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Black British female managers—The silent catastrophe

Denise A. Miller

Centre for Inequalities, School of Education, University of Greenwich, London, UK

Correspondence
Denise A. Miller, Dreadnought Building, Park Row, London SE10 9LS, UK.
Email: D.Miller@greenwich.ac.uk

Abstract

The researcher examined the experiences of Black British female managers (BBFM) who worked for Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) operating in the UK. The following research questions guided this study: How do Black British female managers experience racial micro-aggressions and how do they cope with it? Purposive and theoretical sampling were used to recruit 10 BBFM who worked for CYPS and who had similar demographic characteristics (i.e., racial/ethnic background and managerial experience). Interview transcripts were analyzed using constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006a). Over 200 codes were identified and extracted from individual interview transcripts. Organizing the codes into categories resulted in five themes that highlighted the challenging practices that BBFM perceived thwarted their careers (i.e., The Organizational Culture, On the Outside Looking In, Stereotype Threat, Prejudice, and Discrimination and Institutional Racism and Espoused Practice vs. Reality), and one theme that described their coping strategies (i.e., The Silent Catastrophe). Although the study is centered on a multisectorial sample, two main conclusions can be drawn from this study. First, gendered racism curtails the career development of BBFM in ways that are not experienced by their White counterparts. Second, BBFM perceive that their experiences in CYPS was fundamentally negatively

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disproportionate and aversive. The implication is that CYPS leaders must give racial and gender equality, diversity and inclusion greater priority.

KEYWORDS
Black British female managers, education, microaggressions, racism

1 | INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom (UK) is one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world. As a result of economic developments and equalities legislation, women are making significant gains in the workplace. According to McGuinness (2018), there were 15.11 million women (aged 16 and over) in employment (October–December 2017), 1.48 million more than the preceding decade. In fact, the working-age activity rate for women has increased from 52.8% in 1971 (when record keeping began), to an all-time high of 72.4% in October–December 2019 (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

Although women are gaining employment in a wider range of professions, and some have secured high level positions, the proportion of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women in senior management and leadership roles remains strikingly low. Findings from an extensive study examining the characteristics of post holders in significant public and private organizations revealed that 36 (3.4%) non-White people held top jobs, and only seven (0.7%) were non-White women (Duncan & Holder, 2017). To give some perspective, the 2011 census estimated that 12.9% of UK's population were from BAME backgrounds.

So what are the stumbling blocks? Many researchers have argued that although overt acts of racism may no longer be acceptable in the UK, much subtler varieties have taken their place (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). Explicit and conscious forms of racism have been replaced by aversive, implicit, unconscious, and subtle practices; collectively known as racial microaggressions. According to Sue et al. (2007) microaggressions are, "Verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults" (Sue et al., 2007).

The Lifelong Learning UK (2011) study highlights the detrimental impacts racial microaggressions have on BAME women's career paths and their mental health and well-being. When researchers examined the barriers to career advancement for BAME staff in the further education sector, participants said they encounter differential treatment filtered through longstanding stereotypical attitudes about BAME people. BAME women felt that their White male colleagues have difficulty interacting with them, and they perceive that some male senior managers (irrespective of their ethnicity) harbor racist and/or sexist points of view. In addition, BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) women said that they were unable to access critical networks in their workplaces. As said by one participant: "There is a ceiling for BME [staff], as BME staff are not told about jobs because they don't have the same level of informal contact and so don't hear about opportunities" (Lifelong Learning UK, 2011). Davidson coined the term "concrete ceiling" to denote the embedded discrimination that prevents BME women from being promoted, in contrast to the seemingly less obstructive "glass ceiling" that White women encounter.

As well as feeling a sense of invisibility, BME women explained how they were exposed to daily slights, assaults, indignities, and condescending remarks (Lifelong Learning UK, 2011). The said microaggressions caused many BME women (and especially those with family commitments) to decelerate their career trajectories. Racial

microaggressions also had negative impacts on their general health and mental well-being. Nadal et al. (2014) found a significant correlation between participants' perceived and experienced racial microaggressions, and negative mental health symptoms (including depression, anxiety, self-doubt, and lack of behavioral control).

