Race, Gender, and Positionality in Urban Planning Research

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Abstract

Reflexivity within planning research has emerged as central to a series of epistemological and methodological debates. There has been less discussion, however, about how research positionalities might intersect with assumptions regarding gendered and raced identities. Writing from within the field of urban planning I consider how a pervasive inattentiveness to the racial and gendered dynamics of the wider field obscures the articulation of the complexities of positionality and reflexivity within the research process. I call for a greater engagement with positionality within disciplinary debates in order to engage with the differential demands placed on feminist scholars of color.

Keywords

feminist research, qualitative research, race, urban planning

The author set out to study how the different people involved in the plan conceived the 'social construct' of ethnicity and how that construct shaped participation by ethnic minorities in the plan making activity…As I read the question at this point in the article I did not believe the author had sincerely asked an empirical question and then set out to find the answer based on systemic investigation. I figured the case study work was just window dressing for the author's prior beliefs.

Reviewer One (2012)

I received the referee report cited above for a submitted paper on planning and ethnic minority communities around 10 years ago. I was surprised that the reviewer's comments seemed more preoccupied with raising questions about how I had interpreted my own research, namely that urban planning continues to understand ethnic minority groups as outside of British identity, reflecting the field's failure to sufficiently engage with racism (see also Gale & Thomas, 2020). They claimed the writing was polemical rather than engaging with how my in-depth work had revealed the dissonance between well-intentioned practice and discriminatory outcomes. She or he (probably he) challenged my critique of the actions of planning professionals which they later argued in the review were well-meaning and thus not worthy of criticism. I was alarmed to see their review then turned to questioning my capacity as a researcher. The scope of the comments moved from a disagreement about how to interpret my findings to an attempt to discredit my integrity as a scholar. Reviewer One interpreted engagement with my own positionality as grounds to believe some form of evidence of prejudice towards planning professionals. Their knowledge of my identity, as a woman scholar of color, was affirmed by the editor's letter.

In revising the above-mentioned paper, I re-engaged with my feminist perspectives on positionality and the research interview as a social interaction that is shaped by interviewer and interviewee, discussions familiar to the readers of this journal. I was guided by scholarship engaging with how all such research encounters are subjective and influenced by our individual identities and their perception by others but there remains only a limited discussion of the differential impacts for planning scholars to date (see Sweet & Etienne, 2011; Garcia et al., 2021 for notable exceptions).

Those referee comments reflected the relative absence of feminist engagement in the field of urban planning research

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that are underpinned by implicit ideas about the types of researchers we are. As I will argue, these assumptions further marginalize minorities and women within a field where they remain under-represented and excluded (see Faria and Mollett, 2016). Although some time has passed since the publication of my earlier paper, the issues raised around perceptions of planning and attention to positionality remain underexplored within urban planning scholarship. More contextually, while diversity may form a key dimension of professional ethics, people of color and women remain marginalized within spaces of scholarship (Greenlee et al., 2018). The planning scholars Elizabeth Sweet and Harley Etienne further note that qualitative methodologies and interdisciplinary frameworks are important in illuminating "… the challenges to, or new perspectives on, existing conceptions of race, gender, diversity and their implications for planning practice and thought" but become "…lost in negotiations among authors, reviewers, editors, and consumers of planning scholarship" (2011, p.337).

I begin by setting out how urban planning's own disputed sense of its role and purpose influences the relative neglect regarding questions of positionality and self-reflexivity. I turn to how the absence of engagement with researchers, as embodied people, facilitates continuing problematic assertions of objectivity in within knowledge and methods. I argue that the wider lack of engagement with race, ethnicity, and gender intersects with a narrow understanding of reflexivity as something that can be overtly shaped through professional rather than embodied forms of identity. I then turn to the literature on feminist positionality, particularly within human geography. Engaging with how research and knowledge are subjective experiences, researchers are acknowledged as integral rather than incidental to the research process (England, 1994; Rose, 1997). These insights have been developed through further engagement with intersectionality, particularly from scholars of color, to emphasize the existence of multiple positionalities (Adams, 2021; Mukherjee, 2017; Sultana, 2007). Despite the importance of positionality to reflexive research, the benefits and costs are unevenly distributed. I argue that the mainstream planning research focus on professional practitioners and expert knowledge in order to address planning problems may favor an absence of engagement with messy questions of positionality and sustain claims to neutral or objective research. However, such inattentiveness serves to disadvantage those who engage with positionality, particularly scholars of color. In this paper, I argue that a fuller engagement with positionality, and its specific gendered and raced impacts, has the potential to open up methodological debates in the context of feminist and anti-racist praxis in planning.

