CLEARVIEW RESEARCH

Black Equity Organisation

"Brick Wall After Brick Wall"

The lived realities and concerns of Black communities in the UK

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Author & Acknowledgements

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BEO extended their own special thanks to the community researchers for their involvement in the project:

"BEO was really excited about the prospect of using community researchers drawn from the Black diaspora to gather insights about Black people's experiences of systemic racism. We were not disappointed as the community researchers did an amazing job to reach out to their own networks, ensuring a wide spread of different voices, different protected characteristics and engaging Black people from different regions across the country. Using this methodology has really helped to bring the research to life. We would recommend anyone doing qualitative research should ensure resources are available to do this sort of co-productive approach. We want to say a big thanks to all the community researchers employed by ClearView – they were amazing and even came to present and share their findings to our Board of Trustees who were equally impressed." **Jake Ferguson, Strategic Adviser to BEO.**

We would finally like to extend our thanks to our team members, Sandra Hicks, Cristina Wilkinson, Busayo Twins, Dr. Niamh McGarry, and Kenny Imafidon, who supported us on this project.

About Us

ClearView Research (ClearView/CVR) is an audience insight and strategy agency. We are specialists in research, evaluation and engagement projects with young people, minority ethnic groups, culturally diverse communities, people with protected characteristics, and those who often go unheard. We are committed to ensuring that our work is inclusive and equitable. We strive to ensure that our participants enjoy the research process and find it accessible, engaging, and empowering. We ensure that their voices are central in the materials (e.g., reports and frameworks) that we produce.

We work best with organisations who give a damn and want to make a genuine impact.

We are an MRS company partner, and we uphold and act in a manner compliant with the strict ethical and rigorous rules contained in the MRS Code of Conduct.

We are also a Certified B corporation, which is a certification only awarded to organisations who exemplify the highest standards of social corporate responsibility, transparency and accountability.

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About BEO

The Black Equity Organisation (BEO) is the national civil rights organisation for Black people in the UK. We exist to promote economic, legal, social and political equality for Black communities in Britain in order to ensure equal opportunity for progress and prosperity. Our efforts will endorse and amplify Black talent, Black enterprises, and Black greatness in Britain. Our vision is to realise the empowerment, self-determination, and welfare of Black people in the UK, and to be a credible and effective catalyst for dismantling structural racism within British society.

BEO commissioned Clearview to conduct this research to inform BEO's approach and to ground their work in the diverse lived experience of Black people at this early stage of their existence as a new charity in the race equity sector. Insights from this research will directly shape aspects of BEO's work going forward.

Executive Summary

In order to capture the diverse voices within the Black communities in the UK, the ClearView Research team decided to take a co-creation centred approach and use research methods involving community research and discussion groups based on participatory methods. Firstly, we conducted a rapid literature review to gather insights and shape our research questions. For the community research element, we trained a diverse group of six participants in our Peer Research education programme that focuses on research and engagement in the community. The community researchers then designed their research questions and research method with the support of the ClearView Research team. The community researchers designed methods based on online discussions and semi-structured interviews, as well as creative methods, such as drawing in responses to questions around what race or racism means to individuals. In addition to this, the ClearView Research team conducted four online exploration labs (i.e., participatory group discussions), engaging 40 people from the Black community across the UK exploring education, criminal justice, health, housing, cultural awareness, and equality of opportunity in the workplace. We conducted thematic analysis on the findings from both the community research and exploration labs. We then worked with the community researchers to validate our findings and to ensure we had correctly understood the key messages by appropriately contextualising and delivering them in a sensitive way.

Our key findings and reflections from our research have been summarised below:

1. **Findings from the community research demonstrated participants' tendency to downplay their experiences of racism. Some voiced this was for fear of white defensiveness.** Some people that we spoke to referred to an ingrained habit of "keeping your head down". This was mainly in relation to not challenging white people on questionable remarks, particularly if they were in positions of power. People spoke about how they regularly found themselves policing their tone in front of white people to prevent causing offence, whilst always second-guessing whether behaviours and attitudes towards them were racially motivated.

2. **On hearing other participants' stories and having identified a common narrative, research participants reflected considerably on the role of institutional racism in sustaining racial inequality.** Across demographics, participants shared how they had felt attacked and dismissed by the report published in March 2021 by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities.[1] They agreed that often, big organisations refused to engage with the concept of systemic racism as it would involve them admitting to discrimination against marginalised groups, acknowledging that meritocracy was a myth and, ultimately, would require them to release power and influence.

3. **Participants regularly referred to experiencing microaggressions, in both social and informal settings and from people in positions of power.** Participants of all ages shared very similar stories of microaggressions in informal settings. They pointed out these served as constant reminders that some people did not think they belonged in the UK and reconfirmed an 'us' and 'them' narrative. On experiencing microaggressions from people in power, such as teachers and healthcare professionals, participants voiced fear that these prejudices were determining very real and important life outcomes. Participants voiced concerns about how difficult it is to identify the attitudes that underpin these microaggressions and deliberated over how it was best to address these with white professionals.

4. **Participants showed frustration at the continued lack of authentic and multi-dimensional representations of Black people and Black culture in the media.** This was particularly the case for Black queer folk and people living with a disability in the Black community, who felt their identities were regularly missed out in media. Participants noted how limited and stereotypical representations of Black people in the media tended to be, from negative images of violence and crime to sexualised or angry images of Black women and tokenistic and minimised examples of character development. Participants also shared how they often felt white people were heavily influenced by these images and they impacted how they interacted with Black people on a day-to-day basis.

5. **Gaining representation of Black people in institutions and senior positions of leadership was also raised as crucial in order to shift towards greater racial parity.** Participants agreed that the lack of Black people in positions of power meant that organisations lacked the knowledge and understanding of the Black lived experience. In the workplace, people felt that after the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, organisations had only paid lip service to committing to anti-racist causes and that Black people still face a lack of support when raising cases of racial discrimination. In the education system, participants spoke at length about the impact of few Black teachers in the workforce, and how this created a predominantly white curriculum and teaching practices. In healthcare, participants spoke about the lack of medical and cultural knowledge about Black communities seen in healthcare professionals in more senior positions, as well as the discrimination that occurs when self-advocating – the latter was particularly the case for LGBTQIA+ participants.

6. **Throughout the research, participants were keen to stress the emotional fallout of ongoing racism and discussions around racism with white people.** People, particularly queer, trans, disabled, and female participants, voiced concerns over mental wellbeing and how they did not feel protected or supported by the UK system. Many participants spoke about lacking a sense of belonging to the UK. For those that did feel a sense of belonging, they voiced how people tried to threaten this regularly, by being told they should "go home", or more formally through changes in policies around citizenship.

7. **Overall, there was a split between how positive people felt about the future.** Younger participants tended to be more positive and dynamic about how they saw racial equity coming about in the UK, whilst older participants tended to voice fatigue and frustration that the same conversations were still going on. Some younger participants doubted that change would occur on a systemic level anytime soon but believed by engaging in alternative spaces and modelling an alternative, equitable and compassionate way of living in their daily lives, they could build equity on a micro level that would slowly chip away at the status quo. Other participants shared many stories of overcoming hardship and challenging authority and pointed to a change in the tone of conversations around race. Although we heard stories of the fatigue that this causes, we also heard the resilience of the participants and their push for change.

Introduction

BEO, a national organisation exclusively focused on dismantling systemic racism across a range of issues affecting Black communities in the UK, will be building on a strong history in the UK of resistance and anti-racism campaigning. It seeks to address systemic racism across health, criminal justice, education, housing, cultural awareness, and economic empowerment. The purpose of this project was to support the launch of the organisation and to share the authentic and diverse voices of Black people across the UK, their experiences of racism in recent years, and what they are most concerned about going forward, as well as the role they wish BEO to play.

Racism in the UK, although a longstanding and daily reality for Black communities and other ethnic minority groups, has been brought into focus in recent years. The global Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 following the brutal murder of George Floyd, the recent Sewell Report claiming that systemic racism does not exist in the UK,[2] and the prevention of teaching Critical Race Theory in schools,[3] all have added to the current conversation on race and racism in the UK. All this public debate has shown that there are clear conflicting views in society. In light of this, through this research, BEO wanted to outline that Black people, in all their diversity, have a strong sense of aspiration and a voice going forward. The research will contribute to an understanding of the priorities and concerns of different Black communities across the UK and how these may vary with different intersecting identities, including gender, sexuality, dis/ability, socio-economic status, as well as heritage. It also explores Black people's views on the more explicit manifestations of systemic injustices such as disproportionate numbers of Black people who are stopped and searched, in prisons, or excluded from school. The research also looks to the impact of more hidden microaggressions in people's daily lives and the impact of this on their sense of belonging.

