

Social dominance, hypermasculinity, and career barriers in Nigeria

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Abstract

Drawing on social dominance theory as a theoretical lens and based on a qualitative study of female managers and supervisors at different levels of the organization, we investigate the barriers women in Nigeria face in their careers. In their accounts of discrimination, corruption, familial/domestic responsibilities, cultural perceptions of gender, and ingrained religious beliefs, participants draw attention to the intense difficulties they face in their careers. We highlight the significance of context and argue that Nigeria is notable for an extreme attitude of male preference at work involving an intensification of career barriers that reflects the entrenched and systemic nature of male dominance in Nigerian organizations. We capture this in the concept of the “hypermasculine organization,” which is characterized by exaggerated male advantage, a tendency towards gender-based exploitation and abuse together with a justificatory logic based on rigidly enforced gender roles. These debilitating factors affecting women in organizations have potential implications for other countries in the global south.

KEYWORDS

career barriers, gender equality, hypermasculine organizations, Nigeria, social dominance theory

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1 | INTRODUCTION

This article investigates ongoing discrimination against women in the global south by considering the barriers women face in their efforts to advance their careers in Nigeria—a country that is often referred to as the “giant of Africa.” The majority of research undertaken on gender, women, and organizations has been developed in the global north with an emphasis on Europe and North America (Grady, 2015; Huffman, 2013), thus overlooking the significance of specific economic, social, and cultural conditions in other contexts. Women's inability to break the glass ceiling into top organizational positions in the global south is however a pressing concern. While up to date, reliable information is scarce, data published on female directors (WIMBIZ, 2011) shows that of the 190 listed companies, only 10.5% of board seats were held by women and in the civil service, while women account for 24% of the workforce, they occupy less than 14% of overall management positions (Ali, 2014). This disparity exists despite legislation supporting gender equality and despite Nigeria being a signatory to international agreements to eliminate gender discrimination (British Council, 2012; Lincoln & Adedoyin, 2012; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2009).

The heavily patriarchal nature of Nigerian society—a possible contributing factor—is widely acknowledged. This manifests in attitudes that suggest women should be confined to the home (Makama, 2013), that identifies women through their male relatives (Tijani-Adenle, 2016), and where autonomy and independent action are constrained by the need to gain permission of husbands or fathers (Adisa, Abdulraheem, & Isiaka, 2019). Taken together and supported by rigid, gender-based cultural norms, this means that women are consigned to the periphery inside and outside of work (Anyangwe, 2015).

Informed by Acker's (1990) influential work, we see gender, not as a static entity but as a socially constituted and dynamically situated social practice that operates in various structural and cultural contexts, leading to the persistent structuring of organizations along gender lines. Here, her emphasis on gendered processes (e.g., organizational divisions of labor, imagery, and ideologies that reinforce those divisions) and the significance attached to hierarchies in terms of how they are constructed and maintained aligns with social dominance theory's (SDT; Islam, 2014, pp. 1779–1781; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) focus on how processes at different levels of social organization, from cultural ideologies and institutional discrimination to gender roles and the psychology of prejudice, work together to produce group-based inequality. With clear applicability to gender divisions, the dominant group, supported by cultural norms and ideologies, is seen to gain disproportionate positive social value and material returns at the expense of the subordinate group. Through this lens and based on interviews with over 40 women at different levels of their organization (mainly supervisory and management roles), our data highlights contextually specific factors as key to understanding the challenges and barriers women face as they seek to progress in their careers. This includes the excessive and systemic nature of male privilege, supported and legitimized by hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths, the role of “godfatherism” in perpetrating corrupt practices in the allocation of organizational rewards, and rigidly enforced gender roles that give women full responsibility for the domestic sphere.

While SDT sees men's and women's preference for hierarchy as stable and largely divorced from context (with men generally being more supportive of hierarchies than women), we argue from our data that a context characterized by systemic and deep-rooted patriarchy manifests in an intensification of career barriers for women. In other words, while the theory suggests a stable gender difference in terms of the support given to hierarchies, we argue that in some contexts such difference can widen and become more entrenched. Thus, strong male preference and excessive support for hierarchical structures have a polarizing effect, potentially strengthening inequality in terms of discrimination and unfair practices at work. Resonant with Acker's (1990) contention that cultural beliefs, attitudes, and practices of wider society pervade organizational life, shaping organizational behavior, we capture this intensification within the notion of a hypermasculine organization that constrains women in their careers. As we suggest, the hypermasculine organization is characterized by a disproportionate and excessive male advantage in the form of organization position, power, and privilege, a tendency towards gender-based exploitation and abuse

combined with a justificatory logic based on rigidly enforced gender roles. These factors are fundamental to an understanding of the barriers and challenges Nigerian women face in terms of career progression and, we suggest, are not only specific to this context but also have potential implications for other countries in the global south.

This article is organized as follows. We outline the key principles of SDT highlighting the importance of contextual conditions, often overlooked in current accounts. With a focus on Nigeria, we then discuss the literature on career barriers and the need to understand the unique, cultural factors hindering women in their careers. After a discussion of the Nigerian context, we describe our research design and method of analysis. We then present our findings based on the roles of systemic discrimination, "godfatherism," and domestic responsibilities in the differential allocation of rewards. These are discussed in the light of SDT and we conclude by foregrounding the significance of context, arguing that the systemic nature of male dominance leads to an intensification of barriers in Nigerian organizations, heavily constraining women in their careers.

2 | SOCIAL DOMINANCE THEORY

An ethnically diverse society, Nigerian value systems are based upon a distinctive set of social and cultural institutions organized around group belonging and family obligations (Ituma & Simpson, 2009). Nigerian society accordingly constitutes an in-built group-based social hierarchy which is substantively, but not exclusively, gender-based (Halabi, Dovidio, & Nadler, 2008; Mifune, Inamasu, Kohama, Ohtsubo, & Tago, 2019; Whitley, 1999). Whilst largely overlooked in gender and organizational research, this orientation towards group-based stratification makes SDT a useful lens through which the challenges and career barriers that women face in Nigeria can be examined. SDT is founded on the notion that social groups are hierarchically positioned, reflecting a universal human susceptibility regarding the formation of group-based hierarchies, and that members of the dominant social groups enjoy a disproportionate or unequal share of positive social value (Mifune et al., 2019; Morrison, Fast, & Ybarra, 2009). Organizational labor markets, for example, are seen from this perspective as hierarchically arranged social groupings where strong group-based competitors with "disproportionate power ... enjoy special privileges ... or ease in its way of life" (Pratto & Stewart, 2012, p. 1) whilst weak or non-competing group members, in spite of individual skills and abilities, have their access to and movement within the labor market to top positions limited.

