Tabulating experiences of racism and racial discrimination across the life course

Article (Accepted Version)

Breheny, Mary, Stevenson, Brendan, Bécares, Laia, Abelson, Jamie, Rafferty, Jane and Cormack, Donna (2021) Tabulating experiences of racism and racial discrimination across the life course. *Stigma and Health*. ISSN 2376-6972

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Tabulating experiences of racism and racial discrimination across the life course -

Submitted for the special issue on qualitative methods

Abstract

Indigenous, migrant, racial and ethnic minority group members report experiences of racism that are lifelong and damaging. To understand the context that shapes these experiences, we developed a tabular approach to analysing focus group interviews of life course experiences of racism. The approach was grounded in critical realism and narrative analysis. Using these foundations, stories of personal experiences of racism were understood to provide evidence of enduring social structures that maintain racism. Extracts were organised into tables with rows corresponding with periods of the life course (such as early childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, mid-life and older age). Rows were labelled with the decade these experiences occurred to highlight sociohistorical influences. Columns in the table were used to represent the familial generation of the protagonists in the stories. Examining these experiences as occurring across different life course periods (childhood, adolescence, adulthood), from different cohorts and family roles (child, parent, grandparent), and time periods revealed patterns in the persistence of racism. This approach was instrumental in identifying the ways that experiences of racism are dynamic and contested even as they are experienced as persistent across the life course. Situating this within a critical realist framework built an explanation of the enduring social structures that support racism to persist even while experiences of racism change.

Keywords: Critical realism; narrative analysis; focus groups; life course theory; racism.

Racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning relative value based on group membership, unfairly advantaging some people and disadvantaging others (Jones, 2000; Krieger, 2000; Paradies, 2006). It advances the notion that some groups categorised by biological or cultural features are innately superior and others inferior. Racism refers to broad structures of oppression which shape economic, political, and social life and perpetuate an unequal distribution of privileges, resources, and power among people organised around hierarchies of race, culture or ethnic identity (DiAngelo, 2012). Racial discrimination refers to the behaviours and acts that emerge or are enabled by this system.

Indigenous, migrant, racial and ethnic minority group members report experiences of racial discrimination that are pervasive, lifelong, and health damaging. Racism works in several ways to damage health. Racism increases the likelihood of experiencing adverse social conditions such as unemployment and insecure employment, and unsafe housing and poor neighbourhood conditions (Krieger, 2014). These adverse social conditions pattern access to the resources required to maintain good health and influence access to healthcare (Marmot & Wilkinson, 2006). Negative messages about minoritised groups may be internalised, which can contribute to poorer mental health (Jones, 2000). In addition, interpersonal discrimination may result in physiological changes which lead to poor health outcomes (Clark et al., 1999). These impacts occur across the life course and lead to marked disparities in health outcomes for minoritised groups (Gee, Walsemann & Brondolo, 2012).

A life course approach provides a useful framework for moving beyond experiences of racism as distinct and isolated events. Firstly, life course theory states that experiences and outcomes depend upon past circumstances which shape future opportunities (Sorlie, Backlund & Keller, 1995). Experiencing racism is a dynamic process that operates across time and domains (Wallace, Nazroo, & Bécaries 2016). Secondly, how people react in response to racism is shaped by historical and social circumstances (Backman & Nilsson,

2011; Ferrer, Grenier, Brotman, & Koehnd, 2017). Manifestations of racism shift over time in response to changes in policy and practice and broader shifts in social behaviour. These shifts may contribute to difficulties in recognising or having experiences recognised as racism (Williams & Mohammed 2009) and complicate responses to experienced racial discrimination. Finally, life course theory suggests an individual's life is linked to and interdependent with the lives of others. Oppression is maintained within and across generations by a variety of intertwined individual and structural processes (Gilligan, Karraker & Jasper, 2018). These elements – the accumulation of lifetime exposures to racism, historical change, and the interaction of individual and structural processes – make the examination of experiences of racism complex.

Using life course theory as a foundation, we developed a tailored approach to analysing data from focus group interviews on life course experiences of racism. In this paper we describe this tabular approach based on critical realism and narrative analysis to examine the cumulative, historical, and interpersonal nature of racism experienced across the life course. This paper focuses on detailing the methodology and method; the substantive findings of the international project are reported elsewhere.

Methodology

Qualitative research examining the experience of stigma should be built on explicit foundations regarding what exists, what can be known, and what counts as evidence. This project used critical realism to confirm that racism and racial discrimination exist and that experiences provide evidence for racism. Personal experiences of racism over the life course reflect enduring structures that work to separate people into groups with differently-valued identities. Although these enduring structures exist, we cannot have independent or unbiased access to them; we can only interpret patterns of events that provide evidence for their existence.

