"You can't do co-production without talking about racism"

Understanding Anti-Racism in Co-production Spaces: Centring the Voices of Racialised Individuals

✳ Report Authors

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Main lead on the project

Main Lead on the project. Isaac Samuels is a passionate community campaigner and activist committed to amplifying the voices of individuals and communities across every level of decision-making. With a focus on co-production in health and social care research, Isaac has worked tirelessly to bridge gaps and build collaborative processes that prioritize the experiences and needs of the people most affected. As a mental health survivor and someone who has faced multiple disadvantages, Isaac brings lived experience to their work, ensuring that citizen voices are authentically represented and drive meaningful change. In recent years, Isaac has been at the forefront of anti-racism efforts, particularly within co-production spaces, working to ensure that racialised individuals achieve the best possible outcomes.

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Additional project support

Samantha has provided invaluable assistance throughout the project, offering the lead support, emotional guidance, and co-delivering sessions. She has also played a significant role in creating safe spaces for collective discussions. She's a Global majority black woman, mother and creative designer and co-producer.

Colour illustrations © Kareen Cox of Absolutely Kareen

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We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all global majority community members who shared their stories.

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Content warning

This report contains sensitive material related to experiences of racism. Readers will encounter multiple descriptions of instances of racial discrimination and its impacts. Please be aware that engaging with this content may require significant emotional labour. We recommend taking breaks and practising self-care while reading. If you are from racialised communities, please consider your well-being and take the time you need to process this information.

Your emotional health is important, and we encourage you to approach this report in a way that feels most supportive for you.

Guidelines to approaching conversations regarding anti-racism

During conversations about racism and anti-racist work, People's Voice Media has created guidelines to ensure an open, safe, respectful space. We have adapted these guidelines to suggest a way to approach this report as a reader in order to process and learn from its findings while taking care of your own emotional health.

✴ Curiosity

Seek to understand and explore the contents of the report, particularly the lived experience of people from racialised communities. If you don't understand an aspect, you can research it or ask

✴ Active reading

Focusing on what is written within the report, not what your response is

✴ Awareness

Be aware of your own privileges, how racism can manifest itself, the impact of racism and conversations about racism on us. It's okay to 'tap out' and take a break, letting shame spirals pass/work through them

✴ Openness

Be willing to learn, grow, and change your mind and shedding any defensiveness

Tokenism. (Illustration credit: Kareen Cox, 2024)

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A group conversation. (Illustration credit: Kareen Cox, 2024)

✳ Positional Statements

People's Voice Media

People's Voice Media's 'reason for being' is to create a just world in which people's lived experience is heard, valued, and has influence.

In 2020, the murder of George Floyd sparked introspection within our organisation and an examination of our own complicity in systemic racism. At the time we were a predominantly white organisation, operating in predominantly white spaces and we see now that we were playing our role in upholding the status quo. On acknowledging this – as a team and as a Board – we knew this was not good enough. Things needed to change if we were truly committed to creating a just world in which everyone's lived experience is heard, valued, and has influence. **We needed to be actively anti-racist.**

This fundamental shift in thinking catalysed a set of actions in both the individuals in the organisation and the organisation itself. These have included (1) establishing an active learning process across the team and Board structures focused on reflection, action and accountability, (2) changes to recruitment practices to enhance racial diversity (particularly in terms of leaderships), (3) a critical review and update of our communications and language with an anti-racist lens (4) positioning becoming actively anti-racist as one of our core strategic goals. This, however, is just the start of our journey – we have a lot more to learn and to do.

As part of this journey, we have made a commitment to use our learning and journey to being actively anti-racist to not only shape ourselves, but also the sectors and systems that we work in, and the people and organisations we work with. This project, that Isaac has led, is a key part of this pledge; using storytelling as a tool to shine a light on and catalyse action, on the impact of racism in co-production.

> Our team would like to thank all of the individuals who have contributed to this work, for their time, energy, insights, and challenge – but we know that words alone cannot express our gratitude for your generosity. In sharing your stories, we know that there is implicit trust that we use our resources and platforms to ensure that the message from the stories is heard, valued and has influence.
>
> **We hear that change is long overdue. We will not shy away from this challenge.**

ISAAC SAMUELS
(they/them)

Main lead on the project

As a longstanding participant in co-production initiatives, I offer a deeply personal perspective on the systemic challenges faced by individuals from racialised backgrounds. Across various iterations of co-production, a persistent theme has emerged: the marginalisation and dismissal of voices like mine. While hesitant to label these experiences as outright racism initially, years of observation and introspection have led me to confront the reality of racism and microaggressions pervasive within co-production environments.

In my professional journey, I have witnessed the privileging of ideas from my white counterparts, the appropriation of my contributions, and the dismissive responses to my advocacy for greater diversity. The events of 2020, notably the murder of George Floyd, served as a stark reminder of the historical dehumanisation and violence endured by racial communities, often overlooked in the United Kingdom. My own encounters with racial profiling, derogatory remarks, and dismissive attitudes have left indelible scars on my psyche.

Undertaking this project was a deliberate effort to reshape co-production into a more equitable space, where leaders and facilitators reflect the diversity of our society, where racism is acknowledged without hesitation, and where the contributions of individuals from marginalised backgrounds are valued and rewarded appropriately. Yet, despite years of research and dialogue, tangible progress remains elusive.

> The emotional toll of this endeavour cannot be overstated. It is crucial that individuals engaging in this work are emotionally prepared for the challenges ahead. Mere discussion of racism does not guarantee change; it is the lived experiences and unwavering commitment to action that will propel us forward. We must enable individuals to step in and step out of these difficult conversations, without fear of being labelled as "uppity" or any other derogatory term. Co-production must be underpinned by a set of values that actively make a difference for those who have experienced harm as a result of racism.

Moving forward, our focus must shift from mere rhetoric to actionable steps. It is imperative that we address power imbalances head-on, implement concrete measures to promote diversity and inclusion, and hold ourselves accountable for meaningful progress. The journey ahead may be arduous, marked by scars and challenges, yet it is a journey worth undertaking for the sake of a more just and equitable co-production landscape.

✸ Introduction

> "I think you can't do co-production without talking about racism. You have to talk about it. It's there, it's happening. It's affecting people and it's affecting people interacting and working successfully. So, you can't just say it's mutually beneficial, whatever. Because like you said, if it's only one way, it's not going to work. And you have to talk about racism existing. And it's not going to go away. And if we don't actually address it for what it is, it's never going to go away. We're never going to reduce it or help people in any way."
>
> – A storyteller sharing their thoughts on the existence of racism and co-production

Project background

The initiative for this project, led by Co-Production Collective and People's Voice Media, emerged from concerns about how racism manifests within co-production spaces. The goal of the research and this report is to ensure that these spaces are equitable and inclusive, especially for racialised communities, by addressing barriers and concerns related to racism.

Approach

The project took a responsive and reflective approach, allocating time and resources to understand as fully as possible how racism operates and manifests in co-production. This involved:

✸ Listening to lived experiences of racism within co-production spaces
✸ Facilitating discussions to explore these experiences and make sense of the findings
✸ Developing actionable insights to help co-production communities become more anti-racist

Objectives

The initiative for this project, led by Co-Production Collective and People's Voice Media, emerged from concerns about how racism manifests within co-production spaces. The goal of the research and this report is to ensure that these spaces are equitable and inclusive, especially for racialised communities, by addressing barriers and concerns related to racism. We aim to:

✸ Amplify diverse voices
Ensure that underrepresented and racialised communities are included in co-production spaces

✸ Understand racism in co-production
Explore how racism manifests in these spaces

✸ Become an anti-racist community
Develop strategies and practices to foster anti-racism within co-production environments

Key deliverables

In addition to this report, the key deliverables of this project are:

✸ At least 12 lived experience stories collected, highlighting racism within co-production spaces
✸ 2 sense-making sessions to reflect on and understand these stories
✸ 1 thematic film, edited and subtitled, presenting key themes and insights from the stories.
✸ 1 Learning Exchange event to share findings, learnings, and solutions with a broader audience

Future steps

The project aims to create a solid, evidence-based understanding of racism in co-production that cannot be disputed. As a result of this foundational work, the initiative is expanding into a larger programme to further address these issues and continue driving equitable practices in co-production.

This structured approach ensures that the project not only listens to those impacted by racism but also works towards lasting change in co-production communities.

✳ Methodology

Community Reporting is a qualitative research method which uses peer-to-peer approaches to gather, understand, and mobilise stories of lived experience to create change. Originating in 2007, Community Reporting has been developed across Europe as an approach for enhancing citizen participation in community development, research, policymaking, service development, evaluation and decision-making processes (Keresztély and Trowbridge, 2019; Geelhoed et al, 2021; Trowbridge and Willoughby, 2020). In-line with work such as Glasby (2011) and Durose et al (2013), this method emphasises validity of lived experience and knowledge-based practice in these fields. Community Reporting uses digital, portable technologies to support people to tell their own stories, in their own ways via peer-to-peer approaches. It then connects these stories with the people, groups and organisations who are in a position to use the insights within them to make positive social change. When used like this, storytelling, as Durose et al (2013) argues, allows for the representation of 'different voices and experiences in an accessible way'. Central to Community Reporting is the belief that people telling authentic stories about their own lived experience offers a valuable understanding of their lives.

Community Reporting has three distinct components – story gathering, story curation and story mobilisation – based around the Cynefin decision-making framework for complex environments (Snowden and Boone, 2007), as depicted in Diagram 1.

During the story gathering phase, dialogue interviews were used to capture the stories of people's lived experience of racism in co-production. Dialogue interviews are stories that take the format of peer-to-peer 'interviews' that do not have pre-determined questions. Instead, an opening question (i.e., a conversation starter) is asked which enables the storyteller to start to tell their story. The Community Reporter recording the story then asks any questions within this storytelling process that naturally occur to them and interacts with the storyteller to support them to communicate their experiences. In essence, the structure of this practice mimics our day-to-day conversations and the questions and interactions that take place are those that occur naturally as the story progresses. The storyteller is largely determining the 'agenda' of the conversation, whereas the Community Reporter is the 'agency' facilitating the conversation.

