



LEEDS
BECKETT
UNIVERSITY

Citation:

Fletcher, T (2014) 'Does he look like a Paki?' an exploration of 'whiteness', positionality and reflexivity in inter-racial sports research1851). *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 6 (2). 244 - 260. ISSN 2159-676X DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2013.796487>

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/160/>

Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

“Does he look like a Paki¹?” An exploration of ‘whiteness’, positionality and reflexivity in inter-racial sports research

Dr Thomas Fletcher, Leeds Metropolitan University

To be published in *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*

This article reflects on fieldwork with white and British Asian cricketers which explored the construction, maintenance and contestation of racialised identities in the sport of cricket. It addresses my experiences of gaining access to and working alongside both communities; particularly as I negotiated insecurities over the suitability of my own identity(ies), the normalisation of ‘whiteness’, and the constant awareness of my insider and outsider status within different contexts. I draw on personal experiences and fieldnotes to argue that one’s insider or outsider status is never certain; rather it is filled with dissonance and ambiguity, is an ongoing performance and is always in a state of flux. I provide evidence to show how white researchers (of sport) are, at times, culpable of reinforcing dominant racial discourses rather than challenging them. I conclude by arguing that if sociologists of sport are to establish a methodological framework for researching ‘race’ and its intersections, more scholars need to engage with the relationships between self and other and the self-as-other; more freely exploring the nature of reflexivity, and how doing reflexivity presents opportunities to connect with people across (and in spite of) cultural divides.

Key words: British Asians, Ethnography, Identity, Insider/Outsider, Inter-racial research, Methodology, Reflexivity, Whiteness.

Introduction

Very little research has directly focused on the experiences of British Asians (term discussed below) in cricket (cf. Author, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b; Burdsey, 2010). Dominant histories of the sport in England have centralised white voices. Subsequently, the experiences and stories of minority ethnic communities and, in particular, how they have interacted with (and within) ‘white’ spaces - remain heavily marginalised (ibid.). This paper goes some way to address this lack of scholarly attention.

At the professional level at least, British Asian players are now over-represented compared to their numbers in the overall population (Burdsey, 2010a). Within the sport itself, among politicians and in sections of the media, this numerical representation signifies the eradication of racism from English cricket (ibid.). Historically, representatives of English cricket have been reluctant to acknowledge that racism exists in the sport, and have instead championed its inclusivity. However, numerical representation is certainly not the equivalent to equality and integration. On the contrary, a great deal of evidence exists to suggest that racial prejudice and discrimination are still routinely embedded in aspects of the sport (Author, 2011a, 2011b, 2012; Carrington and McDonald, 2001).

Over the last two decades there has been growing evidence of a distinctive South Asian (often inferred to mean, Islamic) identity emerging from within the Western world (Abbas, 2011; Modood, 2007). Despite there being tremendous diversity amongst British South Asian communities, including Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus, it is common for these communities to be conflated as representatives of one homogenous group. These representations are, more often than not, clumsy stereotypes depicting South Asians as ‘radicalised’ and ‘dangerous’ [and Muslim]. According to Ryan (2011: 1046), currently, “Public discourse on Muslims in Europe is increasingly framed around the alleged incompatibility of Islam and a generalised notion of Western values”, which means Muslims in the West face a number of issues in relation to their identities, their adoption of religio-cultural norms and values and, ultimately, their citizenship (Brah, 2006; Abbas, 2011; Thomas, 2011; Thomas and Sanderson, 2011). There is a popularly

held belief within certain strata of the British population that British Asians consider themselves a 'community apart'. These views have been reflected in mainstream British cultural thinking and social policy, which has freely regressed to utterances of the Orientalism of the South Asian 'Other' who live 'parallel lives', completely lacking in shared identities (Abbas, 2011). As a result British Asians have been treated with suspicion and hostility, and widely 'racialised' in Orientalist terms.

Notes on Terminology

This paper employs the term 'British Asian' to refer to those British citizens who trace their ancestry back to, or who themselves migrated from, the Indian subcontinent. It is employed as a dynamic category and its application has no firm boundaries. The complexities involved in applying the term 'British Asian' and explaining relative levels of citizenship has received significant academic attention over the last two decades. Amongst them, Kalra et al. (2005) discuss the tendency to polarise 'British' and 'Asian', while also prioritising the British signifier as modern, compared to the traditional (inferred by 'Westerners' to mean 'backward') Asian signifier. Karner (2007) is critical of this due to an inability to successfully articulate the complexities and diversities of hybrid identities. Karner advocates for a greater appreciation of the possibilities that identities may be produced (and reproduced) by the fusing of British and South Asian heritages. Ali et al. (2006) propose use of the term 'BrAsian', which reflects how many British Asians are unable (or unwilling) to prioritise either their 'Britishness' or their 'Asianness'. More contemporaneously, Burdsey (2007) has referred to the nomenclature 'Anglo-Asian'; South Asians with mixed (white and Asian) parentage. I prefer to conceptualise British Asians within a discourse of hybridity. Hybridity reflects the dynamic, fluid and fragmented nature of British Asian identities in late modernity; identities that are contextually specific, amalgams of numerous different, and often seemingly conflicting and contradictory influences, and always in process (Burdsey, 2010).

