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**WHAT ARE THE PARENTING PRACTICES OF MULTIRACIAL PEOPLE IN BRITAIN?**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Since ‘Mixed’ was first offered as an option in the ethnicity question in the 2001 England and Wales Census, Britain’s recognition of, and interest in, mixed people has not abated. In the 2011 Census, the mixed population was estimated to be about 2% of the population – though this is almost certainly an under-count (Nandi & Platt 2012). In fact, the mixed population is predicted to grow very quickly in the coming decades (Coleman 2010).

In recent years, studies of multiracial people and families have grown significantly in Western multiethnic societies. Up to now, studies of the US have dominated and these studies have explored the racial identifications of ‘mixed race’ (or ‘multiracial’) people (see Spickard 1989; Root 1996; Rockquemore & Brunsma 2002; DaCosta 2007; Harris & Sim 2002) and the ways in which parents in interracial unions identify or raise their children (see e.g. Roth 2005; Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005). Studies of mixed people and families in Canada and Australia (see e.g. Mahtani 2002; Luke & Luke 1998), and those with a more global focus (King-O’Riain 2014), are growing, demonstrating the importance of specific historical and regional understandings of difference and the formation of racial regimes.

Studies of ‘mixed race’ people and families in the UK have also grown considerably, reflecting the increasing prominence of such individuals and households in the British media and in public policies (see Aspinall & Song 2013; Ali 2003; Bauer 2010; Edwards & Caballero 2008; Olumide 2002; Tizard & Phoenix 1993, to name only a few). Some recent British studies have also investigated the experiences of parents in mixed families and the family lives of mixed children (see Twine 2010; Barn 1999; Harman 2010; Okitikpi 2005). These studies have been important in refuting longstanding beliefs about the problematic nature of interracial relationships, as well as the allegedly troubled and in-between status of their progeny (see Caballero 2012).

Studies which employ terms such as ‘mixed’ (more common in the British context) and ‘multiracial’ (more common in the US) invoke notions of ‘race’, which are clearly controversial – not only because of the socially constructed nature of categories and ideologies pertaining to ‘race’ and racial difference, but also because the terms ‘mixed’ and ‘multiracial’, which will be used interchangeably in this paper (there is no consensus on any one term), seem to imply the existence of pure ‘races’ which can combine into a race mixture. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address the debates concerning these terms, we use the terms ‘mixed’ and ‘multiracial’, as they are the most commonly used terms in both in colloquial usage and in scholarship.

Overall, recent studies have found growing latitude both in how parents in interracial relationships identify their multiracial children, and in how multiracial people identify themselves, including many Black/White mixed people, who have historically been racially assigned as monoracially Black (Davis 1991). For instance, studies in the US employing census data have investigated the ways in which interracial couples identify their multiracial children (see Xie & Goyette 1997; Roth 2005; Brunsma 2005; and see Gullickson & Morning 2011). The racial designations of mixed children by these parents has tended to be seen as a proxy for how these children are raised – but this link is implied, and has not actually been investigated. And while there has been growing attention to the rich and varied histories of interracial relationships and multiracial people and communities in Britain, we still know very little about *multiracial people as adults, and as parents*, in contemporary Britain (Song 2015).

* + **THE UPBRINGING OF MULTIRACIAL CHILDREN**
	+ The upbringingof multiracial children – which is related to, but not synonymous with, the racial identification of multiracial children – is still under-studied in Britain. Nor are parenting practices easily captured or investigated in analyses of large data sets, as in many US studies.What are the particular concerns which arise for parents in interracial families, and in particular for multiracial individuals who are parents (Bratter & Heard 2009)? Do multiracial people (who are parents) want to steer their children toward a particular kind of upbringing, and if so, toward what, and why?

Not surprisingly, we know that the parents of multiracial children (as is also the case for the parents of minority children more generally) can adopt different approaches in raising their children. Much of the American literature on multiracial families concerns how parents can foster the healthy development of multiracial children (see Kich 1992; Rockquemore & Lazloffy 2005). As one influential book called *Raising Biracial Children* (2005) strongly argues: ‘Because of the power of race, parents raising mixed-race children have a responsibility to engage in a process of racial socialization that will prepare their children to understand and effectively negotiate the complexities of race relations’ (59). Parents’ awareness and understanding of racial issues, and their willingness to discuss and to validate their multiracial children’s perspectives and experiences, is said to be crucial for the development of healthy identities (Caballero, Edwards, Puthussery 2008).

