

**Black-on –Black Bullying in  
Roy Williams’ *Fallout***

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## Abstract

Racism is a serious issue that impacts a lot of people around the world. Since slavery days, racial discrimination has been increasing to abhorrent levels in relation to black people. The aim of individual psychology by Alfred Adler is to study human behaviour by situating it in the social context which makes his writing ideal to explanation of racism. This paper aims to study racism in Roy Williams' *Fallout* from the perspective of Alfred Adler's theory.

Alfred Adler's individual psychology emphasizes the importance of social factors in shaping individual behavior, including the ways in which individuals form their sense of self and identity. This makes it a valuable framework for understanding the complex social and psychological factors that underpin racism. Through Adler's lens, one can examine how racist beliefs and behaviors are often rooted in feelings of inferiority or insecurity, as well as in broader social and cultural contexts that reinforce racial hierarchies and stereotypes.

Roy Williams' *Fallout* provides a compelling case study for applying Adler's theory to the issue of racism. Set in the aftermath of a racial controversy of child's murder, the play explores the complex interplay between individual psychology, social structures, and cultural norms that contribute to racism and perpetuate its harmful effects. By analyzing the characters' motivations, emotions, and behaviors through the lens of Adler's theory, one can gain a deeper understanding of the psychological and social dynamics that drive racism and perpetuate inequality. This study asks the question of what causes racism in social settings, is it something innate or aggravated inside people by outside forces?

This study also argues that the bullying of individuals on the basis of their sex or race remains an aspect of Fire Service culture and is perpetuated by some to ensure the continuation of the white male culture.

**Keywords:** racial discrimination, black-on-black racism, bullying, *Fallout*

## **1.1 Introduction**

Roy Williams wrote *Fallout* in 2003 and was staged on the Royal court in the same year. Its original production was directed by Ian Rickson. This play was inspired by real-life murder of a British Black Nigerian boy, Damilola Taylor, at the hands of young Black boys in Peckham. The murder and the collapse of the trial without giving the killers proper punishment sparked Roy Williams' mind to write this play. The play belongs to a type of contemporary plays that relate to real-life incidents in which Black or Asian males are killed by the police or the government, or in which the investigations into such murders are corrupted (Goddard, 2018, p.72). Damilola Taylor, a 10-year-old teenage boy, gets stabbed in his leg and gets abandoned to die on a staircase in South London. The conviction of brothers Danny and Ricky Freddie for homicide require six years and three trials. They are 12 and 13 years old at the time they stabbed him. According to police, the inquiry is impeded by the Peckham society's wall of silence and a lack of prior experience coping with minors in gangs (Christodoulou, 2022).

*Fallout* investigates racial bullying and criminal activity on South London's streets. The actual area of performance has been flipped on its head. Ultz built a stage that resembles a wire-mesh basketball space over of the Royal Court seating. This becomes the scene of a police investigation into Kwame's death. The play begins with a group of Black youth kill who

Kwame, a schoolboy, by kicking him to death. The murder gets done by gang boss Dwayne and his associates Perry, Clinton, and Emile who also gave Kwame the final kicks in the skull. His ex-classmates, who hate him for being African and successful, wander around the estate periodically committing violent crimes after they are dismissed from school. Police officers who are looking into the murder face their own problems. Joe, a Black estate officer, despises the celebration of gang culture. He rushes things by becoming overly attached to the murdered child. While Matt, a white man, is greatly inspired by the antiracial movement in Britain, is willing to go cautiously. Even though Kwame gets killed by more than one boy, every piece of information points to a boy named Emile who goes out with a group of neighbourhood gangsters.

Bullying behaviour has always been part of the human condition. On a global level we have witnessed fairly overt domination even recently. Its visibility level is not so obvious in current workplace practices but its existence is in no doubt. More subtle, less detectable actions and behaviours are employed by the bully and the emergence of e-mail's flame mail and spamming techniques in the workplace demonstrate this point. Bullying in the workplace is psychological violence (Crawford , N " Conundrums and Confusion in Organisations . The Etymology of the World Bully". *International Journal of Manpower*).