The term 'white' is equally problematic. Used sociologically, "the term 'white' can be interpreted as encompassing non-material and fluid dominant norms and boundaries" (Garner, 2007: 67). To be white in Britain does not, however, automatically mean one will occupy a privileged position within the overall social hierarchy. Within the white racialised hierarchy there are a number of 'races' with varying degrees of acceptability (Puwar, 2004) or, as Long and Hylton (2002) suggest, different 'shades of white'. For instance, those who appear phenotypically white, including Irish, Jewish and 'new migrant' communities, such as Eastern Europeans, continue to occupy marginal positions. In this paper I use the term 'whiteness' to refer to an invisible power relation that privileges (and normalises) the culture and position of white people. This invisible power relation had a number of implications for how this research was conceptualised and conducted. Over the last two to three decades, sociology and the sociology of sport have begun to ask new questions about 'whiteness', including problematising the positionality and power of white researchers to speak on behalf of minority ethnic communities. Historically, 'whiteness' has been viewed as normal, with many eminent academics alluding to the invisibility of white ethnicities (Dyer, 1997; Ware and Back, 2002; Nayak, 2003; Frankenburg, 2004; Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi, 2008; Hylton, 2009). Of course, this conceptualisation focuses on the popular view of white people because white ethnicities are always visible to 'non-white' people (Ware and Back, 2002). Leonardo (2002) suggests that 'whiteness' gains a significant amount of its power by 'Othering' the very idea of ethnicity. Continuing this argument, Nayak (2003) refers to white ethnicities as 'cultureless', whilst Bonnett (1993) has termed white, the

'Other of ethnicity'. Best (2003) argues how an important opportunity is lost when white researchers fail to see how they could begin to unpack issues surrounding the "variability of whiteness" (cited in Carrington, 2008: 429). This begs the question of how 'whiteness' operates at the mundane, quotidian level, such as in sport cultures. Rather than focusing on overt forms of racial prejudice, which have formed the staple of historical writings on 'race', ethnicity and sport, I argue for research to address how processes of inclusion and exclusion might operate implicitly through routine and normalised practices on the field and within social environments surrounding sports as a consequence of a white-centred culture. In so doing I argue for the need to develop more critical projects on 'whiteness', moving beyond "the jaundiced view of whiteness as simply a trope of domination" (Giroux, 1997 cited in Rasky, 2002:243).

Postcolonialist theorists, including Said (2003[1978]) have previously drawn our attention to the 'crisis of representation' (Denzin, 1997: 3); the need to challenge the taken for granted privilege of (white) ethnographers to write about the lives and experiences of Other groups. Continuing this, Ryba and Schinke (2009: 268) call for the 'decolonisation of research methods' in order to challenge the western male-centred hegemony that has dominated sport research. In recent times these suggestions have been heeded as a number of studies exploring the experiences of ethnic minorities in multi-ethnic/white dominated institutions have been produced (see for example, Author, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b; King, 2004; Burdsey, 2007; Ratna, 2010). However, currently, Hylton (2009) warns that 'Insider' stories (i.e., white researchers on white respondents) are being ignored, and are rarely the focus of systematic critique and evaluation. Indeed, the systematic 'telling' of white people's narratives about their understanding of their 'race', as opposed to the way whites define the racial 'Other', remains relatively unexplored in Britain (Gallacher, 2000). There is an assumption that being white means one is ascribed with power and privilege that is used to one's advantage on a daily basis. This conceptualisation is, however, questionable, as it assumes (wrongly) that all white people are conscious of their 'whiteness' and its attendant privileges.

Methodology

This research differs to previous studies of 'race'/ethnicity and sport through its interaction with *both* white and British Asian sportsmen. As the following sections demonstrate this approach raised a number of pertinent intellectual, political and ethical considerations for undertaking research in a cross-cultural context. The research explored the relationship between cricket, regional and national identities, 'race'/ethnicity and 'whiteness'. Fieldwork was undertaken with two culturally contrasting cricket clubs in northern England. Both clubs and all respondents have been given pseudonyms. The research took place between June 2007 and September 2010. It involved in-depth ethnographic fieldwork based on 21 semi-structured interviews, two focus group interviews and participant observation. Where possible, matches, training sessions and social gatherings were attended and participated in. Interviews addressed topics including ethnic identities, belonging, community, religion, (anti) racism and ethnic privilege. They took place at a variety of locations, such as training grounds, players' homes, cafes/restaurants and bars. They varied in duration; from around 40 minutes to two and a half hours. Each interview was recorded via electronic Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim. All data from interviews and observations underwent inductive analysis and thematic 'coding'.

Personal reflections after every training session, match, or social activity were noted in a diary. Though these reflections were not a formal depiction of events, they did include clearly delineated passages of notes which were often referenced back to pertinent theories. This approach allowed the data to be organised into manageable mini-narratives. Emergent themes were earmarked with specific folders on the computer. Folders were eventually divided into sub-folders; in which relevant interactions and fieldnotes were saved in Microsoft Word documents with explicit titles. Where files overlapped in relevance, multiple copies were made and saved in appropriate folders. This is known as 'physical sorting' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 170) and was the most efficient technique available for manually managing the hundreds of hours' worth of interview and fieldwork data.

Both clubs were 'chosen' for a variety of reasons. The first club, 'Sutherland', is where I participated as a player throughout the research period. The club has a reputation locally for being an exclusively 'white club'. The demographic of Sutherland's players is not rare within amateur cricket leagues throughout the United Kingdom. However, what sets this club apart from others is that geographically, it occupies a position in an area of a city with a significant minority ethnic population (37%). The second club, 'Aylesworth', contained over 95% South Asian membership during the research period. Aylesworth was targeted because, unlike other clubs that have majority minority ethnic membership, it was never intended to be a club exclusively for South Asian people. The club was formed in the middle of the nineteenth century and was already well established by the time migrant communities from the Indian subcontinent began to settle following World War II. It is only since the turn of the twenty first century that Aylesworth has begun to attract disproportionate numbers of players of South Asian descent.

The majority of the white respondents were born and bred in the Yorkshire region. Most were educated to university level and occupied 'skilled' occupations. The majority of the British Asian respondents were British-born, although a small number were migrants from the Indian subcontinent. A small minority had mixed white and South Asian parents. Their level of education, and ability to speak English varied tremendously. All were from a Pakistani Muslim background. They chose different descriptors to articulate this. The majority self-identified as either 'British Asian' or 'British Muslim'. Many used these descriptors interchangeably. A small, predominantly younger group cited no religious affiliation.

Research in a cross-cultural context

The majority of ethnographic research into British Asian and Black communities in Britain (including sport) has been conducted by white researchers (Bulmer and Solomos, 2004). For Carrington (2008: 427), "This has raised a number of epistemological as well as ethical questions concerning the politics of knowledge production (who is the information being produced by, for whom and for what purpose) and methodological problems relating to researching groups and cultures that are in some fundamental sense Other to the researcher". It is often argued that for research which aims to find out more about a particular culture or group of people, researchers should attempt to bridge the gaps between themselves and those they are undertaking research with (Duneier, 2004). This necessarily requires researchers to think carefully about their identities.

