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## Using Constructivist Grounded Theory to Examine the Experiences of Black British Female Managers: A Worked Example

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### Abstract

Staff working at children and young people's services (CYPS) are often charged with the responsibility of restructuring, developing, and putting into effect policies and procedures that are supposed to safeguard their clients and their colleagues from the effects of institutional racism. However, there continues to be incongruences between some leaders' espoused commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and their actions. In this paper, I draw on a larger research project to critically reflect on the usefulness of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) as a methodological approach for developing understandings about the experiences of 10 Black British female managers working for CYPS. To demonstrate the utility of CGT, I share extracts from interviews, examples of my reflexive accounts (or memos), and my findings are discussed. In essence, the findings illustrate challenging practices that prevent Black British women from progressing their careers, including subtle and explicit forms of racial prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalized racism. In this sense, it can be concluded that despite CGT research being an intense and time-consuming endeavor, it is an effective method for developing insightful understandings about discriminatory practices that can thwart Black British women's careers in CYPS.

### Keywords

Black British female managers, constructivist grounded theory, institutional racism

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# Using Constructivist Grounded Theory to Examine the Experiences of Black British Female Managers: A Worked Example

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Staff working at children and young people's services (CYPS) are often charged with the responsibility of restructuring, developing, and putting into effect policies and procedures that are supposed to safeguard their clients and their colleagues from the effects of institutional racism. However, there continues to be incongruences between some leaders' espoused commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and their actions. In this paper, I draw on a larger research project to critically reflect on the usefulness of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) as a methodological approach for developing understandings about the experiences of 10 Black British female managers working for CYPS. To demonstrate the utility of CGT, I share extracts from interviews, examples of my reflexive accounts (or memos), and my findings are discussed. In essence, the findings illustrate challenging practices that prevent Black British women from progressing their careers, including subtle and explicit forms of racial prejudice, discrimination, and institutionalized racism. In this sense, it can be concluded that despite CGT research being an intense and time-consuming endeavor, it is an effective method for developing insightful understandings about discriminatory practices that can thwart Black British women's careers in CYPS.

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## Introduction

Around the world, racial and gender inequalities persist in professional occupations and manifest in several ways. In the US, for instance, African American female teachers perceive they are stopped from accessing networks where information, advice and guidance about career progression is informally shared (Perry et al., 2013). Likewise, research shows how "exit appears to be an active strategy" (Al Ariss et al., 2013, p. 1253) when ambitious Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women living in Germany encounter the "concrete ceiling" effect. According to Davidson (1997) a "concrete ceiling" prevents BAME women from advancing their careers, as opposed to the 'glass ceiling' that White women encounter. In England, similar concerns have been raised in relation to the underrepresentation of BAME women at senior levels in various large organisations, including the National Health Service (British Medical Association, 2022) and within the police, legal, medical, and pharmaceutical sectors (Ellen et al., 2013).

This paper is part of a larger research endeavor (Miller, 2021), wherein I (the researcher) reported on the ways in which Black British female managers developed, negotiated, and managed their professional and personal identities in children and young

people's services (CYPS). I decided to use constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methods for two main reasons: (1) the possibility of constructing a substantive theory in a field where there is little research, and (2) I knew that my subjectiveness would affect the research process and findings. It should be noted that I am an aspiring Black British female manager who has spent over 20 years working in CYPS. Throughout my career, I have experienced and observed both subtle and explicit forms of institutionalized racism. Although I am "determined to work from inside the system with enough tempering to influence the organizational mainstream" (Bell et al., 2003, p. 383), my feeling is that aspiring Black female managers, who either conform to, or speak against institutional racism in CYPS, do so at a personal and/or professional cost (Bell et al., 2003). In other words, and as an aspiring Black British female manager, I have a personal stake in evaluating research approaches and designs that give power to traditionally marginalized voices, and that focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace.

In the current paper, I report on the utility of adopting CGT as a methodological tool to examine Black British female managers experiences in CYPS, rather than on the findings of the larger project. However, given the scarcity of research focusing on Black Britishness in this context, the literature relevant to BAME female managers experiences in CYPS is discussed next.

### **Institutional Racism and BAME Women's Career Progression**

In the UK, the Equality Act 2010 dictates that it is unlawful to discriminate against people with protected characteristics. Public bodies in England, Wales and Scotland are governed by the same "Public Sector Duties" (PSDs) that introduced a legal obligation onto public organisations to consider race, disability and gender equality when making decisions. The first PSD, the race equality duty, came into existence primarily because of the Macpherson Inquiry into the police's mishandling of information surrounding the murder of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson, 1999). Following the failures of the investigation into Stephen Lawrence's murder, the Macpherson Inquiry revealed widespread institutionally biased practices and policies within the Metropolitan Police. At this point it is worth noting how Macpherson (1999) defines institutional racism:

The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (Paragraph 6.34)

Although this landmark definition was specifically related to the Metropolitan Police, it provided an indication of the extent to which prejudice, discrimination and racism were active in British society at that time. In the post-Macpherson Report landscape, while some may claim that they "no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities" (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021, p. 8), paradoxically, the body of research evidence detailing the adverse experiences of BAME female managers is steadily growing. An interesting study that tracked women's work experiences in higher education found "on average BAME [female] respondents were more ambitious and career-focused than others, especially white British, but in certain respects reported less support" (Arnold et al., 2019, p. 4). That influential support networks may impact the careers of women was first discussed by Kanter (1977) in her seminal work entitled *Men and Women of the Corporation*. Arguably, in the context of this study, the notion of "homosocial reproduction" that Kanter

speaks of, can be applied when White leaders tend to secure managerial positions for employees who are like themselves. It seems possible that the said reproductive behaviour may in part explain why gendered racism may persist in CYPS.

