a limitation of interpretivism is it assumes that people can readily and accurately comment on their motives and intentions, and assumes actors' continuous monitoring and reflection. However, as, ethnicity and gender are socially-salient identity dimensions in their intersection with seniority in UK organisations, I expected that respondents would readily comment on experiences that raised their awareness of these identities (this was the case for both pre-pilot interviews I conducted, as well as during the main research project).

Having described the philosophical assumptions underpinning this study, the alternative perspectives considered, discarded or integrated as well as articulating the limitations of working within this paradigm, I present this research as a qualitative inquiry into individual constructivism with critical influences. Considering the study's aim to use identity work as a lens for understanding experiences of ethnicity, gender and seniority, I continue the methodology discussion by presenting the study design and introducing data collection methods.

3.3 Research design

In this section, I discuss research design considerations including how ethnicity and seniority were defined and how identity-heightening episodes were operationalised. The research was designed following the theoretical framework of identity work being prompted following a trigger episode or identity threat (Ashforth et al, 2008; Pratt, 2000), aligned with intersectionality research methodological guidelines (Bowleg, 2008) described below.

3.3.1 Defining 'senior minority ethnic man or woman'

As discussed previously, context plays a significant (but undervalued) role in the meaning associated with various social identities. As this study is conducted in the UK, the assumption is that minority (i.e. non-white) ethnicity is a disadvantaged status compared to white ethnicity. Independent of ethnicity, female gender is assumed to be disadvantaged relative to male gender. From a socio-cultural context, gender and

ethnicity are socially-salient markers of disadvantage in the UK. In contrast, seniority denotes privilege within organisations (Peiro & Melia, 2003). Another difference between seniority on one hand, and gender and ethnicity on the other, relates to the relative visibility of these identity dimensions. Therefore constructing one's identity as senior minority ethnic man or woman, assumes the juxtaposition of (less visible) advantage and (more visible) disadvantaged identities in the context of organisations. Having said this, female gender and minority ethnicity are not merely associated with disadvantage in society, but within work as well. For instance, stereotypically feminine roles (e.g. secretaries, nurses, teachers) have lower status than stereotypically masculine roles (e.g. managers, doctors, scientists). Similarly, minority ethnic individuals (especially black, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women and men) are over-represented in low status jobs (Bradley & Healy, 2008). Thus, broad patterns of ethnic and gender segregations occur in organisations, reflecting status differentials in society at large.

Compared to seniority, there is relatively more agreement across organisational studies about the meaning of 'gender' and its constituting categories, and, to a less extent, 'minority ethnicity' and who falls into this group. The measures taken to define 'senior' status in the organisations from which respondents were drawn are discussed later in this chapter (Section 3.4.7). As discussed in the Introduction and Literature Review, there are several challenges associated with researching ethnicity, including challenges with defining and ascribing socially-constructed ethnicity to individuals. Explicitly investigating individuals' (demographic minority) identity may raise challenges and sensitivities, such as people feeling singled out or coerced into self-ascribing as a member of a demographic minority group. I sought to mitigate this risk. First, aligned with the research focus on self-identification, I opted to work with respondents' self-identification as 'senior minority ethnic men and women'. Then, in my initial email I asked respondents how they would describe themselves and referred to these descriptions (e.g. 'Indian woman') in the journal and interview, thus describing the respondents' identities in the way that most resonated with them. Additionally, I relied on self-nomination for participation and reiterated voluntary

participation, confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process. I also inferred (from respondents' seniority and the contexts worked) a degree of maturity and professionalism, such that, having given informed consent, respondents would be comfortable with and open to a research project on their identities as senior minority ethnic women and men.

I also made decisions in line with intersectional methodological guidelines regarding researching and defining ethnicity (Bowleg, 2008). Primarily, I avoided asking questions that assumed an additive approach to intersecting identities (e.g. by asking respondents to rank or separate their identities). Intersectionality views multiple identities as mutually-constitutive; additionally, this research adopts a non-essentialist, interpretivist, meaning-centred stance on individual identity construction. To align with this, following self-nomination for the study I asked respondents the following question: "*In the context of this study, how would you describe yourself*?" I then tailored my comments to each respondent using identity descriptors that most resonated with them e.g. *"senior Indian woman*". However, I occasionally asked some respondents to account for other identity dimensions if the episode they had recounted appeared to primarily draw on one identity facet over others. For instance, after talking about fitting in by engaging in *"male banter"* over drinks, I asked one Indian male respondent at the end of the interview: "*What role do you think your ethnicity played in that scenario*?" However, in general I strictly avoided separating the identities and always referred to individuals by drawing on the three identity dimensions salient in this project – ethnicity, gender and seniority. The assumption was that, by asking individuals about their ethnicity, gender and seniority together, I acknowledged individuals' 'holistic' intersecting selves, leaving to them to share exactly what intersecting ethnicity, gender and seniority meant to them. This meant that they sometimes paid attention to some identity facets over others and at others they considered all three simultaneously. This is discussed further in the section on Data Analysis (Section 3.5).

3.3.2 Identity-heightening episodes

To answer the research question examining respondents' meaning-making in response to identity-heightening encounters, the unit of analysis for this study was the episode, with attention paid to how ethnicity, gender and seniority were revealed within each account. As discussed in the previous chapter, identity work is the (primarily mental) effort individuals undertake during the dynamic interaction between self and environment, to construct an understanding of self (Alvesson et al, 2008; Beech, 2008). The literature also speaks broadly about the contexts or episodes that could present as threats or challenges to identities. Thus, research on identity work does not focus on the 'when' but the 'how' identity work happens. The literature also suggests that individuals have a heightened awareness of situations in which they seek to make sense of perceived identity threats (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). However, the word 'threat' or 'challenge' could be perceived as somewhat laden - I was mindful that the notion of threat in the context of minority ethnicity may conjure up vivid, non-routine instances of personal attacks on one's identity (such as overt cases of discrimination or abuse). However, as discussed in the preceding section, this thesis seeks to understand *everyday* (rather than atypical) experiences, to address the gap in knowledge of experiences relating to ethnicity in the UK. Additionally, identity 'threat' suggests a self-protective or coping response as conceptualised by Breakwell (1986). Rather than assume ethnicity is to be endured or resisted, the intersectional perspective of this thesis highlights hierarchical (and gender) privilege accorded senior BME (male) individuals, such that one's ethnicity may not always be associated with threat. I also received feedback from an organisational contact that the phrase 'identity threat' was negative and not easily understandable. My personal experience suggested that I was able to recall relatively muted contexts in which my identity as a black female Psychologist was simply 'heightened'. To check this, I conducted an informal pre-pilot interview with a senior black male executive in a FTSE 100 company to see if simply asking about 'identity-heightening' episodes would elicit apparently valid responses. Following a brief (two sentence) presentation of the concept of identity-heightening episodes, he spontaneously described two recent examples of

when he felt that his identity as a senior black man was made salient. The less emotive term, identity 'heightening' events, also enabled respondents to share their experiences of affirming (rather than challenging) encounters, providing a broader range of contexts in which to explore the identity work of senior minority ethnic individuals.

The focus on identity-heightening episodes has some parallels with the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) (Flanagan, 1954). I did draw on literature using this method to guide my design (e.g. Chell, 2004). However, there are also some key differences between the approach used in this study and the Critical Incident Technique, including underlying philosophies. A summary of similarities and differences between the method adopted here and the CIT are displayed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Comparing the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) and identity-heightening episodes

	CIT	Identity episodes (this study)
Similarities	Focus on a key incident or flashpoint The event is often the unit of analysis Based on reconstructions by respondents Structured and focused yet flexible method Offers rich data on context/situation Useful for comparative work (Chell, 2004) Facilitates process, dynamic research	
Differences	Positivist ontology (traditionally)	Relativist ontology
	Usually one-off, memorable events	Likely to be small, everyday events
	Typically used to understand multiple perspectives on one issue (e.g. competencies required for job; different perspectives on major incident) (therefore can be adopted as a social constructionist method)	Used to understand individual meaning-making of episodes (therefore used as an individual constructionist method)

A final consideration for combining identity work with intersectionality is the former's primarily individual cognitive assumptions about meaning-making against the constructionist assumptions of gender and ethnicity, emphasising societal influences. Identity challenges can thus be conceptualised in two ways. For example, they could

be presented as an *intrapersonal* perception of lack of 'fit', driving identity 'work' (the approach taken here). Alternatively, identity challenges may be viewed from a status inconsistency perspective, such that incongruence is conceptualised as imposed primarily by external social structures that do not recognise 'oppositional' categories such as 'senior Asian woman'. In this latter example, focus moves from individuals' self-perception as the driver of identity work to socio-structural imposition of what constitutes given categories. In this thesis, I acknowledge the socially-constructed nature of meaning-making of ethnicity, gender and seniority, and the intertwining of self, other and context in this process. However, the perspective adopted is influenced by my psychological background, such that my interest (and bias) lies in individuals' responses and reactions, which guided the research design.

In summary, the following factors influenced the final design:

1. The ontological assumptions that identification is an ongoing process.
2. An integrated (rather than disaggregated) perspective on intersecting identities.
3. The desire to move away from 'major' incidents (e.g. clearly prejudiced or racist or sexist) to 'micro', everyday practices.
4. The absence of a definitive list in the literature of the nature of the episodes that induce identity work.

For the above reasons, I designed the study to examine episodes that raised awareness of respondents' identities using the broader and less emotive terms 'identity heightening episodes' or 'events in which identities are made salient'. I did not prescribe the nature of the episodes for respondents, although I used an example episode (a meeting) and informed them that the focus of the study was on 'micro-episodes' i.e. day to day events. More information on the data collection methods are discussed in the following section.

3.4 Data collection

In this section, I describe the methods used to answer the research question:

How do senior black, Asian and minority ethnic men and women make meaning of episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities at work?

I present the methods that I adopted to fit with the individual constructivist perspective described earlier in the chapter. To gather data for the study, I relied on four sources – respondent journal entries, interview data, contact summary sheets completed after each interview and my personal journal entries. Interviews were the primary data source, supplemented by the respondent journal entries. Contact summary sheets (see Appendix A for sample) and my personal journal were referred to during analysis as an aide memoire and to support reflexive practice.

The research question sought to understand senior BME individuals' identity construction processes in contexts in which their multiple, intersecting identities are made salient. The unit of analysis was therefore the episode in which intersecting identities were made salient. Each respondent was asked to "*think about a time, event or episode at work today that prompted you to think of yourself as a senior [black woman, for example] or a time, event or episode in which being a senior [black woman] was salient /meaningful for you*". Respondents were asked to write (in a journal) and discuss (in a follow-on interview) what happened during the episode, their thoughts, feelings and actions, and the significance or impact the event held for them/their identities as senior minority ethnic individuals, with additional probing where necessary. The same questions were posed for reflective journals and interviews (Table 2).

3.4.1 Reflective journals

To explore everyday experiences of identity-heightening events and minimise the risk of poor recall from retrospective questioning around 'small', incidents, I asked respondents to complete reflective journals for three to four weeks. In the journals, they recorded details of episodes that raised their awareness of their identities as senior minority ethnic women and men (see Appendix B for sample). I referred to

‘reflective journals’ rather than ‘diaries’ to manage respondents’ expectations about entries. I however draw on the ‘diary method’ in my design. The diary method is considered useful in management research for several reasons (Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Symon, 2004; Bryman & Bell, 2007). Diaries are useful to ‘get close’ to and investigate the subjective experiences of participants. They do not rely as much on recall nor do they require researchers’ participation like observational techniques. They can be useful for collecting a large body of data from a larger pool of respondents (Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003). Diaries have been used to explore private, nuanced, sensitive or complex issues like gossip (Waddington, 2005), psychological contract breach (Conway & Briner, 2002), sensemaking during restructuring (Balogun & Johnson, 2004) and technological change (Symon, 2004). This method was thus considered appropriate for exploring identity work. Diaries are also particularly useful for accessing “*ongoing everyday behaviour*” (Symon, 2004:98) (such as identity work) from the perspective of the individual (such as subjective accounts of experiences relating to ethnicity). Diaries (i.e. reflective journals) were thus considered appropriate for this study. Additionally, the study’s approach to identity construction sought to specifically elicit the sense respondents made about identity-heightening events, rather than infer identity work from general narratives people share about their lives (e.g. Down & Revely, 2009; Watson, 2009). This focus on personal meaning-making following identity-heightening encounters fits with the individual constructivist perspective adopted. To demonstrate sensitivity to work demands and also encourage completion I provided specific guidance on time commitments and depth of response sought (five to ten minutes of writing/reflection, every one to three days). I kept each episode to one page, and put clear instructions for completion even after speaking to each respondent individually (Symon, 2004). I also emphasised that journal completion was to be viewed as an ‘aide-memoire’, to support recollection of events during interviews, to allay anxieties individuals may have had with regards to the amount of effort required to keep the journal. Roughly once a week, I reminded each participant by email or text to complete the journal. The reflective journal prompts and the interview questions were identical (see Table 2). I

used the journal entries primarily as interview prompts rather than data sources. I was thus able to delve more deeply into sensitive issues during the interview that were not evident in the journal entries.

3.4.2 Interviews

About three to four weeks after journal completion, I conducted 90-minute semi-structured interviews with respondents. The interview protocol (like the journal prompts) (Table 2) was designed following the theoretical assumption that identity construction follows an identity-heightening event (Ashforth et al, 2008; Pratt, 2000). Interview data constituted my primary source of data. I explored respondents' experiences of journal completion at the beginning of the interviews. Rather than being an integral part of analysis, I used this as a warm up for the interview. Episodes recounted in the journals were useful starting points for discussion, resulting in deeper and broader discussions about how respondents made sense of identity-heightening encounters, and constructed their identities as senior BME individuals in the process. The interview method is familiar, flexible and ideally suited for exploring complex issues (King, 2004) such as identity work. It also encourages openness and sharing, especially as many people enjoy talking about their work, but often do not have the opportunity to do so with interested outsiders (King, 2004). I expected that this would be particularly welcoming for respondents as ethnicity is a socially-salient phenomenon, but often considered as a sensitive topic for workplace conversation. Mostly, I found respondents spoke extremely openly about their experiences of minority ethnicity. This was likely a consequence of my shared minority ethnic identity. Such over-identification can however constitute a threat to the validity of the study (Lofland et al, 2006). The implications of this are discussed later in this chapter (Section 3.6: Attending to reliability and validity) and as part of the study limitations (Section 7.8). Rather than a hierarchical question and answer exchange, I adopted the 'reflexive dyadic interviewing' stance (Ellis & Berger, 2001). I believe this reciprocal research relationship facilitated rapport, impacting on the type and level of information shared.

Table 2: Journal and interview questions

Main question: ***Can you think about a time/event/episode at work today that prompted you to think of yourself as a senior*** **(black woman, for example)*? Or Can you think about a time/event/episode at work today when being a senior*** **(black woman)** ***became salient*** *or* ***meaningful for you?***

Prompts**:**
 	
• **Why did this episode come to mind?**
• **What happened?**
• **How did you respond?**
  ○ **What did you think?**
  ○ **How did you feel?**
  ○ **What did you do? /What did this prompt you to do?**
• **Why do you think you responded in this way?**
• **What significance or meaning did/does this event have for you as a senior *(black woman)*?**
• **What was the outcome of this episode?**
  ○ **For you/ for others?**
• **Is there anything else you would like to say about how you responded to the event?**

3.4.3 Contact summary sheets

As soon as possible after each meeting I completed a contact summary sheet (see Appendix A for sample). I referred to this from time to time to reorient myself to respondents during data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also included some of the content of the contact summary sheets in my reflexive commentary in this document.

3.4.4 Personal journal

In line with the interpretivist assumptions underlying this research, I kept a personal journal during the design, data collection and analysis stages. The reflections section in the final chapter (Conclusions) features material from my personal journal.

Having discussed the philosophical assumptions underlying this study and considerations in its design, I move on to discuss the steps I took in conducting the research in an ethical and credible manner.

3.4.5 Access and ethical considerations

This section describes some of the steps I took to ensure that this study was conducted in an ethical manner. Fortunately, I had little trouble in finding organisations in which to conduct this study as I had the benefit of access to contacts developed by one of my supervisors, Professor Sue Vinnicombe in her role as Director of the International Centre for Women Leaders. Two organisations participated - a major UK public sector organisation ('Govt PLC') and a global professional services firm ('Professional Services Firm', P.S.F.). Access for my first round of data collection, in Govt Plc, was initiated by the Senior Diversity Manager whose manager was acquainted with Professor Vinnicombe. My second round of data collection, in P.S.F, was conducted after Professor Vinnicombe mentioned my interest in conducting research in the Professional Services context to one of the Senior Diversity managers with whom she met frequently. I was able to manage these relationships such that there was a significant degree of independence and I was able to meet the requirements for conducting doctoral research as well as provide practical support for the organisations and respondents (this is further discussed in the validity section at the end of this chapter and the practical contributions section in the final chapter of this thesis).

After initial informal introductions, I engaged with both organisations using similar processes. First, I met key contacts to discuss logistics and suggest potential benefits for individuals and/or organisations. In Govt Plc, I held meetings with the Senior Diversity Manager and Union representatives. With Professional Services Firm, I had several telephone and face to face meetings with the Diversity Managers for UK & Ireland and Europe, Middle East, India and Africa. I also worked with key contacts to ensure that the study's purpose and method were communicated in an accessible way and emphasised confidentiality and voluntary participation. The study was promoted to individuals who described themselves as 'senior Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

men and women' to partake in a 'study on identity'. I also attended a two-hour briefing at Govt Plc at which I gave a presentation with interested respondents to introduce the study and clarify queries. Thus, I gained general consent and buy-in, generating interest in the study. The study also had the public support of the Race Champions in both firms, two very senior white men (Permanent Secretary in Govt Plc and a Senior Partner in Professional Services Firm). Comments from respondents indicated that public support from senior members of the organisations supported my response rates. The fact that the organisations were happy to research issues on ethnicity also illustrates that both organisations may be somewhat progressive compared to others in the UK, potentially limiting the study's applicability to organisations with a different approach to diversity. Conversely, I am aware that the overt institutional support may have meant that respondents viewed me as an organisational agent and were maybe cautious about what they said to me. I however do not think this was particularly the case as I reiterated confidentiality several times and individuals shared an average of four identity-heightening episodes each, some of which contained potentially sensitive data, such as their perceptions of senior managers' incompetence in their organisations.

I informed respondents of their rights to record in journals only episodes which they were comfortable discussing, and the right to withdraw (or stop recording during interviews) at any time. I offered respondents the option to conduct interviews outside their organisation if requested. One person (from Govt Plc) did this and explained that this was primarily due to his location outside London; while he thought the organisation may to some extent support diversity, he felt that the attitude towards diversity was unfavourable in his location. He believed his colleagues did not take issues of diversity seriously and wanted to avoid any questions that may come up should people enquire about my presence in his office. I also received electronic or paper copies of journals and informed respondents that these will be destroyed at the end of the study. In accordance with the Data Protection Act, the study data were kept securely in my private home. I also assured participants that they will be non-identifiable in the reporting of the results. I have used pseudonyms to protect

respondents' confidentiality. Pseudonyms that mirrored the ethnicity and gender of respondents' names were chosen, where relevant. I have since gained agreement from the government department that they are happy for me to identify the organisation by name, which I have done in informal conversations (such as with respondents in P.S.F.).

On a final ethics-related note, as a Chartered Occupational Psychologist I adhered to the British Psychological Society's Code of Conduct which hinges on the principles of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity throughout the study. I have the capability to competently, professionally and empathetically respond to any initial distress from insecurities/fears and can handle a degree of emotionality (e.g. due to participants' recalling experiences of discrimination or harassment) and was prepared to deal with this during the interviews. I also informed all respondents about the potential discomfort that may accompany retelling the episodes, asking respondents to stop the interview if they wanted. Nobody chose to do this, and I was not aware of any heightened discomfort or distress beyond anger, frustration and disappointment with some of the events recounted.

3.4.6 The organisations

As this is an exploratory study, I thought it would be beneficial to explore identity construction processes in a range of contexts, and thus selected a public sector and a private sector organisation for the study. This is however not a comparative study or one that adopts a case study methodology. I analysed the data to see if there were any differences but found similar occurrences of identity work (the phenomenon of interest) across both groups. Key differences between groups were with regards to the contexts in which identity work occurred rather than the process of identity work. Another key difference was in respondents' motivation for participating. These issues are discussed further in the Findings (Chapters 4 and 5) and Discussion (Chapter 6) of this thesis.

3.4.7 The respondents

As described earlier, it was important that respondents saw themselves (i.e. self-identified as) as senior minority ethnic individuals in the organisation. Although I invited individuals who self-ascribed as 'minority ethnic', I also influenced the sample as I sensitively explained to two people who described themselves as Jewish and Irish in response to the request for respondents that the study focused on *"visible minorities"*. I also worked with my key contacts in the organisation to define (and thus, socially construct) the term 'senior'. 'Senior' status was agreed at Senior Officer (in Govt Plc) and Senior Manager (in Professional Services Firm) levels or higher. Due to low numbers of minority ethnic people at the very top, it would have been impossible to locate more than a handful of minority ethnic men and women in total from both organisations. For instance, in the first round of data collection, I sought 15 senior managers but had to widen my selection to a wider range of people that included upper middle managers in Govt Plc. The study was promoted to individuals who described themselves as 'senior Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic men and women' to partake in a 'study on identity' as a note on the intranet in Govt Plc and as an email to delegates on the Professional Services BME Leadership Programme. Study participants were selected from responses to the communications. I adopted a criterion sampling method, selecting respondents based on a spread of gender, ethnicity, grade and location. This enabled examination of identity work from a wider context, minimising threats to validity from selecting an overly narrow sample (Lofland et al, 2006). It is also useful for quality assessment – it 'guarantees' the sample group content (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The snowballing technique (Lofland et al, 2006) was used to recruit two additional individuals (senior black men) as I had a relatively low number of black men self-nominate for the study. In total 12 men and 12 women participated (Table 3).

Table 3: Number of respondents by gender, ethnicity and organisation

		Black African/ African Caribbean ("Black")	Indian/Asian ("Asian")	Chinese	Mixed	Total
Male	Govt Plc	3	2	0	1	**6**
	P.S.F.	1	4	1	0	**6**
Female	Govt Plc	4	3	0	2	**9**
	P.S.F.	1	1	1	0	**3**
	Total	**9**	**10**	**2**	**3**	**24**

Following self-nomination, in a 10 to 20-minute conversation, I introduced myself, the research and the commitment required to individuals. I also allayed any fears, reiterated confidentiality and discussed the potential organisational and individual benefits of participating. I spoke to 27 potential respondents, reiterating that the research concerned ongoing, day to day activities around meaning-making, focusing on micro-events rather than major events. After briefing, all respondents were happy to participate, some were intrigued by the study and the opportunity to keep a journal, some a little sceptical about the long-term organisational benefit and two were not optimistic about having 'anything special' to report. Over the course of the study, three participants dropped out. One black female from Professional Services Firm, although very interested in the study and its findings, declined to participate for "*personal reasons*". Another respondent (a black male from Govt Plc) dropped out of the study due to work commitments. An Asian man from Professional Services Firm did not respond to further email messages I sent although he had signed a consent form. I stopped trying to contact him after three unsuccessful attempts.

Twenty-two respondents completed the journal (in varying degrees of detail) and participated in an interview, between two and four weeks after starting the journal. One Asian woman and one black man (both from Professional Services Firm) said they

did not have time to complete the journal at the beginning of the interview. They both offered 13 episodes that "*happened recently*". On reflection, I should have probed further to get a clearer idea of how recently the episodes they recounted occurred. Three interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes; the others between 90 and 110 minutes. Of the twenty-four interviews, 20 were held in private meeting rooms on the organisation's premises. One interview (with an Asian man in Govt PLC) was held off-site (as mentioned previously) in a local coffee shop. Three interviews (with two Asian men and one black man at Professional Services Firm) were conducted via telephone and Skype, as it proved difficult to arrange a suitable time to meet them as they were often off-site working with clients.

The interview schedule was followed, with additional probing where necessary. For instance, some respondents did not spontaneously share emotions regarding the episode (e.g. responding "*I thought*…" to the question "*How did you feel?*"). However, every participant was able to share some information regarding their reactions to episodes that had happened recently that raised the salience of their identities as senior minority ethnic women or men.

After each interview I completed a contact summary sheet (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All interviews were recorded and 22 fully transcribed. Due to equipment malfunction, I lost data from two Govt Plc interviews. I was however able to draw on respondents' journal entries, my interview notes and contact summary sheets during analysis. Each interview once transcribed was an average of 24 pages (wide margin, 1.0 space). As discussed earlier, from the start of the study, I recorded thoughts, ideas, concerns and learning points in a personal journal. While these did not serve as data, I referred to this information in writing up the methodology and limitations sections of this paper. As I gathered the data, I began the iterative process of analysis, which is presented next.

3.5 Data analysis

Having discussed the process of data collection, I will now present the analysis. This study sought to understand how senior minority ethnic women and men respond to episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities. Thus, it sought to explore and describe respondents' meaning-making accounts of events that raise awareness of their intersecting identities at work. Blaikie (2000) suggests that research such as this one, which focuses on describing and explaining how identity dimensions are constructed by respondents would apply a primarily abductive research strategy. An abductive research strategy describes *"the process of moving from lay descriptions of social life, to technical descriptions of that social life"* (Blaikie, 2007: 91). It is a cyclical and spiral process, fitting with a constructionist epistemology and an appropriate method for theory construction within interpretivist social science (Blaikie, 2007). Abduction is an analytical process in which observations from experience as well as the data stimulate the production of explanatory positions (Locke, Golden-Biddle & Feldman, 2004) and describes my primary approach to analysis. Fitting with an abductive approach, I engaged in an iterative process that involved data immersion, analysis, peer review (with supervisors and colleagues at Cranfield and other universities) and literature review during the analysis stage.

The process of data analysis occurred over a period of 18 months (starting from the first round of data collection in Govt Plc), but intensified in the three months after I had finished collecting the data the second time around from Professional Services Firm. Although the analysis stages below are presented in rough chronological order, my experiences were not the linear process implied below. The following section describes the steps I followed during data analysis. These steps are presented graphically in Figure 2.

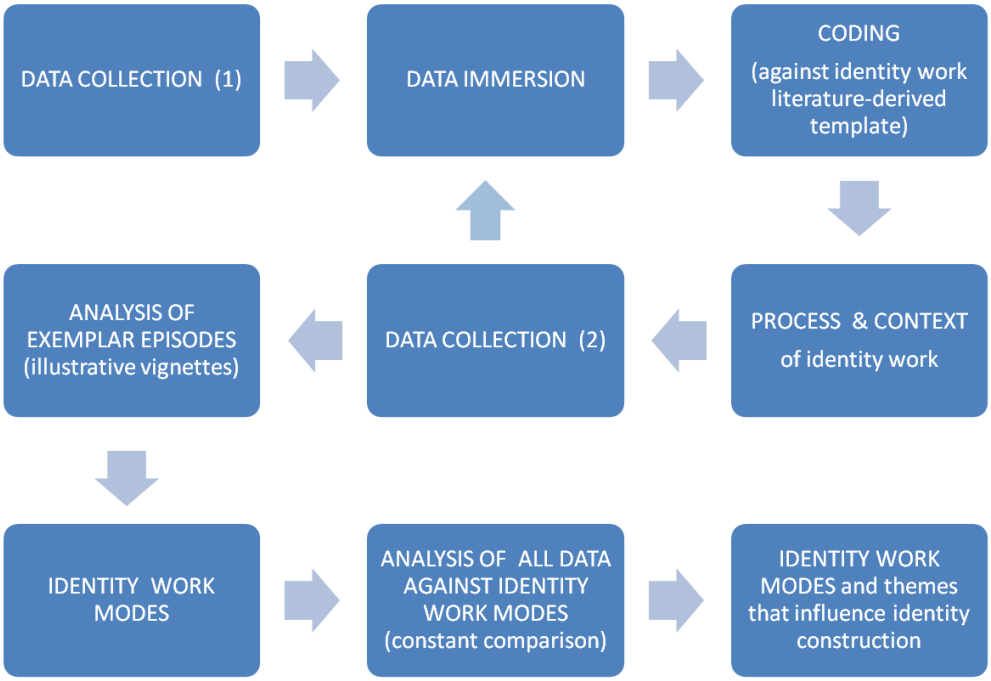


Figure 2: Steps taken in data analysis

3.5.1 Data collection and data immersion

I began data analysis while still in the process of conducting interviews. The first stage of analysis entailed familiarisation and sensitisation of data through immersion. I did this through listening to recordings, transcribing and reading each transcript several times. For instance, I listened to the audio recordings while driving and on tube journeys and read hard transcript copies through. In total, I read or listened to each complete transcript about 10 times. I did this to get a good sense of the contexts and episodes described by respondents as identity-heightening. This approach supports intersubjective analysis, as described by Witz & Bae (2011), who refer to "*extensive sinking-in time and digestion time as well as contemplation distributed over days and weeks*...[in order to understand data] *as a whole, in their natural context in the conversation*" (ibid:436 – 437). Although these authors focus on understanding the person as the unit of analysis in intersubjective research, I refer to their emphasis on holistic understanding through data immersion as the first step towards interpreting

the identity construction experiences of respondents within the episodes recounted. In total 68 episodes were originally elicited from Govt Plc respondents.

3.5.2 Manual and computer-assisted coding

Parallel to data immersion, I began to manually code the transcripts. Some of this was done while transcribing (I transcribed about half of the interviews myself) through reflective remarks within the text (as recommended by Miles & Huberman 1994). Most of this however occurred while reading hard copies of the transcripts which were printed with wide margins on which I made repeated marginal notes (again, as recommended by Miles & Huberman, 1994). During this stage, I found the richness of the data somewhat overwhelming. I was also aware of the pull I felt, from the desire to 'stay true' to respondents' experiences and for their voices to be heard. This was likely brought about by my identifying with several of the respondents as well as the relationship I had built with many of them (by this time, I had had contact with some participants up to four times, from initial briefing to journal prompts, interview and feedback session). By acknowledging the intersubjectivity of this account, I do not claim to be 'objective' so do not consider this a weakness in the design. However it is important to be explicit about my position. To help me navigate this stage, I regularly reminded myself to be "*explicitly mindful of the purpose of study and of the conceptual lenses* (I) *trained on it, while allowing myself to be open to and re-educated by things I didn't expect to find"* (Miles & Huberman, 1994:56). This also fits with the 'learning orientation' encouraged by Edmondson & McManus (2007) for researchers conducting this type of exploratory research.

For subsequent computer-assisted analysis, I relied primarily on Excel software to facilitate organising and sorting the data. I used Excel because it enabled me to present the data sequentially along a horizontal axis as I sought to code each episode as a process that followed the broad narrative of each respondent. I created a matrix to display and analyse each episode. The matrix analysis technique enabled the large amount of data (123 episodes in total were elicited from respondents) to be easily viewed and accessible, facilitating comparison within and across episodes in a standard

format (Nadin & Cassell, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This meta-matrix comprised a table of rows per episode and columns of attributes for each episode. Column data included such information as respondent gender, ethnicity, and description of context (see Appendix C for screenshots of spreadsheets). Additionally, the status of the parties involved, additional diversity dimensions, the identity cue (the critical event that heightened identity salience), the identity work involved (the individual's response to the event) and overall identity outcome, as described by the respondent were also coded at this stage, using Excel and Word. During this stage, I primarily engaged in descriptive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) which generally involved answering such questions as: What is happening in the episode? Who was there? Who said what?

3.5.3 Emerging theme: Process and context of identity work

As previously discussed, rather than this being a comparison across gender, ethnicity or senior status, this is an exploration of subjective accounts of senior minority ethnic women and men in UK organisations. Paraphrasing Bowleg (2008), I grappled with 'the task of making meaning of respondents' intersections' of ethnicity, gender and senior status as they sometimes did not describe this explicitly. I noted (quoting from my journal): *"You can't necessarily 'observe' identity work, but maybe you can infer (?) this from the sense people try to make of events, particular those episodes in which they refer to their identities to do so"*. Following several conversations with my supervisors and more reading, I began to draw on the narratives within the episodes to reveal identity construction. I attempted to focus on the deep structure of event sequence and focal actors (in my data set, this entailed seeking to understand what happens to ethnicity, gender and senior identities from the senior BME individual's perspective) (Pentland, 1999). Subsequently, identifying the process nature of identity work became relatively straightforward as the interview protocol prompted a chronological discussion of responses to identity-heightening events. At this stage, perhaps overly cognisant of the research question (and the focus on the dynamic process of identity work), I initially adopted a somewhat deductive approach, and a 'bound' (rather than

loose) perspective (Miles & Huberman, 1994) of identity work. As described in the Literature Review, identity work begins with an identity-heightening event that prompts sense-making leading to coherence in the final identity resolution phase. Key sources such as Ashforth and colleagues (2008) were used as orienting theoretical papers, providing a preliminary template for analysing the episodes. Following the template suggested by Ashforth and colleagues (2008) I read each episode multiple times to assess 'breaking points', i.e. points at which it appeared that one's sense of self shifted, changed or resolved (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), indicative of the three identity work phases (Figure 1, page 43). Thus, the key outcome from the first round of data collection was a description of the stages of identity work in which respondents engaged during the episodes. In navigating the data I sought to retain focus on the research question on senior BME women and men's meaning-making in response to identity-heightening events. In the process several additional themes were identified. These included five broad contexts in which senior minority ethnic men and women engaged in identity work and 11 grand-parent codes such as expectations of professionalism and issues of isolation vs. visibility. However I was unable to fully explore and analyse these in-depth as they fell outside the scope of this study on the dynamic process of identity work. The contexts and initial codes are presented in the Appendix D.

In summary, at the end of the first data collection stage, the data were sorted into three key phases of the identity work *process* experienced by respondents (heavily influenced by the identity work model) and five inductively-derived categories of the *contexts* in which identity work occurred.

3.5.4 Second round of data collection and data immersion

As described above, data from Round 1 attuned me to the different phases of identity work and the range of responses to episodes. A significant outcome following the first round of data collection was the challenge to my assumption that individuals would refer to their intersecting identities holistically. On the contrary, there were several incidents of different strands of identities becoming prominent over others as

respondents recounted episodes of identity work. Thus, in the second round of data collection, I occasionally asked, *"What role do you think your gender/ethnicity had to play in this episode?"* where there had been an overwhelming focus on one or the other. There was no other significant modification to the study design for the second data collection round.

I adopted a primarily abductive approach when I began collecting the second round of data from Professional Services Firm (P.S.F). Abduction involves constructing theories from language, meanings and accounts of everyday experiences (Blaikie, 2007). It entails integrating observations from experience and data to stimulate the production of explanatory positions (Locke, Golden-Biddle & Feldman, 2004) and describes my primary approach to analysis. After conducting the P.S.F. interviews and transcribing data, I engaged again in a process of immersion and manual coding. An additional 55 episodes (making a total of 123 episodes) were reported by P.S.F. employees. Again, the models provided by authors such as Ashforth and colleagues (2008) were useful for framing the data and sensitising me to a process perspective on identity work. This made it easier to navigate and interrogate the rich data the second time around. However, the identity work model, while useful for understanding the general flow of some of the events described, did not fit all the data well. For example, the identity work literature assumes that awareness of a gap or a threat induces identity work which occurs in a cycle that starts with surprise and ends with resolution. However, some of the data suggested that even if individuals spoke about experiencing incongruence, they were not always driven or motivated to make additional 'sense' of this, such that identity 'work' ended at observing or noting the incongruence. Another way in which the identity work literature did not appear to fit was due to the assumption of identity work (used in the initial framing of this thesis) as effort that goes into meaning-making *following* an identity-salient event. However the data suggested that senior minority ethnic individuals also strived to negate, or work *away* from an already constructed (i.e. stereotype-based) identity. In this instance, they appeared to engage in *anticipatory* identity work or at least work away from, rather than towards, a given identity construction. For these reasons, I was challenged to go

beyond the framework provided by identity work theories in order to more accurately describe what was emerging from the data.

3.5.5 Focus on illustrative episodes

Challenged to go beyond the template provided by mainstream identity literature, my familiarity with the data drew me to a small number of episodes that appeared to vividly illustrate identity work, defined as the primarily mental effort individuals undertake to construct an understanding of self, in dynamic interaction with the environment (Alvesson et al, 2008; Beech, 2008). I drew on Miles & Huberman's notion of illustrative vignettes at this stage of analysis. According to these authors, a vignette is "*a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical or emblematic…it has a narrative, story-like structure that preserves the chronological flow and that normally is limited to a brief time span, to one or a few key actors, to a bounded space, or to all three*" (Miles & Huberman, 1994:81). This description of a brief, focused narrative captures the essence of micro-episodes of identity work shared by the respondents. Vignettes, presented as illustrative episodes, serve as a useful exploratory device to aid conceptualisations of what identity work is and how it works. Focusing on illustrative narratives is a "*strategy for sensemaking*" when working with process data (Langley, 1999). This narrative approach fits with a constructivist perspective and is high on accuracy, as it closely sticks to the original data (Thorngate, 1976; Weick, 1979; both cited in Langley, 1999). However, high accuracy does not favour simple or general theory generation, and is thus most suitable as a *starting* point for data analysis (Langley, 1999). In conjunction with the focus on illustrative episodes, a temporal bracketing strategy was used to make additional sense of the data (Langley, 1999). It entails the "*decomposition of data into successive adjacent periods*" (ibid: 703) within which these periods or phases become units of analysis. The benefit of this approach is its simplicity, and moderate to high accuracy, moderate generality (the range of situations to which the emerging theory may be applicable) (Thorngate, 1976; Weick, 1979; both cited in Langley, 1999).

I thus selected a small number of illustrative episodes to gain deeper insight into the micro-processes experienced and described in the episode. I started this stage of analysis by selecting eight episodes which I decided (in conjunction with my supervisors during ongoing peer review meetings) were rich examples of the phenomenon of interest, identity work. The following are criteria against which episodes were selected:

- Is there evidence of mental effort in which the respondent attempt to understand, explain or clarify a personally-pertinent identity-relevant event?
- Is there evidence of a process or sequence; does the episode reflect a clear narrative?
- Is there evidence of a change in reference to identity-related constructs ('breaking points', Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008)
- Is there evidence of articulation of salient identity dimensions – gender and/or ethnicity in a senior context?

Initially beginning with two episodes that fulfilled these requirements, I then engaged in a process of comparison with the entire data set, selecting six additional episodes based on seeking maximum variation. I sought instances of identity work across organisation, gender, ethnicity, and positive or negative experiences.

3.5.6 Analysing illustrative episodes: The emergence of identity work modes

The next key stage of the iterative analysis process involved coding the micro-processes within the eight episodes. This involved another data display method – the time-oriented display format particularly useful for process data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). That is, for a given column in an Excel spreadsheet, I coded/categorised various stages described by respondents during each episode, presenting this in sequential/chronological order from the beginning of the episode (jolt sensation) in the left column through to the end of the episode (outcome of event) some cells to the right (see Appendix E for screenshots from the spreadsheet). Such display matrixes are considered useful for examining process within critical incidents and micro-level events

as they provide a form of focussed narrative that is both descriptive and analytic (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I coded trigger events, reactions, meaning-making tactics and outcome/impact on identities in rows in an Excel spreadsheet. As before, I separated these phases for analytical ease rather than as an indication of clear boundaries between phases, as several episodes represent 'mindful moments' – brief, sometimes fleeting instances of heightened identity awareness (by design, in line with assumptions of on-going identity construction). In this stage, I primarily generated pattern codes, which are explanatory or inferential codes that identify an emergent theme, configuration or explanation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Pattern codes answer the question, 'What is the broad way to describe what is going on here?' From in-depth analyses of the first eight illustrative episodes and ongoing comparison with the wider data set emerged an initial typology of seven, which was then modified to five, identity work 'modes' that captured a distinct path or process followed to make sense of the identity-heightening encounter. A 'mode' represents a particular pattern of responses to identity-heightening encounters. Additionally, the word 'mode' conveys no assumption that these are enduring meaning-making responses. Rather, a mode describes senior BME women and men's response to a given encounter at that moment in time.

Initially, 123 episodes were elicited from the data. Two respondents (an Indian woman and black male, both at P.S.F.) recounted 13 episodes in combination from memory (rather than based on journal entries). Eleven episodes were extracted from the data rather than recorded by respondents in their journals. These were extracted from accounts that were split into two episodes (e.g. attending a retirement party and a subsequent conversation with the retiree); or, extracted as a micro-encounter within a longer event (e.g. concentrating on the first few minutes of a development programme rather than the entire weekend).

Rather than attending unselectively to the entire data set and "*recording everything from the same distance*", I followed Wolcott's guidance, seeking to "*zoom … in to particular details consonant with the purposes of the study*" (1994:16), using the initial

eight illustrative vignettes as a template against which the other episodes were analysed. The primary phenomenon of interest in this thesis is the nature of identity work, rather than nature of the trigger or 'jolt' events themselves, for instance. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, I focused primarily on the dynamic process described by the respondents as they recounted how they made sense of episodes that raised the salience of their intersecting identities, comparing sense-making attempts within the data set with the initial eight vignettes. I considered each episode holistically to gain insight into what was happening. In line with an intersubjective approach (Witz & Bae, 2011) I first concentrated on understanding respondents' experiences of the identity-heightening event, which entailed focusing on larger holistic impressions within each episode. I then followed the model that identity work begins or is heightened following a trigger event or 'jolt' experience that raises awareness of an identity gap. Where respondents did not articulate an identity-related dilemma, a sense of ambiguity, or some other form of incongruence or gap (no matter how subtle, or positive), that episode was not categorised. Even after probing, some accounts did not fit this identity work assumption of a 'jolt' experience prompting meaning-making about self (see Appendix F for an example). I believe that as respondents were asked to share episodes of identity *salience* (rather than *threat*) some of their accounts were merely stories of experiences that reminded them about their identities as senior black, Asian or minority ethnic women or men, rather than identity-heightening moments. Additionally, some accounts were a series of unfolding events (e.g. leading up to a mediation meeting) or events which respondents (sometimes retrospectively) noticed gender or ethnicity and seniority (such as reflecting on colleagues' reactions to another woman) that did not directly challenge self-perceptions. Or, there were primarily accounts of others' sense-making. As these did not feature identity 'work' (effort to construct self-understanding as a senior BME individual), they were excluded from further analysis. In total, I excluded 22 episodes from further interpretation. Although I had reasons for asking about 'salience' instead of 'threat' (described in Section 3.3.2 of this chapter), tempering the language this way probably influenced the high incidence of these episodes. This is considered further in

Discussion and as part of the study limitations in the Conclusions. In the 101 coded episodes, the 'jolt' sensation was conceptualised as one of the following: a sense of surprise, a confirmation of expectation, a sense of a paradox, a feeling of belonging or difference and a sense of a new opportunity. These are discussed in further detail across the two Findings chapters.

A modified definition of identity work evolved as analysis progressed. Drawing on Alvesson and colleagues (2008), and Beech (2008), identity work was taken as 'the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct understanding of one's ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with the environment'. To understand the identity 'work' following the jolt experience that signalled an identity gap, I paid attention to what (respondents said) was happening to identities in a given encounter, which regularly required understanding of the wider encounter, and on-going constant comparison with the emerging framework of identity work modes. For instance, an initial, context-free reading of the following statement: "*I don't like being singled out for being a woman or for being an Indian woman, or for being a minority ethnic*" suggested an initial coding as *Refuting* Identity Work mode. Refuting Identity Work, (described in detail in the two Findings chapters), involves rejecting and challenging ascribed identities. However, this was later recoded as an initial phase in (i.e. a component of) *Reconciling* Identity Work. This was because further reading of the episode and analysis of other encounters indicated that this statement was made in the *context* of explaining how the respondent felt regarding some of the tensions she experienced during an episode in which she sought to *reconstruct* or *reconcile* identities, rather than an outright rejection. This excerpt (along with subsequent statements) was then coded as articulating **a sense of paradox/conflict**, the initial phase of Reconciling Identity Work. Another illustration is the following excerpt *"I do have a picture that maybe there's a stereotype of what a black role model should be like, … and it's not like me … I'm not the kind of black role model that people have in mind".* Again, reading this in isolation suggested that the respondent engaged in *Refuting* Identity Work (by rejecting or denying that she is a 'black role model'). However, this was eventually coded as Reconciling Identity Work because although

this respondent dismissed or rejected the 'stereotypical black role model' term, in this identity-heightening encounter she did not refute or contest the aspersions that others had of her (**contesting** being associated with Refuting Identity Work) in other encounters. Looking at the episode in totality, what this respondent did eventually was to tweak (i.e. **reconcile**) rather than completely reject and contest the expectations others had of her. As I continued analysis, I thus discounted or qualified codes that seemed to have greater explanatory power, as I sought to increase the precision with regards to how the pattern within that cluster of episodes was being defined. As this process continued, it became evident from the data that not all experiences of identity salience or challenge resolved themselves in a complete cycle of identity work (as suggested by Figure 1). Thus, if respondents reported a 'jolt' event that raised identity salience but did not engage in ensuing meaning-making, this was coded as 'partial' identity work. These 'partial' responses illustrated how identity work was sometimes interrupted and are discussed in Chapter 5.

As I continued the process of constant comparison of the working typology against the data, dimensions that appeared to best explain the emerging pattern shifted. For instance, I initially positioned the identity work responses along a positive/negative continuum. However, further analysis suggested that experiences or outcomes could not be categorised so simplistically and were not always evident in respondents' accounts (although it was sometimes easy to infer positive or negative experiences, respondent experiences were ambiguous or ambivalent in other situations).

Additionally, (as discussed earlier), when analysing episodes, it became evident that respondents did not just engage different identity work modes in response to the identity episodes, but they also referred simultaneously, sequentially or independently to ethnicity, gender and seniority during the sense-making process. I adopted an 'intersectional sensibility' (i.e. sensitivity to pertinent identity dimensions) (e.g. Healy & Forson, 2011), paying attention to how gender, ethnicity and/or seniority were revealed in respondents' identity work. This involved coding terms linked to these identity dimensions (including synonyms) as well as being sensitive to identity

dimensions that were visible to me (and not necessarily to the respondents) due to their *absence* during identity work. The purpose of this analysis was not to disaggregate identities or 'rank' them in order of salience or importance (such as by counting how many times gender was mentioned instead of ethnicity). The purpose was to explore how senior BME individuals made sense of, or constructed ethnicity, gender and seniority, in response to identity-heightening events. In contrast to this approach, Bowleg adopts a strictly critical perspective, recommending that intersectional researchers analyse each *"structural inequality"* separately *"within a macro socio-historical context"* (2008: 319-320). Considering the theoretical and philosophical assumptions of this management research project, I chose instead to restrict analysis and interpretation to the identity dimensions of interest, drawing primarily on the organisation as the context within which these identities 'played out' (rather than a macro-socio-historical analysis). As discussed in the Literature Review, I believe that this micro-approach, examining ethnicity as it intersects with gender and seniority, also offers insight into ethnicity research in organisations, in addition to traditional sociological 'macro' approaches.

Although this thesis' primary focus is intersecting ethnicity with gender and seniority, the respondents often drew on wider identity dimensions such as religion, nationality and culture in making sense of identity-heightening episodes. As 11 respondents referred to one of these identity dimensions, and, to respect the non-essentialist approach to identities, I drew on these instances in the analysis. This is a typical challenge of intersectionality research (Bowleg, 2008). This approach aligns with McCall's (2005) perspective on 'intracategorical intersectionality research' as it raises awareness of diversity within groups, representing the heterogeneity of minority ethnic experiences. However I only selected these additional identity dimensions when respondents referred to them in conjunction with one of the primary dimensions of interest (ethnicity, gender and seniority).

Further refinement led to the final typology of five identity work modes in which senior BME men and women engaged as they made sense of episodes that raised their

awareness of their intersecting identities. The five identity work modes and the sense-making tactics employed within them accounted for 101 of the 123 episodes. These modes represented dynamic processes within which respondents reported their noticing and processing of episodes that raised the salience of their identities. Within each identity work mode, I identified a key sensemaking tactic with which respondents sought to manage the identity work episode. Additionally, several key themes that had specific implications for identity work emerged from the data. The Findings are presented over Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 comprises a description of respondents and episodes, and five illustrative vignettes to describe the five identity work modes in which respondents engaged to make sense of encounters that heightened the salience of their ethnic, gender and senior identities. The illustrative episodes in Chapter 4 are interspersed with analytic text (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which is a level of interpretation and analysis that remains closely with the narrative in the data. This data (in Section 4.3) also serves as evidence of this stage of analysis. In Chapter 5, the identity work modes are presented in detail with reference to their constituent phases.

Having explained the process of data analysis, I end this chapter with a discussion on the steps taken to maximise the reliability and validity of the findings.

3.6 Attending to reliability and validity

Within all forms of social research, evaluating the extent to which the data or findings reflect what they purport to be continues to be debated. Guba & Lincoln (2000) encourage qualitative researchers to ask questions regarding the extent to which one's findings are sufficiently robust, authentic, and trustworthy, such that one may feel secure to act upon them in some way. For qualitative researchers, this involves rigour in both methodology and interpretation. The means through which I sought to address these issues are discussed in detail in this section.

Overall, this chapter also serves as an audit trail to support the validity of this research. Transparency in describing sources, analysis and rich description of findings (in Chapters 4 and 5) are required for assessing rigour of qualitative research (Bansal &

Corley, 2011). Additionally, visibility of researcher voice is important (Bansal & Corley, 2011). Thus, in this (and other chapters) I have sought to make my position and decision-making explicit to contribute to the reliability and validity of this reading of the data. Additional criteria for validity include clear methodology and evidence of researcher reflexivity (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). This chapter, comprising the philosophical assumptions underlying the study, the research design, data collection and analysis process, and the reflexive comments within and in other sections of the thesis (e.g. Introduction and Conclusions chapters) are offered as further support for the trustworthiness of this research project.

To guard against 'lone researcher' bias (e.g. single, narrow interpretation) (Lofland et al, 2006), I shared my transcripts and tentative findings with research colleagues throughout the analysis process. I had regular meetings with my supervisors about the data and my position within the research which were both challenging and insightful. For instance, one of my supervisors commented that my analysis tended to focus on ethnicity over gender, thus privileging one identity dimension. This challenged my avowed 'purist' intersection perspective. With this insight I challenged myself to check my assumptions when re-looking at the data, but I also accepted that this would be one limitation of this research, as described in the Literature Review, the study was designed to respond primarily to criticisms of ethnicity research. Through the research process, I also actively sought feedback from a wide range of others, incorporating some of the feedback offered. I presented aspects of this study in six academic conferences and seminars and integrated feedback from other scholars. I also proactively sought feedback and insight from experts in the field. For instance, I sought and received feedback on a conference paper from Professor Stella Nkomo (an accomplished scholar in the field of management diversity research). I also had two meetings with Professor Rob Briner (co-author of the only systematic review of management literature on ethnicity in the UK) to discuss my initial research question and subsequent data analysis. Professor Briner supported the selection of identity work as a way to address his critique of the absence of 'meaningful examination' of experiences related to ethnicity in organisations. He also was emphatic about the

need to be articulate about my decision-making during analysis. I also had several conversations with visitors to our quarterly Centre meetings and fellow Doctoral Researchers. In the last 18 months of my PhD (from the beginning of analysis of the second round of data), I had meaningful one-on-one conversations around the sense-making of the data with 10 other people, all organisational researchers of various intersecting identities, including four professors, three white men, one black woman and two Doctoral Researchers. I believe that, in conjunction with my proximity to the data, these discussions have increased the rigour and validity of my findings.

Moving on from data interpretation, another criterion against which the 'truth' of a qualitative account may be assessed is 'authenticity' (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). Researchers are encouraged to be aware of the range of perspectives and assumptions that fall within qualitative research, and adopt research aims, methods and evaluative criteria that are aligned. Johnson and colleagues (2006) present 'authenticity' as a validity criterion that draws on both social constructionist and critical theory approaches to management research. Therefore, authenticity, "*a consensus view of truth*" (Guba & Lincoln, 2000:141) is a lens through which the validity of this research may be assessed. Authenticity entails including a balance of perspectives, such that the *voices of all stakeholders appear in the text* (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). As earlier discussed, this is not a piece of critical research; it undoubtedly privileges some voices or identities over others. However, within the scope of the topic studied, a range of intersecting identities is represented, with individuals of mixed gender and ethnicity in different contexts and of varying grades. Additionally, I have included voices of stakeholders who did not necessarily 'fit' the identity work modes presented in the Findings chapters. Another aspect of authenticity is *raised levels of awareness* in respondents and those around them. Several factors suggested raised awareness following participation in the study. For instance, respondents kept reflective journals, which many found extremely useful (one respondent described it as a "*cathartic*" experience). Mere participation, which entailed taking the time for personal reflection, prompted new learning for some. One respondent ended the session with the following comments:

> *It's not that I didn't know these things, but you're helping to bring them together to make new shapes which I think would be really helpful, which is kind of a revelation to me because I saw this as something that I was doing to help you …I hadn't thought that it would be something that I would actually get learning out of myself, so that's wonderful really.*

Additionally, I prepared individualised reports and conducted feedback sessions, which were also used as validity checks, with 13 of the 24 Govt Plc respondents (as agreed with the organisation in return for access). Four of these individuals consequently emailed me saying how the initial findings provided new insight for them (see Appendix G for a sample of the feedback received).

Authenticity also entails the ability of the inquiry to prompt action on the part of the respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). Following awareness raised in discussions with me, two respondents (one from each participating organisation) completed psychometric questionnaires to enhance their understanding of personality differences and apply it to relationships at work, another read up on impression management to support her promotion goals, a fourth opted to be more proactive as a mentor/role model to junior BME staff in his building. Additionally, I produced a 26-page report for Govt Plc (see Appendix K) and presented these findings to the Gender and Race Champions (both of whom are Permanent Secretaries) and Director of Corporate HR. The report discussed the methodology, findings and offered recommendations for senior BME individuals, their managers and peers to enhance their understanding of identity work. I also facilitated a 2-hour action planning session with 11 Govt Plc participants, the Gender and Race Champions and a representative from the Diversity and Inclusion unit, to formulate next steps for Govt Plc in light of respondents' experiences from the study. The study in Govt Plc also featured three times in a quarterly newsletter that goes to all the senior Union members (excluded from the Appendices to maintain organisational anonymity). I also prepared a report for Professional Services Firm, and conducted a 2-hour workshop, drawing on the study, for the Black Women's Network which the Race Champion, a Senior Partner attended. Most recently, I was invited to speak at a BME into Leadership conference run by the

Civil Service, at which I again shared highlights from the study. The feedback I received from these activities was overwhelmingly positive. I received feedback on the impact that reflecting, reading one's story (in the report) and meeting other senior minority ethnic people had on individuals' sense of significance and their perceptions of the potential to be organisational change agents. Overall, there was evidence supporting the authenticity of this research. Some of the points presented here are discussed further in the Contribution to practice section of the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Overall, to maintain the validity of this account, I have sought to practice reflexivity. Evidence of this is in the Introduction chapter (setting the scene), this Methodology chapter as well as the section on my personal reflections in the Conclusions chapter.

3.7 Chapter summary

My overall approach to design sought 'methodological fit' between the research question, data collection and analysis methods, and the potential contribution of this study (Edmonson & McManus, 2007). I aimed to demonstrate 'fit', between the previous Literature Review, this Methodology chapter and the following Findings chapters in the following way. The Literature Review indicated an opportunity for theorising and a methodology for examining ethnicity intersecting with gender in organisations. Thus, an exploratory approach, using identity work as a lens for examining ethnicity intersecting with gender and seniority was proposed. This exploratory approach also suggests open-ended research questions, which are particularly useful for understanding how a process unfolds. This study aims to examine how senior BME women and men construct an understanding of their multiple-identified selves in response to affirming, contradictory or ambiguous identity-heightening experiences at work. Qualitative data, primarily elicited through journal and interview methods from twelve male and twelve female senior BME respondents offer rich, detailed insight into the identity work of senior minority ethnic women and men. This fits with an iterative, exploratory abductive approach to analyse the 101 episodes reported. Working with an identity work model and templates developed from a small number of illustrative vignettes, five identity work modes

emerged. This suggestive typology of senior BME individuals' meaning-making and an overview of the episodes are presented over the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 4: IDENTITY-HEIGHTENING EPISODES AND IDENTITY WORK

4.1 Chapter overview

In the Methodology I described how I conducted the study to answer the following research question:

> ***How do senior black, Asian and minority ethnic men and women make meaning of episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities at work?***

After keeping journals of episodes that raised the salience of their intersecting ethnic, gender and senior identities, twelve men and twelve women recounted their responses and the sense they made of these episodes in interviews. Episodes were analysed to understand senior BME men and women's identity work, and, how ethnicity, gender and seniority were revealed in these accounts. Modifying Alvesson and colleagues (2008), and Beech, (2008), in this thesis, identity work describes the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct understanding of one's ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with the environment. The Findings are presented across Chapters 4 and 5, in three sections. In this chapter I introduce *episodes* that raised salience of respondents' identities as senior BME individuals. In the following chapter, I present five *identity work modes*, a typology of responses of senior minority ethnic men and women as they made sense of identity-heightening experiences. The Findings structure broadly follows guidelines for transforming qualitative data from description to interpretation (Wolcott, 1994):

1. The initial *descriptive* stage "*stays close to the data as originally recorded*" (Wolcott, 1994:10), offering an overview of respondents, and the nature of reported episodes (Section 4.2)

2. The second stage of organising and reporting data is *analysis*, building on the preceding descriptive account by *"identify*(ing) *key factors and relationships*

among them" (Wolcott, 1994:10). Responses to the episodes, the five primary identity work modes, are presented through illustrative episodes (Section 4.3). This stage illustrates the richness of the research findings.

3. The third stage of transforming qualitative data is *interpretation*, the goal of which is to "*reach out for understanding or explanation beyond the limits of what can be explained with the degree of certainty usually associated with analysis*" (Wolcott, 1994:11). This occurs in Chapter 5, with in-depth analysis and interpretation of each of the five identity work mode, constituting phases, and the role of intersecting identities therein drawing from the wider data set. Interpretation is also present in the following Discussion chapter.

4.2 Respondents and identity-heightening episodes

The Findings begin with a quantitative description of respondents and identity-heightening episodes. This study's interpretivist stance rejects normative assumptions of quantification for assessing significance of results. The figures provided are to orient readers to the data. This orientation is useful for understanding how specific factors (e.g. some groups or contexts) may influence respondents' lived experience (as recommended by Bryman & Bell, 2007).

