Is race a ‘salient.. .’ or ‘dominant identity’ in the early 21st century: The evidence of UK survey data on respondents’ sense of who they are Peter J. Aspinall a,⇑, Miri Song b

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a r t i c l e i n f o

Article history:

Received 20 April 2010

Revised 29 October 2012

Accepted 29 October 2012

Available online 7 November 2012

Keywords: Master status Salient identity Race

Ethnicity Surveys Mixed race

a b s t r a c t

The term ‘master status’, coined by Everett Hughes in 1945 with special reference to race, was conceptualised as one which, in most social situations, will dominate all others. Since then race and other collective social identities have become key features of people’s lives, shaping their ‘life scripts’. But is race still a ‘master’ or ‘dominant identity’ and, if not, what has replaced it? Analyses of recent social surveys show that race has lost its position to family, religion (in the South Asian and Black groups) and (amongst young mixed race peo- ple) also age/life-stage and study/work. However, many of these different identity attri- butes are consistently selected, suggesting the possibility – conﬁrmed in in-depth interviews – that they may work through each other via intersectionality. In Britain race appears to have been undermined by the rise of ‘Muslim’ identity, the increasing impor- tance of ‘mixed race’, and the fragmentation of identity now increasingly interwoven with

other attributes like religion.

1. Introduction

It is now commonplace to talk of collective social identities such as race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, gender, sexuality, and age/life-stage (Appiah, 2005; Woodward, 2004; Cornell and Hartmann, 1998). They are seen as key features of people’s lives, things that shape their sense of who they are and their projects or ‘life scripts’. Many of these identities fall into the category of what Ian Hacking calls ‘kinds of people’ (Hacking, 1986), brought into being by our invention of categories for them. We meet them again in the vocabulary of equality governance (Aspinall and Mitton, 2008). British Government White papers refer to ‘protected groups’: ‘groups of people.. .who are protected by discrimination legislation in respect of less favourable treatment based on particular characteristics or personal circumstances’. The so-called ‘six strands’ now encom- pass gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion, and age.

These social identities, however, have a more complex origin in the disciplines of the social sciences in the mid-twentieth century. It was American sociologist Everett C. Hughes (1897–1983) who coined the term ‘master status’ in the 1940s (Hughes, 1945), with special reference to race, and ‘Race Relations and the Sociological Imagination’ was the subject of his address as 53rd president of the American Sociological Association. In the 1950s the idea of status positions rose to prom- inence in the ﬁeld of social psychology in the work of Gouldner (1954) and Erikson (1959), with ‘master statuses’ being clas- siﬁed as either ‘ascribed’ (such as sex or race) or ‘achieved’ (such as educational level or occupation).

Hughes’ inﬂuence in American sociology has been extensive. Goffman was taught by him at the University of Chicago and drew upon his intellectual ideas in Stigma (Goffman, 1968). Barth’s theorising in his Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (Barth,

1969) also has strong afﬁnities with Hughes’ work. The enduring inﬂuence of Hughes’ conceptualisation of ‘master status’ has shaped much work on social status over the last half century or so. Becker’s (1963, pp. 31–39) work on the sociology of deviance, for example, uses Hughes’ term ‘master status’ as one to which most other identities are subordinate. Other can- didates advanced as ‘master statuses’ (and frequently citing Hughes’ original conceptualisation) include religion (Bartkowski,

2004), AIDS/HIV (Haas and Dur, 1992), overweight (Hiller, 1982), gang membership (Miethe and McCorkle, 1997; Brownﬁeld et al., 2001), giftedness (in school) (Bryant, 1990), infertility (Bryant, 1990), homelessness (LaGory et al., 2005; snow and Anderson, 1993), and refugee status (Hein, 1993).

The ‘master status’ of an individual was deﬁned as one which, in most or all social situations, will overpower or dominate all other statuses. According to one recent sociological text, ‘occupation, race and sex may all function as master statuses in Western societies, and can produce powerful contradictions and social dilemmas when important status positions contradict perceived roles and stereotypes’, the examples being cited of the female astronaut or the African-American surgeon (Anon,

2005, p. 394). In these conﬂicting situations, social actors must make status decisions, which may take the form of denial (the astronaut labelled ‘unnatural’ or the physician as ‘exceptional’); or responses may take the form of exclusion, or the accep- tance of a new master status.

The position of a master status has always been seen as important as it inﬂuences every other aspect of life, including personal identity and everyday practices and experiences. In fact, many collective identities (some of which comprise ‘dom- inant identities’) matter because while some degree of individual latitude concerning one’s identity and lifestyle is possible, there are dominant modes of behaviour which are prescribed either implicitly or explicitly by particular groups, and pres- sures to adhere to ‘normal’ behaviour (whatever this may be) may be quite signiﬁcant – especially in relation to racialised scripts of behaviour (Song, 2003, p. 48). Expectations concerning dominant modes of behaviour are linked also with groups’ understandings of ethnic and racial authenticity (Taylor, 1994). But not only are collective identities contested, the inﬂuence of traditional master statuses, such as race, are subject to change, especially in contemporary periods of signiﬁcant demo- graphic change and diversiﬁcation, such as found in Britain today (see Vertovec, 2007).

Race clearly continues to have social signiﬁcance, exercising a major effect on a person’s life-chances and exposure to structural processes of discrimination and disadvantage. How people individually endorse race as an identity strand is likely to take account of such patterns, given the essentially social nature of the self. However, its inﬂuence may be mediated by other factors, including people’s ability to exercise agency and the salience of other identity strands. The attention accorded to race in identity construction, therefore, provides a somewhat different perspective to that of the observer seeking to mea- sure the social signiﬁcance of race and its centrality as a determining factor in shaping social advantage and disadvantage. While this analytical distinction can be made, the ‘external’ and ‘internal’ moments in identity construction are clearly mutu- ally entailed.

2. Salient and dominant identities

The growing interest in the last few decades in social identities has resulted in a shift in focus from external status mea- sures of race/ethnicity to self-ascriptions. While government surveys eschew measures of socially-perceived race that might provide a point of access to Hughes’ conceptualisation of ‘master statuses’, several capture data on the most important or

‘dominant identities’ (the term ‘dominant.. .’ rather than ‘master identities’ was chosen to avoid elision between the two concepts, one being an externally attributed status, the other a freely determined identity). However, social identities still embody much of what Hughes would term status positioning.

Recognition by others is crucial to such identities, that is, identiﬁcation as, say, an African-American or as straight or as a woman (Nagel, 1994). The theoretical literature on this topic frequently invokes the concept of ‘agent autonomy’ or simply

‘agency’, the possession of which enables the subject to conceive and pursue projects, plans, and values. Some writers sep- arately distinguish ‘personal autonomy’, that is, the ability to actively choose the values and projects one wishes to pursue, a process of ‘reﬂective self-direction’. Clearly, to exercise ‘options’ requires an awareness of one’s options and also that, in choosing, the knowledge that one is charting a course. This core idea connects to debates about structure and agency: yet there has, in the ﬁrst place, to be an availability of options and the possibility that such options can be validated by others (Waters, 1990; Song, 2003). Our choices are both constrained and constituted by social practices. As Charles Taylor puts it, a self only exists and an identity only emerges within ‘webs of interlocution’ (Taylor, 1994, p. 36, 39), that is, our actions be- long to the practices that shape them and endow them with meaning. Sociologist Margaret Somers (1994) calls such prac- tices ‘public narratives’. Thus, the options available may, in themselves, be the product of institutions and practices external to the self. In recognition of these external forces, Elster (1993) refers to the process of choice-making as ‘adaptive preference formation’.

It is usual, therefore, for sociologists to talk of the mutually constitutive character of agency and structure and the recur- sive nature of their interactions. Appiah (2005, p. 107) frames the issue thus: ‘.. .we make up selves from a toolkit of options made available by our culture and society. We do make choices, but we don’t, individually, determine the options which we choose. To neglect this fact is to ignore Taylor’s ‘webs of interlocution’, to fail to recognise the dialogical construction of the self, and thus to commit what Taylor calls the ‘monological’ fallacy’’. While in the context of race both ‘master status’ and

‘dominant identity’ are interactional in their construction, in the case of ‘dominant identity’ processes of group identiﬁcation and social categorisation are mutually implicated in each other. In that of race as a ‘master status’, it is the ‘external moment

of identiﬁcation’ (Jenkins, 1996) that is important, that is, how other people see us, public image rather than self-image (Song and Aspinall, 2012). In using a conceptualisation of ‘dominant identity’ rather than ‘master status’, the structural aspects of status may be moderated (but not inevitably so) by the interactional world of identity.

