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‘How did it go?’ Negotiating race, racialisation and identity when teaching issues of race and equality in HE

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Abstract

This paper reflects on our experiences of teaching various aspects of race and ethnicity within the higher education context over the past decade. We highlight various ways in which teaching race and ethnicity is ‘sensitive’, and reflect upon our teaching practice. We also highlight some of the approaches that we use in our teaching. In particular, we consider the value of a focus on ‘everyday’ spaces for teaching and learning about race and ethnicity. We also explore issues relating to the positioning of ourselves, our ethnicities and social biographies, within the context of our teaching. In so doing, we engage with issues relating to authenticity, conflict, emotionality, racism and backlash narratives.

Key words: emotions, ethnicity, everyday, backlash

Introduction

Together, we have been active in teaching about issues of race¹ and ethnicity for the past decade, in various academic contexts. Our students have included those on applied degree courses, such as those studying to be social workers, police officers and lawyers, as well as those specifically studying sociology or, more broadly, social studies. Our classes have included those that largely or exclusively comprised students from majority ethnic backgrounds (white British), and we have also taught on modules which comprised mainly students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds.² These contexts are hugely significant given the nature of the subject. Jacobs notes:

Teaching 'race' and ethnicity is widely perceived by staff to be challenging as well as rewarding, but the types of challenge vary a good deal according to whether institutions are mainly 'white'/ethnicity majority or whether a number of EM students are enrolled.

(Jacobs, 2006: 344)

We have taught at various HE institutions within the UK, in large metropolitan cities and in smaller towns, within both 'new' and established universities, and at different levels, including foundation year programmes and master's. Our engagement and pedagogic practice has emerged and developed during this time, partly in response to our own shifting epistemological/theoretical frameworks, but also in response to who we are and the social changes taking place around us. Indeed, our own ethnicities, identities, our 'personhoods' to borrow from Stanley and Wise

¹ We use the term 'race' in this paper to refer to 'a process, a set of discursive practices [as] a concept that is both slippery and sticky ... always aware that this phrase is contested in theory, discourse, policy and the everyday, and yet [aware] that in the British context it has real meaning and effect not only through claims to raced identities, but also through continued widespread racism' (Ali, 2006: 473).

² Following from Lewis (2000: 207), it is evident that there are limitations with the use of any racial/ethnic categorisations and terminologies.

(1983: 162), are integral to this paper. In simplistic terms, we could identify ourselves as a white female and Asian male; yet, within these overarching racial categorisations, our biographies are shaped and disrupted through interrelated aspects such as our social class, gender, sexuality, family histories and social networks. These aspects of difference intersect and are played out, marked, recognised and made real within the 'everyday'.

In the context of this paper, we want to draw particular attention to the complex ways in which teaching race relates to the notion of teaching 'sensitive issues', the theme of this special edition. Despite Skinner's (2006: 13) argument that 'we have done to death the topic of what a 'difficult' or sensitive subject race is', we feel that there is more to be said here, particularly in the context of a rapidly changing social world and changing HE context.

Our discussion of teaching race as a sensitive subject is divided into three sections. First, we outline our theoretical location, which informs not only this paper but also our teaching practice. Second, we reflect on our teaching experience to consider the sensitivity in teaching around race and ethnicity in contemporary HE settings. Finally, we consider approaches that we use in our teaching practice in order to engage with the sensitivity inherent in teaching race and ethnicity.

