'Hang on, she just used that word like it's totally easy': Encountering ordinary racial affects in early childhood education and care

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Abstract

At a time when racism remains prevalent in educational spaces, this paper addresses what *else* we can know about the ways in which race and racism manifest and are experienced in practice. This paper draws on continual mobilisations of affect and new materialist theory to examine the conditions of emergence through which race and racism are experienced within ordinary, yet affective, encounters. I propose that drawing attention to how race surfaces in affective encounters may allow us to develop more critical interventions that challenge racisms in process.

Opening

If documented experiences of race and racism among educators remain an under-researched area within the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC),

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then theorisations on the role of 'affective' experiences are even fewer still. The purpose of this article is to draw upon the theory of affect to think through the ways in which experiences of race are felt and lived in ECEC (Massumi, 2002; Stewart, 2007). I return to my own existing data from a previous study into the experiences of Black educators at work in predominately white spaces to foreground ordinary, everyday racial affects. I argue that a focus on affect may provide insight into the ways in which bodies become racialised through assemblages and contribute to the existing literature on anti-racist pedagogies.

This article begins by situating the current context around race and racism in educational spaces, before considering the dominance of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the primary analytic framework for scholars concerned with revealing the narrative experiences of racism. I then justify my reason for working with, and beyond, CRT toward more ontogenetic forms of research inquiry. My primary aim is to reconceptualise research inquiry for the purposes of providing new knowledges on experiences of race and racism. At this point I introduce affect and think through what it does for our understanding of the ways in which power relations operate in respect of race. In the latter part of this article, I revisit my own existing data from a study on experiences of race and racism from Black ECEC educators to highlight how racial affects surfaces through bodies and language in ordinary encounters. I conclude by considering implications for research inquiry and efforts to challenge processes of racism in educational spaces.

Situating this paper: Race in educational spaces

It is well documented that educational spaces are fraught with experiences of racism. For children, recent years have seen a rise in instances of racial abuse and bullying in schools (NSPCC, 2019). There is evidence to show that Black Caribbean pupils are disproportionately (three times) more likely to be excluded from school than their peers, both temporarily and permanently, and that this trend has persisted over time (Department for Education, 2020a). Black teachers are under-represented among the teaching workforce (Department for Education, 2020b), and in some places almost non-existent (Boyle and Charles, 2016; Young, 2018). Recent discussion on race in education has largely ignored the formative early years of education, prior to formal schooling, where a focus on educator identity has primarily sought to address issues of professionalism and gender. The recent Department for Education (2017), for instance, makes explicit reference to the gender diversity of the workforce, calling for more male role models. However, there are no such calls for educators from Black and Minoritised Ethnic (BME) groups, despite the fact that they are under-represented within the profession (Tembo, 2020).

Parallel to the under-representation of BME educators, the perception that young children do not 'see' race permeates discourse on equalities. Colour-

blindness treats all people as the same regardless of their race. It is a homogenizing representation of society built on the premise that, in a society where we have equal opportunities for all, race no longer matters. This then works to permeate and shape the discussion on race and the extent to which it is seen as a taboo issue (or not). Yet, in turning a blind eye to race and racisms, colour-blindness merely stands in for whiteness as the normative standard, which detracts attention from the structural and material disadvantages face by people racialised as Black. Whiteness is a Eurocentric worldview that establishes white privilege as an often-hidden norm and a number of studies have shown that schoolteachers enact colour-blindness to remain silent on issues of race (Brubaker, 2016; Castagno, 2008; Garner, 2016). For instance, in their research on whiteness in schools, Castagno (2008) found that, rather than acknowledging racial difference and issues of racism among students, teachers tended instead to silence race talk and avoid such conversations completely. In their own words:

> Through both teacher silence and demands for student silence around issues of race and racism, teachers exhibit an overwhelming aversion to acknowledgments that race exists or matters. And through their discursive appeals to culture, equality, and meritocracy, teachers further erase race and engage Whiteness. This is significant because I posit that in their prescriptions for colormuteness, educators are able to maintain the legitimacy of meritocracy, which serves to protect the status quo and the interests of White people and communities. In other words, by denying race, educators are able to also deny the ways in which we participate in the legitimation of Whiteness.

