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The construction of “criminal outsiders”: security services and *whitening-securitization* in higher education

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Abstract

This article examines students’ experiences of security services on university campuses. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and a national survey of UK students, we demonstrate that students’ perceptions of safety often rely on excluding non-student “outsiders” and “criminals” from campus. We argue that neither the figure of “the outsider” nor “the criminal” is race-neutral. Thus, the exclusionary impulses held by students and institutions legitimize securitization practices that disproportionately impact racially minoritised students. On the one hand, these practices (re)produce the deep-rooted association between Blackness and criminality. On the other, they (re)produce the whiteness of the university. We conceptualise *whitening-securitization* to underscore the previously overlooked role of security services in maintaining whiteness and perpetuating institutional racism. In so doing, we argue for a more comprehensive conceptualization of institutional racism in higher education than that found in existing literature, one that considers the peripheral, more informal spaces where racism is sustained.

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KEYWORDS Whitening-securitization; Criminal outsiders; Campus security; Institutional racism; Higher education; Racialized criminalization

Introduction

In recent decades, securitization efforts have spread into wide-ranging areas, including education. Widely welcomed, even demanded, in Western societies, securitization has become the purview of an increasingly diverse

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range of actors, including private security services (Schuilenburg 2015). Yet the proliferation of securitization has brought about harmful consequences, particularly for those at the margins (Browne 2015). Offering a case in point, in November 2020, an undergraduate student at the University of Manchester was apprehended by three campus security officers on his return to his halls of residence after visiting a shop. Reflecting on the incident in a BBC Three (2021) documentary, the student, Zac Adan, noted that officers told him “a lot of drug dealing going on, on campus”. A recording of the interaction shows Adan produce his student ID card and security officers physically restrain him against a wall.¹ The officers then attempt to forcibly take the card. Adan reported being “traumatised by the situation”. The harm he encountered continued through, and was exacerbated by, the institutional response to the incident in the ensuing days (BBC Three 2021). Feeling unsafe and unwelcome on campus, and frustrated by the lack of urgency in the university’s handling of the incident, Adan allowed his friend to upload a video of the encounter online. The story sparked student protests at the University of Manchester and attracted national media attention, leading the university’s Vice-Chancellor to claim on national television that she had written to Adan to apologize “for the distress that he felt” (Walker 2020). The Vice-Chancellor was obliged to issue a public statement the next day clarifying that the apology email had not been sent (University of Manchester Media Services 2020).

Pointing to the questioning of his student status and the reference to “drug dealing” on campus, Adan was clear that he was a victim of racial profiling (BBC Three 2021). Days after the incident, a security officer was recorded explaining the encounter, noting that Adan matched “the description” and that he did not “know of any white drug dealers, white female drug dealers” (BBC Three 2021). The logics at play here are well-understood in literature that examines racialized criminalization (Gilroy 1987; Hall et al. 1978; Williams 2014): certain “crime problems” become racialized and gendered, such that drug dealers are imagined to be Black men, or, all Black men are cast as potential drug dealers.

The context in which Adan was apprehended is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it coincided with many universities intensifying securitization on campus in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Secondly, it occurred amidst renewed conversations about racism in universities following widespread Black Lives Matter mobilizations, prompting institutional declarations of commitments to addressing racism (James, Joseph-Salisbury, and Gooden 2021). At the intersection between concerns about intensified securitization and concerns about institutional racism, Adan’s experience serves as an entry point through which we critically examine security services’ role in (re)producing institutional racism and whiteness on university campuses. While this context is crucial, it is essential not to view Adan’s encounter in isolation. Black and other racially minoritized students have reported encountering differential treatment by academic and non-academic personnel on campus (Johnson

and Joseph-Salisbury 2018; O'Neill 2023; UoM Cops off Campus 2021). As Simone Browne (2015, 10) puts it, "surveillance is nothing new to black folks. It is the fact of antiblackness". In this article, we demonstrate that Adan's racialized encounter was not an aberration but rather a high-profile example of a much wider set of processes – which we conceptualize as *whitening-securitization* – wherein securitization (and specifically the practices of security services) serve to both sustain and extend the whiteness of universities. Whitening-securitization draws attention to how measures purported to, or legitimized as, ensuring safety and order on campus feed in to and are fed by the complex system of power that is whiteness, such that the systemic privileges and power of white people are protected, and racism is sustained.

In addition to offering a new concept, the article makes empirical and theoretical contributions. The data derive from the only study that we are aware of to explore students' views on, and experiences of, security services and police across UK university campuses, a project that was in part prompted by Adan's encounter. Here, we examine data from two of three datasets generated through a mixed-method multi-scalar approach: 30 semi-structured interviews at three case study universities in one county and 635 responses from a national survey of students.² In what follows, we innovatively bring together two bodies of literature that have typically operated in silos – scholarship on racism and whiteness in higher education and scholarship on racialized criminalization and surveillance. We extend these respective bodies of literature by revealing the previously under-considered role that security services play in sustaining whiteness in higher education, and by centring the university campus an under-considered site upon which racially minoritized students are subject to racialized criminalization.