What we endeavour to do in this paper is to explore the outcomes of this process of choice-making across various identity dimensions for different racial/ethnic groups, including ‘mixed race’ people, and how it is constrained and enabled within these broader social practices. The difference in approach is one of emphasis. While Hughes saw ‘master statuses’ as social labels and not personal choice, the consequence of which was that the individual has little control over his or her master status in any given social interaction, our social identities continue to be primarily constituted by social practices rather than the bearers of those identities. However, the fact that we choose from this toolkit of options (Swidler, 1986) – that the labels are self-assigned – makes the use of the term ‘dominant identities’ a better concept.

Another theoretical strand that informs our study is that of ‘intersectionality’. The main contribution of intersectionality theory has been to challenge the presumption that race/ethnicity, class, gender, nationality/national identity, sexuality, and others exist as discrete and independent identity strands and analytical categories (Collins, 1990; Hall and du Gay, 1996). Intersectionality focuses on the simultaneous and interacting effects of these categories of difference and has been heralded as both ‘a research paradigm’ (Hancock, 2007) and a new ‘buzzword’ (Banton, 2008; Davis, 2008). Whatever the view of crit- ics, intersectionality theory and arguments have been operationalised in many different contexts and have been especially inﬂuential in ﬁelds such as feminist scholarship, which has, for instance, delineated the multiple layerings and combinations of gender, ethnicity, class, and nationality (Collins, 1990; Ali, 2003; Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992), human rights in the UK and internationally (in terms of the interaction of the various recognised equality strands), and in the ﬁeld of social justice and critical legal studies (Davies, 2007). The relevance of intersectionality here is that it challenges the singular status of any given status dimension, such as race, gender, or socio-economic position.

Given the importance of collective social identities in our lives and their substantial capacity to shape our projects, they have become the focus of interest amongst researchers and policymakers. Again reviving a concept that was ﬁrst used in the USA in the last century (Hanifan, 1916), surveys exploring the concept of social capital have shown an interest in these broad ascriptive labels. Similarly, investigations of social cohesion have seen these labels as powerful and constitutive of the way we see ourselves. These policy interests have articulated the concept of salient and dominant identities in a fairly consistent way. They have been taken up, too, in surveys of the minority ethnic group population which have focused on identity. In addition, there is now growing policy interest by bodies such as Britain’s Equality and Human Rights Commission in how these various ascribed identities interact and contribute to multiple forms of disadvantage. Indeed, this public policy focus provides our study with one of its main points of access to empirical data.

Rather than attempt to analyse all identity strands, we place emphasis upon race/ethnicity, both as an identity strand and as a key demographic characteristic of respondents. More than a half century after Hughes ﬁrst identiﬁed race as the ‘master status’, this paper will assess whether race still occupies this primary position in an era in which this dimension of identity has been challenged as never before. And if race is a less dominant identity, what other aspects of identiﬁcation have come to the fore?

3. Methods

The study draws on a number of survey instruments that have been developed to investigate social capital and social cohesion in the UK and (to a lesser extent) USA. All the UK surveys use similar terminology to categorise the ethnicity of their samples, based on that used in the 1991 Census and expanded in the 2001 Census. This lexicon is locally-grounded and acceptable to the various communities. For example, in the 1991 Census, around 60,000 who selected the ‘Black-Other’ open response category wrote in ‘British’ (as opposed to 3000 who indicated a Caribbean island, ‘West Indies’, or ‘Guyanese’), resulting in the use of the overarching label ‘Black or Black British’ in 2001. Moreover, cognitive question testing for the

2011 Census found that many Afro-Caribbean respondents spontaneously described themselves as ‘‘Black’’.

Three UK and one US survey are used, the wording of the questions on identity, the dimensions used, and response op- tions being shown in Table 1. The Citizenship Survey is a survey of adults (aged 16 and over) in England and Wales carried out biennially since 2001. Each wave surveys 10,000 adults with an additional boost of 5000 people from minority ethnic groups. In addition, the authors’ Ethnic Options of ‘Mixed Race’ People in Britain survey (2006–2007) asks about identity in a sample of 326 young (aged 18–25) ‘mixed race’ persons in further/higher education. The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities (FNS), undertaken in 1994, contextualises the question and omits gender from the list of possibly important iden- tities. The key US survey is the 2006 Social Capital Community Survey designed by the University of Harvard’s Saguaro Sem- inar for Civic Engagement in America and also used in various regional studies. It does not ask about the most important identity dimension. There is substantial equivalence across most dimensions (but less so in the case of ‘national identity’/

‘being an American’) and ‘regional identity.’

Information is available on the response rates of the three British surveys. The 2007 Citizenship Survey comprised three samples, a core sample and ethnic minority boost samples obtained by direct screening of addresses in primary sampling units (PSUs) (grouped wards) in the higher-density ethnic strata and by focused enumeration (proxy screening) in PSUs in the medium-density ethnic stratum. The core sample response rate (total interviews achieved) for the in-scope addresses was 57%, a further 30% of the addresses being refusals. For the boost sample with focused enumeration screening, the

Table 1

Identity attributes in UK & US surveys. Source: Citizenship Survey, 2007.

UK: Ethnic Options of Mixed Race

People (17 dimensions)

UK: Citizenship Survey (13 dimensions)

UK: Fourth National Survey (12 dimensions)

USA Social Capital Community

Surveya,b (5 dimensions)

‘The kind of study or work you do or did’

‘Your occupation’ ‘Your job’ ‘Your occupation’

‘Your ethnic group or cultural background’

‘Your ethnic or racial background’

‘Whether you are white, Black, Asian, Chinese or mixed’

‘Your ethnic or racial background’

‘Your religion’ ‘Your religion’ ‘Your religion’ ‘Your religion (if any)’

– ‘Your national identity’ – ‘Being an American’

‘Your regional identity (Londoner, Geordie, etc.)’

‘Where you live’ – ‘Your place of residence’

– ‘Your interests’ – –

‘Your family’ ‘Your family’ – –

‘Your social class (working class, middle class, etc.)’

‘Your social class (working, middle)’

‘Your father’s job’ –

‘The country your family came from originally’

‘The country your family came from originally’

‘The country(s) your family came –

from originally’

‘Your gender’ ‘Your gender’ – –

‘Your age or life-stage’ ‘Your age and life stage’ ‘Your age’ –

‘Your level of income’ ‘Your level of income’ ‘Your level of income’ –

‘Your level of education’ ‘Your level of education’ ‘Your education’ –

‘Your political beliefs’ – – –

‘Your nationality’ – ‘Your nationality’ –

– – ‘Your height’ –

– – ‘The colour of your hair and eyes’

‘The colour of your skin’ – ‘The colour of your skin’ –

‘Any disability you may have’ – – –

‘Your sexuality/sexual orientation’ – – –

‘Something else (please write in)’ – – –

Ethnic Options of Mixed Race People in Britain, 2006–2007: Suppose you were describing yourself, which of the following things would say something important about you (tick all boxes that apply)? And which of the above would be the single most important and second most important thing that would say something important about you?; Citizenship Survey, 2007: We’d like to know how important various things are to your sense of who you are. Please think about each thing I mention, and tell me how important it is to your sense of who you are? Please choose your answer from the card. (Response options: Very important; Quite important; Not very important; Not at all important; Don’t Know). Which one of these would you say is the most important? (established through a process of derivation or further questioning); FNS, 1994: Now some questions about yourself. Suppose you were describing yourself on the phone to a new acquaintance of your own sex from a country you have never been to. Which of these would tell them something important about you.. . (Response options: Important – Yes; Important – No). And which of these would be the two most important things to say about yourself to this new acquaintance? Social Capital & Community Survey, 2006: We’d like to know how important various things are to your sense of who you are. When you think about yourself, how important is (DIMENSION) to your sense of who you are? (Response options: Very important, Moderately important, Slightly important, or Not at all important). The Citizenship & FNS surveys were accessed via the Economic & Social Data Service.

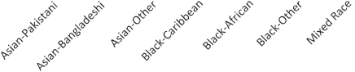
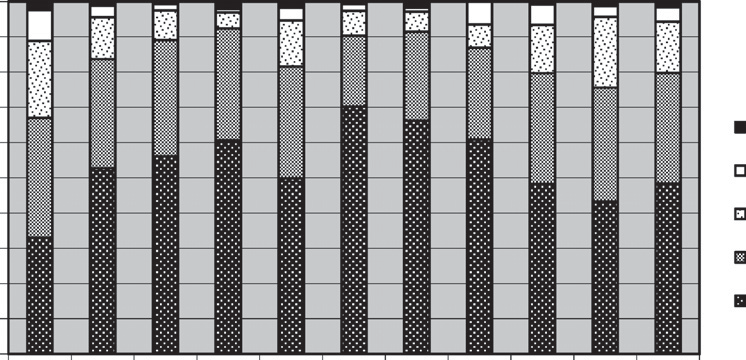
a Social Capital Community Survey, 2006, National Sample, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

b Staten Island Social Capital Community Benchmark Study, 2007, College of Staten Island/CUNY.