4.2.1 The respondents

There were twenty-four study participants, nine from Professional Services Firm (P.S.F) and 15 from Govt Plc, half of whom were women. About half the respondents described themselves as 'British', emphasising that despite their minority ethnicity they also identified as UK nationals. Three respondents self-identified as *"black"* and of *"mixed ethnicity"*. They described themselves as *"mixed"* when I directly asked about their ethnicity but referred to being *"black"* or of "*minority ethnicity"* interchangeably during accounts of identity work. In this thesis when I quote directly from them, I keep the identifiers they used; however when I describe them, I use the term 'mixed ethnicity'. For all the other respondents, for consistency, I use one of the

following: Indian, Black African, Black Caribbean or Chinese. In this and subsequent chapters, I use 'minority ethnic' to refer to all ethnicity-related identity dimensions. This is a complexity of identity and ethnicity research, considered in the thesis limitations section. Respondents' self-ascribed ethnicity, title, age and number of episodes reported are in Table 4.

Respondents' ages ranged from 29 to *"over 50"*. The average age of Govt Plc respondents was 46 years and P.S.F 34 years. Three women in Govt Plc opted out of given precise ages. Age is a socially-significant identity facet, contributing to differential organisational experiences, particularly for women (Duncan & Loretto, 2004). However, it did not constitute a major differentiator between groups in the data, nor did it feature prominently in the identity work accounts.

Table 4: Respondents by gender, self-ascribed ethnicity, title and age

	Name	Gender	Self-ascribed ethnicity	Title	Age	Number of episodes recounted
Govt Plc	Amber	Female	Black/African-Caribbean	Grade 6	Not given	4
	Serena	Female	Black/African-Caribbean	Grade 7	47	5
	Vivian	Female	Black of African-Caribbean heritage	Senior Officer	40s	5
	Uzo	Female	Black African	Grade 7	45	4
	Dean	Male	Black Caribbean	Senior Officer	48	5
	Sean	Male	Black	Grade 7	40	6
	Dayo	Male	Black of Nigerian origin	Grade 6	43	3
	Indira	Female	Indian	Grade 6	Over 50	5
	Sinita	Female	Asian	Senior Officer	45	4
	Rani	Female	Indian	Senior Civil Servant	40	5
	Gurditta	Male	Asian	Senior Officer	52	5
	Ameet	Male	East African Asian	Grade 6	52	6

	Name	Gender	Self-ascribed ethnicity	Title	Age	Number of episodes recounted
	Louise	Female	Black/Mixed Caribbean & English	Senior Civil Servant	49	2
	Tamara	Female	Black/Mixed Caribbean	Grade 6	38	4
	Steve	Male	Black/Mixed Nigerian and English	Senior Civil Servant	51	5
PSF	Amarachi	Female	Black	Senior Manager	39	7
	Jamal	Male	Black	Director	39	5
	Devi	Female	Of Indian origin	Assistant Director	31	8
	Ehsan	Male	Indian	Senior Manager	34	8
	Lalit	Male	Indian from India	Director	32	6
	Nihal	Male	Of Indian origin	Director	34	5
	Taj	Male	Indian	Director	35	3
	Bernadette	Female	Chinese Malaysian	Senior Manager	35	9
	Sam	Male	Chinese	Assistant Director	29	4

4.2.2 The episodes

Overall, 101 episodes prompted respondents to reflect on their intersecting identities as senior BME men and women. Ninety-three were experienced during the study, about four per person per month. Men and women experienced similar numbers of episodes; just over half (57) came from Govt Plc (Table 5). As this study was not designed as a comparative or case study, ongoing comparisons were not made between the two organisations. However, I remained open, and paid attention, to evidence suggesting that particular organisational contexts influenced how respondents interpreted episodes. This is addressed further in the Discussion. The average number of episodes per ethnic and gender group across organisations was 4.5 The relatively high average from P.S.F women is because there was only one woman in each ethnic group, all of whom shared a high number of episodes (Table 6).

Table 5: Episodes by ethnicity, gender and organisation

		Black African/ African Caribbean ("Black")	Indian/ Asian ("Asian")	Chinese	Mixed	Total
Male	Govt Plc	10	11	0	5	**26**
	P.S.F.	4	19	3	0	**26**
Female	Govt Plc	13	12	1	5	**31**
	P.S.F.	6	5	7	0	**18**
	Total	**33**	**47**	**11**	**10**	**101**

Table 6: Average episodes by ethnicity, gender and organisation

		Black	Asian	Chinese	Mixed
Male	Govt Plc	3	6		5
	P.S.F	4	5	3	
Female	Govt Plc	3	4		3
	P.S.F	6	5	7	

4.2.2.1 Types of episodes

This section provides an overview of the nature of the episodes. The identity-heightening episodes consisted of reflective and interactive experiences. It is difficult to draw clear boundaries between these categories as interactive encounters involved reflection and some reflective episodes were prompted by others (such as email correspondents).

1. **Reflective/intrapersonal episodes**: Indirect or non-interactive encounters, e.g. email messages, moments of reflection, observing physical (non-social) environment (12 episodes).
2. **Interactive/Interpersonal episodes**: Actual and anticipated social encounters, further categorised against i) relationship between parties, and, ii) frequency/familiarity of events. Some episodes occurred during routine/familiar encounters (e.g. team meetings) or non-routine/unfamiliar contexts (e.g. new client meetings). Additionally, some interactions occurred between parties who had relatively clear and structured role relationships (e.g. consultant to client, line manager to subordinate) or more fluid, emergent role relationships (e.g. group discussions, networking events). The distribution of episodes across categories was:

a. **Routine events with structured role relationships**: E.g. appraisals or meetings with line managers and subordinates, encounters with role models or mentors (21 episodes).
b. **Routine events with fluid/emergent role relationships**: E.g. team meetings, spontaneous colleague discussions (in corridors, in taxis), social events with colleagues (25 episodes).
c. **Non-routine events with structured role relationships:** E.g. client meetings, presentations or Chair roles with non-familiar colleagues, interviews (23 episodes).
d. **Non-routine events with fluid/emergent role relationships:** E.g. network events, town hall meeting, cross-departmental meetings (20 episodes).

As this thesis focuses on identity work and intersecting identities, further analysis of the trigger episodes is beyond its scope. Subsequent references to the type of episode will be in direct relation to identity work patterns (e.g. how meeting unfamiliar clients may prompt a particular identity work response).

4.3 Identity work modes

Having described respondents and episodes, this section introduces responses to the episodes. As described in the Literature Review, identity work is the phenomenon of interest. Modifying Alvesson and colleagues (2008), and Beech, (2008), in this thesis, identity work describes the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct understanding of one's ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with the environment. Identity work is applied as a lens for examining senior minority ethnic women and men's identity construction in response to episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting ethnic, gender and senior status.

The main finding from adopting identity work as a lens is the typology of senior BME individuals' responses to identity-heightening episodes, the identity work modes

(Table 7). A 'mode' represents a particular pattern of responses to identity-heightening encounters. These identity work modes represent a range in the nature and intensity of effort or 'work' in which respondents engaged to make sense of their identities as senior BME men and women. In the first mode, ***Accommodating Identity Work*,** respondents internalised, without overtly challenging, positive and negative inferences about their senior, ethnic, gender identities. ***Refuting Identity Work*** is the second mode, in which respondents were sensitive to contextual cues about their identities, but proactively refuted these. During ***Reconciling Identity Work***, respondents actively reconstructed or rebuilt identities to create favourable self-identities as senior BME women and men. During ***Affirming Identity Work,*** some respondents actively sought out cues to affirm themselves as senior BME men and women; others were struck by external positive identity cues (e.g. seeing role models), interpreting these as beneficial to their identities. The final mode, ***Exploratory Identity Work***, represented the most performative identity 'work', with respondents leveraging their senior, ethnic, gender identities as resources to facilitate connections with others.

Table 7: The identity work modes

1.	**Accommodating Identity Work** Acquiescing to an externally-derived (positive or negative) meaning regarding one's identity as a senior BME woman or man
2.	**Refuting Identity Work** Disputing unfavourable assumptions and reasserting oneself as a senior BME woman or man
3.	**Reconciling Identity Work** Reconstituting two or more aspects of one's intersecting identities that initially appeared disparate
4.	**Affirming Identity Work** Reinforcing and strengthening the meanings attached to one's identity as a senior BME woman or man
5.	**Exploratory Identity Work** Leveraging one's identity as a resource to reap a benefit from being a senior BME woman or man

Three episodes were coded as primarily one with evidence of a second. Identity work modes by ethnicity and gender are presented by respondent in Table 8 and by demographic category in Table 9. Applying identity work as a theoretical lens for examining ethnicity and its intersection with gender and seniority elucidated respondents' dynamic meaning-making during identity-heightening experiences. Within each mode, respondents appraised the identity-heightening encounter and attempted to make meaning of the encounter/themselves by engaging a sense-making tactic which resulted in a given identity-related outcome (Figure 3). As discussed in the previous chapter, these three phases follow the identity work model. I use *sense-making tactic* in this thesis to refer to how respondents sought to resolve the intersectional identity-related dilemmas they faced during an episode. In line with the individual constructivist approach adopted, a sense-making tactic describes the tack taken to understand or infer meaning from episodes that raised respondents' awareness of their identities as senior minority ethnic men and women[5]. A crude illustration of the relationship between 'identity work modes' and 'sensemaking tactic' is that the five identity work modes represent *how* the respondents broadly engaged with different identity-heightening events, and the sense-making tactic describes *what* they did to grapple with the dilemmas within each mode.

[5] The sense-making term employed here describes respondents' approach to meaning-making during the process of *individual* identity work. In this thesis, 'sense-making' is differentiated from the 'sensemaking' term coined by Carl Weick, as Weick's term is often used to describe collective and cognitive meaning-making (see Appendix H for further clarification between concepts).

IDENTITY WORK MODE	**Accommodating** *Acquiescing to externally-ascribed identity meanings*	**Refuting** *Disputing externally-ascribed unfavourable identity meanings*	**Reconciling** *Reconstituting apparently disparate identities into a whole*	**Affirming** *Reinforcing and strengthening identities*	**Exploratory** *Leveraging identities as a resource for personal benefit*
Jolt sensation	Sense of surprise	Sense of expectation	Sense of paradox/conflict	Sense of connection or difference	Sense of opportunity
Sense-making tactic	Introspecting	Contesting (game-playing)	Reconciling or Discounting	Inferring personal identity worth	Leveraging identities
Identity outcome	Internalise positive or negative identity meanings	Refute negative, reaffirm positive identities	Reconstruct (re-build) identities	Reaffirm identities	Augment identities

Figure 3: Identity work modes and phases

Table 8: Respondents by ethnicity, gender and identity work modes

	Name	Ascribed Ethnicity & Gender	Accommodating	Refuting	Reconciling	Affirming	Exploratory	Total
Govt Plc	Amber	African-Caribbean female		1	1			2
	Serena	African-Caribbean female	3	1		1		5
	Vivian	African-Caribbean female	1	2			1	4
	Uzo	African female				2		2
	Dean	African-Caribbean male	3			1	1	5
	Sean	African-Caribbean male				1	2	3
	Dayo	African male	1			1		2
	Indira	Indian female	5					5
	Sinita	Indian female	3		1			4
	Rani	Indian female				3		3
	Gurditta	Indian male		2		3		5
	Ameet	Indian male	1	4		1		6
	Louise	Mixed ethnicity female		1	1			2

	Name	Ascribed Ethnicity & Gender	Accommodating	Refuting	Reconciling	Affirming	Exploratory	Total
	Tamara	Mixed ethnicity female		1		1	1	3
	Steve	Mixed ethnicity male		2		1	2	5
PSF	Amarachi	African female			4	2		6
	Jamal	African-Caribbean male		2		2		4
	Devi	Indian female			2	3		5
	Ehsan	Indian male	1			5	2	8
	Lalit	Indian male	4					4
	Nihal	Indian male	1		1			5
	Taj	Indian male				1	1	2
	Bernadette	Chinese female		1	1	2	3	7
	Sam	Chinese male			2	1	1	4
	Total		**26**	**17**	**13**	**31**	**14**	**101**

Table 9: Identity work modes by ethnicity and gender

	Black		Asian		Chinese		Mixed		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Accommodating	4	4	10	8					26
Refuting	2	4	6			1	2	2	17
Reconciling	0	5	1	3	2	1		1	13
Affirming	5	5	10	6		3	1	1	31
Exploratory	3	1	3		1	3	2	1	14
Total	14	19	30	17	3	8	5	5	101

In the next section, an illustrative episode typifying each identity work mode is presented to portray the richness of respondents' identity construction and illustrate the mode's constituent phases. Additionally, attention is paid to how ethnicity, gender and seniority were revealed in respondents' meaning-making. In the following chapter, each identity work mode is described in detail with reference to the wider data set.

4.3.1 'Accommodating' Identity Work: *Internalising the 'invisible Asian woman'*

An episode recounted by Indira, an Indian woman in Govt Plc, is first presented to illustrate Accommodating Identity Work. In this episode, Indira attended a meeting with colleagues that heightened the salience of her identity as a senior BME woman. During this identity-heightening encounter, Indira interpreted subtle cues her colleagues communicated, internalising the negative meaning she inferred from them.

Indira explained to me that she had made several past tactical career decisions to broaden her expertise and strengthen promotion prospects. One of these decisions involved a year-long stint in another business function. This current meeting objective involved exploring future opportunities for collaboration between the business function in which she had worked previously and her current department. From Indira's manager's perspective, her experience of both departments made her uniquely suitable to attend the meeting ("*because I'd experienced the team…he thought I'd be a good representative…He actually sent* ***me*** *as* (our departmental) *representative…to that meeting*"). Additionally, Indira had undertaken preliminary research in preparation for the meeting. Indira therefore saw herself as particularly well-prepared and well-suited for this meeting.

Accommodating Identity Work begins with a **sense of surprise**. Indira's first identity-heightening cue was noticing, as she walked into the meeting room, her meeting companions' "*faces fell*" on seeing her. Following probing, she described additional cues she observed, although she struggled to fully articulate this.

> *I said I've come into the meeting for … and they said, 'Oh yes'* (in unenthused, downcast tone). *They didn't get up and, say, shake hands which is normal…* (It was) *like 'Oh....' ...They were expecting… I don't know …They didn't seem very happy; they just didn't seem…I don't know what I expected.*

Although Indira suggests she did not "*know what* (she) *expected"*, the excerpt indicates surprise; she was perhaps expecting a level of interest (if not enthusiasm) and a courteous (if not warm) welcome from her colleagues. Their lack of effusiveness contrasted with her anticipation of the meeting, evoking the **sense of surprise** that typified the beginning of Accommodating Identity Work. This unexpected incident prompted sense-making through **introspecting**, the next phase of Accommodating Identity Work. Indira began to question her role in the meeting.

> *I was thinking 'Is it because I'm …why why?'... It was amazing because I did feel that they weren't all that happy to see* ***me*** *coming as a representative, as if, 'What does she know?' or something.*

Indira did not complete her statement ("*Is it because* ***I'm****…?"*). However her response suggests she interpreted this as an identity challenge. She referred to their expectations of a business "*representative"*, interpreted as incongruent with who she was. At the beginning of this encounter, Indira inferred that her colleagues' lack of effusiveness was because they doubted her suitability for the role. This was likely to be particularly challenging to her identity as she felt uniquely equipped for the role, due to her past experience.

Indira noticed subsequent cues throughout the meeting, which she continued to interpret as personally salient. For instance, she observed how her companions greeted another meeting participant.

> *When the other guy came in, they immediately stood up and said 'Oh hello, we were looking forward to seeing you'…It was then I thought, 'Gosh oh they are being very polite and happy' saying 'Err, would you like a drink?' They had biscuits and things, they hadn't offered me any…but they were offering him drinks and biscuits. And I felt a bit funny then.*

The verbal and behavioural reaction the other attendee received contrasted against her reception. These additional cues confirmed Indira's initial discomfort which she then articulated ("*And I felt a bit funny* ***then****").* As the meeting continued, Indira paid

attention to additional cues. She made sense of, and interpreted, her colleagues' behaviours with reference to her intersecting identity as a senior minority ethnic woman. For instance, she observed there was little eye contact and note-taking while she was speaking. In contrast, the meeting attendees were apparently "*lapping up*" what the other man (also a representative of her function) said, taking notes while he was speaking.

> *Even though he was lower in rank, even though I was giving the reply, they were more or less just talking to him, the white man.*

Thus, Indira's companions signalled to her (or at least she inferred) that despite her seniority, her colleague who was "*lower in rank", but also* a "*white man"* held more value, inferred from their constant eye contact, note taking and discussions with him. This apparent 'trumping' of (his) gender and ethnicity over (her) hierarchical status and functional expertise also prompted much self-questioning for Indira. Initial **introspecting** was prompted moments after she entered, as she perceived that her colleagues' *"faces fell",* and she questioned her role as a "*representative"* at the meeting. However, she engaged in more intense self-reflection as the meeting progressed and she attempted to make sense of events and the significance for her. During **introspecting**, Indira drew on seniority to make sense of the episode. She interpreted feelings of invisibility and incompetence (inferred from her colleagues' behaviour towards her) in the context of being senior (inferred from her reference to promotion and management).

> *I felt like - am I really good enough?...Why aren't they noticing me? …I'm making all these useful suggestions…I almost felt like I wasn't good enough. And I also felt like if people who are* (my) *peer group… behave like that towards me, what chance have I got to impress the superiors, to ever be promoted? And if I* <u>*were*</u> *to be promoted and if that's the attitude of people* (I managed*)…how would I cope with it?*

Indira perceived she was being devalued and excluded by her colleagues, a phenomenon many minority group members report (Kandola, 2009). However, she

made sense of this in conjunction with her senior status, questioning her ability to cope with being undermined by colleagues and subordinates. **Introspecting** led to the final Accommodating Identity Work stage, **internalisation of meaning**. After **surprise** at her associates' responses to her, and subsequent **introspecting**, Indira began to internalise the marginalised position she sensed.

> *I was so aware that I was not one of them…it was like 'them and us' sort of thing, like they are not going to play with me…*

Indira reported the identity-based process of categorisation in which people differentiate the groups to which they belong (the 'in-group'), from others ('out-groups') (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Despite sharing gender status with her female colleague, business function group with the younger white male colleague, and senior status with two of her associates, ethnicity became the 'fault line' identity dimension against which difference was constructed. As Indira continued to **internalise the meaning** this event held for her, she again drew on senior status to consider the implications of this encounter for her career prospects.

> *They were the same grade as I was so it wasn't like they were a higher grade and ignoring me… if they behave like that towards me, what chance have I got to impress the superiors, to ever be promoted? And is that why maybe I don't get promoted, maybe the superiors think, is she going to be able to manage this…In what way would the senior department head send me again to a similar meeting, where more senior people are there? Would I be able to keep my head? It would not be very good for my career.*

Indira referred to her and others' seniority several times in this episode, suggesting it was a significant identity dimension for her. If her peers devalued her, she presumed her superiors would deem her unable to cope with subordinates who she expected would treat her similarly. Additionally, she feared her superiors considered she may not be able to hold her own in more senior contexts. Being a BME woman unable to manage feelings of exclusion was constructed as an impediment to building relationships with colleagues higher and lower in the hierarchy. Indira then

internalised this, extending it to broader career implications ("*It would not be very good for my career"*).

As the meeting continued, Indira described her performance as "*substandard*", she felt "*bad*", "*undermined*", and *"invisible".* Feeling uncomfortable, not being taken seriously and not being "*good enough*" meant Indira started to "*blabber*" and repeat herself, then chided herself for being "*unprofessional*". The identity work shifted from **introspecting** to **internalising meanings** inferred from the encounter which then extended beyond the meeting:

> *My last manager* (said) *that I don't have the confidence to be promoted and I'm beginning to wonder if that is true.*

Indira did not consider challenging the exclusionary practices she experienced. She appeared to cope through Accommodating Identity Work - challenging herself to cope better to 'prove' she was ready for promotion. Indira could thus be perceived as sustaining the problematic meaning of 'senior BME woman' inferred from the encounter. This internalisation contrasted with Indira's positive self-construction prior to the encounter in which she prepared for the meeting and emphasised her fit as business representative.

In brief, the **sense of surprise** at her colleagues' reactions to her prompted **introspecting** in which Indira questioned then doubted her current and future capacity to 'be' a senior minority ethnic woman. Thus, by the end of the encounter, she **internalised the** (negative) **meaning** inferred from her colleagues' actions. This study explored senior BME individuals' subjective experiences of their intersecting identities. Therefore, the focus was not on what Indira's meeting companions 'really' thought or their actual intent during the meeting. Interpretation and analysis focused on Indira's identity construction during the encounter and how intersections played out in this. Her colleagues' behaviours (intended or inadvertent) were interpreted as identity challenges, which, although unexpected, came to be internalised, and in which gender, ethnicity and seniority played a part in her meaning-making.

4.3.2 'Refuting' Identity Work: *Refuting negative attributions of the 'senior black man'*

The second identity work mode is Refuting Identity Work. To illustrate this, two episodes recounted by Jamal and Steve are jointly presented, due to the similarities in how they anticipated, then rejected perceived negative attributions others had regarding their identities as senior BME men. Jamal and Steve were the most senior non-Asian male respondents in the study. Jamal was the first black person internally promoted into his level in Professional Services Firm, and Steve (half Nigerian and half English) is a Senior Civil Servant, in the civil service's top tier. These experiences played out at the top of the organisational hierarchy. Steve's episode entailed a meeting with a Senior Partner of an accountancy firm and the Partner's clients, the CEO and CFO of a publicly-quoted company. Jamal's position in the hierarchy was inferred from the fact that he was assigned to fly from London to Los Angeles to meet the clients - Managing Partners of a law firm.

Comparative analysis of Steve's and Jamal's experiences of Refuting Identity Work offers useful insight into the nature of identity challenges that senior BME women and men may face. Perhaps the 'high stakes' nature of these encounters may have exacerbated tensions, resulting in clients' raised anxiety about trusting multi-million pound transactions to individuals who they may (perhaps subconsciously) perceive as less capable. Consequently, this perhaps increased the likelihood that they would directly or indirectly challenge senior BME individuals' identities. The comparative analysis further sheds light on the range of cues perceived as identity challenges or threats, which could be direct and explicit, or, more subtle like Indira's experiences in the previous episode.

Refuting Identity Work begins with a **sense of expectation** and 'decoding' cues. Steve and Jamal observed identity-heightening cues as they began their meetings. Jamal described explicit challenges from his meeting companions, which he directly attributed to his ethnicity.

> *I just knew straight away…that because of the colour of my skin they just weren't taking me seriously. They were really giving me a hard time…they kept on questioning my experience and they kept on asking* (if I was) *the most senior person in the practice …You're asking me to justify my plane ticket.*

Jamal "*knew straightaway*" that client's querying his experience and seniority was a competence test he had to face due to his skin colour. While we can never 'really' know why his clients asked questions, this excerpt illustrates how his clients' giving Jamal *"a hard time"* was constructed as a challenge to his identity as a senior black man. The identity cues Steve described were more subtle. Steve noted indirect and non-verbal cues, the implications of which altered through the meeting. For instance, in response to his introduction as "*Steve, Head of (…) function*", he commented, "*you can just see the surprise in their faces, they just can't hide it*". Then, he contrasted what he perceived as an initial "*perfunctory handshak*e" against the "*firm*" one he received at the end of the meeting. Steve also described observing how one of his meeting companions changed his seated position from a slouched, relaxed posture (which was interpreted as a sign of not being taken seriously) to a rigidly upright one as the meeting implications became increasingly grave (this was interpreted as recognition that Steve was indeed a force to be reckoned with). In contrast to the sense of surprise and the ensuing introspection during Accommodating Identity Work, these excerpts illustrate the automatic, often expectant feature of the first phase of Refuting Identity Work, a **sense of expectation**. Jamal said, of this episode, *"I'm used to it, Doyin, I really am"*. In Steve's words, "*I've always been aware of people's reactions around me, especially when you're in a position where they don't expect you to be in*". Additionally, Steve indicated that this was "*a typical meeting"*, and suggested that the sequence of events at this meeting was one which he had experienced many times before. Perhaps, however Jamal and Steve were experiencing confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998) and a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is, they expected to be challenged, and therefore were primed to (mis)read subtle, ambiguous cues as identity threats. However both accounts were strikingly similar, and, as

discussed in the previous chapter, the thesis' focus is on individuals' construction of experiences relating to ethnicity; therefore respondents' perceptions and interpretations (i.e. their sense-making of events) are generally privileged over competing perspectives in this thesis. What is of interest here is the attention they paid to ambiguous cues and how these may be interpreted.

Refuting Identity Work begins with a **sense of anticipation** and managing preconceptions. With the **sense of anticipation**, respondents inferred they had 'seen this before' and were prepared and expecting to be challenged. Jamal's and Steve's excerpts suggested feelings even stronger than expectancy. Both appeared to relish the challenge perceived from the verbal and non-verbal identity cues, setting them up for the next phase of Refuting Identity Work, **contesting**. Jamal's response to the opportunity to *"justify* (his) *plane ticket"* was:

> *I like situations like that, because … all you've done is just given me a level playing field to prove to you that you're going to be eating out of my hand by the end of this project.*

Similarly, Steve described relishing the opportunity to transform the situation:

> *I just love the look on their faces, I just love the conversation when they leave and the handshake when they leave it's completely different from the* (first) *handshake …I love the challenge …I love the disproving against conceptions…I do like to see the face change as it becomes clear who actually has the upper hand.*

Following a **sense of expectation**, Steve and Jamal 'worked' their identities by **contesting**. That is, they constructed their episodes as opportunities to prove themselves, asserting their identities as senior minority ethnic men. In this thesis, the root word 'contest' is used in both senses of the word, as a verb to describe how respondents disputed the assumptions they perceived others had of them, as well as to reflect the noun – as a competition or game in which respondents engaged. The identity challenges were relished as an opportunity to disprove others' false assumptions, and, additionally, show who was 'really' in charge. The quotes conjure

images of game playing *("you've just given a level playing field to prove … that you'll be eating out of my hand"; "it* (will become) *clear who* ***actually*** *has the upper hand*). Further, an intersectional analysis sheds additional insight. Although both were prepared to handle their (apparently) devalued minority ethnic status, their responses appeared to be influenced by gender. The identity work here appeared to be conducted within a masculinised domain - a highly competitive, win-lose context, with minimal attention paid to the importance of the relationships in the interactions. This illustrates how ethnicity intersecting with gender may be played out in senior contexts. On reflection, some of this male posturing may also have been amplified because Jamal and Steve were also presenting or 'working' their identities in situ - during the interviews - to a younger black woman interviewing them. In contesting the identity challenges, Steve and Jamal explicitly drew on the status inherent in their competence (Steve: "*Numbers are my thing*"; Jamal: "*One of my skills is I'm good at cleaning up everybody else's' mess… I'm completely confident in what I do*"). Bolstered by this, both Jamal and Steve went on to demonstrate their expertise.

Another benefit of comparative analysis of these episodes is the insight into how client-professional role relationships may determine which cues prompt identity work for BME individuals. Jamal, in his role as consultant and 'expert' was openly challenged by his clients to prove his capability. On the other hand, Steve, in his role as government agent and a symbol of compliance and enforcement, perceived *relief* from the meeting associates on seeing him.

> *So you see the look on their face* (after meeting me) *and then they suddenly feel 'Oh well'. You can actually see they think they're going to have a fairly easy ride…They start off with this 'let's pull the wool over salesman' patter.*

Jamal's comment "*they were really giving me a hard time*" and Steve's "*they think they're going to have a fairly easy ride*" were opposite sentiments with the same outcome, as they were both perceived as identity challenges. For Jamal, the perceived challenge was whether as a black man, he was 'senior enough'; for Steve, the relief

was interpreted as reaction to the perception that, as a black man, he 'could not be senior enough' (to constitute a 'real' threat). Thus the nature of the relationships perhaps contributed to Jamal needing to explicitly counter and contest the identity threats to quickly dispel any credibility concerns and engage his clients.

> *So I said to them, 'No, I'm not the most senior person in the practice, but I'm best qualified to solve your problem here today. So I can get you somebody more senior, but they won't have my skills to solve your problem….This is your problem, this is how I'm going to solve it, this is the time we've got to solve it in. Do you have a problem with that?'*

In contrast, Steve appeared to be able to contest through further game playing, facilitated by his perceptions of his meeting companions' lowered expectations. He began by saying:

> *It may well be because I'm totally ignorant which is not unlikely and I've got the wrong end of the stick which has been known to happen before, but can you please treat me like an idiot and talk me through this?*

Steve's approach to **contesting** was self-deprecation, describing himself as "*totally ignorant*", someone likely to get "*the wrong end of the stick*", asking his associates to treat him "*like an idiot*". Steve described this as a "*tool*" he had "*worked on*", likening himself to Lieutenant Columbo, a seemingly naïve and dishevelled-looking detective television character, often underestimated by colleagues and criminals but who, in the final moments, solves the case due to his meticulous eye for detail. Although Steve referred to a Caucasian American detective as his model, there are parallels between this image of incompetence and subservience and some stereotypes of black people, particularly the African – American 'black fool/jester' stereotype of black men. Following this routine, Steve described how he then suddenly changed role from a "*bumbling fool*" to someone who "*actually knows what I'm talking about*".

> *Then I ask a question which has picked up on something they said…and all of a sudden … I'm on the front foot…and they suddenly start concentrating on the meeting … whether I'm black, white, green or yellow suddenly goes out of the window, what suddenly becomes the*

> *focus is the fact that you're having to have a conversation with me because you're fighting for your business…it becomes clear that I'm going to really pull your business to pieces and you're going to suddenly have to justify to me what you've been doing and I'm going to ask questions that your wife may never even ask you about the way you're running your business… their countenance changes, they suddenly realise they are not in here for a ride anymore.*

The identity outcome of Refuting Identity Work is **refuting negative and reaffirming positive identities.** Steve accomplished this by demonstrating his analytical skills, placing himself on "*on the front foot".* The impact on his associates appeared to be new appreciation of his status as someone who could potentially cause serious damage to the business, that is, his identity as a *senior* black man. **Refuting negative and reaffirming positive identities** strengthened and enhanced their identities as senior black men. Steve described it as re-giving him his confidence, and Jamal described it as giving him a boost.

As described previously, the manner in which they 'contested' their identities appeared to be influenced by gender. Additionally, there was the implicit assumption that this 'game' was being contested in 'a man's world'. For instance, Steve's comment (in the present continuous sentence, reflecting the familiar nature of this encounter) "*I'm going to ask questions that your wife may never even ask you about the way you're running your business*", implicitly assumes that CEOs and CFOs will be (heterosexual) men. Steve's reference to the closing handshake also reinforced this assumption.

> *The first handshake is just a perfunctory handshake. At the end of it, it's usually a proper, firm handshake like 'I'm here with a* ***man****,' whereas before it's 'Oh well, you are the secretary' attitude.*

The association between the firm handshake acknowledging 'manhood' contrasts with the weak, perfunctory handshake for being *"a secretary"*. This episode suggests successful passage into intimate masculine spaces from which secretaries and 'even' (white) wives are excluded.

Having emphasised the stereotypically masculine, hard and competitive elements of **contesting** identities, there was also an emotional aspect of Refuting Identity Work described by Jamal. Jamal reflected on the struggle to maintain a professional demeanour during this encounter, describing how he avoided getting overly emotional about this.

> *Justifying my presence was easy. What was more difficult was, and what I tend to struggle with sometimes, was containing my emotions. …It's taking that aggression and locking it in a safe, and then responding professionally. So in terms of emotion, I'm a human being, so yes I was angry, but I was able to contain that.*

This excerpt further illustrates the 'work' and effort involved in containing the emotional fall out of the identity challenges and sustaining the 'senior black man' identity. In contrast to Jamal and Steve, no Asian man responded in this directly combative/antagonistic manner in response to identity-heightening encounters. However, none of the Asian men reported episodes in which their status and/or expertise met a business requirement while being simultaneously challenged. Other Refuting Identity Work episodes (described in the following chapter) involved responding to less direct identity threats such as challenging misconceptions about certain groups in informal conversations with colleagues. The apparent difference between the experiences of the senior Asian men and the senior black men may be explained in two ways. In the UK, Asians tend to be more positively stereotyped as hard working and African/Caribbean individuals are more negatively stereotyped with regards to competence and capability. This may prompt more direct/overt threats to their credibility compared to Asian people. Additionally, culturally, Asians adopt a more passive and reserved stance and therefore may avoid direct conflicting situations or respond to these in more subdued ways. Two Asian male respondents spontaneously reported Indian/Asian cultural/behavioural norms about being reserved and non-confrontational. The impact of stereotypes and/or cultural behavioural norms may thus contribute to black and Asian professionals systematically experiencing significantly different identity challenge encounters. This may

consequently contribute to differential response patterns and outcomes. This falls outside this thesis' remit, but supports the case for deeper insight into different groups' experiences, rather than clustering all 'minority ethnic' individuals together.

In summary, Jamal and Steve's experience of Refuting Identity Work involved **a sense of expectation** that appeared to be primed by past encounters, and helped frame the subtle and direct identity challenges they faced. They engaged in **contesting**, influenced by their intersecting gender and ethnicity, to assert their identities as senior minority ethnic men. Through demonstrating their competence using the contesting tactic, they accomplished the identity goal of **refuting** lowered expectations others had of them. This also **reaffirmed** their identities as senior minority ethnic men. These episodes were particularly vivid illustrations of Refuting Identity Work mode, which were perhaps amplified due to the intersections of ethnicity and gender at play in the senior contexts. Other episodes (described in detail in the following chapter) were more muted, but did constitute the three phases.

4.3.3 'Reconciling' Identity Work: *Reconciling 'role model' and 'senior black woman'*

To illustrate the third mode, Reconciling Identity Work, an episode recounted by Louise, a Senior Civil Servant of mixed (English and African-Caribbean) ethnicity in Govt Plc is presented. The episode was a meeting initiated by two junior women, seeking Louise's guidance on establishing a senior black women's network. Louise described meeting "*younger...junior* (black) *women…wanting some advice in connection with the network that they are setting up"*. The meeting objective positioned Louise as a senior BME woman, making her intersecting gender, minority ethnic *and* senior status salient. Additionally, although there was no indication in the data that she had been explicitly referred to as a role model, Louise was aware that the meeting implicitly positioned her as one - someone expected to offer guidance on running the senior black women's network and provide advice to its members.

Reconciling Identity Work describes the process in which respondents put in effort to integrate disparate or conflicting identities. Respondents in the Reconciling mode began by acknowledging a perceived disparity, a **sense of paradox/conflict**. Having experienced heightened awareness of her gender, ethnic and senior status, Louise's initial reaction to the meeting with the junior black women was explicitly and decidedly ambivalent (i.e. of two minds). She connected with the women on the basis of shared gender and ethnicity and senior status (relative to them) but reported disconnecting with the 'role model' identity inherent in the meeting objectives. On one hand, she was "*really pleased and flattered*" to have been approached by the women. On the other hand, she had reservations about being positioned as a spokesperson or role model for younger black women "*for something I don't particularly feel I can take credit for*". Louise's strong affinity with one of the black women (whom she did not know well) was particularly implicated in this ambivalence.

> *I really like her…you know, you warm to people… I had a good vibe about her. So when she came up to me and said 'Oh could I have a word*

> *with you?', I was pleased because I had a positive vibe about her and I didn't know then exactly what she was after, but I had an inkling it was something more personal and that's a kind of flattering thing which felt stronger when I knew what it was.*

Although they did not know each other well, Louise felt positively predisposed towards her, having previously "*noticed*" her. There is an indication that their shared *intersecting* identities as well as their demographic visibility as black women in Govt Plc facilitated this 'noticing' and Louise's openness to the meeting. The data suggest that their shared gender and ethnicity in combination with her senior status relative to the junior black woman may have intensified the conflict and ambivalence Louise experienced.

In trying to make sense of the intersecting 'senior black female role model' identity, Louise then engaged in sense-making through **reconciling and discounting**, the second identity work phase. To reconcile these identity dimensions, she first articulated her discomfort with the notion that her gender/ethnicity should be the basis upon which people related to her, rejecting essentialist assumptions of gender and ethnicity. She discussed the fluid nature of how she saw herself and how she hoped others would see her and other BME women.

> *The fact that I'm a black woman is, it's just what I am. To be seen as a role model to other black women just seems like a gross oversimplification of who I am and who they are because…all of us* (are) *many other things at the same time.*

Louise then referred to several other identity strands (including being a woman, mother, of mixed ethnicity and a scientist/analyst) as she evaluated how she fit other aspects of her identities together. Louise's sense-making involved working through these multiple identities, which were alternately embraced and rejected, **reconciling or discounting the apparent paradoxes**. On one hand, she did self-identify as a senior "*black woman*", however, she reflected that it was not necessarily an "*internally meaningful*" lens through which she saw herself. As she engaged in further sense-

making to **reconcile** identities, Louise explained that did not see herself as fitting 'black role model' expectations ("*I'm not the kind of black role model that people have in mind*"). She found the (stereotypical) "*black role model*" ascription constraining, proposing more suitable role models, who she perceived as more "*black conscious*" and conversant with the socio-historical context of relationships between Africa, the Caribbean and the West. However, Louise was also cognisant of the contradictions in her sense-making. One contradiction was her discomfort with labelling people, while acknowledging "*I am very used to thinking of myself as analyst, and that's a label just like any other label*". Another was her rejection of identity labels as the basis upon which she related to others. Yet, she embraced her analyst label, acknowledging she was "*very conscious of seeing the world slightly different from other people because of my analytical training*" and this was "*always there*" when she interacted with others. A third paradox, not articulated by Louise, but evident in the data, was her rejection of the 'role model' and 'black woman' labels as meaningful.

> *I don't like the idea that people would see me in a particular way and relate to me in a particular way because I'm a woman or because I'm black or any other reason.*

However, this episode occurred *because* she was a senior BME female. Approached to be a source of guidance for setting up a senior black women's network by the junior black women, she was construed by the women as a role model. Additionally, despite her reservations about giving advice as a senior black woman, Louise freely admitted that she was used to "*giving talks…help and advice to young analysts*". These paradoxical statements regarding "*analyst*", "*black woman"* and *"role model"* identity categories reflect Louise's 'work' or effort regarding making meaning of the intersecting 'senior black female role model' identity. It also illustrates her awareness of the tensions and complexities of constructing an intersecting identity whose constituent dimensions are infused with different socially-constructed meanings.

In the final Reconciling Identity Work phase, Louise successfully **re-constructed** (i.e. rebuilt) her identity as a 'senior black female role model'. Two related factors

appeared to contribute to this. First, Louise acknowledged that her favourable "*vibe*" about (i.e. strong affinity with) the younger black woman helped her overcome her reservations. Second, Louise negotiated and **re-constructed** expectations her meeting associates may have had concerning what being a 'black role model' meant.

> *I'm not the kind of black role model that people have in mind…they might be wanting to hear about the obstacles that I've met and overcome and the prejudice… I would be coming much more from 'You don't have control over all those things but what you do have control over is you and how you respond to things.'*

Louise thus redefined 'black role model' in such a way as to fit it with her identity as a senior black woman. Rather than being a role model who talks about past challenges and hurdles to overcome, she reconciled her role model identity with seeing herself as someone who talks about personal agency and taking control over one's destiny. She explained this to the women and received the encouraging response that it would be useful for the network members to hear this message.

In summary, Louise engaged in Reconciling Identity Work in this episode. Following a **sense of paradox**, she worked at integrating 'senior black woman' and 'role model' identity facets, **reconciling and discounting the apparent paradox** thrown up by the meeting. To reconcile disparate identities, she embraced her identity as a senior black woman (in responding positively to the request to support the senior black women's network), discounted the label she perceived as inherently constraining (the stereotypical black role model), thus **reconstructed** the 'senior black female role model' by explicitly outlining the nature of the advice she would give junior black women, were she to take on the advisory role.

4.3.4 'Affirming' Identity Work*: Self-affirming the 'senior Indian woman'*

The fourth identity work mode, Affirming Identity Work, is illustrated through the experience of Rani, an Indian female Senior Civil Servant at Govt Plc. In this episode, Rani attended 'Boot camp', a programme for newly-appointed Senior Civil Servants (SCSs). This is a three-day development and networking event at the government training premises in Sunningdale, UK. Rani's account illustrates the attention paid to visible identity markers and the (often positive and affirming) meaning individuals inferred from comparisons based on observed demographic data. The first Affirming Identity Work stage involves noting **a sense of connection or difference** based on visible, socio-demographic identity facets. This can happen in the first few seconds of entering a social situation, as illustrated through Rani's description of walking into the room at the beginning of the event:

> *You walk into a room and there are a hundred and ten people there...Of course you scan round the place…and think 'Oh, that's a lot of people', and, in my case, you immediately do a proportional assessment and think 'Okay, fine-roughly 50:50 men and women'; you do an age assessment and you think 'Okay, lot's of young people, that's good'...Of course you look around the room…how many people …non-white and ...I think there were four...women…and...you've probably picked it up... very few men of either sub-continental, African or Caribbean background at all.*

This excerpt illustrates a systematic scanning process for several visible identity markers (gender, age and ethnicity) and a rapid interpretation of 'what the numbers mean'. Rani scanned the room for an initial verification of the extent to which the demographic distribution within the Senior Civil Service was "*proportional*". However, Rani did not articulate (nor did I probe) what base population she used as a comparison to assess proportionality. Perhaps, knowing that the group represented the latest SCS cohort, and in the absence of any additional context (she had little idea of what to expect), it may have been natural for her to evaluate the group on the basis of (whatever) visible data were available, gauging the extent to which future leaders of

government departments represented the communities they serve. However, the data suggest gaining **a sense of connection or difference** through "*proportional assessment*" was a personally relevant and mindful process of positioning herself as a minority ethnic female member of this privileged group of Senior Civil Servants. This is the first Affirming Identity Work phase. Rani's expressions (e.g. *"of course you scan around the place… in my case you immediately do a proportional assessment*") suggest ongoing awareness of the significance of visible difference in the Senior Civil Service context. Additionally, the tone that this is a natural, logical process ("*of course…you immediately…*") suggests it was not purely circumstantial or incidental, but a conscious attempt to evaluate herself against the context - placing or positioning herself in the roomful of other Senior Civil Servants. Rani evaluated the newly-appointed SCS population on specific demographic features – gender, age and ethnicity. It is likely that age (in addition to gender and ethnicity) was a salient category in the Senior Civil Service context for few reasons. At the time of interview, Rani was 40 years old, about 10 years younger than the other SCSs and lower grade colleagues in Govt Plc (Table 2). Additionally, when I asked about her age, her response was (somewhat proudly) "*You want my age? I'm not coy about it. I'm 40*". Also, Rani had shared that she had been promoted quite quickly and had skipped a grade to get to SCS level. Thus, the quote above suggests that ethnicity, gender *and* age in the Senior Civil Service context were personally salient intersecting identity facets. These framed her **sense of connection or difference** as she began to construct her identity as a senior BME (younger) woman in the SCS. Perhaps majority ethnic individuals encountering the same situation may have engaged in a similar process of social categorisation, but may have experienced connection or difference through other personally salient data such as colleagues' familiar faces. As a senior BME woman, Rani's sense of connection or difference was primarily based on visible socio-demographic data:

> *It's about finding your place within* (Govt Plc)*…I'm one in a minority, but how big is that minority? Am I one in three or am I one in....several hundred?*

The dynamic and context-dependent nature of this scanning and positioning process can be further illustrated in another episode reported by Rani. Rani reported delivering a corporate presentation to potential junior recruits in a non-London location. Rani was struck by the absence of demographic diversity in her audience:

> *There were lots and lots of low grade people, whereas in London you see a very high proportion of BME people...I was practically the only BME person there...just made me feel a bit different.*

Rani is unlikely to have felt so "*different"* had she been presenting to potential junior recruits in her London base, in which lower grade employees comprise *"a very high proportion of BME people".* In London, it is in the 'senior' spaces that her ethnicity becomes meaningful. However *outside* London, her ethnicity became salient, and a point of differentiation for her, illustrating the contextual and socially-constructed nature of making sense of intersecting identities. Although Rani did not mention this, it is also possible that the juxtaposition of senior status against minority ethnicity contributed to her feeling "*a bit different*", rather than ethnicity alone.

Affirming Identity Work's second phase involves **inferring identity worth**. This occurs through establishing specific points of similarity and/or difference with other individuals. Rather than a simple in-group/out-group self-categorisation process, Rani demonstrated sensitivity to intersecting identities and the complexity of 'minority ethnicity' as she sought meaning from visible demographic cues. For instance, she noted the relative absence of black men and the relatively high proportion of Indian women in the room. However, after acknowledging the wider gender representation was "*proportional*", and the BME women were four to one BME man, Rani no longer referred to gender distribution as a meaning-making cue. Rani did not refer to the other South Asian women as a basis for inferring identity worth, despite the multiple affinity points between her and the other women (gender, ethnicity and senior status). On the contrary, she **inferred identity worth** by *differentiating* herself, based on her success as a *"generalist"* in contrast to their being *"specialists"*. Additionally, Rani did not appear concerned about the absence of black men. This appeared to have become

normalised for her in the context of senior levels in Govt Plc, as she said to me "*you've probably picked it up* (yourself)...(there were) *very few men of either sub-continental, African or Caribbean background at all*"). That the presence of other Asian women and the absence of black men were not used by Rani as significant points of meaning-making illustrates the complexity of the 'minority ethnic' category, challenging the assumption of homogeneity of experiences in much ethnicity research that treats members of different groups as one.

To gain further insight into her "*place*" within the Senior Civil Service, Rani **inferred identity worth**. She made it "*a point to speak to all the non-white people"* as she *"was curious to know what their background was"*. This involved seeking additional detail on the expertise of the other minority ethnic SCS colleagues, which she interpreted within the organisational context of beliefs about civil service careers.

> *They were all specialists - Lawyers or Accountants ...and I was the only generalist...When you're sort of quite specialised, you're either a good lawyer or you're not a good lawyer…. or if you're brought in to be an accountant to manage department of whatever budget, then you're either an accountant and you've got the experience in big organisations or you don't…If you're a specialist, you'd probably come in at a higher grade to start with, and you jump grades and you get promoted on the basis of your skill set, whereas I feel ...as a generalist, I get judged on a much wider range of things, so it's not just my skill set, it will also be my attitude ... my management of the team ... does my face fit?*

This excerpt illustrates the importance of (organisational and professional) context and shared understanding in constructing the meaning of 'senior minority ethnic woman' for Rani. She contrasted seemingly objective criteria used to assess 'specialists' against perceived subjective criteria for assessing 'generalists'. Supporting her assertion, two other respondents referred to the perceived value of generalist over specialist career tracks in Govt Plc (of course, the notion that it is relatively straightforward to decide whether one is "*either a good lawyer or …not a good lawyer*" can be critiqued). According to Rani, specialists are recruited at higher grades and promoted because

they have more clearly-defined skills. This may suggest that specialists are more highly valued by the organisation. Yet, perhaps because it is apparently more difficult to get promoted as a generalist ("*it's not just my skills set…it's does my face fit"*), the intersection of Rani's senior role as a generalist with her minority ethnic status, meant that she placed more value on (i.e. reaffirmed) her identity as a senior (*generalist*) minority ethnic individual in Govt Plc.

The quote also demonstrates the range of contextual lenses through which Rani evaluated herself as she **inferred identity worth**. First, this episode occurred in the high status context of the Senior Civil Service. Second, in the immediate environment, Rani was conscious of the numbers of non-white civil servants ("*you immediately do a proportional assessment*" and "*I did make a point to speak to all the non-white people*"), inferring self-meaning from this ("*I was the only generalist*" [in the minority ethnic group]). Third, she drew on commonly-held organisational beliefs regarding career trajectories to evaluate the perceived ease with which other individuals had gained entry into the high status context. **Inferring identity worth** was thus dependent on the multiple contexts in which the identity work played out.

After **inferring identity worth**, Affirming Identity Work ended in identity **reaffirmation**. Rani's identity as a senior minority ethnic woman was affirmed and strengthened after comparing other BME professionals' backgrounds against hers. Through this process, she realised that, compared to the other senior minority ethnic women and men she was the only "*career"* civil servant, one whom was judged on wider, more demanding criteria – including skills, attitude, people management and whether her face fit. This had a strongly affirming impact on her identity as a senior minority ethnic individual.

> *I was pleased to know that I was the only generalist there...So my sense of achievement is more... I ... walked away feeling a bit pleased with myself...A bit prouder that I was one of the few people there who'd crawled their way up.*

Learning she was the only BME generalist, one of a select few (perhaps the only one) who had successfully managed to *"crawl* (her) *way up"* the Civil Service in the face of greater hurdles, reaffirmed Rani's identity. Although the identity work goal was primarily positive reaffirmation of her senior BME female identity, there was also evidence of slight discomfort, perhaps guilt, in displaying pride in her achievements. For instance, occasionally Rani laughed a little awkwardly while recounting this episode. She also reflected on the appropriateness of her emotions during the episode:

> *I felt a bit prouder. But then you'll probably tell me I probably should have felt a bit sadder that there weren't more people like me (laughs).*

Additionally, Rani admitted to me during the interview that after the event she wondered if she could have taken alternative steps when meeting the other BME individuals. She admitted she may not recognise her BME colleagues again, wondering why she did not take the opportunity to network with them, while she had developed contacts with non-minority Govt Plc colleagues.

> (At the end of the event) *I was thinking why didn't I do that? …There's a potential to network here and...strength in numbers …but I haven't taken any steps to do that… whereas within Govt Plc I tried to create networks with other senior people.*

As earlier discussed, this suggests that Rani primarily differentiated from, rather than connected to, her BME colleagues. This encounter also sheds light on how intersecting identities may be constructed and deployed. First, Rani utilised other BME individuals' presence as *cues* for constructing a nuanced understanding of her identity as a senior minority ethnic woman. Then, she was mindful that she missed the opportunity to leverage these connections as *resources* – as potential allies to strengthen her network. Additionally, these excerpts also demonstrate the ambivalence that may accompany senior minority ethnic identity construction. In comparing herself (and thus constructing her identity) as a minority group member compared to majority others, she gained initial positive insight. She then compared herself against other

BME professionals and "*felt a bit prouder*". In this episode, Rani demonstrated identity work, involving an increasingly selective bases for **inferring identity worth** resulting in **reaffirming** (i.e. strengthening) her identity as a senior minority ethnic woman. In addition to using visible demographic data to make sense of her identity as an Indian female Senior Civil Servant, Rani drew on additional data (e.g. institutional beliefs about generalist vs. specialist careers) as a source of additional meaning.

This episode illustrates the continuous identity construction process that occurs as individuals make sense of themselves in given locations. This episode illustrates Affirming Identity Work phases, starting with Rani's **sense of connection or difference,** followed by sense-making through **inferring positive identity worth,** resulting in strengthening or **re-affirming** salient aspects of identity. During Affirming Identity Work Rani inferred positive identity worth through comparison with similar or different others, drawing on multiple identity dimensions in the process of meaning-making as a senior Indian woman in Govt Plc.

4.3.5 'Exploratory' Identity Work: *Discovering the value of 'senior Asian man'*

The final identity work mode is Exploratory Identity Work. This will be illustrated through Ehsan's experience (a Professional Services Firm employee, who self-identified as a senior Indian man as well as "*a Brit*"). The first phase of this mode involves noticing and responding to a **sense of opportunity** created by one's identity as a senior BME man or woman. Ehsan's identity was heightened when he noticed the man sitting across from him in business class on a trans-Atlantic flight was "*Indian, clearly*". On noticing this visibly Indian man, Ehsan grappled between initiating a conversation with his travel companion and keeping silent.

> *The cold reserved Brit* (in me) *would carry on eating…* (drink his)*, glass of wine and go to sleep…. So it takes me a while and I think 'Okay, I'm stuck on this flight for six hours I may as well talk to this guy'. And I thought to myself 'Well, how difficult can this be given that he's an Indian?'*

Ehsan noted the **opportunity** for connection based on their shared identities. His tentativeness appeared to stem from a pull in the opposite direction from the second cultural dimensions with which he identified. This incident was, however, not coded as Reconciling Identity Work, which, as described earlier, involves individuals reconciling apparently disparate identity facets leading to reconstruction. In this episode, Ehsan **leveraged** his **identity**, using it as a 'bridge' to connect with his companion, rather than reconciling two disparate identity dimensions into one. The evidence suggested that Ehsan identified as both Asian and British. He referred to himself as British on four separate occasions during the interview (more than any other respondent). He also used such terms as "*British Asian*" and "*British born Asian from Wolverhampton*" to describe himself, differentiating himself as "*a raised in the UK* (minority ethnic) *Brit*" from a "*normal Brit"* (when referring to a white female colleague). In this encounter on a trans-Atlantic flight, there was no evidence (other than the excerpt above) that he struggled or grappled with trying to make sense of or *reconcile* both identity dimensions (as is the case in Reconciling Identity Work). Perhaps Ehsan had already

successfully reconciled what he conceptualised as the British and Asian parts of himself by referring to "*the Brit in me*". However, faced with a 'clearly Indian' travel companion, he grappled with both identities, as striking up a conversation with a stranger challenged the cultural norm and stereotype of the "*cold reserved Brit*". However, Ehsan reasoned he was *"stuck on this flight"* and seized the opportunity, asking himself *"how difficult can this be, given that he's an Indian?"*

The initial Exploratory Identity Work phase, **a sense of opportunity**, is followed by **leveraging identities.** Ehsan did this by asking a *"very simple"* opening question.

> *I just asked him a very simple question, I said 'Are you going away from home, or are you going home?' And he said, you know, I don't know, you tell me. So we had a little discussion where his family, and where all his children were and where his house was, etc.*

The question *"Are you going away from home, or are you going home?"* is an example of how individuals actively leverage their identity, using it as a resource to maximise the connection in the encounter. With this question, Ehsan 'worked' his identity in different ways. First, he indicated to his companion that he was cognisant of the fluid relationship between skin colour, national origin and background – that no assumptions could be made about 'where you are from' based on perceived ethnicity. He also assumed his companion would understand this, asking a question that was likely to be significant in a culture in which migration forms part of common discourse. Following this question, Ehsan and his companion fell into easy conversation, covering topics (such as the companions' origins and where he was born and raised), that form part of this migrant discourse. Leveraging from his ethnicity fast-tracked their conversation to heightened levels of openness and disclosure. Within five minutes, information was exchanged about the best places to purchase Bollywood films and fresh coriander on both sides of the Atlantic; using ethnicity as a bridge led to enhanced understanding.

> *So, we talked about family, I immediately know we're talking about not just his brothers and sisters he grew up with. When we were talking*

> *about food and I knew what he was talking about. When we were talking about, you know, the importance of looking after your elders, I completely get this.*

This common identity led to enhanced shared understanding that transcended generation and nationality.

> *Talking to somebody I've never met before and we share so much in common. Even though we're probably thirty years apart in age, we were born in different decades in different countries, born and raised in different norm systems. It doesn't matter that this person has never ever met me,* (nor) *…lived in the UK.*

As Ehsan learnt more about his travel companion's background, the responses led him to conclude that "*this is another senior Indian man in business, clearly*". Ehsan's reference to *"**another** senior Indian man"* reflected the strength of affinity, enhancing the salience of his intersecting identities of senior professional status, ethnicity and gender. During Exploratory Identity Work, leveraging led to individuals expanding the meaning of their intersecting identities – thus **augmenting identities**.

> *I felt quite proud…He's somebody who's reached the top of his game, the top of his organisation* (therefore) *I can do this… I felt a sense of enthusiasm around I can achieve what I want to achieve as well. But I also felt a sense of belonging.*

Although both Affirming and Exploratory Identity Work modes featured identity affirmation through affinity with similar others, during Exploratory Work, individuals reaped additional benefit from the identity-based connections (beyond **inferring worth** through **a sense of connection**). During Exploratory Identity Work, after **leveraging identities**, individuals came to expand and **augment** their identities as senior BME men or women. Through further discussion (disclosure having been expedited by their shared identities), Ehsan learnt more about his travel companion, such as networks with which he was involved, which included senior board members of Ehsan's client companies. Going beyond his realisation that "*this was another senior*

Indian man in business, clearly" Ehsan learnt about the existence of an "*unofficial…* (yet) *very organised…London senior Indian men in business*" network.

> *There is this 'London senior Indian men in business'… unofficial, I don't know, they have dinner parties or something…He knew these guys on first name terms. So it was like quite eye-opening that this community is very organised when they get to a very senior level.*

In this encounter, Ehsan learnt more about what being a senior Indian man in business meant. Ethnicity as a basis for connection was a novel way of building professional ties, engaging an identity dimension he admitted he would "*typically hide*". An identity facet which he had not previously emphasised, gained currency, becoming a resource, such that his sense of what being a senior Indian man is (or could be) was **augmented**.

Adopting an intersectional lens also adds further insight to the opportunity and benefits reaped during Exploratory Identity Work. The data suggested that rather than this being an essentialised 'Indian' connection, this 'identity capital' emerged from the intersecting 'senior Indian male' identity shared (and leveraged) by both actors. Although Ehsan did not talk about sharing the same gender as his travel companion, the data suggest that gender (in addition to ethnicity and senior status) may have facilitated the gains reaped from this Exploratory Identity Work experience. First, Ehsan saw a projection of himself in this man *("He's…reached the top of his game…I can achieve… as well*). This suggests a strong affinity that was likely enhanced by their shared ethnicity and gender. Additionally, Ehsan referred to the network of "*senior Indian business* ***men"*** and mentioned the senior *"**guys**"* on the executive boards they both knew. It is possible that Ehsan's attention to their shared ethnicity was because the context in which this happened (business class on a trans-Atlantic flight) rendered gender and organisational status privilege invisible. Implicit assumptions of gender homogeneity at the top of organisations are prevalent (Singh & Vinnicombe, 2004). Additionally, this interaction sheds insight on male networks in minority ethnic spaces. The nature and content of Ehsan's conversation with his travel companion was not predominantly stereotypically 'masculine'. For instance, rather than sports, they

exchanged grocery shopping tips and talked about their extended families. Although this not a prevalent theme in the data, this raises the question about the extent to which minority ethnic professional men's discourse is as macho/masculine as is often portrayed in (majority ethnic) men's interactions.

In summary, this episode illustrates Exploratory Identity Work. Ehsan reacted to a **sense of opportunity** triggered on seeing a fellow (senior) Indian (man). He **leveraged** his identity by initiating a conversation based on their shared identities. After the ensuing conversation, he had an **augmented** sense of what it means to be a senior Indian man, which he had not appreciated prior to the encounter.

