

British Society of Criminology

The British Criminology Conferences: Selected Proceedings. Volume 1: Emerging Themes in Criminology. Papers from the British Criminology Conference, Loughborough University, 18-21 July 1995. This volume published September 1998. Editors: Jon Vagg and Tim Newburn. ISSN 1464-4088. See end of file for copyright and other information.

RESEARCHING RACIAL VIOLENCE: A SCIENTIFIC REALIST APPROACH

Colin Webster

'But the city in its corruption refused to submit to the dominion of the cartographers, changing shape at will and without warning.' (Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*, p. 327)

Introduction

This paper summarises some theoretical and methodological problems and proposed solutions arising from an empirical study of racial violence.^[1] The study population comprised Asian and white young people living in Keighley, West Yorkshire. At the time the study began in 1989, Keighley was said to have the worst public record for racial violence in the country outside London (*Keighley News* 27 March 1987, 2 June 1989). The study focused on the experiences and perspectives of young people who were victims and perpetrators of violence, and on the accounts of those who worked with young people as youth workers, school teachers and police officers. It is a bottom up account of what happened in the experiences of several hundred young people over six years as they negotiated and traversed an urban landscape of shifting danger and group enmity. The study involved a four-stage research strategy. First, there was a four-year evaluation of a detached youth work project which aimed to work with perpetrators of racial violence and offer support to victims. Second, and arising from the evaluation, a four-year quasi-longitudinal cohort study of 70 victims and perpetrators of racial violence and offending was carried out. Third, a self-report crime survey was conducted which looked at racial and criminal victimisation and offending among 412 13-19 year old Asian and white young people, 7 per cent of the age group living in the area. Fourth, there was an in-depth follow up study of 65 young people.

A depressing narrative of racial violence in British localities offers ample case studies to describe the experience of victims of racial violence (see Tompson 1988; Klug 1982; CRE 1979, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1992). This literature does not however, offer many clues about why, how and under what conditions racial violence occurs. What is left out of account is the relationship between victims and perpetrators, how the meanings and actions of these groups influence each other, and the character and nature of perpetration. The commission of racial violence is assumed in an unproblematic way to be an extreme expression of an ubiquitous white racism. However, an understanding of the underlying causes of racial violence requires as much attention be given to documenting and analysing perpetrators' experiences, and the relationships between perpetrators and victims, as is normally given to victims' experiences - a task largely ignored in research about racial violence.

Background

Racial violence, locality and history

Histories of racial violence have demonstrated the longevity of racial violence going back to medieval times (Dobson 1974, Husband 1981). Jenkinson (1993:110) in analysing the white 'race' riots of 1919 that occurred in nine British ports, made the important observation that the way in which victims interacted with and responded to white violence influenced the outcome. Hiro (1991) has similarly emphasised the ways in which black and Asian people have resisted racial attacks through organised forms of self-defence. Asian parent cultures resisted racism and discrimination through trade union and industrial action, whereas racial violence provoked an altogether 'rougher' and more politicised response from a social movement of Asian youth (CARF 1981). The precise nature of resistance and interaction between perpetrators and victims depends on factors particular to an area, and the nature of the groups involved. Panayi (1993) in an overview of anti-immigrant riots in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain, suggests that 'racial violence breaks out against the background of underlying hostility towards an out-group, exacerbated by recent developments, and sparked off by a particular incident' (1993:19). Local factors precipitate and conjoin with underlying racial hostility based in a wider background of social anxieties and insecurity about immigration, local economic insecurity and the general influence of colonialism, nationalism and neo-colonialist discourse (Miles and Phizacklea 1984, Layton-Henry 1984, Pearson 1976, Holmes 1988, Colley 1992). Just as racial violence cannot be understood outside this wider context neither can it be understood only as a function of racism when other factors are involved. Solomos and Back (1996:57) suggest that 'part of the complexity of analysing the historical impact of racism is that it is often intertwined with other social phenomena, and indeed it can only be fully understood if we are able to see how it works in specific social settings.'

Although histories of racial violence point to the importance of local conditions and specific events, rather than the wider context of English racism, and thus engender the same kind of 'events orientation' to understanding as contemporary surveys and monitoring projects, this paper argues that it is primarily at the local level that a causal understanding of racial violence can be reached. Husband's (1982, 1989) and Pearson's (1976) studies are distinctive in that they attempt to *explain* racial violence through examining its history in particular localities, rather than as an expression of wider societal racism. Although different in approach both studies are informed by an historical *methodology* rather than mere narrative description of events and incidents. Husband (1982) associates the continuity and longevity of racism in the East End of London, with the area's territorial and geographical peculiarities, which led to an entrenchment of racial violence. Pearson (1976) explains racial violence in a North East Lancashire town as an aspect of a long tradition of group enmity based in the defence of 'cotton culture'. Pearson emphasises local community discourses, and Husband territoriality, as explanations of racial violence in the localities studied. Pearson in particular rejects the notion that violent racism is explained by the existence of a fixed, unchanging and essential white racism, arguing instead that groups such as Irish people have been the object of local racial violence. Both studies assume that the violence described is racist, that is the domination of black and Asian people by white people, although Pearson's analysis is sceptical that racism alone tells the whole story.

