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Being an Insider and Outsider: Whiteness as a Key Dimension of Difference

Abstract
This article demonstrates the significance of engaging with whiteness as a key dimension of difference shaping research in multi-faceted ways. I critically reflect on a research project that included interviews with Muslim men in Rotherham, a northern English town that had experienced a child sexual exploitation crisis involving Pakistani Muslim men. It raised significant methodological and epistemological issues regarding my position in the research, as a white female researcher, and my relationships with local Pakistani Muslim men and women. I highlight the fluidity of my insider-outsider position through exploring political and ethical dilemmas involved in carrying out the research and structural and experiential aspects of researcher subjectivity. I show how being white both facilitated and obstructed the research as I steered my way through a highly sensitive set of circumstances and how engaging with whiteness is key to democratising research and shedding light on unequal power relations in knowledge production.

Introduction
Reflexive accounts of researching race and ethnicity include assessing 'race of researcher effects' and the merits of ethnic and racial matching in interviews. These have drawn attention to the positioning of the researcher as white and the researched 'other' as 'non-white' and have advocated reversing the gaze to consider the position of researchers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and white research participants (Gunaratnam, 2003; Twine and Warren, 2000; Rhodes, 1994; Sin, 2007; Torngren and Ngeh, 2018; Twine, 2000). They provide insight into the different ways in which questions about race and ethnicity are relevant to all research. Despite increased recognition of the usefulness of paying attention to whiteness, it is still uncommon for white researchers to provide an account of how whiteness impacts on the research that we conduct. Our lack of engagement with whiteness reflects that it is socially constructed as an empty category and is usually invisible to those categorised as white (Bonnett, 2000; Dyer, 2000; Frankenberg, 1993; Garner, 2007). There is little, if any, consideration of how white power and privilege advantages white researchers and the resulting impact on research remains unseen and unchallenged.

This article addresses a persistent lack of researcher attentiveness to whiteness by drawing on my experience, as a white female researcher, of carrying out qualitative research that involved interviews with Pakistani Muslim men in Rotherham, a northern English town that had experienced a child sexual exploitation scandal involving local Muslim men. Newspaper headlines such as "Revealed: conspiracy of silence on UK sex gangs. Most convicted offenders of Pakistani heritage" (Norfolk, 2011) and "British Pakistani men ARE raping and

exploiting white girls … and its time we faced up to it" (Champion, 2017) are typical of how attention was drawn to the offenders' ethnic background and how it was presented as a key explanatory variable in understanding the offending. The purpose of the research was to explore the impact of the scandal on local Muslim men. It involved ethnographic observational work carried out over a two-year period and in-depth interviews with eight men. The research raised a number of significant methodological and epistemological issues with respect to my position in the research and my relationships with local Pakistani Muslim men and women, who contributed to the project in different ways. The article reveals both the dynamism and fluidity of my position as an insider and outsider as I negotiated my way through the research and the key relevance of being white.

The aim of the article is to draw attention to the significance of engaging critically with whiteness as a key dimension of difference shaping the various stages of the research process in multi-faceted ways. It problematizes whiteness by examining the interface between my subjective position as a white female researcher and the social, cultural and political situations I encountered during the research. I critically reflect on my position as a white researcher in order to show how the racialised identity of both researcher and research participants affect the research process generally and qualitative interviewing specifically. This involves considering both structural and experiential aspects of researcher subjectivity and the intersection of whiteness with other dimensions of difference, such as gender. It also involves considering political and ethical dilemmas I encountered in negotiating insider status while carrying out the research. A related key aim is to show how researchers can critically engage with whiteness as an essential part of democratising the research process, challenging unequal power relations and shedding light on knowledge production.