There are several key elements that we seek to explore within these sections. The study or talk of race and race-related issues is seen by many – both within the academy, lecturers and students alike, and outside, within mainstream popular media and politics – as 'sensitive'. Indeed, race-related issues continue to provoke what can be described as emotive responses and debates. We also want to suggest that teaching about race, racism and ethnicity differs from the majority of teaching found within wider social studies syllabuses because of the complex ways in which we engage with the subject in relation to our own identities and social biographies (see also Jacobs, 2006) (although, of course, there are similarities with

teaching related to gender, sexuality and disability). Teaching about race in the British context, with its histories of colonialism, empire and immigration, can also evoke particular forms of classroom dynamics, which in some cases may result in conflict, anger and distress. Indeed, drawing on a research project on teaching race in HE, Jacobs (2006: 344) notes that such conflict can involve 'heightened emotions and more explicit expression of beliefs, perceptions and (sometimes) stereotypes than is routine'. In discussing these emotive experiences, we also draw on our personal recollections of student narratives. It is necessary to note that these comments are based on our reinterpretation of the events and do not arise from a focused research project. They are therefore influenced by a range of factors that affect retrieval, such as our emotional state, the perceived severity of the comments to us, and the amount of time that has passed since their occurrence.

Theoretical location

Our thinking (and teaching) about race and our pedagogies are informed by our own theoretical locations, which could loosely be described as 'critical poststructuralist' (see also Williams, 2003). We are inspired and informed by the work of contemporary theorists such as Caroline Knowles (2003; and with Claire Alexander, 2005), Gail Lewis (2004) and Suki Ali (2006), as well as having a longer history of engagement with the work of Stuart Hall (1992), Paul Gilroy (2004), Avtar Brah (1996) and Mac an Ghail (1999) in particular. Given this, we view race as something which is socially constructed, yet something which continues to have meaning. As Alexander and Knowles (2005: 1) argue, 'race still matters' in contemporary times as it remains 'a definitive marker of identity, difference, inequality and violence'. Indeed it is also apparent that 'race practices remain integral to social and political formations' (Warmington, 2009: 283).

Race and the 'everyday'

In particular, we are interested in how race and 'race practices' operate within the 'everyday', in the mundane and the ordinary settings of social interaction. Here we follow on from the work of Lewis (2004: 167), who talks of the 'practices of the everyday' as 'a code for the taken for granted, ordinary ways of organizing living and relationships in networks of intimacy (families, lovers, friendships etc.) workplace relationships, schools, hospitals or other public institutions, communities or other networks'. Such a focus on 'everyday' settings and experiences can also be useful in shifting perceptions and for teaching and learning the 'sensitive' subject of race and ethnicity, as we explore in this paper. Furthermore, developing Giddens' (1984) work on structuralisation, the 'everyday' can be viewed as a space within which the dialectic relationship between structure and agency is materialised.

Central to our understanding and pedagogic practice is an attempt to convey the ways in which processes of ethnicity and race within 'everyday' spaces affect both hegemonic majorities and subjugated minorities (though in different ways). A focus on the 'everyday' is particularly useful here. As Warmington (2009: 284) notes: 'If ... the everyday is acknowledged as being sinewed by raced practices then it becomes less easy to take refuge in the position that race 'happens elsewhere', in exotic, marginal spaces, and that it couldn't 'happen here', in the midst of our everyday experiences.'

Essed's (1991) work is also relevant to this discussion, particularly the concept of 'everyday racism' as a means of understanding how structural racism is normalised within everyday practices and routines:

... everyday racism can be defined as a process in which (a) socialized racist notions are integrated into meanings that make practices immediately definable and manageable, (b) practices with racist implications become in

themselves familiar and repetitive, and (c) underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualized and reinforced through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations.

(Essed, 1991: 52)

Our focus here is not on the existence of institutionalised racism within HE. Rather, we want to point out how race matters within practices and interactions of the 'everyday', which includes HE and the processes of reproducing and remaking race and racism (Essed, 1991). Moreover, this has particular currency in the context of the classroom when teaching and learning about race and ethnicity.

In understanding the relationship between structural processes and the 'everyday', as configured in this paper, it is important to recognise that race, class and gender are not separate entities. Rather, frames of difference are experienced in and through each other in complex ways (McClintock, 1995). Moreover, as Mac an Ghail and Haywood (2007) point out, in terms of social relations, recognised aspects of difference such as 'ethnicity' are also understood through the frameworks of gender and sexuality:

We can say that power is shaped by relationality: one group is both powerful and powerless. For example, particular social relations of ethnicity simultaneously 'speak' gender and sexuality; to be a 'Paki' is also to be a 'poof', is to be a 'non-proper' boy.