1.1 | The research problem

Educational professionals have produced practice policies and procedures that are supposed to safeguard service users from the effects of institutional racism. However, when we consider research evidence, it seems that compared to their White peers, Black British students experience disproportionately more exclusions from school (Demie & Mclean, 2016), receive harsher treatment (Demie & Mclean, 2016), are more likely to be referred for special educational needs support (The Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2011), and receive lower grades if their name sounds foreign (National Union of Students, 2011). Equally disturbing is the increase in support for racist ideology in the UK. Arguably, racist views are gaining ground in the UK especially since the "Brexit" referendum. The success of the UK Independence Party becoming a mainstream political party with a number of electoral successes is indicative of this trend (Whitaker & Lynch, 2011). If the UK has a persistent problem with prejudice, discrimination, and racism, then it is entirely logical to suppose that this problem might be replicated within CYPS organizations.

1.2 | Context of the study

The present study is a novel approach to investigating the experiences of Black British female managers who work for CYPS, including the barriers they face and the approaches they use for managing those challenges. In the context of this study, the term "Black British" is used to describe non-White people of African and Caribbean heritage. By the same token, the term "White" is used to denote non-BAME people.

This study started with the researcher's own conversations with friends and family, and her relationships with driven and career-minded Black British female educational psychologists, deputy/head teachers and college lecturers who had achieved managerial careers in CYPS. The researcher realized that from a young age these Black British women took educational pursuits very seriously. They invested heavily in obtaining the professional qualifications and experience needed to outperform their White counterparts. They did this often at the expense of their mental, physical, and emotional health and well-being.

1.3 | Research aims and question

This study brings together grounded theory qualitative data (anchored in the constructivist research paradigm) from in-depth interviews with 10 Black British female managers who worked for CYPS. The researcher wanted to facilitate the realization of the following aims:

- to improve knowledge of BAME women's experiences;
- to help CYPS employers better understand a workforce that will increasingly contain BAME women at all levels;
- to gain insight into whether Black British female managers are doubly disadvantaged due to their gender and racial identities.

The following research questions guided this study: How do Black British female managers experience racial microaggressions and how do they cope with it?

1.4 | Uniqueness of the study

While this paper advances existing bodies of research that have already sought the views of BAME teachers, unlike previous endeavors the study's participants were a relatively homogenous sample, consisting of Black British women of African or Caribbean heritage, who were working in educational psychology services and various learning institutions (i.e., a primary school and further/higher educational provisions). A review of the extant literature indicated that there were no studies that have examined the views of Black British female educational professionals in this way.

Additionally, even though there are numerous accounts supporting the notion that people from BAME backgrounds are disadvantaged in society, what is not so widely explored and conceptualized in literature are the experiences of Black British women who have moved to managerial positions; seemingly, they have made cracks in the "concrete ceiling" (Davidson, 1997). If such a substantial ceiling does in fact exist, this study proposes to examine Black British women's experiences of becoming and being managers.

2 | METHODS

2.1 | Genesis of the study

The researcher was involved in a mixed-methods study that sought to develop a grounded theory about the prevalence of implicit prejudice among educational professionals in the UK. After taking an Implicit Association Test (an online test that purportedly measures covert forms of prejudice), the participants were invited to discuss their results with the researcher. It was during the course of conducting semistructured interviews that the researcher became aware of a common occurrence. The first two participants who were interviewed (i.e., two Black British female managers who work for CYPS) perceived that they have recurrently encountered subtle forms of institutional racism in their working lives. In line with the spirit of grounded theory, this revelation caused the direction and focus of subsequent interviews to change its course.

2.2 | Participants

As Table 1 shows, the participants were selected in such a way that they exhibited a high degree of homogeneity. The participants identified themselves as Black British women, being born to African or Caribbean parents.

In total, 10 participants, employed by four CYPS organizations across London, were deemed eligible to participate in the study. Four of the participants worked in further/higher education colleges, two were primary school deputy head teachers, and four were educational psychologists. All the participants held specialist and/or managerial roles in their respective places of work. The said 10 participants reported years of experience working in managerial roles ranging from 5 to 15 years (median = 10), and years of experience in working in CYPS ranging from 8 to 27 years (median = 10.6).

2.3 | Procedure

The study was conducted in compliance with the Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (2014). Purposeful sampling strategies were used to identify and email Black British women who were known to have experienced racial microaggressions in their CYPS workplaces (Creswell, 2007). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data from a brief demographic questionnaire provided the researcher with a basis to theoretically sample the respondent population in accordance with the requirements of homogeneity. This was

TABLE 1 Order of interviews and participants' characteristics

Order of interviews	Name[a]	Age	Occupation	Managerial experience (years)	Years in career
1	Shirley	60+	FE lecturer	12	27
2	Patricia	50+	FE lecturer	10	19
3	Jenny	40+	Deputy head teacher	8	17
4	Amber	40+	Senior educational psychologist	6	10
5	Sian	40+	Senior educational psychologist	8	15
6	Leanne	40+	Senior educational psychologist	5	8
7	Brenda	50+	Senior educational psychologist	8	12
8	Georgina	40+	Deputy head teacher	5	12
9	Maxine	50+	HE lecturer	15	21
10	Ann	40+	HE lecturer	9	16

Note: HE/FE = higher/further education. Participants who were recruited but not included in the study as saturation was achieved after the 10th interview.