After outlining the extant literature and our methods, we advance our argument through three sections. First, in our examination of the roles of security services we show how the spectres of the non-student "outsider" and the "criminal" inform security practices on campus. In the second section, we explore students' experiences of securitization in order to demonstrate the centrality of racism in shaping the likelihood and nature of encounters with security services. In the third section, the most substantive, we show that the racialized practices of security services operate to construct racially minoritized students as potential "criminal outsiders" who pose a threat to the campus community. Ultimately, we argue that the construction of racially minoritized students as "criminal outsiders" simultaneously reproduces the whiteness of the university and the deep-rooted association between Blackness and criminality. We argue for a more comprehensive conceptualization of how institutional racism operates in HE than that found in existing literature. Specifically, we call for an understanding that considers the role of whitening-securitization – which often operates in the peripheral, more informal spaces – in sustaining racism.

Racism and whiteness in higher education

There is a significant body of research that explores how racism shapes student outcomes and experiences within UK higher education. This scholarship demonstrates that despite having long since entered higher education at higher rates than their white counterparts (Pilkington 2013), racially minoritized students are less likely to: attend “prestigious” universities, complete their degree

mes, be awarded a first or upper second-class honours degree, and receive research council funding for postgraduate study (Alexander and Shankley 2020; Bhopal 2017; Williams et al. 2019). As both research and student-led campaigns have shown, racially minoritized people are also underrepresented amongst senior academic staff and are often underrepresented, misrepresented or marginalized in curricula (Joseph-Salisbury et al. 2019; Murji 2003). This underrepresentation – a feature of whiteness – has implications for shaping the experience of all students, but it has particular implications for racially minoritized students’ sense of (non-)belonging (O’Neill 2023). Moreover, although likely impacted by (under-)reporting practices, statistics from the EHRC (2019) show that 24 per cent of “minority ethnic” students report racial harassment at university and 20 per cent report physical assault. Respondents in the same study also cited being socially excluded and exposed to racist teaching materials, as well as being subject to subtle forms of everyday racism.

Whilst broad patterns can be observed when considering the outcomes and experiences of racially minoritized students in general, a more nuanced picture is revealed through an attentiveness to “differential racialisation” (Rollock and Gillborn 2011). For example, the awarding gap in UK universities is particularly pronounced for Black students, with 67.2 per cent of Black students qualifying with a first or upper-second-class degree in 2021–22, compared to 79.6 per cent of Asian and 85.7 per cent of White students (Advance HE 2022). Differential impacts are also felt by Muslim students, who are impacted disproportionately by the suspicion, surveillance and institutional Islamophobia that is (re)produced (among other ways) through the Prevent statutory duty (Akel 2021).

The research discussed above, and much more, contributes to a body of work that has shown UK higher education to be characterized by institutional racism. The concept of institutional racism holds that racism is not the sole preserve of individual bigots, but is embedded in the norms, cultures, policies and procedures of an institution – “reinforcing individual prejudices and being reinforced by them in turn” (Sivanandan 1998, 3). This scholarship relatedly understands examples of experiences of racism as “a catalogue of widespread incidents that are all similar in nature” (Sian 2019, 63) rather than as one-off events. The concept of institutional racism begins to explain the

racialized dynamics outlined above, as well as the “lack of urgency” from (Pilkington 2013, 242), or inability of, institutions to transform the situation. Considerations of institutional racism also prompt an awareness of the whiteness of the university, as institutional racism and whiteness operate in a symbiotic and mutually reinforcing relationship. In this context, whiteness extends beyond phenotypic characteristics to encompass a complex system of power that, as Gillborn (2008, 171) elucidates, is “constantly re-enacted and reinforced through endless, overlapping racialized and racist actions and discourse”. Within the university, whiteness functions to prioritize the needs of white individuals while minimizing the racist history and ongoing racism within institutions (Law, Phillips, and Turney 2004).

In this broad tradition, literature has explored the whiteness of space. As Puwar (2004, 8) puts it, “social spaces are not blank and open for any body to occupy. There is a connection between bodies and space, which is built, repeated and contested over time”. In the context of the university, the historical(-colonial) association between whiteness and knowledge – and its attendant shaping of curricula, the professoriate and a range of other factors – contributes to constructing the university as white space. Crucially, this construction of space has implications for the bodies who enter it. In white space, white bodies (always mediated by intersecting factors such as class and gender) are assumed to have the inherent right to belong, while racialized bodies are marked out as trespassers or “space invaders” (Puwar 2004). At various times and in different ways, those rendered as “space invaders” can be subject to a range of overt or covert, direct or indirect, and formal or informal mechanisms of exclusion (Anderson 2022). This racialized exclusion, which is often articulated at the interpersonal level, is the everyday manifestation of institutional whiteness and structural white supremacy. Put another way, the institutional and the structural create fertile conditions for interpersonal racisms and, in turn, interpersonal racisms keep those structures in place (Joseph-Salisbury 2019). As we discuss in the next section, there are parallels – in terms of the interaction between the interpersonal and institutional – with regard to profiling and criminalization.