> (Castagno, 2008: 329)

These practices feed into a cycle where inequalities are perpetuated when educators fail to address racism, thus failing to address children's needs and sustaining whiteness. In light of this, it remains imperative that researchers continue to map experiences of race and racism within formal schooling and ECEC contexts and critique the normativity of whiteness.

Working with and through CRT

For scholars concerned with revealing experiences of racism, CRT has, since at least the 1970s, remained the dominant analytic framework for analyses. CRT emerged in the United States in response to the endemic presence of race within the American social and political formation and is now commonplace in educational research in England (Warmington, 2020). It can be understood as race-conscious social analysis, built on the premise of social constructionism which, in a broad sense, is a framework that understands power relations (such as race, gender, or class) not as naturally given, but rather as socially inscribed. This is

visible through Delgado and Stefancic (2017: 9), who, in their primer on CRT, write that:

> Race and races are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society manipulates, or retires when convenient.

CRT as an analytic framework rooted in social constructionism has significantly enhanced knowledges about race and racism, particularly in working against contemporary proponents of 'behavioural genetics', which argues for the genetic heritability of intelligence as a biological basis for racial difference in educational achievement (Gillborn, 2016). Counter-narratives are another important component of CRT that seek to privilege experience. Minoritised people of different races can have radically different experiences as they go through life. Mapping these experiences is therefore important since, as Nguyen (2012: 659) writes:

> Minority members find voice when they use experiential knowledge in naming their own reality given: reality is socially constructed; stories are a powerful means of destroying and changing mind-sets; stories have a community building function; stories provide members of out-groups' mental self-preservation.

While I maintain a commitment with CRT to understanding experience within this article, I follow others in the concern that a framework which regards race and racism as primarily social or structural has several significant epistemological implications for how we might both understand and meaningfully challenge dominant power relations. Clearly the productive contributions of CRT thus far must be stressed as crucial; I am indebted to them. Yet, it remains salient that any conceptual framework which primarily addresses the social realm arguably restrains the possibility for resistance against these forms of power to the domain of discursive agency, thus bracketing out the social world from the material world that enables it (Barad, 2007; Kirby, 2017).

In recent decades, a body of scholarship has converged around the idea that encounters with race might be understood beyond epistemological knowledges (Lim, 2010; Liu, 2017; Puar, 2017; Saldanha, 2006; Swanton, 2010; Tolia-Kelly and Crang, 2010), and that experiences of race and racism might more usefully be understood in terms of 'affect' (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2013; Vila and Avery-Natale, 2020; Zembylas, 2015). This is an important theoretical shift concerned with how race is performed through situated encounters, through certain affective and material conditions of social interaction beyond discourse. It also involves reconsidering how power relations operate through heterogeneous arrangements of social and material experiences (assemblages, defined below). This carries epistemological and ontological implications for how research might produce new knowledges that enable us successfully to address racial inequalities. Importantly, none of this is to say that CRT is the 'wrong' approach, this is not

a refusal, but a more creative engagement with experiences of racism. The point is that, as Massumi (2002: 7) identifies, 'It's just that their sphere of applicability must be recognized as limited to a particular mode of existence ... Cultural laws of positioning and ideology are accurate in a certain sphere'. At a time where racism not only continues to exist, but *persists* and may be worsening[1], this article is concerned with *what else* we can know about the ways in which race and racism manifest and are experienced in practice. The next section introduces the role of affect and provides a brief overview of its use in research inquiry, before considering implications for understanding power relations.

