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The Racial Ideology of the British Police: Protecting and Maintaining the Racial Interests of the White Institution

Nikhaela Wicks[*] ⬤

[*]N. Wicks, School of Social Policy, Sociology and Social Research, Division of Law, Society and Social Justice, University of Kent, Room 111, Cornwallis North East, Canterbury CT2 7NF, UK; email: n.wicks@kent.ac.uk

Previous canonical writings on racism and policing have focussed on the shift from overt to covert articulations (Loftus 2010; Holdaway and O'Neill 2013), finding that racism is communicated primarily by white, heterosexist men in 'white spaces' (Loftus 2008). This paper moves beyond individualistic conceptions of racism to explore how police officers subscribe to a *white racial ideology* (Bonilla-Silva 2018). By drawing upon over 600 h of observations and interviews and discussions with over 60 officers, this paper explores four police discourses that underplay, defend and maintain the unequal racial status quo in policing: (1) individualization, (2) historicization, (3) discursive deracialization and (4) racial stories.

KEY WORDS: policing, 'race', racism, whiteness, discourse analysis

'RACE' AND RACISM IN BRITISH POLICING

Prior to the 1960s, policing research was relatively marginal within broader criminological analysis and tended to be positivist in stance (Rowe 2004; 2007). Underlying this early work was the assumption that policing fulfilled a functional role of applying laws and reflecting consensus across society (Reiner 2010). Scholars have critiqued positivist portrayals of the police, drawing attention to the disproportionate targeting of ethnic minorities and working-class populations (Long 2018; Shiner *et al.* 2018; Elliot-Cooper 2021). Cynicism, a central component of police occupational culture, is said to manifest in police racism (Reiner 2010). Following the Macpherson Inquiry (1999), there became a broad acceptance in policing that overt racism was no longer acceptable, although Loftus argues this was due to the 'disciplinary line taken with police officers' rather than a 'genuine change in assumptions and understanding' (2008: 762–73). In her ethnography of Northshire Police Force, Loftus (2008; 2010) found that white, heterosexual and male officers shared narratives of decline, discontent and resentfulness towards the new organizational focus on diversity, outlining that there had been an erosion of white

advantage as a consequence of the positive discrimination towards ethnic officers. She found that whilst covert articulations of racism had declined, white, heterosexist males continued to 'espouse intolerant views, but merely "chose their audiences" when expressing them' (Loftus 2008: 770). Both Foster *et al.* (2005) and Holdaway and O'Neill (2013) strengthened this finding in their own research, evidencing that racism in policing had shifted from being communicated overtly to covertly. In interviewing Chairs of the Black Police Association and Assistant Chief Constables in the United Kingdom, Holdaway and O'Neill (2013) found that racism had become less explicit in policing due to the severe punishments taken by senior officers.

Despite the reported decline in overt racism in policing contexts, we are still 'policing the crisis' and racialized Others continue to be over-policed and under-protected in the United Kingdom (Long 2018). Black men are criminally racialized as 'perpetual suspects' (Long 2018) and Black and Black mixed-race people are more likely to be on the receiving end of police use of force, restraint and stop and search (Long 2018). As Black and mixed-race men are the 'ideal offender', this results in them becoming the (un)victim when reporting a crime to the police (Long 2021). Parmar (2024) has recently explored the role of the police in migration control in the United Kingdom and how their work contributes to upholding the 'hostile environment'. Additionally, racism towards Gypsy and Travellers by the police has been described as the 'last acceptable racism' in the United Kingdom by Hutchinson *et al.* (2018: 2017). The Scarman Report (1981) and the Macpherson Inquiry (1999) have also critiqued the force for not being representative of the communities it serves. Despite their recommendations to diversify the force, policing in England remains overwhelmingly white and male. In 2022, just under 92 per cent of police officers in England identified as white and only 5.5 per cent of senior officers (Chief Inspector or above) were from an ethnic minority group (Home Office 2023). In 2023, The Baroness Casey Review (2023) revealed that there had been little change since the Macpherson Inquiry (1999), declaring the London Metropolitan police force institutionally racist, misogynistic and homophobic. The recent cases of Metropolitan officers racially profiling athletes Bianca Williams and Ricardo dos Santos in 2023 (Dodd 2023) and the two officers dismissed for sharing comments and photographs of deceased sisters Bibaa Henry and Nicole Smallman in 2020 (Dodd 2021), shows that little has been done to change the occupational culture of policing. Confidence in policing is at an all-time low in the United Kingdom and the Met commissioner continues to resist accepting that institutional racism exists in the force (Fox 2023).

