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To cite this article: Alpa Parmar, Rod Earle & Coretta Phillips (2022): Seeing is Believing: How the Layering of Race is Obscured by “White Epistemologies” in the Criminal Justice Field, Journal of Criminal Justice Education, DOI: [10.1080/10511253.2022.2027482](https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2022.2027482)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2022.2027482>



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Published online: 04 Feb 2022.



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Seeing is Believing: How the Layering of Race is Obscured by “White Epistemologies” in the Criminal Justice Field

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ABSTRACT

Criminology has been slow in recognizing the central organizing logic of race in (post)colonial societies. It is therefore unsurprising that research practice falls behind that proffered through other disciplinary epistemological critiques. In this paper, we interrogate the tools of whiteness that are obscured in the widely used research method of in-depth interviews. We scrutinize what is not “seen” but which can be made evident in research interactions, using three interview case studies conducted in England. Warren, a white man interviewed by a white man (Earle), exposes the occlusions and upholding of race and racism in prison settings. Rafan, a British Bangladeshi man interviewed by a British Indian woman (Parmar) reveals a socio-cultural backstory in which coloniality is deeply implicated but seems just beyond view, within and outwith the criminal justice system. Finally, the interview of Cairo, a black (British) Jamaican man by a mixed-race black British woman (Phillips), articulates a poignant yet defiant response to structural and cultural racism, which begins long before interaction with the criminal justice system. Laid bare are the limitations of existing research where over-represented white researchers typically conduct research involving under-represented minorities who are vulnerable to exclusion, criminalization, and state violence. Our three case study interviews offer a step beyond traditional qualitative research instruction for students and apprentice researchers. It aims to impart a reflexive pedagogy which intertwines biography with politics in training the next generation of criminal justice researchers.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 December 2021
Accepted 24 December 2021

KEYWORDS

Epistemology; reflexivity;
biography; ethnic matching;
whiteness; qualitative

“The Master’s Tools?” Insider-Outsider Epistemologies

The increasingly loud call to decolonize criminology and criminal justice has the implicit and sometimes explicit aim to refute the supremacy of tools of knowledge production that derive from white racial logics. In a recent piece, for example, Cunneen and Tauri (2017, 2019) point to the dismissal of indigenous knowledges within Anglo

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criminology. What counts as legitimate criminological knowledge, they argue, is that which emanates from a rigid positivist paradigm of science. In contrast, the epistemologies and ontologies of indigenous groups stand accused of partiality as localized knowledge production using storytelling, artistic, and other literary styles to generate understanding are considered overly subjective and without scientific merit (see also Tauri, 2012). This dismissal is neither new nor trivial. Indeed, for some, criminology has always been mired in such colonialist reasoning. Disciplinary knowledge has indirectly facilitated systemic state violence and subjugation by European nations through the disciplining of (former colonial) subjects using agents of the criminal justice, immigration and military systems (Agozino, 2003). Charting the discipline's origin provides ready fodder for such a view, of course, rooted as it is in Lombroso's phrenological positivism (Carrington, Hogg, Scott, Sozzo, & Walters, 2019; Lombroso, 1892).

Feminist criminologists too have challenged criminological positivism, asserting the need for us to question who has the authority to speak and whose voices are heard. Combined with criminology's seeming aversion to centralize race as an organizing logic of race in (post)colonial societies (Bosworth, Bowling, & Lee, 2008; Phillips, Earle, Parmar, & Smith, 2020), it is no wonder that the tools of knowledge production have also sidestepped the interventions of black criminology and minority perspectives (Phillips & Bowling, 2003; Russell-Brown, 2018). As Henne and Shah (2013: 117) put it, the criminological field has been subject to whitewashing as researchers unreflexively and reductively fix racial difference in quantitative and qualitative research, while the "the inherent bias of White logic is masked through so-called objective (White) methods" (see also Cullen, Chouhy, Butler, & Lee, 2019; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008).

Young's (2004) account helpfully rehearses the ideological and epistemological debates which have surrounded the validity of white scholars immersing themselves in the lifeworlds of those with whom they share little, economically, politically, culturally and socially. These differences and distances have been assumed to hinder access to such populations and to preclude the possibilities of meaningful and engaged analysis. This vexed issue received mainstream attention in the ideas of Merton (1972) in his paper examining insider- and outsider-discourses. In this, he outlines extreme and milder versions which claim, to varying degrees, that access to knowledge about the histories, cultures and social lives of individuals defined by their ascribed status, is only of value when undertaken by those who share that ascribed status. This, rather inevitably, implies the need for "ethnic correspondence" between researchers and research participants. For Merton (1972: 15), the notion of "Insider as Insider" prevails in the insider doctrine, whereas "the Outsider, no matter how careful and talented, is excluded in principle from gaining access to the social and cultural truth" by virtue of not being socialized into that cultural milieu. This, for Merton, ignores the risk that Insiders may be predisposed to see value and worth, even supremacy, within their lifeworlds, even when there may be reasons to assert less categorical and positive perspectives. At the same time, the literature is replete with examples where rapport, intimacy, and trust can be more easily forged in instances where researchers and research participants share ethno-racial identities. As Brah (1996: 207) notes, the similarly situated can [co]-"create a space in which experiential mediations may intersect in ways that render such understandings more readily accessible." Similarly, writing

from an ethnographic perspective, Duneier (2004: 101) maintains that “neither blacks nor whites in the USA talk honestly about race in the other’s presence,” and his experience at the frontline of qualitative research is by no means an unusual one.