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter orients the reader to the main thesis Findings. It introduced the episodes that raised awareness of respondents' identities as senior BME men and women in UK organisations. It described key response patterns around ethnicity, gender and organisation, and, the major differences between the identity-heightening episodes. The chapter also presented in-depth analyses of the five identity work modes in which senior BME women and men engaged, and demonstrated how ethnicity, gender and seniority were implicated in respondents' meaning-making. Further in-depth analysis and interpretation of each identity work mode and its constituting phases, drawing on data from several episodes, are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5: IDENTITY WORK PHASES

5.1 Chapter overview

The distribution of identity-heightening episodes presented in Chapter 4 indicated participants' breadth of identity work responses across ethnicity and gender in a range of interpersonal and reflexive encounters. Five identity work modes were presented through illustrative episodes, portraying the richness of respondents' identity work and how ethnicity, intersecting with gender and senior status were implicated in respondents' meaning-making. In this chapter, each mode is described in greater detail, drawing on the wider data set. After an introduction, example quotes are presented for each phase, followed by elaboration of the constituent phases: i) the 'jolt' sensation prompting identity work, ii) the sense-making response, and, iii) the identity work outcome (Figure 4 below, repeated from Chapter 4).

IDENTITY WORK MODE	**Accommodating** *Acquiescing to externally-ascribed identity meanings*	**Refuting** *Disputing externally-ascribed unfavourable identity meanings*	**Reconciling** *Reconstituting apparently disparate identities into a whole*	**Affirming** *Reinforcing and strengthening identities*	**Exploratory** *Leveraging identities as a resource for personal benefit*
Jolt sensation	Sense of surprise	Sense of expectation	Sense of paradox/conflict	Sense of connection or difference	Sense of opportunity
Sense-making tactic	Introspecting	Contesting (game-playing)	Reconciling or Discounting	Inferring personal identity worth	Leveraging identities
Identity outcome	Internalise positive or negative identity meanings	Refute negative, reaffirm positive identities	Reconstruct (re-build) identities	Reaffirm identities	Augment identities

Figure 4: The identity work modes

The three phases are separated for analytical and interpretive ease, rather than to indicate rigid and clear boundaries in the data, as some episodes were brief

experiences of heightened identity awareness (by design, in line with identity work assumptions). Also, as discussed in the Methodology chapter, the three phases were not evident in every account, thus some identity-heightening responses were coded as 'partial' instances of identity work. For example, when a respondent experienced the initial phase of Reconciling Identity Work (i.e. **a sense of paradox/conflict**) but stopped short of engaging in the next phase (i.e. **reconciling or discounting the apparent paradox**), the episode was considered 'partial' Reconciling Identity Work. These episodes were included in the analysis and circumstances contributing to their 'interruption' discussed below. Most episodes (94%) recounted comprised 'complete' identity work. That is, the data suggested that once respondents expressed a certain reaction, they then engaged in sense-making tactics (however briefly) leading to a final identity work phase.

5.2 Phases of 'Accommodating' Identity Work

Accommodating Identity Work is the identity construction mode in which senior minority ethnic individuals appeared to acquiesce to, and sometimes internalise, the positive or negative meanings inferred from others about their identities, even if temporarily. In contrast to the other modes, respondents did not modify these meanings 'internally' or confront others 'externally'. Twenty-six episodes were categorised within Accommodating Identity Work (26% of identity work episodes). About half the episodes involved direct, interpersonal encounters (e.g. meetings, casual conversations with colleagues, an interview), which appeared to have a stronger impact on respondents. In other episodes, respondents adopted a detached, bystander perspective, reflecting on physical cues or overheard comments and internalising positive or negative meanings inferred from this. Two predominant types of Accommodating Identity Work emerged from the data – internalising positive inferences (e.g. seeing oneself as a business asset for building international client relationships) and internalising negative inferences (e.g. seeing oneself at the margins of an encounter). Compared to the other modes, Accommodating Identity Work may be more influenced by gender differences. Most negative Accommodating Identity

Work experiences were reported by women and most positive Accommodating Identity Work experiences by men (this differentiation was not as stark with other Identity Work Modes). Warranting this assertion is difficult due to the study's small sample size and is beyond this thesis' purpose. In addition, and perhaps more significantly, four of the five positive Accommodating episodes came from the same male respondent.

The following section describes respondents' Accommodating Identity Work, beginning with a **sense of surprise**, followed by **introspecting** and self-questioning, concluding with **internalising the meaning** inferred from a given encounter (Table 10).

Table 10: Accommodating Identity Work example quotes

Sense of surprise	Introspecting	Internalise meaning
When I walked into the room and he saw that I was black woman… he was surprised…. even at that level, you still get those kinds of reactions...he was quite young, that was the thing that surprised me as well.	(I thought) *Why are you surprised? Is it about me? You never expected to see a black woman at this level, to have the level of skills, knowledge & experiences to be able to …get* (to the interview)*…is that why you reacted the way you did?*	*I did feel that because of his reaction and surprise, did he think that I wouldn't be as good as anyone else because of who I was? I just felt the need to try even harder...to be extra, extra special …I reacted by going into overkill.* ***Serena,*** African-Caribbean female
(I thought) *is this good or bad and where is it going?* ("Forced marriage") *was just … such a strange concept to use…* (to describe the merger) *I just wouldn't have expected it especially from this person, do you know what I mean? Because she was so senior.*	*Was it the right way to describe the merger, and is it acceptable? And if there was a room full of Asian women who have arranged marriages, how would they have felt?*	*As the only non-white woman in the room… I just wondered if people would look at me as if I understood the scenario a bit better than them…I was pleased I was sitting at the back of the room…**It's what goes on in people's minds rather than their reactions (that matters).*** ***Sinita, Indian female***
Although there's big cheese and big cheese (in this meeting) *… the client seemed to quite cling onto what I was saying…it completely surprised me.*	*N/A*	*This is somebody who is dragging me onto a forum I definitely don't belong in for the sole reason that I'm a senior person from an Indian background….It made me realise that I was key to the account. I didn't know that before.* ***Lalit, Indian male***

5.2.1 Sense of surprise

The first Accommodating Identity Work phase is marked by respondents' surprise in response to identity cues. The 'identity gap' inferred from their accounts of unexpected cues is typical of general identity construction models (discussed in the Literature Review chapter; e.g. Alvesson et al, 2008). However, an intersectional perspective examining how the interplay of ethnicity, gender and senior status may constitute an identity trigger for senior black and Asian men and women yields further insight.

For instance, there was surprise at awareness of one's *positive* identity value, predominantly (four of five instances) from one respondent. Lalit recounted several identity-heightening events in which he registered surprise at the attention directed towards him by senior colleagues and clients based on his Indian heritage. The surprise emerged from the apparent premium placed on ethnicity by colleagues and clients, even over seniority. For instance, he noted the hierarchical levels at which discussions were held about the impact of his loss on an Indian client's account.

> *My boss, his boss and his boss, and the two of them - not me and my boss, but the big two, between themselves, with me copied on the email,* (discussed that) *Lalit not being on the account is going to be a big challenge for us.* (Lalit, Indian male, P.S.F.)

In another episode, Lalit described:

> *So, we went for a meeting… a massive client of the firm…And all these guys are like way above my pay grade….And I'm sitting there, I'm thinking I'm the note-taker…So, the big cheese* (client) *from London goes to big cheese* (client from) *India and says, 'Lalit is here with some of his colleagues from Professional Services Firm'. So he didn't even bother…* (to introduce my other senior colleagues)… *As things went along… although there's big cheese and big cheese … the client seemed to quite cling onto what I was saying…I was so active in that meeting, it completely surprised me.* (Lalit, Indian male, P.S.F.)

In both excerpts, examining ethnicity in the context of senior status adds insight to understanding Lalit's surprise reaction. The senior context (perhaps interplaying with

gender) exacerbated the surprise and incongruence between seeing himself first as a low-ranking "*note taker*" relative to other associates, to someone whose words the "*big cheese*" would "*cling onto*". First, Lalit referred his boss' boss and *his* boss (the country director for that service) having quantified the potential value he brought to a given account based on his Indian background. Lalit observed this as a bystander – he was "*copied in*" to the email as decisions were made, up to three levels above him. In the second excerpt, attention was paid to his colleagues' senior status; they were "*way above* (his) *pay grade*" and regularly referred to as "*big cheese*". As a lower status "*note taker*" (again, a detached observer in proceedings), he was taken aback by Indian clients' keen interest in his contributions. Although Lalit did not explicitly mention gender, the data suggest that these episodes occurred with individuals in which he shared gender. He referred to the "*guys*" in the meeting and inferred that the three reporting lines above him were men. In these very senior spaces Lalit's ethnicity (and possibly gender) was perceived as a tangible asset. However, although he did not refer to this explicitly, it was perhaps his cultural and national capital (rather than his ethnicity per se) that differentiated him from his British Indian colleagues - Lalit described himself as an "*Indian from India"* inferring additional value to the firm, compared to 'British Indians'.

The intensity of the jolt sensation during this phase varied across episodes. For some, the **sense of surprise** was relatively muted and respondents adopted a detached, bystander stance as they recounted the surprise they observed 'out there'. In contrast, more intense experiences of surprise appeared to be associated with personal encounters, perhaps construed as more direct identity threats. An example of a relatively muted jolt experience occurred when one respondent experienced incongruence during a teambuilding event in which a 'high performing team' image comprising homogenous-looking people was presented, which she construed as not "*normal*".

> *In London, that isn't how a team consists of because we've got so much variety here now...we're cosmopolitan, you know and that is not a normal image* (Sinita, Indian female, Govt Plc)

The surprise was in the disconnection between the projected image and Sinita's personal experiences as a minority ethnic person. In another episode, Sinita's identity as a senior Indian woman was made salient when she unexpectedly heard Govt Plc's Chief Executive describing a recent merger as a "*forced*" union, likening it to an "*arranged marriage*".

> *I just thought the word 'enforced' on us was strong…It was …just such a strange concept to use - I just wouldn't have expected it especially from this person… because she was so senior.* (Sinita, Indian female, Govt Plc)

Sinita's lived experience as a minority ethnic person suggested that a team would look less homogenous. Additionally, from an intersectional perspective, her lived experience as an Asian woman potentially sensitised her to the Chief Executive's comments. Comparing a merger to the (culturally-sensitive term) 'arranged marriage' was uncomfortable *("strong…strange…not expected"*), particularly considering the speaker's status. She noted the incongruence between her experience and what was projected. Further, the incongruence and surprise was heightened by seniority, and, her expectation that individuals in authority perhaps ought to know better and demonstrate greater sensitivity to diversity.

In contrast to these relatively muted expressions of surprise, there was also evidence of more jarring experiences. Some of the most intense experiences of surprise were associated with respondents seemingly going out of their way to legitimise their presence i.e. define 'who they were' prior to the identity-salient event. For example, in the illustrative episode in the previous chapter, Indira legitimised her presence by emphasising her past experience, and, reinforced this by reporting that her manager nominated her. Similarly, Serena asserted that "*I know for a fact my application form will get through any sift because of* (its) *strength*" when recounting an episode in which she was being interviewed. Additionally, Serena's self-certainty was bolstered as her interviewer was someone with whom she had interacted as a peer in the past. She had "*spoke*(n) *to* (him) *on the phone like five days before on a work connection*" and he was a member of a group with whom she spoke "*on the phone on a regular regular basis*". By legitimising their presence through prior relationships and

competence, respondents demonstrated a self-certainty that starkly contrasted with the identity challenge and surprise in the initial phase of Accommodating Identity Work. Additionally, the intersection of senior status and minority ethnicity possibly heightened this surprise, for both target and instigator. For example, Serena recounted the first moments of attending the interview:

> *When I walked into the room and he saw that I was black woman, you could see kind of amazement and when I put my hand up to shake his hand he was like* (demonstrated with a limp hand) *… There was a reluctance…He was visibly - you could see on his face he was like surprised, totally surprised…It was visible…It was actually quite quite obvious* (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

The intersection of (visible) ethnicity and gender with (invisible) senior status appeared to play a role here. It may be inferred that Serena's interviewer was aware of her senior status (as a suitably qualified interview candidate) and her gender (given their previous phone conversations). She interpreted his surprise as based on her ethnicity and its apparent incongruence within the context. In turn, her reaction was surprise at, and disappointment in, his actions against the backdrop of his apparent youth *and* the hierarchical level at which he worked.

> *It just disappointed me that even at that level, you still get those kinds of reactions and he was quite young, that was the thing that surprised me as well, he was quite young. I can understand if it's older people, you know, set in their ways, a bit reluctant to change and sort of look at things from a different viewpoint, but he was quite young. He was young.* (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

The configuration of visible gender, contextual seniority versus invisible ethnicity was perhaps unexpected by her colleague[6]. In turn, his reactions prompted her identity work. Additionally, the specific configuration of his identities (senior status and age) exacerbated this 'work'. In Serena's opinion, her interviewer's youth *and*

[6] Serena had a British accent and a Western name. Perhaps BME individuals with non-British accents/non-Western names may not experience such a noticeable reaction, if their accents/names signal their demographic features to an interviewer.

organisational status afforded him less latitude for visibly starting at seeing a black female applicant.

Serena began recounting another encounter by legitimising her presence. Serena did this by construing herself as a staff canteen customer having a conversation with the canteen staff member, another black woman. Constructing herself this way, she demonstrated self-certainty that contrasted with introspection that followed. In addition to being a customer, Serena appeared to further legitimise her presence using intersecting identity dimensions. Serena considered it important to "*acknowledge*" other minority ethnic people:

> *Regardless of grade... I say hi to the people who clean the toilets because they are doing a job…. I say hi to the clerical assistants… I talk to the ladies downstairs in the canteen who make the sandwiches… because we need to acknowledge each other... because there are many people in this building and organisation who look down on those kind of groups of people…who do menial tasks, as they describe them… I will look out for people because we're the minorities...We have to… support each other.* (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

The intersection of ethnicity with organisational status, and suggestions of class (in reference to "*menial jobs*") contributed to Serena's account of her presence in the context. Despite the distance created by organisational hierarchy between those who do menial jobs (e.g. cleaners, clerical assistants and catering staff) and senior employees like her, Serena identified with these individuals due to their shared minority ethnic status. Despite, or perhaps because of, the hierarchical gap, she took responsibility for maintaining these connections and bridging the divide ("*we need to acknowledge each other")*. This exemplifies the everyday 'nod' of acknowledgement minority group members often exchange, even with total strangers. Serena acknowledged, and showed support for, the black female canteen staff member as a fellow minority group member, by having a "*little chat*" with her as she prepared sandwiches. The identity-heightening cue occurred when her boss interrupted and admonished his staff member "*You have to get on with your work, stop talking, get on with your work*" in a manner which Serena considered condescending and rude, as

there was no acknowledgement of her presence. From the canteen manager's perspective, it perhaps appeared that the "*chat*" his staff member was having with another black woman while preparing her sandwich fillings was distinct from her duties ("*Get on with your work*"). In contrast, Serena's jolt experience was perhaps intensified as she construed herself as a (valuable) customer, with whom the canteen staff member was forging stronger customer relations, which had been primed by their shared minority status.

The previous examples illustrate the contrast that some respondents experienced between the moments prior, and subsequent, to the identity-heightening experience. Considering the intersections of instigator and perceiver identities such as seniority, gender and ethnicity sheds insight into the intensity of the surprise reported by respondents. Additionally, some respondents appeared to go out of their way to legitimise their presence, emphasising the incongruence triggered by the identity challenge. It is possible, however, that legitimising one's presence was a rhetorical or narrative device respondents used in conversation with me, rather than an actual feature of the first phase of Accommodating Identity Work, as about half of the episodes did not feature such stark contrasting and emotive responses. Whether pleasant or disagreeable, respondents paid attention to the actions of majority members in high status positions. The unexpected nature of the identity triggers in the first phase of Internalising Identity Work led to **introspecting**, resulting in respondents **internalising the meaning** inferred from the episode experienced.

5.2.2 Introspecting

The data revealed a range of responses to the **surprise** of the first Accommodating Identity Work stage. The theme connecting these responses was the self-questioning triggered by the episode. **Introspecting** involved respondents making sense of how their identities may have been complicit in their associates' actions towards them. Two themes influenced this – managing the in/visibility of seniority vs. ethnicity, and, ethnic/cultural influences (and stereotypes) on behaviour.

During **introspecting,** respondents reflected on their associates' apparent inference of status and meaning from their visible ethnic identities. They also sought to make sense of the intersection and juxtaposition of multiple identities for themselves. For instance, following surprise at being interrupted by the canteen manager, Serena reflected on the complexities of visible and invisible identities and how her companions' lower status reflected on her, due to their visibly shared ethnic minority identity.

> *Is he assuming that because I'm talking to her* (and) *she's making sandwiches* (therefore) *I can't be anyone in the organisation, otherwise I wouldn't be talking to her…I can't be that important…I wasn't white, I wasn't senior, I wasn't important, so he felt that he could just butt in the conversation in that way and humiliate her that way, in front of me? … And would he have done that if it was a white woman standing there? Is there a badge I'm supposed to be wearing to say that, that makes others, like him, show me or us the respect that we're kind of due or treat us in the same way as others?* (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Another respondent expressed a similar sentiment:

> *I said 'My name is Gurditta Josh and I'm* (key position in high status departmental function)*…and he said 'Do you…Are you?' and I said 'Yes' …and he goes 'I thought it was Graham'. Graham* (my deputy) *is white*…(It's) *embarrassing, someone who doesn't know you, says 'Are you?' Graham is grey-suited, 50s, looks like he has experience…he must be* (my role)*. Why have you jumped to that conclusion?* (Gurditta, Asian male, Govt Plc)

Serena's response (and Gurditta's, to a smaller extent) was punctuated with several pauses, reputation and question marks, suggesting significant sense-making and **introspecting**. Both examples illustrated how others infer visible fit (or lack thereof) for specific roles; drawing on implicit occupational stereotypes, they ask questions reflecting these implicit biases (Kandola, 2009). These questions then prompt introspecting as senior minority ethnic professionals attempt to understand why their whole, intersecting identities have been mistaken or overlooked. Gurditta's deputy

was *"white*…(in his) *50s* ... *grey-suited"* (which Gurditta described as the organisation's 'senior' prototype). Unlike Gurditta, Graham "*looked like*" he fit the role. Serena perceived that, as she 'looked like' his subordinate, the canteen manager assumed they shared lower hierarchical status too. Serena reflected on her invisible senior status in contrast to her visibility as a black (female) individual, wondering if a visible 'senior badge' would counter assumptions of low status. Although the data did not suggest an explicit role of gender, it is possible that the canteen manager's male gender facilitated the exertion of his authority over two (black) women. In addition to the relative impact of visible and invisible identities, **introspecting** also involved interpreting actions through cultural and ethnic lenses, sometimes leading to the fear of stereotyping.

For instance, one respondent attempted to make sense of his sense of exclusion during a corridor conversation involving a peer and two Partners:

> *Why am I excluded from this conversation? Is it because I'm not making a proactive effort? Or is it because they don't want to include me? …Can I be doing something different to get engaged in this conversation to become included?* (Nihal, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Nihal explained that his "*perception of Indians is they're more reserved, they're more 'do as you're told', type of thing, rather than 'let me butt in'*". He associated his discomfort around 'butting in' (and his ongoing exclusion) with his Indian ethnicity and cultural norms concerning interaction. Somewhat similarly, Serena reflected on a colleague's comment about her behaviour during a sensitive meeting about departmental restructuring. While **introspecting** she considered how her ethnicity may have influenced (others' perceptions of) her behaviour. Unlike Nihal, however, she was particularly concerned with how *others'* stereotypes about black women influenced her colleague's comments.

> *I'd said that I'd been quite proactive in finding another job, because I'm not going to sit around to be used, and I've got interviews lined up and such, she said 'Why doesn't that surprise me about you?'…*(I wondered)… *is it a perception about black women and the stereotype*

> *that we're over-assertive and we're pushy and got big mouths?* (Serena, African-Caribbean female , Govt Plc)

The comment also prompted Serena to question her behaviour.

> *And I did also think, oh, was I that bad then? Was I that dominating? Is that part of my character?..I challenge and ask questions and it made me think... is it negative?* (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Serena wondered the extent to which stereotypes associated with the *black + female* intersection influenced her colleague. Simultaneously, the comment caused her to start to doubt her behaviour *("Was I that bad…? Was I that dominating?"*). This excerpt illustrates the impact of stereotyping. Stereotype threat is heightened awareness of the risk of being negatively stereotyped (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Serena reported being irritated by her colleague's remarks, but, simultaneously evaluated her behaviour in the fear that her natural behaviour (her "*character*") may be *"bad"* and "*negative"*. Ethnicity intersecting with gender appeared to make her more conscious about how her behaviour would be perceived, as she assessed her tendency to *"challenge* (and) *ask questions"* (perhaps justifiable in the uncertainty of restructuring) against the risk of being seen as an over-assertive or 'aggressive black female'.

In another illustration of alertness to stereotyping, Vivian described being "*irritated*" by a colleague's simplistic, competency-related question to her. She inferred from this that he thought she was "*incapable of understanding"* a (simple) task. Reflecting on her reaction she remarked:

> *I wondered if perhaps the way I've dealt with it would have fallen into that stereotype cliché, you know, black woman being aggressive, but I wasn't being aggressive, I think I was being assertive. I wasn't being aggressive because I didn't turn around and fling the paper in his face and say 'Look, you deal with it, I'm not paid to be your PA or anything', I didn't do anything like that, but I did wonder if... perhaps if I could have ....and then I thought well no...I'm happy that I dealt with it in the right way, but ... I deliberated on it.* (Vivian, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Vivian was surprised by her colleague's actions and engaged in **introspection** (following the identity encounter), which included considering the extent to which she played up to stereotypes. As such, she demonstrated evidence of the two initial Accommodating Identity Work phases. However, after consideration she was satisfied and "*happy that I dealt with it in the right way*". Consequently, this encounter did not include the final phase of Accommodating Identity Work, **internalising meaning**. Vivian also challenged her colleague's assumptions about her competence in this encounter (thus engaging in Refuting Identity Work, which is described next). This was one of three episodes in the data that was coded under two identity work modes.

The combination of frustration (directed at others) and self-doubt (directed at self) associated with stereotyping during **introspecting** suggests considerable energy expended during this identity work stage. This had implications for respondents during and beyond the encounters. This is discussed further in the following section on the final phase of Accommodating Identity Work.

There was little evidence of having to 'work through' positive inferences via **introspecting**. The 'pleasant' surprise of being positioned as a cultural asset to the organisation did not appear to prompt self-questioning, but led straight to embracing and internalising meaning. During less positive encounters, respondents pondered over the relative visibility and invisibility of ethnicity and senior status; and, the role of ethnicity, when interpreting personal and others' actions. During **introspecting,** respondents did not necessarily embrace the perceived negative inferences others made of them. However, by not directly refuting or modifying these meanings (to themselves or others) they were deemed to engage in Accommodating Identity Work as they were directly or indirectly complicit in accepting the meanings others inferred about their identities.

5.2.3 Internalise identity meaning

The final Accommodating Identity Work phase is **internalising** the externally-derived **meaning** inferred from the encounter. Sometimes, meanings were internalised as part

of a relatively straightforward acceptance and tolerance of being positioned in a particular encounter. However, internalisation was also sometimes the result of agentic decision-making. Overall, however, compared to the other identity work modes, the outcome and final phase of Accommodating Identity Work involved relatively minimal incremental change in the value of the senior BME female or male identity inferred at the beginning of the episode to that internalised at the end of the episode.

In positive and challenging encounters, some respondents relatively passively accepted the meanings inferred about identities. Where this was favourable, it can be explained by the self-serving bias in which individuals are more likely to accept favourable self-conceptions (e.g. Swann, Polzer, Seyle & Ko, 2004). Lalit was surprised that his lowered status (in organisational hierarchy terms) was superseded by the high value placed by major international clients and senior colleagues on his ethnicity and cultural background. In one episode he basked in the glow that email exchanges between very senior colleagues were "*all about*" him, and from that, inferred his unique position as key to the business, meeting his self-serving bias. Although positive (i.e. affirming), this was coded as Accommodating Identity Work because, in the encounters, others (i.e. clients and senior colleagues) ascribed Lalit's positive value to him. My reading of the data suggested that the significance of his senior Indian male identity was determined by others, which he accepted without challenge or modification.

> *I was reading* (the email) *going, 'Oh my God, this is all about me. I'm feeling good about this'. It made me realise that when it comes to clients with that background, I am in a position to do things and achieve things that others are not….It made me realise that I was key to the account. I didn't know that before.* (Lalit, Asian male, P.S.F.)

However, another explanation is required concerning one's acceptance of negative encounters, such as experiencing exclusion. One illustration was Sinita's apparent acceptance of the homogenous "*high performing team*" image.

> *If someone's going to make it to that level, that's the image, they wouldn't have your hair (*referring to my unusual hairstyle)…*they wouldn't dress like you or me*. (Sinita, Indian female, Govt Plc)

Although we were both in smart casual attire, Sinita made a connection between us on the basis of dress (perhaps inferring that we both came from cultures associated with colourful national dress). She contrasted this with the *"smart suits"* worn by people in the photo, in her view "*conforming to the western world*." Gurditta also commented on how the image projected by the all-white Govt Plc leadership team excluded him. Describing the prototypical senior individual in the department he referred to age and dress (having earlier referred to ethnicity).

> *'Grey suits' means experience, knowledge…the Executive Committee - (names them) - all look similar, the same black/grey suits, very corporate…Grey suits – legacy – you had to serve your time, certain number of years, so all the people who joined ages ago are now late 50s, and they wear grey suits.* (Gurditta, Indian male, Govt Plc)

Sinita's and Gurditta's comments were two of four references to dress, as a minority ethnicity marker and potential differentiating factor at work. However, as identity-salient cues, they also appeared to be intertwined with gender. Three comments were made by women. At Professional Services Firm both discussions about attire concerned how women ought to present themselves appropriately at work. It is possible that the emphasis on dress was influenced by different organisational cultures. At Professional Services Firm, the emphasis was on women dressing to present themselves well and fit in to the corporate, traditional masculine (and conservative) culture. The implications for one minority ethnic woman are discussed further in Exploratory Identity Work. In the somewhat more relaxed and less image-conscious culture of Govt Plc , the emphasis appeared to be on ethnicity and culture (inferred from comments as well as the emphasis on grey contrasted with the popular notion of brightly coloured cultural attire).

However, despite asserting that the image ran counter to her lived experience, Sinita appeared to exclude herself from the *"high performing team"*. She did this by

observing that the picture did not reflect her self-image and consequently internalised the meaning and its personal implications (*"if someone's going to make it to that level…they wouldn't dress like you or me"*). It was not clear whether her reference to "*that level*", meant a "*high performing team*" at a senior organisational level, or, an advanced stage of maturity and optimal performance. If the former, perhaps this indicated Sinita's awareness of the absence of diversity at the top of organisations. Alternatively, if the latter, she may have constructed the image as the epitome of performance, inferring that the organisational image of competence and excellence excluded people who were 'like' me or her. Individuals seek evidence to verify self-views, even if negative, just to maintain self-consistency (e.g. Swann, Chang-Schneider & McClarty, 2004). Despite being critical of the image, Sinita accommodated or acquiesced to the status quo, perhaps due to perceived/actual limited power or capacity to change this.

In another example, Nihal reflected on the unexpected and undesired attention that had been drawn to him during a meal with colleagues, including a senior Partner at Professional Services Firm. He constructed his vegetarian meal request as "*causing the problem*", to which he responded by keeping a low profile so as not to reinforce to his colleagues that he was different, thus **internalising meaning**.

> *So that made me sort of feel a little bit different in the sense that okay, people are having to accommodate my needs and I'm the one who's causing the problem here…I kept fairly quiet…I didn't want to be perceived as different to the rest of the group.* (Nihal, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Nihal was visibly Indian and the request for a vegetarian meal (which involved some detailed queries about the way the meals had been cooked) had already occurred. Therefore it could be argued that he had already demonstrated that he was 'different'. Additionally, he had proudly asserted his identity as an Indian professional in the interview.

> *I'm an Indian professional,* (who) *…doesn't eat meat for cultural/moral/religious reasons …and has faith, or has some belief in*

> *faith…I guess that's my identity in the workplace…I guess, that's why I'm different.* (Nihal, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Thus, despite his identification as an *"Indian professional"* and demonstrating his cultural/moral/religious values at dinner, it could be considered that Nihal avoided the opportunity to present and affirm his identity at this event ("*I kept fairly quiet* (after requesting a vegetarian meal)…*I didn't want to be perceived as different to the rest of the group*"). To justify this, he commented:

> *Going hungry is okay, I don't have a problem with that, it's the view that other people have of you after that experience that I have an issue with…Going hungry, that's something you can address, you can go and get something from M&S on your way back, but you can't change people's view, or people's perception of what has just happened* (Nihal, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Although self-verification theory suggests a desire to maintain the status quo even if personally unfavourable, (Swann, 1997; Swann, Chang-Schneider & McClarty, 2004), this data suggest somewhat more sophisticated decision-making surrounding identity work and ethnicity at work. Nihal consciously weighed up the temporary challenge of hunger against the long-term challenge of being perceived as *"different"*. This suggests some effort being expended to reject (or at least hide) his faith to assimilate. In another episode of internalising the negative implications of his minority ethnicity, he maintained he "*stuck to* (his) *principles*". Similarly, despite being unsettled by her interviewer's behaviour, Serena commented:

> *It was someone that I would have had to work quite closely with, and I thought, 'No, you're not ready enough, if something like that fazes you in this day and age…I don't know if I want to work with you because I don't like what I think you stand for.* (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Although Nihal and Serena did not directly refute or challenge negative inferences regarding their ethnicity, they justified their subsequent actions, constructing themselves as principled. Accommodating Identity Work involved respondents apparently acquiescing to (by not directly challenging) the perceived positioning

inferred in the identity-heightening encounter. However, assenting to externally ascribed identities did not necessarily indicate the absence of agency. As illustrated above, internalising negative meaning was not necessarily an all-encompassing embracing or acceptance, but sometimes justified by an ethical stance.

Adopting an intersectional perspective sheds further insight into factors that may lead senior minority ethnic women and men to **internalise meanings** that appear to be unfavourable. For example, in her canteen encounter, Serena may be perceived as accepting and internalising the unfavourable position in which she was placed by the manager. This is because, following his interruption, his perceived condescension and disregard of her presence, she did not directly challenge his actions. However, Serena demonstrated agency by weighing up the effect of publicly rebuking him against the impact on his black female staff member.

> *I just wanted to say to him, 'Do you know who I am? Do you know what grade I am? Do you know where I sit in this organisation? Do you know what I could do to get you in a whole load of trouble?'* (But) *I knew it would be hassle and grief for her… I knew it'd get her in trouble….I could tell by her reaction.* (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Serena observed that the black female canteen employee was "*visibly upset"* by her manager's abrupt remarks.

> *I've not been able to even go back and speak to her because I'm scared she'll get in a bother…in financial terms, that's probably more on her because she needs her job a lot more than I do.* (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

An intersectional perspective suggests why Serena chose to 'work' her identity by 'accommodating'. First, Serena had earlier indicated the importance of 'acknowledging' other minority ethnic individuals in "*menial*" jobs, making her intersecting ethnicity with seniority salient in this interaction (as previously discussed). Second, it is possible that the manager felt authorised to exert his power as her supervisor, as well as a man, over the two women. By reporting that she was "*scared"* about returning, Serena could be perceived as relinquishing her power (her very senior status in the organisation) to the canteen manager. However, Serena consciously

opted for this line of action due to her connection with the black woman as a fellow minority individual *("I will look out for people because we're the minorities….We have to … support each other"*) in conjunction with the fact that this woman may have been more dependent on her income. Serena thus demonstrated awareness of the potential class difference between them. Thus, gender (in the man speaking down to two women), ethnicity (in the affinity between the two women) and senior status (in sensitivity to differential economic needs and being protective of one's own), contributed to the situation's complexity, leading to Serena's eventual assenting to the inferred lower identity status.

Having discussed compliant and agentic types of **internalising meaning**, I will now discuss the second major theme in this final Accommodating Identity Work phase. This involved the *impact* of internalising problematic meanings on respondents. One outcome of the fear of being stereotyped or judged based on one's group membership is impaired performance (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). The data suggested that the sense of surprise followed by intense introspection may have led to individuals' subsequent dissatisfaction with themselves. For instance, in the meeting in the illustrative episode in Section 4.3.1, Indira became repetitive and chided herself for "*blabbering*" which further reduced her impact in the meeting. Serena's interview experience and reflections on her colleague's comment offered rich insight into this non-constructive aspect of **internalising meaning**.

> *I did feel that like because of his reaction and surprise, did he think that I wouldn't be as good as anyone else because of who I was? I just felt the need to try even harder…I think it made me want to go into overkill… I thought 'Serena you should be disappointed with yourself, don't look too desperate for the job because you're not, because you know you are* <u>*worthy*</u> *of it…I thought I'm going over the top here like I'm begging them for their job, and at one point thinking 'No, we're not back in slavery days where we have to keep begging them' …. you just want to do well, don't you? Because I thought his negative reaction meant that I wasn't going to be as good as the others, and I have to try* (to) *be extra extra special*. (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Here, Serena **internalised the meaning** inferred from her interviewer's surprise ("*did he think that I wouldn't be as good as anyone else because of* ***who I was****?"*). As an interviewee, her performance was pulled in multiple directions. On one hand, as an interviewee, one would want to do one's best, however, she did not want to appear to be "*too desperate… begging them for their job",* because she was not powerless (relative to "*slavery days*"), she was worthy of this job. Simultaneously, she grappled with the pressure to be "*extra extra special*" to disprove his assumption (as perceived by her) that she would "*not be as good as anyone else".* In a similar example, Serena noted her colleague's comments about not being surprised that Serena was the first to speak and act out during the restructuring meeting (by being open about seeking opportunities outside the organisation and challenging the support level available to employees during the uncertainty). Serena thought:

> (Her colleague's comments) *did prompt me to go back and think about myself… I'm going to be a bit more wary... I'm going to think more about my interaction with her and, if needs be, ask for some sort of feedback… It's made me wonder about … what characteristics of mine that I've got that don't fit in the boxes that they want for … the structure …and the organisation going forward.* (Serena, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

No longer comfortable about vouching for her behaviour, Serena **internalised meaning,** resolved to be more wary and mindful of her interaction with her colleague, and, questioned her fit within the organisation. Although there are significant benefits of heightened self-awareness for personal development, this raises the issue regarding when self-awareness becomes excessive self-monitoring that subsequently impacts on one's ability to fully fit in and develop authentic relationships with others.

Overall, Accommodating Identity Work may be construed on the surface as a subjective, reactive form of identity work. The data suggest that the first stage is often marked by an unexpected cue that triggered introspection in respondents, and several episodes were reported from a bystander perspective. This may be considered as somewhat responsive rather than proactive. However, there was also evidence of

respondents consciously assenting, as a small price to pay in return for assimilation, or, to minimise the impact on relationships and broader outcomes. The rest of this Chapter introduces identity work modes in which respondents adopted a more active stance, modifying identities and the meanings inferred about who they are through refuting, reconciling, strengthening or leveraging from their senior, gendered, ethnic identities.

5.3 Phases of 'Refuting' Identity Work

During Refuting Identity Work, individuals disputed unfavourable assumptions and reasserted themselves as senior minority ethnic men and women. Seventeen episodes were categorised in this group (representing 17% of the instances of identity work). Refuting involved asserting one's identity in response to verbal and non-verbal exclusionary practices, or, directly challenging assumptions and stereotyping about groups. In this identity work mode, although respondents demonstrated sensitivity to being positioned unfavourably (similar to Accommodating Identity Work), they also presented as 'knowing subjects', interpreting others' actions, in contrast to the bystander perspective occasionally present in Accommodating Identity Work. Refuting Identities occurred in response to direct and subtle identity challenges, in which respondents used practiced tactics to contest inferred threats, by drawing on competence or senior status. The following section describes the Refuting Identity Work phases from a **sense of expectation**, to **contesting** low expectations, leading to **refuting and reaffirmation** (Table 11).

Table 11: Refuting Identity Work example quotes

Sense of expectation	Contesting	Refute and reaffirm
He was asking me questions... 'So what is the nature of the work that you do?' So, he was now trying to quantify whether I had the…appropriate skills.	*I ... raised the point....and it was dismissed… I allowed them to dismiss it the first time, I wasn't going to allow them to do it a second time. …These are quite senior people…at that level...irrespective of what your personal views are, you should be able to identify when somebody's come up with a solution to a business problem.*	*I demonstrated that I felt confident enough in what I had to say that I wanted to say it again. So, even if they have another meeting where another ethnic person is there, that person has something to say, they may hesitate about just dismissing what the person has to say.* ***Vivian, African-Caribbean female***
True to nature, (it was) *the first thing I thought about, a very male way of preparing for a meeting… made me very conscious that, okay, I'm in an all-male environment.*	(I thought) *first I need to personally gel with this bunch, and secondly, even if I can't gel with them I need to actually do something to demonstrate to a client that I've worked with this bunch of people all my life.*	*I'm one of the subject matter persons that* (the client) *will work with… and I knew I was there for an important reason… This is what builds my brand, you know, what am I going to be famous for? Somebody who feels a bit embarrassed when risqué jokes like that comes out or…am I going to give as good as it gets, basically?* ***Bernadette, Chinese female***
You can pretty much wager that if this (immigration-related) *sort of topic is on the news, it's going to be discussed.*	*When I get on the bus in the morning… I have my potential answers prepared…So to some extent when anything happens I am ready I am expecting it and..I am going to make sure that I get across the positive aspects overlooked or underplayed.*	*We managed to get across what possibly they were choosing not to see….there were other people listening around on the outside…at least we were able to establish or destroy some myths… they have been forced to acknowledge* (alternative sides of the immigration debate). ***Ameet, Asian male***

5.3.1 Sense of expectation

In Serena's words, this phase is "*about preparing your defence…because the perception is that you're not there".* The perception that one is "*not there*" captures respondents' experiences of low representation, i.e. 'invisible' minority ethnicity in senior organisational spaces, which can constitute a threat to one's sense of significance and meaning, i.e. one's identity. A **sense of expectation** involved foreknowledge that one's intersecting identity as a senior minority man or woman may not be unquestionably embraced by others. Several respondents reported regular experiences of managing the "*perception…that* (one is) *not there".* In contrast to the other identity work modes, Refuting Identity Work was associated with a **sense of expectation** based on past experiences of identity challenges such as credibility/competency tests. For instance, Ameet who reported several episodes of Refuting Identity Work and challenging stereotypical assumptions commented *"I could have put many episodes. This episode isn't untypical*". Steve described the importance of *"managing preconceptions"*. Minority professionals often engage in self-protection or self-management strategies in navigating careers (Singh et al, 2002). Concerning identity work, past experiences appeared to influence respondents' meaning-making, as they adopted a 'knowing subject' position interpreting and explaining others' actions (in contrast to the self-questioning of Accommodating Identity Work).

A combination of past experience and current observations constituted the initial Refuting Identity Work phase. Respondents observed and interpreted several verbal and non-verbal direct and subtle behavioural cues, including the firmness of a handshake, who paid attention to one's entrance, and third parties apparently listening in on as one justified one's role to others. The **sense of expectation** in Refuting Identity Work contrasts with Accommodating Identity Work. Rather than facing an unexpected identity challenge (prompting **introspecting**), respondents observed, then accounted for, others' behaviours. For instance, in one episode, Vivian attended an emergency strategic meeting. First, she explained that she always made a point to arrive five minutes early to events to counter stereotypes regarding black

people being late. Second, she observed others' reactions as she entered, which she interpreted as others' attempts to 'place' her.

> *I said 'Good morning' and people said 'Oh, good morning', and I could see there was sort of like some speculative looks because they were trying to work out who I was.* (Vivian, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Vivian was mindful of where she sat. Past experience suggested that if she sat between empty chairs, they tended to be filled last (interpreted as others' reticence about approaching her). She therefore sat next to someone and initiated conversation. In these micro-moments, Vivian illustrated how, drawing from experience, she proactively positioned herself. She had a **sense of expectation** regarding meeting dynamics in unfamiliar spheres, managing this by arriving early, de-coding "*speculative looks*", tactically sitting in a central position and initiating a conversation with a colleague. Then:

> *I told him that I was from* (Central Function). *(Aside: In order of priorities...* Central Function *is top). ...And I could see the look on his face - he was a bit taken aback.* (Vivian, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc).

Although we cannot know what exactly prompted her colleague's reaction (or whether he was actually 'surprised'), Vivian constructed his response as surprise about who she was (i.e. her identity). Her perception was reinforced by continued questions.

> *He was asking me questions...he said 'Oh, so you're here to represent Central Function.....so what is the nature of the work that you do?' So, he was now trying to quantify whether I had the appropriate skills to be a representative for Central Function.* (Vivian, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Like Jamal's inference that clients required him to *"justify* (his) *plane ticket*" (in the illustrative episode, Section 4.3.2.), Vivian perceived her associate was "*trying to quantify"* whether she was suitably qualified for her role.

Another strand of this phase concerned advertent or inadvertent exclusionary practices, rather than direct credibility challenges. For instance, Bernadette's identity heightening episode occurred in the run up to a meeting with a "*very big client target…£10 million type opportunity".* She attributed her exclusion from the all-male team to gender differences in work styles.

> *It* (was) *like a hallway conversation, talking from here the ninth floor all the way down to the taxi rank, chatting in the taxi, no agenda, no structure in to the discussing. No one's actually prepped me about what this client's doing…that's what made me very conscious that, okay, I'm in an all-male environment.* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

Bernadette drew on experience (and stereotypes) to explain her colleagues' behaviour, attribute the behaviour to them (rather than her).

> *True to nature,* (it was) *the first thing I thought about, a very male way of preparing for a meeting….I've worked out that it's a very natural way for males to bond and talk, and prep for meeting… It is quite common.* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

In another example, Ameet's **sense of expectation** was cued by topical issues earlier in the day.

> *You can pretty much wager that if this* (immigration-related) *sort of topic is on the news, it's going to be discussed. So, when I get on the bus in the morning, I sort of predict the sort of thing that's likely to happen…So to some extent when anything happens I am ready, I am expecting it.* (Ameet, Asian male, Govt Plc)

Not every experience of Refuting Identity Work started with a **sense of expectation**. For instance, Gurditta was *surprised* to learn of his exclusion from a meeting, which he then **contested**. However, compared to the **sense of surprise** prompting introspecting during Accommodating Identity Work, a **sense of expectation** involved noting and attributing causes to others rather than oneself, which Gurditta did. This involved adopting a 'knowing subject' stance, reporting their understanding of events. Steve described his associates' "'*pull the wool over salesman' patter*," Jamal inferred his clients' seeking justification of his costs and Bernadette attributed colleagues' sexist

comments and exclusionary practices to the stress they were under. They constructed themselves as knowing what was 'really' going on despite others' attempts to fool, challenge or exclude them based on ethnic or gender status.

5.3.2 Contesting

Contesting is about directly or indirectly opposing others' views of one's identity, often with a view to changing others' perceptions of one. **Contesting** during Refuting Identity Work is differentiated from Accommodating Identity Work in which respondents were complicit (by not directly challenging) the assumptions others had of them. Cognisant of the dynamics their presence brought into the encounters, respondents often talked about managing these with previously honed responses/tactics. Sometimes, respondents specifically labelled them - Steve commented on using the Inspector Columbo persona as a "*tool*". Vivian and Amber paid attention to timing as a "*tactic*" for getting viewpoints considered in meetings.

> (After being undermined or ignored) *I can't then not come up with ideas and not do anything or else they may think I'm withdrawing or being really stroppy and sulky…if I've got ideas I should still carry on… As long as I'm not being aggressive, or negative… I think women probably always have this issue anyway. When you say something the first time you don't always get listened to…it's probably more noticeable because it's the first time I've had a women manage* (me)*… when it's a guy you can be a bit more forceful I think, but, when it's a women I think am I being too forceful?* (Amber, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

An intersectional perspective adds insight into some of the complexities involved in devising these tactics. As a woman (typically managed by men), Amber learnt to be "*forceful*" in meetings if she was being ignored, to avoid the (somewhat gendered) accusation of being perceived as "*stroppy and sulky"* if her views were not considered. Thus she learnt to 'work' her identity as a woman during meetings. However, now being managed by a woman, she was aware of the *black female* stereotype that may reconstruct her "*forceful*" meeting tactic as "*aggressive*". For Amber, **contesting** involved being aware of the different ways her behaviour may be read in conjunction

with her and others' identities, to avoid subsequent stereotyping. Others spoke more generally, but inferred that they mindfully engaged in a series of actions to obtain a specific outcome as they negotiated their identities as senior minority ethnic individuals. For example, Ameet prepared his responses to topical diversity issues:

> *When I get on the bus in the morning… I have my potential answers prepared… I am going to make sure that I get across the positive aspects overlooked or underplayed. And* (then) *you …weigh in* (to the debate). Ameet, Asian male, Govt Plc

Ameet reported several instances of Refuting Identity Work, many of which concerned interrupting and challenging colleagues' diversity-related assumptions. His senior role also provided the latitude to *"weigh into"* ongoing debates and overtly challenge others, thus asserting his identity as a senior BME individual.

Bernadette contested the exclusion, weighing up business and career implications of remaining at the margins of "*male banter"*:

> *I need to personally gel with this bunch, …even if I can't gel with them I need to actually do something to demonstrate to a client that I've worked with this bunch of people all my life at P.S.F…..So how am I going to, first, get myself psyched, so that I can banter a bit with them? And, secondly, don't stick out like a sore thumb at the client, and so that they can see that we've been working together and I can then fulfil the objective of being there and showcasing that we're a cohesive team?* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

Acknowledging *"tools"* and strategies suggests awareness of, having to engage in tactics to assert oneself as a senior minority ethnic man or woman. Bernadette emphasised fitting in (even if only superficially) to the team. She acknowledged the effort required ("*getting myself psyched*") to play the 'game' of "*showcasing that we're a cohesive team".* However, Bernadette did not challenge her colleagues, or directly refute the invisible position in which her colleagues' camaraderie and risqué jokes placed her.

> *I just laughed along, and I didn't really know how to respond or join in appropriately….I was very aware that I didn't fit in.* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

This statement is similar to Indira's meeting (reported in the Accommodating Identity Work illustrative episode):

> *I was so aware that I was not one of them…it was like 'them and us' sort of thing, like they are not going to play with me.* (Indira, Indian female, Govt Plc)

By laughing along despite her discomfort, it may be inferred that Bernadette was complicit in sustaining this exclusion (and thus engaging in Accommodating Identity Work). However, the identity work here was not interpreted as Accommodating Identity Work. Bernadette did not report surprise at her colleagues' behaviours and attributed the poor behaviour to the context rather than questioned herself. Rightly or wrongly, she recognised the 'game', empathised with her male colleagues, and excused their behaviour (rather than internalise this).

> *The reason why they were bantering, and they were talking about everything other than the client … is because they were worried, they were stressed, it's a big deal, it's a make or break type meeting… they were just dispelling the nervousness.* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

This was therefore coded as 'partial' identity work, as Bernadette did not ultimately challenge or refute the assumptions in the micro-episode. However, she successfully met her objective to fit in with the group and engage in banter and small talk in the moments leading up to the client meeting. Here, **contesting** involved awareness of, and participation in the game, by refusing to be excluded rather than challenging exclusion.

Other than Bernadette's somewhat passive approach, the data indicated that respondents contested by targeting the identity threat source directly or indirectly. This was mostly through asserting competence or senior status, rather than social

justice arguments for fairness and inclusion. Although Ameet contested identity challenges for 'just' causes, he was also careful to do this "*in an intelligent fashion"*:

> *I always do challenge…challenge has obviously got to be in an intelligent way… said in an intelligent fashion without being rude or anything like that…these issues are very complex.* (Ameet, Asian male, Govt Plc)

All other instances of **contesting** were linked to competence, and individuals using senior status as a proxy for expertise and a 'shield' to counter potential lowered expectations. Like Steve's "*numbers are my thing"* and Jamal's "*One of my skills is I'm good at cleaning up everybody else's' mess"* (in the illustrative episodes), Louise admitted she may use her 'analyst' skill as a "crutch", to **contest** the low assumptions others may have of BME women, triggering ambiguity, so she could "*just be me*".

> *To counter my thought that people might be making assumptions of me as a black woman, it's useful then for them to know that I'm an analyst because then rather than thinking I'm not intelligent, they think that, 'Ah she is intelligent'…People assume that analysts are clever…I'm a black woman and I'm an analyst, I think the assumptions around those two things are very different so, hopefully, when people meet me they won't know what to think… …Because you're unusual then my hope was that people would let go of all their assumptions and then I could just be me.* (Louise, mixed ethnicity, Govt Plc)

Gurditta also appeared to use his status to contest his exclusion from a meeting. Exclusion resulted from his non-Western name having been mis-spelt, and the organiser subsequently being unable to locate him. Gurditta said to the organiser:

> *I represent* (key function) *and* (we) *have an obvious interest in what you discuss in the policy, why was I not invited?* (Gurditta, Indian male, Govt Plc)

Although Gurditta emphasised his role, he also referred to his visibility in the senior group from which volunteers came, reasoning that the organiser could have easily determined his name from the attendee list.

> *If I put my hand up in a group of 40 people…there's no black people there…no Pakistani…I'm the only Indian in that group. I do stand out, I'm the only one.* (Gurditta, Indian male, Govt Plc)

Thus, although respondents directly contested presumptions or exclusions through seniority (as a proxy for skill and competence), experiences of invisibility and stereotyping were linked to ethnicity and/or gender, illustrating the interplay of these identity dimensions in constructing their identities as senior BME individuals . Others' seniority was also considered. As in Accommodating Identity Work, respondents expressed disappointment in senior colleagues' behaviour. Ameet commented:

> *These are people at senior level who are tasked with the responsibility of putting through and implementing the diversity policies* (Ameet, Asian male, Govt Plc)

Vivian elaborated further:

> *These are quite senior people…when you're dealing at a strategic level, I expect that you would always first and foremost put the business first. ...Irrespective of what your personal views are, you should be able to identify when somebody's come up with a solution to a business problem....whether you want to give that person credit for it or not is a different matter, but you should be able, at that level, to say 'Hold on a minute, that girl's got a point, OK, I didn't expect it to come from her, but now that she's said it, let's discuss it'.* (Vivian, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Vivian expected senior colleagues engaged in strategic decision-making to be sufficiently self-aware to recognise business solutions despite their unexpected source. Being in a roomful of twenty-odd senior white men, perhaps she was subject to implicit biases about her gender/ethnic status, which manifested as lowered value of her contribution. This is likely to happen to members of 'out-groups' (i.e. the non-dominant group) (Kandola, 2009). Women's and BME individuals' experiences of exclusion are often magnified at senior organisational levels which tend to be more homogenous and therefore more clearly defined along in-group/out-group lines

(Kanter, 1977; Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Additionally, senior context may mean more subtle and ambiguous identity challenges to BME individuals:

> *I thought the higher up I went, the less I would come across that sort of thing… It hasn't lessened, but it's become more sophisticated and more subtle.* (Vivian, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Despite the emphasis on the effort employed by respondents while contesting, there was evidence that this work was eased through colleagues' support. Vivian's team members spoke up when she was being unduly grilled by her manager in one identity-heightening episode. In the department-wide meeting, one of the other two female attendees validated her suggestion, raised for the second time after it had been initially (and in her perception obviously/visibly) discredited and dismissed without warrant. Although welcome, Ameet believed his senior white male colleague risked disfavour among his peers if he was too visible and proactive in supporting Ameet challenging negative assumptions about diversity in Govt Plc.

In summary, **contesting** involved asserting one's identity as a senior BME individual by directly or indirectly challenging the subordinate position in which individuals had been placed. This was usually through affirming one's competence or status (through seniority, rather than ethnicity or gender) however BME individuals still integrated dimensions of ethnicity and/or gender in doing this. Following contesting, respondents then successfully **refuted and reaffirmed** their identities.

5.3.3 Refute and reaffirm identities

Refuting and reaffirming involves rejecting inferred negative meanings and successfully reasserting one's intersecting ethnic, gender and senior identities in encounters. This phase highlights the favourable and adverse result of the effort engaged during **contesting**. There was satisfaction with changing others' minds about other BME individuals.

> *I think it increased the awareness...for a number of people around that table. It kind of helped to challenge the stereotype that they would have*

> *of an ethnic person… I made the first point and it was dismissed and they all knew what had happened, but then.....I raised it again, so I demonstrated that I felt confident enough in what I was, in what I had to say that I wanted to say it again. I allowed them to dismiss it the first time, I wasn't going to allow them to do it a second time. So, even if they have another meeting where another ethnic person is there, that person has something to say, they may hesitate about just dismissing what the person has to say.* (Vivian, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

> *They now knew that regardless of the colour of someone else's skin, that your capability was your capability … next time they engage with a BME, they are more likely to think 'Oh maybe there's more to this than I know'.* (Steve, mixed ethnicity male, Govt Plc)

Steve and Vivian articulated the capacity for small-scale organisational change from engaging in Refuting Identity Work. Vivian hoped that active participants and mere observers would have altered perspectives about senior BME women and men. One of the only two other female attendees endorsed Vivian's contribution after Vivian's suggestion had been quashed a *second* time, supporting Vivian's assertion that meeting participants "*all knew what had happened*".

However, satisfaction was mixed with less positive emotions at the end of such encounters. Despite successful **refuting and reaffirmation**, there was frustration.

> *There is satisfaction once you've got across your point, there is satisfaction, but sometimes there is also frustration.* (Ameet, Asian male, Govt Plc)

After challenging associates' presumptions during **contesting**, refuting and reaffirmation involved projections about the long-term impact of consistently justifying one's significance (and identity) to others. Frustration was particularly at the senior organisational levels in which Refuting Identity Work occurred (as mentioned previously).

> *It's not enough just to do the tasks, you're having to deal with people's attitudes about you doing the task so you're having to take time to explain things to people, validate what you do, whereas I think with my other colleagues, they just do a task and they just present it. That's it,*

> *they move on to the next task, whereas for myself, I do a task, I'm having to justify figures, I'm having to validate it…to demonstrate that the information is accurate and complete and that just adds to the effort, the time, the resources that goes into the task…So, in terms of scale and weight and workloads, I feel mine is greater, but, on the positive side, when it is accepted I know I've done a bloody good job so that is the plus side, but it's tiring.* (Vivian, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Ehsan described the resilience necessary for this process.

> *You have to self-manage yourself….Back up again quickly, you know, you kind of work that through. (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)*

Amber discussed not taking it personally, also attributing negative behaviours to others:

> *For me it's just not to take it personally …even if people say no or don't agree with your ideas…just basically ignore them* (laughs)… *I shouldn't see it as being a negative reflection in me … Their behaviour is not mine.* (Amber, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Refuting and reaffirming was the identity outcome following **contesting.** It involved satisfaction in proving others' assertions wrong, at the price of frustration and fatigue for some.

In summary, Refuting Identity Work involves a **sense of expectation,** drawing on past negative experiences and responding to subtle cues in unfamiliar environments, adopting a 'knowing' stance indicating familiarity with how events would 'play out'. Respondents engaged in **contesting** to refute low assumptions or exclusion. Successful **refuting and reaffirming**, involved ambivalent emotions - satisfaction from asserting one's senior minority ethnic identity tinged with frustration.

5.4 Phases of 'Reconciling' Identity Work

Reconciling Identity Work describes the identity construction process in which senior minority ethnic men and women engaged to reconstitute two or more aspects of their identities that initially appeared disparate. 'Disparate' reflects the finding that the

respondents often saw themselves as made up of parts that initially appeared different from, or even in conflict with, each other. Thirteen episodes were categorised within Reconciling Identity Work (13% of identity work episodes). Eight episodes triggering Reconciling Identity Work were related to a single event at Professional Services Firm – being nominated for a Black, Minority & Ethnic (BME) Leadership Programme held around the same time this study was conducted. Reconciling Identity Work also occurred in response to tensions or conflicts thrown up by respondents' positions as senior minority ethnic men and women in other situations, e.g. as a role model, aspiring Partner, a consultant to a senior client and a senior professional in a Mergers & Acquisition role. Accommodating and Refuting Identity Work entailed surprise or expectation then self-questioning or contesting in reaction to others' expectations about respondents. Reconciling Identity Work involved articulating incongruence, paradox or conflict of identity facets and working through it, primarily for personal insight, rather than in response to others. The following section describes how, following a **sense of paradox or conflict**, respondents **reconciled** perceived tensions or **discounted** dimensions that did not 'fit', thus **reconstructing** identities to create a coherent whole (Table 12).

Table 12: Reconciling Identity Work example quotes

Sense of paradox/conflict	Reconciling or discounting the apparent paradox	Reconstruct identities
I got the email saying…we'd like to invite you to a Leadership course, but it's for black and minority ethnic people….I don't like being singled out for being a woman or for being an Indian woman, or for being a minority ethnic.	*I can't change being a woman* (but) *as a female, I don't feel different to the boys in the office. I am …as aggressive as anyone else…I'm not a rose… being a woman now, you can still have it. What I see less of is minority ethnic people in senior positions… I can't necessarily change people's unconscious bias about minority ethnics.*	*It's* (about) *understanding and being comfortable with the fact that actually, Devi you are different, and there isn't much you can do about it. So I chose the BME* (Leadership Programme) *over the women's one.* ***Devi, Indian female***
'Black and minority ethnic leadership programme conference call' clearly, as soon as you go into a conference call like that you're like, well okay, fine, I am different here! There's not going to be another white colleague of mine actually participating in this call…we are being treated differently… if we say no, we're not going to, there's going to be like, 'Well, we're giving you an opportunity to do something about being different'… And if we do go on it then we are different.	*Whilst* (my Asian manager) *might think I'm not different and I've been brought and raised in this country, I know I'm different! I know that there are differences between me and other people that I interact with on a day-to-day basis…from a cultural and a behavioural angle.*	*The reason I'm going* to (the BME Leadership Programme) *is because…the leadership think I'm a potential partner candidate, I'm a professional Indian and that's why I'm going on this thing.* ***Nihal, Indian male***
I think that he'll be surprised I'm female …because he's quite senior … I will not be what he's expecting to see.	*My personality and how personable I am is probably one of my biggest strengths…*(I) *can use that to disarm or diffuse what could otherwise be a really difficult or tense situation…..*(So) *they specifically wheeled me into this… we need to sort of leave him with that warm, cosy feeling.*	*Once I got in there I was able to … just be myself.* ***Amarachi, Black African female***

5.4.1 Sense of paradox/conflict

Reconciling Identity Work began with respondents experiencing and articulating a conflict, tension or paradox raised by an identity-heightening event. In this thesis, a 'paradox' refers to a situation in which respondents considered two or more identity dimensions with apparently opposing features in a given context. Respondents articulated this paradox by showing awareness of the potential challenges they faced if they were to simultaneously enact identities that had been made salient within the episode (such as *"minority ethnic"* individual and *"leader"*).

