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‘Where do you feel it most?’ Using body mapping to explore the lived experiences of racism with 10- and 11-year-olds

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Abstract

This paper presents an overview of the arts-based methodology used in a research project that aimed to explore the impact of the lived experiences of racism on 10- and 11-year-old children in the United Kingdom. The research responds to the relative lack of literature concerning the racialised experiences of young children. We discuss how we developed the arts-based method of body mapping as an ethical approach to foregrounding the children's voices. We consider that this approach contributes to knowledge and understanding about exploring the nuanced and complex relationship between the children's external worlds and their internal feelings, and supporting them to process and communicate this. We suggest that the method presented is transferable, and present our ethically engaged, arts-based planning framework that can be used if others wish to adopt this way of working.

KEYWORDS

accompaniment, arts-based research methods, body mapping, children, children's voice, impact of racism, mental health, wellbeing

Key insights

What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

We examine how arts-based research methods can support and enable sensitive conversations with children. We propose a method of carefully considered relational engagement in which an ethical approach is embodied in, and delivered through, the methods. We use the idea of accompaniment to listen and give value to children's voices.

What are the main insights that the paper provides?

By developing the body-mapping method as described, we suggest that it can be used with children to explore and express the complex and embodied ways in which psychological distress about racism can be felt, but is difficult to communicate. We provide an original planning framework that incorporates our refinements of the method, and suggest that it may support future sensitive conversations.

INTRODUCTION

In seeking to understand the subjective experience of their participants, researchers are often challenged to deploy methods which ensure respect for different positions, ideas and values. Some have advocated the integration of 'experts by experience' in the research process in order to address this (Schleider, 2023, p. 119). When working with children or minoritised groups that the researcher does not belong to, it can be particularly challenging to ensure that voices emerge in a way that recognises the nuance and complexity of participant experience. With that in mind, the current paper presents an overview of a research methodology which sought to address these challenges using an arts-based methodology exploring the impact of the lived experiences of racism on primary school children. The research was conducted by a team of education and psychology researchers in collaboration with Luci Gorell Barnes, a socially engaged artist with many years' experience of developing and delivering arts-based processes with minoritised groups. The research responded to the relative lack of literature relating to the racialised experiences of younger children in the United Kingdom (Emerging Minds, 2021; Ghezae et al., 2022), and aimed to explore children's lived experience of racism in order to inform anti-racist education training for student teachers. Guided by the socially engaged arts practice of Gorell Barnes (2014, 2018, 2022), Freire's (1972) concept of infusing dialogue with love and Watkins' (2015) idea of accompaniment, the research used body mapping (De Jager et al., 2016; Orchard, 2017) with 90 children aged 10–11 years attending three Bristol primary schools (Gorell Barnes, 2022) as a way of approaching children's lived experiences by engaging them as active participants in the process. We apply Watkins' (2015) model of psychological accompaniment to carefully considered relational engagements using arts-based research methods and suggest that such a method can inform a range of socially just research practices, in which researchers practice 'walking in the company of others' (Fanon, 2004, p. 238).

RACISM AND MENTAL HEALTH: WHY THIS RESEARCH MATTERS

There is a large and growing body of robust evidence demonstrating that experiencing racism is associated with mental health issues, including psychosis, depression and substance misuse (Berry et al., 2021; Bhui et al., 2018; Brondolo et al., 2016; Lazaridou et al., 2023; Mikrut et al., 2022; Paradies et al., 2015). In the United Kingdom, a recent government report (Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 2021) indicated a relationship between racism and mental distress, suggesting that the fear of racism and racist attacks among people from ethnic minority groups can lead to chronic stress, and that when experienced by parents can affect the mental health of their children (Bhui et al., 2018). Evidence from longitudinal studies suggests that exposure to structural and personally experienced racism is damaging to young children's social and emotional development, with the effects lasting into adolescence and adulthood (Berry et al., 2021). There is an emerging body of evidence on how persistent racial discrimination, both direct and indirect, has a harmful effect on young children's physical and mental health (Cave et al., 2020), that experiencing racism has a negative impact on both academic engagement (Verkuyten et al., 2019) and educational outcomes (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010). However, there remains little inquiry into the impact of racism on children and young people (aged 0–25 years) (Ghezae et al., 2022), with the focus of the literature to date being mainly centred on the lived experiences of adolescents and young adults (Arday, 2019; Carter & Pieterse, 2020; Demie, 2021; Doharty, 2019; Ong et al., 2013; Perera, 2020; Wallace & Joseph-Salisbury, 2022). Noticeably lacking in the literature are the racialised experiences of primary school children, and this project begins to address this lack of evidence. By developing and delivering embodied methods in carefully considered relational engagements, we suggest that this research is an important response to such epistemological injustice (de Sousa Santos, 2020; Fricker, 2007).

Despite its importance, we acknowledge the need to go beyond describing the negative impact of racism and find ways of understanding both the subjective worlds of children and young people with lived experience of racism and social structural factors underpinning racism. In order to develop effective anti-racist education, it is essential that the accounts of young people and children with lived experience of racism are listened to and acted on, otherwise it is unlikely that changes in educational policies and practices will meaningfully benefit them (Mannay et al., 2017). Therefore, in this paper we discuss a research method which allows us to explore children's lived experiences of racism, with the children as active participants in the process. However, before we describe this, it is important to examine the conceptual underpinnings of our use of arts-based methodologies and how this links to theoretical accounts of accompaniment as a way of conducting research.