Racialized criminalization, surveillance and profiling

Although rarely considered in the context of higher education, a rich body of literature has explored the connections between processes of racialization and processes of criminalization. The construction of Black criminality is not a new phenomenon. It has long been evoked as an ideological device that justifies the “expanding penal control apparatus” (Williams and Clarke 2018, 234). Hall et al.’s (1978) seminal work demonstrates how once assigned as “Black crime”, the spectre of mugging in the 1970s legitimized an authoritarian law and order response that, in turn, functioned to reinscribe mugging

and “Black crime” as virtually synonymous. This synonymy continues to shape policing today, such that for many types of criminalization the racial identity of “the criminal” is so readily assumed in the public imagination that “race does not even need to be specifically mentioned for a connection to be made” between Blackness and crime (Welch 2007, 276). In this regard, as Lisa Long (2018) suggests, Black people are cast as “perpetual suspects”.

This status as “perpetual suspects” is both cause and consequence of what Simone Browne (2015, 16) refers to as “racializing surveillance”. As Browne explains, racializing surveillance refers to a process, intimately tied to – though extending beyond – policing, through which racially minoritized people are disproportionately subject to surveillance. Racializing surveillance “signals those moments when enactments of surveillance reify boundaries, borders and bodies along racial lines, and where the outcome is often discriminatory treatment of those who are negatively racialized by such surveillance” (Browne 2015, 16). Recalling our discussion of Puwar’s work in the previous section, Browne (2015, 16), borrowing from a translation of Étienne Dumont, argues that this surveillance reflects a “power to define what is in or out of place”, which is often both product of and productive of whiteness.

A key concern in the literature on racialized criminalization and surveillance pertains to what has been conceptualized as racial profiling. As Amnesty International (2004 cited by Lusane 2010, 197) explain, racial profiling occurs when race is used “as a basis for criminal suspicion in non-suspect specific investigations”. Although the concept has global reach, its use has been particularly prolific in the US context, where it has been deployed to understand racialized policing practices generally and, to a much lesser extent, on university campuses specifically (Takei 2018). In the UK, a particular concern around racial profiling relates to how it produces unequal enforcement of drugs laws (Shiner et al. 2013). Yet despite its omnipresence in public, media and academic discourse – in no small part a consequence of its common-sense appeal – the concept of racial profiling has received criticism in some quarters. Seigel (2017:, 476), for example, warns that its “individualizing implications [...] suggest an incidental, improper police practice that could be reformed, leaving policing intact, failing to extend any critique to this fundamental instantiation of state racism”. With this critique in mind, we understand the concept of racial profiling to have the greatest conceptual utility when it is situated in conversation with the aforementioned concept of institutional racism. When it is, racial profiling can be understood as an example of a policing practice through which institutional racism is (re)enacted, producing racial disproportionalities across a range of indicators; from stop and search to deaths in custody following force or restraint (Inquest 2023).

Although the concept of racial profiling has tended to be applied to the practices of the police, it is important to acknowledge the proliferation of policing beyond the police in recent decades. Policing, securitization and surveillance have increasingly shifted from being almost exclusively the preserve of the government and criminal legal system to being enacted by a complex web of actors, including private security services. Policing has also spread into a range of contexts, including education (Schuilenburg 2015). The racialized functions of and patterns found in traditional policing are often reflected in these adjacent institutions and contexts. Scholarship demonstrates that private security services engage in practices that function to make public space unwelcoming for racially minoritized people (Saarikkomäki and Alve-salo-Kuusi 2020). This is both cause and consequence of the underlying whiteness that characterizes space. Importantly, research argues that the private security industry both responds to racialized moral panics and actively reproduces essentialist conceptions of race (Diphorn 2017; Kempa and Singh 2008). As such, private security capitalizes on the reification of the dangerous “Other”. This scholarship is significant for our purposes because UK university security provision is typically undertaken by non-state actors. That is not to say, however, that the state police are not involved in the policing of university campuses. Indeed, security-police partnerships were particularly commonplace as part of institutional responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, with security staff granting the police right-of-entry into student residences without a warrant or students’ permission (Joseph-Salisbury et al. 2023; UoM Cops Off Campus 2021).

There is a dearth of literature on the policing (public or private) of university campuses, particularly in the UK context. Menichelli, Bullock, and Allen (2024) offer a useful exception. Their case study draws upon the perspectives of university managers, security personnel and residential wardens to give insight into the roles played by security personnel. Though this study helps to build a sense of the day-to-day work of campus security services, the perspectives of students are not considered. Roberts (2022, 551) does turn attention to the perspective of students, as she offers insight into how students’ feelings of unsafety are often tied to identifying “dangerous others” who are deemed “out of place” on campus: “the homeless, drug addicts, beggars, ‘chavs’, drunks, young people, (male) strangers and non-students”. Roberts’ research does not, however, examine how whiteness and institutional racism shape campus dynamics, nor does it consider the impact that exclusionary cultures have on students, particularly racially minoritized students, who are deemed to be possible outsiders themselves. A very limited number of studies reflect on these issues in the US context, but they tend to employ small and/or institution specific samples. Jenkins et al.’s (2021, 149–162) research, for example, reflects on their personal experiences of securitization to suggest that the habitual requirement of

Black students to produce their student ID card “evokes a legacy of surveillance” that makes them feel unsafe and unwelcome. Dizon (2023), in a case study of Black male undergraduate students at one university, argues that the “dangerous Black male stereotype” coalesces with the racist-classist stigmatization of local (non-student) communities. Although instructive in drawing attention to how the policing of Black students appears to be driven by a desire to keep non-students off campus, this US literature cannot be uncritically transposed to the UK given that the roles, functions and powers of those policing campuses differ across geographic contexts. As such, by focusing on the UK context, and including a sample across a range of institutions, this paper offers an original and much needed intervention.

