



# PPN Anti-Racism Community of Practice

## Year 1 Report

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## Introduction

Racism in healthcare is a systemic, structural and interpersonal issue, that pervades the care, treatment, and experiences of those using services, as well the wellbeing, safety, and progression of those working in the system (Woodhead, et al., 2021) (Barnett, et al., 2019). Despite laws legislating against racial discrimination and numerous efforts to address racial inequity in healthcare, such interventions have not sustained lasting change (Estacio & Saidy-Khan, 2014) (Gray, Shwom, & Jordan, 2012). As such, the complex and intractable nature of racism in healthcare has been termed ‘a wicked problem’ (Came & Griffith, 2018). Addressing this ‘wicked problem’ requires a different way of working to establish, unearth and interrogate internalised bias, power and prejudice and create movement in the system to shift cultures, policies and practices (Griffith, et al., 2007). Systemic and community approaches could play a vital role in this shift, as they offer the potential to disengage from the dominant structures in which many organisations and institutions operate which are predicated on White, Western norms and ideals (McEntee, 2021).

This report describes one such community approach, an anti-racism community of practice (CoP) for psychological professionals affiliated with the Psychological Professions Network (PPN) in the North East and Yorkshire. The community of practice (CoP) uses systemic and community based approaches such as race based caucusing which is an evidenced and internationally recognised approach to tackling racial inequality (Blitz & Kohl Jr, 2012) (Obear & Martinez, 2013) (Varghese, Daniels, & Park, 2019). This approach involves creating separate groups by self-identified racialised identities, which accommodates for the differing needs of racially minoritised and white individuals in anti-racist and racial equity work (Buehler, Rogerson, & Gushwa, 2021). The inaugural meeting of the CoP took place in July 2022, and it has since met quarterly with a total of six meetings as of October 2023. This annual report provides a summary of the context and approach adopted in the CoP, presents characteristics of the membership and an overview of topics explored to date. This



report also includes a thematic analysis of qualitative feedback from CoP members. This feedback was routinely collected after each session and was used to inform future discussion topics and to understand the impact of the CoP for its members.

A note on language, the CoP and hence this report use the term 'racially minoritised', as a social constructionist term recognising that people and groups are actively minoritised by others, rather than inherently existing as a minority (Milner & Jumbe, 2020).

## Context

Evidence of racism in mental health care presents a stark reality. For individuals from racially minoritised backgrounds, it presents in greater risk of mental health problems (Mohammed & Williams, 2009), higher likelihood of being diagnosed with psychosis (Islam, Rabiee, & Singh, 2015), over-representation in crisis, secure and inpatient mental health services (Barnett, et al., 2019) (Farooq, et al., 2021) and higher likelihood of being restrained, medicated and secluded whilst on inpatient wards (Vidal, Reynolds, Praglowski, & Grados, 2020). Moreover, whilst overrepresented in acute mental health services, individuals from racially minoritised backgrounds are vastly underrepresented in preventative and therapeutic services, with lack of trust, poorer experiences of care, and culturally inappropriate therapies and interventions cited as some of the barriers (Grey, Sewell, Shapiro, & Ashraf, 2013) (Keating & Robertson, 2004).

For psychological professionals from racially minoritised backgrounds working in the system, racism presents in disproportionately less representation in senior and higher-paid roles (Chasma & Khonat, 2021), higher levels of discrimination and harassment at work (Harwood, et al., 2021) (Walker, et al., 2020) more frequent and severe disciplinary processes (Archibong, Kline, Eshareturi, & McIntosh, 2019), increased formal questioning of fitness to practice and negative assumptions about clinical abilities (Woodhead, et al., 2021). It also presents in reduced likelihood of being shortlisted for interview and offered a place on training programmes despite the profession being overwhelmingly white (Turpin & Coleman, 2010). Furthermore,



individuals from racially minoritized backgrounds report poorer experiences of training and being subject to both overt and covert racism (Adetimole, Afuape, & Vara, 2005).

The psychological literature which forms the basis of psychological professionals' training and practice is also largely drawn from a Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic or 'WEIRD' evidence base (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). This means that not only do the professions' theories, models and therapies make sense of human psychology and behaviour from a specific cultural lens, the evidence of efficacy of psychological therapies for individuals outside these WEIRD populations is limited (Flynn, Betancourt, Emerson, Nunez, & Nance, 2020). Widely used therapies such as CBT have begun to be adapted to work with specific cultures, for instance, considering how belief systems influence perceptions of mental health within communities (see (Naeem, et al., 2023) for an excellent example). Research shows that to be efficacious, these adaptations must be accompanied by clinician cultural self-awareness and cultural awareness within services (Grandpierre, et al., 2018).

Training courses for the psychological professions are increasingly including formal training on cultural awareness, Whiteness, decolonisation and anti-racism in their courses (Phiri, Sajid, & Delanerolle, 2023). However, analysis of clinical psychology trainees' experience of their course reported 50% of trainees in 2019 did not feel their course left them adequately equipped to approach conversations around privilege, power, and intersectionality or provided a space to reflect on how these might impact the people they work with as clinical psychologists (British Psychological Society, 2020).