Diagram 1: Community Reporting Cycle
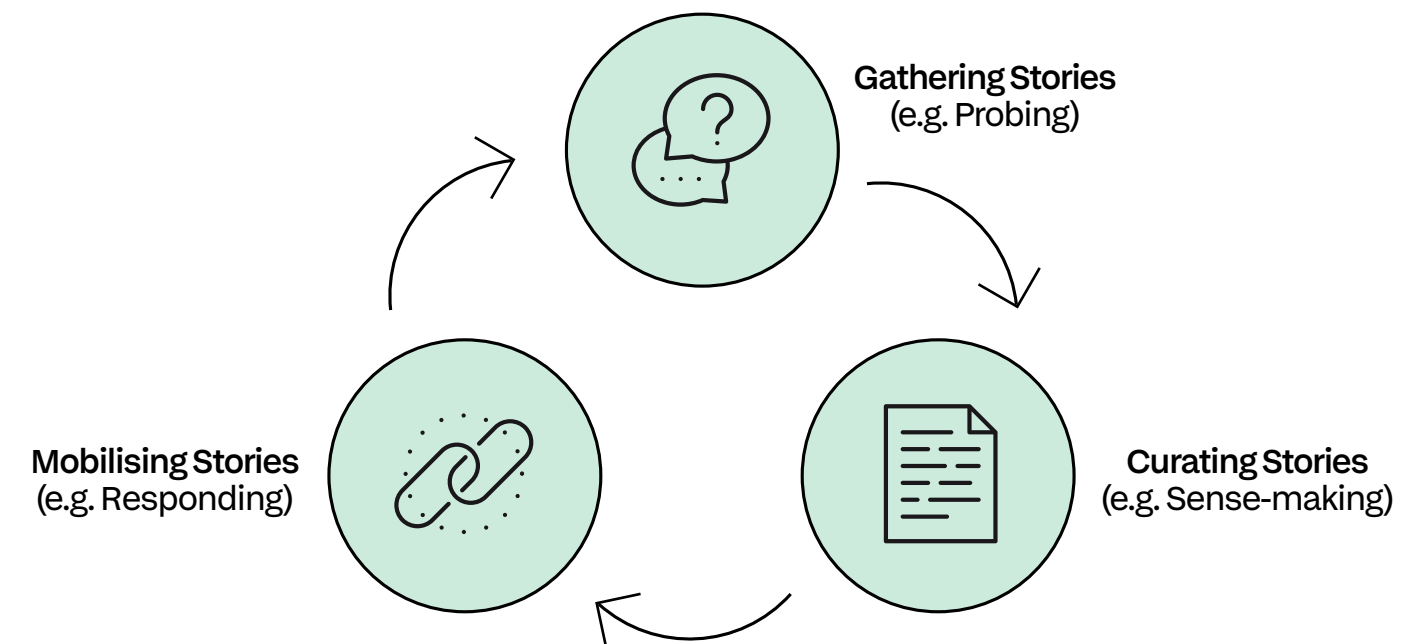
Credit: People's Voice Media

To ensure a degree of consistency within the Community Reporting practice and how it is implemented, Responsible Storytelling is embedded into each Community Reporting activity. Responsible Storytelling accounts for the ethics and values of Community Reporting; ensures appropriate content; ensures the necessary permissions and consent are gained; and puts people's online and offline safety at the heart of the practice.

Story curation within this project involved working with storytellers and people connected to the storytelling context to review and analyse the stories gathered in order to produce a set of findings. This participatory process borrows from established qualitative data analysis practices such as discourse analysis (Brown and Yule, 1983) and grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Tummers and Karsten, 2012) which provide a framework through which hypotheses can emerge from the data rather than being imposed upon it. Furthermore, Pierre Lévy's (1997) concept of 'collective intelligence' underpins the group sense-making aspects of this process; in principle, multiple people's knowledge is greater than an individual's knowledge. People's Voice Media replicated this process internally to curate any stories not covered in the participatory sessions.

Story Mobilisation processes connect the learning from stories to people, groups, and organisations who are in a position to use this knowledge to create positive change. In this project this has taken the shape of two sense making workshops, two Conversation of Change events (one specifically for racialised people, another for a wider mixed audience), plus two spaces for racialised individuals affected by the summer 2024 riots.

While all lived experience projects require ethical consideration, we have had to be especially mindful here due to asking people to speak about circumstances that could be deeply traumatic, with conversations having the potential to re-traumatise. There is also the issue of the project team at People's Voice Media not wishing to become part of the problem. With this in mind, an additional layer of ethical considerations have been embedded into the Community Reporting cycle, in line with our Responsible Storytelling practices and our anti-racist principles. Diagram 2 demonstrates these considerations.

The main ways in which we have enacted our ethical responsibilities throughout the research process have been:

✳ Working in a trauma informed way to ensure the wellbeing of storytellers

✳ Centring the experiences of racialised people and communities

✳ Gaining informed consent from each storyteller (with the right to withdraw at any time) and respecting their desired levels of confidentiality

✳ Allowing storytellers to choose their own manner of authorship and/or attribution for their stories

Diagram 2: Ethical considerations to the community reporting cycle
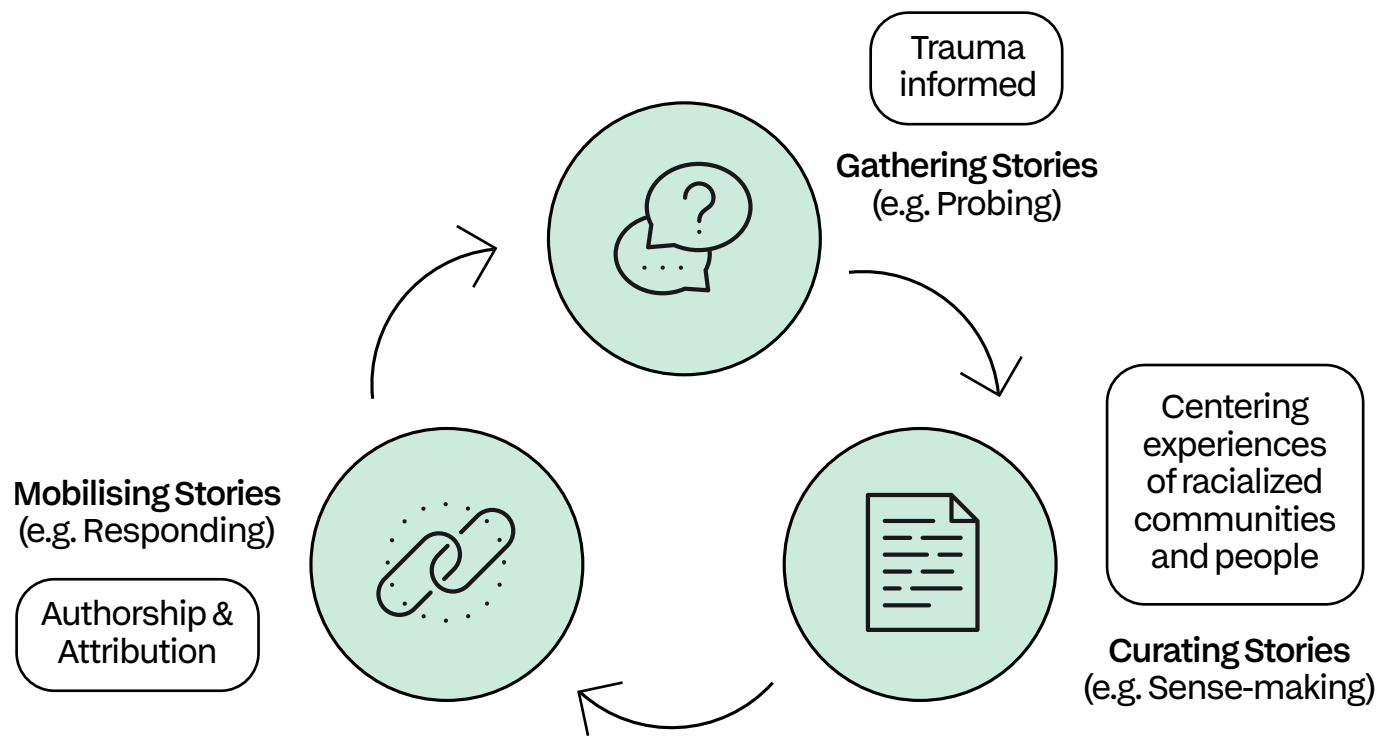
Credit: People's Voice Media

In total, 37 stories were gathered and curated. As some additional stories were shared after the story review process was underway, not all have been directly included in this report and some will be carried forward into further work.

Navigating the challenges of storytelling in anti-racism work

"Working on an anti-racism project as a storyteller has been both deeply rewarding and immensely challenging. As someone who has experienced the harm of racism, I approach this work with a dual perspective: a commitment to creating a safe space for others to share their narratives, and the personal emotional toll that listening to these stories can take." – **Isaac Samuels, Project Lead**

From the outset of this work, the goal has been to establish the safest conditions possible for individuals to share their experiences. This involves building trust, ensuring confidentiality, and being transparent about how the stories will be used. However, the process has been fraught with moments of burnout, emotional fatigue, and re-traumatisation. The weight of these stories, coupled with Isaac's own lived experiences, has sometimes been overwhelming.

The struggle for safe expression

One of the key challenges has been the willingness of participants to share their stories while grappling with the potential consequences. Many people want to contribute to change but fear their stories will be weaponized or misappropriated. There's a palpable anxiety about how these narratives might affect their professional lives and how they will be perceived by their peers, especially in predominantly white spaces.

This fear has led to instances where individuals have shared their stories, only to later retract them out of concern for potential repercussions. The need to emotionally disconnect during the storytelling process is another coping mechanism that has emerged. Participants often narrate their experiences in ways that feel safe to them, which sometimes involves detachment from the emotional weight of their stories.

Creating a supportive environment

The project has required significant time and care to build trust and provide ample debriefing opportunities. It's crucial to demonstrate to participants how their stories will be used and the impact they will have. Ensuring that storytellers retain ownership of their narratives and that these stories are honoured and respected is paramount. This means moving away

from centring whiteness as the norm, and being inquisitive and reflective about one's own experiences and those of others.

The project team has explored various methods for people to share their stories - through video, audio, written descriptions, and even third-person narratives. Each medium offers different levels of emotional safety and control for the storyteller. Despite the complexities and emotional labour involved, there is a strong passion among participants to share their stories and contribute to meaningful change.

Sense-making workshops and support structures

To further support the storytelling process, People's Voice Media has integrated sense-making workshops into the project framework. These workshops provide participants with the opportunity to process their experiences collectively and make sense of the narratives shared. Recognising the importance of financial resources and additional facilitator support, we have ensured that the budget accommodates these needs, allowing us to respond to any access requirements effectively.

A critical aspect of these workshops is the inclusion of multiple facilitators from racialised backgrounds. Having more than one individual from a racialised perspective in these spaces is essential for providing balanced and empathetic support. Working alongside facilitators from the global majority has been crucial in managing and holding the complex emotions that arise during these sessions.

The project team has also recognised the need for creating affinity spaces where racialised individuals can share without the presence of white peers. These separate spaces are necessary to prevent the dynamics of power and privilege from affecting the contributions of racialised participants. Being prepared to call in or call out behaviours and attitudes that arise in these spaces is part of our commitment to fostering a safe and respectful environment.