A contrasting view maintains that an Outsider status offers insight that cannot be easily seen or interrogated by those too close to a socio-cultural group. Their over-familiarity prevents deeper probing and questioning of practices that constitute lived experience as a detached observation and interpretation would reveal. Young’s (2004) study of low-income African Americans is a salutary reminder of the lack of certainties identities create for the conduct of qualitative research. He refers to the “crippling effects” his insider status produced where socio-cultural connections can impede access to research participants’ social worlds, where rapport can, in fact, be ruptured by familiarity. Best summarized by one of his research participants as “What’s more to be said?”; it is in the *what does not get said* that much knowledge can be gleaned, according to Young (2004: 195). And, in fact, Duneier (2004) similarly mused that his understanding of the experience of poor, black excluded populations may have been enhanced by his privileged social position as a white, Jewish, middle class academic. His example, like Young’s, turned on an everyday experience his research participants faced that would not necessarily have been regarded as worthy of elaboration for research purposes, unless Duneier had come across it serendipitously. Winddance Twine and Warren (2000) excellent volume, *Racing Research Researching Race*, similarly offers plentiful examples of distance in qualitative research not easily breached by same-race researchers and participants when other identities constrain communication, interaction and engagement (see also Buford May (2014) on African American interviewer-white interviewee dynamics).

But what of such (normative) matching with regard to the (typically) white majority ethnic group? Do these same Insider dynamics prevail when the researcher and research participants are white? For scholars of critical whiteness studies also engaged in empirical research, the answer seems to be a qualified, “Yes.” Gallagher (2000), for instance, notes the “methodological capital” that opens up a space for white research participants to reveal their racist sensibilities in interview situations, and considers the dangers of complicity in implicitly supporting rather than challenging such narratives of white supremacy.

A focus on whiteness and the cultivation of an awareness of whiteness is a strategic decision in the research process as much as it is in the classroom, but the dynamics are not simple inversions of a binary relationship. Being white is something white people will not “feel” because whiteness operates on the basis of its normality (Frankenberg, 1993). The fundamental nature of simply being in modern postcolonial societies is one of whiteness without a sense of political positioning. This apparently color-blind sensibility, it should be stressed, is historically unusual because asserting white supremacy was the prevailing modality of colonial conquest. Investigating these now “invisible” characteristics and positionalities involves a necessary turn toward personal experience that align with phenomenological methodologies (Hartigan, 2010). Biography, autoethnography and reflexivity are particularly significant to white scholars for whom a direct connection with the object of study, race, has rarely been taken for granted. Providing white students with a critical appreciation that they are “educated formally and educated culturally into whiteness” (Ryden & Marshall, 2012:

10), and that whiteness is not some innocuous feature of an ethnic spectrum but a systematic, historical form of supremacy, is crucial. The challenge for researchers, teachers and learners in the classroom or in the field, is how to expose white invisibility as a disembodied norm so as to demonstrate the concrete possibilities “of going through race to get beyond race” (Leonardo, 2009).

What Merton (1972) referred to as “status” sets recognizes that, obviously, individuals are located intersectionally (Crenshaw, 1989). Individuals are positioned therefore as both Insiders and Outsiders as they interact in the social world. Thus, the likelihood of precisely finding the same configuration of statuses, to use Merton’s terms, among researchers and research participants is likely to be very small. Moreover, racial identities may not be automatically foregrounded or have exclusive primacy; in Hughes (1945) terms, occupying a “master status.” As importantly, racial identities themselves are not necessarily mono-cultural and there is a real danger of reductive reification when this is not recognized (Gunaratnam, 2003). Gendered, classed, age, religious and occupational identities are also noted by Merton, but it is now incumbent on scholars and researchers to recognize the significance of identities linked also to sexualities and disabilities (for a critique Carbado, 2013; Potter, 2015).

Feminist scholarship has also privileged the importance of documenting lived experience in reaction against male-dominated knowledge production that erroneously assumes the possibilities of objective or value-free research (Cain, 1990; Harding, 1987; Hartsock, 1983). Principles of feminist epistemology have rejected the favored necessity of neutrality and have instead embraced, if not partiality, at least subjectivity. Subsequent intellectual interventions by feminists of color more explicitly advocated the significance of recognizing intersectional realities (Hill Collins, 1990; Rice, 1990).