Recent years have seen an increase in widening access schemes, mentoring programmes and positive action initiatives in an attempt to increase the diversity of the psychological workforce (Farooq, et al., 2022) These initiatives are seeing more individuals from racially minoritised backgrounds join the psychological workforce. However, analyses of the experiences of staff members on these schemes and within training courses have found that individuals feel 'othered' in the profession, frustrated by cultural insensitivity in the workplace and increasingly hopeless as they progress through their career (ACP UK, 2022) (Farooq et al., 2022) (Patel & Wood, 2017).



Farooq and colleagues (2022) therefore highlight the limitations of ad-hoc positive action initiatives without structural, systemic and interpersonal transformation and change.

These studies suggest that, whilst increasing the diversity of the workforce is important, it must be accompanied by a culture shift to make the profession more accessible, inclusive and psychologically safe for all (Farooq et al, 2022). With modern racism moving to more covert and subversive forms, such culture shifts can be challenging to enact, quantify and maintain. Systemic and community informed practices offer a way forward in tackling these challenges by attending to dialogue, empowerment, structural power and relational reflexivity (Hassen, et al., 2021) (West, DiMeo, Langer, Shah, & Molina, 2022). Communities of Practice offer one such systemic and community informed approach because addressing ‘wicked problems’ requires change and transformation in the social, cultural and environmental context that generates and maintains inequality (Brown, 2010).

## Approach

### **Developing a Community of Practice**

Communities of Practice (CoPs) are becoming increasingly commonplace in the NHS as a means for groups of staff members to meet with a particular focus, be that role-specific skill development or to explore a common topic or issue (Pyrko, Dörfler, & Eden, 2019). Communities of Practice offer the potential to disengage from the typical structures through which many organisations and institutions operate, with time-constrained, outcome and productivity-focused work (Durand, et al., 2022). Instead, CoPs centre a longer-term learning and development process offering a space to practice, make mistakes, and grow (McEntee, 2021). CoPs have become popular in anti-racist practice as a space for reflecting and examining individual, group and cultural processes relating to racism (Ladhani & Sitter, 2020) (Ladhani, Este, & Sitter, 2021).

For CoPs to be effective, research shows collaboration, group commitment, and collective accountability are integral (Durand et al., 2022). Psychological safety between group members has also been shown to be a key mechanism through which CoPs can facilitate the learning process (Durand et al., 2022). Research shows, however, that attempting to address topics such as racism, prejudice, Whiteness,



White supremacy, and White privilege in a mixed group setting has the potential to cause further harm to racially minoritised individuals (Just Lead Washington, 2019) and elicit defensiveness and 'White fragility' amongst White individuals (DiAngelo, 2011) (DiAngelo, 2016). Moreover, one analysis of psychological safety within a healthcare CoP, found that those with 'higher job status' perceived greater psychological safety than 'lower job status' individuals in the group and that those with higher status contributed to the group more readily (Edmondson, Higgins, Singer, & Weiner, 2016). This is significant for designing an anti-racism CoP as those with White privilege may experience greater psychological safety and dominate the mixed-group conversation, resulting in those without this privilege being further silenced.

### **Racial Identity Caucusing**

Racial identity caucusing is one methodology used in anti-racist practice internationally to address these concerns. Racial identity caucuses offer a space for individuals who share a common racialised identity to meet separately to explore how racism and Whiteness operate, dominate, and shape individual and group experience (Buehler, Rogerson, & Gushwa, 2021) (Ladhani & Sitter, 2020) Caucusing allows individuals from racially minoritised backgrounds and White backgrounds, who come to anti-racism work with different experiences, needs and priorities, to do different work with the same eventual goal (Lewis, et al., 2023). By developing spaces for individuals by their self-identified racialised identities, caucusing helps to foster 'brave spaces' (Arao & Clemens, 2013) where group members feel safe to take interpersonal risks and approach the topic with greater honesty and vulnerability (Blackwell, 2018).

The literature on caucusing emphasises the importance of collective accountability, particularly with the White caucus being accountable to the racially minoritised caucus (Came & Griffith, 2018). This is to ensure that the CoP is shaped by the directives of the racially minoritised caucus and does not mirror the dominance of Whiteness in society. Many racial identity caucusing tools recommend facilitated inter-caucus dialogue after caucused discussions. This promotes transparency and offers a chance for structured feedback between caucuses (Just Lead Washington, 2019).



## Setting Up an Anti-Racism Community of Practice

The present anti-racism CoP was set up by two co-chairs from across North East and Yorkshire; Dr Romana Farooq (Consultant Clinical Psychologist) and Dr Richard Thwaites (Consultant Clinical Psychologist), with support from the PPN NEY Chair, Dr Sharon Prince. The team was later joined by Yahya Delair, Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner, as CoP secretary. The inaugural meeting of the CoP took place in July 2022 and the CoP has since met quarterly with a total of 6 meetings at the time of this report. The CoP has established a committed psychological professions membership from across North East and Yorkshire, representing a range of different psychological professions including Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners (PWP), Cognitive Behavioural Therapists, Clinical Psychologists, Trainee Clinical Psychologists, assistant psychologists and Counsellors. Each CoP has been attended by between 11 and 22 professionals each time.

