



DIFFERENT WOMEN DIFFERENT PLACES 2



Executive Summary

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There are approximately 2.9 million¹ Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women in the UK. Worldwide, 70% of women are non-White². They have a voice – but it is rarely heard – and it’s a voice that needs to be listened to.

In 2007, the first *Different Women, Different Places* study examined the careers and leadership strategies of black and ethnic minority women in the UK and Europe. It was the first research of its kind to explore the experiences, behaviours, challenges and perception of this group of women leaders – “Different Women”. The key findings included:

- Different Women used the intersection of their race, gender and ethnicity as leadership strengths;
- The early foundation for their success was built on high expectations and positive messages from their parents;
- They faced a multitude of workplace barriers, notably discrimination, organisational culture and lack of recognition;
- Gender was not a unifying factor between white women and Different Women;
- Their successful leadership strategies were a combination of eight key components which the study termed “Factor 8”;
- Traditional approaches to recruitment, leadership development, talent management and diversity strategies rarely targeted, identified and nurtured the rich experience and capabilities of Different Women.

Different Women are Black, Asian and ethnically diverse women who make a unique and positive contribution and difference to the world

Just over a decade later, we felt there was a need to revisit the issues raised in this first report to ascertain whether Different Women’s position in the workplace has improved, particularly in the light of gender pay gap reporting, and the rise of social movements such as ‘metoo’ and ‘black lives matter’.

The ***Different Women, Different Places 2 Study is a comparative study of the working lives and experiences of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse women in the UK, the United States and the Middle East.*** Its primary objectives were to build on the data gathered during the first study to see what has changed, what has remained the same and build a picture of where Different Women are



Watch the Overview film here:
<https://www.differentwomen.co.uk/account/our-story>

today. The research focused on four key areas: leadership from the perspective of Different Women, the effect of intersectionality, the relationship between Different Women and white women and the experience of Millennials.

The research used a combination of methods to ensure that all participants’ voices were heard. An online survey explored four main themes: the women’s early lives and careers, their leadership strengths and workplace experiences, their perceptions of relationships with white women and their successful leadership and career strategies. The survey was followed by five discussion events, individually targeting Different Women, White Women, Different Men and Different Women in the Civil Service. In addition, we interviewed fourteen high-profile Different Women of Distinction. In-depth discussion of their life stories enabled us to probe their childhood experiences and influences and gain knowledge of the leadership and career strategies they used.

We also worked closely with our partners in the US and UAE, to extend the geographic scope of the study. In total, we had over 600 women contribute to the research.

UNCOVERING DIFFERENT WOMEN

Our exploration of the Different Women’s early years found that the **family was the main source of inspiration**. An encouraging, positive home environment gave them the confidence to succeed. Different Women and their families had high expectations, which motivated them to pursue education and achieve higher qualifications and positions of responsibility than their mothers. Childhood and school experiences, both negative and positive, were also key drivers of their determination to succeed. Another key point reflected in the participants’ **early experiences was the feeling of navigating two worlds**: the family environment which provided support and encouragement and school, where many experienced bias. For the Different Women, however, this had a motivating effect.

A key element of the study was our examination of Different Women’s working lives, in particular their unique characteristics and how these influence their career success. As with the 2007 study, the participants identified their **diversity as a strength**. They placed great emphasis on being grounded in their identity, values and beliefs, and were proud of their cultural heritage. Resilience and optimism were two unique characteristics highlighted. However, unfortunately, these **strengths were often misconstrued in the workplace, which had a negative effect**. Different Women reported that they were sometimes perceived to be overconfident and even ‘too tough’. This lack of understanding has consequences, with Different Women suffering an emotional, mental and physical toll. Many reported that they had experienced stress-related problems due the feeling of being outsiders.

ORGANISATIONAL LIFE

Different Women’s workplace experiences revealed that there are still many **barriers to career progression**. The four key issues which this research identified were **organisational culture and style; being from a different racial or cultural background; limited access to growth and development opportunities; and actual bias and discrimination**.