Reflexivity

A move towards reflexivity has assumed an uneasy compromise position between Insider and Outsider discourses. Reflexivity promises to examine the identity of the researcher to set out how this might impact the research process in its entirety (Hertz, 1997). The researcher co-constitutes the research setting as active participant rather than passive observer. Thus, here it is increasingly recognized that Outsider researchers, who after all are typically the majority, at least in criminological research, directly influence the research they participate in. Biographical identities influence the questions we ask, the ones we don’t, who we interview and who we don’t, how we interview, how we listen and how we don’t, and ultimately how we understand (Hertz, 1997). There is then an effective requirement for researchers to self-critically examine the biases which can influence their interpretation of the lived experiences of those whose lives typically bear little relation to their own. Acknowledging the fluidity of Insider and Outsider positionalities has afforded an opportunity to acknowledge the multiple selves present in any research interaction (Reinharz, 1992), as identities are “restructured, retained and abandoned during the course of interaction between researchers and respondents” (Buford May, 2014; Young, 2004: 192).

Reflexivity has, nonetheless, been open to much criticism as an effective epistemological tool. Concerns have centered on the degree to which it comprehensively

informs the research process, or instead operates as an ineffectual, routinised exposition of Outsider status without political engagement with structural bias and how that can frame or mediate research settings. Or it can risk centralizing the identity of the researcher in ways that diminish the lived experiences of research participants. It can privilege a dominant biographical conceit that does little to diminish the racialized hierarchies of power that prevail in any research encounter, or more worryingly, can conceal them completely (Ploder & Stadlbauer, 2016; Smith & Linnemann, 2015). Instead, the written account obscures, permitting the authorial voice of the (typically majority) white researcher to be self-important. Herein lies the rub; well-summed up here by Duneier (2004: 101) “[t]hough I constantly obsess about the ways that my upper-middle-class whiteness influences what I see, I must emphasize my uncertainty about what I do not see and what I do not know I missed.”

And yet—still—much social science research tells us that racial identities remain a useful lens through which to understand social realities, both objectively and subjectively. It is axiomatic that on most indices of equality, race operates to frame lived experience—that is true in experience of the education system, labor market, and obviously the criminal justice system (Phillips & Bowling, 2017; Strand, 2014; Zwysen, Di Stasio, & Heath, 2021). Similarly, subjectivity measures, also point up certain commonalities of belief and experience that are shaped by racializing processes in society (but see also Aspinall & Song, 2013; Knowles, 2003; Platt, 2014).

Historicizing Race and Racializing Histories: Co-production in the Research Encounter

There is always a danger that researching race and racism can assume an inherent centrality that is externally imposed by the interests of researchers. Narrative and life history interviews afford an opportunity for research participants to articulate experiential realities through multiple frames. They can permit an analysis of how structural forces produce and reproduce material outcomes, inflected by emotion and subjectivity, and in intersection with institutional processes that frame lived experience through societal institutions such as the family, education system and labour market, and most obviously through the criminal justice system. Indeed, the study of crime and social order provides the perfect vector with which to examine these dynamics. Crime, as the Comaroffs’ (2016) have intimated, has utility in capturing and holding up to scrutiny public and political anxieties concerning morality, justice, governance, and material security, ideals that have rarely been racially neutral. Methodologically, interrogating life, offending, and desistance narratives offers a means to identify racialised realities that appear in the foreground, but also those that may be implicit, or just out of view in the background. Such interviews can give insight into the texture of social relationships and hence the fabric of society as they “open a window on individual lives and their crises of existence, at the same time as they open onto the political landscapes in which those lives are made” (Knowles, 1999: 58). Whilst they can only ever be incomplete accounts of a life and there is often a tendency for recalled stories to assert a coherent and moral self, they present opportunities for self-reflection and meaning-making that can expose the fissures of individual and collective

identification. Our argument is that such research interactions can also expose how race animates lived experiences without deliberately leading research participants into assumed ways of talking, or not talking, about race.

Connecting to the epistemological issues raised earlier around positionalities as relative insiders and outsiders, our approach in this paper is to bring the prism of our biographical lives as researchers into the picture. Earle is a white British man with an Irish passport, born in West Africa to a white English mother and a white Irish father. Parmar is a British Indian woman of Hindu heritage whose family background in East Africa traces the complex routes and roots of the British Empire and Indian diaspora. Phillips is a British mixed-race (black) woman born in London to a white English Jewish mother and whose father was Nigerian. Parmar and Phillips have working class backgrounds while Earle's background is middle class. Increasingly, we find it helpful to situate these diverse subjectivities alluded to in this brief categorical taxonomy into the research process. We centralize our affective sensibilities as scholars of race and our respective race, class and gender positions are taken as material to the interview and the analytical and writing processes. Without assuming any direct or linear correspondence, we choose in this article to focus on three individuals from our research whose identities resemble our own in the loose sense of also being "white," "brown" and "black." We critically examine our biographically inflected understandings of how three individuals interpret and negotiate the racialized social locations in which they find themselves. In so doing, we seek to exploit our diverse biographical positionings to assess the potential for exploring the contours of race that can sometimes be obscured.