Fig. 1. Importance of ethnic or racial background to respondents’ sense of who they are, by 2001 census categorisation (11 groups). Source: 2007 Citizenship

Survey (accessed via ESDS Data Archive).



response rate for eligible addresses was 59% and refusals 23%. The response rate for eligible addresses in the direct sampling boost sample was 49% and 31% were refusals. The reported response rates – interviews achieved - for the FNS (amongst those who were approached for an interview) were 71% of White, 61% of Caribbean, 74% of Indian/African Asian, 73% of Pakistani,

83% of Bangladeshi, and 66% of Chinese respondents. In the case of the ‘mixed race’ survey, the questionnaire was hosted on the student websites of a stratiﬁed sample of higher/further education institutions, respondents being self-selected.

Analyses were undertaken of the salient and dominant identity dimensions by ethnicity/race subgroup. An attempt is then made to explore the degree of mutual implication or interaction between the different identity dimensions by: ﬁrstly, investigating how different social class groups prioritise ethnicity in the Citizenship Survey and, secondly, by exploring the potential for interaction by identifying which sets of dimensions most frequently cluster together in the ‘mixed race’ survey using cluster analysis techniques. In addition, in our research with young ‘mixed race’ adults, transcripts of 65 in-depth interviews are used to provide an enhanced understanding of why some identity categories are prioritised and the interac- tion between the different identity attributes. There is the potential to further explore these relationships through multivar- iate models, such as latent variable models, to assess whether individuals labelled with standard ethnic categories actually agree about the importance of different identity dimensions.

4. Results

Firstly, results are analysed for the UK national surveys and then for the mixed race sample.

4.1. National samples: Citizenship Survey

The 2007 Citizenship Survey contained ethnic group data for 14,038 respondents on the question assessing importance of ethnic/racial background to respondents’ sense of who they are. Besides the ‘Black-Other’ category, responses exceeded 160 for each of the 11 categories.1 Fig. 1 shows the level of importance respondents attached to this dimension.

On the measure of ‘very important’, ethnic/racial background had the greatest saliency in the three black groups: Black- Caribbeans (70.2%), followed by Black-Africans (66.3%), and Black-Other (60.9%). It was also considered very important by over half respondents in each of the main Asian categories. In all other categories a minority of respondents considered eth- nic/racial background to be very important, falling from 49.8% in Asian-Other and 48.2% in Mixed to 43.3% in Chinese and a third in White. When the ‘very’ and ‘quite important’ categories are combined, the rank-order changes little.

What, then, are the competing (‘very important’) salient identities? In the Citizenship Survey ‘family’ was selected by three-quarters or more of respondents in all the ethnic groups (Table 2). Religion was selected by a half or more of respon- dents in the four Asian groups and the Caribbean and African groups. National identity was selected by between two- and three-ﬁfths of respondents (with the exception of Chinese), country of family origin performing similarly to national identity. Gender, occupation, and level of education were also important. Level of income, age/life-stage, and where you live less so. Social class was chosen by around only a ﬁfth in most groups, having the highest saliency in some of the most disadvantaged (Africans and Bangladeshis). For most identity attributes saliency is lowest in the Chinese group.

One dominant identity emerges from the 2007 Citizenship Survey data, ‘your family’, the most frequently selected dimen- sion across all 16 census ethnic categories (Table 3). It was chosen by three-quarters of White British and Mixed White and Asian, and by two-thirds or more in the White Irish, Any other Black/Black British background, and Mixed White & Black Caribbean categories. If ‘dominant identities’ are deﬁned as those selected by at least 10% of group members, then only one other – religion – emerges, chosen by a third of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, around a ﬁfth of Black Africans and Mixed White and Black Africans, and fewer Indians and Black Caribbeans. The only other dimensions that came close to a ‘dominant identity’ were occupation amongst the Chinese (9.8%) and ethnic/racial background amongst Black Caribbeans (8.6%). Social class, gender, and where you live mattered the least.

4.2. Fourth National Survey

The data for the Fourth National Survey (FNS), predating the deﬁning events of ‘9/11’ and ‘7/7’ (the July 2005 London bombings), excludes ‘your family’ and ‘your gender’, the latter a major problem given its saliency. The omission of ‘your fam- ily’, dominant in other surveys, enables other identity categories to be prioritised. Ethnicity attributes scored highly. A major- ity in the different groups chose ‘White, black, Asian, etc.’ (range, 56–76%) as an attribute saying something important about them, the highest proportion being found in the Caribbean group – but with the Chinese almost as high at 74% (Table 4). A majority also chose ‘nationality’ (range, 63–81%), again the highest proportion in the Caribbean group. ‘Country your family came from’ was, again, selected by a majority of respondents (range 62–76%), especially Bangladeshis. Only a majority in the Asian groups selected ‘religion’. Skin colour was selected by 61% of Caribbeans but was of low importance (range, 15–37%) in other groups. Across all groups under a ﬁfth selected either level of income or father’s job.

1 Unweighted counts: White, 8538; Asian-Indian, 1367; Asian-Pakistani, 808; Asian-Bangladeshi, 290; Asian-Other, 283; Black-Caribbean, 806; Black- African, 813; Black-Other, 46; Mixed Race, 483; Chinese, 164; Other, 440; missing, 57. TOTAL, 14,095.

Occupation Ethnic or

Religion National Where Interests Family Social Country Gender Age & Level

Level of

racial background

identity

you live

class

origins

life- stage

of income

education

White British 39.5 32.8 19.9 47.6 30.4 41.7 87.9 16.3 40.0 46.1 29.0 29.1 32.4

White Irish 37.3 39.8 33.7 44.6 31.3 38.0 91.0 21.7 56.6 50.6 33.1 33.7 34.9

Any other White background

Mixed White & Black

Caribbean

Mixed White & Black

African

41.3 35.9 25.4 41.3 20.5 43.4 84.1 14.1 46.2 45.9 29.7 28.7 46.8

48.4 56.4 33.5 48.9 29.3 46.3 87.2 20.7 40.4 54.8 45.7 44.7 43.6

38.5 44.0 39.4 46.8 27.5 41.3 81.7 19.4 43.5 49.1 38.0 33.3 45.4

Mixed White & Asian 44.6 35.9 38.0 42.4 31.5 44.6 87.0 14.3 35.9 52.2 40.2 37.0 54.3

Any other Mixed background

Asian or Asian British

– Indian

Asian or Asian British

– Pakistani

Asian or Asian British

– Bangladeshi

Any other Asian/Asian

British background

Black or Black British

– Caribbean

44.7 48.9 36.2 44.7 30.9 55.3 87.2 19.1 45.7 47.9 38.3 39.4 46.8

52.4 52.7 56.7 52.7 33.2 33.8 87.9 24.4 45.3 49.2 36.5 39.4 52.1

38.0 56.1 77.2 52.1 29.8 29.2 88.4 20.3 43.6 50.7 33.9 34.3 48.3

48.6 60.7 81.4 58.6 39.0 38.3 88.3 26.6 52.1 55.9 46.2 44.1 49.3

52.7 49.8 50.9 46.3 29.7 39.2 86.9 23.0 45.2 47.7 39.2 46.6 57.2

47.0 70.2 51.2 55.0 32.5 47.5 88.1 24.3 56.7 61.3 42.8 43.0 48.4

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Black or Black British | 54.2 | 66.3 | 71.7 | 59.7 | 39.1 | 47.7 | 90.5 | 30.4 | 61.9 | 63.1 | 49.6 | 48.1 | 59.0 |
| – African |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Any other Black/Black  British background  Chinese | 41.3  44.5 | 60.9  43.3 | 47.8  14.6 | 41.3  34.1 | 26.1  12.8 | 43.5  25.6 | 80.4  74.4 | 17.4  14.0 | 58.7  34.1 | 58.7  36.6 | 41.3  23.8 | 37.0  22.6 | 54.3  39.0 |
| Any other ethnic group | 51.8 | 48.4 | 47.0 | 50.9 | 34.8 | 41.4 | 86.4 | 23.0 | 52.5 | 51.6 | 37.3 | 43.0 | 49.5 |
| All groups (unweighted | 43.1 | 42.5 | 35.2 | 49.4 | 31.1 | 40.7 | 87.7 | 19.2 | 44.1 | 49.1 | 33.3 | 33.8 | 40.1 |
| data) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

This survey asked for the ‘two most important’ attributes. Nationality was stressed but religion emerged as the ‘dominant identity’ amongst South Asians, though chosen by few Caribbeans and scarcely any Chinese. Skin colour was the third most important item for Caribbeans but inconsequential for other groups.

