
Decentring Whiteness in Research : Towards Racial & Social Justice

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Session Aims

01

Expose how whiteness structures research epistemologies, methodologies, and institutional norms.

02

Connect epistemology to social justice by examining how knowledge production sustains or disrupts inequity.

03

Practise critical reflexivity (Freire, Greene, Pinar) as a means to re-imagine and redistribute epistemic authority.

04

Move from reflection to *praxis* — identifying concrete design and institutional changes that advance justice in research.

Ground Rules



“Education is never neutral; it either functions to maintain the existing social order or to liberate through critical consciousness.”

— Paulo Freire

“To be wide-awake is to refuse what is given as inevitable.”

— Maxine Greene

Knowledge, Power & Whiteness

Epistemology

Postivism

- ✓ Interpretism
- ✓ Pragmatism
- ✓ Critical Theory
- ✓ Constructivism



How is
knowledge
recognised in
your field of
study?



Whiteness

Whiteness is the invisible cultural standard that positions white, Eurocentric knowledge as universal and others as particular.



Knowledge, Power & Whiteness

Epistemology

Whiteness as an epistemic frame

(Ahmed; Leonardo; Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva)



[Research-paradigm-screenshot](#)

Institutionalisation of Eurocentric “neutrality”

- Picture someone/ somewhere that holds knowledge.... (*chat*)
- Universities are not neutral spaces.
 - People
 - REFs
 - Journals
 - Gatekeepers – who?

Valuing knowledge

Global Knowledge Justice - [Professor Catherine Manathunga - Durham University](#)

Bologna (1088)



Al-Qarawiyyin (جامعة القرويين) (857-859)



Gendered Knowledge & Barriers (example)

*Elizabeth Garrett
Anderson (1865)*



*Sophia Jex-Blake
(1873)*



*Cambridge
University*

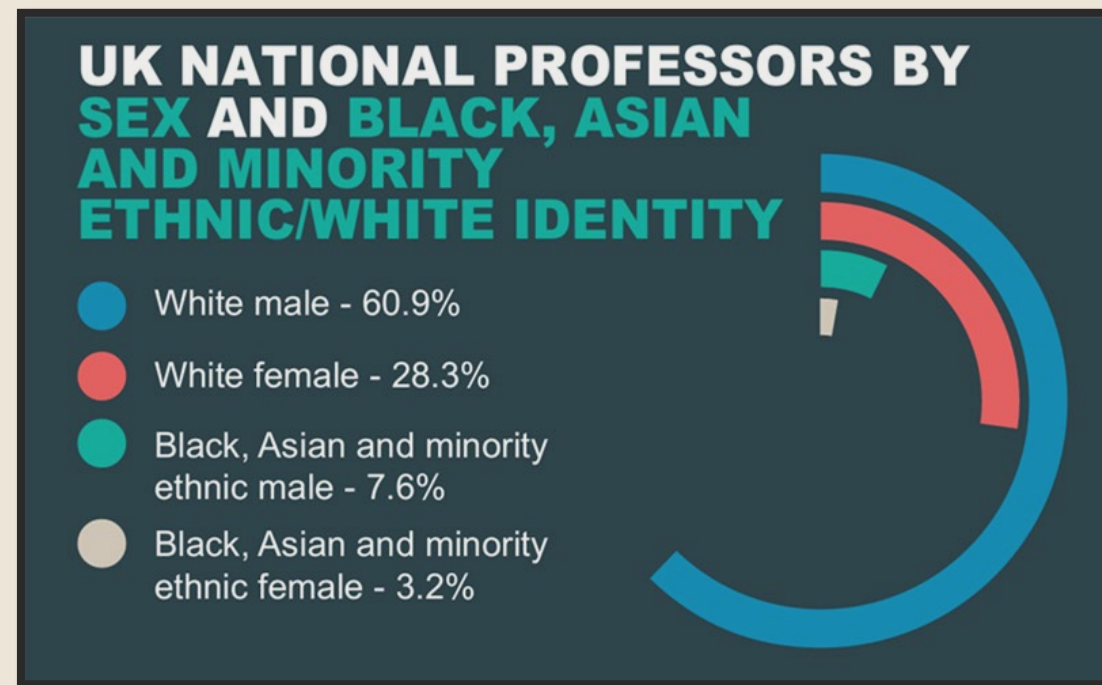
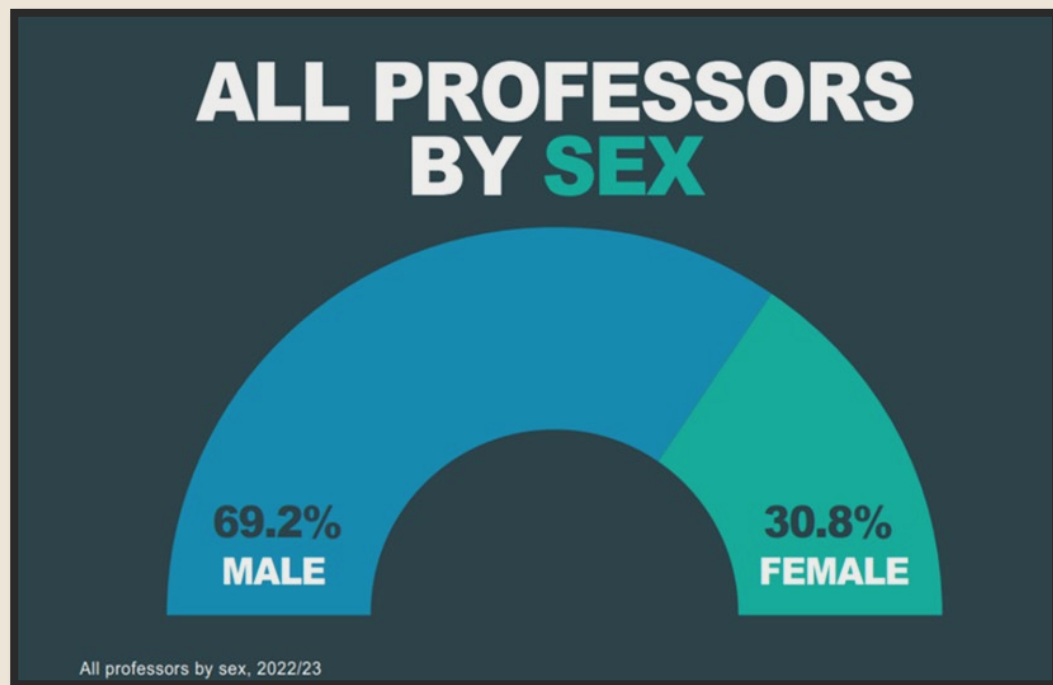


