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"What's the Footballer Doing Here?" Racialized Performativity, Reflexivity, and Identity

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In this article I argue for the importance of ethnography and the efficacy of reflexive autobiography within sociological work in understanding the complexities of racial identity formation. I offer a rereading of some of my earlier research as a way to draw out some of the elisions embedded within that work. I suggest that understanding such moments of "silence," those passages where the ethnographic narrator disappears from view, are central and not marginal to any theorization of "race," culture, and identity. This is because such literary and symbolic suppressions point to both the ontological gaps within identity formation and subjectivity and the continuing shortfalls within our theorizing of those concepts. The article thus develops both an epistemological framework for a reflexive cultural studies/critical sociology of sport methodology that is sensitive to questions of racialization and an analysis of the conceptual problematics in thinking through the contingent nature and embodied performance of race. The article concludes by noting the limitations to the autobiographical turn and the use of reflexivity within ethnographic accounts such as those found within autoethnography. It is argued that although critical interpretive perspectives offer a needed correction to positivistic approaches founded on a naive objectivism, the production of subjectivity and the use of autobiography always need to be located within broader frameworks that map the historical forces and social formations that make (racial) identity possible.

Keywords: *reflexivity; race; identity; (auto)ethnography; autobiography*

> A reflexive sociology . . . is not characterized by *what* it studies. It is distinguished neither by the persons and the problems studied nor even by the techniques and instruments used in studying them. It is characterized, rather, by the *relationship* it establishes between being a sociologist and being a person, between the role and the man *[sic]* performing it. A reflexive sociology embodies a critique of the conventional conception of segregated scholarly roles and has a vision of an alternative.
>
> Alvin Gouldner, "Towards a Reflexive Sociology"

> Autobiography is both impossible and inevitable.
>
> Susanne Gannon, "The (Im)Possibilities of Writing the Self-Writing"

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This article makes an argument for the importance of ethnography and the efficacy of reflexive autobiography within sociological work in understanding the complexities of racial identity formation. Everyday cultural practices are an important site for the (re)production and performance of (racial) identities as well as the construction of boundaries between and within racial and ethnic communities. Racial identities are themselves formed by and through political struggles that are often staged within the arena of "culture" (Carrington, 2007). The article uses sport—a particular cultural practice that has long been central to black political mobilization and struggle (Hartmann, 1996, p. 560)—to think through some of the methodological issues in tracing the interrelationships between race, culture, and identity. Sport's dominant position as an embodied, contested, and highly mediated component of popular culture (Giardina, 2005) and its central place within everyday life makes it a particularly interesting—if sometimes overlooked—cultural form through which to examine questions of racial identity formation.

More specifically I attempt a partial deconstruction of racial identities by problematizing the signification of blackness itself. Rather than just alluding to the ways in which sport becomes an important site for racial identity construction, I examine the extent to which sport provides a contested arena through which *competing* definitions of race, gender, sexuality, class, and region are articulated. Or, to put it more succinctly, how are different versions of what it means to be black confirmed or challenged within particular sporting locales?

I do this by conducting a *re*reading of some of my earlier ethnographic research as a way to draw out some of the elisions embedded within that work. I suggest that understanding such moments of silence, those passages where the ethnographic narrator disappears from view, are in fact central and not marginal to any theorization of race, culture, and identity. This is because such literary and symbolic suppressions point to both the ontological gaps within identity formation and subjectivity and the continuing shortfalls within our theorizing of those concepts. As George Marcus has argued, "cultural translation, which is what ethnography is, never fully assimilates difference. In any attempt to interpret or explain another cultural subject, a surplus of difference always remains, partly created by the process of ethnographic communication itself" (Marcus, 1998, p. 186). Thus, the attempt to produce analytic closure whereby our concepts and theorizations provide us with a final moment of epistemological certainty is brought into question. It is an argument for (and a realization of the inevitable shortcomings of) an ethnographic openness in how we recount our stories and

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the complex positionality of the researcher and of subjectivity itself (Gannon, 2006). The article, then, is as much concerned with trying to develop an epistemological framework for a reflexive cultural studies/critical sociology of sport *methodology*, or what Silk, Andrews, and Mason (2005) call the "sporting empirical," that is sensitive to questions of racialization (Murji & Solomos, 2004) as it is with mapping the conceptual problematics in thinking through the contingent nature and embodied performances of racialized identity.

Reflexivity, Ethnography, and the Use of Autobiography

Although there has been much written in recent years on the question of race, sport, and identity, there has been limited engagement with ethnography as a way to explicate these issues and even fewer accounts that have explicitly used forms of reflexive autobiography. Reflecting the "cultural turn" within much social science analysis, we now have numerous textual analyses that skillfully deconstruct the ways in which dominant ideologies of race become embedded within particular media texts such as films and advertisements, how such privileged ways of seeing are then reproduced through (political) discourse, and the effectivity of this in the attempts to hail individuals into particular racialized subjectivities.[1] However, although such work continues to be necessary and theoretically productive, I would concur with Les Back when he states that "in order to escape the trap of meta-theoretical reification, it is necessary to examine how the formation of identity, racism and multiculture is manifest within everyday life" (1996, p. 6).

Developing this argument concerning the need for grounded, interpretive studies, Charlotte Davies has argued that ethnographers need to produce "forms of research that fully acknowledge and utilize subjective experience as an intrinsic part of the research" (Davies, 1999, p. 5). This key epistemological position is well known: broadly stated, interpretive sociologists argue that as social scientists are themselves a part of that which is studied—that is, human behavior—it is not possible to achieve the required "distance" that positivists argue is necessary for social scientific protocols of "detached objectivity" (Giddens, 1986).[2] Furthermore, the social world is not static but in a constant state of change and flux, to which the researcher's very presence often contributes. The location of the researcher vis-à-vis the field of study should therefore become a part of the analysis in a way that develops a degree of *reflexivity* (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992). Thus, far from trying to keep the areas of theory development, hypothesis construction, data collection, and analysis (and the reporting of this process) artificially separate, researchers should instead explore how all these moments, as social practices, are interrelated and (re)define one another (Walsh, 1998) toward what Anoop Nayak (2006, p. 412) terms an "epistemological reflexivity." The result of this shift is that the very *writing* of qualitative research accounts, be they ethnographic or otherwise, becomes the moment for the inscription and performance of reflexivity, leading some proponents (see Marcus, 1998, p. 189) to argue for more open-ended, polyvocal, and ultimately "messy" forms of dialogic writing.

My use of autobiographical reflection in this article—and even of the first person pronoun that carries with it both a logic of an opening up, a certain exposure *as well* as an unavoidable authorial masterly inscription—is admittedly both strategic and partial, and used as much to reveal complexity and ambivalence as to produce analytic clarity and conceptual closure. It should *not* be seen as an attempt at evoking authentic moments as if the personal always reveals an unmediated truth that other forms cannot reach. As Ruth McElroy (2000, p. 252) notes in her research, "I approach autobiography positively as a process of contradiction rather than as a narrative of truth-telling." Nevertheless, the telling of what Laurel Richardson calls "evocative representations" (2000, p. 11) particularly via the use of autoethnography means that the *politics* of locating the researcher as an embodied participant in the research process is made apparent and helps to disrupt the researcher/researched power divide. This feminist-derived approach means that the narrator avoids attempting to represent the Other and instead reveals the Self as the object/subject for analysis. Thus, reflexivity "is a performed politics and the means of overcoming the gendered character of supposedly value-free objectivist discourse" (Marcus, 1998, p. 193).