Showunmi (2020) drew on feminist, intersectional, and critical auto-biographical theoretical frameworks to analyze Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and White women's experiences of being leaders within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Although the optimum number of participants attending some focus groups was occasionally exceeded ( $n=25$ ), the study reiterates questions about the absence of support offered to BME women in HEIs (in terms of progressing their careers), and the presence of prejudicial racial stereotypes that served to knock their confidence. The most prevalent stereotype threats (Aronson & Steele, 2005) associated with Black British women of African and Caribbean heritage, are typically ones connoted with anger, laziness, aggressiveness, and dominance (Ashley, 2014; Phipps & Prieto, 2020). Interestingly, on the other hand, East Asian women, for instance, are often stereotyped as being intelligent, hardworking, and subservient (Berdahl & Min, 2012). It is no surprise then that the Black female participants in Showunmi's study reported how racial discrimination was far more "vociferous" than gender-based discrimination (2020, p. 58).

Endemic institutional racism is also cited by numerous researchers as one of the main reasons causing disproportionality in positions of leadership in the British school system (e.g., Elonga Mboyo, 2019; Joseph-Salisbury, 2020). When Haque and Elliott (2016) examined research literature and findings from various sources (including BME teacher's survey and focus group data), they surmised that racial discrimination was one of the more significant and deep-rooted factors that adversely affected BME teachers' career progression. Just like the participants in Showunmi's (2020) study, it seems Black Caribbean and African teachers reported more negative experiences and obstacles when compared to other minority ethnic groups.

It is striking that the voices of senior-level BAME female psychologists in the UK is relatively absent in research (Thomas et al., 2020; York, 2019). In an open letter to White psychologists, M'gadzah (2020), a Black female academic and senior educational psychologist, questions why is it that "BAME professionals disappear from the profession? [and] when this pattern of exclusion is repeated time and time again why do psychologists remain silent?" (p. 1).

In the following section, I provide an illustration of the CGT approach I took to examine the perceptions of Black British female managers' in CYPS (Miller, 2021).

## Methods

### Constructivist Grounded Theory

The study adopted a constructivist grounded theory research approach that was developed by Charmaz (2003). In essence, constructivist grounded theorists aim to build an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives to generate an explanation (or a theory) about their practices, actions or interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Contrary to other qualitative approaches, a constructivist approach both acknowledges and accepts that reality is subjective, and that the researcher's background (in this case, a Black British female educational psychologist) will unavoidably influence the research findings by "disciplinary emphases" and "perceptual proclivities" (Charmaz, 2003, p. 259). This means it is essential for the researcher to practice reflexivity during the investigation. Because the new theory is produced because of the researcher's absorption in, and handling of the data, it is a created theory (i.e., it did not exist before), and it is very specific to the context, the researcher, and the participants under examination.

There are two types of grounded theories: substantive and formal. Formal theories are said to be abstract and can provide a theoretical explanation of a generic issue that can be applied to a wide range of disciplinary concerns and problems (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). On the other hand, substantive theories provide a theoretical interpretation or explanation according to a specific point in time and context (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, generalizations remain incomplete, restricted, and situated in a specific context. Bearing this in mind, what follows is a brief discussion that draws on research examining the experiences of Black British female managers in CYPS (Miller, 2021), with the aim of reflecting upon the benefits and challenges of using the CGT approach to research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I (the researcher) gained ethical clearance to conduct this research study from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (UHREC). The study's aims and objectives were fully explained to all participants via an emailed information sheet, and my email address was provided to ensure that the participants could easily access further information if they required it. As soon as the participants were identified, informed consent was obtained prior to the commencement of the interviews, and then in addition, verbal consent was obtained from each participant before the start of each interview. When an interview ended, the participant and I engaged in a debriefing discussion where I offered them the opportunity to discuss their involvement in the study and receive counselling and/or supervision from an educational psychologist who was not connected to the study. I reminded participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time prior to completion of the study and that their participation would remain anonymous in any subsequent disseminations. A professional company outside of the UK (i.e., a company that is based in the USA) transcribed the audio recordings from the interviews. The transcripts referred to each participant using a pseudonym (chosen randomly). Throughout the course of the study, I stored all hard data in a locked filing cabinet, and I kept soft data on a password protected and encrypted USB stick. I informed participants that in accordance with UHREC guidelines, upon the successful completion of the study, all the data would be deleted and/or shredded.

### **Selection of the Participants—Purposive Sampling**

I selected an initial sample for this study in a non-random, purposeful manner. The participants were mostly chosen using my professional networks, and they all exhibited a high degree of homogeneity. The participants self-identified themselves as Black women, being born to African or Caribbean parents. In addition, the participants reported having held managerial positions in CYPS workforces for at least five years. That is, all participants managed “the process of designing and maintaining an environment in which individuals, working together in groups efficiently accomplish selected aims” (Weihrich & Koontz, 1994, p. 4).

In total, thirteen participants employed by four London-based CYPS organisations were eligible to participate in the study. The participants were aged between 40 and 65 years old, the reported years of experience working in managerial roles ranged from 5 to 15 years, and years of experience in working in CYPS ranged from 8 to 27 years. Six of the participants worked in further/higher education colleges, two were primary school deputy head teachers and five were educational psychologists. However, because of theoretical sampling and data saturation being achieved, not all participants were interviewed. That is, only ten participants were required to achieve saturation because it was clear that “gathering fresh data no longer spark[ed] new theoretical insights” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113).

## Data Collection

### *Demographic Questionnaire*

A demographic questionnaire was emailed with an information sheet to thirteen potential participants at the start of the recruitment process. Participants who agreed to take part in this study were asked to return (via e-mail or post) the completed questionnaire together with the consent form. All participants who were interviewed confirmed the demographic information prior to the interviews.

