Importance of relevant role models: a qualitative study investigating experiences of Black women studying STEM at Imperial

MEd in University Teaching and Learning

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Overview

- This presentation is a quick snapshot of my research.

- In this presentation focus on:

  o Black Female STEM students:

    ➢ Who are their role models?

    ➢ Their views on Imperial's diversity and representation.

Method

- Qualitative study.

- Semi-structured interviews.

- Black women studying STEM at Imperial.
  - Self-identified Black and woman.

- 6 students interviewed:

Calling the Black Women of Imperial

My name is Linda, I am conducting an educational study about the role models of Black women who are STEM students at Imperial. I want to understand who your role models are, what the impacts are of these role models, and how they influence ambitions and career paths. I aim to provide better insights into this underrepresented group and draw recommendations to better support Black women and others at Imperial in the future.

Criteria:
- ✓ You identify as a Black woman.
- ✓ You are either an Undergraduate or Postgraduate student at Imperial College London.
- ✓ You are willing to be interviewed and share your experience as a Black woman in STEM.
- ✓ You are **not** a student at the Imperial Business School.
- ✓ You are **not** a Medical student.

Interested?
Sign up via this form:
tinyurl.com/BWImperial

For further questions contact:
Linda van Keimpema via
L.van-keimpema@imperial.ac.uk

Undergraduate students:	3	Faculty of Engineering:	4	Home students:	4
Postgraduate students:	3	Faculty of Natural Sciences:	2	Oversees students:	2

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How do participants define a role model?

Someone(s) (6)

Inspires/inspiration (4)

Look up to (3)

How do participants define a role model?

Replicate
Measure against

Aspiration/aspire (2)

Path/journey (2)

Model
Role

Achieve (2)

Someone(s) (6)

Society/world (2)

Inspires/inspiration (4)

Look up to (3)

Similar to you
Can be done

Not copy
Keep going

Example (2)

Emulate (2)

Space/field (2)

Impact positively

Value opinion
Guidance/help to succeed

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Characteristics of participants' role models

- The participants mentioned the following as characteristics making people likely to be their role model:

Gender: being a woman (5)

Ethnicity: being Black (4)

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Personality   (5)

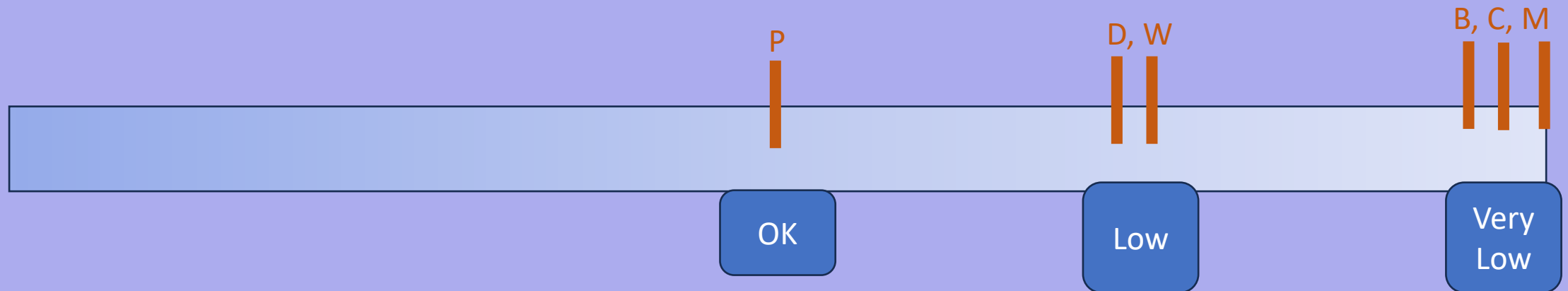**Similar experiences/ struggles** (4)

Same course/career interest (3)

Background   (2)

World view   (2)

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Diversity at Imperial

Question: How do you feel about the diversity and representation at Imperial?

Answer: I feel it's....

Diversity amongst peers

In terms of **Black woman on their course**, participants shared they were:

The only one (2)   **One of two (4)**

"There's no way it's just me. But I can't think

of anyone, and that's quite scary for me.**"**

Note: participants noted this is the **ones they have seen**, for instance some might not have turned up to lecturers. Though, these are groups of up to over 200 students.

Diversity amongst lecturers

When asked about Black lecturers, participants responded: **NO** (6)

"I **have, never, ever,** engaged with like a Black tutor
   or like a Black professor within [my department]"

"Have I ever heard of a Black lecturer? I don't,
   I genuinely don't think so."

"There's **no academic staff who are Black**"

"I don't think we've had, we **haven't
   had any Black lecturers at all** yet."

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"I don't think we've had, we **haven't had any Black lecturers at all** yet."

"It's the fact that **my mind didn't even go there** as a possibility because I have never seen one! I don't know if you know **how elusive**... the idea of a Black lecturer like that makes my heart sing, but I have never seen one."

"I know there are some in medicine. But I yeah, I don't do medicine. **I've just heard off people**."

Thematic analysis of my research:

Belonging
- Feelings of belonging
- Imposter syndrome
- Socioeconomic influences
- Feeling safe
- General emotions

Money
- Influencing future
- Issues caused by limited funding

Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI)
- Benefits of diversity
- Curriculum
- Alumni
- Peers
- Website
- Academics
- EDI initiatives
- Trends in diversity
- Problem of having "just one"
- Being seen as the "token"

Route into Imperial
- Cultural influences
- Experiences at other universities
- Interest in Science
- Pre-university initiatives
- School experiences
- Role model influences

Future/Careers
- Influences career in academia
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Role Models
- Definition
- Examples
- Characteristics
- Role models at Imperial

Negative Experiences
- Racism
- Misogyny
- Microagression

Improvements

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Improvements

Improving diversity of people

More Black students

Funding:

- More funding and scholarships.
- Loan opportunities.
- Work for education.

Improve application rate:

- Increase outreach activities.
- Recruitment in African schools.

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More Black academics

Recruit from abroad.

Collaborations.

Improving diversity

Build a **safe environment**:

- Robust and compulsory **EDI training** for staff and students.
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- Celebrating **Black success** and provide platform.
- **Listen** to Black community.

Thank you – questions?

Thank you for listening!

Questions/remarks/ideas?
Ask in Q&A or contact me: L.van-keimpema@imperial.ac.uk

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