A critical reflection on being an ethnic minority researcher of child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities: Implications for social work and sociology

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This is a copy of the pre-print article published on Medium, with the following citation:


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Funding This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest The author declares no conflict of interest.
A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON BEING AN ETHNIC MINORITY RESEARCHER OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IN ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIOLOGY

ABSTRACT

Sociology is concerned with promoting equality. One way to understand what inequality looks like is to document personal lived experiences. This is the aim: to critically reflect on being an ethnic minority researcher of child sexual abuse in ethnic minority communities. Minority victims/survivors are at risk of racist stereotyping, unlike their white counterparts, making their barriers to disclosure even greater. Protecting this ‘hard to reach’ group requires acknowledgement of the main cause of victims’ silence – patriarchy – which is overt in many ethnic minority and collectivist cultures. However, this leads to a grave risk: sexism (the right discourse) is replaced with racism (the wrong one). Doing ‘everyday sociology’ in the form of critical self-reflection – a qualitative research tool in the search for truth and agency through deconstruction of power – helps generate new ideas for social work practice, policy, research, and education, as well as the broader framing discipline of sociology. Specifically, the propensity for racism is argued as biologically inherent to human nature, and therefore education in social justice can only reduce but never close racial inequality. Accepting that equality is unattainable may, perhaps counter-intuitively, be empowering because it allows social workers and sociologists to set more realistic and achievable goals.

Keywords ethnic minorities, child sexual abuse, everyday sociology, critical self-reflection, racism, feminism
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background: Why was this article written, and what are its aims and significance?

In 2007, I was awarded a three-year Postdoctoral Fellowship to explore ‘Culturally and Linguistically Diverse’ (CALD) children and families in the New South Wales (NSW) child protection system in Australia. In the national discourse, ‘CALD’ refers to those who are neither Indigenous (Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander) nor Anglo (Saxon and/or Celtic) [1]. The international literature refers to this group as ‘ethnic minorities’ because they are non-mainstream in race, language, culture, and/or religion – the four main dimensions of ethnicity [2]. The Fellowship topic was broad. It spanned: (a) child maltreatment – physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect; (b) risk factors – domestic violence, mental health issues in carers, substance abuse, poverty, and homelessness; (c) culture – everyday norms, traditions, beliefs, and values that might intertwine with child maltreatment and its risks; and (d) the ‘big picture’ sociological issues of racism, sexism, and classism.

It was a transformative and harrowing experience – to have thrown myself into the sadness and injustice that marks the lives of many people. However, I explored so much in such little time, that each piece did not get my full attention. When I did start to spend time exploring some of these sub-topics more deeply, there was even greater transformation waiting ahead. The aim of this article is to describe that transformation, using the qualitative tool of critical self-reflection. In doing so, implications for social work practice, policy, research, and teaching were also revealed. Implications for how racism is conceptualised in sociology were also revealed, and added a complex and challenging but necessary layer to an already difficult conversation.

Both implications for social work and sociology are discussed after the self-reflective commentary. However, it is first important to identify a theoretical framework as this proves useful when discussing the implications of the commentary. Specifically, ‘everyday sociology’ is used. It is a theoretical sub-discipline of sociology espousing the value for personal experiences as a vehicle for understanding social structures, as well as a research tool when used in the form of critical self-reflection, and sociology is intimately linked with social work.
1.2 Theoretical framework: Why is ‘everyday sociology’ an important lens for this article?

Sociology is a discipline within the social sciences that goes beyond the experience of individuals (the business of psychology) to highlight that different groups in society experience different, and specifically unequal, access to opportunities [3]. Some groups experience the privilege of higher social, political, and economic power, leaving other groups systematically marginalised, vulnerable, and/or disadvantaged. Most commonly, sociology is concerned with promoting equality across race, gender, class, ability, and sexuality, among others. In drawing attention to the inequality that minorities from these groups experience, sociology has the chance to reduce that inequality rather than letting it sit silently under the understanding that such inequalities are normal or part of the ‘status quo’; the more noise made, the better the chance for equality.