[a]Each participant was allocated a pseudonym, by which they are consistently referred to here. Each pseudonym was chosen by the researcher and allocated randomly, to maintain anonymity.

achieved by minimizing variation in terms of race, gender, field of work, and occupational role. The researcher conducted audiotaped semistructured interviews in private places. Consistent with the grounded theory constructivist process, the data were further developed by carrying out several interviews, undertaking preliminary analyses, and then choosing to interview additional participants who might be able to answer emerging questions (Charmaz, 2006a). Interview questions were reshaped throughout the data collection process according to participants' responses. Audio recordings were transcribed by a professional company, and to ensure confidentiality, all identifying information (i.e., names of places, and people) was deleted from the transcripts, and each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

2.4 | Data analysis

The researcher collected data in three stages. At the end of each stage, the researcher applied initial codes to each portion of the interview transcripts; a method termed “fracturing the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher used sentence-by-sentence, as well as event-by-event analyses in order to thoroughly compare and examine the words and phrases used by the participants to describe their views about their experiences. The researcher also scrutinized the data to find in vivo codes. Through focused coding, the researcher examined all words used by the participants to describe their worldviews, experiences and feelings, meanings, and assumptions they attach to those experiences. The most frequent and significant codes were selected and then raised to tentative themes. This process involved memo writing, which, according to Charmaz (2006b), is the pivotal step between data collection and writing a draft grounded theory, because “it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process” (Charmaz, 2006b). The researcher continued to collect data until no new theoretical insights were achieved. In-depth information came from detailed descriptions and was not determined by the rate of recurrence. In the final analysis, after all interviews were transcribed and coded, the researcher re-examined every set of coded data to ensure accuracy and consistency.

2.5 | Findings

Over 200 codes were identified and extracted from the interview transcripts. As shown in Table 2, organizing the formulated codes into categories resulted in five themes explaining the types of racial microaggressions the participants experienced (i.e., the organizational culture, on the outside looking in, stereotype threat, prejudice, discrimination and racism, and espoused practice vs. the reality), and one theme that described their coping strategies—the silent catastrophe.

2.6 | Discussion of findings

The organizational culture: Many of the Black British female managers believed that organizational barriers presented obstacles to their career progression. One of the most frequently reported problems faced by the women was their limited access to or exclusion from informal and yet highly important social networks. All the women spoke about the existence of a powerful subculture, where members of this group seemingly assisted one another in acquiring jobs and promotion:

> I mean when it's subtle as that you can't… intervene… there are things that go on and maybe with the upper echelons or people take certain positions that you might not be aware of, or things that go on behind the scenes that you don't know about or you know who the real decision makers are I'm not always quite sure. (Brenda)

TABLE 2 Overview of themes and codes generated from the interview data

Theme	Codes
The organizational culture	• Subtle racism • Lack of support and acceptance • Espoused policy versus real life • Old boys' network
"We are on the outside looking in"	• Outsider-within • Exclusion • Cliques
Stereotype threat	• Race-based assumptions • Racialized expectations
Prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalized racism	• Overt racism • Subtle racism • Glass ceilings • The need to work harder
Espoused practice versus reality	• Subtle racism • Institutional racism
The silent catastrophe	• Racial discrimination • Choosing battles • Leading different lives • Stereotype threat • Tired of working harder • Leaving the CYPS • Optimism • Anger

> Getting jobs is still about who you know and losing jobs is about who you know and who's protected and those sorts of things. So, it's looking at the structures and the systems. (Amber)

The women also confirmed the existence of the proverbial glass ceiling in CYPS that Cornish (1994) argues is "a thick layer of men doing things their way." The Black British female managers agree:

> We do live in a country where Black British people are not represented at the highest echelons in great numbers. So there are some things to be aware of, so… there's still ceilings that we have to break through. (Amber)

> There is a glass ceiling and there is a glass ceiling. (Jenny)

Black British female managers perceive that they have been excluded from informal networks where, had they been included, they might have been privy to important life-changing information and opportunity. A possibility that resonates with other BME staff working in higher education (Singh & Kwhali, 2015). Amber suggests that concrete ceilings exist because "A lot of people got that mentality that they're clinging to their kingdom" (Amber). Meaning that, glass ceilings are likely to manifest and increase in severity as BME people move up the occupational hierarchy (Jackson & Leon, 2010). Likewise, Singh and Kwhali (2015) wonder whether BME women, who have managed to break through concrete ceilings, run the risk of "falling through the floor from height."