The article reveals how my being white both facilitated and obstructed the research as I steered my way through a highly sensitive set of local circumstances. It shows that the advantages and privileges of whiteness cannot be assumed when examining the subjectivity of white researchers (Sin, 2007). In doing so, it is a reflexive account of my subjective position as a white, female researcher, showing how whiteness was one of several dimensions of similarity and difference between research participants and myself that shaped the research in subtle, complex and unexpected ways. I explain how I was simultaneously an insider and outsider, as delineating boundaries were constantly, and inevitably, blurred (Hayfield and Huxley, 2015; Merriam et al, 2001; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). This provides a reminder of how researchers are embedded in complex, multi-layered sets of power relations that shape the research process at every stage. It reinforces that whiteness is an important dimension of difference for researchers to consider alongside other dimensions when undertaking qualitative research. The article's aims are explored with

reference to three key aspects of the research process: accessing research participants, interviewing and knowledge production.

Evolution of the research

The research concentrated on sensitive issues at a highly sensitive time and place due to its focus on the impact of a child sexual exploitation scandal on local Muslim men. Public and media concern about the involvement of a large number of Muslim men in serious crimes involving child sexual exploitation arose following a substantial number of cases in UK towns and cities with a significant Muslim population. The publication of the Jay Report on findings of a public inquiry identified Muslim men as the main perpetrators in Rotherham (Jay, 2014). The scandal and publication of the report had a notable detrimental impact on local community relations, amplified by persistent negative media reporting, an increase in incidents of hate crime and sustained far right activity. I began visiting Rotherham in the weeks following the publication of the report, initially accompanying a colleague who had been involved, for many years, in co-produced research in the town (Rasool, 2017). My interviews with eight Muslim men took place two years after the publication of the report, following an extensive period of immersion in the research site that involved ethnographic observation in a range of formal and informal contexts and the gradual development of collaborative relationships with key local actors, three Muslim women.

The research illustrates the part played by place, and time, as animating forces in the research process, with spatial and temporal factors shaping each stage from design and planning onwards (Neal et al, 2015). Rotherham is a place that did not tend to attract media, public and research attention until recently. Located outside of main urban centres and with a relatively small minority ethnic population, it has been overlooked in the rich body of UK-based research on diversity, multi-culture and Muslim minorities (e.g. Hall, 2015; Neal et al., 2018; Wessendorf, 2016). Unique, sustained, negative media and public attention as a result of the scandal prompted a range of pertinent questions for research regarding the future of multiculturalism, incorporation of Muslim minorities and racialised Muslim masculinities (Britton, 2018, 2019). A set of extraordinary localised circumstances presented an exceptional, opportune backdrop for the development of the research, whilst posing potentially insurmountable challenges for its successful execution. Specifically, the research required the participation of local Pakistani Muslim people who were understandably growing suspicious and tired of the problematic attention of people seen as outsiders.

Research design and methods selection comprised an iterative process, progressing slowly, in order to accommodate a shifting spatial and temporal context arising from the persisting local, multi-dimensional impact of the scandal. This necessitated continuous negotiation and reflexive consideration of

risk, which included assessing the vulnerability of both researched and researcher. Uppermost were ethical issues arising from the potential for the research to do further harm by contributing to dominant problematizing accounts of both local Muslims and the town. This included the challenge of anonymising interview data when the location of the research would be identified in publications. Information sheets and consent forms included details about limits to guarantees of anonymity and this was discussed at length with participants. There is always a possibility that participants may still be identifiable despite careful anonymisation of the data (Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 2015). As a result , I constantly reflected on my position in the research and the rationale for continuing with it. The following sections demonstrate how my reflections revealed the relevance of whiteness, and how it intersected with other dimensions of difference, in the research relationships that I developed with three local Muslim women and eight men who agreed to be interviewed. Each section details the constant fluidity of my hybrid insider-outsider position. Pseudonyms are used in examples from the data.