Each CoP meeting follows a similar structure. It lasts for two hours and involves the group splitting into their respective caucuses to discuss a particular topic. The caucuses then rejoin in a facilitated inter-caucus space to feedback on their caucused discussions and invite feedback from the other caucus. Both the caucused discussions and the inter-caucus discussions are facilitated by the CoP chairs. The CoP chairs hold different racialised identities and therefore are responsible for facilitating their respective caucus: Romana facilitated the racially minoritised caucus and Richard, the white caucus. At first, each CoP session looked at two discussion topics, splitting into caucuses twice a session. However, through feedback from CoP members this was later reduced to one topic for the whole session, where the second time the group split into caucuses the discussion topic was reflecting on what they had heard from the other caucus during the intercaucus dialogue. This allowed conversations to journey deeper and offered more space to process reactions and responses.

## Assessing Impact

### **Feedback Data**

Assessing the impact of an initiative aimed at producing a culture shift is hard to quantify. Instead, this report uses qualitative feedback collected via an anonymous



online survey after each CoP in order to understand how the CoP was received by members, the learning and insights they gained and the learning in terms of running the CoP. Data was collected after five meetings in total spanning across July 2022 – July 2023. All responses were anonymous and were further anonymised into ‘White caucus’ and ‘Racially minoritised caucus’ to protect CoP members’ identities.

Respondents answered five open-ended demographic questions (See Table X). They were then asked one rating question around how the participant felt in the CoP (on a 5-point scale from 1, “Strongly disagree” to 5 “Strongly agree”) and five open-ended feedback questions around experience, learning, influence on practice, future themes and developing intercaucus dialogue. Questions were consistent across the five meetings.

**Table X. Feedback Survey Questions**

<p>1. Within the Anti-Racism Community of Practice, I felt...</p> <p>(Score 1-5, 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Listened to</li> <li>b) Confident in my abilities</li> <li>c) Connected</li> <li>d) Oppressed</li> <li>e) Motivated and empowered</li> <li>f) Burdened by addressing anti-racism and inequity</li> <li>g) That others are committed</li> </ul>
<p>2. How did you find the experience of caucusing this time?</p>
<p>3. What learning did you take away from the Anti-Racist CoP this time?</p>



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| 4. Is there anything you would do differently in practice in response to the most recent CoP?                    |
| 5. Are there any particular themes you would like the caucused group to focus on in future sessions?             |
| 6. Do you have any thoughts about how we continue to work towards inter-caucus dialogue over the next 12 months? |

## Analysis

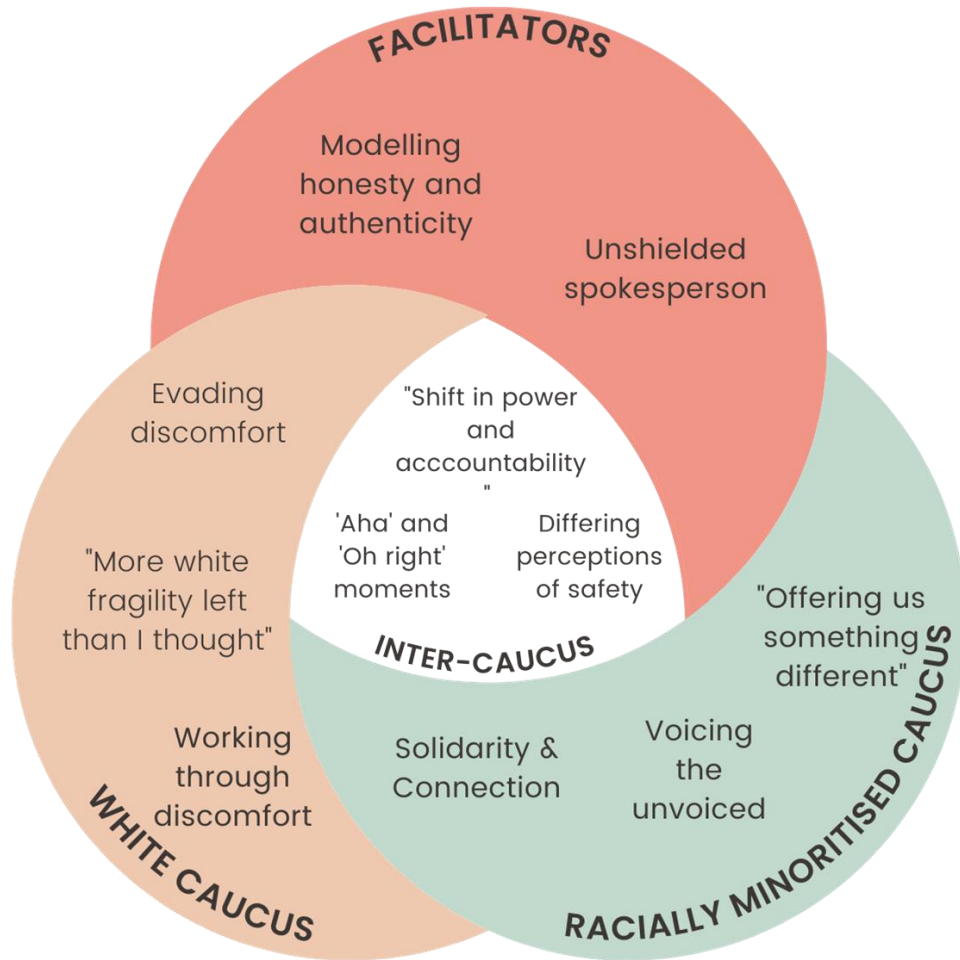
The qualitative survey responses were analysed using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis was primarily conducted by Assistant Psychologist, Freya Thompson (FT), and began with collating the feedback data and reading through the responses a number of times. Initial codes were then generated through a bottom-up, data driven process, and initial themes were generated. These initial themes were then shared with an independent reviewer, who was separate from the community of practice and the evaluation. Following this FT then developed a thematic map with discussions with Romana Farooq. At this point, the findings were triangulated with Richard Thwaites and Yahya Delair, who read the feedback responses independently, to establish face validity and internal consistency of the themes. Through this process the final themes were named and defined. The themes, thematic map and analysis was then shared with COP members in October 2023 to gain respondent validation. Following this the analysis was written-up by FT with input from the CoP facilitators and secretary and the chair of PPN NEY.