To specifically address the hidden presence of whiteness, we begin with material from a narrative interview with Warren that comes from a prison study conducted in 2006–2008. The research centered on examining how the construction and negotiation of ethnic and masculine identities were enacted in prison life, particularly in their intersection with faith, nationality, and locality. The second and third interviewees, Rafan and Cairo, were drawn from a purposive sample of 20 young, minority Londoners, examining how racial orders are mobilized and contested in everyday life. They volunteered for interview, based on their participation with community development and sports organizations, mosques, and other youth groups. Rafan and Cairo were interviewed on more than one occasion over a period of around three weeks in 2017. They themselves provided the pseudonyms used in this paper to preserve their anonymity.

Introspective Co-interviewing

Communication inevitably entails joint construction, negotiation, and introspection, albeit sometimes conscious, and sometimes unconscious. For this reason, we proceed here to utilise a tried and tested method for analysing prison ethnographic and interview encounters (Phillips & Earle, 2010). It readily excavates layers of meaning which are laid bare by our relative situatedness in the racial social order. We use the technique of what we refer to as "introspective co-interviewing" to help uncover the complexities of racialized experiences, the contradictions, inconsistencies, prevarications,

projections, silences, and emotions. This three-stage reflexive method involves firstly, each interviewer reflecting on their preliminary and subsequent analysis of the interview encounter and fieldnotes, including post-transcription summaries. Secondly, we each read the interview transcripts of the two men selected for inclusion who we had not interviewed and prepared questions on aspects of the interview which seemed, just out of view, based on a surface-level reading. These questions were used in the third stage to enact a three-way co-interview between Earle, Parmar and Phillips, about each other's readings of the interviews, combined with reflections and interrogations.

We cannot, of course, be certain that we are not misrepresenting our research participants' lived experiences. There inevitably remains the possibility that our interpretations are incorrect, but that is not a limitation that is exclusive to this research method, or in fact, to qualitative research more generally. However, we hope that the co-interviewing applies efforts at triangulation that go further, that are revealing, opening up the seeing of experiential realities that might have been hidden without this inter-biographical cross-examination. This is further enabled by recognising the fluidity of our Insider and Outsider subjectivities, requiring us to not simply sit with a singular perspective. Richness and subtlety emerge from the process of co-producing research: in the interview itself, in the preliminary analysis, and in the re-thinking engendered through co-interviewing amidst biographical complexity. The illustrative examples below illuminate the strengths and limitations of this epistemological stance and its methodological application.

The approach taken in this article also underscores the value of collaborative or "sociable methods" which produce circulations of communication oscillating across researchers' horizons of understanding (Sinha & Back, 2014). Whilst Sinha and Back have discussed the merits of sociable methods for producing genuine dialogue between participants and researchers, we apply this principle to the exchanges *between researchers* and feel that the insights to be gained are particularly important for seeing how race operates and indeed how perceptions about its operation can vary. Sociable methods or introspective co-interviewing as we call it, encourages dialogues that allow researchers to notice things that would not have otherwise be seen because of the insight and analytical choices that different researchers can bring to the analysis.

Warren: An English Nationalist with Something White to Hide?

Aged 61 at the time of interview in December 2007, Warren was interviewed by Earle, as part of a study of men's social relations and identities (Earle, 2014a, 2014b; Phillips & Earle, 2010). Warren, a former print worker, came from an Eastern county of England on the margins of London with its ethnically diverse population, replicated to a degree in the prison where the interview took place. Re-analyzed here, the introspective interviewing centered on the traces of whiteness and white supremacy that were woven through the interview. A particular emphasis was on the dynamics of the interview that ensued where whiteness was raised and scrutinized by the white researcher whilst at the same time, obscured and resisted by the white interviewee. What is

revealed in Warren's interview, as discussed below, is a familiar disavowal of whiteness' dividends and privileges, but also the unsettling nature of the surfacing of racism in research encounters where interviewee and interviewer come from the white majority.

Early in the interview Warren tells Earle he speaks Dutch and that he spent 19 years of his life in Zimbabwe. Earle acknowledges to him he picked up the accent and assumed it was a South African accent. This prompts Warren to disclose he also speaks some African languages, though he does not specify which ones. In fieldnotes Earle recalls wondering if Warren really means Afrikaans, the South African derivative of Dutch that is such a powerful signifier of the imperial legacy of European struggles over Africa. Perhaps Warren was concerned it might disclose too much about himself too soon. He knows the research is concerned with race and Afrikaans is a language uniquely and inescapably associated with apartheid, the paradigmatic pariah racial order of the postcolonial period. Anyone with the marker of the Afrikaans-inflected accent must contend with the fact that when they speak, their accent projects not just a national identity but a political ideology now resolutely out of favor (Vesterhgaard, 2001). Pointedly, as Warren notes, "I'm an Englishman. I may not sound like one but believe me I am." While asserting a more acceptable whiteness, Earle's post-interview fieldnotes record his impression of Warren's evasive need to talk euphemistically about race.