(Mac an Ghail and Haywood, 2007: 40)

Recognising the intersection of these (as well as other) aspects of difference has implications for teaching and learning about race and ethnicity, and again we would suggest that focusing on the racialisation of 'everyday' spaces is an important tool, as we will later explore.

The teaching experience

We now want to reflect upon and engage with aspects of our teaching practice, focusing in particular on the ways in which teaching race and ethnicity is a 'sensitive' subject. In particular, we explore the importance of our ethnicities and social biographies, and we address issues relating to white backlash narratives.

Negotiating our ethnicities

The teaching of 'race' and racism, and perhaps of other subjects, such as gender, cannot escape personal exposure and experience.

(Housee, 2008: 418)

Housee (2008) talks in some detail about the effect that 'black' lecturers can have on students when teaching race, as their racial categorisation can be seen to provide some sense of validity to the experiences of being a racialised minority. For example, in such situations, lecturers can draw on their own personal experiences to illustrate the lived realities of theory and policy relating to racialisation within schools (Housee, 2008). This is a practice which we have both employed, not just in relation to race, but also in other aspects of our teaching, such as gender. Using personal experiences can help provide a rich and engaging space for understanding race, ethnicity, racialisation and racism. For example, as an Asian, Sikh male, you can utilise your experiences or family experiences as located within the south Asian diasporic experience. Issues of direct and blatant racism within the workplace, which may for some be hard to comprehend in contemporary social contexts, can then be explored through documenting the stories with which we are familiar and are connected to our social biographies. This places the lecturer overtly within the context of the subject being studied. Consequently, the subjective position of being an 'Asian man' when teaching students about histories of south Asian migration, south Asian communities or

south Asian masculinities could be seen to provide a valuable position for teaching and learning. Yet, similarly, the position of being a 'white woman' could be exploited when exploring issues of whiteness, white ethnicities, racism, and the intersectionality of race with other aspects of identity.

In utilising ourselves and our social biographies, we do not want to suggest any simplistic notion of authenticity. However, at the same time, it is apparent that this can help to provide some grounding in subject matter which can, at times, appear far removed from the 'everyday' contexts of our students' lives. In this process, we certainly draw on what Housee (2006: 38) has described and advocates as a form of 'engaged pedagogy', underpinned by 'collaborative learning' which, 'through the generation and use of biographic stories, connects and challenges the academic material with everyday experiences and stories'. Again, the concept of the 'everyday' is apparent here, and this further supports our argument relating to the importance of the 'everyday' as a conceptual tool for teaching and learning about race and ethnicity. Housee (2006) draws on bell hooks' (1994) argument that critical pedagogy is rooted in engagement and inclusion: '[My] pedagogical strategy is rooted in the assumption that we all bring to the classroom experiential knowledge that can indeed enhance our learning experience' (hooks, 1994: 84–85, cited in Housee, 2006: 38). As Housee rightly notes: '[I]f we want to encourage students to speak on sensitive issues, such as 7/7, then we take the challenge to vulnerability ourselves and share our thinking, our views, to initiate the dialogue' (Housee, 2006: 38). As previously argued, this is not necessarily an 'easy' or painless experience, but is often an emotional encounter.

