



A NEW FRAMEWORK

The Concrete Ceiling Breakthrough

Scaling evidence-based solutions for Black women's workplace advancement.

Our qualitative research is the evidence. The Concrete Ceiling Breakthrough is the action. You are part of both.

We are BlackFemaleProject — a Black women-led narrative research organization. For ten years, we have collected the evidence: workplace narratives, vignettes, surveys, and a working evaluation corpus of nearly 200 coded participant responses. We began this work because the research on Black women's workplace experience had been locked behind university paywalls, inaccessible to the women whose lives it described. We freed those stories. Now it is time to break through.

Why this barrier, and why this name:

The concrete ceiling is the structural barrier Black women and others with intersectional identities experience in the workplace — a barrier where race and gender compound. It is distinct from the glass ceiling, which centers white women's experience and treats gender as the primary barrier. It is distinct from racial equity discourse, which addresses racial barriers but often centers men. The concrete ceiling names what neither single-axis framework can see. It is the language for what we have always navigated.

The scholarly lineage runs 27 years — from Jennifer Lach's 1999 article in *American Demographics* and the Catalyst report authored by Katherine Giscombe and Sheila Wellington of the same year, through Dr. Ella Bell and Dr. Stella Nkomo's *Our Separate Ways* (Harvard Business School Press, 2001; republished 2021), through Victoria Sepand (2015) and Jasmine Babers (2016), to recent work at the University of Manchester (2021) and in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* (Otake-Ebede et al., 2024). The concept exists. The campaign to make it standard practice does not. That is the work BlackFemaleProject takes on next.

BLACK FEMALE PROJECT

Why now:

Two generations have passed since women began entering management in the 1980s. In those forty years, our presence in senior leadership has barely moved. We remain at approximately 1 percent of C-suite positions despite being the most educated demographic group in America. Work will look very different in the years and generations ahead. There will be a transition. Our obligation, during that transition, is to name what has persisted — because what is unnamed cannot be addressed.

How we break through:

We break through with our love for one another at the center. Our stories and our truths are the evidence that will power the movement. Where the barriers stand today as a concrete ceiling or a wall, our work together will transform it into stepping stones and pathways making workplaces better for everyone. When Black women thrive, we all will win.

Learn more at blackfemaleproject.org/concrete-ceiling