Debates about the ethics behind (and legitimacy of) white researchers investigating people from minority ethnic communities have existed for some time. As Puwar (2004: 74) states, "structures of

whiteness pervade academic and political relations. They have a huge bearing upon who has the authority to speak and in what capacity". Carrington (2008: 428) extends these arguments to the study of sport; "failure to develop sufficiently *self-reflexive* modes of research has meant that 'whiteness' has, regrettably, become the default, unmarked, normative position through which much work in the area is produced". As a result, Burdsey (2010: 323) argues that the sociology of sport lags behind other areas in the social sciences in that, currently, it has yet to establish an appropriate framework for theorising the relationship between white researchers and minority ethnic respondents. However, does the sociology of sport *need* such a framework? Does the sociology of sport differ epistemologically to other paradigms to such an extent as to warrant a separate theory for doing reflexivity in this context? I would argue that it does not. Reflexivity should be embedded in all qualitative research.

Although the discourse of reflexivity has been fundamental to feminism since the late 1980s (cf. hooks, 1989, Collins, 1991), similar considerations were largely absent from sociological studies about 'race'/ethnicity, in particular, 'whiteness', and sport until the turn of the twenty first century. I use the term 'reflexive' to argue that the researcher's positionality within the context of fieldwork must be examined and accounted for. This perspective of positionality however, is not, as Frankenberg (2004: 106) notes, simply a matter of accounting for one's "perceiving capacity"; "I am this, therefore I think that". Rather it signals the impossibility of a 'true' Self, an objective, all-seeing stance, and the subsequent inevitability of a 'situated' point of departure. As Richardson (2000: 10) argues, "[t]here is no such thing as 'getting it right', only 'getting it' differently contoured and nuanced".

The ethnographer's *raison d'être* is to learn about a particular social reality and to report on it. However, is there a reality beyond the ethnographer's own mindset? Bruner (1986) contends that "reality only exists for [us] in the facts of consciousness given by inner experience" (cited in Hughson et al. 2005: 174). This means that the ethnographer's 'reality' is always a matter of personal perspective and interpretation and therefore, lacks the 'inner experience' of those being studied (ibid.). However, Hughson et al. are clear that "the unavoidability of the researcher reporting from within his/her own experiential frame need not result in an ethnographic solipsism, which filters out the views and interpretations of others. Subjectivity is not something that needs to be 'fixed'; certainly there are needs for, and benefits to, directly embracing differences and complications in our work (Berry and Clair, 2011: 95).

It is essential for all researchers — not just white researchers — in the fields of the sociology of sport and ethnic and racial studies to examine, not just the existence of hegemonic 'whiteness', and how its connotations of privilege permeate the structures and institutions in our areas of research (Ware and Back, 2002); we must also be wary of how these enter and influence the research process itself. For example, being white, middle-class, heterosexual and male was essential for contextualising this research. Indeed, researchers are shaped by their socio-historical locations, including the values and interests that these locations confer upon them (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Current literature argues that any white researcher is camouflaged by white methods and, therefore, can only ask 'white questions' — i.e. questions that privilege and normalise the position of white researchers and white respondents (Frankenburg, 2004; Bonilla-Silva and Zuberi, 2008; Carrington, 2008, Hylton, 2009). However, data does not emerge in a vacuum. Frankenberg (2004) stresses the need for white researchers to be recursive; to situate our work in the contexts it was developed in, and those it develops into. Who we are, Frankenberg argues, influences the questions we ask, the responses we get, and ultimately, the scholarship we produce.

A lack of cultural sensitivity and reflexivity on these matters could have a number of negative consequences for research, including: distorting the voice and message of respondents; marginalising/silencing key perspectives; reinforcing the centrality of white ideologies and practices; whilst reifying 'whiteness' and assuming this perspective can best explain all number of experiences.

An exhaustive appraisal of inter-racial research literature is not warranted here. However, there are a number of agreed assumptions that I will address briefly. For instance, researchers who share the same cultural characteristics as their participants (commonly 'race', gender, class and sexuality) are in a superior position to unearth ideas, arguments and opinions related to the research (Young Jr. 2004). Though, as I argue later, commonality can also lead to a lack of critical reflection. A corollary presumption is that researching people who do not share one's cultural characteristics negatively affects access, one's ability to build a rapport, and ultimately, hinders data collection. As Lofland and Lofland describe, "If you are black, studying the Ku Klux Klan members and sympathisers will probably not be feasible. Nor are you likely to reach the desired 'intimate familiarity' if you are male and attempting to study a radical lesbian group." (cited in Gallacher, 2000: 69). To be an 'outsider' means being someone who may not fully understand the behaviours, values and beliefs of the group under study. Outsiders will most likely possess preconceptions, most likely faulty, of those involved in the study (thereby often misrepresenting everyday actions) because they cannot subscribe to the norms of sporting practice. An inability to subscribe to these norms may lead to exclusion, both literally and figuratively, from influential people, places and information. Attempts to mitigate one's exclusion are often in vain, for as Walter Benjamin (1992: pp. 91-92) argues, "traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way hand prints cling to the clay vessel." Juxtaposed to this is the position of 'insider'. An insider position is commonly favoured as insiders are presumed to be privy to the most intimate, and arguably, most 'naturally' occurring information. Being an insider means one understands the nuances of the cultural group because one already subscribes to the norms of sporting practice. This is an essential feature of researching sports communities because knowledge of the sport and one's own technical proficiency are often fundamental to integration (discussed below).