Accessing research participants
Race and gender were significant intersecting, structural factors influencing this stage of the research process. Carrying out the research made me aware of how I was ostensibly positioned as a local insider because whiteness granted me privileged access to move through public spaces in the town without racialised anxiety and fear. I visited Rotherham regularly, meeting research participants at various locations in or close to the town centre. Research participants recalled encounters during their daily lives that made themselves and other local Muslims feel unsafe and unwelcome. In contrast to them, I did not need to adopt strategies of accommodation to minimise risk of exposure to everyday racism, nor did I become familiar with being marked as a body out of place in mundane multicultural encounters (Britton, 2018). Routine experiences of public spaces did not threaten my ontological security in the same way as it threatened that of participants, although gendered experiences of space still mattered as I took into account risk factors associated with being a female researcher working alone. Instead, Rotherham reminded me of the town where I grew up and I felt at home walking around there. The contrast between research participants' experiences and my own promotes recognition that access is facilitated by the racialised advantages of white researchers in moving unhindered through public spaces that are research sites.

Race and gender were significant intersecting, structural factors influencing my developing relationships with local Pakistani Muslim women that were integral to the execution of the research. My deep personal familiarity with Pakistani Muslim culture and traditions meant that I had privileged insider knowledge and understanding, which proved invaluable in building relationships underpinning collaboration. I disclosed that my partner is a

Pakistani Muslim man at the beginning of my collaboration with local women. My disclosure encouraged women collaborators to regard me as an insider who was sympathetic to the circumstances of local Muslims, which I willingly corroborated. Subsequent revealing of gendered commonalities based on mutual experiences facilitated relationship building. This included positioning myself as a white woman who has encountered moments of questioning my white privilege as a result of my personal circumstances (Frankenberg, 1993). For example, I did so by discussing my growing awareness of discrimination faced by Muslim men as a result of reflecting on my own relatives' experiences. Women collaborators expressed sympathy for and solidarity with my relatives and discussed comparable experiences of Muslim men who they knew. Highlighting this kind of shared knowledge and understanding helped me in securing insider status.

The process of doing rapport in order to develop productive research relationships raises serious ethical questions regarding deception or 'faking' (Duncombe and Jessop, 2011). Although managing appearances and selectively offering information are integral to all interaction, it is important for white researchers to critically reflect on potential consequences with respect to using deception in securing racialised advantages that facilitate research (Goffman, 1969). The powerful invisibility of whiteness makes it challenging to identify reliable and valid examples, even for white researchers who are alert to the potential for whiteness to facilitate access to minority groups (Dyer, 2000; Garner, 2007). Although undertaken in a spirit of openness and transparency, I was aware that I presented a partial account of my position to women collaborators. I arguably distanced myself from my privileged white background and identity in order to demonstrate my closeness to that of my partner's, securing insider status. For example, unless explicitly encouraged by the women, I avoided criticism of Pakistani culture and traditions and did not usually articulate differing views. My researcher agency enabled me to distance myself from my white identity, providing me with an advantage in facilitating successful access. In addition, I acknowledge that I was potentially, similarly advantaged by the fetishisation of whiteness experienced by white converts to Islam who, unlike non-white converts, are welcomed by lifelong Muslims as a result of their privileged place in a racialised hierarchy (Moosavi, 2014). As a result, research participants who are not white may see the attention of a white researcher as beneficial, helping to secure privileged access and co-operation. This is explored further in subsequent sections.

Interviewing
Research interviews take place in a stratified society so reflexive accounts of research involve considering interviewer effects across various dimensions of difference, and the merits of interviewer-interviewee matching (Arendell, 1997: 363). These must take into account both the performative aspects and social

dynamics of interviewing (Manderson, Bennett and Andajani-Sutjahjo, 2006). In interviews I carried out with Muslim men, whiteness intersected with other dimensions of difference in multiple, complex and fluid ways. Specifically, race, gender and place were notable intersecting dimensions shaping interactions in interviews and data collected. My subjective position in the research continuously shifted between being an insider and outsider due to the interplay between these (Hayfield and Huxley, 2015; Merriam et al, 2001; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Power and control shifted as interviews were dynamically co-constructed between each participant and myself in a powered interaction (Vahasantanen and Saarinen, 2012). Reflecting on this illuminates how whiteness both facilitated and obstructed the interviews. Whiteness played an integral part in interviews, including when I distanced myself from it in order to establish rapport and facilitate disclosure.

