

Using ethnodramas to explore everyday racism by students in Bristol medical and dental schools

Dr Patricia Neville PhD
Lecturer in Social Sciences



Presentation to
"Advance HE
Surveys and
Insights"
Conference
28 April 2021

This is not a conventional conference presentation

- Conventional academic writing/presenting can erode the affective and political aspect of research.

'data becomes separated from the relationships and circumstances that produced it'(Raith 2015, p.18).

- Inspired by feminist writings and critique, the research will be presented as an iterative journey for all participants/stakeholders, giving equal access to the different voices and emotions that shaped and drove this project to its creative/political vision and (current) end goal(student narratives, stakeholder narratives and researcher reflections)



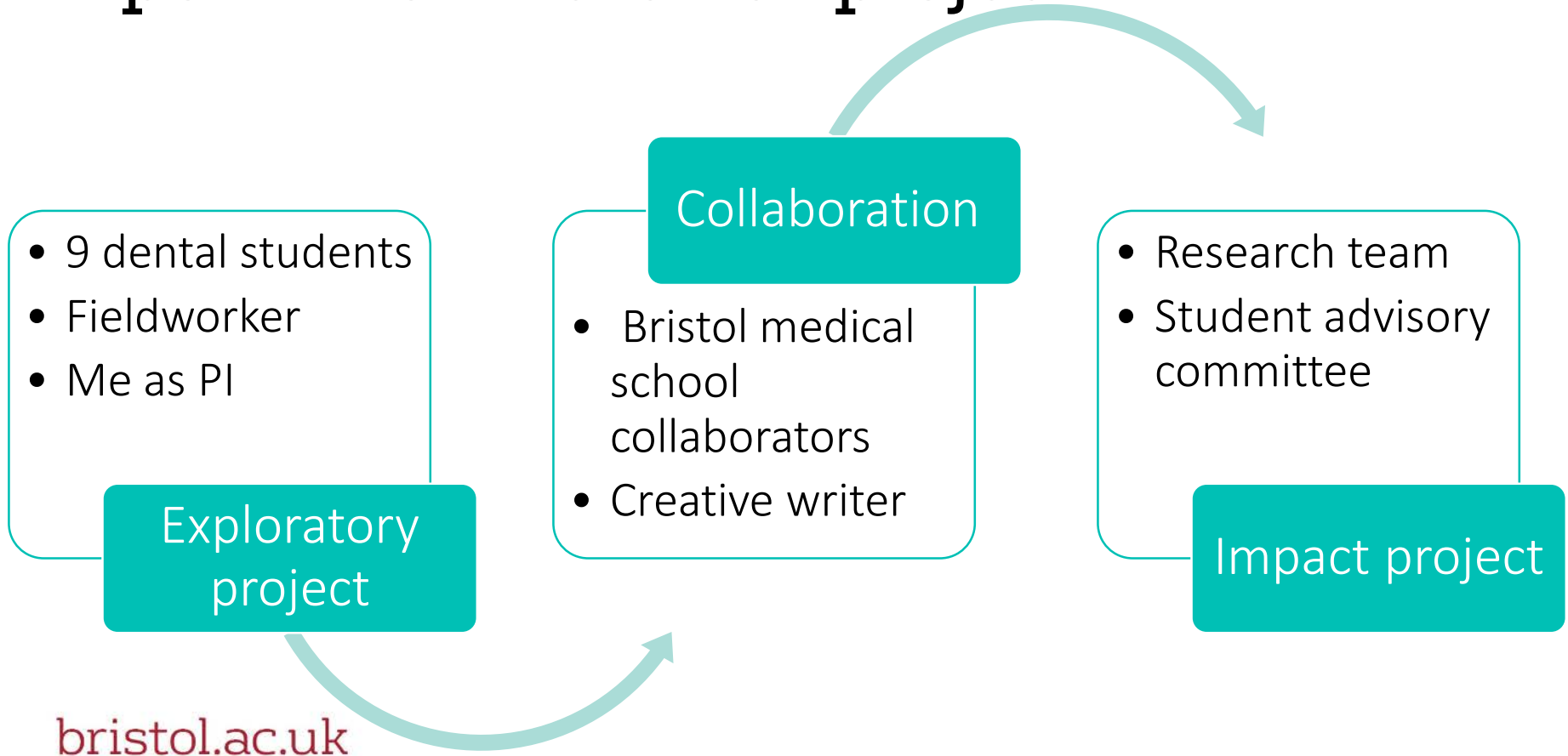
Rene
Magritte(1936)
Clairvoyance

Why/not an alternative approach to conference presenting?

