How do people's experiences of authority differ, depending on their identity or their socio-economic or racial background? Should the law, institutions or people in positions of authority or power, change in order to address these differences and, if so, how?

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Our relationship with authority creates the foundations for how we engage with our communities and represent our self-identity. We place trust in this system to help fairly and justly regulate our behaviour. It is often assumed that this rapport of mutual respect is the universal experience; this is far from the case. For many of us who identify as BAME, or are from a lower socio-economic background, this dynamic is much more complex. Authority is intertwined with our lives; our experiences with it are less like isolated events and are much more like a series of steps along a path. To simplify how these incidents coincide with one another, I think this connection with authority can be separated into two main halves. First, its internal, cognitive influence on individuals, then its external material consequences.

The primary phase of this relationship starts with our first interaction with authority: at school. Teachers play an influential role in shaping not only our world view but how we expect the world to view us.

Psychologically, we begin to internalise these behaviours. Here lies the fundamental difference between how people of different backgrounds experience authority. For those who are BAME/of a lower socio-economic group, authority is a passive process; it is something that happens to us, not with us. It devolves into less of the mutual experience which more privileged counterparts engage in, into one with heavily weighted power dynamics. To illustrate this point further, I would like to use my school as an example. My high school permits students from a large catchment area, which spans over Essex and East London. As a result, our school is extremely diverse, with a high proportion of BAME students. However, the majority of staff are from the surrounding white-dominated local vicinity, creating a stark contrast to the multicultural student body. In fact, in 2018, White British teachers made up 85.9% of school teachers, higher than the percentage of White British people in the working force ('School workforce in England', 2020). The authority structure innately holds a racialised force, due to the disproportionate lack of representation of the students in those in power. That is to say that the subconscious bias of 'the real world' bleeds into the hierarchical system and manifests themselves through how these teachers interact with students. Often, these 'microaggressions' are only discernible through lived experiences, which is why I believe my analogy of one such experience will help to demonstrate these tangible consequences. As a Hindu, my ethnic identity is coupled with my religious beliefs, and I take pride in practising my religious customs. My school upholds a policy that accessories are not to be worn unless for religious reasons. After a Hindu festival, I wore a holy thread around my wrist and was asked by a teacher to remove it. I explained its importance and how Hindus are not allowed to purposefully take it off. The teacher was adamant that I was fabricating the tradition and that I

needed to cut it off immediately. In class, in front of everyone, I was made to cut off the thread. While this is by far not the most heated experience with authority that I have had regarding my identity, it was a pivotal event. The stance of superiority adopted, by flippantly invalidating something so dear to me, highlighted how the actions of BAME people can be regarded so differently in comparison to our white peers. What had seemingly been a form of my self-expression was seen as a calculated attack in a way that a white student wearing a bracelet is not, due to these intrinsic personal prejudices. This stems from a lack of understanding and inability to empathise with the cultural background of minorities and leads to a sense of distrust and isolation from these groups. It can be argued that this example is an isolated event however this is not a sentiment which is exclusive to just my school. It has become apparent that this clash of cultures, backgrounds, and circumstances is much more widespread. Irish Traveller and Gypsy/Roma pupils had the highest school absence rates, at 17% and 13%, respectively, over the Autumn Term 2019/2020 ('Pupil absence in schools in England',2020). This anomalous result of such a high school absence rate shows an ingrained insufficiency of understanding of different ethnic groups, namely here the nomadic lifestyle of Traveller communities. It remains also a large issue for students of a lower socio-economic group, especially white working-class pupils. White students who are eligible for Free School Meals 'make up the smallest percentage of their entire ethnic group at GCSE' despite almost ⅔ of FSM pupils being white ('Pupil absence in schools in England', 2020). Clearly, the issues unique to white working-class students are not addressed properly, stemming from an integral misunderstanding of their contextual background. Simply put, the system of authority in schools neglects students from BAME/lower socio-economic backgrounds due to an unawareness of specific cultural and contextual issues.

So, the fundamental issue with how authority perceives specific groups stems from a lack of understanding and knowledge. These issues then foster a sentiment of distrust amongst certain groups; the idea that it is 'us against them'. This leads to the second stage; how these attitudes manifest themselves palpably later on. By not addressing how subjective authority can be depending on the beliefs of those governing, certain groups are left vulnerable to abuses of power. In 2002, there were 5,502 Muslims in prison, however by 2018, this figure had more than doubled, of which only 1% were in prison for terrorism-related offences (Ministry of Justice, 2018). Over this period, there was an increase in extremist terrorist attacks, namely the rise of Islamic
State. As only 1% of Muslims were in prison in 2018 for new terrorism-related offences (Home Office, 2018), the sudden increase in incarceration rates is striking. It can be therefore inferred that the prejudices of the authorities were enhanced by current affairs and led to such a sharp increase in the number of Muslim prisoners, albeit subconsciously. The authorities and the judicial system have observed this occurrence. In the notorious 'Stephen Lawrence Inquiry', investigating institutionalised racism in the policing system, it was noted that there had been no cases of 'overt racism' besides a few offensive racial terms, which were results of 'at least insensitivity and a lack of training'. It is interesting to note how these cases of offensive terms were seen as separate to any wider issues of racism in the whole policing system, despite them stemming from 'a lack of training'. The actions of authoritative roles are seen as isolated issues, rather than symptoms of a much larger culture. Furthermore, in 1981, as a response to The Brixton Disorders, Lord Scarman rejected the idea that Britain is institutionally racist, instead noting that these racist 'practices' may be adopted by 'public bodies as well as private individuals'. Once again, the stance taken here is rather isolationist, suggesting that different authority structures act autonomously. It can be said that they have adopted a sort of 'us against them' mentality, too. The truth remains that for

BAME/lower socio-economic people, this change in treatment is consistently widespread and systemic.

It may appear as if the lack of understanding of individuals leads to the unfair treatment of certain people, however by 'lack of understanding', I am referring to a much wider institution rather than the impacts of individuals. Despite recent figures of disproportionate representation of BAME and lower socio-economic prisoners in prison, according to the 'Judicial Diversity Statistics', 2018, the proportion of BAME representation has increased. 'BAME representation among tribunal judges was higher than that of the working-age general population at all age bands from 40 and over' and '12% of magistrates declared themselves as BAME'. It is clear that despite increased representation, the established unfair treatment of certain groups is not so easily reversed. We can't simply have more people of different identities without addressing the problems these identities face. The structure of authority institutes white individuals of a higher socio-economic group as the set norm while pushing 'outliers' into situations which makes them even more vulnerable to authority. The structure of authority is immanently cyclical for these 'outliers'. By preaching the belief that 'justice is blind' and viewing all individuals as the same without considering their background, we don't realise how they 'fall' out of this structure. We must work to trace this pattern to its original root, from the first phase and aim to implement more diverse authority figures with more projects tackling the specific issues these parties face. By learning more about the diverse issues these groups experience, a collaborative, understanding relationship with authority can be developed. However, to deal with the later consequences, there should be more transparency in the judicial process, to act as at least 'harm reduction' of internalised bias. In closing, authority must view these groups not as statistical 'outliers' of the set norm, but rather as individuals.