

Racist bullying of BAME (Black and Asian Minority Ethnic) women within police services in England: Race, gender and police culture

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Abstract

This article examines the hidden and under-researched area of bullying and harassment of Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) women in the police service in England. It discusses the impact of a historical policy failure to acknowledge the importance of intersectionality in matters of diversity and the continuing struggle between race and gender. This contributes to the ‘invisibility and sexualization’ of BAME women in policing. In doing so, it makes BAME women susceptible to unique tactics of bullying and harassment that contribute to their impeded progression compared with their White counterparts. These unique tactics are enhanced by the police organization and enforced by police culture. The article concludes that the bullying and harassment of BAME women are underpinned by issues of patriarchy and racism that are difficult to challenge in a bureaucratic and hierarchical organization like the police.

Keywords

Bullying, harassment, BAME women, police, race, gender

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Introduction

The voices of Black and Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME) women working in police services in England have been marginalized in much of the existing debate about diversity, race and policing. Their voices need to be heard and acknowledged in fostering their own empowerment within the intersecting oppressions of race and gender and also for their social standing. This article emphasizes the importance of capturing and highlighting the experiences and stories of BAME women who have experienced bullying, harassment and discrimination in the workplace in some form or other. Moreover, the article focuses on understanding the day-to-day struggles of BAME women within police services in England in how they deal with everyday unfair treatment, racism and sexism at work. It is important to understand their coping mechanisms and survival strategies within the institutional setup. The article is based on a study that focuses on whether police culture acts as a facilitator for the bullying and harassment of BAME women

and explores whether there is an underlying discourse as to why BAME women suffer bullying and harassment within police services in England. The study also aims to identify the nature of this discourse and how it has impacted on the progression of BAME women in policing.

Waddington (2009) identified that there is very little comparative research on Black and White men and women police officers in police services in England. Mirza and Sheridan (2003) contends that gender is viewed as White issue, whereas it is taken for granted that race is viewed as Black male issue. BAME women appear to fall into the cracks between the two. They are often invisible, occupying a blind spot in mainstream policy and research studies

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that talk about women on the one hand, and minority ethnic groups on the other hand. There is an apparent gap between policy and legislation, and between experience and practice. At the heart of this gap is the lived experience of BAME women.

Manifestation of bullying on women in the police

This article argues that failure to grasp the issue of bullying and harassment of BAME women within police services in England is due to lack of effective leadership, driven by a ‘crisis management’ culture around issues of race and gender (Rollock, 2009). Furthermore, the situation is compounded by a paucity of research in this area, which contributes to intensifying the perceived and actual invisibility of BAME women within policing. In this section, a number of case examples are discussed to highlight the reality and manifestations of bullying and harassment of women in the police services in England.

A watershed case highlighting the bullying and harassment of women police officers in the UK was that of the former Assistant Chief Constable Alison Halford of Merseyside Police in 1992 (*Halford v the United Kingdom*, 1997). In 1992, Halford was the highest-ranking woman officer in the police services in England. However, she failed to gain promotion nine times between 1987 and 1990, and in 1990 made a complaint to the Equal Opportunities Commission stating that she was a victim of workplace discrimination. Following her complaint, Halford, along with a number of her colleagues, attended a function at the home of a businessman. At the function, Halford and her colleagues drank heavily, and she allegedly undertook a lifesaving demonstration in the swimming pool, in her underwear. The incident was investigated internally, and Halford and her colleagues were reprimanded (*Halford v the United Kingdom*, 1997). However, the incident was leaked to the national press, and Halford faced disciplinary proceedings (which her male colleagues were not subjected to) and was later suspended from work, her phone was bugged and her character smeared in the national press. The case exposed the techniques used to bully and harass women who complained about their discriminatory treatment.

The issue of bullying and the intersectionality of race and gender came to public prominence as a result of the outcome of a high-profile case involving the Metropolitan Police (*Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis v Ms C Howard*, 2014). PC Carol Howard, a Black woman firearms officer in the Metropolitan Police, Diplomatic Protection Group of the Special Operations Directorate, brought a case of race and sex discrimination before an employment tribunal. Howard claimed that she was singled out and targeted for nearly a year by her line manager who

subjected her to a course of interventions that were detrimental to her. In addition, an internal report designed to investigate these allegations was deliberately rewritten prior to the employment tribunal hearing. She was also victimized by her employer who sought to deflect negative press coverage by releasing information about her.

PC Howard won her case for race, sex discrimination and victimization. The case was reported widely in the British media. However, it is the outcome of the case that is of interest in this study. First, PC Howard’s victory resulted in a number of negative stories about her being printed in the press (Lusher, 2014). These stories were viewed by the employment tribunal as an attempt to deflect attention and critics from the case, and to portray PC Howard in a negative light (PC Howard Employment Tribunal Judgement, 2014). The tribunal found that PC Howard had been subjected to ‘vindictive . . . spiteful, insulting, malicious and oppressive treatment’ by the Metropolitan Police. The tribunal also found that the Metropolitan Police had a policy of removing findings of discrimination from internal grievance proceedings. The tribunal recommended that the Metropolitan Police undertake an independent review of its internal grievance procedure, known as ‘Fairness at Work’, and re-examine the handling of all complaints since 2009. As a result of the case, the Equality and Human Rights Commission announced (2014) under Section 20 of the Equality Act (2006) that it would investigate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization of employees by the Metropolitan Police Service.

