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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1969586>

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Budjanovcanin, A., & Guest, D. (2021). Understanding the unobserved influences on the careers of ethnic minority women: implications for human resource management. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2021.1969586>

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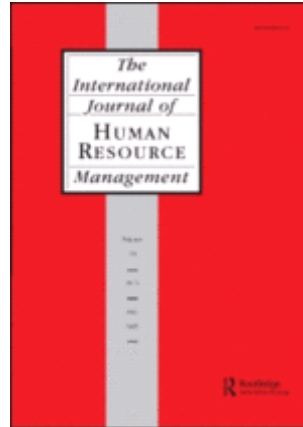
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Understanding the unobserved influences on the careers of ethnic minority women: implications for human resource management

Journal:	<i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i>
Manuscript ID	RIJH-2019-1130.R3
Manuscript Type:	Original paper
Keywords:	Careers, Relational, Women, Minority, Intersectional, Scripts

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Manuscripts

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3 **Understanding the unobserved influences on the careers of ethnic minority women:**
4 **implications for human resource management**
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10 **Abstract**
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12 If HR managers wish to influence the careers of professional staff, it is important to understand
13 their career aspirations and what determines them. This paper reports a study of the experiences
14 of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) women professionals that shape their careers and
15 working lives. Qualitative data from 39 interviews identifies a distinct set of influences on their
16 career decisions linked to the intersection of their gender and ethnic identities. In particular, it
17 reveals how the mechanisms of *fit* and *accommodation* play a role in shaping career adjustment.
18 The paper contributes to career theory by demonstrating the role of mesostructures in the form
19 of career scripts in exploring the interplay between individual agency and structure. It also
20 contributes by incorporating reference group theory and highlighting the role of reference
21 groups in shaping and transmitting career scripts. In so doing it reveals the potential longer-
22 term implications for careers of relational influences on career choice. The analysis highlights
23 the need for HR managers and HR researchers to be aware of the ‘hidden influences on the
24 career decisions of BAME women.
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49 **Key Words:**
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51 Careers; minority; women; relational; intersectional; scripts
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56 The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author,
57 [Author Initials]. The data are not publicly available due to their containing information that could
58 compromise the privacy of research participants.
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Introduction

Attracting and retaining high quality professional workers has long been a priority for human resource (HR) managers. To achieve this, they require some understanding of the factors that influence career choices and subsequent career decisions. For this, they can look to theories of career development and decision making, which have long been a mainstay of career studies (Gati, 2013). Within this literature, the importance of occupational choice has been established for both the individual and more broadly for society; at an individual level, occupational choice can influence career adjustment (Nägele and Neuenschwander, 2014), whilst it can also have an impact at a societal level leading, for example, to segregation in the labour market (Tellhed, Bäckström and Björklund, 2018). Given these and other potential implications, the importance of understanding the influences on this early career choice become self-evident.

Theories of career choice, despite belonging to a mature field, have been subject to criticism because of neglect of important sections of the working population. As Patton and McMahon (2014:135) explain: “There is very little argument in the career development literature of the 1990s and into the twenty-first century that there has been too little attention paid in both the theoretical and practical literature to groups outside the white western able bodied middle class male”. This neglect has been noted and to some degree addressed in the growing literatures that focus on women and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities respectively. However, although a lot more is now known about how gender and ethnicity respectively play a role in the process of occupational choice (e.g. Fouad and Kantamneni, 2013; Watt, 2010), far less is known about this process for individuals at the intersection of these identities. As long ago as 1989, Crenshaw observed the importance of intersectionality because of the unique experience of individuals at the juncture of these

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3 identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Despite this acknowledgement, the Warwick Institute for
4 Employment Research more recently observe that “in research, there has been a tendency to
5 separate. Minority women, in this sense, have been invisible” (WIER, 2011:1). Translated into
6 the workplace, the distinctive experience of BAME women and their specific needs, if
7 overlooked or poorly understood, cannot be reflected in the design of organisational policy and
8 practice and can lead to less inclusive human resource management (HRM) (Bashford, 2019).
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10 This becomes a more central HRM concern when it is considered that in the UK individuals
11 from BAME backgrounds make up a significant proportion of the workforce (10% -
12 McGregor-Smith, 2017) and BAME women, in particular, are increasingly important
13 contributors to the workplace and specifically to the professions (Atewologun, 2018).
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29 This study therefore examines the career stories of professional BAME women, with a
30 view to understanding their experience of one of the more determinative decisions in a career
31 journey – their occupational choice – and its implications for subsequent career decisions. An
32 established conversation in the literature has long debated the relative roles of agency and
33 structure in shaping career outcomes for individuals (Mayrhofer, Meyer and Steyrer, 2007) and
34 the decision about an occupational pathway is as subject to this debate as any other career
35 decision. This study illuminates the way in which an individual’s social identity, and their
36 resulting salient reference groups, may alter the balance between the relative influence of
37 structure and agency in occupational choice and draws on the concept of ‘career scripts’ to
38 understand how this occurs. In doing so, it reveals the unique experience of BAME women at
39 the intersection of gender and ethnicity, highlighting potential implications for long-term career
40 adjustment and career theory, as well as practical implications for managers and HR
41 professionals.
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The careers of BAME women and intersectional analysis

Within the UK, and more widely, BAME individuals comprise a growing proportion of the workforce (Atewologun, 2018). In particular, statistics show that BAME women are entering occupations such as law, professional services and pharmacy (Atewologun, 2018; Aulack, Charlwood, Muzio, Tomlinson & Valizade, 2017; Howells, Bower and Hassell, 2018). Despite these trends in the occupational choices of BAME women, they have been largely absent from research into occupational choice – with the focus more on women’s choices or BAME employees’ choices, rather than both. The research that does take account of both gender *and* ethnicity concentrates predominantly on the double discrimination BAME women encounter once in their careers, referred to as the double bind (e.g. Van Laer and Janssens, 2011).

