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Research Report

Breaking the Glass:
Understanding the Barriers faced
by Black Professional Women in
Career Progression

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1. Executive summary

There are more than 1.2 million Black and mixed-race women of Black heritage in England; almost 73,000 of them live in the North West (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Many Black women perform paid work, contributing their time and efforts to organisations in diverse sectors and of varying types and sizes. However, despite their valuable contributions to these organisations, they encounter several barriers that negatively impact their professional trajectories and hinder their progression to leadership positions. Many of these barriers can be explained by the fact that they live at the intersection of sexism and racism (at the very least), in a system of discrimination that perpetuates gender and race inequalities, which prevents their career advancement (TUC, 2020).

However, little is known about the barriers that Black Professional Women (BPW) have to overcome to reach leadership positions. Our Comprehensive Literature Review (see section 3.1) of 758 publications that address gender-based inequalities in career progression, found that only 19 (2.5%) focus on BPW experiences. More interestingly, none of the research employs a mixed-methods design.

Thus, this research report aims to address this gap by presenting a detailed mixed-methods study on the complex and unique barriers faced by BPW to advance their careers. Drawing from a rich set of qualitative and quantitative data, this research examines the experiences of 75 BPW who participated in an online survey (see section 3.2) and nine BPW who were interviewed (see section 3.3). By analysing these primary data and making connections with the findings reported by the scholarship on this topic, we sought to identify not only the barriers imposed on BPW in the workplace but also to examine how BPW have defied and overcome those barriers. As part of this process, we actively listened to these women and tried to capture their

experiences and translate them into action points that promote gender and race equity within organisations. Therefore, our main contribution lies in the recommendations we make to the Partner, organisations and allies to support BPW's career progression (see section 4.2).

Key messages

Overall, the data demonstrate that racism, lack of social capital and lack of transparency in promotion and salary raises are the most prevalent barriers to BPW in England. However, we recognise that these barriers represent only a small fraction of what BPW face daily in their workplaces and do not comprehend the complexity of the multiple intersections to which this group is subject. Thus, we recommend that future research consider the perspectives of an even more diverse group of BPW.

While it is well-known that Black women face unique barriers to advancing to leadership positions, the complexity of these barriers makes it difficult to unpack. How these barriers interconnect and how Black women's multiple social identities (i.e. age, class, sexuality, class, abilities, etc.) impact their career progression remain under-researched. The existing body of literature on the topic has identified some of the social, organisational and individual barriers for BPW, but it has not yet explored the complexity of such intersectionalities in depth. This gap reflects the wider lack of academic interest in this topic, something that our research seeks to challenge and address.

This research provides a snapshot of the experiences faced by BPW during unique historical moments. The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the repercussions of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and the recently published Sewell Report,[1] marked the social context of the study. Such context has both shaped the research design and approach and also has influenced the participants' perceptions.

[1] A controversial government report severely criticized by several UK-based scholars and by the United Nations Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent for undermining racial disparity in the UK.

2. Objectives and approach

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature as well as to practitioners interested in designing relevant strategies to help overcome these barriers and give visibility to BPW. This research is focused on BPW working in England, at least 18 years old, in all ranges of age, sectors, across the entirety of career lifespan and at different career stages (leaders/non-leaders). Considering the longstanding complexities of the phenomenon, a list of key concepts is presented in <u>section 6.1</u>. Additionally, the following qualitative and quantitative methods were employed:

1) Comprehensive Literature Review (CLR): A total of 1,806 keywords and abstracts were retrieved from academic databases; of these, 758 publications addressing gender-based inequalities in career progression were screened and 19 articles were selected to be fully evaluated given their focus on the barriers that BPW face to progress into leadership positions.

2) One-to-one semi-structured interviews with BPW: A total of nine in-depth interviews were conducted from 7 to 19 May 2021. The interviews were held online via Zoom due to the current COVID-19 restrictions. The interviews took approximately 45 to 75 minutes and were conducted online. Details of the participants are presented in <u>Table 1.</u>

3) Online survey with BPW: An anonymous online survey was conducted from 29 March to 25 May 2021. In total, the survey received 88 responses that met the inclusion criteria. Of the 88 BPW that accessed the survey, 13 did not fully complete the questionnaire, resulting in a total of 75 completed responses (quantitative data). Of 75, 21 participants answered the open-ended question (qualitative data). The

survey consisted of 17 questions and the average completion time was seven minutes. For a detailed summary of the demographic distribution of participants see Table 2.

Both the survey and the interview employed a self-selection sampling (or volunteer sampling), that is, a non-probability sampling technique and therefore the results presented in this study lack generalizability. Participants were recruited online (see Table 3) and did not receive any compensation; however, as an incentive for their participation, a prize draw was held among those participants who disclosed their email addresses.

Table 1. Demographic portrait of interview participants

Participant Pseudonym	Professional Title	Field	Region of England
Anna	Non-manager	Local Government	North West
Carla	Manager	Higher Education	North West
Danielle	Non-manager	Not-for-Profit Sector	North West
Elizabeth	Non-manager	Social work and Care	Midlands
Florence	Non-manager	Civil Service and Higher Education	North West
Natalie	Senior Manager	Health and Local Government	Midlands
Beth	Non-manager	Higher Education and Not-for-Profit Sector	North West
Sarah	Non-manager	Customer Service / IT	South East
Jo	Manager	Banking	North West

Note: Own elaboration.

3. Findings

To advance the understanding of the main barriers faced by BPW in their career progression, this section presents the main findings of the data collected and analysed. Accordingly, this has been organised as follows: Section 3.1 introduces the findings of the Comprehensive Literature Review. Then, section 3.2 discusses the findings of the survey. This is followed by section 3.3 which is dedicated to presenting the main results of the interviews.

3.1 Comprehensive Literature Review

The results from the CLR conducted in this study unveil interesting findings in terms of trends in the scientific literature. They are organised as follows: 1) major publication trends (see section 3.1.1) and 2) an overview of the literature available on BPW (see section 3.1.2).

3.1.1 Major trends

Using descriptive statistics, this subsection identifies the main trends in the relevant academic literature about BPW. Thus, numbers of publications, trends per year, country, sector, and methodology are analysed.

BPW publications

Regarding the publications about BPW, Figure 1 shows that after removing duplicates and assessing the abstracts and keywords, only 2.5% of the retrieved documents (n=19) examined the barriers that BPW face in their career progression, indicating a clear gap in the literature about the topic.

Most of the articles analysed (97.5%) discuss gender-based barriers, without focusing on the intersection of gender and race.

Figure 1. Comparison Women versus BPW articles in WoS
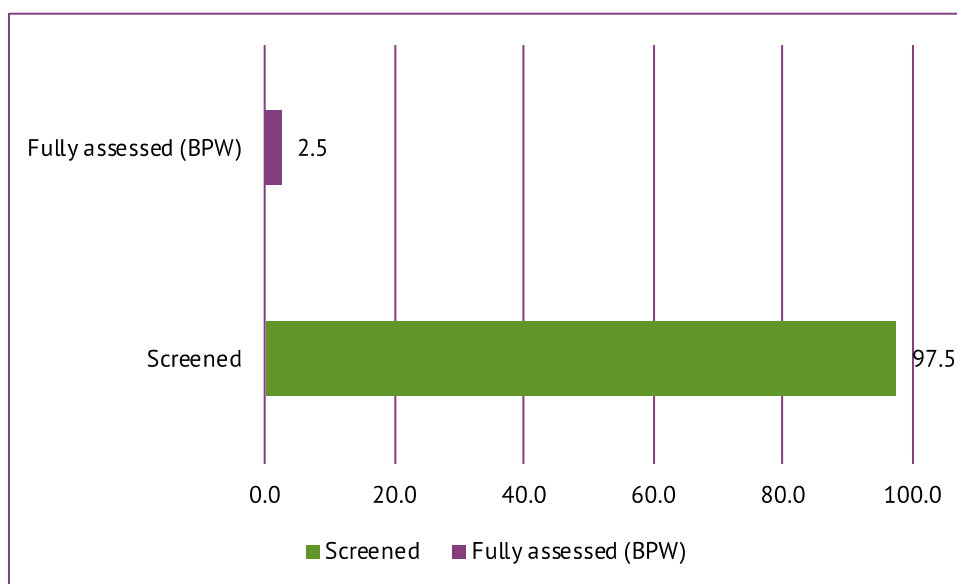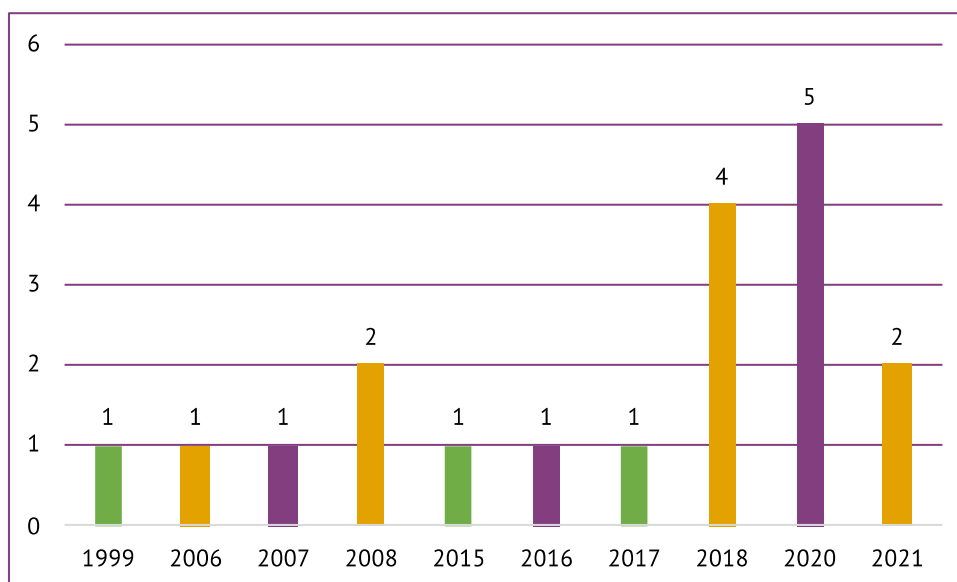

Note: Own elaboration. N= 758

Publication trends per year

Concerning publication trends per year, the analysis of the 19 articles shows growing interest in the topic since 2006, with only one article dedicated to the issue before that date. During the following decade (2006-2017), the number of articles remained steadily scarce, averaging a total of 1 article per year.

Interestingly, since 2018, the number of publications has increased, a phenomenon that could be associated with the growing interest in examining the barriers that Black Women face in general, with barriers related to BPW career advancement being among the most researched. Thus, social movements such as "Black Lives Matter" and "Me too", which gained significant public attention in the last few years, probably have impacted the interest of academic research in exploring the phenomenon.

The results of this section are presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Publication trends per year

Note: Own elaboration. N=19.