It was reasonable for male participants to assume that a white female researcher had very little in common with them so, prior to each interview, I attempted to reduce difference and build rapport through self-disclosure. The extent of disclosure varied between interviews and was related to how much participants asked me about myself after I disclosed that my partner is of the same ethnic and religious background as them. Self-disclosure can be considered good research practice because it encourages critical self-reflection. It invites recognition of how a researcher's personal and working life overlap, connecting researchers as private individuals to the public issues we research (Mills, 1959). It also plays a role in positioning the interviewer in the interaction (Poindexter, 2003; Abell et al, 2006: 223). It enabled me to indicate cross-cultural sensitivity and that detailed explanations about cultural and religious practices and traditions were probably unnecessary. However, it also led me to risk overstating commonalities as the following excerpt indicates:

Anis: My worry, as a parent of young children, was that they were going to completely lose their culture, their inherited culture, and actually the reverse is happening. Because it's the only thing they can cling onto, because they are more like … they're singled out to be different.

AA: It's kind of about belonging I guess?

Anis: Yeah, belonging, of course it is. As a third generation Pakistani myself you do struggle with thinking about belonging because I equally have only visited Pakistan once, so I don't really have any connection to it.

AA: You've been once?

Anis: Yeah.

AA: I've been twice (laughs).

Anis: Yeah? You're ahead of me (laughs). I don't have any connection really to the country. I've got relatives that are Pakistanis and I can't sit around the table and chat with them for very long. After I've asked how they are, that's me done. Because I'm interested in film, books and football, and mixed ... they're not interested in that. They like cricket, I don't like cricket. Culturally, I have very little in common with my family members that are Pakistani.

The excerpt shows that, as in my interactions with women participants, a key performative aspect of my interviews involved me distancing myself from my privileged white background and identity and arguably overstating my closeness to Pakistani culture. In doing so, I colluded in a common sense, essentialist understanding of culture and ethnicity in order to stress commonalities. I presented a partial account of my position in order to position myself as an insider, which contributed to the invisibility of my white power and privilege in the research. This advantaged me in rapport building whilst, again, highlighting the serious ethical issue of deception (Duncombe and Jessop, 2011). I did not fake my closeness to Pakistani culture, but can be seen to have deceived by drawing attention away from my white identity.

As well as distancing myself from whiteness, I engaged in blurring boundaries and equalizing power relations through utilising gendered dynamics of the interviews. Meeting the aims of the research was dependent on the participation of the men and their willingness to talk openly. I was surprised at the extent and type of disclosure in interviews. Participants talked frankly and at length about the relational, emotional and intimate dimensions of their lives and their responses to different forms of racism experienced in the town following the scandal (Britton, 2018, 2019). It was unusual for local Muslim men to have an opportunity to express their views about the scandal's impact and for someone to listen with compassion and sympathy. This suggests that the interviews had some therapeutic value (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). There is evidence that men are more willing to discuss aspects of their personal lives with a female interviewer (Vahasantanen and Saarinen, 2012:495; Manderson, Bennett and Andajani-Sutjahjo, 2006). I was aware that I was involved in a gendered performance, displaying care and concern and conforming to stereotypes of women as good listeners.

