Title: How does race work in social work education? Everyday racial logics, distinctions and practices in social work qualifying programmes in England.

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Abstract

This article presents findings from a study which explored the everyday ways race works on social work programmes in England. The study focussed on how race was spoken about and conceptualised, how people were categorised and ordered according to race, and the social interactions where race was understood by participants to be significant. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight social work lecturers and nineteen black social work students at two universities in England, to explore the following topics: classroom-based and practice learning, assessment and feedback, interactions between students and between students and educators, and university and practice agency cultures. Data were analysed using thematic analysis and the following themes identified: the routine interpellation of black students and communities in terms of absolute cultural differences, black students' everyday experiences of marginalisation, hostility and othering, and the racialisation of black students in judgements made about their academic and practice performance. The article concludes that social work education must engage more deeply with contemporary theorisations of race and culture, and that social work educators need a reflexive understanding of how notions such as diversity, equality and universal academic standards are put into practice in ways that marginalise and devalue black students.

Teaser text

This study explored everyday, commonplace ways that race is talked about and thought about on social work programmes in England. We explored black students' experiences on programmes and we did this by interviewing eight social work lecturers and nineteen black students in two universities in England. We explored the following topics with participants: classroom, practice learning, assessment and feedback, interactions with students and with lecturers and University and practice cultures.

Important themes were identified:

- Black students' everyday experiences of marginalisation, hostility and othering.
- The racialisation of students when judgements were made about academic work and performance in practice.

- The limited ways in which black students are thought about and talked about, often drawing on narrow assumptions about people's culture.

We end the article with a recommendation that educators become familiar with contemporary ideas and thinking about race and culture which often challenge the orthodox and limited ways that race is currently understood in social work education. The second recommendation is that educators in social work need to consider how notions of diversity, equality and generic academic standards often work to marginalise and devalue black students.

KEY WORDS

black students; distinctions; marginalisation; race; racism

INTRODUCTION

This article presents research findings from a study that explored the everyday ways race works in social work programmes in England. By 'everyday', we mean ways of thinking and speaking about race, categorising and ordering people through race, and the forms of interaction through which these are sustained, that are mostly treated as normal and acceptable by lecturers, practice educators and students themselves. These matters are of particular importance for black social work students—they greatly influence students' experiences during their study, how they are viewed and assessed, and their outcomes in terms of progression, qualification, and whether they are likely to continue in the profession. This article therefore adds to the recent research literature about black social work students in the UK, which two of us have reviewed elsewhere (Jeysingham and Morton, 2019). That work has offered important findings about the prevalence of racism in social work programmes (Tedam, 2014; Hillen and Levy, 2015; Masocha, 2015), the largely tacit expectations about performance that can prove difficult for black students to negotiate (Fairtlough et al., 2014; Fletcher et al., 2015), and the poor outcomes for some groups of black students (Hussein et al., 2009; Liu, 2017). However, while knowledge has developed in some areas, there have also been some common problematic assumptions. Much research has treated cultural difference as a straightforward issue that can be distinguished from race and is often understood to account for differences in learning or attainment. Even when racism has been identified, the solutions presented have most often been about providing safe spaces for black students or better meeting what have been presented as culturally specific needs, rather than changing racist practices or addressing their various implications. There is a need for more research that explores the normative ways of thinking, ordering and interacting through which race operates in social work programmes—what we refer to in this article as *racial logics*, *distinctions* and *practices*. By normative we mean the everyday ways in which race is made sense of in a particular setting, which are treated as normal and acceptable by those involved and so are seldom scrutinised. We do not claim these norms will be the same across different contexts but we do assume that in any social setting there will be ways of thinking, ordering and interacting through race that are normative. By exploring the norms at work in one context, we hope to offer an example of an approach to

analysing how race operates in everyday settings that differs from most current discussions of race and social work and that is likely to be relevant for other social work education contexts.