Psychoanalysis is a large discipline with a long history, and it is often believed that psychoanalysis offers the most complete perspective to understand human thinking and behaviour. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, is not a single approach: Under the greater umbrella of "psychoanalysis," exists several intellectual and cognitive aspects, just as there are in other fields of knowledge. Furthermore, psychoanalytic approach has undergone significant changes throughout time, and have

developed into various theories and methods that all have been originated in the work of Sigmund Freud (Luyten et al., 2015, pp. 5-6).

Alfred Adler was an Austrian psychiatrist who coined the term “Individual Psychology” to describe his philosophy. He was the original chairman of the Vienna Psychoanalytical Society, and therefore a member of Freud’s close circle. Adler sees that humans are motivated by emotions of inadequacy as children, rather than sexual and violent desires, and that individuals should be examined as a whole. Adler’s notions are influenced by Freud but they focus not only on the individual’s inner-self, but also on their interaction and the wider environment in which she has lived (Maniacci, 2003, p. 3).

Basic Adlerian notions concentrate on man’s profound sentiments of inadequacy and the numerous tactics he uses to cope with the nagging sense of self-doubt. These notions have broad consequences for understanding racial dynamics. Adler’s thoughts show that man’s heartlessness to man displays itself as a reaction to his own inferiority and need of prejudice. Adler addresses these difficulties by saying:

Those who have travelled have found that people everywhere are approximately the same in that they are always inclined to find something by ‘which to degrade others. Everyone seeks a means which permits him to elevate himself at little cost. The Frenchman considers the German inferior, ‘whereas the German, in turn, considers himself as belonging to a chosen nation; the Chinaman disdains the Japanese ... Until mankind consents to take a step forward in its degree of civilization, these hostile trends [prejudices] must be considered not as

specific manifestations, but as the expression of a general and erroneous human attitude. (1997, p. 452)

Adler's study and its relationship to social motivation was a pioneer in what is now known as a social-science orientation. His followers think that once an individual understands the desire to overcome inferiority and acquire excellence, the social element of that person's experience is the most crucial factor in sustaining such growth. Social integration and the feeling of stability and security that comes from being a member of a bigger entity are highly valued in collectivist societies. One might begin to understand a person's whole personality by evaluating his/her attitudes and viewpoints toward others (Aslinia et al., 2011, p. 6).

Thus, to discuss racism in relation to Adler's theoretical work is to focus on the social factor that promotes racism or diminishes it. It is indeed vital to highlight that socialisation is similar to every other psychological activity occurring within a person's mind, and it is among the most essential things. This social motivation allows the person to aim towards superiority or excellence. In some ways, collectivist civilisations see this as a quest for virtue.

## 1.2. Literature Review

Racism in British drama and theatre has been discussed academically in number of pieces. Among the recent thesis on this issue is "Theatre, Performance and Representation: African Diasporic Identity on the British Stage" by Rachel Ekumah-Asamoah (2015). This thesis concentrates on the presentation of African diasporic personalities through a distinct theatre that has emerged from the later generations of African

immigrants and non-European people in Britain. This inquiry focuses on the geopolitics, sociology, language, and portrayal of these identities on the British theatre. However, the thesis also extends well beyond the performance to remark on British society. The thesis argues that theatre and performance are suitable tools for investigating the concept of African diasporic identity since they remain an important element of any country's intellectual debate about who and what they are.

Another thesis that discussed the issue of racism in Britain is “A Home You Can't Live in: Performances of The Black Body and Domestic Space in Contemporary Drama” by Leslie Jewell Gray (2015). This thesis tackles the Black household and identity in modern American and British drama through the writing of some prolific Black dramatists. The researcher focuses on the plays *The Blood* by Suzan-Lori Parks, *The Mountain Top* by Katori Hall, and *Chef* by Sabrina Mahfouz as settings of recollection, love, and trauma where what is termed “home” defies the protection of solid walls and a strong fence. Instead, the authors show that home surpasses the tangible. Parks, Hall, and Mahfouz all reflect on what it implies for Black women to live in dangerous environments, places they would not want to live in.