Although "reflexivity," "autobiography," and "autoethnography" undoubtedly have a certain familial affinity, it is important to recognize that the terms do correspond to differing ways of knowing and enacting the self (for recent discussions on the dilemmas of reflexivity, the question of subjectivity, and the use of autobiography and (auto)ethnography, see Adkins, 2004; Davies et al., 2004; Ellis, 2004; Foley, 2002; Gannon, 2006; Lynch, 2000; Macbeth, 2001; May & Pattillo-McCoy, 2000; Pels, 2000; Roberts & Sanders, 2005). Reflexivity is understood here as a general positionality of heightened self-awareness and more precisely relates to those accounts that problematize the complex and mutually constituting relationship between the Self, Other, and society. To put it another way, reflexivity concerns how the modern Self can become a knowing subject of and about itself. By autobiography I refer simply to the self-narration of a life story. Autoethnography is the attempt to develop a reflexive account of the Self that opens up to critical interrogation of both the researcher's own biography in relation to those studied and the very act of inscribing or narrating that ethnographic story. In short, turning the analytical gaze back on the researcher in an attempt to dissolve or at least problematize subject/object relations within the research process and even that we have a unified, fixed, and singular Self. Of course these neat definitions obscure as much as they clarify. There is nothing "simple" about the narration of a life story, for example, especially when we rely on self-disclosure, which tends to disguise the inevitability of the unreliable narrator. Rather the article itself should be read as an attempt to use methodological reflection as a way to both define and problematize these concepts.

Black Skin, White Methods

In contrast to the numerous ethnographies on sporting violence, and the more recent autobiographical accounts examining gender construction, students interested

in exploring the situated nature of racial formation and identity construction in sport have little to draw on apart from the studies on institutional racism and athletic stacking on one hand and theory-driven textual and discourse analysis on the other.[3] In part, the paucity of such studies reflects the wider lacuna within the social sciences of detailed, rich, and sensitive ethnographies of racial formation.[4] Most of the ethnographic research into black communities in Britain, at least until fairly recently, has been conducted by white academics. This has raised a number of epistemological as well as ethical questions concerning the politics of knowledge production (who is this information being produced by, for whom, and for what purpose) and methodological problems relating to researching groups and cultures that are in some fundamental sense Other to the researcher. These questions have been particularly important when sociologists both in the United Kingdom and the United States have produced accounts that have reinforced rather than deconstructed racial stereotypes furthering racial ascriptions of black people as deviant, primitive, and dangerous, black communities as pathologized, and black family structures as dysfunctional and inherently unstable (Alexander, 1996; Duneier, 1992; Lawrence, 1982; Nayak, 2006).[5]

These debates over who gets to speak for whom have often been framed within the wider context of essentialist versus antiessentialist discussions over culture and identity and methodological questions on standpoint epistemology. Not surprisingly therefore, the literature, until relatively recently, has tended to focus on the dilemmas for *white* social scientists in researching so-called nonwhite cultures, groups, and communities. Researchers from the *same* racial background of those studied are often assumed to have an unproblematic relationship. That is, race is only perceived to be an issue, *becomes a marker of difference*, when white researchers begin to investigate the racial Other.[6]

Returning specifically to social scientific work on sporting cultures, the failure to develop sufficiently *self-reflexive* modes of research has meant that "whiteness" has, regrettably, become the default, unmarked, normative position through which much work in the area is produced. Sport sociologists have been slow to investigate the construction of (white) racial identities as evident in the lack of empirical studies (Long & Hylton, 2002). Within such a context, race can only figure as a barrier or impediment to knowledge production—which is somehow "unraced"—and the positionality of white researchers largely ignored. Thus, even an ethnographer as adept as Richard Giulianotti, who over the past decade or so has provided some of the most insightful readings of football fan cultures, struggles to break free from a certain "racial blind spot" when it comes to thinking through the formation of whiteness within the ethnographic account. When Giulianotti has reflected directly on how race may impact the fields of study that he has been preoccupied with, it is to suggest that black researchers would have difficulty in studying football hooligan cultures because such groups are "predominantly white" and often associated with "ultranationalist, racist politics" (1995, p. 13). He continues that "a non-Caucasian researcher would highlight some of the latent bigotry underlying Scottish football's white, male fan cultures, but beyond these (already known) findings, the study may influence more than it observes" (1995, p. 13).

This is a limited—and limiting (on others in the field)—analysis of the complexities involved in thinking through racial formation and ethnographic research. Leaving aside the problematic nomenclature of non-Caucasian, the no doubt unintended implication is that black researchers are effectively barred from researching such cultures as they would, unlike white researchers, adversely and negatively affect the field—"the study may influence more than it observes." This is deemed to be problematic as the only useful information derived would be further evidence of racism, which apparently is something "already known." Clearly black researchers are capable of providing insights other than those that are directly related to the effects of racism—there might be other aspects of the cultures studied that a black researcher might be able to "highlight." Significantly, black researchers' position within such sporting subcultures might itself prove insightful in producing more *complex* accounts of how racism intersects with class, gender, and sexuality especially as such spaces do *occasionally* allow in black male fans, as Giulianotti himself later acknowledges. For example, Back, Crabbe, and Solomos (2001a) have shown how black, and less frequently Asian, male fans can obtain cultural passports of inclusion into fan cultures if they display certain masculinist attitudes despite and even alongside the promotion of racist vernacular within such cultures. Recent accounts of fan cultures, which have paid more serious attention to race, have actually shown the *changing nature* of racial discourse, especially when located alongside questions of national belonging, thus providing us with more nuanced ways of reading contemporary sporting (fan) cultures (see Back, Crabbe, & Solomos, 2001b; Crabbe, 2004).

Furthermore, an important opportunity is lost when white researchers fail to see how they could begin to unpack issues surrounding the "variability of whiteness" (Best, 2003, p. 908). This would help us to avoid the construction of monolithic and often stereotyped portrayals of, for example, white, working-class culture and communities as universally racist and undifferentiated, something, paradoxically, that the work of Giulianotti (along with Gary Armstrong) has often tried to avoid and actively worked against.[7] In contrast, Les Back has shown how it is possible for white researchers to avoid both the "bourgeois caricatures" (Ware & Back, 2002, p. 40) of the white working-class racist "thug," at the same time confronting (as opposed to simply ignoring) the ethical problematic, the "gray zone," of a critical ethnography of white racism.

Such accounts that fail to interrogate whiteness inadvertently produce a fixed view of racial identities, negating the very *contested* nature of their construction. Of course, this is not just a problem limited to qualitative forms of sociological enquiry. The production of unreflexive forms of "racial knowledge" that have reified the concept of race (treating race as a variable) and reproduced a "white logic" (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, in press) of racial difference (disavowing white racism) has occurred most readily within quantitative forms of social scientific research which, particularly within U.S. sociology, remains the dominant paradigm.

Although whiteness remains understudied within both the sociology of sport and leisure studies, recently there have been attempts to redress this situation (see,

e.g., King, Leonard, & Kusz, 2007; McDonald, 2005). In some cases, this is in part a feminist-derived attempt to use reflexive autobiographical narratives as a means to give a fuller account of the power dynamics involved in the research process. As a first step toward this there has been an attempt to also recognize the failures within previous research projects that have not accounted for the racialized identities of those conducting the research. For example, Beccy Watson and Sheila Scraton (2001, pp. 268-269) acknowledge that in relation to their studies on women's leisure, "we did not ask the white women about their whiteness or discuss ethnicity as a similarity. We failed to recognise whiteness and assumed ourselves and the white women in the research to be raceless. If we are to confront white epistemology then we must centre ethnicity in relation to whiteness, not only black and/or South Asian ethnicities."

Some social scientists have responded to the criticisms concerning the ethnocentrism of "white sociology" (Lawrence, 1982) by pointing out that the argument that only those from the same racial or cultural background can research Asian or black cultures denies the inherent heterogeneity of cultural formation and rests on a questionable, essentialist understanding of identity. The desire for so-called racial matching (Twine & Warren, 2000) also implies that racial sameness usurps all other social identities—for example, class, gender, sexuality, age, region—which can largely be ignored as barriers to cultural understanding. There is also the implication that knowledge production itself is directly tied to empathy; thus to not have lived the life of someone else means exclusion from any degree of understanding. Such naive accounts of the supposed immutable and essential nature of racial identities have been extensively criticized (see Gilroy, 1993). Black identity, as with all identities, should be understood in terms of the social processes and cultural practices of narrating, representing, and performing the racial self. Its *contingent* character, forged from political struggle over the signification of "blackness" itself, is therefore not a closed secret to which only its racially coded members have access and hence why grounded empirical research is so vital to avoid further reifying racial and ethnic categories. As Yasmin Gunaratnam (2003, p. 19) notes, "categorical approaches" risk reifying concepts such as race and ethnicity, ignoring the dynamic processes that make these terms real in the first place. The end result is that they "produce and reproduce wider forms of essentialism, stereotyping and racism" (2003, p. 19).

