Coping techniques and strategies for pursuing anti-racism within academe: A Collective autoethnographic account from minoritised academics in the UK.

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Coping techniques and strategies for pursuing anti-racism within academe: A Collective autoethnographic account from minoritized academics in the UK.

Abstract

Purpose
Drawing upon our experiences as minoritized academic scholars within leadership roles of a Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) Network in UK academe, we explore the research question ‘In what ways do racially minoritized academics use coping techniques and strategies to counter racism and inequality in the higher education environment?’

Design/methodology/approach
We use collective autoethnography accompanied by storytelling, underpinned by a qualitative interpretative process, supported by inductive, data-driven theorising. Our approach is supplemented by the usage of Content Analysis (Schrieier, 2012) to analyse our data, and generate findings.

Findings
Our findings specifically highlight (1) Collectivism, solidarity and belonging (2) Knowledge expansion and critical consciousness (3) Disarming approaches and emotional labour (4) Resistance through setting boundaries and (5) Intersectionality and BAME men allyship, as specific approaches for taking forward anti-racism.

Research limitations/implications
Autoethnographic research has encountered challenges around verification, transparency, and veracity of data, and issues have been debated due to its subjective nature (see Jones 2010; Keeler, 2019; Méndez, 2013). Additional complications arise regarding neutrality and objectivity associated with the researchers’ identities and experiences being represented in autoethnographic accounts. We acknowledge that our accounts are subjective and have influenced the research process and product.

Originality/value
Research on the experiences of minoritized academics leading staff equality networks constitutes a research gap. This article offers an original analysis through outlining our lived experiences in leadership positions of a BAME Network, and offers hope to other minoritized employees undertaking anti-racist work.
Purpose
The purpose of this article is to explicate the lived experience and coping techniques and strategies that three minoritised academics of colour, who are the authors of this article, have utilised to navigate the culture, systems, and processes of a university in the United Kingdom (UK). It is supported by a key research question: In what ways do racially minoritised academics use coping techniques and strategies to counter racism and inequality in the higher education environment? The authors of the article have leadership and/or strategic positions in a BAME Network, which was established in 2020 at the university. One of the article’s women authors is the co-lead of the BAME Network. The two additional authors consist of one woman and one man (an ally to the two women) both of whom have key roles within the BAME Network steering committee, which has a policy and strategy function for the BAME Network.

The focal point of the article will be our involvement with the BAME Network, and our lived experience through undertaking its associated leadership activity. Our discussion will be drawn through reference to Critical Race Theory (CRT) (e.g. Crenshaw et al., 1995; Daffery, 2018; Mills, 2009), as well as being informed by extant anti-racist literature (e.g. Ahmed, 2012; Arday, 2018; Arday and Mirza, 2018; Bhopal 2022). The accounts presented in this article entail active reflections of our lived experiences as academics of colour using a collective autoethnographic approach (see Ngunjiri et al., 2010; Wężniejewska, et al., 2020) via the medium of storytelling (see Kim, 2020; Watson, 2013). Our reflections emanate from an understanding that through efforts to transform institutions, we generate knowledge about them (Ahmed, 2017). Ideally, we hope that we will give voice to others, particularly, minoritised scholars in the challenges that they potentially face as they undertake similar leadership roles. The research hence has the wider objective of enhancing the efficacy of minoritised scholars to pursue anti-racism within academic institutions, with a broader view towards promulgating positive advancements in the constitutive racial equality field.

Background – BAME Network’s rationale for establishment
The BAME Network’s rationale is to challenge and assist the university to address issues of racism and racial inequality, whilst the institution itself has embarked on implementing the Advanced HE’s Race Equality Charter (REC). The BAME Network’s function, through its collective membership, includes consciousness raising about racial inequality issues, a safe space to discuss our lived experiences of racism, acting as a consultative body, operating as a
challenge mechanism to the university’s policies, strategies, and racial equality approaches, alongside our active involvement in anti-racist work itself. Numerous evidence highlights that the higher education institution (HEI) landscape is characterised by racism, inequality, and discrimination (Arday, 2021). Indeed, the extensive Leading Routes (2019) Report outlined that this predicament is aligned to racism which has become institutionalised within HEIs and continues to disadvantage BAME individuals attempting to pursue academic careers within the academy. Racism itself entails a dialectical process of signification, categorisation, and ‘othering’ of BAME people which renders them ‘minoritised’ (Mills, 2009). It is therefore an ideological process whereby social relations between people and the social construct of ‘race’ leads to racialisation, which is inappropriately used to define and construct differentiated human groups, underpinned by dubious notions of inferiority and superiority (Miles, 1993).

The backdrop to the establishment of the BAME Network was a flashpoint incident that became globally significant concerning police brutality and the murder of George Floyd in the USA in May 2020. Around this time, the University, whilst simultaneously launching its Race Equality Charter activity, put out a call for BAME staff to co-lead the BAME Network. That said, additional recent events in close succession in the UK have brought issues of racism and racial inequality into the spotlight. Specifically, the 2016 European Union referendum that resulted in the Brexit outcome leading to an increase in racism and xenophobia, the 2017 Grenfell Tower Fire, the 2018 Windrush Scandal, and the over-representation of BAME people in the COVID-19 death and infection statistics in 2020. Furthermore, bleak prospects and socio-economic insecurity in the UK have fuelled nationalist, jingoist, and populist discourses (Sandbrook, 2022). These complex issues illustrate the existence of ‘structural’ racism and deprivation, which is shaped by the broader political and socio-economic context, and underpinned by unequal access to finite societal resources, perpetuating White privilege and power, and racial inequality (Virdee, 2019).

**BAME Network focus: Racial inequality within Higher Education Institutions**

Within HEIs, several issues pertaining to institutionalised racism have been researched and examined, and form the focal point of our BAME Network activity (see Arday and Mirza, 2018; Bhopal, 2017; Rollock, 2016, 2019; Sian, 2019). Institutionalised racism highlights that workplace racism and inequality is proliferated in covert, subtle and oblique ways within systems, processes, discourse, and unconscious bias, and operates indirectly, above and beyond any overtly individual racist expressions (Crenshaw, *et al.*, 1995; Sian, 2019). Institutionalised
racism has been evidenced as pervading HEIs operationally through systemic bias leading to
systematic disadvantage experienced by BAME individuals including candidates for
employment, existing staff, and students (Arday and Mirza, 2018). Indeed, in general terms,
differential Higher Education (HE) outcomes for candidates from BAME backgrounds within
academia include unequal entry into the academic profession, inequality in access to permanent
and secure employment, and reduced likelihood of career progression (see Arday, 2018;
Bhopal, 2020). In addition, disparate outcomes between White and BAME students endure
pertaining to access and entry to HE, and success rates within HE, including the completion of
degree programmes (Janowksi, 2020).