Methods

The data in this article are drawn from a wider study exploring students’ views on, and experiences of, security services and police on UK university campuses (Joseph-Salisbury et al. 2023). Here, we discuss the two datasets examined in this article: semi-structured interviews at three case study universities and a national survey.

Semi-structured interviews

With a view to generating rich and detailed data, we conducted semi-structured interviews with students at three universities situated in one county in the UK. The county was chosen as the research site for the interviews because, as a metropolitan region, it is home to universities with a range of different dynamics, for example in terms of student demographics, course tariffs and the respective proportions of home vs. international and commuter vs. residential students. Whilst this enabled the exploration of distinct dynamics, it is also notable that the three universities in our sample are situated within urban centres. This commonality suggests they may also exhibit similar patterns in dynamics, and this might be a point of distinction with more rural or suburban universities (which do not feature in our interview sample). The selection of the research sites was also influenced by the established connections the research team had with the three institutions, which were considered advantageous for recruitment purposes.

Participants were recruited via the placement of posters on campuses, social media and relevant email lists. Thirty students took part in interviews: sixteen from site one, nine from site two and five from site three.³ Participants were relatively diverse in their demographic makeup. Nine identified as a man or male, nineteen as a woman or female, one as non-binary, and one

as queer. Fifteen identified as “White British”, three in ways broadly understood as “White other”, and 12 in ways that may be categorized as “racially minoritised”, including but not limited to identities such as Black, Asian and mixed race. Whilst other forms of demographic information were not collected in a systematic fashion, the sample also displayed diversity in terms of religion, sexuality, disability, home/international student status, and stage of study. Participants were asked to provide a pseudonym, a practice that aimed to promote the use of racially and culturally appropriate designations, alongside demographic descriptors of race and gender. As these descriptors were chosen by participants, they appear in a non-standardized fashion in this article. We do not attach anonymized institutions to each participant to preserve anonymity.

Interviews were either conducted online or in-person, and an interview guide was utilized to encourage reflection on security services and police on campus, perceptions of equality in relation to securitization, and what makes a safe campus. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, before anonymized transcripts were returned to participants for member-checking. A rigorous thematic analysis was undertaken. Firstly, three members of the research team independently familiarized themselves with the complete dataset by reading all transcripts. Secondly, they independently manually coded a sample of the transcripts, a process that involved identifying commonly raised issues. Thirdly, the researchers came together to share initial codes, and to identify and agree upon broader themes. An initial coding schedule was developed that was then inputted into NVIVO 11. Fourthly, to promote a consistent approach, one member of the research team applied the coding scheme to all the other interview transcripts, adding to and/or amending it to reflect new codes and themes as they emerged.

Online survey

Complementing the interviews, a national online survey was conducted to establish a broader, national picture. Respondents were mainly recruited via social media, but researchers also contacted student societies and academics at other institutions to share the recruitment materials with students. Hosted on the Qualtrics platform, the survey consisted of multiple-choice questions and free-text response fields, producing both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative survey data were analysed using the R software package version 4.1.0, using the *ggplot2* and *summarySE* libraries for plots and analyses. Tests for differences between sub-groups within our sample were conducted using Fisher’s Exact Test at the $p < 0.05$ level. The researchers manually undertook a thematic analysis of the qualitative survey data in the same way as is outlined above.

In total, 635 people participated in the study: 602 current students and 33 students who had graduated from a UK university within the last two years, with 91 different universities represented in the sample. Although the sample is non-representative, it is comparable to the UK student population in some ways, although different in others. In terms of gender, there is an over-representation of women in the sample (67.2 per cent) compared to the student population (57 per cent) (HESA 2021), with 21.6 per cent of the sample identifying as a man, 7.1 per cent identifying as non-binary, 1.7 per cent identifying as trans and 2.4 per cent identifying as an “other” gender identity or preferring not to respond. A minority of respondents (8.7 per cent) identified with a gender different to that assigned at birth. The sample is comparable to the UK student population in terms of race, with 30.2 per cent of respondents coming from a racially minoritized group compared to 26.2 per cent of the student population (HESA 2021).⁴ While limitations in the sample size preclude being able to observe potential differences across all of the disaggregated racial identities of participants, it remains possible to draw conclusions about statistical difference between broader (aggregated) groups at the 95 per cent (or $p < 0.05$) confidence level. For example, the combined sample size of all Black respondents is sufficient to be able to test for moderately sized differences in comparison to White British respondents.

Data triangulation and further analysis

Once the two datasets were analysed independently, the research team examined them in relation to each other, including alongside the data generated via Freedom of Information requests (which do not feature in this article). This process aimed to maximize rigour by facilitating the cross-verification of data to corroborate or refute findings. This process involved exploring commonalities and differences between the findings from each dataset, and identifying areas where further analysis was required. To write this article, the researchers examined existing coded data but also revisited the raw data from both the interviews and survey to undertake new analyses.