Reflexivity, Positionality, and Urban Planning

Before turning more closely to the concept of positionality, it is important to consider some of the ways qualitative research is used in urban planning. Close connections between theory and practice have contributed to an under-exploration of how planning scholars position themselves and how they engage with the challenges of research positionality (see Siemiatycki, 2012). Referee One, cited at the start of the paper, claimed that the actions of planning professionals should be appreciated as well-meaning thereby highlighting a tension in planning deriving from the close connections between scholarship and practice and the desire to contribute to a normative planning project. Planning's self-image as a progressive discipline remains a strong driver of research. Planning research encompasses a broad spectrum of interests but the orientation towards forms of professional practice and policy leads to a series of distinctive challenges for the discipline. Næss (2018, p1233), for instance, describes planning as "a problem-oriented field of professional practice and research."

Planning emerges from an ethos of social improvement with knowledge playing a distinct role. As the planning theorist Yvonne Rydin (2007, p.53) explains:

> [T]he very rationale for planning within modernism is that knowledge can be harnessed through planning to achieve positive change…Planning practice has, therefore, seen itself as a user of knowledge in the pursuit of progress. The status of planners as experts resides in their command of specialist knowledge.

Planning scholars have provided a significant critique of claims to objective knowledge within planning research (see, for example, Sandercock, 1998). Indeed, there are different conceptions of objectivity ranging from the longstanding emphasis on the figure of the "neutral" observer to a variety of standpoints highlighted within feminist and critical race theory informed epistemologies. The feminist elaboration of "strong objectivity," for instance, shows how positionality can provide vital nuance to the research process (Harding, 1995). However, there remain gaps in engaging with how the contingent and subjective nature of knowledge is constructed within the research process. The geographer and urban planner Susan Moore (2015, p.391), for example, notes that there is a relative neglect of the research interview as a social interaction worthy of more critical attention or articulation in writing up findings:

> [S]elf-presentation and impression management in the interview are not only a methodological challenge, but are themselves key data, which often get overlooked in research geared to typifying development processes, identifying industry 'best practices' and evaluating the relative 'success' of outcomes on the ground.

Moore highlights a contradiction between extensive research on the work, value, and motivations of planners in contrast to the paucity of discussion surrounding researchers' methodological approaches to the research interview.

This lacuna is perhaps related to the disparate nature of the urban planning field which draws heavily on other disciplines

spanning architecture, design, and social sciences. The field remains in conflict over questions of objectivity and subjectivity in knowledge (see Flyvbjerg, 2001; Howe & Langdon, 2002 for a discussion). The discipline of urban planning has long prioritized traditional ideas regarding objective knowledge as a basis for perceived rational and technical decision-making based on forms of expertise in the face of strong critiques in feminist literature and the field of Science and Technology Studies (Rydin, 2007). Where urban planning has engaged with issues of reflexivity and positionality within scholarly practice, these have often been oriented towards our professional identities as planners (see Siemiatycki, 2012 for a discussion).

These absences of engagement echo the ways in which planning's limited engagement with race, ethnicity, and gender within methodological debates remains underexplored (notable exceptions include Dorries & Harjo, 2020; Garcia et al., 2021; Goetz et al., 2020). The limited attention to ethnicity, race, and gender within planning's historiography denotes a normative self-representation whereby spatial interventions are considered to serve a putative public interest (Campbell & Marshall, 2000). However, such assertions have been challenged through numerous studies that demonstrate how minorities are systematically disadvantaged through planning (see for example, Goetz et al., 2020; Roy, 2006). Planning scholarship and practice has historically acted to exclude women's ethnic and racial minorities forms of knowledge from the discipline (Sandercock, 1998; 2003; Spain, 2001). These critiques emphasize not only the historical framing of the discipline but the persistent under-representation of ethnic and racial minority perspectives within the field and a continuing lack of engagement with diversity and inclusion (see Beebeejaun, 2021; Garcia et al., 2021; Greenlee et al., 2018; Gale & Thomas, 2020; Thomas, 2008).