Performance management of my femininity was arguably a suitable strategy to achieve disclosure and meet the research's aims. It facilitated extensive, high quality data collection, enabling me to foreground men's detailed accounts in writing up the findings. However, it highlighted ethical issues regarding deception that arise when researchers make difficult choices about how to present themselves (Duncombe and Jessop, 2011). There were times when I was uncomfortable with my passivity and willingness to relinquish

authority and I worried that my approach was deceitful. For example, I chose to loosely adhere to the interview schedule, relinquishing control by enabling participants to talk without interruption. Participants varied according to the extent to which they assumed control, with some displaying this typically masculine quality more than others. In contrast, each articulated vulnerabilities arising from the impact of the scandal, although the degree of this type of disclosure also varied. The interview was therefore a complex gendered and racialised encounter, with shifting power relations throughout.

The intersection of gender and race advantaged the interviews in other complex, unforseen ways, further illustrating the fluidity of my insider-outsider position. Participants were arguably willing to disclose sensitive details about their personal lives because they positioned me as an outsider, specifically a white woman with less conservative social values than deemed typical of local Pakistani people. For example, one talked at length about cultural expectations and changing patterns of relationships in his family, with younger members challenging cultural norms:

No-one talks about it … I mean, a small town like Rotherham anybody who goes out with anybody is going to be talked about. If you go to (*another place in England*) my (*relative)* goes out with a black girl and my other (*relative*) goes out with a white girl. My (r*elative*) goes out with a Sikh and there's all this stuff happening but it's just their choice because they've been with…they've gone through the process of courting and going out and building relationships. I feel that in a small community like that it's like the young men are like suffocated (Hassan).

Participants would have potentially been less willing to disclose this kind of personal information if the interviews had been ethnically matched as inter-ethnic relationships are unusual, and often frowned upon, in British Pakistani families (Yip, 2004). Conversely, they may have been more willing to disclose different kinds of personal information had the interviews been ethnically matched. All were open about discussing details of what they had learned about child sexual exploitation, which is noteworthy as it is a topic that remains taboo in South Asian cultures (Gohir, 2013). Some revealed detailed awareness about different, complex dimensions of exploitation and the local scandal and positioned themselves as knowledgeable insiders, with comprehensive understanding of the impact of the scandal locally (Britton, 2018). Due to cultural taboos, they would have perhaps been less likely to engage in discussion on this topic with a researcher of the same ethnic background.

Positioning themselves as knowledgeable insiders involved an assertive, gendered display of competence as male possessors of expert knowledge that eclipsed my privileged and racialised positioning as a white possessor of expert knowledge (Mills, 1997; Puwar, 2004). In colluding with this, I distanced myself

from power relations associated with my racialised identity as a white researcher. It is another example of the fluid power relations of the interview encounter, highlighting how I continuously shifted between being an insider and outsider. It is also another example of how the ethical difficulty of deception filtered through the interview encounter (Duncombe and Jessop, 2011). Place was another intersecting dimension shaping the interviews and data collection as I was subjectively positioned in the research as non-local, and therefore an outsider (Sin, 2007:485). Intersecting with gender, this further enabled participants to position themselves as experts on the scandal as part of the dynamic co-construction of the interview (Ikonen and Ojala, 2007). It was common for participants to assume that I knew relatively little about the scandal and, as a result, they talked at length about its various dimensions. Appearing uninformed provided an advantage in enabling me to ask questions about issues that I already had some understanding of in order to facilitate the collection of high quality data (Abell et al, 2006:223). The shifting intersections of race, gender and place contributed to the successful execution of the interview, further drawing attention away from my privileged racialised identity, whilst reinforcing the fluidity of my insider-outsider position.

Reflexive awareness of my position and status as a white female researcher was particularly acute during encounters in which participants placed emphasis on, and were keen to evidence, their own position and status. The following excerpt is from a lengthy exchange that was not directly relevant to the research questions and was led by the participant. Although he had trained and worked as a computer programmer, he was a taxi driver at the time of the research in order to accommodate significant caring responsibilities for his elderly parents. Earlier in the interview he had pointed out his children's degree certificates, which hung on the wall of his living room. He spoke at length and with pride about his children's high level of education and subsequent employment success. He invited me to view a substantial folder of his own academic and employment-related certificates, which were close at hand:

Nasir: Am I an ideal candidate to be a taxi driver? Probably so. I warrant all the necessary qualifications. I'm going to give you a sample, so you can just go through these, yeah? My children think that they've got more certificates than I do.