Official definitions and discourses

Despite the historical longevity and entrenchment of racial violence in British localities, and plentiful evidence of the scale and seriousness of attacks against Asians in the 1960s and 1970s (Helweg 1979, Pearson 1976, Layton-Henry 1984, London 1973) *official recognition* of the problem only began in 1981 with the publication of a Home Office report on racial violence (Home Office 1981). This official endorsement of the scale of the problem began to spawn surveys and monitoring exercises which counted the prevalence of racial attacks and pointed to the inadequacy of police statistics, reporting practices and police responses to racial 'incidents' (Bowling 1993a), to the extent of highlighting racial harassment by the police against black people (GLC 1984). The subsequent Home Office report, *Racial Attacks* (Layton-Henry 1984) provided an initial *policy impetus* to change statutory agencies' attitudes to racial harassment. It revealed that Asian people were fifty times more likely to be attacked on racial grounds than white people, and Black people were thirty-six times more likely to be attacked (ibid.:14). Controversies surrounding the definition, reporting and recording of racial violence, and responses amongst policy makers have continued (see Bowling 1993a, Hesse 1992). Indeed, Gordon (1990) has pointed to the history of police policies to racial violence as resting on the notion of 'inter-racial incidents' defined primarily as attacks or crimes by black against white people. When agencies are able to agree on a definition, the reporting of racial incidents, whether to police officers or others, is likely to be highly problematic to victims. The range and seriousness of behaviours which can be defined as racially motivated present considerable problems of interpretation and definition. Smith's (1994:1106) definition of *racial harassment* best encapsulates the experiences uncovered in the Keighley study:

'...victims of a pattern of repeated incidents motivated by racial hostility, where many of these events on their own do not constitute crimes, although some crimes may occur in the sequence, so that the cumulative effect is alarming and imposes severe constraints on a person's freedom and ability to live a full life.'

Research into racial violence has tended to reflect these agency and policy concerns by attempting to measure the size of the problem through local or national victim surveys, that is its prevalence and patterning among young adults and adults, although most local surveys have been carried out in London (Maung and Mirlees-Black 1994, Layton-Henry 1984, CRE 1987, Seagrave 1989, Saulsbury and Bowling 1991). This survey approach has focused on: the discrepancy between self-reported and officially reported and recorded incidents; victimisation patterns that demonstrate that some groups are disproportionately at risk depending on where they live; and definitional problems of 'racial motivation'. However, this 'random incident perspective' (see Hesse 1992, Bowling 1993b) has contributed little to our understanding of why and under what conditions racial violence occurs. As a style of research readily associated with the *modus operandi* of the police and criminal justice system, local authority housing, and school policies, it sees racial violence as essentially random, one-off events, within a legalistic framework which emphasises that every incident has to be judged in its own terms, and within the time frame of the criminal act itself and its immediate antecedents and motivations (whether it was racially motivated or not). According to this view violent racism is an individualised criminal act understood in terms of inter-personal and situational factors, rather than there being any local or wider historical or social context (Husband 1989, 1993; Hesse 1995, Keith 1995, Panayi 1993). Furthermore, the political antiracism movement mirrors this 'official' policy view in encouraging a blanket labelling of all incidents in which the parties are different race as racially motivated because all whites are seen as essentially racist (see Miles 1993, Braham et al. 1992, for a critical discussion).

This paper takes a different view of racial harassment and violence as following a discernible *pattern* which involves a *process* of relationships between victims and perpetrators. Much of the official research has 'resulted in policy makers chasing the comparative shadows of rises in numbers of unreported incidents rather than focusing on locally identifiable patterns' (Hesse 1992:132). Instead studies should start from 'a qualitative premise that victims of racial harassment are knowledgeable about the experience of victimisation' (ibid.:132), so as to redress the imbalance between a statistical and qualitative approach. The survey approach has tended to ignore younger populations and areas outside London. It is unable to capture repeat victimisation and ignores the social, political and historical contexts which explain the persistence and entrenchment of violent racism in British localities. Very little is known about younger people's experience of violent racism, yet this population is likely to have the highest

rates of victimisation and perpetration. Racism and violent racism is likely to take different forms and involve different problems in smaller provincial towns where ethnic minority populations may be more vulnerable and isolated. There has been a failure to make use of available comparative local statistics collected by the police and other agencies, which might show up variations in reporting and recording practices. Finally, a focus on those populations most likely to be victimised - Black and Asian populations - has obscured the relationship of perpetrators to their victims. This methodological, demographic and geographical narrowness has resulted in neglect of some important questions about the underlying mechanisms, processes and contexts of violent racism that might further our knowledge of why and under what conditions violent racism occurs.

It is not that studies have been unaware of these problems. Bowling (1993b) reflecting on his and Saulsbury's local survey of racial violence in North Plaistow said:

'We lacked what seemed to be vital explanatory information - *how* and *why* racial attacks and harassment were occurring in the locality....We still knew little about what processes underpinned these incidents or what happened after they had occurred. Still obscure were the nature of the relationships between minority and majority communities and how racism and violence influenced the behaviour patterns of these communities. While racial victimization seemed to be a dynamic phenomena, the survey had reduced the process to a static and decontextualised snapshot.' (Ibid:232).

Bowling went on to argue that there are three requirements for the reliable study of racial violence: first, to trace processes over time as well as describing frequencies and incidence; second, providing opportunities for the research subjects to describe their experiences in their own terms; third, and most importantly, to research perpetrators (ibid.:245). Retrospectively, the Keighley study can be seen to have followed this advice.