At the same time, new forms of intolerance and societal racism are growing in the United Kingdom. In 2016, Britain voted to leave the European Union, with much focus on 'taking back control' of its borders (Back *et al.* 2023). Favell (2020) argues that this has led to the growth of racism and xenophobia, with Brexit opening up old forms of racism. Since Brexit, there have been continual efforts to develop and maintain a 'hostile environment' around questions of immigration and belonging (Parmar 2019; 2024; Back *et al.* 2023) and some have argued that forms of 'national citizen preference' and 'racial self-interest' need to be distinguished from racism (Back *et al.* 2023). There have been attempts to counter these discourses through anti-racist mobilizations. Black Lives Matter activists have not only brought attention to racism in the police, but everyday forms of state violence faced by black communities (Garza 2016) and a number of semi-official reports highlight the scale and extent of racial inequalities in British society (Lammy 2017; Williams 2020). We are therefore at a political, cultural and social turn, where old forms of racism are returning at the same time as support for antiracist movements have begun entering the mainstream.

THEORIZING 'RACE' AND RACISM

Much of the canonical writings on policing and racism have focussed on the shift from overt to covert articulations of racism (Loftus 2008; 2010; Holdaway and O'Neill 2013). This paper

moves beyond methodological individualism (Bonilla-Silva 2003), approaching 'race' as a discourse. Stuart Hall writes:

> Socially, historically and politically, race is a discourse … it operates like a language, like a sliding signifier, that its signifiers of reference not genetically established facts but the systems of meaning that have come to be fixed in the classifications of culture and that these meanings have real effects not because of some truth that inheres in their scientific classification but because of the will to power (Hall 1997a: n.p.).

Alike to gender and class, there is no fixed reality to 'race', instead 'race' is socially constructed through discourse (Hall 1997b). As humans are organized into diverse forms of hierarchy (along racial, gendered, classed and other lines), this produces social relations of domination and subordination (Bonilla-Silva 2003). The 'race' ascribed to the superior position receives economic, political, social and psychological advantage, as described by Du Bois and a 'public and psychological wage' (DuBois 1998). This results in groups with different *racial interests* (Bonilla-Silva 2003). The dominant group tends to justify, defend or accept the racial order and create *racially based frameworks* to explain and justify the racial status quo (Bonilla-Silva 2003). This paper employs Bonilla-Silva's (2003) concepts of *racial ideology* to explore how police actors underplay, explain, justify and maintain the racial status quo in policing. Previous police researchers have been influenced by methodological individualism (Bonilla-Silva 2003), tending to explore shifts in officers' racial views (see: Loftus 2008; Holdaway and O'Neill 2013). However, 'race' researchers must shift from examining actors' racial views from an individualistic framework to a group-based framework of *racial ideology* (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Bonilla-Silva (2018) writes:

> Subscribing to an ideology is like wearing a piece of clothing. When you wear it, you also wear a certain style, a certain fashion, a certain way of presenting yourself to the world. The style of an ideology refers to its peculiar *linguistic manners and rhetorical strategies* (or *race talk*), to the technical tools that allow users to articulate its frames and story lines (p. 77).

As critical race scholars argue, racism is ordinary and not aberrational, happening because of social arrangements and not in spite of them (Meghji 2022). Whites have racial interests in preserving the racial status quo as they benefit from a racialized social system which results in greater access to employment, education, housing and a fairer criminal justice system (Garner 2007; Bonilla-Silva 2018). This study approaches police officers' views as part of a *white racial ideology* which expresses their collective group interests. It racializes the dominant police group as white, revealing how police institutions contribute to institutionalizing 'race' (Ray 2019). Frankenberg states:

> Whiteness … has a set of linked dimensions. First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint', a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed (1993: 1).

Minimal attention has been paid to the role of whiteness in police research (with the exception of Kahn *et al.* 2016 and; Clarke and Smith 2023). This paper contributes to the growing body of research on whiteness and policing by illuminating the role of whiteness in the production of a police racial ideology. It draws attention to a *white racial ideology* which is upheld by officers of differing ranks, genders and ethnicities in a variety of police settings. It, therefore, goes beyond the findings of previous research which found that racism was shared by white, heterosexist

males in 'white spaces' (Loftus 2008) to reveal how a shared *white racial* id*eology* was shared by officers in a variety of settings, including police training, diversity documentation, formal interviews, police meetings and group discussions.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

The study on which the following discussion is based set out to explore how meanings of 'race' are produced through the governance of nightlife. The research took place at 'Greenshire[1]' police force, a provincial constabulary located in the South of England. Greenshire is a predominantly white space, with over 90 per cent of residents describing themselves as White British in the most recent census. A smaller percentage of residents are from ethnic minority backgrounds, particularly those of Pakistan, Bangladeshi and Black African origin. Police officers in Greenshire are predominantly white men, although there has been a notable increase in the recruitment of white women in the last decade. The fieldwork began in January 2018 and ended in September 2019. During this time, the researcher attended meetings with senior police officers, police trainers, police licensing officers and accompanied rank-and-file officers on a range of shifts. The observations were also supplemented with semi-structured interviews and group and individual discussions with over 60 officers. Where possible, the researcher asked officers to provide consent for the nature of discussions to be used to inform the research findings. Where consent has been provided, these discussions have been used to inform the research findings.