However, racism, sexism, classism (and so on) all play out across the backdrop of everyday lived experiences. It is here that inequality manifests and takes shape, so to best understand what inequality really looks like and capably capture its complexity, it is important to investigate the unique lives of individuals. It is also important for being able to effectively and efficiently design strategies that can combat inequality. Thus, there is an intimate connection between the experience of individuals and social groups, synthesising micro and macro perspectives [4]. At its heart, ‘everyday sociology’ values subjective phenomenological experience (‘insider perspectives’), and one qualitative research tool that aligns with this is critical self-reflection.

2 METHOD

Brookfield (2009) acknowledges that critical reflection is a contested rather than unequivocal concept, but still broadly defines it as “a process that calls into question and foregrounds power dynamics and relationships that uncover hegemony … assumptions that are accepted and unquestioned as commonsense but actually are constructed by the dominant group to keep others servile and marginalised as if the current structure and organisation of society is in the best interests of all” [5] (p. 294, 296). According to Mattsson (2014), it involves “focussing on a chosen event or situation and analysing the feelings, thoughts, and actions it involves in a way that opens up alternative ways of understanding” [6] (p. 11). Fook and
Askeland (2007) say that it is “ultimately about a person becoming more empowered in acting within and upon (their) social world” [7] (p. 522).

Although critical self-reflections – as a methodology of everyday sociology – have immense value for understanding the nature and complexity of inequality, they are also criticised for being subjective, which is “unavoidably multiple and contradictory” [8] (p. 347). This is seen as mostly a problem for premodern and modern scientists, because postmodern scientists do not believe in an objective reality independent of subjective ones; the search for the truth is the same as the search for a truth because a truth is as good as the search will ever get. However, it is still somewhat problematic for postmodernism in that opening up opportunity for (extreme) relativism risks interpreting all experiences as equally true [6].

Just like in the physical sciences, where light is both a particle and a wave depending on how you look at it, and that because perspective determines its veracity a certain element of uncertainty needs to be accepted (the Heisenberg principle), so too in the social sciences. Whether or not an objective reality exists independent of subjective reality simply depends on how you look at it, and at some level we can never really be sure. It is for this reason that critical reflections on personal experiences in everyday life are both a tool for getting closer to truth as well as a hindrance to it; its very strength is also its very weakness. Thus, the search for truth will remain philosophical and be both subjective and objective in nature.

Given that perspective matters so much, the constructed realities of people are truths worth asking about and documenting. It is in this spirit that this article has been written – being aware of the limitations of qualitative and subjective accounts of truth and everyday inequality, while still acknowledging its value for providing a means to truth. Moreover, some stories are compelled to be told, especially when people perceive “various stretches of their lives as (particularly) meaningful” [9] (p. 17). In this vein, I am taking the time to make some noise, and use the ‘sociology of narrative’ to reproduce stories that aim to make visible and explicit relations of power and inequity [10].

3 SELF-REFLECTIVE COMMENTARY

In 2016, at the suggestion of colleagues looking for in-depth information on the topic, I conducted a systematic literature review on child sexual abuse (CSA) in ethnic minority communities in Australia, by necessarily using the international literature to help inform the
national context – essentially absent (as described later). At first, I was reticent. I knew from the years I had spent on my Postdoc that a part of me had shut down on the specific issue of CSA. I was quite comfortable to explore the complex relationship between culture, race, gender, and migration as they pertained to physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect, but CSA sat apart from the rest of them. I knew that nothing could make this type of maltreatment ok. Nothing justified it or explained it. Not poverty. Not culture. Not race. Nothing. So there was no ‘story’ I could construct to help make sense of what it might look like within a sub-group of the population – ethnic minorities – because no matter who you are and which groups you belong to – no context made this kind of victimisation sensical. It is, simply, a heinous and absolute crime. A moral outrage. When I embarked on the literature review, I was forced to come out of the box I had cocooned myself into, to face the story that might surround CSA in ethnic minority communities. I always knew the story was never going to be one that sounded like it was making an excuse. But I did need to create some story – some context – so that victims from this group did not remain at risk of being isolated by the silence and fear of taking ‘the dirty work’ on.