The interview transcript re-read by Authors X and Z and discussed within the triangulating features of our respective ethnic and racial identities, reinforce Earle's misgiving that Warren spends much of the interview dissembling around the issue of race, seemingly saying almost the opposite of what he means. In the interview itself and over several listenings, Earle's suspicions grow that Warren is deeply invested in his white racial identity, and that his orientation is actively rather than passively white (supremacist). Mentioning to Warren that he wants to ask some questions about ethnicity and diversity to which Warren interjects emphatically "on our small island," then quickly covers himself with "Having said that I'm not xenophobic, in any way, so don't get me wrong," he offers a familiar clichéd caveat often documented in dismissals of individual racism. Asked what ethnic category he identifies with; Warren says easily and quickly "I am a white Englishman." Discussing pride and Britishness, he pauses. A small, pregnant silence, then "I am just patriotic, I think." As Earle tries to encourage Warren to elaborate, he mentions his own sense of equivocation toward Britishness, mentioning it is a national identity he associates most easily with himself in a relational context (Hall, 1991/2000), when on holiday abroad and he is "seen" and heard as British by other people. Warren responds quickly to Earle's equivocation: "May I ask why might you not feel British in your own country, what would be the reason for that? Is it because of the influx of many other peoples?." It is a pivotal moment in the interview, as if Warren has disclosed some of his true feelings in a fleeting but expectant moment of hoping they may be shared with Earle in some way.

Earle explains his feelings of national ambiguity and equivocation that arise from having an Irish father and an Irish passport but declines to include a significant confusing detail of being born in West Africa for fear of provoking the usual racist obsession with natality and belonging. Warren continues "I take it when you say Ireland,

you mean 'Eire', southern Ireland?." This interest in the contested nomenclature of the two Irish states established by partition rings alarm bells for Earle because it indicates an unusual awareness of the UK's precarious nationalist politics. Apparently warming to a theme of ethnic essentialism around which he feels more comfortable, Warren jokes, "I don't care what your clan is, you're a foreigner," and laughs, a bit excessively, as he adds a barbed "I hope we've made you very welcome." This quip—positioning the Irish as guests of the benevolent English rather than as economically productive migrant laborers—is experienced as deeply unnerving by Earle. It secures a reversed power dynamic in which the subjectivity of Warren's whiteness is displaced by an interrogation of Earle's inferior white Irishness. Phillips asks in the collective co-interview about the implications of this discomfort and anxiety, suggesting how these emotions expose a jockeying for position in a hierarchy of whitenesses (Garner, 2006). Such revelations require an educative approach to methodology that does not preclude discussion of the variable and contingent nature of ethnic matching in qualitative interviewing. It is precisely these kinds of interactions which the student qualitative researcher must be schooled in, or at least, ready to encounter and respond to in the field should they arise.

Revisiting the interview, and perhaps seeking corroboration of the suspicions of dissembling and evasion in Warren's account of himself, it is noticeable how much correspondence there is between his travels and the cocaine trade routes that traverse the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, and how little it corresponds to the life of a sedentary East London print worker. Warren is serving a substantial sentence for importing Class A drugs although this does not feature in the interview. This conviction seems steeped in a racialized world of global commerce that is hyper-exploitative and hugely profitable (Koram, 2019). Warren talks about how glad he was to leave these places behind him because he knew he would be welcomed home. "I feel at home in my own country. These other places, they tend to have different standards to us," was how Warren put it. His subsequent remark that "[t]he way they run things is not the way we are used to" oozes, without actually articulating, nostalgic nationalism and white supremacism as he continues "A British passport speaks volumes. Perhaps not as much as it used to but ... you know the European Community" An affirmation of white similarity between interviewee and interviewer ebbs and flows.

Parmar's reading of the transcript prompts her to note that Warren "seems quite determined to present himself as an anti-racist" in some of the terminology he uses. More clearly, he performs a kind of desultory, perfunctory "political correctness," that whilst not anti-racist as such, does indicate his awareness of the moral dividends of denying racist motivations and sentiments. But what emerges through the course of a longer biographical interview are recurring contradictory subtexts that, taken at face value, might appear innocent but in the context of critical race scholarship take on a more pointed and less innocuous presence. These were originally surfaced in Earle's fieldnotes but they are reaffirmed in the introspective interviewing with authors X and Z who are able to probe the fluctuating power dynamics observable in this interaction between the two white men. The process of critical reflection that explicitly deployed the distinctive and contrasting positionalities of Authors, X and Z, brought into play a variety of biographical insights informed also by critical race scholarship (Parker &

Lynn, 2002). These shared readings offered theoretical and empirical purchase on the misgivings and apprehensions that were encountered in the interview. Parmar and Phillips's descriptions of the frequency of their own haunting, indeterminate encounters with racism and racists in which much is hidden below the surface further highlights the value of introspective co-interviewing to engage meaningfully with Warren's narrative.

Rafan: "Just ... Let Me Try to be One of Them"

Rafan was 20 years old at the time of his interview with Parmar whose origins are British Indian. Of British Bangladeshi, Muslim origin, Rafan had been involved in a serious incidence of violence that led to his police arrest. Unsurprisingly, the episode had a profound effect on Rafan as he was excluded from school and effectively denied access to the formal pathways of achievement that initially seemed within his reach and for which he had aspired. Rafan felt betrayed that his peers had not supported him by acting as witnesses to vindicate his role in the fight which left the other boy in a coma.

