

## RACE MATTERS IN BRITISH PRISONS

### *Towards a Research Agenda*

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*Drawing on surveys of 4,860 prisoners' perceptions of the quality of prison life in 49 establishments in England and Wales, this paper examines the extent to which prisoners viewed race relations in prison as problematic. Emphasis was placed upon how aspects of race relations were rated by different ethnic groups, and in individual prisons. Significant differences were found between prisons of the same security category. The findings support those of previous studies in that they raise concerns about the treatment of ethnic minority prisoners, particularly in some prisons. Attention was also paid to the role of gender, age and the security category of the prison. Ethnic minority prisoners tended to rate the quality of race relations in prison more poorly than their White counterparts. Large proportions amongst all ethnic minority groups felt that they were subject to unfair treatment compared to the White majority. On the whole, female prisoners were more likely than males to rate the quality of race relations more favourably, as were adult prisoners in comparison to their young counterparts. Gender and age had a considerable impact on the views of ethnic minority prisoners on the quality of race relations in the establishment. Perceived quality of race relations was significantly associated with prisoners' views on more general aspects of their treatment in prison, such as respect, humanity, fairness, relationships with staff and safety. Neither the ethnic composition of each prison's population nor the respective ratio of White to ethnic minority staff had a significant impact on how prisoners viewed the quality of race relations. These results suggest, amongst other things, that perceptions of the legitimacy of penal practices differ significantly between age and ethnic groups, and that attempts to reduce discrimination work more effectively in relation to distributive practices than in relation to attitudes and general treatment.*

The ever-increasing proportion of ethnic minorities in British prisons, alongside high-profile racial incidents in a number of establishments, have elevated prison racism to an issue of primary importance in the Prison Service's agenda in recent years.<sup>1</sup> In his foreword to the *Annual Report and Accounts 2000–2001*, Martin Narey, then Director General of the Prison Service, acknowledged that:

... the Prison Service is an institutionally racist organisation, which reflects an institutionally racist white society. We have to add to this, our knowledge that there are pockets of blatant and malicious racism within the Service. It is time to face up to these things (Narey 2001: 7).

Narey's statement represented an effort to set the stage for combating racism in British prisons, yet it seems to have exaggerated our level of knowledge about the nature and

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<sup>1</sup> According to the definition by Macpherson (1999), adopted by the Prison Service in 2000, a racial incident is any incident perceived as such by the victim or any other person.

extent of the problem. Whilst there is broad consensus that 'institutional racism' exists where organizational networks linked to rules, procedures and guidelines covertly disadvantage certain cohorts because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or culture, it is less clear whether or to what degree such practices stem from deliberate discrimination with the purpose of racial domination (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967), or from 'unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping' (Macpherson 1999: 28; see Matravers and Tonry 2003). Also, there are concerns that 'blatant and malicious racism within the Service' may actually be more widespread, both in terms of levels and patterns, than is commonly believed or shown in officially recorded figures (see, e.g. Burnett and Farrell 1994).

This article reflects critically on race-related research in British prisons in particular. We draw on sociological sources to examine the complexities surrounding the study of the concept of race, with particular reference to its socio-political roots and the fluidity of its character. The focus is on key themes of the available research on racism in British prisons, dealing mainly with the different types of racial victimization experienced by prisoners. We describe a survey of prisoners' perceptions of the quality of prison life in 49 establishments, with particular emphasis on the race-relations dimension, and the differences amongst ethnic groups and between varying types of prisons. Though our findings support those put forward by previous studies in that they raise concerns about the treatment of ethnic minority prisoners, attention is also paid to the impact of gender, age, the security category of the prison and other aspects of institutional life (e.g. respect, humanity, fairness, relationships with staff and safety) upon prisoners' views on race relations in the establishment. The final section offers some general observations about the directions that future research on prison racism should take. We do not advance any conclusive answers to the questions posed above. The reason for, yet also the central argument of, this article is that further research is needed to address prison racism more effectively.

### *Conceptualizing 'Race'*

The dictionary definition of the term 'race' is 'each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics' (*Oxford Dictionary of English*). In criminological research, however, as in any branch of social research, the significance and complexity of conceptualizing race stretches far beyond the narrow confines of lexical semantics. It is a task fraught with epistemological difficulties and socio-political implications. A number of scholars argue for the study of race from an ontological perspective. Said (1978; 1993), for example, considers the age-long discourse of distinction between the West and its 'Others', particularly the Orient, to have consolidated political and military control over the latter. In this respect, to adequately conceptualize race is to decouple folk from analytical notions (see Banton 1979), and, having done so, to explore in depth the classificatory functions the slippage between the two performs in society and its various institutions (see, e.g. Wacquant 2004). We contend (and to distance ourselves from the ontological angle) that to theorize race is to acknowledge its contingent character and, hence, to analyse it in terms specific to the socio-historical contexts within which it developed—put differently, as a concept that varies across spatial and temporal spans (see Winant 2000).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> By this, we do not simply mean the geographical areas or the historical eras in and during which race evolved as a concept, but also the cultural and political conditions, at a macro- and micro-level. Bowling (1998: 2) reports significant variations even amongst

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To take but a few examples, whereas one's race in France is perceived along the lines of being either a French citizen or a foreigner, with the latter representing and undergoing the exclusionary consequences of 'Otherness', 'the politics of race [in Britain] has historically been understood . . . in a more agonistic fashion, as one of belonging' (Bosworth 2004: 231). Irrespective of citizenship, Bowling argues, 'Englishness or another of Britain's national identities . . . privilege claims to *belong*, to be *of* Britain, "one of us," only to white British people' (1998: 11, original emphasis). This is not to be confused with a mere Black–White distinction which would fit somewhat better, but still not at all neatly, to the American paradigm.<sup>3</sup> The bulk of the pertinent scholarship in Britain has shown instead that ethnic minority groups, whether of African Caribbean, Asian or other non-White origin, share common experiences of socio-economic marginalization in comparison with the White majority (Solomos 2003; compare Jones 1993; Modood *et al.* 1997). Such experiences may include (but are not necessarily restricted to) discrimination in the labour market (Heath and McMahon 1997; also Alexander and Halpern 2000), systematic inequalities in the provision of housing (Phillips 1987; 1989; Smith 1989) and health care (Nazroo 1997; also Cochrane and Sashidaran 1996), exclusion from education (Gill *et al.* 1992), unfair treatment in the criminal justice system (NACRO 1999) and violent victimization (Bowling 1998; Panayi 1996; for an overview, see Bhat *et al.* 1988; Skellington 1996). In recent years, some analysts have suggested that Asian people suffer worse prejudice than Black people in Britain (e.g. Modood 1996), whilst others have proposed that White minorities, such as Jewish and Irish people, may well be subject to as much and severe discrimination as their non-White counterparts (e.g. Cohen 1996; Song 2004). Whatever the viewpoint taken, one can also point to progress, on paper at least, with regard to the civil and legal rights of ethnic minority people (see, e.g. Bleich 2003), mainly as a result of the political struggles of Black and Asian communities and anti-racist organizations that culminated in the civil disturbances of the early 1980s (see Benyon 1984). In this light, whilst we cannot deny the prejudicial experiences of ethnic minorities in contemporary Britain and other Western societies, binary contrasts like the 'West–Rest' dichotomy (Hall 1992; see also Hulme 1986; Said 1993) or the Black–White dyad can be less constant, absolute or universalized than their proponents suggest (see Malik 1996).<sup>4</sup>

Implicit in this analysis is the notion that human agency, whether at an individual or at a collective level, plays a crucial role in the formation of racial meanings, notwithstanding the structural and institutional constraints of action (see Omi and Winant 1986). In particular, far from being stable or innate, racial identities—i.e. the ways individuals position themselves in relation to members of other racial groups within social hierarchies, and build a sense of themselves in time and space—are the products of a fundamentally relational process. Albeit demarcated in terms of social resources through which to construct identities, this process involves the continuous negotiation

British statutory agencies (i.e. the police, the Home Office, local government and anti-racist organizations) in their definitions of violent racism. He argues that '[t]he discourse used by these agencies and their officers indicates that these competing terminologies have deep micro-cultural roots, have emerged historically within different social spaces, and are indicators of quite different frameworks of language and experience'. To complicate the discussion further, one could cross the analysis of race with other concepts such as gender or religious beliefs (see, e.g. Agozino 1997, and Spalek and Wilson 2002, respectively).

<sup>3</sup> Miri Song (2004: 178) goes as far as to argue that in the United States, 'there is a fairly robust consensus that there is a racial hierarchy (with Whites on top, Blacks on the bottom, and Asians and Latinos somewhere in the middle)'.