The research will be used to tell the story of what it is like to be Black in the UK, to demonstrate why BEO is needed, and how racism is still in fact a very real problem. It will additionally be used to inform BEO's priorities and how they should support different groups or communities in the UK. We acknowledge that this research does not capture the entire experience of people from the Black community and that many Black people are thriving in society, in spite of these barriers. However, these barriers still remain and these need addressing systematically to enable Black people to be fully recognised and valued in society.

Scope and language

This report is focused on Black people. It concentrates on those from Black African heritage, Black Caribbean heritage and mixed heritages, such as Black African-Black Caribbean as well as white and Black African/Caribbean or Black and Asian. We fully acknowledge that Asians and other ethnic minority groups also experience the effects of racism. By focusing here on the particular experiences of Black people, we do not seek to diminish the experiences of those from other ethnic minority groups in any way.

Methodology/Approach

Rapid Literature Review

We conducted a rapid literature review for the internal project team's benefit to better understand the experiences of Black communities in the UK. As part of this, we reviewed academic literature, grey literature, charitable campaign materials, thought pieces, and commentary pieces. We also reviewed our previous research studies that are publicly available, as well as those not in the public domain. This ensured we covered a range of experiences of diverse Black communities that may not get coverage in more official or commonly available literature, such as Black people who identify as LGBTQIA+ and disabled. The rapid literature review informed our research and determined the key lines of enquiry for the team. Throughout this report, we acknowledge how our own research findings confirm, add to, or counter findings from the literature review and our own research studies.

Community Researchers

We trained up six community researchers in our Peer Research education programme that focuses on research and engagement in the community. This included modules on research design, research methods, fieldwork approaches, community engagement, analysis, and reporting. Following the training, we supported the community researchers through our own research expertise as well as our knowledge base from the literature review. We worked closely to assist them in designing their research questions and methods, recruiting participants, and engaging with their own communities locally.

To ensure comparable outputs, each community researcher was tasked with asking a general, introductory question about people's experiences of racism in the UK and their hope for future change. Based on the participants that each community researcher chose – for example, work colleagues, children, or support groups – they then asked more in-depth questions on certain topics. The specific topics explored were maternity healthcare, workplace discrimination,discrimination in higher education, and belonging and identity.

The community research fieldwork was carried out over the period of a month, with regular check-ins with the CVR team to ensure they felt supported throughout the process. This approach gave control of the research back to people in the communities themselves to decide what the focus of the conversations should be, as well as creating the opportunity to engage and gather insights from communities who normally may not participate in research or share their opinions. We also worked closely with the community researchers to inform the discussions in the exploration labs, as well as working with the group to validate the research findings at the end of the process. This enabled us to properly contextualise the findings, represent them correctly, and frame them in sensitive and appropriate ways.

The sampling approach to identify community researchers was driven by convenience sampling. This is where participants are selected based on key characteristics, their availability, and willingness to participate. The main disadvantage of this approach is that there are often already underlying differences between those who volunteer to participate in research and those who do not, so this could lead to the views or experiences of certain groups not being represented in the research. The links that the community researchers have to their own communities will have helped to overcome some of these limitations, as they can encourage a broader reach and engagement with the research. However, there will always be a risk that certain groups are under-represented when using this sampling method.

To further overcome this sampling bias, we adapted the convenience sampling method to include a quota driven sampling approach, where participants from specific groups of certain characteristics were targeted. In our final sample, we ensured coverage across demographics, including people from a spread of geographic regions with a variety of genders, sexuality, ethnic backgrounds, and dis/abilities (see Appendix 2 for breakdown of demographics).

Exploration Labs

In addition to the participant-led community research, we also held four online exploration labs. These were to complement the findings from the community research and to ensure we had a broad representation of Black voices from across the UK involved in the research. Where the community research achieved depth of engagement and insight, the exploration lab insights brought breadth of experience. For the purposes of this report, the findings will be presented together – any differences in findings will be highlighted throughout.

Exploration labs are similar to focus groups. They allow participants to share their experiences, views, and ideas and incorporate engaging visual and graphic methods where participants can draw and map counter-responses. From our experience and evidence from the literature (Bagnioli, 2009), participatory methods work well, as they break down barriers to engagement in the research process. They work well with young people, seldom heard groups, those for whom English is an additional language, and those who may have special educational needs and/or come from neurodiverse backgrounds.

We were particularly interested in including people in our research across different social-economic backgrounds, a variety of Black ethnic backgrounds, specifically Black African, Black Caribbean and mixed-Black heritage, and a range of ages, genders, dis/ability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, and geographical location. Similar to the community research, participants were recruited through convenience sampling. We also adapted the convenience sample to include quota driven sampling to ensure we had a variety of experiences represented. Questions and discussions remained broad; people were asked to share experiences of racism across a series of topics – education, criminal justice, housing, health and wellbeing, cultural awareness, and economic empowerment – as well as provide a final reflection on how positive they felt about the future, and where they saw change coming from.

Before we conducted the exploration labs, we carried out **'thinking out loud' sessions.** As part of these we worked with a small sample of people from the Black community to ensure the discussion guides were received as we wanted them to be and were delivered in a culturally sensitive manner. These sessions also gave us a final opportunity to test the effects of the messaging that relayed why we were doing this research.

In total, **199** people from a diverse range of lived experiences signed up to take part in the exploration labs. From these, we selected **40** to take part. When combined with the **20** research participants that the **6** community researchers engaged, we reached a total sample of **66** (see Appendix 1 for demographic breakdown). All participants' real names have been replaced with pseudonyms throughout the report. For quotes shared by community research, we have not included age or location.

Project Limitations

Though the insights in this report reflect the lived experiences and reality of the people we spoke to, our findings cannot be generalised to represent the wider population of all diverse Black communities in the United Kingdom. We see this project as a helpful way to sufficiently contribute to and complement the broader quantitative analysis conducted on behalf of BEO, by asking and building an understanding of why people feel as they do.

Key Findings

Throughout the research process, both in the community research and exploration labs, discussions were kept broad allowing participants to take the conversations where they wanted. We worked with participants in the exploration labs and the community researchers to understand the cross-cutting themes that underpinned people's experiences across education, criminal justice, housing, health and wellbeing, cultural awareness, and economic empowerment. These emerged as follows: institutions, structures and policy, microaggressions, representation, identity, wellbeing, and belonging. Discussions on institutions, structures, and policy were particularly present in the exploration labs, whilst all the other themes were common across both aspects of the research process.

Institutions, Structures and Policy

Despite no explicit questions on systemic racism, there was strong conviction and consensus amongst participants in the exploration labs that the key cause of ongoing racism in the UK was in-built within institutions, structures, and policies. This confirmed findings from the literature review that systemic racism is at the heart of the issue in UK society.[4] While many participants reflected on the gains that had been made towards racial equality within these institutions, there was, however, also the recognition that fundamental problems still remained. This section focuses on participants' views of systemic racism and their experiences of how institutions, structures and policies have promoted and facilitated discrimination.

Interestingly, the community researchers found their participants tended not to link their own experiences to institutional racism and, in fact, would often downplay their experiences of racism. The community researchers found this was particularly the case in one-to-one interviews. They agreed people may have lacked the same sense of shared experience that exploration lab participants developed and, therefore, the sense that these experiences are connected or 'systemic'. Some of the community researchers explored these omissions or downplaying of emotions with their participants. Participants shared how they felt this came from a place of habit or an in-built coping mechanism, to minimise their pain or suffering to be acceptable to white people around them.

In contrast, in the exploration labs, people repeatedly spoke about how they felt failed, unprotected and even targeted by the government and other institutions. Most participants reached the conclusion of facing racism and discrimination at an institutional level based on their individual repeated experiences of racism. These were further confirmed by the commonalities in experiences raised in the Exploration Lab discussions. The 1999 MacPherson Report, commissioned after the murder of Stephen Lawrence, defined institutional racism as, "The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racial stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people".[5] This concept of institutional racism was clearly referred to in multiple discussions.

"...this is such a normative patriarchal system of oppression that it doesn't actually care who you are. It's oppressing all of us the same way". - Joe, 58 from Scotland

Jill shared, *"because they (the West) colonised 80% of the planet and possibly more in vicarious forms of colonisation. So how do you create change when people are being oppressed and subjugated by these same systems?"*

Participants in the exploration labs were keen to discuss why they think systemic racism remains unquestioned. People tended to speak about this in two ways. Firstly, participants felt strongly that many of the decisions that disproportionately and negatively impact Black people occur because of ignorance. People in positions of power make decisions based on how they and those around them live their lives and do not consider other ways of being.

Diana, 30, in West Midlands, echoed this point: *"It is ignorance - they get to pretend not to understand why that treatment exists and why we feel a certain way."* Likewise, George in Yorkshire and Humber said, *"It is not in British culture to ask the hard question or to have an awkward conversation, and that is what needs to happen."*

Other participants considered the cause of systemic racism to be more disingenuous. They agreed it was not just the absence of knowledge of people in power that meant racism continued, but that institutions were actively ignoring or refusing to engage with the idea of inclusion as it presented a threat to their power and the status quo.