There are articles and researches on Roy Williams accessing the multiculturalism in his plays, such as the article “Roy Williams: Representing Multicultural Britain in *Fallout*” by Harry Derbyshire (2007). This article examines how Williams' 2003 play, depicts a Black-on-Black murder and the ensuing botched police investigation, reflects modern British culture, particularly in respect to the contentious issue of multiculturalism. *Fallout* has been seen as limiting and dismal by others, confirming prejudices about Black life and culture. This article, on the other hand, explains how the play, by examining both a divided police

force and the social tensions that drive Black teenagers to violence, brings awareness to the fundamental structural causes of local violence and contributes to current public discussion of racism in Britain.

Williams' touch on multiculturalism is also discussed in "The Question of Multiculturalism: The Plays of Roy" by D. Keith Peacock in the book, *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama*, edited by Mary Lukhsurt (2008). In this book, Peacock refers to the social aspect in Williams's work. Williams reflects on the British Multicultural experience from the eyes of the Black people, whose life in Britain cannot be compared to the white race. Thus, Williams shows that Discrimination is a plague that is eating the British Nation from the inside and it cannot end without some actual measures.

### 1.3. The Spark of Racial Bullying

The play is less a murder mystery and more a revealing of personalities because the viewer knows who is the real killer from the very beginning. The drama focuses on the cops Matt (White) and Joe (Black) and their joint police interrogation. According to Adler (1926), individual psychology views and studies the person as socially integrated even if the individual might be seen as separate from his or her social setting. He states, "we refuse to recognize and examine an isolated human being" (Adler qtd. in Aslinia, Rasheed & Simpson, 2011, pp. 4-5). The use of Individual (Adlerian) Psychology for addressing people is based on the idea that each individual should be understood in the context of their social setting.

Williams presents the audience to a subculture that has split out of white British community. Black teenagers in the play use a mixture of slang words with Jamaican and African American accents while speaking



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which reflects their identification with the wider African American culture and its stereotypes. There is an emphasis on “the racist idea that African-Americans are closer to animals and therefore act on instinct” (Muhie, 2020, p. 17). Thus, the gang boys in the play see Joe as a Black guy that surrendered himself into the enslavement of white authority (Rebellato, 2013, p. 155). Emile addresses Joe as a white man because he does not identify with the Black stereotype, she says: “Mr White Man over deh. Yu like my friend, Mr White Man? Yu want ask him out, get his number?” (Williams, 2003). The focus on male characters as violent and aggressive is clear given that these characters are going through one of the roughest time periods which is teenage (Al-Qraghuli et al., 2018, p. 2481).

According to Adler, a person’s views of himself or herself, the society around them, and how they interpret the world are all significant parts of life style and have an impact on every psychological mechanism within the person (Aslinia, Rasheed & Simpson 4-5). Joe is also raised on the estate but then moves away, so that he is likewise uprooted. Joe becomes hostile toward the gang because he believes the police are being treated unfairly in the wake of the Macpherson ruling. (Rebellato, 2013, p. 156).

*Fallout* provides a realistic portrait of a group of Black teenagers who are totally cut off from mainstream culture. The action starts with the violent killing of an intelligent young African teenager, Kwame, then a complicated picture of Black adolescent culture develops, with men competing for power and respect. The play opens with the boys kicking Kwame to death:

*Enter* CLINTON, DWAYNE, EMILE, *and* PERRY.

CLINTON. Kick him in the head, kick him!

DWAYNE. Yes!

PERRY. My bwoi.

CLINTON. Kick him.

DWAYNE. Tek off him glasses and chuck dem.

CLINTON. Chuck dem now, man.

EMILE. Pass me de phone, yu [... ]!

...

EMILE. Trainers too.

...

DWAYNE. Bus his head.

CLINTON. Bus him up.

EMILE. Trainers!

...

DWAYNE. Punch him.

CLINTON. Kick him.

PERRY. Bus him up.