<sup>4</sup> Our intention here is not to argue for epistemological relativism, but rather to emphasize the importance of contextual analysis in providing a truer reflection of the reality under study (see Paechter 2001).

between those who populate what Gramsci (1930/1971) calls the 'hegemonic' stratum and those subordinated.<sup>5</sup> As Simmel (1908/1971: 97–8) puts it, 'even in the most oppressive and cruel cases of subordination there is still a considerable measure of personal freedom'. Not wishing to legitimate any surpluses of power, in the same way that we do not wish to blame victims of racism for apathy, we venture tentatively to extend this appreciative perception of agency to the 'superordinates'. By this we mean those in positions of power who, against the odds, resist racial essentialism, namely the idea that 'racially pure' groups exist and are superior to those deemed to be mixed or hybrid. The Nazi brutality during the Second World War and particularly the Holocaust, to take the most appalling case of racial essentialism in human history, met with the opposition not only of those nations that were under attack or occupation, but also of several members of the Italian Fascist regime who refused to cooperate with their German allies in the consignment of Jews to certain death (Steinberg 2002; see also Arendt 1977; Clark 1984). As historian Jonathan Steinberg (2002: 6) tells us:

In the heart of Nazi-occupied Europe, in the midst of the fury of destruction, witnesses told of Italian officers, diplomats and civil servants who simply refused to be part of the crime: consuls who forged passports, generals who bent rules, ambassadors who disobeyed orders, ordinary citizens who broke their country's strict racial laws.<sup>6</sup>

In a similar vein, the role of scientists and intellectuals has historically oscillated between fuelling the problem of racism and struggling to explain it adequately, with a view to combating it. To give a flavour of this, Mosse (1985/1999: 41) argues convincingly that the philosophers of the Enlightenment and the natural scientists of the day jointly laid the foundations of racial domination, for they sought to define human nature in aesthetic terms, 'with significant stress on the outward physical signs of inner rationality and harmony' (compare Malik 1996: 38–70). Most famously, de Gobineau, the father of 'scientific racism', described the Black race as marked by animality and limited intellect, the Yellow race as of apathy and mediocre intelligence, and the White race as innately superior because of its love for liberty, life, honour and everything spiritual (Biddiss 1966/1999). As is well known today, such taxonomic conceptualizations of race served to justify exploitation of and control over those at the bottom of racial hierarchies (see, e.g. Gould 1981). Goldberg (2000: 158) uses the term 'State Ideological Social Science' to describe how 'racial knowledge' produced by several anthropologists and natural historians conferred legitimacy upon Western colonialism, 'as morally necessary for the sake of the colonised' (see also Gilroy 2000). On the other hand, one cannot but recognize the strenuous efforts of pioneers like Du Bois (1903/1989), Boas

<sup>5</sup> We find Gramsci's (1926/1978) notion of 'hegemony' particularly helpful for the present analysis because, at the level of theory, it attempts to bridge the gap between the Marxist emphasis on class structures and the poststructuralist stress on agency. In short, hegemony concerns situations of class inequality where the ruling class bases its dominance not on direct force or coercion, but rather on a moral and intellectual leadership, able to draw subordinate groups into an alliance and obtain their consent. Yet, this 'historical bloc', Gramsci goes on to maintain, is contingent upon the ever-changing socio-political conditions and the dynamic role of the subordinate classes in giving leverage to such transformations (see Hall and Scraton 1981: 479–80; see also Hall 1988; Hall *et al.* 1978). Echoing this point, Giddens (1982: 39) uses the term 'dialectic of control' to argue that 'all relations of autonomy and dependence are reciprocal; however wide the asymmetrical distribution of resources involved, all power relations express autonomy and dependence "in both directions"' (see also Giddens 1984).

<sup>6</sup> In a similar manner, Malcolm X, one of the most radical Black activists ever, concluded in his autobiography: 'I don't speak against the sincere, well-meaning, good white people. I have learned that there *are* some. I have learned that not all white people are racists. I am speaking against and my fight is against the white racists' (Malcolm X and Haley 1965: 367, original emphasis, cited by Bowling 1998).

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(1911) and, later, Benedict (1934; 1942/1983) to dismiss deterministic theories of race, rather arguing for a more social and historical analysis. But it was not until the 1960s, particularly after the 'Moscow Declaration' in 1964, that the scientific world, including biologists, explicitly recognized the socio-political roots of the concept of race (Rex 2000). Ever since, the study of racial and ethnic issues has known a rapid expansion as a sub-field of sociological inquiry, with its own professional associations, university affiliations and research institutes, and a vast array of scholarly publications. Paradoxically, as Bulmer and Solomos (2004: 3) point out, these welcome developments have been coupled with 'a move away from research on social action and on institutions, and a fixation with theoretical abstraction and textual and cultural analysis'. It thus comes as no surprise that the questions 'about what the focus of research should be and on the appropriateness of conceptual and methodological tools for analysing the changing and evolving patterns of race and ethnic relations in contemporary societies' remain unanswered, despite their location at the centre stage of a spirited debate (Bulmer and Solomos 2004: 3).

Contemporary criminology, particularly the strand that draws upon sociological ancestry, can—and should—partake in this discussion, not as a *passerpartout* subject, but rather as a key contributor. It is not simply that the most acute manifestations of racism fall within the criminological purview (consider, for example, violent or prison racism), but also that the discipline and its preoccupation with empirical inquiry, sometimes even to the detriment of theoretical reflection, may well offer insightful answers to the 'what and how' question in the broader domain of race-related research. At the same time, as Garland and Sparks 2000: 21) suggest, 'criminology can replenish its intellectual resources by engaging with the theoretical work of contemporary social theory' (see also Bottoms 2000). So, how have criminologists approached the study of race and racism so far? To what extent, if any, have they informed and/or been informed by the ongoing debate? It is to this theme that the discussion now turns.

*Race, Crime and Justice in Contemporary Britain*

Almost 40 years ago, Bottoms (1967) doubted whether the then mounting research findings in support of the link between criminality and immigration-blackness should be taken at face value. To our dismay, the issue of race and crime is no less controversial today. The overwhelming majority of studies to date have centred upon the consistent overrepresentation of African Caribbean people in British prisons from the 1970s onwards. In 2002, for example, Black groups formed 15 per cent of the overall male prison population and 24 per cent of the female prison population, whilst comprising only 3 per cent amongst the general population aged 10 and over (Home Office 2004). The Black prison population rate per 1,000 population was 4.4 times higher than the White one, the Asian rate was lower, and that for other ethnic minority groups was more than twice as high (Home Office 2003; see also Institute for Criminal Policy Research 2004). The explanations offered focus mostly on what Phillips and Bowling (2002: 579) call the 'either/or debate', i.e. the question of whether this overrepresentation of African Caribbean people in British prisons reflects their offending rates or, conversely, results from an accumulation of biases in the ways in which ethnic minorities are treated by the criminal justice authorities.

With regard to research on ethnic differences in offending, the findings so far are too perplexing to licence firm conclusions. This is hardly surprising, as the most common sources of data—official statistics, particularly arrest and imprisonment rates, victims' descriptions of offenders and self-report offending studies—have inherent methodological deficiencies. Official statistics show that Black people are more likely than White and Asian people to be arrested for notifiable offences. In 2002, Black people were three times more likely to be arrested than White and Asian people. Despite some police force variation, there was a tendency for Black and Asian people to be arrested for fraud and forgery, robbery and drug-related offences, and for White people to be arrested for burglary and criminal damage. Also, Black people were over-represented in violent and sexual offences, as well as in theft and handling (Home Office 2004; see also Smith 1983; 1997; Smith and Gray 1985; Jefferson 1991). Official statistics, however, do not provide objective indices of patterns and levels of criminality, mainly due to variations in the reporting and recording of crime, and the operation of discretion on the part of the criminal justice agencies involved (i.e. police, prosecution and courts). In effect, what official statistics demonstrate concerns only a small proportion of offenders who have not been diverted from the criminal justice process in one of its various stages (Bottomley and Pease 1986; Bowling and Phillips 2002; Bryman 2001; Coleman and Moynihan 1996; Maguire 1997).<sup>7</sup>

The evidence is open to different interpretations. On the one hand, there seem to be substantial ethnic group differences both in levels and patterns of offending. But this may well result, at least in part, from a vicious circle of stereotyping Black people as more crime-prone, over-policing ethnic minority neighbourhoods (particularly those populated by Black people), drawing more minority people into the criminal justice net, and extending their criminal records, thus also enhancing their chances of being retargeted by the police and punished more severely in the event of reconviction (Phillips and Bowling 2002; see also Agozino 2000; Hiro 1992; Keith 1991).<sup>8</sup> To this, one might add an array of socio-economic disadvantages that impinge disproportionately upon minority groups, and affect not only criminality rates, but also criminal justice practices (Faulkner 2002; Smith 1997; see also Carlen 1988; Holdaway 1996; Lea and Young 1984; Stevens and Willis 1979).<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, whilst procedural disparities can be demonstrated at each stage of the criminal justice system, it is not clear whether/the extent to which they reflect discrimination, at least of a purposive kind, nor is it plausible that they can fully account for the vast overrepresentation of Black people in the prison statistics (Rutter *et al.* 1998, Matravers and Tonry 2003; Smith 1997). Reiner (1993) has argued that the either/or question is too complex to answer. But it may not

<sup>7</sup> The results from victim reports are broadly in line with official statistics in that they show an increased participation of Black people in robbery and 'mugging' incidents, and low offending rates by Asian people (see, e.g. Clancy *et al.* 2001; Mayhew *et al.* 1993). But victimization surveys provide estimates only for crimes involving personal interaction, and may well suffer from false reports, intentional or otherwise (O'Brien 1985). Self-report offending studies show similar offending rates amongst Black and White respondents, in relation to both property and violent crimes, with the corresponding rates for Asian people remaining significantly lower (see Flood-Page *et al.* 2000; Graham and Bowling 1995). Yet, the validity of self-report data depends upon the honesty of interviewees who are likely to report fully on trivial offences, yet not to admit to serious offences (Jupp 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Wacquant (1999: 219) goes as far as to suggest that such a process of criminalization tends 'to (co)produce the very phenomenon it is supposed to combat, in accord with the well known mechanism of the "self-fulfilling prophecy" . . . [thus eventually] justify[ing] . . . the special attention given to these groups by the police services'.

<sup>9</sup> Arguably, this point applies mostly to Black people, since Asian people's criminality rates are generally low, as is their rate of imprisonment. For Smith (1997) and Rutter *et al.* (1998), this underrepresentation of Asian people implies that racial disparities in the criminal justice system are less likely to result from discriminatory practices.