### *Interviews*

In-depth interviews were used to discover shared understandings of Black British female managers' experiences of working for CYPS. Interview participant selection was initially based on an iterative process—purposeful sampling. I chose this method for acquiring participants to maximize the depth and richness of the data. I achieved this by minimizing variation in terms of race, gender, field of work and occupational role. As an ambitious Black British woman, I envisaged that my “insider” knowledge and understanding of the participants' personal and work lives (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007) might lead to greater relatability, and in turn, the sharing of rich data (Berger, 2013).

The data were further developed by conducting several interviews, undertaking preliminary analyses, and then choosing additional participants who could answer emerging pertinent questions. The setting for the interviews varied. Two interviews were conducted in a conference room, another in a quiet café and the others were conducted at the participants' homes. While a risk assessment was undertaken, careful consideration was also given to the appropriateness of these locations. If participants were not comfortable in their surroundings, the quality of the interview may have been detrimentally affected.

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide (see Appendix 1). I prepared for the interviews by referring to the extant literature. Thus, topic areas and questions that would encourage the participants to talk about incidents that might be “of deep and abiding interest to [them]” were identified (Chase, 1995, p. 2). The interviews were also intended to be personalized and friendly meetings, during which my semi-structured questioning would be used to ascertain in-depth narratives and salient stories. This necessitated using the following processes to establish the required levels of rapport and sensitivity:

**Apprehension.** Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest that “in building an open and trusting relationship, researcher and interviewee work towards forming a...conversational partnership” (p. 7). I achieved this by ensuring that the women were comfortable and by demonstrating that I was actively listening, interested and non-judgmental. That said, one of the first questions I asked participants (i.e., “Please can you tell me about an occasion when you were prompted to think about your identity?”), was broad, open-ended, and reflected the general direction of the research study. As each interview progressed, I used verbal probes to elicit further clarification. Typically, this constituted repeating words used by the interviewee. The following excerpt from an interview with Jenny, provides an example of such a probe<sup>1</sup>:

Jenny: I know I've had like negative impact. I don't know if it has held me back. [25]

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<sup>1</sup> Note: the bracketed numbers correspond with the line/event/phrase number in participant's interview

Me: Negative impact, how does that look...?

Jenny: I think it makes...I am quite cynical I think, I think it makes me quite cynical yeah, but I am not someone that gives up. [26]

After Jenny's response, I asked several unplanned follow-up and sensitizing questions to continue the discussion. For instance, I asked Jenny, "Are you tired?" And "Do you think things will ever change?" This was because Jenny seemed visibly tired and aggrieved, and I wanted to be reassured of Jenny's well-being, and once assured, I wanted to encourage her to think about and then share her deepest thoughts and feelings. Forthwith, and despite previously saying "I am not someone that gives up" [Jenny, 26], Jenny responded thus:

Jenny: I am coming out of education totally because I feel that I don't want to fight ...I am just looking at life and thinking I want other things. [28]

As an aspiring Black British female manager, I was both surprised and disappointed by Jenny's contradictory words. As a CGT researcher, however, I was motivated to look explicitly for other instances of inconsistencies, and indeed, I found several contradictions in other participant's statements. Hence, my conversation with Jenny led to theoretical sampling and memo-writing, and the recoding of data. I also developed a memo, titled *Contradictions*, that was firmly anchored in the data (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

**Exploration.** The exploration phase took place when the participants became unselfconsciously engaged in giving detailed descriptions of their experiences in their own words. As the following extract shows, by integrating reciprocity into the creation of understanding and development of theory (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), in return I was given advice that affected subsequent lines of enquiry:

Me: Is there anything I've missed out or you think is really important?"

Amber: You really must take it into account when you analyze these transcripts...you may have noted or not, issues around the systems which enable Black people to make it to positions of leadership and the exploration of that." [33]

The afore-mentioned extracts illustrate the importance of developing an enabling partnership with participants, in terms of the time, energy and information they contribute to the research process, collaborative reflexivity, and the mutual construction of a grounded theory. Accordingly, I assumed that the establishment of trust was best achieved by flattening the hierarchy between the study's participants and myself. This view is in accordance with Charmaz and Thornberg's (2021) assertions, and other research approaches (e.g., participatory action research and feminist methodologies).

**Co-operation.** The co-operative phase was characterized by a comfort level in which the participants seemed at ease. This was also a time when I asked questions that were deemed to be too personal or sensitive to ask at the beginning of the interview. For instance, by keeping alert for clues that the interviewee was comfortable, I felt able to ask Ann, "What was your relationship like with your parents?" Ann responded thus:



Ann: It was a fairly strict upbringing, at the time I thought it was strict, but now I understand why they were strict because they were preparing for the future.” [3]

This stage of the research process reflected the greatest degree of rapport, and prompted the writing of a reflective memo, as shown in Box 1:

**Box 1**

Reflective Memo: On Being a Black British Female Researcher

As a Black British woman, I intuitively knew what Ann’s words meant – especially “they were strict because they were preparing for the future.” It was not necessary to probe what she meant. As a Black woman, I intuitively understood what was meant. Our parents believed that working hard at school and achieving academic qualifications would enable us to have successful careers. Asking Ann to explain this, might have led her to feel that I was not on the same wavelength.