The significant levels of under-representation of BAME employees within the workforce
profile, in both the academic and professional support services components of universities,
point to the aforementioned access and attainment barriers (see Arday, 2018; Bhopal, 2020).
Debates abound, for instance, about the so-called ‘leaky pipeline’, a metaphor used to
encapsulate the progressive and sequential reduction of diverse representation within the
qualification and career hierarchy. Ultimately, this phenomenon leads to a lowered likelihood
of BAME academics advancing in their careers, accompanied by higher attrition levels
compounding the situation (see Figueiredo, 2023; Mahony and Weiner, 2020). Indeed, the
proportions of BAME employees within UK HE senior leadership cadre and professoriate
positions remain low, with BAME candidates being less likely to be promoted in comparison
to their White counterparts, put forward as bias inherent within recruitment and selection
strategies (see Arday and Wilson, 2021; Bhopal, 2020). In addition, the unequal nature of
BAME students’ experiences has led to renewed attention being paid to the ‘race’ attainment
and awarding gap, which highlights the greater probability of White students performing well
in their degree studies when compared to their BAME counterparts (Jankowski, 2020).
Furthermore, lower BAME student success rates in terms of achieving employment
opportunities beyond HE studies remains an inherent issue (see Arday, 2021; Arday, Branchu
and Boliver, 2022).

Intersectionality further compounds issues of racial inequality where dismantling power
dynamics around class, ‘race’, and gender are necessary to transform HE (Santa-Ramirez et
al., 2022). Intersectionality premised in the ‘herstory’ of Black feminism (Collins, 2000;
Crenshaw, 1989) highlights how intersecting axes of oppression create a patriarchal matrix of
power-over that sustains racial inequality. As an analytical concept, intersectionality recognises
that power relations of racism, sexism, and class are not mutually exclusive, but inter-related, and mutually influence each other to compound social inequality (Collins and Bilge, 2020). The intersectionality of racism with other forms of oppression and social differences hence underscores distinctions in the oppression of BAME women, which translates into exacerbated disadvantage (Daffery, 2018), and emphasises the complexity and multiplicity of exclusions. Within HEIs, intersectionality raises further challenges for universities to genuinely disrupt White hegemony and institutionalised racism, and become anti-racist. An associated phenomenon includes complex issues rooted in the inadvertent propagation of colonialist, imperialist, and misogynistic discourses that implicitly persist within the curriculum. This area requires considerable work in relation to epistemological engagement with racism and representation, to counteract the extant White, male, Eurocentric hegemony permeating the university syllabus (Arday and Mirza, 2018; Gopal, 2021; Jansen, 2019).

Ethical approval, research question reminder, and focus

We received full ethical approval from the university to undertake this study, which is supported by a key research question: In what ways do racially minoritised academics use coping techniques and strategies to counter racism and inequality in the higher education environment? Racism is a contentious issue, and as minoritised academics we voluntarily embraced the leadership roles of the BAME Network to provide us with the opportunity to proactively influence university racial equality strategy. We broadly encapsulate our coping techniques and strategies for pursuing anti-racist work as the individual and collective interpersonal approaches that we have utilised to deal with difficult and challenging situations. The next section outlines our methodological approach in detail. We take inspiration from Arday’s (2019) assertion that reflexive autobiographical work can operate as a cathartic force and mechanism for disrupting normative Whiteness, and pursuing anti-racism.

Methodology

Collective autoethnography

The methodology used in this article is collective autoethnography, which is a burgeoning, embodied, methodological praxis (see Mejia et al., 2022; Peters et al., 2020, Sisco et al., 2022; Spry, 2001) whereby a group of researchers are deeply ensconced in observing, journaling, writing, and reflecting on the collection of their prolonged firsthand experiences. The autoethnographic element helps researchers to gain deep personal insight into their own
experiences, emotions, vulnerabilities, and backgrounds, and become reflective and critical about the broader context of their experiences (Méndez, 2013). Their multiple perspectives are in turn introspectively examined as a social phenomenon to expand knowledge, and to gain further insights at a particular point in time. Collective autoethnography is a qualitative research approach premised on feminist approaches to knowledge expansion where emotional and social data involving the study of the selves is generated to facilitate positive movement on contentious issues (Kidd and Finlayson, 2010; Wężniejewska, et al., 2020). The collective component of our autoethnography enhances the power and possibilities of promulgating advancements together, and recognises the inter-dependence, shared responsibility, and community required for effecting change (Jones, 2021).

Collective autoethnography enables the usage of our (the authors of this article’s) personal experiences as primary data to understand the social phenomena under investigation. Due to the autoethnographic element, we are the central characters and participants in the research enabling us to contribute uniquely to understanding our lived experience, within a specific ethnographic context (Chang, 2008, 2013; De Vries, 2012). In this instance, our respective lived experience of racial discrimination, marginalisation, and inequality in the workplace, and our mutual leadership roles in the BAME Network provide collective and shared experiences to draw from. In addition, the collective component strengthens autoethnography as a method of qualitative enquiry through the incorporation of multiple voices and perspectives in the research process, thereby facilitating a more in-depth understanding of richer data, reinforced by mutual scrutiny, interrogation, challenge, and probing (see Roy and Uekusa, 2020).

**Method/design/approach**

Collective auto-ethnography allows participants to self-reflect, delve into their experiences, contribute to knowledge, and convert their lived experiences into a narrative through methodological praxis and theoretical analysis. This process enables us (the authors) to adopt the role of autoethnographer-participants (Chang et al., 2016). Moreover, as Ellis et al. (2011) highlight, the autoethnographic element is both a process and product whereby we are researching ‘from the inside’, within a particular political and socio-economic context. In relation to the research setting and environment, autoethnographic fieldwork can occur in ethnographers’ offices, homes, archival libraries, and wherever the fieldwork happens (Chang, 2013). In our case the contextual backdrop is the day-to-day running of the BAME Network through its steering committee, operating within a university, and forms part of our ongoing
daily working lives. Our research setting, through which we have drawn our data, includes offices, committee meeting rooms, and on-line meetings.

Autoethnographic data sources, processes, and collection vary, and the data could potentially involve participants’ documents about themselves such as diaries, official records, e-mails, memos in the form of ongoing self-reflection and self-observation, photos, and memories (Chang et al., 2013; Janssens, et al., 2018; Muncey, 2010). Several of these factors align well with this research as we have documented our experiences in multiple ways over the last three years. This process of authentication has allowed us to focus on the coping techniques and strategies that we have used to navigate the HE environment through our BAME Network leadership roles. The physical data that we have collected in this autoethnographic account includes evidence such as meeting notes, e-mail correspondence, and the usage of respective journals and diaries to record and reflect on our experiences.