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be the right question to pose, for, as Phillips and Bowling (2002) suggest, it downplays equally important issues like racist violence, the experiences of ethnic minority practitioners and prison racism. The remainder of this article attempts to shed light on the possibility of racism in British prisons.

*Racism in British Prisons*

In attempting to reduce racial conflict and discrimination in British prisons, the Prison Service has revised its race-relations policy several times over the last 20 years or so. Initiatives have ranged from extending the scope of the race discrimination legislation to cover all prison contexts (including discipline, categorization, segregation or transfer), to widening inmates' access to complaint forms, maintaining local monitoring bodies, appointing race relations liaison officers in each establishment, and promoting the recruitment of ethnic minority staff (NACRO 1999; also Jackson 1997). As is so often the case in criminal justice, however, policies have yet to meet their promising rhetoric. Albeit extreme, the following two examples suggest that urgent action is needed. In March 2000, an Asian prisoner, Zahid Mubarek, was bludgeoned to death by his cellmate in HM Feltham Young Offenders Institution, although the prison authorities were aware of the perpetrator's violent racist tendencies (*The Guardian*, 5 October 2001). In July 2004, another Asian prisoner, Shahid Aziz, was stabbed, beaten and strangled in HMP Leeds by a White inmate, shortly after the two were allocated to the same cell (*The Guardian*, 29 July 2004). Whilst both incidents were perpetrated by White prisoners, staff can also find themselves implicated in these circumstances, e.g. if they pay insufficient attention to the risks posed to the newly received prisoners.

In the face of these and similar developments, criminological research has been strikingly inert. Although much has been written about the problematic state of British prisons and the need for penal reform (see, e.g. King and McDermott 1989; 1995; Ramsbotham 2003), the issues of interracial conflict and racism within the institutional context have received little scholarly attention to date. In fact, there exist only a handful of major empirical studies touching upon prison racism in Britain, the most authoritative of which are Genders' and Player's (1989) *Race Relations in Prisons*, and Burnett's and Farrell's (1994) *Reported and Unreported Racial Incidents in Prisons*. Another important study was conducted by McDermott (1990) in five male prisons of varying security categorization. More recent accounts are confined to a snapshot survey by NACRO (2000), an exploration of the perspectives of ethnic minority inmates and prison officers in relation to race and conflict in four local male establishments (Edgar and Martin 2004), and an action research project on how to improve race relations in prisons (Ellis *et al.* 2004). In what follows, we try to summarize the main points distilled from these studies (enriched, wherever possible, by official data and other relevant research findings), to assist and illuminate our forthcoming empirical analysis.

To begin with, prisoners' experiences of racism whilst in custody fall into three main categories. First, racism can occur directly in the form of victimization by other inmates. Secondly, it may concern direct victimization initiated by members of staff. And thirdly, it may be less overt, relating to discrimination in decision-making processes, mainly with regard to aspects of disciplinary control, and access or allocation to facilities and activities within the establishment (Burnett and Farrell 1994). Before examining the specific types of racial incidents, we should note some preliminaries:

- Despite a recent increase in the number of ethnic minority people recruited into the Prison Service, they remain considerably underrepresented, both amongst prison staff and compared to the proportion of ethnic minority people held in custody (Home Office 2004).
- Black and Asian people are underrepresented on the Independent Monitoring Boards (formerly known as 'Boards of Visitors'), i.e. the public bodies responsible for visiting establishments and hearing prisoners' complaints or requests (Bobb-Semple 2001).
- Ethnic minority prisoners are far more likely than their White counterparts to experience some form of racial discrimination, direct or indirect, whilst in custody, yet the prevalence and type of racial incidents may vary between establishments (e.g. relative to the ethnic composition of the prison population, or to the ratio of White to ethnic minority staff) (Burnett and Farrell 1994; Edgar and Martin 2004; Ellis *et al.* 2004; Genders and Player 1989; McDermott 1990; NACRO 2000; Sparks *et al.* 1996).
- In a considerable number of cases, racist treatment is serial, involving the same victims, offenders or situations (Burnett and Farrell 1994).
- Discretionary decisions relating to the ways in which racial incidents are dealt with are liable to result in both under-reporting and under-recording (Burnett and Farrell 1994).
- The vast majority of ethnic minority inmates who experience some form of racist treatment or discrimination tend not to file an official complaint, mainly due to mistrust of the relevant procedures and fear of reprisals from staff (Burnett and Farrell 1994; Edgar and Martin 2004).
- The primary grounds on which prisoners identify racial discrimination are observation of differential treatment (sometimes deduced or suspected; see Burnett and Farrell 1994), the perpetrators' demeanour, a lack of explanation for decisions taken, and an ambiguous process (Edgar and Martin 2004).

#### *Racial victimization by other inmates*

Establishing a racial component in incidents of conflict between prisoners of different racial origins is not as straightforward as one might think. Just as interracial confrontations may be inspired or escalated by racial hatred, so too can they be fuelled by other factors like power imbalance, peer pressure and individual responses to victimization (Edgar *et al.* 2003: 157–9). The approach taken by most studies to date has been to survey prisoners' subjective interpretations of assaultive actions in context. It has been shown that:

- The overwhelming majority of racial incidents between prisoners are perpetrated by White inmates (Burnett and Farrell 1994).
- Asian prisoners are more likely to be victims of other prisoners in racially motivated or aggravated incidents, compared to Black and other ethnic minority inmates (Burnett and Farrell 1994).
- The most common type of racial incident amongst prisoners is verbal abuse (e.g. racial insults or derogatory references to one's race, skin colour and/or religious beliefs). Other racial incidents may involve bullying, theft, assault, harassment and drawing racist graffiti (Burnett and Farrell 1994; Clements 2000; Commission for Racial Equality 2003).

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*Racial victimization by prison staff*

Despite the 'British tradition' of generally favourable staff–prisoner relationships (Liebling and Price 2001: 7), there are enough examples of staff overusing their power against inmates (Burnett and Farrell 1994). Yet, the extent to which direct excesses of institutional authority entail a racial aspect is often hard to assess. Key research findings so far indicate that:

- Black and, to a considerable extent, Asian and other ethnic minority prisoners tend to disproportionately experience racial victimization by staff. This may be exacerbated by the low numbers of ethnic minority staff employed within prisons (Burnett and Farrell 1994: 9; also McDermott 1990).
- The most prevalent types of staff-initiated racial incidents are verbal abuse, harassment and, to a lesser extent, bullying (Burnett and Farrell 1994: 18; Commission for Racial Equality 2003; on verbal abuse, compare Edgar and Martin 2004; Ellis *et al.* 2004). The formal investigation by the Commission for Racial Equality (2003) into HMP Brixton also revealed an ongoing problem with racist graffiti by staff.
- Black inmates are far less likely than White, Asian and other ethnic minority inmates to perceive the relations between staff and inmates as favourable (Burnett and Farrell 1994: 32; see also Walmsley *et al.* 1992).
- With exceptions, prison officers often stereotype Black inmates as being troublesome, lazy and sharing an antipathy towards White society. By contrast, Asian inmates are frequently described as 'model prisoners' (Genders and Player 1989: 50–2; also Gordon 1983; Chigwada-Bailey 1997; McDermott 1990; Sparks *et al.* 1996).
- The majority of prison officers fail to perceive racism in terms of attitudes (e.g. stereotyping) or to appreciate its subjective dimension, namely that an incident is 'racial' if the victim or any other person understands it as such; instead, they define racism merely within the context of manifest acts (e.g. verbal abuse; Edgar and Martin 2004). Similarly, they tend to ignore the underlying causes of racial conflict, rather focusing upon its immediate triggers (Genders and Player 1989: 66; also Commission for Racial Equality 2003).

*Racial discrimination in decision-making processes*

According to Baumgartner (2001: 157), 'discretion, in practice, amounts to what is commonly known as discrimination', for it rests predominantly upon the social characteristics (e.g. race, gender, age and class) of both decision makers and those embroiled in the various segments of the criminal justice system, thus allowing for the systematic disadvantaging of certain cohorts. Whilst this approach is overly pessimistic (see, e.g. Liebling and Price 2001: 75–108), nevertheless it seems to contain an important element of truth in the prison context. In particular:

- The most common form of racial victimization experienced by ethnic minority inmates concerns discrimination in decision-making processes, particularly with regard to aspects of control and access or allocation to prison facilities and activities. Such incidents may include harsher disciplinary treatment, higher security categorization, intensified searches, disregard for differential dietary needs, unavailability of specialist products at the prison canteen, difficulties in practicing religion, limited

- contact with the outside world, inadequate handling of requests and complaints, and unfairness in the allocation of jobs and accommodation (Burnett and Farrell 1994: 20–5; see also Agozino 1997; Coid *et al.* 2002; Commission for Racial Equality 2003; Edgar and Martin 2004; Ellis *et al.* 2004; Spalek and Wilson 2002).
- Formal action (i.e. referral for adjudication) is more prevalent in disciplinary offences involving ethnic minority inmates, especially Black prisoners (Genders and Player 1989: 113; also Edgar and Martin 2004; McDermott 1990).
  - Black inmates tend to be the subject of higher prison security categorization and thus be sent away from their area of origin (McDermott 1990; also Edgar and Martin 2004).
  - Ethnic minority prisoners are less likely than White prisoners to be allocated to what are considered to be the best jobs within the establishment, due to ‘pressures for exclusion from dominant White inmates and the preferences of supervisors’ (Genders and Player 1989: 125; see also Commission for Racial Equality 2003; Edgar and Martin 2004; McDermott 1990).<sup>10</sup>
  - Black prisoners are more likely to receive negative formal assessments with regard to working skills (even after having completed vocational training or possessing work experience), levels of resistance to authority, seeking or caring for approval from staff and aggressiveness (Genders and Player 1989: 114–17; see also Walmsley *et al.* 1992).
  - Muslim (usually Asian) and other non-Christian prisoners are more likely than their Christian counterparts to be treated unfairly in practising their religion (e.g. with regard to special dietary needs, place and times of worship, suitable ministers; see Burnett and Farrell 1994: 21–3; also Ahmed 2001; Horabin 1978; Spalek and Wilson 2002; Weller *et al.* 2001: 53).