In Britain, some recent studies of White mothers of children with Black ancestry have shown that they can actively work at teaching and socializing their children to take pride in their Black heritage – countering the mainstream view which has questioned their competence to raise their children with racial awareness or to foster their children’s sense of belonging in the wider Black ‘community’ - see Twine (2010) and Harman (2010). In fact, Twine (2010) argues that White mothers can work hard at developing what she calls ‘racial literacy’, in order to raise their children with both practical knowledge and coping strategies in relation to racist encounters. She also found that some White mothers provided forms of supplementary education about Black history and cultural practices and learned to adopt a ‘black signature’ via the cooking of Caribbean food and caring for their children’s hair.

Nevertheless, given the variable experiences and perspectives of disparate kinds of mixed people and their families (Aspinall & Song 2013), there is no one template that can be applied to how parents of mixed children should raise them more generally. In a discussion of race matching in adoption and fostering policies, Caballero et al (2012) convincingly argue that, given the great diversity of experiences for children in families of mixed ethnic and racial backgrounds, there cannot be ‘a single benchmark’ of how to raise such children – thus a rigid application of an ethnic or racial matching policy may be misguided. By the same token, we can expect multiracial people who are parents – the focus of this study - to think about and practice their parenting in quite disparate ways.

Clearly, various types of parent-child interactions can shape a child’s sense of self and well-being. Both the quantity (the amount of time parents spend with children in particular activities and contexts) and quality of parental involvement (based upon the degree of emotional closeness and communication between parents and their children) mediates the influence of parents’ socialization of their children (Bratter & Heard 2009). And while the influence of peers grows as children grow older, there is no doubt that parents play an absolutely fundamental role in their children’s upbringing, whether through acts of commission or omission.

However, most studies of mixed people and families still centre upon the experiences of Black/White multiracial people and do not really address the issue of cultural (in addition to racial) socialization by parents. In one of the only British studies of how parents in ‘mixed’ relationships raised their children, a study of 35 ‘Mixed-parent couples’ found that these couples could be ‘mixed’ in terms of racial, ethnic, and/or religious differences (Caballero, Edwards, Puthussery 2008). They found not only variable approaches to parenting, but also a growing ordinariness to various forms of ‘mixture’ (and see Caballero 2012).

However, no studies (in either the US or Britain) have looked specifically at *multiracial people as parents*, and their relationships with their own children (see Bratter 2010). As some analysts have pointed out (Bratter 2007; Rockquemore & Laszloffy 2005), parents in interracial relationships are not themselves multiracial, and will not have experienced many of the issues and concerns that can arise for their children. Therefore, we know very little about how multiracial people in Britain think about, and experience, parenthood, or how they raise their children.

This paper explores the ways in which mixed people in Britain think about their parenting and the practices they employ in raising their children. What approaches and practices do multiracial parents in contemporary Britain adopt in relation to their children? To what extent is it important for these parents to raise their children with an awareness of their minority ancestries? How do the participants’ own identifications and life experiences shape the ways in which they wish to raise their children?

Why is this of social importance? These multiracial individuals are raising the next generation, and as such, they provide a valuable glimpse of how ethnic and racial identification and difference more generally may or may not matter for the coming generation. Furthermore, as the status of multiracial people in a racially stratified society such as Britain is yet unclear, the experiences of these parents also illuminate the question of if and how ethnic and racial difference will remain a key basis for how people identify and interact with one another. It is also important to investigate contemporary approaches and practices adopted by these parents, as their experiences of parenthood are likely to differ considerably from those of multiracial people of an earlier generation (or the experiences of their parents), when mixed relationships and families were both less common and socially acceptable.

**THE STUDY**

We set out to explore these questions in a study funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Most of our 62 participants resided in the Greater London area and the Southeast, but a small proportion lived in cities and towns in the Midlands and the North. Participants’ residential locations and their children’s schools varied considerably in terms of their ethnic and racial diversity. While participants living in London and other large cities tended to live in ethnically diverse areas (usually with relatively diverse schools), those residing in small towns and cities outside of London and other large metropolitan areas reported predominantly White neighborhoods and schools for their children. Through schools, websites, and snowball sampling, we recruited 62 mixed race parents who each completed an online survey, and an in-depth interview. After obtaining permission with gate-keepers, brief letters describing the nature and aims of the project were disseminated by schools directly - either via hard copy to all parents, or via email attachments sent out by the school. Adverts were also placed on some websites aimed at mixed individuals and families in Britain. Overall, 19 participants were recruited through schools, 22 through websites, and 21 through snowballing. We did not discern any notable differences in the participants or data, based upon the mode of recruitment – though those who were recruited via websites aimed at multiracial people and families could have had a greater awareness and investment in their status as mixed people.