In making racial logics, distinctions and practices our focus, we are influenced by recent sociological discussions of race and racism, particularly work by Alana Lentin. Lentin (2016; 2020) argues that most academic writing about racism critiques racism as a set of ideologically flawed attitudes and immoral acts. Instead, Lentin examines racial logics— patterns and justifications that frame and establish norms of belonging, are highly systemised and have complex origins. We find the concept of racial logics to be useful in examining experiences described to us and in making apparent the ways people make sense of racism in social work education.

Examples of racial logics that are normative across many contexts are assumptions that racism is outdated, irrational, sustained by ignorance, and antithetical to rights-based, liberal politics. However, racism can be explicitly rational, because racial thinking has been woven into concepts such as liberalism, the universal subject and human rights from the moment of their inception (Goldberg, 1992). We need to attend to the plurality of contemporary racisms that rely on diverse, often contrasting constructions of racial difference, many of which are grounded in liberal arguments. With the rise of state policies to ensure equality and minority rights in the West since the late 1990s, racisms have often been legitimised through, even driven by, such rights movements. For example, the 'War on Terror' has repeatedly been justified through reference to women's and gay rights (Puar 2007; Bhattacharyya 2008).

Anti-racism has tended to be an ineffective tool because, rather than eradicating racism, it is more likely to replace one form of racial thinking with another, grounded in claims about race that are more appealing to whichever anti-racists are making the arguments. Lentin (2020) shows how the current dominance of an individualised, moral account of racism—that only intentional, malicious acts are racist, and that white people can be victims of racism as much as anyone else—makes it easy for individuals to proclaim they are anti-racist while making racial distinctions they present as legitimate and *not* racist. Such distinctions are sustained through multiple, highly flexible logics that distinguish people through indices such as geography, culture, religion, gender and sexuality (Lentin, 2014). While these distinctions might not present race as a matter of biological difference, they still frame differences as absolute and structure power relations in ways equivalent to earlier racisms.

Accounts of cultural difference can be found in social work practice where they are frequently treated as valid even when they produce problematic associations and have negative effects. Some social work discussions of child sexual exploitation in the UK, for example, have been underpinned by racialising notions of absolute cultural difference (Cockbain and Tufail, 2020). Cultural competence and antiracism—frames that are instrumental for understanding race in social work education—are poorly placed to critique these ways of framing racial difference. Cultural competence reproduces the same idea of cultural difference that animates much contemporary racial thinking (Pon 2009). Anti-racism, too, is a limited tool because it tends to understand racism as irrational and abusive, and so ignores most normative racial logics and practices. Diversity, a dominant frame for articulating difference in UK universities, entails

further problems because it tends to present black people's presence in universities as evidence of universities' inclusiveness, while simultaneously marginalising them (Ahmed, 2012). The flexibility of race, combined with the limitations of the frameworks we have for conceptualising racism, show the need for research that focuses on the everyday ways race works in social work programmes and its effects on black students.

Note on terminology

Throughout this article, we use the term 'black' to refer to people who are racialised through their difference from whiteness. Used in this way, 'black' includes people of African, Caribbean, black British, South, West and East Asian origins. In referring to students from these communities as black, we are seeking to maintain focus on students' experiences of racialisation and the inescapably political nature of discourse about race. We do not seek to minimise differences between experiences of racism across the various groups of people we refer to here as black, and we describe race and ethnicity using other terms when presenting students' and lecturers' own accounts or when making certain points that only apply to specific groups of black students. We also do not wish to suggest that racism is only experienced by those communities that we refer to here as black. However, we view as important the histories of these communities in the UK, which have meant some shared experiences of racism. This study's findings also show many continuing shared experiences of racism across different black communities in the micro-context of social work education.

METHODS

We sought to detail the everyday practices and understandings that occur in social work education and impact upon black students' experience of learning. The study used semi-structured interviews, conducted with social work lecturers and black social work students at two universities in England. The research team comprised two white Norwegian women, one British South Asian man and one white British woman. Participants were recruited via emails sent to all students and lecturers in social work programmes at the two universities.