Overview

The Keighley study found that what young people said about racism and racial violence posed severe problems for orthodox definitions of racism and theories of societal racism. Instead a distinctive theory of youth racism was developed which better explained the kinds of racism found among the young people featured in the study, bringing together a range of theoretical traditions, and theoretically informed empirical studies, from urban anthropology to cultural geography and environmental criminology, so as to provide a contextually sensitive theoretical framework in which to discuss group enmity and racial violence. The methodological weaknesses of previous studies of racial violence were overcome using multiple methods because not only were most previous studies of racial violence lacking in any theory but they were methodologically narrow. In particular they have been unable to explain why racial violence occurs or why it changes in character. So as to be able to find out what causes racial violence, studies need to address the underlying processes and community contexts in which it occurs using a range of research strategies that are able to capture processes, contexts and causes. Scientific Realism was found to offer a programmatic yet coherent methodological approach that seemed to encompass these concerns, and offers compelling reasons for combining quantitative with qualitative data in empirical social science research. In treading a methodological path between statistical and ethnographic approaches without being reduced to one or the other, realism emerges with a non-empiricist model for understanding causality. In attempting to provide an empirically based example of the conduct of scientific realist research applied to racial violence, this study has a wider significance in wanting to carry forward and define a realist research agenda for criminology conceived as a multidisciplinary enterprise.

Study of the history, economy, social and demographic structure of the study area revealed specific conditions that were important in explaining the area's prevalence of racism and violence. The survey showed an association of high levels of delinquency and criminality with high levels of racial violence, and that young people were severely restricted in where they could go and what they could do. Violence, crime and abuse was found to be an everyday experience among many young people and profoundly influenced their way of life, whether as victims, witnesses or offenders. The survey also showed however that young people's perceptions and experiences of crime were structured by a highly racialised mutual suspicion and fear between Asian and white young people. This group enmity between Asians and whites had been a feature of the study area over some considerable period and had entered

the local lore of young people, told and retold as a local history of events and happenings. This history was captured through changes in young people's experiences of racial violence among perpetrator and victim groups contacted in 1989 and periodically interviewed until 1993. Relationships between the groups were found to have changed as some perpetrators desisted whilst others continued to be involved in racial violence. However underlying changes were based on attempts by victim groups to resist racial violence through defending their neighbourhoods from attack by white racists, and it was this resistance found in local vigilante movements that caused violence to decline.

Themes and issues which emerged from the survey and the cohort study of victims and perpetrators were checked for reliability and validity through interviewing a follow-up group of young people who were asked in some considerable detail about crime and racial violence in the locality. What emerged were highly differentiated responses to violence and crime which confirmed, consolidated and refined the earlier analysis. The implications of these findings are placed in a wider context of an increasingly racialised local and national discourse about violence and crime among young Asian males. Although the 'Asian' community has hitherto been 'known' for its law-abiding behaviour, young Asian males are being repositioned from being seen as a victim group (primarily of racial attacks) to being associated with violence, crime and disorder (see Webster 1997). The paper concludes that racisms are more localised and contingent in their sources and effects than general theories of racism can capture.

Theory: towards an understanding of youth racism

Mainstream theories and definitions of racism were found to be inoperable in the context of the studies empirical findings. The particular 'racism' uncovered was that of a locally based adolescent racism which promotes exclusion or actually excludes people from using public space. Although a lot of young people in the study referred to racism in terms of colour others deployed cultural and religious categories to define themselves as victims or target others with little or no allusion to colour or descent. The question then was whether because victim groups are *treated* like a different race and *alluded* to in race-like ways, they can be considered the victims of 'racism', or whether 'We can have "racism" without "race"' (Cohen 1994:194). An 'aggregation procedure' typical of the mainstream sociology of racism which stretches 'racism' to cover virtually all exclusionary discourses and practices is problematic in ways that transcend the issue of definition. It was concluded therefore that there cannot be generic definitions or monolithic concepts of racism, and that the existence of racism cannot be decided in advance of empirical inquiry in specific contexts where racism may coexist with other exclusionary practices.

A provisional theory of adolescent racism called on different disciplinary and theoretical traditions including the following: urban anthropology (Barth 1981, Suttles 1967; Wallman 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1983); territoriality and power (Hesse 1992, Smith 1989, Sibley 1995); localism and spatiality (Callaghan 1992, Jenkins 1983); cultural geography (Keith and Pile 1994; Hesse 1993a, 1993b; Jackson 1989); nationalism (Cohen 1993, Back 1996, Anderson 1982, Billig 1995, Holmes 1988); group enmity (Bauman 1991a, 1991b, 1993, 1995; Balint 1987, Elias and Scotson 1994); and a situational model of racism (Back 1993, 1996; Solomos and Back 1996). The logic of the argument was that first, through processes of social interaction actors cognitively map their locality in terms of where they can go safely and where they must avoid danger and conflict. These perceptual maps operate as ecological labels that can become self-fulfilling prophecies so that actors become entrenched in their own neighbourhoods which are to be defended from incursions by 'others' who are perceived to be a (real or imagined) threat. This defence of locality encourages the drawing of boundaries around a given 'territory' and also functions informally to control actors within defended neighbourhoods as well as to ward off potential conflict from outside. Although adults share these perceptions it is the young who because of their closer proximity and use of public space defend territories and police boundaries. Territoriality - the control of people through the control of area - as a solution to the problem of security and danger in urban neighbourhoods becomes heightened and reinforced when presumed 'outsiders' are racialised. In this context social interaction becomes saturated with 'distancing vocabularies' and gesturing devices the purpose of which is to ascertain with whom it is safe to associate. Secondly, these interactions nearly always involve relationships of (real or imagined) relative power of one group or neighbourhood to another which determines the capacity of these

groups to exclude or include actors. This power relationship is amplified in ethnicised or racialised situations where forms of racial violence can be the preferred *modus operandi* of defending and extending territory and drawing symbolic boundaries. Once territories are established and boundaries drawn however, the two 'sides' of the boundary that defines for each group 'us' and 'them', interact in various ways and it is this social activity at the boundary of their meeting which is most important in forming a racialised group identity. Inter-ethnic fighting and racial violence as the purest expression of boundary contact becomes one of the means by which identity is formed and gains significance.