AA: Are these yours? Oh my word, you have a whole file.

Nasir: Yeah. It's a never-ending file. Yeah, there's some qualifications, all the way from when I was very young at school, these are pre…they're not the best of qualifications, but I tell you what, I've got loads of them.

AA: You've got loads. I don't think I've seen so many … that's incredible. This one is September 2015.

Nasir: Yeah, it's been a lifetime of qualifications. There are some that are missing from here as well. Occasionally I have to step into special shoes, in regards to fast food. All my fast food ones are placed in…

AA: Okay. Have you got some of those qualifications?

Nasir: Yeah, yeah.

AA: That's very impressive. That's incredible.

Nasir: And then just for the record, I don't mind you seeing this side, that's HMRC, Revenue and Customs, this one, this is the DBS which has been conducted by the local authority, for me to drive a taxi. (Nasir)

Through drawing attention to his and his children's educational and employment success, Nasir provided evidence that his position and status were similar to mine. Although Nasir did not refer to experiences of racism, his and his children's success could be considered more of an achievement than my own given that the racialised advantages of being categorised as white played no part in theirs. As a result, boundaries were blurred and power relations were equalized and this meant that my subjective position as a white female researcher was no obstacle to the collection of useful data.

My subjective position in the research continuously shifted between being an insider and outsider, facilitating the execution of the interview in other less congenial, unexpected ways. For instance, it helped me to gain important insight into participants' critical perspectives on the response of various authorities to the scandal. The following two excerpts are from one interview. The participant's confrontational, provocative statements are understandable due to the highly sensitive, wider political context in which the interview occurred. They reflect widespread criticisms that various relevant authorities responded inadequately to the scandal, despite possessing expert knowledge about what had happened in the town:

And where were the academia then? Where were the rational people then? Where were the … why did you guys basically fail in your duty? … this is institutions saving their necks and trying to silence people coming out (Umar).

We don't have academics coming out on publishing a different set, a different type of argument or a different way of looking at things. What we've had is a shunning of academics totally from any debate that takes place. Whereas before, academics

were a central tenet of how people formed their views. Now their views are formed on what's in the media and what the politicians are saying … moderate and the academic and the rational voices are being silenced. It's high time the academics sat in their universities and their chairs come out (Umar).

Like researchers, research participants are aware of the potential audience for the research and speak to it. Umar's criticisms were not aimed at me alone but at the institutions he saw me as representing. They were made as part of the dynamic co-construction of the interview in which power relations constantly shifted. They illustrate that being positioned, at times, as an outsider was frequently no barrier to the collection of rich data capturing men's perspectives of various dimensions of the scandal. Instead, key aims of the research were met through enabling criticism of the powerful institutions I was seen to represent. This is significant given that these institutions perpetuate white power and privilege and are adept at avoiding criticism (Ahmed, 2012).

Knowledge production

Structural and experiential aspects of researcher subjectivity are relevant to reflexive examination of the ethics and politics of knowledge production. Paramount to the design and execution of the research was my concern to produce knowledge that would, at the very least, do no harm to the research participants and, at best, would provide fresh insight into Muslim men's lives, balancing problematizing accounts. The research aimed to foreground the accounts of Muslim men and to encourage their centring as historically speaking subjects in accounts of issues involving them (Britton, 2018; 2019). It involved constant reflexive consideration of using my privileged position to draw, potentially unwelcome, attention to a stigmatised group and risk contributing to problematizing accounts of Muslim men and Muslims in general. Even my use of the category 'Muslim' involved complicity in positioning participants as 'Muslim', risked essentialising difference and highlighted a fundamental tension in research regarding researchers' reliance on problematic ethnic and racial categories (Gunaratnam, 2003).