Students were able to confirm their participation and willingness to be interviewed directly to either Morton or Jeyasingham. This gave student participants some degree of choice about the gender and racial positionality of their interviewer. Depending on the programme cohorts, participants' student groups were between one fifth and one half black people, which is comparable to the 33% of students in social work qualifying programmes in England who are from black and minority ethnic communities according to the most recent research statistics (Skills for Care, 2021). Participants were studying on qualifying programmes and had completed at least one practice placement. Students with a range of ethnic origins participated, including people of black British, African, South Asian and East Asian origin. Students described different

personal histories in the UK, with just over half the student participants having lived all their lives there, while other participants had moved to the UK as children or adults.

Lecturers who taught on social work programmes at the two universities were contacted by email and invited to contact Vindegg or Fjeldheim (who both work in Norwegian universities) if they wished to take part in the study. Fjeldheim and Vindegg then conducted the interviews with lecturers. We did this to promote the anonymity of lecturer participants and because we anticipated lecturers would be more likely to make explicit their everyday practices if they were speaking to people outside the specific context of English social work education. Lecturer participants were all white, which largely reflected the two institutions involved in the study and UK universities more broadly (Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2021).

Single, face-to-face interviews were conducted with students (n=19) and lecturers (n=8), over a 10-month period in 2019. Interviews with lecturers occurred in private rooms at the universities where they worked. Students were interviewed in private rooms at either their university or their practice placement depending on their preference. Interviews lasted between 40 and 120 minutes. We asked student participants about their experiences and views relating to: classroom-based learning; practice learning; assessment and feedback; university culture; interactions between staff and students; and factors external to the University which impacted on learning. We asked lecturers about their perceptions of black students' experiences in the same areas. We followed initial questions with additional probes, for example a question to lecturers about experiences and views of classroom-based learning could be followed up by asking:

'What do you do in the situations described'?

'How do you account for what is happening'?

All four researchers participated in a thematic analysis of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). We recognise our experiences as social work educators and our different positionalities in terms of race and ethnicity cannot be 'bracketed' from our research practice; instead they have influenced the study's focus, data collection and analysis. We sought to take a reflexive approach to this throughout the study. During analysis, we read and reread transcripts individually, coded the data and discussed them together. In identifying themes, we sought to make explicit, as far as we could, the models for understanding race that we brought to this analysis. This helped us evaluate the different interpretations that arose in our discussions. We also analysed participants' transcripts in the context of each other by considering, for instance, what students and lecturers said about the same issues, in order to develop more plausible analyses. This close engagement with the data anticipated the emergence of new ideas, and construction of theoretical understandings of participants' worlds, emphasising the connections between individuals and social structures which may otherwise remain invisible (Charmaz, 2020). We view this process and the different racial and geographical positionalities we have brought to it as enabling a deeper, more reflexive analysis.

Ethics and reflexivity

The study was approved by the University of Salford's Research Ethics Committee (Reference: HSR1718-09). We obtained written consent from Directors of Social Work at both participating universities and all individual participants. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed and anonymised before being analysed. The inclusion of quotations in this article has been carefully considered to ensure the anonymity of participants. We resisted setting up a dichotomised presentation where students' accounts are valued and lecturers' are not. We acknowledge what students told us were accounts of their individual experiences. Nevertheless, we consider students' awareness and depth of perception as genuine, providing valuable and valid data for analysis.

As researchers and social work lecturers we are influenced by the discursive frames available for conceptualising race and racism in social work education. We do not consider ourselves to be outside of some of the problematic processes we describe but, as researchers, we have been motivated to develop an analysis which illuminates and advances our understanding of race in social work education.

FINDINGS

The following themes present a range of ways that race operates in social work education. The first theme examines how lecturers understand race and racism, present culture in teaching and categorise black students through racial logics. The second theme explores how black students' everyday interactions in social work programmes are racially inflected, characterised by marginalisation, hostility and othering. The final theme considers how students' work and practice are continually assessed through a racialising lens.