Having initially spent more time with the British Asian respondents, rightly or wrongly, I problematised my 'whiteness' ahead of any other aspect of my identity. Given the insecurity surrounding white and South Asian people throughout Britain at the time of research, I assumed the cultural differences that existed between myself and them would be an irreconcilable source of misunderstanding and that my presence with the group would not have been welcome. As I reflected:

Regardless of how hard I tried to prepare myself for working alongside these men, I could not overcome the fact that I (along with my white body and traditions) represented a community, culture and ideology that, on a daily basis, both privileges the position of other white people, and systematically pathologises and 'Others' these men for no other reason than their South Asian and Muslim backgrounds. (Fieldnotes, December 21, 2007).

Such dimensions of embodiment are never neutral (Newman, 2011). Different cultural characteristics, including gender, age, class, nationality or sexuality become relevant at different times and in different social settings. Carrington (2008) develops this argument in a critique of (inter)racial methodology and sport in which he warns against the assumption that one's 'insider' or 'outsider' status is

based solely on 'race'. Carrington argues that the identities of researchers and their participants are not fixed. He draws upon the work of Song and Parker (1995: 243) who argue that such identity binaries:

“often put too much emphasis upon difference, rather than on partial and simultaneous commonality and difference between the researcher and interviewee. Such oppositional rubrics are based upon notions of *fixed* identities which are based upon readily identifiable and socially recognised points of difference.”

Instead, these identities must be 'interrogated' and 'deconstructed'; in that, the diversity within ethnic and cultural groups is often so great that it is by no means certain who would be 'inside' and who would be 'outside' the group at any time. Researchers will invariably share some characteristics with the participants, such as gender or nationality, while differing in others, such as 'race' or class. To assume that only those from the same racial or cultural background can research one another ignores the innate heterogeneity of contemporary social identities.

Being an Insider *and* Outsider

As a competitive cricketer myself, I was already freely moving in this social world and understood “many of the unique cultural practices and languages” that pervade the sport (Dashper, 2012). I was what Adler and Adler (1987) refer to as a 'complete member' within cricket (cited in *ibid.*). While this insider 'status' may, at times, restrict the researcher's ability to be critical, in this case it proved invaluable for gaining acceptance from many of the research respondents, and in understanding the social world I occupied. This status however, was never total, and I was acutely aware that my role as a white researcher was constantly being negotiated. As I reflected:

At the first outdoor training session I attended with Aylesworth, I was faced with a situation I had neither planned for, nor anticipated. Up to this point I had spent about two months training alongside players, coaches and members of the club and, to be honest, I had enjoyed myself, and I was confident about being there. As the season moved closer, more and more players I had never met joined the field. As I arrived at the ground, I began to become aware that seeing white faces here was uncommon, and that my appearance was attracting attention. I was approached by a British Asian male youth who asked: “Are you Adnan?” My confusion over the question was clearly evident and he continued: “Are you a Paki?” I was visibly very uncomfortable with the questions and, as I began spluttering some kind of response, I was thankfully rescued by [British Asian player] whom I had become familiar with. He responded: “Does he look like a Paki, dickhead?” The youth skulked off back to the rest of the players, chuntering under his breath: “What the fuck is he here for then?” (Fieldnotes, June 5th, 2008)

Up to this point I had spent, without incident, over four months training alongside and socialising with a number of players and other members of the Aylesworth club. However, the area I had entered seemed designed to be sealed off from non-South Asian people and, although I was an invited guest and I had built up a rapport with many senior members of the club, it was clear that to others I was *different*. This environment was a space for British Asian cricketers; it was a space sealed off from the ubiquitous domination of white people and white ideologies within wider society; and for some of these British Asian men, I was invading what little space they had negotiated for themselves.

The focus of being 'in' a space but not 'of' a space requires consideration that is largely absent from sociological studies about 'race'/ethnicity and sport. Researchers must engage in continual self-reflexion and critically scrutinise and interrogate how our ethnicities (amongst other characteristics) impinge on (and/or facilitate) the research process (Carrington, 2008; Burdsey, 2010). For example, being English, white, middle class, heterosexual and male ensures that my life has and will continue to involve experiences which are both contradictory and conjunctive and, as a researcher, I should be able to investigate these without being accused of lacking authenticity and being voyeuristic (Alexander, 2004).

There is evidence to suggest that minority ethnic respondents often distrust white researchers (Duneier, 2004). This is particularly relevant when researchers from a position of privilege attempt to provide counter narratives on behalf of marginalised groups (Puwar, 2004). As a respondent in Duneier's study of street vendors asserts, "African Americans are at a point where we have to be suspicious of [white] people who want to tell stories about us" (Duneier, 2004: 94). This point was well articulated by Hamza Illyas:

Researcher: "Do you think the [British Asian] lads have accepted me being here?"

Hamza Illyas: "For most you're fine. Some probably won't ever speak to you. They're happy to train and play alongside you, but they probably won't sit and talk to you."

In the early stages of my research my white identity was fairly unremarkable. I had been welcomed into the habitus of the British Asian participants, and at no stage had I felt it necessary to even enquire about how the British Asians felt about participating in a white man's research project. I was certainly guilty of assuming I possessed some level of privilege to tell their stories for them; not because I was white (cf. Alexander, 2004; Frankenburg, 2004; Carrington, 2008; Gallacher, 2008; Hylton, 2009), as I was consummately aware of my 'whiteness' throughout, but because many of these men already supported the project. Consequently, I did find it hard when people refused to be interviewed or showed limited interest in the study. These instances reminded me that my relationship with many of the respondents was tenuous, and that I did not possess a given right to tell these stories.

This does however question, whether, when white researchers are working with minority cultures, the impact of their stories is reduced if the person telling them (namely the white researcher) is not an organic member of that community? Dyer (1997) for instance, warns white researchers of the influence of their white gaze:

"[T]he position of speaking as a white person is one that white people now almost never acknowledge and this is part of the condition and power of 'whiteness': white people claim and achieve authority for what they say by not admitting, indeed not realising, that for much of the time they speak *only* for 'whiteness'" (ibid: xiv, *author's emphasis*).

