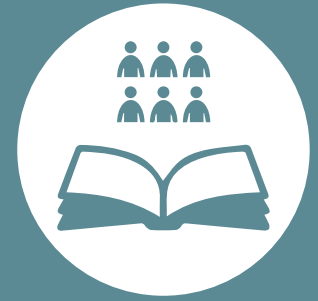


Kwansah-Aidoo, K., & Mapedzahama, V. (2018). "There is Really Discrimination Everywhere": Experiences and Consequences of Everyday Racism Among the New Black African Diaspora in Australia. *Australasian Review of African Studies*, 39(1): 81–109.



Chapter 8

SOCIAL DIVISIONS

Chapter 8 explores the ways that societies are divided along the lines of class, race, gender, and sexuality with some groups having power and privilege over others. In this chapter, we looked at the ways that macro social structures, such as slavery as an economic model or biased hiring practices which disadvantage ethnic minority groups, create and reproduce racial inequality. This chapter talks also about what Essed (1991) calls 'everyday racism' which is the reproduction of racial divisions and white power through everyday conversations and actions.

Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo and Virginia Mapedzahama (2018) use the everyday racism framework to explore the experiences of 'new' black African migrants in Australia. In their article, they define 'new' migrants as 'first-generation black continental Africans who ... immigrated to Australia since the abolition of the White Australia Policy in the early 1970s' (page 86). Through semi-structured interviews with 24 participants, Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama found that 'familiar, often small, but nevertheless significant' acts of racism (page 89) were common in the everyday lives of their participants. They give examples of participants being passed over for job promotions in favour of less qualified white colleagues, not being offered jobs because of 'an 'undesirable' accent, or ... a variation of English that does not reinforce whiteness' (page 95), and even being ignored completely by colleagues and service users. But, Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama's also show that everyday racism can manifest in acts of kindness and generosity. One of their participants, Aloma, recounted situations in which white neighbours offered second-hand products which Aloma didn't need and could easily have afforded to buy. In this case, it was the underlying assumptions of Aloma's poverty and need to be 'saved and uplifted' which is evidence of deeply entrenched racist thought (page 90). Would Aloma's neighbours have made this assumption about a white family living in the area and offered second-hand goods?

These kinds of pervasive micro-aggressions had significant consequences for Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama's participants including the need to work hard to prove themselves competent in fields where they were already well-established. Nirmal Puwar (2004) has discussed this in detail too, taking the example of women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds entering work environments, such as politics, academia and the art world, which have historically been marked by masculinity and whiteness. Puwar uses the notion 'space invaders' to discuss the ways

that racialised bodies in these spaces disrupt the normalised power structures yet also need to work extra hard to ‘prove themselves competent’ (Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama, 2018: 96).

To reach these important conclusions, Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama used interviews. Interviews are an incredibly common method of data collection in sociology. In his book tracing the history of British sociology, Albert Halsey (2004) shows that 80% of qualitative articles published in British sociology journals in the year 2000 used interviews as their mode of data collection. This popularity of interviews as a data collection tool is understandable considering the flexibility that interviews present for researchers. Interviews may be structured, semi-structured or unstructured; they may take place with multiple participants simultaneously; they might be what we call ‘walking interviews’ where researchers and participants walk through a particular space and use the interview to make sense of that space; they could be conducted online or over the phone; they may use photographs or poetry to facilitate conversation; or they might be conducted ‘in the field’ as part of an ethnographic study. Interviews offer the opportunity to delve deeply and understand participants’ perceptions of tricky and potentially sensitive topics in a way which wouldn’t be possible in other methods. For example, David Adeloje and colleagues (2020) used interviews to speak with Nigerian domestic tourists about their experiences of terrorism which is a very sensitive topic given Nigeria’s high rates of terrorism which itself is underpinned by political, cultural and religious disputes. Adeloje et al. (2020: 72) note that interviews allowed participants ‘some degree of privacy and the opportunity to express themselves in a more relaxed setting’ in contrast to focus groups at which participants may have felt ‘uncomfortable expressing themselves in the presence of a religiously, politically, or ethnically diverse group of people’ (page 72).

This point about interviews creating a relaxed environment is echoed in Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama’s article where they discuss the relationships that they were able to build with participants because of a shared heritage and identity. They explain that ‘as skilled black African migrants ourselves, we were considered ‘insiders’ and therefore participants were very comfortable talking to us’ (Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama 2018: 83). Such rapport between researchers and participants isn’t just limited to situations where researchers and participants share an aspect of identity or experience, but can also be a result of the interview method itself creating the space for deep conversations which can create empathy and rapport. These kinds of positive relationships are important both for ethical reasons (participants feeling comfortable and safe) and because they can yield good quality data; in an earlier article, one of Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo’s participants commented that ‘they probably would not have talked about racism in the interview ‘the way they had’, had it been ‘any other researcher’ (Mapedzahama and Kwansah-Aidoo 2014).

But interviews also have their disadvantages and drawbacks. Researchers would, on the whole, prefer to conduct interviews face-to-face to build better rapport and respond to participants’ non-verbal cues such as changes of facial expression or body language. However, individual face-to-face interviews take a significant amount of time compared with, for example, focus groups (where we can talk to multiple people at the same time) or surveys (where we can reach large numbers of respondents

in a short space of time). And, of course, more time means more money so interviews can prove to be expensive! As well as this, interviews can be emotionally demanding for researchers. The emotional toil is a particular risk when looking at sensitive topics like race and racism in Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama's work where researchers ask difficult questions and hear upsetting stories multiple times during an interview study. Virginia Dickson-Swift et al. (2009) draw attention to this 'emotion work' of interviewing, suggesting that 'a participant's story may evoke strong reactions from the researcher because it reminds the researcher of their own personal experiences or they may empathize with the participant's story' (page 65). They go on to highlight the consequences including burnout, 'emotional exhaustion' (page 71) and even 'vicarious traumatisation' whereby 'individuals listening to and working with the traumatic experiences of others begin to experience the effects of trauma themselves' (page 72). This kind of emotional toil is particularly likely in

Even for researchers who're not looking at particular sensitive topics, interviews can be emotionally draining because of the need for 'double attention' where researchers must listen intently to the participant's response, be ready with the next question but also ensure that the immediate response is reactive to what the participant is saying to keep the conversation flowing naturally (Wengraf 2001: 194).

In a broader sense, interviews have also been critiqued for their lack of innovation. For Savage and Burrows (2007) the extensive use of interviews in sociological research has contributed to what they labelled as a 'crisis of empirical sociology'. By this they mean that sociologists have continued to rely on interview methods despite technological developments such as GPS tracking and social media data mining and the opportunities of diverse data collection methods that they present. This reliance upon 'dated' interview methods, according to Savage and Burrows, presents a crisis for sociology which can no longer claim any kind of methodological innovation because of the persistent reliance on interviews.

QUESTIONS:

1. Interviews are all around us daily on TV, social media and in our everyday lives. What makes a research interview different from a TV interview with a celebrity? Or a job interview?
2. Kwamena Kwansah-Aidoo and Virginia Mapedzahama (2018) suggest that their 'insider' status was helpful for their interviews. Do you agree that sharing an identity, heritage, or experience with participants would be beneficial?
3. How might researchers protect themselves against the emotional burdens of interviewing?
4. Savage and Burrows (2007) argue that over-reliance on interviews presents a 'crisis' of innovation for sociology. Do you think this is true?

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