4.3. The young ‘mixed race’ population

In the ‘mixed race’ survey (Aspinall et al., 2008), the most salient identity attributes were kind of study/work, followed by age/life-stage, family, and (jointly) level of education and ethnic group/cultural background’ (Table 5). Gender was also se- lected by more than half of the respondents. Nationality, religion, and country of family origins were of lesser importance (selected by between a quarter and third of respondents). Regional identity was, surprisingly, more important (at 42%) than all of the latter. Social class was mentioned by under a quarter and political beliefs by even fewer. Under a ﬁfth of respon- dents selected skin colour and around only one in ten or fewer respondents level of income, disability, or sexuality/sexual orientation.

In this survey the most important (ﬁrst choice) attribute selected was, again, ‘family’, though less dominant than in the Citizenship Survey (Fig. 2). Over 10% of respondents also selected age/life-stage and kind of study/work. Ethnic group/ cultural background almost reached the ‘dominant identity’ threshold at 9.2%. Combining ﬁrst with second choices, this rank-order is broadly maintained, ethnic group/cultural background, level of education, regional identity, and gender now entering the 10% plus threshold as ﬁrst and second choices; however, around only 6% or fewer each selected income, political beliefs, family origins, nationality, skin colour, social class, disability, and sexuality. Thus, while ethnicity is a salient identity – one of several broad, ascriptive identities chosen by a majority of respondents – it did not emerge as a ‘dominant identity’.

A number of our ‘mixed race’ respondents, including those who reported (in the survey) that their parents’ race/ethnicity was important to them, revealed in their interviews that their mixedness was not particularly central to their sense of selves. For instance, Richard (19), who was Portuguese/Pakistani, indicated that he did not really identify with any ethnic or racial groups. When asked how his mixedness inﬂuenced his day to day life in multiethnic London, where he had grown up, Rich- ard replied: ‘I just don’t let it affect me.... I wouldn’t really say that it’s that much of a hindrance or help at all.. .It’s something that’s neutral, it has no bearing on my life really.’ Interestingly, he differentiates his being mixed race from his interest in his parents’ cultural backgrounds, though even the latter is quite limited. While Richard was fairly interested in Portuguese cul- ture, he reported that he did not speak the language, and that he mostly felt ‘British’ – a term of national belonging which he

Table 3

Dominant identities in the 2007 Citizenship Survey. Source: Citizenship Survey, 2007.

Occupation Ethnic or

Religion National Where Interests Family Social Country Gender Age & Level

Level of

racial background

identity

you live

class

origins

life- stage

of income

education

White British 3.0 0.9 3.2 5.0 1.2 3.5 75.4 0.3 1.4 1.0 1.7 1.5 2.0

White Irish 3.3 1.3 8.5 5.9 0.7 1.3 71.2 0.7 3.3 0.7 2.0 0.0 1.3

Any other White background

Mixed White and Black

Caribbean

Mixed White & Black

African

6.0 0.4 7.7 3.9 0.0 5.3 64.9 0.7 2.8 0.4 1.8 2.5 3.9

2.9 3.4 7.4 4.0 0.6 0.6 66.3 0.0 1.1 0.0 4.0 6.9 2.9

2.9 7.7 18.3 1.9 0.0 3.8 52.9 0.0 2.9 1.0 0.0 2.9 5.8

Mixed White & Asian 4.8 1.2 6.0 1.2 1.2 1.2 75.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 2.4 3.6 3.6

Any other mixed background

Asian or Asian British – Indian

Asian or Asian British – Pakistani

Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi

Any other Asian/Asian

British background

Black or Black British – Caribbean

Black or Black British – African

Any other Black/Black

British background

3.3 6.5 4.3 4.3 0.0 5.4 63.0 0.0 4.3 0.0 1.1 3.3 4.3

5.8 3.4 12.0 4.3 1.2 1.5 60.5 0.5 1.8 0.5 1.2 2.2 5.3

2.7 5.3 34.4 2.2 1.0 0.5 44.6 0.0 1.5 0.6 0.3 1.4 5.5

2.2 4.0 34.1 1.8 1.1 0.7 45.7 0.0 1.4 1.4 2.5 1.4 3.6

7.7 3.8 8.0 4.2 0.0 2.7 61.3 0.4 0.8 0.4 1.1 3.1 6.5

3.1 8.6 10.7 4.2 0.8 0.8 59.5 0.1 3.5 0.8 2.7 2.0 3.1

4.5 4.1 19.1 2.4 1.4 1.4 55.3 0.0 2.3 1.0 1.0 2.3 5.0

2.4 4.9 7.3 0.0 2.4 2.4 70.7 0.0 0.0 2.4 2.4 4.9 0.0

Chinese 9.8 5.6 2.1 4.9 0.0 1.4 62.9 0.0 0.7 0.7 2.1 2.1 7.7

Any other ethnic group 6.2 2.7 9.2 2.2 2.0 1.0 64.4 0.2 3.2 1.0 0.5 1.0 6.2

All groups (unweighted data)

3.7 2.5 8.7 4.3 1.1 2.6 67.8 0.3 1.7 0.9 1.6 1.8 3.2

Note: Dominant identities shown in bold (selected by 10% or more of group members).

Table 4

Things that say something important about respondent (percentages). Source: Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities (FNS).

Dimension Caribbean Indian African Asian Pakistani Bangladeshi Chinese

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| A. Nationality | 81 | 78 | 69 | 74 | 63 | 77 |
| B. White, Black, Asian, etc. | 76 | 68 | 60 | 56 | 64 | 74 |
| C. Country your family came from | 63 | 67 | 62 | 67 | 76 | 65 |
| D. Religion | 44 | 73 | 68 | 83 | 75 | 25 |
| E. Skin colour | 61 | 37 | 29 | 31 | 21 | 15 |
| F. Height | 31 | 30 | 26 | 26 | 26 | 13 |
| G. Colour of hair or eyes | 30 | 25 | 24 | 26 | 19 | 13 |
| H. Age | 61 | 57 | 50 | 65 | 57 | 50 |
| I. Job | 56 | 57 | 65 | 64 | 54 | 61 |
| J. Education | 47 | 49 | 60 | 57 | 53 | 54 |
| K. Level of income | 16 | 19 | 17 | 19 | 14 | 6 |
| L. Father’s job | 10 | 14 | 15 | 19 | 7 | 7 |
| Weighted Count | 765 | 606 | 290 | 397 | 141 | 183 |
| Unweighted count | 580 | 595 | 361 | 538 | 289 | 101 |

considered to be race neutral. Of course, Richard’s emphasis upon how little his mixedness shaped his sense of self or daily life must be understood within the context of his upbringing in a city as cosmopolitan as London – one’s mixedness was likely to be of much more prominence if one grew up in a remote White village in England.

Amelia (21), who was Burmese and English, grew up in a primarily White town northwest of London. In the survey, she had indicated that her parents’ and their ancestors’ race/ethnicity were wholly unimportant, and when queried about this in the interview, she responded: ‘It’s never really been discussed... it’s only maybe recently that stories of our ancestors have actually been mentioned. I mean it was never something that was considered important to be part of.’ Later in the interview, when Amelia was asked how central her mixed heritage was to her everyday life, she replied, ‘Not really at all to be honest. I mean, I kind of identify really with White anyway.. .just in the sort of interests I have, sort of culturally.’ Although most respondents reported that either one or both parents had made some attempt to introduce their cultural backgrounds into family life, Amelia’s

Things respondents select as saying something important about themselves (n = 326): percentages. Source: Ethnic options of mixed race people in Britain survey, 2006–2007.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Attribute selected | 1st Choice | 2nd Choice |
| A Your age or life-stage | 64.4 | 17.2 | 11.7 |
| B The kind of study or work you do or did | 72.4 | 14.1 | 11.0 |
| C Your level of education | 54.6 | 6.7 | 9.5 |
| D Your level of income | 11.7 | 0.9 | 0.9 |
| E Your political beliefs | 20.9 | 2.8 | 1.8 |
| F Your family | 63.5 | 21.2 | 12.9 |
| G Your ethnic group or cultural background | 54.6 | 9.2 | 12.3 |
| H The country your family came from originally | 30.4 | 0.6 | 2.8 |
| I Your regional identity (Londoner, Geordie, etc.) | 41.7 | 2.8 | 9.5 |
| J Your nationality | 34.0 | 0.9 | 4.9 |
| K Your religion | 23.6 | 4.9 | 4.6 |
| L The colour of your skin | 16.6 | 3.7 | 2.8 |
| M Your social class (working class, middle class, etc.) | 23.3 | 1.2 | 5.2 |
| N Your gender | 52.1 | 5.8 | 6.1 |
| O Any disability you may have | 4.9 | 0.6 | 0.0 |
| P Your sexuality/sexual orientation | 10.7 | 0.0 | 0.9 |
| Q Something else | 8.6a | 1.5b | 1.5 |