In extending this line of argument however some white academics have inadvertently implied that they in fact have a *privileged* position in relation to researching Asian or black cultures. Scott Fleming in *Home and Away*—at the time a ground-breaking work on sport and education amongst South Asian male youth—in a section entitled "A white man studying blacks, the very idea!" (1995, p. 65), suggests that "the social distance of a 'cultural-outsider' enables description, analysis and understanding of a particular socio-cultural group that is not plagued by subjective 'insider' biases" (1995, p. 66). Similarly, Penny Rhodes has suggested that in her research, being white and discussing issues surrounding racism with black interviewees did not hinder the process, indeed

> many people were prepared to talk openly at length about their experiences and opinions and several confided that they would not have a similar discussion with another black person. People treated me to information which they would have assumed was the taken-for-granted knowledge of an insider. (1994, pp. 551-552)

It is understandable, given the earlier problematic work produced largely (but not exclusively) by white academics that pathologized black British communities (e.g., see Cashmore, 1982, 1983) and where ethnography itself was seen as "voyeuristic at best and part of a process of neo-colonial control at worst" (Alexander, 2006, p. 401), that contemporary white sociologists would want to distance themselves from accusations of being illegitimate outsiders. The problem with the solutions offered is that they risk further marginalizing black researchers who apparently cannot achieve the same level of "detached engagement" supposedly necessary for qualitative research as they are, by definition, too close to their subjects thereby rendering the research biased (Hanchard, 2000, p. 174). Thus, black researchers cannot research white cultures (that may be racist) as we will only "distort" the field and similarly we cannot research black cultures or communities either because we are, apparently, too close to them!

In arguing (correctly) against essentialist notions of knowledge production that would only see black people capable of researching black cultures (and so on *ad finitum*), such arguments fail to go on to acknowledge the *complex, relational, and dialogic* nature of racial formation and the fact that being "black" and researching "black" communities and cultures will not de facto make the researcher an "insider," any more than a white researcher *necessarily* an "outsider." All our ascribed, learnt, and behavioral characteristics—as well as simply the degree of rapport that has been built up before and while in the field—will *shape*, though not *determine*, how successful the research process is. The key questions for any interpretive analysis are: What are the specific aims of the study and how does a researcher's various social identities help or hinder them in understanding these processes at different moments before, during, and after the research (Roberts & Sanders, 2005), and how should these be reflected in the research narrative? [8]

Caribbeans, Cricket, and the White Rose of Yorkshire

I want to draw here on research I conducted to illustrate some of these points. That is, I want to turn the analytical gaze back on my own work to offer an account of my failings with regard to certain ethnographic silences as well as my inability to follow through on a more radical approach to writing reflexively. This can be seen, following Burawoy (2003), as an *ethnographic reanalysis*, albeit a partial one, whereby a previous study is reexamined and reinterpreted. This is distinct from his notions of an *ethnographic revisit* whereby the ethnographer conducts new research into the same site at a later point in time with an explicit attempt at comparison and an *ethnographic update* "which brings an earlier study up to the present but does not reengage with it" (2003, p. 646). Crucially revisits are not

attempts at *replication* that is based on a positivistic logic of reliability and predictability in which "change" would be seen to have "contaminated" the field and "invalidated" the findings. As Burawoy goes on to note,

> Where *replication* is concerned with minimizing intervention to control research conditions and with maximizing the diversity of cases to secure the constancy of findings, the purpose of the *revisit* is the exact opposite: to focus on the inescapable dilemmas of participating in the world we study, on the necessity of bringing theory to the field, all with a view of developing explanations of historical change. (2003, p. 647)

In the mid- to late 1990s I examined the role of sport in the construction of black identities and sport's place within black community life.[9] To this end, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork within a predominately black community in an area of Leeds, a northern English city, called Chapeltown. I joined, studied, and ended up playing for—as a participant observer—a black cricket team founded in the late 1940s called the Caribbean Cricket Club (CCC), one of the oldest black sporting institutions in Britain. The study explored the wider social dynamics of a predominately black cricket team "representing" an area of Leeds racialized as black, and playing cricket—a sport invested more than any other with the national habitus of Englishness—in the county of Yorkshire, a county renowned for its strong regionalism, chauvinism, and an often explicitly racially exclusive form of identity (Marqusee, 1994; Searle, 1990; Wagg, 2003-2004). The county's emblem of a white rose taking on for many "true Yorkshiremen" (gendered nomenclature intended) a metonymic significance in wanting to keep "the white rose white."[10] This sociopolitical context meant that for the majority of the players and spectators of CCC, the cricket contests were never "just a game"—the notion that cricket "brought people together" through interracial contact was largely dismissed—with the matches themselves becoming overburdened with the signification of racial contestation and masculine pride. As one respondent told me, "As far as I'm concerned we're just an extension of the West Indies national team" (Carrington, 2002, p. 284), reflecting the widely held view at the club that the matches were proxy battles between England (represented by the white teams in the league) and the West Indies (i.e., the CCC).

My previous published work from this study focused on issues of community formation and how the club operated as a symbolic marker of the black community's struggles against racism and the ways the club's identity and signification had shifted during its 50-year history (Carrington, 1999). I have also examined issues relating to the intersection of gender and race, and more specifically how the actual playing of the cricket contests became, to invoke C. L. R. James (1963/1994, p. 66), "charged with social significance" and could be read as a form of cultural resistance to white racism (Carrington, 2002). What is interesting about those published accounts is that my own positioning vis-à-vis the subjects is not acknowledged. Furthermore, the "messy" nature of both the research itself as well as the narrative provided is "cleaned up," presenting a fairly orthodox account of interviews, field notes, and observations, with the obligatory "tidy" conclusion at the end. Returning to Marcus's (1998) call for more open and necessarily incomplete accounts that do

not hide behind authorial detachment but reveal the self reflexively through the writing and rereading of accounts, I want to use a number of critical moments or what Ann Gray calls "synecdoches" (2003, pp. 172-173) from my research to illustrate some of these broader points. I do this to think about the construction and negotiation of racial identity and its manifestation in embodied sporting performance as well as a means to rethink how we understand questions of objectivity/subjectivity and insider/outsider status in ethnographic research.

Reflexive Field Notes and the Use of Autobiography

At the end of the first summer's cricket season, I went to listen to the sociologist Felly Simmonds give a talk at a one-day conference entitled "Minding the body" at the University of Leeds. It was an inspiring talk about the need for a greater degree of reflexivity and engagement with our embodied selves as sociologists. I spoke to her afterward and she asked me if I was keeping a diary. I replied that I was and that I was confident that my field notes were descriptively accurate. She then repeated the question stressing if I was keeping a *personal* diary on how the very process of researching issues of identity was affecting *me*. I confessed that I had not been doing this and initially found the idea somewhat difficult to come to terms with.

Acknowledging the methodological requirement to produce "value-free" observation, the notes I had taken during my first summer's research followed the standard guidance within many qualitative textbooks and had attempted to be as descriptive and factual as possible, with the analysis and interpretation of the data and any theoretical inferences being made at later stages. This process was similar to the classic conceptualization of "sequential analysis" whereby in the periods between data collection, the researcher "steps back" from the factual data and reflects on their possible meanings. In this way new avenues of investigation could be highlighted and research questions either revised or abandoned for newer ones that appeared to be more relevant in light of the data collected. This distinction proved problematic as during the research process I increasingly felt uneasy and unconvinced with this bifurcation based on principles of scientific detachment and the notion that it is possible to descriptively record "self-evident facts." It also necessitates a tension with writing what Clifford Geertz refers to as "thick descriptions," which as Norman K. Denzin notes "gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organized the experience, and reveals the experiences as a process" (1994, p. 505).