Despite the engagement with sociology and human geography's methodological literature, feminist and anti-racist engagement with reflexivity and positionality has been relatively neglected (for notable exceptions see Dorries & Harjo, 2020; González & Irazábal, 2015; Sweet, 2016; Sweet & Ortiz Escalante, 2015). Although there is a growing scholarship in urban planning from feminist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial perspectives, there remains a neglect towards the methodological implications for planning. Despite the growing feminist literature in the field engaging with subjectivity (see Dorries & Harjo, 2020; Sweet & Escalante, 2015), too often mainstream methodologies treat positionality and reflexivity as personal concerns or individual methodological dilemmas to be addressed by the individual researcher.

The transference of these questions from disciplinary concerns to the focus of individual action close down space to question the differing impacts and experiences of women and scholars of color. Planning methodology handbooks engage, to some extent, with the topics of positionality and reflexivity but within a diverse field which does not always value the quality of these research approaches and perspectives (Forsyth, 2012; Lowe, 2021). The planning scholars Balakrishnan and Forsyth (2019: p.157) note that "Some would argue that research is never fully objective because the researcher always brings her [sic] positionality into her data collection and analysis." Their ensuing discussion articulates the challenges within qualitative research and how positionality sits in an unresolved tension with claims of rigor, driven by more traditional research approaches in the field. Although noting that qualitative researchers impact upon their research, they suggest that external verifiability might be met if sufficient are materials should be collected, including recordings, and other researchers feel confident their work might yield similar findings:

> Investigators can help reliability by clearly documenting their methods, assumptions, and their position in relation to what is being studied (e.g., insider or outsider status). Triangulating the researchers' interpretation of her data can also help in identifying researcher bias.

<div align="right">Balakrishnan and Forsyth (2019, p.157)</div>

The authors assert approaches in which a clearer articulation of ones' relationship to research helps to develop reliability and critical positionality. My concern is how the scepticism expressed towards qualitative work in other parts of the discipline, as discussed in the opening paragraph, facilitates the capacity to criticize qualitative researchers, and misrepresent these methods, as problematic rather than reflexive bias. Paradoxically, an inattentiveness to situating one's embodied self-offers a more strategic approach for scholars given the limited engagement with positionality within the field of planning. However, such an absence of overt reflexivity favors certain researchers by default who hold embodied identities that can be perceived as relatively neutral as opposed to scholars to color.

Reliable or Relatable Researchers?

The figure of the qualitative researcher emerges as someone who must guard against being an "unreliable" narrator. Researchers continue to be directed towards quantitative methods as a measure of reliability and truthfulness despite their longstanding problematization (Harding, 1995). Such instructions to urban planning researchers are motivated by attention to good research practice. Nonetheless such exhortations reveal the continuing engagement with traditional, and critiqued, concepts of objectivity as a realizable goal. Research methods asking for interviews to provide framework for replication are underpinned by the idea of the neutral, disembodied, researcher, and stymie broader discussion. An overview of empirical articles published in planning journals found limited engagement with what the planning scholars Jacques Du Toit and colleagues term interpretative or critical social science. In their analysis they found limited evidence of studies that drew upon a qualitative methodology to more critically engages with how urban spaces and the planning

profession, for example, are discursively and socially constructed. They note:

> This means that the widespread use of qualitative methods in planning research was arguably for reasons other than epistemological and may reflect a range of possible reasons, including a lack of quantitative research skills or the use of qualitative methods such as interviews for mere fact-finding purposes
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> Du Toit et al (2017, p.484)

The authors argue that the planning field has "a need for greater methodological coherence" Drawing on their critique, I argue that if qualitative research is utilized principally as a "fact-finding" operation it further obscures questions of positionality.