Publication trends per country

Most of the studies analysed were conducted in the United States (n= 8), followed by the United Kingdom (n = 5) Canada and South Africa (n= 2). These results are presented in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. Publication trends per country
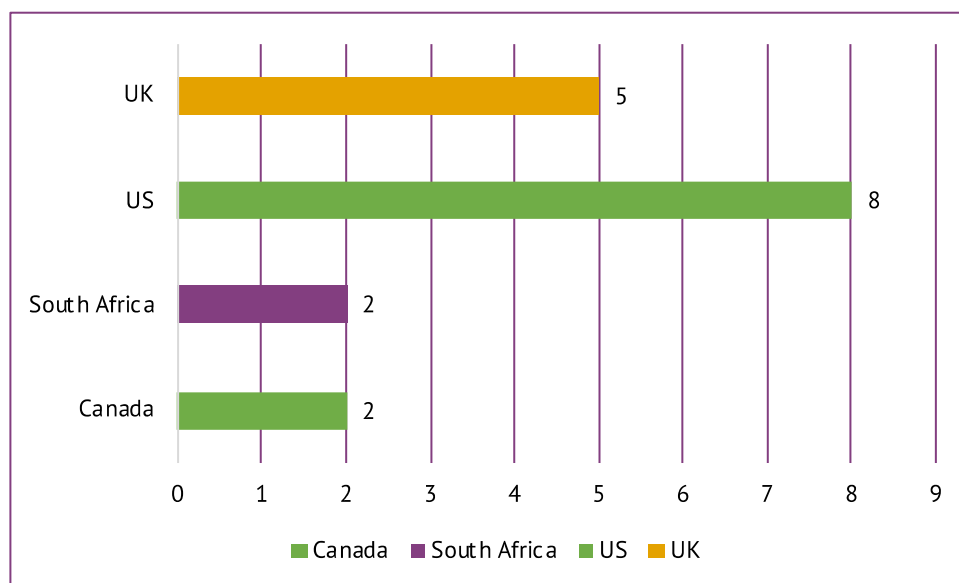
Note: Own elaboration. N=19.

Figure 4. Map of publication trends

Note: Own elaboration. N=19.

Publication trends per sector

Concerning the sectors explored in the selected studies, this aspect unveils a greater variety than the other dimensions analysed in this section. Indeed, the most studied sector is health (26.3%, n= 5), followed by the public sector (n= 3), studies focused on multiple industries (n= 3) and education (n= 3). Additionally, two studies were found analysing barriers in the private sector (n= 2), and one study focuses on the IT sector (n= 1). Despite this variety, there is a lack of studies focused on other areas and industries, such as STEM careers. Figure 5 illustrates these findings.
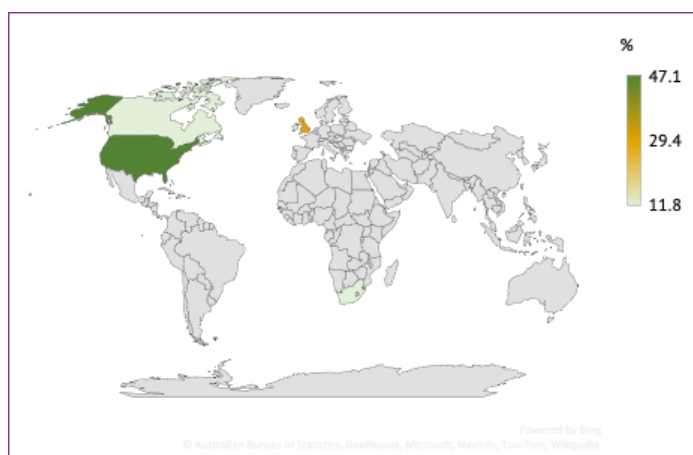
Figure 5. Publication trends per sector
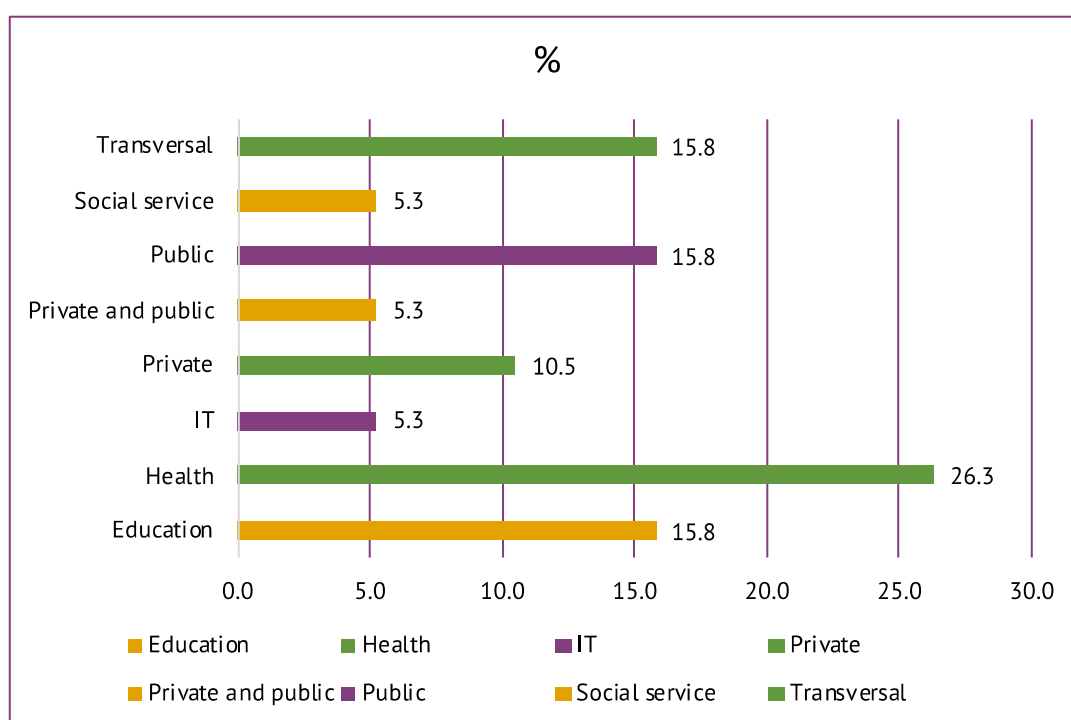
Note: Own elaboration. N=19.

Publication trends per methodology

The analysis of methodologies conducted in the studies contributes to information that shed light on what has been done on the subject and the methodological, allowing incumbent parties to outline strategies to deliver future innovative research.

Thus, the analysis of trends per methodology unveils that 76.5% of the studies were qualitative (n= 13), and 17.5% of the studies were quantitative (n= 3). Interestingly, none of the studies found was conducted using a mixed-methods design. In this regard, the current study emerges as an unprecedented contribution to the knowledge of the barriers that BPW face in their career progression to leadership positions. Details of these results are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Publication trends per methodology
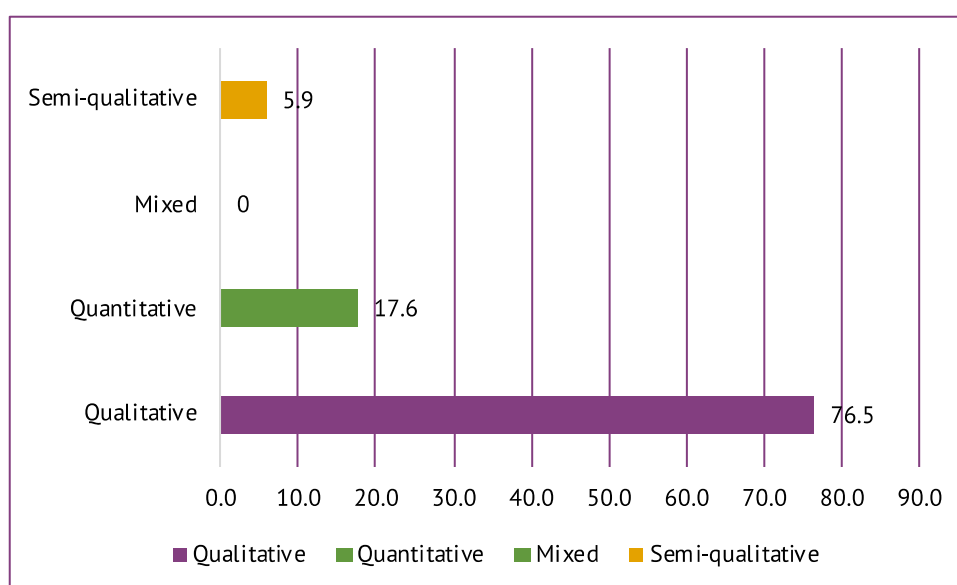
Note: Own elaboration.

The following section presents a comprehensive analysis of each of the analysed articles, identifying barriers and facilitators to BPW career progression.

3.1.2 Characterisation of the literature available about BPW

This subsection presents the results of the comprehensive analysis of the retrieved articles. The analysis was developed based on the main categories identified in the revision of relevant literature: social, organisational, individual/personal, and racial (McCullough, 2020; Rijal & Wasti, 2018; Xie & Zhu, 2016). Also, Table 4 identifies and summarises the barriers identified in each dimension.

Social factors

In terms of barriers, the revised articles identify social expectations and spread racist and sexist prejudices, gender explicit and implicit bias and stereotypes regarding BPW across society (Lugar et al., 2020; McGee, 2018; Mogadime, 2008; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Sales et al., 2019; Showunmi et al., 2016; Shung-King et al., 2018). For instance, Jefferies et al. (2018) and Mogadime (2008) recognise as key factors the perpetuation of historical, societal hegemonic discourses and racial oppression. Also, Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008) add to these barriers the phenomenon of colourism, referring to the differences of treatment based on skin tone.

Following this, in terms of social facilitators, the main topics highlighted in the academic literature were issues related to the existence of legislation attempting to protect individuals from any type of discrimination based on personal characteristics, such as the Equality Act 2010 in the United Kingdom (Bhopal, 2020; Bogg et al., 2007; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015) or the Employment Equity Act in South Africa (Motaung et al., 2017).

Institutional/organisational factors

Barriers at the organisational or institutional level identified in the literature unveil organisational practices and values that foster a detrimental culture for BPW (Bogg et al., 2007; Jefferies et al., 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). For instance, Bhopal (2020) explains that BPW feel organisational pressures after returning from maternity leaves. Moreover, Erskine et al. (2021) specify that institutional patriarchal logic and white supremacy are perpetuated at the organisational level, employing the concept of "misogynoir". Other authors propose that the organisations are predominantly "male's domains" (Lugar et al., 2020; McGee, 2018). Indeed, in a study developed in the education sector, Mogadime (2008) identified that decision-making boards or committees were predominantly white. When having any Black employee, these workers felt that these were chosen as an act of tokenism.

Also, in terms of stereotypes perpetuated at the organisational level, BPW suffer a series of prejudices, such as being seen as the "angry black woman" (McGee, 2018). Also, Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008) provide a comprehensive review of the most common stereotypes that BPW face, including "the supportive mammy", "the unqualified Jezebel", "the feisty sapphire", "the unstable crazy black bitch", and "the overachieving superwoman".

Interestingly, the findings of Bloch et al. (2021) propose that participants had more possibilities to occupy senior management positions in headquarters than branches offices. Considering that, traditionally, companies' headquarters tend to be located in capital or important cities across countries, it can be suggested that the geographical location plays an important role in BPW career progression.

Other organisational barriers identified by the authors were related to the lack of formal and informal network opportunities (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Wyatt &

Silvester, 2015), lack of role models and mentorship within the organisation (Showunmi et al., 2016; Shung- King et al., 2018), and sponsorship (Wyatt & Silvester, 2015). Following these lines, the same factors (i.e., informal and formal networks, role models, sponsorship, coaching and formal mentoring opportunities) were identified as facilitators for the progression of BPW in other articles (Allen, 2020; Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020; Hoover, 2006; Motaung et al., 2017; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Showunmi et al., 2016; Shung-King et al., 2018; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015).

Table 4. Summary of the main barriers and facilitators identified in the literature

Article	Barriers				Facilitators			
	Social	Institutional/ Org.	Personal/ Individual	Racial	Social	Institutional/ Org.	Personal/ Individual	Racial
1		X	X	X		X	X	
2		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
3		X		X				
4		X		X	X	X		X
5		X	X	X		X		
6	X	X	X	X		X	X	
7		X	X			X		
8		X	X			X		
9	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
10	X	X		X		X	X	
11	X					X	X	
12	X	X		X		X	X	
13	X	X		X		X	X	
14	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
15	X	X	X	X		X		
16		X		X			X	
17	X	X		X			X	
18	X	X		X		X	X	
19	X	X		X	X	X	X	X

Note: Own elaboration. N=19.