Crenshaw (1989: 140) argues that an intersectional perspective is essential because “the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism (and) any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated”. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013:795) suggest that “what makes an analysis intersectional...is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problems of sameness and difference and its relation to power”. An intersectional perspective has been increasingly applied to research on minorities in employment settings (see, for example, Healy, Kirton and Noon, 2010). However, Tatli and Ozbilgin (2012) in their review of the diversity at work literature, show that the study of intersections in workplace research focuses either on a social equality approach or on implications for performance - with the respective aims of promoting fairness and equality or improving organisational outcomes. This is laudable but limits understanding of how BAME women will react to related HR

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3 policies. We propose that the lived career experience of intersectionality for BAME women
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5 goes beyond discrimination, and that HR policy and practice should reflect this.
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10 **Structure, Agency and Career Mesostructures**

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12 An ongoing discussion in career theory, reflecting a longstanding debate in the wider
13 organisational literature, concerns the relative roles of structure and agency in understanding
14 human behaviour, and this has taken place, as Mayrhofer et al. (2007:215) put it “under varying
15 labels such as structure versus agency, micro versus macro, or individual versus context.”
16
17 Increasingly, the structural perspective has been subordinated to an individual-centred
18 approach in careers research (Gunz, Mayrhofer and Tolbert, 2011; Johns, 2018) as evidenced,
19 for example, in the research on protean and boundaryless careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).
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21 However, a critique of this literature (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh and Roper, 2012) has highlighted
22 a need to reintroduce boundaries, citing a lack of empirical evidence for the boundaryless career
23 concept and the overemphasis placed on personal agency in examining the boundaryless career.
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25 As such, there have been calls to address the “limited understanding of the interplay between
26 context and career patterns” (Gunz, et al., 2011: 1614). The empirical difficulties with
27 responding to this call have been recognised and Laudel, Bielick and Gläser (2018: 933)
28 suggest “one of the recurrent problems of career theory is the integration of individual agency
29 and structural conditions of action in explanations of career decisions, and through them, career
30 trajectories and their outcomes.” They propose the concept of career scripts as a means to
31 resolve this difficulty.
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54 Scripts can be defined as “a schematic knowledge structure held in memory that
55 specifies behaviors or event sequences that are appropriate for specific situations” (Gioia and
56 Poole, 1984: 449). In the context of careers, Laudel et al. (2018) explain that they are
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3 collectively shared interpretive schemes, with Valette and Culie describing them as resulting
4 from “the interactions between a context that prescribes appropriate behaviors and individuals
5 who conceive their career paths according to their own preferences and aspirations” (2015:
6 1746). Finally, Andresen et al. (2020: 369) define them as the ‘mesostructure’ that mediates
7 “between societal structure and individual career action.” In many of the traditional western
8 theories of career development, the part of a career script that represents the occupational
9 choice stage emphasises individual agency and specifically the quest for person-environment
10 fit, with the ‘environment’ usually denoting work – e.g. the organisation/occupation (Holland,
11 1997).

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This study’s examination of professional BAME women’s careers considers whether
other scripts beyond what we call the traditional ‘P-O fit career script’ can help understand and
explain their trajectories and outcomes. In line with Andresen et al.’s approach, we identify
alongside career scripts another career mesostructure that serves as an intermediate level of
structure that guides and channels interactions that in turn can shape less proximate structures
(Dokko, Nigam and Chung, 2019), namely reference groups. As Grote and Hall (2013: 270)
state: reference groups are “powerful in shaping individuals’ interpretations of and actions in
the world, thereby connecting the individual with social systems.” Reference group theory
(Hyman, 1942) proposes that attitudes and behaviour are influenced by the social groups with
which individuals most strongly identify and thus makes the relational context of careers
important to consider when examining career choices.

The relational context of careers

In organisational research, context has been categorised variously and at different levels
(Johns, 2018; Mayrhofer et al., 2007). Recently, social context has gained more prominence,

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3 with researchers focusing on the relational setting within which career decision-making occurs
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5 (e.g. Afiouni, Karam and Makarem, 2020). Sauermann (2005) identified how ‘significant
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7 others’ may influence career-related decisions. In line with this, a study by Bosley et al. (2009)
8
9 created a typology of career shapers highlighting the role played by ‘informal others’ including
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11 the family, supporting previous research identifying family as an important source of advice
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13 and guidance (e.g., Dietrich, Kracke, Nurmi, 2011; Ginevra, Nota, & Ferrari, 2015).
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19 The social context of career decision-making may take on different meaning to people
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21 from different cultural backgrounds (Blustein, Schultheiss and Flum 2004). This is
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23 acknowledged by Bosley et al. who drew on a British sample and stated: ‘ethnic diversity was
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25 not among our sampling criteria: ethnicity would add a dimension worthy of specific
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27 investigation beyond the parameters of our study’ (2009:1499). Indeed, Warwick Institute for
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29 Employment Research (WIES, 2011) suggests that for many in the UK and other countries
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31 characterised by the western value system, their reference point “may be individualistic (i.e.
32
33 assume choice and control lies with the individual)” but that this may differ for certain minority
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35 ethnic groups with strong family values.
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42 The effects of generation and acculturation may have diluted these distinctions (Farver
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44 Narang and Bhadha, 2002) meaning that individuals fall along a continuum of individualism-
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46 collectivism. Nonetheless, research has found that among cultural backgrounds that emphasise
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48 filial piety and group conformity, familial social influence on career decision-making is greater
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50 (e.g. Leung, Hou, Gati and Li, 2011; Polenova, Vedral, Brisson, and Zinn, 2018), leading
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52 scholars to advocate a focus on the relational context in career theorising. To use Afiouni et
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54 al.’s (2020:3) words, the relational approach “views people’s careers and career-related
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56 experiences as produced and reproduced through their social interactions within a social system
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3 influenced by cultural and historical forces. Such a perspective allows us to move away from
4 an overemphasis on a decontextualised examination of the individual.” We suggest that a
5 relational perspective will be particularly appropriate for understanding the career decisions of
6 individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds. Grote and Hall (2013) have proposed a
7 framework for the study of reference groups in relation to careers that provides a basis for
8 understanding the social influences on career decisions. This is now outlined.
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19 **Grote and Hall’s reference group framework**