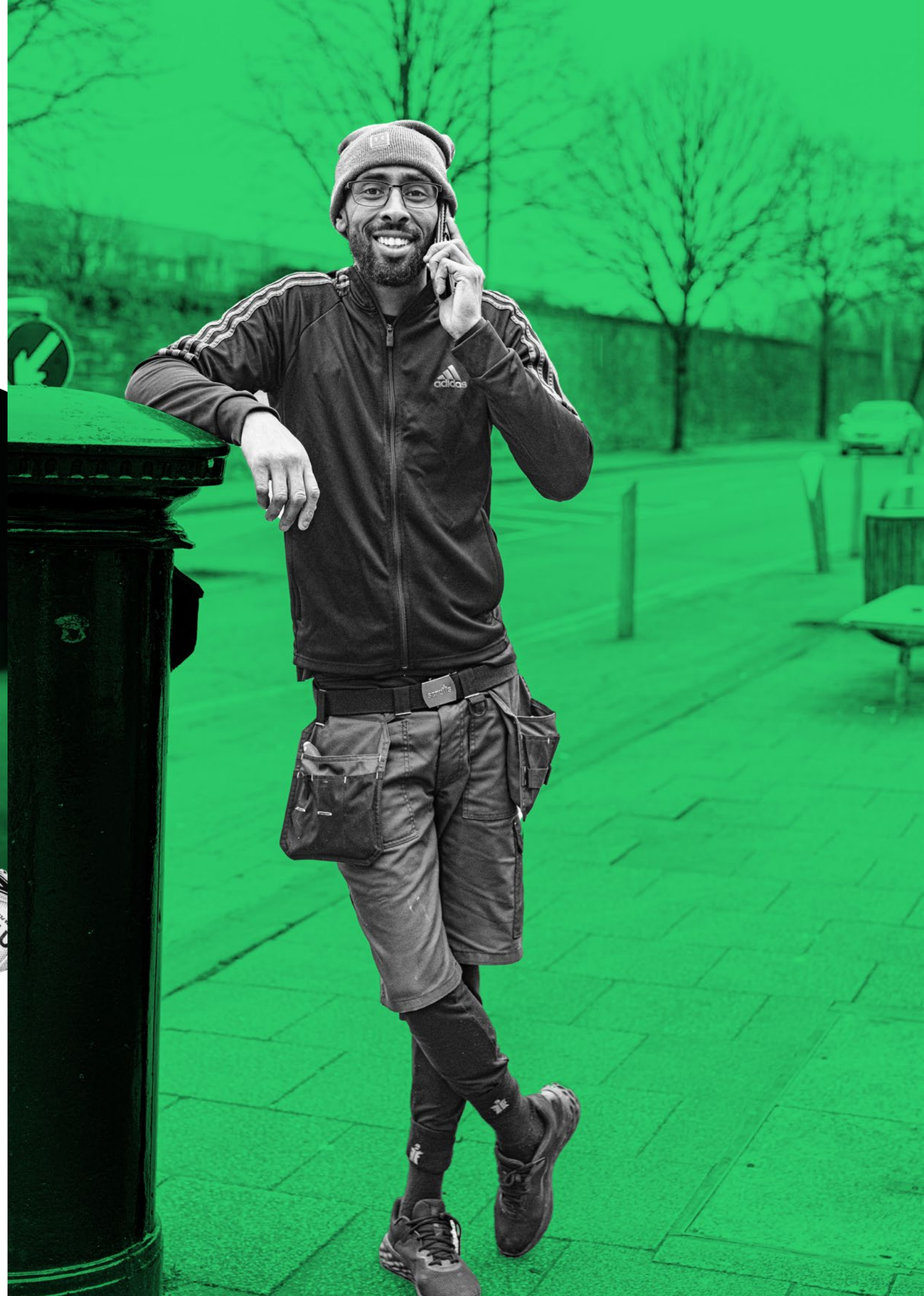
Shonda, 34, from Bristol, noted, *"Indeed, people have different backgrounds which means some people do not learn or understand things; however when the knowledge is freely available and people choose not to engage, that is where the real problem lies."*

Sheila, 43, in West Midlands argued a similar point: *"For it to change, the people with the power have to be willing to release the power. They are not willing to release the power. Not at all...If they have all the power, the authority, the money, and everything else and influence, why would they give that up so we can get a chance?"*

When discussing systemic racism, participants frequently referred to the March 2021 report by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities that claimed that the UK should be seen as "a model for other White-majority countries" with regards to racial equality.[6] They expressed anger at the report's conclusions which claimed there was no evidence of institutional racism. Participants would often only raise systemic racism when discussions had covered a variety of topics and experiences that pointed to repeated maltreatment at the hands of institutions, including education, welfare, and healthcare. It was in these discussions that people would voice disbelief that the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities refused to consider these repeated experiences at an institutional or connected level. In the report itself, it outlines, the term 'institutional racism' should "be applied only when deep-seated racism can be proven on a systemic level and not be used as a general catch-all phrase for any microaggression, witting or unwitting."[7] Participants agreed that what made institutional racism powerful was its *"subtlety"* and that it is difficult to 'prove'. However, the repeated unequal treatment of Black people at the hands of institutions should be enough to understand these experiences are connected and systemic.

Participants voiced particular frustration and apprehension at how 'colour-blind' stances often also interacted with other factors beyond race such as gender, class, sexuality, and age. Many felt at a loss as to how they were meant to progress or feel protected in this country, given how the system is shaped so heavily by views of straight, white men. Many spoke about this in relation to hiring patterns of organisations, promotions, and access to support services.

"The thing that they did is to divide us so that we feel like we're not all being oppressed, and so that when you encounter multiple oppressions, you can't necessarily tell where it's coming from...It is just now compounded." John, from Scotland.



Microaggressions ('subtle' racism)

When asking broad questions on people's experiences of racism in the UK, participants across exploration labs and the community research regularly referred to their experiences as "subtle" racism. These are also known as microaggressions – the indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of marginalised groups. As mentioned by the community researchers, it is unclear whether the racist experiences themselves were subtle or that the participants were hesitant to label them as racist out of a habit of downplaying their experiences. This section will outline the examples of subtle racism that participants shared and how they can occur in informal settings, as well as by people in positions of power.

Participants across exploration labs and the community research referred to subtle racism as the kind of comments, behaviours, and treatment where you find yourself *"second-guessing"* a racially motivated intention. People gave countless examples of these experiences, including other people moving away from them on the bus, not receiving a promotion despite fulfilling the criteria, being stopped and searched by police, or receiving bad customer service. Participants, of all ages and backgrounds, had examples of such experiences and agreed that having a government who refused to address systemic racism in many ways encouraged this type of behaviour. Many felt that these behaviours are learnt and sanctioned by social institutions so that they become commonplace and normal.

On hearing different accounts of subtle racism across different aspects of people's lives, it emerged that there were two types of scenarios in which it occurred; some microaggressions occurred in informal, social spaces and others came from people in positions of power.

"I FINISHED MY NURSING DEGREE THIS YEAR. SO, WELL, DURING MY PRACTICES IN THE HOSPITAL, I WOULD GO ON DUTY, AND THEN I WOULD JUST MEET A NUMBER OF PATIENTS WHO WOULD TELL ME TO MY FACE, "YOU CANNOT ATTEND TO ME," JUST BECAUSE I'M BLACK. YEAH, IT'S REALLY TRAUMATISING."

JULIE, AGED 23, FROM THE EAST OF ENGLAND

There were numerous accounts across the exploration labs and community research of people of all ages, backgrounds, and regions in the UK who faced microaggressions in informal, social spaces. The community researchers were shocked to hear strikingly similar accounts across their participants from a variety of backgrounds and regions. Similarly, older participants in exploration labs voiced surprise that the racist comments and behaviours they had faced when they were growing up were an ongoing issue. Participants agreed that microaggressions in informal spaces acted as a constant reminder that there was an 'us' and 'them' mentality, and that they did not feel welcome.

Rachel, 31, a mixed race, Black Arab woman, who lives in London, describes her experience in the airport, *"I sat next to a white lady in her seat, and she had a few people sitting next to her on her left side. When I sat down, she looked at me multiple times. I could tell she wasn't happy that I sat there, and I didn't want to move because I knew what that look meant…When I didn't get up, she huffed, so she folded her newspaper back together and she went and sat directly behind me where there were more white people…It's things like that that didn't really have verbal communication as much as it was body language… And so… you're even more hyper-aware of somebody saying something to you and also more about preconceptions of being black."*

As noted by Julie, 23, from the East of England *"I finished my nursing degree this year. So, well, during my practices in the hospital, I would go on duty, and then I would just meet a number of patients who would tell me to my face, "You cannot attend to me," just because I'm Black. Yeah, it's really traumatising."*

Joseph, 33, a full-time nanny in London, explained, *"I've been stopped four times especially when the baby cries and that is not okay. I have said to them [the police], "If I was white man with a Black child, I would not have been stopped." I've complained but then it happens again and again and again."*

People also described experiencing microaggressions from individuals in positions of power, such as teachers, police officers, nurses, doctors, and work colleagues. Undoubtedly, participants voiced how this was particularly concerning or frustrating as these people were there to support them and take control of the environment. For example, people mentioned teachers not supporting them as they were deemed a troublemaker or police officers stopping and searching individuals with no grounds for suspicion.