Organisational and culture style encompassed the general ethos of the workplace plus the hidden and unconscious behaviours and biases within it. This was the most significant factor that Different Women felt affected their ability to progress. Many felt that they were noticed for what they got wrong, rather than what they got right, or were completely invisible in their workplace and excluded.

¹Source: <https://race.bitc.org.uk/>

²Source: World of 100; UN Statistics Division

MILLENNIAL DIFFERENT WOMEN

Millennials are those women under the age of 34; they are the next generation of leaders, if they are not already occupying senior positions. We had expected Millennials' experiences in the workplace to be different from their elders. Given the recent focus on diversity, women in the workplace and inclusion we were confident that a different picture would emerge to that of 2007.

Sadly, the results were exactly the same. **Millennial Different Women reported that organisational culture and style, plus their different racial and cultural backgrounds still represented considerable barriers to their progress in the workplace.** However, whilst younger Different Women face the same challenges as their older colleagues, they are more confident of their identity and aware of the opportunities available to them.

SAME GENDER DIFFERENT RACE

Whilst Different Women realised the importance of building relationships, they reported that gender did not unite women in the workplace. In fact, the situation here has deteriorated.

In 2018

91%

of respondents felt that gender was not a unifying factor; in 2007 it was 86%

Furthermore, Different Women felt that race was a more significant barrier to their progress than gender, in both the UK and the US. They felt that **white women were perceived more positively, had more opportunities in the workplace and that the gender agenda was led by and focused on white women.** When it came to building relationships with

white women, responses were mixed. Some respondents reported positive experiences, but many felt there was a lack of empathy and trust, and general unwillingness to discuss the issue.

STRATEGIES TO SURVIVE AND THRIVE

In the face of the challenges identified in this research, we found that

Different Women use a number of strategies to survive and thrive in the workplace.

These include their strong sense of self-belief and identity – including using their difference as an advantage; continuous learning and development; building relationships across diversity, developing networks and seeking out mentors and sponsors that value the difference they bring; relying on a strong family support network; and being strategic. In contrast, one method that was noticeable by its absence was self-promotion.

CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Our 2018 study builds on the research of 2007. It is clear that

Different Women are highly motivated, ambitious and value their cultural backgrounds.

Although considerable barriers to their progress still exists, their determination and leadership strategies have enabled them to bring a distinctive value to their organisations, which is sadly often overlooked. One striking issue highlighted by this study is that **gender is not inclusive; white women are perceived more positively than Different Women.**

For the future, there are actions that must be addressed by policymakers, educators, public and private organisations, white women and Different Women themselves if we are to see progress within the next decade.

Black, Asian and ethnically diverse women represent

70%

of the global female population and their voices must be heard.

To our stakeholders we say:

- **For Us** – as Different Women we must recognise our self-worth and our value; be more conscious of self-care, self-compassion and our well-being; lead with legacy in mind; and leverage our collective global power.
- **See Us** – government, policymakers, educators and statutory bodies must make applying an intersectional lens a non-negotiable foundation for gender policy development and strategy, proactively involving Different Women in shaping the issues affecting their lives, local communities and beyond.
- **Inspire Us** – schools, educators, teachers and career advisers must create the right learning conditions for Different Women to dream more, do more, become more.
- **Include Us** – public, private and third sector organisations must “*commit, be honest, act on what you say, bring the value of inclusion to life*”. See, hear and value Different Women for who they are and what they bring; Create a space for race – conversations change cultures; Go beyond mentoring and unconscious bias and create sponsorship frameworks for Different Women.
- **Partner with Us** – In the debate around the Gender Agenda, white women should recognise that equality for only some women is not acceptable and do more by becoming proactive partners and allies. The call to action for our white female counterparts is to advocate, champion and work with us to create a more inclusive agenda for women that will have global effect.

All stakeholders should resist the pull to normalise the findings, but rather use the outcomes of the DWDP2 study to deepen their understanding and appreciation of Black, Asian and ethnically diverse women and develop effective strategies and interventions that focus on intersectionality, eradicate discrimination and improve the lives of Different Women everywhere.





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