Safeguarding and ethics

The research team had enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks, safeguarding training and worked closely with the schools' safeguarding leads. Throughout the research process we followed BERA guidelines. In the research the children were encouraged to talk about their experiences, and we made it clear when we introduced the project to the children that what they told us would remain anonymous unless we thought that they—or someone else—was at risk, in which case we were duty bound to refer this to their school's safeguarding team. The research was approved by University of the West of England, Bristol. However, because of the sensitive nature of the research, it was appropriate to go beyond the standard approval process and consider ethically informed relational engagements, which we will discuss below.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ADDRESSED IN OUR ARTS-BASED METHODOLOGY

In arts-based research that takes place within carefully considered relational engagements, the ethics and methods overlap and interlock; one informs the other and there is not a clear boundary between the two. Used in this way, these methods can disrupt what is usually allowed to be discussed and enable participants to retain a sense of agency in the research process (Leigh, 2020), and therefore this felt like a suitable approach to support the children to think through their lived experiences of racism. Matarasso (2019, p. 75) argues that because of its ambiguous and oblique nature, the art process is 'a protected space in which to express identity, beliefs and experience'. However, for a space to really feel 'protected', it is crucial to work gently and responsively, allowing children to be inconsistent, silent, opaque, upset or hesitant; supported but not scrutinised by another's gaze (Hanna, 2022; Watkins, 2015; Welty & Lundy, 2013). Accordingly, the research team treated the participating children as experts on their own experiences (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003), with our role being to support their explorations and try to capture and understand the meanings they were making from them. As researchers we needed to be prepared to revise our own perspectives and practice according to what the children might say, giving credibility and respect to their views (Brooker, 2011) and being clear that this was a space in which the children could safely explore alternatives to White, adult, imperialist thought (bell hooks, 1990; Esteban-Guitart, 2012).

In order to find a suitable method for working with the children, we reviewed and developed body-mapping methods. This is a process that starts with people working with an outline of their body drawn on paper, which has been used to collect the lived experiences of participants (Coetzee et al., 2017). Body mapping is more than simply asking participants to draw a body map, because to work well this process needs to take place within carefully considered relational engagements. As a method that uses a combination of drawing, writing and narration, body mapping allows participants to move between modes of expression, choosing the form they feel most comfortable with and thereby maintaining a sense of control in the process. In the methodology section later, we give a detailed, step-by-step account of how we have developed the body-mapping method to increase its ethical affordances, with particular focus on children's agency and voice. By foregrounding carefully considered relationships throughout the research process, including reviewing each body-mapping session as a research team, we add to the discourse around how children can be listened to, validated and supported as research participants.

In more general terms, however, by offering our version of the body-mapping process, we aimed to support participants to 'recognise and make visible previously invisible experiences, acts, voices and histories' (Tumanyan & Huuki, 2020, p. 381). Discussing the process of making an artwork, artist Paula Rego said: 'It can reveal things that you didn't expect. Things you keep secret from yourself' (Kellaway, 2021). Arts-based methods can enable people to express experiences and events that might not so easily be captured in other ways, and this can often bring hidden or previously unspoken elements to the surface. This felt relevant in our task of supporting children's conversations about racism. Ecklund (2012, p. 260) reminds us that 'most cultural identity models are adult centric', and in light of this, our methods were carefully designed to allow the children to explore their own experiences, define their own perspectives and construct meanings at their own pace.

The children's meaning making was constructed through engaging with the arts-based process, participating in what the painter Gerhard Richter describes as 'another form of thinking' (Belz, 2011). In her participatory research work using self-portraits, Bagnoli describes participants' artworks as artefacts that 'link to verbal data, a narrative that is told contextually and which explains its meaning and the circumstances of its production' (Bagnoli, 2019,

p. 1260). Similarly, our participants' body maps functioned as forums through which their ideas could be articulated and understood (Froggett et al., 2011), and these elements were all viewed as integral parts of the meaning-making process (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). We aimed to understand their meaning making by observing the sessions and valuing the discussions the children had with us, as well as with each other. We understood the children's meaning making as a collaborative, generative process (Wang et al., 2017), and saw it as something mutable that 'involves reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter' (Barad, 2007, pp. 29–30).

Accordingly, our insights were drawn from our observations and the children's drawings, along with their accompanying and variable narratives. Arundhati Roy (1999, p. 134) writes 'To never simplify what is complicated…', and it was essential that our engagement did not attempt to reduce or homogenise the children's experiences and meaning making but allowed them to be seen as 'individual contributions that speak to a common theme' (Gorell Barnes, 2022, p. 128).

We invited the participating children on a journey into a potentially challenging landscape, and it was vital that the methods could support and respect the complexity of the issues being examined, and the different positions, ideas and values understood by the children, by allowing their voices to emerge in distinct and nuanced ways (Carbado et al., 2013; Ecklund, 2012). We were aware that speaking out in a group can be inaccessible to some people for a range of reasons, especially if the discussion is focused around a sensitive topic such as racism. Bagnoli describes arts-based methods as 'one small but significant way in which the research process can be opened up and made more democratic' (Bagnoli, 2019, p. 1257), allowing voices to be heard that might otherwise be ignored, overlooked or discounted. Considering how we might accompany participants through such delicate places, the team aimed to create a space where unspoken and/or sensitive lived experiences could be gently brought 'into the public arena to be acknowledged and witnessed' (Gorell Barnes, 2022; Watkins, 2015, p. 327). Ursula Le Guin (1989, p. 168) writes about the fragile and nuanced nature of everyday stories, describing them as 'tiny grains of things smaller than a mustard seed'. The sensitive nature of this study, in which we were trying to gather 'mustard seeds', meant it was particularly important that the methods were designed so participants could engage by having a private conversation with themselves before considering whether they wanted to share their thoughts and feelings with the wider group.