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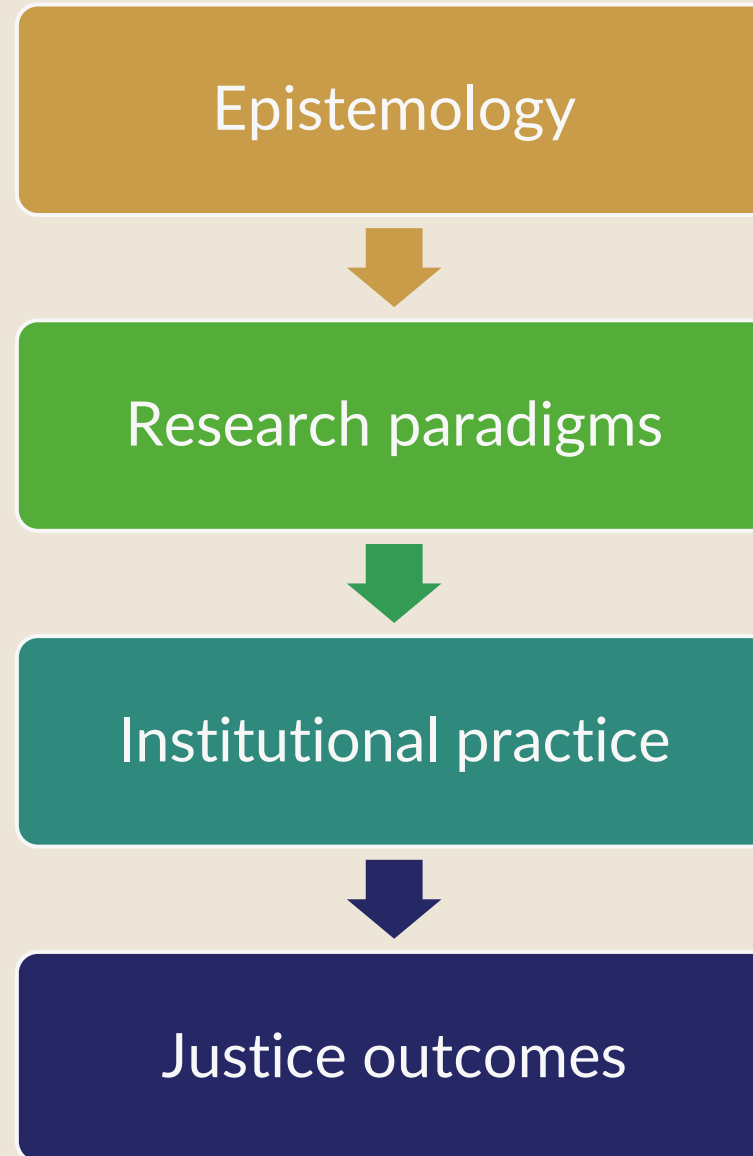
From Gendered Barriers to Racialised Structures in Academia