At this point, we should issue a number of caveats. First, it is not clear whether/the extent to which these disparities reflect *intended* discrimination against ethnic minorities—an ambiguous situation that Edgar and Martin (2004: 20) term ‘informal partiality’. Even so, accumulated biases like the increased number of adjudications and higher security categorization may not only have a dramatic impact upon ethnic minority inmates’ institutional life, but also disqualify them from release on parole (see Moorthy *et al.* 2004). Research also suggests that racial mistreatment may also be experienced by prison staff and other individuals visiting the prison. For example, a small, but notable, proportion of ethnic minority prison officers are racially victimized (in most cases, verbally abused) by inmates and, to a lesser extent, by other members of staff (Burnett and Farrell 1994; also Commission for Racial Equality 2003). Likewise, during visits, the children and families of ethnic minority prisoners are often the subject of more searches and racist remarks (see, e.g. Amira 1992: 90–5; McDermott 1990). Also, unlike Christian chaplains, Imams face an array of problems when visiting Muslim prisoners, ranging from intimidation from staff and inmates, to exclusion from race relations management teams (Spalek and Wilson 2002).

It should be borne in mind, however, that the findings exposed so far are idiosyncratic in that they focus on a limited number and type of establishments (mostly adult

<sup>10</sup> In the much-cited *Alexander v. Home Office* case in the late 1980s, an African Caribbean inmate was compensated for having been refused a higher-paying job in the prison kitchen on the basis of two reports that contained racially discriminatory remarks (Livingstone *et al.* 2003: 193).

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male prisons) and/or shed light on different periods of time. With a view to promoting a broader and more up-to-date perspective, the next part of the article offers an exploration of prisoners' views on race relations in 49 prisons in England and Wales.

*Surveying Race Relations in British Prisons*

The following section is intended to assess empirically the extent, if any, to which prisoners in England and Wales perceive race relations in prison as problematic. Drawing on a survey of prison life and quality in 49 establishments, we attempt to shed light on how race relations are rated by different ethnic groups and how individual prisons perform on this dimension. Support is lent to the arguments that: ethnic minority groups share common views on the quality of race relations in comparison with White people; ethnic minorities tend to rate the quality of race relations in prison more poorly than their White counterparts; gender and age have a considerable impact upon the views of ethnic minority groups; perceived quality of race relations is most significantly associated with views on respect, humanity, fairness, relationships with staff and safety; the security category of the prison has a strong effect on how prisoners evaluate race relations; prisoners held in high-security prisons tend to rate race relations significantly more poorly than those in low-security establishments; and neither the ethnic composition of the individual prison population nor the respective ratio of White to ethnic minority staff has a significant impact on how inmates view race relations.

*Design of the study*

This survey research was originally developed during 2000–01 as a tool for measuring prisoner treatment and experience, and establishment culture. In identifying 'what matters in prison' and formulating the appropriate questions, assistance was sought from both staff and inmates in workshop exercises. The areas eventually identified were: staff–prisoner relationships, respect, humanity, trust, fairness, order, safety, personal development, family contact and well-being. This work has been subject to constant refinement, in the context of which a race relations component has been introduced. Each concept or dimension is represented by a number of specific questions or statements with which respondents are asked to agree or disagree on a five-point Likert scale, from 1 ('strongly agree') to 5 ('strongly disagree'). The neutral 'passmark' score has been designated as 3, and anything above it is a positive score. The questionnaire includes a mixture of positively and negatively worded statements, subsequently recoded in a positive direction at the analysis stage. The structured questionnaire data were entered and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) (for a more detailed overview of the survey design, see Liebling 2004).

A version of the questionnaire has been adopted by the Prison Service, and is being used as part of their Standards Audit process. The Cambridge research team retain an oversight role and are invited to conduct specific analyses of the data. This article represents the first exercise of this nature. The data were collected and entered between 2003 and 2004 by the Standards Audit Unit research team, and analysed by the Cambridge team. The 49 prisons in the sample were included because they were due to be audited in this order. The sample comprised: 16 category C prisons, 13 local prisons (of which three held females), 5 category B prisons, 4 closed female prisons, 4 high-security

prisons (of which one held females), 3 young offender institutions, 3 multifunctional prisons and 1 category D prison. Four of the prisons in the study were private. One hundred prisoners were selected randomly in each establishment, with no overrepresentation of ethnic minorities.<sup>11</sup> A total of 4,860 prisoners were included: 78.5 per cent (n=3,816) self-identified as White, 15.1 per cent (n=734) self-identified as Black, 4.8 per cent (n=231) self-identified as Asian, and 1.6 per cent (n=79) self-identified as Chinese/Other people.<sup>12</sup>

#### *The race relations dimension*

For the purposes of the survey, the dimension 'race relations' was defined as prisoners' perceptions of their treatment according to race or religion. It consisted of five statements:<sup>13</sup>

*Statement 47* Racist comments by staff are rare in this prison

*Statement 23* Race complaints are not taken seriously in this prison

*Statement 60* This prison encourages good race relations

*Statement 59* There is respect for all religious beliefs in this prison

*Statement 44* Black and Asian prisoners are treated unfairly in this prison by comparison to White prisoners

#### *Prisoners' perceptions of race relations*

White inmates viewed race relations in prison more positively than all their ethnic minority counterparts. Black prisoners reported the lowest mean level (closely followed by Chinese/Other prisoners), although the overall mean score was slightly above the neutral 'passmark' score of 3. The overall internal reliability of the 'race relations' dimension across all groups was high, at 0.72. The mean differences amongst White prisoners and each of the ethnic minority groups were found to be statistically significant at the  $p < 0.001$  level; by contrast, the differences between Black, Asian and Chinese/Other prisoners were not significant. Likewise, with very little exception, the answers attracted by all five statements discriminated significantly between White inmates and each of the ethnic minority groups, but not so amongst the latter (see Table 1). On the whole, ethnic minority prisoners shared common views on the quality of race relations in prisons. This casts strong doubt upon the possibility of a 'racial hierarchy of oppression' in the institutional context. Consistent with the available literature, ethnic minorities, especially Black and Asian prisoners, reported low mean levels on the items concerning the quality of processing race complaints, and the fairness of their treatment in comparison with the White majority. Their scores on the question 'This prison encourages good race relations' were positive, but only marginally so. On the other hand, when asked about whether 'Racist comments by staff are rare in this

<sup>11</sup> The questionnaires were completed in small groups, with opportunities to discuss the questions and elaborate on answers at the end.

<sup>12</sup> White prisoners comprised 3,513 White-British and 303 White-Others. Black people comprised 275 Black-Caribbean, 267 Black-British, 99 Black-Africans and 93 Black-Others. Asian people comprised 78 Asian-Pakistanis, 58 Asian-British, 49 Asian-Indians, 28 Asian-Others and 18 Asian-Bangladeshis. Finally, there were 13 Chinese and 66 various Other prisoners.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that since its original construction, the race relations scale has now been revised, refined and validated in 22 establishments. Due to lack of space, we only refer to the original dimension here (see also note 22).

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TABLE 1 *A comparison of ethnic groups' views on race relations: dimension and individual item mean scores*

Item/statement	Dimension and item scores (1–5)				ANOVA (mean difference)					
	W	B	A	C/O	W&B	W&A	W&C/O	B&A	B&C/O	A&C/O
RACE RELATIONS	3.58 <sup>a</sup>	3.05 <sup>b</sup>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>3.06</b>	0.53*	0.42*	0.52*	N/s	N/s	N/s
Racist comments by staff are rare in this prison	<b>3.65<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>3.39</b>	<b>3.10<sup>b</sup></b>	0.32*	0.26*	0.54*	N/s	N/s	N/s
Race complaints are [not] taken seriously in this prison	<b>3.28<sup>a</sup></b>	2.90 <sup>b</sup>	2.92	<b>3.00</b>	0.38*	0.36*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
This prison encourages good race relations	<b>3.52<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.03</b>	<b>3.22</b>	2.99 <sup>b</sup>	0.48*	0.30*	0.53*	N/s	N/s	N/s
There is respect for all religious beliefs in this prison	<b>3.62<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.28</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>3.19<sup>b</sup></b>	0.33*	N/s	0.42*	N/s	N/s	N/s
Black and Asian prisoners are treated [fairly] in this prison by comparison to White prisoners	<b>3.80<sup>a</sup></b>	2.72 <sup>b</sup>	2.88	<b>3.06</b>	1.07*	0.92*	0.73*	N/s	N/s	N/s

W, White prisoners; B, Black prisoners; A, Asian prisoners; C/O, Chinese/Other prisoners. Item scores in bold indicate those that achieved the 'passmark' score of 3. \* The mean difference is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level; N/s, not significant; <sup>a</sup> highest score; <sup>b</sup> lowest score.