Thirdly, configurations of territories and boundaries change and are dynamic in that for example a vilified excluded or out-group can retaliate against exclusionary criteria ascribed it by the in-group by crossing boundaries, but this may serve to further exaggerate the out-group's imputed threat to the in-group thus reinforcing boundaries. Fourthly, these spatial processes are expressed through and find their rationalisation in various 'imagined' community discourses such as 'white flight' (whites leaving the area) and ideologies of localism based on a myth of origin, and neighbourhood nationalism - what Cohen (1993) calls 'local patriotisms and prides of place'. Imagery of 'home' and 'home territory' found in young people's repertoires of safety and security come to serve as a metaphor for a fundamental relationship between space and security in the lives of young people, whilst offering the thrill and danger which accompanies the transgressive possibilities of 'going out' and 'leaving' safe territory. These *heroic* and yet seriously dangerous adventures into 'alien' territory embarked upon by some young people in the study, it is argued, began to change local perceptions of racial violence as these ventures entered the racialised local lore of youth victimisation and retaliation. Fifthly, processes of territoriality, boundary drawing and neighbourhood nationalism go on whether or not 'race' or 'ethnicity' is present in the situation, that is, they are an ubiquitous feature of situations in which 'established' and 'outsider' groups form, although these group figurations are processural, dynamic and changing rather than an ontological feature of human group interaction. Their occurrence and strength depends on local conditions but group enmity in situations where there are established and newcomer groups is highly probable even when race is absent. Minority ethnic groups, however, unlike newcomer groups belonging to the ethnic majority are much more likely to be perceived as permanent newcomers or outsiders because of their status as 'strangers' rather than enemies. They produce such anxiety and ambivalence among some established groups that they are unassimilable, but they do however change local cultures on their own terms, and eventually the wider culture is transformed also.

In emphasising the importance of territoriality and boundary processes in the generation and maintenance of 'racist' and other forms of exclusionary practices, racism and contestant enmity were found to be inseparable in accounting for the behaviour uncovered in the study. Territoriality, social distancing and boundary drawing find their articulation through local community discourses about who belongs and who are outsiders, and it is these processes and discourses that give rise to adolescent racism and racial violence. This racialisation of space and spatialisation of race seems particularly marked among young people who share an ideology of localism or pride of place, and who by virtue of their particular relationship to public space, are the main carriers of this exclusionist ideology and its main practical exponents. The logic of the situation however, produces retaliation by the minority ethnic 'outsider' group against their stigmatisation and vilification by the majority ethnic 'established' group. The empirical case study documented the ways in which the dilemma of establishing community safety was resolved in one locality among groups of white and Asian young people in ways that had unintended consequences for community safety.

Methodology: a Scientific Realist approach to the study of racial violence

The methods chosen for the study

In choosing multiple methods it was hoped through triangulation of the different data sets to overcome, with mutual support of theory and data (Pawson 1989), the limitations found in previous studies of racial violence. Lack of a longer time frame and of contextualisation in understanding and responding to victim's experiences by statutory agencies and the criminal justice system are disabling of the efficacy of agencies responses when they do not understand the meaning of the 'event' (racial victimization) nor the implications for the rest of the communities affected. All the research indicates major dissatisfactions of victims and victim communities with criminal justice and other agencies in that they look only at the incident, not its history and setting (Genn 1988, Shapland et al. 1985). Responses, if they are to be effective, must tackle the underlying processes as well as responding to the reported incidents to which these processes give rise (Bowling 1993b).

The four methods chosen - cohort study, agency evaluation, crime survey and follow up study - were devised so as to offer an holistic analysis that would be *dynamic* in accounting for change and capturing all the moments in the victimisation process, and *contextual* in setting this process in the local geographical, social, historical and community context. Crucially, it was felt that an understanding of the victimisation process alone could not capture the dynamic and contextual nature of racial violence without equal attention being given to the perpetration process and relationships between perpetration and victimisation. In devising methods that could capture these relationships and processes, the study was also interested in *causality*, that is an overall conclusion or set of 'results' as to why racial violence occurred and changed in the way it did in the locality studied. The cohort study and the follow up study complimented each other and were meant to trace processes and relationships between perpetrators and victims over time to see whether and how these relationships changed both for *individuals* as they got older, and in terms of *community* change or how generally race relations in the locality changed. The cohort study allowed observation and recording of the events involved in the commissioning of racial violence, its immediate aftermath, and long term consequences for those involved; the follow up study allowed a follow through of the cohort and survey data in the sense of providing a 'control' on the process data from the cohort, confirming or falsifying the hypotheses found in this data, and in the survey. Young people in the follow up had not been involved in the cohort, the survey or the evaluation. The follow up also allowed a comparison at a certain point in time with what cohort members had told the study in the previous five years; the survey enabled a statistical profile of crime and victimisation within the general youth population living in the locality to be built up in terms of the relevances and concerns expressed by cohort members - what was discovered among them helped inform the survey design - and survey findings were then tested against both the cohort and follow up qualitative data; finally, by charting the moments at which the youth work project intervened in the processes of victimisation and perpetration of racial violence, agencies impact and effectiveness could be assessed over a longer period than is usual and in relationship to the community context in which the project was inserted. The multi-faceted account of the expression and experience of violence found in the range of data was also expected to identify multiple sites for intervention and to see whether and to what extent the intervention project covered the range of conditions and possibility of racial violence among the young people it targeted and across the community in which it intervened.