Researchers have to be innovative in how they approach research on 'race' and policing, particularly in a climate where overt racism is less likely to be shared and where post-race sentiments are the norm (Nayak 2006; Tate 2016). The researcher employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the analytical framework for the study. CDA approaches institutions as serving the interests of the powerful and imposing their power on the powerless (van Dijk 1987). Policing is one of the institutions which has historically, and continues to, reinforce an unbalanced, violent and harmful racialized social structure (Elliot-Cooper 2021; Fatsis and Lamb 2021). The researcher paid attention to recurrences and pervasive patterns of talk about 'race', racism and ethnic minorities across the transcripts, fieldnotes and the research diary. As discourse is more than language, the researcher also focussed on how officers act, interact and think in certain ways (Paltridge 2006), paying attention to body language, interruptions, the curtailing of speech and silence. In doing this, the research reveals 'the institutional embeddings of social representations of people as group members' (van Dijk 1993*a*: 99).

The researcher is an able-bodied, heterosexual, white woman from working-class origins. Many police researchers have not reflected upon their whiteness,[2] as whiteness operates as an invisible norm with its advantages often remaining invisible to those who benefit from them (Bhopal 2018). Nayak (2006), inspired by Butler, argues that approaching 'race' as a proper object is violence and that the white woman researcher can only ever be approximated. Ware states 'it is not about *being* a white woman, it is about *being thought of* as a white woman' (1993: xii). Being thought of as a white woman resulted in a number of advantages throughout the fieldwork. As police institutions are oriented around whiteness (Ahmed 2007), the researcher was able to blend in with the police institution, moving around police buildings and policing teams with relative ease. The researcher's whiteness was fundamental in facilitating access to

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1 Due to promises of anonymity to the police force and the police officers contained within, pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the force and the research participants.
2 Inspired by Williams (2020), rather than accepting that white is a natural referent, 'white' is not seen as an inherent characteristic of people but rather a product of social practices and the ideology of whiteness. 'White' and whiteness are social constructions with very real, tangible and violent effects.

the police to conduct research on 'race'. They were interpreted as someone who was likely to be sympathetic to the police. The next section outlines the four dominant discourses utilized by the police throughout the fieldwork.

POLICE DISCOURSES OF 'RACE' AND RACISM
Individualization

At the beginning of interviews with police officers, I explained to officers that I was exploring if and how 'race' informs the governance of nightlife. William, a licensing officer with two decades of experience working for the Greenshire Police Force, expressed his concerns:

> I'd like to think we would come out of this no different, from the way we police it. I think as a force we're not too ropey on that if you know what I mean, so I'm just worried you won't get enough juicy information. Do you run the risk of coming away at the end of this and saying, 'actually they're policing them completely the same?' Do you see what I'm saying? (William, White Police Sergeant, February 2018).

William reveals his concerns that not enough '*juicy information*' would be found and that he hoped the force was '*not too ropey*', appealing to simple conceptions of racism (Embrick *et al.* 2020). William approaches the researcher as the 'acceptable incompetent' (Lofland 1971), showing concern for the research findings which are anticipated to be evidence that ethnic minorities are policed in the same way as whites. Despite not being asked specifically about racism in their interviews, over 90 per cent of the officers used the interviews to deny racism in their force. The following snippets are indicative of some of the declarations of denial which were present across the transcripts:

> I can say hand on heart that I've never seen what I would deem racism in this organization. I've heard many reports from people that have, but I have never seen or heard anything that I would deem racist. (Scott, White Police Constable, February 2018).

> I can put my hand on my heart and say in my 11 years of service I have not seen the terrible tales of woe that people of BME, or of different races, have had to suffer. The Brixton riots, Stephen Lawrence, etc, etc. Those cases which have framed the police force for what it is now. I haven't seen that in my service. I see everybody being treated fairly. (Alex, White Police Sergeant, March 2018).

Alex, a white male, argues that he sees '*everybody being treated fairly*' whilst Scott, a white male, argues he has '*never seen or heard*' racism in the force. Their definitions appeal to simple, micro and individual forms of racism (Essed 1991; Embrick *et al.* 2020; Williams 2020). As such, macro understandings of how racism operates did not feature in interviews with the police or the police training room. The following fieldnotes were taken after a week of observing the police diversity training:

> 17:30pm
>
> I've just finished a week observing the new recruits being trained on 'diversity'. There were no discussions of structural or institutional racism. In fact, discussions of racism rarely occurred, and when they did erupt, this is when police trainers explained to new recruits that if they held any racist viewpoints then these would not be tolerated, and they would be punished by superiors.