How is power held in academia?

Data & Reality Check



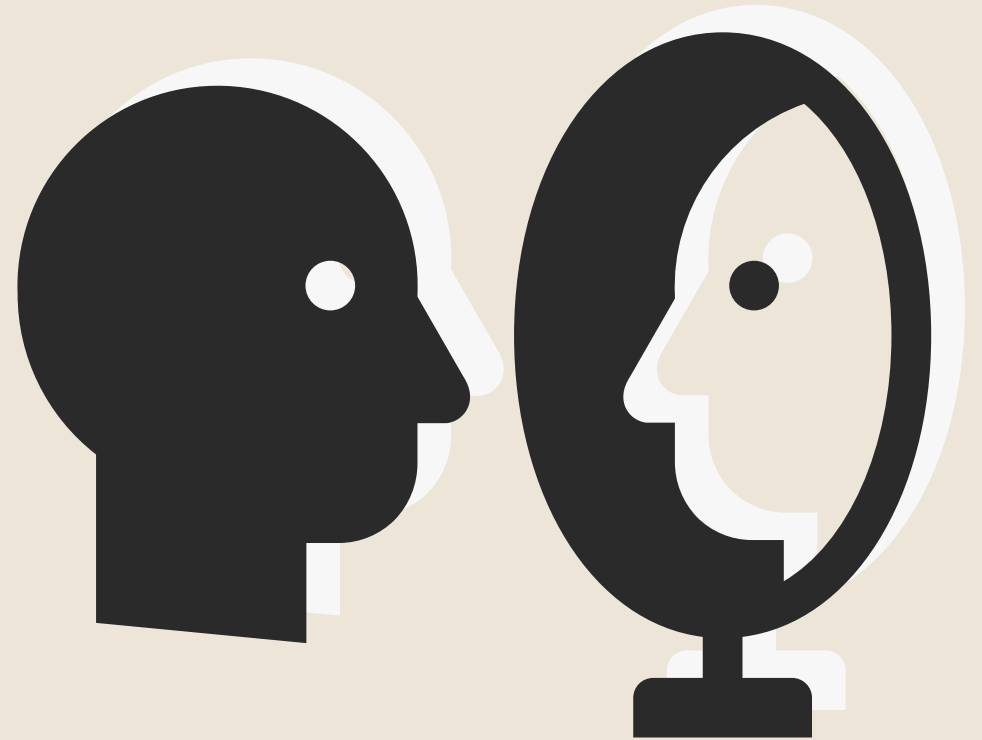
Connecting



Break

5 min break

- Reflections on race and privilege



Decentring design

Pick an aspect
of your
project



Who is
centred?