Critical Realism

Critical realism holds that reality exists independently of our apprehension of that reality (Bhaskar, 2011). Observable events are produced by the complex interaction of causal powers (Elder-Vass, 2010); critical realism concerns itself with the generative mechanisms that produce observable events. According to critical realism, the social world has three realms: the observable, the actual (that which can be observed in principle), and the real. The real cannot be directly apprehended and includes enduring structures which generate the actual and the observable (Bhaskar, 2011). According to critical realism, we can only understand the social world by recognising the structures that generate observable events.

Firstly, this distinction is foundational for separating out the generative mechanisms that make racism possible from the observable events that may or may not include racial discrimination. Race ideas can be understood as enduring structures that generate observable events (Carter, 2000). Enduring structures that distribute power according to racialised identity exist even in the absence of observable events of racial discrimination. Focusing on generative mechanisms means that causal powers cannot be reduced to the actions of individual agents. Social structures exist beyond individuals; causal powers may act through individuals, but they are not reducible to these individuals' actions (Kaidesoja, 2007).

Secondly, critical realism separates out social relations from social relationships. Social relations are the structures that systematically support the distribution of resources and power (Carter, 2000); social relationships are the interactions between people that are shaped by these relations of power (Elder-Vass, 2010). Accordingly, addressing social relationships of racial discrimination does not necessarily alter the social relations that make racism possible. Social relations which enable racism to exist structure social relationships even when acts of discrimination are not experienced.

Finally, altering enduring social structures is possible, but it requires that social actors possess knowledge of these structures (Kaidesoja, 2009). Addressing racism requires strategic collective action to transform the social relations that make racism possible rather than to merely eliminate acts of racial discrimination within social relationships. These collective actions will not produce structural change unproblematically, as all actions bring about both intended and unintended consequences (Dyson, Atkin, Culley & Dyson, 2014). Mechanisms and powers operate as tendencies and alternative mechanisms acting concurrently may prevent tendencies from being realised in observable events (Fleetwood, 2017). Racism may be realised under certain conditions, but remain unrealised in others (Porter, 1993). As Elder-Vass (2010) describes, “actual events are always the product of an unruly mess of interacting powers that happen to rub up against one another at that particular moment and place” (p.47).

The social structures that produce and perpetuate racism exist beyond the individual, even as the impact of these structures are played out in the lives of individuals and families. Using critical realism, we can examine experiences reported through language to comprehend the enduring structures which shape social life. Bhaskar (2005) suggest that knowledge of social structures begins by examining agents’ own conceptions of the phenomena. Interrogating these conceptions provides evidence for the shape enduring social structures must have for people to describe experiences in that way. The descriptions that research participants provide of their experiences depend upon the social and interactional purpose of the moment; they provide situated evidence of the enduring structures that exist beyond their talk. Examining experiences enables us to answer the following question: What social relations must exist for these kinds of social relationships to take place between people? Critical realism is well placed to develop explanations about the enduring structures that produce racism.

Narrative Analysis

The stories people tell are significant; they are worthy of close examination, both for the ways they signal the important events of people's lives and how they reflect and reinforce social identities. Narrative analysis is concerned with storytelling as a meaningful social act (Murray, 2003; Riessman, 2008). People tell stories which involve characters interacting in plot lines to achieve a narrative resolution (Polkinghorne, 1995). These accounts both represent the participants' experiences and are told to achieve an interactional purpose (Murray, 2000). Using a narrative approach, we understood the focus group data as representing the speakers' interpretation of experiences as racial discrimination. Correspondingly, the transcripts were examined for stories; stories were understood as a description of events depicted as part of an evolving plot line (Grbich, 2013; Wong & Breheny, 2018). Although the stories people tell include other people, these people would not necessarily describe the same experiences, or account for their role in these experiences in the same ways. They are characters in a story that plays out in a particular setting; both characters and setting are integral to understanding the narrative (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008). These stories are inevitably subjective and situated accounts of racism and racial discrimination told to convey a message to the listener. The interpretation of these events as experiences of racial discrimination is meaningful, regardless of whether others would attribute the experience to racism. As Bhaskar (2005) states, reasons can function as causes, and over time this may become a disposition to respond to events in a particular way.

In this analysis we understand talk as reflecting particular experiences of events, as a rhetorical accomplishment designed to achieve a particular social outcome in the interactional moment, and as grounded in the enduring structures of social life. Talk about racism demonstrates the sort of world that exists outside of that talk, but it does so in the context of social and moral rules for conduct which differ across different settings. Drawing together

critical realism, narrative analysis and life course approaches enables experiences of racial discrimination to be understood in terms of interpersonal, developmental, social and historical processes.

Method

The focus group data used was part of an international project examining life course experiences of racism conducted in parallel in the United Kingdom the United States and Aotearoa/New Zealand (hereafter Aotearoa). Focus groups were particularly suited to examining experiences of racism and racial discrimination as participants told detailed stories and encouraged others to add their own similar or contrasting accounts.