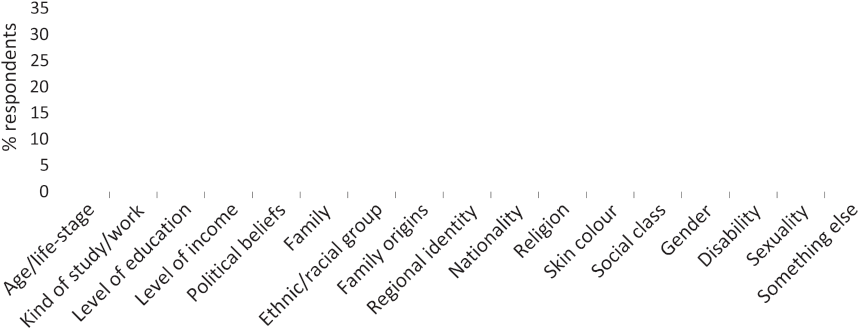
a Q responses (n = 28): ‘hobbies’/’interests’ (n = 4), ‘friends’ (n = 3), ‘beliefs & what they stand for’, ‘illness’, ‘ethnic outlook’, ‘what you do for fun, e.g. transport/going out’, ‘personality’, ‘musical taste’, ‘I am a whole person, none of these by themselves deﬁne me completely’, ‘music’, ‘my accent’, ‘my approach to life’, ‘my personality and who I am’, ‘relationship status with friends’, ‘the languages I speak’, ‘the relationships I have with family (mother) partner and friends’, ‘the university I went to’, ‘who am I as a person’, ‘Your spirituality (also where is language)’, ‘sports i.e. basketball’, ‘to know who I am in life, the days have gone where people’s backgrounds are judged, it’s not about colour of the skin but on the content of your character’, ‘none’, no details (n = 1).

b (n = 5) ‘Be free, before you’re consumed by the majority’; ‘I don’t think that any of the above are important when describing yourself things like hobbies

and interests say. You have little inﬂuence over the above points so they shouldn’t matter’; ‘Other’; 2nd choice, blank, n = 1, can’t decide, n = 1.



Fig. 2. The ﬁrst and second most important things. Source: Ethnic options of mixed race people in Britain survey, 2006–2007.



exposure to Burmese culture had been very limited, and instead she emphasized her identiﬁcation with mainstream White culture.

While some respondents emphasized the importance of either their mixedness or their parents’ cultural backgrounds, both Amelia and Richard were typical of the majority of our multiracial respondents, for whom being British (and being im- mersed in mainstream British culture) was a taken-for-granted common denominator of experience, and not one which they necessarily explicitly highlighted in terms of its relative importance, vis-à-vis other attributes. Of course, claims to being British, or belonging in Britain, however, were not always validated, and this applied to not only some part-Black respon- dents, but also some East Asian/White and Arab/White respondents, especially if they were considered to look ‘foreign’ or somehow physically indeterminate by others. Despite the fact that neither Richard nor Amelia were seen as White by others (based on their appearance), they played down the notion of racial difference, and claimed a strong sense of Britishness instead.

Interestingly, while ‘the colour of your skin’ was selected by just 17% of respondents, almost two-thirds – 63% – of these respondents were Black Caribbean/Black African/Other Black and White. In comparison with Richard and Amelia, above, part Black respondents were much more aware of how they were seen by others, as ‘Black’ (as opposed to mixed). For instance, Sarita (25), who had a Black African and White English parent, reported that while she considered herself to be both Black

and White, and thus ‘mixed race’, most people simply saw her as Black. Although her racial assignment as monoracially Black used to bother her a great deal, Sarita talked of the ways in which she now felt more secure and comfortable about who she was: ‘I am more relaxed about categorisation. I have a whole range of cultures that I identify with, some are racial, some social, and some are related to ethnicity but in some ways I feel labels are meaningless. I am proud of my heritage but it’s not entirely how I deﬁne myself or wish to be deﬁned.’

However, it is important to note that while some respondents did not indicate that ethnicity/race, or the colour of one’s skin, were attributes which were important in describing themselves, attributions of ‘race’ and of being ‘different’ could still be imposed upon them, and as such, these attributes could become central to their lived experiences. Chris (21), who was Saudi Arabian and White English, did not choose either ethnic and cultural background, or the colour of his skin, as qualities which said something important about him. If anything, he did not see himself as anything but British: ‘I think in this day and age it’s not really an issue. I do wish sometimes that I could erase it [his ethnicity] and be British, British, British.’ Yet because of his indeterminate appearance, Chris was often queried about his ethnic background. As such, he sometimes struggled with the knowledge that others could perceive him as ‘foreign’ – an image which totally diverged from his sense of self. Thus these interview excerpts were able to provide more detail concerning the ways in which ‘race’ and ethnicity might or might not be central to mixed young peoples’ sense of selves.

4.4. How identities in this population intersect and cluster

In the mixed race sample (Table 5) we saw how the different identity attributes listed attracted varying levels of support, age/life-stage, kind of study/work, level of education, family, ethnic group/cultural background, and gender being selected by over half of respondents. However, this does not tell us about the strength of associations between the attributes and the extent to which they may shape or modify each other through processes of intersection. Given the lack of direct survey evi- dence, intersectionality is investigated through two approaches: ﬁrstly, a speciﬁc relationship is examined, that between one of the identity dimensions (ethnicity/race) and the social class of the respondent, as coded in the dataset. Secondly, in the mixed race dataset, Jaccard Similarity Coefﬁcients were calculated for every pair of identity attributes to create a similarity matrix (Table 7) and to investigate clusters.

In the 2007 Citizenship Survey ethnic/racial background is examined in terms of the social class of respondents who indi- cated it was very important (Table 6). This data indicates that a person’s social class (whether manual or non-manual2) only made a statistically signiﬁcant difference to whether they identiﬁed ethnic/racial background as ‘very important’ in the three White groups and the Mixed White and Asian group (although it is possible that confounders and the social class measure might have inﬂuenced this outcome). In the other groups the odds ratios were modest and non-signiﬁcant. One could, therefore, hypothesise that there is only weak intersectionality between social class and ethnicity identity attributes amongst minority ethnic groups.

The Citizenship Survey provides just one direct measure of intersectionality: respondents who said that their national identity and religion were (very or quite) important to them were asked if they ever felt that there was a conﬂict between these (a question redolent of the literature on conﬂictual master statuses). Under 5% of respondents in the three White groups indicated that there was a conﬂict all or most of the time but 5–9% in the White and Asian, Chinese, Other Black, Black Caribbean, Indian, Other Asian, and Black African groups, and P10% in the Any Other (10.7%), Bangladeshi (12.3%), Pakistani (12.7%), White and Black Caribbean (13.1%), Other Mixed (13.7%), and White and Black African groups (16.4%). The high pro- portions in three of the mixed groups is notable.

To investigate intersectionality in the mixed race sample, a Jaccard Similarity Coefﬁcient matrix was constructed to show the strength of association between any two of the sixteen identity attributes. Ethnic group/cultural background has strong similarity in pairs with other high frequency attributes, notably, age/life stage, kind of study/work, level of education, family, and gender (Table 7). Unsurprisingly, a number of respondents in the in-depth interviews who attributed importance to eth- nic group/cultural background also chose family. Larry (19), who had an Iranian mother and English father, chose these two attributes as the two most important to him. In Larry’s case, his attachment to ‘family’ was primarily about his interest and attachment to his mother’s Iranian culture and extended family in Iran: ‘I mean obviously I go to Iran and I’m Muslim.. .I have a lot of contact with the Iranian side and that’s family for me. Like my mum’s family is my family really. I don’t know anyone on my father’s side.. .’ Thus, for Larry, ‘family’ and ‘ethnic group or cultural background’ were effectively intertwined, but applied only to one side of his family. An asymmetry in attachment and/or contact with each side of the family was not unusual among our respondents, although Larry’s case was more pronounced than in most cases.

Regional identity also has reasonably strong associations with age/life stage, kind of study/work, level of education, and ethnic group/cultural background. Country family came from, religion, and nationality all have the strongest association with ethnic group/cultural background. While skin colour was an infrequently selected attribute that has weak associations with most others, its strongest association is with social class, perhaps suggesting that those from lower social classes more strongly experience the burden associated with discrimination based on skin colour (see Herring et al., 2004; Rondilla and Spickard, 2007). Social class was most strongly associated with level of education.

2 Collapsed from the full 6 categories: see footnote to Table 6. While based on occupation, this measure is also indicative of other factors such as income, wealth, educational qualiﬁcations, and of a person’s life-course.