So, I faced that demon and wrote some papers on the issue [11–15]. I looked at several issues that could be relevant to that story – prevalence and risk factors of CSA in various countries, awareness of CSA in ethnic minority communities, how prevention could be improved for them, how barriers to disclosure might be addressed in culturally appropriate ways, and features of culturally competent service delivery for victims/survivors from this group. It was a ‘Pandora’s box’ I’m glad I stuck my head in, because I now know that if I stayed living in the dark – in the safe space of denial and ignorance – then I would just be letting the terrible status quo prevail and flourish; where victims experience life-long victimisation in the form of silence and exclusion from their family, community, and government (through lack of research that leads to uninformed intervention – described later) well beyond the sexualised abuse itself.

Above all else, patriarchy stood out as the resounding and fundamental issue. CSA is a gendered crime with female victims at reported worldwide ratios of 3:1 [16,17], sometimes 4:1 [18,19]. Female victims report more severe sexual assault that is coupled with violence [20], and myths about CSA such as ‘some people deserve rape due to their way of clothing’ [21] which shift culpability from the usually male perpetrator to the usually female victim are more likely to be endorsed by males [22]. They are also likely to be endorsed by females, at
the hands of patriarchate socialisation, to help decrease their perceived risk of susceptibility [23]. Even among male victims of CSA, there is a fear of not being believed [24,25] – which may in part be related to the lower incidence – but there are also additional fears of being seen as weak or feminine [19], which all reveal the relevance of patriarchy here too.

The problem is, traditional gender roles that overtly accept patriarchal structures, are more common in ethnic minority communities [26]. So upon reading this body of literature, I became polarised to an extreme; I became an even more staunch feminist than I already was. In the same way that a black bottle heats up quicker and hotter than a white one (something I learned in a Year 8 Science class), the extremes are greater for ‘black bottles’; when the confines of sexism are suffocating, the pressure to escape and change them is equal in its opposing force. In other words, I was forced to (finally) pass unapologetic and unambiguous judgment on my own culture in ways that the other forms of child maltreatment did not make me do. It was the only way that full and proper responsibility for its perpetuation of the initial and prolonged victimisation could be taken.

But clarity about patriarchy being a root cause of this evil meant that I could also see it in mainstream cultures. Unfortunately, that doesn’t mean that others do too: the literature documents that CSA in ethnic minority communities is seen as ‘a cultural issue’ but the mainstream escapes this racist stereotyping [27]. This means that minority victims of CSA remain even harder to reach because in staying silent about the abuse, they leave themselves open to risk of re-victimisation and mental illness including suicidality [15], but protect their community in a multicultural society trapped by human nature – the nature to judge, fear and denigrate ‘the different other’ [28,29]; heightened for groups without the same social power as the white mainstream. While the literature continues to document these instances of racism [30–33], and therefore build knowledge and capacity in the area, it still faces the glass ceiling of human nature: just because you understand a problem, doesn’t mean you’ve resolved it.

Then there was another issue: if I’m allowed to pass judgement on my own culture – which I need to do to take full and proper responsibility (and as an act of self-determination) – then how can I expect others not to? And by others, I mean the white mainstream. But actually, I wanted all groups to pass judgment on all forms of gendered inequality. I saw that it was my job to pay attention to cross-cultural differences so that overt patriarchy could be labelled as the key risk factor, but I wanted the job of white folk to be that of paying attention to cross-cultural similarities.
In my readings of the current literature on ethnic minorities, CSA, and family violence (2000–2016), I came across a large handful of ethnic minority writers (not identified here) who are taking responsibility by naming patriarchy as the leading risk factor; and in only naming risks can they be addressed. They are nowhere near sizeable to effect macro-level change, and hardly any of them are Australian, reflecting a deep national trend to stay silent on the matter.