The high-profile case of former top Asian woman police officer Nusrit Mehtab of Scotland Yard came to public attention when she made a racism claim against the Metropolitan Police (Camber, 2020). Superintendent Mehtab was the most senior woman minority ethnic officer in the Metropolitan Police. She joined the force in 1988 and worked in everything from undercover operations to counter-terrorism. After a long career, Mehtab quit the force in January 2020, complaining of a ‘toxic workplace’ with sexism and institutional racism. Mehtab claimed that she was told to keep quiet after a swastika was written in biro on the walls of her police station in Edmonton, North London, by someone within the station. The former police officer, who is of Pakistani origin, believes she was forced to patrol alone because of her race. She also claims that her White male colleagues refused to talk to or sit next to her and described how senior White women officers ‘huddled together like Mean Girls’. She added: ‘In my case, the white male officers did not know how to initiate me. They put their minds to it and set a trap . . . they left a vibrator in my locker and congregated to watch me open my locker, thrilled with their ingenuity and sniggering. That was the openly misogynistic culture in the police’. Mehtab resigned

after 32 years having hit a 'glass ceiling', saying she would have achieved more seniority 'was it not for the institutional racism'. However, Scotland Yard is vigorously contesting the legal action brought by Nusrit Mehtab who is now bringing a claim against the Metropolitan Police at the Central London Employment Tribunal claiming constructive dismissal, race, sex and religious discrimination, harassment and victimization (Camber, 2020).

Research by Gittens (2004) into the experiences of BAME women police officers and staff in England and Wales highlighted that policing is no different from any other public service, in that it is resistant to change. Gittens argues that the continued failure of police services to support BAME women is indicative of an organization that mismanages its resources by failing to recognize the importance of its staff. This has the effect of limiting the organization's capacity and success as a service provider and employer of choice. Gittens advocates that change must be brought by BAME women themselves. In an interview with the BBC, Shabnam Chaudhri, one of the Metropolitan Police's most senior woman Asian officers (now retired), revealed that she was unfairly treated throughout her career because of her ethnicity (My 30-year struggle with racism at the Metropolitan Police, 2020). Her experience highlights concerns about the treatment of BAME officers in the UK that have persisted for years.

Among BAME women there is an overwhelming sense of being overlooked. They are not sufficiently encouraged to excel and develop in their careers by their organization and they are also judged as being less capable than other staff. Puwar (2004), contends that for BAME women, 'you have to work twice as hard to keep up, to be seen... because they don't see it. You have to prove yourself all the time'. Furthermore, because it is not standard practice to see their full range of skills and abilities, BAME women are less likely to be selected for high-profile portfolios. As such, the 'condescending manner' in which BAME women are treated means that they are more likely to be entrusted with 'tedious work' than with more challenging roles. Assumed to be lacking or not quite up to positions that carry weight, their competencies are side-lined. Interestingly, even if BAME women are in senior or managerial roles they can still be told they do not quite belong by, for instance, 'being left out of decision making' and by 'conversations' that circulate exclusively between men (Puwar, 2004).

Police culture and race

The push for race equality as a result of the MacPherson Inquiry (MacPherson, 1999) into the death of Stephen Lawrence, was both a significant political/policy driver and a catalyst for change, and resulted in policy shifts in the recruitment and retention of BAME police officers and

staff in the police services. Nearly two decades later, there is still evidence in the UK of both an explicit targeting policy and ingrained police practices that amount to 'institutional racism' (Phillips and Bowling, 2017). The crucial source of police prejudice is societal racism, which places minority ethnic groups disproportionately in the least privileged and powerful social strata. Interactions between minority ethnic groups and the police are frequent because of their street lifestyles which is where the police focus their attention (Reiner, 2019). This provides an invaluable insight into critical features of police culture such as resistance and hostility to change, as evidenced through occupational and organizational aspects of police culture (Reiner, 2010). The significance of the definition and recognition of institutional racism, especially in policing, is important because it changed the previous publicly held view established by Lord Scarman that racism in policing was not institutional, in what has since been described by Bowling and Phillips (2002) as the 'bad apple' theory. In this respect, the organization, its policies and procedures, witting and unwitting, were now seen as conduits for discrimination.

Rowe (2012) argues that following the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the MacPherson Inquiry (MacPherson, 1999), reform aimed at diversifying police services in England through the inclusion of minority ethnic officers was deemed necessary. However, Rowe (2012) stresses that recruitment of minority ethnic officers appears to be the result of pragmatic factors, whereby the integration of BAME officers into police services in England has never been fully realized. Although acknowledging the operational advantages of recruiting minority ethnic officers, the Metropolitan Police Authority rarely took measures to eliminate race discrimination within the police and diversity policies did not help mend relations between the police and minority communities (Rowe, 2012). Outside the police, 'accusations that minority officers are "coconuts" (black on the outside, white on the inside) might, in part, be testament to the sorry state of police relations with minority communities' (Rowe, 2012: 38). Cockroft (2013) argues that it is difficult to draw clear conclusions from links between police culture and racism on the basis that racism is multifaceted. Graef (1989) and Skolnick (1994) also contend that the multifaceted nature of racism means that it is harder for police officers to explain racism, on account of the fact that they often deny 'allegations' of racial bias by claiming that they are merely telling the truth about race issues (Cockroft, 2013).

Reiner (2019) identifies that BAME people are seen as 'police property' in terms of being a group with little societal status, who are viewed by the dominant societal groups as problematic. Reiner articulates rather controversially that the police contend that a large proportion of the public

give them a ‘mandate’ to deal in a certain way with BAME groups as they do with other problematic groups such as sex workers, deviant youth and homeless people. Therefore, when members of BAME communities require assistance from the police, they are viewed negatively. However, it is the issue of stereotyping of minority ethnic groups that is most associated with what is described as ‘canteen culture’ within the police. In their seminal work, DJ Smith and Gray (1983) identified that, ‘racial prejudice and racialist talk [...] pervasive [...] excepted, accepted and even fashionable’ (cited in Bowling and Philips 2002: 158). DJ Smith and Gray’s work was validated by that of Holdaway in which he observed the use of discriminatory terms of ‘nig-nog, spade, monkey and nigger’ (Holdaway and Baron 1997: 78) to describe those from BAME backgrounds; Holdaway articulated that use of these terms was commonplace. Cain (1973) established that diverse stereotypes were made for different racial groups, with Asians viewed as liars and illegal immigrants, whereas Black people were viewed as violent and suspicious (Reiner 2010).