Participants with children often spoke about the injustices they saw their children face at school, but found it very difficult to find recourse to support. Many of these incidents revolved around teachers accusing children of misbehaving or labelling certain children as challenging, seemingly singling Black children out over others. Participants who remembered their own time at school spoke about how these microaggressions occurred not only around supposed misbehaviour, but on an ongoing basis where comments would be made about ability, hair, clothing, and attitude or they would be incorrectly placed in lower sets. In fact, over 60% of participants in exploration labs reported discrimination in schools.

"I'VE BEEN EXPOSED TO A LOT OF RACISM IN MY WORK ENVIRONMENT. WHEN I USED TO WORK AS A DELIVERY DRIVER, I WOULD BE WITH CAUCASIAN PEOPLE AND THEY WOULD PUT ON A JAMAICAN ACCENT, OR THEY WOULD IMPERSONATE MY CULTURE WITHOUT HAVING ANY UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT THEY'RE DOING."

MICHAEL, FROM LEEDS

Monica, aged 57, from South-West England, shared, *"When teachers get you to read, and when I would read and my English teacher was looking at me, "No, that's not how Black people speak." And I say, "What do you mean?"*

John, aged 34, from London, reflected on his unequal treatment at school, *"So when I was in secondary school, basically most of the youth of colour were put in the lower classes. And that was tough, because basically, our parents thought that we were just rubbish."*

Research has shown that Black pupils, especially those of Caribbean heritage, consistently perform under the average achievement of their peers and this has been the case for over four decades. In 2018, for

example, Black Caribbean boys' attainment in London was 17 percentage points behind the London average for expected standards in reading, writing, and maths by the end of primary school.[8]

Equality of opportunity in the workplace was mentioned most by 30- to 40-year-olds within the research. Some people spoke about feeling their organisations lacked accountability structures for reporting workplace microaggressions. They typically felt like more senior people also did not respond openly to reports of workplace discrimination. Other people spoke about being passed over for promotions despite fulfilling the criteria and when challenging decisions, being described as "angry".

Michael, from Leeds, stated, *"I've been exposed to a lot of racism in my work environment. When I used to work as a delivery driver, I would be with Caucasian people and they would put on a Jamaican accent, or they would impersonate my culture without having any understanding of what they're doing."*

In the same vein, Lisa, from the West Midlands, shared how her white boss called her *"angry"* and *"outspoken"* when she complained about racist remarks in the workplace.

Typically, male participants of all ages raised experiences of maltreatment and microaggressions from the police. This was often around regular stop and searches or the police not taking their concerns seriously.

Hannah, 45, from Bristol, noted, *"My daughter had been driving my car when it was new and she was stopped several times...saying she shouldn't be driving the car, asking whom it belongs to."*

Joseph, aged 35, from London described the relationship Black men have with the police: *"The relationship with Black men, with the law, isn't the healthiest because we seem to get judged and punished before justice."*

This negative relationship between Black people and the police has been long-lasting in the UK. The experiences of participants reflect broader reports that show Black people are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched by police than white people.[9] Home Office figures show that in 2017/18, Black individuals were 40 times more likely to be stopped and searched under Section 60 than white individuals, where police officers require no evidence to do so.[10] Research that ClearView conducted for the Joint Committee on Human Rights found that almost 9 in 10 of the Black people that we polled stated they were not confident at all they would be treated the same as white people by the police. This was overwhelmingly the area where most Black people found they were treated unequally, out of the areas explored in the research project. Additionally, interestingly, we also found that Black women, in comparison to Black men, were less likely to believe they will be treated the same as white people by the police.[11]

Participants of all ages, genders and backgrounds regularly mentioned being the subject of microaggressions in healthcare. This also mirrors findings from our research for the Joint Committee on Human Rights where we found that the majority of Black people (over 60%) in the UK do not believe their health is as equally protected by the NHS compared to white people. Additionally, as with the police, this was more pronounced for women, as Black women are more likely than Black men to not believe their health is equally protected by the NHS.[12]

Older participants agreed that they had learnt to educate themselves extensively on their conditions before seeking medical support, largely because they had regular experiences of being dismissed and in some cases, diagnosed incorrectly. This was particularly distressing because they had to fight to be taken seriously in what was already a difficult time. Particular recurring examples of this were around maternity care for Black women and Special Educational Need (SEND) diagnosis. Experiences of participants around maternity care reflect broader research and campaigns that highlight how Black women are four times more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth than white counterparts.[13] Similarly, experiences around SEND diagnoses also speak to research that outlines the prejudices involved in the diagnostics process. Specifically, the research outlines this through the disproportionate number of Black Caribbean boys over-diagnosed with social, emotional, and mental health needs,[14] and an under diagnosis of Black children with autism.[15]

Lilian, aged 49, from Yorkshire & Humber, shared, *"I was hospitalised and my treatment in the hospital was absolutely disgusting. This man came in and I feel like he had this idea of what Black women and our community were like. He said, "You are very selfish. You will probably infect a lot of people up there." I had not yet been vaccinated and he went on to say it's the Black community that's stopping the country from recovering from COVID."*

Similarly, Jenny, aged 25, from North-West England, noted, *"I found out this year that I need an ADHD/autism assessment and they've just been dragging it out for so long. There's this misconception that if you have ADHD, you can't have a successful career, you don't have a good education. Um, and I- and I guess it was just not taken seriously when you're a Black woman."*

The emotional fallout of these experiences was self-evident in our conversations with participants. As subtle forms of racism are difficult to detect and can be perceived and interpreted differently, participants regularly spoke about finding themselves questioning whether comments or behaviours were racially motivated. One participant referred to this as having to walk a tightrope between being constantly *"hyper-vigilant"* whilst also not letting it affect or exhaust you.

As Michael, 48, in South-East England expresses, *"I could be offended by what they're doing but, it's something I've got used to over the years because it's quite common in Britain in general."*

This sense of constantly questioning people's motivations around you is linked to the notion of 'microinvalidations',[16] which is when comments or behaviours from white counterparts seek to invalidate or deny the lived experience of people of colour. Participants explained they often found themselves fearful to question comments or behaviours because of past experiences where white people responded aggressively or highly sensitively. They described this *"second-guessing"* and the inability to be heard as *"exhausting"* and *"another layer"* of oppression.

Jessica, from Scotland, explained, *"It gets to the point where you don't even want to talk about your experiences because they don't even recognise how their actions really affect you, you just accept it."*

Nina, aged 33, in South-West England expressed, *"It is just annoying because how many more times are we gonna get treated like we're not good enough?...Our experiences don't count. You just keep hearing so much of people's experiences and they just keep making excuses."*

Participants agreed that subtle racism and microaggressions were the most common forms of racism they experienced in formal and informal spaces. Participants, across all ages, genders, and backgrounds, felt microaggressions were a constant way of *"keeping us in our place"*. They agreed the *"double layer"* of having to emotionally deal with the microaggression whilst policing their tone so as not to offend white people in the process was altogether a draining task.

Representation

When pushed to consider why subtle racism, microaggressions, and institutional racism occur, participants in exploration labs and the community research reflected on the lack of representation of Black people in senior positions, political spaces, and the media. Participants thought that this is important for two reasons. Firstly, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues, by presenting one-dimensional representations of Black communities, "the single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete".[17] Secondly, it means those in senior positions are making decisions on behalf of Black communities without the knowledge of their lived experience. This section will outline the impact of the lack of representation and participants' views on how to build a more representative society to create sustainable change.