The planning scholar, Matti Siemiatycki (2012) offers an important viewpoint on the series of differing positionalities that planning scholars may deploy in their research. He highlights the ways in which researchers in the field might feel obligated to situate their work in ways that gain approval inside and outside the academy. One, the independent observer, is characterized as the dominant construction in planning, and reinforces how research remains considered a lens onto an unproblematic form of social reality:

> For many scholars assuming the role of the independent outsider, then, their primary emphasis on achieving impact within academic forums provides an opportunity to carry out research that is relatively free from conflict with research subjects in professional practice or the agencies that employ them.

Siemiatycki (2012) notes that tensions may arise if research findings are overtly critical. This balancing act between academic research and maintaining access and good relationships with planning organizations poses a key challenge to scholars seeking to cultivate access to organizations. Less considered is how one's personal identity intersects with professional identity. Research positionality becomes reworked as a professional characteristic that masks the different experiences for women and minority scholars. Positionality, in this formulation emerges as an explicit perspective an individual academic can shape or feign. In the next section, I turn to the feminist critique and the value of engaging with positionality as a positive dimension of research practices.

Complicating Positionalities

Feminist scholarship has made the most important contributions to engaging with reflexivity in research (England, 1994; Haraway, 1991; Kobayashi, 2003; Rose 1997). The idea that there are objective forms of knowledge have been shown to mask the subjectivity of dominant groups, normally the white and male viewpoint (see Haraway, 1991). Positionality

emerges from a reflexive orientation towards research practice. The geographer Gillian Rose (1997, p.306) notes:

> Reflexivity in general is being advocated by these writers as a strategy for situating knowledges: that is, as a means of avoiding the false neutrality and universality of so much academic knowledge.

Feminist critiques have powerfully challenged universal claims to epistemological understandings. Black feminist and feminist work have emphasized how their perspectives have been deliberately marginalized or erased within knowledge production (Collins, 1988; Haraway, 1991; McDowell, 1992). Feminist scholars have made significant critiques of the notion of researcher objectivity that considers our prior beliefs, and our embodied identities as superfluous to research practice (Rose, 1997). A broader epistemological project not only situates the researcher within their practice but is attentive to power imbalances and asymmetries. Engaging with our own positionality opens up perspectives that challenge traditional claims to objectivity or expertise. However, feminist insights do not seek to suggest that qualitative research is a process that can neatly be controlled within a messy social world.

The geographer Audrey Kobayashi (2003), for instance, sets out how reflexivity seeks to overturn the ways in which the notion of objectivity papered over assumptions about research that in turn shaped processes and practices (see Haraway, 1991). Proponents claim that understanding the various dimensions of our identity and their interplay with others within the research process is not a hindrance, it "does not mean that scholarly work is weakened as a result, but rather revealing the social structure of position from which one writes can actually lead to more insightful analyses" (Moser, 2008, p.384). The concept of strong objectivity developed by the philosopher Sandra Harding sheds light on the value of working with subjective knowledge. She argues that criticisms of feminist work misrepresent subjectivity, arguing that engaging with how marginalization is experienced, provides a window into a wider understanding of how inequalities are produced and sustained within society. Strong objectivity also gives critical attention to how the relationship between these inequalities and methods of investigation. Harding (1995, p.334) argues that "The prevailing standards for good procedures for maximizing objectivity are too weak to be able to identify such culture-wide assumptions as androcentric or Eurocentric ones."

Reflexivity has urged us to return to the researcher who has often slips into the background of the research articulation. Kim England (1994, p.81) writes

> For me, part of the feminist project has been to dismantle the smokescreen surrounding the canons of neopositivist research-impartiality and objectivist neutrality-which supposedly prevent the researcher from contaminating the data (and, presumably, vice versa).

Here the rejection of the idea that the researcher contaminates, or skews research findings opens up a greater understanding of how positionalities are differently distributed based on our embodied identity. Nonetheless there have been critiques of the limitations of feminist positionality. Rose (1997) argues that the significant demands of positionality gesture towards its impossibility and incompleteness as our positionalities are never fixed and certain. Thus, this lack of closure within feminist methodological insights makes it challenging to integrate with dominant planning discourses. The demands of reflexivity and the engagement with messiness and failure in research practices have led to some feminist scholars retreating from engaging in work in the global South (see Sultana, 2007 for a discussion). Others have emphasized that a new wave of positionality engagements appear rather self-indulgent in their contributions and offer limited critical insights to research practice (see Kobayashi, 2003 for a discussion).