The effect of respondents’ social class on selection of the ethnic/racial background identity attribute as ‘very important. Source: 2007 Citizenship Survey.

Ethnic/racial background of respondent

Social Class Groupb ‘Ethnic/racial background’ as identity attribute

Manual vs. Non-Manual: Odds Ratio (OR) (95% Conﬁdence Interval)

N = non-manual

M = manual

‘Very important’ (n)

Not very importanta (n)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| White British | N | 1424 | 3046 | 1.21 (1.09–1.33)\* |
|  | M | 1058 | 1875 |  |
| White Irish | N | 31 | 62 | 2.00 (1.03–3.88)\* |
|  | M | 30 | 30 |  |
| Any other White background | N | 61 | 129 | 1.75 (1.07–2.85)\* |
|  | M | 48 | 58 |  |
| Mixed White & Black Caribbean | N | 41 | 36 | 1.25 (0.66–2.36) |
|  | M | 44 | 31 |  |
| Mixed White & Black African | N | 23 | 28 | 0.88 (0.36–2.15) |
|  | M | 13 | 18 |  |
| Mixed White & Asian | N | 15 | 39 | 3.47 (1.24–9.74)\* |
|  | M | 12 | 9 |  |
| Any other mixed background | N | 29 | 25 | 0.65 (0.26–1.61) |
|  | M | 12 | 16 |  |
| Asian/Asian British – Indian | N | 381 | 362 | 1.15 (0.90–1.47) |
|  | M | 215 | 178 |  |
| Asian/Asian British – Pakistani | N | 185 | 134 | 0.76 (0.52–1.10) |
|  | M | 89 | 85 |  |
| Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi | N | 65 | 32 | 0.63 (0.35–1.13) |
|  | M | 51 | 40 |  |
| Any other Asian/Asian British | N | 73 | 65 | 0.79 (0.47–1.36) |
| background | M | 41 | 46 |  |
| Black or Black British – Caribbean | N | 294 | 115 | 0.92 (0.66–1.26) |
|  | M | 227 | 97 |  |
| Black or Black British – African | N | 227 | 118 | 1.15 (0.81–1.62) |
|  | M | 172 | 78 |  |
| Any other Black/Black British | N | 15 | 13 | 1.30 (0.32–5.29) |
| background | M | 6 | 4 |  |
| Chinese | N | 45 | 48 | 0.75 (0.34–1.64) |
|  | M | 14 | 20 |  |
| Any other ethnic group | N | 87 | 101 | 1.33 (0.87–2.03) |
|  | M | 86 | 75 |  |

a The response categories for the ‘ethnic or racial background’ identity attribute were dichotomised into ‘very important’ and not very important

(encompassing ‘quite important’, ‘not very important’, & ‘not at all important’).

b The social class variable used was ‘Social Class (Old Scheme)’ [known as Registrar General’s Social Class Scheme] (variable 915): Response categories were dichotomised as Non-manual (I Professional etc. occupations; II Managerial & technical occupations; III(i) Skilled occupations N – non-manual) & Manual (III(ii) Skilled occupations M – manual; IV Partly skilled occupations; & V Unskilled occupations).

\* Statistically signiﬁcant difference for the OR (manual vs. non-manual).

Clearly, pairs with strong similarity can be regarded as potentially indicating intersectionality. However, we are not able to systematically assess whether there is intersectionality operating – in terms of ‘the co-constitution of identities’ (Grabham et al., 2009, p. 2) – and not just incidental co-selection in these pairs; if there is intersectionality, we don’t know how strong it is and what form it takes. The only evidence we have is in the in-depth interviews and questionnaire responses. Perhaps intersectionality is easier to assess where few respondents select the pairs as such ‘exceptionality’ may be more likely to be commented on.

Although there is some heterogeneity in the small number of social class/skin colour pairings, two examples gives a rep- resentative ﬂavour: Gloria who described herself as ‘White British, Black Jamaican’ prioritised ‘Black’ as the one racial/ethnic group that contributed most strongly to her identity ‘.. .because that is what the majority of society associate with my iden- tity from both white and black groups’. She went onto say: ‘I have often wanted to better myself compared to others in my urban area, by doing so means going to school/university which is highly dominated by white people.. .And by doing do I feel at times that I have lost my connection to my black culture. I act (theatre) so I have been taught to articulate my words (also taught by my mother) and sometimes black people think when I speak I can sound upper class which can upset me because I’m mixed race and am a typical mixed race woman with two cultural inﬂuences’. Her parents were qualiﬁed to secondary school level. Colin, who identiﬁed as ‘Black Caribbean and White (Black)’ said he so identiﬁed as ‘being mixed race with my background in society means I’m either black or half cast, but can’t be classed as white’. He, too, prioritised ‘Black’ on the grounds that: ‘.. .if I told a white person I was white they would be confused but if I said I was black then that’s ok’. His father was a vehicle mechanic with secondary school qualiﬁcations and his mother a nurse.

These pairings across the 16 identity attributes do cluster together (Fig. 3). A hierarchical clustering algorithm is used which groups data over a variety of scales by creating a cluster tree or dendogram. The tree is not a single set of clusters,

Table 7

Jaccard Similarity Coefﬁcient Matrix.a Source: Ethnic options of mixed race people in Britain survey, 2006–2007.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P |
| A | 0 | 0.59 | 0.49 | 0.12 | 0.21 | 0.48 | 0.48 | 0.27 | 0.43 | 0.32 | 0.23 | 0.16 | 0.24 | 0.53 | 0.04 | 0.12 |
| B | 0.59 | 0 | 0.52 | 0.11 | 0.20 | 0.52 | 0.46 | 0.27 | 0.42 | 0.32 | 0.23 | 0.15 | 0.21 | 0.46 | 0.06 | 0.10 |
| C | 0.49 | 0.52 | 0 | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.45 | 0.40 | 0.29 | 0.37 | 0.31 | 0.17 | 0.20 | 0.30 | 0.41 | 0.07 | 0.14 |
| D | 0.12 | 0.11 | 0.19 | 0 | 0.12 | 0.12 | 0.09 | 0.10 | 0.07 | 0.13 | 0.11 | 0.16 | 0.18 | 0.09 | 0.15 | 0.12 |
| E | 0.21 | 0.20 | 0.19 | 0.12 | 0 | 0.18 | 0.21 | 0.15 | 0.18 | 0.15 | 0.14 | 0.10 | 0.20 | 0.17 | 0.06 | 0.11 |
| F | 0.48 | 0.52 | 0.45 | 0.12 | 0.18 | 0 | 0.49 | 0.32 | 0.31 | 0.31 | 0.25 | 0.14 | 0.20 | 0.42 | 0.05 | 0.11 |
| G | 0.48 | 0.46 | 0.40 | 0.09 | 0.21 | 0.49 | 0 | 0.39 | 0.37 | 0.35 | 0.31 | 0.17 | 0.25 | 0.43 | 0.04 | 0.12 |
| H | 0.27 | 0.27 | 0.29 | 0.10 | 0.15 | 0.32 | 0.39 | 0 | 0.24 | 0.27 | 0.27 | 0.15 | 0.15 | 0.28 | 0.05 | 0.10 |
| I | 0.43 | 0.42 | 0.37 | 0.07 | 0.18 | 0.31 | 0.37 | 0.24 | 0 | 0.29 | 0.22 | 0.15 | 0.25 | 0.35 | 0.05 | 0.13 |
| J | 0.32 | 0.32 | 0.31 | 0.13 | 0.15 | 0.31 | 0.35 | 0.27 | 0.29 | 0 | 0.21 | 0.16 | 0.25 | 0.28 | 0.07 | 0.10 |
| K | 0.23 | 0.23 | 0.17 | 0.11 | 0.14 | 0.25 | 0.31 | 0.27 | 0.22 | 0.21 | 0 | 0.16 | 0.16 | 0.19 | 0.04 | 0.12 |
| L | 0.16 | 0.15 | 0.20 | 0.16 | 0.10 | 0.14 | 0.17 | 0.15 | 0.15 | 0.16 | 0.16 | 0 | 0.24 | 0.19 | 0.08 | 0.09 |
| M | 0.24 | 0.21 | 0.30 | 0.18 | 0.20 | 0.20 | 0.25 | 0.15 | 0.25 | 0.25 | 0.16 | 0.24 | 0 | 0.22 | 0.08 | 0.10 |
| N | 0.53 | 0.46 | 0.41 | 0.09 | 0.17 | 0.42 | 0.43 | 0.28 | 0.35 | 0.28 | 0.19 | 0.19 | 0.22 | 0 | 0.04 | 0.14 |
| O | 0.04 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.15 | 0.06 | 0.05 | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.05 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 0.08 | 0.08 | 0.04 | 0 | 0.16 |
| P | 0.12 | 0.10 | 0.14 | 0.12 | 0.11 | 0.11 | 0.12 | 0.10 | 0.13 | 0.10 | 0.12 | 0.09 | 0.10 | 0.14 | 0.16 | 0 |

Key: Where A Your age or life-stage (1); B The kind of study or work you do or did (2); C Your level of education (3); D Your level of income (4); E Your political beliefs (5); F Your family (6); G Your ethnic group or cultural background (7); H The country your family came from originally (8); I Your regional identity (Londoner, Geordie, etc.) (9); J Your nationality (10); K Your religion (11); L The colour of your skin (12); M Your social class (working class, middle class, etc.) (13); N Your gender (14); O Any disability you may have (15); P Your sexuality/sexual orientation (16).

a This technique provides some measure of similarity between any two of our identity attributes in the matrix of the full 16 attributes, the Jaccard

Coefﬁcient measuring the number of individuals who ticked both attributes as a proportion of the number that ticked at least one. The procedure was undertaken in MATLAB using the procedure: »Y = 1-pdist(X, ’jaccard’); »squareform(Y).