## Findings

The CoP members showed honesty and vulnerability in their feedback responses which allowed for the rich data that informs this analysis. The rationale for using caucusing in anti-racism practice was reinforced in the data, as the themes generated from each caucus were different, reflecting different processes taking place for individuals who identify as White and those from racially minoritized backgrounds. There were some common themes in terms of the intercaucus processes within the



CoP and the role of the facilitators. The themes generated have been split into four sections: racially minoritised caucus, white caucus, role of the facilitators and intercaucus (see Figure 1. for a thematic map).



## Racially Minoritised Caucus themes

### Theme 1: Solidarity and Connection

Members of the racially minoritised caucus described strong connection and mutual understanding within their caucus. This connection appeared to be created through



openness and vulnerability of group members in speaking about their experiences of racism, discrimination, and othering.

“I really value how authentic and honest people are in our caucus and it helps me connect with all of them”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

This was described as an evolving process, deepening every time the group meets:

“I feel the caucus is so very powerful, and every COP I attend it appears to deepen”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

The caucus members described solidarity within their caucus as they shared similar experiences of racism and oppression and a sense that this sharing would not be possible in a mixed group.

“I found it more comfortable to speak up about my difficulties as I was aware people had been through similar experiences”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

“I enjoyed caucusing and felt it provided the racially minoritised individuals in the group to speak freely about their experiences of holding individuals accountable for racism and our barriers and challenges with this”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

This connection and sense of safety fostered in the racially minoritised caucus, allowed the group to hold a space for strong emotions that arose with compassion and understanding.

“I felt a bit embarrassed that I couldn't hold my tears in, but the group were so supportive and compassionate. I was really touched by that”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

“Although I was saddened to hear some of the experiences my fellow BAME psych professionals have had or continue to have, I felt connected to them”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

**Theme 2: Voicing the Unvoiced**

A key process which appeared to take place within the racially minoritised caucus was that through sharing lived experience and connecting with others with similar experiences, the caucus members came to shared understanding and recognition of things that had impacted themselves and their fellow psychological professionals from racially minoritised backgrounds.

“For me it has impacted how open I am with myself. I am starting to acknowledge experiences that have been minimised by others and myself”.

*Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

The racially minoritised caucus members reflected on feeling more empowered to talk about racism within the workplace and noticing barriers within themselves to doing this.

“[I will] start to raise issues around racism whereas previously I would have stayed quiet”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

“I learned about my own barriers towards holding individuals in a position of power accountable for complicity with racism and the insidious and sophisticated nature of racism which is perpetuated institutionally”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

Through these group discussions, members of the racially minoritised caucus recognised common learned behaviours in response to racism and oppression and were committed to voicing these in their workplaces where previously they may have been unvoiced.

“I was also interested in the conversations about forgiveness and permission seeking, this will mean that I will name this in supervision with individuals from a racially minoritised background” *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

“There was a statement made about the silence that accompanies whiteness and that this maintains white supremacy. I became interested in this and now will be more aware of the quietness in the room. I may even name it now”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

**Theme 3: 'Offering us something different'**

Through having separate spaces to approach the topic of anti-racist practice, members of the racially minoritised caucus felt their experiences and needs related to racism and anti-racism were centred, away from educating, comforting, or operating in spaces geared to white people.

“This [caucusing] was really beneficial - especially for people of colour who feel burdened and angry in spaces where white people are silent. I think it's useful to have separate spaces but also a space where we come together”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

The space was seen as restorative, a place to share mutual understanding and provide much needed respite from the negative impact of racism.

“I feel a space where our experiences are validated and acknowledged is so important to keep us going and to re-energise us”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

A space for racially minoritised individuals in the workplace was seen as something unusual and group members noted how defining the parameters of a space for racially minoritised individuals would take time and be something that the caucus could work on together.