Minority Positionalities

However, feminist scholars of color, in particular, have been engaging with positionality to question assumed asymmetries of power that are purported to exist between researchers from the global North working in the global South (Mukherjee, 2017; Sultana, 2007). Their interventions have drawn attention to how positionality intersects with gendered and raced assumptions in the field and in the institution. Scholars of color have noted how privilege is not unilaterally accrued to all those who study and work in elite institutions. A series of studies have drawn upon intersectionality (Adams, 2021) critical race theory (Fisher, 2015) and the concept of multiple positionalities (Ali, 2015; Mukherjee, 2017; Ruan, 2020; Sultana, 2007). Engaging with the differential experiences of researchers in relation to gender, race, and ethnicity has opened up the assumptions about the identities of researchers and the wider implications for knowledge. The geographer Karen T. Fisher (2015) notes that:

> Much of the existing research on subjectivity and its role in the research process has focused either on 'white' researchers in Global South contexts or on researchers working in their 'home' country or community.

Although important literatures, Fisher's account traces the complexities of a hybrid or mixed identity and the varied negotiations in one's personal life and research experiences over claims to identity and belonging. Part of her reflexive engagement is through exploring numerous different perceptions of her positionality. Fisher engages with how others perceived her as "white" despite her self-understanding as an Indigenous person of color. These assumptions, alongside her own reflections upon the mutability of racial and ethnic identity, provide critical reflection on what a socially constructed racial understanding means within research. Fisher

demonstrates that in writing about positionality there is a need to go beyond a descriptive accounting of ourselves, our assumed identity and how we imagine our relative power in relation to others (Vanner, 2015). Rather our identities are dynamically constructed within the field and must be linked to wider structural framings of race, gender, identity, colonialism and imperialism even when the experiences are uncomfortable.

How can we create space for a more nuanced capacity to engage with our own reflexivity on our identity as well as how we are situated by others that is attentive to these shifting perceptions? The concepts of "multiple positionalities" and "multiple marginalizations" open up space to question research dynamics in greater detail. The feminist geographer Farhana Sultana (2007) carefully articulates the multiple positionalities some researchers navigate that are mediated through institutional, subject and disciplinary commonalities of understanding. As a US-based scholar, her fieldwork in rural Bangladesh challenged assumptions of belonging and the multiple markers of relative privilege or education. Sultana elucidates the complex and ever-changing nature of negotiating her positionality with others as viewed through a lens of being both an insider and outsider to their communities. She sets out how patriarchal gender relations, created discomfort and experiences and the importance of reflexive decision-making on how to engage with these experiences in the field.

These insights have been further developed by the geographer Sanjukta Mukherjee in her studies of Indian IT industry she notes that less attention has been given to how the multiple positionalities that may be inhabited. She argues that more attention is needed to how research participants position themselves and their viewpoint towards researchers. Mukherjee (2017, p.293) emphasizes the "ambiguities" of positioning for:

> Scholars of color who navigate researching their own community in the Global South have argued against rigid boundaries distinguishing insider and outsider positions. This is not to deny their relative privileges as academics institutionally situated in the Global North but to emphasize their complex positionalities as simultaneously insiders, outsiders, or in-between.

These insights address some of the complexities of working in contexts where one faces misogyny or racism, depending on one's identity. However, their absence from disciplinary discussions means that ethical questions underexplored. As Sultana (2007, p.383) further sets out "there are critical disjunctures between aspects of everyday behaviour in the field and the University's institutional frameworks that aim to guide/enforce good ethical practice, as the very conduct of fieldwork is always contextual, relational, embodied, and politicized." The absence or neglect of these responsibilities reflect wider concerns within the academic environment as a space of progressive whiteness where criticism of racial and

gendered inequalities is treated with hostility (Ahmed, 2012). Furthermore, there is always a danger that radical anti-racist paradigms such as decolonization become co-opted by the university and radically simplified (see Gopal, 2021).