SDT is premised on three interacting principles. First, group-based oppression is driven by systemic institutional and individual discrimination, unequally allocating resources and social value. The theory therefore provides a potential basis for understanding how individual and structural factors combine in developing and maintaining group-based social hierarchy (Islam, 2014, pp. 1779–1781; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Second, group-based discrimination is systemic because it is supported by unified societal, group-based ideologies and "legitimizing myths" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Vargas-Salfate, Paez, Liu, Pratto, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2018) comprising societal values, stereotypes, attitudes, and beliefs that shape individual behaviors, form new practices, and dictate the norms that govern various institutions (Whitley, 1999). These ideologies take the form of "hierarchy-enhancing" legitimizing myths (e.g., racism, sexism, stereotypes, and nationalism) that serve to increase hierarchies and "hierarchy-attenuating" legitimizing myths (e.g., political and humanist doctrines) that seek to challenge those hierarchies. Factors that enhance hierarchies become self-perpetuating in that they become embedded in social systems, reinforcing unequal group-based social relations (Islam, 2014, pp. 1779–1781; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Whitley, 1999).

The degree of enhancement or attenuation of the group-based hierarchy is determined by the extent to which that hierarchy is consensually placed among the dominant and dominated groups (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This relates to an individual's social dominance orientation (SDO) that is an individual's preference for group-based hierarchy, which is the third interrelating element of the theory. Defined as an orientation "expressing the value that people place on nonegalitarian and hierarchically structured relationships among social groups" (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999, p. 61), SDO partly determines the level of acceptance of the ideologies that legitimize inequality. An individual with a high SDO will, for example, lend support to hierarchy-enhancing and oppose hierarchy-attenuating

practices (Ho et al., 2012). As the theory suggests, irrespective of setting, men will exhibit a higher SDO than women (Pratto, Sidanius, & Levin, 2006) reflecting their greater endorsement of sexist beliefs that justify and perpetuate patriarchy. This desire for group-based dominance is seen as important for understanding in-group favoritism and inequitable preferment to social roles that support the degree of hierarchy (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). These three factors (the systemic nature of oppression, the significance of legitimizing myths, and the role of SDO) accordingly combine to explain different forms of group-based inequality, highlighting the significance of discrimination that is related to ideologies and policies, institutional practices, and individual relations within and outside social groups (Pratto et al., 2006).

As Sidanius and Pratto (1999) argue, while gender differences exist in SDO, this difference is universal in that the relative degree to which individuals support group-based inequality is stable across contexts. Referred to as the “invariant hypothesis,” this accordingly proposes a constancy in gender differences in SDO that is insensitive to setting. In other words, group-based hierarchies reproduce and reinforce themselves via individuals who, regardless of the context in which inequality occurs, have a preference for hierarchical structures over egalitarian ones and where, regardless of the social setting, men will be disposed to have a higher SDO than women. Arguing that under certain circumstances gender differences in support for hierarchies may in fact diminish and that women and men might have similar SDOs, some authors (e.g., Batalha, Reynolds, & Newbigin, 2011; Schmitt & Wirth, 2009) have however problematized the assumed universality and stability of these individual tendencies.

Building on this critique, we contribute to current debates by arguing that contextual conditions can have a profound impact on the intensity and strength of male preference in the form of SDO with a potential polarization of support for inequality and inequitable regimes. Specifically, conversely to Batalha et al. (2011) above who suggest that egalitarian contexts might lead to gender convergence in attitudes that make up SDO, we show that a context characterized by systemic and deep-rooted patriarchy can lead potentially to more entrenched and divergent attitudes. In other words, rather than seeing gender differences in SDO as constant as the invariant hypothesis suggests, we argue that such differences can widen in some contexts. This manifests in an exaggerated male preference and heightened level of support for hierarchical structures by dominant groups and hence an intensification of barriers faced by women. We capture this in the notion of the hypermasculine organization discussed further below.

3 | THE GLASS CEILING AND CAREER CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN IN NIGERIA

The challenges women face advancing beyond a particular point in their careers has been analyzed through the popular metaphor of the glass ceiling (GC; Purcell, MacArthur, & Samblanet, 2010)—defined by the US Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) as “artificial barriers” orchestrated by attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from moving into management-level positions. The concept has been adopted widely to describe and examine gender discrimination and inequalities between men and women in the workplace (Bomuwela & Chamaru, 2013). While it is beyond the scope of this article to undertake a systematic review of this work, the majority refer to a range of organizational centered barriers (e.g., lack of mentoring and recruitment bias) and/or sociocultural barriers with the latter often including reference to a “male norm” that casts women as outsiders (e.g., Billing, 2011). This can manifest in “unseen barriers” (Morrison, White, & Velsor, 1987) such as a “men’s club” culture that excludes women and impedes their advancement in organizations (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004).

As we suggest, these and other factors may be more prevalent and have greater intensity in non-western contexts such as Nigeria where, despite women’s improved access to education and training (International Labour Office [ILO], 2004), strong patriarchal norms and beliefs prevail (Adisa et al., 2019; Makama, 2013). Entrenched stereotypical attitudes position management and leadership as the exclusive domain of men, with women seen as less suited to management roles (Okafor, Fagbemi, & Hassan, 2011; Osondu-Oti & Olominu, 2018)—attitudes that have been identified by Osondu-Oti (2016) as a major barrier to women’s progression and a key component of the

GC in this context (Bomuwela & Chamaru, 2013). The significance of entrenched beliefs and negative stereotypes has been supported by Mordí, Adedoyin, and Ajonbadi (2011) summary of career challenges in Nigeria, which highlighted a “women-not-good-enough” ideology as well as exclusive formal and informal networks forged by men. These barriers are not confined to male-dominated industries (e.g., construction, banking, telecommunications, and manufacturing) but are also evident in sectors that are traditionally the domain of women. In teaching, for example, while women outnumber men in the profession as a whole, men dominate in all senior roles (Obamiro & Obasan, 2013).