Findings and discussion

The role of campus security services: keeping students safe from “outsiders”

A review of job descriptions at the three case study universities reveals that a fundamental purported function of security services on campus is the provision of a “safe” and “welcoming” environment for students and staff. Across job descriptions, this provision seems to engender a vast,

sometimes-competing set of responsibilities which include: (1) serving as a first point of contact, (2) monitoring and controlling access to campus buildings and other facilities, (3) conducting regular campus patrols, (4) monitoring CCTV, (5) responding to security-related incidents and assisting with maintaining public order on campus, (6) administering emergency first aid, (7) protecting university property, (8) liaising with police and other emergency services and (9) overseeing compliance with the Prevent statutory duty.⁵ Whilst participants across both the survey and interviews generally seemed to believe that the main role of security services ought to be to keep students safe, there appeared to be considerable doubt over the extent to which this was being achieved. As [Figure 1](#) shows, respondents displayed mixed views on the effectiveness of campus security in fulfilling this role, 30.8 per cent believing that security services keep students safe, 27.8 per cent believing that they do not and 41.5 per cent being unsure.

Respondents who believe security services keep students safe and/or those who believe security services are necessary in other ways were prompted to leave free text qualitative comments explaining their views. One theme arising from these responses – for others see [Joseph-Salisbury et al. \(2023\)](#) – was that security services protect students from non-student “outsiders”. As one survey respondent put it, “[t]he university campus is porous [...] At night it becomes uncertain to identify students and outsiders. Which is why university security is necessary”. Public access to campus was a widespread (though not universal) concern among participants. One interviewee, Meera (British Indian female), for example, said that “literally anyone

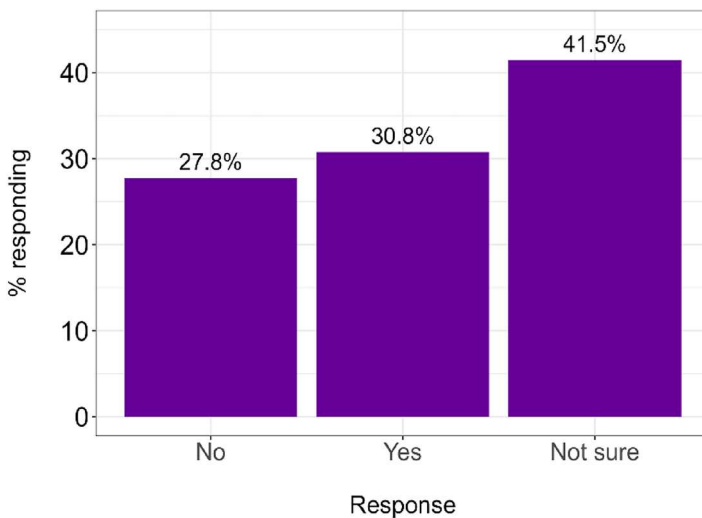


Figure 1. Response to survey question “Do you think that university security on campus keep students safe” ($n = 562$).

could just walk in [...] not sure if that's safe", while a survey respondent noted that "[security] protect students from outside threats [...] such as [the] general public walking onto campus" as Roberts (2022) has highlighted, it seems that students' sense of safety is intimately tied to the exclusion of outsiders. This view was epitomized by one survey respondent who said that "[security] scare outsiders" and "make us feel protected". Returning to the roles discussed in the previous paragraph, while students' desire for "outsiders" to be kept off campus is perhaps best reflected in, but likely also impacted by, the institutional imperative to monitor and control access to campus buildings and other facilities, it also shapes the other designated roles of security services. Indeed, when "outsiders" are constructed as a threat, it may quickly become subtext for other imperatives such that protecting university property becomes protecting university property *from outsiders*, or conducting regular campus patrols becomes conducting regular campus patrols *to deter and identify outsiders*.

In the imaginaries of many students, the "outsider" is not a neutral category but rather informed by the spectre of the "criminal". Vanessa (White British woman), for example, described how she "*liked the security things*" that her institution had in place, because it made her feel like "*they're only letting non-dodgy people in*". Similarly, a survey respondent stated that the task of security services is to "*keep the riffraff off-campus*". It was Carol (White British female), though, who perhaps most explicitly tied outsider status to criminality when, advocating for more restricted access to university buildings, she said:

it's not even that long ago now, but with the MEN arena bombing, it's like anyone could come into a lecture, like a lecture is such an easy target [...] it would be much easier to identify someone or prevent them from even getting into buildings, if there was that kind of electronic automated security.

Although some participants valued the university as public space and were resistant to practices of exclusion, a cyclical process appears to be at play in relation to the securitization of "outsiders". Indeed, often seeming to conflate security and safety, students demand "outsiders" are kept off campus in order to feel safe, and these demands inform the institutional directives that shape the practices of security services. Then, through the security practices that operate to exclude outsiders, the "threat" that "outsiders" pose becomes legitimized, which in turn reinforces students' concerns. An "ever-perpetuating spiral of insecurity" ensues (Roberts 2022, 550).