My own experiences in urban planning research emphasizes how the impact of different identities lack engagement in the methods literature. For scholars of color, working on racial questions, disentangling our identity within research interactions is impossible. The ability to have one's ethnic identity unmarked remains a privilege of white majority identities. As a British Chinese Indo-African woman, interviewees often want to engage with my identity before moving onto the research focus. My non-English sounding name juxtaposed with an English accent leads to a series of questions to try and place my family origins. These encounters often provide an entry point for a location of (mis)understanding related assumptions. The discussions provide positive moments of discussion with other people from minority groups and offer not better but different kinds of research interactions. Given the complexity of my identity, there is not an overlapping sense of belonging to specific ethnic community, instead I have had many discussions on the experiences of being from a minority group in a professional environment. To suggest that embodied ethnic and gendered dimensions of identity, and our responses to them, can simply be left outside a research space privileges individuals whose identities are normalized in these spaces, primarily white men.

The economic geographer Beverley Mullings (1999) has reflected on her work in Jamaica that included business elites, managers, and workers that "perceptions and stereotypes regarding my gender, class, and race were elusive and uncontrollable" (1999; p.346). Mullings reflexive engagement with the interplay between her potential research participants and the varied ideas they had about her identity and interests that were never a stable field, noting:

> Information we as researchers receive will always be partial makes our claims more circumspect and our stance more reflexive. This is a consideration that is particularly important for researchers whose identities rest upon axes that are not only different but in many circumstances disempowering.
>
> (1999, p.349)

These judgements can be made on a set of superficial assumptions. Early in my research career I was delighted to have a chief executive of a local authority agree to speak to me. However, the reality was different and at the time very disappointing. The interviewee was clearly uncomfortable that my research was about race and ethnicity and after sitting down to commence the interview they almost immediately sprung from their chair saying they must find an important file for me. For most of the interview, I only saw the back of the participant, a white man, as he went through his filing cabinets and partially answered the questions with many awkward pauses. I had not got any insights into the local authority's anti-racism strategies. However, the interview helped me to understand more thoroughly the local authority's claims about their anti-racist work and the deep discomfort with the issue. Yet in recounting these experiences in a departmental research seminar, I was challenged by a white male doctoral researcher. He speculated that I most likely had appeared hostile and that my interviewing had created the problem. He suggested that I had failed to make them comfortable although I had attempted to be friendly, maybe even replicating the stereotype of the young naïve woman. The group discussion moved to a speculation of how the findings would have differed if a white male researcher had undertaken the research with a conclusion that they would have been better able to complete the interview. The idea of my hostility or sensitiveness to the topic was considered by them to skew results. As a person of color, I was not considered either a reliable researcher or narrator but rather a barrier to my own research. As Sara Ahmed has written about the person who brings up racism or misogyny is framed as the problem, not the problems themselves. These comments disrupt a comfort within institutions that are built upon intersecting racial and gendered inequalities (Ahmed, 2012; 2016).

Is it thus surprising to find a continuing neglect of experiences of racism and misogyny in the field? Although others have written about gendered sexual harassment there is little institutional engagement with what that means for researchers (Vanner, 2015). These problems are left to the individual researcher to negotiate on the ground establishing further inequalities along racial and gendered lines between researchers. These experiences raise questions about the responsibility of academic institutions and disciplines towards their own researchers and the limitations of university approaches to research ethics (see Beebeejaun et al., 2015; Caretta & Jokinen, 2017; Vanner, 2015 for a discussion).

The criminologist Maria Adams offers thoughtful ethnographic insights into intersectionality and prison research articulating the multiple challenges of negotiating her positionality. These experiences raised questions about perceptions of being the naïve researcher as well as silences when she faced harassment. She powerfully notes that:

> The silence of being mistreated; sexualized; and racialized have been a focal point to my experiences in conducting research on families of prisoners.
>
> (2021, p.8)

Her experiences within these prisons illuminated the shifting complexities of ethnic and gender identity. Mistreatment within the research arena is an underexplored but evidentiary dimension integral to understandings of racism and misogyny within our research work.