- *‘In a painting all its elements are there to be seen simultaneously. The spectator may need time to examine each element of the painting but whenever (s)he reaches a conclusion, the simultaneity of the whole painting is there to reverse or qualify his conclusion. The painting maintains its own authority’*

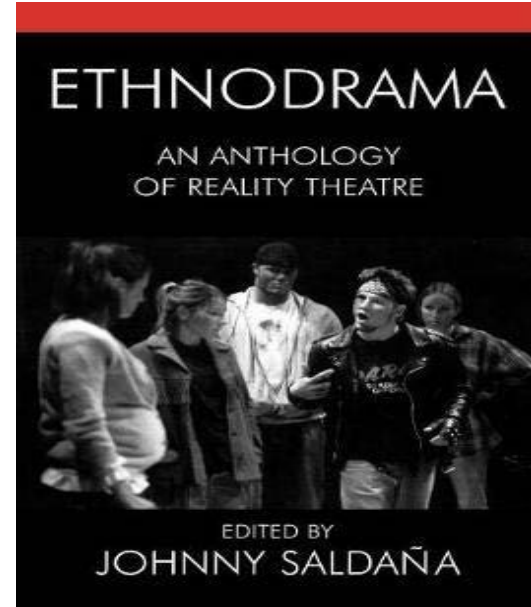
(Berger, 1972, p. 26).

A portrait of a research project



Let's begin, at the end- what's an ethnodrama?

- “An ethnodrama is the written transformation and adaptation of ethnographic research data (e.g., interview transcripts, participant observations fieldnotes, journals, documents, statistics) into a dramatic playscript stage as a live, public theatrical performance” (Saldaña 2012).



Aims

This exploratory impact project will use the creative technique of ethnodrama (mini-plays) to:

1. challenge the knowledge, understandings and attitudes that UoB Faculty of Health Sciences staff, faculty, and students towards the impact of ethnicity and discrimination in the professional educational settings of Medicine and Dentistry,
2. increase the capacity building capabilities of students from Black and minority ethnic groups (BME) who study in predominantly white educational programmes.

Objectives

- In this project we will:
 1. use the transcripts from the qualitative studies and transform them into written playscripts. Dr Edson Burton, Pervasive Media Labs, an experienced playwright with an interest in equality and diversity, will initiate and lead this creative writing process.
 2. Recruit students to a student advisory committee to ensure the authenticity and relevance of his scripts.
 3. Film these ethnodramas using actors from minority backgrounds and transform them into re-usable resources for staff training and student undergraduate education.

Why/not ethnodramas?

Ethnodramas are also known to have a cathartic impact on the participants themselves, without exposing their identity through their personal testimonies.

The news about the funding is amazing! And you should be so proud of yourself for all the work you're doing to improve the uni experience for students like me. Honestly so validating! I would absolutely love to be on the student advisory team in October!

Student participant

Why/not ethnodramas?

The medium of dramatic playwriting allows for participants lived experiences to be relayed to a wider audience, transforming such sharing into a meaningful and/or educational experience for the wider audience (Saldaña 2012).

"It's nice to be of use in the struggle for equality I just hope that the energy is sustained and directed. This project could be part of the long term changes that we all hope will take place in the months and years to come."

Creative writer collaborator

Let's go back to the start

What do we know?