“We spend our lives being in spaces for white individuals and although the COP is offering us (people of colour) something different, we do not know how to use it or how we would like the space to look for us”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

When discussing the progression towards intercaucus dialogue, members of the racially minoritised caucus were cautious feeling that the centring they were experiencing in their caucus might be lost in the wider group.

“There are many dynamics that are likely to get played out [...] the main one being that it can become a space just for white people because that is the default”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

**Theme 1: Evading Discomfort**

The white caucus described significant discomfort, hesitation, and ‘over-thinking’ during the CoP. This was particularly evident in the first few meetings where many described a fear of saying something wrong or feeling exposed in the group.

“I do find myself questioning every response and contribution I make, and this was especially so when feeding back to the large group”. *White Caucus Member*

One way the white caucus appeared to protect themselves from the discomfort of discussing whiteness and racism and the negative feelings that arose from this, was to approach topics at a theoretical level. This was named as ‘intellectualisation’ in the group and a number of the white caucus members recognised this reaction in themselves.

“I was also really taken with hearing about the differences between the two groups - with the white group being quite detached and intellectualising. That is absolutely what I do in that space, and it was helpful to have that reflected back at me”. *White Caucus Member*

Some of the white caucus members wanted more action and outputs from the meeting. Although members expressed this was rooted in their desire for the CoP to make a difference, it also appeared to be a way of relieving and redirecting feelings of discomfort into positive action.

“I find myself becoming increasingly irritated at my perception of a lack of progress”. *White Caucus Member*

“I'd like to see a move towards action”. *White Caucus Member*

One white caucus member commented on the importance of reflecting and interrogating their internal world before focusing on action.

“Maybe (this is one of those rare occasions) that psychological practitioners need to spend more time on reflection and thinking about themselves before rushing to action?” *White Caucus Member*



## **Theme 2: 'More white fragility left than I thought'**

When discussion within the CoP began to move away from theoretical concepts towards a more direct examination of the group dynamic and emotional engagement, many of the white caucus members experienced a defensive reaction. Even those that had clearly dedicated time and energy in developing their white racial identity, were surprised by their reaction.

“Unfortunately, a lot of my learning was internal rather than anything generally useful. Firstly, I have got more white fragility left than I thought”. *White Caucus Member*

For one white caucus member, the experience of watching their own defensive reaction was a significant source of learning and self-reflection.

“I experienced a strong rush of emotions, a sense that this 'wasn't fair' and that I wanted to protect or defend the person [...] I have learnt something about my own responses to talking about racism and also being directly called out, and I don't particularly like what I have seen about myself.” *White Caucus Member*

Others tended to externalise the reasons for their discomfort, citing numerous reasons including caucusing as a methodology, the feedback process, misunderstanding of intentions or overgeneralisation.

“This time I found the experience concerning and felt that something really unhelpful is happening”. *White Caucus Member*

Some of the white caucus noticed this defensive reaction and commented on the impact this could have on members of the racially minoritised caucus.

“We need to do that work within the white-identifying caucus to make the group discussions safer for the racially minoritized- identifying caucus. That feels quite urgent. Our response as a group to perceived criticism was to explain, feel uncomfortable, challenge back”. *White Caucus Member*



### Theme 3: Working Through Discomfort

Moments in the CoP where the white caucus were able to work through their discomfort and emotional reactions seemed to be the most profound moments of learning and insight.

“Whilst it creates discomfort for me at times, I feel able to take responsibility for managing that. I find the process really valuable because there is a sense of authenticity, and I am learning in an embodied way”. *White Caucus Member*

For some, the CoP provided a mirror allowing them to see their reaction in real time.

“I found this helpful in seeing my own instinctive response to challenge - defensive, certain, protective. It was a really useful experience”. *White Caucus Member*

For others, it was not until they returned to the next CoP meeting three months later and heard reflections from members of the racially minoritised caucus about the group processes taking place, that they began to make sense of their own reactions.

“The reflections from the minoritised caucus on the risks of speaking truthfully to a group of white people really struck me”. *White Caucus Member*

“It highlighted for me the experience of being grouped according to race which is not something I am used to. This was uncomfortable but aided learning”. *White Caucus Member*

Through acting as a mirror, the CoP provides a space for the white caucus to experience authentic feedback from the racially minoritised caucus, observe their reaction and then through reflecting as a group come to new insights and learning.

“The CoP is a forum where often unconscious and automatic processes are observed and articulated. It almost puts conversations into slow motion so that we can look at what is happening. So now I have a language to describe what I am seeing”. *White Caucus Member*



## The role of the facilitators

### **Modelling Authentic Communication**

The facilitators were a highly valued and essential part of the caucusing process. The facilitators had worked with each other outside of the CoP and this was noticed by participants as a key enabler to them being able to have honest and sometimes difficult conversations.

“I have noticed the safety and ease that the facilitators have with each other [...]” *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

The ability of the facilitators to notice, observe and at times challenge elements of the feedback from the other caucus was key to the process in terms of stimulating conversation and facilitating new insight and understanding between the groups.