Addressing concerns and building trust

The concerns about how stories will be perceived and used have required ongoing dialogue and reassurance. Ensuring that the knowledge and skills embedded in these narratives remain with the storyteller is a core principle. We strive to honour the contributions of each participant and ensure that there are tangible outcomes from this work.

The journey has been anything but straightforward. It has involved constant adaptation, a willingness to face difficult emotions, and a commitment to creating affinity spaces for racialised individuals. These spaces are crucial for processing experiences and influencing white peers in a meaningful way.

Moving forward

As the project evolves, so does our approach. We continually refine our methods to better support storytellers and address the inherent dilemmas in this work. The process is slow and often painful, but it is also profoundly important. By prioritising the safety, ownership, and impact of these narratives, we strive to create a platform where voices can be heard without fear, and where stories can drive the change we all seek.

> "Because when [the project] moves from one stage to the next, the actual publishing, writing and publishing, and the words appear. You know, it depends on who's involved and, you know, I'll reserve judgement on that till the very end because, you know, in my experience, these things can change dramatically from where we think we ought to be."
> – A storyteller sharing their thoughts on how this project might change or experience 'mission drift'.

In this journey, the importance of listening with empathy, respecting boundaries, and fostering a supportive environment cannot be overstated. The road is long and winding, but with each story shared, we move closer to a world where racialised voices are not only heard but also honoured and valued.

Participants

The project gathered triple the number of stories that it set out to do and, as such, there is a large number of participants referenced in this report. To simplify the process of understanding each storyteller's experience and the context within which they have shared their experience, we have put together the below table (Table 1) to outline some details of each participant (and the code by which we refer to them within the report), while maintaining anonymity.

Table 1:
List of participant code names and their experience

Code	Experience/Context
XX	Social entrepreneur and live experience storyteller, with a focus on lived experience as a radical move
GW	Discussion of how they feel in co-production spaces when their ideas are ignored or rejected
NG	Experience of racism in co-production
XI	Director of user-led disability charity with a focus on education
XY	Works in children's social care, with a focus on the care system
AX	A decade of experience in co-production within the health and social care space, traumatic lived experience of racism
AD	Passionate about co-production, but has found racism in these spaces to be part of his everyday experience
AU	Passionate about social justice and inclusion, lived experience of racism
PX	Mixed experience of co-production, lived experience of racism while providing workshops
PY	Many years of co-production experience but is yet to see any changes
DM	Experience of co-production with a focus on kindness
UR	Vast experience of co-production and has endured racism as a Muslim in these spaces
QY	Vast experience of co-production, lived experience of racism.
TC	Chief Executive of race charity who discusses challenges of having conversations about racism

TZ	Discusses tokenism and box-ticking in co-production
TE	Left with cognitive and physical disabilities following a stroke, discusses what would need to happen to make co-production spaces more inclusive
RM	CEO of a major charity that are working to make co-production inclusive, and has experience being from both a disabled and racialized background
RS	Has a vast experience of supporting and embedding co-production in the UK, and has experienced both overt and covert racism
OD	Is from a mixed heritage background and has experience of co-production, but believes her background is not valued and she is often included for 'box-ticking'
KZ	Discusses co-production in universities, and tokenism, while believing change is possible
IA	Believes co-production lacks diversity and that there is a disconnect between co-production projects and reality
MY	Has experienced inclusive co-production, but acknowledges that most of the time co-production spaces can feel judgmental and prejudiced
YZ	Has experience of co-production and racism in the context of mental health services
YT	Has faced racist behaviour in co-production spaces
WU	She is disabled and has experience of racism and co-production in the context of university research
WM	Has experience of tokenism in co-production
YT	Vast experience of co-production, working with people with learning support requirements and has witnessed racism in co-production spaces

✳ Insights & Lessons

"You have to talk about racism existing. And it's not going to go away" – Understanding racism

There is a fundamental lack of understanding and acknowledgement of racism and racialised communities in co-production spaces. The different stories heard in this research show that this can come from a variety of levels of thinking, everything from naivety to wilful ignorance.

> "Here's the rub: racism has got its claws deep into me wherever I go. It's some old timey thing of the past or something happening far away. Nah, it's right smack bang in the middle of our co-production gigs. From sly things to outright discrimination." – Y
>
> "If I'm in a space where even if I'm not treated poorly, I see other people treated poorly. I then think, well, if you treated that person poorly, then I don't have much faith in you in terms of you treating me well as a black woman. So, I think dignity and respect has to be paramount." – AU
>
> "People need to take ownership of their position. Recognise the position and recognise the privileged position they are in in this particular society that we're in. I mean, it doesn't always work that way." – DM

These stories demonstrate the prevalence of racism and the ways in which it can be both explicit and implicit, intentional and unintentional. It predominantly stems from a position of systemic white supremacy: the legacy of centuries of colonialism and oppression which continue to shape contemporary realities. As the stories in this report show, intersectional experiences compound these injustices, highlighting how racism intersects with other forms of discrimination such as ableism and misogyny, perpetuating systemic marginalisation. Additionally, there appears to be a fundamental lack of understanding that racism is a systemic issue.

> "I think a lot of the anti-racism has more of a focus more on an individualised level. Whereas I think we need to be pushing it more at a systemic level. But sometimes it is hard to do that, when we've got things like, you know, equalities in diverse and – I'm sorry – equality impact assessments that aren't being undertaken or not undertaken properly. So, the data isn't there to show because that's how they talk. They talk in data, in numbers and so forth. But sometimes I think it's easy for institutions to say, right, we've done this anti-Racism training, for example, for all workers so they know what they need to be saying and don't. Whereas it's not kind of systemic and throughout." – AU

AU's story shows how anti-racism work struggles to move from the individual to the societal/systemic, so while people may become more aware of racism within certain spaces, the inequalities perpetuated by systemic racism and institutional white supremacy remain untouched and intact. This does harm. It means that racism is often considered – in particular by white people – as a non-issue, or one that has been addressed by some training. This means that actual racism, overt and covert, often does not get seen by those it is not directed at. A first step towards addressing this is, naturally, acknowledging the existence of racism and white privilege in co-production spaces.

> "[Talking about racism is] essential. Growing up, I don't remember being in any organisation where it was discussed or talked about or even acknowledged that what comes with discrimination, exclusion, injustice, all those things. These levels of trauma." – RM

Direct engagement with racism is, as RM says, essential and while some co-production spaces do practise this, there is, as another storyteller reflects, a disconnect where people in the space treat experiences of racism in an pseudo-scientific manner, thus distancing themselves from their own complicity.

> "In certain spaces, I think very carefully about how I choose to engage in those conversations. So, for certain groups who are interested in sort of understanding this, but, to me it feels like they're trying to understand it in a way where they can rationalise about, intellectualise about it, but not really connect with it on an emotional human level. I'm just not interested in having that conversation with those individuals anymore." – IA

Understanding and acknowledging racism is only part of it though. Some organisations that storytellers have worked with have struggled with 'decision paralysis' through a fear of accidentally doing something that could be considered racist.

> "One organisation was so obsessed in getting things right that they then didn't do anything at all. And … we were able to make them understand that often there were other areas that they were willing to take risks in, even though they didn't necessarily know what was the best thing to do. Yet, for some reason, in terms of race, they didn't want to take any risk for fear that they'd be labelled. And I think that two years down the road, they've become more confident about being willing to say, we're going to try this. It may not work, but at least we're going to try something." – **TC**

This inaction through fear is not compliant with anti-racist practices and, while it's positive that this particular organisation is working through this with TZ, there are many others who will not commit to anti-racism either because it is uncomfortable, or because they do not comprehend that our systems, institutions and society are fundamentally racist – something which reflects in co-production spaces. Inaction – or lack of acknowledgement – demonstrates a lack of understanding of racism and the experiences of those to whom it is directed. It suggests a belief that to be racist, one has to do something racist. However, failure to recognise racist and white supremacist systems and infrastructures, and their historic origins in colonialism and imperialism, while benefiting from them in the form of white privilege is complicity in racism. It is, therefore, on white people within co-production spaces to understand racism as it is experienced by the global majority, and take action to perpetuate anti-racist practices in those spaces.

Key learnings

* Many white people in co-production believe that to be racist, one has to do something racist
* Failure to recognise racist and white supremacist systems and infrastructures, and their historic origins in colonialism and imperialism, while benefiting from them in the form of white privilege is complicity in racism so the onus is on white people in those spaces to perpetuate anti-racist practices

'Gaslighting' is the term used for the process of making somebody believe things that are not true in order to control them. This includes, but is not limited to, the idea that they have imagined or misinterpreted what has really happened. It is most often used in relation to psychological/emotional domestic abuse. The term was coined from the plot of the 1944 film, Gaslight, in which a man deliberately makes his wife believe she is going insane.

"A senior manager referred to me as a very toxic service user" – Fear of calling it out, and gaslighting

Many of the storytellers spoke of a pervasive fear of calling out racism in co-production spaces, and the consequences they have faced when they have done so. This anxiety, manufactured knowingly and unknowingly by those in positions of power, perpetuates cycles of harm, exacerbated by gaslighting that undermines individuals' experiences and perceptions. This reluctance to confront racism, particularly among senior figures, perpetuates systemic oppression and denies accountability.

AZ was involved in a co-production project developing an app for black mothers. She was the only black person on the team and, once the funding was granted, she noticed that she began to be excluded.

> "I wrote a quite detailed diary of all the different instances and behaviours and so forth. I remember feeling quite sick. Especially a project that's meant to be about the health inequalities of black women, that I was myself being treated in such a way whereby my voice was heard, but I was being constantly shut out and removed from the process and essentially felt used because the treatment was so different from before having the funding to then after. Yeah, it was. It was just very apparent that in terms of what had happened and, and in the end, to step down from that co-opted control. Not because of me, but more because of how they were not committed to involving women."

She goes on to talk about how speaking out in that situation has now affected the way she speaks out, giving her a fear of consequences.

> "Sometimes, that particular past experience does mute me because it showed me that when you do speak out that is different from what the institution wants you to say, and a mark is put on your back. Most times I try to be brave, but because of that instance I'm quite careful and all. I try and think about how to do if there's other ways to kind of get a point across or to raise an issue that makes sense."

This story is indicative of a much wider issue, whereby people from racialised communities are forced out of projects due to overt and/or covert racism, but the onus for this is put on to them rather than the perpetrators.