However, it is also evident that the presentation of self within the teaching and learning setting is one that is performed. It is therefore a process whereby we may choose which personal examples are selected to convey racial 'experience', while other aspects of identity such as class or gender maybe underplayed. As Knowles (2003, cited in Alexander and Knowles, 2005: 13) points out, 'recognition of the

role of individual subjectivity is crucial to an understanding of the ways in which race is 'made', resisted and performed in the 'rituals of everyday existence". At the same time, it is also apparent to us, having engaged with teaching around this subject area, that students may react negatively, at least initially, to being taught about race/ethnicity by someone who they feel does not have the 'authenticity' to speak/teach this subject. In this context, being white and teaching a subject which students may perceive as being specifically and only *about* black and minority ethnic communities/histories/experiences can create tensions. For example, one of our students asserted: 'White people can't teach us about race.' Housee (2008: 417) also notes that, in such situations, students 'drew on essentialist discourses to argue that only blacks can teach race and racism and that white folks cannot sincerely teach race/ethnicity/racism issues because they do not understand and 'feel' the issues in the same way'. However, again, we would suggest that focusing on race and ethnicity in 'everyday' spaces, and particularly on ways in which race and race practices affect both majority and minority groups, is useful here.

There is a further aspect to this however, which warrants some discussion. Being positioned as a white lecturer, combined with being a woman from a working-class, rural background, may create intrigue among students as to why one might be interested in and committed to teaching about race, racialisation and inequality. Such questions are unlikely to be directed towards lecturers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. This clearly relates to our racialised identities, but also highlights the ways in which race is made and constructed within spaces of social interaction, in the everyday, including within the classroom. In our experience, students have probed: 'Are you of mixed background then?', 'Are you Asian?' The implication is, you could not possibly be white English. In these instances, if one was to reveal some aspect of being a racialised minority, it would enable the students to fall back on simple and essentialised understandings of race which often surface in seminar discussions. This process of racialisation, which shifts from being identified as 'white' to 'something else', shows how racial

difference is not simply mediated by skin colour. Indeed, writers such as McClintock (1995) and Roediger (1994) have documented the processes by which various groups become white. Similarly, within the context of the everyday, we are actively engaged in the process of constructing racial categories, and various cues serve to mark and define boundaries of otherness.

In such processes, a whole range of intersecting markers of difference is at play. There are particular discursive processes that allow us to 'accept' who is authentic for the role of lecturer and who can legitimately teach. Difference and the process of othering complicates who should hold authority (Subedi, 2008). Indeed, individual biographies differ. As Subedi (2008: 61) points out, 'on the limits of the biological conception of race, one may be 'skinfolk' but not necessarily a 'kinfolk'.

In an effort to disrupt and challenge the assumptions within some students' perceptions, and those of some of our colleagues within HE past and present who assume(d) that race/ethnicity should be taught by lecturers from racialised minority groups, we have made a determined effort to engage with the notion of racialisation within our teaching and to explore and deconstruct whiteness in everyday settings as well as exploring blackness or Asian-ness. This is one way to destabilise processes of race-making that essentialise, legitimate and reinforce race as mattering only to racialised minorities. Therefore, within our teaching practice, particularly on modules that focus on the study of race and ethnicity, we also encourage students to engage with the study of whiteness and Englishness.

Challenges to our 'personhoods'³

The pedagogy of race remains extremely emotive and 'sensitive'. Indeed, as Housee (2008) skilfully and succinctly outlines:

Learning about racism often pulls on our emotional strings: black students sometimes express their hurt and anger, while white students sometimes remain silent or express their hurt, shame and discomfort. The lecturer's racialised identity is an important factor in these emotional exchanges. Black lecturers are sometimes judged for their 'loyalties and sensibilities' with the black community, while white lecturers are questioned for their understanding and sympathies with 'race'/racism issues.

(Housee, 2008: 415)

While as academics we may be given the position of 'knower', the power dynamics within the classroom are, of course, complex, in part reflecting the intersection of race, class, gender and other aspects of social differentiation within 'everyday' spaces. Our social biographies and identifications are infused with our practice here, and this can place us in a vulnerable and open position. For example, identifying oneself as an Asian man can enable students to make easy associations between what is being taught and the Asian male doing the teaching. When teaching about statistical evidence of continuing disadvantage within employment for different minority groups, students have openly asked about earnings, educational achievements and social class. There is a lot to make sense of here, and we can only explore some of it in this paper. However, one reading may be that this has taken place when students have wished to challenge the validity of the academic material being presented, partly to deny the persistence of racial disadvantage reflected in the question, 'You're doing alright though, aren't you?' This reflects the contradiction, as mentioned previously, that, on the one hand, there is a problematic assumption that black or Asian lecturers may be best suited to teach about race, yet there is also evidence of an underlying narrative at work which suggests that they are not the most capable (Subedi, 2008).