ACCOMPANIMENT AND POSITIONALITY

As researchers exploring issues of social justice and anti-racist pedagogy, we acknowledged our obvious positionality as majoritively White, adult when we introduced ourselves to the children, saying that we had come to learn from them about their experiences of racism to inform an anti-racist education toolkit for training student teachers. We invited the children to voice their lived experiences of racism from their own perspectives, including those that we might not have previously understood as being pertinent to the study (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2011), and shared with them our desire for change and commitment to action to address those desired changes.

Our positionality was informed by ideas of accompaniment, with its roots in the liberation theology and psychology of Latin American human rights activism (Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020; Griffin & Block, 2013), recognising that to bring about anti-racist social change one must not only have a structural analysis, but an understanding of the lived experience of racism (Farmer, 2011, cited in Watkins, 2015). Accompaniment is a relational and ethical stance (Távara et al., 2018) that involves walking alongside a person and being present as

a witness as they explore their lived experience and tell their stories. These stories might involve distress and suffering, but may also be filled with beauty and resilience (Watkins, 2015, p. 330). Accompaniment involves the accompanier listening intently to what the accompanied person says, without attempting to intervene or provide solutions (Kapitan, 2023), and setting aside the 'vertical hierarchy of expertism' and moving instead to a 'practice of horizontality' (Watkins, 2015, p. 330) where the accompanier is in a position to learn from the person they are accompanying (Wessells, 2021). Freire frames these dialogues in terms of love and writes:

> Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and recreation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself. (Freire, 1972, p. 89)

Our study responded to a gap in research about primary school children's lived experience of racism, and this gap constitutes what Fricker describes as hermeneutical injustice:

> … when someone is trying to make sense of a social experience but is handicapped in this by a certain sort of gap in collective understanding—a hermeneutical lacuna whose existence is owing to the relative powerlessness of a social group to which the subject belongs. Such a lacuna renders the collective interpretive resources structurally prejudiced. (Fricker, 2007, p. 69)

To enable a dialogue which attempted to recognise and go some way to reduce this gap, the research team aimed to be sensitive to how issues of trust and emotional safety were brought to the forefront when talking about lived experiences of racism (Adams, 2016). We were aware that the project might arouse discomfort within and between researchers, teachers and children (Boler, 1999; Zembylas, 2015). Conversations about racism with young people are often referred to as 'difficult' (Barenboim et al., 2021; Watt, 2017), and this can be an unhelpful characterisation, making those tasked with facilitating such conversations feel that they lack the skills and experience to support them adequately. Mannix (2022), who has a background in palliative care, rejects the term 'difficult' and instead reframes such conversations as 'tender', which she defines as 'a sensitivity to pain' (Mannix, 2022, p. 37). She suggests ways of being alongside people in distress that foreground the other person's feelings and perspectives, enabling them to draw on and find solutions in their own lived experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Before going into schools, and mindful of the potentially sensitive nature of our research and of our positionality, we consulted an advisory group (Maiter et al., 2012), comprising educators, higher education students and community members who were representative of minoritised ethnic groups in the local area. Based on our discussion with this group, in the workshop sessions we were direct and transparent with the children about our research aims, stating clearly that we wanted to know about their experiences of racism.

We conducted five arts-based workshops in three schools in inner city Bristol. These schools were invited to work with the team due to the diversity of their pupil population. In total, 90 children participated in the workshops. Over 90% of the participating children described themselves as being from minoritised ethnic groups. The workshops had three stages, starting with a whole-class activity. We allowed approximately half an hour for this

stage. The children were then put into groups of about six to create their body maps, and we allowed approximately an hour for this. These smaller groups were determined by the class teachers and were based on friendship groups and the teachers' perceptions of which children would work well together. The first two stages were facilitated by Luci, with other members of the team acting as observers as well as participating in the conversations with children while they were creating their body maps. A smaller group of children from each school (40 children in total) also took part in focus groups to discuss their experiences of the workshop sessions. Each stage will now be described in more detail.

Stage 1: Showing images that are relevant and contemporary

The session started with showing the children a series of photographs on the interactive whiteboard in the classroom. Research shows that using visual images can allow young people to reflect on their lives (Clark & Morriss, 2015) and help build rapport between the young person and the researcher. By using open questions and positioning the young person as the expert, the researcher–researched power imbalance was reduced (Dumangane, 2022). The pictures we showed were designed to elicit discussion of racism on a local and international level. For example, we showed pictures of a local Black Lives Matter demonstration and two photographs of a Black sports person firstly being celebrated, and then seen in despair. We asked the children '*Do you remember this event?*', '*Do you know what this is about?*', '*Can you remember how you felt when you saw or heard about this?*' This approach engaged the children in discussion and provided the opportunity for them to explore the relationship between the external world and their internal responses (Mannay, 2016).