In truth, most types of reflexive writing practices often amount to little more than the periodic reference to the researcher's impact on those researched (and how this was avoided), or occasional moments of self-doubt, and normally disappear altogether when the ethnographer moves from description to the more "serious" analysis (Johnson, Chambers, Raghuram, & Tincknell, 2004, p. 53). As mentioned earlier, the use of reflexive accounts and particularly the use of autobiography have been systematically developed within feminist work (Cosslett, Lury, & Summerfield, 2000, p. 2). It could be argued that outside of qualitative

research that explicitly locates itself within feminist scholarship, it is still rare to read in ethnographic accounts *genuine* attempts at narrating the author into the texts from the beginning and then using the self as site for analytical reflection. The problem, which is not often addressed is that it is incredibly difficult to write in this way as the ethnographer has to avoid using the detached, yet safe, third person pronouns, and acknowledge their own feelings and desires with no necessary safeguard that the approach will "work" (in terms of analytical insight generated) and not be dismissed, as is often the case, as narcissistic self-absorption.

Despite these concerns, I tried, for a while, to keep a diary about my feelings and emotions and how I perceived my own (changing) sense of self—as a young black male, as a working-class person who now found himself in a middle-class academic environment, as a doctoral research student, and so on—and to write the field notes as well. Later, I wrote to Felly Simmonds telling her I was now using this more "genuinely" reflexive mode of writing and that it was becoming increasingly difficult to separate out the two diaries; my field notes became more reflexive of my own changing sense of self. Simmonds later reprinted (with my permission) a part of the letter in a chapter she wrote on embodied sociological writing for Heidi Mirza's edited collection *Black British Feminism*. In her chapter, Simmonds writes:

> Recently a young Black man doing his Ph.D. on sport and identity, wrote to me after a conference:
>
> You suggested that I keep a personal diary of my feelings about the research alongside the more "serious" research notes. Anyway you'll be pleased to know that I did, grudgingly, start to do this and over time (and you'll no doubt be aware of this) I found it increasingly more difficult to separate the two types of notes until my field notes became increasingly reflexive and "personalised." I am currently at the stage of writing up my notes and attempting to theorize them.
>
> I'm aware that he has embarked on a difficult journey—toward the discovery of (an embodied) self through the practice of sociology. It is an act of transforming theory, an act of admitting the body and embodied social experiences into theory. (1997, p. 237)

It was not only an intellectually difficult but also an emotionally disconcerting journey, and one that I aborted shortly afterward. There are many reasons why I stopped writing in this more personalized way that can be rationalized but which are ultimately unconvincing. For one, it became very time consuming having left the field to write two diary entries, especially as I was not sure how I would use and integrate the second more personal diary. As many people who have done ethnography will acknowledge (in private), after a while, writing up field notes can become laborious.[11] Having to do two such entries did not help my motivation. Also I was concerned that such a personalized account would slip too far away from the protocols of established ethnographic writing.[12] Ultimately, though, it required a degree of "opening up" that I was uncomfortable with even as, and I became increasingly aware of this contradiction, I was asking *others* to speak about their feelings, desires, and pain in relation to their own lives and

identities. In short my unease said more about my own sense of masculinity and the problem *I had* in opening up emotionally, even (especially?) to myself, than it did about the academic merits of using a personal diary.

The use of the term "grudgingly" in my letter is instructive. It was a remarkably unreflexive attempt at reflexivity! Although my field notes for the rest of the research were "better" (in terms of a *degree* of reflexivity and sensitivity to my own positionality), I stopped writing in this way because I could not take the final step of allowing myself to become a text through which to think through the issues I was concerned with. In the "continuum" (Johnson et al., 2004) from detached ethnography of others through to an autobiography of self, rather than reflexivity being the moment of opening up, it actually served to close down that more radical step of an autoethnography; the "flashes" of personal narrative in my PhD and my published work until now being used strategically to actually prevent a full account of the self. In part, this related to a certain masculinist disdain for the perceived feminized space of "keeping a diary." But my refusal also related to the fact that the research process and the "difficult journey" that I was on, was significant not just for my maturation as a sociologist but for my formation of a black self in which I was coming to terms with my own black Britishness. In this context, Belinda Wheaton (2002, p. 262) makes an important point when she notes that researchers often fail to see the parts of ourselves that are the most personal. She continues:

> Whether the researcher's original positioning is insider or outsider, the critical distance is achieved through the process of constructing or writing the ethnography, and centrally experiencing and grappling with the constant and multiple tensions between "self" and "other" . . . This recognition of, and attention to, the reflexive situating of the researcher to their subjects, perhaps inevitably, ends up as a biography of self. (Wheaton, 2002, p. 262)

The personalized account that Simmonds had pushed me to write meant that I started to engage those "most personal" aspects of my self; that is, I began to think about what it meant for me to be "black." But, as I demonstrate below, my experiences in the field were proving difficult as I negotiated field relations in which my blackness was being questioned. The personal diary began to take the form of self-reflexive questions: How black *am* I? Am I black *enough*? What does such a question even mean? Feeling increasingly uncomfortable with a mode of writing that read like a bad attempt at self-psychoanalysis, I simply chose to stop writing in that form, to close down those internal thoughts and worries, and "retreat" back into the security of third person pronouns and "detached" observations of the field.

Some Kind of Black Revisited

As with most ethnographers, I used my ascribed and learnt characteristics to gain a degree of acceptance and legitimation from the club members. I could play cricket to a relatively high level, and so within a couple of weeks at the club I was co-opted into playing for the team—moving from a spectator–observer to an

active participant–observer role. I was also familiar with the cultural codes of black British vernacular culture, having been born and raised in a fairly multiracial part of London, and, as importantly, I was from a similar working-class background to many of the players and supporters. Thus, although I was "the guy doing the study on us from the University," my working-class accent meant that I was not seen as a middle-class interloper who did not understand what it was like for someone to live in "the ghetto" as some of the members referred to Chapeltown. Thus, there were some assumed affinities that I would "know" what it felt like to be a black person, and importantly, a working-class black *male*, living within a predominantly white society. The repeated use of "you know how it is," references to "the white man" and "us and them" during informal conversations and the formal interviews reflected an (unspoken) shared space of assumed racial empathy.

Yet I was also marked out in other ways that did help me to see things "afresh" and from differing standpoints. Initially I did not know the local area and its history, so I could ask the "naïve" questions that would allow people to tell me their stories (often repeatedly) that they may not have done if they had assumed I would necessarily know such information. More significantly as I was from south London and not West Yorkshire, there were clear regional differences to being black British/English that quickly became apparent. That is, while black Britishness is constitutively a diasporic formation, it is also profoundly *regionalized* and imagined through particular localities and urban spaces (Hesse, 2000, p. 114). These differences not only concerned regional variations in relation to the performance of black identity but also with how class was inflected differently. For example, when I first moved to Leeds I was struck by how many people—male and female—that I read as working class would wear rugby shirts, thinking I had found a mass cultural form of false class consciousness and identification. The working-class habitus that I was used to from growing up in the North Kent/South London area—or Kentish London as it is sometimes referred to (see Gilroy, 1999)—meant that rugby connoted "that middle-class sport" that we were forced to play at school when we couldn't play football,[13] and the game that no one watched or talked about, except for occasionally seeing the (then) Five Nations highlights on the evening news. Of course I soon realized that these were rugby *league* and certainly not rugby union shirts that were being worn.[14] In short, there were contingent configurations of race, class, region, and gender expressed within this specific Yorkshire/Leeds/Chapeltown setting. This meant that, depending on the situation, I could be ascribed a status of outsider just as easily as an insider.[15]

Perhaps most significantly, I was also quickly marked out as not being "from the Caribbean," but as being black British. I am not just referring to the extent to which the "national context can alter one's ascribed racial or ethnic position" (Twine & Warren, 2000, p. 19) which often occurs when black people travel from their own part of the black diaspora to another and find that their blackness travels differently and arrives changed, as often experienced by African American academics working in Brazil, for example (see Hanchard, 2000; Twine & Warren, 2000). Rather, and this says something interesting about the constitutive role of

the diaspora within black British identity, the degree to which the signifier "black" is *internally* struggled over between black peoples living in Britain, only some of whom would self-identify as "black British." Simply put, I did not need to fly to Brazil but only drive up the M1 to Leeds to experience this racial dislocation. As I explain in more detail later, this meant that I was in many ways *in* but not *of* this particular black cultural space.