Rafan's interview demonstrates a socio-cultural backstory in which racialized interactions and coloniality is deeply implicated in what he tells Parmar, but it seems often just beyond view, within and outwith the criminal justice system. For example, in his interview, Rafan replayed a conformity to South Asian colonial stereotypes including respect and deference towards his parents and community members as well as displaying a pressure to present himself as law-abiding and distant from any association with crime or with drugs (Wardak, 2000). However later he introduced some ambiguity by admitting "I know drug dealers. I know people, I know ...". This performative thread carried throughout his interview and Rafan seemed to have some self-awareness about this idealized presentation of himself in interview, as illustrated by the sub-heading quote "Just ... [I]et me try to be one of them [subservient South Asian]."

Amidst the rapport that Rafan and Parmar had, underpinned by some shared "British Asianness", Rafan held back on some of his answers, and this created an interview dynamic where he would first answer a question by giving a model or expected answer, followed by a clarificatory, "real" answer. Earle, in reading the interview between Rafan and Parmar verified this pattern:

It's the sense in which you know there's so much that's left out. And I got that feeling in your interview ... he was performing for you a piece. He wanted to present himself as brash and confident and you know, unfazed by anything but you just saw the performance not the person.

There are no guarantees with "ethnic matching." As Young (2004:192) notes convincingly, "although researchers continue to strive to maximize their insider status, in fact they stand experientially in the midst of ever-shifting configurations of both positions." This was certainly the case in the interview with Rafan. While he would often appeal to a sense of shared knowledge or understanding between himself and Parmar, remarking to Parmar, "You know how, you know how it goes" and whilst this might be read on the face of it as an offhand comment that he may have said to anyone regardless of their ethnic background, in the interview Rafan was very much alluding

to an assumed shared understanding of culture between himself and Parmar. Illustrative of the ambiguous nature of ethnic matching particularly in light of intra-ethnic boundaries and the different colonial and religious histories for Rafan and Parmar, Phillips raised this in the introspective co-interviewing exercise, asking:

What did you think about when he said he was of Bangladeshi origin? What did that communicate to you? Did you think that there was common ground, or there wasn't?

Parmar responded to this question by highlighting that there may actually be more barriers to trust developing given that he was Bangladeshi Muslim, and she was Indian Hindu, and this was evidenced by the fact that throughout the interview, Rafan was continually trying to place Parmar, asking her about her religious background and so on. Parmar also expressed that she expected there to be a shared experience of racism and cultural understandings. Thus, while Parmar understood Rafan's discussions of Bangladesh and visits "back" to see his grandparents and the connections he felt, Parmar's postcolonial family story is vastly different, having been shaped by her parents' life in Kenya and Uganda which were also both part of the British empire. Parmar's father's family came to England as refugees following Idi Amin's expulsion of Asians from Uganda in August 1972. Her mother's family came from Kenya to England as economic migrants in the 1970s. Parmar's great-grandparents and grandparents were settled in East Africa having migrated from Gujarat, India as indentured laborers. While colonial histories often resonate between racialized groups, it is also important to recognize the limits of claims to similarity across different imperial regimes and therefore how they impact the colonial present (Stoler, 2016). Rafan and Parmar's interview therefore highlights how common ground cannot be taken for granted, resonating with Winddance Twine's (2000) racialized dilemmas as a 'light skinned black American' researching race in Brazil. She too had not anticipated the lack of common ground shared with Brazilians of African ancestry as recipients of anti-black racism.

In a later part of the interview, Parmar and Rafan were discussing the over-representation of certain minority ethnic groups in the criminal justice system when he made a clear statement about the immutability of racial hierarchies and the actions of other subordinated ethno-racial groups, stating that the reason for the over-representation of black men in the criminal justice system was "Because they're black." Rafan immediately recoiled as he knew that he was communicating a racist stereotype, albeit in somewhat ambiguous terms, which Phillips highlighted in the co-interviewing exercise.

The introspective co-interviewing allowed a sense by which we as researchers could each go beyond our horizons of understanding to make visible what was felt in the spaces, pauses and allusions made by participants. There was also a commitment in our interview approaches with participants to evaluate how we listen to and avoid the coercive forms of (qualitative) interview (Sinha & Back, 2014) that participants might have been subject to by the criminal justice process (e.g. in police, probation and immigration interviews). This raised the need for a conversational and softer unstructured style, where traditionally assumed interview power dynamics were upturned and oscillated from interviewee to interviewer and vice versa. This was certainly the case with Rafan who determined the tempo of the interview as though traditional gender dynamics were at play. As a brash, confident young man, Rafan often took charge in

the interview, directing its focus on his own terms and performing his story and the parts he wished to share, on his terms. For example, Rafan talked about a recent breakup with his fiancée and how this had diminished the hopes he had had of pursuing a conventional life. Parmar wondered whether this was rehearsed to convey his affirmation of South Asian family stereotypes, to present himself as conventional and committed to family values, almost to neutralize what he had divulged in his interview about his past violence that filled him with shame. The fragments of Rafan's story were at times frustrating and just beyond reach, difficult to place in an overall coherent whole. Traditional interview methods have had an extractive quality which we were keen to avoid; however, as the life story interaction between Rafan and Parmar shows, there can be no certainties that this will necessarily result in coherence or clarity about a person's life in the round. This too is an important lesson for the student learning the practice of qualitative interviewing.