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21 Grote and Hall’s (2013) framework for conceptualizing reference groups draws on
22 identity theories and social network literature and distinguishes between *social domains*, *types*
23 and *functions* of reference groups in seeking to characterise them. In their framework, the *social*
24 *domain* refers to the social systems to which individuals belong. Examples include family and
25 friends, a person’s employing organisation or occupation, and their ethnic group. Grote and
26 Hall note the need to expand research to consider social domains beyond the employing
27 organisation, which is where much previous study has taken place. The second dimension
28 proposed in Grote and Hall’s classification is the *type* of reference group – either ‘known’ or
29 ‘abstract.’ Known referents can refer to individuals directly known to a person, such as family,
30 friends and work colleagues, but can also be a reference group by dint of “mere knowing of
31 the existence of an individual or a group without any personal contact involved” (Grote and
32 Hall, 2013: 270). The other type, ‘abstract’, are social categories such as an occupation or
33 ethnic group.
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54 The final dimension is the *function* of the reference group – identified as normative,
55 comparative or supportive in nature. The normative and comparative functions stem from
56 identity theories and “influence individuals in developing and adjusting their sense of self”
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3 (Grote and Hall 2013:270). Via the normative function, members of a given group transmit the
4 norms about the way in which conforming individuals should think, feel or act. These norms,
5 they suggest, could be imposed on an individual or may just serve as a frame of reference. It is
6 also suggested that the normative influence of a reference group can go against an individual's
7 preferences and thus "the normative function of the reference group can have potential for
8 causing conflict for the focal person" (2013: 272).
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19 The comparative function provides standards against which an individual can evaluate
20 their own behaviour. This function and the normative function can become very interwoven,
21 with an individual drawing on the same person or people to provide norms for thought, feelings
22 and actions, as well as standards for comparison. The comparative function can also have a
23 dark side: comparing whether one measures up to a standard can potentially lead to detrimental
24 thoughts and feelings.
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35 The supportive function of reference groups is enabling and serves to help career actors
36 navigate their working lives and can be instrumental or emotional in nature. Instrumental
37 support assists agentic behaviour in order to further individual (e.g. career) or group success.
38 Examples might include 'opening doors' to opportunities for an individual or providing advice
39 or connections. Emotional support, on the other hand, is enabling in a different way and can
40 take the form of reassurance, encouragement and understanding. We employ Grote and Hall's
41 framework to more systematically examine the social influences affecting professional BAME
42 women's careers.
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56 Drawing together the preceding analysis, this study contributes to the literature in four
57 main ways. Firstly, through the lenses of reference groups, it provides a relational perspective
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3 on the influences shaping the career choices and experiences of BAME women, a perspective
4 much needed to address the partial understanding provided by the “traditional view of career
5 as an individual and decontextualized pursuit” (Kenny, Blustein and Meerkins, 2018). In doing
6 so, it contributes to the literature on careers, illuminating the processes of and motives for
7 relational influence on the occupational choice of professional BAME women in the UK.
8 Secondly, through employing the concept of the career script, the study reveals the unique
9 experiences at the intersection of gender and ethnicity utilising what Crenshaw describes as
10 ‘intersectional sensibility.’ It therefore contributes to conversations on intersectionality in
11 employment settings, focusing specifically on BAME women’s experience beyond that of
12 discrimination. Third, through employing career mesostructures, it furthers understanding of
13 how the different balance between structure and agency, as manifested through career scripts
14 and shaped by reference groups, have the potential to explain long-term career outcomes for
15 individuals. Finally, the study contributes to career management by providing an improved
16 understanding among HR professionals of the influences on career decisions and career
17 aspirations of this increasingly important section of the UK workforce, drawing out
18 implications for HR policy and practice.
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42 **Methods**

43 *Sample*

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45 According to Mooney (2016:710) “a study is intersectional when the aim is to reveal
46 differences *between* and/or *in* different groups, where the dominant/privileged individuals are
47 *not* positioned at the centre of the research”. Our study therefore focuses in particular on
48 BAME, professional women working in pharmacy but the wider project of which this study is
49 a part, afforded the opportunity to include a few individuals from other categories namely
50 BAME/non-BAME men and non-BAME women. Thus, in a limited way, we were able to
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3 engage in comparative analysis. The sample included twenty-five BAME women and four
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5 BAME men. In addition, it included six non-BAME women and four non-BAME men. Within
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7 the BAME group there was a variety of ethnicities (as described by the participants
8
9 themselves)¹. We also included four BAME students allowing us to explore the nature and
10
11 relevance of relational influence for the emerging generation of BAME female professionals
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13 although clearly they were not in a position to discuss longer-term career consequences of their
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15 decision to study pharmacy. Ages ranged between 21 and 60. The participants were based in
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17 the UK, with some bias towards the London region. Purposive sampling was mainly employed
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19 to recruit participants to the study via known professional networks. Snowball sampling was
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21 subsequently employed.
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28 *Research setting*

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30 The occupational setting for the study was pharmacy. It provides a particularly relevant context
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32 in which to study the careers of BAME women since it has, over time, become ethnically
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34 diverse and feminised and is therefore well suited to addressing the research aims. In 2017,
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36 women comprised 62 percent and BAMEs comprised 49 percent of registered UK pharmacists;
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38 both have been steadily increasing and these trends are predicted by the General
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40 Pharmaceutical Council to continue (Howells et al., 2018). To qualify as a pharmacist requires
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42 a four-year degree followed by a one-year pre-registration vocational training course in a sector
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44 of pharmacy. The core aims in selecting our sample were to focus on BAME women but also
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46 to cover the main areas of pharmacy work. One consequence was that we were presented from
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48 time-to-time with opportunities, which we took, to interview pharmacists other than BAME
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50 women resulting in the comparative element of our study.
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58 ¹ The respondents described their ethnicities as including the following: Indian, Hindi, Pakistani,
59 Middle Eastern, Singaporean, Chinese, British and African (e.g. Black African Caribbean).
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Approach to data collection and analysis

Blustein (2011:3) explains that “relational theory builds on a social constructionist perspective, which proposes that people learn about themselves, their social world, and culture through relationships.” A fundamental goal of social constructionism is to understand and make sense of life experiences and their connections with various systems of influence (Peavy 1997). Such situationally contingent understandings of career experiences mean that they require consideration in the context of a broader career history. To achieve this, the study adopted the life history method and took an interpretative and qualitative stance. The life history approach “focuses on the ways in which individuals account for and theorize about their actions in the social world over time. The subjective interpretation of the situation in which people find themselves, past or present, is its cornerstone” (Musson, 2004:55). Since primary data in the life history approach is ‘talk’, it lends itself to in-depth interviews, which we adopted and which allowed us the flexibility to pursue detailed enquiry into observations arising that were relevant to the study. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews of between 44-84 minutes in length explored how participants made sense of their career choice, their career path to date, and retrospective interpretations of career decisions, asking questions such as how they chose their occupation and to what they attributed their current attitudes and feelings about it. Emphasis was placed throughout on the role of social influences, asking, for example, to what extent anyone else had an influence on their decision to study pharmacy. Interviews were electronically recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim and data were analysed using NVIVO 12.