TABLE 2 *Percentage of prisoners who agreed/strongly agreed with statements about race relations*

Statements	White prisoners	Black prisoners	Asian prisoners	Chinese/Other prisoners
Racist comments by staff are rare in this prison	60.9 <sup>a</sup>	49.9	54.2	40.5 <sup>b</sup>
Race complaints are not taken seriously in this prison	14.5 <sup>a</sup>	33.1 <sup>b</sup>	32.4	32.0
This prison encourages good race relations	53.4 <sup>a</sup>	35.1 <sup>b</sup>	44.1	35.5
There is respect for all religious beliefs in this prison	61.7 <sup>a</sup>	50.2 <sup>b</sup>	60.3	53.2
Black and Asian prisoners are treated unfairly in this prison by comparison to White prisoners	8.8 <sup>a</sup>	42.1 <sup>b</sup>	40.9	30.4

Throughout this account, scores accompanied by <sup>a</sup> indicate the most positive score; scores accompanied by <sup>b</sup> indicate the most negative.

prison', and 'There is respect for all religious beliefs in this prison', all three ethnic minority groups scored relatively high.

Table 2 shows the percentage of prisoners within each group who agreed or strongly agreed with each statement. It is interesting to note that Asian prisoners were almost as likely as White prisoners to report that there was respect for all religious beliefs in the establishment. This may well have been due to the individual efforts of Imams who visit prisons (Spalek and Wilson 2002) and/or the relevant policies put in train by the Prison Service. Even so, substantial proportions (between 22 and 30 per cent) amongst all ethnic minority groups disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. The results also revealed that only one in ten White prisoners believed that Black and Asian

inmates were treated unfairly as compared to White inmates. By contrast, more than 40 per cent of Black and Asian inmates and nearly one-third of Chinese/Other prisoners felt that they were subjected to unfair treatment. This finding underlines the importance of a more subjective approach in analysing racial discrimination, with greater weight placed upon the interpretation of decisions and interaction by their recipients.

Table 3 shows that ethnic group membership was the main determinant of perceived quality of race relations, even when we introduced other (significant) inmate and establishment characteristics into the model.<sup>14</sup> In particular, throughout all models, being a non-White prisoner was the most significant predictor of lower perceived quality of race relations. Model 2 showed that prisoners placed on higher regime (i.e. standard or enhanced) tended to report higher quality of race relations, whilst model 3 indicated that prisoners held in high-security prisons reported lower levels. We shall return to this point later in the article. Models 4 and 5 showed that female prisoners were significantly more likely than males to rate race relations higher (3.58 vs 3.45,  $p < 0.001$ ), as were adult inmates (aged 21 and over) in comparison to their young counterparts (aged 18–20) (3.49 vs 3.37,  $p < 0.001$ ). Further analysis also revealed interesting variations within ethnic, gender and age groups. For example, young Asian males scored the lowest quality of race relations, significantly lower than their adult counterparts (2.78 vs 3.22,  $p < 0.05$ ). Amongst adult Black prisoners, females rated race relations higher than males (3.12 vs 3.04), though the difference was not statistically significant. Irrespective of gender or age, White inmates rated race relations fairly high. These insights call into question the assumption widely held by prison officers that, unlike Asian inmates, Black inmates tend invariably to ‘[see] racial prejudice around every corner’ (Genders and Player 1989: 50) and call for more diverse analysis and policy making (see Shaw and Hannah-Moffat 2004).

The race relations dimension was significantly positively correlated with all other dimensions explored in this survey. It was most highly correlated with perceptions of: respect (0.541); humanity (0.534); fairness (0.533); relationships with staff (0.521); and safety (0.514). Table 4 presents the means of, and significant differences between, ethnic groups on all five dimensions and individual items. In stark contrast with Asian and Chinese/Other prisoners, Black prisoners rated all dimensions and most items lower than White prisoners, yet it is important to look at the scores in themselves (i.e. whether or not they exceed 3). To take an example, although Black inmates rated safety significantly lower than White inmates, their mean score was above 3, at 3.37. In this limited space, we wish briefly to focus upon the low levels of fairness reported by all ethnic groups, most notably by Black and Chinese/Other prisoners. To a large degree, this can be attributed to the relatively low means of all groups on the relationships with staff dimension. In line with the relevant literature, we found a highly significant correlation between inmates’ views on the fairness of procedures involving discretionary decisions (e.g. on privilege distribution, disciplinary control, access to information, and responses to requests and applications) and their perceptions of relationships with staff (0.760,  $p < 0.001$ ) (see Ahmad 1996; Bottoms and Rose 1998). In other words, the way inmates defined their relationship with the prison as an institution depended considerably upon the perceived quality of their day-to-day interaction with members of staff.

<sup>14</sup> Table 3 presents the standardized coefficients for five regression analysis models predicting scores on the race relations dimension, entering variables in a stepwise manner.

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TABLE 3 *Linear regression model predicting mean levels on race relations dimension*

Variables	Perceived quality of race relations									
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	B	t	B	t	β	t	β	T	β	t
Ethnic group (White = 0; Non-White = 1)	-0.297*** (0.024)	-21.111	-0.293*** (0.024)	-20.982	-0.296*** (0.024)	-21.271	-0.298*** (0.024)	-21.433	-0.297*** (0.024)	-21.450
Regime level (Basic = 0; Standard = 1; Enhanced = 2)			0.119*** (0.016)	8.539	0.119*** (0.016)	8.555	0.123*** (0.016)	8.845	0.115*** (0.016)	8.247
Prison security level (Low security = 0; High security = 1)					-0.082*** (0.037)	-5.884	-0.084*** (0.037)	-6.029	-0.089*** (0.037)	-6.417
Gender (Female = 0; Male = 1)							-0.076*** (0.028)	-5.458	-0.077*** (0.028)	-5.561
Age (Young = 0; Adult = 1)									0.052*** (0.028)	3.729
Constant	4.085 (0.031)		3.748 (0.050)		3.771 (0.050)		3.894 (0.054)		3.827 (0.057)	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.088		0.102		0.108		0.114		0.117	

Standard error estimates are in parentheses; \*\*\* indicates that all relationships are significant at the p < 0.001 level.

TABLE 4 *A comparison of ethnic groups' views respect, humanity, fairness, relationships with staff and safety: dimension and individual item mean scores*

Item/statement	Dimension and item scores (1-5)					ANOVA (mean difference)					
	W	B	A	C/O	C/O	W&B	W&A	W&C/O	B&A	B&C/O	A&C/O
(a) RESPECT											
I feel I am treated with respect in this prison	3.15 <sup>a</sup>	2.97 <sup>b</sup>	3.07	3.15 <sup>a</sup>	3.15 <sup>a</sup>	0.17*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Most staff address and talk to me in a respectful manner	3.15 <sup>a</sup>	3.04 <sup>b</sup>	3.04 <sup>b</sup>	3.05	3.05	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
My legal rights are respected in this prison	3.47	3.34	3.32 <sup>b</sup>	3.53 <sup>a</sup>	3.53 <sup>a</sup>	0.12*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
This prison is [good] in treating prisoners with respect	2.99	2.78 <sup>b</sup>	2.97	3.00 <sup>a</sup>	3.00 <sup>a</sup>	0.21*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
	2.99 <sup>a</sup>	2.75 <sup>b</sup>	2.93	2.99 <sup>a</sup>	2.99 <sup>a</sup>	0.23*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
(b) HUMANITY											
I am treated as a person of value in this prison	3.16 <sup>a</sup>	2.99	3.04	2.97 <sup>b</sup>	2.97 <sup>b</sup>	0.17*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Most staff here treat me with kindness	2.87	2.76 <sup>b</sup>	2.89	2.90 <sup>a</sup>	2.90 <sup>a</sup>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
I [am] being treated as a human being in here	3.31 <sup>a</sup>	3.18	3.22	3.15 <sup>b</sup>	3.15 <sup>b</sup>	0.12*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
The treatment in this prison is [not] degrading	3.33 <sup>a</sup>	3.15 <sup>b</sup>	3.23	3.21	3.21	0.18*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
	2.94 <sup>a</sup>	2.85	2.93	2.69 <sup>b</sup>	2.69 <sup>b</sup>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
(c) FAIRNESS											
Privileges (like enhanced and extra visits) are given and taken fairly in this prison	3.18 <sup>a</sup>	2.96 <sup>b</sup>	3.15	3.01	3.01	0.21*	N/s	N/s	0.18*	N/s	N/s
Most staff here treat prisoners fairly when applying the rules	3.18 <sup>a</sup>	2.93 <sup>b</sup>	3.17	3.05	3.05	0.24*	N/s	N/s	0.24*	N/s	N/s
Overall, I am treated fairly by staff in this prison	3.44 <sup>a</sup>	3.08 <sup>b</sup>	3.27	3.15	3.15	0.35*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
The rules and regulations in this prison are made clear to me	3.62 <sup>a</sup>	3.28 <sup>b</sup>	3.45	3.33	3.33	0.34*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Control and restraint procedures are used fairly in this prison <sup>1</sup>	3.36	3.23 <sup>b</sup>	3.52 <sup>a</sup>	3.34	3.34	0.13*	N/s	N/s	0.29*	N/s	N/s
In general, I think that the disciplinary system here is [not] unfair	2.62 <sup>a</sup>	2.46	2.58	2.18 <sup>b</sup>	2.18 <sup>b</sup>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
It is [not] hard for me to obtain information about the prison regime and the rules and regulations in this prison	2.91 <sup>a</sup>	2.68	2.79	2.67 <sup>b</sup>	2.67 <sup>b</sup>	0.22*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
This prison is [not] good at giving reasons for decisions made about me	3.13	2.99 <sup>b</sup>	3.14 <sup>a</sup>	3.08	3.08	0.13*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
	2.63	2.56	2.67 <sup>a</sup>	2.53 <sup>b</sup>	2.53 <sup>b</sup>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s