In addition, Shung-King et al. (2018), in a study conducted in the South African health sector, highlighted the positive contribution of supportive and collaborative teams (encouragement among team members). Finally, Bhopal (2020), Erskine et al. (2021),

Lugar et al. (2020), McGee (2018), Mogadime (2008), and Motaung et al. (2017) explain the relevance of organisational strategies to support this issue.

Racial factors

Racial factors were identified in most of the articles analysed, describing racism and bias in the organisations (Allen, 2020; Bogg et al., 2007; Erskine et al., 2021; Lugar et al., 2020; Maume, 1999; Mogadime, 2008; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Showunmi et al., 2016; Shung-King et al., 2018). Specifically, Bloch et al. (2020) developed a study in Higher Education (HE) institutions in the United Kingdom describing the presence of marginalized groups based on race and gender. Similar findings were presented in the work of Sales et al. (2019) developed in the United States.

Moreover, the research conducted in an educational institution in the United States by Cirincione-Ulezi (2020) described that working under racist conditions is characterised by constant exposure to microaggressions and stereotypes causing what the participants called "racial battle fatigue".

Finally, in terms of racial facilitators as "protected characteristics", the literature highlights the existence of legislation that aims to protect workers from discrimination in the workplace (Bhopal, 2020; Bogg et al., 2007; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015) such as the Employment Equity Act in South Africa (Motaung et al., 2017). Although most authors recognise that such legislation is not enough by itself, to overcome discrimination, it does provide an important baseline in the issue. Finally, the details of the reviewed articles are presented in Table 5.
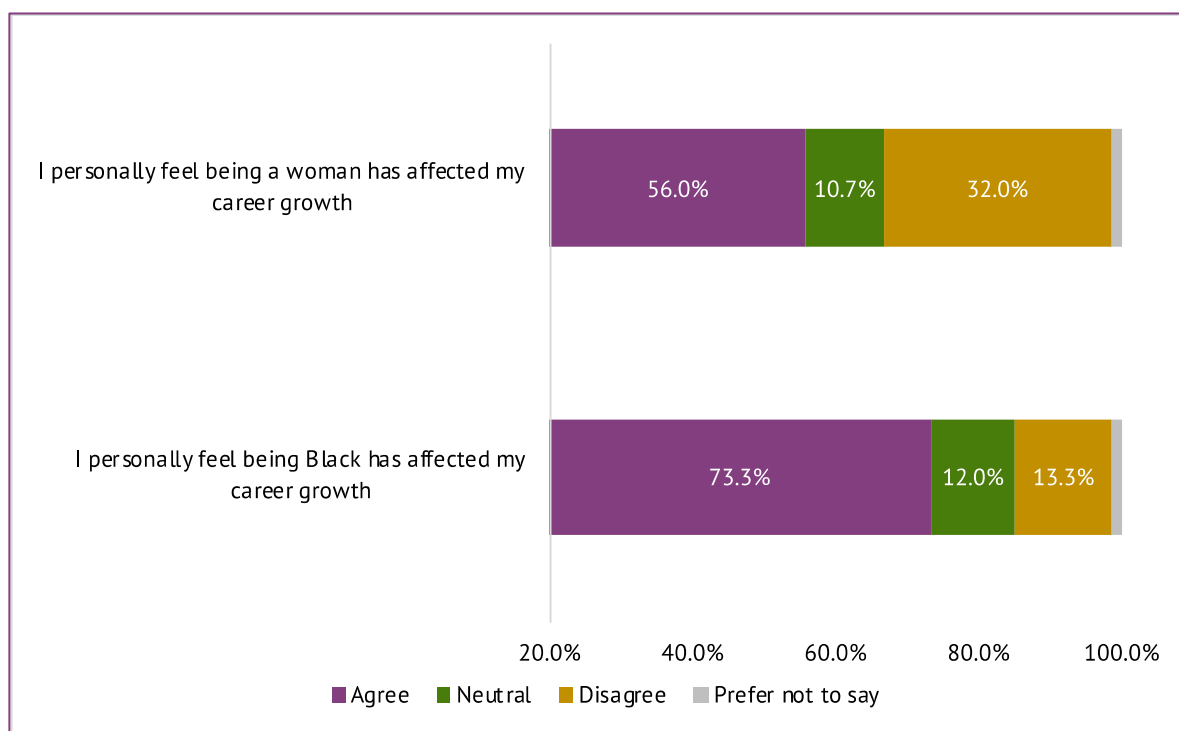
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3.2 Survey

This section presents the results of the online survey conducted with BPW. The main findings arising from the survey data can be grouped into three categories: 1) issues of race and gender presented in section 3.2.1; 2) barriers that BPW face to advance into leadership positions discussed in section 3.2.3; 3) participants' comments detailed in section 3.2.3. Additionally, Table 2 presents a demographic portrait of the participants.

Race and Gender

The survey findings indicate that BPW perceive the barriers they face to progress in their careers are more associated with their race than with their gender. A significant number of participants (94.7%) agreed that Black women face unique barriers to advancing to positions of leadership when compared to non-Black women. In the same vein, 73.3% affirmed that they feel that the fact of being Black has affected their career growth. In comparison, when asked to compare the barriers that women face with male professionals (both Black and non-Black), although 90.7% agree that women face unique barriers, only 56% of them stated that their career progression was affected by being women. In this sense, participants seem to agree that the glass ceiling for women exists, but only about half of them are able to identify this as a barrier that has prevented them from being promoted to leadership positions; on the other hand, almost three-quarters of participants stated that being Black has impacted their career progression (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Career growth and its relationship with being Black and a woman (% of respondents)

I personally feel being a woman has affected my career growth: Agree 56.0%, Neutral 10.7%, Disagree 32.0%

I personally feel being Black has affected my career growth: Agree 73.3%, Neutral 12.0%, Disagree 13.3%

Legend: Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Prefer not to say

Note: Own elaboration

The perception that being Black has influenced their career progression is more evident among participants with greater professional experience. Although the data show that there is no statistically significant relationship between the age of the participants and the impact of being Black on their career progression, there is a relationship between the number of years worked and the impact of being Black: 90% of those who have worked between 10 and 19 years agree that being Black has affected their career growth, a rate that drops to 44.4% among those with less than five years of professional experience. These findings reflect the fact that those who have been working for fewer years (and, consequently, have had fewer career advancement opportunities) are less likely to associate the impact of being Black with their career progression. However, the data also indicate that race is perceived as a potential barrier among respondents with more professional experience compared to

the less experienced ones. While all respondents who have between 5 and 19 years of working experience agree that "Black women face unique barriers when compared to non-Black women", 77.8% among those with less than five years of experience agree with this statement (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Comparison between the barriers faced by Black women, non-Black women and men (% of respondents)
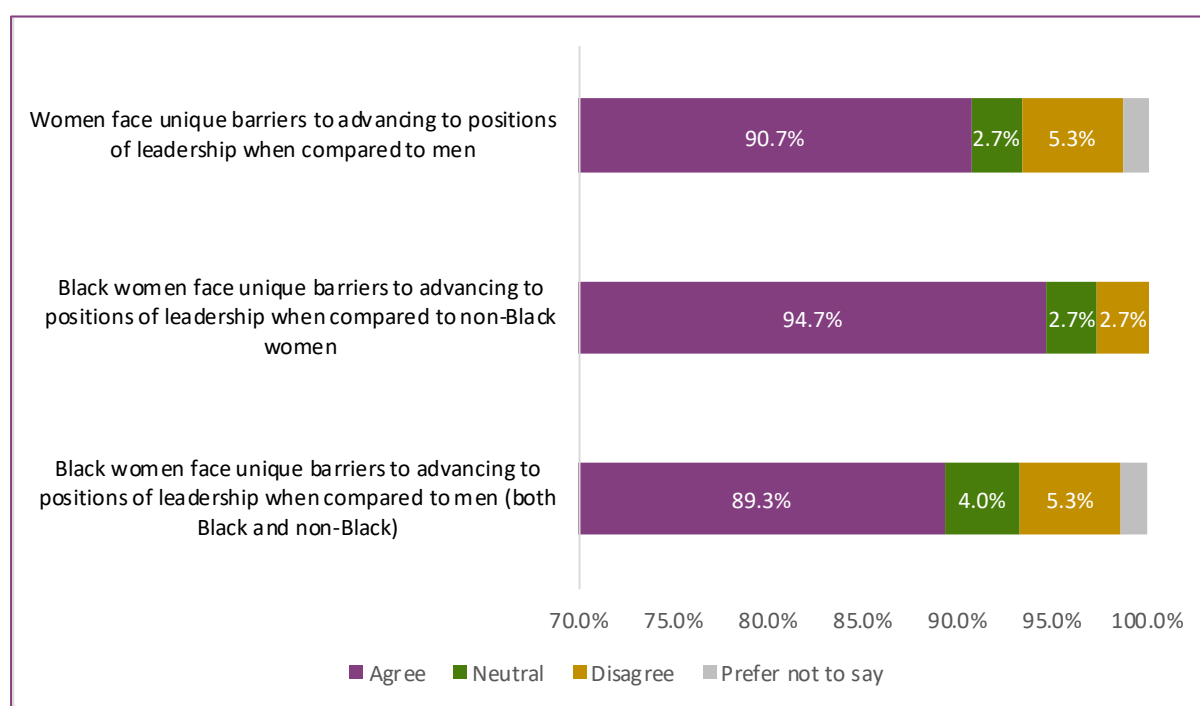
Note: Own elaboration

Barriers

Regarding the type of barriers that BPW face, "racism in the UK" (76%), "lack of social capital" (74.7%) and "lack of transparency in promotion and pay rises" (73.3%) were the barriers most often selected as "very important". In contrast, "travel requirements" (36%), "issues related to COVID-19" (32%), "heavy workload" (20%) and "personal safety concerns" (20%) were the barriers most often described as "not important". In terms of racism in the UK, there is a strong statistically significant

relationship with age. For instance, while 93.3% of respondents between 30 and 39 years of age reported racism as a "very important" barrier, only 61.5% of those between 18 and 29 years agree; at the other end, 23.1% of participants aged 18 to 29 considered racism to be a "not important" barrier. Likewise, data shows a strong statistically significant relationship between "difficulty to balance work and family" and age (with higher rates of participants considering it a "very important" barrier – 60% – among those aged between 40 and 49 years old). Conversely, no significant relationship was found between this barrier and caring responsibilities.

Participants also had the option of adding a barrier that was not listed. The responses varied widely; "menopause" (cited by two respondents), "being a single parent", "being young" and "insufficient knowledge of what opportunities are available" (each one cited by a different participant) are some of the barriers identified. A respondent also affirmed that she has "never witnessed any barriers for any women, in fact, the opposite is true; people bend over backwards to accommodate us".

When asked to rank the five main barriers they have faced throughout their careers, the barriers most selected as the most important were "lack of Black women mentors and role models" (21.3%), followed by "racism in the UK" (14.7%) and "lack of mentorship and sponsorship" (12%). For the second place, the barriers most chosen were "lack of opportunities and experience" (16%), "lack of social capital" (10.7%) and "lack of mentorship and sponsorship" (9.3%). Among those who chose to write an unlisted barrier, participants added "not being seen as a professional due to my look", "cultural/Professional adjustment after working & living abroad", "poor attitude, laziness, drugs, alcohol, obesity, poor English, entitlement, promiscuity", among others.

