



# **Where Am I? Black Asian And Minority Ethnic Role Models in Performing Arts?**

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# Introduction

*“Seeing is a skilled social practice - what we see and how we see it is intricately connected with the forms of social organisation within which we are all located and with which we have a matrix of connections” (Jenks, 1995).*

In 1976 Naseem Khans report “The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain.” was published. In 2016 at the “40 Years On. The Arts Britain Ignores and Diversity in Theatre” Conference at Curve Theatre, Leicester in October 2016, Naseem Khan, in her opening address, said *“it’s ‘extraordinary’ that the issues around diversity and the arts remain as ‘sharp, troubling and vibrant as ever’ (Shaikh, 2016).*

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic artists still have low visibility in arts and culture. For instance, the Creative Skillset 2012 Census notes that the *“representation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people declined from 7.4% of the total workforce in 2006 to 6.7% in 2009 and is now just 5.4% in 2012” (p. 4).*

What is the impact of such underrepresentation? Does this lack of visible representation for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) members of society signal to individuals from non-white ethnic backgrounds that a career in the arts is not open to them? If what we see in the arts represents overwhelmingly white middle class male aesthetic, history, values and thinking, then how are others to value their own ideas, stories and ambitions if they are different and not represented? What would a world look and feel like if the people that we looked up to came from all kinds of backgrounds? If there were more black theatre designers, an Asian female artistic director of the National Theatre, more BAME drama workshop leaders in schools? Would this encourage a more diverse arts workforce?

This research project has explored the importance of BAME role models for developing a more diverse workforce. In doing so, it blends concerns of key sector bodies and a growing public recognition that workforce diversity in the arts and culture is an issue that needs addressing (e.g. the recent #OscarsSoWhite, #BritsSoWhite, #Yellowface campaigns).

Arts Council England and other key sector bodies such as Creative Skillset, Directors UK, BECTU and the Creative Diversity Network have identified workforce diversity as a priority area. The emerging consensus is exemplified in Arts Council England’s statement that *“diversity and equality are crucial to the arts because they sustain, refresh, replenish and release the true potential of England’s artistic talent, regardless of people’s background” (ACE, 2011).* Translating this recognition into practice, Arts Council England aims for its investment to *“create conditions in which the diversity of audiences, and leaders, producers and creators of art reflect the diversity of contemporary England” (ACE 2015, p. 6)* and has dedicated over £7 million through a number of funds including *Changemakers* which will address the lack of diversity in arts leadership.

Arts Council England’s example is pertinent as it prominently recognises the importance of role models. In December 2014, Chair of ACE, Sir Peter Bazalgette explained: *“The doorway into the arts can be hard to find. And beyond it there are few pathways for progression, and many economic dead ends. It’s a frustrating experience. And looking up, many see the white cliff-face of the arts establishment and feel they just cannot climb it.”*

Although there now exists a substantive body of academic research into workforce diversity in the arts and culture (see Eikhof and Warhurst 2013 for an overview, Maxwell 2004 for BAME), studies into BAME role models are not available. Research elsewhere, for instance into entrepreneurs, has evidenced that role models are crucial for individuals’ career ambitions

(e.g. Summers et al. 2014), and Allen and Hollingworth (2013) have shown how young people's perceptions of the cultural industries influence their likelihood to pursue a career in this area. A much better and systematic understanding is needed of the how and why, the exact ways in which BAME role models impact individual aspirations to develop an artistic career. There is also little understanding of how the development of BAME role models can be supported.

This report presents findings from a project that set out to

- Explore why and how BAME role models are important in the performing arts in relation to workforce diversity;
- Examine what influences are important to career entry and progression in theatre;
- Analyse successful BAME and white role model careers to understand the factors that have facilitated their success;
- Identify good practice examples for supporting BAME role models.

The research has found that BAME and other role models are important for the aspirations and career progression of BAME workers. Authentic, visual representation, in terms of ethnicity is of particular importance for BAME workers. Another key finding is an insight into how role models operate. They can be seen to have functions, as BRIGHT LIGHTS, GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS, that each have different impacts and influence on individuals.

In the background section, this paper sets out the current industry debate and thinking around BAME workforce diversity, alongside academic research that highlights the inequality of access and barriers to employment progression for BAME workers, and other protected characteristics.

The qualitative research methodology is detailed in section three, before the findings of the research are presented. The discussion section goes on to analyse key findings in relation to current research and industry debate and the conclusion presents some recommendations for the industry and future research.

The overall aim of this line of enquiry is to facilitate change, and this project has opened up vital conversations and generated insights that deserve to be continued and explored further if we want to support a diverse workforce and see confident, adaptive and resilient BAME workers and leaders across our cultural sector.

This study was undertaken in collaboration with CAMEo, the Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies at the University of Leicester under the supervision of Dr Doris Eikhof.

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## Background & Context

In certain, especially policy-facing discourses, the creative and cultural industries (CCI) have a reputation for being ‘open’, ‘diverse’ and ‘Bohemian’, ‘hostile to rigid caste systems’ (Florida, 2002 cited in Connor, Gill, Taylor, 2015). The expansion of the CCI has been heralded as a means to offer employment opportunities for all, within a sphere that is acknowledged to have a considerable effect on society.

*“These industries have an impact on us as individuals and in our shared culture – they shape our arts, contribute to our view of the world, influence our consumer choices and improve the enjoyment of environments in which we live and work. They also shape the way in which we are perceived by others around the world”* (Neelands, J., et al, 2015, p.12).

The arts, in particular, appeal to government and policy makers as a means to “help individuals and communities by bringing people together and removing social barriers” (DCMS 2017a). However, when one looks at who is actually creating and producing this work however, we find that “the cultural industries workforce is less ethnically diverse, more male and skewed towards those of a higher socio-economic background than most other sectors of the economy” (Oakley and O’Brien, 2016 p. 2). The work on offer to audiences thus disproportionately represents the choices and world view of only a part, not the whole range of our society, and consequently,

*“Engagement with the arts is higher for adults in the upper socio-economic group and for those with no disability. Arts engagement is significantly lower for the Asian ethnic group than for the white and Black ethnic groups. Engagement with the arts and heritage is consistently higher for the white ethnic group”* (DCMS, 2017b, p.1).

These patterns are particularly pronounced in theatre:

*“The wealthiest, better educated and least ethnically diverse 8% of the population forms the most culturally active segment of all: between 2012 and 2015 they accounted (in the most conservative estimate possible) for at least 28% of live attendance to theatre, thus benefiting directly from an estimated £85 per head of Arts Council England funding to theatre”* (Neelands, J., et al, 2015, p.33).

Contrary to the above assumptions about the CCI as engaging a wide range of workers and consumers, this data suggests a problematic relationship between those creating the art work and those consuming it: wealthy, white, able bodied workers are making work that engages wealthy, white able-bodied audiences. Indeed, a substantive body of academic research into workforce diversity in the arts and culture highlights significant barriers, for certain groups, to employment and career progression in the creative and cultural industries. (See Eikhof and Warhurst 2013 for an overview). These studies have focused on a range of worker characteristics, including ethnicity, social class, gender and disability. For instance, Allen and Hollingsworth (2013) examined effects of social class on career aspiration. Randle and Hardy (2016) focused on how disabled workers are doubly disadvantaged by able bodied stereotypes and the physical and temporary nature of employment contracts; Conor et al. (2015) illuminated some of the distinctive features of working in arts and media to understand the persistence of gender inequality in the CCI, and Maxwell (2004) examined ethnicity through the process and outcomes of a BBC BME training programme. Other research has analysed workforce diversity in relation to the CCI’s models of production

(Eikhof and Warhurst 2013), bias in decision making processes (Boulton 2015;Eikhof 2017) and the heavy reliance on social capital and networks for progression (Grugulis and Stoyanova 2012).

Studies into BAME role models, however, are not available and this research project with its focus on ethnicity intends to contribute to the discussion around both ethnic diversity in the arts, and other characteristics of diversity.

It is worth noting here that the intersection of ethnicity with other protected characteristics and also social class, is likely to affect the employment prospects and career advancement of BAME workers. Barriers to inclusion can be exacerbated for, for example, a BAME, working class woman, and some obstacles to advancement may be more easily overcome by a BAME, middle class male. This paper will highlight instances where intersectionality is particularly relevant to the subject matter, but will focus primarily on how ethnicity relates to workforce diversity, role models and leaders.