Ways of distinguishing race and culture

Most lecturers described race as a system of socially constructed differences that reproduced inequality, while speaking about cultural differences as real, important matters that were distinct from race. Lecturers most often discussed race in terms of 'structural' or 'unconscious racism' while they repeatedly presented culture in terms of identity, community, practices and values. As we discuss below, this often led to racism being presented in narrow terms while issues where culture was seen as significant were articulated as if they were *not* about race, while still being heavily racially inflected. These ways of distinguishing race and culture from each other featured in the content of teaching sessions described to us by lecturers and students, and the ways lecturers talked about black students in their interviews.

Framing racism as structural and unconscious had the effect of presenting it as something complex and hidden. One lecturer explained that black students were over-represented among those who failed placements. When asked what caused this, she answered: 'I would say structural racism [...] that will be a massive factor but there's obviously layers and layers of other

factors as well, it's very complex.' Another lecturer discussed white practice educators' resistance to considering whether black students might experience racism during placements:

> I'm sure there are very few people in our agencies who are intentionally being racist towards our students—you know, I'm sure that that is very rare—but the incidents where people may not understand what they're doing, the way they're behaving is racist in that it's unconscious racism.

These accounts of structural racism and unconscious racism mitigated against lecturers adopting a reflexive approach to their own frameworks for categorising and interacting with students. Racism was understood as located in an overarching structure and obscured by layers of other factors or hidden from the self, at the level of unconscious biases. These frames ignored the everyday, mundane ways in which black people and communities were explicitly categorised and distinguished from the norm. Descriptions that indexed culture were central to this: accounts that framed black communities and black students themselves as different in absolute terms were presented as valid, sensitive and *not* racist. Students described how a substantial amount of teaching about social work practice issues concerned what were presented as problematic, oppressive, abusive or exploitative cultural practices. One student explained:

> Things like forced marriages, FGM [female genital mutilation], that kind of stuff and physically disciplining children. How it might be cultural, but it's not okay—that's the way culture has mostly been discussed. In terms of making us aware of how certain cultures can oppress or normalise behaviours that legally are not acceptable and why we should challenge that.

Case studies were used extensively in teaching; lecturers explained that these were used as ways for students to make connections between theoretical perspectives and 'real life' practice, and as means of incorporating minority issues into the curriculum. However, the students we interviewed saw them as framing culture as a matter of simple, absolute differences in values, beliefs and practices, which contributed to black students feeling on the outside of undefined cultural norms. One participant expressed how she experienced diversity in teaching, referring to case studies where 'this family's Asian, this family is Muslim, and then we talk about diversity, but I've never seen that when it was white British families, which made me feel kind of excluded.' She felt she was positioned as 'part of the diversity …. because I'm black and my family is black'. Such experiences revealed the commonplace ways black students were made to feel different.

The representation of black people as cultural others in teaching has two effects. First, case studies work to produce narrow, superficial understandings that reference culture rather than race but nevertheless reproduce racial hierarchies by constructing cultural difference from an unspoken norm (Pon, 2009). Second, framing difference through culture constrains how students are permitted to participate because they are 'part of the diversity'—the subject to be discussed. Attention to how social work practices are implicated in the reproduction of racial inequalities is diverted to what is presented as a neutral discussion of culture. Anti-oppressive practice is employed as a framework for understanding the oppressive nature of certain cultural

practices. Black communities are framed in terms of difference, using culture as the means through which racial distinctions are affirmed (Lentin, 2014).