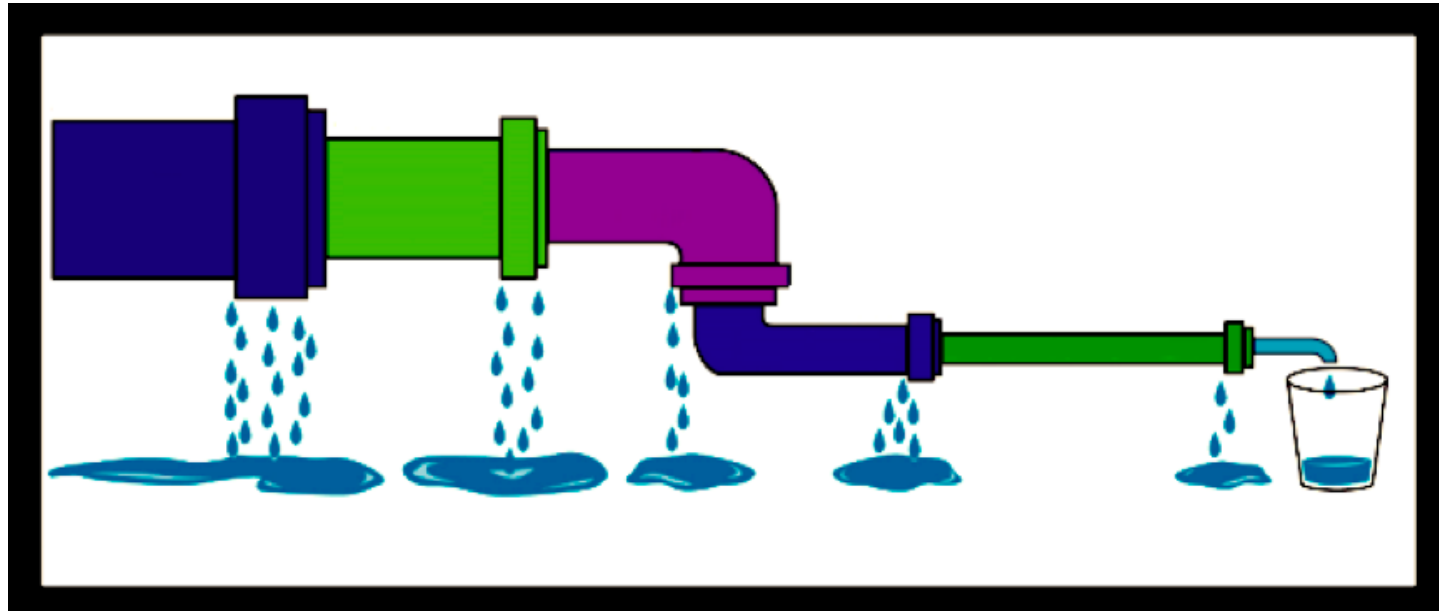
Secondary
education

University

Foundation
Training

General
practice

Specialism/
clinical
academia



What do we know?

Secondary education



University

Dentistry is a popular UCAS option for students

2007-2008 –54% white; 46%-

BME ¹

2013 - 49% -White, 51%

BME ²

British Asians(41%) are the largest minority group represented in the student cohort

Black British students are continually under-represented (2%)

²

What do we know?

Secondary education



University

Medicine and dentistry have the largest proportion of undergraduate students from minority backgrounds

2010-2011- 29.7%

2018-2019 – 40.3% ³

bristol.ac.uk

Medicine and dentistry record less attainment gap than other courses

93.2% of white students and 90.4% of BME students received a 1st/2.1

6.8% of white students and 9.6% of BME students received 2.2/3rd ⁴

Is Bristol Dental School colour blind?

Exploring the experiences of students in Bristol Dental School and their experience of ethnicity.

Aim:

To undertake a qualitative research study exploring the reasons why students pursue a career in dentistry and to determine whether their experiences in Bristol Dental School reveals a culture of inclusivity and diversity.

Objectives:

1. To identify and explain the reasons why high achieving students from Asian and BME backgrounds are choosing a career in dentistry
2. To examine if the culture in dental school is inclusive and culturally sensitive to the needs of Asian and BME dental students
3. To explore if there is a relationship between ethnicity and academic performance/underperformance in dental students

Is Bristol Dental School colour blind?

Exploring the experiences of students in Bristol Dental School and their experience of ethnicity.

Research design:

one-to-one qualitative interviews conducted by independent interviewer who was American-Caribbean

Participants = 9

Gender - 7 female, 2 male

Ethnicity - White (3), mixed(1), Black African(1), Black Caribbean(1), Middle Eastern(1), Latin American(1), British Arabian(1).

NB: No British Asian



I know I cannot paint a flower. I cannot paint the sun on the desert on a bright summer morning but maybe in terms of paint color I can convey to you my experience of the flower or the experience that makes the flower of significance to me at that particular time.