Stage 2: Showing some of our own vulnerabilities

Luci then shared examples of her own artwork with the children before asking them to engage with the body-mapping activity. Using the dialogical potential of sharing her images developed ideas from Watkins (2015), in that it moved towards seeking similarities between herself and the children rather than focusing on differences. Reaching towards what we might have in common with each other can open what bell hooks describes as 'the space of the possible' (bell hooks, 2003, p. xvi), and the work was carefully chosen to try to achieve this. The examples she shared revealed vulnerabilities in Luci's own lived experiences. Some drew on events from her childhood, demonstrating that she had not forgotten what it was like to be a child, and the stories the images told were about small moments of vulnerability in which she described feeling anxious or making unwise decisions. These lived experiences were fragments of stories, 'mustard seeds' rather than heroic tales. They were specifically chosen to signal to the children that they did not have to come up with dramatic narratives, and that the team valued uncertain and fragile stories (Alderson & Morrow, 2020). Affirming the importance of unsettled and unsure stories was particularly relevant in our role of supporting the children to explore their lived experiences relating to microaggressions, absence and feelings of being overlooked. We were mindful that we were about to ask the children to draw and that even though drawing is a familiar activity, for many people it carries an expectation of technical ability with it (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). To move towards dismantling such expectations in both explicit and implicit ways, Luci selected examples of her work that had relatively low production values and highlighted the content to indicate that the focus was on using drawing as a tool for thinking, rather than foregrounding technical ability and aesthetics.

Stage 3: Body mapping

We will now look more specifically at body mapping, which Dew et al. (2018, p. 2) describe as 'non-verbal storytelling', and highlight its use as a method to engage with vulnerable and lesser-heard communities. De Jager et al. (2016, p. 220) express the view that we 'do not *have* bodies, we *are* our bodies', and we agreed that using a proxy of the body (i.e., a body map) to explore lived experiences would be an appropriate method. Bagnoli (2019, p. 1262) describes her participants' maps of physical places as 'visual scaffolding', which can prompt memories as well as help frame responses to inquiries. In the same way, body maps can help participants not only to see things in relation to each other, but also to assess the impact these different elements have on each other. Our body-mapping method was designed to frame the idea of external events affecting internal feelings and states, and to support the children to express the impact that racism has on their mental health and wellbeing (Figure 1).

Having introduced the focus and purpose of the research to whole-class groups, we took groups of between four and eight children to a separate space away from the class where they were invited to work in pairs of their own choosing. The rooms we chose allowed for the children to lie full length on the floor with enough space to work around their body maps. The advantages of the body-mapping method are found in its means of production, which we will now describe here. Lying on lengths of paper spread on the floor, one child drew around the other child's body, creating an outline. They then swapped over and repeated the process with a fresh sheet of paper, so that both children had an outline of themselves, and each child took possession of the body outline that had been drawn for them by their partner. Drawing allows non-verbal means of expression and can ease 'stress associated with oral communications' (Tumanyan & Huuki, 2020, p. 388), but for some people it can be

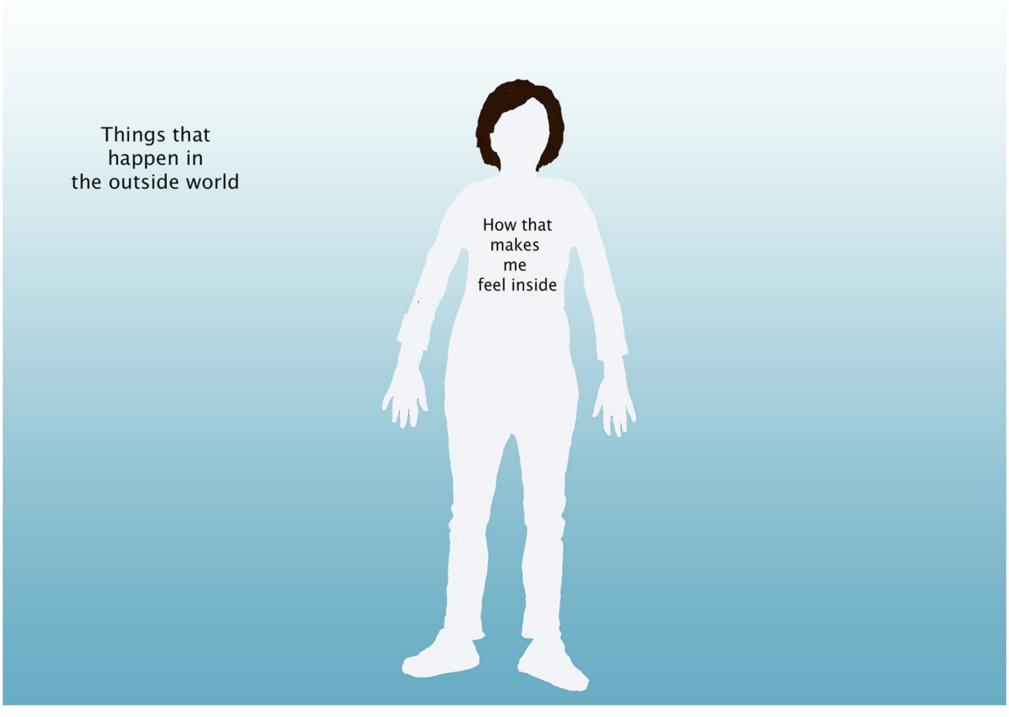

FIGURE 1 Body mapping. Digitally manipulated ink drawing (Gorell Barnes, 2022). [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

a place of self-criticism based on ideas of technical ability. However, the outlines made by drawing round another person's body were inevitably inaccurate, with mitten-like hands or other anatomical imprecisions. Combined with the fact that the children were not responsible for producing their own outline, this went some way to alleviating potential pressures and self-consciousness for children who might have expectations that their drawings should be realistic (Einarsdottir et al., 2009).