This highlights one of the problems—both theoretical and methodological—with much of the work on race, namely the failure to fully interrogate and deconstruct what we might term the internal hierarchies of racial identity and the porous fault lines of racial boundaries.[16] Too often we are happy to merely name race as an analytical factor and to then map the ways in which blackness and whiteness reinforce one another as relational forms of identity. However, as Miri Song and David Parker (1995, p. 249) point out, dichotomized rubrics, such as black/white or insider/outsider, are "inadequate to capture the complex and multi-faceted experiences of some researchers . . . who find themselves neither total 'insiders' nor 'outsiders' in relation to the individuals they interview" (1995, p. 243; see also Gatson, 2003; Nayak, 2006, pp. 425-426). They continue that such binaries

> often put too much emphasis upon difference, rather than on partial and simultaneous commonality and difference between the researcher and interviewee. Such oppositional rubrics are based upon notions of *fixed* identities which are based upon readily identifiable and socially recognised points of difference. (Song & Parker 1995, p. 243)

My "acceptance" at the club, despite my south London "roots" was aided, somewhat fortuitously, by the fact that during the previous winter, and before I first went down to the CCC, I had played for a mainly black Sunday football team in Chapeltown. The team was very successful and had attracted a lot of publicity both within the local sporting circles and the regional news media. I later discovered that there existed a kind of informal social network that all the black sporting teams in the area were a part of. The pubs that the footballers used after the games were also social meeting places for many of Chapeltown's black residents. Thus, through playing football and socializing with the players afterward, I had met a large number of the supporters and players of CCC. Although not realizing it at the time and not knowing their names, they were often aware of who I was.

When I first arrived at the club at least three people came up to me and said, "You're the footballer aren't you?" This was, in one sense, helpful as it marked me out as someone who was "known" and enabled some immediate conversations to be entered into. Later on it was even used as a term of mild abuse to refer to me as "the footballer"—the direct implication being that I wasn't a *true* cricketer, that is, that I lacked certain cricketing skills. In truth I was a better footballer than a cricket player having been associated with a professional team as a schoolboy, played college football, and then semiprofessional "non-league" football. However, it also operated at a deeper level of racial signification enabling some people at the club to mark their difference from me to establish their own identity. The label of

"the footballer" positioned me (and other younger players at the club) as a *certain kind* of "black man," locating me as black *British* (football) as opposed to black *West Indian* (cricket): the sports themselves acted as signifiers of intraracial difference.[17] Indeed, one of the older players, called Freddie, continued to call me "the footballer" throughout my entire time at the club. In my 1999 chapter entitled "Cricket, culture and identity," I wrote:

> the negotiations of their black identity, for the younger players, meant that they were marked out, to some extent, from the culturally hegemonic notion of blackness at the club articulated as a black Caribbean presence—so the youngsters were more likely to listen to jungle or swing than to soca music, more likely to talk with a Yorkshire inflection than to use strong Caribbean patois. They were, in Diran Adebayo's (1996) telling phrase, "some kind of black"; in, but not fully of, this particular black cultural space. (Carrington, 1999, p. 17)

Of course what I did not say in that passage was that I too, not just those *other* "younger players," was marked out as subordinate to the dominant notion of blackness. This proved to be a difficult space to occupy as it meant, in addition to the usual pressures that an ethnographer faces while in the field, that *my blackness* was constantly being questioned, tested, and in some cases undermined.

One of the main ways in which markers of cultural identity and racial difference were established was through the use of language. The players and spectators of CCC would often switch vernacular codes depending on the context—sometimes speaking in more formal English, at other times reverting to (very strong) Caribbean patois, especially if an argument broke out or as the evening after a game wore on and more Dragon Stout and Cockspur rum was consumed. This would sometimes happen strategically. If there had been an "incident" on the field of play and there were tensions between the CCC and the other side, the players and spectators would revert to using a strong patois often meaning that the opposition team and their supporters, quite literally, could not understand what was being said. Conversely, if no such tension existed, conversations would take place with more standard English/Yorkshire tones. During the times when the conversations became more animated, Freddie would often ask me, publicly, if I understood what was being said—I normally did—as though he was monitoring my ability to follow the conversations, and by extension to test my own blackness. My time at the club thus entailed a degree of personal animosity between us. However, as Gary Fine reminds us, personal animosities between researchers in the field and the subjects of study should not be ignored and exorcized from our accounts, especially when "the personal dislike is not merely idiosyncratic but is connected to our orientation to the research scene" (Fine, 1993, p. 273). When I interviewed Freddie I asked him whether he saw any generational differences within the black community in terms of how cricket was played and watched. He said:

> . . . I think the older ones, like my generation, sees cricket as—cricket to me, like, was an everyday ting in the West Indies, that's the way I was brought up. But over here it's like *football*. Over here you only get made-up cricketers . . . There's not a

> West Indian I know who don't know about cricket, the older generation, they *know* their cricket. So somewhere along the line, you know what I mean, it's inbredded *[sic]* in some of them that's born over here. It's just getting it out them, init? It's just getting to them to get it out of them. (Carrington, 1999, p. 24)

For Freddie there was a fundamental difference between the older Caribbean-born blacks and the younger British-born black players—which of course included myself—who at best, and no matter how successful we might perform, could only ever be "made up cricketers." Even within this exchange there is a marking of boundaries, the emphasis, almost to the point of disdain on *football* as if the sport has somehow corrupted the (cricketing) soul of British blacks. There is also a sort of biological essentializing within Freddie's account with cricket somehow located in the marrow of Caribbean diasporic blacks everywhere. The notion that deep down, inbred/embedded (an interesting conflation) into the soul of every black person there is a real cricketer struggling to come out if only they (the assimilated British blacks) would acknowledge it. My presence at the club simply embodied these issues for Freddie.

At the end of the second cricket season, when I had been playing for the club for 2 years and was (or at least felt) as much a part of the club as anyone else, I attended the after-season dinner-and-dance where the awards for the season are given out, and the usual chair's after-dinner speech is given about a good year past and a better season ahead. As I walked into the clubhouse, and was greeted by the players and supporters with the usual smiles, welcomes, and touches of the fist, Freddie saw me, turned, and said, without irony nor hesitation, "What's the footballer doing here?"

Confessions of a Football Player

Below is an extract from my field notes (Carrington, 2004) of a game that took place during my first season at CCC.[18] I use it as it provides a powerful illustration of the issues of racial identity or perhaps more accurately racial *identification* and the performativity of sport and brings together some of the preceding discussions.[19]

> Played the league leaders in an important game if we were to win the league. I knew I was opening as my name was down at number 2 [on the team sheet] which made me a little nervous—to make matters worse everyone had been talking about their New Zealand quick bowler and I had spent the week worrying (I hadn't included "potential death" on my doctoral application form under "Risk of Research"). Carlton was about a 30 minute drive to the south of Leeds, near Rothwell (a mining village) and was quite a small, quaint ground. During the day a good number of mainly older white men came and watched the game. Brett [the team captain] gave us a quick team talk after Clive's warm-up saying how we needed to do our best as individuals today and no more could be asked. He also told us not to get involved with them ("you know what they're like"). We won the toss and put them in to bat—I was relieved as it put my stay at the crease off. We bowled really well and fielded well with most catches being taken—and Clive got another run-out. They ended on 160 off their 50 overs [a relatively low score] . . . I was a bit alarmed though when I