"There's [projects] that I have stepped into and stepped out just as quick. You go in because they say the right things. They do all the right things. And then you get there and you think, oh, this feels really uncomfortable. And the moment you challenge anything, you know, you've stepped on someone's toes and they're not happy about it. So, you step away rather than– And maybe I should probably stay in cause some more waves. But there's only so many battles you can fight. And I think, as I am a carer as well, I have to choose my battles because I can't fight them all." – **TZ**

This story particularly sums up the choices faced by people experiencing racism in co-production spaces. To use the colloquial, it is often 'put up or shut up': choose to stay and not say anything lest you have to add to the 'battles' you are fighting, or leave the project, meaning voices from racialised communities won't be included. This strategy means that (usually white) senior figures do not have to be accountable. It is also indicated by several storytellers that the very values held by a lot of co-production spaces are in themselves a tool of white oppression that actively shuts down people from the global majority within those spaces.

"I think there's a massive conflict in the values lots of the organisations espouse to have around co-production and the one that I always struggle with is whether it's okay to disagree with it respectfully. Now, how do you disagree with racism respectfully, if you have experienced racism all your life? You are told how to turn up. You're told that you can't challenge, and if you challenge, you have to do it in a nice way. But the same isn't said about the people that are perpetrating these microaggressions." – **QY**

"QY think one of my problems, one of the ways of working used by Co-production Collective, this idea of, I can't remember which one it was, but it's something about the tensions, right. And I don't know if it was 'argue with the point, not the past'. And that there was another one on the list of six values, but it just made me think you're talking about resolving tensions. No, that's just pretending, like, how do you work with tension? How do you work with conflict? And let's acknowledge that's there. Let's bring it out. And don't get me wrong, and I think we're in this kind of age and I get it, you know, trigger warning and oh, this affects my mental health. And I know it's really important. But I think also sometimes that it doesn't allow us to engage in ways that are necessary to deal with the more structural stuff. Things are painful, you know, but who should take responsibility and accountability of that? I don't think it's just the host organisation or the collective right." – **KZ**

"How can we as a group think about how we can make this a space where everybody can feel that they can bring their whole selves and that we're not by and a little pandering to white fragility? You know, we're frightened we can upset colleagues, or some colleagues cry, and then that takes away from the discussion that's been had. And because suddenly all the attention is on their well-being rather than the issue that is really at hand." – **WU**

These three different storytellers share a collective insight into the state of co-production spaces, outlining a culture underpinned by white supremacy: if people from the global majority want to call out racism, they should do it in a 'nice' way that's 'palatable' to their white colleagues; they should do it without causing the white people in the space any kind of pain or discomfort; they should not upset anyone. Yet the reverse does not seem to be held as true for their white colleagues. This is not necessarily a deliberate action of senior figures within those spaces (although that's not to say that is always the case), but more an echo or reflection of how wider systems and structures are also underpinned by systemic racism. Racist infrastructures are part of our society and therefore are replicated within smaller systems too. This can appear in several guises, as the storytellers state, but it all harks back to the notion that white feelings and white fragility should be protected at all costs, while harm is done to people from racialised communities.

One storyteller, YT, shares a particularly stark account of her own experience as part of a co-production group within the NHS, where she was a volunteer. From her very first session she experienced overt racism from other volunteers, publicly using derogatory language and singling her out, however, nothing was done about her complaints. Despite her ongoing experience, she continued with the group, helping to increase the number of participants from racialised communities during that time. After several years, a new consultancy group came onboard and, at their very first meeting, they told the group that they should not talk about racism, or use the words 'racism' or 'racist'. YT pointed out that she had heard a lot of racist comments from the group and that people were being excluded because of race. Some of the other people from racialised communities agreed and explained they were not given feedback opportunities or allowed to give their point of view, yet the people who were actively shutting them down were listened to. Due to this, "a senior manager referred to me as a very toxic service user."

> "I was very instrumental in getting more, you know, different ethnicities to come into the group. And one of the first things we needed to look into was people's safety. Would they be safe to speak out as in co-production? ... I've had this experience where you trying to challenge [racism]. It's not a straightforward process. You don't have the backing of other people and things like that. [You're made to feel], that you can't do the job well and execute it well because it kind of feeds into the way that people don't necessarily trust you. Co-production is about power and how that power is spat out."

There is a paradox to the process of calling out racism. The burden of calling it out is put upon the person experiencing racism, rather than those witnessing it, however, the feelings of white people should always be prioritised, and the act of calling it out will result in negative consequences for that person, rather than those being racist. This is symptomatic of white supremacist structures, where the people in senior positions do not have to consider racism or face accountability.

Key learnings

✳ The reluctance to confront racism, particularly among senior figure, perpetuates systemic oppression and denies accountability

✳ The values held by a lot of co-production spaces are in themselves a tool of white oppression that actively shut down people from the global majority within those spaces

✳ If racism is called out, it is expected to be done in a way that is 'palatable' to the white people in the space

Tokenism. (Illustration credit: Kareen Cox, 2024)

"You don't get chosen because you're black or you get chosen because you're black" – Tokenism and appropriation

Minoritised communities often find themselves tokenized, their knowledge and ideas appropriated without recognition. This tokenism not only undermines their contributions but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and denies individuals agency over their own narratives. This is highlighted by XX who shares her experience of co-production post-pandemic.

> "After the pandemic there were a lot of spaces where we were invited to share our experiences with racism and sometimes it was tough. … The question for me was: why are white people taking over our stories?"

Tokenism and appropriation are, unfortunately, a common experience of people from the global majority, however, the stories we have gathered show that it is particularly an issue within co-production spaces, with a large number of storytellers experiencing it at one point or another, in different ways. For some, it was an expectation to 'perform' a particular role.

> "Over time, the lived experience became a performance of trauma. So, we need somebody who is like African. It's even better if they are disabled. Let's just find out if they are members of the LGBTQ so they can come and perform their trauma and then they can go. And when we are looking for people to hire, we can see that we want people with lived experience and we can even mention that intersection we want, but not acknowledging that perhaps as an organisation we've realised that for so long we have been doing this thing a certain way and now we have seen that we want a change, a change quite radical, that we want these people to come in here and offer."
> – XX

> "When I do co-production, I'm invited. I often know that I'm invited to represent millions of people in the United Kingdom, people that I have no experience of because I'm clearly the only South Asian person that can come to those spaces because I have adapted and become assimilated into this culture of speaking and behaving in the same way. I won't rock the boat. I'm safe, I've been told. I am often invited to make the numbers up. When I bring my opinions and share my ideas, they're often stolen, or they are just overlooked. I don't even have the same security." – AX

> "My experience has been wounding painful othering. You start to believe that is the way it is. And you start to accept that. I started to accept that, actually, when I'm invited, am I really being invited because I have lived and learned experience? Or is it because of the colour of my skin, because of my sexuality, because of my disability? And I suspect most of the time it's around the identity rather than wanting to hear my voice." – QY

> The moment they realise. Someone's black. You either get chosen or you don't get chosen. You don't get chosen because you're black or you get chosen because you're black and you make up the numbers and you meet the quota or whatever it is. And that has not changed. That's not changed from when I was told that in the sixties. It's more discreet. It's not in your face as much. And it's not subtle, but it's still there." – TZ

This tokenistic, othering approach to co-production recruitment, under the guise of intersectionality, is both racist and dehumanising. It reduces people to labels – black, gay, disabled – which carry damaging stereotypes and expectations of performance. It also contributes to a culture of tick-boxing, where people are asked to participate in co-production spaces because of specific characteristics in order to fulfil a quota, often for the purposes of obtaining funding.

> "I don't know how recently, but it seems to be a new thing to me. Um, and it has been predominantly white, but now, all of a sudden, it seems like because there's funding coming up and, you know, if we get this person or that person, we can have more funding. Now, it seems like all now we need to get these people in. But again, we just seemed like we're a gimmick." – OD

> "I struggled for a very, very long time to go up the ladder because in my career there are many checkbox exercises. Athena Swan Plans are in place and race equality, charter marks, promotion for females. Due to the data, everything exists on paper. What does it mean for a person like me at the other end of receiving? Not much. It feels more like a tick box." – MY

> "When it is tokenistic, my voice doesn't seem to carry as much weight. So, I really feel that sometimes I'm just there to be a visual representation. But in terms of my ideas, contributions, that's not taken into account." - WM

This approach is harmful to racialised people, but also to the process of co-production itself as it devalues outcomes by behaving more like consultancy than co-production, resulting in disenfranchisement within those communities and reduced participation in the future. XI discusses this as a problem they are already facing.

If somebody approaches me and said, 'can you get the minority communities around the table', or 'can you get disabled people around the table'? ... I'll be lucky if I can get half a dozen people around the table, because that is that disenfranchised, disconnected with the whole process and they haven't seen any positive outcomes from previous engagement.

Of course, this is not just the fault of the organisations carrying out co-production, funders also play a part by encouraging box-ticking rather than broad inclusion. A big problem that this creates is that there is now a situation where, by and large, the same people are taking part in co-production projects over and over again, which means one or two people speaking for entire communities.

"[It] becomes an echo chamber. And, as I said before, that the notion of different voices of inclusion seems to include everything but people of black and brown skin. And I think, I think the work is lacking something in that space then because we have got things to contribute. But it's almost like people are cherry picking one or two black and brown people who show up all the time in all the spaces. And I'm like, why then not more diversity about why it, you know, why is it just the same two all the time? And why is that not causing people to question what they can do to bring in more black and brown people and retain them? So, you know, sometimes they do come, but because the space doesn't feel brave or safe or welcoming. They stay for a bit and then they leave." – WM

"Just because you have lived experience, that doesn't necessarily mean you are an expert of that lived experience. So, you may be someone who is disabled. But that doesn't necessarily mean that you are an expert in the wider disabled movement, in disability justice. Or if you are a black person, that does not mean that you are an expert in race, the history of colonialism, or you know that because these things are so broad and so wide, and I think because I have both hats on, I am a disabled, um, South Asian person myself, but also a researcher. I've kind of navigated these spaces where there are people who think just because, for example, they worked with some disabled people [or] some black people, that they do a good job of it." – WU

These stories show the importance of broader inclusion beyond the tokenistic within co-production. For co-production to work in the way it is intended, it needs to steer away from exclusive and racist practices. Additionally, as WU goes on to identify, if co-production can move towards anti-racist practices and away from tokenism, then the services they set out to change would also benefit.