Introducing affect

> Thinking *through* affect is not just reflecting on it. It is thought taking the plunge, consenting to ride the waves of affect on a crest of words, drenched to the conceptual bone in the fineness of its spray. (Massumi, 2015: xii)

While it is well noted by nearly all who come across 'affect' that there is no single definition of the term, the turn to affect can be said to be broadly unified behind the idea that power relations such as gender or race cannot be thought of as externally imposed structures, nor conceived of as static, atemporal formations. Affect takes a step back to focus on the emergence of movements, where *passage* precedes construction and *affects therefore precede representation* (Massumi, 2002). Affects focus on 'the processes of transition one body goes through when encountering another and the implications such encounters have for a body's capacity to act' (Simpson and Brigstocke, 2019: 2). To think in this way is to take account of the dynamic nature of certain power relations, rather than starting with a presumption that they are already embedded in social structures. Necessarily, these processes coalesce into regularities; however, this places power structures as *secondary* effects of affective encounters, rather than already-existing formations (Massumi, 2015). By way of illustration, Massumi (2002) refers to this process of signifying subject formations in terms of coding people on to a 'grid'. The grid is understood as an overarching framework of culturally constructed significations (i.e. gender, sex) whereby the body corresponds to a particular site and therefore comes to be defined by that position. Yet, when 'positioning of any kind comes a determining first, movement comes a problematic second" (Massumi, 2002: 3). This kind of research in the social sciences, while necessary, is, at the same time, often unable on its own to capture the entangled and contradictory nature of our quotidian lives.[2] Affect therefore figures as a means to move away from back-end processes of signification, coding, and representation.

There remains little consensus within the literature on the relationship between affect and emotion. While I take the position that a distinction can be usefully applied, I also recognise that both of these terms often fade in and out of coherence with one another. The crude distinction I settle on here positions emotions as referring to conscious thoughts and subjective processes about how individuals

feel, whereas affect is ontologically *prior to* emotion (and, in fact, all forms of conscious self-reflection). Emotions follow affect as felt and thus represent the subjective feeling of affect, as 'affect plus an awareness of that affect' (Manning, 2006: xxi). However, just as significations feed back into the processes from which they arise, affect also works both ways. Ahmed (2010: 231n) pins this down well when she writes that:

> While you can separate an affective response from an emotion that is attributed as such (the bodily sensations from the feeling of being afraid), this does not mean that in practice, or in everyday life, they are separate. In fact, they are contiguous; they slide into each other; they stick, and cohere, even when they are separated.

For present purposes then, working with affect affords the ability to go beyond solely what is said (and what can then be mapped onto discourse), toward a more ontogenetic consideration of the ways that racialised forms of power are felt and experienced between bodies in the present.[3] Importantly, this perspective relocates the politics of difference (simply how we discriminate between beings and essences) outside the dialectical scheme, effectively overcoming the fixity of 'zombie categories' that have tended to dominate social sciences research (Gullion, 2018). Consequentially, this emphasises movement and implicates questions of ontogenetics: how particular affects connect thoughts together with bodies, in particular spaces, and what capacities they enable or constrain going forward. Affects can surface in composition with elements of an assemblage and can be attached to people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, any number of other things, as well as time and space (Sedgwick, 2002). These things become affective when they leave an impression, when they press upon us (Ahmed, 2000). In going beyond the dialectical scheme and overcoming binary distinctions, affect enables and resituates a more relational understanding of power through considering the capacity of bodies to affect other bodies and be affected by them. In short, bodies, human or not, must be seen as productive in their own right.

What does this mean for race?

> Theory is an inquiry, which is to say, a practice: a practice of the seemingly fictive world that empiricism describes; a study of the conditions of legitimacy of practices that is in fact our own. (Deleuze, 2001: 36)

The implications of affect for race, following an ontological formation, means no longer conceiving of the concept as purely a social construction that is mapped onto the body. It is *more* than that. Here we can turn to Deleuze and Guattari (1994) who, in blurring epistemological knowledges and ontological ways of becoming, saw concepts as only ever defined by the sum of their components and dependent on the immanence of the material world, coming together as a whole, though only fragmentarily. Their phrase 'thinking par le milieu' is

translated by Stengers (2005) to uncover the French double meaning of milieu, both the middle and the surroundings or habitat. To think with the surroundings means that no theory can be disentangled from its particular surroundings, and no practice can be disentangled from its particular environment. In methodological terms, this would mean not taking data such as interviews as signs or symptoms of a wider social construction, but rather as knowledges and experiences that can be thought through in-themselves. As Colebrook (2002: 82) argues, 'We do not begin *from* an idea, such as human culture, and then use that idea to explain life. We chart the emergence of the idea from particular bodies and connections'. Importantly, this also resituates concepts as doings, always in the process of becoming.[4]