Cairo: "The White Man Made the System"

Cairo was interviewed by Phillips, a mixed-race (white British and Nigerian) woman. At the time of the interview, Cairo was 17 years of age, living in South London with his parents and siblings. Cairo is immediately forthright in asserting his Jamaican identity in the interview ("Yes, I've got British passport ... I'm Jamaican by blood"). It was at a very early point of the interview that Cairo reveals an incident that could very easily have changed the temperature of the interview and the nature of the rapport which seemed to have been achieved up until that point. In response to a question about his parents' qualities and his relationship with them, Cairo is reverential and appreciative, describing his parents as "very special." Nine minutes into the interview, he goes onto divulge that, whilst at school, he had been accused of raping a girl in his class. Juxtaposed for Phillips at this stage, was an automatic assumption that a victim of a sexual assault should always be believed alongside a warning sign that this resembled the familiar scenario of the "black monster" rapist so easily conjured up in the public imagination (Fanon, 1967/2008). Cast by the white gaze, with its hegemonic power, this is the "indistinguishable, amorphous, black seething mass, a token of danger, a threat, a criminal, a burden, a rapacious animal incapable of delayed gratification" (Yancy, 2017: 19). In the interview moment then, there was both a gendered and an occupational identification: the first recognizing the violent vulnerability young women face and the second an awareness of the challenges involved in reporting such violence to the police and it then being investigated and prosecuted. At the same time, it seemed particularly significant that Cairo had chosen to reveal this accusation. It is certainly possible that Cairo might assume that he and Parmar shared a political-cultural awareness of the racialized nature of such allegations against black men. After all, such incidents represent *the* cultural trope of blackness circulating, marking black men as one-dimensional violent predators. Noted in the co-interview was this intersectional, yet racially-inflected dilemma on what to believe and understand from this revelation:

I think it's such a good example of how you can immediately, you know, it can challenge your kind of intersectional identity and understanding because, you know, my first

reaction would always be to think that when a woman makes an allegation of violence against a man that her account should be recognized and believed. Of course, we're only ever talking about ... a single side of the story. You know? When you're talking to an offender, you're hearing their reflections of their offending behavior that can often be about denial and neutralization or whatever. I think, like, if I-, I'm trying to think, you know, a seventeen-year-old young man talks to a much older woman in an interview situation about something like that. I mean, it's something that you [he] could very easily not talk about.

For Parmar and Earle, this admission was an indicator of the trusting rapport that appeared to have been present very soon into the interview. They assumed his investment in the interview was being displayed in his eagerness to tell this portion of his story to someone racially similar who would not immediately make judgements about his character and impugn his guilt. The possibility that Cairo was deliberately trying to advocate for himself and neutralize his offending was a less convincing conclusion given that he had not needed to raise the issue at all. Moreover, he went on to admit to the fraudulent hacking of credit card accounts, which were used to purchase iPhones that were sold by his friends. As Earle noted in the co-interview:

he did disclose to you quite a lot, he trusted you at some level ... I mean, you know, the whole story of the credit card things, the whole extent of the kind of material gain he had made ... there were moments where he was like, 'Shall I tell you this?' ... You know, and you were saying, 'no it's all anonymized' or whatever. And some of that was to do with, like, in the rape story was taking risks. 'You're going to think of me as some kind of person' ... But none of those stopped him and something in your rapport and sense of openness or honesty in terms of, 'I'm interviewing you for this' allowed him to share.

A further unforeseen part of the identity and positionality mix was Phillips's sense, as a mother of boys liable to hostile racializations, of a degree of parental identification with Cairo's predicaments. In trying to fathom the entangled nature of his conflictual, and subsequently violent, peer relationships, Cairo's story is hard to follow in the transcript, but his demeanor was familiar:

He was doing that classic thing that I find with my own children, like, you ask them something and you can't get the detail from them of something. It's just like, you know, and it almost like it's a-, they feel almost slightly threatened like you're asking for too much information ... But I think there's something about the humanity, the nature of the interaction being very potentially raw, potentially emotionally laden but also a kind of, a sight of things that get misconstrued or misunderstood. It's not-, this isn't a neat dataset ... it's just never really very straightforward.

Some details of the story remain obscured, but the account is revealing of Cairo's immaturity, and of the complexities of peer relationships that are fraught, impacted by structural inequality, material insecurity, and institutional racism. Exemplified in Cairo's comments, "they [white society] made it tighter for *us* to get somewhere ... White man is at the top of the food chain." Cairo envelops Phillips in his category of included potential recipients of racist practices. There is also a poignancy to Cairo's tone in the articulation of everyday racism (Essed, 2002). As Parmar noted in the co-interview:

it's so telling the way he says, 'Oh, no I've not had *any* involvement with the police. I've *only* been stopped once.' I mean, that's not a regular occurrence for a white boy, is it? It's

like, only been stopped once, kind of thing. So that normalization of racist, kind of, everydayness.