Other Topics Discussed by the Participants

In the open-ended question in which participants were invited to comment, one participant took the opportunity to express her concerns about the survey, affirming that women are favoured and stating: "I thank god [*sic*], I am not a white male as they face open hostility. If women and coloured men were treated the way that white men are now, it would be called racism and misandry". Similarly, another participant affirmed that "every opportunity is given to us; rules are changed for us; standards are lowered for us; we get the same pay, despite not performing to the required standard; we cry racism when there is none; we are allowed to be overweight/obese; this is not equality, this not what we have been fighting for". According to her, "people at the bottom of the food chain are white working-class men".

However, most of the participants expressed strong views that Black women face bias, prejudice and discrimination at the workplace as a result of the intersection of race and gender. According to a participant, "the combination of race and sex for women of colour means that we often work harder to get into leadership positions and if we do get there it is far from plane sailing compared with other groups. Racism and sexism increase and this needs to change". This was echoed by a participant who affirmed that "Black women have to tackle racism and stereotypical views alongside gender discrimination. Therefore tackling multiple disadvantage [*sic*]". In the same way, a participant stated that "the Intersectionality of gender and race creates a barrier for black women because they share neither race or [*sic*] gender with the dominant groups - white men and women". According to some participants, this is especially true in sectors such as law, librarianship, social work, health, and education.

Another recurring theme was the lack of equal opportunities at the workplace. According to a participant, "equality needs to be at the top of the agenda". In the same vein, a respondent commented that "Black women are regularly not included in

gender equality work". Another frequent topic was the lack of Black women role models. A participant, for instance, reported that after finally finding a Black women role model she has perceived the benefits of it in terms of "support, acknowledgement of the issues we face as we progress in our careers". Still on the subject, one participant stated that, after having benefited from the guidance of Black women throughout her career, she is currently committed to mentoring young Black women; however, according to her, they "resist any efforts to support them. They tend to pretend that everything is fine until a very serious moment of crisis. However, black men, White and Asian men/women have been very open and even actively sought ought mentorship [*sic*]".

Finally, participants also mentioned individual characteristics, such as "meekness to challenge and push back", "speech and dialect", "being perceived as young and therefore not professional" as having affected their careers. A participant also stated that she feels that wearing her natural hair does not appear professional to others. Another respondent highlighted that "Black women often are unable to take chance [*sic*] and risks with their jobs as they often don't have the luxury or the option not to work or to reduce hours (...) Leadership roles are risky and therefore can be off putting when there is financial leeway for 'failure'."

3.3 Interviews

The following analysis is broadly grouped under three overarching groupings: Personal/Individual, Social and Organisational Factors. Whilst this is a helpful means of presenting our data, and concentrating thought, it also seems important to highlight the intersecting nature of these subdivisions within the life of a BPW: evidently, some features may stretch across all three areas (as do race and gender), with others sitting more compactly beneath one tag. As was hoped, despite the

differences in the sector, current point in career lifespan, and location, clear themes emerged throughout the interviews, as did some illuminating differences. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most factors – by far – were those connected to organisational concerns; whilst those originating in participant's personal circumstances were the least numerous.

The analysis is shaped around particular concepts which emerged from both the interviewees' contributions and the literature reviewed. Specifically, informed by a womanist intention, ideas such as misogynoir, bias, stereotyping, otherness and the concrete ceiling function as helpful connection points between the women's experiences and the literature.

3.3.1 Personal/Individual Factors

Background, Class and Social Capital

> *Having to network as a black woman, it's that much more difficult*

Whilst not all women explicitly discussed their personal background in response to questions regarding personal circumstances, some did; others did so less directly. In addition to the evident commonality of having been racialized as Black and being women, at least four interviewees highlighted the fact that they grew up in working-class families, being the first to enter higher education. As such, the impact of being doubly – or commonly triply – marginalized at the intersection of race, gender, and class (Mitchem 2002), these women were keenly aware of what is commonly assumed in middle-class professional environments, and the reality from which they are coming. For example, Beth spoke about the fact that she is "a working-

class woman . . . a first-generation, you know, academic" and the impact this has on her in the professional context.

As with several other women interviewed, there was a strong sense of a consequent alienation experienced in the work environment as she had to learn to navigate the language, culture and social mores of the space, its norms (as in Kumra & Manfredi, 2012; Rijal and Wasti, 2018; Xie and Zhu, 2016). Beth and Natalie spoke, with triumph, of being able to use "their language" (Beth) - the language of the prevailing majority and culture, much like a pioneer exploring a new land. Whilst such versatility is an undoubted skill, the daily exercise of it for decades is costly – the "emotional labour" expended by Black women (Mitchem 2002), as Beth expressed it.

Participant responses also emphasised that the bi- or tri-dimensional alienation with which they live is also expressed in their consequent lack of insider knowledge and experience within their personal peer group or family context, rendering them also isolated within that space to some degree. Natalie (working at a very senior position within her organisation) countered this by intentionally gathering a "very small" support circle around her fellow Black "predominantly women" professionals – others who understand the particular experiences of challenges of her daily working lives. Another interviewee was instrumental in building a network for Black staff in her organisation. In this way, the women are seeking to establish safe supported spaces for themselves, and others, within which to process their experiences.

A further consequence of being from a non-traditional background is the lack of existing social capital into which the women can connect and from which they can draw (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Wyatt and Silvester, 2015). The resulting need for professional network building is rendered a further challenge due to the disconnect which can occur between the BPW and her surroundings. Elizabeth directly stated that "having to network as a black woman, it's that much more difficult simply

because unless somebody understands you" you may be perceived as being "a little bit aggressive, sometimes, or overconfident. Or also, as well, a threat". The BPW's implicit reference to the well-worn stereotype of the angry Black woman (McGee, 2018) neatly demonstrates misogynoir (Bailey, 2018), the unique coincidence of anti-Black racism and misogyny encountered by Black women and the psychological impact it can have.

Psychological Effects of Misogynoir

Several respondents shared candidly about their battle with Imposter Syndrome. Whilst this phenomenon is not unique to the Black woman, the accounts relayed by participants highlighted that their experience of misogynoir and, potentially, classism, left them labouring under the particular self-doubts which characterise this psychological battle. Beth saw her attaining of a PhD as "the culmination of misogyny and racism and classism and all of the -isms and, you know, against the North" because, upon reflection, she realised she had undertaken the higher degree in order to be accepted and validated in White professional spaces. The experiences which paved her route were characterised by a common practice of being professionally undermined, ignored and silenced – systemically by White male environments and structures (Miller, 2016; Britton and Logan, 2008), not necessarily always by White men (some of whom have shown themselves to be great allies, full of intentional action).

Natalie expressed the sense of constantly questioning why she was in the room and whether she deserved to be there, giving an insight into the psychological and emotional onslaught with which these women live as a consequence of (often unintentionally) violent structures and practices encountered in the workplace, a product of its systemic context (Czarniawska, 2017; Luhmann, 1986; Seidl, 2004).

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Counteracting that, Beth stated that she was aware of the strong prevailing sense that she should be grateful to be there but, in response, her assertion is that she has worked hard, deserves to be there, and the organisation should be grateful that she is there, enriching them.

The other face of misogynoir and its effects were referenced by one woman, who detailed a compulsion to work exceptionally hard (which she believed she had observed in the majority of other BPW) due to feeling a sense of responsibility to everyone racialized as Black: a responsibility to excel and to thereby not prejudice opportunities for those who will come behind her. This "whole host of motivations" (Beth's words, also Natalie's sentiment) identified by two interviewees actually reveals a further emotional weight under which the BPW may be living: both women identified the sense of the fragility of the moment, of the opportunity to be in the room and at the table; the huge responsibility of needing to overperform so that racial prejudices, stereotypes and negative expectations may not be fulfilled and exclusion (of one's whole community or demographic, not only oneself) justified. (See Lugar et al., 2020; McGee, 2018; Mogadime, 2008; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Sales et al., 2019; Showunmi et al., 2016; Shung-King et al., 2018 on the impact of social expectation and stereotyping).

Motherhood and Family Life

In common with women more generally, interviewees expressed a belief that motherhood (or the desire to be a mother in the near future) impacts their professional opportunities and makes them more concerned about the balance between their personal life and work. Some interviewees with children were not actively seeking to advance professionally at the time of the interview, prioritising their child, or acknowledged a potential conflict between career and family for them.

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Anna stated that "my child's very young, she's only six years of age (...) I have to have a work-life balance, so I'm not seeking anything higher at the moment. My job is very accommodating for me in my situation."

Danielle shared that she is not currently seeking a management position because she wants to start a family in the near future and she felt that the "pressure to work in the evenings and the pressure to work on the weekends" would probably be too much for her, alongside a family. The tone of inner conflict connected to this is worth noting, as she also reflected that "but then also I'm kind of stuck as well." Equally, a respondent without children (Elizabeth) said that "I haven't had children at 38; that's important and I think that probably would be a barrier in terms of me progressing to management. I don't think that it will be looked at favourably if they probably knew that I wanted to have children." Elizabeth's comments here echo Bhopal's findings (2020) that women feel organisation pressure after returning from maternity leave.

Equally, whilst speaking about her own rise to the upper echelons of leadership in several organisations, Natalie referenced the benefit of her having been flexible regarding location: she had lived and worked in Birmingham, London, Canada, and was now back in England; she regarded her ability to move to wherever the job was as a major strength and support in her ability to progress. Natalie also highlighted her deliberate decision to "no longer" own a house, further making her able to relocate with ease. In contrast, women with children felt a significant weight of responsibility to provide stability for the wellbeing of their children.

Age

Four interviewees highlighted age as a relevant factor. Interestingly, the women who did so focused on opposing ends of the spectrum.

Danielle reflected on the challenge of frequently being perceived as younger than she is (a problem she considers common for BPW), and thus less competent and experienced than she is. Highlighting an example from general life, she referenced her mother, who was asked to show her ID card until she was forty, and her cousin, a 35-year-old doctor who believes that patients do not take her seriously because she looks younger than she really is. Danielle stated that she is afraid clients will not take her advice seriously, as they may think she looks very young (she is 28 years old). She believes this because she knows that as a Black woman, people tend to perceive her to be younger than she is. Arguably, these assumptions to which the BPW are subject carry overtones of "the unqualified Jezebel" identified by Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008).

Other respondents used part of their interview to explore their struggle with Imposter Syndrome due to age, as opposed to gender, race or class. For example, Florence reported that being young, in addition to being Black, is not only a barrier to leadership positions but also impairs her self-confidence. She is the youngest on her team and believes that because she does not have as much experience as her colleagues; she cannot contribute to the discussions. Florence, alongside Carla, also felt unready for leadership due to age. Danielle reported (alongside the two already referenced) believing that people perceive her as too young to be in leadership. Particularly striking is the admission that these accumulated microaggressions and stereotypical expectations lead to self-censorship and silencing in the professional setting, an expression of "racial battle fatigue" as referenced by Cirincione-Ulezi (2020).

Finally, Beth expressed concern at being "an older woman" and considered too old when in professional competition with twenty-one-year-olds only a few years behind her professionally in her current field; however, these self-doubts overlook the

decades of field-relevant experience she brings to her current professional context – an experience which she knows her colleagues respect and envy. Some aspects of the formerly mentioned misogynoir- and classism-based Imposter Syndrome echo here also.

3.3.2 Social Factors

Racism, Unconscious Bias, Stereotyping

> *I would never dream of going into an interview with braids or my natural curly hair . . . So, I strip my culture away as much as possible*

The atmospheric elements of racism, unconscious bias and the psychological strain of negotiating stereotypes are, unfortunately, long-established and enduring social factors for Black women (McGee, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020), and the professional context seems to be no different.