### **Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Workforce: The Current Picture**

To understand the extent of the issue it is important to gain an understanding of the current picture of workforce diversity across the arts and cultural industries, and in particular with reference to theatre.

Arts Council England in 2016 stated that progress has been made in relation to BAME workforce diversity: *“17 per cent of the workforce is Black and minority ethnic”* (across permanent, contracted and volunteer staff in National Portfolio Organisations in 2015/16) which *“is above average as the 2015/16 Annual Population Survey (APS) states that of the working age population in England 15 per cent are Black and Minority ethnic”* (ACE, 2016a, p. 6 & 7).

This data looks positive. However, a closer examination of the (ACE 2016a) data of permanent staff of the largest NPOs and major partner museums, who employed more than 50 staff, reveals a less homogenously positive picture. Out of 96 organisations profiled, only 21 had a staff team of more than 10% BME, and 46 organisations had less than 5% staff from BME backgrounds (ibid). When Theatre alone is examined, ACE is not so confident with its progress report: *“Workforce diversity also remains a key concern. At many levels, it has improved in recent years with the proportion of BAME theatre workers in NPOs now slightly higher at 13.3% than in England’s overall workforce. However, this is deceptive because the theatre sector is concentrated in urban areas, particularly London, where the overall BAME population is much higher”* (ACE, 2016b, p. 48). Additionally, 13 of the largest ACE supported NPO theatres were shown to be employing only 5% or fewer BAME workers (Hutchison, 2015):

Almeida Theatre	5%
Royal and Derngate, Northampton	5%
West Yorkshire Playhouse	4%
Colchester Mercury Theatre	3%
New Vic Theatre	3%
Sheffield Theatres	3%
York Theatre Royal	3%
Harrogate Theatre	2%
Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse	2%
Theatre Royal Plymouth	2%
Queen’s Theatre, Hornchurch	1%
Hull Truck Theatre	0%
Theatre by the Lake	0%

Notably, some of the theatres above, such as Sheffield Theatres, West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds, and Almeida Theatre in London are located in areas with significant BAME populations.

The Arts Council data clearly presents an arts and theatrical landscape that does not reflect the ethnic diversity of the UK population, the aforementioned academic studies, and a number of recent industry reports and surveys (e.g. Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation 2017, Arts Professional Pulse Report, 2016) provide further insights into the conditions that prevent equal participation and progress for BAME workers.

Firstly, admission processes into higher education establishments, in preparation for careers in the arts, are based on the underlying assumption both that talent is “innate”, and that knowledge about particular canons of art and culture are expected in prospective candidates. Banks (2015) points out that talent is socially constructed and Burke and McMannus (2009) show that social constructions of talent that admissions decisions are made on are essentially those of a white, middle class, European cultural elite (cited in Eikhof, 2017). In addition, the expected knowledge that individuals can use to position themselves, is more easily accessible to middle class and white individuals (Eikhof, 2017).

Within the theatre industry however, there is a general lack of awareness of how white middle class bias, conscious or unconscious plays a role in talent spotting. A pertinent illustration is Principle Adrian Hall’s insistence that audition processes at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts are “*as free from bias as possible*”. Hall expands: “*The audition panels do not discuss or have any say in final decisions. These are made on the basis of score alone, which can’t have been unduly weighted by any single person [...] ‘I’m sure some schools feel the temptation to positively discriminate to ensure BAME figures look good, but that risks compromising the quality of entrants’*” (Bano, 2017).

Secondly, Eikhof (2015) describes how the cultural industries are highly influenced and dominated by images of an artist or creative worker that predominantly centres on the persona of the Bohemian artist. Eikhof also asserts that even supposed counter culture creative personas, such as the hipster, have developed from ideas around the Bohemian artist: “*The conventional image of an artist or creative is also an ethnically white and still predominantly male one*” (Eikhof, 2015, p. 10). The further away an individual is from this image, Eikhof points out, the more work they will need to do to be perceived as a creative, an artist. Adding the intersectionality of gender and class this also means a BAME woman, from a working-class background is even less likely to be positively received by decision makers than a male, white middle class counterpart and so will need to work “twice as hard” to progress their career.

Playwright Emteaz Hussain articulated this problem from her experience “*‘Being understood is hard.’ Learning the language helps, she says, [ .....]How do you manage the conversation when it’s the power structures that so often render you invisible?’*” (Shaikh, 2016). This invisibility, unless the right language is learnt and the artist adapts to be like the dominant elite, suggests conformity is what is needed to progress in theatre.

Thirdly, the preponderance of informal networks for recruitment is also known to favour the white middle classes. This is in part due to the nature of “fitting in” with the industry. The historical prevalence of the white middle classes in the TV industry meant that their mores, “*even though unconnected to the nature of the work, were often seen as synonymous with professionalism*” (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012). In addition, those from BAME backgrounds may not even have access to the kind of social capital that is important when

recognising that a job in the CCI might be possible, or making decisions on how to apply for a CCI industries role, or even degree subject (Eikhof, 2017). These informal networks, combined with a preponderance of unpaid internships that favour those who can afford them has been acknowledged as contributing to a “*serious under-representation of ethnic minorities*” (ACE, 2011, p.10, Gunnel, Barbara and Bright, Martin, eds 2010 p.5).

Fourthly, the project based model of production is supported by recruitment through those networks. Recruiting through personal connections, in particular to fill short notice vacancies, has been found to favour workers already known to those who assemble teams (Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012). Decision makers lack incentive to recruit outside known channels, making recruitment decisions in the CCI akin to “*frequently revolving doors through which the same types of workers repeatedly enter*” (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013, p. 505).

## **Leadership**

BAME Diversity at leadership level has been acknowledged as a potential lever for change. “*For change to be real, there needs to be more diversity at the top.*” states Arts Council England’s Chief Executive Darren Henley after reporting that only 8% of chief executives are black and minority ethnic; 10% of artistic directors; and 9% of chairs (ACE 2016a, p.18).

When the figures for theatre are broken down even further we see “*overall leadership of theatre NPOs shows that in 2013/14, only 13 out of 152 NPO theatres (9%) were led by someone of BAME origin – none of these were large organisations and the largest share were small organisations*” (ACE, 2016b, p.87). Drama Schools, are also lacking in BAME leadership, with not one drama school in the UK being led by a BAME Director/Principle.

Whilst there is little academic research into BAME leadership specifically, one can assume that the previously highlighted barriers such as socially constructed talent, bias, social capital and networks, and a unequal model of production (Banks, 2015; Eikhof, 2015; Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2012) also have a marked effect on the opportunity for BAME leadership. In theatre, leadership at the top is often combined with a strong artistic presence in the form of the Artistic Director, which in itself will be subject to bias towards the white middle class male as a symbol of creativity (Eikhof, 2015).

One BAME professional articulates their struggle to progress towards seniority “*As a black artist, you sometimes get considered as ‘emerging’ until the day you die*” (ACE, 2016b p.86). When constantly perceived as emerging, the move to senior leadership ranks can be seen by oneself and others to be out of reach.

In 2008 the Cultural Leadership Programme undertook research into BAME leadership and found that the experience of the BAME leaders working in the arts included low employment mobility, perceptions of the persistence of old boys networks, feelings of isolation and invisibility and always being “emerging” (CLP 2008). The report also identified a number of strategic actions that could support BAME leadership, from widening diversity at entry level, to more mid-career training, to setting up a BAME board bank so that it wasn’t always the same BAME trustees, sitting on a number of arts and cultural boards.

The small number of BAME workers in current leadership positions suggests that the impact of the proposed strategic actions from the CLP programme has been limited. This in itself puts pressure on those few BAME workers who do find themselves in positions of leadership, as highlighted in this quote “*You are [also] expected to be a carer for younger black people. People don’t realise what that does to your creativity and time; it’s an added layer of responsibility. If there were more of us doing it, more diversity, it wouldn’t be such a big deal. But with us being so few, it’s a problem for all of us*” (ACE, 2016b, p. 86).



The impact on workforce diversity with BAME leadership in place therefore cannot be fully assessed because of the low numbers, particularly in mainstream and larger organisations. One indicator however can be seen in the example of The Bush Theatre, which is led by BAME Artistic Director Madani Younis. He pledged in March 2017 to ensure that at least half of the plays the theatre presents will come from ethnic minority writers. This suggests that workforce diversity is important to his leadership of this organisation.

## **Role Models**

The common image of role models is that of the music icon on the poster of the teenage bedroom wall or the Olympic athlete achieving their best. Closer to home we may see our parents or family members as role models. Role model figures exemplify values, attitudes and behaviour in ways that others perceive as positive and worthy of imitation.