Our approaches pertaining to analysing our lived experience of involvement in BAME Network activity, and our perceptions of organisational relations, social relationships, and networks amongst organisational actors (see Raittila and Vuorisalo, 2021), were more internally subjective. They entailed self-introspection, recalling of past memories about events, examining our inner-most thoughts, highlighting our emotional experiences and opinions, and probing each other’s perspectives for sensemaking purposes, in order to generate meaningful data in the form of storytelling (see Kim, 2020; Watson, 2013). Our data collection process entailed systematically gathering autoethnographic and self-reflective data, to build an archive of material for pragmatic application to social enquiry (Chang et al., 2013; Roy and Uekesa, 2020). Our approach assisted us in producing an analytical framework for deciphering our data to produce an informed analysis, which we critically examine and turn to next.

Data collection/data analysis/challenges

Data collection and analysis within collective autoethnographic research varies due to the data being embodied inside and amongst the researchers, and the nuanced, personal aspect of data sources and collection (Chang, 2008). Indeed, there is not one uniform approach for undertaking this collation and analytical process. Issues of verification, transparency, and veracity of data abound, and have been debated due to the perceived contentiousness of the subjective nature of autoethnography (see Jones 2010; Keeler, 2019). That notwithstanding, the advantages of this method include the generation of rich and detailed data, which draws on
lived experiences and emotions, providing a unique perspective on a given phenomenon. Autoethnography additionally enables the exploration of sensitive or taboo topics, in this case our personal and collective lived experiences as minoritised scholars, which are potentially more difficult to study using alternative research methods (Alvarez et al., 2022). Accordingly, collective autoethnography enables researchers to reflect on their own biases and positionality within the research, leading to a greater understanding of their roles in shaping the data and accompanying analysis (Koopman, Watling and LaDonna, 2020; Méndez, 2013).

We contend that our collated data is flowing, liquid, and socially constructed within a given system of norms and mores (Holliday and MacDonald, 2020; Roy and Uekusa, 2020). Autoethnographic methods, however, are critiqued for their invested personal nature leading to inevitable subjectivity, which potentially impacts upon the nature of the research findings (Méndez, 2013). Maintaining ethical boundaries can be challenging when exploring sensitive topics through personal experiences, rendering it difficult for others to reproduce the study or validate its findings (Wall, 2016). Researchers might also unintentionally emphasise or de-emphasise particular aspects of their experiences, leading to the ethical dilemma, or moreover accusation, of inherent bias in the analysis. To offset these challenges, our data collection and analysis importantly had, as Chang et al. (2013) recommend, a sequential form to aid a robust, systematic process, and to enhance transparency. Our systematic approach, and intricate analytical activity was juxtaposed by arriving at data analysis via an inherently tangled process, necessitating an iterative exercise, and repeated discussions and readings, to aid the sensemaking of our experiences.

Our collective data pertains to the time period from September 2020 to June 2023. We stored our data within NVivo software, which facilitated ease of data management, keeping track of messy data, coding data segments (known as ‘nodes’ in NVivo), and categorising the coded data into themes. The usage of NVivo helped us to organise copious data documents, such as, e-mails and notes from meetings, extracts from our diaries, and written descriptions of our memories encapsulated as stories (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). We engaged in steady and methodical application of interpretative, inductive, data-driven theorising to analyse our data using qualitative Content Analysis (Schrieier, 2012). Diagram 1 outlines our research method and overall study design, broadly based on an approach proffered by Ngunjiri et al. (2010).
Diagram 1: Research Method and Overall Design - Adapted from Ngunjiri et al. (2010).

1. Preliminary Data Collection
   - Tracing through our physical correspondence e.g. e-mails and meeting notes, and organising it into date order.

2. Individual self-writing and reflection
   - Examining and sense making of physical correspondence through reading and re-reading. Producing written individual self-reflection and interpretations from self-observation. Group sharing, interrogation of data and probing.

3. Subsequent data collection
   - Recalling our thoughts, experiences, memories, and opinions of meetings, people interaction, and working with each other through mutual discussion. Group sharing, interrogation of data, and probing.

4. Individual self-writing and reflection
   - Self-reflection, followed by group sharing, and preliminary meaning-making of subsequent data collection.

5. Subsequent data collection
   - Collating further data stemming from our self-writing and reflection.

6. Individual data review, coding, and theme generation
   - Reading and re-reading the data. Organising the data into codes, categories, sub-categories, and themes through Content Analysis (See Table 1).

7. Individual meaning making and outlining the results in writing
   - Examining themes, initially writing up the results individually.

8. Group data analysis and interpretation
   - Group-reflection and theme interpretation.

9. Group writing
   - Group writing and meaning-making to ensure that our collective perspectives were represented meticulously within the final analysis.
Data analysis

In order to underpin our research with academic rigour, and self-reflexivity, and to engage in data analysis transparently and effectively, as highlighted in Diagram 1, we participated in self-observation, recalling, self-reflection, group-reflection, and meaning-making to analyse our data (see Chang, 2013). Our ‘self-observation’ was underpinned by a storytelling approach adopting a free writing style within our personal diaries to record our thoughts and feelings, and our unconscious ‘taking for granted’ observations (Janssens, et al., 2018; Rodriguez and Ryave, 2002). Indeed, within CRT, storytelling and counter-storytelling have been used as a means of empowering marginalised voices, challenging racialised privilege, and addressing racial inequality (Kim, 2020). We also engaged in ‘recalling’ entailing remembering and recollecting past events, and engendering an emotional connection to past events in which we imagined ourselves being back in the scene (Fox, 2021). To this end, we continually revisited the BAME Network series of events, how they unfolded, discussed them repeatedly, and recorded our accounts through writing, providing us with rich data for analysis (see Ellis, 2009). Supplemental data verification included re-reading email content, recalling discussions that we had in meetings, and reflections on our conversations afterwards. This process of corroboration and reflection assisted us to reconnect emotionally to the scenes.