Elsewhere, Okafor et al. (2011), in a Nigerian-based study of women's careers, have pointed to lack of mentoring, few opportunities for training and development, and family responsibilities as key constraining issues. With a similar focus on female executive careers in Nigeria, Mordí et al. (2011) and Adisa et al. (2019) have referred to personal and organizational factors including practices of exclusion, lack of organizational support, and, also in tune with patriarchal values above, widespread perceptions that women lack ability and competence. Although not with a specific focus on women, Ituma and Simpson (2009) have highlighted the role of ethnic allegiance, personal connections, and gender discrimination in Nigeria as key factors in work mobility and progression. Such factors may relate specifically to the male-dominated as well as the group and relationship-oriented nature of Nigerian society where personal favors and preferential treatment (e.g., for recruitment and promotion) are common. Here, the misuse of authority in the form of corruption, where personal favors are drawn on for organizational or personal gain and where these favors supersede official channels and institutional frameworks, is also a common problem (Pfarrer, Decelles, Smith, & Taylor, 2008). These and other studies, notwithstanding, this suggests a need to understand the unique, cultural factors (such as the legitimization of a strong male patriarchal order) that might be responsible for women's inability to break the GC in terms of the career barriers they face especially in attaining senior positions in this context—a pressing issue this research, drawing on SDT as an appropriate lens, seeks to address.

4 | RESEARCH CONTEXT

We develop our contribution in the context of Nigeria, a country with a population of over 190 million (World Bank, 2017). Seen as a beacon of African economic progress, Nigeria represents both the hope and the despair of Africa in terms of prosperity and acute challenges including corruption, mismanagement, and poor leadership. Nigerian society is excessively patriarchal (Makama, 2013) with distinct gender-based roles, inculcated from childhood that cast women in a subordinate role (Akintan, 2013). Sanctions are often melted out to those who deviate too far from the culturally imposed gender role standards (Mordí, Simpson, Singh, & Okafor, 2010).

Nigerian society is not culturally homogeneous as there are geographical and cultural variations from the North through what is commonly referred to as the Middle-Belt, all the way to the South (which would encompass the South West, South East and South-South/Niger Delta). Gannon and Pillai (2010) refer to Nigerian society as “cleft national culture” that is one in which the major ethnic groups are markedly distinct from one another in terms of norms and values so that it is difficult to form a clear national culture. Nevertheless, despite this diversity, patriarchy is shared across groups and is strongly embedded in Nigerian traditions and culture. Drawing on understandings of men and women as “essentially different,” men are typically identified with physical strength, power, and “rulership” of various private and public institutions (Adisa et al., 2019) such as family, work, and religion where women are confined to the periphery. As renowned African feminist Ogunjipe-Leslie (1994) observed, the African woman is expected to be conscious of her status as a woman. This enduring variant of African, specifically Nigerian, culture demands that a woman be reserved, reclusive, and “homely” with ambitious and aspiring women viewed with disapproval as copiers of western culture (Ogunjipe-Leslie, 1994). Men, by contrast, are encouraged to “better themselves” for the good of the family. This is captured in Grace Ogot's depiction of Jakoyo, the prominent male character in her landmark feminist piece, *The Graduate*. Here, Jakoyo has just spent 7 years as a foreign

student in the United States, leaving his wife behind in their native Kenya to care for their three children in the extremely difficult war years. On his return, he is celebrated as a “hero” by the narrator who notes that “Jakoyo has worked hard for his children” and also by his wife who praises him saying: “... *you have brought honor to the family dear, I am so proud of you!*” (Ogot, 1980, p. 44).

While it has been suggested that patriarchy was imported to Africa with the arrival of Islam in the 10th century (Diop, 1989), the roots of excessive patriarchy have been located within British colonialism (in place between 1882 and 1960) through a carefully constructed imperialist ideology and philosophy that became embedded in colonial legislations, education, land rights, modern healthcare system, politics, and markets (Reid, 2012). Although the pre-colonial era witnessed male domination where territories were governed mainly by kings, the importation of British imperialist ideas and values together with the advent of the Christian missionaries, who functioned as quasi-colonial agents, arguably helped to strengthen patriarchal norms (see Crowder, 1968). This is because in many parts of the country the British colonial power adopted pre-existing political and monarchical structures, in which existing traditional rulers (predominantly kings and male chiefs) were employed by the colonial government to rule on its behalf, under British guidance and supervision.

In other parts of the lower Niger (as it was then termed by the British colonizing powers), where there did not exist a clear-cut structure of monarchical governance, the colonial government introduced the Divide-and-Rule system with the institution of “Warrant Chiefs.” These were typically male and, in their zeal to carry out the colonial mandate, oppressed the population and severely restricted the role of women in government. This led to the well-documented Aba Women’s riot of 1929 also known as the “Women’s War” (Falola, 2008, pp. 133–135; Johnson, 1982). The Christian missionaries, in addition to spreading the goodwill message of salvation, often came with their extreme interpretations of the Bible, unwittingly encouraging the subjugation of women. Colonialism can therefore be seen to have introduced new lines of command and authority that reinforced existing, patriarchal structures.

Customarily, in Nigeria and indeed in all African countries, an ideal family consists of mothers as dependent homemakers, who oversee and coordinate the affairs and activities of the home and fathers who are breadwinners. However, although this dichotomy is being eroded with the rise in the number of economically active women in Nigeria (women’s percentage of the labor force has risen significantly from 12% in 1971 to over 65% in 2016 [Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, 2016]), this has not necessarily translated to gender equality. Despite labor laws that advocate equality, gender discrimination is embedded in systems and ideologies, reflecting the important role in Nigeria of informal attitudes and practices that influence and dispense the policies within organizations. There accordingly still remains a large gender gap between men and women in terms of the representation of women in senior positions in Nigerian organizations.

5 | METHODOLOGY

Given the context-specific nature of this study, which is concerned with subjective perceptions and experiences, we adopted a qualitative research approach. Similar to other qualitative studies on gender diversity (e.g., Kakabadse et al., 2015; Yamak, Ergur, Özbilgin, & Alakavuklar, 2016), this approach facilitates understanding of the participants’ motives, emotions, actions, and experiences from their own perspectives. We conducted our study in five major administrative capitals of Nigeria, including the federal capital: Abuja, Lagos, Ibadan, Ilorin, and Port Harcourt. These cities have a combined population of more than 30 million and have an appreciable number of private and public organizations.