The police diversity training was written by five police trainers. Four of these were white men and one was a white woman, all of which were ex-police officers. This impacted the construction of diversity training and the ways in which it silenced discussions of institutional and structural racism. Frankenberg states:

> The material and discursive dimensions of whiteness are always, in practice, interconnected. Discursive repertoires may reinforce, contradict, conceal, explain or 'explain away' the materiality or the history of a given situation (1993: 2).

Despite numerous inquiries into police racism, such as the Scarman Report (1981) and the Macpherson Inquiry (1999), with Macpherson being the first formal inquiry to highlight institutional racism in the Metropolitan police force, the police training consisted of no discussion of institutional or structural racism. Williams (2020) argues that whites refuse to consider how their collective exercise of power within white institutions creates racial inequality, preferring to attribute racism to individual bigots. Racism was individualized by trainers, who tended to use terms such as 'unconscious bias' and 'prejudice' rather than racism. Tate and Page (2018) state that '(un)conscious bias is a strategy to distance the White self from the charge of racism, and indeed, that one can be implicated in its perpetuation' (p. 151). Whilst whites have not suffered racism themselves and benefit from a racialized social system predicated on whiteness (Bonilla-Silva 2018; Meghji 2022), white trainers and officers felt able to declare whether racism did or did not exist within a white organization. DiAngelo states, 'whites invoke the power to choose when, how, and to what extent racism is addressed and challenged' (2018: 103).

During interviews, officers did not speak of any past or previous investigations of racism in Greenshire. However, throughout observations, there were moments where officers shared that some individuals in the force were being investigated for racism. The fieldnotes below were taken after a 10-h shift observing a young male officer who had been working for the force for 2 years:

> 05:30am

> I interviewed Ben prior to observing him out policing the night-time high street. During his interview Ben denied racism early on and said that he was proud to work for a force where racism didn't exist. Later that night, were walking along the night-time high street at about 3am and Ben explained that there was on-going investigation into a police officer in his team who had been accused of racism. I asked him what had happened, and he seemed immediately skittish and said he couldn't share any more.

> Fieldnotes, August 2018

Police officers are increasingly aware of the political climate they are working within and the declining trust and confidence in policing (Lister and Rowe 2015; Rowe 2020). This resulted in performances in interviews where racism was denied in order to present the organization in a positive light (Augoustinos and Every 2007). However, there was a reduction in these performances during observations with the police, whereby on three separate occasions officers shared that current serving officers were being investigated for racism. The individualization of racism in the force resulted in individuals or groups of officers being investigated by a designated policing team, whilst the racial inequalities produced through policing practices continued as the norm. For example, the stop and search rate of Black individuals increased during the fieldwork, from 8 times to 12 times more likely to be stopped and searched in comparison to their white counterparts in Greenshire. Ethnic minorities were also more likely

to be stopped and searched under section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994)[3] and were more likely to have a Taser used against them in Greenshire. Individualizing racism allowed the force to disproportionately use police powers against ethnic minorities, placing the blame for racism on individual officers. Essed (1991) argues 'the term *individual racism* is a contradiction in itself because racism is by definition the expression or activation of group power' (p. 37). Essed (1991) calls for an everyday understanding of racism which transcends traditional distinctions between institutional and individual racism. Everyday racism approaches racism as power, defined in terms of cognitions, actions and procedures which contribute to the development and perpetuation of a system in which whites dominate (Essed 1991).

HISTORICIZATION

Prior to beginning their role as officers, new recruits undergo 6 months of training at the police college in Greenshire. This training is underpinned by the law and therefore legislative changes result in changes to the training topics. At the time of research, the Equality Act (2010) informed 1 week of diversity training for new recruits. This act legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society, on the basis of nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation (The Equality Act 2010). Prior to the introduction of the Equality Act (2010), the training was specifically focussed on 'race' and underpinned by the Race Relations Amendment Act (2000). The shift from 'race' to diversity focussed training was spoken about positively by officers:

> Before, everything was about race and how bad the force was after Macpherson. I think it's much better now because we concentrate on diversity and all protected characteristics. (Darren, White Police Sergeant, August 2018).

> It's definitely better now. I guess that is what is so good about diversity, it's not like before, it's now inclusive of everyone. (Laura, Mixed Race Police Constable, July 2018).