There is currently little research in arts and culture that examines the impact of leaders and/or BAME leaders, and role models on workforce diversity. Studies elsewhere, for example into entrepreneurs, has evidenced that role models are crucial for individuals' career ambitions, in particular when there are issues of underrepresentation and inequality (e.g. Summers et al. 2014). Allen and Hollingworth (2013) have shown how young people's perceptions of the cultural industries influence their likelihood to pursue a career in this area. Additionally, Morgenroth (2015) has shown that role models have an impact on role "aspirants" in several ways including influencing expectancy by showing how to perform certain behaviours, contributing to reinforcement of "aspirants" goals, supporting skill acquisition, and changing perceptions of potential obstacles. This last function Morgenroth (2015) also suggests, is particularly key for under-represented groups.

Within the CCI role models can inhabit a variety of positions, for example actor, director, producer, writer that aspiring BAME workers may look up to. As previously described, in relation to increasing workforce diversity, BAME senior leadership has been seen as a potential lever for change, so the role of leader can be viewed to be of particular importance:

*"Cultural leaders inspire, they connect, they navigate. As inspirers, they are passionate about what they do, and they have ideas that resonate with others. As connectors, they know themselves, they are true to themselves and they are able to build and nurture relationships. As navigators, they have a clear sense of purpose, they plan strategically and they show others the way. They have their eye on the horizon, and have a vision of how things could be five or even ten years from now. They are always looking forwards, they are not concerned with maintaining the status quo, they bring about change" (Sue Hoyle, 2014).*

There is also an acknowledgment from the sector that role models can have a positive impact on leadership progression, e.g. *"respondents are more likely to recognise the important positive influence of good role models"* (Clare Leadership Programme 2014, p.3). This report also highlighted the relationship between funding, role models, leadership and workforce diversity *"the reductions in public funding have had the effect of reducing the number and/or the scale and profile of BAME/diversity-focused organisations, which means that there are fewer role models to aspire to (or the role models are less visible)"* (ibid).

Two examples of this lack of visible representation in theatre can be seen in the ways in which the mainstream theatre and media industry recognises the achievements of its workforce. Firstly, The Stage Theatre 100 Power List features the most influential people in the theatre industry, those that can be perceived of as leaders. In 2016 only six people from BAME backgrounds were featured in that list. Secondly, The Evening Standard Theatre Awards Issue on 25/11/2016, was a free paper picked up by millions of Londoners, 40% of

whom are BAME. Whilst the awards did feature two winners from BAME background, Charlene James for the most promising playwright, and Tyron Huntly as an Emerging Talent, the visible representation of the BAME London theatre workforce as seen in the photos of the event was six or seven people in almost 100 photos featuring over 150 people.

Alongside a lack of visibility, actors face a struggle in terms of the roles they are offered. Not only is there a lack of available roles for BAME actors, when they are employed there is the perception that these are often little more than racial stereotypes that fail to reflect the stories, lives and context of BAME communities. *'I have lost count of BAME actors and directors who have told me that they have said to agents and directors they are great at Shakespeare, but instead they are told they need to "develop a London accent" if they are to get work'* (Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, 2016, p.11).

When BAME actors are being offered stereotypical roles, the opportunity for them to be positive role models is reduced and this representation runs the risk of reducing whole communities and ethnic groupings into types. To compound the stereotypical representations actors often face another problem, that of being assessed for the "acceptable" face of race. There is a perception that mixed race and light skinned actors are more palatable to white audiences as a South Asian actor remarked: *'A director said in my hearing that actors of colour who succeed tend to be acceptable to white audiences so are quite white.'* (Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, 2016 p.11).

Another factor to consider in relation to role models and workforce diversity is cultural appropriation. As the cultural industries are increasing reliant on being drivers of the economy Hesmondhalgh and Saha (2013) highlight the cultural politics of "the commodification of race". They raise concerns when forms of cultural production that are associated with ethnic minorities become borrowed (or appropriated) by dominant groups. *"This is viewed as part of an ideological process that designates non-white groups as inferior"* (Hesmondhalgh and Saha 2013, p.184) and cite the example of how musical forms of the oppressed African-American population became the foundation for commercially successful popular music, the world over.

British Theatre has often borrowed stories from across the world but when, in a multi-cultural society, global stories are presented through a purely white lens, then they risk being seen as racist. Several companies, including the RSC for their production of *The Orphan of Zhou*, have come under criticism over the past few years for staging Chinese or East Asian stories, but employing white actors, not British East Asian actors, to play Chinese roles. The recent #yellowface protest at The Print Room's all white production of a Howard Barker play with a cast of characters with Chinese names highlighted the fact that British East Asian actors are not considered for "white" roles, and yet are also losing out to white actors in Chinese roles. The act of white washing, and the notion of the "acceptable" face of race prevents a diverse range of BAME actors from being even considered as role models.

If role models are crucial for addressing issues of underrepresentation and inequality (e.g. Summers et al. 2014) but stereotypical and racist representations of BAME communities are being perpetuated, and BAME cultural forms are still being appropriated, then this suggests that visible, positive examples of BAME role models, owned by BAME workers, have the potential to make a change with BAME workforce diversity. Eikhof (2017) suggests that new, modified artistic role models can be seen in cases of black rap musicians and Bollywood dancers, but she concedes that these still habit an "other" space, compared to the dominant white creation of the "Bohemian" artist. However, many questions remain and a much better and systematic understanding is needed of the how and why, the exact ways in which BAME

role models impact individual aspirations to develop an artistic career. There is also little understanding of how the development of BAME role models and leaders can be supported.

### **Diversity Initiatives**

Artist and Practitioners have once again taken a lead in response to the recent lack of workforce diversity in the CCI. Movements such as Act for Change began, in 2014, to campaign to strengthen diversity across the live and recorded arts and Artistic Directors of the Future was founded in the same year with a mission is to increase BAME diversity at leadership level in mainstream theatre.

As we have seen, Arts Council England have pledged over 8 million into their recent diversity initiatives;

- **Sustained Theatre:** £2 million repurposed to support established and emerging Black and minority ethnic theatre makers across the wider theatre sector in England.
- **Change Makers:** £2.6 million to help address the lack of diversity in arts leadership.
- **Elevate:** a £2.1 million fund to develop diverse-led organisations that may be future contenders for national portfolio membership.
- **Unlimited:** £1.8 million to continue to support the development and commissioning of a range of new work by deaf and disabled artists.

The ambition of these funds and the way that they are promoted can give hope that change is possible in particular with Sustained Theatre, with its exclusive focus on BAME diversity. The initiative will support BAME producers, talent development for cultural leaders, producing models led by BAME artists, large scale BAME work in the west end and networking initiatives across five schemes led by a range of theatres. The numbers of BAME workers to benefit from Sustained is not known and a feature of the successful lead organisations who will run each programme is that they are all ACE NPO organisations. These organisations are already working within the system and so run the risk of inherently perpetuating some of the structures and bias that we know can impede workforce diversity.

On closer examination of the other funds, the impact on BAME workforce diversity and leadership in theatre, may not be as far reaching. Out of forty Change Makers, four are BAME and working in theatre, two Elevate companies out of forty are BAME led theatre companies and one of seven Unlimited and Commission is BAME led.

Across the subsidised arts sector there is a duty, because of the 2010 Equalities Act, to actively promote workforce diversity, and whilst sector bodies are clearly demonstrating a support for diversity, this is not necessarily the case with individual organisations, as the following data reveals;

*“Diversity in relation to workforce was seen as slightly less important than diversity in relation to audiences or artistic work by respondents. Less than half (45%) indicated it was a top strategic priority for their organisation, compared with around 57% who said diversity in relation to audiences and artistic work were top priorities. (Richens, 2016). This is compounded by some attitudes towards the issues as the Arts Professional survey found. Respondents said, “We do not exist to promote diversity – we exist to promote great art.”, “There is a tick box mentality rather than an enthusiasm for diversity. It is not intrinsic to our work, it is still being ‘added on’.” Another wrote: “As long as people think that we are doing what we say we are and there is no real accountability, it’s not that important” (Richens, 2016).*

The above suggests that even though sector bodies and certain organisations are taking steps forwards to address some of the issues surrounding a lack of workforce diversity, more work is needed for it to become a top strategic priority for individuals and arts organisations in general.