Thus, to be white, is panoptic, in that its power relies on its invisibility, and its role as the 'watcher'. While attempts to understand Other communities are vital, Burdsey (2010: 322) argues that, "they cannot fully substitute experiential knowledge of the lives of minorities". Burdsey assumes that a privileged ontological position exists. However, the subjectivity of researcher positionality is an irrevocable dimension of ethnographic research praxis and therefore, it is impossible to say with any certainty whether

this is the case. According to Berry and Clair (2011), writing from a reflexive standpoint requires a particular kind of vulnerability and exposure; particularly when either writing from, or about a marginalised positionality. They argue how researchers are often required to negotiate stories and representations that are problematic, not only for themselves, but entire communities. They continue that, to use reflexivity in this way provides researchers with an 'epistemological entrance'. In other words, researchers may engage their own life stories as a source in the 'decolonizing movement/methodologies' that challenge traditional ways of doing research and creating knowledge (ibid: 202). For example, while white people (men and women) may not regularly be on the receiving end of racist discourse, their 'whiteness' is certainly constitutive of that discourse and therefore, it provides vital introspection for questioning and critiquing the self (Back, 2004; Watson and Scraton, 2001). However, there are limits to this. Berry and Clair (2011) advocate further that it is essential for researchers to be discursively reflexive and consider with what discourse we speak and write. In other words, researchers must avoid obscuring the meanings of our observations and participant testimonies by representing them completely through a voice of authority, or too much through our own voice and assumptions.

Being different (an 'outsider'?) offers an alternative ontology for interpreting researcher positionality. Brah states that qualitative researchers may actually benefit from confronting their differences. For Brah, difference is not necessarily the marker of hierarchy and oppression; instead arguing that being different "is a contextually contingent question" of whether difference pans out as inequity, exploitation and oppression *or* as an egalitarian, diverse and democratic form of political agency (Brah, 1996: pp.125-126). In other words, by confronting one's differences and centralising them in the fieldwork, one's impact on the setting may be more successfully documented and negotiated. This interpretation discredits the view that any singular insider or outsider status exists, and instead opens up the possibility of conceptualising researchers through the lens of hybridity, whereby researchers adopt a myriad of positions and statuses with their participants in order to survive the field.

For example, in spite of my 'race' and ethnicity placing me as a cultural outsider with the British Asian respondents, my mutual love for cricket and my different experiences of playing the game provided valuable commonality. To many of these men cricket was vital for how they defined their identities. It is a cliché to say that cricket on the India subcontinent is like a religion, but in the case of these men, it was. They trained and competed very professionally, and while many of them were not especially talented, they prided themselves on competing at a high level. Therefore, my history as an ex-county player provided me with a degree of social capital (Bourdieu, 1978) in this environment and, in turn, helped me gain access to testimonies, which arguably would not have been available to a non-cricketer.

Many of the British Asians presumed I knew little about South Asian culture. They used interviews to explain to me elements they expected me to be 'ignorant' to. They clearly valued my willingness to talk about myself (and to question my own ignorance). I made it clear from the beginning that I wanted to learn about them individually and how 'race' and racism were experienced in their lives. I presented myself as an 'acceptable incompetent', that is "someone who is partially competent [skilled and knowledgeable in the sport] in the setting, but who is accepted as a non-threatening person who needs to be taught" (Neuman, 2000: pp. 359-60). I emphasised to them my desire to explore aspects of their everyday lives, which were beyond the research-specific context. This approach was holistic and exploratory, and produced a more

integrated and nuanced understanding of their South and British 'Asianness'. As Alexander (2006) advocates:

There is, then, an additional step, which is to look outwards at the broader *social* and *political context* within which identities take shape. We can no longer afford to think that simply demonstrating the complexity, the autonomy or the multiplicity of our lived identities is enough.

It is important for researchers to gain their respondents' trust and respect. I attempted to integrate by adopting certain mannerisms and ways of behaving that were common amongst the participants. I would freely engage them in conversations about sport and family, and with the younger participants, we would often talk about typical 'lad' culture, including their sex lives and alcohol consumption (i.e., level of religious adherence). I wanted to earn their respect, and normalising/distancing my role as a researcher was, I believed, an important aspect of this (cf. Newman, 2011). Taking on these different roles facilitates gaining access to participants who ordinarily they would have been excluded from. For instance, about two months into participant observation I learned that a number of the players represented an all-'Asian' football team. Though football was not strictly speaking an important aspect of the research, the emergence and significance of minority ethnic teams and leagues was. I was invited to join the team at a meal organised by the team's captain, who owned a restaurant specialising in Pakistani and Bangladeshi cuisine. My access was assured via my relationship with the Aylesworth players. At the meal I met a number of fascinating individuals who provided invaluable testimonies which facilitated my understanding of British Asian sportsmen (gendered nomenclature intended) and the challenges they face for recognition in white dominated spaces (Fieldnotes, 28 November, 2009).

Talking and understanding, however, can only go so far in gaining and maintaining access. During early stages of research I had to prove myself to these men. This involved not only demonstrating that I was a decent, moral and trustworthy individual, but also embodying/performing a role as a player of the game. I am a competitive semi-professional player, and a former county cricketer. I am a very capable bowler, but a less capable batter. I found it easy to prove I belonged in the setting because my ability to bowl demonstrated I was skilled at playing the sport. However, my skill at bowling was not enough to ensure I was welcome in this environment. I gained respect from the British Asians, not by showing what I was skilled at (i.e., bowling), but through being challenged at something I was less skilled at (i.e., batting). During early training sessions, for instance, when I batted I was subjected to a great deal of fast, aggressive bowling, aimed at my body (Fieldnotes, January 6, 2008). I never felt like this was a personal attack; rather this was their way of initiating me into 'their' environment. In many ways, to be put to the test like this demonstrated that these men were interacting with me, and if I could overcome these trials (which I could), I had a good chance of long-term immersion with them. For example, after a particularly challenging training session Aylesworth's fastest, and most aggressive bowler, approached me and said, "Good defence Mr Fletcher. You can bat [at] number 3 for us!" (Fieldnotes, 4 July, 2008). In this context I had used my sporting body (not detached from my racialised body) to acquire social capital (Bourdieu, 1978) with the British Asian cricketers. Hughson et al. (2005) argue that we are able to link issues of experience and power through critically exploring how forms of power are embedded in the sporting body itself. They suggest that the sport is often just the "pretext for the rituals associated with a particular social

group” (ibid: 152) and therefore, being competent in, and knowledgeable about, the sport, whilst highly influential in this instance, can only go so far in explaining how researchers access and maintain their ‘insider’ position (Newman, 2011).