saw Gerome, my opening batting partner, putting on his chest guard and his helmet before he went out to bat. None of the helmets fit me, because of my 'locks, though I felt some pressure not to ask for any protection and just go out there and "take it like a man." Gerome faced the first ball from their fast bowler which was short and he played it down with a straight bat fairly comfortably. I was relieved after seeing this as I didn't think he was *that* fast, just as long as you stayed alert. However the next ball flew past Gerome's head at some speed, and the Kiwi seemed to get faster and faster after that. I didn't face any balls off his first over. The other bowler was fast but by comparison was almost medium paced. When I finally faced the Kiwi all I had on my mind was not to get hurt, and not to get myself out (in that order!)—scoring runs was just an optional extra (in fact I feared sneaking a four through an edge in case this upset the bowler and made him angry!). Fortunately my ability and eyes were good enough for me to spot the short balls (about three an over) and sway out of the way. The thought of actually hooking or pulling was totally out of the question. Nevertheless, with a display of swaying, leaving balls, and the odd leg glance I managed to survive. Just two scares—one ball that rose sharply on me, hitting me on my gloves, to which I'm sure I closed my eyes, and one which "squared me up" totally—the ball whizzing passed my bat, hands, arms and elbows, somehow missing them all, despite the belated appeals of their wicket-keeper. I had an amazing feeling of exhilaration—like when you are on a fair-ground ride, seemingly out-of-control, going fast, in a highly dangerous situation, yet knowing that nothing really bad will happen. We didn't need many runs, just to "occupy the crease" which we did—I was eventually bowled out with the score at 68 runs for 2 wickets, having made 15 (13 in singles!). A low score but I had done my job. We then struggled a bit as we lost wickets. The run rate was OK but wickets were falling and the New Zealander came back on to bowl. Brett faced him without a helmet, and played his first shot at about the same time as the wicket-keeper caught the ball, i.e. very late. The next ball was just short of a length, and it suddenly rose higher than Brett had expected, he didn't have time to get out of the way—the ball thundered off the side of his head as though a tennis ball had rebounded off a brick wall. He staggered about for a few moments, as if drunk, and was lead straight back to the changing rooms. As he approached you could see that his left eye was swelling up badly, and you could see an actual indentation under the skin on the left hand side of his face just beside his eye. I felt physically sick. There was sense of shock at what had happened and its severity—people rushed around Brett with bags of ice though it must have been beyond pain to put ice onto an injury like that. In the mean-time George had gone out to bat and was out very soon to the New Zealander playing a poor shot. Even Harold was wearing a helmet now—if Harold needed a helmet the guy was fast. An over or so later Harold was out too to a brilliant catch—Carlton celebrated as though they had won a Test series at Bridgetown. Then something happened which was totally amazing. Brett went back out to bat! I made some remonstrations that this was ridiculous, that none of us were doctors and we didn't know how serious the injury was. Most people agreed but Brett was determined to go back out and bat and no-one seemed capable of convincing Brett otherwise. By now his eye was watering, the swelling had increased and blood was actually running down from his nose, which I pointed out must be serious, as it probably meant he must have internal bleeding somewhere as he wasn't hit on the nose. He put a helmet on and walked back out—I thought it was crazy. Everyone else couldn't believe it. Amazingly he struck two big sixes off the Kiwi and hit out against everyone else as we edged towards their score—come the last over he faced the Kiwi and he duly scored the winning runs. I had never seen anything like it. He left the pitch to applause and went straight to hospital. During this time Clive had been saying, "See what happens

> when you don't wear a helmet!" as he is the only first team player to regularly wear a helmet—nearly all the opposition side wore helmets. We'd won an important victory, but at what cost? On the way back Harold said he would have done the same thing, "I'll play 'till I drop . . . If I'm standing I'll keep playing." The clubhouse had been hired out when we got back so we didn't stay long. I felt very weird that day—anticipation, exhilaration, satisfaction, horror, sickness and confusion. I would have never gone through what Brett did, and I felt uneasy that that could easily have been me, so very easily. I suddenly felt out of my depth—an impostor "playing" at cricket. Perhaps Freddie was right after all, perhaps I was only a "footballer." The seriousness of the game to some people struck me. The Kiwi had continued to bowl bouncers at Brett . . .

A year after that game I conducted an interview with Brett (Carrington, 2004), who after the incident had to have a metal plate inserted onto his skull. It is significant for a number of reasons. For one, the exchange reveals as much about my own attempt to comprehend Brett's actions on that day—"but we're not talking about a grazed finger or . . ."—and his almost nonchalant dismissal of the seriousness of his injuries as it does the commitment to a certain notion of sporting hegemonic masculinity on the part of Brett.[20] Beyond that, it also speaks to a certain distance perhaps between my own black Britishness and the Caribbean-based black identity that Brett, and many others like him, held on to. Brett (digressing as he does before returning to the original question) highlights the importance of cricket to himself and to others of his generation. But he also acknowledges that he is perhaps the last of those, who, from their experiences in the Caribbean, see cricket as being a central part of their identity. The contrast made is with those younger blacks who now identify more strongly with football—again the signifier of the footballer!—thus marking their own distance from a Caribbean-based black identity. The feeling, or notion, of loss is also apparent from Brett's remarks as he suggests that black cricket teams across the country are now fading away, in some ways reflecting the perceived dissolution of formal black political mobilization since the 1980s (Sivanandan, 1990). The suggestion that there are no longer black communities actively playing cricket to the same extent as before is read as a cultural and even social loss. Against these shifts—and it is of course unlikely that these were his conscious thoughts at the time, rather it is his later recollection and reconstruction of the event and its significance that is important here perhaps illustrating what Wacquant calls "embodied practical reason" (2004, p. 98)—he *literally* inserts his own body against this perceived demise by the very act of donning a helmet and walking back across the boundary ropes.

Ben: Earlier you said you don't agree with winning at all costs but I remember my first season when we played against Carlton and the New Zealand guy, when you got hit. What was the actual injury?
Brett: Oh, my cheekbone was cracked in three places.
Ben: But you put on a helmet and hit the guy for a six and you scored the winning runs. To me that is winning at all costs.
Brett: No, that's just playing the game.

Ben: But we're not talking about a grazed finger or . . . [Brett cuts in]

Brett: He couldn't hit me in the same place again, I had on a helmet! No, I thought it was important for Caribbean to win because of our position in the league.

Ben: But at what expense to you personally?

Brett: But it was no expense to me because I was already smacked anyway [both laugh]. He couldn't hit me again in the same place because I had the helmet on this time! I just, I wanted Caribbean to win, because it was important for Caribbean to win. Individually I could have said, "Huh, I'm not going back out there. He's bloody chinned me once, he's not gonna get another chance," but I wanted Caribbean to win because at that time we were high up in the league, or we were second in the league or something and had a possibility of winning the league and I thought it was important for the club to win because if the club wins something then black people get to hear about it. It might only be of interest for a year but at least we might find another four or five guys who want to play for that year and out of that we might regenerate a bit of interest again in cricket in black people . . . Because black people have now become centred and all want to be footballers because of money, and because that's what they get pumped down them, through the channels of television all the time. Every time you put on your television they're talking about football, from the radio they're talking about football. So cricket for us [black people] has now gone out, whereas cricket has actually increased in the Asian and white population in Britain. It's actually died away, literally, in the black populations. Virtually every town in Britain once had a black team, you could ring up and get a game. Huddersfield's West Indians, Manchester, Birmingham wherever, but that is now dwindling away, so in a way, maybe I should not have gone back out to bat, maybe. But I never see just the mere winning a game as being the be-all and end-all. I saw it that it was important that year when Caribbean had a really good chance of winning the league, in the bigger picture, not in just that game alone because if it was for just that game, yeah, I would not have gone back out to bat, because I didn't play the following two weeks anyway, because of the injury. But at that time, at that position we were in, it was important for me to go back out there and bat and then go to hospital afterwards—I was already chinned by then anyway, so . . .

Ben: What have been the long-term effects of the injury?

Brett: I wear a helmet more often! [both laugh].