The next stage of the process was for the children to recall their experiences of racism by notating them on the *outside* of their body outline. These could be direct experiences of theirs, their friends and/or families, as well as events and attitudes that they had heard about. Using a range of coloured pens, they were encouraged to use images, words, symbols, emojis, colour coding and any other graphic variations they might come up with to notate their experiences, feelings and perspectives. The children were not faced with potentially daunting blank sheets of paper for this task because their outlines were already in place, ready to act as containers for their thoughts and feelings whilst still allowing them to have individual open-ended engagement in the activity. They were encouraged to consider how these experiences of racism made them feel and notate this *inside* their body outline. We suggested that they might locate these on their body map in the places where they resonated most strongly in their actual bodies, and several of the children drew the feeling of anger being felt in their hands, whilst many of them showed feeling sad and upset as being experienced in the area around their heart. The capacity of the body map to act as a proxy for the child's embodied experience felt important because racialisation is written so emphatically on racially minoritised children and it is their bodies themselves that are seen as the sites of conflict. It also allowed children an opportunity to present the complex somatic ways in which psychological distress can be felt, but yet can be difficult to communicate. Boydell et al. (2020, p. 4) describe using body maps as a way for participants to express their experiences and feelings about 'the world, their lives, and their bodies'. In relation to this, the inaccurate nature of the body-map outline that we discussed earlier has another potential advantage in its quality to be both 'me and not me' at the same time. Its inaccuracy makes the representation of the child more oblique and possibly less confronting to work with than a photograph or more technically accurate drawing might be.

Body mapping also allowed the children to shift into a more decorative mode, for example, embellishing elements of their body maps like trainers and fingernails, thereby giving themselves the space to step back from an exploration of racism and the intensity of the session, without having to declare their position to anyone else. For the children to maintain a sense of agency in the process, it is important that the methods being used can support them to make spontaneous and private decisions about the distance they would like to be from the subject under discussion (Figure 2).

Watkins (2015, p. 330) describes the person in the facilitating/researching role as someone who understands that oppression has 'torn the connective tissues that bind humans together', and is ready to work respectfully to reflect the 'preciousness and dignity' of the other's life. Holding this in mind, the research team attempted to understand and validate the children's meaning making by observing how they narrated their engagement in the process, and there were two distinct stages to this. Firstly, some of the children narrated out loud whilst they were drawing their body maps as they began to reflect on their experiences of racism and how that made them feel. Members of the team joined the children on the floor and accompanied them in their reflections, and sometimes these narratives bubbled up into general discussions before subsiding as the children returned to their own work. The second phase of narration took place towards the end of the sessions, when we asked the children if any of them wanted to share anything from their body maps. We emphasised that this was entirely voluntary, although we found that the children we worked with all wanted to share their reflections and/or experiences with the wider group. In group work there can

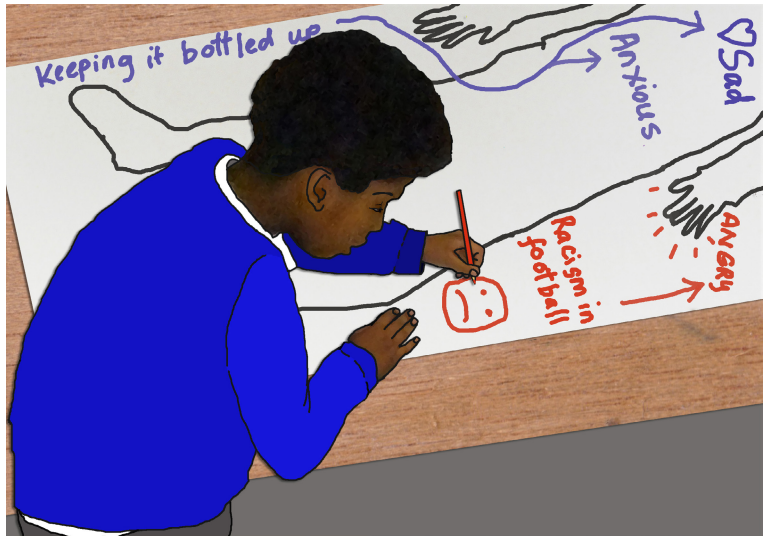

FIGURE 2 Child creating their body map. Digitally manipulated ink drawing (Gorell Barnes, 2022). [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

be both stated and tacit pressure to reach consensus, however we emphasised that racism is a complex issue that is enacted in many ways, and there was no need to reach a shared agreement about what a racialised experience was, or how it might feel.

At the end of the session we offered the children biscuits and an origami butterfly as a way of showing our thanks to them for their involvement. The butterflies were made by Luci in a range of colours and patterns and the children were invited to choose one for themselves. Offering the children something made by hand was another way to indicate that we saw love and respect as being the 'foundation' (Freire, 1972, p. 89) of our interaction with them. At the end of each session the research team took time to reflect on the process and any issues that had arisen.