In his examination of race within the police, Holdaway (2009) focused on the National Black Police Association (NBPA). He established that in organizing themselves as a group, the NBPA were asserting their own cultural identity through which they challenged policies and practices. This was most evident in their submission to the Macpherson Inquiry in which they identified the impact of police culture on BAME staff (see later in this article). In particular, Holdaway and O’Neil (2004) identified that social events organized by the NBPA took into consideration the religious and cultural needs of their members. One major aspect of this was the fact that the non-consumption of alcohol by Muslim officers and staff seemed acceptable. As such, NBPA-organized events did not mirror mainstream police events and their associated ‘rowdiness’, which was identified by Waddington (1999). The NBPA created a safe space, free from racist banter and an expectation to drink alcohol. The consumption of alcohol and the associated peer pressure is particularly problematic for Muslim officers who chose to observe the tenet of their Islamic faith.

Banton (1964), Rowe (2004) and Crank (1998) assert that within the UK and USA, the literature on policing accepts political tensions around the inclusion of BAME people in the police and the racial challenges this can present within policing. There can be no doubt that an organization’s culture plays a significant part in how women are integrated into or excluded from the workforce and at what level. Simpson and Altman’s (2000) research suggests that there is little inequality at lower levels, thus limiting the ability of women to achieve the next level within such a culture. It was also implied that the oppressive nature of

these cultures contributes to the minority status of women within such organizations.

Cockroft (2013) contends that employing BAME officers in the police has resulted in them being the victims of race discrimination within the organization. Banton (1964) identified that in the USA, Black police officers were stereotyped as lazy. The reality for BAME officers in the UK is that they have received perceived and actual disproportionate treatment, which has led to a number of official inquiries (Commission for Racial Equality, 2005; Morris, 2004). Furthermore, internal research by the Metropolitan Police in 2004 (Ghaffur, 2004) highlights the barriers BAME officers face in trying to progress within the organization. Ghaffur (2004) later identified this as a combination of discrimination, biased appraisals and informal appraisals, the features of which it can be argued utilized elements of police culture such as solidarity, isolation and suspicion (Cockroft, 2013; Reiner, 2019) to restrict the progress of BAME officers.

Police culture and gender

How an organization interprets gender can have a significant influence upon its culture. Rutherford (2001) suggests that organizations are either gender aware or gender unaware. Where organizations are gender aware, they recognize the unique contributions from both genders and the language and actions of people within such an organization differ from those in organizations that are gender unaware. Rutherford (2001: 376) also argues that gender unaware organizations are those which are paternalistic and male dominant, and tend to ‘mask gender inequality and (is) exclusionary to women’. This links to the style and language adopted by managers, and Rutherford continues that in order for women to be successful, organizations need to adopt a culture that ‘nurtures women in their careers’ (2001: 376), a view shared by Cortis and Cassar (2005). Rutherford further suggests that language can be divided into three exclusionary categories—military language, sports language and sexual language—none of which is women orientated. As a result, social exchanges prior to and during business meetings may well exclude women, particularly if they are in the minority, by focusing on these three areas.

It is only relatively recently that gender issues and comparative gender perspectives in policing have become the subject of academic research in policing following work carried out by leading academics such as Brown (2000), Heidensohn (1992), Silvestri (2003) and Westmarland (2001). The structure of the police as an organization with authority to use means of coercion has created a masculine and macho police culture. Fielding (1994) argues that this situation has arisen as a result of what he terms ‘hegemonic

masculinity', which denotes the manner in which masculinity is seen as an integral feature of the 'canteen culture'. The use of force and the centuries-old male domination in the profession created obstacles for women who wish to join the police force (Martin 1996). In particular, the uniformed ranks of police services were traditionally open only to men, and women's roles, abilities and values are undermined. Stereotypical beliefs about gender characteristics have also influenced gender inequality within the police force. It is perceived that men are rational, whereas women are emotional, and men are more capable of performing difficult or risky tasks. The supremacy of men deserves respect, women are incapable of giving orders. Such gender-specific stereotypes have paved the way for a patriarchal culture, which causes women to refrain from joining certain professions, including the police (Barak, 2010).

If we briefly look into the history of police forces, the first recruitment of women into the police service dates back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the United States, the first woman was recruited into the police service in 1845. Her duty was the supervision of a women's penitentiary. Similarly, in Canada, the first women joined the police in 1900 and their duties were to supervise detention institutions and prevent juvenile crime. Women officers were assigned to take care of abandoned children, female youth and sex workers. In Europe, England was the first country to recruit women police officers in 1905. Sweden, Norway and Denmark followed by 1914. Women often were recruited to fight prostitution and crime by juveniles and women. By 1927, twenty countries had women in their police services (Spasic, 2011). During the 1950s, women were recruited into the police in greater numbers within the UK. Significant progress was made in the United States and the UK during the 1970s regarding the recruitment of women into the police, thanks to social movements that asked for greater rights and equality for women and for minority ethnic groups. The adoption of laws on equality and non-discrimination on the basis of race and gender forced the authorities to make police forces more inclusive. In the West, the feminist movement contributed to raising awareness of discriminatory conduct, and the implementation of equal opportunity policies has helped women to secure greater power for themselves.

As this brief history shows, although women have managed to enter the police services, they still face numerous challenges regarding their promotion and retention within the police because traditional male police culture encourages the dominance of men. It is argued that the introduction of equal opportunity legislation may trigger a resistance to women police officers among men police officers. Police culture has been traditionally seen as a bastion of male attitudes and behaviours (Skolnick, 1994)

and it is acknowledged that policing has historically been based on male values (Silvestri, 2007). The impact of this for Westmarland (2008) is that limitations are placed on the police in providing equitable services to women members of the public and to women employees.