**Field Notes**

I used a notebook to record aspects of the interviews that were not captured by the digital voice recorder (e.g., a participant’s facial expression or tone of voice during the interview). The notes were also used as an *aide-mémoire* regarding the major topics that arose during the interview, and they contained my observations as to how the interview questions worked (or did not work) and any other pertinent issues. Box 2 provides an extract from a field note:

**Box 2**

Extract from Field Notes Written After my Interview with Jenny

- Jenny took the interview to new directions as it progressed. This was a good thing.
- I needed confidence to let go and let other (subsequent) interviewees take control.
- Conducting the interview in a place and at a time that was most comfortable for Jenny (away from noise and distractions) was great. She seemed really relaxed.
- I need to update the list of questions for the interview. I do not need to follow this list exactly because clearly other more pertinent questions will arise during the interview. I need to make sure that I listen to recordings straight away and make a list of questions in time for the next interview. Must remember to put the simplest questions at the beginning, and the most complex or sensitive questions at the end.
- Need to group the questions logically, so that the interview progresses smoothly.
- Must remember to not alienate the women by pursuing too hard for information they may not want to share.
- Need to ask more open-ended questions rather than questions that are leading.... For example, do not ask, ‘How do you deliberately take a stand against racism?’ but rather ask ‘What is your attitude towards taking a stand against racism?’ I want the women to feel able to truthfully tell their own stories and express their own opinion without feeling that they might be judged.

**Preliminary Procedures of Data Analysis**

**Transcription**

Prior to commencing data analysis, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim by professional transcribers who were skilled at replicating audio recorded interviews. The typed transcriptions were returned (by e-mail file attachments) within 5–15 days of each

interview. To guarantee accuracy of the transcriptions, I listened to the interview recordings (several times) while at the same time as reading the transcribed interviews. Any inaccuracies that I found were immediately corrected, and in addition, I transcribed interview data that were marked as incomprehensible by the transcriber. By re-reading and correcting inaccuracies, I gained a deeper understanding of the participants' narratives.

### *Initial Coding*

I remained open to the data to discover different shades of meaning by collecting data in three stages. At the end of each stage, I applied initial codes to each portion of the interview transcripts—a method termed “fracturing the data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 160). I used line-by-line and issue-by-issue analyses to thoroughly compare and examine the words and phrases used by the participants to describe their perspectives and their experiences. This process was facilitated by the underlining of words and extracts in the participants' transcripts that were of interest. I also scrutinized the data to find *in vivo* codes. *In vivo* codes were used when participants described their experiences with “imagery power that far transcend individual situations” (Charmaz, 1983, p. 115). As an example, Ann described how in her early and formative years, her mother talked about issues related to the salience of her race, more so than issues associated with her gender:

Ann: I know she prepared me for being a Black woman in Britain more than she had to prepare me for being a woman in Britain.  
[11]

I took the phrase “she prepared me for being a Black woman in Britain” and raised it to a conceptual level to treat it analytically. This coding process helped me to gain perspective on the interview text, to focus data collection, and to facilitate making comparisons (Charmaz, 2000). An example of some of the initial codes from my interview with Jenny is provided in Table 1.

After applying codes to the first two interviews, I realized that I was not giving complete regard to the participants' voices. Hence, I referred to Charmaz's writings and realized that I was analyzing the data while looking for themes. Charmaz (2006) specifically states that this type of coding tends to lead researchers to construct descriptive theories and not a meaningful understanding of the data and the theoretical links contained therein. Therefore, I recoded each interview using gerunds. This method “fosters theoretical sensitivity” (2006, p. 136). In so doing, I was forced to develop a more process-oriented way of thinking, providing the template for seeing sequences and connections among the codes. Table 1 shows the gerund codes that were applied to Jenny's interview.

I used line-by-line and issue-by-issue active coding to stay close to the data and to maintain the fluidity of each participant's experience. By so doing, I was able to find diverse ways of looking at the data, notwithstanding the fact that my preconceived ideas often served as a starting point for looking at the data. The term “theoretical agnosticism” describes the stance that I “attempted” to maintain (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003, p. 138). That is, I endeavored to become immersed in the data and, importantly, formulate an insider's perspective without the interference of my own preconceptions. This process was continuously deliberated by the writing of memos. Rather than trying to control my subjectivism, I consciously acknowledged them. Indeed, a strength of CGT is that it encourages such openness and acknowledges that the researcher is an integral part of the research. The writing of memos facilitated reflexivity, albeit throughout the course of the study, I questioned whether the participants stories were fueling my presumptions, or vice-versa. I addressed my uncomfortableness by reflecting upon specific

issues, writing memos, and by finding evidence (i.e., verbatim quotes) that served to substantiate my interpretations. In this way, telling the story of Black British female managers always remained central to the interpretative process.

**Table 1**

*Extracts from Jenny's Interview with Examples of Initial and Gerund Coding*

Raw Interview Data	Initial Codes	Gerund Codes
<p>Jenny: Well, I <u>identify</u> myself as <u>primarily</u> a <u>Black woman</u>, a <u>Black teacher</u> that's grown up in <u>England</u> with <u>Jamaican</u> heritage <u>parents</u> (3).</p> <p>I see myself as very much a <u>Jamaican</u>. I <u>never ever</u> refer to myself as <u>English</u>, but I <u>refer</u> to myself as, and that's a discussion that came up quite recently as well with my <u>colleague</u> who's <u>Jamaican</u>, and it was that you know, why are you saying you're English and when I sort of <u>had</u> to <u>explain</u> to him about it (3).</p> <p>The <u>English</u> would <u>see you</u> like you are a <u>foreigner</u>; at least that's my perception of how I am perceived so I see myself as a <u>strong Black woman</u> (3).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black woman of Jamaican heritage</li> <li>• Grown up in England</li> <li>• She is a foreigner in the eyes of English people.</li> <li>• Her identity is not obvious, it needs explaining.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying herself as a Black woman first</li> <li>• Associating predominantly with her Jamaican heritage</li> <li>• Viewing herself as a Jamaican</li> <li>• Implying that English people view her as a foreigner</li> <li>• Having to clarify her [complex] identity to other Black people</li> <li>• Feeling empowered</li> <li>• Acknowledging that the dominant culture's views serve to marginalize minorities' views</li> <li>• Taking control by attributing positivity and strength being a Black female in the UK</li> <li>• Preserving a positive sense of self-concept</li> </ul>