We are on the outside looking in: "We are on the outside looking in" describes the standing of a person who is located on the boundary between two groups' statuses; one with potential power and the other with relatively little power. Specifically, this in vivo term explains the positioning of Black British female managers who work for CYPS.

Theoretically, they belong to a high-status group and are powerful by virtue of their credentials, earning potential, and job titles. However, because they are members of relatively low status racial and gender groups, they remain as outsiders:

> It's their world we just live in it, so that just says that we are on the outside looking in, because when they make the rules, they make laws, they change it to suit them, they don't have our inputs. (Ann)

Along the same lines, going “down the pub” was raised by the women as part of the organizational socialization culture that they did not necessarily want to partake in:

> If there is like Christmas time and everybody wants to get drinks, it's always done in the same usual way. You go down the pub… food that you eat, places that you go. Sometimes it just doesn't… that's not my thing. (Maxine)

While this was not a most significant source of discrimination, Maxine clearly articulated that being a Black British female manager requires considerable effort to fit into the social culture in CYPS workplaces. This notion of being an “outsider-within” is reinforced by people's reactions to the women. To clarify, Leanne, an educational psychologist, described an occasion when she met for the first time, teachers (i.e., service users) that she had previously only spoken to on the telephone:

> Recently, I was scheduled to do a consultation with a parent and when I went to meet them, they [the SEN coordinator and the parent] just knew my name and when I approached them… they pretended like they didn't have the interview with me… I just thought, is that because they didn't expect that the person you were going to be meeting is a Black person… and then she started to ask me in a roundabout way what my experience was. (Leanne)

A key aspect in developing an in-depth understanding of Black British female managers' experiences, concerns taking into account the issue of exclusion via the organizational culture, which is perceived as being based on a predominantly White and male set of values. In Amber's words:

> Well they initially assume you have a subservient role or you have a tertiary role in the place…you must be a support worker as opposed to somebody who's going to come and help them in their professional roles. (Amber)

Leanne and Amber's stories highlight how CYPS employees and service users presume that Black British female managers are either underqualified or unlikely to hold positions of responsibility. The women's colleagues had not expected them to be Black. As a result, their professional identity was attenuated. They were considered only as stereotypical Black people/women.

Stereotype threat: As noted in Jenny's statement, stereotype threat describes the experience of apprehension or unease that a person feels in situations where he or she has the potential to avoid confirming a negative stereotype about their social group (Burgess et al., 2012):

> “I am very much aware of how I am perceived” (Jenny).

Maxine's words illustrate how she used strategies that served to challenge negative stereotypes:

> “You go into the work place, you always have to prove that you are worthy” (Maxine).

Interestingly, there are numerous studies indicating that Jenny and Maxine's awareness of stereotype threat can manifest in a variety of situations and can result in an array of responses and outcomes. For instance, it is known that stereotype threat (a) can cause women to attempt fewer maths problems (Rivardo et al., 2011); (b) can have a detrimental influence on older adults' memory performance (Hess et al., 2009); and (c) can cause older employees to resign and (possibly) retire (von Hippel et al., 2013). Clearly, a person's performance, level of achievement, and psychological well-being can be detrimentally affected by the awareness that he or she may be prejudged on the basis of negative stereotypes. Miller (2016) supposes that "essentialist stereotypes" about the acumen of BAME educational professionals may inhibit their career progression in England's education system. In such situations, Black British female managers strive to maintain a sense of self-worth by "proving" (Maxine) that they do not confirm negative stereotypes pertaining to their social group.

Leanne's words concur with research findings that stereotype threats occur in the workplace (e.g., Burgess et al., 2012), particularly when people are in a demographic minority:

> Some of my White counterparts… they're just using…she's aggressive, but they're just using adjectives. They don't even understand…they're describing people…a stereotypical way of viewing young Black girls or Black women in general…that's one of the descriptors I hear about Black women being described, quite frequently. (Leanne)

The stereotype of Black women being "aggressive" is discussed in Bell and Nkomo's (2001) study of successful Black female executives' career paths. The authors used the term "the Sapphires" to describe a stereotype that depicts Black women as both aggressive and sassy. Bell and Nkomo (2001) supposed that "the Sapphires" were more likely to be criticized or even ostracized for being abrasive or opinionated. They suggest that "the Sapphires" may also be viewed as unsuitable for holding managerial positions (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Likewise, the Black British female managers in this study perceived that they were "the Sapphires." Despite their obvious visibility, they were made to feel invisible, and they frequently had their capabilities questioned and authority challenged:

> Some people would make persistent lateness or rhetorical questions that were designed practically on the spot…I suppose just an attempt to really try to draw you out into somehow having to prove that you're the leader or whatever. (Amber)

> I think the challenges, was actually doing the role. People just actively trying to sabotage, like a lot of things…there was administrator and she wouldn't do anything I asked her to, I could ask her to write this letter, she wouldn't do it. (Leanne)

In many ways the experience of stereotype threat served to strengthen the resolve of the women. Some women became even more determined and harder working:

> "Actually, to me, there was a job, there was a job to do it didn't stop me from doing that job" (Leanne)

Many Black British female managers worked harder than their White counterparts to reduce the likelihood of being stereotyped:

> "It is about an awareness that I'm being noticed and therefore I have to be the best that I can be at all times I think yeah" (Amber).

The women's comments suggest that they continually undertook “identity work” in order to counter prevalent negative stereotypes in their places of work, in a similar way to employees who use impression management to further their careers (Gioaba & Krings, 2017). However, for Black British female managers, this work was made more complex due to the added dimensions of their cultural, racial, and ethnic identities.

> Even in primary it starts from there, and then later on goes on to secondary where there is something in the subconscious that makes them think of us in a stereotypical way. It's quite a complex issue, but it certainly does exist in my opinion. (Georgina)

The next section highlights the “complex issue” that Georgina speaks of in terms of the less than favorable treatment that Black British female managers experienced in CYPS workplaces.

2.7 | Prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism

Elrich (1994) suggests that BME people “carry the secret of racism inside them, harboring questions and doubts about themselves and others.”

> That's the old word that people don't want to go near these days… because racism you need to really have to pin it down to race and that's true… it's like trying to nail jelly, but sometimes… your instincts can tell you what it’s about… the discriminatory practice that you see is the place is coming from is ideas about race. (Amber)

> I have had to face issues where racist comments are made so openly and blatantly. But again, I do not always use the word racism because people don't like to be called racist. So I use other ways of approaching the issue to let them understand what it feels like to be racist against. (Shirley)

> I've heard in the staff room, the stories… and that includes sort of talking about families, what they do, the way they speak, it's all that. I do wonder how much things have changed over the years. Actually I don't think very much. (Georgina)

The women described contemporary acts of racial discrimination as being much more subtle and harder to prove (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). When the Black British female managers were asked for specific examples of discrimination, some of the women reported overt experiences, including pejorative remarks that could only be attributed to the enduring legacy of slavery:

> I mean, she said to me, ‘Look at you…the way you are you are meant to go and cut sugarcane in the field’. And I said, ‘Excuse me?’ And she said, ‘Yes, you're meant to go and cut sugarcane in the field’. And I said, ‘Are you talking about slavery?’ And she said, ‘Yes’. I said, ‘No, I don't think so’. I couldn't believe what this head teacher just told me. (Georgina)

The Black British female managers perceived that they were considered by others largely in terms of their ethnicity and this was the basis on which they were being judged and held back. The women gave examples of covert, subtle, and implicit institutionalized racism, explaining that “many doors are closed” and that they were “blocked for promotion”:

> I remember I was a practice assessor for a particular university… I had a couple of Black British

> students and one of the tutors who was a non-Black spoke very derogatory about one of my student's assignments basically assessed her to be a very incompetent person and [said she] writes like a typical Black person. This conversation was held over the phone so the tutor obviously felt either it was a fool she was speaking to, or somebody of like culture to herself. (Patricia)

> I had been blocked for promotions, I have, even though I had more qualifications than any other person. (Ann)

> In very subtle ways, very subtle ways, they can hold you down through lack of opportunity, promotion. (Jenny)

> There are many doors and you got to know how to open them and if you are not favoured in certain ways it's not easy for you…because sometimes the colour… your colour matters. And there are many doors that are closed for Black people because they are Black and because they may seem to bring in a threat to the status quo of what that organisation is about. (Maxine)

The women felt that their performance was judged more harshly because of the color of their skin, even when they were more highly qualified than their White counterparts. Hence, they "work twenty times harder" (Leanne) to prove their capabilities:

> When you know things are working where people are judging you on a different level…for you to be considered to be equal or you were to have equal value, you have to work 20 times harder. (Leanne)

Hunter's (2011) qualitative examination of workplace racial microaggressions found several microaggressive domains that related to workplace policies and procedures. In the same way as the women in this study, Hunter's (2011) participants (i.e., Black employees) encountered numerous microinsults (e.g., disparaging remarks made about their accents and clothes), microassaults (e.g., remarks regarding a lack of ability to do their job), microinvalidations (e.g., stereotypical comments), and environmental microaggressions (e.g., a lack of promotional opportunities).