Media

Participants noted the problematic lack of people of colour on radio, the news, television shows, and films in the UK, especially when compared to countries like the United States. Participants shared that not only is there a lack of representation, but when you do see people of colour, their characters are minimal, tokenistic, or harmful portrayals of Black people. Participants agreed that is problematic on multiple levels, but largely because you cannot be what you do not see represented. Further, the way in which stereotypes are created then determine how white people see and interact with Black people in their day to day lives

Similarly, as noted by Sue, 63, South-West England, *"I grew up watching things like Fawlty Towers, Keeping up Appearances, Dads' Army and things like that, there was no Black person in sight. To be honest, it is not much different now. The only difference is the one odd Black person sprinkled in."*

"LOOKING ON TV, THERE WAS ONLY KIND OF LIKE QUEER OR TRANS REPRESENTATION OF WHITE PEOPLE. AND I NEVER THOUGHT IT WAS VALID TO BE TRANS, YOU KNOW"

ASHLEY AGED 23, FROM LONDON

As stated by Janet, 36, in South-West England, *"The way we're portrayed in the media - it's Black history and that's it."*

Participants also recognised that when Black people are portrayed in the media, it is usually negatively or in relation to crime, gangs, or drugs. As Peter in South-West England stated, *"You only see Black people especially Black men in the news when they are either in handcuffs, smoking or being hunted down. Like that is the only thing we represent".*

Sherry, 43, in London was *"fed up"* by the portrayal of Black women in the media: *"Of the two roles which you predominantly see, the angry Black woman or the over-sexualized Jezebel Black woman.... In other communities, you got people who are sexually liberal, you got people who are reserved, you got a combination of all types of women. But why is it that we can only hold these, you know, two certain roles? And it doesn't matter what you do, it doesn't matter how much you elevate, that is always attached to you."*

Ashley, aged 23 from London, spoke about the lack of representation of Black queer folk in the media and how this had a knock-on impact on how they/he viewed themselves/himself as well as how they/he was accepted in the Black community: *"Looking on TV, there was only kind of like queer or trans representation of white people. And I never thought it was valid to be trans, you know. But looking back and reflecting on things, not much has really changed in terms of representation of Black queer & trans people. And actually, within the Black community as well, it is also something that's quite weird. But I think that does come from the dominant culture, in terms of the lack of representation for Black queer & trans people."*

This reflection from Ashley reflects broader calls from the Black queer community, who often feel they have to sanitise their identities and pick a cause to support: either their Black identities or their sexuality/gender. This is echoed by the performer and writer, Travis Alabanza, who states, *"I used to get feedback that I didn't represent the 'true' trans experience - with white LGBT people loving certain parts of the show, and then being challenging to the parts that were about race."*[18]

Representation in the Workplace

In workplaces, older participants felt they regularly faced a glass ceiling when reporting issues of workplace discrimination and escalating it to people in more senior positions. Likewise, participants felt they were often held to a much higher standard than colleagues around them. Many felt this was because those in senior positions were predominantly white and, therefore, a desire to incorporate best practice around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion was low on the agenda.

As noted by Vivian, 46, in West Midlands, *"In my present role, I have tried repeatedly to get the job at the same level, at the same pay grade level, as other employees who are doing the exact same work as me. And it's been a fight. I have repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly had to jump through the hoops, only to go and find a brick wall after brick wall after brick wall after brick wall...I'm still at the bottom of the ladder and yet my skills, my intellects, my lived experiences are harvested to benefit the organisation. And I am forever, forever being told that my contribution is invaluable to the organisation, and I influence the CEO to trustees, all the way down to senior management."*

Vivian's point around being repeatedly overlooked speaks to findings from the 2017 McGregor-Smith review: Race in the Workplace. It was found that Black people are much more likely to be overqualified for their jobs than their white counterparts, who often advance up the ladder of promotion with ease. In other words, Black talent is not necessarily lacking in abundance, but it is seriously lacking in recognition and support.[19]

Jennifer, 38, in South-West England spoke about a culture where workplace discrimination seemed to be sanctioned by a lack of accountability frameworks: *"I'm quite light-skinned. So I find that people say things in front of me that they wouldn't say in front of a person who's visibly Black, which I find quite upsetting. And then you're in this scenario where you don't know, you either say something and you're seen as a troublemaker, you stay quiet, you hide silently, and sort of hate yourself for staying quiet."*

In addition, Nancy, 27, in East Midlands, noted with regards to her job search, *"I found out that people are being picked for the next level based on their names, kind of because my first name and last name is English. But then I've got a middle name, which is my tribal name. And I've seen that the job I've applied for with my full name doesn't get as much response as much as my resume with just my first and last name, and I just feel like that's just racism in a way."*

Lack of representation in the workplace clearly has a bearing on how far Black people progress in their careers. Recent research by Business in the Community found that there has been little change in the number of Black people in senior professional roles since 2012, representing just 1.5% of managers, directors, and senior officials in the UK.[20] Similarly, other research further contextualises Nancy's point. The Centre for Social Investigation found that on average, nearly one in four white applicants (24%) received a callback from employers, whilst applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds with identical CVs and cover letters needed to send 60% more applications in order to receive as many callbacks as the majority group.[21]

Representation in Education

Participants also noted the lack of representation of Black people in the teacher workforce and senior leadership

"THERE ARE NO BLACK MALE TEACHERS AS WELL. AND BEING A BLACK GROWN EDUCATOR AND NOW PROFESSIONAL, I'VE REALISED THE LACK OF REPRESENTATION FOR BLACK MALES IN A POSITIVE LIGHT OTHER THAN SPORTS OR RAPPERS."

JOSEPH, AGED 33, FROM LONDON

positions in schools, as well as a lack of Black culture within the curriculum. When participants in exploration labs reflected on their educational experience, most of the responses were highly negative. The lack of representation in education was noted as being problematic because without the representation of Black leaders and Black culture, the education system does not feel designed with Black people in mind, their learning styles, their behaviours, and their needs.

Participants of all ages particularly reflected on the lack of Black teachers. This was the case for older age groups looking back at their time in school and younger participants who had recently left. Recent statistics confirm and show that white British people made up 93% of headteachers, 90% of deputy or assistant headteachers, and 85% of classroom teachers in England in 2019. The percentage of classroom teachers who identify as Black are also considerably low, with only 0.9% of the teacher workforce who are Black African, 1.1% Black Caribbean and 0.1% Mixed White/Black African, the lowest percentage out of all ethnic groups in this role.[22] Participants reflected on the negative impacts of this. Some reflected on the regular microaggressions they would

"YOU CAN SEE HOW BLACK BOYS WERE TREATED DIFFERENTLY... YEAH, EVEN AT THAT AGE, YOU CAN NOTICE THAT YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH SOMETHING - AS A WHITE BOY, OR EVEN AS A GIRL - I COULD GET AWAY WITH A LOT MORE THAN A BLACK BOY WOULD. IT JUST MADE NO SENSE."

SHONDA, AGED 34, FROM BRISTOL

experience from their white teachers that would go unnoticed. Others spoke more pressingly about the impact this had on feeling like they did not belong or were not understood by the school.

Lisa, aged 43, from the Midlands, shared, *"My school career was between 1970 and 1982. No Black teachers, nothing addressing anything to do with my culture or my heritage. I do remember when I was about 11 years old, I was referred to as a dusky maiden by a music teacher, a middle-aged man. So, he felt free to exoticise me, as a child."*

Similarly, Michelle, 34, from Wales noted, *"I went to school in Cardiff in Wales. The primary school I went to, my sister and I were the only, not even only Black, but only people of colour, only students of colour in the whole school, including the teachers. So, as you can imagine, coming out of our home, as a very young child, out of your house into that environment is a big culture shock."*

Also noted by Joseph, 33, in London, *"There are no Black male teachers as well. And being a Black grown educator and now professional, I've realised the lack of representation for Black males in a positive light other than sports or rappers."*

Dana, aged 56, from London shared: *"I went to a very diverse primary school where Black children were not in the minority. Um, that didn't mean that we had the teachers who were any more equipped to deal with us."*

Many participants shared the relief and positive relationships they did have with teachers of colour. As Mina, 32, in Bristol put it, *"I had an Asian teacher, and I still remember his name, Mr Shaw, and he was particularly attentive to me, keeping me focused and stuff like that. He respected my parents in terms of ensuring that we got the best part of the education system."*

As Dana's point suggests, participants agreed that the lack of diversity in the teacher workforce had a huge impact on how Black students were viewed and supported in their education. Participants regularly voiced the sentiment that they did not feel understood by their teachers, having been viewed as troublemakers or simply written off with little expected of them.

In addition, Kerry, 29, in Yorkshire noted, *"Time and time, again, there's this sort of expectation that you won't do that well...So, kind of like there's a limit all the time where your peers will be expected to do a lot higher than you....And it's a very low expectation when Black people are of any age. This is like from school, all the way up to university."*

Kerry's point speaks to broader research into the low expectations that teachers have of Black and minority ethnic students, which was particularly evident in the teacher assessment grades that determined UK students' GCSE and A Level results in 2020. It was found in an Ofqual review that the gap between Black and white students' attainment was 1.4% worse for Black students when their grades were awarded by teacher assessment, pointing to bias and lower expectation of Black students.[23]

Shonda, 34, in Bristol, raised a point around the treatment of Black boys in particular: *"You can see how Black boys were treated differently…Yeah, even at that age, you can notice that you can get away with something – as a white boy, or even as a girl – I could get away with a lot more than a Black boy would. It just made no sense."*

As Joe, aged 49, from London, put it, *"They didn't know how to deal with me…In primary school, they often labeled our behaviour as aggressive, or violent, or loud. I look back now, I got put in what we call special needs. I got labelled as Dyslexic. But none of this stuff was true, it was just the teachers that didn't know how to kind of manage our behaviour."*

Interestingly, some participants felt that teachers only showed an interest in them when they showed a talent in sport. Alice, aged 65, from South-West England, noted, *"And there was no encouragement for Black kids to do anything other than maybe go into sports."* Some parents reflected that this felt like teachers were pushing Black children into sport as a way of dealing *"with their aggressive behaviour"* rather than truly trying to understand them.