Research Design

The study combines a case study approach (Yin 1994) with what Harre (1979) calls 'intensive research designs' which contains a specific conception of social groups appropriate to the research context. The case study as a research strategy comprises an 'all-encompassing method' and 'comprehensive research strategy' incorporating contingent or specific approaches to data collection and analysis because 'there will be many more variables of interest than data points' and these multiple sources of evidence will need 'to converge in a triangulated fashion' (Yin 1994:13). Triangulation means comparing and contrasting one data set with another to see if they 'fit' to achieve a holistic account of the phenomena in terms of context, history and process. Intensive research focuses on groups and individuals who actually connect or interact with one another, rather than on taxonomic groups, that is groups whose members share similar or different (formal) attributes such as ethnicity. Instead of surveying assumed victim and perpetrators groups, usually identified as individuals sharing ethnic group membership, simply because they represent the population as a whole, intensive research focuses mainly (though not exclusively) on groups whose members may be either similar or different but which actually relate to each other structurally or causally. Causality is analysed by examining actual connections between individuals and groups. In intensive research designs 'individuals need not be typical and they may be selected one by one as the research proceeds and as an understanding of the membership of a *causal* group is built up' (Sayer 1992:244). As well as a case study approach, an intensive research design was chosen so as to have much better chance of learning from specific victim and perpetrator groups of young people what the different significance of circumstances were for them. For example, the survey sample was generated from groups and sampling sites more likely to procure victims and perpetrators than the usual random sampling of a 'generalisable' age group, and participants in the qualitative study were chosen because of their actual connections and interactions which are lost in the aggregation procedure of survey approaches.

Mainstream methodological problems

Mainstream approaches to the study of racial violence, and indeed other forms of 'crime', are problematic and might be spurious if they do not address process and context, and are unable to decide on the question of what caused the racial violence. Drawing from the empirical study of racial violence a series of practical problems in interpreting and analysing data were uncovered:

1. 'Doing' empirical research into racial violence and harassment was found to be extremely problematic. Because it was part of the research design to ask victims and perpetrators not only about their behaviour, but about their reasons for behaving in the way they did, the issue became one of the meaning and context of what they told the study. An invitation to young people to talk about experiences of racial violence risks inciting a received discourse about racism embellished and influenced by informal sources such as family members, local lore and peers, or official sources such as schools, the media and youth clubs. The research/interview effect is to encourage young people to construct racisms and racist behaviours in ways that *exaggerate, distort, justify, rationalise and neutralise* their behaviour.
2. In wanting to address the issue of causality, or why violence occurred in the way it did in the locality studied and why its pattern and prevalence had changed, the study was left with the problem that survey approaches 'objectively' *describe*, and qualitative approaches 'subjectively' *account* for social phenomena, but that neither approach *explains* the phenomena in question.

In evaluating the effectiveness of a crime prevention programme aimed at reducing racial violence, the study was faced with the prospect of following a methodological strategy of the 'before and after' model.^[2] If this approach had been followed^[3] then the study would have been left with the problem of possibly discovering that the programme had produced certain outcomes among its target groups, but then not knowing how these outcomes had been arrived at during the programme's work. There are a number of problems associated with 'experimental' (see Bennett 1991, Smith 1972) approaches to evaluating crime

prevention/reduction programmes. First, they do not take account of the effects of the evaluation itself on *both* programme *and* by extension, delinquency/crime; second, and relatedly, they do not tell us whether community or some other effect are responsible for the statistical difference between groups in levels of delinquency at the beginning of the programme and the end; third, and conversely, they do not discuss project effects on change within the wider community and youth population at risk. For example, programmes might aim to change some of the social and community processes and contexts within which delinquency is said to flourish. That this is rarely if ever addressed in evaluations as a measure of success or failure is unsurprising given a prior commitment of evaluation strategies to extract behaviour from its social context. In summary, the Keighley study wished to know what happened in the locality over the five years of the project's life that might have influenced the outcome, and the quasi-experimental approach does not seem equipped to address this problem still (see the debate between Bennett 1996, and Tilley and Pawson 1996).

The need for a realist alternative

It has been noted that an 'events orientation' dominates both agency responses to, and study of, racial violence, and this ignores the need to locate it within a *process* of human action, in which there are *interpretational* problems associated with its definition. Even when studies attempt to address this problem (see Hesse 1992; Bowling 1993a, 1993b), they have not *empirically* demonstrated the *causes* of racial violence, or addressed the problem of causality, and they continue to hold onto a taken for granted and unitary notion of racism, and a too rigid view of the separation of victim and perpetrator rather than inquiring into their relationship within the processes observed.

So as to overcome these omissions in the research literature, the logic of enquiry pursued in the Keighley study followed the scientific realist (Harre 1972, Bhaskar 1979, Pawson 1989, Sayer 1992, Pawson and Tilley 1994) methodological injunction that the first task of *explanation* is to provide a possible *generative* mechanism for an observed pattern of events.^[4] A generative mechanism is the underlying force(s) which bind events together and allows us to experience the world as a series of regularities. Research into racial violence has hitherto relied on cataloguing and describing its prevalence and occurrence through historical and contemporary surveys, but few explanations are offered that explain *why* racial violence occurs in some localities and not others or why its prevalence changes over time. The predominant approach to the study of racial violence has been the survey method and yet as Pawson argues (1989:13), following Blumer (1956) and Cicourel (1964), '...social life consists not of events but experience, and thus the same happening can carry totally different meanings for people in different social contexts'. However because of the requirement that variables or measures like racism or ethnicity have to have standard meaning across a total sample surveyed, this forces social research into the mistaken assumption that events in the social world are commonly understood within and between different groups and cultures. Previous studies have not taken sufficient account of the variation of possible meaning of 'racist' or 'racial' violence and abuse, nor the different contexts in which these terms are understood and used, instead preferring either an everyday common sense view of 'racism' that racism exists in situations of conflict where the parties to the conflict are different 'race', or an unproblematic monolithic concept of 'racism' as an ideology, sometimes expressed in a certain type of violence.