The shift from 'race' to diversity training was depicted positively by police officers because it was '*inclusive of everyone*' and concentrated on nine protected characteristics of which 'race' was one. Trainers explained that the previous 'race' related training had been informed by Black community groups, proudly declaring they were '*no longer needed*' since the focus was now on 'diversity'. Bobo and Hutchings (1996) argue that white opposition to policy changes is rooted in Blumer's theory of racial group threat, where dominant racial groups begin to perceive minority groups as an economic and political threat to their dominant social status. During the fieldwork, I became aware that all trainers were serving police officers at the time of Lawrence's murder. However, many of the new recruits were not born at the time of Lawrence's murder and some had no awareness of who Stephen Lawrence was. It was clear that the feelings of positivity towards the replacement of 'race' training with 'diversity' training were informed by police trainers' feelings of resentment towards the Macpherson Inquiry (1999). This was evident in two incidences during the training when new recruits asked trainers if they could explain more about the Macpherson Inquiry (1999) and the murder of Stephen Lawrence. My fieldnotes read:

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3   Section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) allows a police officer to stop and search a person without reasonable suspicion.

17:30pm

During two different training sessions today, new recruits raised their hands and asked the trainers whether they could explain more about the Macpherson Inquiry and what happened to Stephen Lawrence. The trainers responded to their questions firmly and defensively. One stood with his hands on his hips, declaring to the lecture hall '*that was a long time ago. Racism no longer exists in this force … (raises voice) … WE DO NOT NEED TO TALK ABOUT THAT*'. He then diverted the conversation. An air of tension surrounded the room, and it was clear that new recruits weren't sure whether or not they could ask any more questions.

Trainers tended to exercise individualism and expression of choice to protect their own interests and not necessarily the new recruits' needs or interests. This is evidence of Bonilla-Silva's (2018) concept of abstract liberalism, whereby trainers' individual interests impacted how they approached institutional and structural issues of 'race'. Shiner (2010) found that the findings of the Macpherson Inquiry (1999), particularly that the Metropolitan police force is 'institutionally racist' resulted in trauma in officers. During the research, I found that the 'trauma of institutional racism' (Shiner 2010) informed police trainers' and officers responses to questions about the Macpherson Inquiry (1999), with these presenting an opportunity to historicize racism and construct the organization as a space where racism did not need to be discussed because it no longer existed.

Post-race narratives were pervasive across the interview transcripts and fieldnotes, as officers focussed on the positive shifts made in policing since the Macpherson Inquiry (1999). Police officers' explained that Black and mixed-race people lived '*too much in the past*' and '*needed to move on*'. This was reflected strongly in a story told by the white, male diversity trainer to new recruits during their diversity training:

09:30am

The trainer explained they were at a conference recently where a Black man was presenting with the surname 'Mc' something, clearly a Scottish name. Rolling his eyes, the trainer stated, 'the man went on about how this was his slave name and started talking about the slave trade to everyone in the conference'. Then trainer then stated, 'I thought don't go over this stuff, that was 200 years ago, he killed the conference'.

<div align="right">Fieldnotes—January 2018</div>

Paranoid projection informed white officers' responses to racially minoritized individuals raising past and present experiences of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that paranoid projection helps whites 'escape from guilt and responsibility and affix blame elsewhere' (p. 71). The Black man raising his family with a history of slavery resulted in frustration in the white male trainer. Ahmed (2010) argues that those who highlight racism are seen as getting in the way of its total disappearance:

given that racism recedes from social consciousness, it appears as if the ones who 'bring it up' are bringing it into existence […] People of colour are often asked to concede to the recession of racism: we are asked to 'give way' by letting it go back.
(2010: n.p.).

As the Black man raises his connection to the slave trade, the white fragility of the trainer becomes apparent. DiAngelo (2018) defines white fragility as the predictability of the

white response to having their racial positions challenged. In telling this story to new recruits, the white male diversity trainer has high capital, operating from a place of power as the trainer but also as an ex-policeman and a white, British man. He chooses to disregard the Black man's history in favour of privileging the comfort of himself and other white individuals at the conference and in the training room. Through the story, the trainer constructs the police institution as a place where the history of racism does not need to be discussed and where white comfort is prioritized. The positionality of the researcher as a white woman also comes into play, as the trainer assumes the researcher will agree with him as her whiteness provides him with comfort and ease in telling this story (Song and Parker 1995). Within the training room, a large majority of the police recruits were also white and British. However, there were a small number of ethnic minority recruits who were not born in Britain and had differing ethnic origins. Despite decades of attempts to enhance the recruitment of ethnic minorities into British policing, these have failed (Waters *et al.* 2007; Merrick 2021). Stories like this signal how the police organization is oriented around whiteness (Ahmed 2007), offering an understanding of what can and cannot be discussed in particular police settings.