“I admire the way the facilitators challenge one another and pick up on certain observations. I appreciate that this is one of the goals the facilitators have for us”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

Interestingly, it was members of the racially minoritised caucus who mentioned the facilitators more frequently in their written feedback. It appears members of the racially minoritised caucus, in particular, appreciated and felt inspired by how the facilitators could speak openly and frankly in the shared space in a way that perhaps isn't common.

“I am noticing more that we are being shown a model and way of being with regards to inter caucus dialogue. This is based on psychological safety, trust, respect and vulnerability” *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

“Seeing [the facilitators] role model this [intercaucus dialogue] has been inspiring and helpful” *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

### **Unshielded Spokesperson**

As spokespeople for their respective caucuses, the facilitators are responsible for summarising and communicating the discussions which take place in each caucus. This was particularly appreciated by the racially minoritised caucus members.



“[I] thought that the themes were fed back to the wider group in a sensitive and considered way - really skilfully facilitated”.

*Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

“I feel the way the workshop was conducted allowed for very useful and progressive dialogue, and that the facilitators were able to sensitively amplify our voices, whilst remaining respectful and empathic towards both groups”.

*Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

In taking the role of spokesperson, the facilitators provide a shield for caucus members to speak more openly and honestly within their caucus and feel less vulnerable and/or exposed in the wider group. This appeared to be true for both racially minoritised and white individuals.

“I appreciated being asked if I would like to feedback to the larger group but lacked the confidence [...], as the subject matter in our POC caucus was quite emotive and difficult to know how to share this with the larger group in a sensitive way”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

“I have appreciated the facilitators leading the feedback and I am confident that this will be more shared once we 'break the seal' and dare to take risks”. *White Caucus Member*

In providing a shield for their caucuses, however, the facilitators are themselves more exposed and vulnerable to scrutiny. This was evident when discussions became challenging, and a number of the white caucus found fault in the white caucus facilitator’s feedback methods.

“It is difficult to provide a short and meaningful feedback of the content of the caucus when the two groups are together and sometimes the felt sense of the conversation in the caucus is different to what the whole group hears” *White Caucus Member*

“I also struggled with a man always being the person to summarise the group discussion in the inter-group dialogue and I think this process needs re-thinking in order to account for intersectionality and to get a broader range of perspectives”. *White Caucus Member*



## **Inter-Caucus Processes - 'Aha's' and 'oh, right' moments**

A key process which took place in both caucuses was moments of insights and understanding between the two caucuses. This occurred through the authentic feedback led by the facilitators in the intercaucus space. For instance, through hearing the racially minoritised caucus' account of being othered, some of the white caucus members felt better able to empathise with how that would feel despite not experiencing othering themselves.

“It has really helped me think about the feelings associated with 'othering', what this term means and how it is experienced”. *White Caucus Member*

For some members of the racially minoritised caucus, the conversation highlighted how different the experience of othering was between the caucuses.

“I was struck by how for some oppression is relentless, whilst others openly admitted that they can't even imagine what it is like. I wondered how this influences the work we do. The things we notice and are drawn to, or what we might miss or avoid discussing with our colleagues and service users”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

Differences in how the two caucuses behave was also a source of insight for the white caucus:

“The discussion around people from the racially minoritised caucus responding differently to being 'called out'. I hadn't considered this before, and I found the reflections delivered from that interesting”. *White Caucus Member*

“That white fragility includes having our feelings hurt and realising that that being the worst thing indicates privilege - I was struck by the other caucus' experience of saying that survival needs were more important than feelings”.  
*White Caucus Members*

Members of the racially minoritised caucus were also struck by the conversation around intellectualisation which they observed in the white caucus:

“I noticed how individuals can use intellectualisation as a process to detach from issues which may evoke challenging emotions such as shame and guilt.



I learned how strongly conditioned this response is". *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

### **Differing Perceptions of Safety**

Developing psychological safety seemed to be important within each caucus in terms of feeling safe to be honest and vulnerable. This seemed to develop easily in the racially minoritised caucus but took more time to develop in the white caucus.

"I feel like the sense of mutual trust, respect and safety has developed organically within the racially minoritised caucus which has made discussions flow more naturally". *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

"The white-identifying caucus felt more cohesive than in previous meetings. We were able to be honest about our experience of the CoP, even when we weren't all on the same page". *White Caucus Member*

As building this trust took time in the white caucus, consistent attendance was seen as integral, and this was evident in those that didn't attend consistently, feeling more easily emotionally evoked by the discussion content.

"Very difficult today. I missed the last one and not sure whether that has influenced how I felt. Much more discomfort and not able to articulate things the way I would like to.". *White Caucus Member*

Within the inter-caucus, there was an expectation particularly amongst the white caucus of a similar process of evolving safety. When discussions felt uncomfortable, some white caucus members felt troubled by their feelings of a greater divide and a lack of trust between the two groups.