We might challenge the justness of the construction of non-students as security threat, and consider how this is a product of the neoliberalization, commodification and/or privatization of higher education. We might consider how this construction turns universities into private spaces which (re)produce privilege, and how it undermines the notion of the university

as existing for the public good. Yet, given the focus of this article, and noting that Roberts (2022) has engaged these questions so effectively, we set these important contemplations aside. Instead, we contend that in a society that is deeply invested in processes of racialized criminalization – where “riffraff”, “dodgy” and “terrorist” are more likely to interpellate racially minoritized and working-class people – the desire to keep non-students off campus puts racially minoritized students at increased risk of security intervention. Such intervention, we suggest, is encapsulated by the concept of whitening-securitization, wherein security practices (re)produce the whiteness of the university. Importantly, whitening-securitization is driven by both the association between Blackness and criminality, and the construction of the university as a white space, of which it is both consequence and cause. The concept therefore helps to explain the pervading sense amongst so many participants that, as Clover (Indian female) put it, “*people from other races who aren’t White are targeted more*”. As such, a more critical take might suggest that the purpose of campus security services is to whiten the university campus, through securitization. We discuss student views on racism and securitization in the next section.

Racism, security services and police on campus: the views of students

Race was identified both in the interviews and the survey as a key factor in shaping students’ views on, and experiences of, security services on campus. Two quantitative survey findings are particularly noteworthy. First, 73.8 per cent of respondents reported believing that some students are more likely than others to have encounters with security personnel on campus. As Table 1 shows, 78.6 per cent of these respondents chose race when asked to select from a predetermined list the factors most likely to

Table 1. Among those who thought that encounters with security personnel are more likely for some people than others, what factors did they think affected the likelihood of an encounter?

Factor	%
Disability	39.2
Faith	36.4
Gender	61.7
Migrant Status	47.9
Nationality	44.9
Race	78.6
Social Class	54.8
Sex Worker Status	41.6
Sexuality	32.8
Other	15.7

Notes: Survey question: What factors do you think affect the likelihood of an encounter with security on campus? Please select all that apply.

increase the likelihood of an encounter, making it the most commonly selected factor ahead of gender (61.7 per cent), social class (54.8 per cent), migrant status (47.9 per cent) and nationality (44.9 per cent). Of the Black respondents who believed that some students are more likely than others to have encounters with security personnel,⁶ 100 per cent said that race was a factor compared with 75.6 per cent of White British participants. Second, whilst racially minoritized respondents as a whole were as likely as the White British group to think that security services do not keep students safe on campus (26.7 per cent compared to 27.7 per cent⁷ Black respondents were significantly more likely to hold this opinion (47.1 per cent Fisher's exact test, $p = 0.03$). This data demonstrates the centrality of race in shaping students' views and experiences. Perhaps more significantly, it also reminds us that the views and experiences of racially minoritized students are not homogenous.

Race and racism were also central themes in the qualitative data, with interview and survey participants expressing concern about differential experiences with campus security. One survey respondent, for example, noted that *"campus security approach students, especially black PoC [people of colour] and visibly Muslim students, very aggressively"*. Similarly, Zee (Tongan female) argued that campus security services represent *"a threat"* because *"they target and racially profile, and then do harm"*. Often these views were informed by first-hand observations. As Olivia (White British woman) explained: *"I've seen the way that they've acted with young black men. I've watched them talk down to one of my black female friends"*. Alex (White British non-binary) similarly noted that *"they'll treat me differently to my friends of colour"*. These accounts describe instances of whitening-securitization, in which racially minoritized students are marked as potential "criminal outsiders", whilst the university experiences a *whitening* (or is reinscribed as white space). In addition to these observations – as we show in the next section – the most damning testimony is often provided by the first-hand experiences of racially minoritized students.

Racially minoritized students as "outsiders" and "criminals"

As detailed in the literature review, feeling a sense of outsidership or non-belonging is not uncommon for racially minoritized students in universities, *generally*. This view was reflected by some racially minoritized participants in relation to securitization, *specifically*. Sariya (Indo-C female), for example, noted:

because of stereotypes [...] that people might have sometimes, yeah, I do feel like maybe they would perceive me as someone who does not belong here in this university.

A similar view was shared by Omar (Black man), who recalled a negative encounter with campus security:

they, in their head, had an expectation of a certain type of student that should go to the university, and *I didn't fit that description*. And a lot of it was based on basically my culture and where I was from [...] the way I dressed [...] and then also my skin colour. Because being one of the only few Black students on that particular campus, *I stuck out like a sore thumb* (emphasis added).

Both Sariya and Omar report feeling that racially minoritized students are unexpected bodies on campus, constructed as trespassers in the white space of the university. This leads Omar to feel hyper-visible, while Sariya experiences a sense of non-belonging. As Puwar (2004) notes, however, the construction of the space invader has consequences not only for the invader but for the space too. In this sense, the construction of racialized students as bodies out of place operates to reinscribe white space. Sariya and Omar's remarks may appear to be similar to research findings elsewhere on institutional racism in higher education. However, in Sariya and Omar's cases, these comments were made specifically in conversations about the role of security services on campuses. They thus point to the specific implications of whitening-securitization. The consequences of being marked out as a space invader take on particular form when the actors involved are security personnel. These consequences are shaped by the power imbalances deriving from the institution empowering security personnel to perform the roles mentioned earlier in the article, such that those constructed as bodies out of place encounter the aggression and harms noted by participants in the previous section.