Interviewing across ethnic boundaries can have a bearing on participant responses. Racial (among other) differences between the interviewer and interviewee can limit disclosure. Since ethnic matching was not an option in the present study, the interviews were approached

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3 with a view to building rapport to establish trust in an attempt to overcome the problem of race-
4 of-interviewer-effects. The majority of the interviews were conducted by the first author -
5 female, European Caucasian background - and the remainder by a male European Caucasian
6 researcher. Sands, Bourjolly and Roer-Strier (2007) identify how genuine interest in the other's
7 story can enable the surmounting of barriers; given the long-standing research interests of both
8 researchers, demonstrating genuine curiosity came naturally. Evidence of any interviewer
9 effect was carefully considered when the results were analysed but we found no evidence that
10 it affected the responses or, for example, the length of the interviews. We believe the mixed
11 genders and bicultural status of the interviewers – both being influenced by British and another
12 European culture – should have gone some way to bridging the gap between interviewers and
13 subjects.

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31 Because it accommodates both a priori issues and emergent data-driven themes (in line
32 with our approach), the process for analysis outlined by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) was
33 adopted, starting with familiarisation with the data. This involved iterative reading and coding
34 of interview data. Through this we identified two different career scripts in the sample: the *P-*
35 *O fit career script* and the *accommodation career script*. The first of these has been well
36 established in the research to date and highlights success in a career as being about finding 'fit'
37 and matching elements of 'self' to an occupation. Since there is a long history of studying the
38 careers of individuals who follow a *P-O fit career script* (see studies of Holland's (1997) model
39 of person-occupation fit for example), this script is not given much consideration in the results
40 section, other than for use as a comparison script against which the *accommodation career*
41 *script* can be examined. The *accommodation script* represents a career that accommodates the
42 expectation of others, in relation to the occupation chosen and its characteristics (e.g. family
43 friendly).

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3 In the next step, Grote and Hall's framework was applied to the data allowing the
4 identification of the relevant reference groups, of the role they play at the macro and meso
5 levels of BAME women's careers and of the related script role (see Table 1). Initial coding was
6 cross-checked within a sample of the same transcripts to ensure consistency between
7 researchers, then the remainder of transcripts were split between researchers to code. This was
8 followed by coding of career experiences and outcomes, then charting, to provide an overall
9 picture of the data. The final step made comparisons and identified connections within the data
10 highlighting theoretical connections made between relational influence, career experiences and
11 outcomes. The analysis was both iterative and collaborative, with authors repeatedly returning
12 to the data to ensure integrity of findings. Where divergences in interpretation arose, these were
13 discussed and consensus sought, involving, where necessary, other researchers participating in
14 the wider project.

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33 The next section presents the findings. As stated, the opportunistic data collection from
34 social categories other than BAME women afforded some limited opportunities for
35 comparison. When quoting participants, their participant code, age and ethnic background (as
36 they described it) are cited. Participant gender is female unless indicated as male (M) after the
37 participant code.

38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 **Results**

48
49 While participants' accounts highlighted both similar and different experiences
50 throughout the career course, the data revealed that the relational context of BAME women's
51 early career decision-making was distinct from other groups and had consequences for career
52 adjustment. We applied Grote and Hall's reference group framework to our data (social
53 domain, type and function), mapping the relational context of BAME women's careers at the
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3 macro, meso and micro levels (see Table 1 for overview). Presented alongside these are four
4 identified roles of reference groups in relation to career scripts – script writers, transmitters,
5 approvers and adherers. The results section firstly presents the data that led to the definition of
6 the accommodation career script and that highlights its prominence among BAME females
7 professionals. This is followed by data pertaining to the roles played by salient reference groups
8 in relation to that script. Finally this section addresses the outcomes of choosing whether to
9 adhere to an accommodation script.
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22 **Finding 1. Individuals in the sample followed an accommodation career script in addition**
23 **to a traditional P-O fit career script.**

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26 Asked about why they had chosen to pursue pharmacy, the participants' rationale
27 broadly reflected two script types – *fit* and *accommodation*. There were those who had chosen
28 it because of an interest in the subject and those who had chosen it because they knew it was
29 an 'acceptable' choice. The *P-O fit career script* describes individuals whose career reflects
30 their interests and abilities. Accordingly, occupational choice and a successful career are based
31 on finding a good fit between self-knowledge and occupation – as one participant put it
32 '*pharmacy sort of fitted my profile quite well*'. However, the *accommodation career script*
33 describes individuals whose occupational decision and subsequent career trajectory reflects
34 acceptable choices as delineated by their salient reference groups. A successful career is based
35 on finding a good fit between the occupation pursued and expectations of important others.
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51 **Finding 2. The accommodation career script is more salient for BAME women than for**
52 **other groups and that script is 'written' by an abstract reference group**

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56 Within the BAME female subsample, the majority (16 out of 25) described choosing
57 an occupation in line with expectations of others – most usually family members. The
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3 remainder chose the occupation based on a P-O fit career script. In other words, the
4
5 accommodaton career script was more salient amongst the BAME female subsample than a P-
6
7 O fit career script. The accommodation career script featured less in the other smaller sub-
8
9 samples, although accounts of two of the four BAME males reflected it. Within the non-BAME
10
11 subsamples, all four males and all except one of the six females pursued a P-O fit career script.
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17 In depicting the “collectively shared” interpretive scheme that represents the
18
19 accommodation career script and the origin of expectations, a number of BAME participants
20
21 referred to the country of their ethnic background (e.g. Indian) or ‘community’ when discussing
22
23 the level at which that understanding was shared, with one participant indicating it was about
24
25 a ‘white’ / ‘non-white’ distinction when explaining the parameters of her family’s expectations
26
27 about her career choice.
28
29

30 *‘I don’t think a white family would have been really too bothered about which first*
31
32 *degree. No, this is very much an Indian thing about stability and profession and you*
33
34 *will ‘be somebody’ and all of this’ (P7-34, British Indian).*
35
36