"I don't feel that the two groups have much trust for one another, and definitely today felt there was active distrust towards the white caucus (the racially minoritised members feeling rightly upset over the discussion) [...] this lack of trust is understandable, but I find it uncomfortable". *White Caucus Member*

"Whilst I feel we are developing this space in my caucus I don't think we are there yet when we are interacting as a wider group and that in this space, we



are pushing each other further and further away from a joint brave space” *White Caucus Member*

Interestingly, this view was not shared by the racially minoritised caucus who tended to comment on increased discomfort being a good thing and a sign that the CoP was beginning to achieve its purpose. It is possible that the racially minoritised caucus does not have an expectation that the intercaucus would be a safe place as they are used to not feeling safe discussing whiteness and racism in shared spaces.

“I am starting to feel like there is some movement in terms of progress with the inter-caucus dialogue, we are starting to have more of those uncomfortable conversations that we more readily shied away from at the beginning of the CoP”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*

### **“Shift in power and accountability”**

By providing separate spaces which then come together in a facilitated shared space, the CoP allowed a direction of feedback from the racially minoritised caucus to the white caucus.

“It feels like a necessary rift is emerging between the two groups that is produced by honest communication of experience that has maybe not been vocalised in shared spaces before”. *White Caucus Member*

The opportunity to feedback to white people was seen as unusual by both the white caucus and the racially minoritised caucus.

“The feedback from the racially minoritized-identifying caucus is increasingly frustrated with the white caucus. This feels like an honest voicing of experiences of discrimination that many in the white caucus will be oblivious to”. *White Caucus Member*

The feedback from the racially minoritised caucus to the white caucus was an integral part of creating accountability within the CoP. This was noticed by the racially minoritised caucus as something different.

“I very much appreciated this workshop and the shift in power and accountability which occurred”. *Racially Minoritised Caucus Member*



For the white caucus, being grouped on the basis of their white identities and given feedback from the racially minoritised caucus as a collective identity was a novel experiential experience.

“I am aware, as a white person, that I have never felt inferior due to my race and I feel that this COP is the closest I have come to feeling that - I think the feelings of guilt and shame that are felt may stem from finally getting a taste of how it feels to feel inferior in any way”. *White Caucus Member*

“I haven't had to develop a thick skin around how I am treated due to my race”.  
*White Caucus Member*

The CoP also provided a space to examine power dynamics and how they can present in interactions between staff members.

“I really liked that we looked at this topic in-depth, as an example of how power dynamics play out in everyday interactions in the workplace”. *Racially Minoritised caucus*

## Reflections from the facilitators

### White Caucus Facilitator

Facilitating the white caucus was personally anxiety provoking and demanding, much more so than being part of the inter-caucus discussions. As someone who is learning about their own whiteness, I was keen to be clear that I did not possess any specific expertise on racism and whiteness, but I felt comfortable and prepared to have conversations with the facilitator of the caucus for individuals from a racially minoritised identity.

The white caucus was much larger than the other caucus and I wonder if my attempts to agree on what we would feedback and then trying to represent everyone's perspective led at times to an unhelpful list type approach of feedback rather than focussing on one or two key themes in more depth. It also felt that the white caucus started from a very different place with very different needs, and that the sense of solidarity and support reported in the racially minoritised caucus (with a sense of having a new space where their voices could be heard) was very different from the group confusion and discomfort present in the white caucus for several of the first sessions (accustomed as we are to being in majority white spaces most of the time).



Although I routinely encouraged caucus members to feedback or join in the feedback this was not often taken up and there were times when I felt some group pressure to almost 'defend' the positions and statements that I had fed back (potentially because they had felt that I had not represented these precisely) when these were reflected on by the facilitator from the other caucus. I was aware that feeding back from the caucus meant that I was sharing a range of thoughts and ideas, some which may have reflected my experience and others not. It was a very different (and powerful) experience compared to speaking on behalf of myself.

### Secretary reflections

As a racially minoritised individual participating in the facilitation of an anti-racism community of practice, I have gained valuable insights into the importance of creating a safe space for open and honest dialogue. The concept of caucusing, which involves separate spaces for individuals from racially minoritised backgrounds and white backgrounds, has allowed for a unique and raw exploration of experiences related to racism. Being part of the minoritised group as well as a facilitator, my experience was very unique.

In the early days of the COP, as a member of a racially minoritised group, I experienced a sense of paranoia. I questioned whether I could trust this space enough and worried that the white caucus, who were part of a hierarchical structure built upon whiteness, would react negatively to my raw and unfiltered experiences. This fear lingered as I considered the potential impact on my future career. However, as a facilitator, it was important for me to demonstrate courage and reassure the team that this space was indeed safe and protected.

As the sessions progressed, I personally began to feel a growing sense of safety and protection. The racially minoritised caucus offered a unique opportunity for genuine and unfiltered conversations. What made this experience truly exceptional was the ability to share our raw experiences with the white caucus in a secure and protected manner. We were able to confront the uncomfortable reality of what ethnic minorities face in the world. However, occasional anxious thoughts still occupy my mind regarding how safe it truly is to share our traumas in predominantly white spaces.