"In my opinion, there is a big relationship between anti-racist work and co-production, because co-production, as I view it, is a strength-based approach. It's also trauma informed and it's also saying if we can design and to deliver services, we need to include the people who are using those services to help us shape and design them. Right now, if brown people are not included in those conversations and those decision-making processes, and if they haven't got a seat at the table, as Shirley Chisholm describes it, then the services are instinctively going to be designed without a robust, anti-racist and intentioned awareness and approach." – WU

Key learnings

✴ Tokenism is regularly perpetuated in co-production, particularly in an effort to tick boxes and acquire funding

✴ Funders encourage this problem by implicitly endorsing check-box inclusion

✴ This is creating echo chambers where the same people are included again and again, meaning breadth and depth of experience is lacking and this is feeding into the services being transformed

"I've been asked why I have a staff badge" – Overt and covert racism

"I think most places and most times co-production is done with good intention and it's inclusive wherever and to whatever possibility it can be. Sadly, the true fact is that it can also be very exclusive, or it can create barriers or clearly outright the show in some spaces be racist. And I've experienced in some arenas and some spaces in co-production spaces, clear racism. And sometimes racism is not so prevalent in your face that you can put your finger on and say, this sometimes is done in a very like this. They call this covert racism and overt racism." – UR

The people who shared their stories have communicated a wide range of both overt and covert racism that they have experienced. Both overt and covert forms of racism manifest in co-production spaces and beyond, causing individuals to question their own experiences and perpetuating systemic inequalities. Covert acts, such as scheduling meetings without regard for religious holidays or dietary needs, subtly reinforce exclusion and discrimination and often stem from systemic racism and white supremacist ideology. Overt acts include using racist terminology, stereotyping, questioning people's authority or experience based on race and other direct forms of racist bullying. This report will detail these experiences first.

> "In the main I would say that my co-production journey has not been very positive at all. Especially because I am also a professional in children's social care. I feel like I'm always having to choose a hat and I feel like I've been in environments where I've been asked why I have a staff badge or I have had a joke made at my expense, or I've had people's opinions and be told I can't or shouldn't be doing a piece of work or just people's tone of voice when they It sometimes is really hard to explain, like the unconscious nature of how co-production can sometimes not be positive." – **XY**
>
> "Sometimes I feel the fear-based reaction to my vocalisation is there. It's glaringly obvious that I've touched a raw nerve, so therefore I'm no longer going to be invited. But it doesn't matter. Actually, for me, it makes me more inspired to keep talking and saying, you know, we're not all the same. You can't treat us all the same." – **PY**
>
> "A big institution that I worked for ... on my first day, somebody opened the door for me and I was called a c**n. I've had, when I've been in a meeting and we've been doing some research, and somebody said, 'It's like trying to find a n****r in a haystack.'"" – **RS**
>
> "I've done co-production now for... it's almost sixteen, seventeen years, right? The racism has been horrific. I was called a black this, that, and the other. In meetings, I was threatened with actual bodily harm. The service user, the female, who was after the initial one who called me a token black, my first five meetings, would get up when I – because you had to stand up and introduce ourselves – she'd get up and she'd call me all the ugly names under the sun. It was horrific." – **YT**
>
> "Either they were a very rude person. I don't know. But they weren't, they was not doing that to anybody else. So, that made me, you know, okay, I should maybe I shouldn't jump to the conclusion, but they were very abrupt and blunt with me. Some strange reason, I don't know. But they were allowing other people to have their say and talking as if to say what I had to say wasn't important. So that's what led me to believe. I think they were racist. ... It had a very bad, impact on me because, you know, then I started to, you know, doubting myself. You know, I'm thinking, should I ever join this kind of thing again? What's the point?" – **GW**

There will likely be readers of this report who will be shocked that such blatant instances of racism could take place and particularly that they would take place in co-production spaces which are supposed to hold inclusivity and safety as values. However, overt racism is the natural byproduct of covert racism being allowed to continue unchecked. When people are othered, however subtle, consistently over a long period by microaggressions and sheer thoughtlessness, then it is perhaps understandable how more obvious racism can then follow. However, because covert racism isn't always apparent to those it isn't directly perpetrated against, it is easy for it to go on unchallenged. Covert racism is also a more direct symptom of systemic racism, and a byproduct of white supremacy, whiteness and all of its contexts and connotations are considered the 'norm'. And, as some of the storytellers noted, it's much harder to challenge than overt racism.

> "The racism and the discrimination that can be done without words and that can be pushed through during policies and procedures is far more dangerous than maybe somebody saying something. So, because, if you say something, then you can at least start to question and have that dialogue. ... So, I think sometimes a lot of anti-racism work almost focuses on the people who are, you know, potentially more verbal, might say something that is not deemed, as, you know, appropriate to say. I genuinely think there needs to be a lot more anti-racism work within the actual bureaucracy of systems ... monitoring actually what is actually going on." – **AU**
>
> "People assume that unless a certain word has been used or, uh, something obviously discriminatory has happened, that racism doesn't exist. But if we understand structural racism, it's about the patterns of behaviour, then. So, if one particular group is regularly experiencing comparatively poorer experiences than others, then that's an indication. And there must be an explanation that isn't just that this is random, but that this is actually part of a pattern. And the evidence is quite clear that the police's treatment of black, Asian and minority ethnic people, particularly women, is comparatively poor and everyone else. And the only explanation can be, uh, can be racism. There is no other no other explanation. So when the government turns around and says there isn't any, you then see that this is part of a pattern." – **TC**
>
> "That impact - microaggressions are very subtle and very deep, you know, because. It defines whether a project succeeds or not. And, also, it kind of undermines the hope which it values, that you're trying to facilitate. It could be something very subtle, you know. And when you're in the present, fine. You know? But when you look back on it, reflection, you can see. You can see what's going on. And sometimes, it's very intentional, ... and sometimes it's not entirely consistent. School staff aren't aware of what they're doing, and it becomes custom and culture almost. Because that thing about institutional racism is almost coming over." – **PX**

"If an attempt to bring people together, they're already people that have been disadvantaged because of circumstance, because of the actions of other people, then there's never going to be equity in that space. And if the people facilitating their spaces are white people and are not in tune to being, and I'm going to use the word anti-racist, and not that outward anti-racism, that inward anti-racism - we all have prejudices, we all have views." – QY

"There's a certain disregard for the needs that are sometimes so completely sort of unique about being the colour I am and what things that I understand to be normal and what is actually normal for certain other races. But I find that the catering for our production groups that I started off with was nil. Really, there's nobody who thought that maybe I don't eat sandwiches and whatever else." – PY

These stories of covert racism demonstrate that it can take a variety of forms and show how things that go unchecked can become the norm after a period of time. For example, using venues that don't have a prayer room, not offering a diverse menu at events, and other similar incidents allow it to be a given that only white-centric needs will be met by default, which then others anyone else. Some storytellers have pointed out that it is difficult to challenge this form of racism as it can be very subtle, however, at least one storyteller pointed out that challenging it is the only way it can be stamped out, particularly when it comes from a place of ignorance rather than malice.

"I think it's really important that people don't walk away thinking that all co-production spaces are racist. I don't say that, but what I'm here to say is where it does take place. We have to raise awareness, nip it in the bud and support people who may not know what they're doing." – UR

This is where robust anti-racist practice can help by giving white people in these spaces the knowledge and tools to be an anti-racist ally, as demonstrated in AU's story.

"There's also been people that I've met who are... and you know that I can see that they can see what's going on. So, there's a particular – I won't go into who it is or anything – but there's one particular project where I remember, one of the leads was being quite dismissive and wasn't talking like I was in the same space as the other person as well.

"They weren't giving me any eye contact, though. Just talking to the other person. [The other person] kept bringing me back in... They've said, 'Well, we're going through this process. We can do this, we can develop this, and that in itself.' It's just been like a relief because it feels okay. It's not me having to fight. I can see somebody fight in my corner. Even then, they're not saying it and then not mentioning it. But you can see that they can see what's going on and their actions... You know, actions speak louder than words. And I think me that gives me hope." – AU

The fact that the person AU speaks of doesn't do anything explicit speaks to how just knowledge and understanding can be beneficial. They let AU know they have seen the problem and then help to bypass it. AU saying, "It's not me having to fight," speaks to both weariness and relief: weariness that AU has to put up with occurrences like these frequently, but relief that for once someone else is shouldering the burden of dismantling.

Key learnings

✳ Both overt and covert racism take place in co-production spaces
✳ Anti-racist training can be key in creating anti-racist allies to support others facing racism

<u>"I've often been the only brown person at the table and often it's only men"</u> – Elitism and exclusion

"And what I always feel is these people [white senior professionals], they are in their ivory towers. They do not know what exactly happens on the ground and I can bring that perspective, as in, like, what is happening at road level?" – AX

Exclusion often stems from elitism, which is a more generally pervasive societal issue, but one that particularly affects racialised communities, especially in terms of white supremacy. Elitist structures within organisations (particularly, but by no means limited to, academic institutions) perpetuate racism, denying opportunities and legitimacy to those from racial backgrounds. This exclusionary culture marginalises voices, perpetuating harmful dynamics where individuals are expected to conform to dominant norms and expectations. While co-production should see all involved on a level playing field, if it is led by organisations that

subscribe to elitist structures (often who are actually conducting consultancy disguised as co-production) then these can infiltrate the process and lead to exclusion, as many of the storytellers recounted. One of the most pervasive apparent reasons for exclusion of racialised communities (and other excluded people) from co-production spaces is a lack of desire to carry out the work needed to make the space more inclusive and/or accessible, or the work that would be required should more voices be included. DM gives a direct example of her experience of this in a co-production context.

> "I recently spoke with the person who's supposed to be dealing with this issue that I had to deal with. She said, 'Oh, we've contacted the local Race Equality Network and we've asked them to sit on the board.' Out of this list, basically, one person who spends her time … basically, sit listening to other people's issues. And I said, 'well, why don't you just get those people in, the people that have the issues? Why don't we get the actual people who are struggling with life experience, who can speak for themselves?' And no. 'Well, we need to keep it all under control and, you know, make sure we don't get too many voices.'"

Rather than speaking to people with lived experience, the decision was made to speak to one single person who had learned experience. It is not clear if this person also had lived experience but, even if they did, they were just one person. Saying they don't want to gather 'too many voices' could be interpreted a number of ways, although the most likely interpretations are either that more voices equals more work, or that they want to control their findings. Either reason speaks to a sense of elitism, of hierarchy and the default consequence is that people are excluded. The 'hard to reach' fallacy also comes into play here. It is our belief that people are not hard to reach, however there are people whose voices are seldom given a platform, including those from racialised communities.

> "Sometimes it feels like you're not prepared to listen because you have made your assumptions. And it's far easier for you to talk to the white community than it is for us, because we just seem, apparently, we're too hard, which is challenging." – **OD**

However, it may be cliché, but representation matters. YZ describes this as a 'chicken and the egg' syndrome:

> "If the people who are leading co-production don't represent the community … That's not really going to work. So, we're going to have to have some boards, or leaders, or co-producers [who] are going to have to … look like the people that they're trying to reach. And maybe that means investing in organisations that are ready to work with these communities."

Again, systemic racism is a pervasive factor here. People from racialised communities, especially women, are not represented as much at board and leadership levels as white people are. RS mentions that when "people from, ethnic minorities that are in junior levels, they're not taken seriously, they are not heard," while YZ says how they feel as if they are "occupying, sort of, white dominated spaces to sort of bring a message from and for people who look like myself but don't have the privilege to be in some of these spaces."