Setting – Aotearoa/New Zealand

Aotearoa is an island in the Pacific Ocean. Māori are the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa. Aotearoa was colonised by the British from the 18th century, and this ongoing process of colonisation has had a detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of Māori. Māori have been disadvantaged by policies and practices that resulted in the dispossession of land and economic base, and the suppression of language and cultural values (Anderson et al., 2006). This has produced substantial inequities in health (Tobias, Blakely, Matheson, Rasanathan, & Atkinson, 2009). Urbanisation following World War II further led to the disruption of Māori connections to land and from intergenerational family structures that form the foundations of Māori society. At this time, labour shortages also led to people from the surrounding Pacific Islands being encouraged to migrate to Aotearoa. Migration continues to occur for employment and educational opportunities as well as for family reunification. In Aotearoa, people of European ethnicity represent 70% of the population, Māori 16.5% of the population, and 8% of the population of Aotearoa identify with a Pasifika ethnicity (Statistics NZ, 2018).

This paper uses data from one focus group with seven Pasifika women recruited through a community organisation in Aotearoa. Participants were recruited through a researcher who was a member of the community group. A Māori researcher stayed during the focus group, whereas the Pākehā [white] researcher left after introducing the project to avoid inhibiting the discussion of experiences of racism. The aim of the project was to recruit participants aged over 50 years. However, as this focus group was held at a meeting of an existing group, it included younger women: one 22-year-old, three women aged between 35 and 48 years and three women over 50 years. Age and interpersonal dynamics will have influenced the data collected; the age of the participants may have facilitated stories questioning the behaviour of elders and teenagers, neither of which were present in the focus group. The focus group was two hours in duration. A donation was made to the group to support their community development work in recognition of their time. The focus group was conducted in English, audio-recorded and transcribed. The community researcher led the discussion of experiences of racism across the life course, beginning with questions on what the participants understood racism to mean and what sorts of experiences would count as racism.

The data extracts in Table 1 are edited to improve clarity. Words removed from the extract are indicated with (...). Explanatory notes are provided in square brackets. For example, both Pākehā and Pālangi are terms used by the participants to refer to New Zealanders of European descent, so they are followed by [white] to make the extracts accessible for international readers. Extracts have been anonymised and the research described here was approved by the university human ethics committee. Details of the findings are reported elsewhere (Authors, 2020).

Tabulating Narrative Experiences

Three premises of life course theory provided the basis for understanding the experiences of racism and racial discrimination that people reported: life course experiences of racial discrimination are chronic and cumulative, racial discrimination changes over time, and the influence of racism and racial discrimination is transmitted within and across generations. A systematic analytic approach was developed to pay specific attention to each principle, whilst also recognising that these processes occurred simultaneously. The table created a framework that allocated experiences to time periods within the life course of the participants, showed how their lives were linked to others, and acknowledged historical processes. This allowed us to understand the interconnections between earlier and later experiences of racism within a person's life course and to show the links between different people's experiences whilst acknowledging their different age and life histories. The table enabled the analysis of each story within the cell whilst acknowledging the links between the cells. Rows corresponding with periods of the life course were also labelled with the decade these experiences occurred. Marking the decade allowed the experience to be linked to key historical events that shaped those experiences. The stories people told were systematically linked to those in the same rows (which occurred at the same time period, but to people of different ages and familial relationships) as well as those in the same columns (representing the same cohort at a different point in the life course).

Columns were used to represent people in familial cohorts, and these have been separated into rows representing different stages of the life course. In this example, the first column represents the experiences of the speaker's parents' generation, the middle column the experiences of the speaker's generation, and the third represented the experiences of the speaker's children's generation. Separating the experiences into columns focuses on the relationships between the speaker and intergenerational family members who appear in their accounts of racial discrimination.

The rows of the table were used to organise the extracts into different periods of the life course for each generation – from childhood, teenage years, young adulthood and older adulthood. In this way, we could analyse the importance of early childhood experiences of racism, and how these early experiences shaped later encounters. This tabular format drew attention to the ways that experiences influenced more than one life stage. At times it was difficult to assign experiences to one row, as participants described stories of earlier life that segued into accounts of contemporary experiences (see My Adolescence with the shift from suspicion in public space during adolescence to neighbourhood children being prevented from visiting in midlife). As such, the tabular approach provided analytic structure, but should not be used to ignore or simplify accounts that do not fit simply into the categories established; these segues are meaningful to the participant and therefore to the analysis.

Each cell was labelled with the age of the story protagonist and the relationship to the speaker (see Table 1). Some of the stories could be presented across more than one cell of the table. For example, the story of being excluded from a child’s birthday party is presented in Table 1 in the cell labelled My Adult Parent even though it is a story about the speaker’s exclusion. It could have been allocated to the cell My Childhood, but the resolution of the story indicates that the key protagonist is the mother, not the child: “Then Mum said ‘don’t you play with her, don’t you play with that Pākehā [white] girl’”. As narrated, the message of the story is how the speaker’s mother responds to her child’s experience of racial discrimination. Later iterations of the table merged cells between columns that represented shared experiences between two generations. At times the speakers tell stories that they witnessed, at other times they narrate events that were reported to them and add their own responses to these events.