As well as descriptions of black communities in teaching, lecturers' talk about black students also worked to reproduce racial distinctions. Most lecturers spoke critically about making such distinctions in their interviews while, in the same interview, framing black students as absolutely different from white students. For example, one lecturer told us 'I don't see students in terms of categories' but later gave explanations of why 'Nigerian students' and 'Asian women' acted as they did that relied on assumptions about cultural difference. The racial logic of much of what most lecturers said about black students is illustrated in their accounts of the separation of students into black and white groups during teaching sessions. This was the issue most likely to animate lecturers, with all but one lecturer speaking at length about it. Most saw this separation as a consequence of black students' actions rather than the group as a whole. They explained that students broke into groups according to country or global region of origin, with several lecturers describing Zimbabwean, Cameroonian and Nigerian students sitting in separate groups for 'comfort' or 'support', while others said South Asian women often sat together because they shared a 'lack of confidence'. Similar explanations were also used to account for why some black students from the same community did not sit together, with one lecturer stating that two South Asian men always sat in different parts of the lecture theatre because one of them was 'visibly gay'. These examples illustrate how explanations grounded in superficial understandings of culture were both compelling for most lecturers and flexible enough to explain students' behaviour whether they sat together or apart.

This contrasted with students' accounts of the same issue. They also frequently noted groups of white and black students in class, sometimes presenting these as a 'natural' way for the group to divide up, sometimes describing them with concern. However, they did not frame them as the result of simple choices by either black or white students, rather as patterns of group behaviour that had emerged over time that individual students had to negotiate. They often described sitting with other black students, but not because they had the same ethnicity or country of origin. In the following example, a student of Southern African origin explained whom she tended to spend time with in the programme:

> Within my friendship group we have a white Irish girl, I've got another black female friend, she's from France but her family is from Senegal, and we've got two mixed-race girls, and we've got two English guys.

Most students spoke about ethnic identity as a situated and shifting experience, as was evidenced when we asked students to describe their identity at the start of interviews, for example:

> I was born in Uganda, but I've lived in Kenya, in Tanzania and obviously England, where I went to school.

This kind of response was common and contrasts with the fixed global-regional and national categories used by most lecturers. The distance between students' and lecturers' accounts of

racial groupings in class suggested lecturers frequently resorted to simple frames for judging racial and cultural difference when making sense of dynamics between students in class.

Everyday marginalisation, hostility and othering

Black students spoke about informal interactions through which they experienced hostility, were excluded or were treated as strange. We explore examples of these interactions in university-based teaching and in practice placements.

Most students spoke about how discussion in teaching sessions was given importance and encouraged but also worked to exclude or marginalise them. Frequently, black students whose first languages were not English were excluded in small-group discussions: they experienced other students as impatient when they tried to contribute and dealt with this pragmatically by choosing to work in small groups with other students whose first languages were not English, because of their shared experiences of speaking English rather than shared culture or first language.

Who felt comfortable participating in class discussions related to culture *and* race—who was confident using language as a 'native speaker' but also who was expected to speak about which topics and who was able to direct the tone of interactions. Some students told us only white students spoke in teaching sessions; others told us that when the topics were black cultures or racism, white students were reluctant to speak while black students felt expected to do so. In these circumstances, everything black students said could be greeted as a powerful insight. As one participant said: 'I'm the black person, so I'm supposed to be the race expert. I could say something ridiculous and people would say "oh yes, she's right!"' Speaking about racism was valued but also seen as problematic: a student told us how, when she responded angrily to racism in class 'people said it was legitimate for me to react in that way, but almost that it wasn't professional'. Other participants talked about white students who socialised frequently outside of class, knew each other well, and felt entitled to switch between formal and informal interactions during discussions in teaching sessions. Black students often perceived narrower expectations about the language and tone they could use, and the emotions they could express in class. One explanation for this was that lecturers influenced who felt 'at home' in the space. As one student said:

> There were students that would just talk about going for lunch with tutors and discussing the course and getting extra support on certain topics. I just thought 'Wow'. With those students, there was a higher pass rate, they would get higher grades, but I think that's just from them having that sense of responsibility over their course and what they're doing. They'd email, they'd have meetings in person and just get further information.