So, when it comes to co-production groups, people from racialised communities don't see themselves represented and, often are put off taking part. For instance, AX talks about how people from South Asian communities do not trust co-production "because it has been delivered by mainly white people, that even when they do employ people from our communities, they use processes that are very Euro- and white-centric, even white supremacist, in nature." Because they don't wish to take part, this perpetuates the stereotype of them being 'hard to reach'. Again, we circle back to people not wanting to do the work (diverse recruitment, anti-racist and inclusive practice) to make it easy and desirable to take part. TE, for example, wants to be involved with co-production work because he wants to share his lived experience However, he has found it difficult to get involved and he thinks this is because he's perceived as having too many 'complex needs' that organisations find difficult to accommodate. For example, he would need transportation to attend in person, he would also need a support worker. Due to his speech, language and communication challenges it would also be important for other co-producers to give him time to express himself and to perhaps to adapt their language so that he could fully understand and participate. He would also need documentation to be produced for him in large typefaces. "Maybe they don't want to involve me because they don't take responsibility for me, to take care of me, to come and pick me to take me there."

This is echoed in other co-production contexts. DM, for example, has worked on a project that required some degree of research experience.

> "Because of the desire to keep this project scientific, I think that's meant that that would have excluded some people. But they didn't need to be excluded because we could have broken it down so that we could get their thoughts and feelings, and represented them in a way. And I think that we could have spent more time doing that, reaching deep into the communities that we need to be supporting and we're doing this work for. " – DM

Again, for the project to be inclusive, some additional work would be required to break down the subject and the language to make it accessible to those without academic research experience. But this work was not done, excluding whole swathes of people. Language is an issue that comes up multiple times. AX discusses the need for more interpreters, especially as within the NHS a lot of jargon is used:

> "I do get upset sometimes because … I am involved in public consultations and public service, patient service. And I keep telling the comms people to use those words because they don't understand all those acronyms. Or please make the language simple." – AX

Similarly, cultural contexts are also ignored. Throughout the stories there are instances of workshops being arranged on Friday afternoons when Muslims are at prayer, or of long full-day events happening during Ramadan, or event buffets that serve chicken on the same plate as pork. As TZ puts it:

> "They [racialised communities] do have more challenges to get over because they've got the cultural side as well and the culture can limit what they are allowed to do. … They do prayers at a certain time, that they sleep, eat at a certain time. You know, they've got to do what they've got to do. So, at the same time, when we all think about planning a trip or planning anything, if we've got anybody with any cultural needs like that, we have to take that into consideration."

In the UK, most things follow a Christian calendar (weekends falling on Saturday and Sunday, school holidays arranged around Easter and Christmas, etc.) and, although not all Christians in contemporary Britain are white, it is historic of white-centric practices, and is exclusionary of other cultures and religions. This ingrained institutional racism filters down into co-production practices with scheduling, catering, and other details not taking the cultures of racialised communities into consideration. Again, it perpetuates an othering of the global majority and

creates a barrier to inclusion that simply does not need to be there.

It is not just within co-production spaces that racism happens. The organisations that deliver it also see racism happen to their employees.

> I know an organisation has done some really intense research and found that even professional staff are facing racism in the workplace from their colleagues, their management and from the service users. … And I think that is something that I need to emphasise. The racism victims are not just people who are uneducated or not articulate or vulnerable in society. You could be in a very influential position and still face outright racism." – UR

This is echoed by MY, speaking as an academic.

> "If I were to walk into a room, a networking event, I find it hard to make those connections because I see fewer people making that effort to really integrate with everybody in the audience. People, usually because they gravitate towards people who look like them, so I would see these groups of people standing. So, I don't know, South Asians are standing in one group and the white professors are standing in one group and it's hard to get in, go in there and introduce myself. And that is one of the biggest ways in which I've seen unconscious bias play a role in how I have navigated my professional life ." – MY

Again, within this context of elitism and exclusion, we see how overt and covert racist practices exist. UR's story tells of people facing 'outright racism' within their professional scenarios. MY, meanwhile, speaks of it as 'unconscious bias' which is, of course, a form of internalised racism evolved from living in a systemically racist society. Intersectionality plays a part too, particularly when it comes to gender.

> "I do think sometimes the fact that I'm a woman comes into it as well, because I do see a lot of experienced leaders. There are males that are doing very well or spotlighted or, you know, working alongside government all the time or working in high positions or working with organisations consistently. And I don't see that same equity ability for me." – XY

"I've often been the only brown person at the table and often it's only men. And when I've been part of it as a participant, when I've been part of it as an organising person, often there's mainly men who are making the particular decisions." – **KZ**

"Usually, people mistake the women and the women of colour, as I've been, [for] a system or admin support or whatever. But when I tell them, actually, I am a lead for this, this, this and that I train staff members, and I do this and they are quite taken aback. In their minds, it doesn't match up. And that is when it's sort of like, 'Oh wow, really? Okay, how long did it take you to get this?' That sort of thing, which I appreciate might come from a place of genuine curiosity, but because I'm very sensitive to it." – **MY**

Three different stories from three different women all highlighting how their gender and race combine to form an additional level of elitism that can lead to exclusion. We have already heard how disability also plays its part and, although it didn't come up in the stories gathered for this project, it would be useful to gauge how sexuality and gender identity affects the inclusion of people from racialised communities as well.

Key learnings

* Often, exclusion is happening because no one wants to take responsibility for the additional work inclusion requires

* The 'hard to reach' fallacy is also a factor, with people from racialised communities being deemed 'hard to reach' because they do not wish to take part in projects that do not represent them

* Culture – particularly religion – is often not taken into account when scheduling and planning events, making it difficult or impossible for people from religions other than Christianity to take part

"I think the intention behind co-production honestly seems like a dream if we could figure it out. But how it plays in real life is a whole other story" – Embracing equity in contribution

"There's a lot of challenges that we have in co-production. There's the ableism, the classism, the racism, the fact that it's mainly led by white people. The fact that we're using Euro centric models, the fact that we want people to behave and talk like us, we want them to be performative. When they raise issues around race, we roll our eyes. We tell them it's not the case. We give them evidence to suggest something else. We call them hard to reach. Even we call them users. Service users, the BAME service users, the South Asian people. It's so divisive." – **NG**

For co-production to work and to be truly anti-racist, the challenges detailed by NG need to be addressed. Celebrating diverse perspectives while acknowledging and addressing systemic inequalities, empowering through education and support, promoting fairness and inclusivity, championing marginalised voices, paying people for their time and contributions and fostering solidarity for a more just and equitable society all need to be on the agenda for change. At the heart of this is embracing equity in contribution and creating an environment where a diversity of voices can be heard.

"I think the intention behind co-production honestly seems like a dream if we could figure it out. But how it plays in real life is a whole other story. ... [T]here's a lot of dynamics and a lot of working in one way. There's only one way of working. There's already a lot of predetermined things. There's a lot of fear, there's a lot of prioritising quantity over quality, all of those sort of things which, the characteristics I've just described are characteristics related to a white supremacy culture." - **WU**

"Co-production has to be more representative. And I think at the moment we're not yet in a space where co-production space is representative. ... I have been in spaces before where I've seen people kick off at how co-production is done, and when I've asked if they've made sure that the sample of people is representative, those who they serve. They will say it's who was available. And I think you are not yet in an equitable co-production space. If you are from an inner London borough and you're in children's services and 80% of your young people in care are from black and brown communities. Your co-production group should not be 80% white. It should be representative of the population that you have." – **XY**

> "You know, it's a bit like a mix and match. And obviously with a mix and match, not everyone's going to mix and match because people are people, but it does break a lot of barriers, and it does help people to achieve their best. And that's what we were able to achieve: the best." – **PX**

XY and PX succinctly describe what the dream of co-production, as WU puts it, could and should look like. Co-production spaces need to represent their communities, and this should be done through rigorous sampling, not just seeing who is available. And indeed, spaces may end up with clashing personalities or differing points of view, but that is where the work is done and should be embraced, if moderated. Of course, getting people around the table in the first place can be a challenge, but this too needs to be embraced to ensure equitable co-production spaces.

> "For me, it's never a question of hard to reach. It's a question of who do you need to be developing the trusted, meaningful relationships with in order to get people in the room? And the hard-to-reach people are not hard to reach when they have people who they trust saying this is happening. … You need to step back and let other people step forward in order for that hard-to-reach challenge to not be a challenge. And how are you supporting those individuals who need to step forward? And how are you supporting those individuals to bring in their sort of tacit knowledge and experience in sort of genuine ways that help those individuals to feel comfortable and safe and understood without having to explicitly explain themselves?" – **IA**

This point around stepping back is intrinsic to ensuring diversity of voice in co-production. The hard-to-reach fallacy mentioned earlier can be mitigated by building trusting, meaningful relationships. However, that does not need to mean that co-production leads need to try to do this all themselves. Letting others step forward, who already have those connections and relationships is essential, and why diversity in organisational recruitment is vital for co-production.

> "We have a lot of black Asian minority ethnic communities with influential, articulate, highly educated people, and yet they're not coming around the table. That's what we need to think about. How can we make it interesting?... So, we've got to think about how can we come across to the wider community? That co-production is interesting. It's worthwhile, it's valuable, it's long term, and has an impact. … We've got to show people your involvement is important and there is an impact of that by showing them the difference it makes." – **UR**

This is the other side of encouraging diverse voices: demonstrating impact. Co-production needs to show the people who take part what difference their participation makes, what changes have happened because of it. And if change can't happen due to budgets, logistics, or leadership changes? Tell people about this, let them know that this was outside of control, rather than just letting them think their time was wasted. Of course, when trying to diversify the voices in co-production, there are challenges to be faced, even when the leads are diverse. Even with the best will, not everyone at every intersection will be represented, so how to work out how to include people you don't necessarily have an understanding of? UR shares a practice designed to promote equity in contribution.

> "Sometimes people are thinking about the average majority and they forget the minorities with different additional needs or requirements or, you know, cultural needs, religious needs, language needs and disputes needs and all that. So, I think what we need to think about creating a character and I will say this to someone, because this one person taught me this is not my clever brain, but one person really taught me this and said, [UR], whenever you do work where you want inclusivity. Think of creating a character in your head that's got every different type of barrier that you could think of. They're disabled, they've got a hearing impairment, they use a wheelchair, they're gay, they are religious, they are female or male, depending on what genders you're looking at. They might have language barriers. And then think about how you can create? How can you meet all those needs?" – **UR**

A persona system such as this one is used in professions such as marketing and PR to better understand customers, clients and target audiences and it makes sense to use it in co-production to better understand diverse people and communities. To avoid stereotypes, which could be harmful, these could be created in collaboration with representative services, organisations and communities to create rich, realistic personas for use in co-production recruitment.