Continuing, Cairo discusses the operation and function of racial hierarchies in British society that pit white people at the top and those of South Asian origin in the middle above black groups. Following up on Cairo's indications of racial stratification in British society, Parmar asks Phillips in the co-interview about the feelings associated with Cairo's comments:

I felt sadness actually ... Of these people that were describing their racialized, as you say, normalizing some of those experiences. But thinking about that it is the acceptance of it. It's like it's the fact, I know it's a fact, I know it exists. And I'm not really going to comment on the fact that, you know ... would I have been saying similar things if I was being interviewed when I was seventeen? And I probably would have. And actually, that's quite pretty disheartening ... it's a reminder of where you're positioned. It's a reminder of the commonalities of experiences of racism.

For those of us positioned as inferior in a putative racial hierarchy, hearing about a young black man grateful for "only being stopped once" holds up our own racialized vulnerabilities. As Russell-Brown (2021: 328–9), recently put it in reflecting on images of police brutality, "[t]here is psychological trauma associated with seeing images of people and in particular people who look like you being tortured in public by agents of the state." Words bear the weight of much pain too.

Conclusion: "There is no Impartiality with Respect to Social Injustices"

In a recent piece on prison ethnographic practice, Damsa and Ugelvik (2017) describe how Kongsvinger prison in Norway was similarly described to both of them in their separate studies as the world's most comfortable racist institution. Despite some ways in which foreign national prisoners in this Norwegian prison interacted differently with the two of them (of different genders, nationalities, linguistic groups), they maintain their research findings were broadly alike with regard to prisoners' perspectives on their racialized lives inside. Damsa and Ugelvik (2017: 8) were left concluding that "the differences between our two field positions at the intersection of citizenship, age, and gender ... were not differences that really made a difference." Our findings concur in the sense that biographical positioning can never be expected to *guarantee* or fully determine how a research interaction will be forged in the moment. However, their further thinking that qualitative research may be best served simply by careful and detailed ethnographic descriptions risks excluding the intricate dynamics of racialization in preference to claimed objective, "race-blind" methods. Their resort to promoting methodological rigor and thick description perhaps unintentionally simply re-privileges the idea of a singular, passive mode of seeing that floats "depersonalized, above actual speech, booming loudly with knowledge of the other, inviting its listeners/readers to be persuaded through its reason and reasonableness" (Mykhalovskiy, 1996: 139). Yet our collaborative approach and findings yield the potential for insights to be generated from going beyond a literal reading of what is *said* and what can be *seen* from a singular dominant standpoint. Trying to excavate the silences, omissions, and obfuscations can illuminate the complexities of racializing processes in everyday

life. The value of employing ethnically diverse research teams offer the greatest promise in enabling us to see the foreground and background in criminal justice research settings. In this way we can move beyond the verification required through triangulation and instead seek expansion in our understanding and interpretation. For the student learning about qualitative research in relation to race and ethnicity, knowledge of the multiple ways in which biographical identities impact the research question asked, the research, the engagement in fieldwork, and the analysis and writing stages, is crucial. A tool for learning could utilize the secondary analysis of archived datasets of interviews and fieldnotes with ethnically mixed groups of students being asked to interrogate the authors' conclusions in a similar way to that used in our introspective interviewing approach here.

The material discussed in this paper also serves as a reminder that the "harms" of race-related research do not fall equally on the shoulders of all criminological researchers. Our professional lives do not entail an abstracted, academic existence where data represents only understanding and knowledge. Such data as we have discussed in this paper—stories of racialization and racism—inhire in the bodily subjectivity of our brown and black skin, connecting to own experiential realities in everyday life and in the academy (Essed, 1991). This certainly does not mean that these challenges operate without the associated economic privilege that comes from a tenured position in the academy, but equally neither does it mean that anyone is exempt from the tentacles of racism (Dennis, 2013: 985). It remains troubling that researching in environments and around issues made toxic by racism leaves scholars of color vulnerable, exposed and threatened (see Ali, Rashid, and Tufail, 2021). In contrast, for those with white skins the struggles and exigencies of daily life are not mired with racism in the classroom, academy, and on the frontline of the research field. Just as (typically white) managers of research teams should take note to uphold the ethical integrity of the research endeavor and the safety of vulnerable researchers, so too should this element of racialized dynamics form a critical part of the pedagogical approach used by instructors in the classroom. Care for students of color going into the field is as vital as forewarning students about their likely encounters with complex racial hierarchies in which even forms of whiteness can be ordered into degrees of superiority and inferiority. Neither the field, nor the classroom, nor the academy can escape the formations and divisions of race that circulate in our society, and we do a disservice to students if this does not form part of their methodological and epistemological education.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflicts of interest were reported by the authors.

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