Another consequence of being viewed by security personnel as not belonging on campus is that racially minoritized students are at heightened risk of being subject to racializing surveillance and profiling. Gavin (Black mixed-race man), for example, observed that "*non-white students*" would often "*be stopped, and they'd have to spend a lot longer checking their student ID cards*". The ID check might then be understood as an everyday articulation of the institutional racism underpinning the university. It can appear as routine, uncontroversial and racially neutral (Joseph-Salisbury 2019), and it is possible to see how campus security personnel might understand the checking of student ID cards as falling under several of the roles identified earlier. However, because university campuses are racialized as white space, it is Black and other racially minoritized students that are always at greater risk of being marked as "outsiders" who represent a security risk that "necessitates" additional scrutiny and (racializing) surveillance. This practice of securitization disrupts racially minoritized students' everyday activities, while always threatening to remind them that they do not belong (Dizon 2023, 420). Simultaneously, it reinforces the prevailing social

and racial conditions, and specifically the whiteness of the university: this is whitening-securitization. The everyday racism of the ID check is both produced by, and productive of, institutional racism. Given that much of the existing literature on institutional racism in higher education has focused on the core, formal institutional spaces of the university, this is an important point as it points to a more expansive and complex picture of how institutional racism – and therefore whiteness – is reproduced in universities, including through whitening-securitization.

The racialized “space invader” on campus is also intertwined with the construction of the “criminal”. Reflecting on the securitization of Black and Asian male students, Daisy (Black female) said:

they [security personnel] will literally target them more in comparison to the White people, especially for drugs because they will just say, “oh they look like drug dealers” [...] But you wouldn’t ask the White girl who’s always doing drugs every weekend to like check them, patting them down.

Daisy was not alone in believing that racialized (and gendered) assumptions about who deals drugs put Black men at risk of being racially surveilled and profiled on campus. One Black survey respondent explained that he was “*the only one to enter the Student Union club and [get] stopped and searched*” adding that he “*was stopped and searched every time*”. Recalling a time when he was with “*a small group of black men*”, he noted “*we all got searched. We were then accused of dealing drugs*”. The hegemonic coupling of Blackness with criminality appears to shape how Black students experience security on campus. The repetitive nature of the act of being singled out as potential drug dealer is significant in the survey respondent’s account. Whilst each incident may pose a threat to his sense of belonging on campus, marking him out as a suspect, the cumulative impact of such racist encounters, of whitening-securitization, intensifies this threat

The accounts of some participants enable a consideration of the inter-relationship between the construction of “outsiders” and the construction of “criminals”, and to consider how that construction impacts the experiences of students generally and racially minoritized students specifically. Speaking about the intensified securitization of campus during Covid-19 lockdown periods, Teighlor (Mixed White and Black Caribbean female) noted:

they were probably picking on certain people and using the excuse [...] they felt entitled to come in all the time because there were a lot of complaints that people, like locals were coming in, like young people to either drug deal or just to come into parties basically and a lot of them started fights [...] I think some people got scared of that and probably told security so that was an excuse they used basically all the time. “I’m coming here for your safety” but obviously no-one felt safe.

Teighlor reflects on how students' own concerns over the threat posed by non-student "outsiders" were used by security services to justify the practice of entering students' homes uninvited. Both survey and interview participants reported that this widespread practice was often carried out in partnership with local police, who bypassed the need for a warrant by using, what Sarah (White female) described as, "a loophole" in which "security opened the door and then police walked in". One of our case study sites conducted its own inquiry into the handling of the security response at one of its large halls of residence and confirmed that a key motivating factor was a desire to "restrict access to non-residents [...] to aid with security". It also explicitly cites concerns around "criminal activity, including drug dealing" and, much like we noted earlier, seemed to conflate "outsiders" and "criminals". Teighlor's perception was that such security responses were not experienced equally by students. Given that her comment followed discussion of an incident of racial profiling and harassment, the "certain people" can be assumed to be, or at least include, racially minoritized students. Mirroring racialized policing responses to the pandemic more broadly (Harris et al. 2022), survey responses similarly noted racially disproportionate practices at other universities, with racially minoritized students reporting hostile and violent encounters with security and police in the enforcement of Covid-19 restrictions, and the discriminatory application of fines for breaking local and/or national lockdown rules.

The interrelationship between the racialized "outsider" and the racialized "criminal" on campus certainly seemed to feature in the case involving Zac Adan outlined in the introduction. Many participants were affected by Adan's encounter. As Ryan (Black mixed-race man) recalled, "I watched the video and I literally cried. I was so visibly broken-hearted, seeing that happening". Ryan's account demonstrates that, as Jacob et al. (2018, 302) note, "racism, like trauma, can be experienced vicariously". Experiences of vicarious racism can impact upon mental health, self-esteem, wellbeing and feelings of belonging (Jacob et al. 2018), particularly when such racism is commonplace and recurrent (Spalek 2006). The concept of vicarious racism enables us to see how Adan's interaction with security services can be understood to transmit a message not only to Adan but to other Black and racially minoritized students, that the university is a white space in which racially minoritized students are perpetual suspects who do not belong.