We relied on referral and snowballing techniques to recruit our research participants. In doing this, our initial participants were asked to nominate their acquaintances, who met our sampling strategy. These sampling techniques are cost-effective and time-effective—important considerations for research that is not funded by major grant-awarding bodies. Ethical guidelines appropriate for social science research were followed throughout. For

example, the purpose and procedures of the study were clearly explained to the participants and they were ensured of their anonymity, both in terms of their names and those of their employers.

Altogether, 43 women working at various levels of organizations, including both private and public organizations, participated in this study. The participants varied in terms of their age (28–57 years), level of education, positions, marital statuses (31 married and 12 single), and the business sector in which they work. Participants reported an average of 9 years of work experience. Employees on levels 7–10 in public organizations and employees such as education officers and accounts officers in private organizations could be identified as office workers; employees on levels 10–12 in public organizations and supervisors in private organizations were at supervisory level; with the remainder in different managerial positions (Table 1).

6 | DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author—a Nigerian male—at a convenient time and setting in accordance with the participants' preferences. While this gender difference could potentially add to any social distance felt between the researcher and the participants in terms of work experience and hence to a lack of disclosure on their part, the shared cultural background helped to mitigate any reticence felt and, in fact, all participants engaged fully with the interview. Following the principle of induction (Tenzer, Pudelko, & Harzing, 2014), the interviews began with open-ended questions, gradually narrowed down to more specific questions around career challenges and perceived barriers in order to elicit concrete examples of the interviewees' experiences (Witzel, 2000). After a general discussion of career history and of career aspirations, participants were asked to describe the nature of their work, the relationship with colleagues and line managers, and to reflect on the challenges they had faced in their careers. Specific examples of attitudes, practices, or events that they had encountered and which they felt had held them back were explored in depth. As recommended by Myers (2009), the researchers remained open to new themes during the process of data collection as researchers sought to probe more deeply into the different issues that the participants raised. Interviews were conducted in English and, given that English is the official language in Nigeria, all participants had a high level of fluency. However, researchers critically examined words and phrases to ensure that they were given the correct meanings and interpretations. Interviews were recorded, and transcribed verbatim, and lasted between 60 and 90 min. Thirty interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees, and meticulous notes were taken in the case of the 13 interviewees who declined permission for the researchers to record their interviews. The lack of consent for voice recording may reflect a general attitude of Nigerians towards granting interviews for research purposes, which is still unpopular. The recordings were transcribed verbatim soon after the interviews had taken place.

Transcripts were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), resulting in the emergence of broad patterns of meanings that were repeatedly highlighted by the participants. Theory guided our analysis throughout. Inductive analysis followed by “mapping” onto SDT's conceptualization of the interplay between systemic discrimination, legitimizing myths, and SDO was a key strategy. Familiarization by reading and re-reading the transcripts preceded initial coding that summarized the “surface meanings” of the data, which has been organized initially according to the main interview areas above. For reliability and to corroborate findings, two researchers independently coded the data. Thus, informed by SDT, themes were revisited and refined in an iterative manner as analysis progressed to check for clarity and coherence as organizing concepts. Coding and themes are summarized in Table 2.

Analysis led to the identification of three key themes around systemic and exaggerated gender-based hierarchical differences; corruption and the exchange of favors; and the burden of domestic roles. Analysis highlighted not only the nature of barriers encountered but also, through women's accounts of their experiences, their intensity and strength. This enabled us, in the light of SDT, to theorize that contextual conditions can lead to an intensification of barriers and an excessive preference for hierarchy on the part of dominant groups, undermining SDT claims that gender differences in attitudes towards hierarchy are likely to be stable across contexts.

TABLE 1 Participants' profile

| Pseudonyms/age | Years in service | Level of education | Marital status | Positions | Business sector |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Grace (42) | 10 | Master | Married | Level 12 officer | Public |
| Linda (53) | 17 | Bachelor | Married | Assistant manager | Private |
| Elena (39) | 8 | Bachelor | Married | Level 8 officer | Public |
| Joy (29) | 5 | HND | Single | Level 7 officer | Public |
| Yinka (40) | 10 | HND | Married | Level 8 officer | Public |
| Moji (33) | 5 | Bachelor | Married | Marketing officer | Private |
| Yolanda (46) | 9 | Master | Married | Personnel officer | Private |
| Aisha (46) | 6 | Bachelor | Single | Account officer | Private |
| Bisi (41) | 11 | Master | Married | Assistant HOD | Public |
| Lola (49) | 13 | Master | Married | Assistant manager | Private |
| Monica (51) | 19 | Master | Married | Level 14 officer | Public |
| Folu (39) | 8 | HND | Married | Supervisor | Private |
| Wura (27) | 8 | Bachelor | Single | Level 8 officer | Public |
| Mabel (32) | 5 | HND | Single | Marketing officer | Private |
| Bunmi (45) | 12 | Bachelor | Married | Personnel officer | Private |
| Bukky (31) | 4 | OND | Single | Sales representative | Private |
| Bola (42) | 22 | Bachelor | Married | Account officer | Private |
| Emilie (47) | 10 | Master | Married | Manager | Private |
| Hayley (39) | 9 | Bachelor | Married | Level 10 officer | Public |
| Dupe (44) | 12 | Bachelor | Married | Education officer | Public |
| Fatty (38) | 7 | HND | Single | Level 10 officer | Public |
| Tomi (39) | 11 | Bachelor | Married | Level 12 officer | Public |
| Nancy (43) | 7 | Master | Single | General manager | Private |
| Remo (47) | 17 | Master | Married | Level 14 officer | Public |
| Liz (44) | 9 | Bachelor | Single | Level 10 officer | Public |
| Patricia (41) | 9 | Bachelor | Married | Sales representative | Private |
| Ruth (49) | 12 | HND | Married | Sales representative | Private |
| Sarah (50) | 15 | Bachelor | Married | Manager | Private |
| Kike (45) | 21 | HND | Married | Level 14 officer | Public |
| Christina (39) | 6 | HND | Married | Marketing officer | Private |
| Ana (40) | 12 | Bachelor | Single | Supervisor | Private |
| Betty (38) | 8 | HND | Married | Level 12 officer | Public |
| Nicky (36) | 7 | HND | Single | Sales representative | Private |
| Victoria (40) | 10 | HND | Married | Marketing officer | Private |
| Biola (52) | 22 | Master | Married | Assistant manager | Private |

TABLE 1 (Continued)

| Pseudonyms/age | Years in service | Level of education | Marital status | Positions | Business sector |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Titi (47) | 17 | Bachelor | Married | Program manager | Private |
| Ranti (38) | 6 | HND | Married | Sales representative | Public |
| Ngozi (38) | 7 | HND | Single | Level 8 officer | Public |
| Rabat (28) | 3 | OND | Married | Account officer | Public |
| Kaffy (33) | 4 | HND | Single | Level 7 officer | Public |
| Remy (36) | 8 | Bachelor | Married | Marketing officer | Private |
| Tanya (47) | 12 | Master | Married | Assistant manager | Private |
| Abby (41) | 7 | Bachelor | Married | Level 12 officer | Public |

Abbreviations: HND, Higher National Diploma; OND, Ordinary National Diploma.