³ Taken from Stanley and Wise (1983: 162).

From our experiences of teaching race and ethnicity over the past decade, we could interpret and reflect on the reactions of some students within the framework of subtle racism or even 'aversive racism' (Mistry and Latoo, 2009: 20), which has become more prominent as blatant forms are legislated against. Such subtle forms of racism are played out in everyday cognitive processes. Mistry and Latoo (2009: 20) point out that 'these feelings and beliefs are rooted in the normal psychological processes of social categorisation, satisfaction of basic needs for power and control, and socio-cultural influence'. There is also evidence to suggest that some students' engagement with the subject matter corresponds with what Gilroy (1992) has described as 'new racism' and is tied up with terms such as 'culture' and 'identity'. This discourse has found a new home within contemporary community cohesion policy discourses, which are now seen as a legitimate and acceptable way to discuss issues of race and ethnicity (Worley, 2006). Such diverse forms of racism are maintained and reproduced through processes and rituals that legitimate certain common sense and stereotypical assumptions about racial types along with a continued belief that racism is dead. For Essed (1991), such forms of everyday racism also problematise a distinction between institutional and individual racism, as acceptable institutional practices legitimate individual action.

Research evidence suggests that being questioned on expertise and knowledge appears to be a common reaction by students in these contexts, further reflecting the sensitive nature of the subject. While focusing on the North American context (which of course has different histories to the British context), Alexander-Floyd (2008) describes a 'cognitive dissonance' students have to black academics:

Cognitive dissonance can be defined as a profound disorientation that occurs when our foundational modes of thinking are directly challenged ... or our lived experience fails to conform to deeply ingrained beliefs and assumptions. Blacks and other racial minorities in the U.S. occupy a lower social and political status than Whites and are not typically seen as authority

figures, especially in the lives of most Whites. Given this fact, most White students, and even students of color, experience cognitive dissonance when they have people of color as professors.

(Alexander-Floyd 2008: 184)

Another aspect of what we might refer to as the 'emotionality' inherent in this is that our social biographies are tied to what we teach and we have a personal investment in facilitating students to engage and make sense of the subject. When we are teaching about south Asian immigration, for example, we may therefore utilise case studies such as that of Anwar Ditta, a Rochdale-born Asian woman who campaigned against the Home Office for six years in the 1970s and 1980s in an effort to be reunited with her three children in Pakistan. She was eventually reunited with them after being made to undergo various tests and an internal examination. When faced with students defiantly asserting that 'she should have told the truth' or making statements like 'all Asian women should learn to speak English', this has an emotional impact on us as lecturers and can be extremely difficult to engage with. This again partly relates to our personal social biographies, as discussed earlier, and the investment we have with the area that we teach. Moreover, it can lead to conflict within the classroom, something which we discuss in more detail later in the paper.

As an 'Asian', 'black' or 'white' lecturer, you can also be seen to embody and indeed represent a particular discursive racial category. Embodying and being seen in this position also lends itself to particular forms of representations that can bring with them their own dangers. You are thus placed in a vulnerable position whereby not only can your knowledge be contested, but also your experiences that link you to particular religious, cultural and ethnic communities. It can get personal. And it is overtly 'sensitive', whether the discussions are based on simple misunderstandings or a clear intention to provoke, which is often resolved by days of reflecting on 'how did it go?' It is in such situations that students may ridicule,

justify or support ideas that we feel are misinformed or even blatantly racist. These have included discussions on the subject of arranged marriages and or contemporary immigration for example. These issues are not only linked to our own experiences, but are connected to our families, friends and communities. We are not suggesting that students should remain 'silent' in this context. But this further highlights some of the factors which relate to race being a 'sensitive' subject to teach, and we would argue that this is especially the case when it is relegated to a singular module or, even more challenging, a single lesson. Moreover, these issues emphasise the place of emotions and feelings inherent in our approach.