She was asked whether ethnicity was a factor here:

> Definitely. The ones that said 'I'm meeting this tutor'—they were white English. The people that didn't are the ethnic minorities.

Students described mundane experiences of hostility. Several participants described how some white students used racial stereotypes casually in small-group discussions, which other white students left unchallenged (a phenomenon DiAngelo (2018) has described as 'white solidarity'). Others spoke about racial stereotypes being used when students were socialising together, in WhatsApp group chats and text messages sent during teaching, illustrating the various media through which all students interacted. An African student's description of a teaching session about FGM illustrates connections between lecturers' representation of black communities and students' uncritical responses. The participant described how FGM was presented as an 'African' practice, rather than a minority practice outlawed in most African countries, which also occurs outside Africa. The language used drew implicitly on a racial hierarchy of humanity:

> The expressions and the kind of words that the lecturer used, categorised the people practising it as maybe inhuman, really. Then when it comes to students, when the lecture is going on, you can see students sending messages and then they're laughing and [saying] 'Oh, this is barbaric, these people are inhuman'.

This and other examples showed how, in teaching sessions, culture frequently came to be discussed as a marker for implicit racial distinctions, which black students negotiated by disputing, accepting or remaining silent.

Many students explained how practice placements involved having to engage with a distinct set of norms around racism. Students described placements as 'fine' but would then go on to describe routine abuse from service users and hostility or ignoring from colleagues. Such everyday experiences were often difficult for students to articulate and, sometimes, explicit abuse was normalised. One student was placed in a youth project in what she described as a 'white area':

> I think within the first week, I'm not sure—it's bad, but you kind of do get used to certain things—I'm sure I might've been called a [racial slur] or something at one point […] I'm sure I just heard someone say it in passing, one of the kids, but I was busy doing something else. Yeah, no, I think I did hear a few things to be fair.

While students experienced racism from service users in 'white areas', 'white teams' seemed to present particular problems: from lack of understanding of race to exclusion and hostility. This was sometimes possible to challenge: for example, a student who was the only Black Muslim on the social work team spoke about how she challenged a colleague who ignored her:

> My third week there now, he's never looked up to me to say hello. If he wants to say hello,he used to say his 'hello' in a very low tone. You know what I did yesterday? I looked at him, I was just staring because he was sitting across from me. He knew I was looking at him. I sat there and I said, 'When would you have time to kind of talk me through what you're doing as a practitioner?'

Challenge was not always possible for students. Another Muslim student in a largely white team explained that, in the first week of the placement, the team manager emailed his practice educator to say he was 'not right for the team' and inadvertently copied him in. His first

experience of speaking to the manager was to ask why she thought this, a question she brushed off. Following this, he experienced ridicule from colleagues and hostility from service users but was unsure whether this was about racism or the fact he was a man. He said he did not want to 'play the race card', these problems were 'just frustrating' but the placement was 'fine'.

Students were aware that colleagues' judgements might not be expressed with any hostility but could still be highly consequential. One student, who was doing her final, 100-day placement, described repeatedly being denied opportunities to do the complex work needed to pass the placement. The experience contrasted with a white student there:

> I think I was on day 85, and we had another student coming in, and as soon as she came in, she was given opportunities, safeguarding opportunities. Go and shadow core group meetings[1], represent the agency outside…. whilst I was still in the nursery. I was completing and she was just starting.

The student was subsequently judged not to have demonstrated the level of capability required to pass and so failed the placement. Lecturers' accounts provided further examples of exclusion in placements. A lecturer elaborated on an incident revealed in written feedback from two black students about the same placement:

> I was absolutely floored because they said they'd been treated hostilely, they'd experienced racism. The staff group hadn't been welcoming, they'd been treated differently in terms of learning opportunities, they hadn't been invited along to professionals' meetings as the other students who were on placement at the same time had.

Students' accounts of hostility and marginalisation during practice placements revealed how routine such experiences were. Lecturers, in contrast, heard about few of these experiences and tended to view them as shocking when they did. Experiences of hostility or discrimination in placement were therefore judged to be exceptions to be handled individually and were not brought in for more general collegial reflections at the university.