Importantly, some participants sought to connect racialized security practices on campuses to racialized policing off campus. Carol (White British female), for example, reasoned that "young black, or ethnic minority boys are more likely to be targeted than anyone. So, I guess that's kind of true of university security as well". Similarly, Ryan (Black mixed-race man) argued:

For the majority, especially like Black, Asian, ethnic minority people who have had bad instances of security – whether it’s at a festival or a nightclub or a shop or police – security is security and that sense of authority and disproportionate handling of demographics, it doesn’t stop at universities, it’s still there.

Ryan’s account highlights the cumulative threat facing racially minoritized people who face whitening-securitization in various areas of their lives, both on and off campus. Both his and Carol’s remarks suggest that, as has been noted in research in the US (Dizon 2023), patterns of racism seen on campus are tied to patterns off campus. That Ryan deems it necessary to insist “*it doesn’t stop at universities*” is perhaps an attempt to cut through the naivety that often surrounds discourses in higher education that present universities as liberal utopias that sit outside of the unequal power relations that structure society (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly 2021; Webb 2018). Rather than dissipating on campus, the institutional racism that has been shown to underpin policing in wider societal contexts finds particular modes of articulation on university campuses through discourses of the non-student “criminal outsider” and the construction of the “criminal outsider” student.

Conclusion

This article has drawn on novel empirical data to first show that students’ perceptions of safety are closely tied to the exclusion of non-student “outsiders”, with the porous physical boundaries of university campuses understood by students to enable criminalized behaviours. The exclusionary impulses held by students feed into and are fed by the institutional directives that shape the practices of security services. In turn, the practices of security services reinscribe the threat of the “criminal outsider”. Our data also extend scholarly debate around campus security by demonstrating that neither the “outsider” nor the “criminal” are racially neutral categories. Consequently, the practices and processes of securitization are understood by students, particularly Black students, to be enacted and experienced in racially inequitable ways. In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that students generally, and Black students particularly, are unsure about the effectiveness of security services in keeping students safe.

We have argued that security practices on campus are not only informed by the racialized spectres of the “outsider” and the “criminal” but that they actively construct racially minoritized students as potential “criminal outsiders” who pose a threat to the campus community. As well harming racially minoritized students at the individual level, this construction simultaneously reinforces the prevailing racial conditions that inscribe the university as white space on the one hand and the deep-rooted association between Blackness and criminality on the other. Thus, this article extends theoretical debates in

two key areas that have typically operated in silos: scholarship on racialized criminalization and surveillance, and scholarship on racism and whiteness in higher education. Regarding racialized criminalization, the article advances existing scholarship by centring the university campus as another – previously under-considered – site upon which racially minoritized students generally, and Black students specifically, are labelled as suspect and subject to racializing surveillance. Regarding racism and whiteness in higher education, the article reveals that although previously under-considered, the racialized practices of security services are an important part of the wider picture of institutional racism in higher education.

Our final contribution is conceptual. We proffer the concept of *whitening-securitization* to point to how securitization processes (and specifically the practices of security services) preserve and extend the whiteness of the university. In understanding the university as white space, and the longstanding association between Blackness and criminality, it becomes unsurprising (though no less troubling) that racially minoritized students are disproportionately targeted through security practices. In this sense, Adan's encounter detailed in the introduction is not a one-off aberration but a predictable outcome of securitization on campus. Whitening-securitization must be understood alongside a wider set of entangled issues that are identified in the extant literature – a white workforce, colonial curriculum and an awarding gap, for example – as re-enacting and reinforcing the whiteness of the university. Given that much existing research on institutional racism in HE has focused on core and formal institutional spaces, this is an important intervention in drawing closer attention to the margins and peripheries. In so doing, the paper contributes to the development of a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional racism operates in higher education.

Notes

1. The security officers involved in the incident were acquitted of common assault in a court of law in November 2021.
2. Recent graduates were also included in the survey of students. The wider research project also collected data via Freedom of Information requests at three universities in one county in the UK.
3. The study sites have been anonymized in this article.
4. The HESA data on the UK student population in terms of race excludes White minority groups, which we have also excluded from the sample here for comparison purposes.
5. Much of this correlates with findings from Menichelli, Bullock, and Allen (2024) who highlight 'routine housekeeping and caretaking', maintaining adherence to university rules and regulations', 'support, welfare and mental health', and 'preventing and responding to crime', as the key tasks of security personnel at their case study university.

6. The Black category here includes respondents that self-identified as Black or Black British (African), Black or Black British (Caribbean), Black or Black British (Any other Black background), Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (White and Black African), or Mixed or multiple ethnic groups (White and Black Caribbean).
7. The racially minoritized category here includes respondents that self-identified with all of the disaggregated Black or Black British identities, Asian or Asian British identities, Mixed or multiple ethnic identities, and White minority identities (Including Gypsy and Irish Traveller, and Roma identities).

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Statement of ethics

This project includes human research participants. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Manchester's Proportionate Ethical Review Committee on 27 May 2022 (2022-14791-23787).

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