I engaged in careful, critical reflection on the potential vulnerability of the research participants and the associated dominance of problematising accounts of Muslim men that focus on criminality, cultural dysfunction and social exclusion (Alexander, 2004; Abbas, 2005; Fekete, 2009; Modood et al., 1997). This involved considering my privileged position as a researcher in presenting the accounts of a stigmatised group. It influenced the knowledge I produced as I analysed data and wrote up findings as I sought to avoid reproducing problematizing accounts. It is evident in reviewers' comments on two articles that I submitted, which have since been published (Britton, 2018, 2019). One reviewer referred to my writing as 'oddly cautious' and another stated that the title could be 'much better and more provocative'. Their comments indicate a

tension I experienced between producing knowledge that has a high impact and remaining careful to mitigate possible detrimental ethical and political outcomes of knowledge production. Producing a less cautious and more provocative account of my findings is potentially of greater personal benefit in increasing the likelihood of the writing being widely read and cited. However, it is also an exercise of my privilege through which I risk drawing further, negative attention to Muslim men and Muslims generally. The title of the article was changed as a result of the reviewer's feedback as I concluded that, on balance, the benefit of it being more widely read outweighed any potential cost of a more explicitly provocative title.

Research collaborations can provide a useful opportunity for research participants to shape the production of knowledge, reflecting that participants have their own reasons for participating in research that may, or may not, correspond with the aims of the researcher. Research collaborations with white researchers can secure, albeit racialised, advantages for participants from minority groups. This is potentially exploitative for both researchers and participants and means that the racialised advantages of white researchers are not absolute, straightforward or inevitable. Making use of my authority and position as an established, white researcher, local Muslim women were able to facilitate the production of a different account to the dominant one regarding the scandal in Rotherham and the local Muslim population (Britton, 2018 and 2019). I carried out interviews with men whom the women facilitated access to, having identified them as appropriate participants. The men were all actively involved in the social and political life of the town and had a broadly middle class socio-economic position. I did not interview the more excluded of local Muslim men, who were more likely to live in predominately Muslim areas, and were not identified as suitable prospective participants by the women. One of the participants questioned his suitability as a research participant:

I was thinking if I would be an appropriate person for this interview because [laughs] I, kind of, feel like that I'm outside of the community, because we live in an area where there's hardly any Asian people around, so we seem to be disconnected from everything. So all I know about what's happened is through word of mouth, or on social media, or on the news (Hassan).

In this way, the women's gatekeeping shaped the knowledge that I was able to produce.

Another aspect of the politics of knowledge production relates to what has become known as the white saviour complex, in which self-serving white people act to help people positioned as non-white in a way that validates our privilege, whilst failing to contribute to social justice and equality (Engles, 2016). It is relevant to considering my concerns about how to address the mismatch between my key objective to produce knowledge that would enable me to

publish academic journal articles and participants' core concern to improve community relations in their town. I was constantly wary of research participants' potential preconceptions about my capacity to make a positive difference to on-going, difficult local circumstances. The extent of reciprocity was partly limited by practical constraints associated with carrying out a small scale, unfunded project that was made possible by a few months of research leave. The implications of limited reciprocity are far-reaching if whiteness is considered. My position in research encounters with women and men shifted from researcher and knowledgeable academic to community activist and advisor. For example, one of the male participants asked for my advice on setting up local schemes to encourage cross-cultural exchange and I gave advice on doing a PhD related to themes of the research to one of the female participants. These unexceptional examples of reciprocity are probably less far-reaching in impact than potential career-related advantages for me in producing knowledge from the project. White researchers of race and ethnicity must critically interrogate claims of reciprocity if we are serious about democratising the research process and challenging unequal power relations. Without doing so, racialised advantages remain hidden and intact.