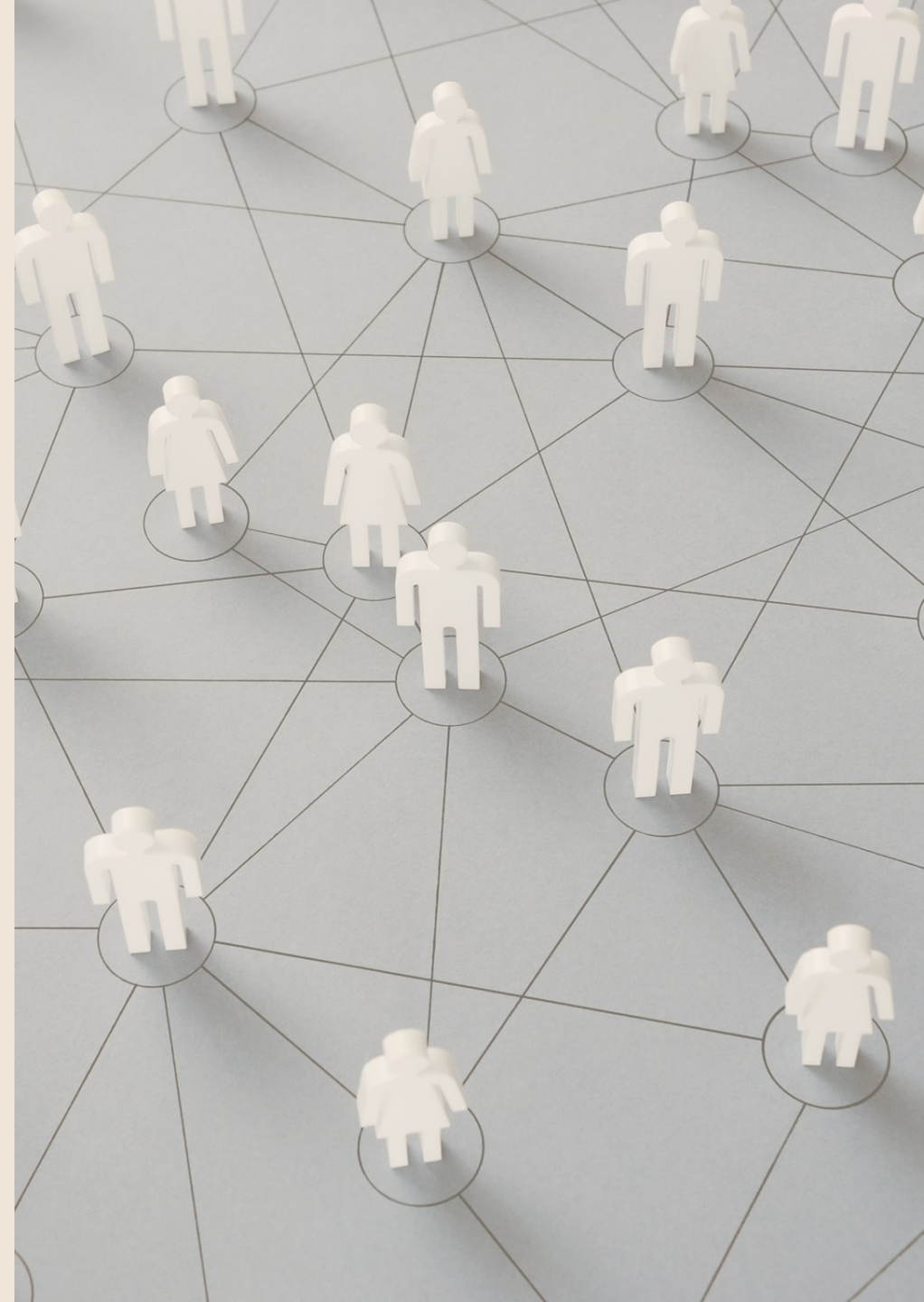


How can
marginalised
voices be
heard?