This idea of race entangled with, and only intelligible through, its surroundings is usefully understood through what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) first termed 'assemblages'. Assemblages have become an important part of the new materialist and affective turn in recent years as a way to disrupt the notion of bodies as unified subjects and illustrate a more relational approach between non-human and human relations. Yet, while the term is used regularly throughout Deleuze and Guattarri's work (1987, 1994), it is never formalized as a theory per se. Part of the initial confusion lies in the translation of assemblage from the French word *agencement*. This is problematic because the English word 'assemblage' does not mean the same thing as the French word *agencement*. While the English definition of an assemblage is a gathering of things together into unities, The French *agencement* is an arrangement or layout of heterogenous elements. Nail (2017) outlines a notable consequence of this distinction. Namely, assemblage was created as an alternative logic to that of unities. A unity is defined by the intrinsic relations that various parts have to one another in a whole, a useful example of this would be the human body:

> Each organ performs a function in the service of reproducing its relations with the other parts and ultimately the harmony of the whole organism. A heart separated from a body does not survive as a 'heart', since the function of a heart is to circulate blood through a body. Similarly, the organism does not survive without a heart, since it is the nature of the organism to have a heart. (Nail, 2017: 23)

Insofar as each element relies on each other to be a unity, any subsistence from their internal relations breaks apart the unity entirely and becomes a mechanism defined only by their external relations. In contrast, an assemblage comprises *heterogeneous* elements coming together in a *non-homogenous grouping*. While unities do not allow for change without abolishing themselves in the process (i.e. the human body does not survive without a heart), assemblages are more like machines, defined solely by their external relations of composition, mixture, and aggregation as well as their processual (machin*ic*) nature.[5] I find the Rube Goldberg machine most instructive for thinking through Deleuze's interpretation

of assemblage, made up of incongruous parts in ad hoc, shifting relations of widely varying degrees of efficiency and probability. As Shores (2010) explains:

> What we note from the machines is how comically unrelated are the conjoined parts. They are more like disjunctions than conjunctions, but they are mechanical, because they affect one another; or we might say the resulting transformations are always implied yet never coherent. What we see is the production of differences on the basis of differences.

We could turn to another example of this in relation to the pollination process between the wasp and the orchid. Here as, Baker (2000: 133 emphasis mine) explains, 'separate bodies enter into alliances in order to do things, *but are not undone by it*. The wasp and orchid, after their becoming, are still wasp and orchid'. Yet, while this is a useful example, not all assemblages occur in this naturalised way. Many are 'machinic' insofar as they only work through being actively put together, just like the Rube Goldberg machine. In any given event, particular relations enable or constrain the capacity of bodies to act. Speculating on what kinds of things come together to racialize bodies, Saldanha (2006: 19) writes:

> Potentially everything, but certainly strands of DNA, phenotypical variation, discursive practices (law, media, science), artefacts such as clothes and food, and the distribution of wealth. How these are connected is entirely immanent to the way certain humans behave in certain circumstances.

Recognising the complexities of the processes of becoming racialised, as illustrated here, is no easy task. What this way of thinking about race demonstrates, however, is its contingent nature: the fact that race is an immanent, non-totalisable assemblage of elements. The implications for research inquiry lie in the ability emphasise what race *does* in interactions, by attending to the different intensities through which race is utilised to sort and judge human difference (Swanton, 2010).