Masculinity plays a crucial role in the occupational culture of the police and has a damaging effect on the treatment of women officers and members of the public. Although there are currently nine women chief constables in the UK (Home Office, 2020), there are no BAME chief constables. Cockroft (2013) postulates that Fielding's (1994) identification of hegemonic masculinity is a result of cultural values of aggression, physical action, competitiveness and preoccupation. The 'imagery of conflict exaggerated heterosexual orientation and rigid in group or group distinctions and that these combine to create a masculine cultural milieu that denigrates values and qualities associated with the female gender' (Fielding, 1994: 47). This point was reinforced by Holdaway and Parker (1998) who argued that a woman's career path would be broken by marriage and children and as such, organizations see little investment in the employment and promotion of women. This situation is the result of deeply rooted beliefs that the domestic responsibilities of women as mothers, wives and carers mean that they lack commitment to their career and the organization (Oakley, 1999). This entrenches and confirms male stereotypical attitudes towards women. Introduction of the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act led to an increase in applications to be women police officers. However, it did not result in police forces recognizing that they needed to better integrate women into the workforce (Silvestri, 2007).

Graef (1989) identified women police officers being described in a derogatory manner; women who do not engage in sexual relations with male colleagues are labelled as 'lesbos' and those that do are classed as 'relief bicycles'. Bryant (1985) argues that where women officers demonstrate their strength to their male peers, this contradicts entrenched views of acceptable female behaviour. This has led J Young (1991) to conclude that the dominance of masculinity within policing culture results in women struggling to be accepted as 'real officers' and that any subsequent success on the part of women officers will be at the expense of family commitments.

A major feature of the working life of women police officers is an 'exaggerated concern over sexuality by male officers' (Cockroft, 2013). One feature of research on gender in policing is the analysis of harassment, restrictions on promotion and role restrictions, which create a feeling of marginalization, increased pressure around performance and a lack of encouragement compared with their male counterparts (Cockroft 2013). Westmarland (2017) stresses that the gendered female body is seen to have competencies

around the treatment of women victims of physical and sexual assaults because women officers can supposedly empathize with victims and inspect injuries; this makes women officers more versatile as ‘body experts’ in the cases of such violations. On the other hand, this may categorize women in ways that restrict their potential role in policing and their career prospects. Westmarland (2017) also argued that women can be martial arts experts or body builders, but police culture tends to view men as having superior ways of using their weight and displaying endurance. Bodies are the determinant of competence, not only where physical force is actually required, such as in fights and struggles where police have to put ‘hands on’ suspects to make an arrest, but also in a myriad of other situations.

This article argues that organizational police culture replicates and reinforces existing forms of oppression on BAME women in the police services in England. However, the ingrained nature of police culture is unable to be effectively dismantled or challenged by a police leadership, which it is argued, is inherently weak and ‘knee jerk’ when it comes to issues of equality. The so-called crisis management mentality has become exacerbated in the aftermath of the Macpherson Inquiry into the death of Steven Lawrence in 1999. The impact of the inquiry was to develop equality-proofed policies. Thus, BAME women in the police are vulnerable to being undermined and subjected to a backlash within diverse parts of the organizational policing structure.

Methodology

This study is underpinned by a qualitative methods approach supported by quantitative analysis into the published figures. This is an effective way to gather supporting evidence to address the research questions. As such, the following data collection methods were used: (a) in-depth interviews; (b) secondary sources; (c) published literature; and (d) illustrative cases. In addition, quantitative analysis into relevant data available in the public domain and through freedom of information (FOI) requests was also carried out. The variety of data collection methods supported triangulation, resulting in a stronger research design and more valid and reliable research findings. However, for reasons of length, the article focuses only on qualitative data analysis and findings. As part of the study, interview questions were developed aimed at BAME women (both officers and staff) working within police services in England. All participants identified themselves as victims of workplace bullying. Following successful presentation of the research proposal to the executive committee of the NBPA, access to participants was negotiated with active support from NBPA who disseminated information about the research to all BAME women police officers and staff

in all 43 forces. It was agreed with the president of the NBPA that their involvement would stop at this stage, and participants were requested to contact the researcher directly and confidentially. Protecting the anonymity of participants was the utmost priority. Even though providing a brief introduction for each participant is a popular practice in conducting qualitative interviews, the researcher made deliberate attempts not to disclose any such information due to sensitive nature of the research.

In total, 13 serving police officers and civilian staff were interviewed: nine were police officers, one was a police community support officer (PCSO), two were police staff and one was a former police officer. Participants were from five police forces, the Metropolitan Police, Bedfordshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Hertfordshire. In terms of ethnicity, one participant identified as Chinese, one as Sikh, seven as Black British and four as Asian British. The age range of the participants varied from 25 to 57 years, with nine participants in their late 30s and early 40s. Length of service varied from 2 to 22 years with at least six participants having over 10 years of service experience. Interviewees were able to provide a very clear understanding of the reality of race and gender within policing and the operation of police culture. The diverse experience of these police officers and staff was made very stark during the interview process. This provided a rich understanding of the complexities behind their perceived impeded progression.