37 In determining the detail of the accommodation career script, an ‘acceptable’ career choice
38
39 was often referred to and ‘acceptable’ was usually deemed to be a professional occupation,
40
41 with both BAME males and females identifying this feature:
42
43

44 *‘We’re Nigerian, so everybody is a lawyer, engineer or doctor’ (P9-53, Mixed*
45
46 *African/White).*
47
48

49 *‘I think with Asian people it’s what the community says ... My brother’s an accountant,*
50
51 *typical Asian family, accountant and pharmacist’ (P6-34, Indian).*
52
53

54 One individual explained that a medical-related occupation was seen as ‘respectable’ hence
55
56 why it was encouraged. A different participant explained it was seen as an occupation that
57
58 could provide opportunities for social mobility. While this collectively held understanding
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3 about career choice applied to BAME males in the sample too, the script had additional
4 conditions that applied only to women - '*girls don't do aeronautics was what I was told*' (P6-
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7
8 34, Indian). Specifically, an acceptable career choice highlighted the importance of entering a
9
10 gender-appropriate career that allowed BAME females to prioritise gender-specific roles (e.g.
11
12 motherhood):

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14
15 *'It affected my career choice because it was seen as a profession that was acceptable*
16
17 *for a female to do'* (P2-34, Pakistani).
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21
22 In summary, the accommodation career script featured more prominently amongst the
23 BAME participants, especially BAME women in the sample and it was the more abstract
24 reference group of ethnic group or community from which the script originated and was
25 collectively shared. This falls into Grote and Hall's normative function of reference groups,
26 with the shared understanding by an ethnic group representing expectations about the
27 occupations that group members should opt for. However, as noted from the excerpts above
28 and outlined in Finding 3 below, family were the main manifestation of these abstract entities.
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40 **Finding 3. For BAME career actors, parents and family are a salient reference group and**
41 **their role is often that of 'transmitter' of career scripts or 'approver' of career choice**
42 **within that script.**
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47 Parents and extended family featured as prominent *social domains* for participants
48 when choosing an occupation. Thirteen of the 25 BAME women, aged between 23 and 54,
49 identified their parents as being partly or wholly responsible for them choosing the pharmacy
50 profession, with a further 3 identifying other individuals within the wider family network
51 including aunts and cousins already working in the profession. The age range of these women,
52 including two current students, indicates that the reference group of 'parents' was, and is still,
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3 a relevant shaper of career choice for BAME women. The nature of that shaping came in two
4 forms, first a ‘transmitter’ of the acceptable choices as understood within the ethnic
5 community and second, as an ‘approver’ of specific decisions made.
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11
12 Describing the transmitter role played by parents, one BAME female P7 and one BAME male
13 P12, explained:
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16
17 *‘I was quite a good little Asian girl at the time- they chose my A-levels for me, they*
18 *chose my university for me. They chose, and I went along with them, because I wanted*
19 *to keep them happy’ (P6-34, Indian).*
20
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25
26 *‘The list of options (that) were laid in front of you, of me, were just from my parents*
27 *really. Not anyone else. So, it was very much doctor, dentist, lawyer or pharmacist.*
28 *Those were the kind of things, nothing more... you wouldn’t be given other options like*
29 *risk assessors...that sounds like an interesting job’ (P12 (M)-33, Indian).*
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38 The way in which many BAME parents were described differed to the way non-BAME
39 parents were described with respect to their function as a reference group. The above excerpts,
40 and similar others, point to a normative function – transmitting norms regarding appropriate
41 career choice and a comparative function – providing standards against which career choices
42 could be compared. This differed to a largely instrumentally supportive role played more often
43 by non-BAME parents - providing mechanisms to help their children make an informed choice.
44 Such mechanisms, mentioned by seven of the ten non-BAME respondents compared with nine
45 of the twenty-nine BAME respondents, included organising a holiday job or time with a family
46 member or friend in the profession and attending specific career-related events during A-levels.
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3 These serve as a kind of realistic job preview and have a primarily *instrumental* support
4
5 function.
6

7
8 The other identified role of the BAME parent reference group was ‘approvers’ of the
9
10 choices made and spoke more to the comparative role of this reference group. They were able
11
12 to evaluate whether their children had met the standard set within the career script, which for
13
14 BAME women included the gender role expectations of their cultural background:
15

16
17 *‘They were quite happy [with the choice of pharmacy]... it’s easier for a girl to work*
18
19 *in community pharmacy, come home in the evening, take care of the kids, that kind of*
20
21 *thing’ (P38-33, Middle Eastern/Arab).*
22

23
24 As well as overtly expressing that approval, it was also latently transmitted and internalised:
25

26
27 *‘My father was very, very, very keen for me to be a medic so maybe I chose something*
28
29 *as close as I could to his aspirations’ (P3-56, Indian).*
30

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32
33 In summary, parents, and to a lesser degree the wider family, were able to translate the
34
35 expectations held by their ethnic community about occupations to their children, and provide
36
37 a comparative standard against which they could hold up their decisions. The difference in the
38
39 roles played by BAME and non-BAME parents, with the former’s emphasis on gender roles,
40
41 points to a distinctive early career experience for BAME women.
42
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44
45 Table 1 presents the role of different reference groups in relation to the accommodation script
46
47 followed by some individuals in the sample.
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51
52 *Insert Table 1 around here*
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54 -----
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3 **Finding 4. Choosing to adhere to an accommodation career script has the potential for**
4 **detrimental individual career consequences.**
5

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7
8 As already identified, many of the BAME women in the sample had chosen pharmacy
9
10 as a result of parental or family influence. This choice reflected filial duty for many, who
11
12 described desires to acknowledge their parents' wishes and make their choice accordingly.
13
14 Often, that choice went against the preferences of that individual, for example:

15
16
17 *'Left to my own devices I'd be playing the piano or guitar somewhere and I certainly*
18
19 *wouldn't have gone into medicine or anything scientific' (P9-53, Mixed African/White).*
20
21