Focus groups

We conducted six focus groups, two in each of the three participating schools ($n = 40$), with the aim of exploring the children's perceptions of the body-mapping workshops and discussing further their lived experiences of racism. We chose to use focus groups as we were conscious that discussing lived experience could be sensitive for the children, and there is evidence that children can feel more at ease discussing such topics in a group with their peers than if they were in a one-to-one conversation with an adult (Due et al., 2014).

We used purposive sampling to determine the children participating in the focus groups. Immediately after the body-mapping workshops, the researchers present identified which children they thought might want to be involved in the focus groups, based on whether they thought the children would feel comfortable participating in a focus group and discussing both the workshop and their lived experiences, with the aim of including a range of perspectives and views. The research team discussed the lists of children with the class teachers, who grouped the participants according to friendship and other group dynamics, as children seem to be more willing to talk and feel safer doing so when they are with children they already know (McGarry, 2015).

The focus groups took place approximately one week after the body-mapping workshops and lasted between 30 and 40 min. They took place in an empty classroom or quiet space

during the school day, with the children and moderators sitting around a table, allowing them to see and hear each other (Wong, 2008). Each focus group had two moderators, who had been present at the workshop, so were familiar to the children taking part, and provided the reliable and consistent presence needed for accompaniment (Watkins, 2015). The focus groups were conducted in an open, friendly environment (Krueger & Casey, 2015), providing a space for participants to develop ideas through dialogue with each other rather than with a researcher (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010, p. 104). Having small focus groups meant we were able to ensure that all voices were heard, recognising that there are multiple perspectives on any topic (Aurini et al., 2016). By foregrounding the viewpoints of the children, empowering them as experts in their own experiences, we went some way towards disrupting the power imbalance between researcher and research participants (Nishiyama, 2018), and allowing the conversation to take a direction unforeseen by the researchers.

Data

The body maps were collected and photographed. They were then returned to the children via the school. The research team kept detailed field work diaries related to the entire workshop process, recounting the conversations had with the children and the feelings and responses the research team had regarding the workshop process and the conversations. The field notes were typed and shared with the team. The data from the focus groups was audio recorded, transcribed and data was analysed using thematic analysis, as informed by Braun and Clarke (2019, 2022).

DISCUSSION

To facilitate effective research with minoritised groups that can drive social change, there is a need to use methods that can gain understanding of participants' subjective worlds and allow nuanced and complex voices to emerge. Rather than seeing this research into children's lived experiences of racism as sensitive or 'difficult' (Barenboim et al., 2021; Watt, 2017), we have presented body mapping as a methodology which allows research participants to explore the relationship between the external world and their internal feelings, and for them to be supported as they process and communicate their lived experiences. We have shown that body mapping provides a way of listening to voices which might otherwise go unheard. While wider themes from this research project are discussed elsewhere (Gorell Barnes, 2024) and a book, co-produced by 17 of the children who participated in the research project, is also available (RESPECT Project, 2022), the remainder of this paper will reflect on the effectiveness of our method.

Body mapping and engagement with the research process

The aim of our research was to explore children's lived experiences of racism, which we were aware might lead to the children experiencing distressing memories and anxieties. We considered this possibility when planning the research and, although all the researchers were trained and able to deal with disclosure and worked closely with the schools' safeguarding teams, we believed that '… disclosures should not be feared but conceived as potentially contributing to an improvement in a child or young person's safety and well-being' (Mannay et al., 2017, p. 354). When disclosing painful and traumatic memories of racism, some children did become upset, and on a few occasions this resulted in them crying. At

such times the child was offered a quiet space and support from the team. The team always followed the particular school's safeguarding procedures, reporting incidents to the school's safeguarding lead to ensure each child was looked after physically and mentally. Without exception, the children quickly returned to the workshop to continue with their body maps and further process their experiences. As one of the team's reflective diaries noted in relation to one of these incidents: '*Body mapping worked well though this was sensitive to handle at times*'. It is interesting to note that the children, in their reflections on the activities, did not recount any upset they felt or witnessed within themselves or others as negative. Instead, there was a general acceptance among the group that this upset was to be expected and accepted. Instead, taking part in the workshops was seen by the children as allowing them to have their experiences and feelings acknowledged. When asked in a focus group what they thought of the workshops, one participant said

> *It was a like, a great opportunity … because we got to like write about like stuff that happened about racism*.

In another focus group, the children were talking about how their lived experiences of racism were not talked about to any great extent in the classroom, and how they were pleased that it was being addressed explicitly in the workshops:

> *I enjoyed coming and knowing that we're going to be talking about racism … And it's been noticed*.

Rather than racism being something that was difficult to talk about, the children appeared relieved that they were being asked about their experiences. When talking about their body maps with the class at the end of the session, typically the children said that they felt the body-mapping method was a positive way to explore their lived experiences of racism.

> *I liked talking, discussing important topics like racism, we usually only talk about racism in Black History Week, or when we learn about slavery or when a racial incident happens. I would like to talk more about racism, the little racist incidents and how we feel about them, because it has such a big impact on us*.