DISCURSIVE DERACIALIZATION

At the time of the research, many police officers shared that young Black men from London were increasingly travelling to Greenshire to deal drugs as part of the county lines organized crime network. This resulted in the formation of a police operation to tackle county lines activity and the use of a 'gangs' matrix. Prior to the police operation, Black men were eight times more likely to be stopped and searched in Greenshire. Once the operation launched, Black men were 12 times more likely to be stopped and searched in comparison to their white counterparts. The increase in the stop and search of Black men was presented by the police as an '*unfortunate*' but necessary consequence of their operation to detain county lines criminals. This finding goes beyond previous research which found racism was articulated by white heterosexist males in 'white spaces' (Loftus 2008), to reveal how institutionalized mental models of the Black male 'gang' member are embedded in the *white racial id*e*ology* of the police. Institutionalized mental models refer to socially shared mental representations and knowledge, seen in ideological systems which organize attitudes (van Dijk 1993*b*). These mental models are constructed by the police as having '*nothing to do with race*' (Mike, white Police Sergeant, July 2018) and are used to legitimize the surveillance of Black men in Greenshire. When speaking of this operation, officers recognized that the men being monitored and detained were predominantly Black or Black mixed-race and from London. Following observations of the diversity training, the following fieldnotes were taken:

> 17:00pm
>
> The diversity trainer was speaking to me in the canteen before the afternoon training session with new recruits. He began telling me one of the most persistent issues the force is dealing with is the increase in organised crime groups dealing drugs in Greenshire. He stated these drug dealers happen to be Black and that unfortunately that means the police are having to stop and search a lot of Black men in the area.

Here, the trainer deemphasizes racial explanations, despite recognizing that the force operation targets Black men. He does this by stating that the dealers '*happen to be Black*'. During their interviews, Daniel and Craig shared:

There's a lot going on with county lines, mainly Black boys who are runners. We're not being racist, it's just unfortunate that they're Black. (Daniel, White Police Sergeant, February 2018).

There's a high population of Black guys I've dealt with, the kids that are sort of in gangs. Gangs and drugs and such. They carry knives, weapons. I completely agree we shouldn't treat anyone differently because of their race, and it's not because of their race, these boys have knives. (Craig, White Police Constable, April 2018).

Within these interview snippets, Daniel and Craig utilize semantic moves associated with colour-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Daniel does this when he states, '*we're not being racist*' and Craig does this when he states, '*it's not because of their race*'. These are moves used to articulate racial viewpoints at a time when colour-blind racism is the norm (Bonilla-Silva 2003; 2018). In underplaying the significance of 'race', officers enhanced the concerns of the police in order to legitimize the increased surveillance and monitoring of Black men in Greenshire. Craig does this when he talks about '*knives, weapons*'. During interviews with police licensing officers, they shared that the police licensing department shares images of individuals on the gang's matrix with venue managers in Greenshire. This list was shared with door staff prior to opening to aid with governing access to the venue. At the time of research, the list only contained images of Black and Black mixed-race men. All of the police licensing officers interviewed spoke about sharing the gang's matrix with venue managers and door staff, but all omitted the 'race' of the individuals on the gang's matrix unless questioned. When asked to describe the ethnicities of those on the list, Scott shares:

They are all Black, yeah. But it's not about their race, absolutely not. Absolutely not. They're in a gang. This came about as part of an operation we were running…we had some real big issues with serious violence that involves knives and knuckledusters and on investigation, a lot were gang members… How can someone like me go to the venue and say why are you having all of this trouble, why are you letting these people in, they don't know they're gang members? It's information sharing. (Scott, White Police Constable, February 2018).

Discursive deracialization techniques were drawn upon by police licensing officers in their depiction of the gang's matrix. These techniques were central in supporting colour-blind and post-race perspectives. Reeves (1983, cited in Augoustinos and Every 2007) refers to the deracialization of discourse as where racial categories are 'attenuated, eliminated or substituted and racial explanations are omitted or de-emphasized' (p. 133). In omitting the racial identity of those on the 'gang' list from the interview, police licensing officers protected themselves and the force from charges of racism (van Dijk 1987; Augoustinos and Every 2007). When pressed, they explained that the images given to venues were all of Black men but that their race was not important to the construction of the list. Scott rationalizes the sharing of gang images within wider narratives of a police operation, serious violence and as a way of helping venues self-police. During the fieldwork, increased attention was paid to young Black men on the door of night-time venues. These Black men were often asked by door staff to show their IDs to ascertain whether they were registered to a London address. If they were registered to a London address, young Black men were asked to provide their reasons for being in Greenshire and were more likely to be searched on suspicion of their connections with county lines criminals.