Notably, the Black British female managers' discourse consistently related to racial inequality and not discrimination based on gender. It appeared that racial and ethnic differences, rather than gender, were most salient in their professional experiences. The women perceived that both White men and women did not encounter the same problems as they did:

> "I think the White counterpart does not have to work that hard or sacrifice… as what I've seen the Black heads do" (Jenny).

> "Because of the treatment, my treatment was different from another female and my treatment was different from another White person" (Ann).

Racism, and, to a lesser degree, sexism provided the impetus for exclusionary practices in CYPS. The Black British female managers' stories added credence to research suggesting that White employees per se, are afforded many more benefits than their Black counterparts (e.g., Singh & Kwhali, 2015).

> When it comes to having access to influence and power, that is, still held in a small group. (Leanne)

> People in positions of power…can't fully understand what it is to be, you know, a Black person living in this country. (Amber)

> On the cliquey-ness with the high-level executives it was very powerful. It's not always an area that anybody could go through…lots of obstacles and sometimes their objectives and your objectives were never the same. (Maxine)

A very important part of CYPS organizational cultures are the informal networks. According to these Black British female managers, it is the said networks that bring together a select group of people who intrinsically behave in institutionally racist ways.

Espoused practice versus reality: The importance of creating inclusive working environments where individuals are accepted and valued for the unique characteristics that they bring, is the basis of equality and diversity in practice. Yet achieving and realizing the full benefits of a diverse workforce was something that, according to Amber, "some people [find] more difficult than others":

> I think some people probably espoused certain liberal ideology about the equality and diversity and accepting others, and, well, they're okay I guess… but actually being subject to is different isn't it? And it's… so as I said my experience was that some people found it more difficult than others and some, and that it did come, it came out sideways. (Amber)

Similarly, when a review of the literature concerning the experiences of BME staff working in higher education was conducted, many BME employees reported "isolation and marginalisation; challenges to their status, authority and scholarship; high levels of scrutiny and surveillance of their work; and difficulties in gaining promotion" (Leathwood et al., 2009). Although the importance of racial diversity was applied to mission statements, supporting goals and recruitment plans, there was a lack of corresponding practice to match espoused notions (Wood et al., 2009). The extent of this contradiction has been an unending topic of academic and political research and debate (see Miller, 2016; Singh & Kwhali, 2015). The narratives of the Black British female managers in this study enhance this debate. They feel that the organizations they work for do not accept, support or nurture them. Ann and Brenda's words aptly capture these sentiments:

> It would have been nice if I had been given like I've seen my White counterparts were given more time off to study… she sat the same exams before… like about six months before I did it, and she was literally given six or seven weeks off completely paid… later when it came time for me I assumed wrongly that I was going to be afforded the same benefit and I was not… it would have been nice if I was afforded the same benefit that my White counterpart was. (Ann)

> Promotion may be being based around who you know… so it's more to do with being institutionalised…White group of managers sort of employing themselves. (Brenda)

Ann and Brenda's accounts were echoed by all of the participants that took part in this study. The women believed that they were deliberately prevented from having equal opportunities to progress at the same rate and to the same extent as their White colleagues. "I feel like it's a rat race… it's almost like we are set up to fail" (Jenny). "Once you start realising people are not helping you and it wasn't about you know at the end of the day what would it have cost him just to say yes… that's where you start thinking about sabotage" (Sian).

The idea that the Black British female managers might have been "set up to fail" (Jenny) also resonates with Mirza (2009), who recalls receiving an email from "a senior White male academic" about an application received

from someone described as "a not very credible Indian" for "the appointment of a chair in a prestigious university." In the same vein, a Black academic in Wright et al.'s study explained the scrutiny she encountered:

> I've never worked as hard as I have in my life. This constantly being set up to fail, somebody is telling you that you haven't met deadlines… I find myself in a position now where I am being watched. I'm being policed… It is a 'race' thing because if you deem yourself better than another 'race' and actually see that they are better than you, how do you cope with that? You have to find mechanisms to keep them in their place. (Wright et al., 2007)

Brenda also talked about the difficulty of proving and challenging racism:

> To me it's been like going through the motions, particularly if you're making a challenge with a big organisation that have got all the resources at their fingertips and all the finances to sort of you know fight a case or take a position, and you're a lone individual that hasn't got all of that at your fingertips really, it's very difficult to confront it and have backing to kind of pursue it. (Brenda, 30)

Brenda's comments led to the refinement of the final theme.