Engaging with the white backlash

The specificities of the student cohort have also shaped our experiences of teaching race over the past decade and our reflections/pedagogic developments. As well as the obvious factors of race and ethnicity, geographic location, the student's place of birth, social class and the nature of the degree (and specifically whether it relates to a professional qualification with a practice-based aspect) are also significant in shaping the ways in which teaching race becomes a sensitive subject. Clearly these aspects of difference intersect (for example, with race and gender) and could for some students provide a legitimate 'counter-narrative' about the realities of race, as reflected in the following student comments:

When do we forget history and can stop feeling guilty for being white?

Why don't we get taught about all the racism that other groups have? Asians don't like other Asians ... I asked (an Asian student) ... if he was a Muslim and he said 'Don't call me a paki, I hate Muslims'.

Haven't we got enough to think about as it is? Than thinking about taking our shoes off or whether we will offend somebody if we shook their hand? We've got a job to do.

Reflecting on literature about multicultural education in the USA, Spring (2006) highlights the sense of guilt white students feel when exploring the realities of racism. This can result in a display of resentment and anger towards black and minority ethnic groups. Such narratives also reflect a wider backlash towards multiculturalism and race equality measures. These are informed by a number of discourses that Hewitt (2005) documents in his ethnography of a white working-class community in Greenwich, London. Hewitt (2005) explores the growing resentment towards black and minority ethnic communities and the perceived positive discrimination and preferential treatment they are seen to receive. In recent years, this sense of resentment has also led to increasing support for the British National Party, particularly among 35- to 54-year-olds in skilled/unskilled working-class occupations (Ford and Goodwin, 2010):

[This 'white backlash'] may more accurately be described as part of a socially disparate set of responses to equalities discourse as they unfold from the 1960s to the present. The so-called 'white backlash' has not been unitary, nor has it had the finality which its name seems to suggest ... It is an international phenomenon whose history, despite often deep national variation, continues to influence contemporary struggles over race and justice, migration and settlement and national policies designed to address them.

(Hewitt, 2005: 5).

From this perspective, the dynamics of race, class and geography play a role in shaping experiences of race. Hewitt's (2005) study conveyed a range of anxieties, such as a fear of being seen as racist, an over-resentment of cultures of 'political

correction', a sense that Britishness/Englishness is a minority identity, and a real sense of disempowerment and alienation. Such discourses have been a key feature of extreme right political narratives, but have also more recently been echoed in mainstream political parties. The communities secretary John Denham has called for an increased focus on tackling disadvantage for white working-class boys (Denham, 2009) alongside the need to develop 'a better understanding of the way in which race interacts with class and other factors' (Denham, 2010). In terms of our practice, a similar sense of injustice and resentment has also been reflected at times in our students' narratives, which, drawing on the work of Hewitt (2005: 75), could be seen as conveying an alternative 'community-approved' narrative. We would argue that these narratives certainly shape our experiences of teaching race and further emphasise the ways in which race is a sensitive subject within the context of teaching in HE. The community-approved version of truth being constructed by our students in the classroom can be difficult to disentangle or challenge. Just as teaching race for us relates to our social biographies and identifications, so it does for our students, who often recite highly emotional racialised encounters, experiences and stories. These may not always be the stories that we want to 'hear': for example, stories that highlight even more 'sensitive' aspects of the subject, such as sexual violence and masculinity or victimisation. While some may vocalise their views, others may remain silent and disengaged. This also has a particular impact in terms of group work within mixed ethnicity and diverse HE settings. In such contexts, particularly when more vocal and assertive students try to dominate discussions, we have noticed ourselves becoming more aware of the potential for enhanced vulnerability and increased visibility of black and minority ethnic students within the classroom. Such examples include comments being made about the perceived 'problems' of wearing the hijab or perceptions of gender inequality within Muslim communities and so on. This becomes highly 'sensitive' when there are students in that setting who clearly can be identified with the community or issue being discussed. Clearly, this highlights