### ***Focused Coding***

I developed focused codes by examining initial codes to establish the ones that had the most explanatory power. Further, these codes were used to look through all the data to interrogate their utility. For example, because of a thorough examination of the data, I formulated the notion of “working harder”. On the one hand I had identified that Jenny was, from a young age, inculcated with the notion that to be successful in life she would have to work harder than her White counterparts:

Jenny: Mum always said, you've got to work harder than others... you can go through the glass ceiling, if you've got the drive or the will or the passion, and if you worked. [24]

On the other hand, I discovered that Jenny is now a deputy head teacher who is exasperated by the reality of having to work harder than others:

Jenny: I am quite cynical, and I am very much aware that I am having to work harder. I just feel like I am having to work a lot harder than others.” [26]

Both scenarios explain how Jenny has a real sense that she must work much harder than her White colleagues. All participants corroborated this perception. Indeed, through going back

over the data, the notion of “working harder” was used to describe the ways in which the women tried to overcome barriers in their working lives—a strategy that was communicated to them by their parents in their early and formative years (see Box 3).

<b>Box 3</b>
<b>Working Harder</b>
It seems that Black British female managers frequently respond to the anxiety caused by exclusionary practices, challenges to their authority and by stereotype threat, by working harder. They believe that by working harder they will stave off criticism. They must be seen to be doing their jobs properly to justify having a managerial role. Amber said, “there can be no questions about my professionalism.” The notion of working harder was also a message that their parents (like mine) drummed into them. It is the case that evidence for this being a “normal” thing to do for Black people in the UK is well-documented. (a) Mirza contends that Black academic staff must bear a “burden of invisibility.” This “burden of invisibility” is played out with Black staff being “viewed suspiciously and any mistakes [being] picked up and seen as a sign of misplaced authority.” She further suggests that Black staff [have] to “work harder for recognition outside of the confines of stereotypical expectations and may suffer disciplinary measures and disappointment if [they] do not meet expectations in [their] work performance” (Mirza, 2009, p. 127). (b) The NUT’s survey undertaken in September 2002 found that BME teachers in senior management roles perceived the need to constantly prove themselves and work harder than their White counterparts. These studies add credence to the suggestion that the perceived barriers in CYPS can cause some Black women to believe that they need to work harder to be acknowledged and rewarded in the same way as their White counterparts. This is something that they were warned about in their early and foundational years. So, very little has changed?

### Managing, Comparing and Sorting the Codes

I typed initial and focused codes on hard copies of each transcript at the side of the segment that they were linked to (see Table 1). I then made a Microsoft Word document that contained a list of the codes and their definitions (see Table 2)

**Table 2**

*Examples of Codes, Definitions, and Abbreviations*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Barriers to Career Progression</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Any reference to individual and institutional issues that BBFMs perceived inhibited their career progression
<b>Abbreviation</b>	B2CP
<b>Code</b>	<b>Old Boys’ Club</b>
<b>Definition</b>	An informal system by which social and work connections are made among White men and women.
<b>Abbreviation</b>	OBC
<b>Code</b>	<b>Glass Ceilings</b>
<b>Definition</b>	“The unseen, yet unbreakable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements” (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 4).
<b>Abbreviation</b>	GC
<b>Code</b>	<b>Concrete Ceilings</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Barriers to career progression that are denser than glass, not transparent, and designed so they cannot easily be overcome.
<b>Abbreviation</b>	CC

I referred to the definitions document to ensure that the decisions I took to use each of the codes remained consistent throughout the course of my investigation. Consistency was also

maintained because I wrote memos that detailed how decisions were made to use the codes, how the coding process had been undertaken, and to record any pertinent questions that arose. Having coded the first two transcripts, each reading of these and other subsequent transcripts was undertaken using this procedure. I then added additional codes as required.

When initial and focused coding were completed, I copied each coded section of the transcript to new Word documents titled according to the name of the code. The name of the participant whose interview the code pertained to and the line numbers from the transcript, were incorporated into each coded segment. Thus, I could efficiently trace segments of transcripts back to the original participant or interview. I also wanted to ensure that I could easily elicit further details (e.g., contextual information). This was carried out by adopting the constant comparative approach to data analysis.

I compared developing concepts with more incidents for the purpose of “theoretical elaboration, saturation and densification of concepts” and I also compared emergent concepts with each other (Holton, 2007, p. 278). Linked to this process was the use of memos. That is, I penned various memos that recorded my thoughts and understanding of the data. As an example, when the women talked about their early childhood and formative years, many of them lovingly discussed their mothers’ influence in shaping their attitudes toward their identity, education, and career. I noted that their fathers were not mentioned. This was a revelation. I had expected that most of the women would have automatically mentioned how both of their parents were instrumental in the direction of their career paths. Through constant comparisons, however, I found that while some of the women’s fathers were absent, some had sadly died before the women reached adolescence. In addition, when both parents were present during their early childhood and formative years, these women felt that their mothers exerted much more influence because of their shared gender:

Ann: I think we three girls received the most of our training as a Black woman from our mother and not from our father, but yeah, I do think the message would be different had I been a Black male.  
[17]

The constant comparative and coding processes produced over two hundred codes. In doing so, I was enabled to understand the data in ways that often challenged my assumptions. Instead of ignoring these assumptions, I used these occasions as opportunities to write memos that afforded time to self-reflect and to learn. While I became even more mindful of my longstanding judgmental assumptions, in some respects I still struggled to completely dismantle them.