EMILE. Yu see yu! (*Kicks continuously.*) (Williams, 2003).

Emile's need to demonstrate his strength is one of the reasons that motivates him to kill Kwame by kicking him to death. After all, "Childhood is a world that requires us to stand, contemplate, understand and study extensively" (Kadhim, 2022, p. 273). The organising element behind the easy back-and-forth banter and intensity of the youngsters' spicy vocabulary is masculine rivalry. These teenagers adore the ecstasy of drugs and the excitement of violence and crimes, in addition to the spectacular fabric of their own ethno-cultural bond (Sierz, 2011, p. 145). However, one might ask, why would they be in one group if they continue to compete with each other. Adler answers such a question by considering the human kinds as social beings, he states that:

When human beings are first born, they are weak, and their weakness makes it necessary for others to care for them. The pattern of children's lives cannot be understood without reference to the people who look after them and who compensate for their weakness. Children have interlocking relationships [...] which could never be understood if we confined our analysis to children as separate entities. Children's individuality is made up of more than their physical individuality. (Adler, 1997, pp. 19-20)

Thus, children's characters are strongly related to the type of group they live in because they consider themselves as needy beings that cannot survive alone. Adler comments on that saying that this phenomenon does not apply only on youths, it applies to all people in general. After all, it is the social needs that drive youths to live in a group, and the same needs drive people to live in communities (Adler, 1997, pp. 19-20). In this case, the gang serves as an alternate family for the youths. Williams wants to explain where from these young men are coming, and he does so by going beyond the stereotype of Black youths as thugs or murderers (Sierz, 2011, pp. 145-146).

*Fallout* introduces audience to complex individuals whose oppression is both created by deeper societal institutions and sustained or violated by their own deeds. Bullying has a negative impact on both the victim and the perpetrator, as well as the society in general (Hadi, 2021, p. 299). These characters play the role between victim and perpetrator. Thus, in order to establish and then question presumptions about Black gang

culture, Williams' play uses stereotypes in portraying the structure of the gang before questioning it. Additionally, Williams shows the gang members' agency and prejudice against a Black boy in order to take the attention away from the multiracial struggles that are used in the media, not to mention that he presents a character of mixed-race family, Perry, as part of the Black gang (Rebellato, 2013, p. 157).

The stereotype that one could anticipate in a Black gang is used to portray the group of young people under investigation. For instance, the two girls, Shanice and Ronnie are dismissed from school for robbery, both of them meet at Shanice's workplace; a lifeless fast-food restaurant. The gang boys earn their living through stealing. Another stereotype is the instance when Emile and Dwayne use weapons like knives and firearms to build their gang hierarchy. And ultimately, women are used as rewards in macho competitions (Rebellato, 2013, p.157). As Harry Derbyshire contends, the play highlights systemic injustices that lead to the young men's exclusion from society as a whole. Derbyshire also asserts that the aggressive subculture of the gang is founded on opposition to deeply rooted societal prejudice, based on his understanding of the work and the type of audience that received it at that time (Derbyshire, 2007, p. 420).

Applying the understanding of inferiority complexes to the gang, one can see that it is quite divided and has different struggles. First and foremost, there is the enmity amongst the killers: Dwayne, the head of the gang; Emile, who carries out the actual killing after being prodded by the others; Clinton, who is pursuing his BTEC; and Perry. Kwame is another dedicated individual who wants to be an architect. According to Shanice, Emile's girlfriend, Kwame "loved to show how smart he was, like deh is

two kinds of black, and he come from the better one, he was havin a laugh. People weren't gonna tek dat" (Williams, 2003).