The silence makes sense; the Australian government only recently intervened in remote Northern Territory (the ‘NT intervention’) in 2007 to protect Aboriginal children from CSA and family violence. However, CSA and family violence occur in all groups. That the government has not intervened in only white families and communities, makes the NT Intervention seen as racially targeted [13]. By virtue of also being non-mainstream, ethnic minorities in Australia are aware or fear that they face the same risk as Indigenous Australians. An ethnic minority victim of CSA is aware she threatens the standing of her whole community should she disclose, but a white victim of CSA does not carry this burden. Sufficient negative attention could again lead to racialised intervention.

However, the handful of white authors in Australia who are currently writing about cross-cultural similarities is even smaller (e.g. [34–41]). I count these authors as an amazing and inspiring group of writers because they help protect the cultural safety of ethnic minorities. Unfortunately, they are a small group of ‘exceptions to the rule’. For the most part, stereotyping through assumptions that traditional gender roles only belong to ethnic minority communities reflects humans’ cognitive nature – to focus on differences to help affirm the boundaries that demarcate the ‘in-group’ from everyone else; and that’s easy to do when gendered power imbalances are overt.

Gender imbalances in white-majority countries are attempted to be redressed in everyday discourse, such as in the areas of housework shares, division of part-time/full-time employment in married couples with children, pay gaps, and access to managerial positions (e.g. [42,43]). However, this leads to a chasm between the rhetoric and the reality, and can make it hard ‘to see the water one swims in’. Patriarchy, silence, and exclusion are hallmark features of the experience of CSA for victims from all groups. If I want to help protect my ‘black children’, I need to fully own the issues in my ‘black community’. But positively, doing so also helps protect the ‘white children’ in my country; that country which, on the
whole, threatens my voice and right to take responsibility for my group’s ills in the form of hypocritical and racist attributions about why CSA occurs at all.

It took me a year to get over the secondary traumatisation – feeling physically sick at the thought of abuse of a child, and imagining what it would be like to be a child who had been abused that way, maybe repeatedly by an uncle I was supposed to be able to trust but not say anything about just to keep the family intact. I dare not imagine what the life-long curse really feels like. (Note: I acknowledge that I am projecting my own despair and rage here, and that disclosure represents liberation from social stigma that works to keep such traumas silent and hidden and allow victims to become empowered, resilient, agentic survivors).

I also realised I have an absolute point. Like the principle of yin-yang, it is my spot of ‘rightness’ in an otherwise wide landscape of ‘leftness’. If I draw the line here, then I can understand why someone else might draw the line at physical abuse or family violence or substance abuse – where nothing, in their mind, makes it ok. The universal emotion of wanting to protect a child severely vulnerable to harm lives on a continuum; the threshold for where it is deemed as ‘crossed’ lives in a different spot for different people along the line. I can now more readily appreciate why others differ from me when I create a story – a context – for the other forms of maltreatment. My experiences as an ethnic minority do not justify them, but they can help child protection caseworkers and other service providers at least reflect on where their threshold is and whether it aligns with the ethnic minority child’s, so that undue harm from intervention when it was not actually needed does not occur. For minorities, that harm does not just belong to the individual family, it belongs to the whole ethnic community.

I am making broad associations between left-wing politics and leanings toward acceptance of diversity and therefore relativism, and by corollary between right-wing politics and leanings toward intolerance of diversity and therefore absolutism. I have discussed at length the pitfalls of extreme absolutism and relativism in child protection practice elsewhere (see [44]), however we do currently live in a global climate where the Western world is swinging to the wide landscape of ‘rightness’. In 2016–2017, Pauline Hanson (leader of the One Nation Party) became an elected member of Australian parliament, Donald Trump was elected President of the USA, and the UK made moves to leave the European Union (‘Brexit’). As a result, my responsibility to speak the truth about patriarchy as a root evil faces a particular challenge. Now, more than ever, it is best to keep my mouth shut on the matter. Anyone not
white is not safe, and the risk of racist stereotyping is at an all-time high. My ‘black community’ needs to be protected. But so do my ‘black children’.