We participated in ‘self-reflection’ as a form of reflexivity about our own life stories, experiences and work activity, specifically encompassing self-reflection upon ourselves, because our lives are the data (see Chang et al., 2013; Hernandez, 2021; Roy and Uekusa, 2020). In particular, this introspective process incorporated turning the lens onto ourselves, and excavating our lived experiences as data. We also undertook ‘group-reflection’ of our collective experiences, routines, emotions, and actions with each other, which provided us with the ability to connect our reflections with each other’s as an ensemble (See Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 2009). ‘Meaning-making’ occurred through us reviewing our data holistically by reading and re-reading the text, taking notes on recurrent topics, highlighting salient themes, and identifying critical issues. We created a group page, accessible securely to us only where we collectively updated the data write up, challenged, and critiqued each other, and agreed the formation of patterns and trends. This iterative process facilitated peer review of each other, thereby enhancing our data interpretation, self-scrutiny, collective appraisal and critique, and reflexivity of our interpretations (See Guyotte and Sochacka, 2016).
Qualitative Content Analysis

The Content Analysis procedure that we used to analyse our data was supported by a qualitative interpretivist approach with the aim of sensemaking and uncovering its deeper meaning (see Duriau et al., 2007; Lindgren et al., 2020; Schreier, 2012). Our Content Analysis process entailed a systematic text analysis applied to the archive of collective autoethnographic data that we collated in this study. Accordingly, analysing the content of our data incorporated a step-by-step, iterative, yet cyclical procedure, and initially consisted of its condensation into meaningful elements (Duriau et al., 2007). We then engaged in coding by applying open codes to the condensed data to assist us to establish conceptual themes and patterns (Duriau et al., 2007; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Subsequently, we formed general categories derived from the open coding exercise, and following this step we established sub-categories stemming from our identified general categories (Duriau et al., 2007). Ultimately, we developed over-arching themes derived from the sub-categories through undertaking this analytical-interpretive and inductive systematic process (Duriau et al., 2007; Schreier, 2012). Arrival at the eventual themes then incorporated comparison of our lived experience to relevant theoretical and conceptual literature to enable analysis of our findings (Hernandez, 2021). Our Content Analysis procedure is summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Content Analysis procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Analysis Step</th>
<th>Research Process</th>
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<tr>
<td>Condensation</td>
<td>We shortened the text within our data corpus whilst preserving the core meaning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>Coding was the starting point for examining patterns in our material. We coded the condensed text by applying a label (open code) that described the content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Categories</td>
<td>We examined the open codes and condensed our data into categories. We formed the general categories by grouping together codes that were related to each other and where they described similarities that belonged together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-categories</td>
<td>We further divided general categories into additional sub-categories for meaning-making purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>The themes generated expressed an underlying meaning found in the sub-categories.</td>
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Adapted from: Duriau et al. (2007).

For illustrative purposes Table 2 outlines some extracted data from inside our data corpus stemming from our respective stories, which supported our arrival at the five themes.
### Table 2: Arrival at themes

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Example data from our storytelling</th>
<th>General Categories</th>
<th>Sub-categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>I can’t explain why really but just being in that space [BAME Network] with minoritised colleagues, knowing that others there understood where I was coming from, and were not denying the racism that I experienced, and that we were in this together in terms of supporting one another, left me feeling uplifted, and seen in a way that I have never felt visible or indeed heard in other university settings.</td>
<td>Safety.</td>
<td>Empathy. Support. Togetherness.</td>
<td>1. Collectivism, solidarity, and belonging.</td>
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<td>After the first meeting of the BAME Network I couldn’t help but think that this space, and us being together, would be the place of sanctuary for me, where I wouldn’t feel isolated, and where I would be understood by people with shared experiences, and where I could vocalise my experiences of racism without judgement.</td>
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<td>It is not an exaggeration to say that I found my voice within the BAME Network. I realised that apart from when I am teaching, my persona in my department meetings is a relatively quiet one, I don’t speak, I don’t ask questions, I don’t offer opinions, and I feel irrelevant. Yet, in the BAME Network meetings, I discovered that I had so much to say, the words just came pouring out of me. I began to feel like my truer self, and that the members cared, and that they could relate to my narrative, and that I wasn’t simply imagining my experiences.</td>
<td>Awareness.</td>
<td>Reading. Information. Understanding.</td>
<td>2. Knowledge expansion and critical consciousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The deeper we became involved, the more we realised the complexity of the racism issue, and the more that we needed to know. Our awareness was already acute but became more heightened. We started recommending various scholarly articles to each other, and we read to enhance our skills and our confidence to challenge. We also challenged ourselves, and each other. We found that through doing this, we raised our own consciousness.</td>
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In meetings and conversations, we would subconsciously share the knowledge we were gaining from our readings. We then brought our awareness together as we formulated our work. We would verbally cite specific work and challenge our own assumptions, which led to intellectual growth and deeper understanding about racism. Yet, at the same time, we were aware that there is always room for further consideration, development of our knowledge, and continued appreciation of the issue amongst us.

We found that there was an expectation and assumption of knowledge within our racialised and minoritised bodies. Whilst it is true that we have lived experience, not all of us identified ourselves as scholars on issues of racism and racial inequality. Over time, the labour that we were expending on reading and engaging with the literature became visible in our beings, and audible in our voices, as our knowledge was being brought into conversations, contributions at meetings, and our recommendations for improvement. Ironically, we became what they thought we were.

We [from the BAME Network steering committee] were wary of the EDI event as many of us felt that it may create a space for the co-optation of our labour. Also, due to the language used in the invitation, it felt that we were under performance-oriented scrutiny. I volunteered to attend and present about BAME Network activity, to show willing. During my verbal update I was even smiling at times, but deep down inside kept saying to myself ... it is alright, we are trying to use the ‘master’s tools’ approach, we are cooperating now so that when we do need to push for changes, we can do so through the cooperation that we ourselves are displaying.

Reflecting back on our conversations, we saw that so much of it was centred on how we would approach difficult conversations about racism. We also acknowledged how much of it was about how we could strategically present ourselves and the work we are doing without appearing difficult or demanding. Somehow, we felt that we needed to blend in, and still get our points and challenges across. Although, it was uncomfortable, we had

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<td>3. Disarming approaches and emotional labour.</td>
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no choice, we had to keep pushing forward, but without damaging or undermining professional relationships with colleagues in the institution.

I remember feeling that finally the emotional labour I am taking on is now visible even if just amongst ourselves. Indeed, after every one of the meetings where we navigated uncomfortable conversations, I would receive a text saying “thank you for listening”, “you did a great job [navigating that]”. And in one particularly difficult meeting, I recall framing my disagreement with what was being asked of us in the most diplomatic way I could, and then looking through the screen at other members of the steering committee, and receiving a smile of support in recognition of the disarming strategy that I had employed.

I knew from speaking to other BAME Network leads and representatives that having it [the BAME Network] become a way of doing Race Equality Charter work was to be avoided as that could then become the Network’s identity, and we could lose members if they felt that they were being used in any way. We needed to be ‘by us and for us’ and saying these short words as a way of highlighting our self-determined activities was a way of protecting the Network.