The gang also has its own internal allegiances and tensions; in particular, Emile and Dwayne are involved in an intensifying physical struggle for Shanice's affection, which leads to Dwayne insulting the much more vulnerable Emile. (Aragay and Monforte, 2013, p.107). By inflicting the deadly injuries on Kwame and later declaring, "I want respect, I want it now, bredren," Emile thinks that he must establish himself in front of the others (Williams, 2003). The two young Black females, Shanice and Ronnie, are juxtaposed and are placed at the heart of the gang's competition. Both are expelled from school, but once again, there are significant differences between them. The much more complicated, aggressive, carelessly speaking Ronnie is the one who gets them kicked out by stealing from someone's pocket, while the brighter Shanice is apprehended. These children's future chances are predetermined by the lack of parental and social positive models, the dysfunctional school organisation, and the extreme poverty in the estate (Rebellato, 2013, p.156). In these cases the best strategy is that the parents must teach their children and plant in them the seeds of love, respect and confidence (Hatem and Baqir, 2022, p. 590).

#### **1.4. Dysfunction of Family and Institutions**

There is also the conflict between Dwayne, who is terribly humiliated and enraged, and Manny, the elder incarnation of Black manhood, and between Dwayne's self-esteem and his own father, who is not present in his son's life (Aragay and Monforte, 2013, p. 108). As Dwayne admits, Dwayn's father is so alcoholic that he is unable to distinguish between his offspring from various women: "Yer so drunk, yu

don't even know which yout of yours yer chattin to. Wass my name? Say my name before I buss yer clart all over dis street” (Williams, 2003).

Williams contextualizes the teenagers' criminality, and shows their crimes as the result of both their own adherence to gang culture and the white pressures on their lives. His main goal is not to justify their actions as some sort of resistance to oppression, but rather as a response to their own choosing of street lives and criminal fellows, and the social neglect to their lives and poor neighbourhood (Rebellato, 2013, p. 157). Hence, the prevalence of workplace bullying could be explained via cultural variables under a variety of circumstances, and as such, they frequently correlate with substantial amounts of bullying from individuals in a position of authority (Archer, 1999, p. 96). Furthermore, where there's a high amount of stress in a company, certain categories of staff members are going to find themselves at point of breakdown, boosting the risk of bullying developing. A larger percentage of staff members at lower rungs within the company's hierarchy, where coworker friction is more likely, could be responsible for a portion of the variance (Hoel, 2010, p.459). For instance, Kwame's murder casts doubt on the idea that Black gang culture can be completely attributed as a result of racial bullying, and more of looking down on one's own group that is degraded and showed negatively in the media. As Shanice says “like deh is two kinds of black, and he come from the better one” (Williams, 2003).

Killing Kwame, perhaps, makes the gap inside the young men disappear. They are the lower “type of black” in their own eyes that are murdering the “better type”. According to the individual psychology, crimes are natural result of the type of life these boys had. Adler invites readers to think about how crimes are carried out. Criminals consistently perceive their acts as both brilliant and courageous if one asks them about

their actions. The feelings of intelligence, awareness, and heroism drive them strongly while taking someone’s life. They feel they have accomplished their superiority aim, namely, that they are smarter than the police and can outwit others. They believe themselves to be heroes as a result and do not see that their behaviours point to something else, something much different from heroic. They are unaware that their lack of social interest, which renders all of their behaviour damaging or socially ineffective, is linked to fear and a lack of bravery and feeling of low self-esteem:

Those who turn to the useless side of life are often afraid of failure, darkness and isolation; they wish to be with others. This is cowardice and should be labelled as such. Indeed, the best way to stop crime would be to convince everybody that crime is nothing but an expression of cowardice. (Adler, 1997, pp. 12-13)

Williams’ depiction of the young people in *Fallout* and, for the most part, their seeming indifference to the killing they have perpetrated provides a difficulty to a liberal audience educated about the social factors that form the basis of this dysfunction. In inventing Black-on-Black crime, the portrayal of conflict does not need one of authority-infused youngsters aimlessly wandering in inner cities, but rather a portrayal of serious pain, despair, and deprived teenagers in socially formed environments. Williams’ play aims to replace the misconceptions about the Black-on-Black aggression as something far more complicated than an action done by cold blood gangsters (Rebellato, 2013, p. 158).