Sarah, Elizabeth and Carla explicitly raise the issue of stereotyping and its effect on them. There are historically and contemporarily a range of negative stereotypes applied to Black women (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). One stereotype, in particular, was highlighted by all three of the women who addressed this problem directly: the angry Black woman (McGee, 2018). All three participants spoke about either being labelled "aggressive" or self-editing in order to avoid the easy misapplication of that label. For example, Carla stated that, because she believes that people see her as an intimidating person, she is more self-conscious about the way she behaves among her peers: "I am very mindful of the presence of how I come across." As a result, she tries to smile more and be more approachable.

Anna explained: "We talk about subconscious bias and all these, you know, fluff. I call them fluffy terms for racism. And so, yeah, before I even crossed the threshold, I know that I'm different. I have to think about how I have my hair. How I speak, what I'm wearing, obviously, but that's, you know, but I wouldn't say that's a racial thing. And when I attend interviews, I have straight hair. I would never dream of going into an interview with braids or my natural curly hair . . . So, I strip my culture away as much as possible." She also admitted to using her middle name, so that her name "sounds English". Approaching the issue from a slightly different vantage point, Natalie's response echoed Anna's admission. She spoke of other Black professionals she has encountered who feel they need to do everything they can to strip themselves of their Blackness – whether in terms of elocution lessons, choice of clothing, or even association with other Black professionals. Whilst Anna spoke from a position of having accepted this practice of assimilation and erasure of expressed identity or "culture", neither woman spoke about the psychological cost of such practices positively.

The following are all contemporary social factors, which exemplify enduring social factors around race: Black Lives Matter, Covid-19, the Sewell Report (2021).

Black Lives Matter

Only Sarah stated that her organisation had responded to the event of summer 2020 following the death of George Floyd and the resurgence of the BLM movement and the global cry for racial justice. All other participants stated that there was no response from their organisation, and no indication of it having had an impact in any way. Sarah's organisation, which did respond, created a Diversity and Inclusion Group, composed of interested employees from across the company. Although at its early stages, Sarah felt hopeful about it because of the person-centred culture which

undergirds the organisation's modus operandi. Whilst only Sarah was proactively offered support in light of the acknowledged emotional effects she may be experiencing, Natalie was able to access support because of the person-centred approach of her manager.

These were exceptions, though, and respondents felt that the general response reflected a general irrelevance of BLM to the organisation for which they work, perhaps best exemplified by Beth who directly asked for a response from her organisation. According to Beth, whilst there was a meeting, there was little engagement during the meeting and no outcome from it.

Covid-19

> 99
>
> *For me it's worse now because when I'm looking up on the screen, I'm seeing all White faces every single day*
>
> 99

In considering the impact of the pandemic on them as BPW, there were mixed responses. Whilst several participants said that they had been able to continue working remotely, which came with benefits, three participants (Beth, Natalie and Elizabeth) stated that they found the isolation created by the lockdown scenario had come at a high cost to their social well-being and their professional networking capability. Beth focused on the intense emotional tax of the pandemic: "The Experience I call it: the global pandemic, the experience of Black Lives Matter and COVID has just been emotionally draining. Yeah, I'm trying to manage that and children home-schooling and people dying in the community, and you know all of that."

Natalie highlighted the effect of attending streams of virtual meetings and being the only non-White face on the screen. Additionally, she highlighted the impact of losing

those incidental, small connections made through the working day in the office environment: "Where it hasn't been so good is the informal networks that you get face-to-face. (...) I don't do tea, but if I go to get water or I'm literally just walking down the corridor and I see someone." As a very senior staff member, Natalie emphasised how deeply she valued the human-to-human interactions she may have had with colleagues of varying levels, with some of whom she shares cultural connections. Such encounters offer refreshment in a context that is entirely White: "It's because we're very social creatures and we need to see a face that looks like us. (...) And for me it's worse now because when I'm looking up on the screen, I'm seeing all White faces every single day."

Consequently, Natalie has had to respond by creating her own access points for such refreshment during the pandemic. Both she and two other participants (Elizabeth and Beth) commented that whilst it can be challenging for BPW to network anyway, the pandemic had made it more difficult because remote meetings make fostering relationships more difficult generally, which may be further magnified by the presence of invisible barriers of stereotyping and unconscious bias. Elizabeth stated that "I think now it's even more difficult simply because we work from home, so it is difficult. Anyway, as a black woman trying to move up within local authorities is very hard. Even go work for a multicultural local authority, it's very difficult, but I think this is going to be even more difficult during COVID."

The Sewell Report

All interviewees, but one, were aware of the Sewell Report. Without exception, those women who were aware characterised it as "disrespectful" (Carla), "harming" (Anna). Elizabeth described it as "very much one-sided (...) a bit of a slap in the face (...) that we're ourselves within the world of where there was a lot of institutional racism, and

there's evidence, every single day in life." Carla said she felt "demoralised" and hopeless of change, whilst Florence highlighted her sense of voicelessness and invisibility when she stated that "it's just, it's like you haven't listened to a single word that people have said."

The interviewees' comments reveal that, in their experience, Kumra & Manfredi's (2012) conclusion that particular power dynamics, values, practices, bias and stereotypes remain untouched at all levels across modern societies is accurate. From this perspective, the Sewell Report certainly seems to highlight a system, where its different parts produce and reproduce themselves, impacting and influencing each other - in this instance - to the harm and further marginalization of the already minoritized.

3.3.3. Organisational Factors

Organisational Culture

> *The lower level, the more the lower the level, the more you see more diversity; the higher, the less level of diversity*

The impact of the prevailing organisational culture was highlighted by interviewee responses to questions on this topic. Whilst Sarah felt that her organisation had a much more nurturing culture than her previous workplace (of 20 years), other respondents who engaged with this question tended to characterise their organisational culture as White, middle-class and male (Acker, 1990; Miller, 2016; Britton and Logan 2008), despite the presence of women in healthy numbers. Beth described her workplace as "elitist". The effect of such an atmosphere is that the *othering* experienced by these women in other areas

of life continues in the workplace, intensifying effects such as Imposter Syndrome, voicelessness and marginalization.

Natalie highlighted the difference between a transactional culture and a transformative culture; whilst she is the only non-White person in her current organisation, she has found their person-centred culture, as practised by her line manager, supportive and empowering (Shung-King et al., 2018). An example given was related to the aftermath of the death of George Floyd and its coincidence with the pandemic. Whilst her manager did not instigate the offer of this specific support, she did ask what she needed to do to "ensure" that the BPW was supported. In response, the participant was able to briefly outline the impact of these current world events and to discuss the exploration of appropriate support for her well-being and, thereby, work. Such an approach was common to Natalie's experience and that of Sarah, whose company established a Diversity and Inclusion Group in response to the events of Summer 2020.

Demographic Profile of Senior Leaders

> *You tend to find that they're whites in management, female and male*

Participants perceived that the organisational culture is evidently set by those who lead and steer it. Without exception, the senior leadership of the organisations for which the interviewees work was shown to be entirely White and, commonly male. This was true even in organisations where interviewees described the composition of the workforce as equitably split between men and women. For example, Elizabeth described her organisation as "very much multicultural . . . there's a lot of blacks and a lot of Asians . . . but once you get to high-level

management, it's very few and far between. . . you tend to find that they're whites in management, female and male." Jo stated that "the lower the level, the more you see more diversity; the higher, the less level of diversity." Such comments suggest the very real existence of a concrete ceiling (Erskine et al., 2021; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015).

The lack of diversity at senior levels impacts the decisions taken and the direction, tone and culture of the organisation, all of which affect the lives of employees. Carla stated she didn't "feel like we're well represented in senior leadership positions across the organisation. And I've always felt like my voice isn't necessarily heard." Similarly, Florence described it as "hard when you look around and there's a lack of visibility of people who look like you." Beth's organisation had two established equality officers, but neither of them was responsible for matters connected with race. In fact, in response to staff calls for a Race Equality Officer, the entirely White senior leadership of her workplace stated that "no one's ever asked us to look at race, so we've never looked at race in the last 10 years." As this example highlights, the myopic and limited vision which results from non-inclusive leadership has demonstrable negative consequences for both organisation and workforce (Truss et al., 2012).

Mechanisms for Progression

As already referenced, professional networking (internally and externally) can be a challenge for BPWs for several reasons, which do not need to be repeated; however, if personal recommendation and nepotism are the chief means of advancement, one can immediately see how this disadvantages those lacking social capital. Similarly, where the mechanisms and pathways for progression are more opaque than transparent, BPW are disadvantaged again and subject to the concrete ceiling (Erskine et al., 2021; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015).

Even though she is technically on a leadership pathway, Beth described it as "very opaque" as is the "decision making that needs to happen in order for you to get there." Her highlighting the opacity of progression pathways and so forth accords well with the concrete ceiling imagery. Elizabeth talked of "literally fighting for your job when you know that you are more than capable to do it. But there are other people that will get the job simply because they're friends with another manager or friends with a director or just because they probably look at them favourably. It becomes a battle." Similarly, Beth also emphasized the importance of discretionary decisions made by those to whom she is exposed and connected. Whilst this is a standard feature of progression, this context does raise the question of how those without such connection and exposure progress: concrete is not only opaque, it is very difficult to breach. Taken together, the women's comments emphasise the harm caused by a lack of role models, mentorship and sponsorship (Showunmi et al., 2016; Shung- King et al., 2018; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015).

Equality for Whom?

> "
> *Your presence is challenging for some, it makes them uncomfortable*
> "

Whilst Jo stated that "there's a big drive for the women to be in" positions of leadership in her organisation, and several others highlighted that there are healthy numbers of women leaders in their workplace, the same is not true of people of colour, whether considering men or women. Indeed, Beth works at an organisation within which the most senior leader is a White woman; however, this company is the same institution which did not look at race for ten years because nobody had asked them to do so. Such an example reflects the disparity in equality-focused activity and initiatives: the gains made in women's rights seem to be evident to the women interviewed. What seems to be much more

elusive is the fruit of equality-focused action around race and, going further, awareness that action focused on those marginalized on account of both race and gender is needed seems to be absent. This reality, as outlined by the participants concretizes the gap highlighted by our literature review: who is aware of the at least double-equality challenge faced by BPWs? As these instances suggest, a lack of awareness produces an absence of action and change.

Such lack of awareness, combined with the other elements such as culture, transparency, stereotyping and accompanying microaggressions, can work to create a workplace which is essentially experienced as an unsafe space (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020). Elizabeth summarized it as "a challenge, simply because your presence is challenging for some, it makes them uncomfortable." She went on to add that it "makes them feel very much intimidated. Some people don't understand this simply because they don't want to understand you as a person, and some people don't want to accept that being a black woman is challenging when it comes to a lot of things." As outlined in this comment, BPW are caught in the maws of an unenviable trap: endure the corrosive violence of microaggressions imposed on you because of the biases of others or dare to speak up about it and be silenced. Neither situation offers either hope or life to the BPW.

Voicelessness

> *Some White guy turn up, possibly even a student – which has happened to me – a student comes and repeats the exact same thing I said and they're 'Oh, this is amazing!*

As already established, the facing of biases and stereotypes by BPW, and their efforts to neutralize them, has led to participants engaging in psychological or cultural self-mutilation (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). One expression of these practices has been the silencing or self-editing of the BPW: whilst Sarah explicitly described adopting a position of silence at times in her efforts to navigate the waters of bias and stereotype, others highlighted the experience of not being heard and, thereby, being robbed of their voice in that way. Beth spoke vividly of her experience of not being heard. She recounted her frequent experience of being in a meeting, saying something and having it dismissed, only to have usually "some white guy turn up, possibly even a student – which has happened to me – a student comes and repeats the exact same thing I said and they're 'Oh, this is amazing! This is fantastic! We need to do this: that's the best idea ever!'" The surreal experience recounted here is commonly reported among women and other minoritized groups to the extent that the feminist practice of hearing into speech emerged in response and as a means of countering the effects of this muting (Morton, 1985).