Overall, the reflection as both a racially minoritised caucus member and a facilitator underscores the significance of safe spaces, long-term development, and understanding of racism. One of the most valuable lessons I have learnt is to try not to intellectualise racism but in fact be real, be raw, be unfiltered and be comfortable with the discomfort of such experiences. This space was extremely powerful as it went from just a safe space initially which then developed into an uncomfortable space but now into a safe and progressive space. By continuing to foster these spaces and promoting inter-caucus dialogue, we can work towards long-term development and a deeper understanding of racism within our communities and institutions.

### **Racially Minoritised Caucus Facilitator**

For many years I have been aware of both my visibility/invisibility as well as the increased scrutiny and the ‘gaze’ that women from racially minoritised backgrounds are subject to in psychological professions. Therefore, when we set off on this journey to establish, foster and sustain an anti-racism community of practice I was both intrigued and trepidatious about how both scrutiny, gaze and visibility would be enacted in this space.

In comparison to my co-facilitator, I felt familiar and curiously comfortable with being positioned as “the voice” of the racially minoritised caucus. Upon reflection it was apparent that my lived experience in institutional and societal spaces had consisted of being positioned as a “cultural expert” and as though I represented racially minoritized communities, this had very much been the norm. Whereas my co-facilitator hadn’t experienced being positioned as the spokesperson for whiteness before and felt both unfamiliar and uncomfortable with this position.

My experience of the racially minoritized caucus was the importance and value of creating safe spaces for racially minoritized individuals to express themselves and explore their identity as it relates to the psychological professions. The racially minoritized caucus was emotional, liberating, challenging and complex and as the facilitator I too held a range of complex feelings whilst supporting others to explore their own. The shift in power and accountability also meant that the voices of the racially minoritized individuals were centred throughout the community of practice, creating a novel and innovative space which was very different to the institutions that



we had navigated and continue to navigate in psychological professions. It left me wondering how systems could be different if some of these principles could be applied outside of the community of practice.

## Discussion

This report used feedback data routinely collected from CoP members after each meeting to understand the processes taking place in the CoP. The findings suggest that the anti-racism CoP is an important and transformative experience for psychological professionals whilst also being complex and challenging, leading to novel and transformative insights and shifts in CoP members understandings of their racialised selves as related to their psychological professional identity.

For racially minoritised psychological professionals, facing one's own oppression was painful but also presented opportunities for them to articulate emotions and experiences in relatively safe spaces and feel more empowered to name the impact of these experiences in their work. Racially minoritized individuals also found the space transformational and different to the usual spaces they find themselves in as psychological professionals, creating opportunities for them to express themselves and explore power, identity, racism and discrimination. For racially minoritized individuals, the “overwhelming presence of Whiteness” in psychological professions and in the institutions, they worked in required the community of practice to focus on reframing some of the marginal and deficit narratives of racially minoritized individuals to recognising and appreciating the value and contribution to the profession.

In a different way, the process of race-based caucusing and the community of practice resulted in significant emotional upheaval for White psychological professions that shifted into deeper and transformational self-reflection and a sense of awareness and allyship over time. There was a recognition and an appreciation that creating honest and authentic spaces for dialogue on racism, discrimination and inequity in psychological professions required a genuine emotional commitment from White psychological professions to interrogate and work through some of the immediate emotional responses. When this was possible White psychological professions highlighted a transformative emerging understanding of the intricacy and complexity of racial inequality. However, naturally the initial emotional upheaval can lead to even



deeper resistance and defensiveness in white psychological professions, highlighting the need for genuine commitment to work through initial emotional responses. Nonetheless, the community of practice provided space for White psychological professionals to explore the consequences of Whiteness for their future identities as psychological professions and for the kinds of communities that they could and wanted to cultivate.

In summary this paper is the first to document, review and highlight the process of developing, facilitating and experiencing an anti-racism community of practice. It recognises how complex, messy, challenging, complicated and transformational the Community of Practice can be and how commitment to interrogation, disruption and upheaval is a necessary part of the process. However, the review also highlights how these spaces need to be appropriately and carefully facilitated by individuals who have engaged in a degree of self-reflection and interrogation of their own racialised identities and are attuned to the subtle and nuanced ways in which micro and macro aggressions may be enacted in these spaces. It was also clear that appropriate, sensitive and nuanced facilitation was particularly valued by the members of the community of practice.

## Recommendations & Next Steps

The Anti-Racism Community of Practice has evidenced impact on psychological practitioners in their personal and professional learning and development over the course of a year. It therefore feels important to consider any recommendations and next steps for this approach and the Community of Practice:

- To continue facilitating and developing the Anti-Racism Community of Practice and supporting members to take back some of the learning into their own organisations.
- To continue to evaluate the impact of the Anti-Racism Community of Practice including disseminating of the learning more widely such as through publication in a peer reviewed Journal.
- To further consider and explore the support required by facilitators in this important but complex and challenging work.
- To consider and explore forward planning for the Anti-Racism Community of Practice such as training for members around racial equity and anti-racist



tools which may enable them to support the delivery of the  
Community of Practice

- To consider whether other areas/regions may want to develop an Anti-Racism Community of Practice and what is required to enable this.

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