Surviving NOT Thriving
Racially Minoritized Female Trailblazers Working in Higher Education

Dr Denise A Miller: D.Miller@greenwich.ac.uk, Dr Charmaine Brown: C.Brown@greenwich.ac.uk, Dr Josephine Gabi: J.Gabi@mmu.ac.uk, Dr Diane Warner & Dr Susan Davis

Background
- Limited mentorship, inequitable employment practices, and underrepresentation in senior leadership roles.
- Academic promotion 'glass ceiling" combined with a 'sticky floor' and a "concrete ceiling" (Corbett et al, 2024)
- Hypervisibility yet feel invisible in academic spaces (Osho and Alormele, 2024)
- Appropriated misogyny , pervasive discrimination and institutional gaslighting
- solation and "battle fatigue" (Quaye, 2024)., burnout, stress, and attrition (Miller, 2021)..

Objectives
- Explore early educational influences on RMW's career aspirations.
- Identify challenges experienced by RMW in HEIs.
- Highlight strategies adopted by RMW to overcome these challenges.
- Provide actionable insights for systemic change.

Research Questions
1. How do the early educational experiences shape RMW's self-efficacy and career aspirations?
2. What challenges do trailblazing RMW encounter, and how do these obstacles fuel their drive for career progression?
3. What strategies do RMW develop throughout their trailblazing careers, and how do these strategies serve as a blueprint for the next generation?

Methodology
- *Approach*: Narrative Inquiry. Captures intersectional lived experiences of racially minorized female trailblazers.
- *Participants*: Four RMW with 5+ years of HE experience., working in HEIs across the UK.
- *Data Collection*: Semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams.
- *Theoretical Framework*: Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Examines self-efficacy and environmental influences on career paths.
- *Limitations*: Small sample size limits generalizability.

References
- Corbett, C., Wullert, K. E., Gilmartin, S. K., & Simard, C. (2024) Glass Ceilings, Step Stools, and Sticky Floors: The Racialized Gendered Promotion Process. Socius, 10. https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231241274238
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D. & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45(1), 79-122.
- Miller, Denise (2021) Black British female managers – the silent catastrophe. Gender, Work & Organization, 28 (4). pp. 1665-1682. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/gwao.12688
- Newton, V. A. (2023) Hypervisibility and Invisibility: Black Women's Experiences with Gendered Racial Microaggressions on a White Campus. Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 9(2), 164-178. https://doi.org/10.1177/23326492221138222
- Osho, Y.I., Alormele, N. Negotiated spaces: black women academics' experiences in UK universities. High Educ (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01279-x
- Quaye, S. J., Satterwhite-David, E. M., Carter, K. D., & Karikari, S. N. (2024) "Who looks out for us?": Black women student affairs educators working to heal from gendered racial battle fatigue. Journal of Diversity in Higher Education. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000599

Theme I: Early and Foundational Years
- Participants discouraged from pursuing high-achieving careers.
- Career advisors reinforced racialized stereotypes.

" Whenever we had history…the way in which the African diaspora was presented to me was one of poverty and war…I used to feel really embarrassed to even be associated with that". "Vet!, don't be stupid. You're gonna go into a job in the factory…Why don't you get a job as a clerical worker "

Theme 2: Studying in Higher Education
- Hypervisibility - Constant scrutiny and surveillance as "outsiders" laced with a lack of recognition beyond skin colour.
- Hyper-invisibility - Marginalized and excluded from academic networks.
- Overlooked in spaces within academic networks (Newton, 2023)

"You know, as a student, you do feel isolated and when you do speak up, you'll always be seen as a troublemaker"

Theme 3: Working in Higher Education
- Limited access to research opportunities and professional development.
- Exclusion from influential networks.
- Sticky floors, concrete ceilings and brick walls.
- Disproportionately tasked with EDI work, often unseen and undervalued.
- Race-based stereotypes.

Theme 4: The Psychosocial Costs
- Exhaustion from prolonged discrimination and systemic racism.
- Self-doubt
- Unhappy
- Depression, race-related stress, and self-doubt.
- Self-preservation

"If you speak up, if you stick your head out, your career is derailed…"
"Don't rock the boat".

Recommendations
- Transparent promotion policies.
- Increased mentorship and sponsorship for RMW.
- EDI accountability
- Regular audits of institutional practices and promotion processes.
- Address racial microaggressions through mandatory training.
- Mentoring and community-building initiatives.
- Larger, more diverse participant groups.
- Longitudinal studies to track systemic changes over time.

UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH
Institute for Lifecourse Development

Manchester Metropolitan University

Cardiff Metropolitan University