# Methodology

To produce rich insights into the ways role models affect BAME careers the project used qualitative research methods aimed at generating in-depth empirical data, interviews and focus groups. Interviews were largely used with cultural leaders while focus groups comprised arts practitioners generally and students.

The cultural leaders were a mix of five male and five females and worked in a wide spectrum of roles across a range of organisations including small to large theatre companies, theatre agencies and sector bodies. These leaders were recruited through personal networks. Eleven interviews were undertaken in total. Six interviewees had BAME backgrounds and five interviewees had white backgrounds.

The focus groups comprised six to nine arts practitioners and students each, divided into the following groups:

- Mid-career artists and cultural leaders of BAME and non-BAME background;
- Mid-career artists and cultural leaders of BAME backgrounds;
- Performing Arts students from BAME backgrounds who have chosen to study acting and other theatre arts but have not yet entered the industry.

The focus group participants worked in a range of roles across theatre including as actors, writers, directors, administrators, producers, programmers, education managers, marketeers, general managers, and casting directors. Participants were recruited through a number of industry call outs via personal networks, and through an invitation to BAME students at a drama school. The study involved a total of 33 participants who were all promised anonymity.

The interviews and focus groups asked participants to respond to a series of prepared questions that had been approved via an Ethics Review. The questions offered participants the opportunity to discuss their personal career trajectories (or ambitions in the case of students) in relation to role models and other impacting factors, and to also give their opinions on BAME workforce diversity, leadership and role models in general.

All interviews and focus groups were recorded and professionally transcribed. The average length of interviews was 60 minutes, and the focus groups were 90 minutes. Data analysis focused on participants' perceptions of role models and the ways in role models had influenced participants' careers.

The empirical research and analysis were also informed by the attendance of several attendance of key industry events, conferences and talks on workforce diversity over 2016/17.

# Findings

## Arts Access and Starting Points

Our participants' careers in the arts were typically inspired by encounters with the arts at an early age. These introductions tended to be instigated by the family or school:

*I am one of 6 children and my mum was a music teacher so we were all, encouraged is a light word, to learn at least 2 instruments and in fact you couldn't eat unless you had done your practice, that was the deal [...] So it was very much a way in to the arts and beyond that I got involved in shows and youth theatres" (Participant 10, leader, male, white).*

*"I think it was, my parents were quite involved in the arts and it was just always something I did as a kid probably in terms of theatre. So, I always was involved in youth theatres" (Participant 6, leader, female, white).*

*"school, doing plays at school, beginning to understand what plays are at school and it being really fun. And then when you are a bit older then going to the theatre but I probably wouldn't have gone to the theatre if I wasn't already interested in it at school" (Participant, FG1, female, white).*

For some participants, particularly those from BAME and who identified as working class, school, college, youth theatre and the wider educational system had played a significant role in introducing them to the arts. Teachers could play a vital influential role as one participant describes: *"I had a great drama teacher who really did believe in me...who helped me realise that it was something I was good at and that it doesn't just need to be a hobby."* (Participant 7, leader, male, white).

Both BAME and white participants benefited from an education system that integrated the arts into the curriculum. Many of the BAME participants described how they had excelled at school, landing lead roles and being given the opportunity to fully express their artistry, as this participant describes: *"I grew up in Smethwick in Birmingham, so very diverse. Did lots of performance, did lead roles in non-traditional, roles you wouldn't expect so that was very open and inclusive for me"* (Participant, FG2, practitioner, female, BAME).

These positive experiences of school contrast with one BAME participant's. *"My teacher, we had a lot of disagreements, and she told me 'You're really good, I'm very impressed because usually your kind don't do well in my classes"* (Participant, FG3, student, male, BAME). On further investigation "your kind" was identified as black, and this troubled our participant greatly. Rather than inspired, he felt he needed to succeed to prove "his kind" could do well.

Where the experiences of white and BAME participants diverged was in the aspiration to enter the arts in terms of choices of higher education, and experiences during and after leaving university and college, where for some, limitations emerged and the theatre landscape became uninviting territory:

*"well posh people, I just saw it [drama school] for rich white people which I wouldn't have very much in common with" (Participant 3, leader, female, BAME).*

*"once I had got to college and university, early career. Then it was about marginalised story" (Participant, FG2, practitioner, female, BAME).*

*“I was actually playing leads at drama school and I was playing leads at school and then I am not going up for those parts in the outside world...I don’t feel like I am being seen for those. It is not like I am auditioning for lead parts and not getting them” (Participant, FG2, practitioner, male, BAME).*

*“it is probably purely because I didn’t really see people around who looked like me at The National at the time. I was doing a bit of a work placement with the marketing department and there were loads of free ticket offers so I ended up there quite a few nights of the week seeing different shows. It was mainly because there wasn’t anyone there who necessarily looked like me.” (Participant, FG1. Practitioner, Male, BAME).*

These limitations, feelings of exclusion, and invisibility contrast significantly with the smooth transition more typical for the white, and middle class, participants experience from youth into a career in theatre:

*“I think access to people and access to the work, so seeing it, reading it, studying it, it becoming second nature has all meant I didn’t ever sort of question the choice. It was never “ooh, theatre?” in our house, it was always just another thing that you might do” (Participant 6, leader, female, white).*

### **How do role models impact individual aspirations to develop an artistic career? Why are they important?**

Our findings clearly show that role models have an impact and an influence on an individual’s aspirations for, and development of, a career in theatre. This influence is multi-faceted and for BAME participants often relates to barriers that curtail the full inclusion and progression of BAME artists and practitioners within theatre.

This evidence suggests that BAME role models in theatre are important because of their potential to play a substantive, active part in an individual’s career. Pursuing a career in the arts is demanding and requires high achievement at all levels. Our findings show that by engaging with BAME role models, BAME individuals feel included, gain confidence, learn skills, are empowered to be themselves, and develop resilience. The most important influences were identified as; inspiration to enter into the arts, an opening of doors into and demystification of the theatre world, a sharing of knowledge, expertise and experience, a boost to confidence, support for career development and the ability to change the landscape. This section will explore these themes and the effect of role models generally.

Role models were found to have an impact both long term and short term. An in-depth analysis of the more typical, constant type of role models is to follow, but a different and important type of role model is worth highlighting, one that can be called BRIGHT LIGHT: a person or group of people who had made a significant difference to our participants at one particular moment in time, casting a light on something, within the participant or in the industry, that enabled our participants to make a leap forwards, change direction or do something new. A typical BRIGHT LIGHT moment was that described by one participant for whom seeing a production of Snookered by Ishy Din galvanised his career change from a job in business to becoming a professional actor. He subsequently applied to drama school and said: *“looking back, maybe it was because they kind of looked like me and I subconsciously identified with them that I walked out thinking yeah let me give this a go”* (Participant, FG1, practitioner, male, BAME).

The key aspect of this BRIGHT LIGHT moment is visual, relating to ethnicity: Because the characters looked like our participant he identified with them. This effect of seeing oneself

reflected ethnically in role models emerged as particularly important from our study, for instance in quotes like this: *“if you can’t see it, you can’t be it”* (Participant, FG1, practitioner, female, white).

Another aspect that requires mentioning here but, again, will be analysed more fully later is the issue of authentic representation. Our participant above described gaining inspiration from a play written by an Asian playwright that presented complex and three dimensional British Asian characters rather than stereotypical representations, such as the young black gang member, the Muslim terrorist, the Chinese waiter, the repressed Indian woman. Images that felt authentic and real were mentioned as particularly influential by a number of participants.

BRIGHT LIGHTS provided inspiration, were catalysts and gave clarity in moments in which participants might have been struggling with what to do or where to go, as illuminated by one participant describing Meera Syal. *“oh wow, she is writing as well as acting [.....]and it was so funny and witty and heartfelt at the same time. Those things really inspired me and really made me think ooh, I want to do this”* (Participant 11, graduate, female, BAME).

### **Role Models and their Functions**

The findings show clearly that the BRIGHT LIGHTS role models can have an immediate and impactful effect on the individual. But our analysis suggests that the more significant influence stemmed from role models and leaders whom participants had a longer-term engagement with. It emerged that these role models fulfilled three typical functions, those of GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS.

**GUIDES** affect careers in the ways we might traditionally expect of a role model. They modelled behaviour that participants wanted to emulate, had a set of values that chimed with those of participants, were successful in their chosen profession and showed themselves to be highly skilled. GUIDE role models mentioned by our participants were often in the public sphere. They could be distant, with the participant in an observer role, or they might be personal acquaintances the participant had a mutual relationship with.