A **sense of** identity **conflict** was associated with identities to which individuals, in the main, ascribed. Respondents appeared to self-identify (or sought to self-identify) with a given identity category (e.g. 'role model'), even if that identity was apparently incongruent with the current way in which they saw themselves (e.g. 'senior black woman'). However the **sense of paradox/conflict** appeared to stem from a perception that unwarranted attention was paid to a specific identity dimension salient in a given episode. The **sense of conflict** was experienced in two broad scenarios – concerning perceived fit between individual and current or future job demands as senior professionals, and, being ascribed a specific identity ("BME leader"). I will first describe experiences relating to conflict regarding perceived fit between the individuals and their senior role requirements, then present the sense of paradox associated with the BME Leadership Programme afterwards.

Cultural upbringing and religious beliefs vis-à-vis work-related demands accounted for some of the conflict faced. For instance, Devi, referring to her Jainism faith, acknowledged "*treating everyone with respect and equally…can be quite difficult to manage when you are in a stressful situation, you've got deadlines, and you've got millions riding on it* ". Bernadette's **sense of** identity **conflict** was heightened as she completed a cultural competency questionnaire challenging her to work *towards* integrating religion with work, rather than keep them separate (as she had in the past, like Devi).

> *This BME survey's … all about looking at your cultural assets. … I actually had quite a long way to go…in comparison to what really successful Black and Minority Ethnic…leaders do... I'm just so busy being a mum, being a wife, being a career woman… there are lots of things like religion … that I have actually dropped down the sidelines… I've dropped religion, I've sacrificed my social circle, I've sacrificed my hobbies, so lots of things that I've actually left by the wayside. …So* (when completing the questionnaire), *I went through like very quick disbelief … 'Oh my God, what am I going to do, bringing religion to work*?*'* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

Bernadette confessed she had successfully managed previous identity conflicts by relinquishing incompatible identity dimensions, having "*dropped down the sidelines*" religion, friends and hobbies in the process of constructing her "*mother"*, "*wife"* and "*career woman"* identities. The cultural competency survey served as an identity trigger, prompting her to rethink what it meant to be a "*really successful Black and Minority Ethnic leader*" and challenged her to consider reintroducing religion into her work identity if, indeed, she also wanted to be like other "*really successful Black and Minority Ethnic leaders*". An intersectional perspective sheds further light on these tensions. Although Devi referred to fit between her job responsibilities and her faith as a conflict source, there is also a masculine/feminine tension in her statement "*treating everyone with respect and equally…when… you've got millions riding on it "*. In contrast, Bernadette's gender was strongly implicated in constructing her current "*mother"*, "*wife"* and "*career woman"* identities. It was integrating her religion (which she associated with her culture) into who she is at work that appeared to be the source of conflict *("Oh my God, what am I going to do, bringing religion to work?"*). This highlights the career-related complexities minority ethnic women may face. Instead of, or in addition to, managing gender-related work/life conflicts, these women also have to manage conflicts around religion and other culturally-derived values (e.g. Kamenou, 2008).

Another example of conflict between self and role fit occurred in an interpersonal encounter. Amarachi experienced a **sense of paradox/conflict** as she prepared to meet a client with whom she had cultivated a relationship solely via email.

> *Just before the meeting I thought 'This guy has never met me…He's been dealing with partners and directors and, in my tax, I'm his only contact … I think that he'll be surprised I'm female …because he's quite senior … I will not be what he's expecting to see'. It was immediately gender; it wasn't my race. Then as I walked up I thought, 'Yeah, he might expect my race because of my name,' but it was specifically my gender.* (Amarachi, Black African female, P.S.F.)

Amarachi drew on her intersecting identities as a senior black woman as she anticipated the potential gap between who she was and the client's expectations. She evaluated her evident minority ethnicity ("*He might expect my race because of my name*") against her invisible gender (they had had only email contact) in a senior context ("*He's been dealing with partners and directors*"). For Amarachi, while her name may have been a cue to her minority ethnicity for her client, the senior context in which the client was meeting her as a functional expert and representative, signalled a potential disconnection or identity gap between his expectations and her gender (plus senior) identities ("*I will not be what he's expecting to see*"). Although Amarachi attributed the **sense of paradox** to her invisible gender in the senior context, it could be argued that (African) ethnicity also contributed to rendering her gender 'invisible' (Amarachi has a *Nigerian woman's* name).

Issues of fit and congruence in prompting a **sense of paradox/conflict** illustrate the influence of structural and interpersonal cues (e.g. religion, demographic distribution in senior contexts, perceived client expectations) in prompting identity work for senior black and Asian men and women. However, although individuals experience identity work triggers 'out there', the focus here is on individuals' reactions to externally-perceived and/or internally-motivated identity cues and the effort put into constructing a sense of self in response.

Having described the **sense of conflict** concerned with perceived fit between the individuals and their senior role requirements, I will present the second category of experiences relating to this jolt sensation - **the sense of conflict/paradox** regarding the BME Leadership Programme at Professional Services Firm.

Much insight into the **sense of paradox/conflict** during the start of Reconciling Identity Work was gleaned from episodes relating to the BME Leadership Programme. Of the respondents who discussed this, many experienced the jolt sensation prompting identity work when they received email messages about the event, discussed attendance with colleagues, or participated in programme briefings. Before attending the briefing call, one respondent thought:

> *The words itself, 'Black and Minority Ethnic Leadership Programme conference call' clearly, as soon as you go into a conference call like that you're like, 'Well okay, fine, I am different here!' There's not going to be another white colleague of mine actually participating in this call.* (Nihal, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Nihal's quote illustrates the perceived gap created between him and his white colleagues by attending the briefing call. The emphasis on difference ("*clearly, as soon as you go into a conference call like that you're like, "Well okay, fine, I am different here!"*) raised an identity dilemma, causing discomfort with the distinction made between him and "*another white colleague*". The jolt associated with the **sense of conflict** was powerful enough to prompt some to consider not attending the course.

> *I thought, 'BME?..I'm not sure I necessarily like being identified with that tag'… I wasn't very receptive to it…And then I thought, 'How do I decline a course?'* (Amarachi, Black African female, P.S.F.)

And:

> *When I got the invite for the* (BME) *Leadership course, I was really like 'Hmm.... I don't think I like this…. I don't like being singled out for being a woman or for being an Indian woman, or for being a minority ethnic'… I was like 'Actually, do I just cancel this, because I'm going to be outside of my comfort zone?'* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

Like Nihal's statement, the quotes above illustrate the jolt sensation of "*being identified with the tag*" or "*being singled out*" as a *"BME"* or *"Indian woman"*. They also suggest that ascription from the nominations generated a sufficient level of conflict for individuals to consider distancing themselves from it. Three (of six

respondents who reported episodes about the event) talked about declining the course (although no one actually did).

During the interview, Devi presented herself as a high-performer on fast-track promotion to Director. However, her response to the programme nomination suggested she felt she needed to identify with being a particular type of leader.

> *I got the email saying that you've been highly graded and you've been recognised as a potential leader and so, therefore, we'd like to invite you to a Leadership course, - but it's for black and minority ethnic people. It wasn't a but, it was a Black and Minority Ethnic Leadership course….it was the first time in my career that … someone has explicitly said it* (i.e. referred to her ethnicity). (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

On one hand, the email supported Devi's identity as a high achiever ("*highly graded…potential leader*"). On the other hand, the email also ascribed to her an identity to which (according to her) no previous reference had been made, in her decade with the Firm. Devi's account illustrated her **sense of paradox** – she inserted a 'but' between 'Leadership' and 'BME', reflecting her discomfort that the terms were linked. Amarachi also inferred there was unwarranted distinction between "*general*" leaders and BME Leaders ("*If nobody thought me good enough to put me on the* (generic) *Management Leadership Programme, why am I on the BME* (Programme)?" Nihal further articulated the 'catch-22' situation in which he felt he, and other nominees, found themselves by being nominated for the BME Leadership Programme.

> *I'm* (perceived as) *different enough, so I'm going on to this programme…if we say 'No, we're not going', there's going to be like, 'Well, we're giving you an opportunity to do something about being different'; and if we do go on it, then we are different.* (Nihal, Indian male P.S.F.)

These comments illustrate the unease associated with the **sense of paradox** respondents experienced. They also reflect the catch-22 situation organisations may face in defining/ascribing a socially- and individually-constructed category such as

minority ethnicity to individuals, when trying to manage the inequality in outcomes stemming from such social constructions through positive action programmes.

Adopting an intersectional perspective to examine the dynamics at play adds further insight into this. The significance of this **sense of paradox/conflict** is underlined considering the context in which it was played out. These were high-performing senior managers in a world-leading professional services firm, selected by the Leadership team on the basis of their business accomplishments, who considered declining an opportunity to develop and raise their profiles. The value of ethnicity in the context of seniority gained currency for the Leadership team. However, the notion that one's ethnicity constituted a 'basis' for leadership potential was a source of tension for the individuals. For all the BME Leadership Programme nominees in this study (bar one), the data suggest the identity conflict emanated from a perceived divide, or disparity between the 'BME' and 'leader' identity labels. Devi confessed she would be "*outside* (her) *comfort zone*" if she knew she was "*singled out for being a woman or for being an Indian woman, or for being a minority ethnic*". There were however no concerns in the data about being "*singled out*" as a "*potential leader*", (or as a woman). This is likely due to the high status accorded the 'leader' identity in organisations (juxtaposed against the low or invisible status accorded the "Black and Minority Ethnic" identity) in many organisations.

Sometimes, however, respondents also talked about a **sense of conflict/paradox** thrown up by identities with which they did *not* so strongly identify. Typically, this latter type of conflicts reflected respondent's awareness of stereotypes to which they were not conforming, or, to which they were concerned about conforming. For example, Amber saw herself as a "*firm manager*" but struggled with enacting this, in case it reinforced the "*aggressive black woman*" stereotype. Devi talked about the masculine Mergers & Acquisitions culture and the challenges with enacting stereotypically feminine attributes in that context.

> *In M&A, it's very male dominated… you have to be a strong person, because you are trying to lead a client and a team there to an end result*

> *…but, being a woman…you're supposed to be caring and nurturing… to be the same as the guys means that you potentially lose some of what makes you a woman.* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

Amber felt constrained with regards to exhibiting a 'firm' management style because of stereotyping associated with intersecting ethnicity and gender. By choosing to identify as an 'M&A team leader', Devi was aware she would be restricted in her ability to fulfil the gender stereotype of being "*caring and nurturing*". Both examples illustrate how some respondents experienced tensions from identity categories to which they belonged, but with associated meanings to which they did not fully subscribe.

Additionally, not everyone who received the BME Leadership Programme nomination expressed a **sense of conflict,** prompting reconciling. Sam acknowledged surprise at being nominated, but this surprise appeared to be from his lack of knowledge about the course and the impact such a course would have on majority ethnic colleagues, rather than discomfort with being ascribed 'BME Leader'.

> *I was quite surprised because I've never heard of that programme … I don't think it's common knowledge that it does exist….I found it strange that there would be such a programme in the first place. I thought it might create some ill feelings among people who weren't eligible for that course, i.e. not from a BME background.* (Sam, Chinese male, P.S.F.)

Sam's relatively muted response to the nomination may have been associated with the fact that he did not necessarily identify with being a minority ethnic professional ("*Most of the time I don't see myself as an ethnic minority"*). Thus, the same identity-heightening event did not necessarily prompt work or effort towards reconciling disparate identities for every nominee.

Overall, experiencing a **sense of paradox/conflict** prompted individuals to reflect on, and, articulate the apparent incongruence between identity dimensions under consideration. This paradox was thrown up in experiences relating to fit between individual and 'senior' status demands such as management style and decision-making on high-value projects, and being ascribed as 'BME Leader'. Paradox or conflict was

experienced in contexts that would appear to be favourable or affirming for senior minority ethnic individuals such as being a 'leader' or 'role model' (as presented in the illustrative episode in Section 4.3.3 in the previous chapter). Although apparently favourable or affirmative, these identity labels were constructed in conjunction with other identity dimensions, such that terms like 'BME Leader' and 'black role model' can have more ambivalent meanings. This ambivalence thus needed to be 'worked through', triggering the second phase of Reconciling Identity Work, **reconciling or discounting the apparent paradox**.

5.4.2 Reconciling or discounting the apparent paradox

The second phase of Reconciling Identity Work entails reconciling or dismissing the apparent paradox articulated in the preceding phase. Respondents engaged in sense-making tactics to 'fit' apparently disparate elements of their identities into a cohesive whole or particular context. This happened in two ways, requiring some 'work' on the part of individuals. Individuals considered, then **reconciled** (i.e. found an acceptable way of dealing with) identities that were apparently opposed to each other. Alternatively, they considered, then **discounted** the apparent conflict (i.e. considered it not important or relevant). **Reconciling** paradoxes was the primary way in which respondents made sense of the identity conflicts they experienced. **Reconciling** involved seeing things differently, with a sense of realisation and raised awareness. In contrast to the realisation and raised awareness of **reconciling the apparent paradox**, acceptance was associated with **discounting the paradox,** and, is discussed later in this section. Both tactics, however, served to reduce the perceived incongruence experienced in the episode. In this section, I first present data on sense-making through **reconciling**, and then present sense-making through **discounting**. I also apply an intersectional perspective to show how different identity strands were manipulated (through **reconciling** or **discounting**) to make sense of the apparent paradox in some episodes.

As presented in the illustrative episode in Section 4.3.3, **reconciling** involved working towards enhanced understanding regarding individuals' understanding about being a

senior minority ethnic woman or man. Louise reconciled her 'role model' and 'senior black woman' identities. She systematically analysed her perspective on the use of different "*labels*", and began to see things differently as she challenged the extent to which she was consistent in applying her principles across contexts and identity categories. She re-evaluated her comfort with, and, approach to, using labels or identity categories such as "*analyst*", "*black woman*" and "*role model*". Similarly, Ehsan recounted an identity-heightening episode in which he saw himself through the eyes of an Indian male subordinate, acknowledging the likelihood that the younger Indian man saw him as more than 'just' a line manager.

> *I think he sees me as a role model, but I didn't know that until recently. I just thought he saw me as his line manager, but I can see now…* (that) *people will look at you when you're different and say 'Oh, if you can do it*...(so can I)*'.* (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Ehsan reconciled 'just being' a line manager with being a role model. Like Louise, he experienced heightened awareness relating to his identity as a senior Indian man. This also involved considering the additional responsibility of being seen as a role model by junior colleagues.

> *It feels a little bit uncomfortable, because I don't mind being responsible for my hopes and aspirations, that's like fine, but to be responsible for somebody else's hopes and aspirations, or at least have that influence over that…* (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Although neither Louise nor Ehsan mentioned this, both started to reconstruct their identities as role models in response to relationships with people with whom they both shared intersecting (gender and ethnic) identities. This raises the question (the answer to which is beyond this thesis' scope) regarding the extent to which affinity strength (represented by multiple shared identities) is a motivator for working through such identity conflicts.

Another illustration of enhanced understanding after working through the fit between self and one's senior role, was Bernadette's attempt to reconcile her culture and ethnicity with a Partner identity. Bernadette was aware of how her intersecting

ethnicity and gender influenced her aversion to self-promotion. Reflecting on early career experiences, she recognised changes would need to be made in order to embrace her 'potential Partner' self-definition.

> C*olleagues who first joined with me in the graduate programme…the white males would have had no problem on day one saying that 'I'm here to be a partner one day'… In Oriental Asian culture … it's not something that you actually announce to people…it's just seen as being really rude and proud…I think Asian women specifically expect to be recognised for their efforts. I think this is not only gender-specific, I think it's ethnicity… It has taken me ten years…before I feel comfortable in publicly saying that, yes, I want to be a partner.* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

Bernadette reflected on the ten years it had taken to embrace the 'rules' of the Partnership 'game', and the role she believed gender and ethnicity played in enabling some groups to take part (white male colleagues) while constraining others (Oriental Asian women). Women often have to actively engage in self-presentation tactics to get ahead in the professional services (Ibarra, 1999; Singh et al, 2002). In this study, an intersectional perspective draws attention to the additional influence of ethnicity and culture in self-presentation in the professions. For instance, two Asian men commented on the reserved and non-confrontational cultural/behavioural norms of the Indian/Asian community. Additionally, three black women (but no Asian woman) talked about fears of being overly-assertive. This suggests more sophisticated consideration of the interplay between ethnicity, gender and the implications for senior positions may offer insight into how and when different groups will engage in particular self-presentation tactics.

Bernadette was prompted by a questionnaire to reassess her "*cultural assets*" as she sought to become a "*black and minority ethnic leader*". Thus, she began to realise how her ethnicity and culture could begin to play an enabling role as she sought to define herself as an organisational leader.

> *Growing up in a foreign environment, I've learnt… to fit in, but then that was alright when I was executing work, working for others, delivering*

> *things as a team. But when I started leading people … I see, well, people are very different even though there are white leaders and they're male, for example. They're all famous for very different things …*(I now have to consider) *so what is your brand? What are you going to be famous for?* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

Early in her career, Bernadette learnt to *"fit in"*, which suited her as she was *"executing work"*. However, as she started *"leading people"* she needed to articulate her brand. Therefore, time (represented by Bernadette's progression through the organisational hierarchy towards leadership) affected her ethnic and cultural 'currency'. Additionally, gender and ethnicity changed significance as Bernadette's career developed. At the beginning of her career, she differentiated herself from her white male colleagues through modesty, aligning with her combined gender and ethnic identity. This modest, humble and non-assertive style suited her then, but not now, as she embraces the 'leader' identity. Now, comparing herself against white male leaders, she reappraised the situation and sought points of affinity with a (white) group with whom she shares the 'leader' identity.

Having discussed the sense-making tactic of **reconciling the apparent paradox** and reappraising the situation, I now present findings relating to **discounting the paradox**, involving working through conflict with a degree of acceptance (rather than the raised awareness from **reconciling the apparent paradox**).

In one example, Devi adopted a relatively angst-free approach as she discussed resolving potential incompatibilities between social/informal work demands and her faith. She **discounted** her religious identity because she perceived that practicing her faith was incongruent with the demands her profession placed on her. Two aspects of working life – the cut throat M&A culture in which she operated, and the social expectations of professional services (e.g. after hours client meetings) meant she did not feel fully able to strictly adhere to the tenets of her faith.

> *I'm quite happy to sit down and eat a steak and I'm quite happy to go out and have a glass of wine, and to do things that aren't necessarily what I should be doing. ...You will meet people that are very devout and*

> *practice. Now great for them but it just doesn't work for me.* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

Compared to Govt Plc, P.S.F respondents indicated that out-of-hours socialising with colleagues and clients was very much part of their daily lives, becoming increasingly important as they progressed through the hierarchy. **Discounting the conflict** may have been Devi's only option in the face of significant structural determinants on her identity, such as religion and profession. There was some evidence of pragmatic acceptance (*"Now great for them but it just doesn't work for me"…"I'm quite happy …to do things that aren't necessarily what I should be doing"*). Although Devi acknowledged that discounting the religious dimension of her identity was not without conflict; she justified it was necessary to *"get a job done".*

I now present how both **reconciling** and **discounting** tactics were engaged, and adopt an intersectional perspective to add further insight into this Reconciling Identity Work phase. One example comes from Amarachi's identity-heightening episode as she anticipated a client meeting. As discussed previously, Amarachi was mindful her client may perceive 'incongruence' between her gender and her senior status *("He's been dealing with Partners and Directors… I think that he'll be surprised I'm female …because he's quite senior").* Implicit in this is the assumption that the context in which her client had been operating (in the higher organisational hierarchy) made her gender as a (senior) woman salient. Amarachi then discounted her ethnicity as salient because she had established email contact with the client, and reasoned "*he might expect my race because of my* (African) *name*". Having acknowledged this potential conflict between gender and senior status, Amarachi reflected on her role in the meeting.

> *My personality and how personable I am, is probably one of my biggest strengths…*(I) *can use that to disarm or diffuse what could otherwise be a really difficult or tense situation… People feel that you're invested and hence it's easier for them to just warm and all their guards drop...(So) they specifically wheeled me into this…we're having difficulties getting this guy to pay…we need to sort of leave him with that warm, cosy feeling.* (Amarachi, Black African female, P.S.F.)

This excerpt was coded as a **reconciling** sense-making tactic. This is because the data suggest that, having considered her gender may be incongruent within the context (from the client's experience of "*dealing with* (male) *Partners and Directors*"), Amarachi reintroduced gender into the situation by referring to personal attributes that would be useful to address the meeting's objectives. Terms such as "*personable*", "*warm*" and "*cosy*" suggest a communal style; a cooperative, facilitative relationship-oriented approach to business, more often associated with stereotypically female attributes (Powell et al, 2002).

Another example of how intersecting identities are accounted for during reconciling and discounting apparent paradoxes can be drawn from Devi's response to being nominated for both the BME Leadership and the Women's Leadership programmes. Devi engaged in both **reconciling** and **discounting** in her attempts to resolve the identity dilemmas raised by the joint nomination. Her interview excerpts offered insight into the tactics of reconciling and discounting various identity dimensions in turn as she made sense of her intersecting identity as a senior Indian woman. Devi's transcript also illustrated how gender, religion and ethnicity held different implications *in the context of* her partnership aspirations (i.e. being senior) within the M&A business function, which she consequently managed differently. Following her joint nomination to the BME and Women's Leadership Programmes, she initially reacted against "*being differentiated for being a woman or being Indian*". However, she then admitted she had stronger reactions against one identity group over the other, referring to her "*bias against being a minority ethnic* (rather) *than being a female*". The data suggested this 'bias' resulted from Devi's parallel, ongoing analysis of the perceived extent to which minority gender and ethnicity status were constrained by the work environment and her comfort with this. Devi mindfully weighed up gender against ethnicity.

> *What kind of course do I want to go on, which is going to completely take me out of what I'm good at, and what I'm known for, and that's being a strong woman, very good at what she does…Which one do I think is going to benefit me more?…In M&A,* (women) *are not*

> *stereotypical at all of what the norm would be….I didn't think that I'd get as much from* (the women's) *course than I would the BME one, because I think the BME one would push me out of my comfort zone….I didn't identify so much with the female one…* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

With regards to gender, Devi acknowledged the tension between stereotypical gender assumptions and the M&A culture, but reinforced her identity as a 'woman in M&A' by **differentiating** herself from other (non-M&A) women (**differentiation** was associated with Affirming Identity Work; this was thus coded under both identity work modes). This excerpt was also coded as **discounting** within Reconciling Identity Work because Devi reasoned that gender was not personally relevant, considering her career aspirations. She therefore discounted gender as a salient identity dimension as she reconstructed her identity as a senior minority ethnic woman. Having evaluated and analysed the extent to which her gender contributed to her career success, she discounted it as inconsequential as she was as aggressive as "*the boys*", and, described as a "*bulldog*" by clients. She compared this to the perceived restrictions of her minority ethnic status, admitting "*being a woman now, you can still have it; what I see less of is minority ethnic people in senior positions"*. The data suggest that, relative to ethnicity, gender may not have been a meaningful identity dimension in Devi's identity work as a senior Indian woman. By bringing ethnicity into the foreground (through the BME Programme), differences between these identity dimensions became exaggerated, with gender-related challenges receding and apparently discounted. However, despite discounting gender as unproblematic in defining herself as a senior minority ethnic woman, the phrases she used suggested gender *was* likely a factor with which she had (consciously or subconsciously) grappled, as she referred to masculine attributes, such as affiliating herself with "*the boys*", being tough, aggressive, and relishing clients calling her "*bulldog*".

Concerning ethnicity, Devi engaged in comparatively less effort to work through any conflict using **reconciling or discounting** tactics. She admitted to having a strong reaction against seeing herself as a minority ethnic person. Perhaps this discomfort (which Devi appeared to find challenging to articulate as I had to probe deeply), was

because she perceived that, unlike the gender restrictions she faced (which she could counter by being like one of "*the boys*"), her ethnicity may well be a hurdle she was unable to fight against or deny as a barrier to her successful career progression. Perhaps the incongruence (and the degree to which she felt she could demonstrate agency through identity reconciliation) between her identities as a minority ethnic individual and a senior professional, may have been too substantial to **reconcile**. Compared to other respondents, Devi subsequently made little effort to **reconcile** ethnicity with the 'senior' or 'leader' identity dimensions. Therefore, this was coded as a 'partial' instance of identity work.

The preceding pages described how respondents **reconciled and/or discounted** apparent paradoxes while making meaning of episodes that raised the salience of their intersecting identities as senior minority ethnic women and men. The focus so far has been on individuals' drive to reduce dissonance through **discounting** and/or **reconciling**. However, having emphasised individuals' agency in managing paradoxes, it is important to acknowledge the contextual influence on sense-making. This was particularly evident when respondents attempted to resolve the paradox raised by nomination to the BME Leadership Programme and considered the implications of attending or not. Ehsan positioned his attendance in the following way:

> *Our leadership team* (has) *picked out the best performing level fours in the business, and they've said 'We're going to try and help you become leaders in our business'.* (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Additionally, Nihal commented on the message that the Firm's "*leadership team*" would receive if a 'potential leader' turned down a 'leadership development' opportunity (or, as Nihal described it, "*the opportunity to do something about being different*"). Taken together, these quotes suggest the nominees had been positioned by their organisational leaders (a very powerful group) as a specially-selected elite group of minority ethnic potential leaders, perhaps guiding their sense-making towards accepting rather than rejecting the ascribed BME Leader identity. Thus, organisational context (represented by the Firm's Leadership) appeared to be an

additional source of influence on whether individuals felt enabled or constrained to enact (by attending) or discount (by ignoring) their ascribed 'BME Leader' identity.

Following the sense-making tactics discussed in this section, the final Reconciling Identity Work phase, **reconstructing** identities, is attained.

5.4.3 Reconstruct identities

After a **sense of paradox/conflict**, respondents engaged in **reconciling and/or discounting** tactics to resolve the paradox, and then moved to the final Reconciling Identity Work phase, **reconstructing identities**. Here, the word 'reconstruct' is used to reflect respondents' metaphorically fitting identity dimensions together to re-build a coherent identity. Reconstructing identities also meant normalising the incongruence, with individuals concluding with statements such as "*difference does not mean bad*" (Amarachi in acknowledging the need for *"differential investment in BME Leaders"*) and "*it's just the rules of the game*" (presented by Ehsan in response to his integrating British and Indian cultures for business benefit).

Primarily, Reconciling Identity Work led to creating new, meaningful, cohesive identities from the apparently disparate identity dimensions raised by the ascribed BME leader title, or more generally, concerning fit with responsibilities as a senior minority ethnic person. For instance Louise (in the illustrative episode in Section 4.3.3) redefined what it meant to be a "*black role model*". The quote below illustrates the 'work' Nihal engaged from first seeing himself as *"coloured"* to *"professional Indian"* in response to the BME Leadership programme.

> *Initially it was like, well, okay, I'm coloured and so therefore I'm going on this programme, full stop. But then I read a bit deeper into it, that the reason I'm going into this is because I've been nominated for it, the leadership think I'm a potential partner candidate, that's why they're sending me on something like this. …I'm a professional Indian and that's why I'm going on this thing! Yeah, yeah.* (Nihal, Asian male, P.S.F.)

Nihal initially interpreted the nomination solely based on his minority ethnic status (*"full stop"*). Reading "*deeper into it*" (with the Leadership team's influence) he viewed

himself as a potential partner. Finally, Nihal integrated or reconciled the two identity dimensions – ethnicity and 'potential Partner' status. The result was a reconstructed identity as a "*professional Indian*", which he enthusiastically proclaimed.

For Ehsan, having indicated discomfort with the responsibility of being seen as a role model and feeling accountable for the younger Indian man's future (as discussed under **reconciling the apparent paradox**), he reconstructed himself as a 'potential leader'.

> *But then* (being a role model) *is not really that different to being the leader, you know? So you're a leader, you're leading in the business and leading the market and you're leading the people, which is what I do. So, I just lead in that slightly different way with him, I guess, than maybe some of the others.* (Ehsan, Asian male, P.S.F.)

Ehsan reconstructed the challenging (in his opinion) 'role model' identity by comparing it to the more appealing 'leader' identity, highlighting its business relevance ("*leading the business...market…and people*") redefining himself as a leader who 'leads differently' with minority ethnic subordinates.

Reconciling Identity Work did not always end in respondents *explicitly* articulating the reconstitution of disparate identity parts into cohesive identities. For instance, after acknowledging a potential identity conflict and engaging in **reconciling and discounting**, Amarachi described reaching a resolution by "*parking*" her anxieties about gender in the final moments before the client meeting:

> *As soon as I walked in there, all those reservations I had were not there. I'd somehow managed to park them…Once I got in there I was able to put that aside and just be myself.* (Amarachi, Black African female, P.S.F.)

By 'parking' her reservations, Amarachi suggested she had perhaps considered, and then *discounted,* her gender as irrelevant. Additionally, 'being herself' suggests an unchanged, i.e. non-reconstructed identity. However, the data suggest reconstruction *did* take place (prompting this to be coded under **reconstruct** identities). As discussed

in the previous section, Amarachi **reconciled** the paradox she felt, by drawing on her personality to address the business objectives.

> *My personality and how personable I am, is probably one of my biggest strengths…They specifically wheeled me into this…we're having difficulties getting this guy to pay…we need to sort of leave him with that warm, cosy feeling. (*Amarachi, Black African female, P.S.F.)

By drawing on her gender and repositioning it as a resource to facilitate the client relationship, Amarachi engaged in a form of identity work in which she re-constructed (i.e. re-built) her identity as a senior female professional particularly equipped to meet the meeting objectives. Having begun with a concern the client would be surprised she was female, Amarachi concluded the identity work process by drawing on personal (feminine) attributes, integrating and reconciling this into her purpose for meeting the client, thus, implicitly reconstructing her gender and senior status to have new meaning and purpose in that context. Thus, perhaps, 'parking' became possible after she had successfully engaged in effort to *reconcile* paradoxes and *reconstruct* her identity in the meeting.

In summary, Reconciling Identity Work started with individuals acknowledging a **sense of paradox/conflict** in multiple, intersecting identity dimensions with apparently disparate parts. They worked through these tensions by engaging in sense-making tactics of **reconciling or discounting the apparent paradox**. For example, for some BME Leadership Programme respondents, the appeal of being seen as a 'potential leader' was personally counter-weighted against being labelled as a 'BME individual'. This way, the minority ethnic men and women often reconciled disparate identity dimensions, which sometimes led to creating coherent **reconstructed** identities from the integrated dimensions. Compared to the identity wok modes previously described (Accommodating and Refuting modes), Reconciling Identity Work demonstrates a shift in the continuum away from constraining and prescriptive identities imposed on respondents, towards liberating and self-determining identities.

5.5 Phases of 'Affirming' Identity Work

Affirming Identity Work describes the identity construction process in which the meanings attached to senior minority ethnic individuals' identities were reinforced and strengthened, rather than qualitatively changed or re-constructed (as in Reconciling Identity Work in the preceding section). The word 'Affirming' reflects the finding that the goal of this identity work process was to strongly support a particular configuration of intersecting identities. Thirty-one episodes were categorised within Affirming Identity Work phases (31% of identity work episodes). Several Affirming Identity Work episodes involved respondents seeing or being seen as role models, which appeared to be particular sources of self-affirmation when intersecting identities were shared between role models and protégés. Affirming Identity Work was primarily triggered externally, by context (rather than anticipated by individuals), with identities heightened when respondents noticed demographic cues, such as being one of the few minority ethnic people in a roomful of senior colleagues or noticing another individual with whom one shared demographic characteristics. An initial **sense of connection or differentiation** accompanied scanning for demographic cues, which occurred in large group settings (such as noting the demographic composition in a group) or specific interpersonal contexts (such as meeting someone similar). This involved positioning or placing oneself and others with regards to the salient demographic features. Through ongoing comparison and differentiation, respondents **inferred identity worth**, resulting in stronger constructions of self. The following section describes how respondents observed and elaborated on points of affinity or difference in their surroundings, resulting in **reaffirmed** identities (Table 13).

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Table 13: Affirming Identity Work example quotes

Sense of connection or difference	Inferring identity worth	Reaffirmed/Reinforced
I am a British born Asian from Wolverhampton… and I think to myself I'm never going to be a partner here…. And he said 'Oh, by the way, my name is Deepak, I was born in Wolverhampton… and I'm Indian obviously, and I'm a partner'…I was…dumbfounded…Now there's….someone that I closely identify with.	*He'd been on the same* (Partner) *journey that I want to go on.*	*It's possible, but it's not easy, but possible - not easy is better than not possible, not easy. So it kind of gives you the light you need to shine through.* ***Ehsan, Indian male***
I'm a Black man in (UK city), *I'm almost unique...an oddity…But for the first time in a long time, I felt as though.... there are people like me.*	*Here was this woman, part-time, kids... breaking the mould...She was an example of someone who could achieve… If Tamara can do it and Steve can do it... I can do it.*	*I felt great. I felt as though I was going to be part of this line of succession of successful BME staff...it was probably the best professional feeling I've had.* ***Sean, African-Caribbean male***
So you walk into a room of people, and you can see someone's introduced, and they're thinking 'Well, (here comes) the big white guy from London'. I walk in and you can see on people's faces, 'Who is he? Is he the global lead?'	*It really helps you connect… they see you as one of them* (in India).	(The team in India)*…they just trust you more …the ability to motivate them, … they're thinking 'I want to work with you'.* ***Ehsan, Indian male***

5.5.1 Sense of connection or difference

Affirming Identity Work began with respondents experiencing a **sense of connection or difference**, often based on visible demographic cues. Individuals either perceived dissimilarity between themselves and the immediate context (emphasising differentiation from the group), or, perceived similarity or affinity between themselves and another individual.

Several incidents were recounted in which identities were made salient due to the demographic distribution of the immediate context. A **sense of connection or difference** occurred as respondents' attention was drawn to indicators of visible fit, a process that appeared to happen automatically. Respondents paid attention to fit within the broader demographic context (often noting difference), or, engaged in direct comparison with the (small number of) minority ethnic professionals in the group (noting connection). First, experiences emphasising a **sense of connection** will be discussed in this section, followed by those related to a **sense of difference**. However, both often happened simultaneously. Rani's assertion (from the illustrative episode in Section 4.3.4) *"of course…in my case…you immediately do a proportional assessment"* encapsulates the motivation of senior minority ethnic women and men to construct their identities from this **sense of connection or difference**.

Several respondents described jolt events that began with noting, and then experiencing, strong affinity with 'someone like them' higher in the organisational hierarchy. This was coded as a **sense of connection**. For instance, Ehsan attended a dinner at which he heard a Partner speak. Before recounting the episode, Ehsan described himself:

> *I am a British born Asian from Wolverhampton, which is a very, very poor town. I'm very working-class by background and I'm a huge Manchester United fan, and I think to myself I'm never going to be a partner here.* (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Ehsan drew on multiple identity strands – his nationality, ethnicity, social class, region and the football club he supported. This combination of intersecting identities, in his

perspective, equated to dis-identification with the senior, high status role of 'Partner'. Ehsan reinforced his working class background ("*very very poor town…very working class*") in this self-description, rather than his ethnicity. Against this background, Ehsan listened to the Partner introduce himself.

> *And he said 'Oh, by the way, my name is Deepak, I was born in Wolverhampton, my dad had a market stall and my dad died when I was fifteen. I'm a Manchester United supporter and I'm Indian obviously, and I'm a partner.* (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Again, there was reference to social class markers ("*my dad had a market stall*") as Ehsan described the Partner. Several points of connection were presented, including town, football club support and ethnicity. An intersectional perspective suggests the *combined* (i.e. intersecting) impact of shared class, ethnicity (and maybe gender, although there was no evidence of Ehsan noting this), contributed to Ehsan's intense connection with the Partner. Ehsan was astounded on hearing the Partner's introduction. His first reaction was disbelief, thinking he had been "*set up"*. He was "*knocked back by it*" and "*dumbfounded*". Ehsan's comment that he was *"never going to be Partner here"* was challenged by seeing an "*unbelievably Indian*" Partner.

The excerpt above illustrates the potential power of affinity with a similar other. However there was no indication that the sole basis for the **sense of connection** needed to be with someone with whom one shared multiple intersecting identities (although these sorts of connections were reported more often than connections across categories). For instance, Sean responded similarly to Ehsan on hearing senior minority ethnic individuals speak at a conference. They were Steve, a man of mixed (white and black) ethnicity, and, Tamara a woman of mixed (Caribbean/Indian) ethnicity (both of whom also participated in this study). Considering Sean's reflections on hearing Tamara and Steve speak sheds insight into some of the complexity and fluidity of identity work for senior minority ethnic individuals. Sean's experience draws attention to how location and context may influence the salience of different identities. It is likely that part of the impact of hearing the Indian male Partner speak was due to the *specificity* of Ehsan's affinity with the Partner. In contrast, Sean drew

on a broader conception of similarity and affinity and responded to role models that were not specifically 'like' him (in essentialist demographic terms), yet to whom he felt strongly connected. He shared feelings of isolation in his non-London location.

> *I'm a Black man in* (main UK city)*, I'm almost unique...an oddity…But for the first time in a long time, I felt as though.... there are people like me...* (Sean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

Perhaps Sean's location outside London intensified the jolt sensation and affinity he experienced with those whom he shared broad 'minority ethnic' status rather than more specific ethnic or gender characteristics.

In addition to seeing role models, a **sense of connection** (and to some extent differentiation) also occurred when respondents were positioned as role models themselves. For example:

> *I walked into a meeting… I was the most senior person in the room …And I knew everyone round the table apart from one person who happened to be a young Indian girl…so what I felt was 'Ah! I'm a role model'... so apart from being in that meeting as … somebody who's you know, trying to knock a few heads together to get work done more efficiently/effectively, I'm also there as a role model.* (Rani, Indian female, Govt Plc)

Again, Rani's description highlights senior minority ethnic identity construction in the context of salient demographic cues. In this meeting, Rani's high status identity was heightened as "*the most senior person in the room*", whose purpose was "*to knock a few heads together*". However, on seeing the "*young Indian girl",* her gender and ethnicity also became salient and her self-identity in the room adopted a 'role model' dimension in addition to 'group leader' (*"apart from being…I'm also…")*. Additionally:

> *There are a fair amount of women around...there are a fair number of younger women around but there aren't that many Indian women around and so I ...thought... she looks new…she probably hasn't met any other Indian women ... so....she will be observing me.* (Rani, Indian female, Govt Plc)

Rani's intersecting gender, ethnic and senior identity dimensions were made salient within the organisational context. Her heightened awareness as a role model was based on their shared ethnic and gender identities, and her status (relative to the younger Indian woman), all in the demographic context of the organisation.

However, there was also evidence of individuals actively seeking data to prompt a **sense of difference**. For instance, Jamal asked a colleague directly.

> *'Look, I've just joined the firm. I need to know where the black senior people are. So tell me how many managers we have, tell me how many assistant directors we have, tell me how many directors or partners we have.* (Jamal, African-Caribbean male, P.S.F.)

Like Rani said, this process is "*about finding your place within it"* (i.e. the top of the organisation). The **sense of difference** experienced by respondents was often a consequence of holding senior organisational positions. Evidence suggested this **sense of difference** was a strong motivator for some. In Jamal's words, "*from there I kind of worked out who my competition was*", as he prepared to be a "*potential trailblazer*" in the Firm.

Thus far, attention has been drawn to the automatic, motivational and positive aspects of noticing connection and difference across gender, ethnicity and senior status. The data also offered additional insight into the meanings gleaned from simple visible demographic cues. For instance, Ehsan noted others' reactions following the announcement of his arrival in an Indian office as project lead.

> *So you walk into a room of people, and you can see someone's introduced, and they're thinking 'Well,* (here comes) *the big white guy from London'. I walk in and you can see on people's faces, 'Who is he? Is he the global lead?…You do notice these things.* (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Ehsan's Indian colleagues did not expect the global project manager from the UK office to be someone 'like them'. However, multiple, shared identities did not necessarily

mean positive affinity, and was sometimes a source of stress. For instance, the fact that a client was also an Indian woman caused Devi some anxiety.

> *I was quite nervous about* (meeting her)*… I was thinking, 'Is she religious, does she not drink, how ambitious is she, how important is career?…Is she going to think 'oh my God, what are you doing, not thinking about getting married? You're thirty-one years old and you don't have children'. I was thinking a lot about how is she going to feel about me … because I'm also an Indian woman. So I was really nervous, I think you become a bit more aware of … how you have to behave with certain people.* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

In contrast to the positive impact described earlier, this excerpt suggests the multiple points of connections triggered anxiety in this episode. Devi had previously 'discounted' gender when making sense of the 'BME leader' ascription *("I don't feel different to the boys in the office")*. However, concerns regarding the impending meeting were gender-specific. Issues surrounding marriage, children and needing to sacrifice career over motherhood are concerns women often contend with, particularly in senior positions (Powel & Maneiro, 1992). The excerpt further suggests pressures relating to gender were perhaps exacerbated due to the intersection of gender with ethnicity (and culture). Although it is not explicit, Devi's reference to *"certain people"* may be in reference to pressure from other Asian women to conform to expectations, here, cultural expectations based on her intersecting gender and ethnicity (such as expectations of motherhood by age 31).

I would also like to use this example to contrast with another seemingly similar episode. An initial reading of this example of the first phase of Affirming Identity Work may suggest parallels with the first stage of Reconciling Identity Work illustrated in Amarachi's anticipation of a client meeting (introduced in Section 5.4.1). However, as described in the Methodology chapter, I coded episodes based on a holistic consideration of the outcome of the identity work reported by respondents. Although both accounts included nervous anticipation in advance of a client meeting, my reading of the data suggested they involved different identity work modes. Amarachi anticipated discord, a **sense of paradox/conflict** concerning her client's expectations

about gender and seniority (phase 1 of Reconciling Identity Work). She ***reconciled*** this by re-integrating feminine attributes into her objective to leave the client with a *"warm, cosy feeling"* to encourage fee payment, thus ***reconstructing*** her identity in the episode. Thus, this was coded as Reconciling Identity Work. In contrast, Devi focused on the demographic features she shared with the client, starting the identity work with a **sense of connection**, the first phase of Affirming Identity Work. As described later in Sections 5.5.2 and 5.3.3, she **inferred identity worth** on the basis of their shared perspectives, which **reaffirmed** her identity as a senior Indian woman. Devi's self-identity remained unchanged, just strengthened, (as with other Affirming Identity Work episodes). In contrast, Amarachi's identity as a senior black woman was coded as Reconstructing Identity Work as she *re-integrated* personal attributes into the meeting, reconstructing her identity to suit that context.

Most of the episodes of demographic-based scanning led to positive reinforcement and comprised Affirming Identity Work. That is, when individuals observed a low representation of ethnicity and/or gender, they often interpreted this as a sign of their achievement. This is likely due to the fact that respondents' visibility was a direct reflection of their success in entering places at the top of organisations perceived as difficult to access. However, some responses to being the 'token' were more ambivalent, with respondents not being surprised and in a few cases being frustrated. Many respondents, however, drew primarily on demographic data to gain a **sense of connection or difference** in a given context. Multiple shared identities with similar others appeared to have the strongest impact on the affinity strength. As individuals engaged in *"proportional assessment"* they appeared to do this with a view to answer the question 'what does this mean for me?', prompting the next phase of Affirming Identity Work, **inferring identity worth**.

5.5.2 Inferring identity worth

The Affirming Identity Work phase following **a sense of connection or difference** is a sense-making tactic in which individuals begin to infer positive meaning about their identities in comparison to their target. Respondents **inferred identity worth** by

favourably comparing themselves to minority ethnic individuals in 'role model' positions (although they did not always use this expression), or, tending to favourably distinguish themselves from peers.

One example was Devi's response to her Indian female client (who ended up being her mentor).

> *I met her and I was like okay … we are quite similar, yeah….So career is very important to her, she's driven by the same values. Married, bit older than me, no kids, completely understands why career is so important. Completely of the same opinion that it's not about this* (waves her hands over her face)*, it's about what I can deliver.* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

Having been nervous about measuring up to expectations surrounding gender, ethnicity and culture, Devi found assurance in their similar perspectives. Her beliefs about the importance of career and performance over marriage and children began to be reinforced (despite prevailing cultural and gender expectations).

Another illustration of **inferring worth** based on shared identities occurred in the moments following Ehsan's observing the Partner. As earlier presented, Ehsan had previously dis-identified with the notion of being Partner. However, after hearing a senior Partner similar to himself, he began to imagine his future in the Firm differently. Strongly identifying with the more senior Indian man meant he began to see himself as a British Indian (man) from Wolverhampton who could also be a Partner in the Firm.

> *Now there's … someone that I closely identify with; he'd been on the same journey that I want to go on.* (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Sean inferred positive self-worth after hearing Tamara, a senior minority ethnic woman, speak at a conference:

> *Here was this woman, part-time, kids... breaking the mould...She was an example of someone who could achieve.* (Sean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

The quote suggests that, if Tamara (as a part-time, working mother) could succeed as a senior civil servant, then he could as well. In Sean's words, "*If Tamara can do it... I can do it*". Sean referred to their similarities (based on ethnicity) as well as differences (based on gender). Perhaps, for Sean, Tamara surmounting the combined, gender-specific career hurdles of part-time working and motherhood (in addition to ethnicity) was an additional motivator.

In contrast to the favourable comparisons with role models, another illustration of **inferring identity worth** in comparison to others involved differentiating oneself from colleagues. For instance, Devi primarily strengthened her identity as a senior minority ethnic woman in M&A by differentiating herself from other women in Professional Services Firm (while simultaneously aligning herself with men). As discussed in the previous section (Reconciling Identity Work), Devi did not fully articulate her thinking on ethnicity (perhaps as a defensive measure); she was however comparatively vocal about her perspectives on gender.

> *As a female, I don't feel different to the boys in the office. I am as hungry, as dedicated, as technically competent. I have clients that call me bulldog, because they know that I'm just as aggressive as anyone else…my personality is not quiet and I'm not a rose… In the M&A world…you have to be a bit brash....and if we're talking about women in the workplace and the boys are having a bit of a giggle about it, I'll join in with that.* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

In constructing her identity as a senior woman in M&A, she drew on gender stereotypes to highlight her similarity with *"the boys in the office"* ("*as hungry, as dedicated, as technically competent…as aggressive*) and differentiate herself from *"women in the workplace"*. This quote illustrates the process of differentiation that often occurs with members of numerical minority groups under pressure to assimilate to the prevailing culture (Kanter, 1977). The vivid imagery ("*hungry", "bulldog", "aggressive", "not a rose*") demonstrates a significant attempt at dis-identification with stereotypically feminine attributes, with a simultaneous alignment with stereotypically male features. This extended to drawing parallels between competence and job

commitment to prove she was 'not different' to her male colleagues. Devi further admitted she could collude with conversations disparaging women because "*in the M&A world, you have to be a bit brash*". Further strengthening her identity, Devi drew on the field of M&A and the women who work within it.

> *I think I work in a field that doesn't represent the norm for women. We all have a louder voice than most, we all have a bigger personality than most, we all are quite opinionated and not willing to not be heard. Because in our jobs, you have to lead…And some of that is around having a loud voice and being confident, but a lot of it is around just really believing in yourself, which some women don't.* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

Inferring identity worth through differentiation supported Devi's decision-making around the Leadership Programme described in Reconciling Identity Work. This was one of the small number of episodes with clear evidence of different tactics with different identity outcomes within the same episode. Inferring her worth as a senior woman in M&A in comparison to other women, Devi justified her decision to attend the BME, rather than the Women's, Leadership Programme.

> *Putting fifty women together is just going to play to all the stereotypes of what the guys in the office are going to think, and I think I'm going to get laughed at more … 'Oh it's just a gaggle of women and all you're going to do is talk about shoes.' And.... yeah actually that's what might actually happen. I've seen some of the women's events … and it's all about how you should dress in the office. Now, no offence, but if you don't know how to dress in the office, I don't feel like I connect with that as much.* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

In deciding between the options, Devi was mindful of the impression attending a Women's Leadership event would have on *"the guys in the office"*. She did not want to *"get laughed at…joining a gaggle of women…to talk about shoes".* She played down the personal impact of gender dynamics at work (*"all you're going to do is talk about shoes…how you should dress in the office").* Having distanced herself from this, Devi opted to attend the BME Leadership programme.

> *So I chose the BME one over the women's one…I didn't think that I'd get as much from that course than I would the BME one, because I think the BME one would push me out of my comfort zone, which is why I chose that one.* (Devi, Indian female, P.S.F.)

Ehsan engaged in a similar process of differentiation from colleagues within the same demographic category. He reaffirmed his identity as a senior minority ethnic (British) man by differentiating himself from non-British minority ethnic colleagues. His identity construction focused on distinguishing British-born minority ethnic people from non-British colleagues. Having reconstructed his identity as a BME Leader (presented under 'Reconciling Identity Work'), Ehsan attended the BME Programme.

> *I was there because I'm high-performing* (and) *because we have a business issue, we need diversity in the business - it makes commercial sense…. So I was fine with that, other people weren't….The discomfort … seemed to come from people who were not like me. So there's another girl, a Greek girl, like me…raised-in-the-UK-Brits, Greek origin, Indian origin. People like us were quite comfortable with this sort of content, it's the people from abroad who felt it was something a bit strange…they all have an issue with progress….you're given an opportunity to kind of remedy it, but they don't want to.* (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Ehsan commented that individuals "*not like me*" were those who had "*an issue with progress*", despite their being identified potential leaders. In line with classic Social Identity and Self-Categorisation Theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner et al, 1987), Ehsan engaged in self-categorisation, defining his minority ethnic in-group as *"raised-in-the-UK Brits"* contrasted against the minority ethnic out-group of "*people from abroad*" who "*have an issue with progress*". This process of differentiation occurred during the BME Leadership Programme run by the Firm, which did not in itself distinguish between minority ethnicity. Again, the fluid and complex nature of identity construction is demonstrated here, challenging the assumption that the 'BME' (Black & Minority Ethnic) label is a unifying category. Ehsan construed the "*people from abroad*" as having "*an issue with progress*" because they did not seize the opportunity given to them to "*remedy*" the problem of the lack of diversity at the top of the Firm.

Although I did not directly probe this, the context in which this statement occurred was during the Leadership Programme. Therefore I inferred that Ehsan constructed "*the problem*" as the low BME representation at the top of the organisation. Ehsan favourably constructed himself not 'just' as a senior minority ethnic individual, but a "*raised-in-the-UK Brit"* minority ethnic person who did not "*have an issue with progress".*

A final illustration of the complexity of **inferring identity worth** through comparison and difference is taken from Ehsan's reflection of his experiences as a British-born Asian man working in India.

> *I don't visibly standout* (in India)*, so I'm different, but not really, which is a different dynamic to here, which is I'm not really different, but I am. …It really helps you connect… they see you as one of them and they're thinking 'I want to work with you'. (*Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

This illustrates the social construction and contextual dependence of identities. Ehsan's role as the global project leader (i.e. his senior status) interplayed with his (in)visible difference (i.e. ethnicity) in India. He compared working in the UK in which he is visibly different *("but not really"*, i.e. culturally) to working in India in which he is not apparently different (but is 'really', in cultural terms). Not being *"the big white guy from London"*, but being the 'big Indian guy from London' enhanced the worth of his identity as a senior Indian man. Additionally, *"big …guy"* assumes that the senior person will be male. Although Ehsan did not refer specifically to gender identity during this episode, the question arises regarding the extent to which his gender supported the identity affirmation he inferred from his subordinates in India. Perhaps, the intersection of *gender* with ethnicity and senior status as global project lead (rather than just the latter two) facilitated his experience of Affirming Identity Work.

There was, however, also evidence that respondents stopped short of inferring positive meaning following a sense of connection or difference. These were coded as 'partial' episodes of Affirming Identity Work. One illustration of this was Rani's reaction (introduced earlier) to the presence of the *"young Indian girl"* at a meeting

she convened. Although Rani saw herself as a role model relative to the younger Indian woman, there was no evidence she **inferred identity worth** as a senior Indian female role model. Further examination of her transcript offered some insight into what may have contributed to this. There was some indication that Rani distinguished between 'role model' and 'senior' identity labels during the episode. She said *"**apart** from being in that meeting as …somebody who's …trying to knock a few heads together to get work done more efficiently/effectively, I'm **also** there as a role model".* On further probing about her reaction to observing the woman, she remarked "*I registered that fact... But I don't think it affected my interventions"*. Rani also commented that she was late, wanted to *"get into the nitty gritty"* and was embarrassed at being reminded to do introductions, after having launched into the meeting. Perhaps, being embarrassed, under time constraints and aware someone was "*observing"* her, put Rani under additional pressure. Rather than engage in Affirming (or Reconciling) Identity Work, she distinguished between 'role model' and 'leader', and may have missed the opportunity (or conserved the energy required) to engage in further 'work' to strengthen her identity as a senior Indian female (role model).

In another example of 'partial' identity work, Sam noticed he was the only minority ethnic person in room of 150 to 200 new senior managers, commenting that "*the BMEs were slightly under-represented*". His reaction was:

> *I just thought there would be a slightly better or bigger mix of ethnicities…But then it could've been just by coincidence because not everyone turned up to that dinner…I was surprised. There wasn't any other feeling than … 'That's a bit strange'. I didn't think more of it. I think that's pretty much where I left it.* (Sam, Chinese male, P.S.F.)

In the UK, the BME population is 10% (and up to 40% in London in which Sam is based). However, Sam considered the reason he was the only BME person in the room of 150 to 200 senior managers was possibly because other minority ethnic individuals had opted out of attending the dinner, and did not engage in any additional sense-making

regarding this. Other respondents merely commented that being the 'only one' was not atypical.

> *Being the only black/ethnic person in a room full of white faces in a department with so many capable black people never feels great but on this occasion one black person could be seen as a fair representation of my unit.* (Uzo, Black African female, Govt Plc)

> *I'm never usually surprised that I'm always the only black woman in a room you know, that's just quite usual.* (Sinita, Indian female, Govt Plc)

> *I just take it as given …I attend these meetings and am the only Asian, black person. I don't think it's going to change…I'm used to it, I don't get angry.* (Gurditta, Indian male, Govt Plc)

Thus, non-proportional representation did not always trigger Affirmative Identity Work for senior minority ethnic individuals. Sometimes it involved frustration and questioning directed at the organisation (rather than self).

> *Very senior meeting… gray suited, well into their 50s…no Indians or black people, no Sri Lankans but I can't be the only competent person…it's the same faces, I'm the only brown or black face, why is this in Govt Plc today? There's only few competent…(trails off) but why is it always white people? It's difficult to explain and you start thinking, 'Why is it only one person out to 40?'* (Gurditta, Indian male, Govt Plc).

This range suggests that noticing a **sense of difference** did not always lead to **inferring identity worth**. It also suggests that a heightened awareness of difference did not constitute an identity threat either. In fact, the data suggest there was a motivational element in noting numerical minority status in senior contexts, as described in previous examples in this section and illustrated in the excerpt below, after Jamal received news about the numbers of minority ethnic individuals on Partner track .

> *I was pretty taken back, I was surprised, the fact that there weren't enough senior BME or black individuals within the firm…I was sad, but I wasn't distraught…rather than sit there and be sad about it, do something about it. So, for me, it was a mixture of sadness, but a mixture of determination, enthusiasm, a tenacity to say, 'Right, here we*

go, I'm going to do something about this'. (Jamal, African-Caribbean male, P.S.F.)

The range of responses to being a token is likely to be a result of differences in personality, motivation and experiences of the senior minority ethnic women and men.

This section described the dynamic process of deriving positive meaning through comparing oneself to similar others (e.g. role models) or different others (even those who share the same 'minority' status). It illustrated the fluidity of identity work as well as the multiple points of identities to which individuals pay attention as they infer meaning about themselves. After noting a **sense of connection or difference** based on demographic cues, respondents **inferred identity worth** through comparison across different identity dimensions. This led respondents to **reaffirm** their identities as senior minority ethnic women and men.

5.5.3 Reaffirm identities

The identity goal or outcome of Affirming Identity Work is identity reaffirmation. In this thesis, identity reaffirmation concerns strengthening a given identity, rather than changing its substance. However, reaffirming was not always a purely positive experience. The positive and challenging aspects of having one's identity reaffirmed and implications for intersecting identities will be discussed in this section.

Sean's identity as a senior minority ethnic man was strongly **reaffirmed** after he heard the BME senior civil servants speak at a conference.

> *I didn't feel alone...I felt part of a greater whole... I truly felt as though I belonged and I feel as though I belong in work as a person, that my culture, my identity, for the first time in a long time, felt right...*(it) *had a massive impact on me...that was a moment of ..latent awakening ...a moment of realisation...it was totally liberating…I felt as though I was going to be part of this line of succession of successful BME staff...it was probably the best professional feeling I've had… I've been in Govt Plc 20 years... and I suppose I've done relatively well... but I can do better. Do I*

> *want to be a Grade 6? If you'd asked me that before the conference...no not really. Why? Black people don't get to Grade 6 in* (UK city) *Do I want to be a Grade 6 now? Abso-bloody-lutely.....Do I want* (to be a Senior Civil Servant)*? Yes, why not? Will I get there? Who knows?…Will I do whatever it takes to get there? Yes I will.* (Sean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

Affirming episodes had strong positive and motivational effects on some individuals (a *"latent awakening"* for Sean). Despite being the most senior visibly black person in his city location, seeing even more senior BME colleagues prompted him to do more and be more ("*I can do better. Will I do whatever it takes to get there? Yes I will*"). On being perceived as a role model (rather than perceiving role models), Ehsan's identity as a senior Indian man was also affirmed.

> (P)*eople in India in the firm…they just trust you more…the ability to motivate them, they see you as one of them and they're thinking 'I want to work with you'* (Ehsan, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Ehsan compared his experience as a senior Indian man in India to one in the UK ("*they trust you* ***more****"* in India, compared to the UK). He associated work-related attitudes such as trust, motivation, connection and commitment, and even followership to the fact that he was seen *"as one of them"*, indicating the experience reinforced his identity as a *senior* Indian man, influencing his ability to motivate others and inspire them to work with him.