7 | RESEARCH FINDINGS

7.1 | Systemic and excessive male-group-based domination

Results demonstrate how recruitment and promotion decisions are allocated largely on the basis of a male preference that is systematically reinforced and legitimized, highlighting the deeply embedded nature of social dominance in this context. This relates to key principles of SDT which place emphasis on the systemic nature of discrimination in terms of how it is ingrained in all institutions and structures, on the role of legitimizing myths as well as on their level of support through attitudes that are captured within SDO. The systemic and pervasive nature of gender bias in reward decisions was identified by all women in the study as a fundamental problem in their career aspirations. This was seen to inhibit their progress to more senior roles, reinforcing Acker's (1990) contention that gender-based inequality is partly based on a division of labor where men are in the highest positions of organizational power. All women spoke in strong terms about the challenges they faced and were critical of attitudes and practices inside and outside the organization that give preference to men. Rather than comprising isolated incidents, discrimination against women was seen as endemic, infiltrating all aspects of society where, in Christina's words below focusing on the context of work, men are "always preferred":

The system places and favors men over women in terms of choosing leaders in organizations with little consideration for merit and women's intellectual capacity. I have experienced it like three times in my various places of work. Male colleagues are always preferred and chosen over me and other ladies. Unless a woman owns an organization, she may struggle to get to the top of the organization. It is the system, the Nigerian patriarchal system. (Christina)

The system is extremely patriarchal, that is how it has been designed. It thus makes it difficult for women to excel. How do you excel when you are surrounded by people who think that women should always be at the back of the queue? Really difficult to break the ceiling. (Tanya)

As this suggests, individual merit-based reward oriented around "best person for the job" is overruled in favor of group-member preference, irrespective of suitability based on talent or expertise. Rather than being covert or concealed, gender bias is openly acknowledged ("a man has to be appointed" in the quote below), universalized and seemingly normalized within systems of decision-making, embedded in prejudicial attitudes and practices. From

TABLE 2 Key themes and associated codes

| Core themes | Sample codes | Aggregate theoretical dimension: SDT | Example data |
|---|---|--|--|
| 1. Systemic and excessive male-group-based domination | <p>Normative and exaggerated male preference in leadership</p> <p>Gender bias in reward systems</p> <p>Lack of merit</p> <p>Questioning of women's competence</p> <p>Normalization of discrimination and difference</p> | <p>Systemic discrimination and bias</p> <p>High SDO and support for hierarchy by dominant groups</p> <p>Hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths based on rigid gender roles</p> | <p>... I was advised by the head of operations not to apply because women will not be considered for the position of operations manager as he feels it's a demanding role more suitable to a man. (Yolanda)</p> <p>... the selection and the reward systems are biased and extremely patriarchal. My male colleagues with same qualifications and same experience as I am are my seniors and those on the same level as I am are placed above me in terms of decision-making and even rewarded better. For example, I don't get invited to the senior management meeting and my male colleagues on the same level as I am do. Seriously, being a woman is more of a disadvantage in this male-dominated society. (Bunmi)</p> |
| 2. Corruption and exchange of favors | <p>Endemic "godfatherism"</p> <p>Bribery and sexual exploitation/abuse of power</p> <p>Widespread acceptance of corruption</p> | <p>Aspect of institutionalized and systemic discrimination</p> <p>Exploitation and "resourcefulness" on part of the dominant group</p> <p>High SDO on part of the dominant group</p> | <p>The popular practice here is to bribe your way up either by having a godfather who make things happen for you, by paying cash. It is particularly difficult for a woman to achieve success in Nigerian organizations without using her body. I have been forced to sometimes pay with my body in the organizations where I have worked because I don't have a godfather, money or important family with societal status. (Sarah)</p> |

TABLE 2 (Continued)

| Core themes | Sample codes | Aggregate theoretical dimension: SDT | Example data |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| 3. Family/domestic responsibilities | Cultural expectations of women's domestic role; burdens of dual role/prioritization of family over work Rigidly enforced gender roles "Natural" positioning of women in the domestic sphere/importance of religious beliefs Women's awareness and "pushing back" (also evident in 1 and 2 above) | Systemic disadvantage institutionalized within the family Strength of hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths Weakness of hierarchy-attenuating ideologies | <i>The cultural and domestic division of labor consign women to domestic servitude in which they must do all the domestic work ... you cannot be seen to be overtly challenging this so as to avert social and cultural sanctions. (Bola)</i> <i>It is part of women's cultural beliefs in many ethnic groups in Nigeria, that men are the king and women are helpers almost like maid of all work who must serve the king regardless of whether the woman is full-time employed or not. For example, I work full-time, yet I dare not avoid doing my domestic responsibilities ... even when I'm sick I must still find the energy to attend to the family and serve my husband. It is worst when the extended family is involved. If I do not do my domestic duties, it could be threatening and sometimes hell at home. (Biola)</i> |

Remo's account below, a female candidate deemed "outstanding" in the interview for a senior role had been rejected and the decision justified based on a normative expectation that the job should go to a man:

Leadership positions are always occupied by men. Men dominate, and they would always be considered before women. For example, last year, the head of operations position became vacant, and three of us were shortlisted. After the process of interview, the only man among us got the job even though the managing director acknowledged that the other lady was outstanding in the interview ... "a man has to be appointed" that was his response when asked why the lady did not get the job. You may call it discrimination, but that is how the system works here. (Remo)