Decentring Whiteness in reflection

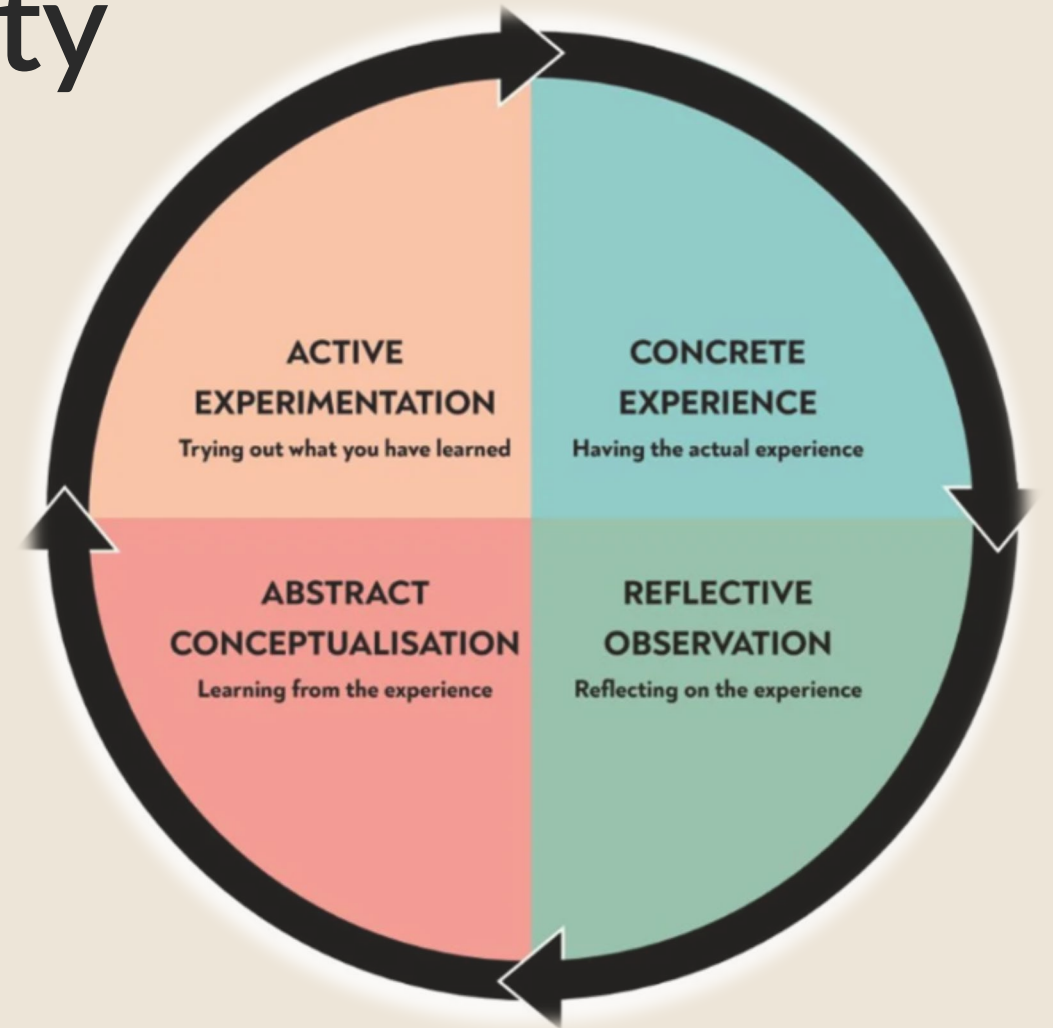
Conventional reflexivity models centre the self, not the system.

Decentring positionality = shifting from introspection to structural interrogation.



Decentring positionality

- Kolb experiential learning cycle



Limitations in Critical Theory uses.

Decentring positionality

- Gibbs reflective cycle:

- ☒ *challenge domination and power;*
- ☒ *recognise positionality and identity as central to reflection;*
- ☒ *link reflection to collective transformation and justice.*



Decentring positionality

- Sounds like:
 - Whose interests were served?
 - What systemic structures shaped this situation?
- Encourage *adjustment* to the system rather than *interrogation* of it

Decentring positionality

- Paulo Freire:
 - Critical Pedagogy/consciousness
- Stephen Brookfield:
 - Four Lenses
- Bell Hooks:
 - Engaged Pedagogy

Decentring whiteness requires reflexivity that repositions the researcher within power, not outside it.