Narrative analysis in this tabular format provided a systematic approach to the organisation of the focus group data. Coding extracts into tables drew attention to the

differences between cells in each row, which contributed to the interpretation of intergenerational transmission and the implications of generational differences. Using this tabular approach drew attention to how experiences were shared between family members and depended upon the age and life course stage at which they were experienced. This tabular approach enabled a systematic examination of experiences to understand what social structures must be like for racial discrimination to be experienced in these ways across these time periods.

Rigour

This approach enabled both creativity and insight as well as structure and rigour. Firstly, theoretical underpinnings of this approach have been detailed so that the reader can evaluate how the accounts are being used as evidence of enduring social structures. Secondly the social and historical context of the stories is at the forefront of the analytic approach. This enables the analysis to contribute to understanding local practices (Seale & Silverman, 1997). Authenticity was bolstered in this data collection by collaborating with community groups in the recruitment of participants. This ensured that group members were in a trusted setting and contributing to a project that they saw the value in, which is vital to the collection of high-quality data. Morse (2015) argue that one criterion of rigour is whether readers can make sense of the interpretation. The worked example below is provided for readers to evaluate the value of this approach for interpreting experiences of racism.

Worked Example

Participants provided accounts of racism and racial discrimination that they personally experienced, storied experiences their parents, children and grandchildren had confronted, and reported anticipating future discriminatory treatment. Using the table, we organised these experiences into historical time periods, key characters in the narrative, and life course timing. An example of this approach to analysis is provided (see Table 1).

Organising the extracts in this way drew attention to several aspects of the analysis. First, experiences of racism were described as accumulating over the life course. Participants reported that their recognition of racial discrimination and their responses to these experiences were different because of prior experiences that occurred during their childhood, adolescence and earlier adulthood. Earlier experiences sensitised people to identifying experiences as racial discrimination and shaped later behavioural responses. This is shown in Table 1 (see My Childhood) where the speaker describes the process of learning to recognise experiences as racism by saying “I guess it takes a while to even recognise that it’s happening, or why it’s happening”. This starting point reflects a narrative of racial innocence (DiAngelo, 2012), which was typically short-lived for participants in this study. Telling stories of a loss of innocence was common; participants recounted the incidents which prompted a recognition of racial difference. Such stories often concluded with this kind of narrative resolution: “And you know that’s when I started to realise - oh, I’m brown.” This realisation provoked a re-examination of prior experiences, a process that continued throughout the life course as experiences of racial discrimination accumulated and experiences shifted their perspectives. By organising stories from childhood through to older age within one column of the table we can highlight the shifts in meaning making across the life course.

Second, people shared the experiences of racial discrimination directed at others. This is represented by the multiple columns within the tables where participants report the experiences of older and younger generations and how racism and racial discrimination pervades interactions with one another. This is best represented across the 2000s row, in which three different stories are told which include different generations. In My Ageing Parent, the speaker recounts a time her father was removed from a welfare office by security for behaving in a way that is interpreted as aggressive. In My Adulthood, a story of being

treated suspiciously by a stranger in public space is provided. In My Children, the speaker recounts her attempt to directly address racial discrimination her child was experiencing, and her child's attempt to derail this direct approach. In these cases, the middle generation resist the tendency to minimise or accept racism that both older and younger generations are reported as preferring. These stories show the importance of familial relationships to understanding the impact of experiences of racism. Placing these experiences side by side facilitates this interpretation.

[insert Table 1 here]

Third, people's experiences of racial discrimination depend upon the social and historical context prevailing at the time as well as the contexts they have lived through. For example, current policies may prohibit explicit racial discrimination in employment and housing, however, experiences of earlier discrimination may predispose older generations to react to contemporary experiences differently than younger generations. The timing of the experiences also shapes how they should be interpreted considering changes in policy and practice. For example, the cell labelled My Childhood refers to a key practice that shaped the experiences of Pasifika people in Aotearoa, the 'dawn raids' (Thomsen, Tavita & Levi-Teu, 2018). The 'dawn raids' refers to the practice of immigration officials searching houses in the early hours of the morning to check people's immigration status and to deport those without work visas (Barker & McMillan, 2014). This practice arose in response to increasing unemployment, which made the labour of Pasifika migrants no longer desirable for economic growth. The practice was highly racialised, with Pasifika peoples targeted whilst immigrants from Australia and the United Kingdom were overlooked (Barker & McMillan, 2014). The cell labelled My Ageing Parent provides an example of a more subtle shift that influenced experiences of racism. In the 2000s, an increasingly punitive approach to welfare provision in Aotearoa (Treen, 2015) saw an increase in security issues in welfare offices around the

country (Hess, 2017). This is the context that shaped the story that is told about the speaker's father being removed and trespassed from the welfare office. His frustration at being misunderstood is interpreted as volatile and potentially dangerous behaviour given his racialised identity.