22
23
24 Whereas ethnic group membership has an influence at the macro level and reference
25
26 groups have an influence at the meso level, at the micro level, the career actor's role represents
27
28 the *agency* dimension of the career debate. In relation to career scripts, the individual's role
29
30 was one of adherence (or not) to the accommodation career script; and dependent on the extent
31
32 to which individuals adhered, there were different consequences within the career domain.
33
34 Pragmatically pursuing a particular occupation to accommodate parents led to some BAME
35
36 women in this sample describing their career in apathetic or less than favourable terms. The
37
38 experience of entering an unappealing occupation that diverges from personal interests or
39
40 passions reflects a lack of person-occupation fit (Nägele and Neuenschwander, 2014) and a
41
42 rejection of one's occupational identity:
43
44

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46
47 *'Who wants to be a Pharmacist? I had this image of sitting within a dispensary counting*
48
49 *tablets all day and it's more than that, but it's not a great deal more than that if we're*
50
51 *honest" (P7-34, British Indian).*
52
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56 Adhering to the accommodation script could lead to occupational regret – a wish that
57
58 they had never accepted or taken the decision to enter the occupation and a wish to undo that
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1
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3 earlier decision (Wrzesniewski, Tosti and Landman, 2006). Six of the of BAME women, whose
4
5 career choice was influenced by parents, spoke about regretting entering pharmacy:
6

7
8 *'I used to sit in lectures and cry, and think oh I don't want to do Pharmacy. There was*
9
10 *always the intention to come out of Pharmacy, do something completely different ...*
11
12 *And then you get stuck in rut don't you' (P7-34, British Indian)*
13

14
15
16
17 *'Sometimes you get to a stage when you're like 'Oh, I can't be bothered', you get so*
18
19 *fed up and sometimes I wake up in the morning and I think 'Oh, do I want to go into*
20
21 *work today?' and I thought, 'What can I do?' and then I re-evaluated things and I*
22
23 *thought 'What do I actually want to do?' (P1-29, Indian).*
24
25

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28
29 Despite feeling regret and in some cases having a preferred alternative occupation,
30
31 making a change to achieve better fit was deemed not to be an option by most because of the
32
33 difficulty with switching career paths, highlighting the role of continuance career commitment
34
35 (Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993) - defined as the perception that the costs of leaving may be
36
37 outweighed by the benefits:
38

39
40 *'I'd love to be an Interior Designer. But I don't think it's gonna happen. I think sort of*
41
42 *like I've invested too many years in pharmacy' (P10-37, British Indian).*
43

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45
46
47 *'I think I'll stay [in pharmacy]. I wouldn't say I love my job but... you do so much*
48
49 *training that it's not worth starting from the bottom. I don't think I could go back*
50
51 *to Uni' (P33-30, Chinese).*
52

53
54 This paints an image of professionals in an occupation about which, at best, they are apathetic
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56 but in which, often reluctantly, many will remain, largely because of the sunk costs of
57
58 becoming a pharmacist. Our data suggest that if individuals cannot easily move to a different
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3 occupation in order to find a ‘path with a heart’ then this has implications, including a lack of
4
5 drive or direction and a feeling of liminality.
6

7
8 *‘If you are not true to yourself it becomes very difficult, an uphill struggle... I didn’t*
9
10 *have a burning desire to be a pharmacist in the first place. I find that I just keep moving*
11
12 *with it... I am still waiting to find my niche’ (P2-30, British Pakistani).*
13
14

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16
17 **Finding 5. Choosing not to adhere to an accommodation career script has the potential**
18
19 **for detrimental consequences within the family domain.**
20

21
22 The consequences within the family domain of not adhering to the accommodation
23
24 career script at the initial stage (occupational choice) were not fully explored because by
25
26 definition those in the sample *had* followed it. However, one male BAME participant used the
27
28 phrase *‘I don’t want to be the black sheep’* to explain why he originally adhered and chose an
29
30 approved of occupation, hinting at potential disharmony in the family as a result of not doing
31
32 so. The consequences of not adhering to an accommodation career script for BAME women
33
34 became apparent as their careers progressed. Specifically, culturally driven expectations about
35
36 alignment of occupational choice with gender role stereotypes extended to prioritising the
37
38 ‘wife/mother role’ throughout the career course. Although a subset of BAME women had
39
40 adhered to the career script at the initial stage by choosing pharmacy to accommodate to
41
42 cultural norms, some described deviating from it later, when prioritising their career over
43
44 motherhood and thereby going against gender role expectations. Responding to a question
45
46 about why her career was important to her, P25 explained:
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49

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51 *‘It gives you a bit of personal satisfaction, rather than being somebody’s mum or wife.*
52
53 *It’s just your own individuality’ – (P25-39, Indian).*
54
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56 And a Chinese pharmacist who wasn’t married and didn’t have children explained:
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3 ‘My priority has always been my career. Which is not usual for someone from my
4
5 background; it is expected that women usually go for the family’ (P36-35, Chinese).
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10 The use of the phrase ‘not usual for someone from my background’ again speaks to
11
12 collectively held views about BAME women’s careers within certain communities, outlining
13
14 the continuation of expectations about female-appropriate choices throughout the career
15
16 course, beyond the initial choice. P1 had been a pharmacist for four years and was thinking
17
18 about retraining to pivot her career towards something more aligned with her interests. Such a
19
20 move demonstrated an attempt to shift from following the *accommodation career script* to a
21
22 *P-O fit career script*.
23
24
25

26 ‘You see so many modern Indian ladies now, who are balancing both. But there’s
27
28 always that... at the back of your mind that you do want to somehow, not conform, but
29
30 you don’t want to be like the dark horse of the community. I already get it now, you
31
32 know, when I go to family gatherings: ‘Why are you going back to university?’ There’s
33
34 a kind of pressure, I think because you’re of an ethnic origin, so it’s a constantly kind
35
36 of battle, you know, please both sides’ (P1-29, Indian).
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40 In one case, this course of action – trying to ‘have it all’ by following two scripts – was
41
42 encouraged by a parent and may reflect the nature of change across generations:
43
44