Race, gender and sexuality

One of the recurring themes to emerge from analysis of the interview transcripts was that the participants believed that the unfair treatment they had to endure was due to stereotypical perceptions by their colleagues and peers towards them. It is articulated here that this is related to issues of racial prejudice, which stem from stereotypes and racism. What is most interesting is the impact that this had on co-workers and members of the public. Indicative examples are that of a woman sergeant with more than 20 years of experience from an urban police force and a senior civilian police staff:

I was doing a lot of hands on work, warrants and arrests. We would use many different stations. As in many stations they do not know me, when I entered the station with a prisoner they asked the prisoner what have you brought in who have you arrested. They would be directly speaking to the prisoner. If I wasn't known and I was dressed smartly then I would be a solicitor. Then, they warned me to sit down since solicitors are not allowed to walk around. If I am in plain clothes... (Interviewee B)

I hold a senior civilian post within [...], having to travel around the country delivering training sessions to both officers and staff in various different forces. It happened more than once when I was deemed to be an admin girl... whilst reporting to the reception of my training venues... probably because of my attire and appearance (Interviewee K)

Interviewees B and K both revealed examples of extreme stereotypes they had encountered when on duty. They articulated that this was dependent on their appearance and the clothes they wore. Although this example is disturbing, in terms of the stereotype, the reactions of the police officers' co-workers are heartening and also exposed them to the reality of racism within the police, such that they recognize that these behaviours should be challenged.

My team was so incensed. These were white guys that I was working with. They said 'Do you want us to have a word?' and I said 'no', cause it was everywhere. (Interviewee B)

In attempting to make sense of the incident, Interviewee B made a rather resigned statement that conveyed a sense of exasperation and is also a recognition that little could be done to change the state of affairs because the attitudes and stereotypes were so well engrained within police culture.

It's endemic throughout the organization... how we are seen. And you know, it doesn't matter how you dress as you will fit into one of their stereotypes. They will fit you into one. So if you are not a solicitor cause you're smartly dressed, clearly then you will be the prisoner as you are not so smartly dressed or as you are standing along a white person who could never be the prisoner. (Interviewee B)

I can put it under the heading of culture. Yep. It's not just because I am police staff but the way I dressed... with their derogatory comments and even, just by the comments, they made. (Interviewee G)

Stereotyping was an issue for BAME women in the police, but it was also combined with a high degree of mockery and undermining of their position of authority in an organized and calculated way. Waddington (1999, 2008) asserted that police culture is such that it 'tolerates corruption' in which other team members are in effect co-opted to intimidate BAME staff, this is especially the case with junior staff. Interviewee H, at the time an acting inspector with responsibility for custody, and Interviewee M, a recently promoted police staff member, articulate this well.

I was an acting inspector. I was posted to work in custody as an acting inspector and there was a sergeant who was in a custody

suite who obviously I outranked. They took it very badly that I am Black and female and obviously look much younger than my age. I'm 40 but at the time I looked much, much younger [...] and basically every time I walked into the custody suite, he would make sarcastic comments which I ignored as I thought he is obviously jealous of the fact that I outrank him. (Interviewee H)

I did a postgraduate diploma. So I looked at myself, I was a very confident person. But when I went there after my promotion they made me feel very inferior as if I don't belong there. They always used to task me with mundane jobs whilst my white colleagues in the same rank would be considered for more serious operations. (Interviewee M)

The significant feature of the experience of the above two interviewees is that bullying and harassment are underpinned by the fact that they were promoted and, in the case of Interviewee H, as a consequence outranked the individual who bullied and harassed her, who in fact had a greater length of service than she did. This was not just an issue for police officers, it was also an issue for police staff. However, it is important to recognize that these subtle forms of racism and stereotyping continue within the police. This was best articulated by Interviewee B, she highlighted two words about the experience of BAME women in the police, that they were 'invisible' and that as a consequence, she felt that they were treated as 'immigrants'. Similar concerns were voiced by interviewees A and G.

As a Black woman in the organization you become invisible to people because their expectation of what Black women represent doesn't come in the form of a supervisor [...] you are not seen as someone of authority and someone that people would come to for advice or anything that is work related. [...] I wouldn't say it's like being treated like a second class citizen it's like being treated like an immigrant. That's how they, you know you are alien to their environment [...] you should not be there but you are [...] we are the black sheep. (Interviewee B)

'It is this which is at the heart of this article, BAME women in the police and by extension wider society are seen as invisible and as a consequence are ignored' (Carby, 1997). This is part of the racism experienced by BAME women. Their status is seen as marginal, and not akin to their white women or men comparators.

They will look all around the office even though you are quite visible and sitting there and they will walk back out and then you'll hear conversation in the corridor, oh is there an OIC (officer in charge) about, yeah there's one in the office you've just come straight out of, and then you'll be like sorry did you

want something? Yeah . . . this was always the case . . . they make you feel invisible. (Interviewee A)

My supervisors, my inspectors and above would know who I am! Of course they are dealing with me but of course you are dealing with a lot of people who don't know who you are people who would visit the station and potentially have need for your advice but they would completely blank you, you just don't exist. (Interviewee G)

Although this could be seen to be a subjective opinion, a pattern emerged during the interviews, namely that the women interviewed were attractive and looked after their appearance. Because this pattern emerged from the face-to-face interviews, all subsequent interviewees were asked whether they would describe themselves as being attractive. This issue matters because it is argued that the experiences of the BAME women in this research were in part due to the fact that they were seen as 'sexually attractive' by their male perpetrators and as such as 'forbidden fruit' and potential 'prey'. Moreover, their women White counterparts viewed them as a 'threat' to their ability to gain White male romantic/sexual partners. A pattern that emerged through the interviews revealed that a number of these women were propositioned by White male co-workers and that on rejection of their advances, a pattern of bullying and harassment ensued. However, this was complicated by the fact that on two occasions, two interviewees (G and E) described how their treatment of bullying and harassment, and ultimately disciplinary sanctions are underpinned by the actions of what can be politely described as the 'scorned white women partners of men who propositioned the BAME women'.