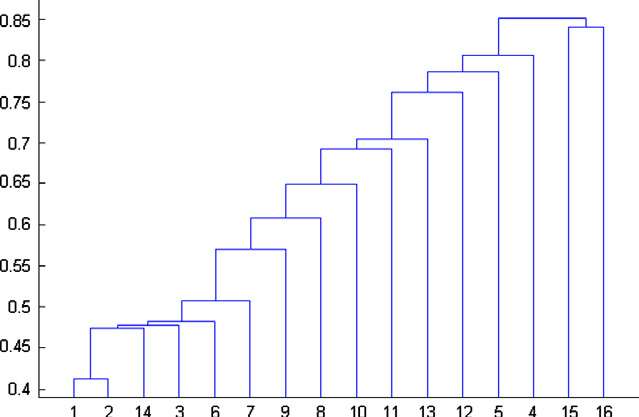


Fig. 3. Hierarchical clustering of identity attributes. Notes: This procedure was undertaken in MATLAB: »Y = pdist(X, ’jaccard’); »Z = linkage(Y);

»dendogram(Z). Key: See Table 5. Source: ‘‘Ethnic options of ‘mixed race’ people in Britain’’ survey.

but rather a multilevel hierarchy, where clusters at one level are joined as clusters at the next level. Clearly, most frequently selected attributes dominate the clustering, ethnic/cultural background (7) being seen to cluster with other frequently se- lected variables, such as gender (14), kind of study/work (2), level of education (3), and family (6). However, more powerful analytical tools are needed to identify actual intersectionality and the form it takes. This may, in turn, give rise to a more penetrating theorisation of the concept and a better understanding of the processes contributing to intersectionality. While intersectionality ‘puts complexity centre-stage’, Grabham et al. (2009) state a truism: ‘Intersectionality requires vectors and identities that exist apart from each other. Acting like a fastener, or zip, intersectionality presumes the gaps that it attempts to close. This raises the question of whether there are, in fact, any areas of the social that exist apart from the meeting point, or overlap, that intersectionality describes’. The challenge becomes one of identifying analytically just how pairs of identity attributes feedback upon each other or are routed through one another.

4.5. Comparable data from the USA

Finally, there is relatively little comparable data from other countries with which to assess wider, cross-national and cross-cultural trends. The only such source identiﬁed in literature searches is the 2006 US Social Capital Survey which shows ethnic or racial background to be the least important identity attribute (amongst a set of ﬁve) in the population as a whole



Fig. 4. ‘Salient identities’ in the 2006 US Social Capital Community Survey. Accessed at: <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/communitysurvey/>. Note: Unweighted number of national respondents: 2741. Source: 2006 US Social Capital Community Survey. Cambridge MASS: University of Harvard.

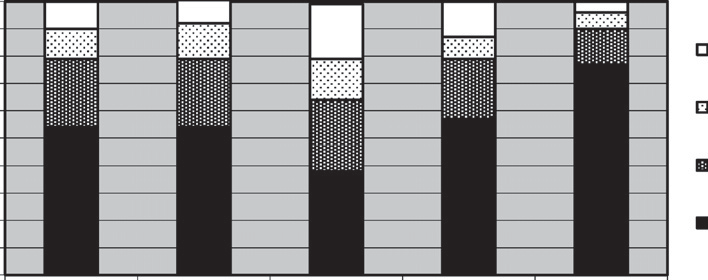
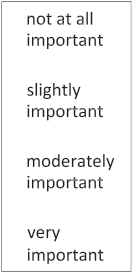
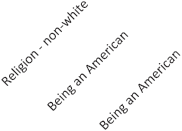
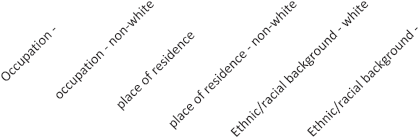
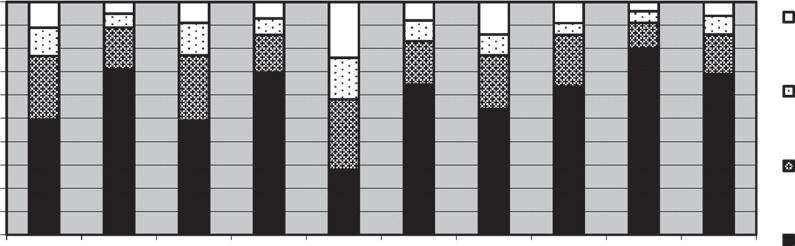




Fig. 5. ‘Salient identities’ in the 2006 US Social Capital Survey: white vs. ‘non-white’ respondents. Accessed at: [http://www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/ communitysurvey/](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/communitysurvey/). Note: Unweighted number of national respondents: 2741. Source: 2006 US Social Capital Community Survey. Cambridge MASS: University of Harvard.



(Fig. 4), compared with occupation, place of residence, religion, and being an American. Markedly different processes of ethnogenesis (including histories of immigration and the racial hierarchy) makes any comparison with the UK problematic.

However, there are interesting differences between the white and ‘non-white’ groups (an apt comparison in a country which sustains a strong colour line) (Fig. 5). What is notable in Fig. 5 is that each identity attribute (besides ‘being an Amer- ican’) attracts a higher proportion of ‘very important’ responses amongst the ‘non-white’ compared with white respondents. Perhaps many identity dimensions can be hypothesised as being more important amongst the non-white population when its members are confronted by societal norms based on white standards and culture (see Fig. 5). The growth in interracial partnering and the mixed population in Britain is likely to deepen the already complex and multiple layerings and combi- nations of identiﬁcation.

5. Discussion

These data from government social and ethnicity surveys provide a novel source that can be exploited to measure salient and dominant identities across an array of identity attributes. Hitherto, no comparative analyses have been undertaken of these question sets, which enable ﬁndings from earlier qualitative research on the importance of the family, religion, and other dimensions (Modood et al., 1994) to be placed in a wider context. The UK surveys provide access to a dozen or more attributes, such proﬂigacy being a beneﬁt when the focus is on saliency. In the case of dominant identities, however, all identities compete for this position so there is a process of displacement. The FNS omitted ‘gender’ from its elements of self-description as ‘it was assumed that nearly everybody would in fact regard their sex as something important about themselves’ (Modood et al., 1997). ‘Your family’ (also omitted by the FNS) raises similar problems. ‘Family’ is so self- evidently important to most people that its likelihood of selection is high. Jenkins (1996, p. 64), for example, describes kin group as ‘.. .an obvious source of enduring individual primary identity. No matter the time, place or culture, one of

the most important elements in individual identiﬁcation, by self and others, is kinship’. Moreover, the ways in which ‘family’ is seen as important are so multifarious that it does raise the question: what does it mean for ‘family’ to be selected? Indeed, in the context of dominant identities, ‘family’ trumps – and so displaces - most other attributes. Given the questionable efﬁcacy of the category ‘family’, as such a broad term that can mean so many different things, we examined the second choices of respondents in the ‘mixed race’ survey who identiﬁed ‘family’ as ﬁrst choice. Around 14.5% selected ‘ethnic or cultural background’: omitting ‘family’ and redistributing these second choices would still have put ethnic/cultural background in third position (after age and study/work) amongst dominant identities. Interestingly, ‘family’ has remarkably consistent saliency across the categories. In the case of dominant identities it is often claimed that strong value is placed on family relationships amongst South Asians (Modood et al., 1997, p. 15, for example, refer to ‘the strength of South Asian family ties as indicated by the number of parents and children living together in the same house) yet the proportions are lowest in these and the African and Caribbean categories simply because for some respondents ‘religion’ is even more important: such is the nature of ‘dominant identities’ and the displacement of close competitors.