**FORGERS** had carved a path that participants identified as one they would like to follow. Participants looked towards them because, for instance, their presence in a position of leadership, or power was unusual or hard fought, or they perceived these role models as breaking down barriers, taking risks, leading the way, and, importantly, not closing the door behind them. Participants typically described these role models as able to see the big picture, having courage, and also generosity.

**ENABLERS** were role models that affected participants not so much because of their own professional path but because of specific interventions or contributions to the paths of our participants. Enablers had given strength, support, insight, knowledge, encouragement, permission and access, often in very concrete situations. They had demystified the theatrical process and industry and thereby made it more accessible to our participants. ENABLER role models directly opened doors and supported participant’s careers, also through what might straddle from the territory of role models into that of friendships and mentoring.

Across the study participants had role models that fulfilled a range of these functions. However, all our BAME leaders all spoke about ENABLERS having been vital to their career path, and the majority of our BAME focus group participants had FORGERS amongst their role models. In the following we will therefore examine in more detail what about fulfilling these functions is so important to drive BAME workforce diversity and successful careers in theatre.



## GUIDES

Role models that fulfilled a GUIDE function for participants included: Nick Starr, Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, Meera Syal, Althea Efunshile, Greg Dyke, Ellen Stewart, John McGrath, David Lan, Richard Pryor and Brian Bovell.

These individuals were seen to have a “star quality”. They were leaders in their field, in positions of great power, or had proved themselves to be exceptional artists. Participants admired them, as illustrated in this quote about Greg Dyke: “... *he is a successful entrepreneur... he knows what he is doing, he is honest, he has integrity, will talk about values... I admired the way he ran that corporation*” (Participant 5, leader, male, white).

GUIDES also encouraged participants to identify positive behaviours for the workplace, for instance in the case of Althea Efunshile: “...*her sense of direction, her clarity, .... a sense of humour and she is also, erm, fearsomely organised and astonishingly intelligent and somebody you can look at and feel like there is lots of her style to admire.*” (Participant 5, leader, female, white).

Participants described GUIDES as having the ability to take one beyond the limited sphere of one’s own knowledge and experience. They challenged one to think and act differently and provide a route map to do this: “.... *you watch it and sometimes you copy it. Sometimes you think “I am going to think about things like that” or “I am going to do that”, “I am going to approach it like that”* (Participant 2, leader, male, white).

The relationship between the GUIDES and those who looked up to them was not necessarily one of engagement. Like the BRIGHT LIGHTS, GUIDES did not need to engage directly to inspire or affect a change. The evidence suggested that participant’s connections to GUIDES not only revealed an aspiration but also identified traits, skills, and potential strengths of the participant: “*suddenly finding myself in front of women who were feminists, were strongly political, were independent, helped reinforce some of the things I had been carrying myself but had never seen really publicly anywhere*” (Participant 9, leader, female, BAME).

The evidence also showed that the act of analysing role models enabled participants to learn something about themselves, for instance by comparing themselves to their guides statement. “*some of the power and beauty I saw in Nina Simone and Billy Holiday, that I was too underconfident to recognise in myself*” (Participant 7, leader, female, BAME).

## FORGERS

FORGER role models were described by participants as those who have broken the mould and created something new in order to succeed. It was the action of creating change in rough terrain that marked them out as someone to follow and pay attention to.

FORGER role models mentioned by our participants included: Viola Davis, Idris Elba, Paulette Randle, Victor Romero Evans, Rikki Beadle Blair, Dawn Walton, Kwame Kweh Armah, Jimmy Akinbola and Frazer Ayres. A FORGER role model demonstrated a new way carving out a career as illustrated by this quote about Jude Kelly “*I didn’t realise you could be a director and run a building at the same time and be in charge, like as a woman, and in Yorkshire, that just didn’t feel possible. It’s a big moment because there is a process of identification that I didn’t have with a male artistic director.* (Participant, FG1, practitioner, female, white,)

A BAME FORGER could also support ethnic inclusivity and provide validation for other people for BAME backgrounds to be in the artistic sphere. One participant described his

experience of a role model at entry level into the industry: *“For a lot of my early career I wanted to be like Anthony, in a weird way and it made it acceptable for me. I felt like I could actually work in this environment because he has done well.”* (Participant, FG1, practitioner, male, BAME). Feeling comfortable and accepted into the industry supported this participant to progress in his own career and thus contributed to his own success in a way typical for the FORGERS described throughout our study.

The findings showed that the FORGERS function was important for finding alternative routes to success, i.e. paths that did not rely on negotiating mainstream power structures. For BAME participants it was refreshing and vital to observe other’s successes that did not rely on acceptance into the usual networks and power structures. FORGERS showed that one could achieve without the need for an establishment pat on the back: *“It is not even I want their careers as such but they do their own thing and they don’t have to work within the industry and the industry kind of comes to them after a while or in Rikki’s (Beadle Blair) case “I will just do my own thing and be over here”* (Participant, FG2, practitioner male, BAME). This function of a FORGER role model for our BAME focus group participants cannot be underestimated. When participants found confidence and inspiration from FORGERS doing things differently, they experienced what can be described as a release from the reliance on “white approval”.

FORGERS not only challenged existing conventions, our participants saw them challenge the racial stereotypes that have permeated both stage and screen portrayals of ethnic minorities. A participants description of recent Oscar award winner Viola Davis demonstrate this: *“one of the reasons why she has such a special place in my heart is because when I see her in roles, a lot of the time they are quite unconventional, they don’t go along with the stereotype of what a black woman would play in a TV programme or in theatre”* (Participant, FG3, student, female, BAME).

Encouraging stamina and sticking to one’s set of values through adversity, were also common in the participants’ descriptions of FORGERS’ influence. Viola Davis demonstrates the power of resilience for this participant *“she refused to be put down and refused to be given roles that weren’t up to par with what she could play, and I feel like for me in my career that’s something that I also want to take, and also want to put into action”* (Participant, FG3, Student, female, BAME).

## **ENABLERS**

ENABLER role models had the most extensive influence and interaction with participants. For some participants, these ENABLER role models were crucial because the role model actively chose to influence the participants and engaged with and helped them shape their career. Especially the successful BAME leaders in this study perceived these engaged, supportive ENABLERS as being vital to their own successful careers.

ENABLER role models mentioned by participants included Vicky Ireland, Janet Steel, Ruth Mackenzie, Rachel Feldberg, Michael Duke, Brian Astbury, Yvonne Brewster and John McGrath.

### **Opening Doors**

The findings suggest that at entry level into theatre and the arts BAME participants’ experiences can differ quite considerably from that of their white middle class counterparts. And a primary function of the ENABLER role model was to show the way: *“I was outside knocking and thinking ‘There must be some secret code, or you have to, I don’t know, be touched by the hand of God to get in’ and then someone you know on the other side just*

*literally opens it and says 'Come in', and when you get through it's like, there's no big thing, it's just a door, and you think 'That's really hard isn't it?'* (Participant 4, leader, male, BAME).

The significance of this function in terms of workforce diversity is exemplified in the following quote. *"I love people opening the door and you can't underestimate that and I feel a lot of people sometimes from a non-minority group don't understand the importance of"* (Participant, FG2, Practitioner, female, BAME).

In contrast to these BAME participants' experiences, their white counterparts did not perceive entry into the industry as a challenge or struggle:

*"A tutor at RADA. He basically suggested me. Somebody was looking for an assistant and he actually said "oh you remind me of someone who works at this office already so you should go and talk to them[...] it immediately allowed you industry access as opposed to just meeting some people"* (Participant 6, leader, female, white).

*"I was doing work experience... and these two people were having a conversation over the top of my head where they said 'Oh, I've just had this email, have you had it? So and so are looking for a publishing assistant', and I went 'Oh, are they? Maybe that's a job that I could apply for.' And that was if I hadn't have been sitting in that seat completely by fluke in between those people, I wouldn't have heard about that job, and I wouldn't have gone for it and I wouldn't have got it"* (Participant 5, leader, female, white)

### **Demystification**

Once BAME participants had gained entry into the industry, there often remained a need for decoding industry practice and processes and accessing networks. The second function an ENABLER would fulfil is responding to that need and imparting knowledge and deconstructing the industry: *"And he helped in making me understand the way things work. He's kind of like the insider. You know 'sit down boy. Let me show you how thing work' type person"* (Participant 1, leader, male, BAME).