The dialogue between us is interesting as Brett dismisses the importance of the incident as if it had been no more than a minor episode in CCC's pursuit of the league championship that season. In his justification, he links his own personal desire to win with the importance of cricket to the local black community, in a sense assuming the Jamesian position of the individual cricketer, in the moment, becoming the embodied representation of the wider community. [21] The passage also alerts us to the importance and power of the voices of participants, of understanding the lived experiences of what playing sport, performing an identity, actually means to those involved in such cultural practices. This is not to overprivilege the ethnographic as the *only* modality for analytic comprehension, as some,

usually anthropological accounts, sometimes do. Theoretical frameworks remain central in order to conceptualize the key questions at hand and in terms of producing key sensitizing concepts to make sense of and frame our ethnographic insights in the first place. Similarly, survey research and other forms of quantitative data collection when constructed with care and generalized with caution also offer important resources with which to map broader changes within society. Yet, ultimately it is necessary to return to the material conditions of existence as they are actually played out and this requires an engagement with critically reflexive interpretive methodologies. The centering of the sociologist as an embodied actor reflexively engaging the social world provides us with a basis to understand, for example, what an encounter on a cricket field in the north of England might tell us about how exactly racialized identities are performed and lived, the investments that people make (big and small) in the various struggles for social change and cultural identity and the continuing effects of racialization within putative postracial societies.

Temporary Closure: Beyond the Sociological Boundary

This article has made an argument for the importance of reflexive autobiographical approaches within ethnographic accounts of everyday (sporting) cultures. It was argued that such approaches help us to understand better the complex ways in which racial identities are constructed and embodied within cultural practices. It was suggested that this would have, for example, the benefit of challenging white researchers to more fully interrogate the often submerged mechanisms involved in the production of the "complexities, contradictions, and ambivalences" (Ware & Back, 2002, p. 40) of whiteness. Furthermore, this would help us to begin to deconstruct static accounts of racial difference and essentialized notions of racial identity.

By reexamining some of my previous published work on race, identity, and sport, I attempted to apply these methods of critical reflexivity and autobiographical exposure to "open up" my ethnographic narratives so as to reveal the moments of closure that I myself had engaged in. As critical anthropologists have long reminded us, even the best ethnographies can only ever produce partial knowledge; ethnography's "necessary incompleteness" (Anderson, 2002, p. 1548). Thus, I argued that the very act of trying to think reflexively and of writing autobiographically produces important insights into the relational, hierarchical, performed, and sometimes contested conditions of racial identity construction. Or to put it another way, my "failure" to write a truly reflexive account in my earlier work (and even this only partially successful attempt) becomes a moment to understand the complex interplays of biography and identity.

However, though I have argued for a greater engagement with reflexivity on the part of ethnographic researchers, we also need to avoid the "romance of reflexivity" (Pels, 2000, p. 2). That is, we need to acknowledge the (conceptual) limitations and (political) problematics associated with the autobiographical (see Suleri, 1992, p. 760). For one, faculty and students of color face the danger that their work will be, in the words of Troy Duster (2000), dismissed as "mere autobiographical

sociology" further rendering both whiteness invisible and race particular. That is, white researchers (unreflexively) studying largely white groups and communities are engaged in "mainstream sociological research," yet scholars of color researching "their" communities are suddenly seen to be doing specialist and marginal "race work." This does not mean we should not do such work, we should and we must. Rather we need to remain cognizant of how the same processes of racial formation that our work attempts to grapple with also operate *inside* the academic field to both normalize and privilege whiteness.

More formally, the question remains as to how we are able to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of reflexive accounts. Though attempts have been made to construct criteria by which the more creative aspects of "evocative" autoethnography can be assessed, these generally remain too generic to be of much use (e.g., see Holt, 2003; Markula & Denison, 2005, pp. 180-181).[22] Furthermore, we normally engage in studies of groups and communities on the basis that they are in some sense significant or important or that wider processes of social formation can be read into the groups' conditions of existence and behavior. The danger, to put it bluntly, of autoethnographic accounts is that *our* stories may not be that interesting. In this context it is worth bearing in mind Toby Miller's observation of the limits of engaging ourselves as texts in "the land of self disclosure," especially in the context of "US culturalist academics' fascination with revealing their really rather dull selves and psyches in public" (Miller, in press; see also Back, 1998, p. 292). More substantively, even if we avoid producing narcissistic, banal, and badly written stories, the autobiographical turn can become a trap that delivers ahistorical accounts of subjectivity within which the social conditions of identity formation are excavated. Rather than reflexivity alerting us to these social and historical forces, it closes them down, thus failing to uncover "the social at the heart of the individual" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 44). Or as Leon Anderson puts it, autoethnography "loses its sociological promise when it devolves into self-absorption" (2006, p. 385).

C. L. R. James's *Beyond a Boundary*, which some regard as his greatest work (Farred, 1996), continues to be an indispensible text for any serious student of race and (post)colonialism precisely because it skillfully interweaves, like few texts before or since, an autobiographical voice with both historical analysis and political critique.[23] James's autobiographical "method" of reading the social formation of cricket beyond the sporting boundary, brilliantly encapsulated in his adapted aphorism "what do they know of cricket who only cricket know?" can perhaps serve as a useful disposition in pushing us to think *beyond the boundaries of sociology itself* to question the "scientific unconscious of the sociologist" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 212). That is, the necessity for a "radical doubting" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 235), of producing a sociology of sociology (and a sociology of the sociologist) that questions, in opposition to "positivist hyperempiricism" (1992, p. 253), the taken-for-granted assumptions that infect academic knowledge production—our concepts, terms, frames of reference, objects of study. Thus, the field of ethnographic accounts of race can only advance by taking a radically reflexive disposition that every stage problematizes

both the boundaries of ethnography itself and the social forces that produce race—perhaps the ultimate absent presence—as an object in the first place. A critical reflective engagement that contests the social and political worlds in which we live and research (and the tools and concepts of that research), holds out the promise, as Gouldner notes in the epigraph, of a better, more humane, and committed sociology. This would be one in which ethnography (and the embodied sociologists doing the research) became a critical tool for unmasking racism rather than the method for the reinscription of racist, (post)colonial folklores.

Notes

1. Examples are regularly found in the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, and the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. Occasionally such textual work on sport can be found within cultural studies/theory journals such as *Media, Culture and Society* and *Body and Society* but rarely within the U.S. and U.K. mainstream sociology journals.

2. This raises the question as to whether or not disciplines like sociology are in fact "sciences" at all and the problematic nature of the "generalizability" of those methodologies used within the social sciences that do not rely on forms of statistical validation. For some sociologists qualitative work is scientific research, in the formal sense of the word, albeit that a different but equally valid language of science is at play. For others, particularly those open to forms of poststructuralist theorizing, the very attempt to frame qualitative research in terms of generalizability and reliability are category errors as the social sciences cannot discover universal laws of human behavior (as the natural sciences attempt to do), thus rendering the attempt to "prove" causation (as opposed to correlation) an impossible object. Social "scientists" can only produce statistical abstractions of the social world that cannot explain the actual causes of human behavior and the mechanisms that produce meaningful action; thus the forlorn search for scientific validation can only result in reification (see Alasuutari, 1995, p. 145). For a useful discussion of the generalizability of qualitative research and its scientific status, see Small (2008); also see Yin (2003, p. 239).

3. The most innovative theoretical work in this area can be seen in the various writings of David Andrews, Grant Farred, Douglass Hartmann, and Brett St. Louis, though with the (partial) exception of Farred, little of this work offers any biographical reflection or ethnographic investigation. Other significant works in the British context that have a more empirical focus, often based on forms of in-depth interviewing, would include Patrick Ismond's (2003) *Black and Asian Athletes in British Society*, Colin King's (2004) *Offside Racism*, Dan Burdsey's (2007) *British Asians and Football*, and Kath Woodward's (2007) *Boxing, Masculinity and Identity*. However, much of this research uses "ethnographic vignettes," rather than long-term, immersed observational studies of sporting cultures, and the use of the Self as a critical tool for analysis is largely absent. In the United States, Scott Brooks and Reuben A. Buford May have provided important insights into the role of sport, particularly basketball, within African American communities. Wacquant's (2004) study of a boxing club in a predominately black area of Chicago might similarly qualify as an ethnography of

race and sport, though Wacquant does not really focus on questions of race per se, as opposed to issues of embodiment and agency within the circumscribed space of the boxing gym. For a critical survey of "sporting ethnographies," see Silk (2005).

4. I am referring specifically here to British social science, which is the main focus of my argument, rather than the United States which of course has a much longer history from within both sociology and anthropology of studies on African American community life, often written by scholars of color.