When we conducted the body-mapping workshops, every child participated and completed a body map; this included children who felt they had not experienced racism. Many of the children expressed having enjoyed the process, and a typical response from a child when they were asked about the body-mapping workshop was

> *I liked the drawing because you were able to get some stuff out of you while you were writing or drawing it on the page*.

It appeared that the children were using the body maps as a tool for thinking and enhancing self-understanding, as well as communicating with themselves and others. This links closely with Froggett et al.'s (2011) concept of the 'aesthetic third'; that the artwork produced through body mapping can be seen as a space within which ideas can be explained and meanings made.

Body mapping provided a way for the children to determine their involvement in the session, allowing for different levels of engagement (Coles et al., 2019) and enabling the children to choose their own pace, content and distance to the subject. Notions of consent can be a very blunt process, whereby someone decides whether they are in the research study or not (Huser et al., 2022; Lambert & Glacken, 2011). However, participants being able to act

flexibly according to how they feel at any given moment is key to them maintaining a sense of agency in the process. The advantage of being able to move into the decorative mode discussed earlier, where children embellished features of their body maps like fingernails and trainers, is that it demonstrates continued engagement whilst subtly signalling itself as a change of state. This change of state might be due to feeling resistant, overwhelmed or upset, for example, and can be quietly picked up on and supported by the research team.

As well as the children being able to engage at their own pace and distance, it was key that they could make their own decisions about the content they explored and in what form. The children were not asked any direct questions about their experiences of racism (or anything else), and were offered repeated reassurance that we had come to learn from them and each of their voices were important. Dew et al. (2018, p. 18) describe how they found body mapping 'shifted the power balance between researcher and participant', because the participants engaged on their own terms, making their own decisions about what to include on their body map, how to express it and where to position it.

Body maps as an anchor for conversation and connection

We saw the body maps functioning as anchors for conversation, providing stability and confidence in uncertainty. The body maps allowed the children to have conversations with themselves, with others and we would suggest with the wider social context.

Body mapping allowed the children to have firstly a conversation with themselves. The body-mapping process meant that the individual children's experiences were not spotlighted and participants were able to think things through on their own, giving them a level of privacy around what could be a complex and potentially upsetting issue. The process provided a space for the children to explore their feelings, which might not have been expressed previously or been seen as too complex or upsetting to articulate. When discussing the process of creating their body map, one child said

> *It was really helpful because I don't really like speaking about my feelings sometimes, cause it's a bit sad. But if I write it down, cause obviously everyone's not hearing it and I can just go without speaking them, just thinking about it, so it's better.*

There is some evidence that the physical process of making art makes emotional issues more readily available for conscious processing (Springham & Huet, 2018). The artwork acts as a container for the creator's emotions (Schaverien, 1992), allowing for a level of both protection and examination of those emotions. In the body-mapping workshops we noticed that many of the children sat very close to their body maps, sometimes even sitting on them, or touching them frequently as they spoke. Turkle (2007, p. 5) describes 'evocative objects' as things that support us to recall and narrate parts of our lived experiences and it seemed as if the children's body maps worked in a similar way, providing reassurance as they shared their experiences of racism and its impact on them with us and their peers.

The body-mapping process also acted as a space through which the children's ideas could be articulated and, if they wanted, shared with the researchers and with the other children in the group. Having the body maps to anchor the conversation seemed to make it easier for the children to speak to the researchers. In keeping with other 'shoulder to shoulder' methodologies, there was no need for eye contact (Griffin et al., 2016) and the children could decide on the level and depth of conversation they wanted. We found that the conversations moved easily from talking about the creative process they were undertaking, to their lived experiences of racism, to other topics the children were interested in. In our conversations

the talk was mediated *through* the artwork rather than being necessarily focused *on* the artwork. In one focus group, when the children were asked what they thought of the body-mapping sessions, this led to a discussion between themselves about how they felt that the presence of the researchers meant that their experiences were validated and valued:

> *I liked doing the drawings and I liked that you always believed us and didn't say no, no that didn't happen*.

These same children went on to express relief at having the opportunity to talk about their experiences with the researchers:

> *If someone's been racist to you and like you like feel like relief that you've told someone. So, like, like as in my past I felt quite happy that I told you guys because like if I never told anybody like there wouldn't be a solution*.

These observations arose from the children's conversations with each other rather than with the researchers, and we found that an important aspect of the body-mapping sessions was the children's conversations with each other. The workshop sessions provided a space for both personal reflection and social activity, which encouraged connection and sharing of experiences (Coles et al., 2019). Sharing of experiences was seen as empowering by the children and when asked what they thought of the body-mapping sessions, in one of the focus groups the children talked together about how participating led them to identify similarities between their and others' experiences:

> *And it's nice to know other people have like the same situation too*.

We found that body mapping provided a way for the research team to accompany our research participants as they explored their lived experiences. Although we took our safeguarding responsibilities seriously and reported any concerns, as researchers in the sessions we listened intently to what the children were saying, acting as witnesses rather than trying to fix anything for them (Kapitan, 2023). In both the body-mapping sessions and the focus groups, the children had talked about issues they had experienced with racism and, in conversation with each other in one of the focus groups, developed a plan for action:

> *I think a large group of students should go and tell the teacher and that I think will have more impact instead of just one person or two*.

Expressing previously hidden experiences can create ripple effects in people's lives and we cannot always know where these ripples will reach. In this case, however, the ripples were more obvious as participating in the workshop and sharing their experiences enabled the children to come together to address an issue about racism that had been concerning them at school, giving them a sense of solidarity.