It was like suddenly all our e-mail in boxes were flooded by emails about the Race Equality Charter and the new BAME Network. While they are separate, the coinciding of their launch and communications about them made us wary of each being seen as a continuation of each other. This issue required us to actively work towards setting boundaries quite early in the formation of the Network because we did not want the members being taken advantage of or exploited in any way, even inadvertently, to do REC work.

I remember being asked by colleagues who were leading a topical talk series to present at a Black Lives Matter panel. But I did not at that time feel that I had the relevant academic expertise to speak at the event. I found myself consulting members of the
BAME Network steering group to better understand how we felt about being asked to participate simply because we are academics of colour. In the end, I attended because I felt strongly that panels like this should be representative, but I expressed the point about assumptions being made during the proceedings as a form of self-protection, resistance, and also challenge.

At first, I stayed quiet as I watched what was unfolding but had to support my women colleagues. A large part of the BAME Network was about respecting women but there were situations where this was not being recognised. I witnessed several occasions when this individual was pushing ideas that could make women members feel unsafe, but he wanted to be the only person heard during deliberations, despite the women’s reasonable arguments. When they [the women] approached me, I had to step in to show my support for them, and their lived experiences.

The situation became fraught as the network member became more firmly entrenched in their own perspective with ideas that could inadvertently exclude gendered concerns. I felt a range of emotions from denial to anger, hurt, defiance, and fear. Through involvement in the work, I had opened myself up to an unexpected situation where I wavered between being diplomatic, and feeling compelled to challenge, and was in general shock given that I was operating on the assumption that intersectionality was an ethos and understanding that we all held.

We felt so alarmed at not being heard given that the connection between us all was equalities work, and we perhaps naively did not expect gender issues to arise. We were even more frustrated that we had to rely on men allies to support us as women of colour, but we considered is that not what allyship is for? We were not looking for men to fight our battles for us, on the contrary, we sought true allyship that amplified our voices rather than replacing them, otherwise the proposal would have gone ahead, and we would have had to boycott it on feminist grounds.
Findings and Discussion

The following section outlines the five themes that our research generated supported by an accompanying analysis of the coping techniques and strategies that we deployed to address racism and racial inequality in the HE environment:

Theme 1: Collectivism, solidarity, and belonging.

The findings highlighted that the collectivism, solidarity, and belonging experienced within the BAME Network meetings, to a degree, ameliorated some of the pain of ostracism and ‘othering’ from other groups within academe (see Crozier et al., 2019). Indeed, we consistently signed off our written messages and verbal conversations with one another with the statement ‘solidarity’, and our communication included expressing appreciation of each other’s labour. Furthermore, through our conversations, we emphasised that our efforts were visible to each other, a collective phenomenon used by minoritised people that hooks (1989) describes as ‘being heard’ and ‘being seen’, and Bhopal (2022) portrays as occurring within an ‘unspoken system of exclusion’. In turn, the acknowledgement that we were seeing each other resulted in a sense of collective belonging underneath the weight of the broader ensemble of political and socio-economic power relations (Bannerjii, 1995). The collective aspect of our involvement led to a sense of energy and wellbeing from occupying the same space as colleagues within the BAME Network who have shared lived experiences of racism.

The labour of solidarity building itself entailed an unconscious and unravelling process of sharing our testimonies and stories of our lived experience of racism through our interactions with each other. Indeed, our counter-storytelling, antithetical to White hegemonic discourses, empowered us to express our marginalised voices (Kim 2020; Watson, 2013). Involvement in social justice issues, however, is invariably reduced to those pursuing it as having a personal agenda. Instead, we contend that individual minoritised colleagues’ stories reveal a hidden transcript of lived experience that exposes structural racial biases, and offers the praxis required for transformation (see De Souca and Varco, 2021; Palmer et al., 2022). To this end, building professional relationships through sharing our stories with each other was important, and provided the knowledge, trust, and commonality of experience, which is essential for collective impact (Kania et al., 2022; Mourad and Middendorf, 2020). Attending guest speaker talks from BAME academics who specialise in the anti-racist field formed part of our solidarity and belonging, as such fora empowered us to disclose, in a safe space, our experiences and challenges.
**Theme 2: Knowledge expansion and critical consciousness.**

As we further immersed ourselves in the BAME Network activity, ‘critical consciousness’ emerged which broadly comprises marginalised people’s critical reflection of their historical, political, and socio-economic conditions (Diemer *et al*., 2015). Critical consciousness is an essential first step towards consciousness raising, which is imperative for counteracting oppressive systems (Freire, 1996). Our critical consciousness was propelled by the motivation to address perceived injustices collectively, and to take some form of action to counteract them. Our critical consciousness also arose from our thirst for knowledge expansion on issues of racism and inequality. Accordingly, we read anti-racist scholarly literature and unconsciously shared knowledge amongst us that we began to embody from our individual reading. Consequently, consciousness raising became epitomised in our personal and professional identities, our narrative, and our collective epistemological stance for challenging racist attitudes, practices, and institutionally racist structures. This knowledge led to us being more well-informed in various professional settings. Our consciousness raising occurred during our steering committee meetings, and permeated the BAME Network meetings, and manifested pragmatically as we worked to influence the narrative and actions of equality-oriented meetings, and other fora within the institution.

In our case, critical consciousness was additionally characterised by developing intellectual and experiential knowledge about the BAME population encompassing their socially stratified positions, and subjugated historical narratives (see Arday *et al*., 2020; Daffery, 2018). Immersing ourselves in the literature enabled us to recognise and meet ourselves in the materials, and comprehend our historicity as a collective (see Ahmed, 2017). That said, demonstrably dismantling inequitable social structures and producing actual social change has always been the central clarion call within critical consciousness scholarship (see Freire, 1996).

We were conscious that arriving at the position of tangible racial equality advances was a regular appeal from the BAME Network’s membership. The membership, however, were also aware of the challenges faced by minoritised employees involved in ant-racist work, and the pressures placed upon us in terms of being part of engendering efficacious change. These factors are coupled with the slow progress of equality charters in fundamentally altering inequities (Roberts, 2023). There was a necessity in the preliminary stages of our anti-racist work to create a climate conducive to raising awareness about the effects of racial inequality through constructive dialogue, yet challenge. Our consciousness raising in this respect entailed,
as Walker (1983) describes ‘caged birds breaking silence’ in opposition to those who are silent, or acquiescent, or in denial, about issues of racism.