From SDT, the systemic nature of social dominance is supported and legitimized by hierarchy-enhancing myths, comprising widespread cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs that reinforce the *status quo*, shaping behavior and practices (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In this context, systematized male preference is underpinned by rigid gender roles that assign women to a subordinate sphere and by values and beliefs that, as both Linda and Joy point out below, question women's capabilities and their suitability for senior roles:

There are many talented women in Nigeria, but the system would not just allow them to fulfil their ambition of getting to the pinnacle of their career. For example, a woman has never been appointed as the managing director. In my time here, five women have retired, and none of them reached that position ... simply because a woman is not deemed capable enough. (Linda)

We were taught from childhood that men are superior, and women should be subservient to men. The girls do the house chores while the boys play football. Men are strong; women are weak. This notion traverses to all spheres of Nigerian life; school, home, organizations, places of worship, etc. Men's domination over women in Nigeria, in my opinion, is super-excessive. (Joy)

Read through SDT, where social dominance is seen to be historically, ideologically, and psychologically rooted in all social systems leading to inequality in terms of power and social value (Pratto & Stewart, 2012), male preference can be seen as part of an ongoing system of bias. As our data suggests, the ubiquitous, endemic, and pervasive nature of this bias manifests in extreme challenges for women at work, captured in a language of struggle and acute difficulty. This may signify a strong SDO and a high level of acceptance of hierarchical difference and of legitimizing ideologies on the part of the dominant group. Nigerian systems and ideologies accordingly perpetuate, as Joy points out above, a "super-excessive" form of domination. Our data accordingly highlights not just an inequality in social positioning suggested by SDT, but an *intensity* of barriers that profoundly hinder women in their ambitions to reach more senior organizational roles. This suggests that the particular sociocultural conditions in Nigeria (described by Tanya above as "*extremely patriarchal*") may manifest in exaggerated forms of male preference, captured in the concept of SDO, on the part of some groups. This goes some way to cast doubt on the assumption that gender differences in SDO are invariant with context and instead suggests that the particularly impenetrable systemic hierarchies in Nigeria may be associated with a divergence of attitudes that is rooted in particular contextual conditions. As we suggest, it is this excessive, all pervasive nature of male advantage in this context, symptomatic of a highly gendered "organizational logic" (Acker, 1990) and acknowledged by all women in the study, that partly underpins and characterizes a hypermasculinity in work-based gender relations, a theme we develop further below.

7.2 | Corruption and exchange of favors

Nepotism and exchange of personal favors have been found to be important factors behind individual career progression in Nigerian organizations (Ituma & Simpson, 2009), where hiring decisions are routinely based on familial and other connections, on a desire to cement relationships or on a need to express gratitude for past and/or anticipated favors. From women's accounts, reliance on exchange of favors can take a particularly abusive and exploitative form through an informal "godfatherism," seemingly endemic and strongly influencing decisions as to who is likely to progress in organizations. This further highlights the systemic nature of group dominance within SDT as well as how the dominant group can exercise "disproportionate influence" in maintaining preferential access to resources (Pratto & Stewart, 2012). Thus, if a woman is unable to use the influence of family or other close networks in seeking a higher position, she can be asked by a "godfather" (normally a man in a more senior management role) to pay cash as a form of bribe or may be coerced into a sexual exchange. The widespread, systemic nature of this practice is evidenced by the high number of respondents who had encountered this form of corruption personally (39 out of the 43 interviewed). This reflects the role of informal connections in career decisions as well as an acceptance of corruption in wider society. As Nancy below confirms, this form of corruption can be destructive to women's aspirations and careers:

I am the general manager and the business belongs to my father. I am aware of corrupt practices that destroy women's careers and ambitions. We had a case of a manager who demanded sex from a lady to be promoted and the manager was sacked. Yes, it happens, and it affects women's progression into leadership positions in organizations. (Nancy)

While this particular action was punished with dismissal, it is common for corrupt practices in Nigeria to continue without sanction, despite government attempts to eradicate them, perpetuating potential abuse. Demands

for cash and sexual favors accordingly form a seemingly institutionalized “immoral economy” that becomes normative, entrenching social injustice at work and where aspiring female leaders are expected, in the words of Lola below, to “play the game”:

I have only been promoted twice in 10 years. While many of my male colleagues, who joined the organization about the same time as me have moved to various leadership positions above me. I had a meeting with the regional director last year, and his words were completely absurd and left me dejected. He said ... “Mrs, you are even lucky to have been promoted twice since you joined us. However, your promotion may be a lot faster if you can play the games.” I asked him what he meant by the games, and he said: “love games ... be my mistress or pay 5 million Naira ¹ ... I am only trying to help you.” This confirms my friends’ experiences in their various places of work. I felt really bad and I decided to forget about promotion. (Lola)

While Ituma and Simpson (2009) have highlighted the importance of contact with “significant others” in obtaining employment and promotion at the application stage, the concept of “godfather” embodies a specifically gendered and power-laden relationship based on inequitable notions of favoritism, partiality, and patronage. The exploitative and potentially damaging nature of this relationship is captured in Monica’s quote below:

As a woman, you need three things to progress and rise through the rank and file in Nigerian organizations: sex, money, and *godfather*. You may be lucky that you are required to provide just one. Sometimes you are required to provide two, or all of them. It is either you provide them and rise fast through the hierarchy, or you may decide against providing them and resign or stay on and not be promoted. This is what women go through here to move up the organization ladder. It stinks, doesn't it? (Monica)

While one would anticipate a reluctance on the part of women to admit to any involvement in the exchange of sexual favors, for fear of potential stigma or disapproval, one woman ceded, regretfully, how she had benefitted from godfatherism and how, after an apparent open discussion, her friends and colleagues had taken a different path, sacrificing their career progression:

I don't like recounting this experience but ... I joined this company alongside two of my friends about ten years ago. Three years later, the then general manager called us, of course separately and differently, and asked us to be his mistresses. One of us refused and resigned. I agreed and did the needful and the result is my present position. My other friends disagree and have never been promoted. I probably was wrong, but that was the only thing that can facilitate my promotion. I am not saying it is right, but it is a common practice in Nigerian organizations. (Emilie)

In fact, many respondents claimed that seniority for women is commonly associated with the supply of sexual favors so that promotion to a more senior role can be a highly visible and uncomfortable position to occupy. These findings indicate the widespread, systemic nature of corruption in Nigeria and how it is implicated in women's underrepresentation in senior positions. From the perspective of SDT, corruption and the exchange of favors comprises a form of “resourcefulness” (Pratto & Stewart, 2012) that helps to underpin the advantages enjoyed by the dominant group. While practices of godfatherism potentially capture an ingenuity in developing ways of “achieving one's ends” and furthering material and social value as suggested by SDT above, this may however underplay the oppressive nature and exploitative effects of this unequal relationship that is open to potential abuse. Highlighted in our data, this can further intensify career barriers in this context and is further representative of a “hypermasculinity” in Nigerian organizations. Following Acker's (1990) contention that gendered

organizations are partly constructed through interactions that enact dominance and subordination, the hyper-masculine organization can be seen to be characterized by unrivalled favoritism, sexual exploitation, and the abuse of power.