Respondents also had less positive experiences even as their identities were **reaffirmed** as role models or mentors. For example, Bernadette referred to a "*female minority senior manager who I look after, because she's like my friend and she works with me a lot*". The senior BME men and women tended to embrace the intimacy and bonds created in these relationships. For instance, referring to another relationship, Bernadette "*felt really proud … that she had enough trust to talk about this with me".* However, for some (female) respondents these bonds carried additional complexities in the mentor/protégée relationship. For instance, Sinita described her line management relationship with her direct report, a younger, black woman as characterised by openness and mutual understanding. According to Sinita "*she views*

me first as a non-white person before a manager". However Sinita acknowledged that the strength of affinity, while personally affirming, created 'fuzzy' boundaries. This was because she had to carefully manage maintaining the status distance in the line management relationship with the intimacy of sharing common experiences as minority ethnic women. These boundaries became particularly blurred when her report shared information that inferred she had been treated unfairly because of her "*race*", yet asked Sinita not to open an official investigation.

> *It's a very difficult position to be in, you know because she shares some things in confidence that you think 'Should I report it further? … I shouldn't because she's sharing it as a friend…I know she wouldn't have shared it if it was a white manager* (but) *obviously it is my responsibility as the manager to protect my staff …and make them feel safe in the workplace.* (Sinita, Indian female, Govt Plc)

The intersection of seniority with shared minority ethnic status, and perhaps shared gender, made this a complex line management dilemma for Sinita. While the episode was broadly **reaffirming** (by sharing such sensitive information, her report strengthened Sinita's identity as a senior minority ethnic woman), it left Sinita in the *"very difficult position"* of having to balance the requirements of managerial responsibility with respecting confidence and trust in the friendship.

In summary, Affirming Identity Work mode began with a **sense of connection or difference**. These included strong affinity encounters in which respondents saw themselves or others as role models, making senior status as well as gender and ethnicity (often in combination) salient. From this, respondents **inferred identity worth** and **reaffirmed** their identities as senior BME individuals. Overall, Affirming Identity Work illustrates some of the processes triggered by straightforward in group versus out-group categorisation, as posited by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, combining identity work with an intersectional perspective sheds light on the fluid boundaries between categories and 'fit' based on such factors as visible ethnicity, organisational demography and nationality, and, individuals' drive to seek favourable self-identities in these complex locations. Additionally it suggests a

‘multiplier’ effect of affinity based on multiple points of connection, and some of the complexities therein, such as line management boundaries across shared ethnic status. Compared to the identity work modes described previously (Accommodating, Refuting and Reconciling), Affirming Identity Work illustrates the potential of identity work towards agentic, self-determining construction.

5.6 Phases of ‘Exploratory’ Identity Work

Exploratory Identity Work describes the identity construction process in which senior minority ethnic women and men leverage their identities as a resource to reap a benefit (such as an enhanced relationship quality) from this. ‘Exploratory’ is used to reflect the finding that individuals considered these encounters with a sense of opportunity, including curiosity (and sometimes tentativeness), as they appraised an encounter through identity lenses. Exploratory Identity Work also characterised identity work of senior minority ethnic women and men at its most agentic, or performative, as individuals sought to ‘work’ their identities to enhance interactions. Fourteen episodes (representing 14% of the instances of identity work) emerged during analysis as instances of Exploratory Identity Work. Exploratory Identity Work had the smallest number of ‘complete’ identity work processes. A number of incidents were recounted in which respondents merely noted a sense of opportunity offered by identity in an encounter (the first phase of Exploratory Identity Work) but did not explore the opportunity by leveraging identities. Following identity leveraging, respondents augmented their identities, expanding and enlarging the significance of being senior minority ethnic women and men (Table 14). The following sections describe these three phases of Exploratory Identity Work.

Table 14: Exploratory Identity Work example quotes

Sense of opportunity	Leveraging identity	Augment identities
Four of the (five) *men in the team couldn't make* (the team meeting)*…I realised there was more women than men and I thought 'Well this meeting could be different...because generally when the men are there, the men seem to.... be all loud & to dominate.*	*Some of the women go into this passive role…*(but) *I raised this point... I sort of like dropped* (the issue on the table) *and a couple of other people picked it up around the table.*	(My manager) *said 'Okay , could I leave it to you then?...I felt good... he asked me to do that with other people there, and it's worked for the benefit of the team.* ***Vivian, African-Caribbean female***
I am so conscious that when I walk to that situation, I almost have to go okay, what is it? What's my cultural capital that I'm going to bring to this meeting? What is it that I'm going to do?	*I made it a point to kind of share a little bit more about who I was…. immediately we started having something else to talk about, which is great.*	*It made it okay for me to push her more in this week, because last week I think we've shared a little bit more, so she trusts me a little bit more. So I felt I was able to be more assertive with her this week, and then we managed to get a lead out of her yesterday evening…that's actually pushing the boundary of what I have done in the past.* ***Bernadette, Chinese female***
I submitted (an email to) *the Talent Management programme, as I felt there were many barriers to BME staff reaching the Senior Civil Service.*	*It had to be considered, it had to be concise, but it had to be also directly approaching the argument...That's what I'm here to do... That's my role as a senior Black man - to challenge the status quo..*	(The positive response to my email) *validated* (my) *approach. It made me feel as though I've got to use it more. Not shove it down people's faces,* (but) *'Listen to me because of my experiences...as a senior black man...learn from me, don't just listen to me'… I've got a wonderful opportunity.* ***Sean, African-Caribbean male***

5.6.1 Sense of opportunity

The initial phase of Exploratory Identity Work is heightened awareness of an opportunity offered based on one's identity. 'Opportunities' presented in various guises, such as proximity to a stranger who shared demographic features (as in the illustrative episode in Section 4.3.5), an article about getting more minority ethnic employees into senior roles, and a line manager who was part of a senior women's steering group. Like Affirming Identity Work, sometimes encounters were triggered by noticing or observing demographic cues, but, unlike Affirming Identity Work, the approach was to utilise the demographic data to facilitate the encounter. Additionally, this phase suggested that respondents may have approached the encounter with prior awareness of the utility of ethnicity (and sometimes gender) in interactions, which was then heightened by the encounter. This was inferred because respondents did not comment on the unexpected nature of these encounters, which was present (to varying extents) in Accommodating, Reconciling and Affirming Identity Work; neither was there the strong jolt sensation of other modes. Sometimes, this opportunity was sensed during the encounter; however, there was also evidence that some (less frequently) had a general awareness of how ethnicity influenced their approach to work.

The first phase of Exploratory Identity Work was marked by respondents noting opportunities, which were perceived in gender or ethnic terms.

> *I realised there was more women than men and I thought 'Well this meeting could be different...because generally when the men are there, the men seem to.... be all loud and to dominate.* (Vivian, African-Caribbean female, Govt Plc)

Vivian often felt silenced during team meetings, in which her male colleagues slightly outnumbered the women. However, she **sensed the opportunity** to put her ideas forward on this occasion. In another episode, Sean, struck by an article in a trade journal on getting minority ethnic individuals into the Senior Civil Service, strategically placed the article in his office as a trigger to stimulate discussion about ethnicity. In

another example, Dean reflected on why a meeting with his white female manager was recorded as an identity-heightening event.

> *I probably wouldn't have recorded the episode if my manager was a white male middle class individual, but the fact that she was white & female…because I know women at that level have had problems in the workplace over the years…Women have had their own problems in having a presence in senior…grades …women generally are faced with similar challenges* (as) *people from ethnic minorities.* (Dean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

An intersectional perspective offers insight into the opportunity Dean sensed. This was heightened due to their shared minority status, which he construed as a potential bridge for mutual empathy and enhanced understanding in the relationship.

There was also evidence of the opportunity to 'work' one's identity that resulted from one's mere presence in an encounter. Steve attended a Directors' meeting (representing his boss) at which one of the attendees commented on his presence during a discussion about women in leadership roles.

> *She said 'Looking round at the directors here, over a third of us are women but there is no BME so shouldn't our target now be looking at the BMEs?'…The fact that I was there triggered that conversation. I'm 100% sure that they would have had the conversation about women leaders and they would have moved on but my presence caused them to* (talk about this). *And I believe my presence in certain places causes people to stop and think.* (Steve, mixed ethnicity male, Govt Plc)

Although Steve did not go on to engage in behaviours to leverage this opportunity, he recognised his presence *"in certain places"* (i.e. in senior contexts in the organisation) sometimes prompted his ethnic majority colleagues to mindfully engage with minority ethnicity.

A **sense of opportunity** concerned recognising one's 'identity capital', or in Tamara's words, one's *"identity credentials"*. However, there was more currency associated with ethnicity (sometimes with seniority) than gender. Two respondents appeared particularly cognisant of this, actively seeking to leverage from their ethnic background

"things I can use in my day-to-day life to my advantage" (Taleen). They appeared to have a general approach to work in which they sought, and relished, opportunities to leverage their senior minority ethnic, articulating the personal benefits of minority ethnic status with words like *"credentials", "skills", "strength"* and "*advantage"*.

> *It feels as though it could be an opportunity because it's not something that that many people can change. If I'm … the only Indian male in our office, it's not something somebody can do to become* (like me) *… arguably I'm in a bit of a monopoly.* (Taleen, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Taleen was also explicit about his decision to be proactive about finding out and using the personal benefits of diversity:

> *I'm actually trying to find out more about it…* (it) *means taking a bit more of a proactive approach and trying to establish how I can use my diverse background as a strength in the workplace…. If it's actually about things like there's a difference in me from a skills point of view.* (Taleen, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Despite this emphasis on being proactive, this was shared against the backdrop of Professional Services Firm's strategic emphasis on the 'business case' for diversity. Although it was not a prevalent theme from all P.S.F respondents, the data suggested this organisational initiative primed Taleen and his colleagues to seek identity-relevant opportunities and provided a language for demonstrating how he could use "*his diverse background as a strength in the workplace*". Additionally, Tamara, who held a diversity advocacy role for senior civil servants promoted her "*identity credentials*" as a minority ethnic woman. Therefore, despite the emphasis on the proactive nature of Exploratory Identity Work (contrasted against the reactive nature of the first mode discussed, Accommodating Identity Work), there was evidence that structural/contextual and individual factors both played a role in this mode.

However, not everyone who **sensed an opportunity** seized it. Sometimes, a sense of opportunity was accompanied by the opposing forces of curiosity and tentativeness. Also, some respondents appeared to engage in a risk/benefit analysis before **leveraging** identities. For instance, it was considered important to be sensitive to

one's associate's needs or comfort levels regarding ethnicity. For instance, despite sensing the opportunity in developing a stronger relationship with his line manager, the hierarchical nature of their relationship and the subject matter dissuaded Dean from pursuing the conversation down those lines.

> *You've got to be so careful with what people may be comfortable discussing or what they may not be discussing and after all,* (the meeting) *was about me wasn't it?...We were discussing my performance.* (Dean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

This was despite the fact that Dean believed the developmental conversation could be augmented by open conversations about disadvantage in the organisation. Another reason for not seizing an opportunity was a lack of belief in the real value of one's supposed identity capital.

> *Am I actually that different to somebody else? I feel normal, like one of the team, not different….I dress in the same way as everyone else, I probably eat the same breakfast as anyone else. Do you know what I mean? It's not really any different for me. …You could probably change Indian man for English man or whatever, I just don't feel as though it would make a lot of difference to me because it would be just coming to work, do my thing and that's it. And being Indian doesn't really come into it for me when I am at work.* (Taleen, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Taleen challenged the concept of identity capital, of the assumed value in being 'different'. Again, the focus was on ethnicity (rather than gender). Later on in the interview, he also reflected on how his behaviours fit in with the norm:

> *It's almost probably easier to be one of the team when you actually show that your behaviours outside of work are fairly similar to everybody else's behaviours in that same environment….I can at least do boy-ish things to almost keep in with the crowd.* (Taleen, Indian male, P.S.F.)

Despite self-identifying as Indian and being able to articulate the benefits of identity capital, by replacing "*Indian man"* with *"English man"* and doing "*boy-ish things"*, Taleen implicitly drew on his privileged gender status to partly account for not feeling

'different'. Perhaps this invisible gender privilege offered greater choice to opt in or out regarding when best to engage his (ethnic) identity capital. In contrast to Taleen, Tamara had an activist professional role, which suggests an overlap between her minority ethnic, gender and professional identity facets. She described reflecting on her identity as a *"natural"* process in her daily job. Perhaps one needs a strong sense of ethnic identity (or less 'choice') to seize the opportunity afforded by ethnicity during encounters and **leverage** this in the following phase. Although Taleen's experience was coded as 'partial' identity work, his comments shed some insight into some of the pre-existing factors supporting Exploratory Identity Work.

Whether momentary or with an ongoing awareness of one's identity capital, respondents acknowledged **a sense of opportunity** that their minority ethnicity provided (sometimes in conjunction with senior status) to leverage from an encounter. Some respondents then went on to **leverage** identities.

5.6.2 Leveraging identity

The Exploratory Identity Work phase following **a sense of opportunity** involves individuals **leveraging identities**, i.e. responding to a situation through deploying ethnicity or gender. In this thesis, **leveraging** describes how respondents used their identities (or attributes directly related to identities) to open up opportunities or challenge a situation. There was a small number of examples of this, thus, aspirational and actual examples of leveraging identities are presented. The excerpt below captures the essence of **leveraging** identities and the potential some respondents sensed but did not necessarily realise:

> *Hopefully there will come a point when I …start becoming a bit of a teacher rather than a learner….and then, if I can figure that out for myself, it's going to be a case of relaying that or spreading that across our team at Professional Services Firm in* (this location) *… to actually advocate a lot more about people from diverse backgrounds have some level of uniqueness and it can be used as an advantage.* (Taleen, Indian male, P.S.F.)

In one example, Bernadette contrasted an early career experience with a current one. She wore one of several handmade Malaysian suits purchased to mark her first promotion at work.

> *The first thing that the senior partner said was 'Oh my god, Bernadette, are you stuck in the disco years wearing that suit?' I guess he was joking, but that one statement was such a big deal for me that I actually threw away all my 'does not fit in' type suits.* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

More recently she wore *"a really bright red suit".*

> (A different) *senior partner said…very loudly in our open office… 'Oh my God, Angie, you're in your power suit. Red. Scary!'* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

Dress as an identity cue has already been discussed in this chapter. These excerpts implicate ethnicity intersecting with gender this encounter. The professional services corporate dress code suggests it is more likely that women will wear brightly coloured, varied colours and styles, compared to men's relatively homogenous and interchangeable, suits. The contrast with which she described her outfits – "*really bright red suit"* and "*different material, different cut, different colours*" reflected a difference in corporate attire across cultures. Additionally, the senior partner's comment, linking red to power ("*power suit…scary!*") holds an implicit assumption or stereotype about women in corporate positions needing to dress in bold, vivid colours for status and credibility. In response, Bernadette seized the opportunity to challenge this gendered (and perhaps Eurocentric?) interpretation of her clothing, **leveraging** ethnic identity to do this, reconstructing the symbolic meaning of 'red':

> *I just looked up at him and I said 'What do you mean red is scary. Red is good. Red is luck! It's optimistic, it's good, what's scary about red?'* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

Not all instances of leveraging identities were as direct as this. Sean wanted to subtly prompt discussions about ethnicity in senior positions in Govt Plc and adopted a *"two-*

pronged" tactic of positioning the article in a central location and, then, directly asking colleagues about it.

> *I thought 'Let's see what happens in the next two weeks...Then I thought I'll be a little more proactive, I'll just raise the issue of that article... I'd done a two-pronged approach- I'll wait to see if people discuss it... well..err...nope...Then I thought....and then I'll go ask people about the article.* (Sean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

As previously described, Dean engaged a 'partial' mode after sensing an opportunity with his white female line manager. The excerpt below, however, illustrates what he envisaged **leveraging identities** could look like.

> *But wouldn't it be nice though…if we could make an impact in the team, for the things that she's had to face as a woman and the things that I've had to face as well as a black man…I'd like to think that her as a senior woman and me as a senior black man would both like to make a difference in the department and make an impact. Both of us should hopefully be able to raise our profiles because we work on the same team* (Dean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

A theme of caution and tentativeness was associated with leveraging one's identity in some episodes. This awareness of risk in **sensing an opportunity** did not appear to be unwarranted. For instance, Sean's colleagues appeared uncomfortable or dismissive of his effort to discuss the article.

> *'Err..read it, it's all right"...*(laughs) *I think it's the biggest comment I've had. Eight words. 'Yeah..it's all right, yeah'. 'Do you want to talk about it?' And funnily enough people are always too busy then...'I've just got to do this...'.'I've just got to get...'..'Come on now, let's talk about it' …I'm interested - they're not interested.* (Sean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

When **leveraging** one's identity, especially with non-minority group members, respondents had to think carefully about this:

> *If you want to win your arguments, you've got to plan what you are going to do. You've got to think about what the relevance is to the conversation underway… If I had introduced it left field, I would have*

> *lost the argument, someone would have said 'Okay Steve we'll come to that one later on'. You've automatically lost….It would have been counter-productive to raise it in that context* (Steve, mixed ethnicity, Govt Plc)

After **sensing an opportunity**, some respondents went on to **leverage** their **identities**, working their senior, gender, ethnic identity credentials to facilitate or challenge within an encounter. However, this was associated with some concern regarding the whether the senior BME individuals' non-BME associates would be open to such explicit demonstration of one's difference. When successful however, respondents resulted in **augmented identities**.

5.6.3 Augment identities

Only a small number of instances of identity work attained the final phase of Exploratory Identity Work, in which identities were **augmented**. The data suggested that at the end of this identity work mode, respondents came to new understanding that expanded or extended the boundaries of the identities to which they self-ascribed. This involved creating new meaning for themselves or for associates, and sometimes more broadly, at the symbolic/organisational level. There was some indication that **augmented** identities related to change. Exploratory Identity Work is differentiated from Reconciling (which was about putting together seemingly disparate elements or components). It is also differentiated from Refuting, because it was about explicitly creating new meaning from the current identity (rather than merely dispelling any myths or stereotypes or misconceptions others had of them). After challenging the Partner, Bernadette said *"I couldn't care less about what people say (now), because this is me"*, embracing (at least momentarily) her ethnic identity and using it to publicly reconstruct 'red' dress from *"scary power suits"* to "*lucky"*. In another episode in which she shared her concerns about ethnic assimilation as a mother, Bernadette also reported this enhanced her relationship with a client:

> *It made it okay for me to push her more in this week, because last week I think we've shared a little bit more, so she trusts me a little bit more.* (Bernadette, Chinese female, P.S.F.)

Sean described the self-validating effects of successful Exploratory Identity Work as well as the potential for broader changes in the organisation. After composing an email about the impact of the Talent Development Programme on BME employees, he commented on the impact on him.

> *It validated* (my identity)*....It made me feel as though I've got to use it more. Not shove it down people's faces, not saying 'I'm black so you must listen to me'; no, 'Listen to me because of my experiences of...as a senior black man...Learn from me, don't just listen to me'...I want to make people think, I want people to challenge all perceptions. I'm a senior black man and there's more people in the department like me who can achieve and I will go out and do something about it, otherwise we're not going to get that dynamic department we really need at these troubled times.* (Sean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

There was, however, the risk of unsuccessful Exploratory Identity Work, having the opposite effect. His colleagues rebuffing his interest in dialogue about ethnicity in senior grades became an identity constraint.

> *It made me feel as an inconsequential black man...that article's there for window dressing, which means that everything I believe in as a senior black man is also there as window dressing, and it also makes me realise that I am alone onsite as a senior black man…my views, my beliefs regarding the race agenda are just seen as something they just need to tick the box- pink and fluffy.... not real work, you know...But they don't see the wider consequences of a senior black man thinking 'Well if you're not really interested in that, how on earth are you going to be interested in me?'* (It feels like) *I'm swimming uphill against a tide and it's a big riptide in treacle.* (Sean, African-Caribbean male, Govt Plc)

Steve did not engage in overt behaviour or thoughts to construct self-understanding as a senior BME man in this encounter. However, his responses suggest he believed visibility was a sufficient cue to prompt others to consider the 'senior BME individual' concept (replacing the discussion about getting women into senior leadership positions).

> *I don't … ram home the message because, obviously, just being there has caused the message to be recognised…. I feel proud that I am*

> *actually able to be at those kind of meetings, because the biggest thing is you are not even visible therefore the discussion never even starts in the first place.* (Steve, mixed ethnicity male, Govt Plc)

This was categorised as Exploratory Identity Work, which is the most performative identity work mode of the five described in this thesis. As identity work is the effort undertaken to construct senior BME female/male identities, the focus so far has been on the cognitive and behavioural features of how people make sense of themselves. Where Exploratory Identity Work is about **augmenting** the meaning of senior minority ethnic identity for self and others, this excerpt draws attention to mere 'presence' in the right contexts prompting individuals and their associates to think differently about the meaning of ethnicity in a senior context.

In summary, Exploratory Identity Work concerns **sensing an opportunity,** awareness of the capital inherent in one's gender and (more often) ethnicity and **leveraging** this to **augment** one's identities. For some respondents, it was a way of life, but usually Exploratory Identity Work involved seizing opportunities to create a newly expanded sense of self.

5.7 Chapter summary

This chapter and the preceding one describe the thesis Findings. Applying identity work as a theoretical lens for understanding experiences relating to ethnicity intersecting with gender and seniority revealed that respondents engaged in five modes to make sense of identity-heightening episodes. The identity work modes, from Accommodating to Exploratory Work, illustrated a shift in the nature and intensity of effort or 'work' in which senior BME women and men engaged in their dynamic interaction with the environment. During **Accommodating Identity Work** respondents were most 'reactive' and susceptible to contextual cues about their identity. However, not challenging others was sometimes a conscious decision, as respondents considered their actions through ethnic, gender and/or senior status lenses. In **Refuting Identity Work,** conscious of contextual cues that challenged their identities, respondents refuted these, again interpreting and responding to cues by

drawing on multiple identities. During **Reconciling Identity Work**, respondents engaged in effort, reconstructing identities into favourable self-concepts. This often involved assessing, dismantling, and rebuilding identities that integrated ethnic, gender, and senior status, such as 'BME Leader' or 'Indian male role model'. During **Affirming Identity Work** some respondents sought out affirming contextual cues, drawing on ethnic, gender and hierarchical cues, as well as professionalism or personal location to make sense of their locations. Connecting with similar others across multiple shared identities was often a strongly affirming experience. During the final mode, **Exploratory Identity Work**, respondents could be perceived as most 'agentic' and performative, constructing and using seniority and ethnicity primarily to facilitate encounters with others. Despite being positioned as the most agentic, structural influences in the form of profession or organisational strategy enabled a few respondents to articulate and scout for opportunities to leverage their identities.

Experiences of ethnicity in organisations are complex. Examining ethnicity's intersections with other dimensions acknowledges this complexity but remains methodologically challenging to implement. Using identity work as a lens helps frame the 'messy' data. Yet, the boundaries between modes and their constituent phases are blurry and I acknowledge this is but one of many possible readings of the data.

Notwithstanding, these findings indicate that the identity work of senior BME individuals is a tight interplay of individual, relational and contextual meaning-making in which meaning and value of ethnicity and gender in the context of seniority were relinquished, negotiated or asserted by respondents. This suggests the significance of sensitivity to these dimensions in understanding ethnicity, gender and seniority intersections in organisations. In the next chapter, I introduce the concept of 'intersectional identity work' to describe the individual, relational and contextual dimensions of the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct an ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with their environment.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Chapter overview

As discussed in the Literature Review and Methodology chapters, this study applied identity work as a theoretical and methodological lens for understanding experiences relating to intersections of ethnicity, gender and seniority in organisations. It was proposed that this would go some way towards addressing reviewers' concerns (e.g. Kenny & Briner, 2007) about ethnicity research in UK organisations. This study addressed 'meaningful examination' by going beyond essentialism and acknowledging context in constructing ethnicity at work. In the Literature Review, attention was drawn to the body of literature that embraces ethnicity with gender as an analytical framework (Section 2.3.3). In this approach, multiple, intersecting identities are considered by researchers as sense-making devices, actively deployed to understand experiences of participants (and researchers), and often interrogated from multiple perspectives (e.g. Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Hite, 2007). Although this approach to examining ethnicity with gender addresses some of the concerns of ethnicity researchers, I proposed that an additional contribution could be made by extending the scope of intersectionality research from minority ethnic women to *men's* experiences of disadvantage *and advantage* in organisations. Additionally, concerns regarding the absence of a clear methodology for examining intersections were raised (e.g. Browne & Misra, 2003; McCall, 2005; Healy et al, 2010). 'Identity work' was proposed as a theoretical and methodological framework for examining intersecting identities at work. Exploring senior minority ethnic women and men's meaning-making of ethnicity, gender and seniority in response to identity-heightening encounters integrated several suggestions for meaningful examination of ethnicity in organisations. An intersectional perspective goes beyond essentialism and acknowledges (senior) context in defining ethnicity; focusing on individuals' identity construction during micro-episodes supports an agent-centred perspective on understanding lived experiences of ethnicity; and, using an identity model provides a

theoretical and methodological framework for examining these processes. The following research question was asked:

> ***How do senior black, Asian and minority ethnic men and women make meaning of episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities at work?***

A sub-question to guide interpretation was "*How are intersections of ethnicity, gender and seniority revealed in respondents' accounts of these episodes?*"

The preceding two chapters presented senior black, Asian and minority ethnic (BME) women and men's identity work in response to episodes that raised the salience of their identities. In this thesis, identity work describes the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct understanding their ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with the environment (based on Alvesson et al, 2008, and Beech, 2008). Five identity work modes (Accommodating, Refuting, Reconciling, Affirming and Exploratory identity work) were presented through illustrative episodes (in Chapter 4). The modes were elaborated with reference to constituent phases and how ethnicity, gender and senior status were implicated during identity work (Chapter 5). The modes, from Accommodating to Exploratory identity work, captured a range of meaning-making processes, from reactive and compliant responses, sometimes resulting in internalising contextual meanings about self (Accommodating Identity Work), to proactive and agentic meaning-making, resulting in expanded and augmented identities (Exploratory Identity Work).

This study's individual constructivist approach privileges an agent-centred perspective on the construction of multiple, intersecting identities. However, it is also important to acknowledge the role of context in shaping identities, which was revealed in this study. It is difficult to isolate (and understand) intrapersonal, interpersonal/relational or contextual influences on identity from one other. Therefore, I introduce the notion of 'intersectional identity work', to reflect the individual, relational and contextual dimensions of the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct an ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with their environment. First, general insight gleaned from intersectional identity work is discussed, with specific attention paid to

agency, affirming experiences and stereotyping in ethnicity research. Then, theoretical implications for individual, relational and contextual dimensions of intersectional identity work are considered. Individual dimensions of intersectional identity work draw attention to potential differences in experience and other personal factors that may explain some differences in BME responses to identity encounters. Corroborating support for this is discussed. Next, the relational dimension representing the everyday nature of cues exchanged between senior BME individuals and other parties is discussed. This is followed by a discussion of the role of context in the form of senior organisational spaces, surrounding demography and organisational culture in constructing senior BME identities.

Overall, this chapter acknowledges senior BME individuals' control or power over self-construction, but also remains sensitive to how relational and contextual factors such as position, shared group membership and organisational context influence meaning making (as recommended by Wrzesniewski et al 2003) and ethnicity (as recommended by Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). It constitutes meaningful examination of ethnicity by offering rich insight derived from an identity work lens into the dynamics of intersectional identity work. In so doing, it offers methodological and empirical contributions to ethnicity research. This supports the conclusion that may be drawn from the study regarding the applicability of identity work as a lens for examining experiences of ethnicity and its intersections in organisations.

6.2 Making sense of ethnicity, gender and seniority: Introducing 'intersectional identity work'

As discussed in the Literature Review, organisational diversity scholars encourage approaches to ethnicity and intersectionality that demonstrate mechanisms through which gender and ethnicity intersect. As described in the Methodology chapter, in line with other intersectional researchers (e.g. Bowleg 2006), I designed the study with anti-essentialist assumptions, investigating individuals' experiences from the perspective of a 'whole' individual. Rather than disaggregating identities by asking

respondents to rank or select one dimension over others, I viewed senior BME women and men as multifaceted individuals who would engage in 'work' during the dynamic interaction between self and environment, to construct an understanding of self in potentially challenging and isolated senior locations. Applying the identity work lens revealed the five modes presented in the preceding chapters. However, the data also revealed that, in responding to identity heightening encounters, respondents often drew on ethnicity, gender and/or seniority in the meaning-making process.

Diversity researchers have also been urged to demonstrate sensitivity to multiple levels of analysis, linking traditional sociological approaches to intersectionality to research on how this is played out, at the micro level, lived experience (Browne & Misra, 2003; Zanoni et al, 2010; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). This study responds to these calls by addressing all of these concerns to some degree. Applying an identity work model to intersectionality demonstrated that experiences linked to the intersection of seniority with gender and ethnicity prompted meaning-making, that individuals adopted an agentic stance in response to managing the identity-related outcomes of these experiences, and, the effort expended had individual, relational and contextual dimensions. The concept of 'intersectional identity work' is introduced to reflect these elements. Intersectional identity work describes the individual, relational and contextual dimensions of the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct an ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with their environment. A relational dimension describes how the relationships between senior BME individuals and others (e.g. familiar or non-familiar role models, subordinates, clients and colleagues) influence the construction of ethnic, gendered, senior identities. A contextual dimension describes how broader factors at play in a given situation (e.g. organisational diversity initiatives, demographic distribution and socio-structural factors like religion and culture) also influence the construction of ethnic, gendered, senior identities.

The concept of intersectional identity work attunes us to how BME individuals resolved identity dilemmas implicating gender and ethnicity in senior spaces. For example,

Indira's experiences of exclusion were amplified when colleagues of the same status to her appeared to ignore her views in favour of a junior white man, prompting her to question her future career potential during Accommodating Identity Work (Section 5.2). In contrast in Refuting Identity Work, Vivian pre-empted the threat of ethnic stereotyping by arriving early, and gained a female ally who challenged the majority male group to reconsider her suggestions which had been dismissed (despite Vivian being a representative of a high status Department) (Section 5.3). Engaging in Reconciling Identity Work, Devi had to choose between self-identification as a woman or BME individual based on organisational diversity leadership development options (Section 5.4). In the Affirming Identity Work illustrative episode, Rani systematically inferred identity worth as she made comparisons between herself and colleagues based on shifting criteria of gender, ethnic group, age and profession (Section 4.3.4). Finally, in Exploratory Identity Work, Dean reflected on the benefits the team would reap were he and his white female manager to have more open relationships and share their learning experiences of disadvantage (Section 5.6).

Thus, intersectional identity work describes how individual factors (e.g. cognitive effort to reconcile a paradox), relational factors (e.g. a sense of responsibility and affinity for subordinate minority colleagues) *and* contextual factors (e.g. visibility resulting from demographic distribution in one's immediate environment) can influence the meaning of 'senior black woman' in an organisation. This addresses a number of gaps in research. First, it demonstrates the richness and complexity of the role of ethnicity in organisational behaviour (as requested by Kenny & Briner, 2007). Secondly, it demonstrates the agency of senior BME individuals in organisations. This agent-based perspective fits with the 'practice turn' in diversity literature (Zanoni et al, 2010). Intersectional identity work presents ethnicity, gender and seniority as *"ongoing dynamic social practices*, *shedding light on the various ways in which individuals, as agents relate to the structural restraints of multiple organisational inequalities* (and opportunities therein)*"* (ibid:16) (brackets added).

Specific ethnicity-related empirical implications of intersectional identity work, regarding agentic identity construction, affirming experiences of difference and understanding stereotype threat, are discussed next.

6.2.1 Agency, 'work' and intersections

Moving from positioning minority ethnic individuals as targets or subjects, this study privileges and demonstrates individual agency and proactivity in constructing the meaning of 'senior BME man/woman' in organisations. While it is impossible to draw clear boundaries between the agentic and structural dimensions of intersectional identity work, some general patterns of this 'work' can be identified.

Accommodating Identity Work involved responding to external cues, with some individuals subsequently apparently assenting to the external meanings inferred regarding their identity. However, there was also evidence that this was a mindful action, to protect others with whom one shared minority ethnic status, or to satisfy oneself about sticking to one's religious principles. Refuting Identity Work involved countering implicit or explicit negative assumptions others held about senior BME identities. With Accommodating Identity Work, Refuting Identity Work was engaged in reaction to the external world, usually to manage (often negative) stereotypical assumptions, about one's intersecting gender and ethnicity.

Intersectional identity work illustrates the mutual interdependence of identity facets and the conscious attempts of senior BME individuals to construct a sense of self in given circumstances. This effort in making meaning of multiple, 'opposing' identities supports other research on identity construction for demographic minority organisational members. As described in the Literature Review, visibility (e.g. women in Kanter's study [1977]), the risk of stereotyping (faced by Roberts' stigmatised professionals [2005] and Atewologun & Singh's black male professionals [2010]) and the implicit assumptions about job roles (faced by young women in Ibarra & Petriglieri's paper [2007]), influence the identity construction of demographically atypical individuals at work.

Identity work attunes us to the effort put into constructing a sense of self, and research on women and BME individuals' identity construction demonstrates how they negotiate identities in the context of difference. This study indicates that intersectional identity work further extends understanding of these processes by demonstrating the multiple identities at play.

Additionally, intersectional identity work extends this by highlighting the dynamic role of multiple identity dimensions during meaning-making, the range of modes to be adopted and the intensity of effort expended in different types of contexts. The complexity of senior BME identity construction and the range of effort extended are illustrated with some examples. For instance, fears of stereotyping in ambiguous encounters were associated with relatively intense introspecting during Accommodating Work. Others' behaviours were interpreted through gender *and* ethnic lenses (e.g. fears of being labelled an aggressive black woman). Also, others' expectations regarding the juxtaposition of privileged and disadvantaged status influenced identity work. Clients' lowered expectations (and past experiences) influenced the development of tactics demonstrated during Refuting Work. The Senior Management Team's ascribing one as a 'BME Leader' offered some respondents the language for articulating how they could reconcile an apparent paradox in Reconciling Work. Inferring identity worth during Affirming Identity Work and leveraging identities during Exploratory Identity Work appeared to involve least intense sense-making, perhaps because they comprised predominantly positive episodes. However, intersectional identity work also sheds light on the intensity of 'work'. For example, observing someone senior with shared demographic identities provoked a strong, affirming experience. However, leveraging from one's seniority and ethnicity to maximise an encounter in Exploratory Identity Work was associated with tentativeness and risk. Thus, rather than mere 'awareness' of the effort required to fit in when different (e.g. Atewologun & Singh, 2010), intersectional identity work also alerts us to the interplay of individual, relational and contextual dimensions during identity construction, and, the significance of different identity dimensions in this process.

6.2.2 Affirming experiences and intersections

Intersectional identity work also attunes us to the breadth of experiences of minority ethnicity intersecting with gender in organisations. Examining advantage with disadvantage and a departure from identity 'threat' to 'salience', probably contributed to the high number of positive identity-heightening experiences reported (a third of episodes involved Affirming Identity Work). This challenges the focus on disadvantage in some diversity literature. However, it also supports other identity work research suggesting that individuals tend to seek to see themselves in a positive light, even those with potentially stigmatised identities like homeless people (Snow & Anderson, 1987), lap dancers (Grandy, 2008) and homosexual priests (Creed, DeJordy & Lok, 2011).

However, intersectional identity work also extends this because, by looking at how ethnicity is constructed *in conjunction with* male or senior privilege, we develop an understanding of when and how the intersection of ethnicity with other identities may result in positive, affirming experiences. Another implication of intersectional identity work is that apparently positive episodes may not always be experienced as wholly affirming (or non-affirming), due to the complexities involved. Identity construction scholars often position identity work as a constructive and regenerative model, as actors reflect degrees of, or ways of working towards, congruence (although this is not without its critics, such as Alvesson, 2010). This uni-directional focus probably reflects traditional (rather than critical) assumptions about identities, with the view that individuals engage in self-categorisation for self-affirmation/self-esteem purposes (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, focus on intersectional identity work suggests that these assumptions may not hold for certain individuals, such as senior BME women and men. For instance, in line management and role model relationships, bonds were formed across shared, intersecting identities, transcending the distance imposed by hierarchical status. Although apparently 'positive' (as senior BME women and men constructed their identities as role models and protégés), some also contended with additional feelings of responsibility and challenges of managing boundaries or

discomfort with self-presentation as a particular type of leader. These experiences constituted ambivalent processes for senior BME individuals such that it was difficult, at least for senior BME individuals in this study, to claim purely positive or negative accounts of identity construction.

The finding that shared gender and minority ethnicity in line-manager/subordinate and mentor/protégée relationships suggested stronger affinity supports other research. Work by Thomas (1990); Ragins and Cotton (1992), and Ensher and Murphy (1997), describe the positive impact of matched gender and ethnicity and, detrimental effects of low similarity between mentor and protégée. An intersectional identity work perspective also sheds further insight. The intersection of shared multiple minority identity with seniority was associated with strong, emotional responses that apparently exceeded the material benefits of an established role model interpersonal relationship. Responses to senior similar others fits with other research that expands the conceptualisation of role models from cognitive and behavioural dimensions (i.e. how one sees role models and how one behaves in response to role models) to their symbolic and affective value. This additional value is raised by Sealy and Doherty (in press), who draw attention to the symbols of similarity, hope, meritocracy and support that role models embody. Similarity and hope featured particularly in this study. This suggests that role models (especially for demographic minorities with multiple shared identities) may play a particularly strong role in motivating and engaging others, even if they are not in direct relationships with them, as evident in some encounters of Affirming Identity Work.

6.2.3 Stereotype threat and intersections

A third area of ethnicity/diversity research to which intersectional identity work is relevant is stereotype threat, heightened awareness of the risk of being negatively stereotyped (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Intersectional identity work describes the individual, relational and contextual dimensions of the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct an ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with their environment. This has specific implications for stereotypes, as the intersection of low

status identities with high status identities suggested that senior BME individuals were sensitive to identity challenges that may result from others' perceptions of their intersecting identities. Encounters that prompted Accommodating and Refuting modes were often associated with respondents' awareness of the risk of stereotyping, and attempts to construct identities in anticipation of or response to this. Specifically, intersectional identity work attunes us to the differences in responses to the threat of stereotyping that may be influenced by different identity dimensions, such as ethnicity with gender. Although it was beyond the scope of this thesis to conduct a direct comparison between and across gender and ethnicity, contesting in response to stereotype threat came from black men, rather than Asian men or black and Asian women. As discussed in Section 4.3.2, this may result from being subject to different stereotypes intersecting gender with ethnicity that are faced by black and Asian men in the UK.

More generally, the focus on senior BME individuals' identity work, which was often prompted by the juxtaposition of low and high status, supports, and adds to research on the impact of stereotyping. Early research on women in organisations suggested that sometimes it is often easier to accept stereotyped roles than to fight back (Kanter, 1977). This was evidenced in encounters triggering Accommodating Identity Work. However, this study also extends understanding of how individuals self-manage against the potential threat of (negative) stereotyping. As presented in the Literature Review, other research has examined stereotype threat as an explanation for the differences in test outcomes between groups (e.g. Steele & Aronson, 1995). However, much work on stereotype threat is conducted in laboratory rather than applied settings (a criticism advanced by Cullen, Hardison & Sackett, 2004 and Roberson & Kulik, 2007). Consequently, there are few studies of how individuals move from sensing threat to impaired performance (Schmader et al, 2008), particularly in organisations. However, the attention paid to subtle interpersonal cues during Accommodating and Refuting Identity Work (further discussed as a relational dimension of intersectional identity work in Section 6.3.2) suggests senior BME individuals' awareness of stereotype threat, and the effort undertaken in

accommodating or refuting this. This contributes to the literature that demonstrates that minority ethnic individuals are aware of the risk of being stigmatised based on their status (Cullen, et al, 2004; Roberson & Kulik, 2007; Schmader et al, 2008). Additionally, the micro focus afforded by an identity work lens extends knowledge in this area. It does so by demonstrating how individuals anticipate or read micro-cues at work that raise awareness of the risk of stereotyping, how they interpret or make sense of these, and the potential outcome of this. The micro-perspective taken on senior BME individuals' identity work strongly supports some of the laboratory and theoretical perspectives on the process of stereotyping. For instance, Schmader and colleagues theorise a process for stereotype threat, suggesting that physiological stress response to perceptions of threat may directly impair cognitive processing and active monitoring. They add that efforts to suppress negative thoughts and emotions can consume executive resources needed to perform well on cognitive and social tasks. Responses from Serena (in an interview) and Indira (in a meeting with colleagues), demonstrated that they engaged in active monitoring, chiding themselves to perform better, but also talked about disappointing themselves at the end of the encounters which had cognitive and social dimensions. This provides some support for Schmader and colleagues (2008). Thus, focusing on meaning-making at the level of the episode suggests strong empirical and applied evidence for the process that leads to impaired performance.

6.3 Dimensions of intersectional identity work

Thus far, I have discussed three areas of research (the effort of identity construction, the significance of affirming experiences, and the impact of stereotyping) supported by insight gleaned from the intersectional identity work approach of this study. In several cases, examining identity work from an intersectional perspective extended understanding of the complexities of identity construction and affirming experiences for senior BME individual.

The next section introduces the core dimensions of intersectional identity work. First, a detailed consideration of how individual, or intrapersonal dimensions influenced

senior BME individuals' effort to construct an ethnic, gendered, senior self, is discussed with reference to other theories. Then, interpersonal and contextual dimensions are discussed with regards to how these contribute to research on subtle organisational practices that reinforce difference, potentially sustaining inequality and those practices that affirm significance, potentially encouraging inclusion.

6.3.1 The individual dimension of intersectional identity work

The range of responses to episodes (from Accommodating to Exploratory Identity Work) may prompt questions regarding whether, what, and how, individual differences influence the observed patterns. The previous Findings chapters stayed close to the data (Wolcott, 1994) and offered a suggestive framework for senior BME individuals' identities. This framework remains to be validated by additional research, however, other theories point to the initial utility of the study's methodology.

Considering individual factors that may contribute to different modes, I draw on soon-to-be-published theorisation on the psychological effects of identity ambiguous encounters on demographically atypical professionals (Clair et al, in press). Clair and colleagues consider experiences of professional identity ambiguity (a sense of uncertainty regarding one's professional identity status, provoked by signals from others in a social context), theorising on the explanations for differences in responses to this uncertainty. The sense that one's claims to a professional identity are questioned or not fully accepted in an interaction because of one's atypical demographic background triggers identity ambiguity, which can have meaningful psychological and behavioural effects on demographically atypical professionals. They develop a model which explores how such experiences of identity ambiguity evoke identity threats and negative emotions. Clair and colleagues suggest that four factors influence responses to ambiguous identity encounters: individuals' degree of professional identification, repeated exposure, coping resources and negative affectivity. Although they focus on threats to professional (rather than personal) identity, the utility of the intersectional identity work model may be supported in the extent to which the findings align with Clair and colleagues' propositions. First,

considering individuals' degree of identification, this is difficult to assess in this study. All respondents self-nominated as senior BME individuals, and the perspective of identity adopted in this study is that its significance emerges from the effort in ongoing self-construction, rather than the relative strength of identities. However, aspects of the findings provide some support for Clair and colleagues' propositions that low identification will be associated with a lowered sense of threat. For instance, some incidents of 'partial', or interrupted identity work were attributed to low BME self-identification (e.g. in Sam's case, described in Section 5.5.2). Their second suggestion is that repeated exposure to identity ambiguous encounters may moderate responses to the perceived threat. The findings support this, as evidence suggested that engaging in Refuting Identity Work may be an outcome of repeated exposure, because the first phase of this mode was a sense of expectation. Clair and colleagues' third proposed factor for explaining different outcomes to ambiguous encounters is individuals' coping resources. Support for this can be found in some individuals' references to "*tactics*" (e.g. mimicking Inspector Columbo) in response to anticipated identity challenges. Their final factor is negative affectivity. Negative affectivity is a general disposition towards subjective distress and unpleasurable engagement (Watson & Clark, 1984; cited in Clair et al, in press). This may be inferred by some individuals' reporting of similar patterns of identity work across encounters (see Table 8: Respondents by ethnicity, gender and identity work modes; page110-111). This study was not designed to test Clair and colleagues' model; however, initial indicators do point to the methodological and theoretical utility of combining intersectional perspectives with identity work. Additionally, as discussed in the section above, the 'work' undertaken by individuals drew on ethnicity, gender and seniority, e.g. gender and ethnicity/culture appeared to influence differences in what stereotypes respondents attuned to and how they confronted them. Additionally, responses to identity challenges appeared to be complicated by seniority, gender and ethnicity (such as the competitive stance adopted by the black men compared to the self-questioning of some women; and, the finding that only black women feared

stereotyping around 'aggressiveness' and only Indian men talked about reserved behavioural norms).

Thus, initial indications suggest that past experience and the personal salience of intersecting identities, as well as individual differences that may stem from gender or cultural differences are individual factors that may influence one's propensity to adopt a particular identity work mode. The study was not designed to examine patterns of difference in response to identity-heightening encounters. However, the initial alignment with Clair and colleagues' work suggests that psychological research to further unpack the individual dimension of intersectional identity work may be a rich avenue for future research.

6.3.2 The relational dimension of intersectional identity work

The role of others in prompting identity work was a prominent theme in the findings. In particular, respondents' abilities to articulate interpersonal triggers of identity work support the body of literature illustrating the significance of others' engagement in 'small' events towards meaning-make of self at work. As noted in the Literature Review, interpersonal cues play a crucial role in individual meaning-making at work (Wrzesniewski et al, 2003). This was reinforced in this study in which the majority (about 90%) of the identity-heightening encounters occurred in interpersonal (rather than reflective) contexts (Section 4.2.2.1, page 105). Thus, colleagues and clients were not just a source of neutral information, but a source of significance and meaning for individuals (Wrzesniewski et al, 2003) playing a critical role in sense-making of ethnicity in organisations. Related to this, others' small and seemingly insignificant actions (e.g. a handshake, absent offers of refreshments, curiosity about one's specialist expertise, misspelt name, acknowledgement by name when passing a more senior individual in a corridor, a passing reference to 'power dressing'), were taken as identity-salient cues, prompting individuals to make sense of themselves as senior BME women and men in organisations. These support the assertion that colleagues are not just models to imitate or nodes in structural networks but constitute *"raw materials in creating work meaning"* (Wrzesniewski et al, 2003:126). A relational

dimension attunes us to the dynamic and bi-directional impact of senior BME individuals' identity work. Next, I discuss senior BME identity work in the context of interpersonal cues sent by others and interpreted by senior BME individuals ('Targets of micro-behaviours'). I then discuss cues sent by senior BME individuals to others to construct new meanings of senior BME identities ('Instigators of change').

6.3.2.1 Targets of micro-behaviours

As discussed in the Literature Review, micro-behaviours (positive micro-affirmations and negative micro-inequities) are apparently small, ephemeral often unconscious acts, in which one engages, which over time result in including and affirming people with whom one is familiar and likes, while excluding and discouraging those perceived to be different (Rowe, 2008). Focusing on everyday experiences of identity salience rather than 'threat' did not just reveal an expanded range of *responses* from relatively negative Accommodating to relatively positive Affirming encounters (as discussed earlier in this chapter). Highlighting the relational dimension of intersectional identity work attunes us to the range of positively- to negatively-appraised interpersonal *cues* regarding experiences of ethnicity intersecting with gender and seniority.

In the study, limp handshakes and doubts about competence contrasted with being called by name in passing by a Permanent Secretary and having an unfamiliar colleague endorsing one's suggestions after it had been dismissed in a meeting. This attention to positive as well as negative micro-behaviours is an extension to the research on the 'significance of small events' which predominantly focuses on the detrimental impact of behaviours on minority members. Also, a relational dimension of intersectional identity work adds insight to theories of 'modern racism' in organisations. This focus is encouraged by several recent diversity scholars, such as Deitch and colleagues (2003); Kenny and Briner (2007), Cortina, (2008); Zanoni and colleagues (2010); Laer and Janssens, (2011), Clair et al, (in press). Modern racism draws attention to the subtle ambiguity that typifies contemporary experiences of diversity and inequality in organisations today. It is also referred to as 'modern discrimination' by Cortina, (2008) and 'everyday racism' by Essed (1991). This modern

form of the manifestation of prejudice describes how systemic racism is reproduced through routine and taken-for-granted practices and procedures in everyday life, rather than more blatant, aggressive acts such as name calling or physical abuse. Modern racist practices manifest as 'micro-aggressions', "*brief and common place daily verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group* (Sue et al, 2007:273). These are also incorporated into Rowe's (2008) 'micro-behaviours'. 'Micro-aggression' is a relatively recent concept, focusing on clinical contexts, with minority ethnic clinical patients as targets of aggressions or incivilities. Cortina (2008) suggests that professionally and/or economically successful women and BME individuals are likely to be targets of workplace incivility, as their competence could threaten the dominant majority. Accommodating and Refuting Identity Work especially reflected individuals' dynamic responses to "*verbal, behavioural and environmental indignities"* during identity-heightening episodes that were interpreted as *"hostile, derogatory, or negative*" (Sue et al: 271) on the basis of their senior, ethnic and/or gender status. This thus aligns with work on the role of micro-behaviours in sustaining or challenging feelings of inclusion, belonging (and therefore identity) in organisations.

Modern racism suggests a degree of difficulty in describing and defining experiences of discrimination - *"this type of discrimination is difficult to identify, quantify and rectify because of their subtle, nebulous and unnamed nature"* (Sue et al, 2007:272). Sue and colleagues urge a need to make these 'invisible' forms of discrimination more visible, suggesting that subtle racism may have more detrimental effects on targets than traditional overt forms of racism. They also suggest there is much opportunity for empirical and theoretical development, especially regarding adaptive responses to micro-aggressions and suggestions for raising awareness and sensitivity in instigators. Cortina (2008) especially advocates focus on BME individuals' experiences (over gender, for example), considering the greater challenges in conducting this type of research, such as the inherent ambiguities of these events and employees' reluctance to identify as victims of prejudice. This study goes some way towards addressing these

suggestions. Organisational examinations of implicit bias and micro-aggressions appear very scant (being more prevalent in clinical research). Where organisational treatments occur, there is an emphasis on quantitative measures, comparing counts of micro-aggressions with measures of climate and personal outcomes such as reported well-being, burnout and job satisfaction (e.g. Deitch et al 2003; Lee, 2009). This study goes some way to documenting these micro-behaviours, and the potential impact they have on senior BME individuals. Although beyond the scope of this thesis, micro-behaviours are linked to implicit biases and value judgements individuals hold about out-group and in-group members (Kandola 2009). This is a growing area of diversity research, which would also benefit from more research in applied settings. In this study, the relational dimension of intersectional identity work attunes us to the range of ambiguous and/or unexpected cues signalled in everyday organisational practices that enable intersecting ethnic, gender and senior identities to wither or flourish.

6.3.2.2 Instigators of change

So far I have emphasised the impact that others had on senior BME men and women's identity work through signalling subtle identity-heightening cues. However, there was also evidence that this occurred in the opposite direction. Another relational aspect of intersectional identity work is the capacity for change revealed in some of the episodes. Intersectional identity work draws attention to the effort undertaken in identity construction in the context of privileged senior spaces against disadvantaged gender or ethnicity. A small number of respondents 'worked' their intersecting identities in this way, recognising how their actions and presence constituted cues for their colleagues and associates. As presented during Exploratory Identity Work (Section 5.6), in some encounters, respondents had a heightened awareness of their identities and the potential significance of their presence in often senior spaces. In some of these encounters, they capitulated from their senior status to challenge the status quo, indicating potential capability for organisational change. The notion of the outsider being an agent of change from within is supported in gender research. Meyerson and Scully's (1995) 'tempered radicals' identify with and are committed to

their organisations, while simultaneously supporting a cause, community or ideology at odds with the dominant culture of their organisations. To sustain their 'ambivalent identities' they engage in small acts of organisational change. This involves small wins (local, spontaneous, authentic action) and selecting appropriate language styles and affiliations towards organisational transformation. I shared the concept of tempered radicals with Govt Plc respondents at a workshop after the study and it was a concept with which they were very much taken, which was consequently featured in a newsletter. Many of the respondents saw themselves as tempered radicals. However, the data also demonstrated the impact this had on the individuals. The final phase of Exploratory Identity Work, which represented individuals leveraging their identities as a resource, was augmented or expanded identities. Being in a position to engage in small acts of change (such as strategically positioning an article about diversity to raise awareness and trigger discussion at work) often afforded by their senior status, senior BME individuals constructed themselves as 'more than'. The paradox of organisational in/visibility faced by many senior BME women and men is often considered a burden to be managed (e.g. Roberts, 2005; Blake-Beard & Roberts, 2004). However, the relational dimension of intersectional identity work attunes us to the power in some of these positions. This power enabled some respondents to augment or expand identities with a new currency or value (constructed as being a "*monopoly*" and *"identity credentials"* by two respondents) and involved some beginning to engage in micro-acts of organisational change. This offers an alternative perspective on ethnicity in organisations.

In summary, the relational dimension of intersectional identity work offers avenues for meaningful examination of ethnicity by illustrating the impact of micro-behaviours on senior BME women and men, and suggesting the potential for organisational change. Although significant, the individual and relational dimensions only tell a partial story regarding senior BME individuals' identity work. Meaning-making of everyday experiences of ethnicity, gender and seniority also revealed contextual influences on identity work, discussed next.

6.3.3 The contextual dimension of intersectional identity work

Context and structure (as argued in the Literature Review) influence the meaning of ethnicity in organisations (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). Favouring this study's individual constructivist stance, attention is paid to how contextual factors were directly involved in respondents' meaning-making. This section focuses on the theoretical implications of the structural and contextual dimensions of intersectional identity work. Interpersonal *and* contextual factors signal threats to individuals' identities (Petriglieri, 2011). However, other than Ely's (1994, 1995) work on the role of demographic representation on how gender is constructed in organisations, there appear to be few studies of how organisational/contextual dimensions influence identity constructions relating to being a demographic minority. Thus, the contextual dimension of intersectional identity work potentially contributes to demographic diversity literature by articulating how context may play a role in individuals' construction of ethnicity, gender and seniority in organisations. Contextual dimensions particularly salient in the study concerned seniority (which had individual, relational and contextual implications), and organisational context.

6.3.3.1 Seniority as context

As discussed previously, context plays a significant (but undervalued) role in the meaning associated with various social identities. In contrast to female gender and minority ethnicity, seniority denotes privilege within organisations (Peiro & Melia, 2003). As such, seniority represented privilege at the individual and the organisational structural/contextual level. Primarily, intersectional identity work sensitises us to the juxtaposition of status advantage (in seniority, whiteness and male gender) and status disadvantage (in ethnicity/non-whiteness and female gender). This notion of 'oppositional identities' is a point of interest for other scholars, such as Clair and colleagues' (in press) 'demographic atypical' professionals and Roberts' (2008) discussion of the image presentation strategies minority professionals are likely to employ in the face of negative stereotypes. Both sets of authors suggest some sort of incongruence between self and environment; however they focus on the interpersonal

encounter (e.g. client meetings or colleague questions) as the site of incongruence. The contextual dimension of intersectional identity work, however, draws attention to the role of seniority as a contextual dimension that often prompted senior BME identity work, and perhaps heightened instigators' implicit biases due to the high stakes nature of encounters. Additionally, perceivers' and instigators' senior status in relation to each other influenced meaning-making around ethnicity. For instance, individuals were more sensitive to identity threats from senior (and white) organisational representatives whom they expected ought to 'know better' about the sensitivities around diversity. This also supports Wrzesniewski and colleagues' (2003) finding that power/status differentials strongly influence how employees interpret cues. Thus, seniority as an *individual*, *relational* and *contextual* identity dimension for both perceivers and targets contributes to how ethnicity is experienced in organisations. As previously proposed (e.g. Kenny & Briner, 2007; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007), juxtaposing seniority with minority ethnicity does prime identity work in response to challenges. This supports an interpretation of ethnicity that is sensitive to organisational context, such as that offered by intersectional identity work.

6.3.3.2 Demographic context

Demographic distribution in one's immediate environment also heightened identity salience. The sense of connection or difference experienced at the start of Affirming Identity Work was heightened by similarity with another, or difference to the group, prompting senior BME women and men to infer identity worth, leading to reaffirmed identities. This aligns with other studies on the impact of demographic representation on the social construction of gender and other identity facets in organisations (Ely, 1994; 1995) However, the identity work lens further adds to this by demonstrating the dynamic process of identity construction that occurs in response to the immediate demographic environment. Some respondents consciously scanned their environments for demographic cues, drawing simultaneously and sequentially on multiple identity dimensions, including ethnicity, gender, seniority, age and profession, as cues to position themselves in the given location. Although it is important to

consider the detrimental effects of being in a demographic minority, or token position in organisations, this study also indicates the potential for *self-affirmation* that comes from being 'demographically atypical' as a senior BME woman or man.