Privilege and Power in Research Positionalities

Methodological neglect of the different identities of researchers within the methods literature reinscribe claims to objectivity and conceal forms of embodied privilege. The idea that we can obscured or downplay our identity within the research process favors those who exist as unmarked in terms of holding dominant gender or racial identities in the field. Whiteness grants invisibility to some, meaning that misogyny and racism become constructed as specific events that individual researchers must navigate rather than wider disciplinary or institutional concerns. In contrast, suggesting that gendered identities are operated as point of leverage in order to elucidate research findings raises ethical dilemmas in an era of resistance to misogyny and sexual harassment. If research methodologies sustain idea of the interviewer as an objective and bias minimizing academic into which research data is transferred, then what assumptions about the types of bodies that can most usefully do this work? What counts as a good research interview and for who? Mainstream methodological training might not explicitly engage with the assumption that it has the white male heterosexual scholar in mind (Caretta & Jokinen, 2017).

It is perhaps surprising that we continue find a limited repertoire available on the basis of gendered and racialized identities or stereotypes. The feminist geographer Linda McDowell's (1998) reflections on elite interviewing within banking disputes the assertion that shared gender identities lead necessarily to a more open and easy interview process. However, she set out how the different types of interviewees she engaged with created the necessity to create comprehensible gendered roles speaking about oscillating between "playing dumb" with an older male interviewee and "definitely not to be patronised" with some of her younger male interviewees (1998, p.2138). Although McDowell's work was highly attentive to gender and feminist concerns, playing to gender norms or listening to sexist or racist remarks pose dilemmas that have been inadequately explored.

The urban geographer Allan Cochrane's (1998) consideration of elite interviews notes playing to assumed norms might form strategies or manipulations to establish rapport. Cochrane questions the ways in which it might lead white men to dress formally or use other social cues to establish parity and in contrast questions how building rapport for women might draw upon other tropes of inferiority:

> Is it acceptable for them [women researchers] to present themselves in appropriate (self-effacing) ways in order to encourage the belief that they are not a threat, thus creating space for those being interviewed to talk and maybe even, if men, to show off their power, possibly letting slip more than they intend to?
>
> Cochrane (1998, p.2128)

Cochrane argues that such strategies are clearly problematic and perhaps methodologically naïve if they presume that the researcher is able to gain information through encouraging a false sense of complacency. Yet despite the changing composition of institutional elites, gendered and racialized under-representation still persist. Thus, acting to a stereotypical gendered role confers authority and status, central to academic work, on men, but omits to engage with the implications for those holding visible racial and ethnic identities and ways in which they may become disempowered as they enter spaces of research.

Seeking to create a legible interaction along the intersections of gendered and racialized identities raise an alarm for those who experience racism or sexism or other discrimination on the basis of their identity. Rapport emerges as an important goal of research interviews despite concerns about how it might be arrived at. But at what cost should it be garnered? Are there arguments to be made against rapport, particularly when engaged with anti-racist and feminist scholarship? Kulnik and colleagues (2020) write within the field of health research on their experiences of interview participants making racially discriminatory remarks to white researchers within their team. They dispute the idea that rapport must always be established in a successful interview. Positionality provides a framework through which to engage with each other on a differing basis understanding our potentially conflicting places in the world. "This can allow them to work together, even if—for example— the interviewee dislikes or disrespects the researcher" (Kulnik et al., 2020, p.7). Such problematizations of ideas of rapport raise important questions. The interview process is never neutral, and the assumptions of replicability can only ever partially be fulfilled. Giving more attention to the ways in which racism or misogyny, for example, operate in the interview site can contribute to a greater understanding of the limitations of planning. The potential emotional harms that researchers, particular from minority groups, might experience are inadequately addressed or explored. Turning greater attention to how interviews are conducted should not demand a replication of gender norms or harmful racial stereotypes or leave these questions to individual researchers to resolve in the field.