**Theme 3: Disarming approaches and emotional labour.**

We deployed disarming approaches such as smiling and injecting humour to diffuse atmospheres, and ‘shifting’ depending on the environment we found ourselves in. The disarming strategy was unconscious and occurred when imparting contentious issues that were underpinned by challenge concerning required racial equality progress, and such messages not necessarily being palatable to the message recipients. Smiling, before official meetings proceeded, became a strategy for institutional passing and surface acting. Indeed, to smile is to appear willing not wilful, happy not unhappy, a friend not foe, familiar not strange, unthreatening not threatening (Ahmed, 2017; Szarota *et al.*, 2010). Humour has also been documented as a coping mechanism for people confronted with their minority status (Sliwa, 2011). For an oppressed person not to smile, or to show signs of not being happy, is to feed into the stereotypical tropes of being perceived as negative: “as angry, hostile, unhappy …” (Ahmed, 2009, p. 49), and/or being ungrateful for their lot in life, underpinned by an intrinsic colonial mindset from the onlooker (Boynton, 2020). Our humour was never inappropriate, and the subject matter concerned innocuous matters such as the weather, but was a way of relaxing the self, and others.

Shifting also emerged, which, in overall terms refers to adopting a persona within dominant spaces for the purposes of ‘fitting in’, which can include altering appearance, mannerisms, or speech (see Spates *et al.*, 2019), and then shifting to a more authentic and comfortable predisposition with familiar BAME colleagues. For us, the shifting process was characterised by us suppressing and masking some of our emotions about our lived experiences of racism. Such suppression inevitably involved the burden of meeting implicit standards for objectivity, or even neutrality inside professional settings. Indeed, shifting is dependent upon ‘emotional labour’ which Ahmed (2012) describes as essential for managing our visible bodies out of place, and to minimise the signs of our difference. Whilst emotional labour is draining for minoritised staff with seemingly less legitimate identities, it is useful for the purposes of relating to, and becoming accepted by, the dominant culture (Wharton, 2009). Through this relational process, we were able to connect with others, reify our academic identities, and develop a sense of purpose for pursuing anti-racist work, which in itself can be perceived as contentious.
Theme 4: Resistance through setting boundaries.

Since its inception, we remained resolute that the BAME Network membership must resist being appropriated by the university’s Race Equality Charter (REC) activity so as not to exploit the membership’s labour. We were motivated by not wishing to replicate the societal racial exploitation, oppression, and injustice within the BAME Network in terms of them labouring with REC work. Furthermore, we were cognisant of the consideration that involvement with the REC amongst the membership was potentially that of happenstance, rather than assumed expertise on issues of racial inequality within HEIs (see Henderson and Bhopal, 2022). Specifically, we did not want to propagate ‘tokenism’ of any of our members, a phenomenon that has the semblance of inclusivity, but is an exclusionary process that masks lack of progress through ironically publicising a minoritised employee’s involvement as proof of progress (Ruby, 2020). Indeed, Ahmed (2017) highlights that our own efforts to advance anti-racism can potentially be used by institutions as evidence that they have indeed been transformed. This point is especially relevant in the context of the REC where research has revealed that it has been a vehicle for incremental developments only, and has yet to contribute to structural and strategic change towards racial equality (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020; Campion and Clarke, 2021; Henderson and Bhopal, 2022). Herein lies the paradox of the fantasy of inclusion de facto being a technique for exclusion. Our objective here was to avoid feeding the fantasy of inclusion, as the latter would potentially entail being complicit in excluding anti-racist work that remains to be done.

Being clear about the BAME Network boundary in relation to the REC required skills of assertiveness and evolving communication processes of imparting the subtleties of our argument. Through this process, we engaged in inadvertent and evolving resistance. Our resistance manifested itself through tenaciously engaging in difficult conversations, which required setting boundaries. Such an endeavour is challenging in itself as it entails going against social expectations to fit in, fear of provoking conflict, and appearing as a critic of the institution, with the accompanying fear of undermining our own professional safety in terms of employment longevity. Challenging racism is also a complicated process because it could result in loss of face for the institution, and be perceived as undermining its leadership (Guerin, 2005). We coped through unconscious ‘habits of surviving’ (see Jackson and Sears, 1992) emanating from our lived experience of racialised economic and gender exploitation, and these habits included not reacting to inertia, self-control, and facilitating hope amongst us. In so doing, we collectively drew strength from each other, and articulated boundaries with care, in
a manner that that was not career limiting for us, or offensive to anyone, in the sense that not all White people are racist. Whiteness itself is a social construct (Kyriakides and Virdee, 2003), and we do not assume a variety of historical privileges and prerogatives endowed by legacies of racism to all White people (Howarth and Hook, 2005).

Theme 5: Intersectionality and BAME men allyship

Undertaking BAME Network activity was not a straightforward endeavour, and paradoxes emerged related to intersectional identities. This rendered the network as a site of struggle due to differing degrees of consciousness regarding interactive and mutually compounding oppressions. Specifically, BAME solidaristic values were compromised in instances where we encountered patriarchal attitudes within the network about proposed activities that lacked the recognition of intersectionality in a way that was gender blind. Within such workplace scenarios, the women authors articulated their gendered discriminatory experiences, which became a form of political labour of pushing back (Ahmed, 2009) due to the intransigence of the network member. We were only heard when we exhausted our attempts at verbal persuasion, and had no choice but to enlist a man ally (one of this articles’ authors), to support us to reinforce our points. Although these instances were sporadic, they highlighted issues of unconscious patriarchal beliefs and gendered assumptions, and the compounded marginalisation of minoritised women’s lived experiences and perspectives (Crenshaw, 1991). Joining the BAME network itself was a political, gendered, and relational process, and we had engaged in relational trust, accompanied by opening ourselves up to relational vulnerability, which felt betrayed by the undermining of our voices as women of colour (see Narayan, 1988).

As intersectional-oriented feminists, having to extend a request upon a man to support our points was not our preferred approach, however, the situation warranted it, and as hook (1998) outlines men can play productive parts in feminist praxis as ‘comrades in struggle’ by engaging in allyship against privilege and oppression. Within our request for allyship we were seeking strategic solidarity that maintained and amplified our voices, rather than asking to be ‘saved’, or for our voices to be dominated (see Smith and Johnson, 2020). Allies have played important roles in feminist social justice movements. Indeed, when they ‘actively’ speak or act against the injurious effects of patriarchy, this is when authentic allyship is demonstrated (Lemons, 2009). Our ally was inherently driven by not being complicit in historic and contemporary patriarchal oppression (Almassi, 2022), and intervened at strategic points to support our viewpoints, but moreover challenged the gender insensitivity. Indeed, allyship from men holds
significance when it is supported by purposeful actions, underpinned by addressing their implicit biases and embracing the complexity and discomfort of equalities work, that is, allyship as a verb (Bourke, 2020), rather than allyship as a noun, namely, a self-ascribed glossy badge of honour (Bruce and McKee, 2020).