As I see it, the only way both can happen is for researchers to continually point out that race is not actually the issue. One day, hopefully, someone in power hears the message and is willing to take full responsibility for the (comparatively less overt) patriarchy in mainstream society and see through the glass ceiling of human nature to the other side, where all children – black, white, male, female, young, old, disabled, not disabled, gay, not gay, rich, and poor – are free from the threat of sexual abuse. That point requires what Fook, Ryan, and Hawkins (2000) [45] call ‘critical acceptance’; a climate in which it is safe to challenge old ideas and try new ones. Indeed, Lilienfield (2002) [46] also talks about how “some scholars avoid discussions about culture out of concern that public discourse may misuse scholarly debate” (cited in [47], p. 165). That window may be small, but it is possible.

(Note: throughout this paper, I have dichotomised white and non-white (‘black’) people. This is not meant to reflect my stereotypes, essentialise categories, nor exclude those who do not ‘fit’ dominant groups. It has been done with poetic license to help distil the points I wish to make as clearly as possible).

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Summary of key issues

To take quick stock: patriarchy is a set of patterns or trends that frame and permeate all aspects of everyday life, with the net effect of systematically advantaging males. In the context of CSA, victims (male and female) face such immense barriers to disclosure – from not being believed [24,25], labelled as ‘crazy’ or mentally unstable [39], compromising marriage prospects for all daughters in a family [48–51], traumatising court experiences [52], and threats of death from perpetrators and non-offending family members more interested in protecting the family’s name and avoiding social stigma [17,39,53–55] – that silence to avoid social exclusion and protect personal safety becomes the more common consequent of CSA than prosecution for the crime. Given that males are the most common types of perpetrators, and that silence makes CSA less visible, their social advantage is protected and preserved. In other words, the patriarchal status quo is maintained, and this is true for all cultural groups (to greater or lesser extents, depending on how overtly patriarchal the specific culture is).
When attention is transferred from the true issue in need of redress (patriarchy) to another issue that is not (race), victims from ethnic minority groups incur an even greater burden to disclose. If these particularly ‘hard to reach’ victims are not acknowledged properly – with consideration of all variables that are relevant to them (i.e. racism) – then a disservice and injustice is occurring. Another moral outrage. It also means that the pervasive cognitive error of using race as a causal indicator of why CSA occurs in minority groups needs deep consideration.

4.2 Reflections in relation to the theoretical framework

Traditional gender roles are, relatively speaking, more overt in many ethnic minority communities which also tend to be high on collectivism [44]. Collectivism is a cultural stance that essentially sees the family rather than the individual to be the unit of society [56–58], and since traditional gender roles serve family goals, they are viewed by group members as acceptable. Traditional gender roles also serve family goals in individualistic societies like Australia, the US, UK, Canada, and New Zealand, but there is also a juxtaposing overt questioning of them and a striving toward more equal distributions of gendered power.

Since: (a) race is visible and cognitively efficient to use as a heuristic for making sense of a complex social world in increasingly time-poor conditions, (b) race, culture, and patriarchy are substantially correlated in ethnic minority communities, (c) minorities are smaller in number, increasing the chances of stereotyping due to less exposure to individual variation, and (d) self-awareness and reflection to de-centre the egocentric and ethnocentric self requires considerable mental work and the giving up of some power, it becomes clearer to see why race and patriarchy get confused. However, the process of doing everyday sociology – critically reflecting on personal experiences as they are authentically perceived and occur – helps unpack this.

Specifically, this article proposes that egocentric judgment is the ‘biological substrate’ for racism – allowing it to occur in the first place – and that because egocentricity is a manifestation of an evolutionary instinct which serves the species’ survival, the propensity for racism is biologically inherent to human nature.