Additionally, organisational culture and context influenced identity work. As discussed in the Literature Review, meaning-making of ethnicity occurs in the context of organisational and socio-cultural influences. The power of the organisation in constructing ethnicity and gender with seniority was demonstrated in several ways. For example, an intersectional perspective on organisational hierarchy suggests that in many large firms, 'a senior woman' is likely to be constructed as being white and 'black woman' may be associated with lower status positions (e.g. cleaners and canteen staff). This was reflected in some of the respondents' stories. The invisibility of the 'senior BME woman' identity prompted identity work (for instance, following an interruption by a canteen manager when speaking to a black female canteen staff member). However, Govt Plc also started initiatives directed at senior minority ethnic women (e.g. in setting up the senior BME women's network), making the 'senior BME female' identity more visible. In turn, this appeared to influence the construction of 'senior BME person' in Govt Plc as *female*. This focus on senior BME women resulted in senior BME men's invisibility, prompting two male respondents (Dean and Steve) to ask, "*What about the (senior, black) men?*" This reinforces the importance of context-sensitive interpretations of ethnicity in organisations (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). Another example of organisational influence on constructions of intersecting identities can be taken from Professional Services Firm (P.S.F.). To reconcile the paradox/conflict during Reconciling Identity Work, P.S.F. employees were influenced by their selection and ascription as "*BME Leaders"* by the Firm's Senior Leadership Team. Additionally, some respondents demonstrated savvy in proactively looking out for a sense of opportunity to leverage identities during Exploratory Identity Work. In contrast to this utilitarian perspective of senior minority ethnic status, there appeared no parallel influence on senior BME men and women's construction in Govt Plc. Identity work in organisations cannot be easily unravelled from organisational control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). At the time of the study, P.S.F. was a global organisation engaged in a strategic

diversity initiative that privileged the business case for diversity. Additionally, attendance on the BME Leadership Programme gave respondents the opportunity to articulate, and put effort into, reconciling identity conflicts. This supports the finding that organisational diversity paradigms influence how diversity is used and perceived in organisations (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Other empirical research suggests that proximal organisational context may play a more significant role than distal socio-cultural context in explaining attitudes to identity groups and conflicts (Chrobot-Mason et al, 2009). In this cross-cultural study on identity group conflict, non-profit organisations demonstrated greater comfort with conflict than for-profit firms, due to their social justice cultural norms. The finding that organisational diversity strategy offered P.S.F employees the language for promoting their 'difference' supports Ely and Thomas (2001) and Chrobot-Mason and colleagues' (2009) assertion that the link between organisational context (e.g. strategy or values) strongly influences how identities are constructed. However, the findings also suggest additional points for consideration. Ely and Thomas (2001) describe three different diversity strategies – equality-and-fairness, access-and-legitimacy, and learning-and-integration. The data suggests P.S.F. may be positioned between access-and-legitimacy (matching employees to diverse markets based on demographic similarity) and learning-and-integration (using demographic diversity as a resource for learning and rethinking strategy and practices). In P.S.F., some respondents of Indian heritage flaunted their identity capital (prompted by others in Accommodating Identity Work or self-driven in Exploratory Identity Work) to leverage business relationships from their cultural background. This occurred in the wider economic context of the growing influence of 'BRIC' countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) in the corporate sector. This offered a specific group of BME senior individuals the opportunity to assert their identities favourably in a specific type of organisation. However, as an approach to 'managing diversity', critics may challenge its context-specific limitations (e.g. Noon, 2010). In P.S.F, the affirming experience of constructing oneself as a business resource for high-value projects is intricately connected with one's employer's current strategic objectives, and raises questions for the relevance of other identity dimensions that

may not carry the same 'business currency'. There are several risks of this somewhat instrumental perspective of ethnicity. For example, what are implications for individuals of minority sexual orientation or minority ethnic individuals who have assimilated or do not self-identify as culturally different from the majority white group? What about employees from cultures considered irrelevant to prevailing business strategy (e.g. the Caribbean)? Or junior employees who may have limited access to high profile international clients/projects? To what extent can gender be utilised in the same way, for men and women to actively leverage from gender differences without raising alarms regarding sexism? Additionally, the risk of essentialising differences is ever-present. Lalit, describing himself as *"an Indian from India"*, differentiated himself from British colleagues of Indian origin, and dismissed any consideration of cultural fit between a member of that group and an Indian-based client. Thus, although Exploratory Identity Work has been positioned in this study as the most proactive and agent-focused approach with opportunity for identity gain and growth through augmenting identities (the final phase), there is still a risk of essentialising and restricting the meaning of ethnicity in organisations through organisational influence.

Overall, contextual sensitivity to understanding experiences of ethnicity, gender and seniority in organisations focus us on the multiple roles of seniority and the proximal and distal impact of organisational context. This reinforces other scholars' emphasis on the significance of context in ethnicity (and diversity) research.

To contribute to the meaningful examination of ethnicity, so far, I have presented how the identity work model helped frame the agency and effort of senior BME individuals and illuminated the relational and contextual dimensions of their identity construction. Finally, I summarise the key points of this Discussion.

6.4 Chapter summary

The study contributes to ethnicity research through the introduction of a methodology and approach for meaningful examination of ethnicity in organisations that

acknowledges the complexity of ethnicity while extending the scope of intersectionality. As presented in the Literature Review, the research sought to extend the scope of ethnicity by examining intersections of advantage and disadvantage beyond minority ethnic women as targets of multiple oppression. It achieved this by introducing identity work as an orienting device for understanding senior minority ethnic women and men's lived experience of ethnicity and its intersection with gender and seniority. Identity work in which senior BME individuals engaged, comprising Accommodating, Refuting, Reconciling, Affirming and Exploratory modes, entailed simultaneously enabling and constraining dimensions.

To capture the dynamic and multiple-level implications of senior BME individuals' identity work, the concept of 'intersectional identity work' was introduced. Intersectional identity work describes the individual, relational and contextual dimensions of the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct an ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with their environment. Intersectional identity work reveals the agency of senior BME women and men in constructing identities, highlighting the individual (e.g. personal differences), relational (e.g. micro-behaviours) and contextual (e.g. demographic context) dimensions that influence senior BME identity construction. This supports non-essentialist conceptualisations of ethnicity and reinforces the consideration that identity work is a personal meaning-making process that occurs in the context of one's social environment.

Findings indicated that identity work is a useful lens for examining ethnicity and intersectionality in organisational studies. This study extends intersectional research on empirical narratives of membership of double disadvantage to demonstrating how ethnicity, gender and seniority play out and are agentically leveraged in dynamic interactions with their environment. In so doing, it offers a methodological and empirical contribution to ethnicity research. This supports the conclusion that may be drawn from the study, regarding the applicability of identity work as a lens for examining experiences of ethnicity and its intersections in organisations.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Chapter overview

In this final chapter, I first re-present the argument outlined in this thesis, from the Introduction to the Discussion. Then, I present the methodological, empirical, theoretical and practical contributions of the study. Following this, I discuss personal reflections on conducting the study, followed by the limitations of this work. The thesis ends with considerations for future research.

7.2 Thesis overview

This thesis began with an account of my personal interest and curiosity regarding identity and difference in organisations. The ensuing discussion of ethnicity at work in the Introduction advocated research in the UK that is sensitive to the complexity of key demographic constructs like ethnicity, gender, minority, seniority and identity. In the Literature Review, particular attention was paid to *how* ethnicity has been examined in organisations. This focus on approaches to examining ethnicity was in response to recurring themes in academic reviews of ethnicity in organisation studies critiquing how ethnicity has been studied rather than what we know about ethnicity (e.g. Kenny & Briner, 2007). The ensuing Literature Review focused on intersectionality as an approach for meaningful examination of ethnicity in organisations. Intersectionality recognises that the meaning of, and experiences relating to, ethnicity are enmeshed with other identity facets. The review focused on studies examining ethnicity with gender. Three key approaches were described: studies presenting ethnicity with gender as essentialised attributes of organisational members, those that focus on narratives of individuals to understand individuals' subjective experiences at the fault lines of ethnicity with gender, and those embracing ethnicity with gender as an analytical framework. The review indicated that, although the latter group of studies often reject essentialism and acknowledge context to examine ethnicity in organisations, additional potential for developing ethnicity research remains. The outcome of the Literature Review suggested that one area of potential is to expand the

scope of 'intersectional' perspectives on ethnicity, by focusing on minority ethnic women *and men's* experiences of disadvantage *and advantage* in organisations. Additionally, the review identified the potential for clearer methodological guidelines for examining intersecting identities with greater reference to organisational theories, and agent-based examinations of the lived experiences of ethnicity in organisations.

Following this, 'identity work' was proposed as a theoretical and methodological lens for understanding experiences relating to ethnicity as it intersects with gender and seniority in organisations. Identity work is relevant as it aligns with other diversity research focusing on the dynamics of identity construction experienced by minority gender and ethnic professionals (e.g. Roberts, 2005; Clair et al, in press). Identity work is the (primarily mental) effort individuals undertake during the dynamic interaction between self and environment, to construct an understanding of self (Alvesson et al, 2008; Beech 2008). Identity work as a lens enabled examinations of intersections from a perspective of juxtaposing advantage and disadvantage. It also enabled examination of ethnicity from a micro-perspective, revealing how black, Asian and minority ethnic (BME) individuals experienced and responded to identity-heightening encounters. The study aimed to examine how senior BME women and men constructed an understanding of their multiple-identified selves in response to affirming, contradictory or ambiguous identity-heightening experiences at work. The following research question was posed:

> ***How do senior black, Asian and minority ethnic men and women make meaning of episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting identities at work?***

The sub-question guiding interpretation was "*How are intersections of ethnicity, gender and seniority revealed in their accounts of these episodes?*"

Twelve men and twelve women who self-identified as senior black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals participated. Thirteen respondents (from a major UK government department, 'Govt Plc') and nine (from a global professional services firm, 'P.S.F') kept journals about episodes that raised the salience of their identities as senior BME

women and men. After two to four weeks, they participated in interviews, describing in detail the sense they made of the identity-heightening episodes and their responses to them. Respondents described 101 moments of self-reflection or encounters with others that raised awareness of their identities as senior BME women and men. The data were broadly categorised against the identity work three stage model using data matrix display methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in Excel. Then, more fine-grained analysis was conducted on eight illustrative vignettes (Miles & Huberman, 1994) which formed a template against which the rest of the episodes were analysed.

The findings addressed the research question by demonstrating how the model of identity work offers insight into ethnicity and its intersections with gender and seniority. A typology of five identity work modes describing senior BME individuals' identity-construction in response to micro episodes emerged from the analysis. Respondents' identity work involved the simultaneous and selective use of ethnicity, gender and seniority during meaning-making. The five modes, starting with a jolt sensation, generally leading to a sense-making tactic and ending in an identity outcome, were *Accommodating, Refuting, Reconciling, Affirming* and *Exploratory* identity work. This identity work perspective on intersections revealed how respondents simultaneously and consecutively interpreted multiple identity dimensions to make sense of identity-heightening encounters. They leveraged identity facets as active resources for making sense of their worlds.

To develop understanding of intersectionality, Browne & Misra (2003) claim there is limited theoretical leverage in highlighting the ubiquitous nature of gender and ethnic intersections. They consider it more important to understand the conditions under which intersections would appear, and how these are experienced. The concept of 'intersectional identity work' was introduced in the previous chapter as a framework for understanding how ethnicity in conjunction with gender and senior status may be constructed in organisations. Intersectional identity work focuses on the individual, relational and contextual dimensions of the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct an ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with their

environment. Intersectional identity work privileges the agency of senior BME women and men during identity construction, highlighting the individual (e.g. personal differences), relational (e.g. interpersonal cues) and contextual (e.g. demographic context) dimensions that influence this process.

The main conclusion drawn from this thesis is the applicability of identity work as a lens for examining experiences of ethnicity and its intersections in organisations. This supports non-essentialist conceptualisations of ethnicity and acknowledges that identity work is a personal meaning-making process that occurs in the context of one's social environment. The methodological, empirical, theoretical and practical contributions are presented next.

7.3 Methodological contribution of an 'intersectional identity work' perspective

A key contribution of this thesis is its methodology for 'meaningful examination' of ethnicity in organisations. As noted in the Introduction, there is a dearth of good quality social research that sheds insight into the patterns and causes of ethnic inequalities in the UK (Kenny & Briner, 2007; Salway et al, 2011). I would not go far as saying I am addressing the gap in *"methodological innovation"* so badly required for research on ethnicity in the UK (Salway et al, 2011:50). However, the approach to examining senior BME individuals' identity construction and intersections was developed in response to scholars' recommendations for 'meaningful' research, and appears to have offered useful insight into lived experiences of ethnicity. I believe this approach, with the introduction of the 'intersectional identity work' concept, addresses the following methodology-related critiques of ethnicity research:

a) Challenging essentialist assumptions of ethnicity by examining it in conjunction with gender and seniority through a dynamic identity work process.
b) Sensitivity to relational and contextual/structural influences on ethnicity, by examining a mixed-ethnic UK population, demonstrating sensitivity to

organisational context, and with assumptions that seniority influences the meaning of ethnicity in organisations.

c) Integrating theoretical and methodological insight from identity work. Using this framework, attention is drawn to factors such as micro-behaviours that trigger identity salience and the effort and agency of senior BME meaning-making.

d) Expanding the scope of 'intersectionality' by examining women and men's experiences at the juxtaposition of privilege and disadvantage across the dimensions of ethnicity, gender and seniority.

Overall, this thesis responded to a specific methodological requirement for advancing knowledge of ethnicity in organisations. It also fits within the need for advancing diversity research, by adopting a perspective on identity that is socially constructed, acknowledging the role of context in shaping identities and acknowledges the (complex and shifting) role of power dynamics in the manifestation of inequalities at work (Zanoni et al, 2010; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). Additionally, it offers considerations for identity work theorists. Such 'extreme cases' (inferred from the socially atypical juxtaposition of high and low status) may prove invaluable for building and elaborating on the dimensions of identity construction (as suggested by Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006). Having presented the overall methodological contribution to ethnicity research, specific implications for adopting an intersectional identity work perspective are discussed next.

7.3.1 Implications of intersectional identity work

The intersectional identity work concept captures the thesis findings of individual, relational and contextual dimensions of the effort undertaken by senior BME individuals to construct an ethnic, gendered, senior self, in interaction with their environment. Considerations for developing this further relate to examining 'intersections' and examining 'identity work' with minority ethnic respondents.

7.3.1.1 Examining intersections

One challenge of intersectional studies (as discussed in the Literature Review) concerns how one examines multiple identities. Intersectional research necessitates fragmentation of individuals' multi-dimensional identities and privileges categories of difference, identity and disadvantage over others, predefined by researchers. The arguments presented in the Literature Review led to the study's focus on specific identity facets (gender, ethnicity, seniority) in a specific context (organisations) at the expense of others. Thus, this study privileged gender, ethnicity and hierarchical status over other identity signifiers like social class, sexual orientation, migrant status and language/accent that may have influenced respondents' encounters and meaning-making responses. Simultaneously, the perspective taken in this study is that intersectional identity work involves multiple, intersecting identity facets simultaneously converging and diverging in response to a given context. Thus intersectional identity work is inevitably messy, and people did not stick to the identities 'ascribed' to them. Intersectional scholars suggest selecting-in those pertinent identity dimensions that are most salient, given the study's organisational and theoretical context, while remaining cognisant of what was selected out (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Cole, 2009; Özbilgin et al, 2011). In this study, this was achieved by focusing on identity work as it pertained to ethnicity, gender and seniority (for the reasons already detailed in this thesis) while remaining sensitive to other identity facets respondents considered during meaning-making, such as nationality, religion and age.

Another implication of the intersectional identity work concept concerns expanding the scope of intersections to the privileged status of male gender and seniority. As described in the Literature Review chapter, intersectionality was devised as a socio-political and critical tool rather than a neutral analytical lens. Thus, its adoption as a perspective for examining disadvantage and privilege may be challenged by traditional feminist scholars. The argument may be advanced that moving away from elucidating and challenging oppressions in organisations and society, to an individualised and

sanitised approach is unlikely to affect much change. Healy and colleagues (2010) argue that the concept of intersectionality is not value free. However, sensitivity to male privilege in the context of seniority and ethnicity offered useful insight to understanding ethnicity in this thesis. For example, there was evidence of invisible gender privilege in the senior ethnic spaces. In addition to this study's empirical support for expanding the scope of intersections, other authors are examining masculinities, whiteness and privilege (e.g. Grimes, 2001), sometimes through intersecting lenses (e.g. Heller, 2010; Levine-Rasky, 2011).

Having considered the study's contributions to, and implications for examining ethnicity-related intersections, implications for examining the identity work of senior BME individuals are presented below.

7.3.1.2 Examining identity work with minority ethnic respondents

I am not aware of any other organisational study that used journals, combined with email/text prompts, to capture identity episodes for further elaboration in an interview. I believe the method mitigates some challenges of identity construction research. For instance, it enables focus on lived everyday experiences, rather than memorable episodes like bullying and traumatic life events used to examine identity work (e.g. Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Maitlis, 2009). This approach is particularly appropriate for revealing positive and negative micro-behaviours central to modern diversity research, as discussed in the previous chapter. It also removes the requirement of examining narratives about personal experiences and *then* inferring identity work from narratives (e.g. Watson, 2009). Although interviews are considered as having the best potential for understanding identity work (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Alvesson et al, 2008), the act of narrating one's stories in interview is also an identity construction activity in itself. Journal entries (and the text/email reminders) as used in this thesis can mitigate this challenge. Additionally, the design (focusing on identity-salient episodes and a journal) was recommended in a paper I came across nearly three years after I started data collection, proposed by Clair and colleagues (in press) for understanding identity threat. Additionally, this method is not as intrusive or

resource intensive as participant observation/video recordings (e.g. LeBaron, Glenn & Thompson, 2009) or other ethnographic methods. It may thus reduce respondent sensitivities about being seen to participate in ethnicity research. It is also less reliant on respondents' memory to recall everyday events compared to conducting interviews in isolation. Although the study did not aim to quantify the frequency of identity-heightening events, journals may also be useful for future research for gathering somewhat precise, more valid, reliable and quantifiable accounts of identity episodes (compared to interviews or questionnaires). Future methods could integrate audio journals, which may capture the intensity of emotions experienced better than written journals.

One limitation of journals is they raise behavioural awareness of an issue (Bryman & Bell, 2007). This may mean that respondents are overly sensitive to identity episodes and 'over-report' encounters. However, the range of episodes reported by this study's respondents was 2 to 9, suggested that not everyone felt under pressure to 'report something'. The four week window for journal completion was selected as a reasonable time span, and appeared to elicit a sufficient number of episodes for analysis. A longer period may result in attrition or poor recall of detailed responses to identity-heightening events. Another limitation of the journal/diary method is there are little established guidelines, or examples to draw from, compared to interviews or focus groups (Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003; Bryman & Bell, 2007), particularly for qualitative research (Symon, 2004). In this study, several factors appeared to contribute to the relatively positive response rate. Following Symon's (2004) guidelines for clear participant briefings and journal design, the fact that some respondents were strongly motivated, seeing the topic as personally salient, the support offered by the organisations, and possibly the fact that these organisations had a relatively active diversity agenda would have contributed to the response. Respondents also found the topic engaging, self-relevant and responded in good humour to my regular text/email reminders.

One unexpected consequence was that the study revealed differences in the reasons behind BME individuals' engagement in ethnicity research in organisations. As mentioned in the Discussion, organisational context appeared to have an impact on how ethnicity was constructed (especially in P.S.F). This appeared to be reflected in individuals' motivation for participating. P.S.F. respondents often presented the business case as a reason for participating; they constructed the study as an opportunity to gain self-awareness and develop skills that may equip them further for success in a global business (in line with the organisational strategy). In contrast, Govt Plc respondents tended to want to support the research out of a civic duty, embodying the social justice case for diversity. This also influenced sampling. Three Govt Plc respondents actively urged their colleagues to participate, while everyone at P.S.F. appeared reticent about sharing they were participating in this study and inviting other BME colleagues to participate. Respondent reasons for participation were not interrogated in depth, as this falls outside the immediate scope of the study's identity construction focus. However, it offers some considerations for how future research is designed and positioned for different respondent groups (such as articulating personal benefits for some respondents).

In addition to the methodological contribution of an intersectional identity work approach, this study contributes to empirical research on ethnicity in organisations. This is presented next.

7.4 Empirical contribution to ethnicity research

A second contribution of this thesis is the rich insight into how micro-episodes prompt identity salience and trigger agentic meaning-making of intersecting ethnicity, gender and senior identity dimensions. This research contributes to empirical research on ethnicity in organisations by providing a typology of senior BME women and men's identity work in response to identity-heightening encounters (Figure 5, repeated from Chapters 4 and 5).

IDENTITY WORK MODE	**Accommodating** *Acquiescing to externally-ascribed identity meanings*	**Refuting** *Disputing externally-ascribed unfavourable identity meanings*	**Reconciling** *Reconstituting apparently disparate identities into a whole*	**Affirming** *Reinforcing and strengthening identities*	**Exploratory** *Leveraging identities as a resource for personal benefit*
Jolt sensation	Sense of surprise	Sense of expectation	Sense of paradox/conflict	Sense of connection or difference	Sense of opportunity
Sense-making tactic	Introspecting	Contesting (game-playing)	Reconciling or Discounting	Inferring personal identity worth	Leveraging identities
Identity outcome	Internalise positive or negative identity meanings	Refute negative, reaffirm positive identities	Reconstruct (re-build) identities	Reaffirm identities	Augment identities

Figure 5: Identity work modes and phases

Research resulting in descriptions of practices is useful even if they merely *"reveal to other researchers and to a wider public the details of various practices, which are primarily known merely to their practitioners"* (Czarniawska & Czarniawska-Joerges, 2008:7). The rich accounts of the identity work of senior minority ethnic people make such an empirical contribution to ethnicity and diversity literature, by describing the experiences of a group about whom relatively little management knowledge exists, i.e. senior black, Asian and minority ethnic women and men in UK organisations.

Additionally, the thesis provides empirical support for the significance of 'small' everyday, events in experiences of ethnicity in organisations. The thesis supports assertions that subtle encounters can prompt emotive and cognitive responses that both challenge and sustain senior BME identities. It extends this literature by describing the relational *and contextual* dimensions of identity-heightening encounters, as well as describing the challenging *and affirming* nature of these encounters. It supports anti-essentialist assumptions of ethnicity, demonstrating that

individuals dynamically engage with relational and contextual factors to accommodate, refute, reconstruct, affirm or leverage their identities. It also supports anti-essentialist assumptions by demonstrating how gender and seniority influence the experiences of ethnicity, demonstrating how women and men, and Asian and black individuals construct identities through ethnic and gendered lenses in the context of seniority.

Specific empirical contributions, regarding sample, an agent-perspective and the significance of micro-events are discussed next.

7.4.1 A different sample

The study increases the body of knowledge on ethnicity in UK organisations. Recommendations to focus on experiences beyond selection, with professionals, considering ethnicity in conjunction with other identity facets, and adopting qualitative methodology for richer, in-depth understanding (Kenny & Briner, 2007) were followed. Insight into how senior BME men and women construct their ethnic, gender and senior identities in response to identity-heightening encounters helps us get 'beneath the skin' of experiences relating to ethnicity in organisations. Examining women and men's experiences across black, Asian and Chinese ethnicity unpacks nuances within groups often lumped together in other studies, such as differences between Asian and black men.

7.4.2 An agent perspective

The findings also extend ethnicity literature by offering an agent-centred and complex examination of the dynamics of constructing ethnicity in organisations. The individual, relational and contextual dimensions of senior BME individuals' identity work extends knowledge from focus on minority ethnic women and men (those assumed to 'have' ethnicity; or those assumed to be doubly disadvantaged) to demonstrating how respondents dynamically engage with the environment and infer personally-salient meanings from this, drawing on intersecting identities in the process.

7.4.3 The significance of 'small' events

The findings also confirm the significance of informal practices that may sustain exclusion or encourage inclusion of certain groups at work. Other diversity scholars have highlighted the role of informal organizing processes that produce inequalities (e.g. Deitch et al 2003; Acker, 2006, Cortina, 2008; Healy et al, 2011; Laer & Janssen, 2011). This study contributes to understanding about the nature and prevalence of micro-behaviours at work. As discussed in the previous chapter, this also enhances understanding of responses to stereotype threat at work. The process-orientation and agent-centred approach helps move beyond reporting outcome differences between groups to understanding the nature of cues that may signal threat, the effort that goes into individuals' response to managing these and the impact on self-constructions.

The third area of contribution, to intersectionality and identity theorising, is discussed next.

7.5 Theoretical contribution to intersectionality and identity theorising

The preceding Discussions chapter described some of the theoretical implications of specific aspects of the findings. In this section, general contributions to organisational studies are discussed. By illustrating dimensions of senior BME identity work and the significance of intersecting identities in this, it confirms the applicability of identity work for examining intersections of ethnicity, gender and seniority. This, in turn, has potential implications for identity work theorising.

The Literature Review raised the significance of context in understanding ethnicity in organisations. The study elucidates the relational (i.e. micro-behaviours) and contextual (demographic and organisational) factors involved in constructing ethnic, gender, senior identities in organisations. This study also contributes to intersectionality research by illustrating some of the conditions under which intersecting ethnicity, gender and/or seniority become salient, and how these are experienced. This agent-centred perspective acknowledges the dynamic nature of

identity construction and attunes us to the multiplicity of identity dimensions. Intersecting gender and ethnicity with seniority illustrated how high and low status identities co-constitute each other, providing further insight into intersectional identity formation processes (as recommended by Nash, 2008). Adopting an identity work lens to examine identity cues, sense-making responses and impact on identity, also extends intersectional approaches to the personal meaning-making domain. In line with the exploratory purpose of the study, the typology of five modes offers a 'suggestive model' (Edmondson & McManus, 2007) of identity work, demonstrating some of the contexts in which intersections may become most salient, the pattern of responses to them and how individuals draw on gender, ethnicity and seniority as meaning-making devices in this process.

A final theoretical contribution is to identity work. The study confirms the significance of identity work at work, contributing to the growing body of literature in this field (Snow & Anderson, 1987; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Grandy, 2008; Creed, De Jordy & Lok, 2011). It directly contributes to the body of in-depth empirical work analysing actual processes of identity construction and identity work, a gap identified by Alvesson and colleagues (2008). The identity work in which senior minority ethnic women and men engage to make sense of their 'oppositional identities' has been raised as a point of empirical and theoretical interest (Kenny & Briner, 2007; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007). Although research on identity work is growing, this is the first study (as far as I am aware) examining identity work involved in the juxtaposition of gender and minority ethnicity in comparison to senior status.

So far, key areas of contribution for the study - methodological, empirical and theoretical have been presented. A final area of contribution concerns practice. In the next section, the practical outcomes from conducting the study as well as implications for future practice are considered.

7.6 Contribution to practice

There were a number of practical outcomes of the study, including feedback sessions with 13 respondents, an individualised report (detailing personal identity work response styles) for all Govt Plc respondents, organisational reports for Govt Plc and all P.S.F. respondents, 3 newsletter articles and two workshops, attended by senior ethnicity champions. These were presented as evidence for the validity of the study in Section 3.6. A primary practical outcome was respondents' enhanced personal insight regarding the work modes adopted in different situations. In the 26-page report I prepared for Govt Plc (see Appendix K) I raised awareness of the importance of small events and the role all parties (BME individuals, their colleagues and the organisation) had to play in sustaining affirmative and inclusive cultures. I presented these findings to the Gender and Race Champions (both of whom are Permanent Secretaries) and Director of Corporate HR. I also facilitated a 2-hour action planning session with 11 Govt Plc participants, the Gender and Race Champions and a representative from the Diversity and Inclusion unit, focusing on the significance of small events and introducing Meyerson and Scully's (1995) concept of tempered radicals, as described in the previous Chapter. I was invited to contribute towards an article for a quarterly newsletter for senior union members of Govt Plc. The study findings subsequently featured twice in this widely distributed newsletter, promoting the concept of 'identity work' and explaining the effort that goes into 'fitting in' into Govt Plc. I also prepared a report for Professional Services Firm, and conducted a 2-hour development workshop for the Black Women's Network, drawing on the study. The workshop introduced the concept of intersections. The purpose was to support participants to self-define in more complex ways and seek multiple points of connections with colleagues by drawing on different identity facets. In October 2011, I was also invited to present findings at a 'BME into Leadership' conference for civil servants.

In addition to practical outcomes of the study, broader implications for diversity practice are described below.

7.6.1 Implications for diversity practice

The interpersonal dimension of identity work revealed in the thesis demonstrates the significant part played by colleagues (subordinate and senior) and clients in meaning-making of ethnicity in organisations. The study draws attention to situations that may hamper the ability of senior BME individuals (and other demographically atypical individuals) to fully engage and connect with colleagues, while also offering pointers for creating affirming cultures. Identifying others' roles in contributing to creating and sustaining inclusion or exclusion suggests implications for 'managing' organisational diversity. It also suggests that some responsibility for constructing ethnicity and its intersection with gender and seniority lies outside formal positions or those perceived as having the authority to speak to these issues (e.g. HR, Diversity & Inclusion professionals, Diversity Champions, members of minority groups and networks). On average, respondents reported one identity – heightening encounter a week. Although further research is required to verify this count, this gives a starting indication of the prevalence of these incidents. It may be beneficial for colleagues, line managers and team leaders who are majority group members to just be aware of the frequency and normality of encounters that trigger awareness of difference – positively and negatively. Learning about micro-behaviours may also offer insight into some of the subtle (and low effort) methods of promoting affirming and inclusive cultures.

The data also reinforced the power of role models. The finding that some participants responded strongly to individuals with whom they shared multiple identities suggests the need for a demographically diverse role model pool. The finding that being seen as a role model was affirming, but carried an additional sense of responsibility also suggests that organisations may need to offer support to role models, who are often elevated as shining symbols of success with little consideration of the pressure under which this may inadvertently put them.

7.7 Summary of contributions

Overall, applying an identity work lens to examine experiences relating to ethnicity as it intersects with gender and seniority contributes to four key areas of knowledge. First, it offers methodological insight into how meaningful examination of ethnicity may be conducted in organisation studies. Integrating an intersectional approach with an identity work model (an intersectional identity work approach) provided an agent-centred perspective on meaning-making of ethnicity, gender and seniority in organisations, and insight into the contexts influencing this. Embracing anti-essentialism and demonstrating sensitivity to context are key considerations for understanding ethnicity in organisations, the significance of which was demonstrated by individual, relational and contextual dimensions of senior BME women and men's identity work. The study's second key contribution is the organisation of empirical data in the typology of identity work modes, and the phases within them. This study contributes to empirical research on ethnicity by in-depth insight into identity-salient events and subsequent agentic meaning-making of intersecting ethnicity, gender and senior identity dimensions in organisations. The study's third contribution is to theory on intersectionality perspectives and identity work. Integrating identity work with intersectionality offers a 'suggestive model' for when certain intersections may become more salient and the pattern of responses to identity cues, on which further theorisation in this area may be built. Lastly, practical considerations for the role of informal practices and all organisational members in fostering positive, identity affirming cultures are offered.

Having considered the contribution, my personal reflections and study limitations are presented next.

7.8 Reflections and study limitations

In this section, I reflect on my subject position in the study and demonstrate awareness of the study limitations, to contribute to the authenticity of this account, in line with the study's underlying philosophical assumptions.

Through this doctoral journey, I have been stimulated, motivated, challenged and confused while attempting to interrogate and present a personally- and politically-sensitive topic with academic rigour. In so doing, my subjective experiences influence this such that I do not claim to present 'the truth' about senior minority ethnic women and men's identity construction in organisations. As indicated in the Introduction and Methodology chapters, this thesis represents my reading of individuals' meaning-making about their minority ethnic, gender, and senior identities at work. In this document, I have sought to present scholarly work that demonstrates awareness of its underlying assumptions, and to be explicit about my decision-making, while drawing links to theory and data. My intersecting identities as a woman with a privileged upbringing in Nigeria, trained in the positivist traditions of Psychology, conducting Doctoral research in a business school influence how I study ethnicity in organisations. Like Egharevba's (2001) experiences of researching 'An-Other', I was aware of my simultaneously shifting insider/outsider status through this research. While insider status may have occasionally fast-tracked rapport and trust during interviews, additional effort may need to be exerted to ensure that shared assumptions and experiences are explicitly surfaced in the research. As my subject position in this study cannot be easily erased or eradicated, the key requirement is to be reflexive and self-aware regarding my position in this research. I share experiences and implications of the shifting connections with the respondents below and demonstrate awareness of the study limitations, to support the authenticity of this account.

A key consideration for this study is that my minority ethnicity (and possibly gender) facilitated sampling and sharing. My Nigerian background facilitated my connection with and understanding of the four respondents of Nigerian origin. For example, one respondent switched from 'the Queen's English' to an exaggerated Nigerian accent to make a point; another presumed my understanding of Yoruba culture (an ethnic group in Nigeria), as he illustrated a cultural norm. However, I was also surprised (and flattered) that two Asian men counted me as "*one of us*". The Cranfield name also offered additional credibility, and facilitated access to the major organisations in which I conducted the study. Additionally, the methodology adopted (requiring multiple

points of contact with respondents before first interview) probably contributed to building rapport. Thus, these factors all facilitated my positive 'placing' by the participants. 'Placing' describes how we relate to/locate each other in research relationships, impacting on credibility and rapport (Egharevba, 2001). I was also aware I related to the respondents differently in other ways. I was aware of a greater sense of obligation to Govt Plc respondents and not wanting to disappoint them. I felt more comfortable with P.S.F employees, with whom I related as peers. This difference may be due to the greater age disparity between the Govt Plc respondents and I. It could also have been a consequence of the strong social justice tone of the respondents, some of whom very strongly communicated their desire to support this research, so that it would "*make a difference*". This may have exerted more pressure on me, especially as it was the first round of data connection, in which I was more nervous.

More generally, conducting the research regularly challenged my personal assumptions about identity and ethnicity. For example, the assumption that 'minority ethnicity' is widely accepted as a visible and disadvantaged/stigmatised/negatively stereotyped category was challenged when Jewish and South American individuals responded to the call for participants. Also, my original intention had been to exclude respondents of mixed ethnicity to maintain sample homogeneity. One of them challenged my (implicit) assumption about whether he was 'black enough' by switching into a Nigerian language halfway during our first phone conversation. The three respondents of mixed ethnicity referred to themselves as 'black'. Only one, Steve, referred to the shifting meaning of his skin colour ("*I'm white with my black friends, and black with my white friends*"). This reiterated the nebulous nature of identity and the challenges of researching it. However it also reaffirmed my decision to focus on individuals' meaning-making of their minority ethnicity (with gender and seniority) rather than try to define minority ethnicity for them, or in the study.

In the next section, I discuss less 'subjective' factors to be considered, to qualify the findings and conclusions of this study. These limitations concern identity work

assumptions and factors limiting the transferability of findings. Following this, considerations for future research are presented.

7.8.1 Assumptions of identity work

There are several perspectives on studying identity in organisations (Alvesson, 2010; Ashforth et al, 2008) and the perspective taken in this study represents one of many potential perspectives of the processes experienced by respondents. In this approach, I assumed a universal search for coherence, implicit in the identity work model used. However, attending to the evidence that some respondents engaged in 'partial' identity work, indicates I was perhaps not overly welded to a preconceived perspective of this process. Presenting a simple 5-category typology also belies the complexity of identity construction. Also, a phase/process model suggests a linear, straightforward series of events, which misrepresents the complexity of respondents' lived experiences, losing some of the richness and detail in this process. However, describing the modes' constituent phases and demonstrating how ethnicity, gender and seniority played out against relational and contextual dimensions to influence this construction, somewhat respects this complexity.

Additionally, focusing on *salience* rather than *threat* meant that several episodes were recounted that did not appear to constitute an identity threat. However, this also probably contributed to the breadth of identity-heightening encounters including positive and negative experiences. On a related note, the largest proportion (30%) of identity-heightening episodes constituted Affirming Identity Work. The contribution of positive experiences of minority ethnicity was discussed in the previous chapter. It is outside the scope and the philosophy of this study to investigate and make any assertions regarding the 'real frequency' or 'real reasons' behind the reporting of some of the episodes. However, it is also important to demonstrate awareness of what may have contributed to this. The relatively high frequency of affirming experiences could be due to the hierarchical status of respondents. Seniority may have countered ethnic/gender disadvantage such that many experiences at this level affirm their success or reinforce their power/privilege. Reporting affirming encounters could also

be due to social desirability (a desire to report socially favourable responses) or positive attribution bias (the tendency to pay attention to information that supports one's self-esteem). Perhaps, in my briefings, by attempting to ensure individuals did not just report experiences of discrimination and asking them to share positive or negative episodes, I primed them to overly consider positive episodes. However, I tried to mitigate such effects by seeking neutrality and consistency in language in email messages, journals and interview questions, asking for an *"episode that made you think about your identity"*. Finally, it is probable that, had I focused on identity 'challenge' or 'threat', the data would have had a significantly higher proportion of negative events. Nonetheless, that senior BME women and women experience positive, affirming micro-moments adds to our understanding of how ethnicity, gender and seniority may be constructed in organisations. Further research may consider validating the incidence of these, compared to less positive encounters.

Another implication of focusing on identity work is that an overly agent-centred focus ignores the strong role of structures and practices in defining experiences relating to ethnicity. It could be argued that focusing on micro-episodes of agent-centred identity construction diminishes the impact of social, economic and cultural context in defining racio-ethnic experience. Undoubtedly, factors at macro-level (e.g. history, legislation), meso-level (e.g. organisational policy) and micro-level (individual agency) influence issues of diversity, and ethnicity within it (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). However, authors like Zanoni and colleagues (2010) highlight the value of alternative perspectives to the traditional emphasis on the structural influences on ethnicity in organisations. Additionally, by adopting a perspective on senior BME identity construction that is dynamic, unfolding, co-generative and on-going (as recommended by Syed & Özbilgin, 2009), the study may avoid criticisms of static, one-dimensional conceptualisations of identities. The intersectional identity work perspective draws attention to individual, relational and contextual dimensions of identity construction. I believe this demonstrates the usefulness of an individual constructivist perspective on experiences of ethnicity and intersectionality, while remaining cognisant and appreciative of the socio-structural impact of ethnicity.

A final identity-related limitation is that the identity work of senior BME individuals is based on simultaneous evaluations of the situation and individual's identity. It is thus difficult to separate 'sense-making of self' from 'sense-making of experience', and this is an implicit conflation in this study, as in other identity-based appraisal processes (e.g. Petriglieri, 2011).

7.8.2 Other limitations

Other general limitations restrict the extent to which the findings are transferable to other contexts. The study may have specifically appealed to senior BME individuals who had a heightened awareness of, or sensitivity to, their minority ethnic and/or gender status. The range of responses, including positive, ambivalent and negative experiences, however also suggests that respondents represented a variety of perspectives and attitudes towards ethnicity, gender and seniority. Additionally, the time and space in which the study was conducted influenced some of the episodes. Prevailing events such as Black History Month activities, launching a Senior Women's Network and the 'BME Leadership' programme, featured several times in respondents' journal entries. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the perspective on constructing intersecting identities in this thesis is that identity work is a product of an individuals' dynamic engagement with their environment. Thus, prevailing events may be perceived as contributing to the richness of understanding this process.

In this section, attention has been paid to my personal experiences in conducting the study, the assumptions of identity work and other factors that qualify the conclusions that can be drawn from this study. Additional points for evaluating the robustness of this work are presented in the Introduction (commenting on reflectivity) and in the Methodology (detailing philosophical assumptions and analysis). The discussion now moves to considerations for taking some of this study's findings forward.

7.9 Future research

Some considerations for future research were proposed in the Discussion and earlier in this chapter. In this final thesis section, suggestions around further development of intersectional identity work dimensions, verifying the identity work mode typology and examining additional intersections are proposed for taking the research findings further.

7.9.1 Robust development of intersectional identity work

The richness of the findings, range of contexts and the large number of episodes recounted suggested that the experiences of senior BME men and women may be a useful site for examining identity work and intersections. The framework of individual, relational and contextual dimensions could be used to guide further studies, to verify observed patterns, enhance understanding and support theorising. For example, it was outside this thesis' scope to examine relational features in detail. However, the data suggest that factors such as relative status and familiarity influence how ethnicity and its intersection with gender and senior status are experienced. Also, future research could examine the extent to which differences between modes can be explained by gender, culture/ethnicity, personality differences, or similar factors. Additionally, the high incidence of observed interpersonal cues during Accommodating and Refuting modes, versus contextual/demographic cues observed during Affirming and Exploratory Identity Work suggest a potential pattern of cue and response type that may be examined in future research. Future research could also investigate the dimensions of the identity heightening episodes, described in Section 4.2.2.1 on page 105 in greater detail.

7.9.2 Confirming or refining the identity work modes

Future research would be useful to validate the typology of five identity work modes, and the constituent phases identified in this study. Broad patterns reported along ethnicity, gender and organisation and the types of episodes (e.g. high frequency of

Reconciling work by P.S.F respondents; intensity of introspection during Accommodating work by BME women) strengthen the case for further examination.

7.9.3 Examining more intersections

This thesis did not seek to measure or compare, but rather examine patterns of identity. However, another avenue for future research could focus more specifically on intersections. For instance research could seek to verify the apparent impact of role models on senior BME individuals, and investigate the conditions under which affinity across multiple shared identities are reported or enhanced. Additionally, research could compare high and low status groups such as white and non-white professionals of high and low organisational status to explore the contexts that prompt identity work and individual responses to them. Future, research could also examine what patterns may be discerned as different identity dimensions are 'worked' in response to specific types of encounters. This research could explicate how and in what way the identities interact and with what consequence.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Contact summary sheet

Initials	
Date	
Age	
Location	
Grade/Title	
Time in role	
Tenure	
Dept	
Highest qual attained	
Self-ascribed identity	

Additional notes:

Context

Which episodes did they appear to focus on?

About what did they seem overly glib?

About what did they have trouble articulating?

What information did I obtain/fail to obtain from the questions asked?

What struck me?

Anything else?

What would I want to ask if I could do it over again?

Appendix B Reflective journal

Identity at Work: Investigating senior minority ethnic experiences at work

REFLECTIVE JOURNAL

CONFIDENTIAL

Thank you for participating in this study on the episodes at work that shape your understanding of how you see yourself. I hope you will find it useful to prepare for our meeting by keeping a brief record of any episode in the next four weeks that prompts you to think of yourself as a senior man of Indian origin.

What is an 'episode'?

An episode may be an apparently 'trivial' event; it doesn't matter what it is, the only consideration is that it made you conscious of your position in Professional Services Firm as a senior man of Indian origin. For instance, it may be a meeting you attended, in which you noticed you were the only senior man of Indian origin. You are free to record only episodes which you will be comfortable discussing, and the journal will be destroyed at the end of the research project.

How much should I write?

It will be most useful to try to make an entry at least every 3 days, although making an entry every day may be helpful, especially if you build it into your routine, e.g. on the train home from work every evening. As a guide, you should probably spend about 5 to 10 minutes on it. You are free to write much more (or slightly less) than this, if you chose to. Please keep the journal for about one month and aim for somewhere between 4 and 8 different episodes.

Please note that the questions here are just prompts to help you express/record your reactions to episodes that prompt you to think of yourself as a senior minority ethnic woman or man. If however, you'd rather express yourself using diagrams, poetry, or anything else, that's fine too. Please keep a record of your response in the format that you find most comfortable.

NAME (OPTIONAL): _____

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns:

email @cranfield.ac.uk

Mobile No.: XXXX XXX XXXX

Episode 1

Can you think about a time/event/episode at work today that prompted you to think of yourself as senior man of Indian origin? Can you think about a time/event/episode at work today when being senior man of Indian origin became salient /meaningful for you?

Event: _____

Date, Time, Place: _____

1. Why did this episode come to mind?

2. What happened?

3. How did you respond?

    - What did you think?

    - How did you feel?

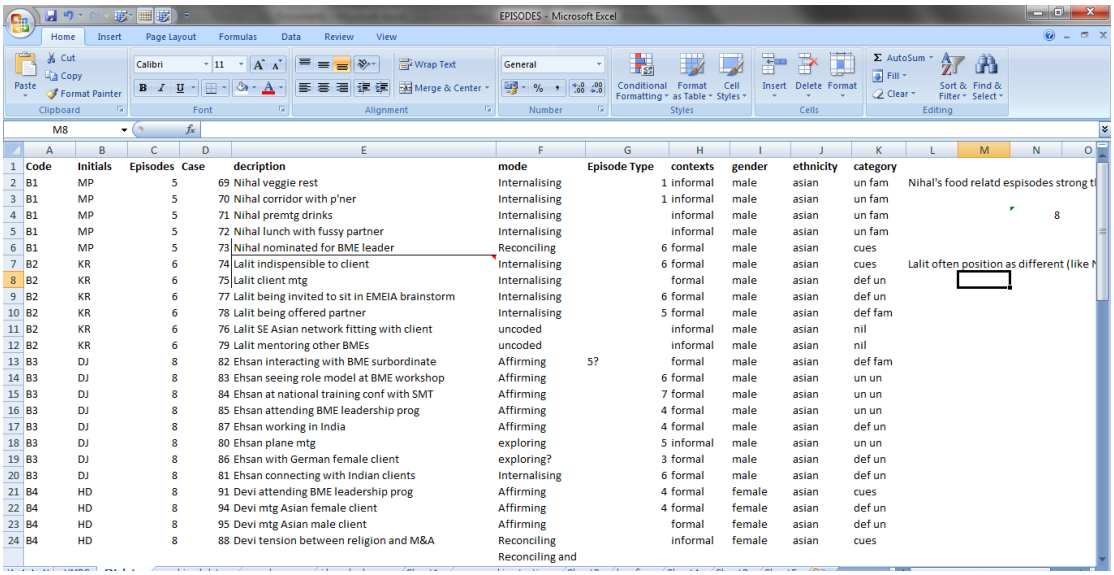
    - What did you do?/What did this prompt you to do?

4. Why do you think you responded in this way?

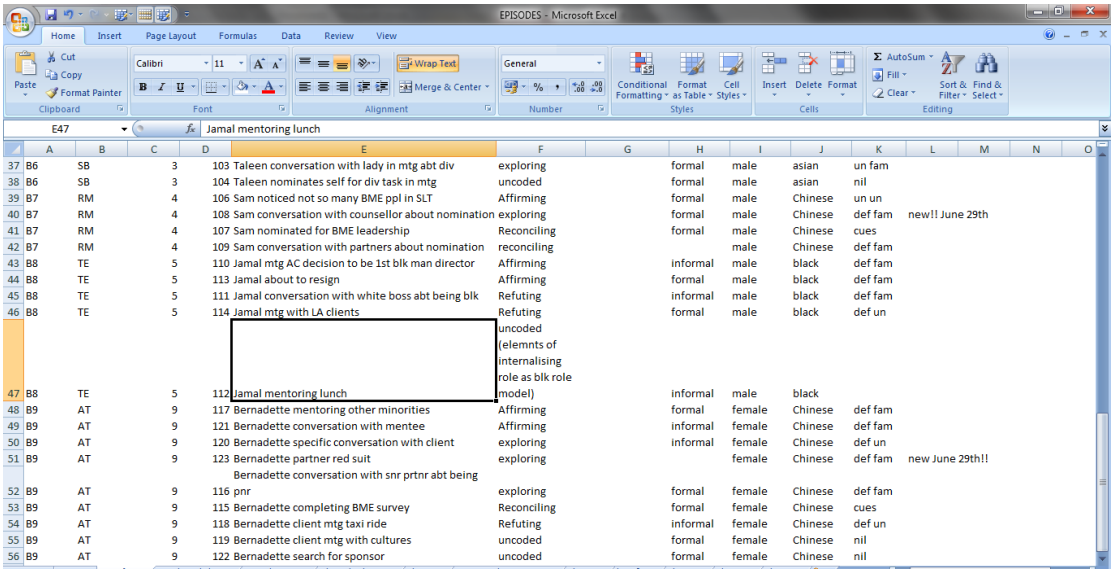
5. What was the outcome of this episode? For you/others?

6. On reflection, do you wish you had responded differently? Why and how?

Appendix C Screenshots of data display matrix



	Code	Initials	Episodes	Case	decription	mode	Episode Type	contexts	gender	ethnicity	category		
2	B1	MP	5	69	Nihal veggie rest	Internalising	1	informal	male	asian	un fam	Nihal's food relatd espisodes strong t	
3	B1	MP	5	70	Nihal corridor with p'ner	Internalising	1	informal	male	asian	un fam		
4	B1	MP	5	71	Nihal premtg drinks	Internalising		informal	male	asian	un fam		8
5	B1	MP	5	72	Nihal lunch with fussy partner	Internalising		informal	male	asian	un fam		
6	B1	MP	5	73	Nihal nominated for BME leader	Reconciling	6	formal	male	asian	cues		
7	B2	KR	6	74	Lalit indispensible to client	Internalising	6	formal	male	asian	cues	Lalit often position as different (like N	
8	B2	KR	6	75	Lalit client mtg	Internalising		formal	male	asian	def un		
9	B2	KR	6	77	Lalit being invited to sit in EMEIA brainstorm	Internalising	6	formal	male	asian	def un		
10	B2	KR	6	78	Lalit being offered partner	Internalising	5	formal	male	asian	def fam		
11	B2	KR	6	76	Lalit SE Asian network fitting with client	uncoded		informal	male	asian	nil		
12	B2	KR	6	79	Lalit mentoring other BMEs	uncoded		informal	male	asian	nil		
13	B3	DJ	8	82	Ehsan interacting with BME surbordinate	Affirming	5?	formal	male	asian	def fam		
14	B3	DJ	8	83	Ehsan seeing role model at BME workshop	Affirming	6	formal	male	asian	un un		
15	B3	DJ	8	84	Ehsan at national training conf with SMT	Affirming	7	formal	male	asian	un un		
16	B3	DJ	8	85	Ehsan attending BME leadership prog	Affirming	4	formal	male	asian	un un		
17	B3	DJ	8	87	Ehsan working in India	Affirming	4	formal	male	asian	def un		
18	B3	DJ	8	80	Ehsan plane mtg	exploring	5	informal	male	asian	un un		
19	B3	DJ	8	86	Ehsan with German female client	exploring?	3	formal	male	asian	def un		
20	B3	DJ	8	81	Ehsan connecting with Indian clients	Internalising	6	formal	male	asian	def un		
21	B4	HD	8	91	Devi attending BME leadership prog	Affirming	4	formal	female	asian	cues		
22	B4	HD	8	94	Devi mtg Asian female client	Affirming	4	formal	female	asian	def un		
23	B4	HD	8	95	Devi mtg Asian male client	Affirming		formal	female	asian	def un		
24	B4	HD	8	88	Devi tension between religion and M&A	Reconciling		informal	female	asian	cues		
						Reconciling and							



37	B6	SB	3	103	Taleen conversation with lady in mtg abt div	exploring	formal	male	asian	un fam		
38	B6	SB	3	104	Taleen nominates self for div task in mtg	uncoded	formal	male	asian	nil		
39	B7	RM	4	106	Sam noticed not so many BME ppl in SLT	Affirming	formal	male	Chinese	un un		
40	B7	RM	4	108	Sam conversation with counsellor about nomination	exploring	formal	male	Chinese	def fam	new!! June 29th	
41	B7	RM	4	107	Sam nominated for BME leadership	Reconciling	formal	male	Chinese	cues		
42	B7	RM	4	109	Sam conversation with partners about nomination	reconciling		male	Chinese	def fam		
43	B8	TE	5	110	Jamal mtg AC decision to be 1st blk man director	Affirming	informal	male	black	def fam		
44	B8	TE	5	113	Jamal about to resign	Affirming	formal	male	black	def fam		
45	B8	TE	5	111	Jamal conversation with white boss abt being blk	Refuting	informal	male	black	def fam		
46	B8	TE	5	114	Jamal mtg with LA clients	Refuting	formal	male	black	def un		
						uncoded (elemnts of internalising role as blk role						
47	B8	TE	5	112	Jamal mentoring lunch	model)	informal	male	black			
48	B9	AT	9	117	Bernadette mentoring other minorities	Affirming	formal	female	Chinese	def fam		
49	B9	AT	9	121	Bernadette conversation with mentee	Affirming	informal	female	Chinese	def fam		
50	B9	AT	9	120	Bernadette specific conversation with client	exploring	informal	female	Chinese	def un		
51	B9	AT	9	123	Bernadette partner red suit	exploring		female	Chinese	def fam	new June 29th!!	
					Bernadette conversation with snr prtnr abt being							
52	B9	AT	9	116	pnr	exploring	formal	female	Chinese	def fam		
53	B9	AT	9	115	Bernadette completing BME survey	Reconciling	formal	female	Chinese	cues		
54	B9	AT	9	118	Bernadette client mtg taxi ride	Refuting	informal	female	Chinese	def un		
55	B9	AT	9	119	Bernadette client mtg with cultures	uncoded	formal	female	Chinese	nil		
56	B9	AT	9	122	Bernadette search for sponsor	uncoded	formal	female	Chinese	nil		

EPISODES - Microsoft Excel

E18 Indira mtg colleagues

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1	A1	BM	4	1	121 mtg with mgr	Reconciling	3?	formal	female	black	def fam	
2	A1	BM	4	2	team mtg suggestion undermined	refuting		formal	female	black	un fam	
3	A1	BM	4	3	121 mtg with snr mgr abt line mgr	uncoded		formal	female	black	nil	
4	A1	BM	4	4	lead up to mediation mtg	uncoded		formal	female	black	nil	
5	B1	KS	5	5	KS mtg young Asian woman	Affirming	6	formal	female	asian	def un	
6	B1	KS	5	6	KS basecamp	Affirming	7	formal	female	asian	un un	
7	B1	KS	5	7	presentation in Liverpool	affirming		formal	female	asian	def un	
8	B1	KS	5	8	application for SCS	uncoded		formal	female	asian	nil	
9	B1	KS	5	9	conversation abt paygrade	uncoded		formal	female	asian	nil	
10	C1	MM	5	14	serena passing DH in corridor	Affirming	7	informal	female	black	un fam	
11	C1	MM	5	10	serena intrvw	Internalising	2	formal	female	black	def un	
12	C1	MM	5	11	serena canteen conversion interruption	Internalising	2	informal	female	black	un un	
13	C1	MM	5	12	serena conversation with woman at end of mtg	Internalising	2	informal	female	black	un fam	
14	C1	MM	5	13	interaction with line mgr at union mtg	refuting		formal	female	black	def fam	
15	D1	TO	3	15	Dayo phone with snr BME man	affirming		formal	male	black	un un	
16	D1	TO	3	17	Dayo's colleagues (not) saying hello	internalising		informal	male	black	un fam	
17	D1	TO	3	16	Dayo mtg with subdued client	uncoded		formal	male	black	nil	
18	E1	GB	5	18	Indira mtg colleagues	Internalising	2	formal	female	asian	def un	
19	E1	GB	5	19	Indira protocol mtg with mgr	Internalising		formal	female	asian	def fam	
20	E1	GB	5	20	Indira sneezing colleague	internalising		formal	female	asian	un fam	
21	E1	GB	5	21	Indira appeal board	internalising		formal	female	asian	def fam	
22	E1	GB	5	22	Indira being rude to other Asian woman	internalising	6	formal	female	asian	un fam	
23	F1	KS	6	24	Sean race conference	Affirming		formal	male	black	un un	
24	F1	KS	6	27	Sean ARC G7 article by SG	exploratory		informal	male	black	un fam	
25	F1	KS	6	28	Sean email wrote abt Talent Mgt programme	exploratory		formal	male	black	def un	

EPISODES - Microsoft Excel

E18 Indira mtg colleagues

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
44	J1	SG	4	43	Tamara delegate at FDA	exploratory	4 or 5	formal	female	mixed	un fam	
45	J1	SG	4	46	Tamara conversation with friend	refuting	5?	informal	female	mixed	un fam	
46	J1	SG	4	44	Tamara seeing demographic make up at SWN mtg	uncoded		6 formal	female	mixed	nil	
47	K1	LW	5	49	seeing black woman chair	Affirming		formal	male	black	un un	4
48	K1	LW	5	51	LW mtg line mgr	exploratory		4 formal	male	black	def fam	
49	K1	LW	5	47	retired comment overheard	Internalising		formal	male	black	un un	
50	K1	LW	5	48	phone call to retiree	Internalising		informal	male	black	un fam	
51	K1	LW	5	50	being group secretariat	Internalising		formal	male	black	def un	
52	L1	KM	4	52	KM seeing powerpoint at team event	Internalising		1 formal	female	asian	un fam	
53	L1	KM	4	54	KM hearing comment re observed marriage	internalising		1 formal	female	asian	un un	
54	L1	KM	4	55	demographic constellation at mtg	Internalising		formal	female	asian	un un	
55	L1	KM	4	53	KM being line mgr	Reconciling		6 formal	female	asian	def fam	
56	M1	CB	2	56	Louise apprached by blk women role model mtg	Reconciling		6 informal	female	mixed	def fam	
57	M1	CB	2	57	Lousie mgt mtg new people	refuting		4 formal	female	mixed	def un	
58	N1	AC	6	63	AC mtg Doyin	Affirming		4 formal	male	asian	cues	
59	N1	AC	6	61	AC golfing fraternity	Internalising		1 informal	male	asian	un fam	
60	N1	AC	6	58	AC bunch of foreigners overheard and challenged	Refuting		3 informal	male	asian	un fam	
61	N1	AC	6	60	conversation supported by line manager	refuting	2?	informal	male	asian	un fam	
62	N1	AC	6	62	AC immigration debate challenged	refuting		3 informal	male	asian	un fam	
63	N1	AC	6	59	AC anti pink comment overheard	refuting		1 informal	male	asian	un fam	
64	O1	JP	5	66	personal mtg with Director	Affirming		7 formal	male	asian	def fam	
65	O1	JP	5	68	JP presenting at snr board mtg	Affirming		7 formal	male	asian	def un	
66	O1	JP	5	65	JP noticing demographic composition of DGs	Affirming		7 formal	male	asian	def un	
67	O1	JP	5	64	JP name misspelt	refuting		6 formal	male	asian	un un	
68	O1	JP	5	67	JP attending DG mtg are you	Refuting/Internal		2 formal	male	asian	un un	

Appendix D Round 1 coding scheme

GREAT GRANDPARENT NODES	GRANDPARENT NODES	PARENT NODES	SIBLING NODES
Positioning	Positioning by BME	Familiarity	Familiar contexts
			Unfamiliar contexts
		Role/stance	Observer
			Reflector
			Participant
	Positioning by others	Positive	
		Negative	Direct cues
			Indirect cues
Role Model	Being a role model		
	Seeing a role model		
Stereotypes & stereotype threat	Age		
	Gender		
	Ethnicity		
	Culture		
	Intersecting	Gender and Ethnicity	Blk and female
			Asian and female
		Intersecting other	
Isolation/Visibility	Strength		
	Burden		
Professionalism	Contextual/situational influences	Career	Career trajectories
			Progression/project opportunities
		Prototypes – what it looks like to be senior	
	Interpersonal influences	Communication	
		Relationships with supervisors	
	Personal influences	Perfectionism	
		Competence	

Structure	Operational		
	Strategic		
Agency			
The role of others	Validating negatives		
	Supporting/affirming		
Outcomes	Positive outcomes		
	Negative outcomes	Reticence	
		Disappointment	
		Exclusion	
		Jumping	
Govt PLC	Role of networks		
	Role/impact of Race champion	Positive	
		Negative	
	Misc comments abt Govt PLC	Positive	
		Negative	
Emotions	Positive		
	Negative		

IDENTITY WORK CONTEXTS

BEING INVISIBLE (IGNORED IDENTITIES)			
Respondents find themselves overlooked or misidentified as their identities as senior minority ethnic men and women are not acknowledged or are directly threatened by their colleagues. This comes in subjective and objective dimensions			
Notice 'me' (from BME)		**Mistaken Identity (from others)**	
SG4	Conversation with friend about BME vs women issues	JP1	Name misspelt
TO3	Not greeting colleagues	JP4	Surprise following introduction (are you…?)
GB5	Not supporting BME colleague	GB1	Disappointment at meeting
GB2	Manager not appreciating 'passion' for work		
GB3	Team not appreciating her directedness	MM 1	Surprise following introduction at assessment
GB4	Promotion appeal board		
AC2	Anti pink comment on diversity initiatives		
AC4	Golfing fraternity discussion overheard		
MM2	Canteen conversation interruption		
KSm4	Irrelevance of Race Network overheard		
MA4	Cold reception at social event from		
BM1	Indirect communication from line manager		
BM2	Suggestion undermined by team leader		
BM3	Indirect feedback from line manager		
IO2	Conversation overheard– was she snr enough to present?		
IO3	Meeting with sponsor who doesn't 'see colour'		
LW5	Meeting with line manager		

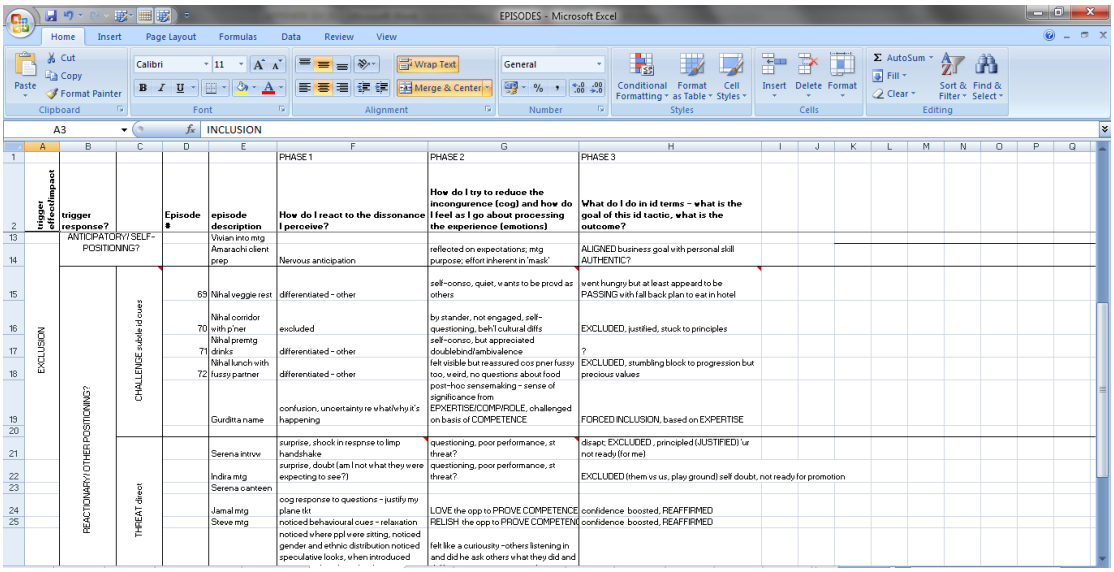
BEING VISIBLE (FRAGMENTED IDENTITIES?)			
Due to being tokens, noticed due to the differences between themselves and others (immediately obvious due to skin colour/gender)			
Heightened awareness of demographic diversity/numeric minority		**Stereotyping by others**	
LST1	Noticed speculative looks on entering meeting	MM 3	Conversation making presumptions about her behaviour
SG2	Noticed demographic distribution at SWN conference	LW1	Overheard presentation about laid back & cool black man
JP2	Noticed demographic distribution at Directors' meeting	KM3	Overheard presentation about arranged marriage
JP5	Noticed demographic distribution at senior board meeting		
MA1	Noticed speculative looks on entering meeting		
CB2	Noticed demographic distribution at Directors' meeting		
KS(f)2	Noticed demographic distribution at Base Camp		
KS(f)3	Noticed demographic distribution at non-London meeting		
IO4	Noticed demographic distribution at SWN conference		
KM1	Noticed demographic distribution on high-performing team image		
KM4	Noticed demographic distribution at meeting		

BEING COUNTED			
Identities affirmed, recognised for who they are, their place/fit, identities integrated?			
Stepping up (self –affirmation) **Focus on high status in context of low status**		**Propping up (affirmation by others ; seeing/being role model)** **Connecting with other BMEs** **Focus on low status in context of high status**	
SG1	Identity credentials to represent team	SG3	Listening to role models
JP3	One to one meeting with Director	KS(m)2	Listening to role models
KS(f)5	Discussing pay grade in context of gender/ethnicity	MA5	Approached as a role model
IO1	Presenting to Perm Secs	CB1	Approached as a role model
LW4	Group Secretariat role	KS(f)1	Observed she is a role model in team meeting
		LW2	Phone call with role model
		LW3	Observed role model (black female chair)
		KM2	Role model conversation with direct report
		MM5	NOTICED BY D HARTNETT
		MA2	Presence at snr meeting altered agenda?