Conclusion
In this article, we have outlined our collective autoethnographic study in which we have researched the coping techniques and strategies that we have deployed to pursue anti-racist work within UK academia. The novelty inherent within our research lies in its situatedness within our everyday work and experiences of leading a university BAME Network. Our findings highlight five themes (1) Collectivism, solidarity and belonging (2) Knowledge expansion and critical consciousness (3) Disarming approaches and emotional labour (4) Resistance through setting boundaries and (5) Intersectionality and BAME men allyship, as key approaches for taking forward anti-racism. We juxtapose our coping techniques and strategies in conversation with existing work including CRT and anti-racist literature, and thereby further nuance the ways in which minoritised women academics and their men allies persevere with anti-racist activity within universities. Through explicating our lived experience via storytelling, and its applicability to the analysis of racism using collective autoethnography - we write ourselves in - and reveal our voices, which are all too often muted, subjugated, or invisible within White hegemonic discourses. The value that we bring is to support and inspire other minoritised employees to develop self-efficacy, determination, and resolve when embarking on anti-racist leadership activities. We also hope that they can see themselves in our accounts, and that this fosters a sense of solidarity amongst those endeavouring to engender positive racial equality changes, within universities, and beyond.

REFERENCES


Chang, H. (2008), Autoethnography as method, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, CA.


Figueiredo, D. (2023), *Walking through the Leaky Academic Pipeline in STEM: Equity not Equality Needed for Women and underrepresented Minorities (URMs).*


Article ID and title: EDI-03-2023-0090, Coping techniques and strategies for pursuing anti-racism within academe: A collective autoethnographic account from minoritized academics in the UK.

Deadline for re-submission to Equality, diversity and inclusion: An international journal: 15th of August 2023

Dear Dr Yaz Iyabo Osho,

With this letter we wish to re-submit our revised manuscript for your consideration for publication in your esteemed journal *Equality, diversity and inclusion: An international journal.*

We would like to thank you and the two expert reviewers for all your knowledgeable, insightful, and encouraging comments. You have provided us with excellent feedback, and this reflection and our additional reading and writing has engendered a revision, which we believe and agree has improved the manuscript.

We have worked on the content, and endeavoured to take all recommendations for improvement into account, pushing our work forward on the topic of coping techniques and strategies of minoritised academics for pursuing anti-racism in academe. Accordingly, we have made improvements to the identified areas of the manuscript based on the comments provided, summarised in this covering letter. We also expand on the nature of these improvements in our more detailed responses to the reviewers’ comments in a separate document that expands on this letter.

Firstly, we have provided a succinct overview of racism in academia, and contextualise this more effectively thereafter within the introduction section, and agree that these additions have indeed enhanced the article contents.

Secondly, we have made more explicit reference to our usage of ideas drawn from Critical Race Theory within the article. Doing this has focussed the contribution of the article more precisely, and has enhanced the clarity of relevancy of the theoretical concepts that we deploy and develop within the article.

Thirdly, and following the insightful comments from the review team, we have explicated our usage of storytelling more effectively. Correspondingly, the article contains a more thorough explanation of our autoethnographic approach through storytelling, which previously was mentioned in only a cursory manner, but is now more explicit.

Fourthly, we have improved the methodology section through the incorporation of a flow chart diagram (Diagram 1) outlining our approach towards the data analysis, and a more detailed discussion about the advantages and limitations of adopting an autoethnographic approach to aid an exposition of our reflexivity in undertaking the research and writing the article.

http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/edi
Finally, as recommended, we have incorporated more direct quotations from the authors to enhance the effectiveness of the autoethnographic nature of the article. In this way, we ‘write ourselves in’ more effectively into the collective autoethnographic piece.

Please see our more detailed responses regarding the revisions in the ‘final response to reviewers’ document, which outlines the amendments that we have made to the manuscript.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely,
Anonymous to aid review process.
Article ID and title: EDI-03-2023-0090, Coping techniques and strategies for pursuing anti-racism within academe: A collective autoethnographic account from minoritized academics in the UK.

Deadline for re-submission to Equality, diversity and inclusion: An international journal: 15th of August 2023

RESPONSES TO REVIEWERS’ COMMENTS AND RESPONSES:

Reviewer 1: Comments and Responses

Overall Comments: Recommendation: Accept
Exciting and well-presented research. Looking forward to see how this methodology develops further.

Additional Questions:

Question and Comment 1.1
Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?:
Yes. The methodologies were innovative and well presented. The authors evidenced the advantages of expounding upon previous forms of data analysis and were self-critical simultaneously.

Reply 1.1
Thank you kindly for these words of encouragement.

Question and Comment 1.2
Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?:
Yes. Very thorough and well supported.

Reply 1.2
Thank you for this positive feedback.

Question and Comment 1.3
Methodology: Is the paper’s argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?:
Yes. Very well designed. Arguments were well presented and the data collection was descriptive.
Reply 1.3
Thank you kindly for this useful feedback.

Question and Comment 1.4
Results: Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?:

Yes. Very thoroughly and impressively. The through line from start to finish was impressive.

Reply 1.4
Thank you kindly for this positive feedback.

Question and Comment 1.5
Implications for research, practice and/or society: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for research, practice and/or society? Does the paper bridge the gap between theory and practice? How can the research be used in practice (economic and commercial impact), in teaching, to influence public policy, in research (contributing to the body of knowledge)? What is the impact upon society (influencing public attitudes, affecting quality of life)? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?:

Yes. The paper shows promise in both solidarity building and the importance of networking with collective work towards social change.

Reply 1.5
Thank you for this important and very helpful observation about working collectively towards social change.

Question and Comment 1.6
Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal’s readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.:

Yes, extensively so. No stone was left uncovered and the tone was appropriate for the various ways this methodology could be used.

Reply 1.6
Thank you for these very helpful and positive comments.
Reviewer 2: Comments and Responses
Overall Comments: Recommendation: Minor Revision

Comment 2.1
Originality: Does the paper contain new and significant information adequate to justify publication?:

This is an interesting topical article which meets the call for papers. The abstract is to the point it signposts the reader clearly by describing the main purpose and objectives of the article. The aim of the research is explicit throughout the journal which provides a clear structure and narrative. The purpose is again is identified in the body and findings “the coping strategies used to counteract racism in the academy”. there is a significant gap in research on the emotional labour of ethnically minoritised staff involved in the race equality charter mark.

Reply 2.1
Thank you kindly for these words of encouragement.

