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**Title:** Leadership of Black Women Faculty in Otolaryngology -- More than A Rounding Error

**Short Running Title:** Leadership of Black Women in Otolaryngology

*Letter in Reference to:*

Uppal PA, Kollu T, Thomas M, Mammen L, Mortensen M. Otolaryngology Department and Society Leadership: Evaluation of Diversity in a Nationwide Study. *Laryngoscope*. 2022 Sep;132(9):1729-1737. doi: 10.1002/lary.29957. Epub 2021 Dec 2. PMID: 34854488.

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**This is the author manuscript accepted for publication and has undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record. Please cite this article as doi: [10.1002/lary.30552](https://doi.org/10.1002/lary.30552)**

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**Funding:** None

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors have no conflicts of interest

**Disclosures:** The authors have no financial disclosures relating to this manuscript

**Keywords:** diversity; equity; inclusion; inclusivity; leadership; otolaryngology; medical education; academic medicine; tenure and promotion; women; underrepresented in medicine; URiM; intersectionality; minority; ethnic; racial; Black; African American; Latin American; Latinx; professor; American Association of Medical Colleges

**Submission Type:** Letter to the Editor

**Word count:** 359

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We commend *The Laryngoscope* for promoting scholarship around diversity, equity, and inclusion in otolaryngology – head and neck surgery.<sup>1-6</sup> We read with interest the article by Uppal and colleagues on otolaryngology departmental and societal leadership.<sup>7</sup> The authors found that otolaryngology has an underrepresentation of women and specific ethnic-racial group leadership, underscoring the importance of recognizing underrepresented women leaders in medicine. These trailblazers elevate the specialty with their achievements and inspire the next generation through role modeling, mentoring, and sponsorship – contributions often underappreciated. It was, therefore, regrettable that this article did not fully report data on URiM women professors and leaders.

Figure 1C, labeled "Full Professor by Race and Gender," omits the categories of Black and Latina women. There is also no mention of these women in the paper's results section. Yet, the AAMC data table of faculty by sex, race/ethnicity, gender, and department from 2020 reports them. Why the exclusion? A similar omission of Black men who were Assistant or Associate Professor occurred. We were also disheartened that these errors were not identified by the peer review process.

In addition, the study inferred a person's race, ethnicity, and sex based on "name, image, country of medical school, languages spoken, and other publicly available information." These measures introduce bias into the analysis and constitute a major flaw. We cannot presume someone's identity based on a picture or their given name. More reliable resources, for example the Harry Barnes Medical Society and the Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the AAO-HNSF, could have been leveraged to ensure proper inclusion of URiM faculty and leaders.

URiM women continue to enter the fragile pathway to professorship and leadership, navigating challenges associated with the diversity tax and structural inequities.<sup>8,9</sup> URiM women are department chairs, division chiefs, program directors, and society leaders. Unless we collectively work to accurately measure and report the gap and take action to acknowledge and support those who choose to enter, these individuals will select another pathway.

The most meaningful message from the article is that small numbers do not mean a small impact, and partnership matters. Through stakeholder engagement and avoiding assumptions we can build together, brick-by-brick, creating a more inclusive and equitable future.

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