Beth also shared her journey of reflection and horrified revelation of the depths to which she had been subconsciously affected by this imposed silence: "When I discovered that that was really actually subconsciously part of the reason why I did my PhD I felt so depressed (...) I actually did a lot of that just because white men mostly ignore what I say (...) Why do I have to have all these things in order for someone to actually say the owner's got something good to say here? You know, we

should listen. It's a value. It's important." It is worth highlighting that, prior to undertaking her successful PhD research, this respondent had over 20 years of sector-relevant experience, including work at high-level positions, but she still found her contribution frequently ignored or side-lined. Beth's experience is echoed by Natalie, who has years of experience in senior leadership, and who is currently an assistant director; despite this, Natalie still considers that she does not have a voice at work, raising the question of whether the voices of BPW will ever become valid.

A final way in which two interviewees experienced voicelessness was coming to a point where they had had to undertake grievances against past employers. Sarah described having the aggressive, angry Black woman stereotype (McGee, 2018)) levelled against her when she sought to lead strongly (as directed) or when she made integrity calls on projects. Similarly, Natalie explained that she had been an advocate for (and thereby challenger on behalf of) diversity and inclusion, specifically in terms of the ethnic weighting of redundancies during restructuring. Although unable to speak about their experiences in detail (due to both companies having settled out of court), both women felt they were rendered voiceless by the process, which carries on now as part of the settlement terms.

The Importance of Allies and Mentors

> **"**
>
> *The unfortunate privilege of being the only one*
>
> **"**

Beth described her experience of "the unfortunate privilege of being the only one" – the only Black person – in an organisation or section. For reasons already explored, participants related that it can be an isolating experience to be a BPW. Every respondent expressed a clear perception of value in having a mentor, which accords with findings in the literature. Seven of the nine interviewed have a mentoring or coaching relationship, whilst another had a coaching-like relationship with her manager, another had curated her own peer support group and the final participant did not have a mentor.

The nature and origins of the mentoring relationships varied widely: some companies have a clear and established practice of mentorship; others do not and the impetus – and sourcing – of the mentors came from the BPW herself; still others use line managers as mentors, where others do not. In the latter distinction, it was emphasised that a mentor not being one's line manager rendered the relationship "a safe space to talk freely," (Danielle) seeing the mentoring exchange as one offering emotional support.

Other views on the value of a mentor were strongly connected to progression (Allen, 2020; Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020; Hoover, 2006; Motaung et al., 2017; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008; Showunmi et al., 2016; Shung-King et al., 2018; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015): having identified and secured them herself, Beth has two mentors, deliberately chosen for their wisdom and experience in different aspects of her career trajectory. Additionally, she knows one to be a long-time advocate of her work, embracing her difference, whilst seeing her value. The mentor referenced here is a White middle-class man, a detail worth highlighting because three interviewees (Natalie, Beth and

Sarah) volunteered those men of this demographic had been the most sincere and effective allies in their personal experience of progression. All three participants focused on the fact that these White middle-class men have been so invaluable as allies because they intentionally listened and then engaged in the act of allyship, leveraging their social capital in support of equity.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that Black women in England face several barriers in their career progression due to personal, social, organisational factors, and more recently, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Such barriers have been found in the academic literature and corroborated by the participants of the survey and the interviews. Furthermore, our analysis, which employed a mixed-methods approach to triangulate information, shows that there is strong evidence that the intersection of gender and race raises unique barriers to BPW' career advancement; however, there is little academic interest on the topic. In this sense, the present study represents an unprecedented contribution to better understanding and making more visible the barriers faced by BPW, by contributing to the discussion about the issue.

Although BPW aspire to leadership roles, the study showed that they face a variety of obstacles along the way. Racism, lack of social capital, and lack of transparency in promotion and pay hikes were found to be the most prevalent barriers for BPW in England. However, we acknowledge that these are just a few components that shape the complex intersectionality that BPW face.

In this sense, our findings confirm that issues such as racism, sexism and other barriers based on prejudices and bias, are not only present in different spheres of the

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participants' lives, but also, these are perpetuated at different levels of the "system" or society. For instance, these are present in their personal experiences, the relationships they establish, the networks they access, and the organisations of which they are members, including their workplace. Accordingly, the issue has implications at different levels and demands a genuine engagement from multiple stakeholders, at the national and local level, from policymakers to institutions and common citizens.

In identifying the barriers faced by BPW, we seek to contribute to future solutions by proposing the following recommendations that aim not only to equip the Partner and organisations but also to contribute to reducing the gender and race inequalities in this country.

4.2 Recommendations

This section presents the main recommendations proposed to the Partner, organisations committed to supporting BPW in the workplace, and BPW. These recommendations are categorized as follows:
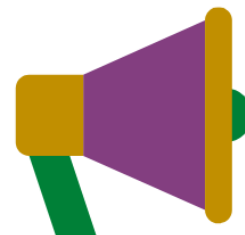
Connectivity   **Development**   **Amplification**

4.2.1. To the Partner (SLL)

Giving voice: Work with organisations to support BPW employees in network building, progression and voice, as suggested by Allen (2020), Showunmi et al. (2016), and Wyatt, & Silvester (2015).

Networking opportunities: Strengthen your position as a support network for BPW, as networks are highly valued that emerge as real shelters for BPW. The findings of Allen (2020), McGee (2018), Showunmi et al. (2016), and Wyatt, & Silvester (2015) support this approach.

Spaces for listening and sharing: Work with organisations to build safe spaces for sharing and listening around race and gender, such as developing a programme or set of materials around *Hearing into Speech* to support active and effective listening and sharing (Westfield, 2001; Chopp, 1995; Morton, 1985).

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI): Reinforce to organisations the importance of engaging in formal strategies (beyond sole personal efforts) to support the inclusion and career advancement of BPW (Erskine et al., 2021).

Internal audit: Work with organisations to audit the efficacy of their existing frameworks, environments, and opportunities for employees to be heard (Erskine et al., 2021; Mogadime, 2008).
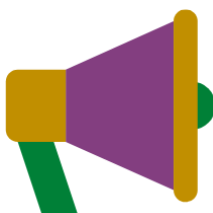
Advocacy: Support initiatives to strengthen and expand the current legal framework, such as the Equality Act 2010 (Bhopal, 2020; Bogg et al., 2007; Wyatt, & Silvester, 2015).

One size does not fit all: Work with organisations to develop more person-centred approaches, which will thus be able to flex a variety of individuals.
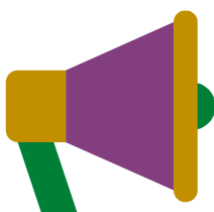
Disrupt stereotypical images of Black Women: Using social media to host events that showcase role models of Black women in leadership positions to have a positive influence on Black women in various organisations (Mogadime, 2008).

Broaden research: Further national studies are required to validate the findings of the present study. For instance, a quantitative survey implemented nationally could provide a complete picture of the country's reality. Equally, interviews or other types of qualitative studies (i.e., Ethnographies or Participatory Action Research) developed in other regions of England, the UK or the Commonwealth can also provide valuable information regarding the meanings, significances, and experiences of BPW beyond the Northwest context.

6.2.2. In the Workplace:

EDI management and policies: Engage in formal organisational strategies to support equality, diversity, and inclusion of BPW. Implement an equality and anti-racism policy to encourage diversity in the workplace (Kumra, & Manfredi, 2020).

Open discussion fora: Organisations should aim to promote a cross-talk on diversity and inclusion among their employees, focusing on the intersection of race and gender. The involvement of employees from different sectors, different areas and, especially, direct managers and senior leaders increases the chances of more effective results. The findings of Allen (2020) and Lugar et al. (2020) support this approach.

Caring responsibilities: Organisations that facilitate flex work, and that provide facilities (i. e., day-care centres) in the workplace, for workers with caring responsibilities are highly valued for the support they provide (Allen, 2020; Bogg et al., 2007; Hoover, 2006). Similar is the case of workplaces that provide and automatic tenure clock extensions (6-12 months) upon request for mothers and fathers (Hoover, 2006).

Post-maternity career development: Organisations institute mentors for women returning from maternity leave to provide support, reintegration and rebuilding of momentum for career progression (Hoover, 2006).

Work-life balance: Engage in family support and work-life balance strategies and actions, such as flex work and career break opportunities (Allen, 2020; Bogg et al., 2007; Hoover, 2006; Howells et al., 2018; Shung-King et al. (2018).

Transparency: To enhance the transparency of processes, such as promotion opportunities and rotation, is key to supporting the organisational culture and contributing to reducing negative perceptions about barriers to career progression. These findings are suggested by Bhopal (2020) and Erskine et al. (2021).

Benchmarking: Mapping out what other organisations are doing to address the barriers that BPW face is a good start point. This strategy requires not only the identification of 'best practices' that promote race and gender equality but involves adapting these practices taking into account the organisational culture and structure, as well as the local context. In this sense, it is always important to remember that one size does not fit all (Truss et al., 2012).

Networks: Take appropriate measures to address identified gaps, such as establishing a Black Staff Network where advice can be given on issues such as career development and promotion. Our findings confirm that both networks within and outside the workplace are highly valued by employees given the support they provide. The findings of Allen (2020), Showunmi et al. (2016), and Wyatt, & Silvester (2015) support this approach.

**Organisational diagnosis:** Commit to diversifying the demographic profile of those in senior leadership by a quantifiable, time-bound target. Mapping the ethnic-racial profile of employees is an important first step towards change. By making an initial diagnosis, organisations are better equipped with data that allow them to understand the racial disparity within the organisation and, thus, establish concrete

and feasible goals to support the hiring, retaining and development of BPW (Erskine et al., 2021; Mogadime, 2008).

Mentorship: Craft a culture of intentional listening by introducing – or developing – mentors and training them in this skill. Ensure the mentors have the right information, understanding and empathy to appropriately engage BPW and the issues they may face in the workplace. The findings of Bhopal (2020), Cirincione-Ulezi (2020), Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008), Showunmi et al. (2016), and Shung-King et al. (2018) support this approach.
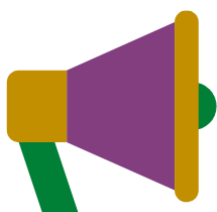
Inform and raise awareness: Prepare and distribute educational materials, such as booklets, communication campaigns, internal marketing, etc. to sensitize employees, suppliers and customers about the importance of fighting racial inequality can be a good strategy to ensure that everyone has the same understanding about the importance of this discussion within the organisation and also a good opportunity contribute to enriching this conversation in wider society (McGee, 2018).

Mentoring audit: Audit your mentoring and sponsorship structure through the lens of inclusion. This could be implemented by conducting information-gathering events such as focus groups or Microsoft Teams Polls to quickly gather

staff views and opinions. The findings of Bhopal (2020), McGee (2018), Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008), Showunmi et al. (2016), and Shung-King et al. (2018), and Wyatt, & Silvester (2015) support this approach.

Dedicated spaces: Creating a safe environment to discuss race issues is vital. Many interviewees reported the importance of peer support and networks that their organisations have established as platforms to discuss issues of race and gender. According to some interviewees, these spaces allow them not only to share their experiences as Black women but also support them by sensitizing non-Black employees, helping those to better understand the unique barriers that Black women face and equipping them to be better allies. The findings of Allen (2020) and Lugar et al. (2020) support this approach.