The following scientific realist methodological principles were employed in the Keighley study:

1. People are knowledgeable about why they act in the way they do, therefore the reasons people give for their actions are an essential element in social scientific explanation of those actions and the basis of any research strategy should be to ask actors themselves why they behaved in the way they did. More than this, intentional human behaviour is *caused* by the reasons people offer for their behaviour, whether or not at the time of the action the agent was aware of the reasons. Even though such reasons may be rationalisations or excuses for a course of action, rationalisation is subject to detection and controls in both the research interview and with the rest of the research subject's behaviour over time and/or in different situations (Bhaskar 1979:115-123; Giddens 1984). The implications are that studies of racial violence, if

they are to begin to explain the phenomena, *must ask victims and especially perpetrators themselves* about why racial violence occurs and what their reasons were for perpetrating violence - something which is completely absent in other studies.

2. The context of people's knowledge about why they do things is found in their language use in communicative or social interaction (Sayer 1992). Studies of adolescent experiences of racism and crime that have used a qualitative approach necessarily rely on first order constructs or accounts from young people themselves, and therefore address the context of language use (see Hewitt 1985, Back 1991, 1993, 1996; Loader 1996). This type of research is led to a consideration of the problems of language and knowledge because as Sayer (1992) argues, a basic context of knowledge (about racial motive, violence, racism etc.) is interaction between people (victims, perpetrators and researchers) which involves the sharing or transmission of meaning. In constructing different data sets the Keighley study sought intersubjective appraisal and confirmation of the truth or falsity of young people's responses. For example the follow up study explored the survey responses which in turn acted as confirmation or refutation of the cohort study and so on. Specifically, how young people had understood the meaning of the questionnaire items in the crime survey, and their own meanings of 'racism' and 'racial violence'. By making judgements about the veracity of these accounts it was necessary to take from them the conventions of language existing in the local 'language community' from which young people were drawn, so that for example, the meaning of 'racism' was sought according to these cultural conventions rather than as is usually the case, from social scientific discourse.
3. Realism's concerns are distinguished by its view or model of causality (Pawson 1989, Harre 1972, Sayer 1992, Bhaskar 1979) and this became important to explaining the data in the empirical study. However, the methodological approach followed in the Keighley study - to infer the existence of racism through using a triangulated approach of both naturalistic and formal techniques over time and in different situations, to see if the data converge - does not in itself provide causal explanation. The connection between causes and their effects is not found in the joint occurrence of events but at a more basic level of reality than the event, namely the underlying process or mechanism which activates, triggers or brings about particular sequences of event (Pawson 1989:128). A mechanism is an *account* of the constitution and behaviour of those things that are responsible for a given manifest regularity (e.g. the entrenchment of racial violence in the locality studied). Real causal explanation depends on the ability to answer the question of why regularities exist in terms of the mechanisms that generate them. 'Events' such as racial incidents or violence are not discrete items but are really the components of a local system. The key to understanding causality is how this system passes from one state to another and it is this changed state that reveals the underlying mechanisms and relationships between the parts of the system.

The application of principle (3) to the study area revealed underlying mechanisms and processes that were empirically manifest, in that a changed state in the prevalence of racial violence had occurred from high levels of white on Asian violence found at the start of the study, to increasing Asian on white violence, followed by a general decline of racial violence in the locality towards the end of the study. The study suggested that the underlying mechanisms/contexts and processes were racially exclusionist local community discourses and practices of neighbourhood nationalism, boundary drawing and group enmity predicated on territoriality. Territoriality was the generative mechanism. The discovery of these underlying community level effects on the level and nature of racial violence required the study to inquire 'beneath the surface' (Hesse 1992) of events which involved investigation of the significant features of the particular community. The empirical or observed properties of the *local system* were found to point towards underlying mechanisms of a particular form of local racism based in territoriality and neighbourhood nationalism. But this was only revealed by the local system's transformation from one state to another. Consider the following diagram:

M (Mechanism)	Territoriality as neighbourhood nationalism
X	Availability, willingness and opportunity of perpetrators
Y	Presence of racial motive
Z	Availability and vulnerability of victims

This schematic representation of transformation from one state to another in the local system is illustrative of the factors and relationships that the study needed to take into account in explaining why the transformation had taken place that had resulted in a decline in racial violence. In actuality it was discovered that changes had occurred in X, Y and Z and their relationship because of changes in M, where M1 is white territoriality and M2 is Asian territoriality. Initially whites 'defended' and extended their neighbourhoods by going into adjoining 'Asian' areas and attacking Asians. Asians eventually began to retaliate, creating for themselves their own 'defended neighbourhoods'. Towards the end of the study period whites and Asians 'agreed' a 'settlement' of which group 'owned' which territory. Of course this is only illustrative, and other factors, processes and mechanisms were operating as well. Nevertheless the point is that causes are revealed through theories of social processes and change (Sayer 1992). At the most simple level causal descriptions can be merely narrative accounts of what produced change, and this element of causal analysis is evident in some parts of this study. But again without knowing what the underlying causal mechanisms were that produced or triggered change then this approach is limited, and a realist approach to causality may be necessary. Other underlying *mechanisms and contexts*, which operated simultaneously in the study area and which influenced changes in the prevalence and conditions of racial violence were: a clustering of criminality, violence and drugs, whereby the presence of criminality and high levels of personal violence increased racial violence, whereas the presence of drugs decreased it; increased knowledgeability among victims about where and under what conditions racial violence was likely to happen; increased availability of 'safe' youth centres for Asian young people; demographic changes among Asians which supplied older young people able to defend their neighbourhood, and so on. The study's *controls* were to try out certain regularities in different contexts of time and place through comparative and cohort inquiry, and this type of *community contextual control* replaces the statistical controls found in conventional criminological study of victimisation and perpetration. Of course this is not to deny that this alternative method has its own problems such as the care needed to distinguishing age, period and other effects.