### ***Memos***

Throughout this study, I wrote several types of memos (i.e., individualized, conceptual and advanced memos). Immediately after each interview, for instance, I wrote an individualized memo that provided an account of my impressions of a participant and their experiences. The memos also recorded my thoughts about what had been said and what I had learned. I adopted an informal and conversational free-writing style in jotting down whatever thoughts came to mind about the interviews and focus codes. At these times, invariably, I asked two main questions: these were “What’s the bigger story here?” and “What is happening in the data?” Box 4 provides an example of a memo written after analyzing Jenny’s interview.

**Box 4**

## Extract from a Memo Written After Interviewing Jenny

I really enjoyed talking to Jenny. Having the interview transcribed so quickly meant that I could start analyzing it quickly. I did not lose momentum. Jenny's views are very similar to my own. I think this is why rapport was developed soon. Make sure this happens with interviewees whose views are divergent from my own. How? Follow Spradley's (1979) steps.

It is noteworthy that I must constantly be mindful of my own subjectivity and monitor how my subjectivity manifests in the research context. Reflexivity issues must be attended to throughout. My personal experiences and opinions should not infect the data gathering and analysis process. It must be a balancing act. This is an interpretative study, so it is my interpretation of what the women have said. Therefore, I must be cautious of the fact that my interpretations are influenced by my experience, values, beliefs, and hidden assumptions.

After the first two interviews, I started to document comparisons among the individualized memos (Charmaz, 2006). I also recorded conceptual memos about the initial and focused codes that were being developed. I did this by using my knowledge of the literature to expand and clarify the focused codes and to sensitize myself to ways of exploring the developing analysis. For example, the varieties of meaning attached to "identity" included gender, ethnicity, race, and professional identity. In this instance, I endeavored to analyze the word "identity" in relation to the context of the study, and the literature was used as a source for asking questions and drawing comparisons.

As I moved through the coding process, I made use of different types of memos to make comparisons between data. I also formulated questions to be investigated in continuing interviews. Additionally, if I had read a journal article or had a conversation that caused me to reflect on something that I had heard in an interview, I jotted it down in the form of a memo. An excerpt of my conceptual musings is shown in Box 5.

**Box 5:**

## Memo—Challenges to Authority and Proficiency

Challenges to the authority and proficiency of Black British female managers in CYPS have surfaced as a significant barrier. Challenges to Black British female managers' authority appear to be interwoven with visibility and scrutiny and may be rooted in longstanding stereotypes and myths that suppose that Black people are not as skilled, intelligent, or competent as White people. Social Dominance Theory argues that this is a myth that is historically rooted in slavery. This leads to problems for Black British female managers in positions of authority. Many participants reported that their authority had been challenged by White people with whom they interact, including line managers, assistants, colleagues, and service users (i.e., college/school staff and students' parents). For instance, Leanne noted that service users were surprised to discover that she was Black and that she encountered an administrator who completely refused to take instruction from her. She now feels that (and just as her mother warned her) she must work harder than her White counterparts. Is this to prove her capabilities? Is this because she wants to remain visible... and so achieve her career goals? Or both?

Sorting and integrating the memos followed memo writing. These two steps sparked new ideas and in turn led to more memos that uncovered tentative core categories. This provided the focus for further data collection in the form of theoretical sampling, which continued until all the properties of the categories were saturated. An example of an advanced memo is provided in Box 6.

**Box 6:****Memo—When do I Stop Interviewing?**

Charmaz (2006) advises that when a researcher has examined straightforward research questions that aspire to resolve practice issues in applied fields, a small number of interviews may be sufficient. Ragin and Becker (1992) suggest that researchers and students ought to collect enough data to prevent criticism from the most ardent critics of their research. With these pieces of advice in mind, I stopped after the tenth interview when saturation was reached.

This memo was written when I questioned whether I was reaching the point of saturation, after I had completed the ninth interview.

***Theoretical Sampling and Development of Core Categories***

Theoretical sampling began at the end of the first data collection stage, after I analyzed the transcriptions from the first two interviews. It was at this point that I became aware that by restricting the data gathering sample to only those individuals engaged in the lecturing profession, I was only seeing a small part of a much bigger picture. I thought that it would be helpful to hear from professionals who worked in schools and higher education institutions, as well as from other people who have experience of working across CYPS (i.e., educational psychologists). This led to individual interviews with four educational psychologists and two deputy head teachers.

A final engagement with theoretical sampling took place at the end of the second data collection stage. After interviews with the educational psychologists and deputy head teachers, and the emergence of a category relating to Black British women's identity development, I interviewed two higher education lecturers. This was because I wanted to further examine Jenny's response to my asking her, "How do you identify yourself?"

Jenny:           The English would see you as a foreigner...that's my perception of how I am perceived, so I see myself as a strong Black woman.  
[3]

The idea that participants' national identity was detrimentally impacted by micro aggressive stereotypes was disconcerting. Consequently, I penned the following advanced memo (see Box 7):

**Box 7****I Don't Want to be a Strong Black Woman, Do I?**

I never wanted to be a "strong Black woman." In fact, I shudder when people call me one. I am Black and I am a woman and I happen to have several things about me that are strong. My mind, my patience, my ability to turn the other cheek in the face of adversity, my personality, my resolve, etc. But putting them all together under that title reduces me to some sort of stereotype that supposes that I can shoulder all burdens because I do not feel. I don't know about the women in this study, but my shoulders are not always broad enough to carry the burden of racism. Those three words, "strong Black woman," form an umbrella term that is not big enough to cover all that I am and all that I do. Maybe I am a strong Black woman? I must be. Every day I walk around with so many chips on my shoulders because of the inequalities that I have experienced in the past, and in fact continue to experience as I write this memo: "And still, I rise" (Angelou, 1978).