Encountering racial affects

> In the heat of an encounter, we are immersed in eventful working-out of affective capacities. We have no luxury of a distance from the event from which we can observe and reflect upon it. But in that immediacy of feeling absorbed in the encounter, we already understand, in the very fibre of our being, what is at stake, and where things might be tending. Massumi (2015: 93)

In this section, I revisit data from a previous Masters' level dissertation study on racial identity with Black ECEC educators working in England, UK (Tembo, 2020). This took the form of eight semi-structured interviews to provide counter-narratives on the experience of working in a predominantly white profession. In the original study, I stayed faithful to social constructionist approaches,

using thematic analysis to code data according to already identified categories. I did this unproblematically, without any serious understanding of the implications of doing so. My intention here is to avoid imposing any kind of arbitrary classification in the form of coding or by applying themes. However, as I discuss earlier, this is not because such an approach is 'wrong'. Conceptually, race is instead proposed as emergent and constituted by a blurring of epistemological and onto-genetic boundaries, always processual, always par le milieu.

The aim is to reveal the everyday reality of race in semi-educational spaces, how race emerges through seemingly ordinary encounters where bodies 'learn' to become racialised (walking into a room, children and adults saying things they should not). In doing this, I am trying to 'slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique long enough to find ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us' (Stewart, 2007: 4). Further, I use the term 'encounter' here in a deliberate way to consider the nature of events that often involve surprise and conflict, as an assemblage of things coming together. This would be distinct from a meeting between 'already constituted subjects who know each other' (Ahmed, 2000: 8) and is premised on the 'absence of a knowledge that would allow one to control the encounter, or to predict its outcome' (Ahmed, 2000: 8).

Of course, the data have affected me. Taking seriously a non-representationalist orientation toward inquiry means a recognition that I am by no means an objective participant in this research. Disrupting the notion of scientific objectivity and neutrality is necessary in avoiding what Haraway (1991: 189) termed the illusory 'god-trick' of seeing everything from nowhere. Such claims to objectivity are intended to offer neutrality, yet this marks the fact that, throughout much of history, neutrality has overwhelming acted in the interest of the white heterosexual cisgendered able-bodied man (Braidotti, 2013). My own subjectivity leaks throughout this paper.

My personal and professional history, the social categories which I am part of and those I claim, as well as my values and beliefs, inform the construction of my subjectivity as a socially and materially mediated process (Braidotti, 2002). As with my previous writing on this subject, I come to this research as a Black man from a working-class family within a predominantly white British community. I have now been involved in various aspects of early childhood education for the past eight years, as practitioner, a family support worker, an advocate for the profession, and now as a research student. I name these not to boast, but deliberately to obviate any notion that I *could* be an objective part of this research. It is not insignificant that I myself am attuned to the affective encounters presented here by virtue of my own experiences. I say this for the purposes of *gaining faith*, not as a weakness of my study, but as a means of getting closer to the 'fundamental constituents that make up the world' (Barad, 2007: 72) and to convey the honesty I hope the reader will grant me as I (re)present these affective encounters. Put differently, this is an approach unconcerned with 'unmasking hidden agendas', 'truth-finding' or 'exposure'. I take the experiences presented to me as necessarily partial, I accept that the

'same' experiences may be told differently in another set of relations. However, I reject the notion that this makes any version anymore 'true' than any other. I do this, with Coleman (2009: 72), to 'acknowledge the relational nature of research, to acknowledge my role in the research without becoming involved in the debate about how to find "better" versions of experience, as if experience can be known outside of its constitution as different moments'.

Affective encounter 1: Suddenly I pop up

(Interviewer) Do you think your influence is different in relation to your Black identity in traditionally white spaces?