Judging performance

The study's data suggested black students' performance in academic work and practice placements was judged on the basis of their ability to demonstrate what lecturers and practice educators often assumed to be culturally specific qualities. There was a preoccupation with written English among lecturers; several lecturers spoke about written English as if it was more likely to be problematic for black students and as if the standard of students' written English corresponded with academic ability and their suitability for practice. Frequently, lecturers said that being flexible about styles of expression might cause problems or increase risks in practice. We were PUAR 'if it's not good enough, then it's not good enough', students without sufficient

1 Core group meetings are a key element of child protection processes in England.

writing skills would ‘flounder in practice’. There could be severe consequences for people who used services and these students themselves, if they were able to qualify: ‘people could be detained, potentially for months’ and ‘practice can be examined in a court.’ Another lecturer associated black students’ written English skills with their capacity for reflection, typically seen as a foundational skill in social work education:

> There are a lot of black ethnic minority students who reflect very well, but there are probably more students who find it, because of the language and just the concept of reflection, find it harder to do than a student who's been educated in this country.

Conventional accounts commonly drawn on in social work (for example, Kolb, 2015) assume that reflection requires an abstract conceptualisation of experience but do not claim that this depends on the ability to write or to have been taught in English. We found that references to written expression and reflection were further devices used to distinguish black students from the rest of the student group.

Sometimes judgements about language clearly referred to students who had come to the UK as adults but there was also evidence some lecturers had lower expectations about the academic work of black students more generally. Importantly, we found that students were acutely aware their academic work was being judged negatively. Students told us they felt their written work was marked down because of stylistic differences rather than problems with content, or were sceptical about work being marked anonymously. Several students, including people who had grown up in the UK and were fluent in English, had come to believe their written work lacked some important quality but had no idea what this might be. Negative judgements about language occurred in placements too. One student recalled that her practice educator had explained to her that her pronunciation of words and the ‘phonetics in your language’ made it more difficult for her to write records in English. Here, a presumption of difficulty in writing was being made based solely on distorted perceptions about how the student’s home language was spoken. The comment made the student feel ‘there are assumptions about, for instance, the education, whether I did even go to school. I think sometimes it’s the language’. Another student explained: ‘Sometimes, it makes it look like if you're black African you need to put in extra effort to make it’.

Frequently, students and lecturers spoke of placements where there was an expectation that students catch the peculiar culture of the workplace, in terms of everyday routines, humour, slang or obligations that were not expressed explicitly. Moreover, students were continuously assessed based on vague criteria while lecturers seemed to have a tenuous connection to what was going on in practice placements. Lecturers viewed racism as something that needed to be stopped or challenged but their accounts were usually restricted to those situations where students had made some level of formal complaint. Nevertheless, lecturers acknowledged differences in placement experiences for black students; as one lecturer said: ‘black students are often judged as 'not ready' to take on work during the placement which would enable them to demonstrate learning, or not ready to pass at the end of it’. This suggested lecturers had a sense of practice educators using a different frame for evaluating black students' practice, but this was difficult for lecturers to identify and therefore challenge because of its tacit nature.

Students felt there was little in the way of concrete evidence they could use to complain about their experiences of racism, while lecturers spoke of hunches that black students might face hostility at certain placements but felt unable to raise this with placement providers. Even when students and lecturers described what appeared to be compelling evidence that black students were subject to racism, the ways such treatment was normalised meant it was difficult to articulate or complain about.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Our research aimed to explore how race operates in the everyday, normative interactions in social work programmes. We did this by using Lentin's work (2016; 2020) to help focus our attention on racial logics (ways of thinking and speaking about race), distinctions (ways of categorising and ordering people through race) and practices (social interactions through which these are maintained as normal and acceptable).