Representation: Engage in EDI policies to ensure representation of minorities at all levels, including senior management (as suggested by Bloch et al., 2021; Bogg et al., 2007, Showunmi et al., 2016).
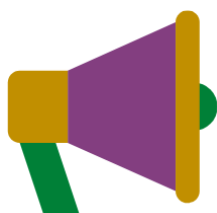
Overcoming bias: It should be reduced in the workplace, therefore increasing awareness and empowering networking should be addressed. This can be accomplished by activities such as discussion of this issue on social media using BPW

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experiences and enthusiasm for the team to highlight the positive influence of Black women in the professional sphere, emphasizing the value of diversity and justice, and encouraging healthy inter-racial conversation in this area. The findings of Allen (2020), Showunmi et al. (2016), Shung-King et al. (2018), and Wyatt, & Silvester (2015) support this approach.

4.2.3. To the Black Professional Women

Positive self-talk: Positive attitudes towards your own career progression (despite the difficulties and obstacles), are key for your development, such as passionate optimism and confidence (Lugar et al., 2020; Sales et al., 2020), and resilience (Erskine et al., 2021).

Training and development: Enhance your profile by engaging in training/development opportunities, such as qualifications achievements (i.e., postgraduate studies) and the development of "soft" skills, such as leadership abilities (Mogadime, 2008; Sales et al., 2020; Wyatt, & Silvester, 2015).

Role models: Follow up on role models (Black women leaders) through various channels to motivate oneself for professional development and boost one's confidence (Bogg et al., 2007).

Reflective practice: Develop reflective practice, as a mechanism to assess your own performance, and to identify potential weaknesses and strengths (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020; Erskine et al., 2021).

Networking: Strengthening your networks and peer support in the workplace may help obtain the ideal career progression pathways in the company. The findings of Allen (2020), Showunmi et al. (2016), and Wyatt, & Silvester (2015) support this approach.

Mentoring: As the findings of this research demonstrate, it is vital to develop strong connections in the workplace, particularly with the mentor, which can prepare employees for greater promotions and help them to advance to leadership roles. The findings of Allen (2020), Bhopal (2020), Cirincione-Ulezi (2020), McGee (2018), Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008), Showunmi et al. (2016), Shung-King et al. (2018), and Wyatt, & Silvester (2015) support this approach.

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Note: References with the asterisk symbol (*) refer to the citations for the articles analysed in the CLR.

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6. Annexes

6.1 Key concepts

Diversity in the organisations

The promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in organisations has advanced from justifications based solely on social justice and equity factors to the inclusion of other arguments such as that a diverse workforce and the use of diversity management strategies actively contribute to improving and developing organisational performance (Truss et al., 2012). In this sense, it has been proposed that such initiatives can impact innovation and develop new and more effective forms of working (Daniels & MacDonald, 2005).

Historically, women have faced several difficulties with entering and succeeding in the job market. Indeed, despite the significant advancements in gender equity, it is still common to find "gendered" organisations (Acker, 1990). Institutional structures, practices, norms, hierarchies, and job roles were created for "gendered characteristics who engage in gendered practices" (Miller, 2016, pp. 120) commonly assigning male characteristics. According to Britton and Logan (2008), in such organisations, the ideal worker is not only male but also heterosexual and White. The authors add that "although people bring their gender to organisations, the jobs they occupy are themselves already gendered" (ibid, 2008, pp. 108). Indeed, Bhana and Moosa (2016) go further and affirm that gender serves to reinforce **power dynamics** in which organisations that meet these characteristics, as one group represses the other. Although gendered organisations are slowly disappearing, particular power dynamics, values, practices, bias and stereotypes remain untouched at all levels across modern societies (Kumra & Manfredi, 2012).

Accordingly, among the main barriers identified in the literature, three core factors have been regarded as obstacles in women's career progression: 1) **organisational**

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barriers, such as internal policies, procedures, and strategies, and the lack of mentoring, sponsorship, training and networking opportunities; 2) **individual barriers**, such as caring responsibilities, family issues, personal motivation, etc. 3) **social barriers**, including social norms, expectations, beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices at the cultural and societal level that are widespread and, in many cases, accepted as "normal" (see Figure 1). For example, studies conducted in contexts such as Nepal (Rijal & Wasti, 2018), the US (McCullough, 2020) and China (Xie & Zhu, 2016) recognise such barriers.

Black Women stereotypes and Otherness

Chilangwa Farmer (2016; Bryan, 2018) sets out the origins of the **negative stereotyping Black women** face in their lives. Identifying the origins of such portrayal in Britain's colonial past and old ideas of racial inferiority, she highlights the way in which these ideas persist in the cultural fabric of daily lives, with women being viewed as "Third World" persons of intellectual weakness (p.156; see also McGee, 2018; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Chilangwa Farmer (2016) also focuses on the experience of being construed as **"Other"** through the colonial gaze, which renders them so profoundly different that it makes it very difficult for BPW to present in any way which fits the expected White, male expectations which typify potential senior managers (p. 156).

Connecting to Chilangwa Farmer's (2016) assertion regarding the colonial roots of the stereotyping imposed on Black women, **unconscious bias** - as pertains to the women in this study - may be considered to originate from the same source: historic efforts to preserve and protect the status quo. Although focused on the concentration of slave populations in the US in 1860, and the connection with levels of pro-White implicit bias in the contemporary world, Payne, Vuletich and Brown-Iannuzzi's study

(2019) suggests that the transmission of bias through time remains strong, particularly where it has been an embedded and essential part of the structural and cultural framework. Payne et al. also highlight such transmission as the source of unconscious bias in those who explicitly reject prejudice. The principal is an interesting one that echoes Chilangwa Farmer's assertion regarding the legacy of imperial Britain and its impact on Black women today, their experiences and the ways in which they are perceived.

In this scenario, a relatively new term, **"misogynoir"** was coined by Black women, including academics such as Moya Bailey, as a phrase that neatly encapsulates the oppression peculiar to Black women: anti-Black misogyny (Bailey 2018). As an intersectional experience of marginalization, neither racism nor misogyny alone was considered to capture what Black women endure. Bailey asserts that misogynoir "impacts Black women's lives in interpersonal, social, and institutional ways" (p. 763).

Consequently, the scarce literature on the topic shows that racism emerges as an additional barrier for Black Women and in specific, for BPW. In this regard, this set not only faces the (in)famous "glass ceiling", but they experience the addition of another aspect to this: racism. Thus, it has been proposed that BPW face a Racialized or Black Glass Ceiling (Erskine et al., 2021; McCullough, 2020; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Furthermore, other authors allude to the metaphor of the "Concrete Ceiling", explaining that the barriers for progression are denser and less easily shattered than the glass ceiling (Erskine et al., 2021; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015).

Systemic barriers

A systemic perspective (Luhmann, 1986) understands that we are all embedded in a system, where its different parts produce and reproduce themselves, impacting and influencing each other. From this perspective, contextual and societal factors impact

and influence other parts of the system, such as the organisations embedded in it (Czarniawska, 2017; Luhmann, 1986; Seidl, 2004). Thus, from this viewpoint, it is possible to understand and propose that in systems where issues such as discrimination, stereotyping or racism (among others) are embedded, these cultural beliefs and values are more likely to perpetuate at different levels.

Accordingly, following Czarniawska (2017), Luhmann (1986) and Seidl's (2004) proposals, in the case of BPW, gender or race-based barriers, discrimination are transversal to all levels of the system. Figure 9 illustrates this idea.

Figure 9. Systemic perspective applied to the exploration of barriers that BPW face

Note: Own elaboration.

Finally, considering the systemic complexity of the phenomenon and the lack of research analysing the intersectionality between gender and race, it is vital to explore the barriers that BPW face in their career progression to leadership positions at different levels of the system.

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Methodology

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Table 2. Demographic portrait of survey participants

Demographics	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Race		
Black	65	86.67%
Mixed	7	9.33%
Other (African heritage)	3	4.00%
Age		
18 - 29	14	18.67%
30 - 39	15	20.00%
40 - 49	20	26.67%
50 - 59	23	30.67%
60 - 69	3	4.00%
Workplace		
North West	38	50.67%
Greater London	16	21.33%
West Midlands	6	8.00%
South East	4	5.33%
North East	3	4.00%
East Midlands	2	2.67%
South West	2	2.67%
Yorkshire and the Humber	2	2.67%
Other	2	2.67%
Nationality		

UK	58	77.33%
Africa	10	13.33%
Caribbean Islands	3	4.00%
Europe	2	2.67%
Asia	1	1.33%
Prefer not to say	1	1.33%
Degree		
Undergraduate degree	31	41.33%
Masters level	24	32.00%
PhD	9	12.00%
Secondary education	6	8.00%
Other	5	6.67%
Current employment status		
Employed full-time	49	65.33%
Employed part-time	11	14.67%
Freelancer, consultant or contractor	7	9.33%
Seeking opportunities	5	6.67%
Other	2	2.67%
No response	1	1.33%
Number of years working		
Less than 5 years	10	13.33%
Between 5-9 years	10	13.33%
Between 10-19 years	10	13.33%
More than 20 years	44	58.67%

No response	1	1.33%
Number of years working for the same employer		
Less than 1 year	20	26.67%
Between 2-5 years	30	40.00%
Between 6-9 years	7	9.33%
More than 10 years	16	21.33%
Prefer not to say	1	1.33%
No response	1	1.33%
Type of employer		
Public sector/government	19	25.33%
Private/for-profit	18	24.00%
Private/not-for-profit	17	22.67%
Academia	10	13.33%
Other	8	13.33%
Prefer not to say	1	1.33%
Caring responsibilities		
No	40	53.33%
Yes	34	45.33%
Prefer not to say	1	1.33%
Leadership status		
In a position of leadership	34	45.33%
Aspire to be in a position of leadership	33	44.00%
Do not aspire to be in a position of leadership	7	9.33%

Prefer not to say	1	1.33%

Note: Own elaboration.

Table 3. Digital marketing statistics

BtG accounts in social media	Figures
Twitter @BreakingGlass10	91 followers; 36 tweets; 7.485 impressions; 37 likes; 31 retweets; 1.953 profile visits
Facebook @BreakingTheGlassConsultancy	117 friends; 24 posts; 110 Facebook reach
Instagram breaking_theglass	41 followers; 23 posts; 314 Instagram reach
Website: https://breakingtheglassconsultancy.wordpress.com/	571 views

Note: Own elaboration.

List of contacted UK-based organisations that act as allies of BAME communities:

- Black Women in Leadership Network (BWIL)
- National Black Women's Network (NBWN)
- Black Women in Business
- WCAN
- PepNetwork
- Black Women's Forum UK
- Black Women in Health (BWIH)

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Findings

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Table 5. Comprehensive analyses of the retrieved articles

Article	Country	Sector	Methodology/ Methods	Findings
1. Allen (2020).	US	Public	Qualitative/ Autoethnography. N= 1	**Barriers:** Authentic leadership; Stereotypes; Racial discord and unconscious bias in the workplace. **Facilitators:** Work-life balance (balance of personal harmony and professional success); Resilience; Peers' network.
2. Bhopal (2020).	UK	Higher education-Academia	Qualitative/ Case study interviews. N= 32	**Barriers:** Ethnic and racial stereotyping; Caring responsibilities: Pressures after returning from maternity leave; Career break opportunities disadvantaged their career progression. **Facilitators:** 1) Legal context: Equality Act 2010. 2) Organisational strategies and practices: a) Workplace encouraged women and BME groups to apply for promotion. Mentoring and promotion opportunities. b) Training sessions: diversity and equality c) Career break opportunities and support offered for those with caring responsibilities. d) Presence of women in senior managerial positions.