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TABLE 4 continued

Item/statement	Dimension and item scores (1-5)					ANOVA (mean difference)				
	W	B	A	C/O	W&B	W&A	W&C/O	B&A	B&C/O	A&C/O
<b>(d) RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF</b>										
Relationships between staff and prisoners in this prison are good	3.32 <sup>a</sup>	3.16 <sup>b</sup>	3.26	3.20	0.16*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
I receive support from staff in this prison when I need it	3.31 <sup>a</sup>	3.03 <sup>b</sup>	3.24	3.16	0.27*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Personally, I get on well with the officers on my wing	3.23 <sup>a</sup>	3.10 <sup>b</sup>	3.19	3.23 <sup>a</sup>	0.13*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
I have been helped significantly by a member of staff in this prison	3.74	3.57 <sup>b</sup>	3.75 <sup>a</sup>	3.72	0.16*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
with a particular problem	3.33 <sup>a</sup>	3.23	3.12 <sup>b</sup>	3.25	N/s	0.21*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Most staff in this prison show concern and understanding towards me	3.10	2.97 <sup>b</sup>	3.11 <sup>a</sup>	3.04	0.12*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Staff [do not] pick arguments with prisoners in this prison	3.21 <sup>a</sup>	2.99	3.15	2.84 <sup>b</sup>	0.22*	N/s	0.37*	N/s	N/s	N/s
<b>(e) SAFETY</b>										
There is [not] a lot of threats/bullying in here	3.48 <sup>a</sup>	3.37	3.36 <sup>b</sup>	3.40	0.10*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
I feel safe from being injured, bullied or threatened by other prisoners in here	3.24	3.29 <sup>a</sup>	3.22	3.06 <sup>b</sup>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
This prison is good at delivering personal safety	3.40 <sup>a</sup>	3.39	3.25 <sup>b</sup>	3.33	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Generally I [do not] fear for my physical safety	3.19	2.97 <sup>b</sup>	3.15	3.22 <sup>a</sup>	0.21*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
I feel safe from being injured, bullied or threatened by staff in this prison	3.76 <sup>a</sup>	3.50	3.35 <sup>b</sup>	3.54	0.26*	0.41*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
I have no difficulties with other prisoners in here	3.52 <sup>a</sup>	3.18 <sup>b</sup>	3.37	3.43	0.34*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Bullying behaviour by prisoners is not tolerated in this prison	3.84	3.85	3.79 <sup>b</sup>	3.86 <sup>a</sup>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Victims of bullying get all the help from staff that they need	3.65 <sup>a</sup>	3.62	3.53	3.42 <sup>b</sup>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
	3.21 <sup>a</sup>	3.11 <sup>b</sup>	3.15	3.14	0.10*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s

W, White prisoners; B, Black prisoners; A, Asian prisoners; C/O, Chinese/Other prisoners. Dimension and item scores in bold indicate those that achieved the 'passmark' score of 3. Scores accompanied by <sup>a</sup> indicate the most positive score; scores accompanied by <sup>b</sup> indicate the most negative; \* the mean difference is significant at the  $p < 0.05$  level; N/s, not significant; <sup>1</sup> this item was answered only by prisoners who had experienced control and restraint procedures (n = 773).

This was particularly true for Asian (0.848,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Black inmates (0.783,  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by White (0.747,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Chinese/Other inmates (0.744,  $p < 0.001$ ). These figures have crucial implications, both for the extent to which anti-discrimination and 'distributive justice' policies translate into practice and the centrality of the prison officers' role in promoting this goal, but also for the effectiveness of monitoring bodies and race relations management teams.

With respect to the rest of the dimensions, White prisoners rated dignity (3.18 vs 2.97,  $p < 0.001$ ), trust (2.93 vs 2.70,  $p < 0.001$ ), family contact (3.17 vs 3.02,  $p < 0.001$ ) and order and security (3.21 vs 3.12,  $p < 0.01$ ) significantly more positively than Black prisoners. The only significant difference between ethnic minority groups was that between Asian and Black prisoners in relation to trust (2.93 vs 2.70,  $p < 0.01$ ). It should be borne in mind, however, that most overall scores are not high. Table 5 presents the means of, and significant differences between, ethnic groups on all four dimensions and individual items. If dignity and respect are integral to fairness (see, e.g. Tyler and Blader 2000; Sunshine and Tyler 2003), then these lower scores pose challenges for those charged with establishing the legitimacy of penal authority in the eyes of ethnic minority populations.

#### *The performance of prisons on race relations*

Turning to how prisons performed on the race relations scale, none of the 49 establishments surveyed scored below 3. This notwithstanding, the levels of perceived quality of race relations varied significantly between prisons. With respect to particular types of establishments, we found significant mean differences between low- and high-security prisons (3.48 vs 3.30,  $p < 0.001$ ), female and male prisons (3.58 vs 3.45,  $p < 0.001$ ) and adult male prisons and young offender institutions (3.46 vs 3.33,  $p < 0.01$ ).<sup>15</sup> The difference between private and public prisons (3.48 vs 3.47) was non-significant. As regards individual prisons, the highest evaluations on the race relations dimension were reported in: Kirklevington Grange (4.08), Blantyre House (4.01), Grendon (3.95), Bullwood Hall (3.75) and Wayland (3.64). The lowest evaluations were reported in: Full Sutton (3.15), Swaleside (3.18), Pentonville (3.21), Onley (3.22) and Norwich (3.22).<sup>16</sup> For reasons of space, we shall only take Kirklevington Grange and Full Sutton as examples. Kirklevington Grange is a category C male establishment, which functions primarily as a resettlement prison, whereas Full Sutton is a high-security prison for male offenders. Significant differences between the two were found not only on the race relations dimension scores and all its items, but also on all other dimensions (at the  $p < 0.001$  level). In Kirklevington Grange, White prisoners scored significantly higher than ethnic minority prisoners on the race relations dimension (4.13 vs 3.68,

<sup>15</sup> It is evident that prisoners in higher-security establishments tend, on the whole, to express their views on prison life more critically. On the other hand, there are significant differences in prisoners' perceptions between prisons of the same security category and, as shown below, significant differences within high-security prisons on prisoners' views.

<sup>16</sup> The rest of the prisons scored as follows (mean scores are in parentheses): Acklington (3.54), Gartree (3.51), Sudbury (3.60), New Hall (3.63), Lowdham Grange (3.49), Bullingdon (3.31), Hindley (3.35), Highpoint North (3.61), Leicester (3.43), Leeds (3.43), Whitmoor (3.26), Preston (3.46), Low Newton (3.57), Stocken (3.38), Blundeston (3.40), Glen Parva (3.39), Stafford (3.33), Wolds (3.63), Downview (3.50), Parc (3.45), Lindholme (3.32), Castington (3.38), Weare (3.51), Shepton Mallet (3.32), Chelmsford (3.51), Albany (3.59), Gloucester (3.51), Doncaster (3.36), Cookham Wood (3.23), Dartmoor (3.30), Ashwell (3.42), Highdown (3.45), Foston Hall (3.63), Stoke Heath (3.50), Coldingley (3.44), Wormwood Scrubs (3.44), Wymott (3.51), Durham Male (3.30), Durham Female (3.57).

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TABLE 5 A comparison of ethnic groups' views on dignity, trust, family contact, and order and security: dimension and individual item mean scores

Item/statement	Dimension and item scores (1-5)					ANOVA (mean difference)				
	W	B	A	C/O	W&B	W&A	W&C/O	B&A	B&C/O	A&C/O
(a) DIGNITY										
I am given adequate opportunities to keep myself clean and decent	<b>3.18<sup>a</sup></b>	2.97 <sup>b</sup>	<b>3.18</b>	<b>3.12</b>	0.21*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
The quality of my living conditions is [not] poor	<b>3.96</b>	<b>3.72<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.83</b>	<b>4.05<sup>a</sup></b>	0.24*	N/s	N/s	N/s	0.33*	N/s
I am given adequate opportunities to keep my living area clean and decent	<b>3.14</b>	2.95 <sup>b</sup>	<b>3.21</b>	<b>3.18<sup>a</sup></b>	0.19*	N/s	N/s	0.26*	N/s	N/s
This prison provides adequate facilities for me to maintain a presentable appearance	<b>3.74</b>	<b>3.63<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.74</b>	<b>3.89<sup>a</sup></b>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Prisoners [do not] spend too long locked up in their cells in this prison	<b>3.63</b>	<b>3.47<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.54</b>	<b>3.78<sup>a</sup></b>	0.16*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Prisoners are treated decently in the Segregation Unit in this prison	2.66	2.46 <sup>b</sup>	2.88	2.92 <sup>a</sup>	0.19*	N/s	N/s	0.41*	0.45*	N/s
When important decisions are made about me in this prison, I am treated as an individual, not a number	2.84 <sup>a</sup>	2.62	2.81	2.18 <sup>b</sup>	0.23*	N/s	0.66*	N/s	N/s	N/s
(b) TRUST										
I feel that I am trusted quite a lot in this prison	2.90	2.89	2.95 <sup>a</sup>	2.85 <sup>b</sup>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
I trust the officers in this prison	2.93 <sup>a</sup>	2.70 <sup>b</sup>	2.93	2.92	0.23*	N/s	N/s	0.23*	N/s	N/s
This prison is good at placing trust in prisoners	<b>3.05</b>	2.89 <sup>b</sup>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>3.08<sup>a</sup></b>	0.16*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Most staff in this prison are honest and truthful	2.70	2.46 <sup>b</sup>	2.71 <sup>a</sup>	2.67	0.25*	N/s	N/s	0.26*	N/s	N/s
	2.95	2.66 <sup>b</sup>	<b>3.00<sup>a</sup></b>	2.91	0.28*	N/s	N/s	0.34*	N/s	N/s
	<b>3.04<sup>a</sup></b>	2.79 <sup>b</sup>	2.94	<b>3.03</b>	0.25*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s