5. Of course black sociologists are just as capable of producing stereotypical portrayals of black life, as for example Ken Pryce's problematic account of black communities in Bristol (see Pryce, 1986). Such works can be more damaging as they are often perceived to carry greater "authenticity."

6. The continuing underrepresentation of Asian and black social scientists within British academia has only served to further this problem (see Law, Phillips, & Turney, 2004). Recent work by a new generation of scholars such as Claire Alexander, Suki Ali, Brian Alleyne, and Anoop Nayak, among others, is helping to change this situation.

7. I have used Giulianotti's work as an example here not because I think his research is uniquely flawed but because, conversely, his ethnographic work has been exceptional. If an argument can be made here then the rest of the work within the field of sport studies is also likely to be lacking in any critical reflexivity with regard to whiteness and the investments of white academics in relation to their fields of study. A reexamination of most of the key ethnographic accounts of the 1990s that are often cited as such within the field of the sociology of sport would, I contend, support this assertion. Free and Hughson provide a critique of what they say is the failure to provide complex pictures of the gendered social relations found within football supporter ethnographies, though they themselves fail to mention the lack of attention to whiteness as a similar "blindness" (see Free & Hughson, 2003). For recent critical accounts examining whiteness and class in the United States, see Hartigan (2005), Wray (2006), and the various writings of David Rodeigier.

8. For ethnographic accounts by white sociologists on race, community, and identity in the United Kingdom that are sensitive to these issues and that generally avoid such pitfalls, see Back (1996), Ware and Back (2002), and Farrar (2002). In the U.S. context, Gallagher (2000) provides a good account of how "white stories" are used to create relational affinities between white researchers and white subjects and the ethical problems this poses (see also Gallagher, in press). See also the essays by the other white scholars in Twine and Warren (2000), and Duneier (2004) and Frankenburg (2004) in Bulmer and Solomos's edited collection *Researching Race and Racism*. Young (in press) provides a useful review of recent ethnographies on black communities produced by white American sociologists. The special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* entitled "Writing race: Ethnography and difference" edited by Alexander (2006) provides a good set of discussions on these issues.

9. This work eventually formed a central part of my unpublished doctoral thesis (Carrington, 2004). Pseudonyms are used throughout for the players' names.

10. For many years Yorkshire County Cricket Club—who represent the highest level of professional cricket—had a self-imposed policy that only players actually born in Yorkshire could play for the county side. This had the effect of barring thousands of eligible players from the Caribbean and South Asia who migrated to England from the 1940s to the 1970s

from playing for the team. Since the ban was lifted in the early 1990s, Yorkshire have only fielded two British South Asian players in its first team and still have never played a black British player (Conn, 2006).

11. On the lies that ethnographers (don't) tell, see Fine (1993).

12. Claire Alexander (2004) notes that in her 1996 study *The Art of Being Black,* the reflexive accounts concerning her sometimes fraught and ambiguous field relations were relegated to a short, neatly packaged section of that book:

> My reasons were simple, if insufficient: it was my doctoral research and I did not want to give any space to those critics to dismiss the work as subjective or unprofessional—one of the dilemmas, I suspect, that a lot of young Black academics face. (p. 138)

13. "Football" here and throughout the article refers to Association Football, or what is referred to in the United States as soccer.

14. There are two codes of rugby football with differing rules. The split occurred in 1895 with the formation of the Northern Rugby Football Union, later renamed the Rugby Football League, which allowed for "broken time payments" for players who took time off work to play, thus challenging the amateur status of rugby football. The divide, which reflected the broader class divisions within British society, meant that rugby league came to be associated with largely Northern, working-class communities whereas rugby union became coded as a southern, middle-class sport.

15. For an interesting discussion of the problematic status of "insider dilemmas" and "outsider possibilities," see Young (2004).

16. For an interesting account of the complex ways in which class complicates forms of "racial solidarity" *within* African American communities, see Pattillo (2003).

17. To be clear, I am referring to a specific and localized construction of blackness—the Caribbean Cricket Club (CCC)—in which black Britishness became problematized. I am not suggesting that the Caribbean is the dominant signifier within black British cultural and social life more generally. In fact as I have argued before (Carrington, 1999), the Caribbean "dominance" or what Hesse (2000, p. 99) refers to as the "Caribbean ethnic particularism" within many narratives of black British history has been declining, especially since the early 1990s, interestingly in parallel with the decline with the international standing of the West Indies national cricket team. Black Britishness has always been configured in complex negotiation and articulation with the signs of "Africa," "the Caribbean," and "America." Furthermore, football is widely played throughout the Caribbean. Indeed James makes constant references to his love of *both* football and cricket throughout *Beyond a Boundary* (e.g., see pp. 24, 25, 28, 42, 43, 64). Crucially, however, the English-speaking Caribbean nations play together under the banner of the "West Indies" providing one of the few cultural institutions that can articulate a pan-Caribbean identity, whereas each individual country has its own national football team. The investment in "cricket" as a signifier of black Caribbeanness for the older players was an imaginative identification with the supremacy of the West Indies national team in contrast to the limited success of the region's football teams. Of course the research took place before the success of the Jamaican football team in reaching the 1998 men's World Cup Finals and Trinidad and Tobago's similar accomplishment in 2006.

18. It is near impossible to provide a quick summary of cricket and the dynamics of the game to those unfamiliar with the sport. However, for the purposes of comprehension for this extract, a "bouncer" is a ball that is pitched or bowled deliberately "short of a length" so that after the ball has hit the ground it rises sharply toward the batter's upper body and head. Unlike in baseball this is a legal action. The batter has to decide whether to hit or "hook" the ball to the edge of the field of play, called the "boundary," or sway out of the way. A mistimed hook shot is especially dangerous as the ball is likely to be heading toward the head of the batter. A shot that reaches the boundary is called a "four" and is worth four runs to the batting side. If the batter hits the ball out of the playing area without the ball touching the ground—similar to a home run in baseball—this is called a "six." Top fast bowlers can propel the ball at speeds of more than 90 miles/hr from a distance of only 22 yards away. In a one-day game of cricket, each side bats for one inning, trying to score as many runs as possible in their allotted "overs." A batting team is out when 10 "wickets" have fallen. A Kiwi is a person from New Zealand. For those interested, the 1994 Serpent's Tail reprint of C. L. R. James's *Beyond a Boundary* has a "Note on Cricket" which heroically attempts to explain cricket in three pages.

19. Except for some very minor modifications of punctuation and spelling, this extract is as it was written at the time of the field research. Later insertions are put within brackets, and deletions from the original notes are indicated by the use of three full stops/periods.

20. There is clearly much going on within this account that I do not have the space to unpack. Central, of course, is the performance of hegemonic masculinity in not wearing a helmet. At the CCC there was a certain masculinist pride and status attached to not wearing a helmet. This was seen to demonstrate both a level of skill and also the fact that the batter was not intimidated by the opposition's (white) bowlers. My own decision to not wear a helmet was, at least nominally, because I had dreadlocks; thus, none of the helmets fitted me. However, after the Brett incident, I did purchase a helmet but I only used it in training, not during games. On reflection my refusal to wear a helmet probably had as much to do with my attempt to demonstrate that I was not just a made-up cricketer and to thereby negate "the footballer" appellation as it did any notion of "masculine pride."

21. As James notes,

> The batsman facing the ball does not merely represent his side. For that moment, to all intents and purposes, he is his side. This fundamental relation of the One and the Many, Individual and Social, Individual and Universal, leader and followers, representative and ranks, the part and the whole, is structurally imposed on the players of cricket. (1963/1994, p. 197)

22. For an interesting attempt to develop a more systematic approach toward an "analytic" autoethnography, see Anderson (2006) and the various responses to his essay in the *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*.

23. *Beyond a Boundary* is actually a difficult text to define. As Farred (1996, p. 175) notes:

> Ultimately, James's seminal work is more than part autobiography, part cultural history, part political history, and part political commentary. *Beyond a Boundary* transgressed formal generic conceptualizations in the process of creating a new genre: James was compelled to produce a new form because he could no longer operate within the limitations of the ones available to him.

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