7.3 | Family/domestic responsibilities

As discussed above, Nigerians are connected in a network of social relationship based on lineages and genealogical lines where there is an emphasis on interdependence, sharing, and reciprocal obligations (Okafor et al., 2011). Here, women are expected to take full responsibility for domestic arrangements and for family-related issues that extend into wider kinship circles. This is symptomatic of a systemic and institutionalized hierarchically arranged bias, supported by widely accepted legitimizing myths based on rigid gender roles, which has negative implications for women's career progression. These implications were acknowledged by all women in the study who, in the conflicting demands on their time and given the demanding nature of their domestic roles, were compelled to prioritize the non-work domain. Two participants recounted a typical experience:

The extended family system that we have in Nigerian society and of course the notion of “women are meant to do all the housework” make it difficult for women to attain the peak of their career. For example, shouldering over 90% of domestic duties including having children and raising them [sometimes I had to take time off work] and looking after my husband's parents who live with us reduce my commitment at work and of course it affects my progression to the top level at work. (Kike)

Huge familial responsibilities and the fact that men don't participate in discharging domestic duties in Nigeria are arduous and affect my career progression. In Nigeria, men are not supposed to engage in domestic duties. So, looking after my children, husband, my father in law, my nephews, and sometime going to help in the family house, especially when there is a ceremony such wedding is really challenging and have negative effect on my career progression because I could not put in the required time and energy. (Betty)

The belief that women should have sole responsibility for domestic affairs—including wider kinship circles and family events—has implications for education opportunities, with parents reportedly prioritizing the university education of sons on the grounds that there is, in the words of one participant, “no need” for daughters to attend given that they are likely to “be married and spend their time looking after home/family and nursing children.” As we have seen, this rigid allocation of roles can be seen to be facilitated and sustained by “legitimizing myths” (Pratto & Stewart, 2012) which, transmitted from generation to generation, comprise regulatory mechanisms, enabling and encapsulating male “hierarchy-enhancing” processes and giving clear directions on important aspects of societal life. As one participant commented, in Nigeria it is “considered sacrilege and wrong for a man to undertake domestic chores” with, concomitantly, strong, negative attitudes towards women in senior organizational roles. One participant summarized it succinctly: “women are not supposed to lead.”

These “legitimizing myths” are reinforced further by religious beliefs and here women referred to a contradiction between religious teaching and women's aspirations to senior positions. A participant commented:

I am a Muslim, and Islam believes that men should lead, and women should follow ... this is the belief that some people transfer to organizational leadership. Also, some sects of Muslim believe that women should not be leaders, whether at home or in organizations. They believe that women have no temerity to be leaders. I am sure this kind of belief contributes to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Nigeria. (Fatty)

The institutional and systemic nature of discrimination, prioritized within SDT, can accordingly be seen in the Nigerian family system. Here, culture and religious values reinforce patriarchal and stereotypical gender roles, pressurizing women to prioritize family/home over work and to accept the negative impacts on careers—an “organizational logic” (Acker, 1990) that underpins a highly gendered organization. Taken together, despite a critical awareness on the part of women of the unjust and discriminatory nature of these ideologies (referred to by Betty above as a “terrible perception” and by another participant as a “senseless belief”), this further highlights the significance of “hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths” (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) and their widespread acceptance on the part of some groups as key challenges facing women in their careers. However, our data shows that it is not just the existence of these ideologies that is important, as suggested by SDT, but their *strength* and the profound implications for women and their careers in this context. Rigidly enforced traditional cultural and religious expectations that women take sole responsibility for the burden of the domestic responsibilities and the care of close as well as extended family members further underpins a gender bias in the Nigerian context, signifying a particularly high SDO and preference for hierarchical difference on the part of some groups. This manifests in an intensification of barriers based on the excessive demands of the domestic sphere, on a high male preference and SDO with reference to key decision-makers and other personnel in the world of work and a widespread aversion to women in senior roles, forming a justificatory logic within “hypermasculine” organizations based on rigidly enforced gender roles.

8 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Drawing on SDT as a theoretical lens, this article set out to explore the barriers women in Nigeria face as they seek to progress in their organizations. While a large body of literature has focused on challenges faced by women in the west, fewer studies have explored these issues in the global south. With an orientation to gender as a socially constituted and dynamically situated social practice, we highlight the significance of context and how the patriarchal system in Nigeria feeds into organizations, leading to an intensification of barriers experienced.

Our study makes a strong empirical and theoretical contribution to our understanding of the barriers faced in a context where merit is routinely cast aside. In terms of the former, informed by SDT, our study demonstrates the significance of intense patriarchal structures that are systemic to the world of work and which lead to extreme preferential treatment and disproportionate privileges to the dominant group of men. Against a cultural background which normalizes the exchange of favors in access to key organizational positions (Ituma & Simpson, 2009), the strength and systemic nature of patriarchal power arguably facilitates the role of “godfather”—a role that reflects the imbalance in gender relations as well as a “patriarchal license” and “resourcefulness” in mobilizing corrupt practices of exploitation based on bribery and demands for sex. Our data also highlights the significance of “legitimizing myths” and a cultural ethos that, as Ette (2017) and Nwosu (2012) found in this context, confines women to the domestic realm and to subordinate roles based on a high SDO and a rigid hierarchy in gender order. In line with SDT, we show the interplay between systemic discrimination, which manifests in part in exploitation and abuse of power, legitimizing myths regarding women’s “natural” position at home and at work and preference for hierarchy or SDO, the strength of which gives such myths “oxygen” and support. These form mutually supporting processes and “structures” (Acker, 1990) that underpin the hypermasculine organization.