Georgia O'Keeffe

Relevant findings

- Theme #1: Why become a dentist?- facilitators and challenges
- Theme #2: Bristol dental school as a predominantly 'white' space
- Theme #3: Being different - standing out and 'blending in'
- Theme #4: Surviving but not flourishing - the psycho-social impacts of being different
- Theme #5: From 'blending in' to 'coming into your own'

Theme #2: Bristol dental school as a predominately 'white' space

"I think that it's common to see a white dentist and it's common to see Asian dentists. It's not common to see black dentists. I think that's exactly why I found it very, very difficult at the dental school because there are not a lot of black students studying dentistry. There are also not a lot of black people in the career as a whole. I get the feeling that people don't see black people as dentists and then it makes your time at the dental school more difficult because you already don't get the same level of respect as everybody else." Interviewee #5(Female, British Carribean)

Theme#3: being different-standing out and blending in

"When I first started I was a bit shocked at the ignorance I guess. Then the longer you get here the more it's just like, "Argh." If I was going to get upset about everything just never stop being upset sort of thing. Overall had a good experience." Interviewee #8

Theme#3: being different-standing out and blending in

"So sassy, you're black." That's what everyone calls me in my clinical group, "She's so sassy." If I say anything it's, "Oh, sassy girl." I'm not sassy, I'm just not impressed by that or I'm not happy about it. If I say I don't like anything, "Oh, so sassy. Yes, it's because there is this general stereotype that black women are so in your face. If they say something it's coming from an aggressive place, and it's like it's not, I should be able to have opinions without it being seen as a..." Interviewee #8

Theme#4: surviving but not flourishing

"At the end, we do have to prove ourselves more than, say, a typical white person. I think that's just generally how it is." (interviewee #7)

Theme#4: surviving but not flourishing

"I think that there needs to be more support at the dental hospital for all students that are finding it difficult because a lot of students are. A lot of students are depressed and things like that so it would be nice if there was more support. . . . It's just that sometimes the way, as dental students, we're spoken to by supervisors and even by nurses, it's not nice. The delivery can be very rude, abrupt. They can say things to humiliate you in front of your peers and your patients, which is not nice." (Interviewee #5)

Impact of the research for the fieldworker

(SMS exchange 28 Feb 2018)

After the interview, I had a chat with her. Her frustrations lie with her experiences as a Black person in dentistry, at BDS and in Bristol. I told her that I related to her and experiences/understood what she was speaking about. She was grateful for that. I think she's ok.

Thanks for spending the time with her. I'm sure she appreciated it, and I do too. With my researcher's hat on, it seems to me that this research is worthwhile because it allows students a voice on these matters and shows them that someone is interested in their experiences. How are you after the interview?

Researcher and fieldworker impact

(SMS exchange 28 Feb 2018)

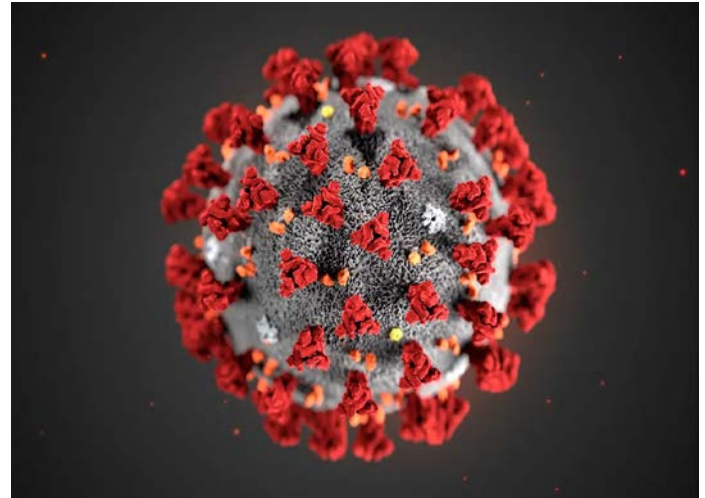
Oh yes, completely agree on the importance of this research.. .I'm fine thanks for asking. It was definitely sad to hear. But on a personal level; and maybe selfishly, validates my experiences too . .. to hear another black person speak of the same things”

Research as an opportunity for critique self-reflection



Where are we now?

- Aim: to create a new/alternative space for talking about everyday racism in professional programmes.
- What have we achieved?



Let's keep this conversation going

- Email: patricia.neville@bristol.ac.uk
- Twitter: @PNevilletweets
- **Acknowledgments**
- A special word of thanks to all the students who participated in the research and to my collaborators, Dr Ellayne Fowler, Dr Joe Hartland and Dr Edson Burton



IMPACT ACCELERATION
ACCOUNT (IAA)