Bonilla-Silva (2018) argues that colour-blind racism results in whites developing 'powerful explanations—which have ultimately become justifications—for contemporary racial inequality that exculpate them from any responsibility for the status of people of colour' (p. 2). Discursively deracializing the 'gang' member is evidence of Bonilla-Silva's (2018) minimization

of race thesis. This refers to whites' sharing the declining significance of race and arguing that racism has disappeared, whilst racially minoritized individuals believe racism (both old and new), is alive and well (Bonilla-Silva 2018). He argues that this results in tools which allow 'whites to explain away racial fractures in their colour-blind story' (Bonilla-Silva 2018: 86). This section outlines how the police work to omit or deemphasize racial explanations which are central to institutionalized mental models such as the 'gang' (Williams and Clarke 2016; Amnesty International 2020). Discursively deracializing racist constructs such as the 'gang' allowed officers to use racially based frameworks (Bonilla-Silva 2018) centred upon myths of Black criminality (Gilroy 1982) whilst also protecting themselves and the force from accusations of racism. The next section explores how officers defended racial stereotypes and disproportionate policing practices, situating these within past policing experience and police intelligence.

RACIAL STORIES

During interviews and observations, officers shared in-depth stories about their experiences in dealing with ethnic minority individuals. These stories were often detailed and usually consisted of negative portrayals of ethnic minorities and positive portrayals of the police officer and/or institution (van Dijk 1987). Officers primarily shared detailed stories about their interactions with Black gangsters, Gypsy Travellers and Muslims. Bonilla-Silva writes

> All racialized social systems produce dominant common stories that become part of the racial folklore and hence are shared, used, and believed by members of the dominant race. What makes racial stories 'ideological' is their social commonality; the fact that users and listeners share a representational world that makes these stories seem factual. Hence, by telling and retelling these storylines, members of a social group strengthen their collective understanding about how and why the world is the way it is. (Bonilla-Silva 2003: 72).

Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues there are two kinds of racial stories: storylines and testimonies. Storylines are fable-like and based on impersonal, generic arguments with little narrative content. Testimonies are accounts where the narrator is the main character in the story and where sympathy is gained from listeners who are persuaded about points they want to convey. Testimonies were most frequently utilized by police officers, particularly in sharing in-depth stories of their interactions with Gypsy and Travellers. During an interview with Paul, a Chief Superintendent, he shared:

> You can't trust Travellers. I remember one of my first experiences of policing, it'll always stay in my head. I was called and told I needed to go and arrest a Traveller man. I remember leaving the station and driving the car to the site. I turned up there and looked around, thinking 'this is different'. I got out the car and knocked on the door to make the arrest and this Traveller man grabbed me. He really beat me up, I mean I was really beaten up. I mean really beaten up. I had to call for loads of back up. I mean loads. I was in hospital all night. It'll always stay with me. They fight different Traveller men, they fight dirty. (Paul, White Chief Superintendent, January 2019).

The interview with Paul took place after observations of the police diversity training in which a Gypsy Liaison Officer provided specific training to new recruits on how to interact with Gypsy and Travellers. This training taught new recruits that they would be frequently interacting with Gypsy and Travellers. Paul begins with a position statement of 'you can't trust Travellers', before backing this up with a general fact (van Dijk 1987), drawing upon his previous experience with a Traveller man as 'proof' of his prior statement. He finishes by essentializing the behaviour

of all Traveller men, stating '*they fight different*' and '*they fight dirty*'. This incident changed how Paul and his team approached Travellers, sharing that he no longer allowed officers to turn up to Traveller sites single-crewed. Bonilla-Silva argues that 'testimonies serve rhetorical functions such as saving face or signifying non-racialism or bolstering their arguments on controversial racial matters' (2003: 72). Almost every police officer utilized testimonies to offer in-depth stories of their interactions with Gypsy and Travellers in Greenshire. These testimonies often resulted in officers defending the need to surveil and monitor Gypsy and Traveller sites. Racism towards Gypsy and Travellers was recognized by police officers but was legitimized through the racial frame of cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva 2018). Police officers blamed Gypsy and Travellers for the police attention they received, stating their inability to pay taxes, likelihood of sexually harassing women and aptitude for criminality warranted the surveillance of Gypsy and Traveller sites.

Whilst there are strategies to enhance the ethnic representation of the police force (National Police Chiefs Council 2018; Race Action Plan 2022) in the hope to eradicate police racism, ethnic minority officers also drew upon racial stories and testimonies (Bonilla-Silva 2003) to legitimize racist stereotypes and defend the surveillance of Gypsy and Travellers and Black men from London. Lisa and Amal state:

> On the weekend we had a case of Travellers that were told they weren't allowed in a club because they were Travellers. They asked to speak to the police and file a complaint, but there's nothing we can do. If a club wants to turn them away, they can. They were a loud group anyway. I attended to listen to their complaint. They were all talking over me as I was trying to explain things to them. They were not listening to what me and my colleague were saying. That's the thing, Travellers just don't listen… you can understand why clubs don't let them in. If I was in charge, I wouldn't let them in either (Lisa, Black Mixed Race Police Constable, February 2018).