Let me talk to you about the incident where I was bullied and disciplined and the perpetrator had actually fancied me. I didn't know that. When we were in the car together and we used to talk etc. and I rejected him. It could have been his payback [.]. Oh I am pretty by the way. That's not my ego, I am attractive. I believe that. Remember when I told you about that incident and the sergeant, what I didn't know was that his wife was also in that department and she was on my case. I think that they sexualize black females in any case. (Interviewee G)

Looks do have an impact, they play a very important part in policing, looks shape . . . being Black and attractive could put you in more danger of attracting unwanted attention. (Interviewee E)

Issues of sexuality as pertaining to BAME women were underpinned by how they presented themselves and what was identified within the interviews was the experience of Interviewee E. What was significant about Interviewee E

was that she had gained promotion to the rank of sergeant within a very short space of time, in 2 years. She was regarded as physically attractive and this was combined with a high level of education (master's degree). More significantly as she put it, 'I speak with an English British accent and I think that that helps me' (Interviewee E). It was significant that she made commented on the importance of speaking English without an accent and the potential consequences for those who had a pronounced accent.

I have noticed a few others who are just as competent as me but who perhaps speak with an accent. I wouldn't necessarily say that they have been bullied, because I haven't worked with them closely enough, like you know they haven't been on my team or anything like that but maybe you know, you sort of hear comments and things. (Interviewee E)

For interviewees J and C, the issue of language and their accents was the trigger for the bullying and harassment they suffered. A number of other interviewees recounted that their accent had never been an issue for most of their managers and peers, except for a few who used it as a basis for what can best be described as micro-management and ultimately, discriminatory treatment.

It was the way I speak, if you look at their pocket notebooks it said that I was very blunt, spoke fast and weak. I believe that this could have been a cultural problem. I don't know how many of them had foreign friends. (Interviewee J)

They gave me a nick name [. . .] behind my back for my strong Caribbean accent. Even though I speak very clear English . . . they made me feel I had a terrible accent that may have been the reason for the way they used to ridicule me . . . (Interviewee C)

Promotion: Problems and prospects

One recurrent finding was the perception borne of experience of seven of the interviewees from four forces who believed that they were subjected to disciplinary action because it was a route for the perpetrators to gain promotion. All police officers and members of staff employed by the police are required to complete an annual personal development review (PDR) with evidence of good work; they also need to identify areas for improvement and development for personal growth. This PDR requires approval from two sets of line managements. Officers need to tick a number of PDR boxes to achieve a satisfactory performance level. Managers seeking promotion often see this as an opportunity to target certain subordinates who do not match their required standards by blocking their career progression path. This was best described by interviewees B and I:

[...] when it comes to promotion they say well you got PDR box 4 don't know if you are ready, that sort of thing, so even though its ineffective and its used in the negative rather than the positive you know people should always challenge the markings and stuff. (Interviewee B)

I think because this individual, he was an acting sergeant wanted to get promoted and so in order to get promoted he had to do an action plan on officers as if they are not performing. So just say for example, that if I need to have X arrests a month in my probationary period and I have only got one, then you obviously discuss it with your probationer and so in order to get promoted, he targeted me. (Interviewee I)

Furthermore, what also transpired during the course of the interviews, and correlates with the findings of Ghaffur (2004), Morris et al. (2004) and G Smith et al. (2012), was the perception by half (seven) of the interviewees that they were subjected to formalized disciplinary procedures. Ethnicity data published by the Home Office and NBPA (2018/19; Freedom of Information request, 32 of 43 forces responded across the UK) shows that of 9,000 officers who were being investigated, 1300 were from minority ethnic groups and accounted for 14.5% of misconduct investigations. About 20% of BAME officers were called to a misconduct meeting or gross misconduct hearing. These figures are interesting as fewer than 7% of police officers in England and Wales are from minority ethnic groups.

For Interviewee H, her experience of disciplinary action stemmed in part from her high level of performance compared with her colleagues. This led to a course of action that can be interpreted as escalating a trivial incident, and which could have been dealt with in an informal manner. However, this example corroborates the research of G Smith et al. (2012) that BAME people are more subject to formal disciplinary sanctions than White counterparts.

I used to share an office with another sergeant he reported me for discipline. [...] Basically this other male sergeant didn't use to get on with anyone in the office. So basically, both teams used to come to me for quite a lot of help. Once I took annual leave. I was moving house. [...] so whilst at home, my team were there and they wanted to come in for a cup of tea, so I let them in for a cup of tea together. And then when they went back to work. He reported me for taking my team off duty. (Interviewee H)

Although the incident could be interpreted as trivial, the sanction applied is revealing for a number of reasons. First, it highlights that some BAME people are subject to disciplinary sanctions more often than their White counterparts (G Smith et al., 2012). Second, those sanctions can have a detrimental effect on the individual's promotion, bonuses and career progression. For about 18 months, Interviewee

H could not go for any promotion or secondment opportunities. She was also concerned that management might try to get her another written warning, in which case she could have faced dismissal. It therefore appears that the disciplinary and complaints system was used to prevent the progression of BAME people in the police. Organizational procedures and practices that enforce the disciplinary complaints procedure are underpinned by a bureaucratic organizational culture. This operated in a way that greatly undervalued BAME employees compared with their White counterparts (O'Neill et al., 2007; Waddington, 2008). Furthermore, it was occurring at the same time as the push for equality post Macpherson Inquiry when competencies recognizing the importance of equality and diversity, and in particular race issues, became part of the performance management framework for statutory agencies including the police. It is argued here that there is an apparent 'trend' of deliberately targeting BAME women in the area of discipline and complaints. This situation then contributes to their blocked progression and is part of the backlash against race on the grounds that for some groups, particularly on the political right, race issues have gone too far.