### **Sorting and Integrating the Codes**

During the sorting phase of the data analysis process, I took already coded sections of interview transcripts and compared them with other similarly coded fragments to ensure consistency of application and adherence to the definitions of codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This was carried out by re-reading, studying, and scrutinizing the memos that I had written. If I found any evidence to suggest that my interpretation of events was inept, I recoded that segment of the interview. For instance, codes that included the word “prejudice,” “discrimination” or “racism” (e.g., “glass ceilings”), were integrated into more well-defined codes (i.e., “overt” and “subtle” forms of institutional racism).

When coding was completed, I started to combine codes that had common themes and dimensions, and so formed four interconnected categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This process was carried out in the following ways:

- I created a file when a new category was formed. The new category was defined, and a criterion for inclusion was developed.
- The files contained copies of the codes that had been combined to create the category.
- When appropriate, several codes were placed in more than one category.
- I printed the categorized data and stored it in hard files that were labelled according to the title given to each category.

### **Final Coding**

After interviews were transcribed and coded, I moved into the final phase of coding. At this time, I re-examined every set of coded data to ensure accuracy and consistency. This was a critical step. I was aware that because my coding behaviours had developed, and accordingly changed over time, potentially there were inconsistencies. Indeed, in the final analysis, several definitions of categories that were developed at the beginning of the process were redefined. An example is provided in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Working Harder: Code, Two Definitions, and Abbreviation*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Working Harder (first)</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Black British female managers perceive they must “work [2 times] harder for recognition outside of the confines of stereotypical expectations” (Mirza, 2009, p. 127). A notion that was inculcated in their early childhood.
<b>Abbreviation</b>	WH
<b>Code</b>	<b>Working Harder (second)</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Black British female managers must be seen to be working up to 20 times harder. Then they <i>might</i> be acknowledged and rewarded in the same way as their White counterparts. A notion that was underestimated by their parent(s) in their early childhood.
<b>Abbreviation</b>	WH

### **Credibility, Originality, Resonance, and Usefulness**

In terms of evaluating the quality of research using CGT, Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) put forward four main criteria: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. In this study, a thorough review of the literature revealed a scarcity of research detailing the



experiences of Black British female managers in CYPS. This revelation influenced my decision to use CGT as a methodological tool and signaled the potential usefulness of the study. Resonance was gained by employing techniques (such as line-by-line and in vivo coding) that ensured I stayed close to the data and that I understood the participants' perceptions of their lived experiences. In addition, throughout the research process, my reflexive views were documented in a journal, and these writings (in the form of memos) were used to facilitate the development of openness and a willingness to give salience to mutual constructions. Furthermore, the interview recordings, transcriptions, field notes and memos constituted an audit trail of the various steps taken; from conceptualization of the study, through to obtaining the raw data, analysis and then interpretation.

### Discussion

In this paper, I endeavored to find out whether CGT procedures would be helpful in terms of gaining insight into the perceptions and experiences of Black British female managers working in CYPS organisations. I discovered Black British female managers' parents, siblings, and prominent community representatives taught them about what it means to be a member of a minority ethnic group in the UK. While they were inculcated with African and Caribbean traditions, Black British female managers learned that when they left the security of their homes (and communities) that, because of the colour of their skin, they would be treated less favorably by the dominant White population, and that they would need to work harder than their White counterparts. This lesson was reinforced when they experienced racism for the first time.

Sian: I remember when I was at primary school as a little kid, I remember being kicked in the shins and things...I mean I must have been four or something like that and going home from school, kids call you names. [8]

Black British female managers are still troubled by the blatant and aversive acts of racism that were invariably perpetuated by their school-aged peers and their teachers. At that time, the label Educationally Subnormal (ESN) was synonymous with Black pupils. A common perception was that Black students were incapable of learning the English language, suffering from poor self-esteem, and lacking a sense of identity (Christian, 2005). Nevertheless, young Black British female managers' desire to achieve educational and occupational success remained unswerving.

Jenny: Since like primary school age, I remember education, education, education, I grew up with that. [6]

Maxine: Your education was very important and don't be deceived when people want to let you do less than what you want to do. [9]

Black British female managers' work ethic, steadfastness, resilience, and sense of determination has enabled them to break through concrete ceilings and circumvent powerful organizational obstacles and barriers. Put differently, while Black British female managers have climbed the proverbial occupational ladder and attained managerial careers in CYPSs, at the same time they have continually encountered various contemporary forms of prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism, which, when compared to their early childhood experiences, manifest in much more discrete and less tangible microaggressive ways (Sue et al., 2007).

Maxine: Sometimes it's very hard to evidence, and then that's a very frustrating thing, because racism is so – it can be so well hidden. [52]

Black British female managers find these modern-day versions of racism much more difficult to prove and challenge. Hence, they choose their “battles” carefully. Although well-meaning diversity enhancing policies and practices have been instituted in CYPs, Black British female managers are sure that institutional racism subtly persists.

In their relationships with their White colleagues, then, Black British female managers endeavor to walk a precariously fine line between showing self-confidence, determination, and assertiveness, and being labelled as “aggressive.” They feel they are being watched by their White colleagues who have been conditioned to reproduce negative homosocial stereotypes (Kanter, 1977). In line with 59% of the White Americans in Gilens’s study (1995) Black British female managers appeared to uphold the notion that “blacks get less of the good things in life” because “they just need to try harder” (p. 1006).