The application of principles (1) and (2) led to a range of issues and problems, some of which will be mentioned here. First, there was the problem of discovering 'racism' and 'racial motive'. The perpetrator acts on the victim in a way that the relationship is one of imputed racial motive, but this assumes that perpetrators and victims cannot be the same person either at other instances in the relationship or at the same juncture of the events/relationship. Also that 'racial motive' is isolated, simple and fixed. This consensual view of racism and racist violence found in conventional approaches^[5] carries an assumption that in situations of inter-ethnic contact, violence will be racially motivated and 'racism' the monopoly of white perpetrators, independent of contextual and community structural variables or discourses. However we cannot assume people have the same cognition of racism or racial motive in terms of ascribed distinctions and semantics, nor assume a consensus as to the *subjective* evaluation of racism by respondents. Instead, we should be concerned with subjective (cultural) models of racism, and with how people judge the relationships between ethnic groups.

A second set of problems involves the need to question the reliability of ethnic/racial classifications as measuring instruments, inferred from relations of inferiority and superiority - these classifications require to be established and confirmed in each and every situation of their use (see Hewitt 1986, Back 1996), and the extent to which relations of inferiority/superiority exists and whether they are stable or change in the situation is an

empirical question. This is because relative advantage and power gained from ethnic status and prestige stem from the ability of an actor to exploit and benefit from *meanings* and *values* at the level of his or her self identification (see Wallman 1983) - his or her 'first order' constructions.^[6] Ethnic categories are not formed simply on the basis of some single hierarchical dimension, but should be subordinated to heterogeneous characteristics of the ethnic group and ethnic structure, e.g. distinctions within the same ethnic group or between groupings differentiated in their cultural and economic situations ('Asian' covers many groupings as does 'White', and the study uncovered widely differing groups within perpetrator and victim communities in terms of their responses to racial violence).

A third set of problems concern the nature of ethnicity and ethnic *relations* - what is the nature of the relations between ethnic groups? A common sense understanding is that ethnic groups exist in themselves rather than relationally - in relation to other ethnic groups - and this means that any measure of racial violence is extrinsic to the relationship of ethnic groups or between perpetrator and victim. By contrast, an understanding that the relation between ethnic groups is internal or necessary, means that one group is dependent on its relation to the other; a person cannot be subordinate without a superior and vice versa - the existence of one necessarily presupposes the other. This internal relation is part of the *definition* of either of the groups; and because they are interdependent, change in one part is tied to change in the other. Thus minority ethnic status is a function of white ethnicity and vice versa, and there can't be one without the other. A common error in conventional studies of violent racism is to see racial violence as an isolated expression of 'racism' within the perpetrator group whereas in any real situation there is usually a complex combination of these types of relation. The study of the racist actions of one group (perpetrators) on the other (victims) in terms of the prevalence, frequency and location of racist incidents tells us nothing about the nature of the relationship between the groups and how the actions and meanings of one group is affected by the other.

Conclusion and discussion

The study uncovered a particular type of *subordinate* racism among Asian and white young people which produces different patterns of racist response among perpetrators and responses to racial violence among victims. This racism is subordinate in the sense that the 'objective' power differentials between the two ethnic groups were much less because of their shared subordination as *youth*, than the 'subjective' perceptions of one group of the other. Some of the theoretical and methodological problems and issues mentioned so far can be illustrated in relation to the empirical data on white perpetrators of racial abuse and violence.

Victim surveys of racial violence, whether locally based or national, reveal what is happening at a particular point in time among a representative population sample. The findings allow inferences to be made about prevalence and frequency of racial violence among the general local or national population. In stark contrast to the findings of these surveys the Keighley survey discovered that more whites than Asians said that they had been victims of racial violence and similar numbers of Asians to whites admitted perpetrating racial violence. Was it that white respondents were confused by the survey's question whether an assault on them by a 'different race' person had been racially motivated? Did whites say an incident was racially motivated simply because the perpetrator was of different race? Did white respondents want to emphasise or give exaggerated importance to victimising experiences when the perpetrator was other race? Would this also apply to Asian respondents? Because the survey findings could be tested against qualitative and contextual data from the cohort and follow up studies these and other questions could be addressed - a facility that is usually absent from most victim surveys (but see Anderson et al. 1994). Comparison of the different data sets enabled the study to conclude that some whites had indeed been attacked by some Asians in the two year period preceding the survey which was also the period of quite extensive Asian vigilante activity against white racist violence. *At the time of the survey* this enabled whites to construct a community discourse that constructed racist violence in terms of their own victimisation, and it was this underlying context that was reflected in the survey findings. This illustrates the way in which the findings of victim surveys may be bogus and their efficacy doubtful if account is not taken of the community context into which they are inserted.