The tabular approach to analysis also highlights the analytic importance of age to the impact of historical events. In the 'dawn raids' example, although the speaker misremembered the date of the event, the feelings of fear, confusion and shame were shaped by the event occurring during her childhood. (Note that the 'dawn raids' began in 1974 (Barker & McMillan, 2014) rather than the 1960s as implied in the extract.) The account provided reports the disruption and noise of the event, relaying the experience from a child's perspective. The story also includes an adult interpretation of the event as a strategic shift in immigration practice, founded on both economic shifts which encouraged open immigration initially and racist policies that targeted Pasifika peoples for deportation. In the welfare office extract, the account is located at the intersection of the speaker's mid-age and her father's older age and pension receipt. The speaker describes the shame her father experienced at being removed from the welfare office in the context of his considerable standing as an elder in their community (extended turn of talk following the extract contained in the table). Table 1 highlights these three features of life course understandings of racism and racial discrimination.

A main finding from this project identified the influence of life course and historical timing of the experience of racial socialisation (Authors, 2020). The mapping of stories to this table format was crucial in understanding the experiences of racial socialisation that participants reported both receiving and imparting to others. Participants recognised that their parents felt shame regarding their culture and limited command of English language. This experience may have led to reluctance to attend school functions and reluctance to challenge

experiences of racism (see [My Adult Parent](#) and [My Ageing Parent](#)). As children, the focus group participants interpreted their parents' absence as part of the problem; their invisibility at school functions potentially supported teachers' low expectations of young Pasifika people (see [My Adolescence](#)).

Mid-aged participants resisted the framing provided by parents and grandparents (see Table 1. [My Adult Parent](#)). In response, they described being visible in schools and at sports events, and recognising and resisting the damaging effects of low expectations on their children. They storied experiences of racial discrimination as fuelling their motivation to succeed (see [My Adolescence](#)). They resisted what they viewed as a temptation to accept poor treatment (see [My Ageing Parent](#)). Instead they modelled using direct approaches (see [My Children](#)), and humour (see [My Adulthood](#)) to challenge racial discrimination. In actively challenging racial discrimination, the speaker's generation often ran counter to both their parents' and children's preferences to fit in and accept racist treatment (see [My Ageing Parent](#) and [My Children](#)). The enactment and manifestation of racism changes over time and that may be one reason why responses to racism change across the life course and generations. This has consequences for how generations interact with each other in coping with racism. In this way, experiences of racial discrimination provide both a link between generations and a point of rupture as generations manage experiences of racial discrimination differently.

Social Relations and Social Relationships

A key tenet of critical realism is the separation of social relations from social relationships. If we examine the accounts of racism in Table 1, we can start to consider what social relations between people might make these experiences of racial discrimination between people possible. Across the experiences described, there appear to be two main social relations that maintain these social relationships understood as racism. The first is a

social relation that is based on *incommensurability*: these participants were not understood as of equal value or worth to others. This is reflected in the social relations that underpin preventing a child from attending a birthday party in My Adult Parent, and the low expectations of schoolteachers in both My Adolescence and My Children. Although these examples may be based on social relations of incommensurability, the social relationships they engender and the strategies they spawn differ. For example, in My Adolescence, the speaker recounts a story of racism as a driver of success. Although this is based on the belief by teachers that Pasifika peoples are less worthy of inclusion, this is reported by the participant to produce persistence and ultimate success. Although this is narrated as producing academic success, unacknowledged in the story is the impact of this interaction on her classmates. Interactions like the one described could entrench discriminatory attitudes among the white students and induce other minoritised students to withdraw from schoolwork.

A second response to educational incommensurability participants described was being present in their children's school, in direct contrast to their accounts of parents' absence. Although the social relationships they develop with school teachers and coaches are designed to alter outcomes, they ultimately do not address the social relations which underpin these assessments of Pasifika youth as good at some things (rugby, dancing around, hip hop see My Children), but unable to measure up in educational domains more generally. The strategies that parents use to challenge racism also produce relationships of resistance, demonstrated by the son being dropped from his sports team when his mother challenged the management of the team (see My Children). Her refusal to accept this treatment resulted in behaviour interpreted as further racial discrimination.

Participants reported strategies designed to directly challenge social relations of incommensurability by publicly demonstrating success in non-stereotypical domains. In My

Children, the speaker told a story of dissuading her son from changing out of his traditional Tongan clothes before receiving an award for best player in his hockey team. Attending in his Tongan church clothes is encouraged as a public display of his pride in his ethnicity. This is used to demonstrate to the audience, described as mostly wealthy white families, that Pasifika children are of equal value: “just coz you’re brown you can just be as good as them”. The success of some in non-stereotypical domains may work to alter social relations of incommensurability. However, such successes may instead serve to support arguments that there are no structural impediments to the achievement of individual success, which undermine attempts to foster systemic change. Some evidence for this is provided by the final extract in Table 1, which describes centralised programmes to educate teachers to be supportive of Pasifika success as having no impact on outcomes.