the ways in which teaching race is a 'sensitive' subject, but it also indicates the ways in which the study of race can lead to conflicts within the classroom.

Jacobs (2006) explores the issue of conflict in detail and, drawing on a classification used in earlier work around this topic (Jacobs and Hai, 2002), argues that such conflicts can be either 'overt/intentional expressions of racism by an individual ... indirect expressions of racism or of unconsciously held stereotypes; and ... overt group conflicts, whether involving direct or indirect racism' (Jacobs, 2006: 346). As previously indicated, within the contemporary context of community cohesion discourses, the so-called 'white backlash' and the rising popularity of the British National Party, this has particular implications for teaching race and ethnicity within HE contexts.

Approaches for teaching and learning

In response to the issues that we have discussed so far, we have sought to develop strategies and practices which can enable the effective teaching of 'sensitive' issues such as race and racialisation to diverse student cohorts and in diverse HE settings. However, even now, we sometimes feel uneasy and bewildered by the situations we encounter. We would now like to consider in more detail some of the approaches that we have found to be useful.

Utilising the 'everyday'

As outlined throughout this paper, we have found a focus on the 'everyday' to be useful because it enables students to explore race as a lived reality and as something with meaning (Alexander and Knowles, 2005) for both racialised majority and minority groups. As a teaching tool, the concept of the 'everyday' can be used to illustrate the realities of 'everyday' racism, and how these are experienced, alongside enabling a exploration of processes of racialisation and

race-making. This also enables an analysis of the interrelationship between race, class, gender and other aspects of difference that are at play within 'everyday' settings. Following from Lewis (2004), we understand the site of the 'everyday' as primarily being about the ordinary ways of living in contemporary society. Our focus in our teaching is to encourage students to recognise how these are racialised and to explore how race operates in specific contexts. This might entail an analysis of local communities and community relations or an exploration of individual identities. One particular example we use focuses on a photography project in Manchester which aimed to capture the diversity within the category 'mixed race' by focusing on individuals' own descriptions of themselves and their 'mixedness' (Lincoln, 2008). This enabled students to consider how processes of racialisation continue to frame ordinary experiences and everyday lives and to engage with the changing landscape of race and ethnicity in contemporary Britain.

We also make use of visual and textual materials about 'everyday' and mundane interactions that help to disrupt stereotypical ideas of the other and to enable students to engage with the complex theories around race and ethnicity. For example, we have developed discussions and practical analyses around the gendered, racialised and classed construction of 'chavs', a contemporary social grouping, drawing on the work of writers such as Nayak (2006) and Tyler (2008). We have also examined the historical racialisation of white working-class women and Irish communities ('white negroes'), drawing specifically upon visual imagery and the work of McClintock (1995). This is important in an effort to shift what are still commonly held perceptions that the study of race and ethnicity means the study of minority ethnic groups. This is in itself a 'sensitive' task, as the gendered and racialised constructions of 'chavs' within popular discourses are highly stigmatising and emotionally charged (Tyler, 2008).

Responding to the 'white backlash'

We have come to anticipate a level of resentment and anger by some students when engaging with issues of race. As previously mentioned, this anger and guilt may be reflected in students feeling that they are being blamed for contemporary racism or histories of slavery and colonialism. Therefore, in such instances, we utilise approaches that include the analysis of case studies which provide alternative perspectives and counter-narratives (see also Spring, 2006). For instance, we may discuss examples whereby white police officers have successfully engaged with black and minority ethnic groups. This helps to counter the position that all white people are inherently racist. Recent research on representations and public opinions on poverty has highlighted the advantages of using real-life case studies and personal experiences to shift public opinions around the persistence of poverty (Hanley, 2009). Within this, it is argued that the media and new technologies play an important role (McKendrick et al, 2008; Seymour, 2009).