A fuller engagement with the idea of rapport can enable more significant challenges to the devaluation of gendered and racialized researchers and their perspectives. A recent discussion on diversity and ethnic minority groups reminded me of the importance of engaging with positionality with each other as researchers. I had attributed a quote to a white man when giving an overview of some recent work on diversity and urban planning to an international seminar, I was startled when a respondent, a white woman, seemed offended that a quote had mentioned that the interviewee was white. She became visibly agitated, challenging me about why it was necessary to mention their whiteness. She then laughed and demanded that if I was to mention whiteness as an ethnic identity, then should I not have said something about the "colour" of the Muslim respondent too, The unease which arose from engaging with making visible the invisibility of whiteness surprised me in the moment. To foreground people

of color is normal whereas whiteness is strengthened through receding into the background. The positive dimensions of diversity are premised on the invisibility of whiteness (Walcott, 2019). Our differential identities conflicts with the narrow delineation of researchers inherent to mainstream methods literature.

Continuing beliefs that effacing the researcher, through linking rigor to replication of research interviews, in fact mask the intersecting gendered and raced norms that continue to privilege whiteness in the academy. As Maya Lefkowich (2019, p.2) has discussed in relation to her work on men and masculinity, "the language of neutrality or impartiality is often used to discredit the scholarship of researchers who are othered because of identity markers such as gender, race, and/or ability." Positionality should be considered at a range of scales and require disciplinary and institutional commitments. The capacity to seemingly lack or not need to claim an identity is a privilege bestowed upon the dominant ethnic group. Sara Ahmed notes that criticisms of these institutional spaces remind us of how scholars of color do not fully belong "Our talk about whiteness is read as a sign of ingratitude, of failing to be grateful for the hospitality we have received by virtue of our arrival" (2012, p.43). Engagement with the complexities for positionality for scholars who are marked as different challenges established conventions of research practice. Drawing attention to whiteness can enable further engagement with how dominant subjectivities continue to shape research methodologies.

Conclusions

In this paper I have engaged with how qualitative research in the field of planning remains limited in terms of its methodological engagements with positionality. I suggest that the strong connections to practice and a normative desire to "improve" the planning profession have hindered engagements with positionality. Feminist insights further demonstrate the futility of seeking to control the research process espoused by traditional forms of objectivity. Instead, situating our positionality and the differential insights that emerge from multiple knowledges requires further reflection within planning methodologies. It is vital to engage further with how ideas of replicability, rapport, and neutrality privilege certain types of researchers within the planning field, particularly given the continuing marginalization of scholars of color and the continuing lack attention to anti-racism and white privilege in scholarship. Such questions may have implications in reflecting upon how they may influence recruitment and progression within the urban planning field given that there are so few scholars of color at all levels of the discipline.

Although my own scholarship is situated within urban planning, this paper seeks to make contributions to the broader debate on positionality. Engagements with positionality by feminist and critical race scholars reveal the continuing

inattentiveness to the differential impacts of qualitative research. More recent insights have questioned research interview practices and the harms that might be enacted through a continuing emphasis on ensuring rapport with research participants, favoring those who are relatively privileged in relation to their identity. There are dangers in assuming that diversity is valued even it forms part of the planning profession's professional mandate (Sweet & Etienne, 2011) Feminist and anti-racist research insights demand that we question these gendered and racialized norms and call for further action in dealing with racism and misogyny in research.

Moving beyond individual self-reflection, positionality and reflexivity have a wider role to play in challenging disciplinary and institution norms. The unproblematic promotion of "research rapport" through the adoption of gendered and raced stereotypes can harm both research practice and the wellbeing of researchers. The importance of rapport in elucidating research findings in professional elite settings might favor researchers who are considered to resemble interviewees or implicitly assume certain problematic identity stereotypes towards other candidates. These assumptions may form further dimensions to the barriers faced by minority academics in recruitment, grant funding, and career progression based on unexplored ideas about research positionality and capabilities by funders and academic recruitment and promotion panels. However, the specific challenges faced by women and scholars of color are often viewed as merely incidental to wider models of research training that exist within institutional environments that remain framed around whiteness. But how, we might ask, can good research practice flourish where pre-existing ideas or identities are replicated, compounded, or insufficiently challenged? In this paper I have sought to engage with these multiple dimensions of positionality through a feminist lens that highlights the need for on-going work which challenges the kind of naïve and much critiqued methodological claims of objectivity that pervade the planning discipline.

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