A second social relation that underpins many of the stories is that of *menace*: that group membership is a way to assess and understand relations of threat. This is reflected in stories told about the ‘dawn raids’ in My Childhood (in which immigration officials raided houses to forcibly remove Pasifika peoples once the need for their labour ended). It also appears as the foundation for accounts of suspicion in public space in My Adulthood, My Ageing Parent, and My Teenagers. The social relationships described are responded to in different ways, in terms of experiencing shame, minimising the experience, or challenging the instigator directly or with humour. For example, in response to her father being trespassed from the welfare office, his daughter formally complained and received an apology and a commitment to train case managers on working with Pasifika people. Such approaches may work to address the social relations of menace that made this social relationship possible. At the same time, the interpretation of the father’s actions in the moment as dangerous and his removal and trespassing by security will have reproduced and reinforced social relations of menace for all those observing at the welfare office. Their response to the incident will

depend upon their own positioning in terms of group membership associated with potential threat.

An alternative approach to responding to social relations of menace included attempting to prevent suspicion by anticipating and conforming to expectations for appropriate social behaviour. For example, one mother described encouraging her children to dress appropriately and keep their hands in sight in stores to avoid be viewed as a threat. In this way she encouraged children to avoid being aligned with the menacing group. Using this strategy may avoid experiences of racism in public space but may do little to challenge the social relations of menace that underpin differential treatment.

These results begin to point to the relationships between these experiences and theorised mechanisms between racism and health (Krieger, 2000). These findings indicate the ways that experiences shape interactions at school, which may influence education and employment trajectories throughout the life course. They demonstrate how messages of inferiority may be internalised and that resisting these messages takes continual effort. In addition, the stressors of discrimination relate not only to one's own interactions, but the experiences of others. Separating out the social relationships from the social relations that make them possible shows how the same structural drivers of racism and racial discrimination may produce different outcomes in specific interpersonal and social historical contexts. This is what is referred to as a "structured mess" (Carter, 2000, p.77) from a critical realist perspective. The patterns that produce these outcomes are structured, but the social relationships and outcomes they engender are far from predictable.

Discussion

Using the table to analyse experiences of racism provided insight into the changing interpretation of these experiences across the life course and between people. Using narrative analysis based on a critical realist epistemological position we were able to go beyond these

as personal stories told in an interpersonal context using socially available resources to see them as providing evidence of enduring social structures that sustain racism. Manifestations of racism are constantly changing to ensure both the persistence of racism, and to challenge attempts that address racism. The aim of critical realism is not simply to describe events, but to understand why they occurred (Porter, 1993). To advance this understanding, we critically examined these accounts to go beyond the authenticity of them as experiences of racism (Carter, 2000). Critical attention to these accounts enables researchers to focus attention on transforming these structures, rather than addressing the states of affairs that these structures produce (Bhaskar, 2011). The structures still exist in the absence of observable events that can be storied as racism (Dyson et al., 2014). The reduction in observable events experienced as racism does not alter the structures that make racism and racial discrimination possible. These social relations may be latent in social situations where other tendencies or mechanisms are working (Porter, 1993). This latency can be misinterpreted as an alteration in the underlying social relations that produce racism.

The analysis demonstrates the messiness of the relationships between experiences, interpretations of experiences, and narrative accounts of the outcomes of such events. Experiences of racism were described as provoking persistence and success, withdrawal and shame, and confrontation without positive resolution. These accounts represent the vantage point of the speaker, and for each experience related here, there were other people observing, responding and reacting from different vantage points. For each of the stories related, it is possible to imagine social actors (some with more institutional power) who would provide a different interpretation of these resistances to experiences of racism. As Bhaskar (2011) states, “society is a skilled accomplishment of active agents” (p. 4). However skilled these active agents, they do not all possess access to the same resources to alter social relations that shape their experiences. This contributes to the potential messiness of the relationships

between tendencies and observable events. Systematic exclusion from academic or occupational success does not mean that individual successes are impossible. Individual success may counter-intuitively support institutional racism; meritocracy as an explanation for the distribution of resources is strengthened by examples of individual success that disguise systematic inequalities in access to resources for success (see DiAngelo, 2010 for the racism of individualism).

The worked example provided here focuses on the characters and the storytelling. Alternatively, the tabular approach could have focused on the ways that accounts differed in different geographical contexts. Collecting data from three countries with contrasting social histories of colonisation and migration provides an opportunity to compare changes in experiences of racial discrimination over time and between people by creating tables for each focus group, which would then be grouped by country. Layering the tables in this way would provide a way to sift through geographical differences to deepen the analysis to include shared and disparate experiences of racism and racial discrimination across the life course.

