# The Impact of Hybrid Working on Black Women Academics: Productivity and Visibility in Post-COVID Higher Education

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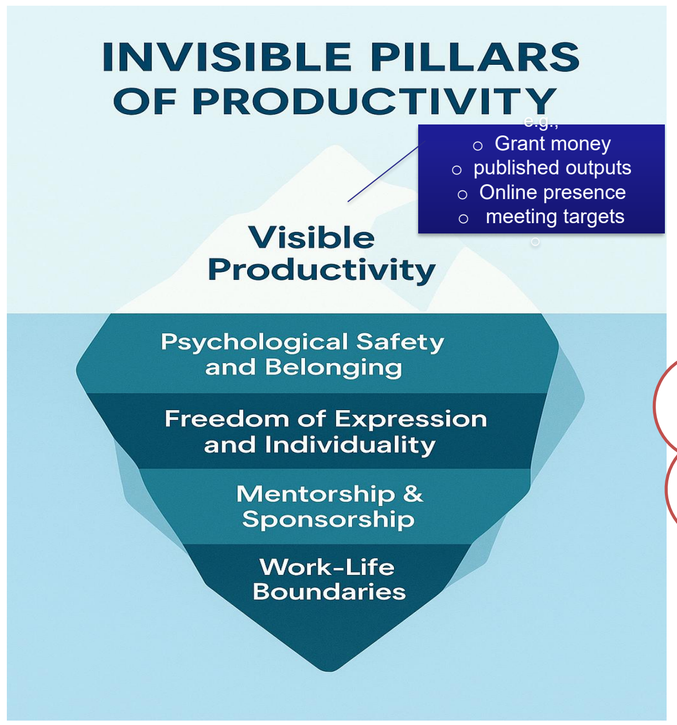
## Introduction

Hybrid working, which blends remote and on-campus arrangements, became the standard in UK academia following the COVID-19 pandemic (Watermeyer et al., 2021). While the hybrid model offers increased flexibility, it can also deepen existing inequalities for marginalised groups (Krajčík et al., 2023).

### Overview of the Project

Our project is a co-design study with 8 Black female academics from 6 universities to conduct two focus groups and 20 interviews with Black Female academics.

We are now coding and analysing the data to prepare dissemination materials. We aim to highlight challenges and opportunities to inform transformational attitudinal and policy changes that foster greater equity and inclusion in higher education.




### Why this research is important!

Black women academics face distinct and intersecting challenges, including:

- Persistent underrepresentation in senior leadership roles (Griffin, 2019)
- Limited access to decision-making spaces (Showunmi, 2023)
- Unacknowledged emotional labour and disproportionate EDI responsibilities (Gabriel & Tate, 2017)
- There are currently less than 90 Black female professors compared to over 25k professors in UK HE
- These structural issues risk being further exacerbated in hybrid working environments

## Aims

Our project explores how hybrid working impacts the visibility, productivity and career progression and promotion of Black women academics in higher education working in the UK.

## Methodology

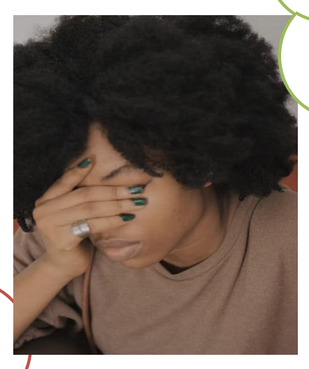
| Location: | Instrument: | Research Design & Analysis: | Sample: |
|---|---|---|---|
| ▪ UK universities across England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland | ▪ 2 X Focus Groups - 90 minutes<br>▪ Documentary analysis<br>▪ A semi-structured interview with 20 Black women scheduled (45-60 minutes each) | ▪ Co-design<br>▪ Phenomenological approach<br>▪ Social construction of Reality Constructivism (Berger and Luckmann 1967)<br>▪ Interviews (Digitally recorded on MS Teams and transcribed using Ottert.AI).<br>▪ Quirkos data analysis software (Used to manage data, organise codes and thematic map).<br>▪ Thematic analysis | ▪ Purposive sampling and snowballing<br>▪ Multiple variation sampling: N=41<br>▪ Focus Group (n12)<br>▪ Individual Interviews =20<br>▪ Target population:<br>▪ Black Female Academics engaged in hybrid working Carribeen, African or Mixed race) |

## Findings: Participants' Quotes

**Theme (i): Intersectional lens: not treating everyone the same**

"We also need to keep intersectionality in mind. Personally, I believe this approach benefits everyone, not just us as Black women. For instance, I'm an admissions tutor, but this year my child is getting A-level results — on that day, I need to be a mom first. It's important to have a safe space where you can say, 'I can't be here for this reason' without fear."

"My white colleagues… got away with not coming on campus… they knew how to work the system. Let's just say that there was a lot of ignorance on our part. Those of us who were migrants, new to teaching, new to the country, with a visa… there's this silence on unspoken pressure. You know you are new, because you don't want anything that will impact your status here. So, you're constantly going above and beyond, even when it's not convenient, even when you are sick and don't need to be present."



**Theme (ii): Work culture & The unwritten rule**

"I think one of the things I really appreciate is mentoring — having someone senior in the career who can explain things. One challenge is that the promotion criteria are often vague. We need someone who can communicate what the criteria actually mean, beyond just the English language, because sometimes the way it's phrased makes it hard for me to grasp what's really expected.

**Theme (iii): needing mentoring & clarity**

As Black women, we acknowledge and we embrace challenges. We don't say no, it's too much for me… & do our best at it…I think some of my colleagues are appreciating that… certainly my line manager appreciates that if he gives a task to me [Flo], he knows it will be completed in the timeframe set.

most of the time, they say you're still smiling when we're all running around. I'm like… I tell them a joke… I'm crying inside, but you won't see my tears…because in meetings, people burst into tears, and I say to myself, I'm not going to do that, because I know I can contain myself.

**Theme (iv) ): Black woman stereotype & Emotional toll**

## Conclusion

- Black Women academics are left to carry the invisible, physical and emotional burden of work, preventing career progression and promotion
- Universities need to develop interventions that recognise the individuality and intersectionality of Black women academics who work in higher education
- Mentorship and Sponsorship are vital for onboarding into HE and developing the tools to recognise how universities recognise and measure criteria for progression and

## Implication & Future Research

- This study offers valuable insights for improving HR policies and for transformational attitudinal, unwritten rules, and emotional labour to foster greater equity and inclusion in higher education.
- Further research needed to determine effect size & distribution

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