The silent catastrophe: "The silent catastrophe" (Abbott, 2002). Dianne Abbott (the UK's first Black British female Member of Parliament) coined the phrase "the silent catastrophe" to summarize the ways in which she perceived that schools in the UK were "continuing to fail Black children" (Graham & Robinson, 2004). Likewise, in this study, the term is used to summarize the ways in which the Black British female managers were being continually failed by their respective CYPS employers.

> "I must admit… you feel rotten… it [i.e., racism] would impact on me negatively, but I wouldn't show it… I did a lot of moaning to my friends and my family" (Leanne).

> "Yeah and I feel it's grossly unfair and it's [racism] grossly unjust and I don't want to play that game. I feel like, I'm playing a game and I don't feel like I should have to" (Jenny).

> "I got a bit angry, because it was just the beginning of an uphill struggle" (Sian).

The women's comments show that the combined effects of race and culture (and possibly gender) render the "glass ceiling" metaphor insufficient. The "glass ceiling" imagery signifies the inability of all women to rise above a certain level. However, the barriers that Black British female managers encounter in their workplaces are much more significant. It seems that "the concrete ceiling" that faced Black British women was more persistent and much more pernicious.

> "I've endured sexism but not to the degree that I've endured racism, racism is a lot more subtle but a lot more dangerous and more cut-throat" (Ann).

The deleterious experience of racism caused the Black British female managers to lose self-confidence. They questioned their abilities and capabilities.

> "You begin to actually question your abilities which is always, it's supposed to be really terrible when you get that way" (Amber).

> "I feel kind of impotent really to say how I handle it, I don't really handle it, and it might not be good to admit" (Brenda).

Both active institutionalized racism and the women's passive acceptance of racism affected their psychological functioning. The resulting frustration was long-lasting and became a critical feature of their psychological make-up:

> I guess sometimes what I've learnt in life if you want good you have to eat humble pie, until you eat that pie and become mature enough then you can fight your battles… but when you're under oppressive people they hold the handle. (Patricia)

> I think for a Black professional, I think you've just got to, I'm just going to say you got to choose your battles, choose your battle that you're going to fight. (Leanne)

> It's about choosing battles, it's about what is appropriate. (Sian)

The women explained how they coped with racial oppression. The use of the vivid metaphor "battle" (as explicitly said by Patricia, Leanne, and Sian) indicated the degree of challenge the women sensed and experienced in their working lives. This metaphor paralleled with the image of "armouring" that Bell and Nkomo (2001) explained as providing psychological protection from the effects of discrimination. However, "armour left on too long can make a spirit heavy and burdened."

> Deflated, depleted, downtrodden to have come this far and at my age and to have achieved, you know when I look back on my career and look at what all that I've achieved and all that I've done and all the way that I've done for people… I don't do it 50% I give a 110, to know I've done all that and if someone else who could do would have done half of that can be above me yeah… disillusioned. (Ann)

The Black British female managers frequently contended with an atmosphere of tension, instability, and distrust. They ate "humble pie" (Patricia) or they lost the desire to contribute fully.

> I don't fit into that. It's like… they definitely never understood me, they were just not connecting. So there were lots and lots of barriers so much so that in the end I left. That was affecting my health and I have stepped down after 36 years of teaching, the pressure became too much. (Georgina)

Evidently racial trauma can cause victims to suffer from clinical depression, anxiety disorders, posttraumatic stress disorder, or personality disorders (Turner & Richardson, 2016). Without a doubt, in this study, the Black British female managers described experiences that caused them to reconsider whether they wished to pursue a career in the CYPS.

> The decisions that were made around rearranging the management at that time meant that I was, I was left with a lot more management responsibilities basically taking on two peoples' jobs… I felt that I was being pushed upon in a way that possibly if it was somebody else it wouldn't have happened and that kind of led to my decision that it was at that point I decided that I had to you know take the step to retrain… Because it felt a bit as though it was being imposed on me and by people that were stronger, more powerful… a White manager I know but

> I feel that that had an effect but…I could say it was instrumental in making a sort of career change. (Brenda)

Similarly, a report concerning the experiences of BME staff in higher education (Hey et al., 2011) found that there was a low retention of BME employees within the sector and that this was principally due to BME staff feeling marginalized, anxious, and frustrated about not being able to advance in their careers. The findings from the present research study echo these results. Based on their experiences of institutionalized racism and discrimination, some Black British female managers had left their CYPS organizations, primarily on account of stress factors, and because of the frustration caused by the lack of support to progress their careers and the lack of recognition for their hard work.