Thus, the significance of contextualizing the Black-on-Black crimes and racial bullying invites people to understand their perpetuation as an outcome of something that audience themselves do, and can stop by ending the discrimination in their society. It is significant to note that the individual's shortcomings are the responsibility of the society as well as the individuals themselves, that is guiding the human beings should be done by the larger society around because those bullying others they mostly lack something in their life (Al-dhuhoori and Yaiche, 2022, p. 315). Williams' teenagers are volatile, their preoccupation with physical desire and status provides some comic moments, but also horrifying ones. When Shanice refuses Dwayne's advances, he responds, "hope they rape yu up bad" (Williams, 2003). Williams handling of the characters challenges the audience to re-think their perceptions. The girls mug the teacher who expelled them, but does her refusal to tolerate disruptive pupils mean she is responsible for what happens to them? (Gray and Dorney, 2013, p.194). That is something which is left to the viewers to decide if they drop their prejudiced stereotypes of Black people or not.

The first motive for the murder seems to be to deprive the poor Kwame of his shoes and phone rather than to really kill him. However, the uncontrolled ferocity of the onslaught also shows that there is no hesitation in taking lives. Dwayne, Clinton, and Perry shout "Gwan, Emile!". It is apparent that Emile is under pressure to do the damage he does by using the phrases "Tell him, Emile!" and "Bus his head" (Williams, 2003). The audience's perception of this is deepened by what they discover later about the conflicts between the lads (Derbyshire, 2007, p. 424). As Emile tells Dwayne, "I want respect... I did wat yu all wanted," he feels underappreciated and insecure and thinks that his involvement in the crime justifies a rise in status (Williams, 2003). When it is discovered that



Shanice has informed Emile, who is already envious of Dwayne's efforts, that Kwame has also made a move on her, a second reason for the crime becomes clear.

The play ends with Shanice and Dwayne having a football game like the one they played as children seven years before. This recreation of their childhood symbolises a fresh start through a return to innocence. It is unlikely that their lot will change dramatically, nevertheless it underlines their desire to start anew and marks a moment of self-intervention. The social oppression experienced by the gang, the killing of Kwame and the accent on the characters' own decision-making all combine to present a gang of youths that are at once oppressors and products of their own oppression (Rebellato, 2013, p.158). This fact disallows any comfortable categorisation of good/bad and victim/perpetrator. The ending line of the play is articulated with humour as Shanice says to Dwayne that both of them can go out but 'Yu ain't grindin me' (Williams, 2003).

This play, which is inspired by the aggressive and untimely death of Black man in today's Britain, serves as memorials for Black lives (Goddard, 2018, p.73). However, the play's message can be understood as speaking to both the present and the past at once. The play calls to shed light on social systems and organisations as well as ethnic distinctions that are not simply inherent in certain social groupings but also made a significant influence in its original setting (Derbyshire, 2007, p. 415). Another message that Roy Williams' has tackled is the bullying that the students are facing at school and how it affects on their personalities and behaviours. In their article " The Culture of Bullying in Middle Schools", J.D. Unnever and D.G. Cornell comment:

Research related to gender differences in middle school students indicated that boys reported participating in higher rates of bullying behavior than girls. Boys also tend to be more physically aggressive and the victims of physical aggression more often than girls. Girls tend to be more indirectly or relationally aggressive than boys and victims of relational bullying more often than boys (Unnever, 2002, P. 8).

## Conclusion

*Fallout* is distinguished as a play about the most complicated forms of racial bullying, which is the type that happens among people from one race. The incident of killing a black child at the hands of his school peers traumatized the public opinion when it came out. However, when Williams adapted the story into his work he showed the wider context that exposes its true hidden motives. Black people are thought of as bullies and uneducated barbarians from a young age that such stereotype becomes part of who they are. The story shows the murderous gang to belong to fatherless families and very poor households with a lot of reasons that encourage them to become dangerous and brutal. Williams defies the black masculine stereotypes and shows that it is a natural result for the neglect experienced by black youth. The play encompasses a wide variety of issues that are relevant to black communities in particular. The class and race differences tend to be magnified around these boys. Their struggle is a direct reflection of their parents' life and conduct. Similarly, their failure and suffering reflect the social condition that leads them to such ending.

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