When reflecting on the body-mapping process, the research team spoke about feeling '*privileged*' and '*humbled*' to have witnessed the experiences of the children. As one commented:

> *There have been a few times in my life when I have found myself in situations of enormous privilege; moments of extraordinary sharing between people that I have felt honoured to witness. Working on this project has felt like that to me*.

Such reflections echo Watkins' (2015) insight that researchers who accompany come away with a sense of gratitude, emerging not as a disassociated bystander but as an 'engaged witness who participates with others to create conditions for peace built on justice' (Watkins, 2015, p. 331).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have developed a research methodology which is informed by the socially engaged art practice of Gorell Barnes (2014, 2018, 2022), Freire's (1972) concept of infusing dialogue with love and expands Watkins' (2015) idea of accompaniment to embrace ideas of commonality (bell hooks, 2003). We have described how our ethically engaged body-mapping approach is a multi-stage process that takes place within carefully considered relational engagements. In the first stage of the body-mapping process, we showed the children visual images related to racism, which made it transparent that we were asking the children to reflect on racism and started the process of the children thinking about the relationship between the external world and their internal, affective response (Mannay, 2016). In the second stage Luci, the facilitating artist, shared some of her own artwork related to body mapping. This allowed us to emphasise to the children that when they were creating their body maps, the focus was on using them as a tool for thinking rather than aesthetic production (Bagnoli, 2019). Luci's work drew on her own lived experience, and this demonstration of uncertainty and vulnerability went some way towards addressing the power imbalance between us as adult researchers and the children taking part in the workshops (Gorell Barnes, 2022, p. 128). In the third part of the process the children created their body maps, by drawing round each other. They were then encouraged to notate their experiences of racism outside of their body outline and link these to their feelings about these experiences, which were added inside their body outline. Throughout this process the researchers accompanied the children in their reflections, attempting to understand and validate their meaning making. The final part of the process involved us discussing the process of body mapping with the children in focus groups, which provided us with a greater understanding of both the children's meaning making in relation to racism and the children's experiences of taking part in the workshop.

Transferability of method

The children's engagement in the body-mapping process enabled the team to witness some of the different lived experiences, positions, ideas and values understood by the children, and acknowledge the complexity of the issues being examined. As might be expected, we noticed some challenges to this method, for example a large clear floor space is needed, especially if you are body mapping with a whole-class group. Also, as with many in-depth activities, it is ideal to be able to work with small groups of children, but we are aware that this is not always possible in all settings. We also suggest that, if possible, it is worth the facilitator/s taking some time for reflection away from the children after the activity, because body mapping can produce rich and detailed data that might need to be noted down before it is forgotten. We have shared a planning framework (see Figure 3) to support those wishing to run a body-mapping process in their own setting. This takes you through the process step by step, considering workshop process, intention, resources and activity. Overall, we found that body mapping went some way to capturing the children's embodied experiences and suggest that it can be used by teachers and others working with children to explore a range of issues.

Workshop process	Intention	Resources	Activity
Introduction with children	To meet the children (if working in a new setting or with a new group). To introduce the facilitator, the purpose of the project and the children's proposed roles. To introduce the nature of the engagement and the structure it will take.	An open heart	Greet the children and finding out what they already know about the process they will be doing. Give clear descriptions of the facilitator's role and context, the project, and the children's roles in it. Give clear descriptions of the methods being used and the structure of the session/s.
Relevant and contemporary images	To open the topic or issue being explored. To focus on the relationship between what happens externally and internal feelings.	Appropriate local, national and international media that speak to the issue being explored. These could be photographs, film clips, voice recordings, artworks, music etc.	Discussion questions: 'Do you remember this?' 'Can you remember how you felt when you saw or heard about this?' 'Can you think where you experience this feeling in your body?'
Sharing vulnerability and further explanation of body mapping	For the facilitator to share something about their lived experience. To show how drawing can be used as a tool for thinking, rather than foregrounding technical ability and aesthetics. To secure children's understanding of body mapping and the importance of their lived experiences.	Images, objects or photos that you have either chosen or created yourself, which support you in discussing something about your own lived experience. Diagram of body map (Fig. 1 in this paper).	Share something about your own life, possibly taken from your childhood. Describe how your chosen artifact shows the content of your lived experience. Give a clear explanation of the process of body mapping. Emphasise that this is about the children's lived experiences and there are no right or wrong things to say.
Body mapping	To enable children to explore the internal impact that the external forces have on them. To deepen the facilitator's understanding of the children's lived experiences.	Lengths of plain paper large enough to draw full-scale body maps and a large enough space to do this in. Good quality drawing materials e.g., washable felt tip pens. Check pens work before the session. Post it notes A 'thank you' of some sort to give to the children (check dietary requirements). Some reflection time away from the children if possible.	Children create body maps. This can be done quietly or in discussion with other children. Facilitator on hand to discuss the body maps with children where appropriate. Make time at the end of the session to invite sharing of body maps. Distribute the gifts; allow choice if possible.
Focus groups	To discuss what happened in the body mapping sessions. The focus could be on the process, the content or both.	Children's body maps to prompt discussion. Voice recorder.	Keep any questions as open as possible. You could ask if the children have any thoughts about follow on actions they would like to pursue.

FIGURE 3 Planning framework for body mapping process.

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