The findings also showed that access to certain types of networks, or people, or status building organisations, such as the National Theatre, were advantageous to progression; *"it just puts you, on this kind of, you know, the information path of what's happening and who knows what"* (Participant 5, leader, female, white).

Being from a BAME background, proved an obstacle for some to having access to these networks: *"When you don't know anyone, you have no idea how it all works or if it is possible or what"* (Participant 3, leader, female, BAME). For some participants this proved to be a disadvantage in an industry described as *"very nepotistic and it's nepotistic because we have a short and very intense rhythm of work which means the cycle of a production which is what dictates most of the way we work as an organisation and industry..... So you inevitably want people around you who you trust so you inevitably look to people you know you can trust"* (Participant 10, leader, male, white).

### **Empowerment**

Findings also showed empowerment as a key ENABLER function, *"as grownups we need people to believe in us"* (Participant 8, leader, male, white). The behaviour modelled was one of encouragement and trust in others in a supportive environment. This trust promoted risk

taking, which is essential to artistic development, confidence building and leadership. A typical statement in this regard was: *“just really grew me in the way that I wanted to grow. He allowed me to evolve rather than pushing me in a particular direction”* (Participant 7, leader, female, BAME).

### **Accessibility**

Unlike some GUIDES and FORGERS, ENABLER role models were typically within direct reach. Participants described two way relationships that provided an opportunity for real engagement, exchange of ideas and the learning to go both ways: *“I think there are a lot of things I agree with him on and lots of things I disagree with him on but I feel like I can have that conversation with him”* (Participant, FG2, male BAME).

### **Long Term**

The findings showed that an added benefit to the ENABLER function was the potential for it to have a lasting impact. Participants described ENABLER support that began at an early stage and continued throughout their career, be it in different forms at different times. Examples include:

*“people like Ruth MacKenzie who was pivotal in my very early days but has always been incredibly supportive and is still the person I will ring up if I need some help”*(Participant 9, leader, female, BAME).

*“She’s a great sounding board in times of stress and she always has good words of advice”* (Participant 3, leader female, BAME).

### **Legacy**

A final function ENABLERS delivered revolved around legacy. ENABLERS can leave behind a set of role model functions that can be used by others. It showed that the role model impact can be much greater than on the individual, it can be organisational and potentially sector wide, through an almost cascade effect than leaves a legacy of behaviours passed on to organisational staff. This is also passed on through those the role models have nurtured in the wider sector. Examples include:

*“She has always been about bringing (on) other people. .... She said “right, you adapt something” so she trusted him and she gave him work and he brought in all of us to audition and then that became the company”* (Participant 3, leader female, BAME).

*“the legacy he left at Contact and subsequent people I have worked with who know him have that ethos. Just having that willingness to listen, open up doors and barriers. That felt like a breath of fresh air 10/15 years ago”*Participant, FG2, practitioner female, BAME).

### **Reflections of Ourselves: Visibility, Authenticity and Representation**

The findings show that role models of all ethnicities can play a significant part in supporting BAME career progression but an ethnic connection and visible reflection of oneself was

important to BAME participants. Participants would emphasise, for instance, *“they [role models] were my connections with black culture”* (Participant 7, leader, female, BAME).

For our white participants, ethnicity played less of an important role. One white female leader described Althea Efunshile, a black woman, as her role model. She emphasised that *“I don’t admire someone just because they are white and a woman... there has got to be something more to it”* (Participant 5, leader, female, white). However, she did acknowledge that *“I can’t quite put myself in a position of being in a world where people don’t look like me”*.

For those BAME participants who had referenced and benefited from white role models, one underlying factor was they were simply not role models that reflected them in the industry as highlighted in this statement. *“I am thinking, god, do I have an East Asian role model?”* (Participant 3, leader, female BAME).

The lack of role models and BAME workforce diversity in general contributed to feelings of isolation, exclusion and disconnection from the wider world amongst BAME participants:

*“the problem is when you go into a space and you see nobody who looks like you. Automatically the assumption is ‘I suppose it’s not for me’ or ‘is there somewhere where they hide all the black people or something like that?’* (Participant 1, leader, male, BAME).

*“as human beings we seek to see ourselves, you know, reflected, and if you don’t then you stop existing”* (Participant 3, leader, male, BAME).

Overall our findings clearly show that the importance of the visible presence of individuals who look like oneself and who are leaders and in positions of power and thus can be role models cannot be underestimated.

The BRIGHT LIGHT moment, that our participant experienced when watching four Asian Males Actors on stage in “Snookered, for instance, was only possible because there was an ethnic identification. Importantly, participants expressed a strong desire for authentic rather than stereotypical representation from their on stage and screen role models: *“Idris Elba kind of got me in such that he doesn’t perpetuate a stereotype of a black British male”* (Participant, FG3, Student, male, BAME).

The need for authenticity off stage was as strongly felt by participants. Celebrating difference, rather than promoting conformity was seen as leading to a more fertile environment within which those from BAME backgrounds could succeed. Role models who could express their individuality and own culture were perceived as inspiring and empowering:

*“young black man, athletic, brilliant personality, great character, small afro, I had never seen that working in the arts before, a hoody on that said BRAT across the back and he walked around like he ran the show [...] For me, coming from working at The National where the only people who really looked like me were the security guards and the cleaners, like really, that was like wow”*(Participant, FG1, Male BAME).

A final and interesting finding in relation to visibility of BAME role models illuminates what can happen if the BAME role model is perceived as representing ethnicity through a white lens, and as operating almost as a puppet for the dominant white elite.

*They [theatre establishment] want to cherry pick and groom right from the beginning. They are selecting young people and I do think there is a grooming culture because I*

*know people who have got more experience, have got a really good CV, they are not being taken on[...] we are going to get someone a bit younger who is sort of showing promise and then they are a bit more open to maybe influence of how we want things run....it is perpetuating the same ways of working, keeping the same structures in place, thinking this is the way we do it so you fit in to our model. There is nothing diversifying about it“ (Participant 2, leader, female, BAME).*

Ethnic visibility becomes part of the problem when it is seen to perpetuate the same old power structures, rather than part of a real shift to workforce diversity.

## Discussion

The findings have shown that role models are important for BAME workers' successful careers in theatre. BAME role models in particular have a positive impact access to the industry and early – mid career experiences. Firstly, BAME role models encourage connections between BAME communities and work on stage, and support confidence in aspiring BAME workers that the theatre industry may offer a viable career. Secondly, BAME role models create inclusive working environments, and promote behaviours that can inspire personal growth in others. Thirdly they can instigate change by challenging the existing power structures and systems that traditionally favour white middle class male progression. Fourthly, BAME workers can be supported to succeed in a career in theatre through timely and long-term interventions from role models that include sharing industry knowledge, mentoring and career advice, being empowered to take risks and responsibilities, and support in times of need and challenge. These interventions contribute significantly to career progression, enabling these BAME workers to become future role models and sector leaders. It is therefore likely that more visible BAME role models and leaders in theatre would result in an increase in BAME workforce diversity.

Role models impact on individuals both long and short term. A short-term role model, a BRIGHT LIGHT, can incite an immediate aspiration or insight. Visual reflection in terms of ethnicity is of particular importance for a BAME individual's relationship with BRIGHT LIGHTS. Long-term role models can be seen to display three typical functions, that of GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS.

**GUIDES** model behaviour to emulate, have values that chime with others, are successful in their chosen profession and are seen to be highly skilled. GUIDE role models can be seen in the public sphere, and observed from a distance, as well as directly in the workplace.

**FORGERS** carve a path that others want to follow. Their presence in a position of leadership can be perceived to be breaking down barriers, taking risks, leading the way, and, importantly, not closing the door behind them.

**ENABLERS** affected individuals through specific interventions or contributions to the paths of others. Enablers give strength, support, insight, knowledge, encouragement, permission and access, often in very concrete situations. They demystify the theatrical process and support career progression.

The discovery of these types of functions a role model fulfils has important practical implications. It challenges notions of what constitutes a role model and who can be one. Emphasising the different functions opens up spaces for individuals to assume role model status in specific areas rather than across the board of personal practice and persona. In this way, recognising the different role model functions identified in our study can allow more role models to emerge across the industry. Similarly, recognition of the different contributions GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS make, can encourage individuals to look for different types of role models, especially at different points in their careers. Instead of searching for a "perfect professional" role model, aspiring actors, artists and workers can look to a range of people for inspiration and support in a variety of ways. Those in positions of leadership, knowing that they can be perceived as role models, can be reassured by the fact that they do not need to be "all things to everyone". They can show themselves to be an GUIDE to some in areas of their own strength and expertise, whilst also being an ENABLER for others, who may need practical intervention on, for example, networks.