If so, then biological factors that underpin racism may not be sufficiently acknowledged in current sociological conceptualisations of it. Sociology literature defines racism as a
combination of prejudice and power. As such, its cognitive, social, political, and economic components are given the most attention. The implication is that if there is no prejudice and if power is equally distributed across racial groups then racism will not occur. Moreover, the means by which sociology (and the cognate areas of psychology and socio-political economics) attempt to achieve these goals is through education in social justice. Such education can reduce prejudice and increase a desire for equitable divisions in social, political, and economic power. Indeed, because of such education, we have moved mountains in terms of putting racial equality on the political agenda in the modern and global world [59].

Yet despite all this education, covert and overt prejudice, racism, and discrimination remain rife, as does the need for the education itself (e.g. [60–61]). It is not as though educating one generation then educates future ones. The education one generation receives does not change our DNA – we do not forwardly pass on these learned lessons. Each generation needs to learn for themselves, so the need for education in social justice never abates. (And if hypothetically all members of the human race received education in social justice, I have no confidence this would guarantee that we never have to have this education again). In short, the journey from egocentric judgment to non-egocentric respect for difference is a personal one.

Thus, the biological impetus to be egocentric – because this attribute works well for the species’ survival – may be contributing to racism more than we currently acknowledge in sociology. Its current construction may not be sufficiently accounting for the evolutionary human tendency to see ourselves ‘at the centre of the universe’ and judge ‘the different other’.

I have always taught that racism is a combination of prejudice plus power and that since negative stereotypes and unequal distributions in access to opportunities are socially learned or acquired, then simply overturning these environmental factors is theoretically sufficient for overturning racism. The (psychological) literature on racism does acknowledge that it may be an extension of the human propensity to fear the unfamiliar, and I do teach this biological component in the name of being comprehensive, but admittedly it is taught in token; I mostly pitch my lectures in the spirit that if you do not have negative attitudes about different others and believe in equal access to opportunities for all, then that’s all you really need. However, I now seriously question the position that racism is mostly environmental; biology may have a larger role than sociology allows for. The upshot is that because egocentricity is entrenched
in the gene pool, so is racism, and therefore racial equality is impossible and education in social justice can only reduce but never close the gap.

My claims are based on one person’s experience, which could also be accused of being ironically self-indulgent [62] since it is the process of egocentricity that leads to an accusation of it. Still, inductive reasoning – using a specific situation to make inferences about general patterns – is useful for finding the truth of things [63]. Here, the outcome of my personal reflection is that striving for perfect equality may be unproductive.

In the same way that fear of the unfamiliar is useful for survival of the species, so too is diversity. Natural selection requires diversity in the gene pool – if we were all the same, and one change that none of us had the capacity to adapt to occurred, we would all die out – so diversity is also critical for survival. Thus, as a human race, we have the contradictory need to be scared of the different and yet also need it. The contradiction is befitting for our complexity, but it forever undermines the project of equality. In future, we may need to give more air-time to the biological roots of egocentricity when we think about and teach racism to sociology and social work students, because education in social justice can continue to direct their valuable work but this substrate may also set the limits of what it can really achieve.

It is essential at this point that I make myself very clear, as I do not want to be misinterpreted on such a critical point. I am not arguing that racism occurs because of biology. This position has already been refuted on the grounds that it is disempowering and absolves supremists from taking responsibility for their perpetuation of systemic racialised disadvantage; I too have argued elsewhere for the importance of discourse and frameworks that truly promote and reflect racial equality [3]. What I am putting forward here is the possibility that biology makes racism allowable to occur. This is a different position to the grave misinterpretation I am open to, because the implication is that not everyone is racist and unable to escape from it. The position is only being put forward for the purposes of intellectual debate. Thus, I do not believe that a possible biological propensity accounts for racism more than sociocultural, cognitive, economic, and historical factors, I just wish to stimulate dialogue as to whether its role may be larger than we what we currently care to admit or face in sociology. Such conversations deserve serious consideration when the truth of things is attempted to being identified. In the words of Fook and Askeland (2007):
Critical reflection involves unearthing deeper assumptions … which is a ‘double-edged sword’: it can be a very potent way of confronting ‘sticking points’; but its effectiveness may be limited because of the misunderstanding, resistance, and anxiety which can result when deep-seated assumptions are questioned. To ‘venture’ involves risks, but with the potential for great gain; a gain which may not be easily achieved in other ways [7] (p. 521).