TABLE 5 continued

Item/statement	Dimension and item scores (1–5)					ANOVA (mean difference)				
	W	B	A	C/O	W&B	W&A	W&C/O	B&A	B&C/O	A&C/O
(c) FAMILY CONTACT										
I am able to receive visits often enough in this prison	<b>3.17</b>	<b>3.02<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.10</b>	<b>3.19<sup>a</sup></b>	0.15*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
The length of time for each visit is long enough	<b>3.25<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>3.12<sup>b</sup></b>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
I am able to maintain meaningful contact with my family whilst here	<b>3.03</b>	<b>3.37<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.52<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.18<sup>a</sup></b>	0.17*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Staff help prisoners to maintain contact with their families	<b>3.50</b>	<b>3.37<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.52<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.52</b>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
(d) ORDER AND SECURITY										
This prison is well organized	2.91 <sup>a</sup>	2.73 <sup>b</sup>	2.86	2.88	0.17*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
This prison is good at delivering a structured and predictable regime so that you know where you stand	<b>3.21</b>	<b>3.12<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.13</b>	<b>3.22<sup>a</sup></b>	0.09*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
This is a well controlled prison	2.71	2.53 <sup>b</sup>	2.81 <sup>a</sup>	2.65	0.18*	N/s	N/s	0.29*	N/s	N/s
Staff respond promptly to incidents in this prison	<b>3.17<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.04<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>3.04</b>	0.13*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Staff carry out their security tasks well in this prison	<b>3.20</b>	2.98 <sup>b</sup>	<b>3.24</b>	<b>3.28<sup>a</sup></b>	0.22*	N/s	N/s	0.26*	N/s	N/s
Supervision of prisoners is [not] poor in this prison	<b>3.40</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>3.28<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.41<sup>a</sup></b>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
The level of security in this prison means that I can [not] usually get away with things	<b>3.53</b>	<b>3.43<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.51</b>	<b>3.59<sup>a</sup></b>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
Staff in this prison respond promptly to emergency call bells	<b>3.18<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.04<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>3.12</b>	0.14*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
The level of drug use in this prison is [not] quite high	<b>3.60<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>3.69<sup>a</sup></b>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
This prison does [a lot] to prevent drugs being smuggled in	2.84	2.82 <sup>b</sup>	2.91	2.96 <sup>a</sup>	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s
(e) DRUGS										
This prison does [a lot] to prevent drugs being smuggled in	<b>3.15</b>	<b>3.20<sup>a</sup></b>	2.94 <sup>b</sup>	<b>3.15</b>	N/s	0.21*	N/s	0.26*	N/s	N/s
	<b>3.50<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>3.39</b>	<b>3.24<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>3.27</b>	0.11*	0.25*	N/s	N/s	N/s	N/s

W, White prisoners; B, Black prisoners; A, Asian prisoners; C/O, Chinese/Other prisoners. Dimension and item scores in bold indicate those that achieved the 'passmark' score of 3. Scores accompanied by <sup>a</sup> indicate the most positive score; scores accompanied by <sup>b</sup> indicate the most negative; \* the mean difference is significant at the p < 0.05 level; N/s, not significant.

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$p < 0.01$ ), and on the statements 'Black and Asian prisoners are treated [fairly] in this prison' (4.42 vs 3.60,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 'This prison encourages good race relations' (4.11 vs 3.66,  $p < 0.05$ ), and also on the humanity dimension (3.96 vs 3.45,  $p < 0.01$ ), though all scores were fairly high.<sup>17</sup> In Full Sutton, White prisoners reported significantly higher mean levels than ethnic minority prisoners on the race relations dimension (3.29 vs 2.59,  $p < 0.001$ ) and on the following items: 'Race complaints are [not] taken seriously in this prison' (3.05 vs 2.05,  $p < 0.001$ ), 'Black and Asian prisoners are treated [fairly] in this prison' (3.50 vs 2.57,  $p < 0.001$ ), 'Racist comments by staff are rare in this prison' (3.41 vs 2.90,  $p < 0.05$ ) and 'This prison encourages good race relations' (3.24 vs 2.76,  $p < 0.05$ ). The only other dimension on which the scores of the two groups differed significantly was the extent to which they felt able to maintain meaningful relationships with their families (3.00 vs 2.50,  $p < 0.05$ ). Albeit explored briefly, it seems plausible that the prison security category has a disproportionate impact upon the ways in which different ethnic groups of prisoners perceive the quality of race relations in the establishment. Intriguingly, it does so more than it influences their views on other aspects of institutional life. In other words, increased regime 'depth and weight' may add to the ethnic minority prisoners' perception of inequalities (see King and McDermott 1995; also Downes 1988).<sup>18</sup>

This is by no means to deny the differential effect that other factors like varying administrative 'styles', distinct histories and ideologies, or even the age, geographical location, and architecture of each establishment, can have on penal micro-cultures (see, e.g. Adler and Longhurst 1994; Jacobs 1977; Kruttschnitt *et al.* 2000; Liebling 2004). Our findings revealed significant differences between some prisons of the same security category. Table 6 illustrates the mean scores of, and significant differences between, all category C prisons surveyed on the race relations dimension.<sup>19</sup> Amongst them, Blantyre House had the highest mean score (4.01), differing significantly from all other establishments. Blantyre House is well known for its high-quality regime and good staff-prisoner relationships (see HMCIP 1993; also Buffry *et al.* 1995; Deighton and Launay 1993). The proportion of minority prisoners at Blantyre House was 21 per cent. Other significant differences were found between Wolds and Bullingdon (3.63 vs 3.31,  $p < 0.05$ ), Wolds and Lindholme (3.63 vs 3.32,  $p < 0.05$ ), Wayland and Bullingdon (3.64 vs 3.31,  $p < 0.05$ ), and Wayland and Lindholme (3.64 vs 3.32,  $p < 0.05$ ).<sup>20</sup>

On an interesting point, although the percentage of ethnic minority staff in each of the 49 prisons studied was significantly correlated with the respective proportion of ethnic minority prisoners (0.642,  $p < 0.01$ ), there was no statistically significant association between either of the two (or their combined ratio) and the perceived quality of race relations in each establishment.<sup>21</sup> HMP Wayland, for example, ranked fifth highest

<sup>17</sup> Due to insufficient numbers of Asian and Chinese/Other people in the respective samples, the present analysis is based on a dichotomous variable differentiating between White people and ethnic minority people grouped together.

<sup>18</sup> Although significant mean differences between White and ethnic minority prisoners were found in all types of establishments on the race relations dimension, the lowest scores for both groups were in high-security prisons (3.39 vs 2.79,  $p < 0.001$ ).

<sup>19</sup> This analysis did not include Kirklevington Grange, which, as already mentioned, serves predominantly as a resettlement prison.

<sup>20</sup> With respect to high-security prisons, there was a statistically significant difference between Full Sutton and Durham female prisons ( $-0.41$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This can be largely attributed to the gender of prisoners held in each prison.

<sup>21</sup> Similarly, there was no significant correlation between the percentage of ethnic minority staff or the proportion of ethnic minority prisoners in each prison (or the ratio of the two) and the perceptions of, or the mean differences amongst, White prisoners and ethnic minority prisoners on the race relations dimension.

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TABLE 6 Prisoners' views on race relations: mean scores of and differences between category C prisons

Prison	Bullington (3.31)	Blantyre House (4.01)	Stocken (3.38)	Blundeston (3.40)	Stafford (3.33)	Wolds (3.63)	Lindholme (3.32)	Wear (3.51)	Shepton Mallet (3.32)	Wayland (3.64)	Dartmoor (3.30)	Ashwell (3.42)	Stoke Heath (3.50)	Coldingley (3.44)
Akington (3.54)	0.23	0.7*	0.16	0.13	0.21	0.09	0.21	0.03	0.22	0.10	0.24	0.12	0.04	0.09
Bullington (3.31)		0.70*	0.07	0.10	0.02	<b>0.32*</b>	0.02	0.20	0.01	<b>0.34*</b>	0.00	0.11	0.20	0.14
Blantyre Huse (4.01)			0.63*	0.61*	0.68*	0.38*	0.69*	0.50*	0.69*	0.37*	0.71*	0.59*	0.51*	0.37*
Stocken (3.38)				0.03	0.05	0.25	0.05	0.13	0.06	0.26	0.08	0.04	0.12	0.06
Blundeston (3.40)					0.07	0.23	0.08	0.11	0.08	0.24	0.10	0.02	0.10	0.04
Stafford (3.33)						0.30	0.00	0.18	0.01	0.31	0.03	0.09	0.17	0.11
Wolds (3.63)							<b>0.31*</b>	0.12	0.31	0.01	0.33	0.21	0.13	0.19
Lindholme (3.32)								0.19	0.00	<b>0.32*</b>	0.02	0.10	0.18	0.12
Wear (3.51)									0.19	0.13	0.21	0.09	0.00	0.07
Shepton Mallet (3.32)										0.32	0.02	0.10	0.18	0.12
Wayland (3.64)											0.34	0.22	0.14	0.20
Dartmoor (3.30)												0.12	0.20	0.14
Ashwell (3.42)													0.08	0.02
Stoke Heath (3.50)														0.06

Notes: Dimension scores are in parentheses. \* The mean difference is significant at the p < 0.05 level.

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on the race relations dimension, although the ratio of ethnic minority staff to ethnic minority prisoners was one of the lowest (nearly 1:30). Conversely, HMP Pentonville ranked third lowest, despite the high proportions of both ethnic minority staff (28 per cent) and ethnic minority prisoners (57 per cent) (a ratio of almost 1:2). This is not to downplay the importance of boosting the numbers of ethnic minority people employed by the Prison Service (although this is certainly not a panacea), but rather to reinforce a more appreciative perception of the 'superordinates', at least in the form discussed earlier, whilst also drawing attention to the need for enhanced race awareness training of staff. Put simply, what matters in race relations in prisons may be how rules are applied, rather than the skin colour of those who apply them (see, e.g. Tyler 1990).