The remainder of this section will discuss key findings in light of current research, and the industry debate on workforce diversity.

### **Visible representation is key**

Visible BAME role models, such as actors on stage, provide an opportunity for BAME audiences to feel represented on stage. This visible representation, in terms of ethnicity, is important because it shows that the lives of BAME communities matter and their voices are credible enough to be heard.

As described in the findings, important changes can take place when an individual experiences a BRIGHT LIGHT moment, such as seeing an all-black Macbeth on stage for the first time. World views can alter in a split second and a theatre industry that is still described as “*hideously white*” (Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation 2016) can offer possibilities to BAME communities that an all-white Macbeth never will.

There is a real hunger for three dimensional, truthful portrayals of individuals from BAME communities, and when would be actors see it, they seize upon it “*I was stunned by his acting and I was like ‘I want that to be me, I want to be as good as that’*”(Participant, FG3, student, male BAME). It inspires excellence.

These BRIGHT LIGHT moments on stage, rely on BAME actors. The Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation Report Centre Stage (2016), recommends that Producers, Directors and Creative teams take a lead to encourage a more ethnically diverse workforce through colour blind casting, and that theatres encourage more plays written by BAME playwrights.

Both recommendations are worthwhile, change can certainly be encouraged to take place by decision makers’ awareness of the need to employ more BAME actors or find more BAME plays. However, we know from ACE (2016) and Creative Skillset (2012) data that the majority of decision makers will be white, and possibly middle class. What isn’t taken into account in Centre Stage’s recommendations is the conscious and unconscious bias that comes into play when white cultural industry professionals make decisions about who to employ.

There is still an underlying assumption in the theatre industry that talent is inherent and easily identifiable, therefore there is an equality of opportunity available for individuals. An example of this can be seen in principle Adrian Hall’s defence of The Academy of Live and Recorded Arts, low number of BAME students, as due to an admissions policy which is “*free from bias*”, and a determination to not risk “*quality of entrants*”.

However, as Banks (2015) asserts, talent can be seen as a social construct and decision-making processes can be hampered by the conscious and unconscious perception of creativity and artistry being held in the image of the white, middle class, European male (Eikhof 2017). ALRA’s position is uninformed and in the Centre Stage instance, all white producers, creative teams and casting directors are not likely to employ BAME actors or commission BAME playwrights just because they are encouraged to.

The findings have shown that BAME leaders and role models have played a significant part in opening the door to the theatre industry to others from BAME background. This suggests that using a diverse team of decision makers would reduce the bias that is present in decision making processes made by a completely white team, leading to more plays by BAME playwrights and more BAME actors on stage, ready to be BRIGHT LIGHTs for their audience.

Such processes would not only likely increase workforce diversity on stage, but, if genuinely adopted across recruitment procedures, could potentially bring those BAME directors,



producers, dramaturgs that currently work in the margins into the mainstream arena themselves, building their influence and impact on the sector.

### **GUIDES: and their impact on personal growth and career progression**

BAME role models can not only inspire an immediate change in an individual view of the world through a BRIGHT LIGHT moment, when the GUIDE function of a role model is activated, there is opportunity for personal development and growth that can support concrete career progress. GUIDES can be observed from afar and support positive behaviours in the workplace, can encourage individuals to take steps out of their comfort zone, and enable those that follow them to identify their own strengths and qualities.

Engagement with GUIDES, to identify the personal strengths, qualities and ambitions that will support an individual to progress in their arts career, could be turned into a really useful tool for early – mid career individuals. The literature has shown that BAME workers in the cultural industries can feel isolated, invisible, have low employment mobility and are disillusioned by the perception of the “old boys network” (Grugulis and Stoyanova 2012; Boulton 2015; Eikhof 2017; Cultural Leadership Programme 2008). In particular it has been identified that BAME individuals are not progressing from entry to higher levels (Cultural Leadership Programme 2008; Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation 2016). The bias in decision making processes has already been discussed as a factor that inhibits BAME career progression and leadership training programmes such as the Cultural Leadership Powerbrokers programme, have also attempted to address the lack of BAME progression, but this initiative closed in 2015. Current Arts Council diversity initiatives also only serve a limited amount of BAME workers.

The findings here suggest an opportunity to advance the GUIDE function as a role model through further research into the creation of a simple toolkit for BAME students and workers. This toolkit could be an online resource. It could include resources, for example a questionnaire, that identifies an individual’s strengths, areas of preference and goals, alongside an opportunity to identify your own role model, or choose from individuals within the online resource. An analysis of the role model, their behaviours and career progression, would enable the individual to reflect on what that illuminates within themselves, and then use these discoveries as a basis for career progression choices and need for further training.

This toolkit could be used in conjunction with drama school and university studies, and also as part of an annual appraisal system. This would have the potential therefore to reach greater numbers of BAME students and workers, than current diversity initiatives allow for.

### **FORGERS: being successful, in and out of the system**

In an industry that is still reliant on historical models of production that disadvantage women, and people from BAME and working-class backgrounds (Eikhof and Warhurst, 2013), the findings reveal that FORGER role models, carving new pathways to success, creating new artistic terrains and rejecting established power structures can particularly inspire confidence in BAME workers. Finding alternative routes to success gave participants hope that they could achieve without “white approval” or needing to compromise or conform. They could bypass the need to “*learn the language*” and “*manage the conversation*” as playwright Emteaz Hussain revealed at the 40 Years On conference (Shaikh 2016). Individuals following FORGERS, can be inspired to take risks, lead as “themselves” and to break down barriers.

But, do such alternative routes bring with them the same industry respect and economic remuneration as afforded those who follow existing structures? Only six of the Stage Top 100 Power List of influential people in theatre were from BAME backgrounds, and at the 2016 Evening Standard Theatre Awards no established BAME artists or actors gained awards (although new and emerging talent awards went to BAME writer Charlene James and actor

Tyrone Huntley). BAME leaders, were also disproportionately running small organisations, which makes analysis of BAME leaders salaries in the sector impossible to analyse “as there are none at any of the top 20 most heavily subsidised theatres” (Hutchinson, *The Stage*, 2016).

This industry, and economic, recognition may not be an influencing factor for the careers of FORGERS who were known to demonstrate strong values, but by remaining on the margins (or being forced to only operate on the margins) the potential positive influence FORGERS can have on BAME workers is reduced unless their presence is given high profile. Operating on the small scale can mean having little capacity to influence those working in larger, mainstream theatre, because their contributions to the industry are not recognised.

More involvement of small scale organisations and their leaders in partnership projects, sector conferences, discussions, consultations will enable these BAME FORGER leaders to be more visible, gain a profile, have more influence, and therefore more opportunity to act as the positively influential role models that they are.

Not all FORGERS worked outside of the mainstream system, but what clearly marks them as FORGERS is an authenticity that challenges both racial stereotypes, “*they don’t go along with the stereotype of what a black woman would play*” ( Participant, FG3, student, female, BAME) and theatrical stereotypes “*small afro, I had never seen that working in the arts before, a hoody on that said BRAT across the back and he walked around like he ran the show,* (Participant, , FG1, practitioner, male, BAME).

Here FORGERS are not only challenging how we navigate and make theatre, but also who has the creativity, artistry and authority to do that. They are deconstructing the industry reliance on the persona of the white male Bohemian artist (Eikhof 2017), and replacing it images of artistic leaders that look very differently.

### **ENABLERS: Changing the system from within**

If FORGERS can be seen to be operating mainly outside of mainstream industry the ENABLER role model functions of opening doors, demystifying the industry, empowering others, mentoring and supporting long term career goals, rely on some degree of insider knowledge or position in the theatre sector that will facilitate the ability to intervene.

The importance of these functions cannot be underestimated for BAME worker progression. They actively address the barriers to equal participation as identified in the current research (Eikhof & Warhurst 2013; Banks 2015; Maxwell 2004; Grugulis and Stoyanova 2012; Boulton, 2015; Eikhof 2017)

The research identifies breaking into networks as key to career progression. Demystifying the industry and its processes works towards providing a more equal playing field for BAME workers. It can potentially encourage transparent processes rather than informal recruitment practices. Empowering BAME workers implies a trust in their abilities and a belief in that individual. This can be a powerful confidence boost and tool for career progression. Mentoring is a tool used in many leadership and career development programmes, and so to find this as part of the ENABLER function, however informally, is a positive support for BAME individuals to attain their career goals.