4.3 Implications for social work practice, policy, research, and education

My experiences have evidently worn down my optimism – if racism is a part of human nature, then it’s something I cannot eradicate no matter how hard I try; the goal for equality can never be realised. Strangely though, this pessimistic and unhopeful kind of thinking has actually set me free from the utopian energy I used to use, toward a more productive, empowered, and realistic use of effort. To this end, some implications for those working in the field of social work – specifically, child protection – are also offered. The aim of these ‘take home messages’ is to help more clearly translate personal learnings into implications for practice and policy:

- The need to protect all children from sexual harm is equal across cultures; failing to protect children from some groups is an injustice.
- Feminist and sociological frameworks are essential in all matters to do with CSA.
- White practitioners, scholars, educators, and policy makers need to reflect on their ego- and ethno-centric selves to develop self-awareness, and thus research agendas that take responsibility for ‘White privilege’ (in the form of searching for cross-cultural similarities, not confusing race with traditional gender roles, and protecting the cultural safety of minorities).
- Non-white practitioners, scholars, educators, and policy makers need to take full responsibility for patriarchy and not deflect attention away from CSA toward (nevertheless valid) issues of racism; the crime is absolute and unconditional.
- All CSA victims/survivors need to be protected from ongoing victimisation by making it safe to disclose; societal trends should not be such that the victim is punished more than the perpetrator.
• Clinical service providers and legal advisors need to fully acknowledge the barrier of racism that exists for minority victims/survivors in seeking help.

• Differences of opinion need to be respected; the subjectivity of individuals may make child protection work confusing and complex, but it is still better than not reflecting on assessments and decisions that aim to serve the best interests of the child (Munro, 1996).

4.4 Some concluding remarks

Several people have read this article. All have something to say about it. Of course: it is highly topical and complex. However, this article is a self-reflection, and so I have unpacked what I needed to unpack. This article has not gone into great depth about teaching implications or the secondary traumatisation I incurred, for example, as these were not fundamental to me when I began nor finished my reflection, they were simply a part of it.

One friend who has worked in Child Safety for over 20 years who read my self-reflective commentary said: “it’s nice to read an article without all the academic bullsh*t!” She struck me as right. Academics need to be careful not to get caught up in their ‘speak’ and alienate their work from being transferred into practice. Having said that, ‘academic speak’ is important – the peer-review or scholarly process helps ensure that other perspectives have been considered at least to some extent – while respecting the rights of scholars to draw boundaries on what is in and out of scope in their critical self-reflection.

Overall, this article aimed to pull together critical self-reflections on exploring CSA in ethnic minority communities as an ethnic minority researcher – an emic methodology that values the subjective phenomenological truth from ‘within’ – to explore what it may be able to tell us about improving the practice, policy, research, and teaching of social work and the broader framing discipline of sociology. This includes understanding limits, identifying achievable possibilities, and directing energy in productive ways toward the end goal of equality. This is a significant endeavour because it celebrates the intimate relationship between the personal and theoretical.

4.5 A bit about me

I was born in Sydney in 1977. My parents migrated from India in 1974. I studied B. Science at The University of Sydney, and I also did my Honours and PhD in Psychology there. It is
for these reasons that I draw analogies between the natural and social sciences; my formative education valued objective empiricism, and so it has become part of the vernacular I chose to use when describing and understanding my world framework. My first main employment after graduation was at the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales (UNSW). It was here that I learned about inequality, social justice, qualitative research, and child protection. It moved the foci from the internal world of feelings and thoughts to the external world of social structures and barriers independent of a person’s interpretation of them. The narrative in this article reflects all these experiential elements.
REFERENCES