We found those involved in teaching on social work programmes placed a high value on racial equality while also often presenting culture as a matter of deep, absolute differences between people. This logic is prevalent in contemporary racisms in the UK and elsewhere (Lentin, 2020), and appears in social work education more broadly: for example, some of the frameworks for engaging with and researching race that we discussed at the start of the article. Black students were repeatedly interpellated in teaching, practice learning and assessments through such notions of cultural difference, with contradictory effects. They were appreciated for their difference, because diversity was positively valued, and they were viewed as having unique insights into black communities' cultural differences and experiences of racism. However, at key junctures, black students were expected to perform in the same ways as white students, despite assumptions they would be less able to do so. Black students also had different experiences of marginalisation and hostility that made it more difficult to meet expectations. This, combined with a frequent lack of clarity or consensus about what precisely students needed to know and 'do' in order to pass practice placements, often resulted in an implicit expectation that students demonstrate they had sufficiently similar values and sensibilities to those assessing them. Negotiating the contrasting expectations of these two conditions—the requirement to be sufficiently similar and the assumption of significant difference—was a fraught process for black students.

These findings chime with those of previous research, for instance about the effects of institutional culture on minority students (Fletcher et al., 2015) and the subtle racism experienced in social work programmes (Tedam, 2014; Hillen & Levy, 2015; Masocha, 2015). However, much of this recent research has also suggested that racial inequalities are produced by hidden forms of racism—micro-aggressions and unconscious bias—and this runs the risk of suggesting the processes that produce inequalities are hidden and implicit (Jeyasingham and Morton, 2019). By considering the everyday normative logics, distinctions and practices through which race works in social work education, we have identified explicit knowledge systems and practices that were clear to many black students and often valued by lecturers. These negatively impacted on black students' experiences and were likely to be implicated in poorer

outcomes for them. Dominant forms of knowledge such as equality and diversity, and valued practices such as informal discussion in teaching sessions and collegial relationships between students and lecturers were often implicated in the marginalisation and stigmatisation of black students. The findings also challenge some assumptions about where racist practices might occur and who reproduces them. Though students were subjected to hostility and explicit racism in their interactions with service users, students also clearly felt marginalised through teaching content in class and by practice educators' exclusion of them from learning opportunities.

Two English universities participated in the study. Other universities in England may have different proportions of black students and lecturers in social work, and the racial logics, distinctions and practices at work in those places may be different. The fact that all lecturer participants in this study were white needs to be borne in mind, but we should not assume differences between the normative ways of talking about race, culture and black students evident in this study's data and ways of talking about these issues among black and white social work lecturers elsewhere. Explanations of black students' experiences grounded in similar ideas about essential cultural difference are prevalent in social work education research in the UK more widely (Jeyasingham and Morton, 2019). Thus, the study makes a worthwhile contribution to the ongoing debates about this topic. As exploratory research, the study also identifies some problems with everyday practices in social work education that could be examined more directly using other methodologies, particularly those involving observation of lecturers' and practice educators' practice.

The findings presented have some clear implications. There should be much greater attention in social work literature and education to theorisations of culture as hybrid, narrated and situated, rather than a matter of absolute differences in values, beliefs and practices. In addition to reflection, arguably already given a high profile in UK social work education, there is a need for epistemic reflexivity—the process of identifying how our own interpretations are located within wider discourses (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This would lead to educators scrutinising, rather than reflecting on, the everyday logics, practices and distinctions our study has revealed. We have offered an approach to analysing how race operates that differs from most current discussions and is likely to be relevant for other social work education contexts in its emphasis on everyday interactions and practices. However, the scrutiny we propose requires effort as practices are so deeply embedded. Reflexive approaches might helpfully start with some concrete strategies, for example, providing space for open dialogue between lecturers about how assessment practices work or examining the ways culture is constructed in teaching. More broadly, as social work educators, we need to attend to the ways our own values, such as notions of equality and universal academic standards, are put into practice in ways that contribute to the devaluing of black students.

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