Parents also expressed how they often were not taken seriously when they engaged with schools and teachers, as if the same prejudices that determined the teacher-student relationship also prevented teachers from listening to parents. As Karen, aged 43, mentioned, *"And my parents, I think, you know, probably didn't understand the education system, they made an effort, but they weren't listened to. We weren't heard."*

These experiences of Black children not being fully supported at school reflect broader research into the disproportionality of exclusions of Black students in England. Black Caribbean and mixed White/Black Caribbean children are more than twice as likely to be permanently and temporarily excluded than white counterparts.[24] As Shonda alludes, there has also been much research that outlines inconsistent treatment and discipline of Black children and young people in schools, where for common, subjective misbehaviour, Black students are at a higher risk of exclusionary discipline.[25] This is further complicated by the lack of representation of Black parents on school Boards of Trustees. According to the National Governance Association (NGA) annual school governance survey, only 4% of governors and trustees come from an ethnic minority background.[26] The reasons for this are unclear but a lack of support and understanding at a Board level will also contribute to lacking accountability to ethnic minority families at a student level.

"I AM A FOURTH YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT. I DO FEEL THAT THERE IS A LOT OF DISCRIMINATION. WHEN YOU ARE LEARNING ABOUT NEW DISEASES, IT'S ALL ON WHITE PEOPLE…YOU NEVER LOOK AT THIS ON DARK SKIN. TO FIND A BLOOD VESSEL YOU WOULDN'T KNOW HOW TO FIND IT. EVEN WHEN I GO TO THE HOSPITAL TO PRACTICE, IT'S WHITE PATIENTS.

SHERELLE, AGED 23,
FROM NORTH-WEST ENGLAND

With a lack of Black people in the teacher workforce and senior positions, it is also unsurprising that Black heritage and culture is not reflected in the curriculum or teaching practices. Research commissioned by Penguin Random House outlined that only 0.7% of English Literature GCSE students in England study a book by a writer of colour while only 7% study a book by a woman.[27] A separate study by the University of Leicester found that this was particularly problematic

because Black students often have to "work harder" in order to connect with assessments and content in the curriculum.[28]

As Peter 40, in London notes, *"And apart from, you know, when you would read like Biff and Chip books in reception and stuff, like when they had the one Asian friend in the book, I was like, "Oh, wow, I didn't even realize that everyone in this book was white. Back home, every one of my books is Black."*

Rob, 42 noted that his school experience was *"frustrating....And just makes you realize that shouldn't be the case." While also expressing how he felt about the education system, Hamza in London noted, "I suppose, as an adult, I feel a bit short changed. Again, it wasn't questioned because there were just no Black teachers."*

Participants were keen to underline the importance of increasing Black teachers within the workforce, as a way to ensure the needs of Black children are properly reflected and the personalities and behaviours are not misconceived due to prejudice. In addition, it is important to note that only having a minority of Black teachers can mean they become the go-to individuals to look after Black students. This also needs addressing to prevent type casting and undue responsibility applied to a minority of teachers.[29]

Institutions - Healthcare

Finally, participants across exploration labs and community research regularly mentioned the problematic lack of Black people in senior positions in healthcare. According to the 2021 Medical Workforce Race Equality Standard, although recent data shows that 42% of medical staff working in the NHS are now from a Black, Asian, or minority ethnic background, Black doctors remain underrepresented in senior positions, including at consultant grade roles, as medical directors, as clinical directors, and in academic positions.[30] Participants mentioned a general lack of understanding of their cultural and medical needs, as well as common discrimination in interactions with healthcare professionals. In contrast, some participants reflected on the potential opportunity for change around emerging, Black-led health organisations, such as Black Thrive[31] and The Black, African and Asian Therapy Network.[32]

Sherelle, aged 23, from North-West England, spoke about seeing discrimination first hand in healthcare: *"I am a fourth year medical student. I do feel that there is a lot of discrimination. When you are learning about new diseases, it's all on white people...You never look at this on dark skin. To find a blood vessel you wouldn't know how to find it. Even when I go to the hospital to practice, it's white patients. I remember one time the lecture had to do with high blood pressure and you get three different types of drugs for three different types of people. But then when you look at it they tested maybe tens of thousands of white people, but when it comes to black people, it's only 600 people. How is that six hundred people are supposed to represent Black women and Black kids, fathers, Black men, you know, all sorts."*

Lacking a diversity of medical knowledge and medical evidence can severely impact the quality of care Black people receive. Other research has shown patients receiving a skin prosthesis not matching their skin tone and medical advice that does not account for cultural needs, such as Ramadan.[33]

Lacking the representation of Black people in senior positions within the healthcare system can also mean discrimination governs patient-doctor interactions. Ike, aged 48, from South-West England, also shared a problematic example: *"I'd like to piggyback on the healthcare situation and say that it's not just for females, it is for everyone. I've had several instances where I've gone in and have a prescription that's supposed to be made out for me. And talking with the doctor, the doctors basically saying, "Oh well, you know that prescription isn't for you because you have Afro Caribbean descent." And I'll be like, "No, you're incorrect. I've read the latest papers on that, and that is antiquated research." And I'm a bit like, how am I the one who's more on the medical terms and things than you are?"*

Discrimination was particularly evident for participants who identify as LGBTQIA+ and disabled. They spoke about facing a two-fold setback when interacting with healthcare professionals. As with Sherelle and Ike above, LGBTQIA+ participants shared how they often felt their voices were minimised or preferences dismissed. However, in addition, they also felt their sexuality or gender identity would be completely ignored or misgendered in the healthcare system.

Ashley, aged 23, from London, explained, *"I went to the clinic just to get a contraceptive and I have to refer to myself as 'she' constantly. It's just horrible and disheartening because they don't register that people who go there to get contraceptives or in terms of gynecology, not all of them are women. But I just had to silence myself in that regard...I'm sure I could have presented my pronouns, but I was trying to avoid being misgendered. It's so much labor, I just find it really difficult when it comes to healthcare...So, it's kind of like feeling very, very backwards, like invisibilising if that's a word."*

One participant noted the real benefit of having healthcare professionals that look like you and understand you, particularly around psychotherapy for queer and transgender people: *"So, the only- and actually, I want to say that the only - really good experience I've had in terms of care has actually come from other Black people or Black organisations. So, I have a therapist that I found on the Black and Asian therapist network. And they also use 'they' pronouns, and like 'they/she' pronouns. And it's like something that actually helped me to see myself and they really understand my experience....And it's really the one in a million in terms...It's so rare to have an organisation that really, really caters to the experience of Black people."*

Additional research conducted by ClearView Research into the experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities with blood cancer diagnoses adds further evidence to this picture of inequitable access to healthcare. It shows how disabled people of colour or people of colour with chronic illnesses regularly face delays in referrals and are regularly excluded from their treatment decisions.

Participants' conversations around lack of representation high up in healthcare are a reminder that the ability to trust that your healthcare professional is listening to your needs is a big privilege. It also shows how their worldview and attitude toward their patient will determine how they listen to and treat that individual.

Impact on Identity, Belonging and Wellbeing

In exploration labs and the community research, there would often be a moment where participants would reflect on the experiences of racism they had shared and link them to the considerable impact these had on their sense of identity, belonging, and well-being.

With regards to identity, participants spoke about the danger of taking on the identity that is prescribed to Black people by mainstream narratives, rather than creating their own sense of identity. As noted by Andrea, 47, from South-West England, *"It feels kind of bleak sometimes...We just need to be highlighted and remember that we need to be careful not to take on the narratives that were given to us."*

As noted by Beatrice, *"I think that as post-colonial Black citizens, we have not actually in any real way come to understand a sort of a resolute sense of who we are."*

While reflecting on her sense of identity throughout her teen years, Annie, in Wales shared that, *"I realised that my identity or what I understood my identity to be got challenged because I was going through puberty and I'm thinking I'm unattractive and my hair will do what it's supposed to do, what I thought was supposed to do. It was challenging for me because I thought that it's not easy being Black."*

One participant shared a story of bathing herself in bleach when she was younger *"to take off her Black skin"* because she felt so ashamed of her skin colour and was not surrounded by positive images to associate with.