What was most shocking in the interviews was the experience recounted by Interviewee I. She highlighted that her line manager and the perpetrator of the bullying and harassment attempted through the disciplinary process to get her to commit an 'illegal act' of stopping and searching people even if there was no valid or suspicious grounds to do so. Interviewee D had also faced similar sanctions for not carrying out enough stop and searches:

On one particular time he called me to the office and said that I am not doing enough stop searches. When I came home, I was upset and I told my brother and he is a [...] and he went, 'Look, you can't do anything unlawful, you need to stand up to him. As if you don't, you are doing something unlawful and you can't stop and search someone for no reason'. (Interviewee I)

I have faced discipline twice and both times it was because I was reported by a fellow sergeant for wrong-doing, to a senior manager who has taken it up and took me down the formal route. (Interviewee D)

Given the historical concern and tension around stop and search within BAME communities and the efforts of successive UK governments to address racial disproportionality in stop and search, it is concerning that this contentious police mechanism was used in this way with a BAME police officer. Interviewee B had a similar experience in which she confirms that she had to deal with the bullying behaviour of her supervisor over a period even though she was holding a senior supervisory position. The issue of

level of service combined with promotion can be problematic for BAME women police officers and staff. For Interviewees B and D, the fact that one outranked her colleague and the other was the same grade as a police officer were the trigger for a campaign of bullying and harassment. This tactic was used to undermine them personally and professionally. However, to her credit, Interviewee I refused to participate in the required activity, even though she risked further disciplinary sanction in the form of action plans that would impact negatively on her probationary period. What was significant for the individual was the reason why she joined the police in the first place, which she, like the other interviewees, stated was a need to help people and uphold the law. Significantly, it was also to help protect their own communities, especially vulnerable groups within them (DJ Smith and Gray, 1983). Most importantly, being a member of the police gave them a sense of pride. This led a number of individuals, particularly interviewee I, to state:

I can't tell you how overwhelmed I was when English people, Black people coming up to me and saying how wonderful to see that you are a Muslim woman police officer. We are so proud of you. You know I was so happy when I joined the force. (Interviewee I)

I carried out a review of a prisoner and he didn't see me carry out the review and I wrote it up on an what we call an official document and I had visited the prisoner and he reported me saying that I had doctored an official document and I didn't at all. He reported me to a senior manager, and I was removed from my rank. (Interviewee H)

Interviewee H had suffered bullying over a period of 2 years due to disciplinary sanctions taken against her. She could not move anywhere else and had to remain in the same department and deal with a particular colleague and her supervisors. Interviewees' experiences in terms of the nature of the bullying and the way in which organizational practices in effect 'supported' bullying and harassment are discussed later in this section. It is, however, fair to say that there was no consistent approach by the cohort regarding the organizational process of reporting bullying and harassment. What became apparent quite quickly was a general consensus that there was little trust and confidence in Fairness at Work policies. This was the result of perceptions of the process by colleagues and peers. The lack of trust in these policies reaffirms IM Young's argument that '[the] symbolic meanings that people attach to other kinds of people and to action, gestures, or institutions often significantly affect the social standing of persons and their opportunities' (1990:). Such an approach shifts the focus of fairness away from the main issue of what particular contexts admit as disadvantage and redress of disadvantage.

However, what became very clear was that on those occasions when victims approached their line managers for support in tackling bullying and harassment, managers who were not in the bully's 'chain' of command were supportive. For Interviewee A, reporting the incident of bullying and harassment to her line manager resulted in the action stopping, but what was most important for her was that her line manager believed her. However, what she did note was that although he believed her, she felt that his action was 'him just performing his job' and was as a result a 'formality for him' from which she did not receive any empathy.

For another interviewee (Interviewee I), her response to the bullying was unique in that she had at her disposal the support of a mentor (senior officer) for BMAE officers, which she utilized. However, the way in which bullying was activated was purely by chance. This displayed her courage, tenacity and her line manager's incompetence and lack of discretion. Her experience also illustrates the importance of support mechanisms for BAME women in the police. Interviewee I was very fortunate that her force had the benefit of a positive action mentoring scheme for BAME officers. She utilized her mentor through the bullying and harassment she endured, and this gave her much needed support to tackle the issue. It also made her bullies aware that there was a process within the police organization that would seek to protect the interests of minority officers. Positive action mentoring support was available to very few. The majority of the participants had to deal with the bullying behaviour on their own and came up with their own strategies to cope with it.

Bullying, trauma and dis-ease

For all of the interviewees, their experiences of bullying and harassment were not overtly racial or sexual. Rather, the bullying and harassment was covert and subtle, yet constant and deliberate. For Interviewee C, the bullying she experienced was as a result of her promotion to a senior position, which was not achieved by her male colleague. The situation was made all the more strained as she was also police staff (also known as civilians or support staff) and was bullied over a 6-month period by a both a police inspector and a sergeant. The bullying consisted of a campaign of individually and collectively undermining her and refusing to undertake tasks that she requested of them. What is interesting is Interviewee C's belief that the techniques used to bully her were unique to police officers and learnt as part of their police training. These techniques were, she believed, used as way to make her feel that she was the one being unreasonable and uncooperative. The issue of rank and status within the police was most graphic with an interviewee who is a civilian member of staff

because of her role, for which she had national exposure combined with a high degree of power and influence. It is argued here that the issue of the perceived 'non-status' of BAME women and the non-status of civilian staff in the police have always been ignored.

For Interviewee G, the bullying and harassment had intensified as she suffered degrading behaviour from her manager/colleagues who thought she was not capable enough to attend a court hearing on her own. She felt that as the only BAME person in her department, her every movement and action was being monitored.

I went out to this task force and initially it seemed okay and then there was a particular white person, a woman, there and she seemed to get on well with her. I had to go to the court but there was no parking at the court, they look at simple things. However, I had parked outside a relative's house. Unfortunately, I went to court and by the time I got back the car was clamped. Just got there to convince the guy that I was a police officer and for him to unclamp it. So that's all fine.