This structured approach to analysis has much to offer in examining other forms of stigma and their relationships to health, as well as incorporating other theoretical approaches. This approach could be productively used to examine mental illness stigma. Personal narratives of mental illness may involve descriptions of relationships with others including mental health practitioners. These perspectives could be organised into separate columns; separating out the stories told, and the key characters of these narratives, would elucidate the ways that distress is experienced in relation to others. This may contribute to work which acknowledges relational accounts of mental distress (Priebe, Burns & Craig, 2013). Using this analytic approach, extracts could also be ordered in rows to demonstrate change in experiences over time prior to and following diagnosis. This format could include changes in responses by family members and by health practitioners. Evidence suggests that

explanations for depression alter as depression persists (Buus, Johannessen & Stage, 2012; Kroch, Breheny, van Kessel & Taylor, 2020). This approach would enable the researcher to identify the ways that experiences of mental distress change over time and are shaped between people. Situating this within a critical realist framework would enable the analysis to incorporate the enduring social structures that shape experiences of mental illness stigma. The orienting question of this approach: “What social relations must exist for these kinds of social relationships to take place between people?” can be applied across experiences of stigma.

The analytic approach described here pays close attention to experiences to reveal the social structures that make these experiences possible. In using the data in this way, it is vital that these stories are analysed as narratives told in a particular setting for a specific interactional purpose. These stories do not provide evidence of what the characters featured in the story saw or felt, or the meaning of the experiences for them. To include this perspective would require collecting data from participants with different perspectives and comparing these accounts systematically. In addition, alternative approaches may be better suited to deconstructing experiences to reveal how they are rhetorically assembled and justified. Social constructionist discourse analysis could be used to examine how members of dominant ethnic groups make sense of racial discrimination. These accounts are likely to rhetorically manage their position of dominance (see DiAngelo, 2010) and position racial inequalities and acts of racism as historical events, not present challenges. These multiple accounts, using different analytic approaches, provide different evidence to understand what kind of structured society we live in and how systems of oppression are maintained. Using different approaches contributes to understanding the processes that maintain white power and privilege, and to work towards challenging them (DiAngelo, 2012).

Conclusion

This paper provides an approach to analysing experiences of racism and racial discrimination based on life course theory, critical realism, and narrative analysis. This analytic approach was developed to match our theoretical understanding of how racism is generated by enduring social structures which shape but do not determine experience. Using this approach, the ways that people described changes over time and across generations provided insight into the social relations which point to the enduring underlying structures that ensure the maintenance of racism and racial discrimination. Approaches such as these allow us to go beyond a uniform approach and develop bespoke methods of analysis that are coherent, theoretically and epistemologically informed and strategically drive attempts at addressing racial discrimination and dismantling racist systems of oppression.

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Table 1

Life Course Experiences of Racism Illustrated with Data from Pasifika Focus Group

Period	Experiences of Racism		
1960s-1970s	<p><u>My Adult Parent</u></p> <p>“this girl was my best friend – Pālangi [white] girl – and back then the health nurse used to come, to check your hair. So they were checking your hair and you were two lines, you were put in that line if you had kutus [head lice] and that one if you were ok. So this blond girl was my best friend and I got put into the line with kutus, nine children in my house so I’ve got kutus – and she must have got kutus, and coz you’re young and you play close together, and then her mum wouldn’t let her play with me, and she told her, coz she’s brown and she got kutus from me. And then when I went home – I cried and got upset– she wasn’t allowed to play with me, I wasn’t invited to her birthday party, that’s how extreme to me. I went home and told my mum. Then Mum said ‘don’t you play with her, don’t you play with that Pākehā [white] girl’.”</p>	<p><u>My Childhood</u></p> <p>“We came from Auckland when it was right at the beginning of the dawn raids, in the 60’s (...) early hours of the morning, you know, and they’d come in, crash through those doors, and they’d be searching all the rooms and it’s just us kids, and my uncle, just looking, checking your papers, but when they send a lot of Islanders back home, you know, there was a huge shame around that. And you know a lot of those Islanders, you know they came over because they needed our work force that’s originally, but they never ever processed their residency or citizenship.”</p> <p>“I guess it takes a while to even recognise that it’s happening, or why it’s happening. It’s not till a bit later you “why did they exclude me?”</p>	