Taken together, in contributing to the career barrier literature, we provide compelling evidence that despite the importance of diversity and the need for more women in senior positions in all organizations (Catalyst, 2011; Eagly & Carli, 2007), women in Nigeria are held back by systemic discrimination, corruption, familial/domestic responsibilities, cultural perceptions of gender, and ingrained religious beliefs. Of these factors, we suggest that the specific role of “godfatherism” has not been hitherto incorporated into career barrier debates. We have accordingly highlighted a particularly gendered and power-laden relationship, based on favoritism, partiality, and patronage, as a prevalent career barrier in this context thereby adding to our understanding of the forms that such barriers can

take. Furthermore, we show that it is not just the nature or type of barrier that is salient to understanding the challenges that women face but also their intensity in terms of their concentration and strength. As we suggest, career barrier intensity is likely to vary with context and to increase under conditions characterized by systemic bias, entrenched negative attitudes, and discriminatory actions and practices that are both normalized and, far from comprising isolated incidents, commonplace.

While some aspects of our findings may be common to organizational contexts in the west, we maintain that they are, in the main, specific to Nigeria and potentially to other areas in the global south in three ways. First, while male dominance may exist elsewhere and limit women's career progression, in the context of Nigeria, patriarchal structures are deeply embedded in all systems and institutions. With an ongoing legacy of colonial power which served to further entrench patriarchal relations, the systemic and endemic nature of patriarchy is accordingly a key characteristic of Nigerian society where, in accordance with SDT, male dominance is historically, ideologically, and psychologically embedded and legitimized by hierarchy-enhancing legitimizing myths (Pratto et al., 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Unlike western egalitarian cultures that promote gender equality, Nigerian culture is based on rigidly enforced gender roles that places women in the domestic sphere and where it is seen, in fundamental terms, as "un-African" for a woman to lead (Aderinto, 2001). With its different cultural context and historical legacy, the strength and endurance of these myths is arguably not shared to the same extent in the west.

Second and relatedly, rewards accruing to men can be seen as excessive yet normalized within these institutions and structures in ways and to a degree that are likely to be less acceptable in the context of the west. Women in the study accordingly highlight how, clearly overriding considerations of merit drawn upon in western-based human resources policies and practices, resources and rewards are allocated openly on the basis of a systemic and exaggerated male preference that assigns women to a subordinate sphere. Finally, while there are potential commonalities between "godfatherism" and the events that lie behind the western-based #MeToo movement, where women have shared experiences of sexual harassment at work, we would argue that, far from being anomalous and ultimately penalized within a western system that is otherwise committed to equal opportunities, "godfatherism" in Nigeria is normalized, largely unchallenged, and has a level of acceptance which places it as part of a system of dispensation of reward.

While our data, relying on women's accounts of their organizational experiences, may not allow us to draw definitive conclusions about men's attitudes and practices, our results strongly suggest a polarization of support for hierarchical structures with a heightened male preference on the part of dominant groups that is rooted in Nigeria's patriarchal relations of power. These attitudes may also be shared by some groups of women (as one respondent noted, older women are often acceptive of the strict gender regime in Nigeria and the inequalities imposed). Nevertheless, all women in our study were highly critical of the gendered *status quo* and spoke in strong terms of the routine gender-based injustice faced (captured evocatively in Monica's comment above: "it stinks"), suggestive of a high level of support for egalitarian rather than hierarchical organizational structures.

Following the above, and on a theoretical level, we not only demonstrate the usefulness of SDT in understanding the challenges women face in their careers by showing how systems, values, and individual attitudes can combine to support group dominance but, more importantly, we also extend our understanding of the theory by highlighting the theoretical importance of context. In particular, we problematize the assumed stability of gender difference in preferences for group-based hierarchy in the form of SDO which is seen to be universal and unaffected by context. While research critical of this "invariant hypothesis" has suggested in some circumstances gender differences in SDO may be reduced (e.g., Batalha et al., 2011), we argue, conversely, that contextual conditions can render such differences more intense. In other words, the strength of male preference and the orientation towards hierarchy-attenuating attitudes in relation to gender may rely largely on the context in which it occurs, suggesting a need to incorporate context into how inequality is construed. Here, a context characterized by systemic and deep-rooted patriarchy, emanating in part from a colonial past, can manifest in heightened preferences for hierarchical structures on the part of some groups and a polarization of attitudes and beliefs with respect to inequalities. These values and practices at the level of the organization lead to an intensification of inequality through a

“hypermasculine organization” and pose fundamental challenges to women in their careers, reflecting Acker's (1990) view that regimes, attitudes, and behaviors of wider society strongly shape organizational values and practices. This manifests, in our context, in a hypermasculine organization which, we suggest, is characterized by a disproportionate and excessive male advantage in the form of organization position and power, a strong potential for exploitation and abuse combined with a justificatory logic based on rigidly enforced gender roles. These roles assume strict gender difference in attributes and skills, in particular those afforded value in senior organizational roles.

As Eagly and Carli (2007) point out, organizations can capture symbols of progressive social change and modernity by appointing women to senior positions. More concretely, in a globally competitive environment, a gender-balanced management team improves productivity, enhances collaboration, and brings in a wider range of skills. The hypermasculine organization is not only inherently unjust by denying women opportunities for self-actualization and economic power but is limiting the potential for organizations to benefit from the full capacities and capabilities of a diverse workforce. In terms of the former, while women are highly critical of the patriarchal systems and practices that place limits on their aspirations and their careers, these “hierarchy-attenuating” attitudes do not seemingly disrupt systems of patriarchal power. As SDT would suggest, it is through the increased “mainstreaming” of hierarchy-attenuating attitudes from non-dominant groups, challenging the *status quo*, that hierarchy-enhancing practices and myths can be confronted, resisted, and ultimately changed. A deeper understanding of the acute problems that women face in these contexts may go some way to highlight and challenge entrenched, systemic attitudes and practices which limit progress and which act as barrier to change. In addressing this critical concern, and while the relatively limited sample size may constrain the extent to which the findings from this study can be generalized and while we rely solely on women's accounts of their experiences, this article provides a useful empirical contribution to the wider issues of gender and work in a key area of the global south and, theoretically, extends SDT as a possible foundation for future, contextually based and culturally sensitive research.

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ENDNOTE

¹ About £8400.

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