Me and My: Experiences of researching the familiar

It may be assumed that since the researcher and respondents are white and the focus of research is about what ‘whiteness’ means, then the social biography and location of the researcher need not be scrutinised as critically as when research is conducted across cultural divides. However, while the majority of whites enjoy many privileges relative to members of minority ethnic groups, this shared privilege does not mean one can minimise, nor avoid altogether, the need to critically assess where one’s social biography, and attitudes towards ‘race’. Gallacher (2008) argues that the social ‘isolation’ white people experience by conducting their lives in spaces dominated by other white people provides them with a distorted view of race relations. He argues that by surrounding themselves with people who look, feel and act in similar ways normalises white privilege, while making the prerogatives of this group largely invisible. Indeed, practices and images that appear strange to an outsider often communicate ‘secret identities’ to those within a given (sub)culture. A large proportion of racist behaviour that takes place within sports communities is ‘coded’. In other words, racism is hidden beneath benign practices that are normalised by and within this community. Locker/changing room ‘banter’ is perhaps the best example of this. Unless you have been accepted and socialised into this community, these coded racisms will often go unnoticed and unacknowledged. Equally important however, concerns how researchers, who have been socialised into such communal coded practices, react when they are faced with them. During fieldwork with the white respondents I witnessed many overt instances of cultural and biological racism, including racist jokes, and use of racist language, including “nigger”, “Paki” and “raghead”. Many of the perpetrators of this racism were people I had grown up with and who I considered my friends and therefore, I reacted to these instances ambivalently.

The sporting environment was a shared white space; a place where these white men felt they had the freedom to act out an exclusionary version of their ‘whiteness’. However, this was not without caution as they demonstrated acute awareness of my position as a researcher. For instance, I recall an interaction with a player from Sutherland:

Player: “I know that you love them, Fletch, but I cannot abide fucking Asians [sic]. I don’t have to justify this. I just fucking hate them” (Fieldnotes, August 8, 2009).

It was interactions like these which, above all others, led to me questioning whether I was in fact engaged in the kind of anti-racist scholarship I set out to undertake. In many instances I allowed the respondents’ racist beliefs to go by unchallenged. At the time I justified my (in)actions on the grounds of maintaining my ‘insider’ position. I did not want to jeopardise my relationship with them by effectively ‘outing’ racist behaviour. As an academic committed to anti-racist research it became unclear whether my inactivity meant I was in fact condoning their beliefs, thereby engaging in ‘inferential racism’, as described by Hall (1981). Indeed, as Gallacher (2000) argues, researchers examining ‘whiteness’ can be unintentionally (or

intentionally) manipulated into racism by their inaction, or by embracing a set of common sense assumptions about white racial attitudes. My feelings at the time were akin to what Fanon (1986[1967]) described as 'metaphysical guilt'. He argues, "Every one of my acts commits me as a man. Every one of my silences, every one of my cowardices reveals me as a man ... if I do not do whatever I can to prevent them [racisms], I am an accomplice in them" (ibid.: 89). In short, as Newman (2011: 550) laments: "I became the norm which I had set out to problematise."

Being white, like being a member of any social group has a host of contradictory, symbolic and situationally specific meanings (Gallacher, 2008). I shared a number of characteristics with the white respondents, namely 'race' and ethnicity, gender, social class and sexuality. However, these shared characteristics did not alleviate my role as a researcher. My research was conducted overtly and therefore, everybody I questioned was aware of my 'objectives'. This role made me a cultural outsider because I was no longer just their white team mate. I was the white team mate who, to quote the testimony above, "loves" South Asians, and this had implications for how people would act, and what they would say around me. I was reminded of my white as outsider status among the white respondents when, following racist talk from a team mate, another responded by saying, "You can't say that around Fletch. You'll upset him..." (Fieldnotes, September 10, 2010). The realities of what white respondents will say to white researchers about their 'whiteness' and how they represent and interpret their 'whiteness' differ tremendously. The way that white people talk around other like-minded white people is very different to the kinds of responses reserved for white interviewers (Gallacher, 2008). For instance, I recall an incident (certainly one of many) where the respondent would challenge the racist talk of another in his interview and yet, in a non-interview situation, openly refer to minority ethnic communities as "niggers" and how he hoped they would "fuck off" (Fieldnotes, May 15, 2010).

Respondents would also 'play up' to my role as a researcher. In many instances, they acknowledged that what they were saying was racist, but trivialised their talk in terms of being 'useful' to the research itself. I recall one respondent referring to South Asians as "smelly ragheads", which he quickly qualified by smiling and saying: "Put that in your book!" (Fieldnotes, April 27, 2009). Though these testimonies clearly demonstrate that some of these white men possess quite aggressive racist beliefs, it is impossible to assess the 'true' nature and extent of their prejudices because, like myself, all these men appreciated the frailty of their 'insider' positions, and worked consciously to maintain theirs. In this sense, explanations of these instances of racism are highly contestable. It may be that these individuals (as they claimed) were consciously 'playing up' to their peers; or (most likely) that racism had become so entrenched and institutionalised that it was normal in this setting.

Discussion

White researchers (of sport) are, at times, culpable of reinforcing dominant racial discourses rather than challenging them. As researchers, we must consider the racialised context(s) of our own experiences and not assume that 'race' is experienced only by ethnic minorities (Watson and Scraton, 2001). Paraphrasing Helen's (1992) work on white feminism, one would argue:

“Yes, [white researchers] have listened and in some cases have become experts at listening to the voices of Black and/or Asian [respondents], but how has this listening affected their own voices and understandings? ... Shifting the focus of ‘race’ and colour into the protected sphere of whiteness enables us to look carefully at how to speak, read, think and write of [‘whiteness’] as a politic” (adapted from Watson and Scraton, 2001: 274).