> The thing is, we ain't racist, but we do have to keep our eye on these Black lads from London. I had a group of them Friday night. They'd got the train from London to Greenshire, this big group of them. They're all hanging around Penton train station, I don't know how many of them, too many to count. I asked them what they were doing around here, why they'd come this way. They explained they were off to some club. I had my suspicions they were up to no good—why would you come all that way to sleepy old Penton? I told them to behave and reminded them that we don't act like Londoners down here. The thing is, they're bringing all sorts of trouble down here. (Amal, Indian Police Constable, March 2018).

Ethnic minority officers sought to defend the racial status quo in policing and subscribed to the *white racial ideology* of the police. Williams (2020) argues that 'white' is not a natural inherent characteristic of people but a product of social practices and the ideology of whiteness. Ethnic minority police officers adhered to what Fyre (1995) calls 'whiteliness'. Reddy writes

> Learning 'whiteliness' is how various immigrant groups, initially defined as 'other' by the white majority… become white. Whiteliness is learned and can therefore be unlearned, it can be engaged in by people who are not white and rejected by those who are. Not all white people are whitely; not all whitely people are white (1998: 1).

The defense of an unequal racial status quo is unlikely to change as a result of changes in recruitment policy. For example, Brogden and Shearing (1993) found that women recruited into a male-dominated police force embrace male police culture and become 'defeminised'. Cashmore (1991) found similar evidence that Black police officers recruited into white forces in the

United States became committed to the racial status quo and took on the working personality of white officers. This was reflected during the fieldwork. Of the five ethnic minority officers interviewed, only one recognized that the force contributed to structural and institutional racism, actively challenging this in his membership of the Black Police Association. He explained that as a result of this, he had experienced bullying from other officers and described himself as a '*bit of an outsider*'.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the Macpherson Inquiry (1999) finding the Metropolitan police force institutionally racist over 20 years ago, the police continue to resist a structural definition of racism. Recently, the commissioner of the Metropolitan Police has come under increasing criticism for denying institutional racism in British policing (Peplow 2022), whilst the Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset force is the first in the United Kingdom to declare their force institutionally racist (Morris 2023). It was clear throughout the fieldwork that many officers individualized racism, believing this was upheld primarily by bigots. This paper makes a unique contribution to the policing literature by moving beyond the study of racism to unveil the *white racial ideology* of the police. It evidences the presence of a shared *white racial ideology* (Bonilla-Silva 2003; 2018) in officers of differing ranks, ethnicities and genders, deviating from previous research which found racism was primarily communicated by white heterosexist men who 'chose their audiences' (Loftus 2008: 77) when sharing racist viewpoints. By taking a structural approach to racism, it goes beyond previous research findings which explore the shift from overt to covert articulations of racism (Loftus 2010; Holdaway and O'Neill 2013) to evidence how white dominance and the defence of the unequal racial status quo in policing were present across four discourses. These discourses are as follows: individualization, historicization, discursive deracialization and racial stories.

Unlike previous research which took place post-Macpherson (Loftus 2008; 2010; Holdaway and O'Neill 2013), this research is situated at a time when old forms of racism and xenophobia have been growing in the United Kingdom (Favell 2020). It would therefore be wrong to conclude that racism was primarily shared by white heterosexist men in 'white spaces' (Loftus 2008). Instead, this paper evidences how the police institution is racialized as a white space. This is evident in the stories told in the training room, the deflection of discussions of the Macpherson Inquiry (1999) and Stephen Lawrence and the racial stories and testimonies which are used by officers to defend the surveillance of ethnic minorities. This is not to say that the researcher did not witness explicit racist views shared by white heterosexist men during the fieldwork, but that all officers subscribed to a *white racial ideology* which underplayed, defended and maintained the racial status quo in policing. Much of the findings contained within the paper are from formal interviews with police officers, meaning that 'race' researchers do not necessarily need to access backstage settings to detect racism. Previous police research has overlooked the whiteness of the institution (with the exception of Kahn *et al.* 2016 and; Clarke and Smith 2023), with whiteness operating as the invisible norm. This paper evidences how police discourses function to protect the white organizational interests of the police and maintain racial inequality. The police are informed by 'whiteliness' (Fyre 1995), with officers of differing ethnicities sharing a social and political worldview which supports the dominance of whites and the subordination of ethnic minorities. The power of whiteness therefore operated beyond the boundaries of the ethnic identities of officers, with both white and ethnic minority officers subscribing to a shared *white racial ideology*. Future policing research must render whiteness visible and bring it into the analytical frame (McLaughlin 2007).

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