I went to my inspector, explained what happened, he seemed happy. What the white female said, 'I don't think she went to court, I think she went to have lunch with her relative'. That's what I understand. So unbeknown to me, this is what has been going on, behind my back. So already again I am served with a 163. (Interviewee G)

The bullying and harassment she suffered was relentless in that it was petty, but also malicious, the outcome of bullying and harassment for 'targets' lead to disciplinary sanctions that slow prospects for promotion. What is most important is that the 'target' was the 'victim' of a police organizational cultural clique (Waddington, 2008) that facilitated her bullying and ensured that the outcome would impact adversely on her performance records. Furthermore, the bullying would have ongoing negative consequences in making her ineligible for established financial incentives and promotion. What is significant in this finding is that Interviewee G was not believed by her superiors. Instead the perpetrator was able to make a statement that had serious ramifications for Interviewee G. It is argued here that as a Black woman she became visible as someone to target and that her treatment reflected the organizational power in controlling her ability to gain financial recognition for her effort and future promotion. Furthermore, her humiliation in asking for confirmation from her criminal justice colleagues in court, provides an extremely negative impression of how the police and that particular force treats BAME women police officers. This reinforces awareness of the continued existence of racism within the service to external agencies, and that BAME people are

untrustworthy and liars. This has similar ramifications to the case of *Aziz v CPS*, 2000¹.

One extremely unsettling feature of the investigation has been the impact of bullying and harassment on BAME women police officers and staff from all five forces. It was extremely alarming to note that one PCSO made multiple attempts to take her own life, a number of which were while she was at work (Interviewee D) and that another officer (Interviewee F) also attempted self-harm which was then made known to her colleagues without her consent. This article shines a light on the psychological, physical and emotional consequences of bullying and harassment for victims. For Interviewee A, although the bullying and harassment she suffered was more than 2 years ago, in the telephone interview, there was still a distressing tone in her voice when she recounted the incidents and their impact on her. Most significant was her lack of confidence. This was a significant feature for all 13 women who were victims of bullying and harassment. While some women worked through their period of bullying and harassment, 11 did not, and took time off as stress leave. Those who managed to work through the bullying and harassment were supported by a combination of family and friends and/or work colleagues. Indicative of this is Interviewee G. She recounted enduring depression, hair loss and an eating disorder. For Interviewee I, her reaction to the impact of the bullying and harassment she suffered was to come home in distress. She experienced panic attacks, eating and sleep disorders. Interviewee M expressed how she suffered from anxiety and withdrawal symptoms. For Interviewee J, her disability was exacerbated as a result of the bullying and harassment she endured. Interviewee H, who held the rank of sergeant, deliberately chose not to take time off work as sick leave as that may have impacted on her prospective career and used annual leave instead. This indicates the vicious cycle of bullying in which the victim suffers both physical and psychological trauma. Victims felt helpless and trapped in the situation they were facing while dealing with bullying on the one hand, and keeping their career going on the other. Adequate support mechanisms are imperative to the wellbeing of BAME women who have suffered from bullying and harassment. Without this support for victims, issues of ill health, termed here as 'dis-ease', are liable to manifest as physical ailments.

All the interviewees had their own coping tactics. Some had support from family, friends and colleagues. Some had the support of a positive mentoring scheme. Some took time off for stress and depression, and a small minority took annual leave. Unfortunately, two of the 13 participants found the bullying experience unbearable and were not able to cope; they had attempted to take their own lives. The damaging effect of bullying and harassment needs to be viewed in terms of not just reputational damage, but also

the financial costs and impact on the health services in the form of prescriptions for medication and consultations with medical doctors and other health experts. The article has provided an insight into the lived experiences of BAME women within the police services in England, how they navigate racism and sexism at work and their survival strategies as they pursue their careers.

Conclusion

Existing research around race and policing has focused primarily on the generic experiences of racism by BAME police officers, regardless of their gender (Ghaffur, 2004). To date, the experiences of BAME women have been under-researched and furthermore, there has been no examination of the experiences of civilian police staff working in the areas of administration, personnel, research, analytical or other supportive roles. There is an apparent gap in the knowledge of the experiences of BAME women in the police services in England and it is concerning that although official statistics highlight the encouraging rise of female advancement in the police, this was not replicated by either BAME men or women (Ministry of Justice, 2015). This made it important to examine how the intersectionality of race and gender manifests within an organization like the police in the area of bullying and harassment of BAME women.

All the research participants in this study had suffered bullying and harassment over a period time (6 months or over), regardless of whether they had been subjected to prejudice or illegal discrimination. They had been made to feel inferior and victimized, and this constitutes bullying. The participants felt that, in addition to subordination and sexualization, they were also 'invisible' to their White counterparts and perceived as incapable of holding supervisory ranks. This resulted in tactics of undermining by their colleagues and peers and is reflective of a culture of police racism (Waddington, 2008).

The article highlights that BAME police officers and staff are subject to disproportionate treatment in disciplinary procedures and struggle to integrate into a predominantly White police culture. However, BAME women are one of the most vulnerable groups in the police services in England. The article advocates that the unique experiences of BAME women within the police services need to be recognized and acknowledged. This investigation and reports into racism in the police services can contribute to raise awareness about the experiences of BAME women facing bullying and harassment. The interviewees all stressed that they felt that their experiences were ignored and undermined them as individuals. This impacted adversely on their confidence and mental health because of the sustained and targeted nature of the bullying and

harassment which they suffered. This was compounded by their negative experience of reporting instances of bullying and harassment. Recent efforts to increase diversity in the police services in England, by direct entry, graduate entry and fast track entry aim to change the culture of the police and improve diversity. It is important to note that recruitment of diverse groups into the police does not make the organization less racist or more tolerant. Rather it is attitudes and behaviour towards minority groups and their treatment in key processes such as retention, progression, discipline and complaints that are important to understand and monitor. It is therefore important that the lived experiences and issues faced by BAME women are acknowledged by their colleagues and peers and that the key enforcement and inspectorate agencies involved should also monitor the issues faced by BAME women within the police services in England.


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Note

1. *Aziz v Crown Prosecution Service* [2008] 1 September 2008; ET/1808550/01.

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Author biography

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