We also encourage a reflection on the 'everyday' nature of race, racialisation and racism by utilising ourselves and our social biographies, real-life narratives and case studies drawn from texts. For example, we have incorporated fiction such as Andrea Levy's (2004) *Small Island* to explore post-war migration, and poetry such as Jackie Kay's (1991) 'So you think I'm a mule?' to explore issues of racialisation and identity. We also utilise film and musical forms which are rooted in the 'everyday': for example, Shane Meadows' (2006) film *This is England* to consider racism and social change, and musical artists such as Punjabi MC and Hard Kaur to explore issues of cultural hybridity, gender and Britishness. At times, we also incorporate an analysis of popular television shows into our teaching practice. For example, we have used the example of Saira Khan, a former contestant on *The Apprentice*, to facilitate a deconstruction of stereotypical constructions of Muslim/Asian femininities. Alongside this, we have used case studies based on academic research, such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's *Living in Bradford* documentaries (2008), which help to deconstruct and situate contemporary Muslim

male and female identities. This rather eclectic approach to teaching can help to diffuse the sensitivities inherent within our subject matter, while the focus on race and race-making in 'everyday' spaces helps to facilitate a deeper understanding of and engagement with the theories and concepts of race and ethnicity.

Conclusion

This paper has been a reflection on some of our experiences around teaching race and ethnicity. Over the past decade, as lecturers in various HE settings, we have become increasingly conscious of the 'sensitive' nature of the subject we teach. We are aware of the existing literature on this subject, and we used aspects of this literature in developing this paper. However, unlike Skinner (2006), who asserts that this area has been 'done to death', we feel the continually changing social world, HE context and, in particular, the development of ideas around emotion and emotionality can be further explored. We have only just begun this exploration in what we present here.

We have outlined our theoretical location, as this informs not only this paper but also our teaching practice. We view race as social constructed, yet with continued significance and meaning. As such, race is a key marker of stratification and identity, and race practices (ways of making race and racial difference) operate in complex ways within ordinary and 'everyday' spaces. A focus on such 'everyday' sites of interaction is useful in helping to challenge notions of race as being about the study of 'others', but also enables engagement and a productive space for teaching and learning.

We have also sought to reflect on our teaching experience over the past decade, particularly in relation to the positioning of race and ethnicity as a 'sensitive' subject. We have considered some of the ways in which teaching race and ethnicity is 'sensitive' and emotive, and we have highlighted the complex ways in

which our racial and ethnic positionings and our social biographies are important here. While we would challenge any simplistic notion of authenticity, we point to the value of utilising ourselves as a teaching tool, whether we are part of a minority or majority ethnic grouping. The concept of 'engaged pedagogy' (Housee, 2006: 38) informs our practice here, and while this is enriching and productive, it is often emotional and sometimes painful, particularly in contexts where our identifications and social biographies are challenged or devalued. At times, this has reflected a revival of racist discourses alongside white backlash narratives (Hewitt, 2005). Yet, by placing ourselves at the centre of what we teach, we too become the target of such responses. Such encounters can be conflictual as well as emotional.

Given the 'sensitive' nature of the subject we teach, we have therefore sought to develop particular approaches to enable effective teaching and learning. We have found that a focus on 'everyday' and ordinary spaces of race-making is useful and we take an eclectic approach to our teaching. In doing so, we utilise not only ourselves but also examples of 'everyday' racialised practices drawn from diverse sources including film, music, photography and literature. This has helped us to move forward with teaching the 'sensitive' subject of race, while facilitating a more dynamic space for teaching and learning.

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