While the more recent ﬁndings do question the view that race/ethnicity continues to be a person’s ‘dominant identity’ amongst respondents from minority ethnic groups, most of the survey data, including our survey of mixed race young peo- ple, show it to be a ‘salient identity’ in this population. The 2007 Citizenship Survey revealed ‘family’ and ‘religion’ to be

‘dominant identities’ (deﬁned as an identity selected by 10% or more of people in that group). Ethnic group or cultural back- ground came close to attaining ‘dominant identity’ status in the Caribbean group and occupation in the Chinese group. In the survey of ‘mixed race’ young adults, family, age/life-stage, and kind of study/work emerge as ‘dominant identities’; omitting

‘family’ and redistributing the second choice responses takes ethnicity just above the threshold. In this sample age and kind of study/work are likely to be so prominent as the study sample is comprised of young people in further and higher educa- tion, at a key transitional life stage, and often living away from home and from direct parental inﬂuence (and more subject to new peer inﬂuences) for the ﬁrst time.

However, some interesting ﬁndings are revealed with respect to particular ethnicities, especially the black groups. In the Citizenship Survey, ethnic or racial background had the greatest saliency (on the measure of ‘very important’) in the three black groups. In the FNS, a majority in the different groups chose ‘White, black, Asian, etc.’ (range, 56–76%) as an attribute saying something important about them but the highest proportion was found in the Caribbean group. Skin colour, too, had the greatest saliency amongst Caribbeans in this survey and amongst Black/White mixes in the ‘mixed race’ survey. These data point to the continuing importance of broader social practices (‘identiﬁcation as’ or societal perceptions) in shaping eth- nic/racial identiﬁcations, as well as the persistence of societal discourses around Blackness, including both positive, but more commonly, negative values attached to Blackness (Alexander, 1996; Hall, 1997).

By contrast, a markedly lower level of importance was accorded to ethnic and racial background by the White and Chinese groups. With respect to the former a substantial body of theoretical work about ‘whiteness’ and ‘white identities’ offers an explanation based on white’s normative position (Dyer, 1997). Ruth Frankenberg (1993, p. 55) has written that

‘white stands for the position of racial ‘‘neutrality’’, or the racially unmarked category’. Similarly, Pamela Perry’s ethnographic study of racial identities in US high schools (perry, 2002) showed that where white students predominated, being white was experienced as both normative, race neutral, and unchallenged. This strand of enquiry is also exempliﬁed by Bridget Bryne’s White Lives (Bryne, 2006) which, through interviews with young White mothers, addresses the normalcy of whiteness through gendered and class-based articulations. This experience of whiteness as centrally or normatively positioned, as non-racial or constituting a lack of race or racial void, and as unacknowledged white privilege, perhaps accounts for the hesitancy to invoke race as an important part of self. In the case of the Chinese group, strong in-group identiﬁcation (as opposed to that where external, relational processes may be more determinative) may account for the difference. For example, the Chinese (along with the White group) were associated least closely with Britishness in the

‘Understanding Society’ survey.

More generally, a number of factors may account for the relatively modest position of race/ethnic background as a dom- inant identity in Britain. With respect to race, the concept of ethnicity or ethnic group has been in the ascendancy in the last two or three decades (Jenkins, 1997; Hickman, 1998). Whilst a major segment of the minority ethnic group population was seen as either Black or Asian in the second half of the 20th century, there have been recent large inﬂows of migrants from Eastern European countries who do not constitute the ‘visible’ minority ethnic group population (being classed as ‘White Other’ or just ‘Other’ in census terminology). In addition, scientiﬁc debates about the concept of ‘race’ are ongoing: in an increasingly polarised debate the legitimacy of ‘race’ as a scientiﬁc basis for differentiating among humankind has been widely challenged by social scientists while geneticists argue that there is evidence for incorporating race into the natural sphere (see Hartigan, 2008). In policy contexts – such as equality and human rights governance – there has also been a shift in interest from major collectivities like ‘Black’ and ‘Asian’ to the diverse cultural background groups concealed within these collectivities and a new interest in intersectionality.

Demographically, ‘race’ is being challenged in complex ways. Rates of interracial partnering and marriage in Britain are increasing signiﬁcantly (Song, 2009) and, related to this, there has been a rise in the population of mixed or multiple ethnic origins and in those people who opt to use a hyphenated or bicultural label like ‘Scottish Pakistani’ or ‘Welsh black’. There is some emergent evidence that being mixed, especially in large metropolitan areas, is regarded as increasingly ordinary (Caballero et al., 2008). A new generation of British-born young people in multiethnic Britain, including many White, minor- ity, and mixed individuals, may conceive of ethnic and racial backgrounds as much less meaningful than they were before the 1990s (a decade during which measured levels of racial prejudice fell markedly), though this is likely to be inﬂuenced by

both context and situation, including patterns of own group and minority ethnic density. ‘Mixed race’ may, at the same time, give credence to the concept of ‘race’ given the saliency of this term in this population.

Other factors include the rise of religious identities at the expense of racial/ethnic ones, particularly the increasing prom- inence attached to ‘Muslim’ identity. Most of the survey data shows the importance of religion in the South Asian and some Black groups. Indeed, ‘religion’ was the only other ‘dominant identity’ in the Citizenship survey, being chosen by around a third of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, a ﬁfth of Black Africans and Mixed White and Black Africans, and a tenth or so of Indians and Black Caribbeans. Also, recognition of the co-dependency or intersectionality of identities based on race, national iden- tity, and religion may have weakened the position of any one of these identities on their own. Indeed, a strong measure of similarity was found between family origins, religion, nationality, and ethnic group/cultural background and also between the latter and other collective identities such as gender. For example, although they remain distinct analytical categories, religious and ethnic identiﬁcations can be blurred for many second generation Asian Muslims in particular, whose conscious- ness of being Muslim constitutes an assertion of ‘public ethnicity’ (Modood, 1996). Similarly, ethnic identiﬁcations and na- tional identity have become implicated in each other with terms such as British and English being frequently used in self- descriptions. Indeed, it is now common to talk of fragmented identities and multiple allegiances rather than discrete identity categories.

The cross-national evidence is limited (to Britain and the USA) so it is difﬁcult to say to what extent the patterns identiﬁed in Britain might generalise to other western contexts. A wider analysis has been precluded by a lack of survey evidence on salient and dominant identities in other national contexts. However, the distinctive processes of race formation and ethno- genesis that take place within national boundaries would be expected to exercise some inﬂuence in the ordering by saliency and importance of these identity categories. Similarly, the data for Britain may conceal important regional variations deter- mined by differences in the ethnic composition and density of the population, as revealed by the respondent who indicated that a mixed race background would be more prominent if one grew up in a mainly white rural town as opposed to London.

This paper has also noted that the relative importance of identity attributes can shift. Again, further exploration of this phenomenon would require multiple cross-sectional data and, ideally, also longitudinal data to track changes in individuals. Such data might enable hypotheses to be formulated around the processual nature of these identities, that is, the factors that lead certain identities to attain dominant importance and those that might lead to shifts in these priorities. Further, better data is needed to more fully investigate what factors or circumstances work against the emergence of dominant identities or, through intersectional processes, affect the patterns that have been identiﬁed.

6. Conclusions

This study has shown that, while ethnic/racial background are salient identities, their position as ‘dominant identities’ has been lost to other identity attributes as forms of self-assigned identities, notably, the family, religion, age/life stage, and work/study. Perhaps only in the Black-Caribbean group does ethnic/racial background compete for this position. Moreover, social class which has occupied such a prominent position in patterning identity in the past through endurance of particular social ‘types’ (Jenkins, 1996) is now of insigniﬁcant importance in terms of the choices made by these survey respondents. Beyond these key ﬁndings, what clearly emerges is that identity attributes – especially those related to ethnic/racial back- ground – are accorded differential importance across cultural background categories in Britain. South Asians and the Black groups stand out in the emphasis they attach to religion. Ethnic/racial background is especially salient amongst the Black groups and skin colour is only really of (albeit limited) signiﬁcance to these groups. The Chinese are outliers on most identity attributes in terms of the importance accorded to them and explanations are difﬁcult to discern but may relate to the strength of in-group identiﬁcation.

It is clear that the multidimensional nature of identiﬁcation and the extent to which the different attributes are impli- cated in each other are likely to further challenge the position of race/ethnicity as other dimensions like religion and national identity fold into or fragment this attribute. The growth in interracial partnering and the mixed population in Britain is likely to further weaken the practice of a single racial afﬁliation. While continuing, albeit changing, patterns of social inequality and disadvantage will surely mediate the relative positionings of various identity attributes, ‘race’ as a dominant, or as the surveys show, salient, identity, appears to be of less obvious importance to many younger minority and mixed peoples’ lives in Britain today.

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