There was a recognition among participants who are parents that these feelings of self-doubt were particularly strong amongst teenage girls. Many parents mentioned daughters trying to straighten their hair to become more acceptable in schools. This speaks to accounts recently that report Black pupils being excluded for fades, locs, braids, and natural afros. There is currently widespread campaigning to amend the UK Equality Act to include Afro-textured hair.[34] Academics and campaigners in particular are calling for more attention to be paid towards the experiences of Black girls in the UK. Because much statistical focus is on attainment, there is the assumption that because Black girls are achieving academically, particularly in comparison to Black boys, they do not warrant educational concern.[35] However, there is increasing concern around the mental health of Black girls, where studies show that girls of mixed ethnic backgrounds are at greater risk than white counterparts with severe mental health problems.[36]

"SO MUCH OF IT [A SENSE OF BELONGING] IS INFORMED BY SYSTEMS OF WHITENESS THAT HAVE TOLD US WHO WE SHOULD BE. AND SO, IN A WEIRD WAY, WHEN WE'RE IN WHITE SPACES I THINK MANY OF US ASSIMILATE AND THEREFORE FEEL A MANUFACTURED SENSE OF BELONGING THAT COULD BE, AT ANY POINT, STRIPPED FROM US FOR ANY REASON."

MOHAMMED, FROM LEEDS

Trey, aged 48, from South-East England, spoke about the responsibility this generation has to learn from the oppression they went through growing up to ensure younger generations are surrounded by images and the knowledge to love themselves: *"She, my daughter, needs to know about hair, her crown, her natural state of herself...And it's like, that's progress that we can ensure from a young age. We now have the vocabulary to kind of express that, to teach that, so she can know that about her."*

Participants were therefore keen to emphasise the harm of mainstream, anti-Black narratives. It was agreed that images of 'Black joy' are integral for people's overall happiness. Many people mentioned the difficult time they had growing up, bombarded by Eurocentric ideals of beauty, but that now they have got to a place where they are proud to be Black. Those who voiced these stories were adamant that younger generations should not have to go through that same denial and instead should be systematically exposed to examples of Black joy.

Michael, 34 in South-East England further adds, *"When you look at the political makeup of this country, the systemic racism, the organisations and the way we are underrepresented in all of the big major corporations, you realise that we don't belong, and we've not been made to feel that we belong ever."*

This was also echoed by Mohammed, in Leeds who noted the reason behind this, *"So much of it [a sense of belonging] is informed by systems of whiteness that have told us who we should be. And so, in a weird way, when we're in white spaces I think many of us assimilate and therefore feel a manufactured sense of belonging that could be, at any point, stripped from us for any reason."*

Christine, 35, in London also spoke to this sense of always being an outsider: *"There's something about the ecosystem and spirit that is missing in these spaces. And some people might refer to it as essential godliness. But there's something about the Black community that is very integrated, very much a sort of a whole-body experience that you miss in unenlightening spaces. And I think that is the thing that makes you always feel like you're just on the cusp of being an outsider, no matter how much you feel like you belong."*

According to participants, navigating one's identity, belonging, and well-being as a Black person in the face of microaggressions and a racist system can be truly exhausting. Having to separate out how other people see you and how you see yourself is a constant struggle that occurs early in childhood. Therefore, there is a need for the reorientation of Black identity and culture. Participants agreed that seeing their diverse lives documented will enable them to feel free and able to creatively develop an understanding of who they are away from oppressive narratives.

"I AM HOPEFUL AND I ACTUALLY KIND OF THINK WE NEED TO PASS THE BATTLE ONTO FUTURE GENERATIONS....YOUNGER PEOPLE ARE BETTER EDUCATED, THEY'RE BOLDER, AND THEY UNDERSTAND THE NUANCES OF RACISM AND THEY QUESTION THEIR META-NARRATIVE AND THEY DON'T JUST LET THINGS SLIDE."

ALISON, AGED 58, FROM SOUTH EAST ENGLAND

The future: if we continue on this current path...

When asked the extent to which participants felt positive about the future, there were mixed feelings. When explicitly asked about how positive people felt given the current trajectory, 60% of participants in exploration labs did not feel positive and 40% felt positive. This hesitancy was also mirrored in the community research. Overall, there was a large age split in how people felt about the future, with older participants lacking confidence in change and younger people feeling more positive.

Those who did not feel positive about the future were driven by a distrust in the system - the government, policymakers, and people in senior leadership positions in business.

Jillian, from Scotland, noted, *"So in terms of what I think will happen in the future, it doesn't feel like much will change. It just feels like we just get platitudes, a little bit of money here and there."*

People's hesitancy to speak positively about the future was also from a place of fear. People were increasingly aware of the risk - to their livelihood, to their relationships and friendships - of speaking out. Sue, in London, shared how *"you'll even get some Black people in organisations where they just don't want to talk to you because they don't want to seem too bothered in front of their white colleagues."*

Although people recognised that things had gradually improved, participants also saw the limit to these changes. Fiona, from London noted that there are no differences between what existed in the 1960s and what is currently going on, stating, *"Yeah there are more freedoms but there stil is racism, it hasn't changed its face. It hasn't gone away, it's just more discrete."*

For those who did feel more positive about the future, their positivity came from the regular conversations people seemed to be having around race, both socially and in formal settings. Hope and energy for the future were particularly linked to the efforts of younger generations.

As noted by Jones in Leeds when comparing the current situation with the past struggle to be heard, *"We have the voice, we've always had the voice, but our voice is now being appreciated and listened to and heard now, I think we are more in charge of the narratives, so that gives me hope."* Participants also reflected on the multiple outlets - social media, the internet, and independent media - that Black people now had access to as a way of platforming their views.

As shared by Alison, aged 58, from South East England, *"I am hopeful and I actually kind of think we need to pass the battle onto future generations....Younger people are better educated, they're bolder, and they understand the nuances of racism and they question their meta-narrative and they don't just let things slide."*

Creating change: what would it take for people to feel positive about the future?

When prompted to consider what it would take for participants to feel positive about the future, there was a complete variety of responses. Some participants would answer this in terms of who has the moral responsibility to change the system, whilst others focused on where they saw people already creating change.

For some, it was about holding the government to account and challenging authority. Helen, aged 33, from South-West England, noted, *"We need to be less trustful, more inquisitive of governments and systemic practices and organisations. And do our own research on our own experiences. We are always the research subjects. We are never the researchers. Stop waiting for validation from white people. Let's make our own narratives."*

Other participants felt that change came from creating alternative spaces and establishing their own narratives around Black people, culture, and heritage. In this respect, people were keen not to wait for the system to change and, instead, to create the society they want to live in.

As Natasha in Scotland put it, *"We can work alongside people but don't make those people actualise us, because we are fullly capable, and we can self-organise, and do all those things that society says we can't do."*

Finally, there were some participants who looked to white people as key agents of change. Participants were keen to stress that the way real positive change would take place was for white people to positively recognise and accept the notion of *"white privilege"*. Participants argued that white people need to release the power themselves, in whatever spaces they occupy. Dave, 34, in South-West England, pointed to the real importance of white people building their understanding of how they contribute to and benefit from systemic racism so allyship is not done *"in a tokenistic, performative way, "I will post this hashtag for the day.""*

Conclusion

Black communities in this research were evidently split on their views about the future, with 60% of Exploration Lab participants feeling pessimistic and 40% feeling more positive. Younger participants tended to be more positive and dynamic about how they saw racial equity coming about in the UK, whilst older participants tended to voice fatigue and exasperation that the same conversations were still going on.

Participants' energy and aspiration for the future came from the spaces they had managed to build outside of formal institutional spaces: online, in social media groups and collectives. They doubted that change would occur on a systemic level anytime soon but believed by modelling an alternative, equitable, and compassionate way of living in their daily lives, they could build equity on a micro-level that would slowly chip away at the status quo.

Education and inequitable access to healthcare were key areas that participants mentioned as requiring systemic reform. Across participants of different backgrounds, people felt that these systems in particular were governed by white prejudices and that these were causing real harm to Black people across the UK. With participants aged from 18 to over 60, it was remarkable to note the consistent ways in which they were mistreated by these institutions, suggesting that institutions have shown little improvement over the years. Participants agreed that inequity in education and healthcare, and institutions as a whole, tended to come down to lack of representation of Black lived experience in senior positions, or in research, service design, and policy-making processes. Participants agreed systemic reform needed to start with building an evidence base of how diverse Black communities experienced and engaged with institutions. By addressing this absence of knowledge at the top, it is only then that systems, programmes, and products can be redesigned with the Black lived experience in mind.

Participants from across the exploration labs and community research were at times reluctant to share their stories. Some reflected that this was because they were too traumatic to relive or that they had learnt to minimise or downplay their experiences. Participants shared their experiences in the knowledge that they would be used towards determining BEO's strategic priorities and steer change. Based on the priorities identified in this research, BEO faces a distinct urgency and moral obligation to advocate for Black communities. In our previous research for the Joint Committee on Human Rights, people called for better anti-racism laws and prosecutions around racist incidents, more positive Black role models across different spheres, better education in school about human rights and equality, and Black-focused initiatives by Government and the NHS, amongst others.[37] BEO need to play their part in ensuring Black people feel protected and able to exist within a system that is not racist.