3 | IMPLICATIONS

3.1 | For CYPS employers

The researcher posits that there is a need for CYPS leaders and policy-makers to commission carefully planned research, designed to be implemented with the involvement and participation of BAME people at every stage. In this way, CYPS employers may be more able to:

- better understand their BAME colleagues and so improve their knowledge, cultural competence, and practice;
- develop a workforce that is representative of the local communities;
- develop ways to reduce staff turnover and attrition rates;
- develop policies and practices that encourage and support BAME employees to attain managerial positions;
- recognize the various forms of racism and develop appropriate responses to it.

3.2 | For CYPS employees

Believing that individual and institutional racism is an inherent concern of Black British female managers is critical to understanding not only how they have developed, negotiated, and managed their professional and personal identities at CYPS workplaces, but also to understanding the mechanisms by which BAME women in general are underrepresented in managerial positions in CYPS. While the implications for CYPS employees largely mirror those for their employers, saliently there is a need for CYPS employees to continually examine their own and other's implicit assumptions, and to mitigate against discrimination perpetuated by those using the organization's services. Accordingly, ongoing mandatory training aimed at improving racial and linguistic knowledge and sensitivity is vital.

4 | LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. The first limitation concerns the purposeful nature of the sample and the fact that most of the participants were recruited through the use of the researcher's personal and professional networks. Although purposive samples can be highly useful, it is well known that they are prone to researcher bias. For example, the women who were asked to participate in this study may be those who have had more experience with ethnicity-related issues at work. Irrespective of the type of sampling used, all questions asked during the interviews were products of research. In addition, the researcher attempted to avoid bias by

introducing diverse perspectives through the inclusion of participants who worked for different CYPS organizations.

A further limitation of this study concerns the fact that although this study was designed to obtain a deeper understanding and generate a grounded theory of Black British female managers' experiences within CYPS workplaces, the extent to which the Black British female managers' experiences would apply to CYPS employees drawn from other minority ethnic populations was not explored. Furthermore, there might have been age implications of this phenomenon which were not fully examined in this study. Indeed, the intersection of race/ethnicity with gender and age, and other characteristics, are known to be highly relevant (Acker, 2006). The researcher posits that intersectionality approaches to the study of racial, age, gender, and socioeconomic inequalities may provide new insight into how BAME women experience CYPS workplaces.

5 | CONCLUSIONS

The debate about racism and the education sector is as old as education itself. However, it is only in the past 5 decades that the policies and practices within CYPS organizations in the UK have come under critical scrutiny (e.g., Mirza, 2009). During this time, much has been written about disproportional outcomes for BAME children and young people who attend UK schools, colleges, and universities. The tacit acknowledgment that racism is a problem within the education system appears to be understood by many educational professionals and researchers. Nevertheless, one conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that in general the experience of BAME managers in the CYPS remains fundamentally negatively disproportionate and aversive.

While adding support to other studies on the topic, the researcher concludes three major summations about how Black British female managers have developed, negotiated, and managed their professional and personal identities in CYPS workplaces. First, it seems likely that gendered racism detrimentally affects the career development of Black British female managers in ways that are not experienced by their White counterparts. Second, Black British female managers learn to employ a range of strategies to negotiate and manage the impact of personal and institutionalized racism on their career experiences and development. Last, while the strategies employed are largely successful, Black British female managers leave the CYPS. This is because they are tired of feeling disenfranchised and disrespected. The researcher suggests that a much more nuanced effort is required to ensure that Black British women are equitably encouraged, promoted, included, respected, and valued in CYPS workplaces.

ORCID

Denise A. Miller https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9947-0616

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Denise Miller received the BA degree in Education from the University of Greenwich, UK. She worked in primary schools for 8 years before embarking on training to become an Educational Psychologist. Denise Miller attained an MSc degree in Educational Psychology from University College London and started working as a fully qualified Educational Psychologist in the London, UK. She successfully completed a Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, and then soon after she returned to the University of Greenwich, this time as a senior lecturer. At present, as a programme leader, senior lecturer, and independent educational psychologist, Denise currently works in early years, primary and secondary school settings, as well as, further and higher education, legal, and clinical contexts. Denise is primarily interested in undertaking research that involves investigating educational professionals' and children and young people's experiences of the education sector.

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