45 ‘See I think for our generation they’ve made us do both... Mum has never been
46
47 independent from Dad, so has always wanted me to have that independence and I think
48
49 she’s pushed it for me. However, in Indian culture it’s very important to have an
50
51 experience of your own child. I suppose if you are not a married woman with a family,
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53 you feel like a failure in this culture ...’ (P5-35, Indian).
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3 This suggests that reference groups can have multiple, intersecting and potentially
4 competing functions – in this case to provide both instrumental support (encouraging financial
5 independence) and normative guidance (encouraging adherence to traditional gender roles).
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10 As well as interpersonal consequences of deviation from the accommodation career
11 script, such as feeling like a ‘black sheep’ or ‘dark horse’, such a course could lead to
12 individuals feeling unsupported within their cultural milieu to pursue advancement in their
13 career path. Comparing her experience with that of her husband, P26 surmised:
14
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19 *‘I would say that perhaps that’s the reason I haven’t had as much personal support,*
20 *because it’s kind of not seen as an Indian woman’s role probably. I think her role is*
21 *still seen as the family aspect first and anything else next’ (P26-42, British Hindu).*
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27 The result of their career choices and subsequent experiences was that some BAME
28 women pursued strategies to help them to fulfil both work and non-work roles simultaneously.
29 This manifested in career crafting (Akkermans and Tims, 2017) and examples described
30 included negotiating particular working arrangements or choosing particular sectors of
31 pharmacy. This is illustrated by the Chinese participant who knew her parents would approve
32 of community pharmacy, hence her choice of this sector. It was also linked to work
33 arrangements, including choices about employment contracts, with locum work being an
34 attractive option in pharmacy for those trying to enact both identities. It also meant that in a
35 number of cases, career aspirations were limited. Nevertheless, one British-Asian male
36 pharmacist who owned his own pharmacies believed that pharmacy was one of only a few
37 occupations within which minority ethnic women could both pursue a professional career *and*
38 have flexibility, through locum work.
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55 **Discussion**

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3 The aim of this paper has been to shed new light on the ‘unobserved’ influences on the career
4 choices of BAME women and their consequences and to offer a novel combination of
5 conceptual frameworks within which to understand these experiences. To achieve this, we
6 conducted 39 in-depth interviews, predominantly with BAME women working in pharmacy.
7
8 In presenting our findings our focus has been on the nature and consequences of what we have
9 termed an accommodation career script. It is important to recognise that the careers of some in
10 the sample reflect the P-O fit script. Particularly among the non-BAME interviewees,
11 pharmacy was an autonomously chosen occupation that provides career satisfaction. But as our
12 findings reveal, for many of the female BAME pharmacists whose experiences reflected the
13 accommodation script, there was a challenge in finding a balance between competing career
14 and family cultures. Our findings and our conceptual frameworks shed light on why this was a
15 particular challenge for BAME women. We have shown that the accommodation script is more
16 likely to reflect the experiences of BAME women than the other groups in our study. The
17 interviews with members of this group reveal how parents and the wider family communicate
18 the culturally defined expectations of what constitutes an appropriate career for BAME women
19 and in providing a strong normative framework were able to influence occupational choice.
20 We were able to show that accepting this choice had consequences for the careers of BAME
21 women with several expressing regret about their choice but feeling stuck and unable to escape
22 their predicament. For those who have given greater priority to pursuing their career, the
23 interviews revealed tensions reflected in hints of disapproval from within the family about not
24 conforming to expectations.
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54 **Theoretical implications**

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56 This paper advances theory and understanding of careers in several ways. First, it
57 employs the lens of reference group theory in order to provide insights on the relational
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3 perspective of careers. The study foregrounds the role of reference groups, working in tandem
4 with career scripts, in shaping or translating them for career actors. Indeed, the integration of
5 career scripts into Grote and Hall's reference group framework provides a more nuanced
6 understanding of the relational context of careers showing how different types of reference
7 group operate at different levels of influence on careers – the macro (ethnic group), meso
8 (family) and micro (self, as a referent) – each with different script roles (writing, transmitting,
9 adhering respectively).
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21 The second theoretical contribution stems from our focus on individuals at the
22 neglected intersection of gender and ethnicity, namely professional BAME women.
23 Woodhams, Xian and Lupton, 2014 (2014:913) have argued that western career theories fail
24 to capture the combined effects of gender and ethnic identity as they affect BAME women's
25 careers. This study has highlighted that in order for career theories to do so, they must
26 incorporate the influence of key reference groups. Lent, Brown and Hackett's Social Cognitive
27 Career Theory (SCCT) (1996) recognises the potential role of others on careers in their
28 inclusion of 'proximal contextual influences' in their model of career development, but our
29 *accommodation career script* provides a more precise conceptualisation of the nature of that
30 influence, and its inclusion could ensure greater relevance of SCCT for individuals at the
31 intersection of gender and ethnicity. Although in this study the accommodation career script
32 was linked to gender role norms that make it specific to BAME women, an accommodation
33 career script might encompass other norms, values or expectations of one's salient referents
34 and therefore could be applied more widely in exploring the relatively under-explored 'dark
35 side' of reference groups (Grote and Hall, 2013).
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3 In sum, the study demonstrates the importance of an intersectional perspective to
4 provide a window on the experiences of BAME women – a growing group in the contemporary
5 British professional workforce – that goes beyond the discourse of discrimination and raises
6 awareness of some of the less visible influences that HR professionals would benefit from
7 understanding when developing HR practices.
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17 The final contribution relates to examining the roles of both (macro and meso level)
18 structure and agency in career paths and outcomes. This study identifies a mediating
19 mechanism in the form of career scripts that help explain outcomes in BAME women's
20 professional careers. Although Andresen et al. (2020) identified career scripts as part of the
21 mesostructure that mediates between the wider social structure (ethnic and cultural norms) and
22 microstructure (individual's choice), they challenged scholars to continue their work by
23 "identifying additional constructs within the overarching category of career mesostructures"
24 (2020: 384). This study identifies a particular type of career script, namely the accommodation
25 script that acts to shape the occupational choice and career paths of BAME women.
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40 Career script adherence, identified in our study, is a variable that may explain how the
41 balance between structure and agency in careers is altered – highlighting that boundaries
42 created by the macrostructure may be accepted or rejected. However, the findings show that
43 non-adherence to an accommodation career script comes with interpersonal risks and
44 consequences, including disharmony within important reference groups which may become a
45 barrier to rejecting the script. Thus, career scripts and script adherence should be included in
46 theories of career development and adjustment, including models of occupational regret, which
47 was identified in the analysis as a potential consequence.
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Practical contribution

Our study has important implications for HR policy and practice. Employment trends indicate that BAME women may soon make up the majority of people entering a career in pharmacy. There is also evidence that other professions are attracting increasing numbers of BAME women. It is therefore important that to attract, motivate and retain them, HR professionals are aware of the distinctive backgrounds and related experiences that led them to make their occupational choice and pursue a professional occupation as well as the challenges they may face in pursuing their careers. The evidence provided in this paper points to some of the factors that need to be taken into account to ensure that the appropriate HR policies and practices are in place.