Throughout this research I advocated for the need to truly hear social actor’s voices, yet, as in all qualitative research, those voices have been scrutinised by the researcher’s own biographical subjectivity. My intention was never to tell the participants’ stories for them, or intentionally portray individuals as racist; rather the aim was to give greater significance to the participants’ everyday experiences of ‘race’ and racism, and to encourage them to think more critically about their own positionality. In so doing, my aim was always to champion reflexivity as a resource for change; a way of promoting material consequences in the lives of those I have written about. Thus, in paraphrasing Alexander’s (2011: 105) analysis of eulogies, my research endeavoured to “strategically inform the communities and cultures that I was speaking about and to, in ways that their own critical reflection on experience would become tools for living, and transforming their lives, so that these engagements of thought (their own reflexivity and cultural performances) would then become practical tools for living” with and through their differences. This approach to doing reflexive qualitative work politicises particularity and encourages researchers to seek real-world impact for their academic work. However, in order for this to happen, researchers must treat reflexivity as an essential act of political self-awareness; the act of writing from a ‘space of particularity’ (ibid.).

In this spirit, I regret not challenging respondents (the white respondents especially) enough to think critically about their ‘race’ as both an instrumental way of being, *and* a political category. This has arguably resulted in the reproduction, and some might argue, uncritical acceptance of, a normalised sense of ‘whiteness’ within this research setting. I agree with Gallacher (2000) that white researchers should encourage their respondents to reflect more critically about their ‘race’ and the relative (non)privileges this affords them. My research is/was guilty of oversimplifying the ‘whiteness’ of myself and the white respondents. As a white researcher studying white people I did largely consider myself to be situated as an insider. As Gallacher (2008) suggests, I treated my ‘whiteness’ as a form of methodological capital which I used to justify questioning white people about the meaning they attached to their ‘race’. While I identified some instances of racism I was complicit in others in the way I allowed some instances to pass me by; not necessarily unnoticed as Duneier (2004) suggested, but unchallenged. White researchers have been criticised for both pathologising Other cultural groups in their research, and for being unable and unwilling to see their own racisms. As Errol Lawrence pointed out, “the white sociological accounts of the cultural life of Black and minority communities were boring travesties in which the sociologist was analogous to a dry-mouth fool who remained thirsty in the midst of an abundance of water” (cited in Back, 2004: p. 206).

In moving this discussion forward I argue that white researchers working in a cross-cultural context would benefit from engaging more with Critical Race Theory (CRT). The central tenet of CRT is that research should centralise the experiences and identities of marginalised groups. CRT is most commonly conceptualised as an empowering framework because it encourages the participation of traditionally overlooked voices. Crucially, in order to successfully perform reflexive cross-cultural research we must acknowledge that these overlooked voices are not always minority groups. Indeed, though white

researchers will freely centralise the voices of ethnic minorities, we must concede that white people talking about 'whiteness' in sport is rare and therefore, these voices would be highly valued by CRT (See Hylton, 2009, 2010).

The story I have told in this paper is one contribution to this debate. It was a personal and reflexive account that has revealed some of the complexities inherent to researching in a cross-cultural context. I have engaged critically on what Merleau-Ponty (1995) refers to as 'corporeal reflexivity'; that is reflecting on myself as an 'embodied subject', by asking questions of how the field was a part of me, and how it shaped me as a white man; how my identity aided or interrupted my progress; whether, throughout my research, I was ever fully ingratiated; and most importantly, whether I was engaged in anti-racist scholarship. For many of these issues there are no solutions, and while for some this may not be a satisfactory conclusion, it should be stressed that sociologists of sport are currently hamstrung by the level of data available for successfully theorising the relationship between white researchers and minority ethnic respondents.

In saying this, the sociology of sport would benefit from more researchers engaging in critical self-reflection. Reflexivity must be central to any critical ethnography. However, our reflexivity should not get in the way of us doing innovative work. Berry and Clair (2011) for instance, suggest that reflexivity can stifle project development. They argue that the tendency of researchers to reflect on their vulnerability whilst in the field means that many researchers will retreat away from complicated and controversial topics; reverting instead to 'common ground' where their positionality is felt less. In so doing, they lament the loss of knowledge and loss of ethnographic understanding that will likely result from researchers being 'blocked', or denied access, due in part to their differences. The very idea of white researchers attempting to access the life-worlds of ethnic minorities could be interpreted in this way. However, researching across cultural divides should not be treated with such trepidation. Unless we push certain boundaries of acceptability, these boundaries will never be redefined and valuable data never created. If we are to establish some kind of methodological framework for researching across the various intersections of 'race' in the social sciences of sport, more researchers need to engage with the relationships between self and other and the self-as-other. In other words, we must explore the nature of reflexivity; how doing reflexivity (correctly?) presents opportunities to connect with people across (and in spite of) cultural divides.