Jenny: I just felt as if we had to be even better you know under no circumstances must there be any cracks or must we be seen, must be working. It's almost as if it makes you even better because you recognize that you are being watched. [32]

So, Black British female managers held off threats from negative stereotypes (Aronson & Steele, 2005), questions concerning their capabilities, and behaviours that challenge their authority, by working much harder than their parents imagined they would need to.

### **Reflections and Limitations**

It is salient that throughout the research, many of the participants’ emotive stories about the difficulties they encountered resulted in my grappling with feelings of protectiveness, sadness, helplessness, bewilderment, and anger. Ironically, one of the greatest challenges I faced, was to decide to reveal the stories that Black women had not publicly disclosed. Examples are shown below:

Amber: You get dragged along by the gutter sniping, and the politicking, and the backstabbing and the gossiping and all those stuff that contaminate your role and your attempts of fulfilling your role. So, without sounding like a horrible snob, but it's a case of trying to remain above it, and I suppose if you're looking up it's easier.” [32]

Shirley: You're constantly challenged or ignored by your White counterparts, and sometimes from your own Black colleagues...they feel they should not ...make any challenges or muddy their waters because they feel their job maybe in danger. [18]

The participants revealed feelings of distrust towards their Black and White colleagues. I presumed that this was not something that Black female managers would be prepared to candidly discuss at their respective workplaces. And my sense of loyalty towards the

participants and my own cultural heritage felt compromised. Moving forward I let my attitudes, thought processes, suppositions, and sense of integrity surface through conversations with the participants and memos. These strategies were both pertinent and critical to the research process. Not only did they afford opportunities for me to address the influence of my feelings, and enhance the trustworthiness of the research, but they also helped to ensure that I remained resilient and emotionally healthy. I recommend that researchers preparing to investigate emotive phenomena that have personal resonance, should consider their own emotional well-being, and put into place peer debriefing procedures that facilitate self-reflexivity and self-monitoring. Pragmatically, a second coder, for instance, might have provided a form of triangulation, as well as a useful form of peer support. There are also implications associated with the research procedures. This study was a complicated time-consuming endeavor. It seems possible that a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2021) might have been a more accessible and flexible method of data analysis, especially for an early career researcher (Byrne, 2021).

### Concluding Remarks

Following the death of George Floyd, and in the aftermath of Black Lives Matters protests, there have been renewed calls for the worldwide deconstruction of systemic inequalities across all areas of society. While attempting to sustain momentum for anti-inequality movements, I set out to critically reflect on the usefulness of CGT research methodologies. Unlike previous studies, I specifically engaged with the experiences of Black British female managers in CYPS. I supposed that, just like Black British students, a culture of negative stereotyping, low expectations and exclusionary practices are detrimentally affecting the career trajectories of Black women of African and Caribbean heritage (Demie & McLean, 2015; Hudson et al., 2013).

Overall, I found CGT guidelines for conducting research offers helpful approaches for collecting, managing, categorizing, and interpreting interview data in relation to Black British female managers in CYPS. In particular, the notion of reflexive memo-writing was a key component that enabled interpretations to be comprehensively grounded in data. However, I recommend that researcher's support networks should be explicitly embedded within the reflexive and ethical approval processes, acknowledging how sensitive topics impact both the researched and the researcher's well-being.

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## Appendix 1: Interview Guide

### Introductory General Questions

- “Can you tell me about...?” “Do you remember an occasion when...?” “What happened in the situation that you mentioned?”
- Continuation questions: Direct questioning of what has just been said, nodding, “mm” and repeating, reframing significant words/phrases.
- Searching questions: “Could you say a little more about that?” “Can you give a more detailed description of what happened at that time?” “Do you have additional examples of this?”
- Specific questions: “What did you think when that happened?” “What did you do on that occasion?” “How did you feel?”
- Connecting questions: “I would now like to introduce another topic...”
- Silence: By allowing pauses, the interviewees will have sufficient time to think and reflect.
- Interpreting questions: “You then mean that...?” “Is it correct that you feel that...?” “Does the expression... Cover what you have just expressed?”

### Identity Questions

- Think of a time or an event at work that has prompted you to think about yourself as a senior Black woman. Why was it meaningful for you?
- How do you identify yourself?
- How has your race influenced your identity?

- How does race affect your daily life?
- How did your culture, race and gender affect your ability to do your job?
- Tell me about a time when your identity was made salient. What happened, who was involved, what did you do?
- If you had to briefly describe yourself, what would you say?
- Who has made you successful in your career?
- Who have been your mentors?

### **Race, Culture and Ethnicity Questions**

- Do you feel that there is a fundamental difference in the way Black British female managers choose to navigate their way through the CYPS?

### **Being a Manager Questions**

- How would you describe yourself as a manager?
- What are your core values?
- What are some specific instances in which your race has affected your job?
- What advice would you give to other Black female managers?

### **Prejudice, Discrimination, and Racism Questions**

- What are some challenges you have faced as a Black British female manager working for a CYPS?
- How do you deliberately take a stand against racism?
- What is your attitude towards taking a stand against racism?

### **Career Development Questions**

- Do you have a role model/mentor? If so, what advice has he/she given to you?
- What strategies have you used to steer your career?
- Are there any barriers – personal or organizational – that you could identify that has served to hinder your progress? Explain.

### **Final Question**

What have I left out that you think is important about how being a Black female manager affects your work?

### **Author Note**

Denise Miller achieved a B.A. in Education from the University of Greenwich. Taught in primary schools for 8 years before training to become an Educational Psychologist. Attained an M.Sc. in Educational Psychology from University College London and started working as a Practitioner (Educational) Psychologist in the London Borough of Lambeth. Completed a Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology. Returned to the University of Greenwich, this time as a senior lecturer. As a programme leader, senior lecturer, and educational psychologist in private practice, works in early years, primary and secondary school settings, as well as,

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