On the basis of the Keighley findings, unitary categories of 'white perpetrator' and 'black victim' understood as binary, simple and fixed categories, are unsustainable. Within the white perpetrator population were found quite distinct groups. The '*normal*' racists were those for whom racist expression found its justification in a myth of origin - being 'born and bred' in the town. There was nothing in this group's outlook that suggested there was anything 'wrong' or 'malicious' in sharing racist *attitudes*. Here racism finds its expression in routine verbal abuse towards Asians in general, although actual physical violence towards Asians was considered 'mental', 'over the top'. Where inter-ethnic violence did occur this was said to be about 'fighting', or proving oneself through fighting. The group maintained a rigid distinction between Asian 'friends' - those for whom one had personal knowledge, who were 'all right' and 'different' to 'the rest, the Pakis' - and 'Pakis' as a racial group. This 'splitting' of racism between 'contingent Asians' whose friendship is valued yet whose membership of friendship groups is conditional on them ignoring racist abuse towards other Asians, and 'Pakis' in general who are vilified, was a constant feature of these young people's discourse, and of young people in other studies of adolescent racism (see Back 1991:19, 35). These young people simply reproduced a consensual adult community discourse that Asians receive favoured treatment from the police, local authority, schools and housing authority. For them 'racism' is violence towards Asians whereas abuse is not, and this understanding is common among young people. At the same time as defining the term 'racist' as physical attacks on Asians, young people admire and give prestige to members of their own and other groups considered 'good fighters', and yet a good fighter isn't necessarily a 'racist', and 'fighting' involves the same (non-racial) behaviours and motivations whether Asians or other whites are fought.

'*Aggressive*' racists, in contrast, possessed a virulent antipathy towards 'Asian' areas and the presence of Asians in public arenas. The 'colour coding' of racialised territories that established 'white' and 'Asian' areas was key to their discourse. Members of this group did not mix with Asian youth, and a rigid spatial separation was enforced in school and leisure situations. They were more likely to target and instigate 'fights' with Asians. This group was interviewed at the end of the cohort study in 1993, after leaving school and finding work. They seemed less overtly violently abusive in their behaviour toward Asian people than previously, although there was plenty of evidence to suggest that their racist *attitudes* were still negative and hostile. They indicated, among other things, that they still preferred to avoid leisure places where there might be Asians. *Behaviours* are more likely to change in the maturation process than perhaps *attitudes*.

The *violent racists* were the most intractable racists and had experienced acute family pressures and conflicts. These were highly disturbed young people. The whole group had been involved in various serious incidents involving racial violence. The violent racists unlike the other white groups were extensive and persistent offenders. This group more than any other were not only white segregationists and exclusionists, their view of Asians encompassed Bauman's (1991) 'true' racism - they were expulsionists and in some cases they supported the extermination of black and Asian people. In this sense their highly focused violence against Asians was the expression of deeply felt beliefs of white supremacy. Towards the end of the study there had been none of the age effects found amongst the other white groups, and offending was still going on, as was overt, hostile and violent racism. An evaluation of the range of groups found in the study leads to the conclusion that the more offending that is going on among white young people, and the more serious and persistent this becomes, then in multiethnic situations, there is a likelihood of greater involvement in perpetrating racial attacks, harassment and violence.

Among perpetrators and victims were found quite different and distinct groups in terms of their racist expression and responses to racial violence. Both 'normal' and 'aggressive' white racists were likely to mature out of their predicaments, although among 'aggressive' white racists this was more likely to be a maturation from abusing and fighting Asians rather than from racist attitudes. Violent white racists on the other hand did not desist as they got older, and violent racism seemed part of their general repertoire of increasingly persistence and serious violence and crime.

Notes

1. This is a much revised version of the British Criminology Association conference paper given at the University of Loughborough 1995. The paper focuses on the conceptual and methodological issues of the study rather than the empirical findings and analysis which can be found in Webster (1995, 1996). [\[Back to text\]](#)
2. Crudely expressed, this involves matching the social characteristics (socio-demographic, offending behaviour, etc.) found in the group or groups targeted by an intervention project, with a group displaying the same or similar social and behavioural characteristics that have not been targeted. The two groups or sets of groups are matched and behavioural characteristics are measured before the project intervenes and attempts to alter the behaviour of its target group. After the project has intervened, the target group is again compared with the group that had been left alone to see if there have been any changes in behaviour in one group and not the other. If there have been changes in the target group compared to the group that was not targeted, then inferences can be made about whether these changes were caused by the project's intervention, or whether other factors were involved (for a discussion about the problems see Pawson 1992; Ekblom 1989; Freeman 1986). [\[Back to text\]](#)
3. In fact this was the approach suggested to me at the outset of the evaluation by the Home Office funders in the Research and Planning Unit. [\[Back to text\]](#)
4. However, different research strategies and objects will have different referents as to what this means. Thus followers of Bhaskar (1979) have taken generative mechanism to refer to social structures endemic to capitalism, whereas another founder member of the Scientific Realist School, Harre (1979) points to social life as a pattern of skilled performances explained in terms of underlying mechanism of peoples 'problem solving' and presentational activities (see Pawson 1989:9). The Keighley study is more appropriately aligned with Harre's approach. [\[Back to text\]](#)
5. See Bowling (1993a) for a review of different political approaches to the study of racial violence. [\[Back to text\]](#)
6. After Schutz, Pawson (1989:7-8) explains that 'first-level constructs' are those through which social actors have already prestructured social reality prior to its scientific investigation. On the other hand, sociological concepts like 'ethnicity' or 'racism' are 'second-level constructs' constructed and used by investigators. The adequacy of measurement procedures depends on somehow bridging the gap between the two levels - in this there arises a type of problem foreign to the natural sciences. [\[Back to text\]](#)

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About the author

[Colin Webster](#) is Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Teesside. He recently received his PhD in Criminology from the University of Leicester. He has conducted a number of Home Office-funded research projects into youth crime and victimisation, racial harassment and violence, and the role of the Youth service in reducing crime. He is the author of various reports and articles about racism and race and crime. His most recent publication is 'The Construction of British "Asian" Criminality', *International Journal of the Sociology of Law*, 25, 1997. He is currently writing a book on racism and racial violence.

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