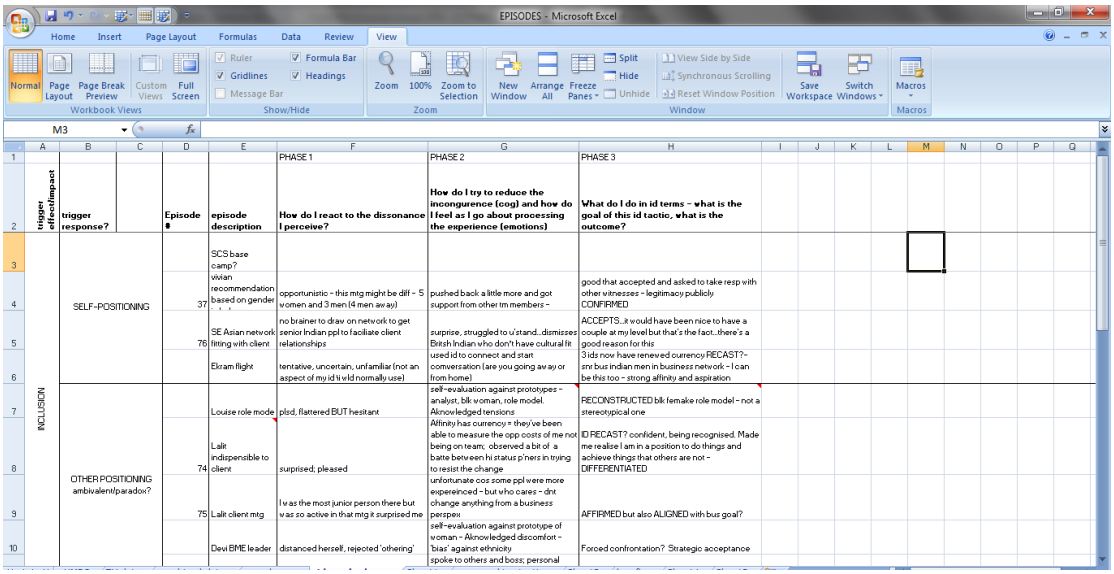
NEGOTIATED BEING – A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH			
LST4	Defending debate about work plans (gender tipping point)		
AC1	Defending debate about ‘a bunch of foreigners’		
AC3	(with help) Defending debate about positive action vs discrimination		
AC5	Defending debate about ‘a bunch of foreigners’		
KS5(m)	Prompting debate about senior BAMEs		
LST2	(with help) Wading in debate after being dismissed		
LST3	Challenging stereotype by colleague		
LST5	(with help) Challenging critique by team leader		
MA3	TURNING THE TABLES ON MEETING WITH TAX PAYERS		

REFLECTING ON PROGRESS		**MISC**	
AC6	Reflecting on progress to date	TO1	Conversation with snr BME
KS(m)6	Reflecting on success on specific task		

Appendix E Screenshots of time-oriented display matrix



trigger effect/impact	trigger response?		Episode #	episode description	PHASE 1 How do I react to the dissonance I perceive?	PHASE 2 How do I try to reduce the incongruence (cog) and how do I feel as I go about processing the experience (emotions)	PHASE 3 What do I do in id terms – what is the goal of this id tactic, what is the outcome?
EXCLUSION	ANTICIPATORY/SELF-POSITIONING?			Vivian into mtg			
				Amarachi client prep	Nervous anticipation	reflected on expectations; mtg purpose; effort inherent in 'mask'	ALIGNED business goal with personal skill AUTHENTIC?
	REACTIONARY/OTHER POSITIONING?	CHALLENGE subtle id cues	69	Nihal veggie rest	differentiated – other	self-consc, quiet, wants to be provd as others	v ent hungry but at least appear to be PASSING with fall back plan to eat in hotel
			70	Nihal corridor with p'ner	excluded	by stander, not engaged, self-questioning, beh1 cultural diffs	EXCLUDED, justified, stuck to principles
			71	Nihal premtg drinks	differentiated – other	self-consc, but appreciated doublebind/ambivalence	?
			72	Nihal lunch with fussy partner	differentiated – other	felt visible but reassured cos pner fussy too, weird, no questions about food	EXCLUDED, stumbling block to progression but precious values
				Gurditta name	confusion, uncertainty re what/why it's happening	post-hoc sensemaking – sense of significance from EPXERTISE/COMP/ROLE, challenged on basis of COMPETENCE	FORCED INCLUSION, based on EXPERTISE
		THREAT direct		Serena intrvw	surprise, shock in respnse to limp handshake	questioning, poor performance, st threat?	disapt; EXCLUDED , principled (JUSTIFIED) 'ur not ready (for me)
				Indira mtg	surprise, doubt (am I not what they were expecting to see?)	questioning, poor performance, st threat?	EXCLUDED (them vs us, play ground) self doubt, not ready for promotion
				Serena canteen			
				Jamal mtg	cog response to questions – justify my plane tkt	LOVE the opp to PROVE COMPETENCE	confidence boosted, REAFFIRMED
				Steve mtg	noticed behavioural cues – relaxation	RELISH the opp to PROVE COMPETENC	confidence boosted, REAFFIRMED
					noticed where ppl were sitting, noticed gender and ethnic distribution noticed speculative looks, when introduced	felt like a curiousity –others listening in and did he ask others what they did and	



trigger effect/impact	trigger response?		Episode #	episode description	PHASE 1 How do I react to the dissonance I perceive?	PHASE 2 How do I try to reduce the incongruence (cog) and how do I feel as I go about processing the experience (emotions)	PHASE 3 What do I do in id terms – what is the goal of this id tactic, what is the outcome?
INCLUSION	SELF-POSITIONING			SCS base camp?			
			37	vivian recommendation based on gender	opportunistic – this mtg might be diff – 5 women and 3 men (4 men av ay)	pushed back a little more and got support from other tm members –	good that accepted and asked to take resp with other witnesses – legitimacy publicly CONFIRMED
			76	SE Asian network fitting with client	no brainer to draw on network to get senior Indian ppl to facilitate client relationships	surprise, struggled to u'stand...dismisses Britsh Indian who don't have cultural fit	ACCEPTS...it would have been nice to have a couple at my level but that's the fact...there's a good reason for this
				Ekram flight	tentative, uncertain, unfamiliar (not an aspect of my id'ti wld normally use)	used id to connect and start conversation (are you going av ay or from home)	3 ids now have renewed currency RECAST?– snr bus indian men in business network – I can be this too – strong affinity and aspiration
	OTHER POSITIONING ambivalent/paradox?			Louise role mode	plsd, flattered BUT hesitant	self-evaluation against prototypes – analyst, blk woman, role model. Aknowledged tensions	RECONSTRUCTED blk femake role model – not a stereotypical one
			74	Lalit indispensible to client	surprised; pleased	Affinity has currency = they've been able to measure the opp costs of me not being on team; observed a bit of a barte between hi status p'ners in trying to resist the change	ID RECAST? confident, being recognised. Made me realise I am in a position to do things and achieve things that others are not – DIFFERENTIATED
			75	Lalit client mtg	I w as the most junior person there but w as so active in that mtg it surprised me	unfortunate cos some ppl were more expereinced – but who cares – dnt change anything from a business perspev	AFFIRMED but also ALIGNED with bus goal?
				Devi EME leader	distanced herself, rejected 'othering'	self-evaluation against prototype of woman – Aknowledged discomfort – 'bias' against ethnicity	Forced confrontation? Strategic acceptance
						spoke to others and boss; personal	

Appendix F Sample interview transcript excerpt

Example of 'non-coded' episode, with no evidence of identity work (with Taleeen, Indian male, Professional Services Firm)

DA: Okay can you tell me more? Can you think of a recent example when you thought about that … ?

A Yeah actually…we had a meeting where there was about eight of us involved….And again we were allocated roles within the firm and I took on the role of promoting diversity and inclusiveness Because of my interest in the subject. And one of the things that one of the people around the table said was there's a lot of talk about diversity and inclusiveness and the people who are actually feeling unloved in our department are the mid-20s white males.

Q What was your reaction to that?

A Well I didn't make any comment. I could understand why that would be the case but I guess it comes back down to the same thing I want to understand well what is it about diversity, are we actually that … am I actually that different to somebody else?

Q Right, okay… did anyone else respond to what he said?

A No, no they didn't.

Q Right. So what … in the moment after he said that could you just tell me what happened, do you remember?

A There were a number of discussions … this was … I guess the discussion wasn't focussed on diversity, the discussion was focussed on people harmony.

Q Okay.

A So it was a bit more of a fact that actually just focusing on diversity isn't going to make all of our staff happy because the people who are unhappy are the ones who are probably not from diverse backgrounds.

Q Yeah. And you said you opted to … you took on that role specifically because it was something you were interested in.

A Yeah.

Q Yeah, was there much discussion or debate about the role allocation? I'm just interested in the build up to that conversation.

A No, there wasn't a great deal of discussion about it.

Q Okay.

A Tell me what your thoughts about who was … the basis upon which you decided collectively or individually to allocate the roles.

A I think I put myself forward and nobody challenged it…It was something that I am interested in finding out more about. And so I thought well I'm already on the track so I may as well carry that on and share that knowledge when I have it.

Q Okay. Did you share that with the seven other people?

A Well one of them, the chair of the meeting, actually knew that. She knows some of the things I'm trying to do around diversity including this and the training and all that kind of stuff. So when I said look I can do that she said yeah I understand why you'd want to do that, you've got an interest in it.

Q Okay. Yeah. Is there anything else that comes to mind around that meeting and the conversations you had about diversity?

A No that was probably one minute of a one hour meeting or something like that. That wasn't the focus of the meeting by any means.

Q Okay.

Appendix G Selection of feedback from respondents

I found the research prompted me to really think about how much I was used to being the only BME in a room and how because of this I probably never noticed some of the subtle actions people take. I think this is probably because I lead projects and people do not have much choice to deliver in line with my decisions. The journal made me articulate concerns that I had not spoken to anyone else about - it made me think about why that was and made me feel some of the deep seated resentment which other talk about - something that I could never empathise with other BMEs which is a good thing. I found the feedback very cathartic to the extent that some areas I think we need to look and maybe put together an action learning set to work through these. The issue around professionalism I found interesting I had never thought about the way I worked as setting too high a standard and still find this difficult to reconcile against the reality (maybe perceived) that a BME standard of performance will need to be above those of non-BME to be noticed. If you are average then what's your USP, what would make a middle-aged BME choose you over a BME? Something I need to reflect on. (**Amber**, African-Caribbean female)

Just a quick note to ensure you arrived safely back in London and to say thanks for your research. I would like to record, in line with our discussion, that your research really has helped me realise my role and position within Govt Plc and that I feel extremely positive as to what the future holds, in terms of my career. This has been a reflective period of 6 months [hard to believe it has been that long – it has gone by really quickly] which has enabled me to realise I have the ability to do my job and talent and potential to go higher. Your research has made me feel connected to other professionals who are in a similar position to me and as a relatively isolated BME professional, that is a very reassuring thing. I do feel for the first time in a long time, that I can achieve, I have much to offer and I will challenge the constraints that may be real or perceived, personal or external, that may be obstacles to any future

development. To use the vernacular, ‘ I am going for it!’ (**Sean**, African-Caribbean male)

I wish you much success in your ventures and am delighted to have met you and joined in your research. It is never too late to learn new things and look at life from a new perspective. (**Indira**, Indian female)

Appendix H Peer-reviewed publication from research

Challenging ethnic and gender identities: An exploration of UK black minority professionals' identity construction

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Dr Val Singh is a Research Consultant and Visiting Fellow. Cranfield School of Management, where she was Reader and Deputy Director, International Centre for Women Leaders, which she helped set up in 1999, initiating the Female FTSE and Ethnic Diversity Reports. Formerly Gender Editor of *Journal of Business Ethics*, Val has published widely, with two US Academy GDO best paper nominations.

Challenging ethnic and gender identities: An exploration of UK black minority professionals' identity construction

Structured Abstract

Purpose: To explore how UK black minority professionals construct and negotiate ethnic/gender identities at work.

Methodology: Separate semi-structured focus groups for three females and four males.

Findings: Ethnicity, gender and their intersection play important roles in identity construction of black UK professionals, who frequently encounter identity-challenging situations as they interact with explicit and implicit models of race and stereotyping. Males use agentic strategies to further their careers, drawing strength from 'black men' identities. Women are less agentic, reframing challenging episodes to protect/restore their identity.

Research implications and limitations: This study helps understanding of workplace experiences of UK black professionals beyond entry level. Several years after graduation, they still engage frequently in identity work, facing stereotyping and expectations based on intersecting gender and ethnic social categories. We show how aspects of 'black identity' provide a resource that supports career progress. Main limitation is small sample size.

Practical Implications: People managing diverse professionals and HRM specialists need to recognise how much identity work (e.g. frequently countering stereotyping) has to be done by black professionals in cultures that do not value diversity. As they gain access to senior positions, this will be increasingly an issue for talent retention.

Originality/value: We provide some rich understanding about identity construction of black male professionals, an under-researched group. We extend work on ethnic minority females, comparing them with male peers. We show that minority groups are not homogenous, but may undergo different workplace experiences and adopt different strategies, drawing on various aspects of the generic 'black identity'. This has implications for how we understand, manage and research organisational diversity.

Key words: Ethnicity, Gender, Identity, Professionals, Race, Social Construction

Type of paper: Research Paper

Introduction

Professional ethnic minority men and women face challenges to their identities at work that have not yet been addressed in depth by researchers, particularly with UK samples (Kenny and Briner, 2007). Individual identities are personal but also social, shaped by the groups in which people classify themselves (such as sex or race/ethnicity) and are classified by others as insiders or outsiders (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Most research on race/ethnicity has been conducted in the USA (Ely, 1995; Ely and Thomas, 2001). However, differing political, economic and social histories of the USA and UK suggest that the context within which 'difference' is experienced in these countries may be very different.

Better understanding of individual identity formation experiences at work of people from non-white minority backgrounds is needed for several reasons. First, organisations need to provide a discrimination-free workplace. Second, it makes business sense to use the whole talent pool by valuing diversity (Ely and Thomas, 2001). Third, people who feel accepted by their organisation respond with commitment, often linked with higher performance (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Roberts, 2005). Fourth, HR specialists working with ethnic minority professionals would be able to design tailored measures to reduce stereotyping.

Research often downplays differences across ethnic/racial groups and there is little work on non-white individuals' experiences at professional and management levels (Kenny and Briner, 2007). While the 'double minority' status of ethnic minority women is of particular interest (e.g. Bell and Nkomo, 2005; Fearfull and Kamenou, 2006), there is little research in organisation studies on identity construction by ethnic minority men in the UK. Hence we focus on male and female UK black 'professionals', i.e. individuals in an occupation that demands advanced education, application of skills based on technical knowledge, with high standards of competence and responsibility (Roberts, 2005). Research reveals that professionals' experiences differ across demographic groups. For instance, despite an apparent level playing-field based on objective measures of qualifications and experience, promotion decisions to partner level in professional services firms still disadvantage women (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008), due to reliance on individual impression management strategies and prevailing masculine models of success. Intersecting gender with ethnicity adds another degree of complexity. Individual and structural factors (e.g. ethnic identity, acculturation, family support and socio-economic status) combine to hinder and enable professional and managerial minority ethnic women's career progression (Hite, 2007; Kamenou, 2007).

We explore how UK black professionals construct their social identities at work, specifically in relation to gender, ethnicity and their intersection. We examine how they experience being black in their organisational lives and how those experiences shape their identities. To address the gap in knowledge about ethnic minorities beyond career-entry stage, we draw on a small sample of minority professionals with several years' experience and many years of residence in the UK.

First, we review relevant literature on social identity, gender and ethnicity aspects of identity construction. We then consider the limited research on UK ethnic minorities in the workplace. Next we describe focus group methodology. We present participants' experiences of being black, black professionals and black women and men professionals. We discuss these findings, review limitations and conclude with implications for future research and management practice.

Literature Review

The Social Construction of Identity

Identity helps us understand who people are and why they do what they do. Identity is a "broad biopsychosocial self-definition that encompasses the individual's self-representation in the areas of physical functioning, cognition, personality, relationships, occupation, and social roles broadly defined" (Whitbourne, Sneed and Skultety, 2002, p. 30). This definition highlights the self-ascribed elements of identity, implicitly acknowledging individual reflexivity in constructing identity. We are also interested in the interaction between self and *social identity*, "the systematic establishment and signification between individuals, between collectivities, of relationships of similarity and difference" (Jenkins, 2004, p.5).

Drawing on Berger and Luckmann (1966), we believe identities are socially constructed. Central to social constructionism is the notion that ongoing human interaction creates a series of mental representations of human roles which become meaningful and 'institutionalised', thus conceived and experienced as social reality. This is a pertinent framework for exploring identity in minority groups, as social group identification comprises both agency of individuals to self-identify and structural restrictions when identities are placed upon them (Konrad, 2003). Agency refers to individuals' capability to change their circumstances, while structure represents the way in which social context shapes human activity and behaviour (Layder, 1994). Hence, both agency and structure contribute to our construction of reality and the identities which we take on or ascribe to others.

Ethnicity and Gender as Identity Categories

There are ongoing debates regarding appropriate use of the terms 'race' and 'ethnicity' (Jenkins, 2003). While race is often taken as physiologically-based physical differences between people (in lay terms often skin colour), we prefer the term 'ethnicity' which captures differences in cultural markers such as language, values, traditions and national origin (Kenny and Briner, 2007; Kamenou, 2007).

UK research on organisational diversity has been criticised for focusing on separate social categories, and treating gender and ethnicity as demographic variables rather than social constructs (Kenny and Briner, 2007). Authors have argued for research that reflects the complexity of diversity, including understanding more deeply the *meaning*

of, and *experiences* related to race and gender at work (Roberson and Block, 2001), acknowledging the range of socio-cultural contexts within which difference is experienced (Kenny and Briner, 2007) and the *interplay* of multiple social identities including gender and race (Frable, 1997).

Particular challenges arise from gender and ethnic social categories, visible markers of membership of less powerful groups in the workplace. The intersection of these categories also merits investigation, as stereotypes often arise from a particular combination of categories. The African –American female 'Mammy' stereotype of a caring, loyal, maternal, self-sacrificing woman is drawn from images of the 'chief caretaker' slave of the plantation master and family. Bell and Nkomo (2005) warn that focusing on her emotional and nurturing style downplays the black professional woman's competence. Roberts (2005) comments that "women are often stereotyped as emotional, maternalistic and nurturing – characteristics that are incompatible with the manager/leader role" (2005, p.689). Another stereotype is 'Sapphire', an aggressive, sassy, bossy, 'drama queen'. A black professional woman perceived in this way may be criticised or even ostracised for being abrasive or too outspoken, with colleagues responding to her behaviour and not her ability. She may also be seen by bosses as not fitting requirements for management (Bell and Nkomo, 2001).

Minority professionals are influenced consciously and sub-consciously by discourses such as gender, ethnicity and professionalism, recognising the external dimensions of their perceived social identity. Some may actively engage in identity work, repairing and shaping the constructions that form their personal identity (Svenningson and Alvesson 2003; Watson, 2008).

Ethnic Minorities in UK Organisations

Much research on ethnicity and behaviour in UK organisations focuses on the adverse impact minorities face in gaining access to organisations (Kenny and Briner, 2007). These reviewers' overwhelming criticism is that ethnicity is often not examined 'meaningfully' by researchers. Acknowledging the socially constructed dimension of social identities enables meaningful exploration of the complexity of diversity (Roberson & Block, 2003). For instance, Kamenou (2007) describes how UK ethnic minority women's career progression is affected by structure (e.g. organizational and family factors) interplaying with agency (strategies, determination and the capacity to act).

This research sought to extend understanding how black professionals experience intersecting ethnic and gender identities and navigate the UK workplace. When conducting the study we asked specifically: *"How do black professionals experience being black, being black women and being black men in their organisational lives and how do those experiences shape their identities?"*

Method

As the purpose of the study was exploratory, to gain rich understanding and gather data in scoping for a larger research project, a convenience sample was considered acceptable. The lead author used her social network to approach the seven participants (e.g. former university acquaintances) who fitted the profile of 'young black professional'. Participants were aged between 28 and 31, with four to eight years' professional work experience, born outside the UK, but resident in the UK for between 14 and 20 years; four were British nationals (see Table 1). They participated in single-sex semi-structured focus groups, particularly appropriate for researching collective cultural experiences (Madriz, 2000). The method also fits with the non-hierarchical, empathy-driven approach recommended for diversity research (Kamenou, 2007). The lead author's style was non-directive with open questions and follow-up probes, allowing participants to give voice to their experiences (Madriz, 2000).

Participants were asked how they would define themselves at work in relation to ethnicity, the contexts in which these descriptions might differ and the role that ethnicity, gender and the intersection of these played in how they experienced their professional identities at work. Each session lasted about 100 minutes.

**********INSERT TABLE I ABOUT HERE **********

While the challenges associated with 'outsiders' researching historically subordinated groups' experiences are well documented (Kamenou, 2007), we also recognise the research challenges of within-group research, such as in-group over-familiarity. A black female researcher from Nigeria, the lead author noted the spontaneous camaraderie and bonding that developed within the group (including herself), and observed that participants reacted to potential sensitivities around the issues of race/ethnicity and identity in a matter-of-fact manner, often light-heartedly. The lead author presented her role as observer/facilitator explicitly, only intervening to refocus discussions. The second author is white British, married to an Indian professor; together they have children born in three countries, and ten years' experience as an immigrant family in Sweden and Norway.

Discussions were transcribed and imported into NVivo (software for analysing qualitative data). When coding, researchers may draw on a conceptual framework derived from the literature, or may be informed (but not constrained) by the literature, building an emergent framework from the data. We used the latter strategy. Concepts within the data were identified and coded as nodes, building up into a hierarchical tree structure. During analysis, we employed an ongoing iterative process, shifting between identity challenges and strategies deployed in response, seeking patterns of structural and agentic influences on self-identification and testing whether identity work processes differed by gender. The lead author conducted initial analyses. The second author reviewed coding for consistency and credibility, discussing and resolving queries with the first author face-to-face. We had approximately 80% agreement in initial coding. We reassembled the conceptual tree together in the second stage. Tentative findings were discussed and challenged as we interpreted participants'

words and confronted personal prejudices and assumptions. For instance, the first author interpreted the men's active identity construction using an ethnic lens. However, the second author highlighted that some differences between the focus groups could be explained using a gender lens, e.g. that males are more likely than females to use impression management tactics (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008). The report was done jointly, again iteratively.

Findings: Identity Forming Experiences in Organisations

Being Black in the UK

How interviewees felt about their black identities is revealed in complex responses to "What would you say if people at work ask you where you come from?" This is a typical early question as we meet new people in the office. It is even more likely if the new person has a visible ethnic minority background, with instant out-group classification (e.g. based on skin colour) until other pertinent identity facets surface. Such identity questions may reinforce feelings of being 'other'. Majority group members usually find this straightforward to answer, but for black professionals, it requires considerable work to clarify where they were born, where they grew up, their nationality, current residence, how that relates to family, and to guess what the enquirer knows about geography. Participants identified themselves and others as Black, African, Black British, or another specified nationality but the labels varied according to context.

Location of formative experiences was significant in raising awareness of the 'Black' racial identity, with distinctions emerging between participants who spent their early years in the UK and those who grew up overseas:

> *TJ (male): I've never been conscious of my race in a way that I think a black British person would be conscious of their race… It's not questioned – that identity is not really shaken.*
>
> *NK (female): I lived in a very white place…You can't deny being black and African… my parents have always told me so.*

NK, who grew up in the UK appeared aware of her black identity from childhood – it was part of her ethnic capital, a sense of belonging to one's ethnic group and recognition of parental investment in building this ethnic environment (Borjas, 1992).

Participants also demonstrated a shared understanding of 'Black British'. Although four participants were British nationals, all participants spontaneously defined themselves based on the nationalities of their families of origin - Ghanaian, Guyanese or Nigerian. The 'Black British' label was restricted to people who had spent their formative years in the UK, even if this varied within the same family. Participants also constructed identities by drawing on parallels between the Asian and Black communities. Stereotypical differences between Indians (perceived as high-achievers) and

Bangladeshi people (perceived as poorly educated and economically-deprived) were likened to perceived differences between black people of African and Caribbean heritage:

> *TJ (male): I think Africans are perceived in a slightly better light than Black British people. The same way we think of Indians and tend to think they are focused on education, people think of Africans and think the same thing.*

Societal structures such as demographic category options on job application forms and standard responses to casual enquiries around place of origin simultaneously expanded and restricted identities. Research shows that socio-structural barriers restrict progress for minority professionals (e.g. Hite, 2007). This study suggests they may have an even more fundamental impact at the level of self-construal – prompting ongoing identity work. For example, expanded 'African' identities emerged in conversations with people (frequently, but not exclusively, outside the UK) whose geographical knowledge was limited:

> *NK (female): I think (the term) 'African' is a very American thing … (Africa) is a vast continent - maybe not just in America. My friend who lives in Geneva describes herself as 'African', so I suppose it is where you are, but in England I don't see many people who see Africa as one country.*

Context also restricted identities. For instance, for SJ's brother, described by her family as both English and Black, there were recognised socio-structural restrictions concerning the extent to which he was allowed to take on both identities simultaneously:

> *SJ (female): Well, he's Black English…but if you tick English, they assume you're white, right? …We would say he should really call himself English as he was born in England…*
>
> *NK (female): That's not really an option is it?*

This tension between being 'black in England' and being 'English' is reflected in national trends (Office of National Statistics, 2004). White respondents are more likely to describe their national identity as English rather than British while non-White respondents are more likely to identify as British (Lam and Smith, 2008). Young non-white British-born people do not identify with Black African or Black Caribbean categories, preferring to describe themselves as Black Other or Caribbean Black British. Additionally, in a group of predominantly British-born black young adults, compared to Africans, more Caribbeans described themselves as "from England" or British (Lam and Smith, 2008). These distinctions within the 'Black' category reinforce Kenny and Briner's (2004) urge for researchers to focus on specific ethnic groups, challenging the assumption of a homogenous 'Black' culture and identity.

The right to self-categorisation was also raised by the participants. Somewhat grudgingly, the legitimacy of non-black people's use of the 'African' identity was acknowledged:

> *LO (female): …A South African at work goes 'us Africans' and I go 'you're not African'. Yeah he is South African…yeah, but no…like err hmm…OK, he is probably African because he calls himself African and he lived there.*

Further, two male participants took agentic steps to challenge the imposition of ascribed identities:

> *NA (male): I don't think I've ever said African. It's poor generalisation. You rarely hear people say 'I'm from Europe'. When people say 'I've been to Africa', I'm like, 'well, I've been to Europe'… I make it a personal point to say I'm from Nigeria…otherwise it propagates the whole misconception about the way people view Africans.*

Optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 2003) suggests that the tension between identity needs for *assimilation/inclusion* and needs for *differentiation/distinctiveness* is a key driver behind the formation of social identity. Optimal identities satisfy both sets of needs through 'shared distinctiveness' as a member of a unique social group. Some black professionals rejected the notion of African identity as a single entity or a uniquely identifying label. Being 'African' (rather than 'Nigerian') does not appear to meet the needs for optimum distinctiveness, as it is not easily defined by skin colour or residence. The participants opted instead to define themselves at the level of national identity. This stands in contrast to the portrayal of Africa in Western media/discourse as a single entity.

Being Black Professionals

Entering the organisation as a black professional represents an identity challenge. Participants discussed positive aspects of diversity in university life which did not transfer to the professional world:

> *SJ (female): When you go out into the workplace, those differences are not appreciated so much - because they've already got a set up wherever you work. When you enter it, they are not really going to embrace the fact that there are differences. You just have to fit into whatever has already been the norm for that particular office or environment.*

Participants discussed how higher education structures facilitated positive inter-group relationships as universities celebrated diversity and increased exposure to multiple cultures and perspectives. This may be compared to the 'integration and learning' approach to diversity management (Ely and Thomas, 2001), where diversity is leveraged as a resource for organisational learning and strategic advantage. For UK universities, student diversity is linked to key success factors such as finances (from

international fees), international rankings, and engagement in a global learning community. However many organisations approach diversity from a 'discrimination and fairness' perspective where diversity is not linked to group processes and outcomes (Ely and Thomas 2001). One implication of diversity not being integrated into the organisational culture is that people's tendency to affiliate with similar others (the homophily bias) impacts on the career outcomes and integration/socialisation of women and ethnic minorities (Bell, 1990). Whilst the need to 'fit' into the context recognised by SJ might be seen as a weak response, participants drew on ethnic capital (Robb, Dunkley, Boynton and Greenhalgh, 2007); here, the African tradition of working hard to succeed, in contrast to perceptions of black people in general as rather laid back) to validate their workplace strategy to fit into the work environment:

> *TJ (male): When Africans come into an environment, we are survivors - and one of the things we understand about this environment is that white people are not comfortable with black people… so one of the things we do is to make people comfortable with us.*

The use of the vivid metaphor 'survivors' by TJ indicates the degree of challenge the young professionals are prepared to encounter. This self-enhancement strategy (adopting subjective belief structures) is employed by lower status group members to attain positive social identities (Hogg, 2003). There are parallels with the image of 'armouring', psychological buffering against the effects of stereotypes and discrimination (Bell and Nkomo, 2003). TJ describes the UK black professional's response to identity threats – engaging in identity work by making people comfortable with his blackness, work that repairs his social or public identity and hence his self-identity (Watson, 2008).

As well as challenging the generic 'African' identity, participants challenged workplace stereotypes associated with the generic 'Black' identity. These often drew on 'Black British' stereotypes, ascribing behaviours to them with which they did not self-identify:

> *NA (male): People's first impressions (at work are) that you're probably not well educated, probably on benefits, probably do drugs. You'll always have that stigma …You'll have to be able to demonstrate your difference.*

This quote, based on the 'Black British' stereotype, indicates the continual identity work that has to be done to counter negative stereotypes at work. Black professionals have to actively promote a positive identity to counter the stereotype (e.g. a national identity), in a similar way to professionals who use impression management to manage their public identities to further their careers (Kumra and Vinnicombe, 2008), but this work is intensified due to the added complexity of their ethnicity.

<u>Being Black Professional Females</u>

Two women noted the impact of ethnicity on social and structural organisational contexts. NK actively used this to take control, believing that her black identity helped her within her work team:

> *NK: I almost use probably subconsciously Ghana and my blackness in the workplace…I almost feel like in some situations people almost take to me because I'm black. … English colleagues and friends… love talking about Ghana, they love talking about black things. It's almost like I give them the chance.*

For SJ, moving into the professional arena meant that power structures played a more ominous role in shaping attitudes to diversity, gradually reconstructing her reality of the ways in which different groups are treated:

> *SJ (female): When I first started working, I wouldn't notice any kind of difference in how I was treated and how white colleagues were treated. As I've moved around, really I can see it so much more. Like you notice that people who are in charge are always white and the people at the lowest level are black or non-white.*

In their discourse, neither NK nor SJ comment on gender inequality, and it appears that ethnicity rather than gender (or gender with ethnicity) is most salient in their professional experiences. In contrast, for LO, being female appeared to be a stronger part of her identity at work than being black, which she attributed to working in a male-dominated team:

> *LO: I think it depends on how good I am at my job so I see that if I'm treated any differently it's because I'm doing an exceptional job and not because I'm a black female. … I see myself more as a woman than I see myself as black.*

NK was also robust in not considering her ethnicity or gender to be an 'issue', focusing on more individual characteristics:

> *NK: I don't consider being black as an issue but I don't really see being female as an issue either, so I can't put one above the other. Even though I identify generally with being black, I feel there's a LOT more to me as an individual and that it's not just about 'a black girl'.*

Despite this, NK later acknowledged the 'issue' of otherness in speculating that "*in terms of your mindset, your state of mind, knowing that everybody else is like you, there's a little bit of ease"* when in the majority.

For SJ, her lack of knowledge about her family's original country (Guyana) and her mix of friends led her to state that her ethnic identity was low, giving the impression that she had assimilated into and now felt part of a racially diverse society. She reflected

that she could not legitimately claim a Guyanese identity unless she had visited and learnt more about her ethnic heritage and engaged more with her ethnic group:

> *SJ: Although I see myself as black, I won't say I have high ethnic identity because my knowledge of where I'm from is really minimal, and I haven't surrounded myself with only black friends.*

The women also talked of encountering stereotyping. The legacy of presumed superiority of white Britishness lingers on despite over half a century of independence for former colonies (Smith, 2008). Even English people describe the British as "arrogant", "nationalistic" and "xenophobic" (Condor, 1996). Not surprisingly therefore, one interviewee speculated that stereotyping may just reflect the British attitude to foreigners of any kind:

> *NK: I also think that it could be a foreign thing rather than a race thing...because I worked with a Greek girl … she had problems fitting in and people didn't really make any effort to make her feel comfortable. So I wonder if it's the English and the way they are with foreigners as opposed to being black and white.*

Another participant felt that covert stereotyping was always there, but questioned whether black people might prefer to take solace that this was due to racism rather than personal dislike. The women shared a view that some of their black friends made themselves into victims of racism that really affected their identities:

> *LO: I have a friend who's very much into 'I'm black, I'm black and everyone around me is racist'.*

> *NK: A woman being horrible to me could be because she's having a bad day or she doesn't like what I'm wearing. Some are always looking for people to give her the wrong look or something.*

The women commented that they could not control racism but they could control whether or not they allowed it to affect them and their sense of identity:

> *NK: There's all kinds of people in this world and all kinds of prejudice even within the black community. You can't control that but you can control yourself and how you respond to it.*

Research on ethnic minority women emphasises 'bi-cultural stress' (Atewologun, 2008), the tension resulting from needing to separate work (often characterised by a culturally distinct white world), and home/social lives (often a distinctly different culture) (e.g. Bell, 1990; Hite, 1996; Davidson, 1997). When asked how they experienced being black females working in a different culture, women rejected the idea of bi-cultural stress. However, being invited/expected to go to the pub with work colleagues provoked different reactions:

NK: I'm quite happy to go to the pub after work. I'm quite versatile that way, I guess I can do whatever.

LO: I go to the pub and if I had a choice I probably won't go. It's more a case of who you are and what kind of society you like... But I'd go and I'll leave like after an hour…that's generally what I do.

SJ: Well I'm quite uncomfortable in pubs in general but I don't mind going at lunchtime for a pub lunch or it's a special occasion such as someone's birthday or someone leaving.

Going to the pub was acknowledged by both males and females as part of the organisational socialisation process. For the women, it seems not so much an issue of gender, as other women went to the pub. Rather, it seems more to do with ethnicity, a different cultural manifestation that their male peers shared with them, as shown below. They didn't want to be outsiders, yet some women did not enjoy such socialisation. Whilst this was not an important source of stress, it suggests that being a black professional requires additional work to fit into the social fabric in the workplace.

Being Black Professional Males

Male participants encountered positive and negative stereotyping, but saw the stereotypes, particularly the 'black male' identity as positive, providing an opportunity for career success:

NA: It's a good thing to be a well educated black guy. I think it's worked for me. When I started looking for a job, there was a huge drive to have more black faces. I think that it opened more doors than I would have had.

AO: People have this perception that you have no achievements. So when you get in there and they see how good you are, their expectations are raised. They have low expectations. I would say that's an advantage.

While recognising the irony of advantage associated with ethnic minority status, the men also acknowledged some challenges. They all faced the challenge of expectations about the 'happy go lucky', athletic office joker, which some totally resisted:

*NA: I think there is a general stereotype about being a black guy and being funny, outgoing, athletic. In some of my jobs they've expected me to be 'Will Smith' (*an extrovert African-American comedy/action movie star*) of the office…but I'm very chilled at work - I like to keep to myself and it always comes as a shock to people that I don't make jokes.*

TJ: A lot of the white guys want to be friends with 'the black guy' because it's 'cool', but you have to be careful not to play to that. People have an expectation – they expect you to be a bit cool, to be a bit wild.

As they were ambitious, others changed their behaviour to fit the expectations, so that they could integrate, potentially perpetuating these stereotypes:

> *LS: I find it very difficult. If I'm too loud, I feel like I'm propagating the stereotype. It's a very delicate balance...the fact that I'm a black male adds that extra dimension… they might be scared of black men. …I know I'm a minority so I just make that all-round general effort to be a little more talkative, outgoing... and make an effort to adjust to the system. That's the way it is.*

Like the women feeling that they had to go to the pub, the black male professionals were adapting their behaviours to fit into the "in-group" at work:

> *NA: I think it very important in a work context to understand the banter structure and how people break the ice and develop relationships... It's very hard to talk to a guy until you learn with guys to 'talk football'.*

> *AO: I don't send emails – I go and see people, so I can interact more with them.*

They would not voice opinions on race/ethnicity issues at work, such as views about slavery. Appropriate dress in the business context was also raised. LS commented *"just to fit into the system so you can move up, but keep it light. You are not supposed to go to work with your Malcolm X shirt"*. TJ said "*I've never seen a guy walk into work in traditional wear",* whilst NA said that his wife would comment negatively if he were to go to an office event in such attire. The fit was so important to TJ that he changed his name at work:

> *TJ: When people couldn't pronounce my name, they didn't talk to me. I use 'Ken' because people know 'Ken', it's easy to say and they will say it. So that's a strategy, but I'm hiding my ethnic identity in the process. You can choose your battles when it comes to these issues.*

However, he reintroduced his ethnicity when he visited South Africa and brought back some dry meat snacks, and asked the people in the office to try it while he was watching:

> *TJ: For me that was an African touch. He knows I'm an African guy who has brought this thing, he took it home, he liked it. I've made a mark, it's a uniqueness that most British guys will never have. I know it helps my career in a way.*

It seems that black professional males encountered ethnic stereotyping, but identified value in their distinctiveness (Brewer, 2003). Their strategy was generally to fit in, sometimes with considerable efforts outside their normal character, challenging their personal identities. This strategy fits with other research on how professionals enact their identities. Men participate in 'acquisitive self presentation' (active, aggressive

attempts to signal credibility) while women respond more modestly and passively in response to identity challenges (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2007). Our study gives additional insight into how members of negatively-stereotyped groups adapt, echoing African-American literature on 'shifting'. 'Shifting' entails expending effort on heightened self-monitoring, managing feelings and altering behaviours to cope with stereotypes (e.g. altering speech, appearance and behaviour to challenge stereotypes of being poorly educated or workshy) (Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

The bicultural existence of members of minority ethnic groups has been variously construed as a source of tension (Davidson, 1997), a platform for cross-cultural skill development (LaFromboise, Coleman and Gerton, 1993) and a resource for coping with tensions associated with being an outsider at work (Roberts, 2005). Reflecting back, our black male participants' perceive their 'outsider' status as more advantageous than disadvantageous up to their present level:

> *NA: There is a general push to have more black faces but I'd agree, I think I've benefited from being hired as the token black guy…but a part of me still feels I would rather not have been the token black guy.*
>
> *LS: Being a black guy in the office, there are still a lot more hurdles but also there is the opportunity to take advantage of the fact that you stand out and if you can, revel in that and use it to break down perceptions and stereotypes.*

The evidence presented shows that 'Blackness' contributes considerable challenges to identity for minority professionals in the UK workplace. They use optimal distinctiveness strategies to claim their ethnic capital from their national identities with a strong education and work ethic, rather than the 'Black British' stereotype. But it is the intersection of blackness with gender that reveals the paradoxes they face . Whilst the men experienced being in demand as competent black professionals, the stereotyping of black men based on movie culture has to be carefully countered. Only one of the black women reported experiencing advantage from the ethnicity/gender intersection.

Discussion

We have shown that ethnic or gender lenses on the experiences and identity formation of black male and female professionals in the UK do not provide the full picture. Exploring the intersection of ethnicity and gender adds considerably to understanding the daily challenges faced by such individuals, who make up an increasing part of the talent pool in industry and business.

Structurally, context strongly influences identity formation, in the form of nationality and demographic classification. Participants reported the tension from being ascribed a predefined social category, juxtaposed against their right to self-identify. Structural forces provide the arena for Berger and Luckmann's (1966) 'practices of legitimation',

contributing to sustaining particular identities in the UK. Structures created by the different 'symbolic universes' of England, USA, South Africa and Switzerland meant that the same individuals identified themselves differently in different contexts, whether completing application forms or explaining to work colleagues where they came from. However universes may be challenged, as when participants recounted their own classification rules, such as deciding whether to accept a white South African as equally African to themselves. "OK, he is *probably* African", but he did not fulfil the blackness criterion that was a crucial part of LO's perceived African identity, and legitimising him as "African" challenged her need for optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 2003).

Black professionals have to do considerable identity work within the workplace. Even the most central determinants of self identity, such as name and origin become daily markers of difference. There was evidence of identity deletion and integration, two of four types of identity work (the others were compartmentalisation and aggregation of multiple identities (Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep, 2006)). Whilst TJ 'deleted' his African name at work, he reintegrated his ethnic identity by bringing African food for his co-workers. This supports Svenningson and Alvesson's (2003) comment that people create contradictory and often changing identities at work.

The black men's discourse showed conscious engagement with identity-challenging structures. They vividly described workplace structures as a "system", "battle", "political arena" or "game". Their workplace navigation strategies consisted of assessing the battlefield before deciding on the strategy required to win (to alter the structure). Unlike the women, they used impression management to promote more amenable black identities at work. They drew advantage from their intersecting black male identities as the diversity climate offered them attractive opportunities. They made sense of this by acknowledging the beneficial climate, through a reflective process about tokenism and positive action that again shaped their identity, echoing Roberson and Block (2001) on the importance of investigating meaning-making in diverse settings. They reflectively acknowledged the risk of reproducing and sustaining some of the very structures (e.g. 'black male' stereotypes) they sought to challenge. This keen sense of agency in the face of structural challenges, with a strong cultural dimension echoes other research on ethnic minority women's experiences in the UK (Fearfull and Kamenou, 2006) and the US (Bell and Nkomo, 2001).

The female participants also employed agency to reconstruct and sustain their identities as minority professionals, but in contrast to the males, this meant reflecting, reconstructing and sometimes re-attributing negative behaviours directed towards them. The women reinterpreted stereotyping on ethnic grounds as just British stand-offishness to foreigners. There was no indication of the isolation Hite (1996) found amongst black US professionals, nor any accounts of black female 'Mammy' or 'Sapphire' stereotyping (Bell and Nkomo, 2001). Neither men nor women acknowledged any bi-cultural stress *per se*.

This study reveals a different tone to the usual drawbacks associated with minority status described in the predominantly US literature (Hite, 1996; Berdahl and Moore, 2006). Rather than victims of society's structures, these respondents were knowledgeable, reflexive, active agents. Results echo findings on the role of ethnic capital (Robb et al, 2007) in the process of identity construction, offering a dynamic perspective on this. Black professionals consciously drew on ethnic capital and shared meanings of identity, as they negotiated their workplace interactions, reflexively managing the tensions therein. Ethnic capital is the legacy of parental investment (Borjas, 1992) and this group talked often about their high work ethic and professional excellence derived from good education, characteristics they associated with Africans in the UK.

Illustrating Jenkins' (2004) definition of identity as the establishment of similarities and differences between groups and individuals, participants compared their black in-group differences to those within the Asian community. While participants recognized that they were playing a significant role in altering perceptions about black people in the workplace, there was regret that this might further divide the black community, reinforcing the distinction between the 'Black British' and the 'black in Britain' subgroups.

While social identity theory has contributed much to our understanding of how membership of groups and categories influences self concepts and identities, our findings support Hogg's view (2003, p.470) that "people are not content to have their identities (*solely*) determined by the social-cognitive context…They say and do things to try to change the parameters so that a subjectively more meaningful and self-favouring identity becomes salient in interactions" (brackets added). Much remains to be learnt about the identity work in which black professionals engage to achieve this.

Conclusion

Following identification of a gap in knowledge about ethnic minority professionals in the UK (Kenny and Briner, 2007), we set out to explore how black professionals construct their identities as black people, as black professionals and as black men and women. Drawing on two single-sex focus groups, we identified that ethnicity, gender and their intersection play important roles in black professionals' identity development. Supporting Fearfull and Kamenou (2006), our data show that black UK professionals encounter a number of structures (e.g. bureaucratic classifications of 'race', social stereotyping and organisational diversity climates), that influence their identities, and they use a variety of agentic actions to navigate through these. Focusing on identity construction and comparing women with male peers, we reveal differences in identification with intersecting ethnicity and gender. While not without limitation, we provide fresh, rich data to enhance understandings on identity formation experiences of black male professionals who act consciously and reflectively to alter structures and produce change, while recognising the inherent risks.

The major limitation of this study is the small sample size. There is likely to be researcher-induced bias due to qualitative design, and gender difference between male participants and the black female researcher, which may have led to social desirability bias as the men sought to emphasise their black male identities to her. There is also the bias of focus group methodology as group dynamics could shift or deepen some issues, or strong personalities could dominate discussions. The first author adhered to the general structure for both groups and the camaraderie experienced in the groups countered any effects of a single dominant voice.

More research is suggested into the implications of ethnic capital of different minority professionals, and links with human and social capital. Further research is needed into identity work by black professionals as they progress into more senior roles. Through longitudinal or case studies, we need to understand these processes and how organisations can foster an environment in which black minority as well as majority professionals succeed and contribute at senior levels authentically.

People managing diverse professionals and HRM specialists in workplace diversity need to recognise how much identity work has to be done in organisational contexts that do not value diversity. Stereotyping at all levels needs to be reduced by culture change and training. As minority professionals seek and gain access to senior positions, this will be increasingly an issue for talent retention.

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Table I: Demographics of Focus Group Members

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation	Self ascribed Ethnic Origin	Country of Family Origin
LO	Female	28	Financial Modeller	Black African	Nigeria
NK	Female	29	Marketing Analyst & Analytics Manager	Black African	Ghana
SJ	Female	30	Healthcare Scientist	Afro-Caribbean	Guyana
AO	Male	31	Accountant	Black African	Nigeria
LS	Male	30	Civil Engineer	Black African	Nigeria
OA	Male	31	Accountant	African	Nigeria
TJ	Male	29	Project (Software) Engineer	Black African	Nigeria

Appendix I Peer-reviewed conference paper (Academy of Management Best Paper Proceedings)

ADVANCING RACIO-ETHNIC AND DIVERSITY THEORISING THROUGH 'INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITY WORK'

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ABSTRACT

Management research on racio-ethnicity inadequately addresses the complexities of multiple identity dimensions and underplays the role of context. Integrating identity construction with intersectionality, we focus on how individuals make sense of the dynamic nature of non-essentialist identities. We offer an 'intersectional identity work' framework to advance racio-ethnic scholarship in organisations.

A THEMATIC OVERVIEW OF RACIO-ETHNIC RESEARCH

We use the term 'racio-ethnicity' in reference to membership of biologically and/or culturally distinct groups reflective of differences in privilege in society that affects performance, satisfaction or progress in organisations (Cox, 1990). To gain a thematic overview of the literature, we drew on racio-ethnicity reviews published in Management and Organization Studies (MOS) from 1990, a 'watershed year' in which diversity research began proliferating management scholarship (Özbilgin, Beauregard, Tatli & Bell, 2011). The review publications on which we concentrated are Nkomo (1992), Cox, Nkomo & Welch (2001), Roberson & Block (2001), and Kenny & Briner (2007). In our analysis of these papers, four themes emerged regarding the state of ethnicity research in MOS. Research has tended to focus on i) elucidating differences in organisational outcomes between racio-ethnic groups; ii) examining the nature of stereotype and bias; and iii) investigating minority ethnic individuals' reactions to this; iv) with differential regard paid to context. While this body of work continues to

develop, a key criticism from reviewers is the essentialist assumptions underlying racio-ethnicity and insufficient consideration of context in examining racio-ethnicity in organisations. This criticism is well articulated by critical diversity scholars (e.g. Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop & Nkomo, 2010) who challenge the positivistic ontological assumption much racio-ethnic/diversity research makes about dimensions of difference being stable, fixed variables. A primary means by which organisational scholars have sought to address these criticisms is by adopting an intersectional perspective on racio-ethnicity.

Intersectionality and racio-ethnic research

Intersectionality theorising emerged from critical feminist roots in an effort to exhume the experiences of women traditionally silenced in gender and race studies due to their position at the nexus of subordinate gender and racio-ethnic status. Intersectionality is "the mutual reproduction of class, gender and racial relations of inequality" (Acker, 2006: 443) and sensitises us to "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall, 2005: 1771). We refer to intersectionality as both perspective and framework.

A recent review (Atewologun, 2008) highlighted three main strands of organisational research on racio-ethnicity and gender. One strand presents intersecting identities as a single analytical unit, and another as a focus for subjective experience. However, we believe the third means by which scholars examine combined racio-ethnic and gender status - as a framework - offers greatest potential for advancing racio-ethnic studies. In this strand of research, the intersection of gender (and other identity facets) with ethnicity is proactively deployed by scholars to make sense of the processes in which respondents (and researchers) engage with (women's) work experiences. For example, Henry (1995) draws on developmental experiences on the interplay of race, class and sex to make sense of how a teacher develops her social cultural practice as a teacher; Hite (2007) uses gender intersecting with culture to make sense of the career decisions and experiences of three generations of Latina women; and narratives of a multicultural group of hotel staff are analysed to illustrate how identities are fused, with gender, ethnicity, nationality and class presented as fluid aspects of simultaneously shifting selves (Adib & Guerrier, 2003). Individually, these studies illustrate how culture, class and gender influence the meaning of, and experiences relating to racio-ethnicity at work. However, there are limitations to their ability to make a collective impact within MOS. Intersectional studies remain at the margins of organisational scholarship and somewhat fragmented, with contributions from assorted disciplines (e.g. medicine, communications, sociology) often published in specialist 'women's issues' journals or critical management publications (Atewologun, 2008). Compounding this, explicit methodological guidelines for analysing intersectionality are elusive (Nash, 2008), limiting the potential of the framework for reproducibility and theory-building. In combination, these factors limit the actual and perceived value of intersectionality research to mainstream management literature.

Advancing intersectionality research

We propose that an intersectional perspective can be applied more broadly to management scholarship, beyond empirical contributions to understanding the experiences of members of minority racio-ethnic and gender groups. Intersectionality has particular relevance for organisational studies of racio-ethnicity. The organisation presents an additional layer of interpretation and meaning for socially-salient identity facets because within its socio-structural hierarchy, any given individual is unlikely to be disadvantaged across all pertinent identity dimensions. Take, for example, the case of a black homosexual Finance Director, whose intersecting gender, race, professional and sexual identities place him in privileged as well as disadvantaged positions within the typical Western organisational context. We propose applying an intersectionality perspective to organisation diversity studies by examining simultaneous axes of disadvantage and privilege. We believe this is an opportunity to advance racio-ethnicity scholarship in a manner that also more closely reflects experiences relating to racio-ethnicity in today's organisations.

In summary, we acknowledge the contribution of intersectionality to highlighting the complexity and subtleties of non-essentialist identity dimensions in MOS. We seek to extend this contribution by recognising the significance of the organisational, and broader context in constructing racio-ethnicity, thus expanding its scope to simultaneous privileged and disadvantaged experiences. We believe that an intersectional lens can go beyond narratives to offer in-depth insight into the on-going meaning-making and self-construal experiences of multiply-identified individuals. To elaborate on how this may be achieved, we draw on another established domain in organisation studies. We draw from the literature on identification and identity work in organisations and adapt it as a lens through which theorising on intersectionality and racio-ethnicity may be advanced.

IDENTITY WORK

Identity is, simply, an individual's answer to the question "who (or what) am I?' Identity helps us understand how the demands of contemporary organisational life affect individuals' and collectives' self-conceptions and self-representations. Within the vast literature on identity in MOS (for reviews, see Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008; Van Dick, 2001) we limit our consideration to perspectives on the process of *becoming* (as opposed to being), represented by identification. Drawing on Whitbourne, Sneed & Skultety (2002) and Jenkins (2004), we define identification as *an ongoing internal process, wherein personal meaning and significance are achieved as one locates one's place in a given social context*. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003: 1164) espouse a need for investigating how people 'become identified' which emphasises "dynamic aspects and on-going struggles around creating a sense of self and providing temporary answers to the question 'who am I?'". This process perspective on identity is influenced by a postmodern agenda and seeks to investigate the subtleties and complexities of the dynamics of identification, fundamental to understanding human relations within contemporary organisations (Brown, 2001).

The mindful aspect of identification is conceptualized as 'identity work', "the ongoing mental activity that an individual undertakes in constructing an understanding of the self that is coherent, distinct and positively valued" (Alvesson et al, 2008: 15). Identity work theory (e.g. Ashforth et al, 2008; Pratt, 2000) describes the processes in which individuals engage, in their motivation to reduce perceived incongruence (or 'identity gaps') between self and socio-structural context. Identity-heightening episodes (positive and negative) often evoke powerful responses and are fertile ground for in-depth investigations into identity work, as at these moments we have a heightened awareness of how we are constructing ourselves (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Such episodes (encounters, transitions or surprises) trigger sensemaking and identity enactment as individuals frame their experiences 'to comprehend, understand, and explain (these) in such a way as to give meaning, purpose, and direction to action' (Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy & Quinn, 2005: 716).

INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITY WORK

We position identification as one's ongoing search for personal meaning and significance in the context of societal structure and power relations. Thus, individual identity is constructed as (social) contexts trigger ongoing self-evaluation and resolution of identity gaps - compared against other individuals and groups. We propose there is potential in placing an intersectional lens over identity work processes by focusing on how (minority) individuals construct an understanding of multiply-identified selves in response to identity-heightening (contradictory, ambiguous or affirmative) experiences as organisational members. We call on researchers to advance racio-ethnic scholarship by adopting a dynamic perspective of how minority organisational members negotiate self-meaning through the ongoing social construction of intersecting identities. To achieve this, we propose a framework of 'intersectional identity work', which (drawing on Alvesson et al, 2008), we define as *the on-going activity that individuals undertake in constructing an understanding of a mutually constituted self that is coherent, distinct and positively valued.*

In drawing on identity work and intersectionality, we integrate two domains with low conceptual distance (Okhuysen & Bonardi, 2011) as both are concerned with enhancing our understanding of self-construction. We position our concept of intersectional identity work at the critical edge of Alvesson et al's (2008) interpretivist framework of orientations to identification in the identity work literature. We acknowledge the context in which self-construction occurs and the role that social and power relations play in this process and in the manifestation of inequalities at work. As such, we are influenced by Calas & Smircich's (1999) post-structural feminist theoretical perspective; our focus however remains at the level of individual identity construction. Our perspective draws attention to a critical and constructivist approach, offering an agent-centred view of individuals' reactions to their social positioning.