*Strengths and limitations of the study*

This study had the advantage that we were able to explore prisoners' views on race relations and other aspects of institutional life in a large number and range of establishments. This, along with the large number of prisoners included in our sample, allowed for valid generalizations. The use of closed-ended questions reduced interviewer variability and enhanced the comparability of responses (see Schuman and Presser 1981). The overall consistency within, and the nature of the differences between, ethnic groups across varying types of prisons suggest that we were finding 'real' differences in how prisoners rate race relations and other dimensions of prison life. On the other hand, with the exception of verbal racist abuse by staff, the questions on race relations did not address direct racial victimization of prisoners, whether by other prisoners or members of staff.<sup>22</sup> Rather, the emphasis was on racial discrimination in decision-making processes. It is important to note here that a refined version of the race relations dimension has already been tested on a sample of 1,814 prisoners, and the preliminary findings are in line with our analysis so far.<sup>23</sup> It was also unfortunate that, owing to the use of closed questions, we were not able to obtain unanticipated answers, nor, consequently, to ask further questions in response to what might be seen as significant replies (see Fowler 2002).

We are aware that self-reports of racial victimization in such an inherently oppressive environment as the prison should be treated with caution. But, to assess the validity of a measure presupposes the existence of a 'real' definition of what is being studied (Babbie

<sup>22</sup> Although interesting insights can be gained through examining the mean differences between ethnic groups on other dimensions (e.g. relationships with staff, safety) and individual items (e.g. 'I feel safe from being injured, bullied or threatened by other prisoners in here', 'I feel safe from being injured, bullied or threatened by staff in here'), it is unclear whether/the extent to which a racial component is involved.

<sup>23</sup> The refined race relations dimension comprises the following ten items: 'I am able to follow my religious practices in this prison'; 'Minority ethnic prisoners in this prison lose out when it comes to opportunities for courses'; 'Minority ethnic prisoners in this prison lose out when it comes to work opportunities'; 'When my family and friends visit me in prison, they have come across racist attitudes'; 'Racist comments from prisoners are not tolerated by officers'; 'Prisoners with foreign nationalities are not treated as well as other prisoners in here'; 'The food and canteen products in this prison cater for prisoners of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds'; 'I think there should be more minority ethnic officers in this prison'; 'Prisoners are treated differently based on the region they are from'; 'Minority ethnic prisoners are allocated to the worst wings'. Amongst others, our preliminary findings show that White prisoners report significantly higher mean levels on the race relations dimension than all three ethnic minority groups (at the  $p < 0.05$  level). By contrast, the differences between Black, Asian and Chinese/Other prisoners are so far non-significant. Also, unlike White prisoners, ethnic minority prisoners had negative mean scores on the items concerning allocation to work, the treatment of foreign nationals and the provision of food and the availability of products at the prison canteen. Interestingly, both White and ethnic minority prisoners felt that there should be more ethnic minority officers in the establishment.

2001). As Burnett and Farrell (1994: 3) put it, 'such a survey approach is valuable in situations [like prison racism] where the full extent [and nature] of a problem is unlikely to be known'. In the concluding part of this article, we draw on the lessons learned from our survey findings, but also the available literature, to outline what we believe to be the essentials of a more holistic research approach.

### *Discussion*

We have become increasingly persuaded that analysing the nature and extent of prison racism is a highly complex undertaking, in terms of both conceptualization and empirical research. What we have accomplished is to bring to the fore some crucially important aspects of race relations in British prisons. These results suggest that perceptions of the legitimacy of penal practices differ significantly between age and ethnic groups (see, e.g. Sunshine and Tyler 2003), and that attempts to reduce discrimination work more effectively in relation to distributive practices than in relation to attitudes and general treatment. Our findings suggest that racism is both a distinctive act and part of a more general tendency to express, and translate into action, inhumane, abusive and insensitive attitudes. The prison confines groups endowed with 'negative symbolic capital' (Wacquant 2000) and their stigmatization constitutes part of the relationship between the confined and those in authority. Prisons in a single jurisdiction also differ in the extent to which they do this, however, and we should seek careful explanations of these differences. This work is ongoing and we hope to have more findings to report in the future.

If we are to understand prison racism in more depth than has been possible in the past, we also need to explore its specific pathways into and out of the institutional setting. Edgar and Martin (2004: 14) suggest that the experiences of ethnic minorities in prison should be seen 'in the context of expectations which might have arisen from contact with other criminal justice agencies' (see also Tyler and Huo 2002). Hudson (2002: 258) has argued that punishment is largely linked to 'the political climate, feelings of solidarity and division, atmospheres of welcome or hostility to strangers; and that strategies for dealing with crime, disorder, and difference will reflect both technological and cultural possibilities available to those with power'. More attention should be devoted to the concomitant practices of racial domination in place in the broader society and its institutions. Wacquant (2003: 479) maintains that today's carceral system in the United States:

... serves only to warehouse the precarious and deproletarianized fractions of the black working class, whether because they cannot find employment owing to a combination of skills deficit, employer discrimination, and competition from immigrants, or because they refuse to submit to the indignity of substandard work in the peripheral sectors of the service economy.

Just as the prison may mirror external, macro-social trends, so too can it feed their existence by stigmatizing and curtailing the life chances of ethnic minorities further (Wacquant 2003). In these respects, studying the social practices of the prison may offer an avenue for inquiring the dominant values and ideologies of the wider society, and vice versa (Duff and Garland 1994; Sparks *et al.* 1996).

We now turn to more practical considerations. We are, in general, unhappy with the use of a 'race relations dimension' in prison quality surveys. It makes more sense to

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evaluate the prison in meaningful ways identified by prisoners and staff (e.g. looking at experiences of respect and disrespect, or fairness and unfairness) and then to explore the differential evaluations of sub-groups on these themes within and between prisons. Such surveys of the prison experience should always, of course, include race, gender and age as categories of particular interest. In view of the multifarious nature of prison racism, it seems to us that whilst carefully constructed quality-of-life surveys are valuable, more rounded insights could be gained by means of methodological triangulation, i.e. the use of different, yet complementary, techniques to study the same questions with the aim to improve both the validity of the data and their interpretation (see King 2000; and see Phillips, in progress). To begin with, the study of racial discrimination in prisons should involve a considerable amount of direct observation of day-to-day life, and of decision-making processes (see, e.g. Padfield and Liebling 2000), in a number of organizational contexts and within a sequence of formal or informal decisions. To complement and extend field observations, they should be compared against any available officially recorded documentation (e.g. risk assessment forms) and data derived from inmate files (on which, see Liebling 1992: 90–3). In addition, research should comprise semi-structured interviews with all key players involved in prison life, and in decision procedures, focusing on the insights already gained with regard to: (a) routine interaction; and (b) the use of discretion. Such a combination of methods would have to address the structures of knowledge, experience, values and meanings that individual decision makers bring to a decision and which eventually coalesce to form organizational routines, as well as the effect of socio-political currents on the ways decisions are cast (see Manning 2001).

Further information is needed on individual prisoners. Research suggests, for example, that certain personal characteristics (e.g. low self-control, status) may be associated with greater sensitivity to issues of injustice and disrespect (Grasmick *et al.* 1993; Hagan and Albatti 1982). Detailed information is needed on acts and interactions. Perceptions (e.g. of unfairness) need to be linked to these actual incidents and interactions.

To avoid making interactants feel defensive, but rather with a view to understanding the complexities of living, or being operational, in the beleaguered prison setting, interviews might incorporate 'appreciative inquiry', namely a technique which 'seeks to supplement "problem-oriented" methodology with a search for "affirming" knowledge and positive imagery' (Liebling *et al.* 1999: 75; see also Bushe 1995; Liebling 2001). This approach, unlike problem-oriented methodologies, asks respondents to 'tell me about a time where you *have* felt treated with respect here . . . why was that encounter OK?' This approach often generates trust, it can provide a more sociologically rounded view of experience and, paradoxically, it often makes the telling of brutal stories more possible and emotionally manageable.

Naturalistic research should be employed in the study of day-to-day relations between those who live and work 'where the action is' in prisons. As Goffman (1967) argues, it is in the micro-level of interaction rituals and discourses that social life goes on in the prison (see also McDermott and King 1988). Under the Foucauldian prism, discourses are socially constructed frameworks of meaning that mediate, but also delimit, our sense of the world. With respect to race, discourses provide the linguistic categories through which individuals position themselves in social hierarchies, by presenting particular relationships and behaviours as commonsensical and self-evidently

'true' or 'natural' (see, e.g. Foucault 1984). From an affirmative deconstructionist perspective, the task of criminologists is to decode and eventually unravel existing power relations conveyed in communication, whether spoken or otherwise (see Derrida 1973; 1976). Time in the field, as Wolcott (1995) said, is everything.

This broader approach to analysis, particularly its ethnographic component, would allow for maximum *Verstehen* (interpreting the world in the same way as its subjects, that is), and thus for examining the degree to which institutional racism is deliberate or unwitting. Equally importantly, it would help to explore whether institutional racism reflects values that decision makers bring with them into prison from the outside world, or is inherent and endemic in the prison's own structures.

We make no claim that the list of directions proposed in this limited space is exhaustive (see also Phillips and Bowling 2003). However, it is our firm claim that urgent action should be taken towards identifying the nature, extent and wider social implications of racism in British prisons. Without this knowledge, policies will continue to fall short of their optimistic intentions.

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