Key learnings

✴ There needs to be trust in recruitment for co-production projects

✴ Co-production teams need to be transparent with the impact of projects so people can see that they contributed to something tangible. When change hasn't been possible, there should be honesty around the reasons.

✴ A persona system could assist with inclusion by helping people understand individual needs better

"Sometimes we can only co-produce when we have these very hard conversations" – Facilitating challenging discourse

> "Sometimes we can only co-produce when we have these very hard conversations, but we need to have it because we acknowledge that systemically these injustices exist, you know, and it's not always going to be a very easy conversation to have. But I think that it takes a lot of preparation. We should be prepared to come into this space believing that everyone has something to share and quite often in such spaces I also find that some people might need a little bit of support." - XX

For co-production to work, it needs to be inclusive and anti-racist. However, often, the challenging discourses involved prove to be a stumbling block. At a systemic level, racism is something public bodies don't want to acknowledge or address. Alternatively, they wish to address it, but in a way that is palatable to them. A lack of acknowledgement will often give rise to co-production groups that are majority white and/or tokenistic in their approach to racialised communities. Censure, meanwhile, stifles people from those communities, and can bring about projects and groups that only include people from racialised backgrounds, creating echo chambers, as well as ideas that will struggle to be heard by those in positions of policy and decision-making due to systemic racism. To resolve this, we need to steer discussions on the involvement of our white colleagues in anti-racism initiatives during coproduction endeavours, fostering mutual comprehension, and encouraging constructive exchanges. This is essential to resolving some of the issues discussed by storytellers.

> "I've sat in rooms where professionals have come with their clipboards to listen to views [and] don't like what's being said, because it's almost to take it as a personal attack on them. So, it takes a certain type of individual to actually be the public body representative, to actually absorb that frustration and then try to channel that into meaningful words, in a document which helps shape a project or a service or a change of direction." – XI

XI describes a common problem in co-production spaces in that white professionals want to be seen to be listening to the experiences of people from the global majority however, they are not prepared for how those experiences will make them feel – and the result can be to take it personally, or fall into a shame spiral. Within co-production spaces, this can cause conflict, or result in the views of people from racialised communities being dismissed and not being carried forward. QY discuss how when they bring information back from the

co-production spaces they facilitate, "there is a lack of desire to respond from my white peers and colleagues," and that the feelings of white colleagues are prioritised:

> "The challenge always gets put on to the racialised global majority people to be the solution [to the] ones that are doing and perpetrating the racism we're experiencing. We are told that our brown scars or our wounds are okay, as long as we don't upset people. [I] often think of the white tears that come … when people recognise their racism, how they use emotion to bypass the fact that they have been racist." – QY
>
> RS, meanwhile, suggests that for some people, these feelings of shame manifest in stagnation:
>
> "I think in certain settings people don't want to hear it. And I think it's because they don't know what to do. Not that they're sick of hearing it, because they're not. They just they haven't got that experience of knowing what it's like. So, they think that they can't have a say about it. For me, I feel people don't take it seriously enough because it's such a hard subject to talk about. People shy away from that, want to do the easy, quick tick box things." – RS

Anti-racism work is hard, so people shy away from it. Or they take an essentialist point of view whereby it's not their lived experience so they do not feel they can, or do not wish to, talk about it. RS believes that for co-production to be effective, people have to be prepared to be uncomfortable when discussing topics such as racism. She adds that she doesn't want people to feel traumatised by what she's experienced because it's her experience. Additionally, RS would like more people from racialised communities to be seen leading co-production, because leaders can demonstrate positivity and expand networks which could also empower others to speak up.

As XI points out 'it takes a certain type of individual' to fulfil this role of facilitator in co-production and channel the frustrations of communities and individuals into meaningful work. YZ also mentions that there is a need to "create systems or platforms or spaces where people who have the lived experience are able to exist and come in to share their experiences in a safe way and be protected," comparing the experience of speaking up in co-production spaces to whistleblowing. One possibility to assist with this is specific anti-racist training for co-production facilitators, with funders embedding this within project budgets.

We use 'shame spiral' here in the context in which Nova Reid uses it in The Good Ally (2021) to describe how the fear and shame arising in white people engaging in anti-racism work can cause them to fall into unhelpful feelings which prevent them from them from actually doing the anti-racism work. Reid guides readers through the feelings so that they can de-centre themselves and have self-compassion.

Key learnings

✻ It is often difficult to facilitate challenging discussion in co-production spaces because white feelings are prioritised and facilitators, policy, and decision-makers can take the frustrations of racialised communities personally.

✻ White people often don't want to engage in anti-racism work because it is hard and there is no 'quick fix'. They feel as if they cannot have a say because it is not their experience.

✻ There is no formalised anti-racism training for co-production facilitators and no space in research budgets for it currently. Implementing these could create more inclusive co-production environments.

Word art illustration challenging discource (Illustration credit: Kareen Cox, 2024)

"Are they going to make sure that we're supported and resourced for it appropriately? Or are we just going to make them look good as an organisation?" – Ensuring equitable compensation and payment

"I have seen some very, very proactive organisations that really went through their policies and procedures and their systems and their staff and said, 'we want to create an anti-racist organisation and we're going to become a world class anti-racist organisation'. So, I think we need to think about how we can develop guidelines. This is something that's just come in my thinking out loud, just in my mind, whether we should create a little co-production forum, and we can develop guidelines on how to have anti-racist co-production spaces because we've done great guidelines on user involvement, co-production and patients, and public involvement, and engagement guidelines. But we haven't actually got a clear set of protocol guidelines, a full couple of pages, and clear key points that say, 'this is how you demonstrate that you're an anti-racist co-production space,' because I don't think that people are racist, always very clearly with intention. I think there's a lot of racism that takes place unintentionally."
– UR

UR's point about anti-racist guidelines follows on from the previous recommendation that there should be anti-racist training for co-production facilitators. However, guidelines such as those discussed by UR could actually reach further, setting out policy guidance for research institutions and funders on how to be actively anti-racist. As has come up in the stories gathered, one such recommendation would be acknowledging and addressing systemic injustices, including disparities in education, opportunity, and the effects of migration and racism, by guaranteeing fair remuneration for individuals from racialised communities and those engaged in co-production efforts since, so often, people are expected to give their time for free. Not only is this unfair in very basic terms, it can also exclude people with lower socio-economic status, and these groups are often overwhelmingly from racialised backgrounds.

However, TC acknowledges that remuneration is a challenge when undertaking co-production because even if people are remunerated for sharing their lived and living experiences, this still does not have parity with staff salaries and therefore creates a relationship imbalance within a co-production space. Additionally, there can be limits to what funders are willing to pay for which is an ongoing challenge in terms of fighting for funds and having balanced co-production relationships. He believes funders have become better at understanding the value of collaboration, but that it comes at a cost which must be met. Ideally, funding grants for co-production projects would incorporate an allocation of funds for fairly remunerating

participants, or research institutions and other organisations commissioning co-production would have budgets ring-fenced for remunerating those sharing their experiences. This is not just a matter of fairness. Fairly compensating people for their time signals that this is genuine co-production, that the invited participants are valued and wanted.

> "So, a big part of it is just about how genuine, genuine are people. I think that's always something that racialised community members have to always think about. How genuinely do people actually want us in these spaces? And if they want us in these spaces, are they going to make sure that we're supported and resourced for it appropriately? Or are we just going to make them look good as an organisation?" – **WU**

WU also flags another, broader problem with funding and institution budgets in that the ideal scenario would be people from racialised communities being involved at the pre-proposal stage so that their input shapes the research proposal, but this is not always (if ever) possible.

> "A lot of it happens before … the proposal is written in my head. What's really important is … to have these voices involved early on. But a lot of the issues are [that] there's not a lot of seed money or, at least, funding [for] people, or when people are planning to do sort of these projects, they've not thought about funding money, about bringing people to be involved a lot earlier. The moment a proposal has been created, you've already predetermined a lot of factors, whether you think you've done a good job keeping it flexible or not. So, make sure you think about involving people as early as possible. Make sure you think about it equitably as well. Creating a culture of shared learning is important and trying to hold yourself accountable on a regular basis and understanding that we need to keep the dialogue going."

Larger research institutions should consider budgeting for people to be involved in the pre-proposal stages, so that funding bids and project proposals can be co-produced from the very start. Or funders could look at a small grants system to make the proposal stage of research more inclusive by enabling researchers to pay marginalised people to co-produce research proposals.

Key learnings

✶ A lack of funding is a big barrier to inclusion as it prevents marginalised people being involved in co-producing research proposals.

✶ Remunerating participants fairly can signal the authenticity of the co-production work.

"Just talking about it won't do squat. We need concrete action" – Calls for change

> "But I think as well as acknowledging things [instances of racism in co-production] and recognising them, I think it's really important to move things forward too, and not just be stuck in some rhetoric." – **KZ**

Addressing racism requires systemic change within co-production spaces and broader society. Progress may be slow, but organisations must prioritise anti-racism efforts, catering to the voices and needs of racialised communities. From dismantling tokenism to fostering inclusive environments, meaningful change demands reflection, courage and accountability. This point of view is reflected time and again in the stories gathered, although there is understandably frustration around the fact that racialised communities have been calling for this kind of change for a long time.

> "You know, after so many years when you're repeating the same evidence and saying, these are the things that need to be done to bring about change, and people then still go away and don't change, you inevitably get angry." – **TC**
>
> "Just talking about it won't do squat. We need concrete action. It's about bloody empathy, understanding and giving a damn about each other… Despite all the talk about being anti-racist. It feels like nothing but hot air, all promises and no substance. Organisations of folks blabber on about fights and racism yet keep the same old biases going." – **HC**

The changes suggested by storytellers include tackling societal racism, but also more tangible changes that can be made to co-production in order to make it more inclusive. One issue that comes up is one that co-production often over-promises and under-delivers, leaving racialised communities disenfranchised and reducing their desire to take part. XI suggests that is an even bigger problem now because:

> "Every local authority is virtually claiming bankruptcy. So, they can't produce results for the for the community. So, co-production at this moment in time is almost meaningless because whatever the outcome is requires finance to change things. And so there needs to be that certainly mentioned, but, as you said, co-production is a word that means something to you and me. But to the vast majority of the community, it's just sitting in a room and having a conversation." – **XI**

The changes suggested here are two-fold. Firstly, a more realistic management of expectations when it comes to what co-production can achieve, but also education on what co-production can be when done right. And part of that would be addressing concerns raised earlier in this report: that co-production does not represent the communities it seeks to support.