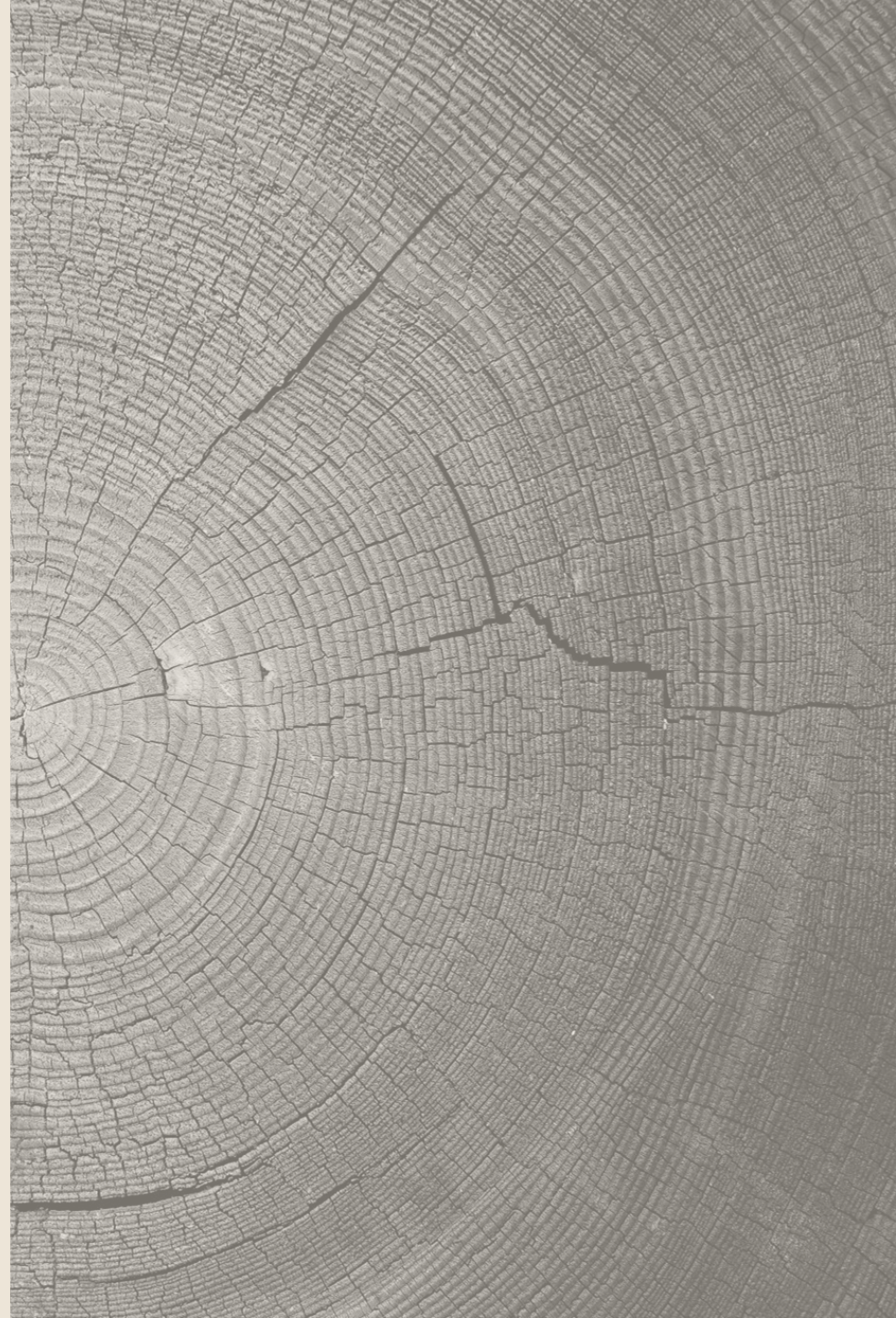


Currere

- Maxine Greene – imagination and social consciousness
- Pinar (1975) = *Currere*
 - Regressive – looking back at formative experiences;
 - Progressive – imagining possible futures;
 - Analytical – standing apart to interpret experience critically;
 - Synthetic – integrating past, present, and future understanding into a renewed sense of agency.
- examines lived experience in relation to history, politics, and culture.

Reflection to Action

*Social justice in research means
redistributing credibility,
authorship, and benefit — not just
recognising inequality.*



Reflection to Action: Share

Individual praxis

- ❑ one design change

Collective praxis

- ❑ institutional lever

Reading List

Decentring Whiteness & Epistemic Critique

- Ahmed, S. (2012) *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*.
- Leonardo, Z. (2004) 'The colour of supremacy: Beyond the discourse of "white privilege".' *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 36(2), 137–152.
- Zuberi, T. & Bonilla-Silva, E. (eds) (2008) *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology*.
- Rollock, N. (2019) *Staying Power: The career experiences and strategies of UK Black female professors*. London: UCU.

Decolonising Research & Knowledge Production

- Smith, L. T. (2012) *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2nd ed.).
- Bhabra, G. K., Gebrial, D. & Nişancioğlu, K. (eds) (2018) *Decolonising the University*.
- Arday, J., Belluigi, D. Z. & Thomas, D. (2021) 'Attempting to break the chains of racial inequality in academia: A collective response to Prescod-Weinstein.' *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 24(4), 607–627.

Reading List

Reflexivity, Currere & Critical Pedagogy

- Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
- Greene, M. (1988) 'Toward wide-awakeness: An argument for the arts and humanities in education.' *Teachers College Record*, 79(1), 119–125.
- Pinar, W. F. (1975) 'The Method of Currere.' *Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists*, 396–414.
- Brookfield, S. D. (1995) *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*.
- Finlay, L. (2002) 'Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice.' *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 209–230.
- Pillow, W. (2003) 'Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research.' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(2), 175–196.

Contextual Data & Policy

- Advance HE (2024) *Equality in Higher Education: Staff Statistical Report*.
- Nature (2024) 'Number of Black UK professors rises by 25% in one year.' *Nature News*, 626(8020), 7–8. DOI: [10.1038/d41586-024-00249-8](https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-024-00249-8)
- Social Science Space (2022) *Addressing the United Kingdom's Lack of Black Scholars*.