References

- Abbas T (2011) *Islamic Radicalism and Multicultural Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Alexander, C. (2004) 'Writing Race: Ethnography and the Imagination of *the Asian Gang*' in M. Bulmer and J. Solomos (eds), *Researching Race and Racism*, London: Routledge.
- Alexander, C. (2006) *The Limits of Identity Theory*. Paper presented to ESRC Identities Programme Conference. Aston University, July 12.
- Alexander, K. (2011) Standing in the wake: A critical auto/ethnographic exercise on reflexivity in three movements, *Cultural Studies ⇔ Critical Methodologies*, 11(2): 98-107.
- Ali, N., Kalra, V.S., and Sayyid, S. (eds) (2006) *A postcolonial people: South Asians in Britain*, London: Hurst and Company.
- Back, L. (2004) 'Writing in and against time', in M. Bulmer. and J. Solomos (eds) *Researching race and racism*. London: Routledge: 203-213.
- Benjamin, W. (1992) *Illuminations*, London: Fontana Press.
- Berry, K. and Clair, P. (2011) Reflecting on the call to ethnographic reflexivity: A collage of responses to questions of contestation, *Cultural Studies ⇔ Critical Methodologies*, 11(2): 199-209.
- Bonnett, A. (1993) *Radicalism, anti-racism and representation*, London: Routledge.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. and Zuberi, T. (2008) 'Towards a definition of white logic and white methods', in E. Bonilla-Silva. and T. Zuberi (eds) *White logic, white methods: Race and social science*. New York: Rowan and Littlefield.
- Bourdieu, P. (1978) Sport and social class, *Social Science Information*, 17(6): 819-840.
- Brah, A. (1996) *Cartographies of diaspora: contesting identities*, London: Routledge.
- Brah, A. (2006) 'The Asian in Britain' in N. Ali, V.S. Kalra and S. Sayyid (eds) *A postcolonial people: South Asians in Britain*, London: Hurst and Company.
- Bulmer, M. and Solomos, J. (2004) 'Introduction: Researching race and racism', in M. Bulmer. and J. Solomos (eds) *Researching race and racism*. London: Routledge.
- Burdsey, D. (2007) *British Asians and football: culture, identity, exclusion*. London: Routledge.
- Burdsey, D. (2010) British Muslim experiences on English first-class cricket, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 45(3): 315-334.
- Carrington, B (2008) "What's the footballer doing here?" Racialised performativity, reflexivity and identity, *Cultural Studies ⇔ Critical Methodologies* 8(4): 423-452.
- Carrington, B. (2011) *Race, sport and politics*, London: Sage.
- Collins, P.H. (1991) *Black feminist thought*, London: Routledge.
- Dashper, K. (2012) Dressage is full of 'Queens', *Sociology*, 46(6): 1109-1124.
- Denzin, N.K. (1993) *Interpretive ethnography*. London: Sage
- Duneier, M. (2004). 'Three rules I go by in my ethnographic research on race and racism', in M. Bulmer. and J. Solomos (eds) *Researching race and racism*. London: Routledge.
- Dyer, R. (1997) *White*, London: Routledge.
- Fanon, F. (1986[1967]) *Black skin, white masks*. London: Pluto.
- Frankenberg, R. (2004) On unsteady ground: Crafting and engaging in the critical study of whiteness, in M. Bulmer and J. Solomos (eds) *Researching race and racism*, London: Routledge.

- Gallacher, C. (2000) White like me? Methods, meaning, and manipulation in the field of white studies. In F. Winddance Twine and J. Warren (eds) *Racing Research Researching Race*. London: New York University Press.
- Gallacher, C. (2008) "The end of racism" as a new Doxa: New strategies for researching race. In E. Bonilla-Silva and T. Zuberi *White logic, white methods*. US: Alta Mira Press.
- Garner, S. (2007) *Whiteness: An introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1981) The whites in their eyes: Racists ideologies and the media. In G. Bridges and R. Brunt *Silver linings: Some strategies for the eighties*. London: Lawrence and Wishart Ltd.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1983) *Ethnography: Principles in practice*, London: Tavistock.
- Hooks, B. (1989) *Talking back: Thinking feminist-thinking black*, Sheba.
- Hughson, J., Inglis, D. and Free, M. (2005) *The uses of sport: A critical study*, London: Routledge.
- Hylton, K. (2009) *'Race' and sport: Critical race theory*, London: Routledge.
- Kalra, V.S., Kaur, R and Hutnyk, J (2005) *Diaspora and hybridity*. London: Thousand Oak.
- Karner, C. (2007) *Ethnicity and everyday Life*, London: Routledge.
- King, C. (2004) *Offside racism*. Oxford: Berg.
- Leonardo, Z. (2002) The souls of white folk: critical pedagogy, whiteness studies, and globalisation discourse, *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 5(1): 29-50.
- Long, J and Hylton, K. (2002) Shades of white: an examination of whiteness in sport, *Leisure Studies*, 21: 87-103.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1996) *The phenomenology of perception*, London Routledge.
- Modood, T. (2007) *Multiculturalism*, Oxford: Polity.
- Nayak, A. (2003) *Race, place and globalization: Youth cultures in a changing world*, Oxford: Berg.
- Neuman, W.L. (2000) *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* 4th Edition. London: Allyn and Bacon.
- Newman, J. (2011) [Un]comfortable in my own skin: Articulation, reflexivity and the duality of self, *Cultural Studies ⇔ Critical Methodologies* 11(6): 545-557.
- Puwar, N. (2004) *Space invaders*. Oxford: Berg.
- Rasky, C. (2002) *Working through whiteness*, New York: Suny Press.
- Ratna, A. (2010) 'Taking the power back!': The politics of British-Asian female football players. *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth Research* 18(2): 117-132.
- Richardson, L. (2000) New writing practices in qualitative research, *Sociology of Sport Journal* 17: 5 – 20.
- Ryan L (2011) Muslim women negotiating collective stigmatization: 'We're just normal people', *Sociology* 45(6): 1045-1060.
- Ryba, T.V and Schinke, R.J. (2009) Methodology as a ritualized Eurocentrism, *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 7(3): 263-274.
- Said, E. (2003[1978]) *Orientalism*, Penguin: London.
- Song, M and Parker, D. (1995) Commonality, difference and the dynamics of discourse in in-depth interviewing, *Sociology* 29(2): 241-256.
- Thomas, P. (2011) *Youth, multiculturalism and community cohesion*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Thomas, P and Sanderson, P. (2011) Unwilling citizens? Muslim young people and national identity, *Sociology* 45(6): 1028-1044.

- Ware, V and Back, L. (2002) *Out of whiteness: Colour, politics, and culture*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Watson, B. and Scraton, S. (2001) Confronting whiteness? Researching the leisure lives of South Asian mothers, *Journal of Gender Studies* 10(3): 265-277.
- Young Jr. A. (2004) 'Experiences in ethnographic interviewing about on race', in M. Bulmer and J. Solomos (eds) *Researching race and racism*. London: Routledge.

Notes

- ¹ The term 'Paki' is a racist and derogatory term used to describe members of the Pakistani diaspora.