(Maria)[6] I think with the parents I've met at the moment that are Black, they seem happy to see me! It's like they were hiding everybody away *and suddenly I pop up,* so they're asking what have you been doing and where have you come from? So, is that where I've come from or where I've come from for work? So yeah, I delight in the fact that it looks like there's a relief on their face, I can say oh we're not the only ones here or thank god there is someone I could talk to that looks like me. Yeah, I kind of get that I'm not – it feels like there they are doing a big sigh of relief like *oh my god they finally bought somebody that looks like me* so I can identify with who knows what I'm talking about ... yeah its funny I see it and I think umm yeah you're thinking the same thing you're thinking oh yeah they've got someone like me I'm feeling much better now, especially when I'm doing a group and the clientele that come it's like the white people that want to talk to me, they will get their Black friends to talk to me first then they will draw themselves in the conversation – I've never had that before when I worked in central you just talk and everyone says hi and bye whereas over there they are a bit more guarded because you are different colour and they want to know what you know and I feel like I've started again. In a way this is a detriment to me and I'm thinking I want to get out as I feel like I'm going backwards, you know my credentials should say it all I'm here as family support and I'm good at the work that I do so now it's like I've got prove myself again and it's tiring. Especially when you are thinking, are you going to let me in because of my job role, or because you trust me and the person I am?

Affective encounter 2: Hang on, she just used that word like it's totally easy

(Interviewer) So, has race or diversity ever come up in your practice?

(Lola): Well I don't know if this is relevant *but* there was a Black boy and he was using the n word, so this is just something that happened, now, no excuses but he's probably

just found the word and he's using it and he knows what it means and is trying to cause controversy and whatever, so this happened and it's not a word that I say and I thought it was just a word that you don't say. Children may not know that but I thought that adults use that, so one of my colleagues was telling me about the incident and she blatantly said the n word like this is what he said and the way he said it he said it quite a few times *and so then she said it quite a few times* and she carried on talking and I was almost *kind of stuck on that word because my brain was trying to comprehend like hang on, she just used that word like it's totally easy*, I don't know there was no like uncomfortable-ness about it and I really, that weekend I just couldn't, it was very difficult for me because I was mad at myself because I though well why did you not say something but it's like I didn't know she was going to say it. Well I was like I need to let her know that you can't just say that word and you can't just say it to a Black person, unless this is all in my head. So on the Monday I spoke to her and she received it really well, I kind of made it known and I think that is the first time I kind of thought . . . and then the same child said it again, and she says it as well and I'm almost . . . and part of me even now is thinking shall I go to the head(teacher) because I've spoken to them individually and when the second lady said I was like oh you can't say it that's offensive just keep it to the n word, but I don't want there to be a culture now where people just think they can fling it about because a child said it, I don't know! All I know is that it affected me and bothered me, and I knew I had to deal with it, and it still makes me feel me a little bit uneven because I know if I was to report what that boy has done I would never have used that word. And I think it bothered me that people did. It was just thrown out and it has made me feel more uncomfortable around those two members of staff, I'm not going to lie.

Affective encounter 3: Do they not know I'm Black?!

(Interviewer) So, I'm just asking about your own identity with your children?

(Lucy) Yeah, well I don't know is it (important)? Are they that bothered or is that my hang up? I mean it's funny because I was working in a room once and there was me, second in charge and an Asian girl who ran the room and there was, we had the children there and we were just sitting there at snack time. And we had a new student who was Black, so she was sitting down and one of the boys turned around and said to the student 'you're Black' and I looked at this boy, and I was just like oh yes and you know . . . some sort of spiel just to make the student not feel too bad, and I said to the room leader me and you are here every single day and this child has not mentioned anything to us at all ever and this student comes in and says that she's Black. He wasn't saying it in a horrible way he was just make a comment type thing and then I thought, do they not know I'm Black?! *Am I not showing my Blackness?!* Like seriously how can these children not know that I'm Black and it was a bit like ridiculous to me. So, I don't know if children necessarily see things how we see things, like we have a hang up on race but it's just I don't know, I've not had an opportunity to share

my background or my heritage or anything because you are going with the children's interests. If I had a load of children that were Jamaican, then yes! I could do it, but otherwise I couldn't necessarily justify it if you know what I mean, people would ask, and my only reason would be so that they know about me, but I don't want to make it about me but it's not about me it's them! I am thinking now!