> "What we need, I stress, are real conversations by black and brown voices. That's the only way we're going to crack this racism in co-production." – **HC**

A big part of this is tackling the wider issue of systemic racism through anti-racist practice. AD puts it as challenging the status quo.

> "I believe all of us, it's our duty to challenge the status quo. But also remembering how we challenge the status quo. We have to do it more subtly. But you can still challenge the status quo. You know, it's about having the tools to do that, you know." – **AD**

This can be done in a variety of ways. At the individual level, this can be educating oneself about racism and doing the work of learning how to be anti-racist, putting that into practice in everyday life. At the organisational level, it's about organisations and services striving to become anti-racist. RM is CEO of a large, national charity and tells how they are taking that journey as an organisation.

> "We're making real efforts to try and make sure that we're actively reaching out, that we're actually trying to communicate and listen to those diverse communities. And that's work you have to do. It doesn't just happen, because if it was just going to happen, it would just be there already. And the fact that it isn't means that the way that we communicate, and the messages that we give, and what we represent doesn't speak to particular communities and people from particular backgrounds. So, you have to proactively do that and engage and listen and understand the perspective of those individuals."

They are currently doing anti-racism work internally, but the longer-term plan is to produce a public-facing document on the process since "being transparent about where we get stuff wrong gives permission to others to then say, 'okay, yeah, I don't have all the answers and neither did they. But they've gone on a journey.'" Their ambition is to also bring funders on this journey.

> "At the same time, trying to work with funders to say, you've got to fund this work. This doesn't just happen. It has to be supported financially as well with resources. And, you know. It's always hard as a leader because I guess sometimes as leaders you get stuck in this thing of, I've got to know the things I've got to do to change it."

From the societal perspective, a two-pronged approach to change is suggested. Organisations and individuals adopting anti-racist practice will, hopefully, begin to influence those around them and make that change. However, there could also be an approach to education policy that makes anti-racism a core part of children's lives from a young age.

> "I think if we can start teaching stuff at school to those younger children, you know, you could be in an all-white school in Cornwall where there's no minority communities living there, but it doesn't mean that you can't go in there and have regular sessions. … So, my hope is governments and local authorities pay attention to the younger generation. It [racism] won't be eradicated, but it'll be a step in that direction in terms of getting rid of some of that ignorance." – **XI**

Key learnings

✸ More realistic expectations of what co-production can achieve need to be set out, but also education on how co-production works and the impact it can have

✸ To achieve this, co-production needs to reflect the communities it seeks to support

✸ Anti-racist practice within organisations can help facilitate societal change, and organisations need to be transparent about their journeys so they can learn from each other

✸ Embedding anti-racism at all levels of school education would help eradicate some of the ignorance from which racism stems

✳ Recommendations

Based on the findings of this 'Understanding Anti-Racism in Co-production Spaces: Centring the Voices of Racialised Individuals' report, we have the following recommendations (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Project Recommendations

Recommendations for research and co-production practice	Organisations embarking on anti-racist journeys should put policy in place to ensure they are transparent, open and honest so that other organisations can learn from them and see that becoming anti-racist is not a straightforward process.
	Anti-racist recruitment practices should be implemented in government, local authorities, public and private organisations etc. to ensure diversity within teams leading on co-production. Organisations should also have anti-racist recruitment policies for co-production spaces.
	There need to be clear policies and procedures in place around co-production feedback loops to avoid racialised communities becoming disenfranchised with co-production. Impacts need to be reported to participants, lack of impact needs to be explained.
	There needs to be fair, equitable reimbursement for people taking part in co-production and this needs to be built into funding bids. There should be 'seed money' available for when funding bids are being developed so that people can be paid for their time giving insight, ensuring people from racialized communities can be involved in projects at the earliest stages and avoid predetermination. This could take the form of ring-fenced budgets within institutions or small grants from funders.
	Formalised anti-racism training for co-production facilitators would be beneficial in creating more open, inclusive spaces. This would need to be budgeted into projects by funders and organisations.
Recommendations for research and co-production practice	A slide (or handout) detailing best anti-racist practice in co-production spaces should be produced for use by co-production projects to educate participants on expected behaviours that do not stem from white supremacy.
	Personas should be created to better understand diverse people and communities in an intersectional way so as to help with inclusion practices. To avoid stereotypes, which could be harmful, these could be created in collaboration with representative services, organisations and communities to create rich, realistic personas for use in co-production recruitment. These could then be made available as open access resources for use by co-production projects and funders.
	Invite community leaders to learn more about co-production and the impacts it can have in their community. In turn, co-production leads can learn more about those communities and what barriers to inclusion they might face. Regular liaison with community leaders would be designed to eradicate these barriers and build trust.
	Open access training resources on non-Christian practices (including food), holidays, festivals and holy days could be used by organisations and services to better understand the religions within their communities, but also to aid them with planning co-production sessions, workshops, and other events to better enable inclusion.
Recommendation for long-term change, to influence the future of anti-racism in co-production	With the aim of making anti-racism commonplace for future generations, there should be an anti-racism curriculum embedded within the National Curriculum. This would include specific lessons around anti-racism and different cultures, but also the embedding of anti-racist practice and language in all parts of learning. This would be taught from Reception through to Year 13. We would recommend that this is a collaborative exercise, co-produced between the Department for Education, teachers, and people from racialised communities.

✳ Conclusion

> "By now, we should have been in a better position with co-production than we are, and I fear also it won't be something we're reinventing all the time. It will be the norm. It will be part and parcel of what we do on a day to day, but to always feel that again, here we are doing the talking and not doing anything different. For me, when you've got limited capacity as a human being to do these things, it adds on to the pressure of trying to live just day to day and survive." - PY

To dismantle racism, we must confront its presence in both co-production spaces and everyday life, acknowledging its historical roots and intersectional complexities. By challenging fear and gaslighting, dismantling tokenism, and fostering inclusive environments, we can strive towards a future where racism is confronted, justice is upheld, and all voices are valued and respected.

The recommendations within this report, as well as the key learnings, can be used by all stakeholders within all levels of co-production to take proactive steps towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment. However, one key insight from this report is that anti-racism work is – and should be – hard. No one expects change overnight, but to do something is to begin the journey. A good starting point is the guiding principles for engaging in anti-racist practices outlined in the introduction of this report, including accountability, solidarity, and continuous learning. Taking small steps everyday can lead to big changes in the co-production process and environment which, in turn, will embed anti-racism in the services, institutions, and policies that the co-production seeks to effect.

About People's Voice Media

People's Voice Media is a civil society organisation established in 1995, that uses storytelling as a tool for social change in the UK and across Europe. As a team we:

✴ Learn and adapt

✴ Work collaboratively and equitably

✴ Act authentically and with integrity

✴ Come with optimism and joy

Our Board, team, and network of freelancers are a diverse group of people committed to working in this way to achieve our vision.

In 2007 we launched the Community Reporting methodology and began to build the Community Reporter Network. Community Reporting is a digital storytelling approach that supports people's participation in research, policymaking, service development, and decision-making processes. We know we cannot achieve our ambitions alone. The Community Reporter Network now spans the UK and Europe. It has 50+ active partner organisations from different sectors in the arenas of policy, research and services, and has trained over 2,000 Community Reporters.

The core objectives of our work are to:

1. Enable people's lived experience to be heard, and provide platforms for marginalised voices

2. Support people, communities and organisations to use lived experience to address inequalities and injustices

3. Inform and influence services and policies so that they better meet people's needs and enable people to live well

Our work will put lived experience at the heart of service improvement, policy development, and research practices.

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Appendix

In our workshops, we use this poem to warmly welcome participants, inviting them into a space of shared understanding and collective growth. The verses reflect our commitment to inclusivity and justice, celebrating the power of diverse voices coming together to create positive change.

Together, Side by Side: A Journey Towards Justice

In a world where shadows cast their mark,
We seek to learn, to grow, to clear,
To stand with courage, bold and stark.
From homes where fear and pain have stayed,
We rise to challenge history's weight,
To call out wrongs, to break the blade,
And forge a path that's truly straight.
We turn to ancestors' guiding grace,
Their stories light the way we tread,
In every tale, a sacred place,
Where justice finds its stead.
Opportunity's doors must swing wide,
For every voice and every hue,
Together, let our hopes collide,
And make our dreams come true.
With strength in shared narrative,
We fight for justice, hand in hand,
To build a world that's fair and free,
A more inclusive, just land.
From every corner, far and near,
Let contributions be seen,
In unity, we hold dear,
A future where all can glean.
So let us learn and let us rise,
To break the chains of old divide,
With open hearts and open eyes,
Together, side by side.

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We are resolute in our solidarity with all oppressed communities and are committed to amplifying voices in a safe and impactful manner. Our goal is to reshape the narrative and discourse that has increasingly surfaced in our public consciousness, driven by recent xenophobic and racist events.

As Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently stated, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." These words resonate now more than ever. They remind us that the fight against oppression is interconnected, and our efforts to make co-production spaces more inclusive and anti-racist are crucial to the broader struggle for justice.

The recent events have reinforced the reality that people are hurt, frightened, and yearning for change. Despite these challenges, the readiness of individuals to make a difference in co-production spaces underscores a shared commitment to progress and solidarity.
In these times of adversity, our work remains as critical as ever. We are driven by a collective resolve to ensure that our co-production efforts contribute to a more just and equitable world. Together, we will continue to confront injustice, amplify marginalised voices, and create meaningful change.

Anti-Racism Learning Resources

✹ Survivors Network Anti-Racism Resources:
https://survivorsnetwork.org.uk/anti-racism-resources/

✹ The Guardian: Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/30/why-im-no-longer-talking-to-white-people-about-race

✹ International Journal of Critical Pedagogy: A Framework for Anti-Racist Education:
http://www.jsc.montana.edu/articles/v19n34.pdf

✹ Anti-Racist Cumbria: How to Have Conversations with Your Family When You Are So Woke:
https://antiracistcumbria.org/how-to-have-conversations-with-your-family-when-you-are-so-woke/

✹ Anti-Racist Cumbria: But I'm Not Racist:
https://antiracistcumbria.org/but-im-not-racist/

✹ Anti-Racist Cumbria: Anti-Racist Guide to Terminology:
https://antiracistcumbria.org/anti-racist-guide-to-terminology/

A Few Self-Care Gifts

We'd also like to offer a few self-care gifts to support your well-being. We hope you find these resources and tips valuable for nurturing your health and relaxation.

✹ For a soothing experience, listen to this calming piece of music:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZYbU82GVz4

✹ Additionally, explore this insightful resource on radical self-care:
https://www.radicalselfcaretoolbox.com/

A group conversation. (Illustration credit: Kareen Cox, 2024)

Thank you

We would like to reiterate our heartfelt gratitude to all global majority community members who shared their stories. This report and it's contents is owned by all of them.

Thank you,
Isaac and Sam

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