Comment 2.2
Relationship to Literature: Does the paper demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored?:

The authors have set out the research context in page 2-3 however this paragraph could be replaced with a succinct overview of racism in academia. “Numerous evidence highlights that BAME populations to the present day, are subjected to racial discrimination, marginalisation, and inequalities, compared to White counterparts in many aspects of UK life including education, employment, health, criminal justice, and unemployment levels (Cole, 2022; Keir, 2018; Meer, 2018; Miller, 2020)”. See Arday, J. (2021) Fighting the tide: Understanding the difficulties facing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Doctoral Students’ pursuing a career in Academia, Educational Philosophy and Theory, 53 (10), pp. 972-979, DOI: 10.1080/00131857.2020.1777640.

Recent discourses and social commentaries have begun to explore and reveal the depth and extent to which institutional racism pervades within HE and its continual systematic disadvantaging of BAME individuals (Arday & Mirza, 2018; Rollock, 2016; Law, 2017) Similarly, on page 3 you mention the unequal outcomes for BAME academics, it may be useful to contextualise this in more detail, for example the Black and white awarding gap which has been in existence for over 25 years, the leaky pipeline to post graduate study and bias in recruitment and selection strategies and policies. It would of been helpful to discuss the limitations of the RECM see Campion, K & Clark, K. (2022) Revitalising race equality policy? Assessing the impact of the Race Equality Charter mark for British universities, Race Ethnicity and Education, 25 (1), pp.18-37, DOI: 10.1080/13613324.2021.1924133 & Henderson, H & Bhopal, K (2022) Narratives of academic staff involvement in Athena

Reply 2.2
Thank you for these helpful and insightful observations. We have reworked this section to incorporate a succinct review of racism in academia, through examining the literature that you have recommended, and this can be found on pages 3 and 4 of the revised manuscript. Accordingly, we have replaced the previous paragraph which has been deleted, and we concur that this has enhanced the introduction section.

Furthermore, we have contextualised the previous section on unequal outcomes for BAME academics and students more effectively using the literature that you have recommended. Accordingly, we have incorporated detail about the Black and White awarding gap, and made reference to the ‘leaky pipeline’, which can be found on page 4 of the revised manuscript, and agree that this has indeed strengthened this section of the article. Regarding the limitations of the Race Equality Charter Mark, we have incorporated this addition which you can find under Theme 4 on page 19 in the findings section.

Comment 2.3
Methodology: Is the paper's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Has the research or equivalent intellectual work on which the paper is based been well designed? Are the methods employed appropriate?:

The methods described in the paper are clear and relevant to the research question. It may have been useful to outline the authors’ ethnicities as this is unclear in the body of the journal. One suggestion to enhance the data analysis section would be to incorporate critical race theory as a framework to analyse the data. Whilst you have justified the use of autoethnography its use in anti-racist work could be further made explicit for example using storytelling is a powerful method to highlight ways of counteracting racism in the academy. See Kim, H.J. (2020) ‘Where are you from? Your English is so good’: a Korean female scholar's autoethnography of academic imperialism in U.S. higher education, International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 33 (5), pp. 491-507, DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2019.1681551 The findings are outlined using headings and the authors have described the methodological approach and data collection methods including limitations of autoethnographic research.

Reply 2.3
Thank you for this helpful comments. We have now made more explicit reference to Critical Race Theory at the outset of the article on page 2 of the revised manuscript within the ‘purpose’ section, which was always the framework that we had drawn from, as well as extant anti-racist literature. Doing this has focussed the contribution of the article more precisely, and has enhanced the clarity of relevancy of the concepts that we deploy and develop within the article. In addition, we have produced a more explicit explanation of our autoethnographic approach through storytelling, which previously was mentioned in a
cursory way rather than being explicit, which is now more detailed, and can be found on pages 1, 2, 7, 10, 12 and 21 of the revised manuscript.

Regarding making reference to the ethnicities of the authors in the article, we thank you for this comment, however, we have not described ourselves by our specific ethnicities or historical lineages because we contend that this act would form a process of minoritisation of ourselves, which is the notion that we are challenging in the article (see Massoud, 2022). In relation to our positionality though, and in support of your helpful comment, the article does highlight more clearly that we are academics of colour who have leadership roles in the BAME Network, and therefore we deem that this is sufficient in informing the readership that we are BAME employees who have lived experience of racism. We do hope that this is acceptable.

**Comment 2.4**

**Results:** Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper?:

The conclusions are summarised in detail and relate to the abstract. The approach to data analysis has been outlined in the table, this could have been included in a flow chart diagram. The authors have briefly mentioned the limitations of autoethnography this could be explained further, for example a summary of the advantages and disadvantages of this method would be helpful. See Méndez, M. (2013). Autoethnography as a research method: Advantages, limitations and criticisms. Colombian applied linguistics journal, 15 (2), pp. 279-287

**Reply 2.4**

Thank you kindly for this comment. We have reworked our methodology section to include a flow chart diagram which has replaced Table 1. Specifically, Diagram 1 outlines our approach to data analysis, which can be found on page 9 of the revised manuscript. We have also summarised the advantages and disadvantages of the autoethnographic method as requested on page 7 and 8 of the revised manuscript, and agree that these inclusions have improved the methodology section of the article through demonstrating our reflexivity.

**Comment 2.5**

Implications for research, practice and/or society: Does the paper identify clearly any implications for research, practice and/or society? Does the paper bridge the gap between theory and practice? How can the research be used in practice (economic and commercial impact), in teaching, to influence public policy, in research (contributing to the body of knowledge)? What is the impact upon society (influencing public attitudes, affecting quality of life)? Are these implications consistent with the findings and conclusions of the paper?:

The findings have potential implications for the development of how RECM teams are selected and how they work together. The paper bridges the gap in research as there is limited research on the strategies adopted by BAME staff working in race equity work.
Reply 2.5.
Thank you very much for this very positive feedback about the implications for research, practice, and/or society, and the value inherent in the article.

Comment 2.6
Quality of Communication: Does the paper clearly express its case, measured against the technical language of the field and the expected knowledge of the journal's readership? Has attention been paid to the clarity of expression and readability, such as sentence structure, jargon use, acronyms, etc.:

The article is well structured with a clear overarching research aim and objectives. I would have liked to have seen more direct quotations from the authors as in part the autoethnographic stance could be made stronger in the body of the journal.

Reply 2.6.
Thank you for this insightful comment, we have indeed incorporated more direct quotations from the respective authors to enhance the autoethnographic stance that we have adopted in the production of the research study, and thereby ‘write ourselves in’ more clearly. Our additional quotations can be found in Table 2 on pages 12-15 of the revised manuscript.

Please note the feedback that we have received from Reviewer 2 led to us examining the literature below and incorporating the arguments into the manuscript, accompanied by associated citations and references in the manuscript:


Below is the material that we have cited in this letter:
Our reference:


Thank you to both reviewers for your helpful and constructive feedback and comments.