The encounters presented here illustrate the varied experiences of race through affective, though still ordinary, accounts of working within the ECEC profession. I have sought to point to the ways in which race works to differentiate particular bodies. The first affective encounter is a complex, emergent assemblage of racial difference through two particular events (when meeting a new parent, running a parent-toddler group) where a number of affects are produced. Something like:

> surprise (*and suddenly I pop up*) – joy (So yeah, I delight in the fact that it looks like there's a relief on their face) – relief (*oh my god they finally bought somebody that looks like me*) – suspicion (they are a bit more guarded because you are different colour).

This encounter is further shaped through broader assemblages of inclusion/exclusion where the discursive racialised knowledges overlaying the colour of skin work to manipulate relations and produce racialised affects of relief and suspicion. These elements stick together in this particular affective encounter to both augment and diminish Maria's capacity to act within these spaces. As Deleuze and Parnet (1977/2007: 60) remind us, sometimes affects 'weaken us in so far as they diminish our power to act and decompose our relationships (sadness), sometimes they make us stronger in so far as they increase our power and make us enter into a more vast or superior individual (joy)'. Maria is clearly affected in different ways in these encounters as a result of the assemblages that produce her body as 'other' within structurally and socially (discursively) white spaces. She has, to use Brennan's (2004: 1) oft-cited phrase, 'walked into a room and felt the atmosphere'. In foregrounding the flow of these affects (surprise relief, joy suspicion) we become privy to the everyday reality of race in semi-educational spaces and alert to the capacities they produce in us when we enter these assemblages.

The second affective encounter is particularly interesting in so as far as it illustrates the affective power of heavily racialised words and how they are mobilised within particular assemblages. Here we have:

> cultural appropriateness in particular encounters (it's not a word that I say and I thought it was just a word that you don't say.) – shock (*hang on, she just used that word like it's totally easy*) – ignorance (there was no like uncomfortable-ness) – the burden of responsibility (I knew I had to deal with it).

This encounter can be thought through with Stewart (2007: 113), who writes that 'the body knows itself as states of vitality, immersion, isolation, exhaustion, and renewal. It can be alert to the smell of something sweet or rancid in air or to a

movement too, a gesture that's a little off'. Lola's body knows something is a little off ('Well I don't know if this is relevant *but* … I thought it was just a word that you don't say'). A number of other feelings circulate from the assemblage, namely shock ('*hang on, she just used that word like it's totally easy*'). As Massumi (2015) has written, shock is a useful concept for understanding how affects register in quotidian moments; how sometimes, to paraphrase Lola, we can become 'almost *kind of stuck on words because our brains are trying to comprehend what happened*'.

Moreover, this encounter does well to highlight how the affectivity of certain words imbued with heavily racialised knowledges (the n-word, in this case, but others too) work differently in different assemblages to produce different affects. Without digressing into whether the use of the n-word is *ever* 'right' or 'wrong', since within contemporary Western societies it is undisputable that in certain assemblages, such as Black UK and US music culture, the use of this word is commonplace, in this particular assemblage, the word is recognised as out of place (and I thought it was just a word that you don't say). As Denise Riley (2005: 5) reminds us, 'there is a tangible affect in language which stands somewhat apart from the expressive intentions of an individual speaker; so that language can work outside of its official content'. While the colleague, to their mind, may have simply been retelling the story verbatim, there is an affective excess to such words that can exceed their official intentions and stay with us, that endure. These words, again with Riley (2005: 09), 'revivify themselves within us, vampirically'. As such, this encounter assembles racially negative knowledges surrounding what is and what is not acceptable within a workplace, potentially diminishing Lola's capacities to act with these bodies in future (and it has made me feel more uncomfortable around those two members of staff, I'm not going to lie).

In the third and final encounter, a mundane event (snack time) with the addition of a new body (the student) produces a comment from a child ('you're Black') that has the power to affect other bodies, in this case through the shock of non-recognition (me and you are here every single day and this child has not mentioned anything to us at all ever and this student comes in and says that she's Black). This shock materialises a phenotype through what Puar (2017: 190 emphasis mine) describes as 'the *impulses* bodies pick up from each other, the contagions of which we know little, the sense of *being touched without having been physically touched*'.

