

[Denise Miller, Associate professor at University of Greenwich](#)  
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This blog post looks forward to the forthcoming symposium at [BERA Conference 2023](#), which will present the findings from two studies that were developed to examine the problem of institutional racism in a London-based, post-92 higher education institution (HEI).

The researchers aimed to (1) examine the extent to which prejudice, discrimination and racism were present across all levels of the HEI, and (2) understand the impact on both Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) and non-BAME staff and students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); thereby bringing to the fore diverse perspectives about the systems that serve to reproduce and maintain inequalities in HE (see Bhopal et al., 2016; Miller, 2021).

### **Paper 1: Race, higher education and special educational needs and disabilities**

Questions about the overrepresentation of BAME groups with SEND have been raised for more than six decades. The widely-held belief that Black children were somehow 'educationally sub-normal' (Demie & McClean, 2017, p. 1) was formally articulated by Coard in 1971. In his paper, 'How the West Indian child is made educationally sub-normal in the British school system', Coard expressed real concern over the large numbers of children from African and Caribbean backgrounds that were being labelled as 'educationally sub-normal' (ESN), and how this label invariably led to stigmatisation, lowered expectations, school exclusion, and poor self-esteem and educational outcomes. It is against this

background that the current pilot study (funded by BERA's Small Grants Fund) emerged.

Drawing on survey data from 224 students enrolled in a London-based post-92 university, the study examined the experiences of individuals who self-identified with both BAME and SEND categories (n=46). To date, there has been limited research examining intersectional discrimination within HE in this way. Despite limitations (that is, the small sample size) the worrying results revealed that when compared to their non-BAME peers with SEND, BAME students with SEND are twice as likely to encounter challenging forms of interpersonal and microaggressive discrimination, including questions about their intelligence, abilities and worthiness as individuals. These findings suggest that the existing measures to address equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are not effectively serving BAME students with SEND.

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**Paper 2: ‘I’m managed by a white man who’s managed by a white man who’s managed by a white woman who’s managed by a white man’: The psychosocial cost of racism on white university staff**

The second paper presented in this symposium examines the Psychosocial Cost of Racism on White (PCRW) university staff. The PCRW is a concept proposed by Kivel (1996) in the US, to explore the emotional and psychological repercussions experienced by

individuals who witness and confront racism, even when they are not the direct targets of it. In the UK, researchers exploring institutional racism within HE, invariably focus on the perspectives of BAME individuals, ignoring the significance of the PCRW on university staff.

Seeking to bridge this gap in the research, as part of a larger study, data were gathered through semi-structured individual interviews from non-BAME HE staff members (n=12). The findings highlighted how, despite benefiting from 'white privilege' (McIntosh, 2001), institutional racism still had an impact on non-BAME staff, resulting in emotions, such as anger, shame, embarrassment and anxiety. The findings indicate that addressing institutional racism in HE should not only focus on the direct targets of discrimination, but should also acknowledge and engage with the emotional and psychological toll it takes on non-BAME members of the university community. This perspective can lead to the development and implementation of more effective strategies and interventions.

### **A call to action**

Be a part of this conversation by attending the symposium, 1.10 The Problem of Institutional Racism in a UK-Based University, on Tuesday 12 September, 11:00am – 12:30pm, room MB 227, at the [BERA Annual Conference 2023](#).

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### **References**

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Themes:

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## About the authors

### [Denise Miller, Dr](#)

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Denise Miller achieved a BA in Education from the University of Greenwich. She taught in primary schools for eight years before training to become an educational psychologist. After achieving an MSc in Educational Psychology from University College London, she started working as a fully qualified educational psychologist in the London Borough of Lambeth. Her work involved supporting parents and teachers to meet the needs of marginalised children, and those with special educational needs and disabilities through assessment, consultation and in-service training. In 2014, Denise successfully completed a doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, and then returned to the University of Greenwich as a senior lecturer. Currently, Denise is an associate professor in the School of Human Sciences, and a child and educational psychologist in private practice. Denise continues to work in all educational settings, as well as clinical and legal (as an expert witness) contexts.