Lastly, my experiences suggest that it is important to take into account the impact on white researchers of engaging with methodological and epistemological issues related to producing knowledge. Research ethics are understandably focused on the interests, safety and welfare of research participants, and those of researchers are seen as secondary. With respect to engaging with whiteness, there are merits to broadening the focus to include considering how researching sensitive issues, such as race and ethnicity, can result in emotional, psychological and reputational harm. For me, this has involved reflecting on how to balance institutional pressures to secure funding and produce knowledge that is deemed impactful with my ethical and political position as a researcher attempting to be mindful of my privilege. I was originally introduced to the idea of carrying out research in Rotherham when I was invited to lead an, unsuccessful, application for research funding. Through the process of putting together the application, I became aware that responding to such pressures can reduce the capacity of researchers to act as autonomous agents in identifying and shaping research projects. I struggled to reconcile the career-related benefits of leading the application with my serious concerns about carrying out research in a context that was highly sensitive, ethically and politically. Responding to these concerns, one of my colleagues described me as a 'woman of steel', implying that I had qualities suited to coping with sensitive research. My unease with his description is related to my view that the success of the research would be as much about my privilege as a white university researcher entitled to examine and produce knowledge about the lives of 'others', as it was about my personal qualities. The project that I eventually carried out two years after the unsuccessful funding application had different

aims and was the result of careful collaboration with local Muslim women. My efforts to reflexively engage with being white show that whiteness played a key part in shaping it from start to finish. Despite these efforts, it is important to acknowledge that my subjective white gaze inevitably shapes what I have chosen to disclose here.

Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to show how whiteness was one of a number of key dimensions of difference shaping the research in various ways at different stages and how my subjective position continuously shifted between being an insider and outsider due to the interplay between these. In doing so, I have shown how whiteness both facilitated and obstructed the research in multifaceted, unexpected ways and how this reinforces that being white is a fluid and situational condition, rather than being permanent with fixed attributes (Bonnett, 1997:178; Sin, 2007:490). This highlights how considering whiteness prompts engagement with important political and ethical issues related to the complex, multi-layered sets of power relations that influence research. In particular, I have explained how there were occasions when my researcher agency contributed to the invisibility of whiteness as I distanced myself from it in order to facilitate the success of the research. This involved drawing on other dimensions of difference, including those arising from my personal circumstances and biography, in order to position myself as an appropriate researcher to carry out the project and facilitate successful execution of it. My reflexive consideration of the ethics and politics of knowledge production illuminates the relevance of whiteness to assessing the balance between advancing the interests of the researcher, and the institutions researchers represent, and those of research participants. In carrying out the project, I arguably utilised my racialised advantages as a white academic to draw attention to hidden, under-explored aspects of Muslim men's lives in a way that challenges dominant problematizing accounts (Britton, 2018, 2019). My experiences bring to light an important tension that requires more critical attention from white researchers. On the one hand, we can produce knowledge that has the potential to challenge ethnic and racial inequalities whilst, on the other, the research which creates this knowledge leaves the structural operation of white power and privilege intact.

Overall, I have sought to provide a critical, reflexive account of how whiteness shaped a research project through examining the interface between my subjective position as a white researcher and the social, cultural and political situations I encountered during different stages of the project (Manderson, Bennett and Andajani-Sutjahjo, 2006:1330). The article has drawn attention to how whiteness is a contextual and structural feature of qualitative research that requires more attention from researchers who are categorised as white. This includes white-on-white research, which is not usually problematised due to an

assumed sameness (Sin, 2007:483). One predictable exception is research conducted with racist and antiracist groups (Gallagher, 2000; Hughey, 2012). By reflecting on my own experiences, I encourage more critical reflection of how the agency of white researchers serves to reinforce the cloak of invisibility concealing white power and privilege (Garner, 2007; Twine, 2008). Conversely, through providing a critical, reflexive account of my experiences, I invite other white researchers to consider how they can act to remove the cloak of invisibility and reveal white power and privilege. This invitation is aimed at white researchers in general, not only those of us researching race and ethnicity.

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