This encounter also foregrounds the situated and immanent nature of Blackness and identity, how it matters in some contexts to some people but may not matter at all in others. It is perhaps less that the children do not know that Lucy has a darker skin colour, but rather that in different assemblages, racial difference produces different and distinct affects. To this end, this proposition takes seriously that affect mobilises who we are in the present moment in terms of identity formation and agency. Identity is continually (re)made in each encounter through affect since it is always contingent and coincident with the forces that bring it into being and which it activates. As Manning (2012: 17) writes: 'Identity is less a form than the pinnacle of a relational field tuning to a certain constellation'. Ultimately, this

encounter illustrates Lisa's Blackness in relation to the children, which is received as an affront (Like seriously how can these children not know that I'm Black) yet at the same time destabilises the conventional binary formation between our individual identities (as a priori and pre-contained) and our environment. As Lisa alludes to, in other encounters with other bodies, our relational field, sense of identity and capacity to act may change (If I had a load of children that were Jamaican, then yes! I could do it).

Closing

This article has sought to understand how bodies become racialised through ordinary affective encounters and respond to calls to engage with the 'tempestuous forces of interracial encounters' in academic scholarship (Tolia-Kelly and Crang, 2010: 2309). The use of affect, alongside the role of assemblages and the broader new materialist, non- or more-than- representationalist turn has allowed for a reading of the ways in which race and racism operate beyond a primarily social constructionist framework. This has a number of consequences for research inquiry and efforts to challenge processes of racism. Firstly, turning to the affective nature of experience is a novel attempt to consider the practicalities of what race *does* through particular assemblages. Affect challenges dominant understandings of how power relations operate, in particular through the argument that passage *precedes* construction (and *a fortiori*, affect precedes representation). The focus on affective encounters within this article points to the notion that structural formations are not all-encompassing, rather they rely on particular assemblages to sustain. Focusing on these processes, it is argued, expands the capacity for resistance beyond the discursive domain, without dismissing it entirely. 'With affect, *the political becomes directly felt*' (Massumi, 2017). A second consequence of rethinking the process of race through affectivity shifts the argument beyond a Cartesian theoretical framework toward a more materialist engagement with concepts. Rather than an understanding of things, spaces, and material as being inert, passive, and in need of human agency to *do* anything, they are understood as having the capacity to enable, constrain and mediate certain encounters that produce certain racialised subject formations. Once again, this has the potential to develop more critical interventions into the ways race and racisms in process can be challenged. Ultimately, my aim here was not to prescribe any precise solution to experiences of racism in educational spaces, as if such a solution exists, nor to provide an endpoint to this discussion. Instead it has sought propose a 'better' kind of problem, one that establishes a springboard for others to continue along this line of thought.

Notes

1. This paper was written and submitted in early 2020, prior to the killing of George Floyd, the subsequent resurgent Black Lives Matter movement and global protests around the world against racism. Hence, this paper is not contextualised within that climate; however it is worth noting that such events have only *reinforced* the continual need to engage in racial equalities work.
2. Massumi (2002: 3) again reminds us here that the sites are of course multiple, but the point is that they are still 'combinatorial permutations on an overarching definitional framework'.
3. The recent increase in scholarship on the affective turn mirrors recent philosophical work in the 'new materialisms' (which I acknowledge are by no means 'new'). Turning away from conventional ways of understanding the world and the belief that humans exist in a hierarchical relationship above animals, plants, and objects, new materialism engages with a Spinozist inspired monist ontology to move past an understanding of power within a static, steady location, and instead places the *mechanisms* of power effects at the core of subjectivity, over the primacy of culture and of signification (Braidotti, 2013).
4. There are also implications for how we interpret spatiality and time here that fall outside the scope of this paper.
5. This is what Deleuze and Guattari are referring to when they talk of a Body Without Organs (BwO), which to my mind is better understood as an 'un-organised body', insofar as a body does not automatically designate a human body but is rather an assemblage of relations (what they call a 'disjunctive synthesis') always in flux.
6. All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the interviewees.

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