3. Bloch et al. (2021).	US	Private	Quantitative/ Linear regressions and intersectional analysis. N= ~52.214.000 workers.	**Barriers** - Marginalised race/gender groups. - Black women had higher percentages of middle and senior management in workplaces that are headquartered versus those that are not located in headquarters.
4. Bogg et al. (2007).	UK	Health	Quantitative/ National survey. N= 420	**Barriers:** Racism; Organisational and employee deviance in perceptions of reality within the organisation. **Facilitators:** 1) Legal context: Equality Act 2010. 2) CARING framework: Challenging stereotypes and traditional role models; advocating new ways of working (i.e., Flexi-work); Recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce; innovate training that incorporate local needs to facilitate employee understanding of culture and diverse groups. Nurturing and empowering employees; Goal orientated objectives for change (i.e., relating policy to practice).

5. Cirincione-Ulezi (2020).	US	Higher education-Academia-Medicine	Qualitative. Semi-structured interviews. N= 5	**Barriers:** 1. Being the only BPW in the workplace: a) Microaggressions: Subtle, unconscious, layered, spoken and unspoken insults directed at people based on race; b) Working under conditions eliciting "racial battle fatigue" (social, physiological, and psychological stress). 2. Racial stereotypes and implicit bias (BPW are hostile, aggressive, less qualified and competent). **Facilitators:** 1. Supervision, Mentorship, and Sponsorship. 2. Data Collection of Demographics of Racial Identity to inform decision-making. 3. Reflective Practice.
6. Erskine et al. (2021).	-	Private	-	**Barriers:** 1. Systemic: a) Implicit bias. b) The "black ceiling" or "concrete ceiling", attitudinal and organisational barriers. c) Institutional logics of patriarchy and white supremacy: socially constructed, historical patterns of practices, assumptions, shared values, and beliefs. "Misogynoir" describes the unique ways. Afro-diasporic women are pathologized based on a combination of anti- Blackness and misogyny. d) The emotional costs for BPW: spirit murder cumulate effects. **Facilitators:** 1) Personal: Thriving: Psychological state in which individuals experience both a sense of vitality and learning that they are energised, passionate and feel alive at work. Women developed three critical skills to their resilience: emotional intelligence, authenticity, and agility. 2) Organisational: a) Minimise incivility in the workplace (racialised sexism, injustice,

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				harassment, and microaggressions). People exposed to a climate of incivility were less likely to feel unvalued b) Adopt a positive deviance framework to problem-solving, based on the premise that solutions to community problems already exist within the community. c) Embrace a critical management stance. Create safe "identity workspaces" for women's leadership development, including learning, experimentation, and community building; Discuss and remedy systemic impacts of oppression.; Hold upper management accountable for the leadership and career development; and honour BPW's humanity and need for self-and community care. d) Incorporate intersectionality awareness into organisational strategies.
7. Hoover (2006).	US	Health-Medicine	-	**Barriers:** Work-life balance; Caring responsibilities. **Facilitators:** Organisational: Provide cultural sensitivity training to male counterparts; Maternity leave and automatic tenure clock extensions (6-12 months) upon request for mothers and fathers; Day-care centres available in the workplace; Mentoring.
8. Howells et al. (2018).	UK	Health-Pharmacy	Qualitative/ Semi-structured interviews. N= 28.	**Barriers:** 1) Discrimination: Women working part-time are more likely to face workforce barriers, irrespective of ethnic origin. Participants normalised gender discrimination as an inevitable consequence of working part-time. 2) Work-life balance. **Facilitators:** Flexible working.

9. Jefferies et al. (2018).	Canada	Health-Nursing	Qualitative/ Review of the literature.	**Barriers:** 1) Power: Discourses of generational oppression and discrimination; systemic, institutional, and historical discourses perpetuate barriers by y operating according to oppressive and hegemonic ideals. 2) Social and institutional discourses: Specific curriculum uses hegemonic and normative approaches to teach. They are perceived as insensitive, stereotypical, and racist. 3) Beliefs, values, and practices: Feel physical stress and emotional pain connected to work-related racism; Feelings of not being trusted and constantly being scrutinised. **Facilitators:** 1) Language and meaning: Within the Black community, leaders are viewed as individuals who have a substantial impact on the entire community; 2) Beliefs, values, and practices: Development of survival strategies to cope with experiences of racism and discrimination. 3) Subjectivity and agency: Suggested that Black women are strong, independent, nurturing and caring, often to the detriment of themselves.
10. Lugar et al. (2020).	US	Social service	Qualitative/ Micro historical analysis. N= 1	**Barriers:** a) Racism and sexism in society. b) organisations (male's domains). **Facilitators:** a) Passionate optimism and confidence. b) Intersectional leadership. c) Organisational support.

11. Maume (1999).	US	Transversal	Quantitative/ Panel Study.	**Barriers:** a) Gender segregation in careers: Stereotypical notions about the kinds of work appropriate for men and women. b) Racial segregation in careers: Channelling into "racialised" jobs. c) Large proportion of women in female-typed occupations hampers career development. **Facilitators:** Positive relation between age and promotion opportunities.
12. McGee (2018).	US	IT	Qualitative/ Interviews. N=10	**Barriers:** 1) Informal networks: Negative experiences and exclusionary practices and behaviours related to gender in "old-boy networks". 2) Career Pathways: Slow rate of promotion, shaped by gender and race-related bias. 3) Bias related to gender (i.e., motherhood). 4) leadership bias, judged by racial stereotypes ("angry black woman stereotype"). 5) Education pedigree bias creates an exclusive group of individuals ("the privileged club"). 6) Credibility and legitimacy challenges. **Facilitators:** 1) Having a variety of job roles and opportunities to learn and grow professionally. 2) Support systems: supervisors and upper-level managers play an essential role as mentors or sponsors. The racial makeup of the organisation and the racial or ethnic background of the company's CEO helped to create a supportive environment. 3) The importance of technical and non-technical skills: The importance of communication, negotiation, and listening skills.

13. Mogadime (2008).	Canada	Education	Qualitative/ Narrative.	**Barriers:** Gendered racism: Stereotypes, discrimination, invisibility, and exclusion; Racial oppression; Resistance of the white male to protect the status quo (patriarchy); Historical and economic relegation of BPW the status of servants; Gendered racial boundaries and marginalisation; All-white committee assessing promotions. Tokenism. **Facilitators:** Qualifications' achievement, including postgraduate studies; Leadership skills and abilities; Joining professional associations to pursue career progression (to "know the movers" as well as to be known by the movers); Professional associations provided guidance, sponsors, and mentors; Need of greater accountability at the institutional level, to explore the extent of inequalities and under-representation; Inclusive strategies and policies.
14. Motaung et al. (2017).	South Africa	Public.	Qualitative/ In-depth semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis. N= 20	**Barriers:** 1) Maternity leave has a negative influence on career progression. Cultural expectations. 2) Patriarchal dominance and power supremacy: A societal system that advantages and privileges men. 3) Lack of commitment and motivation towards their careers was a self-imposed challenge. 4) The absence of a socio-economic support system that prioritises the participation and advancement of BPW in the labour market. **Facilitators:** 1) Gender equality policies: Constitution and Employment Equity Act. 2) Internal family support. 3)

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				Organisational and managerial support. 4)Training, development and mentoring.
15. Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008).	-	Transversal.	Qualitative/ Literature review.	**Barriers:** 1) Sexism, racism, and colourism (differences of treatment based on skin tone). 2) Organisational: Lack of networking opportunities, ethnic role models and mentors, and high-visibility assignments. 3) Organisational: Historically, organisations were designed to benefit White males. 4) Negative stereotypes: gender. 5) Stereotypical images of Black Women: a) Supportive Mammy (placed in support-type positions). b) The Unqualified Jezebel: viewed as women who have used their sexuality to move upward. c) The Feisty Sapphire, viewed as women with attitude problems. d) The Unstable Crazy Black Bitch: These women are crazy and aggressive. The image helps justify the concept of the glass ceiling because it would not make good leaders. e) The Overachieving Superwoman: They are seen as being more competent than their peers, causing isolation and segregation among peers (thereat to others). **Facilitators:** Organisational: Mentoring programmes and diversity-focused programs (i.e., minority employee affinity groups). Doing so would illustrate to all employees that the

				organisation is committed to creating an open, more inclusive work environment.
16. Sales et al. (2020).	US	Transversal	Semi-Qualitative/ Comprehensive review. N= 11	**Barriers:** 1) Overlooked, marginalised, and undervalued in the workplace. 2) Not having any room for error in their leadership roles. **Facilitators:** 1) Perception of internal traits contributing to success in leadership roles: a) Self-driven leaders. Taking advantage of opportunities, having motivation, and being authentic. b) Atmosphere-oriented leaders: the most relevant components to leadership and empowerment are respecting oneself and doing things ethically. c) Influential leaders: Being visionary and strategic in leadership. 2) Perception of external factors contributing to success in leadership roles: a) Value and integrity. b) Advancement: Having equality and economic security. c) Engagement: Having inclusion within the group and creating an environment conducive to productivity.

17. Showunmi et al. (2016).	UK	Private and public	Qualitative/ Semi-structured focus groups and interviews. N= 130	**Barriers:** 1) Racial. 2) Challenges were exacerbated at senior levels. 3) Barriers to being 'whomever you want to be'. The only way to progress was to adopt the dominant culture at personal cost or to leave. 4) Participants observed that society treated ethnicity as a uniquely disadvantaged status. 5) Restricted access to the 'closed' (informal) organisational networks. **Facilitators:** 1) Significance of others support: Relationships with line managers or other forms of indirect support (champion, mentor or coach) 2) Affiliation to official networks.
18. Shung-King et al. (2018).	South Africa	Health	Qualitative/ In-depth interviews. N= 19	**Barriers:** a) Race and gender influence. b) Lack of role models for advice and mentorship. c) Toxic organisational culture. Presence of the "boys' club". **Facilitators:** a) Role models, coaching and mentors. b) Strong family support and positive affirmation. c) Supporting teams. Encouragement among team members.
19. Wyatt, & Silvester (2015).	UK	Public- Civil service	Qualitative/ Semi-structured interviews. Timeline method.	**Barriers:** 1) Legislation: Equality Act 2010 promotes positive action. BME diverted these development opportunities (unfair treatment). 2) Visibility in the work roles and the organisation: less autonomy and discretion and fewer opportunities to develop 'high-profile assignments. When having visibility, they felt more scrutinised than white colleagues. 3) Role type:

| | | | N= 40 | Unequal spread across different functions. Less prestigious and visible roles. 4) Ethnicity. 5) Difficulty in accessing informal networks. 6) Sponsorship: Line managers supported other team members. 7) 'Career impeding behaviour' from line managers blocking requests for training, development, and career moves. 8) Biased performance ratings during appraisal and lack of day-to-day feedback. Perceptions of line managers being apprehensive about providing negative verbal feedback for fear of appearing discriminatory.
Facilitators: 1) Legislation: Equality Act 2010 promotes positive action. 2) Visibility in the work roles and the organisation. Working on "high-profile assignments". 3) Build a personal (formal and informal) reputation within the organisation. 4) Informal networks contribute to promotions. 5) Formal networks created in the organisation improved their career opportunities. 6) Attending development courses provided legitimate networking opportunities. 7) Formal mentoring programmes. 8) Sponsorship: Line managers acted as advocates. |

Source: Own elaboration.

2021

Research Report

Breaking the Glass:
Understanding the Barriers faced
by Black Professional Women in
Career Progression

**Breaking the Glass
Consultancy**

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