People agreed that they had become skilled at living multiple lives by learning how to police their own tone and behaviours so as to not offend or push away white people. Ongoing research, programmes, campaigns, documentaries, and media that centre the voices of Black people are crucial, therefore, to enable Black communities to take up space in British society whilst being their authentic selves, so they no longer have to navigate or live out a narrative dictated to by white people.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, there are some clear actions that BEO can take to have a positive impact on how the human rights of Black people are protected:

1. **BEO should be a model example of an organisation that shifts power, by modelling an assets-based way of working with the Black community.** There was clear agreement amongst some participants, that we have also seen in our research with multiple groups that face discrimination, and that BEO should ensure that they are building diverse voices into the decision-making processes and sharing power with the communities they seek to serve.

2. **There is a key role for BEO in raising awareness of what systemic racism is and the best practice in dismantling it so that the UK can be regarded as a model for other white-majority countries.** Although this may seem obvious, it was very clear that while some participants had limited hope around how the government and politicians may change their views, others were keen for BEO to focus campaigning and lobbying around outlining what 'institutional racism' means, the ways it manifests – including subtle ways – and how to address it.

3. **Support for mental health and wellbeing needs to be a top priority.** Participants across ages, genders, socio-economic status, and backgrounds spoke about the emotional fallout of microaggressions and ongoing discussions around racism that the past two years have had. Although most participants viewed race and racial disparities becoming more of a mainstream discussion as a positive step, people also expressed the fatigue that comes with this too. People called for increased support for the wellbeing and mental health of Black people, particularly by building on the work of existing organisations that address the inequalities that negatively impact the mental health and wellbeing of Black people.

4. **In-depth cultural competency training is required for healthcare professionals in senior positions to deepen their understanding of how to meet the medical and cultural needs of Black communities. Additionally, BEO should fund or develop a partnership with a culturally competent healthcare organisation to deliver training of patient advocates for people in the Black community.** Inequitable treatment within healthcare and the lack of patient-centred or culturally sensitive care were regularly stressed by participants. This has also emerged as a pressing finding from existing research into health inequalities. Participants also shared multiple stories of being dismissed by healthcare professionals, as their questions were viewed as challenges to authority or doctors assuming they know best. People are encouraged to advocate for themselves in healthcare settings, however, many of our research participants pointed to the ineffectiveness of this if healthcare professionals themselves do not listen to their views. To address this, patient advocates should be provided to ensure the voices of individuals are heard.

5. **BEO should also advocate for the training of the teacher workforce in culturally relevant educational practices.** Participants recognised the scale and impact of the lack of representation within the education system. Not only does this call for greater representation in the teacher workforce, but it also suggests that

teachers and senior leaders require in-depth training in how to deliver teaching and support in a culturally diverse environment by adopting an assets-based approach. Culturally relevant educational practices can include broad and diverse curricula as well as varied teaching styles that appeal to the different ways that children learn.

6. **BEO needs to support Black creatives and Black-led media/cultural/arts organisations** so that authentic and varied examples of Black lives, told by Black people, are reflected in the media. Participants reflected on the impact of not seeing themselves or their diverse lives reflected in the media - films, TV, radio, music, art - when they were growing up and the impact this had on their sense of belonging. They also reflected on the power that representation can have in undermining and dismantling harmful stereotypes that exist.

7. **BEO should champion and advocate for the work of groups imagining different ways of existing, working and living**. Many participants lacked hope in the power and ability of politicians to change or protect them. Many mentioned the energy and belonging they had found in Black queer or disabled rights groups, in particular. Examples included collective housing co-operatives to challenge gentrification[38] and safe and celebratory queer nightlife.[39] Much more research needs to be done into and led by the voices of these groups, to create authentic narratives, demonstrate how the system affects these groups and, ultimately, learn from non-dominant narratives.

8. **In campaigns and communications, BEO needs to ensure messaging does not only promote the 'Black excellence' narrative at the expense of the diverse narratives that exist.** Participants were clear that there is a diverse story for Black people and that should first and foremost be shared. There was a preference to talk about 'Black joy' and about Black communities in an assets-based way. This would counter the widespread mainstream images of Black pain and suffering or the negative portrayals of Black communities we see in the media.

9. **BEO has a role in providing accountability to organisations who make public commitments to anti-racism.** Many participants felt most organisations were only paying lip service to anti-racist practices and provided a knee-jerk reaction the BLM protests of 2020, by making commitments that they have not followed through. BEO can do this by creating a platform where businesses make public commitments and actions towards anti-racism, as well as supporting people in the Black community to win prosecutions against employers or the state.

10. **BEO needs to understand the social justice environment in which they are operating and shape their positioning so that they build on and work with organisations already in the area.** Participants were keen to stress that BEO needs to recognise existing work already in this area, otherwise it risks duplicating the work of others. In many of our research projects, by using co-creation with community leaders and experts, we ensure existing expertise is at the heart of our projects and informs the research process. We also view lived experience as a form of expertise; by having diverse people with lived experience of any given topic involved in decision-making, we are consistently able to reach the crux of an issue quickly and effectively. People also mentioned this can happen by acknowledging the strength for change that comes from working with other minority groups on a common cause. Critics of the Sewell Report argued that its focus on the aspirations of white working-class communities was a problematic attempt to pitch minority groups against each other.[40] BEO are uniquely positioned to build a common cause across groups and bring about sustainable and intersectional change to combat this siloed view of social justice.

These recommendations emphasise the need for BEO to recognise the work that has come before them, as well as providing strong leadership to unite and push for change. BEO will have the task of bringing people together, creating an environment of knowledge-exchange, self-determination, and community, as well as building a diverse and authentic narrative of what it is like to be Black in the UK. Participants, in both exploration labs and the community research were at times reluctant to share their stories of racism. They shared how these were draining and that they have shared them many times before, with little result. It is crucial that the stories shared through this research are used to determine the very practical priorities of BEO to drive tangible change.

Appendix 1: Demographics of Exploration Lab Participants

We engaged 40 people in the exploration labs. The following section breaks down their demographics.

Age Bracket	No. of Participants
18-20	10%
21-24	8%
25-30	18%
31-35	23%
36-40	5%
41-45	8%
46-50	8%
51-55	3%
56-60	25%
61+	3%

Table 1: Age split of exploration lab participants

Gender	No. of Participants
Man	28%
Woman	68%
Non-Binary	5%

Table 2: Gender split of exploration lab participants

Do you identify as disabled?	No. of Participants
No	72%
Yes	28%

Table 3: Number of exploration lab participants who identified as disabled

Where do you currently live?	No. of Participants
East Midlands	8%
East of England	3%
London	38%
North West England	3%
Scotland	3%
South East England	10%
South West England	20%
Wales	5%
West Midlands	5%
Yorkshire & Humber	8%

Table 4 - Location of exploration lab participants

How do you define your sexuality?	No. of Participants
Bisexual	8%
Heterosexual / Straight	80%
Lesbian / Gay	5%
Pansexual	13%
Queer	5%

Table 5 - Sexuality of exploration lab participants

What ethnicity do you identify as?	No. of Participants
Any other ethnic group	8%
Black - African	33%
Black - Caribbean	30%
Mixed - Black and Arab/Middle Eastern	3%
Mixed - Black Caribbean and African	8%
Mixed - White and Black African	8%
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean	13%
Grand Total	**40**

Table 6 - Ethnicity breakdown of exploration lab participants

Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?	No. of Participants
No	58%
Yes	43%

Table 7- Number of exploration lab participants who have physical or mental health conditions

Do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day to day activities?	No. of Participants
Not at all	58%
Yes, a little	30%
Yes, a lot	13%

Table 8 - Number of exploration lab participants who suffer from conditions or illnesses that affect their ability to carry out day-to-day activities

Appendix 2: Demographics of Community Researchers

Age Bracket	No. of Community Researchers
21-24	1
25-30	1
31-35	1
36-40	1
41-45	1
56-60	1

Table 1: Age split of community researchers

Gender	No. of Community Researchers
Man	2
Woman	3
Non-Binary	1

Table 2: Gender split of community researchers

How would you describe your ethnic background?	No. of Community Researchers
Black - African	3
Black - Caribbean	1
Mixed - Black Caribbean and Black African	1
Mixed - White and Black African	1

Table 3: Ethnicity of community researchers

How would you describe your national identity?	No. of Community Researchers
Ghanian	1
British	2
Caribbean descent	1
Scottish	2

Table 4: National identity of community researchers

Region	No. of Community Researchers
London	2
Scotland	1
South West England	1
Wales	1
Yorkshire & Humber	1

Table 5: Location of community researchers

Sexuality	No. of Community Researchers
Bisexual	1
Heterosexual / Straight	4
Lesbian / Gay	1

Table 6: Sexuality of community researchers

Do you identify as disabled?	No. of Community Researchers
No	4
Yes	2

Table 7: Number of community researchers who identified as disabled

Appendix 3: Additional materials sourced to inform the research

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