BRIGHT LIGHTS, GUIDES or FORGERS can all impact on others without directly engaging with an individual but an ENABLER’s power resides in the relationship that they have with an individual and the interventions that they can facilitate. ENABLER functions, could actually be seen as part of a leadership job description, and the mechanisms through which each function is supported, can be through a variety of role models.

One noticeable finding was that for some of the BAME leader participants, their ENABLER role model was white, not BAME. This was potentially due to a lack of available BAME role models at the time, but also reveals that for some of the ENABLER functions, a level of seniority and leadership is required – which BAME workers are still less likely to have assumed than white workers. These BAME participants also all named other BAME GUIDE or FORGER role models who had influenced them alongside their ENABLERS, which concurs with the finding that seeing oneself reflected in role models is crucial. The findings suggest that had the ENABLERS in these cases also been BAME their impact would likely have been even greater. BAME leadership at senior level is required to allow BAME ENABLER role models to flourish and support others.

The research showed that BAME leaders in positions of leadership can suffer from a lack of success, burnout and isolation (Cultural Leadership Programme, 2008). The findings also suggested isolation can be a factor when you are a lone BAME individual in a white landscape. BAME role models are potentially vulnerable once they have achieved these sought-after leadership roles. Could being an ENABLER role model for other BAME workers actually work towards alleviating some of those feelings of isolation and therefore strengthen that BAME leadership?

### **Role Models in relation to Industry initiatives and change**

There is once again a call to action to address workforce diversity and the gap in BAME senior leadership. Arts Council England is addressing this through its Diversity Initiatives; Sustained Theatre, Elevate, and Change Makers.

These initiatives clearly address some of the barriers for BAME workforce diversity, and the Sustained programme has identified the role of “Enablers” as crucial to supporting access to available opportunities for BAME artists in the north of England. However, because the initiatives are operating within the current structures of the industries there is little certainty that they can provide long term and widespread change. Initiating BAME practitioners into existing networks will advantage those accepted into the Sustained Programme but will perpetuate the reliance on networks and social capital for progression through the industry. Training and developing more BAME cultural leaders is vital, but when they enter the job market they will still encounter decision makers who’s default bias will be towards the white dominant elite. The low pay advertised for some of the creative roles advertised, pitches the initiatives at emerging artists and doesn’t address the lack of opportunity for those with experience, but not able to progress, or who can’t afford to work long hours for little pay. There is also little acknowledgment of conscious or unconscious bias and no approach to changing the project models of production that we know favour those able to accept short term employment, low pay and job insecurity.

The findings have demonstrated the powerful influence that BAME role models can have on BAME workforce diversity. An increased number of BRIGHT LIGHT moments, would support aspiration of BAME young people to enter into the arts. A GUIDES toolkit could provide students and entry level workers a tangible way to identify their own strengths and career potentials. Raising the profile of existing FORGERS, particularly in the mainstream, will offer BAME, and other workers and organisations, alternative ways to approach creating theatre and place a recognised value on authentic leadership. Inviting the next generation of BAME senior leaders to become ENABLERS, could support not only the careers of those for whom they are a role model, but their own inclusivity in the industry. The Conclusion below offers some practical recommendations for how these changes might be facilitated.

# Conclusions and recommendations

Despite BAME artist and industry efforts over the past 40 years, and the introduction of the Equalities Act in 2010 there is still a lack of BAME workforce diversity across the arts and cultural sector, and in theatre. (ACE 2016a) Moreover, there is a profound lack of BAME workforce diversity at leadership level, with the majority of senior BAME leaders (of Arts Council England's supported NPO's) running small organisations (ACE 2016b). Nevertheless, there is an ambition from sector bodies, campaign groups and high-profile celebrities for the arts and cultural sector to diversify its workforce, in order to fully reflect society.

Academic research provides some insight into a range of barriers to workforce diversity. These include; persistence of a creative industries production model that favours the progress of white middle class men and does not yet recognise the inherent bias of decision making procedures (Eikhof and Warhurst 2013; Eikhof 2015; Boulton 2015) and a reliance on networks and social capital that restricts opportunities for women, and those from working class and BAME backgrounds, (Grugulis and Stoyanova 2012; Boulton, 2015). There is, however, relatively little focus specifically on theatre and BAME inequalities.

Studies into role models in relation to entrepreneurs have shown they are important for individuals' career ambitions, in particular when there are issues of underrepresentation and inequality (e.g. Summers et al. 2014,) and Allen and Hollingworth (2013) have shown how young people's perceptions of the cultural industries influence their likelihood to pursue a career in this area. Again, these studies have their limitations with reference to BAME role models in theatre. This study however, provides fresh insights into the experience of BAME workers in relation to role models in theatre, that can have practical implications across the arts and cultural industries.

This study shows that role models are important for BAME workers' career aspirations, experiences and progression. Firstly, BAME role models encourage connections between BAME communities and work on stage which supports BAME individual aspirations. Secondly, they create inclusive working environments, and promote behaviours that can inspire personal growth in others. Thirdly, BAME role models can instigate change by challenging the existing power structures and systems that traditionally favour white middle class male progression. Fourthly, BAME workers can be supported to succeed in a career in theatre through timely and long-term interventions from role models that include sharing industry knowledge, mentoring and career advice, being empowered to take risks and responsibilities, and support in times of need and challenge. These interventions contribute significantly to career progression, enabling these BAME workers to become future role models and sector leaders. It is therefore likely that more visible BAME role models and leaders in theatre would result in an increase in BAME workforce diversity. This workforce diversity, in turn, is likely to enable theatre to more successfully reflect the multiplicity of voices, creativity and stories of contemporary British society.

## Recommendations

### Industry Awareness Raising

Although there is a sector wide general consciousness of the lack of BAME workforce diversity in theatre, awareness of the barriers to equal participation, e.g. inherent bias of decision makers, reliance on production models that favour white middle class men, appears less developed. The insights from this study, highlighting the role model functions of BRIGHT LIGHTS, GUIDES, FORGERS and ENABLERS can support practical steps towards the alleviation, in part, of some of those barriers. This could be achieved by:

- printed and online materials that detail key findings, feature BAME role models and highlight recommendations;
- facilitated tailored discussions for organisations, drama schools, groups of leaders, gatekeepers, or decision makers, funders, etc that will open the conversations around workforce diversity, bias, role models and ethnicity. These will focus on the possibility for change for individuals, organisations, and across sector areas for example, casting, literary;
- working with theatre boards and senior leaders to look at how the ENABLER set of actions can be incorporated into relevant job descriptions.

### **Greater profile of existing BAME role models**

This study has found that visibility of BAME role models can play a crucial part in BAME workforce diversity. It is known that BAME leaders and role models are found running smaller Arts Council supported NPO organisations and it is also likely that more BAME role models can be found running organisations not in receipt of regular Arts Council support, or operating as sole artist/practitioners. A detailed mapping exercise to discover more details about where BAME artists/practitioners are working would increase visibility of and improve access to BAME role models. Raising the profile of these BAME role models through inviting them to industry wide conferences, symposiums, round table discussions and other events has the potential to inspire both BAME workers and enable a wider sector recognition of the contribution of these role models. This profile raising would also empower these BAME role models to fulfil some of the crucial FORGER and ENABLER functions, for other BAME workers.

### **BAME role model toolkits**

This study has highlighted the opportunity to advance the GUIDE function as a role model through the creation of a simple online toolkit for BAME students and workers. The toolkit could include resources, for example a questionnaire, that identifies an individual's strengths, areas of preference and goals, alongside an opportunity to identify your own role model or choose from individuals within the online resource. An analysis of the role model, their behaviours and career progression, would enable the individual to reflect on what that illuminates within themselves, and then use these discoveries as a basis for career progression choices and need for further training. This toolkit could be used in conjunction with drama school and university studies, and also as part of an annual appraisal system.

### **Further research**

The intersectionality between ethnicity, other protected characteristics and also social class has not been the focus of this research but previous studies indicate that these are important in relation to equality of access and progression and should therefore be more systematically explored in future research.

A pilot case study, introducing some of the recommendations detailed above with organisations and BAME students and workers, could explore and evaluate the impact of increased BAME role models and leaders on workforce diversity.

The overall aim of this study was to facilitate change, and this project has opened up vital conversations and generated insights that deserve to be continued and explored further if we want to support a diverse workforce and see confident, adaptive and resilient BAME workers and leaders across our theatre and cultural sector.

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