At the point of recruitment and selection, care needs to be taken of the factors influencing the choice of occupation with a view to determining whether the motives more closely reflect a fit or an accommodation script. Providing realistic job previews in the form of relevant work experience may help to inform both job applicants and those responsible for selection. It is notable that opportunities for early work experience were less likely to be reported by BAME women compared with others in our sample. This matters because it may influence career commitment and, as an input to selection, help to avoid the risk of employing staff experiencing career regret along with low occupational commitment and low motivation.

Career counselling and career development will be especially important for this group and HR policies need to ensure that those providing advice are aware of what can sometimes be the distinctive concerns of BAME women. Furthermore, the prolonged education and training and the accumulation of occupation-specific human capital (Dlouhy and Biemann, 2018) mean that for those taking a professional path, there are sunk costs. Feeling stuck in a

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3 poor-fitting career can have negative repercussions for psychological wellbeing, including, as
4 noted above, feelings of regret and low career commitment. Where appropriate and feasible,
5 HR professionals can facilitate strategies for reshaping a career into something more aligned
6 with an individual's interests and values perhaps by facilitating career crafting whereby
7 elements of the role might be adjusted to provide a more engaging work experience.
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17 While the focus of this study has been on occupational choice and commitment, HR
18 managers may reflect on how far they wish to seek organisational commitment among
19 professional BAME women. This raises the question of the potential for, and challenges of
20 multiple commitments when there are 'pulls' from the home environment, the occupation and,
21 perhaps, the organisation. There is a risk that competing commitments of the sort identified in
22 this paper are exacerbated, resulting in role conflict and stress. HR managers need to approach
23 this issue with their eyes open to potential risks.
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35 Professional work can often accommodate flexible working arrangements. The scope
36 for flexible working hours can be important for many women (and men). For BAME women
37 who may sometimes be experiencing potential conflicts between the work and home settings,
38 adjusting working arrangements can help to ease tensions and improve work-life balance
39 (Akkermans and Tims, 2017). Understanding the distinctive experiences of BAME women can
40 help HR managers to mitigate potential risks to their organisations. There have traditionally
41 been shortages in the pharmacy workforce, as well as in other professions, and it is notable that
42 40 per cent of BAME women in our sample did not think they would stay in pharmacy until
43 retirement. Thus, HR policy that addresses flexible working or mobility of employees should
44 be sensitive to the cultural tensions encountered by BAME women in particular, in order to
45 help organisations retain talent. While these tensions can apply to BAME and non-BAME
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3 women alike, for the former, contravening cultural norms has interpersonal consequences and
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5 as such may be even more salient.
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10 **Limitations and Future research**

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12 This study has certain limitations. We drew our data from a small sample in a single
13
14 profession, pointing to the need for larger qualitative and quantitative studies in this and other
15
16 occupations. We also chose to include the small sample who were not BAME women as a basis
17
18 for comparison. While we have made reference to some tentative differences that highlight the
19
20 influence of intersectionality, future research would benefit from a larger comparative sample
21
22 while retaining the dominant focus on BAME women.
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29 This study sought to provide a combination of distinctive analytic frameworks to the
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31 study of careers. Future research will benefit firstly from adopting our meso-analytic approach
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33 involving the use of scripts that might include the emergence of alternative career-related
34
35 scripts that provide insights into the important consideration of the relationship between agency
36
37 and structure. We also suggest that the role framework developed by Grote and Hall provides
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39 a basis for novel insights in future analysis of the social context of careers. Being qualitative
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41 and retrospective in nature, the present study is limited in what it can reveal about the long-
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43 term implications of reference group involvement in occupational choice. Nonetheless, the
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45 findings hint at a number of potential avenues for enquiry (e.g. occupational regret) and we
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47 suggest that future studies focus on the influence of the relational context of careers over the
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49 long term. In doing so, studies can answer Duffy and Dik's (2009:37) call to focus on "external
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51 influences and their effects on important career-related and psychological variables" by using
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53 appropriate research design e.g. longitudinal, quantitative studies.
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3 Acculturation may be a fruitful future consideration in studies of BAME women's
4 career development. Since the values of an individual's ethnic background are key to shaping
5 career scripts and these are subject to change with acculturation, future work can consider how
6 scripts change over time, or how bicultural individuals (influenced by more than one culture)
7 manage conflicting scripts.
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14 15 16 17 **Conclusion**

18
19 Situated within the ongoing debate in careers scholarship concerning the relative roles
20 of structure and agency, this study has brought into focus the role of mediating structures that
21 enable a better understanding of how the two are balanced/negotiated for a particular group of
22 employees. In doing so, it has illuminated how, by being situated at a particular juncture of
23 gender and ethnicity, professional BAME women's career experiences can take a distinctive
24 course – addressing calls to better understand the influence of intersectionality on careers
25 (Woodhams et al., 2014), and improve the “limited understanding of the interplay between
26 context and career patterns” (Gunz, et al., 2011: 1614). Through applying Grote and Hall's
27 reference group framework, we have foregrounded the relevance of the relational context in
28 careers. Specifically, we have shown how in reinforcing particular career scripts, families
29 circumscribe the range of occupations open to BAME women and serve to channel them down
30 particular career paths, sometimes with detrimental career consequences.
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47 An important contribution of the study is to shed some light on the mesostructures that
48 can extend our understanding of the career experience of BAME women beyond the more
49 widely recognised impact of discrimination. In doing so, it points to the importance for HR
50 managers, when seeking to understand and potentially influence the careers of BAME women,
51 of being aware of relevant socio-cultural influences.
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Table 1. The Role of Social Influences in the Accommodation Career Script

Grote and Hall Reference Group Framework				
Level of Influence:	Social domain	Reference group type	Reference group role	Script role
Macro	Ethnic group	Abstract	Normative	Script writer
Meso	Family (close and extended)	Known	Normative/ Comparative	Script transmitter/ approver
Micro	Self as referent	-	-	Script adherer