Outlining a research agenda for intersectional identity work

Thus far, we have advocated a more prominent role for racio-ethnicity research in MOS, focusing on how minority individuals dynamically construct and enact

intersecting identity facets that confer advantage and disadvantage. As an initial project, we propose investigating how those organisational members whose location in given organisational spaces may be constructed as 'different' or 'Other', engage in intersectional identity work. Many minority ethnic men and women in high-status (e.g. leadership or professional) positions are in such organisational locations. These individuals are hypothesised to engage in sensemaking processes to reconcile oppositional identities in contexts in which the higher value accorded their organisational status is juxtaposed against devalued ethnic (and gender, for women) identities (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007; Kenny & Briner, 2007).

Drawing on identity work models, this juxtaposition of organisational privilege against socio-structural disadvantage is likely to position such individuals in encounters that heighten awareness of their intersecting oppositional identities, inducing identity work. They are thus likely to respond to or anticipate contextual cues regarding these oppositional identities and construct self-narratives to reconcile any gaps or reconfirm their distinctiveness in such contexts (Roberts, 2005). For example a senior black British man may adopt the masculine posturing of competitiveness and rivalry to counter potential devaluing of his ethnic status by majority colleagues. However, British Asian women (often stereotyped as 'meek') and black British women (often stereotyped as 'aggressive') are likely to adopt alternative and differing approaches to self-construction in the face of similar identity challenges. Intersectional identity work can also offer insight into how senior minority ethnic men and women construct their identities in contexts in which they are positioned or differentiated as role models (heightening their minority status) or generic, non-differentiated leaders (heightening their organisational status).

Thus, we encourage research into minority individuals' meaning-making or identity work in the context of simultaneous privilege and disadvantage. An intersectional identity work lens will facilitate examinations of when, how and why minority ethnic men and women process identity-heightening encounters. Possible topics for investigation are: What are the contexts or encounters in which multiple identities take on different meanings for senior minority ethnic women and men? How do they interpret or make sense of episodes that raise the salience of their intersecting, oppositional identities? What identity work tactics or strategies do they engage when they experience contradictory, ambiguous or affirmative identity triggers? How do senior minority ethnic women and men construct or draw on various identity facets (independently or simultaneously) during this process? Such identity work could be examined by individuals keeping journals of identity-heightening episodes and participating in follow on in-depth interviews to help elucidate the sense-making in response to the episodes.

Potential limitations

It is important to highlight some limitations of the approach offered here. It could be argued that intersectional identity work necessitates fragmentation of individuals' multi-dimensional identities and privileges some identity dimensions over others (in this case, we have focused on racio-ethnicity and gender in a senior context). In response, we join similarly pragmatic scholars (Cole, 2009; Özbilgin et al, 2011;

Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) and encourage researchers to critically and reflectively select-in those pertinent identity dimensions that are most salient, given a study's social and organisational context, while remaining cognisant of what has been selected out. Additionally, our attention to episodes of agent-centred identity construction may be perceived as overly-focused on the micro-level, diminishing the impact of social, economic and cultural context in defining racio-ethnic experience. However, we suggest that the intersectional identity framework, embedded within the identity construct, facilitates examination at multiple analytical levels – individual, group, and organisational as well as political, cultural and social (Alvesson et al., 2008; Loseke, 2007). We also believe that identity work allows us to maintain a uniquely psychological perspective on experiences relating to Otherness, while remaining cognisant and appreciative of the socially constructed nature of difference, within an organizational context. Finally, although we believe that intersectional identity work opens up the field for innovative research methods, approaches such as journals and observations often constitute resource- and time-intensive methods, which may also be considered intrusive by participants and organisations. We urge the use of these highly valid and rich data sources for initial theory development. However, we acknowledge that less demanding methods such as interviews also have potential for examining identity work (Alvesson et al, 2008).

CONCLUSION

We conclude by reflecting on the potential contributions of conducting ethnicity research from an intersectional identity work perspective. Intersectional identity work provides an empirical contribution that goes the beyond rich narrative descriptions of the experiences of minority ethnic organisational members. It would explicate the identity construction processes underlying the meaning-making of oppositional identities. Intersectional identity work also expands the scope and relevance of racio-ethnic research and practice, moving it away from the margins of MOS. The prevalence and relevance of international scholarship draw attention to the limits of racio-ethnicity research's original focus on North American women of colour. Here we have focused on racio-ethnicity but believe this approach opens up empirical space for examining multiple diversity dimensions such as class, sexual orientation, religion and disability. This potentially extends scholarship to the experiences of women (and men) around the world for whom racio-ethnicity does not necessarily constitute disadvantage. We believe that an intersectional identity work lens will extend this traditionally relatively narrow and homogenous scope, while remaining sensitive to the 'politics of place and location' relevant for understanding and theorising around diversity (Metcalfe & Woodhams, 2008). Additionally, intersectional identity work can be applied to studies of 'whiteness', challenging the assumption in traditional racio-ethnic literature that white individuals do not 'have' ethnicity. This could be achieved by exploring whiteness intersecting with class or sexual orientation, for instance. Intersectional identity work also deepens our understanding of power by acknowledging the genuinely diffuse nature of power and privilege, such that even members of historically-disadvantaged groups can wield power in certain spaces (such as when constructed as 'black role models' or in their structural positions as organisational leaders). There is also the potential to contribute to identity

construction literature. Explicating the processes involved in constructing oppositional identities will align with other work on identity construction of 'dirty' or marginalised workers (e.g. Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Creed, Dejordy & Lok, 2010). We also envisage practical implications of an intersectional identity work approach. For example, understanding why/how/when minority ethnic women construct their intersecting identities may offer insight into the benefits (or futility) of having them select from 'gender' or 'race' network silos prevalent in many progressive, diversity-conscious organisations.

Overall, we believe that an intersectional identity work framework offers much potential in way of advancing scholarship on racio-ethnicity in organisations. We present the framework of intersectional identity work as an ongoing project and offer it as a stimulus for conversation with fellow scholars.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE FROM THE AUTHORS

Appendix J Differentiating between Weick's sense-making and identity work

'Sensemaking' is a common organisational construct often taken to represent how employees individually and jointly come to a shared understanding of a collective organisational event or experience (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking is defined as a process that is " i) grounded in identity construction; ii) retrospective; iii) enactive of sensible environments; iv) social; v) ongoing; vi) focused on and by extracted cues; and vii) driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (Weick, 1995, p.17) It concerns *"those processes of interpretation and meaning production whereby individuals and groups reflect on and interpret phenomena and produce intersubjective accounts*" (Brown, 2000:45). Identity construction authors often use the 'sensemaking' terminology (attributed to Carl Weick) to describe the process in which individuals, teams or groups engage in meaning-making in organisations (e.g. Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003; Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy & Quinn, 2005). Identity construction and organisational sensemaking are very similar, and the terms appear to be often used synonymously in the literature. Despite this, I have not come across a refereed journal article that differentiates between the two terms. They are both process oriented, emphasise constant adaptation and reorientation to context and draw attention to a trigger event or encounter as prompt (Ojha, 2005). However, authors tend to use sensemaking as much in reference to personal, as to joint, meaning construction, presenting sense-making as a social, intersubjective process of meaning construction emanating from "*puzzling and troubling data*" (Brown, 2000:46). This begins to blur the lines between making sense of puzzling events and making sense of self through events (which is the focus of this thesis). Additionally, in sensemaking literature, emphasis is often on cognitive/schematic information processing, such as interpreting a surprising event by matching current events to existing schemas (Ramos, 2010). Due to its traditional emphasis on collective meaning-making and low conceptual distinction from identity construction, I chose to exclude sensemaking literature in this paper, drawing solely from the literature on personal meaning-making and identity construction in this thesis. I also distinguish between 'sensemaking' (Weick's term) and sense-making. In this thesis, sense-making refers to how respondents sought to resolve the identity-related dilemmas they faced during an episode. In line with the individual constructivist approach adopted here, a 'sense-making' tactic describes the particular method(s) used to understand or infer meaning from episodes that raised respondents' awareness of their identities as senior minority ethnic men and women.

Appendix K Research report for participating organisations

Identity at work

Ethnicity and gender at the top and implications for XXXX

Doyin Atewologun Cranfield School of Management

Research findings report
June 2010
(Conducted as part of a doctoral research project)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a study conducted between June 2009 and February 2010 investigating workplace experiences relating to identity and minority ethnicity at the top of XXXX. The process of identification (making sense of who we are), is a fundamental, ongoing human activity. In our daily interactions, we classify ourselves and others based on identities that separate and connect us to others. Through our identities - in roles (as parents, managers or mentors), as members of groups (of professions or functions), and as people of a particular gender, ethnicity or religious affiliation - we develop a sense of belonging and of competence. A strong positive identity can raise self-esteem and increase engagement with colleagues, teams, employers and others whom we perceive to be like us.

As part of a doctoral research project, this study examined how minority ethnic women and men in senior positions make sense of themselves. The research explores the mental effort they engage in to make sense of who they are and what roles they ought to play in a specific situation (i.e. identity work). Nine women and six men of mixed, Asian and African/African-Caribbean ethnicity from SO to SCS grades completed journals and participated in interviews to discuss micro-episodes in daily interactions that raised their awareness of their identities as senior Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BME) individuals. Sixty-eight identity events were recorded over a period of six weeks, providing rich insight into the identity work of senior BME women and men.

When does identity work occur?

Identity work is triggered when senior BME men and women experience their identities as **invisible** or (hyper-) **visible**, often resulting in a sense of exclusion and frustration. In contrast, in **negotiated** and **affirmed** contexts, they and others around them proactively established their identities as senior minority ethnic men and women.

How does identity work occur?

Identity work is first triggered by senior BME individuals noticing their difference or others' signalling this difference during **sensebreaking**. During **sensemaking**, they try to understand or process these events while being supported and challenged by people around them. This leads to **identity resolution** which may be a positive or negative experience, depending on the outcome of the dynamic interaction between self and others.

Why does identity work occur?

Identity work is constantly influenced by context (socio-cultural and organisational norms and expectations) that influence senior BME women and men. These include the drive to be 'perfect' (to maintain credibility), 'professional' (striving to attain or fulfil images which do not reflect them) and 'prominent' (taking on the mantle of role model).

What does this mean for XXXX?

Insight into the triggers and consequences of identity work suggests key recommendations for XXXX, managers and BME employees. XXXX should educate all staff about how the little things, i.e. **micro-behaviours** can sustain inequality of outcomes (**micro-inequities**) as well as facilitate the development of an inclusive culture (through **micro-affirmations**). Processes and activities that lead into formal evaluations (such as the informal allocation of project work experience) should be reviewed for subtle inequities, and more public endorsement of diversity initiatives (beyond London) considered. Managers of minority ethnic people should raise awareness of the **psychology of difference** (e.g. how implicit biases affect interactions with people perceived as 'different') to maximise gains from diverse teams. They should develop skills to have open, **courageous conversations** to foster meaningful developmental relationships with their BME talent and foster a culture of inclusion in their teams. BME men and women should leverage positively from their unique identities by proactively engaging in **impression management**, while remaining authentic. They should seek genuine connections through **networking with non-BME colleagues** and engage in **strategic career planning**.

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Finally, to the fifteen women and men who gave their time, opened their lives and shared their stories, I thank you.

Identity at work

Ethnicity and gender at the top of XXXX

For years I've been trying to change myself, trying to behave in an English way, but every now and then I slip up, it's like… you know, you can't… Diversity means we all are different, we react and behave differently. And why should I ever want to be anyone but myself?

-'Indira', Grade 7, XXXX

INTRODUCTION

At work, we define ourselves in many ways. We describe our personality ('I am helpful and supportive), our role ('I am a Customer Service Advisor'), and the groups to which we belong ('I am a member of the KAI function'). Identity is our understanding of who we are, who other people are, and other people's understanding of themselves and us (Jenkins, 2004).

We gain a sense of belonging and capability from knowing and being ourselves and knowing how we are different from, and similar to, others. To achieve this, we naturally sort ourselves and others into categories that are 'like us' or 'not like us', drawing on multiple identities including our profession, position, class, sexual orientation, beliefs, ethnicity, and gender.

People are sensitive to these groupings to maintain a sense of identity. We naturally (and sometimes irrationally) favour our groups (in-groups) over other groups (out-groups). This favourable bias towards our group and unfavourable bias towards out-groups, explains, for example, the very strong emotions and tensions between rival football club supporters, even when clubs are not 'objectively' different, if you compared them on size and skill.

This report describes research on how we manage our multiple identities (how we see ourselves) in the face of others' perceptions of who we ought to be, and how people like Indira, quoted above, make sense of this process.

Identity and Diversity at Work

We all hold assumptions (or biases) about different groups or people. Although we may not be overtly aware of all our biases/preferences, they affect our behaviours in small, but significant ways. How we go about identifying ourselves and others plays a fundamental role in how we feel about ourselves and others and how we gather information and make decisions regarding ourselves and others in a diverse work environment.

Despite decades of legislation and interventions, workplace diversity management is often critiqued for being stuck within organisations' policies and procedures, making little 'real' difference in how people interact with each other (Kandola, 2009). To change this, we must begin to acknowledge and engage with the complex and dynamic nature of diversity.

Evidence shows that we are inclined to favour people who are more like us (e.g. Haslam, van Knippenberg, Ellemers & Platow, 2003). Investigating what happens when we interact with 'difference' helps us understand (and therefore 'manage') diversity more effectively. This is the focus of the present study.

Diversity in XXXX

With the prevailing financial pressures on the Department it is important for XXXX to remain connected to the needs of all staff, to maintain engagement and motivation, and tap effectively into all of its human resource talent.

XXXX is making good progress towards creating a positive diversity climate e.g. by strengthening connections between different individuals through networks and mentoring schemes, and through attaining proportional representation at lower levels. XXXX also recognises that continued effort is required in order to create a working environment that motivates and develops people to give of their best in order to contribute to the transformation of the business.

Multiple aspects of our identities (e.g. ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion) influence our daily experiences. This study focuses on the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff. Across the Civil Service, as well as within XXXX, individuals of minority ethnicity are under-represented in senior positions. This study represents one of many projects supported by the Corporate Responsibility & Diversity Directorate

We still do not fully understand the experiences of minority ethnic people in the UK workplace (Kenny & Briner, 2007). Going beyond policy and politics to understanding the *psychology* behind diversity and how people interact with "difference" brings us closer to managing it more effectively. With this in mind, XXXX, through this project, seeks to better understand the workplace experiences of its BME staff. The findings and recommendations in the report will contribute towards XXXX's strategy to improve BME representation at senior grades, provide development opportunities to help BME staff achieve their potential, and gain insight into how to develop a culture that understands and is comfortable with diversity seeks, focusing on those at the top of XXXX.

This study (part of a wider doctoral research project) sought to understand an aspect of the natural in-group/out-group classification that occurs in diverse work environments by examining the 'micro-episodes' that raise BME individuals' awareness of who they are and investigating how they respond to these episodes.

Research Questions

1. *When are senior BME staff aware of their identities in Govt Plc?*
2. *How do they respond to these situations?*
3. *What does this mean for them, their colleagues and Govt Plc as a whole?*

Study aims

The key aims of the study were:

1. To offer insight into how identity (how you see yourself and how others see you) contributes to work experiences.

2. To provide a developmental opportunity for participants through raising awareness of how 'micro' interactions could impact them as senior minority ethnic men and women.

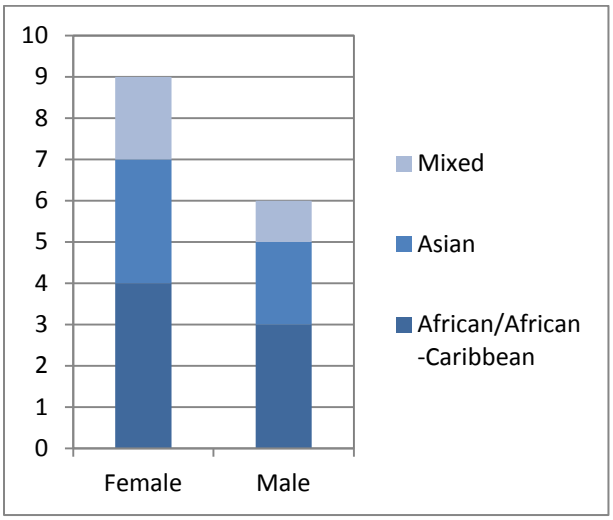
3. To gain insight into how XXXX can support people's sense of belonging and progression and better support its entire BME population.

METHOD

A qualitative, in-depth study was conducted between June 2009 and February 2010. Thirty-five people responded to an intranet note about a study on BME experiences in XXXX. Six men and nine women were selected (based on a spread of gender, ethnicity, grade and location) to complete reflective journals (over about three weeks) and participate in follow-on interviews. Each respondent was asked to "think about a time, event or episode at work today that prompted you to think of yourself/challenged your identity". In journals and in interviews, for each episode, respondents shared their thoughts, feelings and actions, and the significance the event held for them as senior black or Asian men and women.

Interviews were recorded then transcribed. The transcripts were analysed thematically using Nvivo, software specially designed for analysing the rich detail from qualitative data. All names used in this report are pseudonyms, to protect the identity of respondents.

The Respondents



Why qualitative research?

Compared to quantitative research (which relies on large sample sizes to elicit generalisable trends), qualitative research focuses in-depth to investigate complex, human phenomena. This type of research provides the detail to help us better interpret and understand our complex lives, such as how we respond to people in diverse work settings.

To create solutions that match people's real experiences, emphasis is on developing rich understanding of a given social situation over broadly generalizing to other populations or predicting behaviours.

As experiences relating to diversity and identity, are influenced by several social, cultural and situational factors, qualitative research offers a more meaningful lens to investigate these topics (Kenny & Briner,

Validity

Validity concerns the extent to which a study truly captures what it claims to study. In qualitative research the aim is to provide rich understanding of complex phenomena. Thus, validity in this sense concerns robustness, authenticity and trustworthiness, giving us confidence to act upon a study's findings (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). Following established guidelines for qualitative research, this study's validity was established in the following ways:

- Including multiple perspectives; from senior participants of varying grade, gender and ethnicity.
- Awareness-raising through the use of reflective journals and feedback sessions with respondents and other key stakeholders (e.g. the Adjudicator

FINDINGS

Identity work: Making sense of who you are

Overall, 68 identity events were reported by the respondents (mode: 5; range 3 to 6). Sixty-two of these were micro-episodes, 'moments in time' that raised awareness of their identities as senior BME individuals. These episodes occurred in different situations, such as team meetings, one-to-ones with line managers and mentors, informal conversations with colleagues and meetings with clients external to XXXX. These contexts triggered 'identity work', our mental effort to understand ourselves (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008).

This section describes the 'When', 'How' and 'Why' of identity work for senior minority ethnic men and women in XXXX

Identity work: WHEN?

Identity work is triggered in contexts in which senior BME women and men experience their identities as invisible, (hyper)visible, affirmed or negotiated.

Invisible identities

About one-third (18) of the episodes occurred in contexts that overlooked respondents' gender, ethnic or senior aspects of their identity. When their identities as 'senior + gendered + minority ethnic' people were unacknowledged, it meant that the individuals were **invisible** in the interaction. For example, Serena was having a casual conversation with a (black, female) canteen staff member when she was bluntly interrupted by the canteen manager. She wondered whether this would have happened if her seniority was more visible:

> *"Would he have done that if it was a white woman standing there? I wasn't white, (*therefore*) I wasn't senior, I wasn't important, so he felt that he could just butt in … …humiliate her … in front of me. I'm*

What is Identity Work?

Identity work is the process that describes the mental effort in which we engage to create an understanding of ourselves in different contexts – when aspects of our identities are invisible, visible, affirmed or negotiated.

> *a senior black woman, you don't know who I am… is there a badge I'm supposed to wear … (*so you*) show me or us the respect that we're due or treat us in the same way as others?"*

Dean also found that his ethnicity was rendered 'invisible' in his conversations with his line manager. He was wistful about the potential synergies he could have with his high profile white female line manager who was also active in the senior women's network:

> *"I'd like to think that her as a senior woman and me as a senior black man would both... make an impact (*on the department*)...for the things she's had to face as a woman and the things I've had to face as a black man...wouldn't it be nice though?"*

While position, gender and ethnicity formed key aspects of their identities in XXXX, respondents found that in these episodes their 'whole self' was overlooked by people around them. This 'invisibility' of their whole selves meant that the senior BME men and women experienced interactions in which people around them did not *really* notice them. This was often associated with a sense of frustration, disappointment and missed opportunities to connect.

Visible identities

Fifteen episodes triggered identity work by raising awareness of senior BME individuals' **visible** differences. Visibility often prompted 'curious' glances from others (e.g. when walking into an important meeting full of unfamiliar others). Visible difference was also often the basis upon which colleagues reacted to them. Visibility sometimes induced stereotype threat in BME individuals (heightened awareness of being negatively-stereotyped, Roberson, Deitch, Brief & Block, 2003), and also often resulted in stereotyping from others.

Serena, for instance, commented on her colleague's reaction to an account of events that had happened during a meeting:

> "(I told her that at the meeting) *I was the first person to jump up and ask a question, where everyone was all quiet, (*and she said*) 'Why wasn't I surprised it would be you that'd be the first person?' And I (*thought*) 'Why are you saying that? How much do you know about me?' There's not been enough (*interaction*)…for her to be able to*

> *form an opinion about me…Is it a stereotype again about black women that they've got big mouths, and they're feisty…?"*

Amber (G6) reported that "rather than being direct and straight", her manager "just went around the houses" when she had a difficult issue to raise with her, which she put down to her manager not feeling completely at ease in a cross-ethnic management relationship.

> *"I think that she doesn't know how to speak to me … she takes a very different track to talking to me than when she's talking to the other managers … she probably feels a bit uncomfortable with me … there really isn't like a connection, whereas she does connect really well with the other team members"*

Indira (G7) reflected at a meeting:

> *"I was so aware that I was not one of them, it was like 'them and us' … like they are not going to play with me"*

Low contact with out-group members influences our interactions with them. When we interact with 'difference', or something unfamiliar, we try to create certainty out of the uncertainty. This sometimes means we can rely on visible identities (like ethnicity) to draw inaccurate conclusions (like the stereotypical assumption of black women being aggressive) to try to manage the situation, which often unfortunately reinforces feelings of 'difference' and exclusion. Being visibly different (based on ethnicity or gender) thus appeared to affect relationships with line managers and colleagues, prompting a sense of exclusion and disconnection with other senior people.

Negotiated identities

Nine episodes involved senior BME individuals actively **negotiating**, **challenging** or **debating** their colleagues' assumptions about who they were. They initiated or participated in exchanges to make personal or group voices heard. Teresa, for example, seized the opportunity to do something different when she noticed a change in the normal gender distribution of her team meetings:

> *"Generally when the men are there, the men seem to.... be all loud and to dominate.... I realised there was more women than men and I thought … 'This meeting could be different'"*

This resulted in one of her proposals being adopted by the team. Ameet (G6) took the opportunity to clarify the difference between positive action and positive discrimination in a spontaneous office discussion. Sean (G7) read an article in a Union magazine about plans for improving BME representation in the senior tier:

> *"(*The article was*)...really enjoyable, nice to read... (*So I adopted*) a two-*

> *pronged approach - I'll wait to see if people discuss it... then I'll be a little more proactive, I'll raise the issue of (*the*) article...*

Here, respondents seized on opportunities for change and adopted tactics to make the best out of the situation. They also acknowledged that often it was their personality that helped them to face these opportunities head-on, even if the outcomes were not successful.

Affirmed identities

These triggers (approximately one-third of the episodes), were those in which senior BME men and women identities were, from the outset, **acknowledged**, **affirmed** or **supported**. They were not invisible or too visible and they did not have to contest or debate to make their identities as senior minority ethnic men and women accepted or affirmed.

Identities were celebrated by the respondents themselves (such as pride in status reached as minority ethnic people). Louise commented: "*I am pleased to be* (senior grade) *… I am extra pleased because I'm a black woman and it just feels like an achievement*"). Tamara (Grade 6) felt that being a senior minority ethnic woman, she had the confidence to assert her "identity credentials" in seeking selection as delegate for a major conference against more traditional (white/male) colleagues.

Identities were also accepted and affirmed by others. Identities were often affirmed by other BME (rather than non-BME) colleagues. This was often in the context of seeing role models, or being considered as one. Notably, two episodes involved affirmation of the senior minority ethnic identity from non-BME others. For example, Serena reflected on an encounter with Dave Hartnett:

> *"I was walking down the corridor, and* (Dave Hartnett) *said 'Hello Serena'…obviously he recognised me as a senior black woman, he knows me… it was positive."*

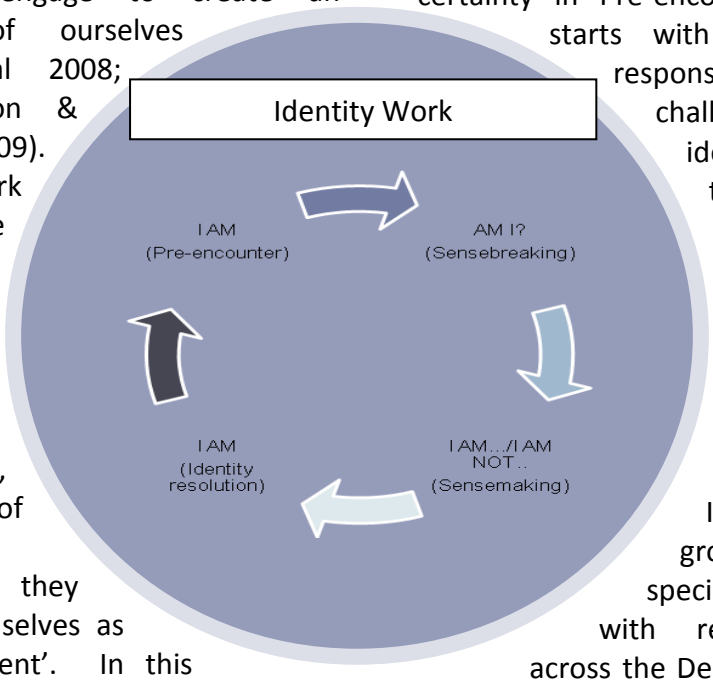
Sometimes episodes in which senior minority ethnic identities were affirmed also highlighted additional tensions associated with that identity. For instance, there was discomfort with being typecast as 'role models', or extra line-management responsibilities associated with the 'senior minority ethnic' identity. Sinita reflected on her position as an Asian woman managing a black woman:

> *"It's a very difficult position to be in ... she shares some things in confidence ... as a friend... and I know she wouldn't have shared (*this sensitive information) *if it was a white manager."*

Overall, however, affirmed identity contexts were, predictably, associated with the most positive emotions.

Identity work: HOW?

Whether as a result of visibility or invisibility, or in affirmed or negotiated contexts, when awareness of one's identity is raised, a process kicks off in which people try to understand 'whom one is'. Identity work is the process that describes the mental effort in which we engage to create an understanding of ourselves (Alvesson, et al 2008; Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2009). Identity work comprises a cycle of four phases.



Pre-encounter: 'I am'

At the beginning of many episodes, a number of respondents emphasised that they did not see themselves as necessarily 'different'. In this stage, Pre-encounter, the senior minority ethnic men and women oozed confidence and certainty in 'who I am'. Whether meeting colleagues, clients, diplomats or ministers, they saw themselves as competent, experienced experts, 'normal' people, doing a good job:

> *"(*Normally*) you don't see yourself do you, as we are ... I'm doing the same grade job, so obviously when I'm dealing with (*other*) people, I just see a reflection of myself (*in them*). I don't think of myself normally as being of a different group or ethnicity because I know the job; I can do the job as well as you or better in some cases. I've got years of experience."*

Sensebreaking: 'Am I?'

In contrast to the self-assuredness and self-certainty in Pre-encounter, sensebreaking starts with self-questioning in response to triggers or challenges to one's identity. There were two triggers of sensebreaking – **scoping** by BME individuals and **signalling** from others.

Scoping

In large, unfamiliar group contexts (e.g. special project meetings with representatives from across the Department, 'Town Hall' events and conferences), as a result of their visibility, senior BME individuals were quickly aware of being 'different', automatically scoping/scanning their environment and noting the gender and ethnic distribution around them. Rani explained:

> *"Of course you scan round the place and in my case, you immediately do a proportional assessment ... non White and ... four women…and…(you've probably*

> *picked it up)... very few men of sub-continental, African or Caribbean background at all…"*

Teresa commented:

> *"As soon as I walked into the room there was about 25 people there, I thought 'Right, okay, there's 3 women, I'm one of them and I'm the only ethnic' straight away"*

Scoping was a natural, automatic reflex. Being 'different' became 'normal' and something that 'you get used to'. This is in contrast to stronger reactions to 'signalling', discussed below.

Signalling from others

Signalling from other people prompted senior BME individuals to think of their identities. For Rajeev:

> *"At the lunch break I introduced myself, I said 'My name is Rajeev and I'm (*major role in Directorate*)' and he said, 'Are you? I thought it was Toby.' I said 'No, Toby is my deputy.'"*

Signalling was often subtle and probably unintentional. Steve, Teresa and Indira walked into meetings and noted the apparent effect their presence had on others. Steve commented "you can just see the surprise on their faces". For Indira, "their faces fell…they weren't happy to see me coming as a representative". In Teresa's experience:

> *"I sat down next to a gentleman and (*he*) asked me what my interest was (*at this meeting*) and I told him that I was from (*central function*)...And I could see the sort of look on his face - he was a bit taken aback."*

For Serena, this was particularly noticeable as she had had an earlier telephone interaction with the man with whom she was now meeting face-to-face:

> *"A guy who I spoke to on the phone like five days before on a work connection, when I walked into the room and he saw that I was a black woman, you could see kind of amazement and when I put my hand up to shake his hand he was like (*held out her hand limply*)…it was visible."*

Scoping (by BME people) and signalling (by others) prompt the senior BME individual to try to understand what this episode means for them. This is the next phase, sensemaking.

Sensemaking: 'Am I?...I am…I am not'

During sensemaking, we try to 'work things out', to understand what happened during sensebreaking and come to a resolution or outcome regarding whom we are.

People work their identity out in different ways. In response to subtle and overt challenges to their identities, some puzzle

things out, others reject it outright, and some actively manipulate the situation, so that the individual (and people around them) come to an understanding of what it means to be a senior BME person (in that specific situation).

In making sense of a colleagues' assumptions about what a senior representative of his business function ought to be, Rajeev puzzles over this.

> *"And I thought why has he just jumped to the conclusion that Toby is the (*major role in Directorate*) and not me? Toby is white, he's grey-suited…50s, looks like he has experience…. and for some reason he thought Toby was my manager. …I didn't look the part (*so*) he won't give me credit… it's just odd…"*

For Steve, in response to clients' surprise at seeing him, he actively influences the situation in his favour as he presents his identity as a senior black man not as an "idiot" (as the clients may expect) but as a highly-skilled investigator.

> *(I walk in and) …you can actually see they think they're going to have a fairly easy ride…* (Then, I say) *Can you please treat me like an idiot…?" …and then I ask a question which has picked up on something they said …and all of a sudden they realise that I actually know what I'm talking about… they visibly change, they suddenly sit up in the chairs … their backs come up straight and they suddenly start concentrating…when it becomes clear that I'm going to really pull your business to pieces and I'm going to ask questions that your* (partner) *may never even ask you about the way you are running your business "*

Other reactions were even more intense. In making sense of her interviewer's surprise to see her, Serena dismisses his behaviour as inappropriate for his role and resolves this identity work experience through dis-identification - defining herself as 'Not' someone who would work with him. Serena's rejection of what a senior black woman is meant (or not meant) to be is also punctuated with disbelief, disappointment and anger:

> *"And I thought, 'No'… it's (*high profile government department*) and they are meant to be… diverse (*and champions of*) equality and opportunity...You never expected to see a black woman at this level, to have the level of skills, knowledge and experiences, to be able to rise to that extent to get through the process, is that why you reacted the way you did? … No, you're not ready … if something like that fazes you in this day and age…well, what hope is there for us?"*

We also make sense of whom we are in conjunction with others' perceptions of us. Sometimes, negative signals from others

were not challenged but were internalised, resulting in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Indira noted her colleagues' apparent disappointment in seeing her at a meeting. This was immediately followed by another sensebreaking episode in which they enthusiastically greeted another (younger, white male) attendant, offering him tea and biscuits (which they had not offered to her). To make sense of this, Indira confirms to herself that she is 'Not' a credible, competent professional with value to add in the meeting.

> *"I was thinking - why aren't they noticing me? I'm making all these useful suggestions and things … I almost felt like I wasn't good enough… I repeated myself, I start to talk … gibberish … it's not very professional. I felt I was losing ground…"*

Peers, subordinates and supervisors also contribute to sensemaking by providing additional clarity during the ambiguous, fleeting moments of sensebreaking. For instance, during a team meeting, Amber perceives that she is being undermined by her manager. She 'sense checks' her perception with another colleague in the meeting:

> *"(*I*) look at the guy and go 'Hmm ok what's happening here?'... just to see his reactions …cos he's quite young so he can't really hide his feelings, so he went a little bit red and a bit nervous, so I know there's obviously something going on…I just look at him... (*to let him know*) 'Ok whatever's happening is happening, but don't think I don't know what's going on.'"*

Sometimes non-BME colleagues noticed and then acted on their observations to support the BME person's identity. During a meeting with unfamiliar others, Teresa became frustrated with the solutions under discussion. She made a suggestion which was initially (and, in her perception obviously) discredited and dismissed without warrant. One of only two other women (in a room of 25 people) noticed this:

> *"And she looked at me and she sort of like raised her eyebrows because I could see she agreed with the point that I raised".*

Identity resolution: 'I am'

This stage represents the closure of the identity work loop as senior individuals of minority ethnicity come to a decision regarding 'who I am'. Contrasting Steve's experience with Indira's illustrates the strikingly different effects that an identity challenge episode can have on senior minority ethnic men and women's sense of self.

As already described, the episode triggers a downward spiral for Indira. She goes from feeling confident to uncomfortable to invisible to undermined. Indira's sensemaking ('who am I?', 'what am I doing here?'), resolves itself into a self-belief of

not being 'good enough', with longer-term ramifications:

> "*If people who are* (in my*) peer group … behave like that towards me, what chance have I got to impress the superiors, to ever be promoted? And if I were to be promoted and if that's the attitude of people …and I would be managing them - how would I cope with it? And is that why maybe I don't get promoted, maybe the superiors think 'Is she going to be able to manage this?' I just felt that I'm not really up to it. (*This meeting*) was informal, low key … in what way would the senior department head send me again to a similar meeting, where more senior people are there? Would I be able to keep my head? It's just not very good for my career at all. My last manager (*said*) I don't have the confidence to be promoted and I'm beginning to wonder if that is true …"*

Steve's experience depicts a different trajectory. His comments reflect self-assuredness in the encounter (*I know who I am).* Then, the meeting dynamics change when others come to realise this.

> *"All of a sudden they realise that I actually know what I'm talking about and I'm on the front foot… and they suddenly start concentrating on the meeting rather than on me, and who I am, whether I'm black, white, green or yellow suddenly goes out of the window, what suddenly becomes the focus is the fact that you're having to have a conversation with me because you're fighting for your business."*

This ends by boosting Steve's confidence and verifying his identity as a (real) man:

> *"I just love the look on their faces…I just love the conversation … and the handshake when they leave, it's completely different …the first handshake is just a perfunctory handshake at the end of it, it's usually a proper, firm handshake like 'I'm here with a man'"*

It is apparent that these momentary encounters have longer-term ramifications. These episodes impact the BME individuals as well as the individuals with whom they have interacted. Indira projected into the future a sense of incompetence and inability to progress further in XXXX. For Teresa, having asserted her opinion, she noticed a change in her interactions with others – what they make of her as a 'senior black woman'- which she directly attributed to the episode:

> *"(*I've*) been in meetings with some of the people round that table where I can see there's a change in their demeanour towards me, they're more for going 'Oh hello, how are you, that was a really good point that you made.'"*

Steve and Teresa also commented on the impact they hoped the interactions would

have on their conversants' future interactions with other BME individuals:

> *"So, even if they have another meeting where another ethnic person is there, that person has something to say, they may hesitate about just dismissing what the person has to say, because they don't know how that person is going to deal with that issue."* (Teresa)

> *"They now knew that regardless of the colour of someone else's skin, that your capability was your capability … next time they engage with a BME, they are more likely to think 'Oh maybe there's more to this than I know'."* (Steve)

This is, of course, until the next identity-heightening episode.

Identity work: WHY?

Having considered the 'when' and 'how' of identity work, this section describes aspects of the wider organisational and cultural contexts that influence the identity work of BME individuals. These emerged from the data as the most prevalent themes appearing to strongly influence what it means to be 'a senior minority ethnic person in XXXX'.

Perfectionism describes *a constant pursuit of impossible standards* as senior minority ethnic men and women strive to maintain credibility at work in the face of ongoing identity challenges. For these individuals, there was a drive to be seen as without fault and therefore worthy of the 'senior minority ethnic' identity label. This was evident in several comments regarding the extraordinary effort to get to the top and remain credible and justify one's senior position:

> *"You don't give yourself a break and you just think…everybody around me is probably looking at me saying "Oh she's only been promoted because she's a certain colour and they need to tick their target boxes"* (Rani)

> *"If you're going to a meeting and it's new people you haven't met before, you just prepare extra hard because you know the first thing… they are thinking (*is*) 'Oh I don't know her, is she (*that Grade*)? Let's see what she's got to do'…It's about working twice as hard and (*being*) twice as good, because the perception is that we shouldn't be at that level, they don't expect to see you there, so when you're there, you do have to not do shoddy meetings, and be very good at what you do, 'cos the expectation is …that you should be a secretary and when you walk in ... that's not what you are…"* (Serena)

Often, this meant that senior minority ethnic individuals perceived themselves as more than capable. However, there were also

challenges facing senior minority ethnic men and women's seeking to attain this perfectionist ideal. First, are *intangible competencies* for measuring success reported by a number of respondents. This has particular implications for minority ethnic individuals because ambiguous selection/promotion criteria are more susceptible to unconscious biases and tend to disadvantage out-group or minority group members (Kandola, 2009). Secondly, while perfectionism ensures that these senior minority ethnic people are striving to excel, this could prove counter-productive, potentially resulting in anxiety, disengagement or lowered performance, common consequences of negative stereotyping (Roberson & Kulik, 2007). In the traditional XXXX culture of high standards and expertise, with no accompanying supporting mechanisms, there is therefore likely to be additional pressure on BME men and women to excel, triggering stereotype threat which, ironically, impedes performance. Serena's experience during an interview reflects this:

> *"I did feel that because of his reaction and surprise (*at seeing I was black*), did he think that I wouldn't be as good as anyone else because of who I was? I just felt the need to try even harder and almost went over the top with this … I think I overreacted by going into overkill …I remember at one point when he asked me for one example, and I gave him two…"*

Symbols of professionalism describe the *organisational norms and images of 'a senior person'* in XXXX. This includes appropriate modes of communication and organisational images of what a 'senior' or 'high performing' individual is expected to look like.

At a teambuilding event a respondent observed that the PowerPoint picture of a high-performing team contained several white men and women and one black woman, all of whom looked and dressed alike, in grey suits. Two of the four senior black women struggled with having to manage the stereotype of being perceived as 'aggressive' black women when communicating with others. The 'feisty Black woman' image contrasted with 'the English rose' and 'grey suits' as symbols of what is appropriate 'at the top' of XXXX.

> *"'English Rose' conforms; 'feisty black woman' (*means*) trouble, problems, challenge… (*But*) I know if I'm a shrinking, quiet violet, I wouldn't get anywhere. I'd regress …because there's no place for us if we're not in your face, up there, confident, good about what you're doing. But I think when you are that, they take it to the extreme and categorise you into… the Jamaican market woman or the Lagos market woman."*

> *"I'm more emotionally attached to my specialism… You shouldn't use emotions within your work. …*

> *Whether it's because I'm a woman or also because I'm an Asian woman, I don't know … I let my emotions drive me … I felt bad because he sort of looked at me and (*thought*) 'Ah, you silly woman'..., maybe he now doesn't think of me as being professional. Maybe one should* <u>not</u> *feel so strongly about anything to do with (*one's*) professional career."*

Prominence is a by-product of the *visibility of senior BME women and men*, particularly non-London-based respondents and SCSs. For these individuals, prominence is inevitable. Sean, a non-London based Grade 7, comments:

> *"I've always seen myself as…the first Black person to get through in the vanguard...(*hoping*)…there will be a whole tranche coming behind, but there's not…"*

In particular, for those at the very top, the SCSs, being a senior BME man or woman also means that you are expected to take on the mantle of 'role model'. All the SCSs reported episodes in which they were expected to take the part of 'role model'. However, this was also a source of tension as it did not necessarily fit how they defined themselves, limiting the extent to which some felt they could behave authentically. Louise describes:

> *"Who am I? Just because I've done what I've done doesn't necessarily mean I am a good role model for other people… I do have a picture … a stereotype of what a black role model should be like ... and it's not like me…there's a risk that I will start to conform to stereotype of what a black woman is or should be … I just start to worry that I will start to behave in a way that I or other people feel I ought to behave rather than being true to myself or who I am."*

Overall, prevailing organisational/cultural norms of perfectionism, professionalism and prominence are additional barriers to navigate as individuals enact their identities as senior minority ethnic men and women in XXXX.

SUMMARY

By focusing in-depth on more than 65 micro-episodes occurring over 6 weeks across XXXX, the study provides rich insight into the daily interactions influencing the sense of self, or identities, of senior minority ethnic men and women. The four-stage process of 'identity work' (making sense of whom they are) is triggered in four main contexts.

When?

Identity work is triggered when senior BME men and women find their identities **invisible** or (hyper)**visible**, often resulting in a sense of exclusion and frustration. In **negotiated** and **affirmed** contexts, they and others around them proactively confirm

their identities as senior minority ethnic men and women.

How?

Identity work is first triggered by senior minority ethnic individuals noticing their difference or others' signalling this difference during **sensebreaking**. During **sensemaking**, they try to understand or process these events while being supported and challenged by people around them. This leads to **identity resolution** which may be a positive or negative experience dependent on the outcome of the dynamic interaction between self and others.

Why?

Identity work is influenced by context (socio-cultural and organisational norms and expectations) that influence senior BME women and men to be '**perfect'** (to maintain credibility), '**professional'** (to attain or fulfil images which do not fully reflect them) and '**prominent'** (to take on the mantle of 'role model').

Study implications and recommendations are discussed from page 18.

A note on study limitations

Like every study, this one has limitations. The analysed episodes were based on a relatively small number of people, most of whom self-selected for the study. However, sampling was controlled by selecting a representation across gender, ethnicity, location and grade (and represents 15% of BME people at G6 and SCS). A range of episodes were elicited in different contexts and common patterns of identity work were found across groups. This suggests that identity work in response to identity challenges is unlikely to be an isolated experience unique to these specific individuals. On a related note, there is no claim that only senior minority ethnic individuals engage in identity work. There will be parallels expected with anyone facing challenges to aspects of their identity, e.g. older people not being expected to embrace new technology or someone with a particular accent not considered to have the intellectual ability for a task. This study however specifically investigated senior BME individuals' perspectives on their identities, an area about which we have very little knowledge.

Further research

This study is currently being replicated in a private sector organisation for comparison and to gather additional episodes of the identity work of senior BME men and women. Future research could explore identity work from a 360˚ perspective, by investigating how BME individuals, their colleagues and their direct reports make sense of the same identity-heightening episodes. Additional data could form the basis of an organisational diversity tool that measures the extent to which teams and organisations create a culture that affirms or challenges positive identity construction for diverse populations.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Implications for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Employees

- Reflect on your significance
- Highlight your 'whole' identity
- Remain authentic
- Connect with non-BME others
- Practice strategic career planning

Reflect on your significance

Taking the time to reflect on one's roles and position within XXXX (via keeping a journal and sharing experiences) helped respondents appreciate their significance to XXXX and to colleagues – BME *and* non-BME. Today's successful civil servant (BME and non-BME) is a pacesetter and a self-starter. A strong sense of identity gives a sense of purpose and contributes to raising engagement, commitment and well-being. **Taking time to reflect on your current contribution** to XXXX is therefore beneficial to XXXX as a whole as well as personally, especially in the context of current staff engagement levels and the uncertainty facing public sector employees.

Highlight your 'whole' identity

The study shows that it is not unusual for senior BME men and woman to surprise others' expectations. We interact better with people where there is 'interpersonal congruence' – where both people have the same understanding of 'who's who' in the interaction. (Polzer, Milton & Swann, 2002)

Minority ethnic professionals therefore need to be proactive about projecting themselves favourably at work (Roberts, 2005). Senior BME women and men may find it helpful to take responsibility for creating 'congruence' when they meet new people, by highlighting their 'whole' identity. For instance, engage in **skilful impression management** by introducing yourself <u>and</u> your area of responsibility (and your potential contribution, where appropriate) right at the beginning of a meeting, so people have the same beliefs about you as you have of yourself.

Remain authentic

Contextual expectations regarding professionalism, prominence and perfectionism indicate how important it is (especially for women and minority ethnic individuals) to project oneself favourably to progress. It is however also important to remain authentic. Authenticity is a vital attribute for leaders, including those who are visibly 'different' (Eagly, 2002).

Small acts, like people with unusual names taking the initiative to make others feel at ease with your difference (e.g. sharing what your name means, or writing/spelling your name for others when appropriate) can help 'different' leaders feel more authentic. In developing career plans, actively reflect on

all aspects of your experiences and identities that make you unique, then align these with XXXX competencies. Attend development programmes that specifically address the challenge facing managers/leaders who are 'different' – **managing being true to yourself, while being seen as credible and acceptable to others**. Authentic leadership development programmes specifically tailored for aspiring BME leaders (as part of a positive action strategy) are a useful start for understanding the psychology of diversity and leadership and the skills necessary for success.

Connect with non-BME others

This research showed that senior BME men and women recognised, affirmed and supported fellow (usually junior) minority ethnic individuals e.g. by giving networking tips or empathising through a challenging work experience. However, people in the numerical minority (like senior BME individuals) can feel isolated and unsupported in organisations. While their positions as role models is invaluable to others and personally fulfilling, the responsibility of supporting junior BME men and women could be shared more widely in XXXX rather than shouldered by the tiny number of visible organisational 'BME role models'.

Senior BME staff (especially those in non-London locations who are in particularly low numbers) could **identify trusted non-BME friends and allies**. However, it is also important to be open about the dynamics of cross-ethnic or cross-gender relationships with selected mentors or sponsors. Openly discuss reactions and assumptions of people from different groups with trusted colleagues. This will add depth and authenticity to such relationships.

Formal and informal networks are also important for connecting with others. Networks have two main benefits - functional (e.g. obtaining information on available jobs) and social/emotional (e.g. providing support and friendship). Minority networks often meet social/emotional needs, and women and individuals of minority ethnicity often need wider networks than white men for functional (i.e. career-specific) benefits. Attending cross-network events (e.g. women's, BME and LGBT events) can help counter isolation and provide *both* functional and emotional support, rather than just social.

Practice strategic career planning

Many senior BME recognised talked about how important it was to exceed performance expectations ("*You have to do 110% to be considered 80%"*, Steve said). To counter low expectations, minorities often expend much energy on being the best *now,* at the risk of ignoring strategic thinking about career advancement (Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli & Bilimoria, 2008). It is however important not to focus on present performance *at the expense of* future career plan. This is particularly necessary for

people in 'generalist' positions who commented on the more ambiguous requirements for progression, compared to 'specialist' roles. Look up the competencies two grades above your current grade, **conduct a personal skills analysis and tailor a development plan** towards meeting that long-term goal.

Implications for colleagues and managers of minority ethnic employees

- Tune into the sophistication of how 'difference' is experienced
- Engage in courageous conversations
- Identify with, and learn from BME colleagues
- Support your BME talent

Tune into the sophistication of how 'difference' is experienced

The research indicates the key role that BME individuals' peers and managers play in the senior BME person's identity work. We all have a part to play in creating positive and critiquing unconstructive cultures in which we work. In gathering information and making decisions impacting the people around us, we all draw on unconscious or implicit principles to guide us. This influences verbal and non-verbal behaviour and probably contributes to many of the episodes reported in the study, such as surprise at hearing a senior black man's title or not shaking hands with a senior Asian female colleague. Managers should raise their awareness of the *psychology of difference*.

Managers could **learn more about how gender and ethnicity influence group communication and performance** by educating themselves (e.g. reading this report and its reference list) and participating in diversity programmes that go beyond equal opportunities legislation to providing insight into the psychology of interacting with difference. **Psychology-based diversity initiatives** for managers and leaders will address different types of identities (e.g. personal, group and social identity). Such initiatives would draw attention to the difference between major (mostly visible) identity facets that we always notice even if we try to ignore them and other (less visible) aspects of identities which may be as important (e.g. mother, Arsenal supporter). There are also work-based identities (e.g. team identities) with which we can all identify, and which managers can use to minimise team differences and maximise team similarities - increasing inclusion, engagement and performance.

Engage in courageous conversations

Gender/ethnicity is a part of people's lives that often does contribute to making our experiences different from colleagues who are a different gender/ethnicity. Additionally, brain research shows us that gender and ethnicity are the first things we

notice about people (Ito & Urland, 2003) – these are natural categories we use for understanding people. Research also shows that it takes more effort to try to ignore gender/ethnicity (e.g. avoid talking about it) than to acknowledge it (Norton, Sommers, Apfelbaum, Pura, & Ariely, 2006).

Over half (nine) of the participants reported episodes involving a line-management relationship that heightened their awareness of their identities. Three participants had negative perceptions of these interactions. Three others regretted that their managers or mentors 'don't see colour'. Three participants commented favourably on their managers' willingness to acknowledge their ethnicity as part of their identities as senior people in XXXX.

This research suggests that BME men and women would be open to their managers raising the 'issue' of difference, and showing some awareness of the role of stereotypes and unconscious/implicit biases in the workplace. It is likely that the research participants were comfortable about talking about gender/ethnicity. It is **not always necessary to make 'difference' a central topic in conversations, but it is important to recognise when it may matter**. One participant was excluded from a brainstorming session in which his Directorate had key input because his name had been spelt wrong and the facilitator had not taken the time to ask how to spell his name. Having the courage to say, "I'm sorry, I didn't catch your name, could you spell it for me?" may have made all the difference in the quality of the solutions discussed.

Develop your emotional intelligence so you can tune more fully into yours and others' emotions and perspectives concerning difference. While not making 'difference' the focal point of all discussions, managers of BME individuals could invite their direct reports to comment or share experiences or challenges that may be related to aspects of difference. Foster a culture in your team that involves taking the time to find out about people. **Remind your team that inclusion concerns everyone,** not 'just BME people and women'. Take the time to involve everyone, including (especially) white men, in the dialogue around difference. Encourage non-BME staff to attend Race events and invite BME staff to report back on race-related events.

Identify with, and learn from BME colleagues

Research shows that we like people who are most like us. If we have low contact with members of a particular group we are more likely to use stereotypes to understand their actions. Unfortunately, if we rely heavily on stereotypes this may increase our belief that visible differences are real and tangible, and could lead to relationships becoming even more distant or strained. This, in turn, reinforces the belief that others are different, strange and not like us, and reinforces the need to maintain distance. To

foster a more supportive relationship with people who appear to be different, managers and mentors could **develop relationships by seeking subtle points of connection with BME subordinates** on other identity facets like common sports interests, professional memberships or family roles, or engage formally in reverse mentoring initiatives.

Support your BME talent

The study showed a relative low occurrence of *non*-minority individuals affirming the senior BME identity. Learning about unconscious bias, having courageous conversations, and learning from BME colleagues all contribute to **active support of minority identity and talent**.

Managers could also actively support BME talent, and their whole team, in many additional ways (Thomas, 2001):

- Be explicit about your expectations around learning and the acceptance that people get it wrong sometimes, to avoid burn-out form pressures of perfectionism.
- Give regular timely, specific, informal feedback, rather than wait to go through formal channels, at which point it is often too late for 'off the record' developmental tips.
- Pay attention at meetings to subtle cues like minimal eye-contact or interruptions which may indirectly discredit others.
- Be a vocal advocate - if you send representatives to meetings, send an initial mail to attendees saying why this is the best person in your opinion to attend the meeting.

Implications for XXXX

The prevailing drive to maximise efficiencies means that XXXX needs to retain its most engaged and talented people. A prominent feature of the respondents in this research was a firm belief that they could 'do the job' (i.e. they had high 'professional self-efficacy'). This research is particularly beneficial because it provides direct insight into some of the daily experiences of engaged and talented XXXX staff. This means that short and long term solutions for diversity and inclusion can be targeted at specific 'trigger episodes' highlighted from the data. In addition to the suggestions discussed above, XXXX should consider the following strategic recommendations.

- Recognise the impact of BME identity work
- Continue the good work
- Legitimise the 'senior BME' identity in middle management
- Monitor progression routes and appraisal processes

Recognise the impact of BME identity work

Respondents reported around four episodes of identity work over three weeks, an average of over once a week. These were

episodes that they selected as pertinent and on which they took time to reflect and record. It is likely that many other fleeting moments of subtle, ambiguous identity challenge are faced by senior minority ethnic individuals in everyday encounters. Some of these may be interpreted as relatively minor (e.g. being interrupted at a meeting, being overlooked while others are offered refreshments, being publicly challenged about the quality of your work). However, these **constant *micro-inequities,* in the long run, eventually erode self-belief, performance, commitment and engagement of staff** (Rowe, 2008). Additionally, constantly employing additional emotional and cognitive resources to justify one's identity reduces the energy available to engage in creative, high performance work and potentially impacts well-being (Roberts, 2005).

The research highlights some of the subtleties that contribute to maintaining a particular type of culture that inadvertently sustains inequalities. Simply spreading this message, by disseminating the key findings of this research will **educate staff** about how 'minor' issues like not knowing how to spell someone's name can contribute to bigger things like institutional discrimination. This will begin to empower staff to become organisational change agents. However, this message would need to be managed sensitively, potentially by being communicated through an external independent party.

Continue the good work

Initiatives such as this study, the Race and Senior Women's Networks, the visibility of role models and the appointment of a Race Champion reflect the positive energy in XXXX towards creating an inclusive work environment. Consistency of message and commitment to this is important. In the context of the prevailing economic pressures, it is also important to find creative ways to sustain this energy, while avoiding any backlash. XXXX could **capitalise on the energy and interest of respondents who gave their time** to record and discuss their experiences. Focus groups, action learning sets or steering committees of respondents can be a rich source of ideas on how their experiences and the research findings can be translated into sustainable and practical recommendations for XXXX. **Public endorsement of other BME/diversity initiatives** will also help. Additionally, senior BME women and men in Grades 7 and 6 in non-London locations could be just as powerful (and potentially more accessible) role-models as the SCSs who may be perceived as far removed from the day to day lives of junior staff in other regions. These will be seen as evidence of XXXX's ongoing support for the respondents and its commitment to diversity and inclusion across the country, further raising engagement levels and affirming people's identities as senior minority ethnic people in XXXX.

Legitimise the 'senior BME' identity in middle management

The research indicated that colleagues make assumptions about the status and competence of senior minority ethnic men and women in XXXX. Against the image of XXXX professionalism and seniority represented as a 'grey suit' some of the SO and Grade 7 civil servants recounted episodes in which their contribution was excluded in group meetings. This appeared more likely to happen during ambiguous encounters such as the beginning of meetings or in large group interactions. It is important that this cohort, who make up the pipeline towards Senior Civil Servant level remain motivated and committed to their jobs and positions as higher level staff, and that their contributions are seen to be valued. This level is also important because the SO level is the point at which minority representation falls most sharply. Yet this level is significant as it may be perceived as the most realistic senior target for many who consider SCS to be beyond their reach.

Introducing practices that reduce ambiguity and formally legitimise the authority of senior BME men and women will reduce the additional burden of identity work required to justify one's worth to others. Small changes can be introduced to transform organisational norms. Examples of such **micro-affirmations** are: encouraging managers to give due credit and timely, specific developmental feedback to BME (and all other) staff; holding Chairs of meetings responsible for introducing attendees and clearly articulating attendees' roles/expertise. Other activities could be distributing meeting attendee lists indicating everyone's areas of responsibility and publicising success stories highlighting the benefits of a diverse workforce, (i.e. beyond stories focusing on minority ethnic individuals). In the longer term, XXXX could incentivise people to demonstrate inclusion in their management activities (such as project allocation processes).

Monitor progression routes and appraisal processes

Respondents were proud of their specialist position in XXXX, but also recognised the challenge of demonstrating evidence of the competence required for progression through the generalist route, compared to the tangible performance criteria of the specialist route.

Ambiguous performance criteria are highly prone to bias which disproportionally affects members of minority groups such as women and BME individuals. 360˚ feedback, psychometric tools and competency-based appraisals will all contribute to **reducing bias in the promotion process**. Promotion criteria should be made public and strategic career planning offered to middle managers. Development conversations should cover past successes, present performance *and* future goals. Relying solely on practices such as advocacy or nominations for promotion or allocation of project work experience are also likely to be influenced by our unconscious biases. Especially

considering the significant plateauing of BME talent at SO level, XXXX should consider a detailed review of the appraisal and promotion process to uncover any subtle forms of bias.

Overall, it is important to raise awareness of the psychology behind difference, such as the concepts of unconscious/implicit bias and stereotype threat more widely across the Department.

This research sought to provide insight into the experiences of senior black, Asian and minority ethnic men and women in XXXX. Analyses of 68 episodes of identity work revealed when it happens, how it happens and why – the socio-organisational context that influences it. These suggest a number of ways forward for the Department, such as supporting BME individuals to positively leverage from their identities, encouraging managers to support their BME talent and instilling a wider awareness of the prevalence and impact of micro-episodes and how difference is experienced in XXXX.

The Department's strategic goal is to develop an inclusive culture in which everyone's potential is fully tapped, rather than focus on one specific group to the detriment of others. Many of the recommendations in this report will benefit everyone, rather than just a small minority. In line with Malcolm Gladwell's (2001) 'Tipping Point' principle, we do not require a global cultural/strategic overhaul to effect major culture shifts; the right push or nudge at the exact spot can 'tip' us into major cultural change. Many of the suggestions in this report do not require large-scale top-down climate or culture change. It suggests several immediate, mid- and long-term recommendations to be implemented at individual, team and organisational level. With increased public sector restructuring and budget restrictions, it is important to examine creative and efficient means to achieve change. Small steps are suggested, like developing impression management skills, connecting with people who are different from us, learning more about how we react to difference and other recommendations in the report. In doing this, each person can begin to play a role towards XXXX attaining its strategic objective of creating a working environment that motivates and develops all people to give of their best and take pride in working for XXXX, in order to contribute to the transformation of the business.

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