1980s	<p><u>My Adult Parent</u></p> <p>“Don’t you think sometimes it’s our parents too, coz you don’t realise. When I went to school, my parents never came to any of our school things, they never came to our schools, never came to any of the parent interviews and I promise you it was all the Pacific Islanders parents, they never came, we do now, but none of our parents did.”</p> <p>“And they may have even seen some of that racism stuff but they didn’t speak up coz they’d come to New Zealand for a better life and education so they didn’t want to ruffle the feathers.”</p>	<p><u>My Adolescence</u></p> <p>“When I was in high school, that’s exactly what my English teacher said to me. He said ‘I shouldn’t bother with you because I can see your future, barefoot, lot of kids running around, on the couch, unemployed.’ (...) He’s Pālangi [white] and, but that sort of didn’t have a negative impact on me, it actually drove me to succeed because I, I thought well, that’s your expectation, you’re my teacher and this is your expectation and you didn’t just tell me, you told the whole class and everyone just laughed.”</p> <p>“So myself and three other Pasifika girls were walking down the street and on the same side of the street were two Pālangi [white] ladies, as soon as they saw us they crossed the road. And I knew exactly why they crossed the road because we’re a bunch of brown girls who might steal their bag or whatever. And it’s still now I see it. I live next door to a Pālangi family, now this family have a son who is about nine, this boy loves coming over to our house,</p>	
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		he waltzes in, eats the food, waltzes out, you know. But he, when his grandparents visit his parent's house, he's not seen anywhere near our part of the street because his grandparents, he told me, his grandparents don't allow him to come to our house".	
2000s	<p><u>My Ageing Parent</u></p> <p>"[My father's] hearing's not good so he went in [to the welfare office] asking for help to get one of those ear things, listening device. And so he went and he was telling the lady, his case manager, and then he was trying really hard because, you know, to get her to understand what he was trying to say. She starts yelling at him, and then he raises his voice, then she stood up and calls security (...) The security came and took him away so we got a letter from the manager to say you are not allowed to be within 200 metres of the office, so I, and my father came home and he was very upset because he didn't understand why he got escorted out and he was only trying to tell her, to explain to her, that he needs help. (...) and Mum was there and</p>	<p><u>My Adulthood</u></p> <p>"One day we were in Emergency Department for about 7 hours over the weekend and there was this Pālangi [white] lady in front of us and she had her phone, she was charging up her phone, and I (...) sat down beside [my daughter] and she quickly moved her phone with her foot, it was like, that's really quick. [My daughter] goes "Mum?" And I go "Oh, I don't want her stink Samsung." [Laughter] Really loud!</p> <p>Before my daughter's ball we went to the shop, so walked into this shop and behind me was an Asian couple and one Pākehā [white] lady. It was a shoe shop and the man followed myself and my daughter</p>	<p><u>My Children</u></p> <p>"[My son] he plays hockey as well, and it's a white game. He's the only brown person playing hockey, but he's so good. [My son] didn't get much game time so I said, I'm going to talk to your coach. (...) So he said, 'aww Mum, Mum, Mum, don't. Because you'll leave and then you know he's going to pick on me so can you just...'. So that stopped me, coz I thought, you know, my son is right, he's going to get picked on. But then coming back I wrote a letter and I said, you know, my point of view as a mother, I disagree with the way this coach worked. So he got dropped off the following year, but that's it. I don't want my son to just look at it and ignore it. I want him to look at it and say – no, I'm not going to accept</p>

	<p>Mum's trying to say "yeah she was a bit rude.: And I said "Rude! You call this just a bit rude?"</p>	<p>around and then he said, to me, "oh but there's a \$20 set". So I said, "thank you, thank you, thank you so much". (...) I came and said to this man, "Can I ask you a question?" He said "yeah, sure". "Why did you ask, why did you tell me that there is a \$20 table outside? What is it about me, that made you think, you know, out of the goodness of your heart to tell me that there's a table? I saw the table. It's the first thing you see when you walk in here." And he said "well..." "You thought what? You didn't tell that lady there." This time everybody was looking. "You didn't tell her, you didn't tell them, but you told me. Now what is it about me that made you, you know, thank you so much for your concern, but what was it?" And he said "Well it's just..." I said "No, you don't, you've got nothing to say, coz you didn't tell the other two, three customers about the table, you told me. Now is it because of my, the colour of my skin? Is it because of what I'm wearing? What is it about me that made you, you know, be that helpful?"</p>	<p>it. It's unacceptable"</p> <p>"like prizegiving for hockey, he said "Mum, I need to go and change" coz it was after church and he was in his Tongan. I said "Why?" I said to him, and he's the only Tongan islander there and, my kids, and for well off families, and I said, "I don't care. You're a Tongan and you let them know that, just coz you're brown you can just be as good as them". So he wore his Tongan island and he actually got, for two years in a row, he got best player. So most valuable player in the Manawatu, his rep team. (...) I want them to look at you and say look, he's a brown kid, he's just as good as our white kids."</p> <p>"It also comes through in the zero expectations of teachers for, of Pacific students, that we're good in rugby, dancing around, hip hop and that's pretty much it. And the art. And the arts, drawing pictures and...yeah, chalkboard. That's really, what they think that's all we're good at and then it rubs off on the kids."</p> <p>"Every teachers parent interview I will attend, and I will be questioning the</p>
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			teachers and saying all these things.”
2010s			<p><u>My Teenagers</u></p> <p>“I tell my kids, when they go to the shop, don’t go into a store with your hood on, and your hands in your pocket, of course people are going to think you’re a little hoodrat who’s going to steal something. Take your hood off, take your hands out and then that helps eliminate you thinking - is it a racist thing, or is it just, just because you’re dressed like a hoodrat.”</p> <p>“Yeah, but back in the 80’s, teachers, they used the excuse that they were not, they didn’t understand the Pasifika way then so they had, so the government produced projects for teachers to upgrade themselves, to become familiar with Pasifika so I thought, oh that’s a really good initiative from the Government but then it hasn’t changed anything.”</p>