Of the 62 multiracial participants in this study, 37 were women and 25 men, and most were aged between 25 to 50, though a small number of participants were in their 50s (and the eldest, 62). While there are no established conventions for who can be said to be multiracial, as such, in this paper we focus upon individuals with the following mixed backgrounds: 32 Black/White, 19 South Asian/White, 11 East Asian/White, as these are the most common mixed ancestries in Britain (ONS 2011). All the participants had a White parent in common. The age of children in these households varied from a few months old to those in their late 20s. Depending on the age of our participants, most of our parents either had children of primary school age and/or younger, or had children in both primary and secondary schools.

While most (54 of 62) participants were ‘first generation’ mixed, with one White and one non-White minority parent, 7 participants were ‘second generation’ mixed (meaning they had at least one parent who was multiracial themselves), and 1 participant was unsure of their mother’s ancestry (thus unsure whether she was first or second generation mixed). The majority of participants (46 of 62) had White British (38) or White other (8 – non-British) partners with whom they had children. By comparison, 11 participants had partners with a (monoracial) minority background (5 British and 6 non-British), and 5 had multiracial partners (2 British and 3 non-British). Most participants were middle class, meaning that they had either a first degree in higher education and/or professional forms of employment, while 10 of the 62 participants had not been university educated, and had relatively low-skilled and/or clerical, or skilled but manual, forms of employment.

While the online surveys elicited mostly factual background information about participants, the in-depth interviews gathered detailed information about their family and individual histories, and their thoughts and experiences as parents. Field work notes about particular themes and issues were noted right after the interviews. Most interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes, though about 1/3 were conducted in the participants’ offices and/or public spaces such as cafes and restaurants. All the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, then transcribed (as soon as possible after the interviews took place). In a few cases, face to face interviews were not possible, and so SKYPE, and in one case, telephone, conversations were employed. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, and personal details were changed in some cases to ensure anonymity.

As researchers, we were interested in not only the literal content of the transcripts, but we then engaged in an interpretation of the interview transcripts (Bryman 2012). A thematic analysis of the interviews started with jotting down notes along the margins of transcripts, but this process was also followed by listening to the digital recordings themselves several times. Through both listening and the recording of themes, we then created codes to reflect key themes (Chavez 2008). We compared the thoughts and experiences of participants of different ethnic and racial ancestries, as well as a range of participants living in both diverse, urban areas, compared with largely White, more suburban locations.

**PARENTING APPROACHES AND PRACTICES**

The parents in this study were asked about how they raised their children, and about the relative importance of imparting an awareness of their children’s minority ethnicities ancestries to them. In doing so, these participants were probed about both their beliefs and practices regarding the upbringing of their children, and they were also asked to reflect upon their own upbringing and formative life experiences.

By referring to the upbringing of children, we mean a variety of practices such as modes of identity transmission (e.g. telling the child that they ‘are’ Zimbabwean, or ‘mixed race’, or giving them identifiably ‘ethnic’ names), ways of engendering a sense of cultural attachment (e.g. by targeted activities such as museum exhibits or speaking another language), or efforts to talk with them about recognizing and coping with forms of racial prejudice and discrimination. While some parents gravitated toward a discussion of ethnic and cultural transmission, others spoke more of how they fostered racial awareness and pride. Some parents also articulated concerns about cultural and ethnic loss (Song & Gutierrez 2015). Yet a small number of parents reported that they made no concerted effort to foster ethnic and racial attachments or identification, or to promote racial awareness. While there were no discernible gender differences in how male and female participants *thought and talked about* how to raise their children, in practice, the mothers (including the female partners of our male participants) tended to adopt a more active role in their children’s upbringing, as they were more often the main carers of young children. Many parents (both mothers and fathers) were also attune to the gendered ways in which their children could be racialised by others.

As revealed in the accounts below, a number of factors were important in shaping the ways in which parents raised their children, including their locality, the ethnicity of their partner or ex-partner(s), the presence or absence of the other parent while their children were growing up, the physical appearance of their children, participants’ upbringing by *their* parents (and the quality of those relationships), and crucially, parents’ own racial identifications and experiences more generally.

While most of the participants in this study were middle class, and educated, not all of our participants had the resources, time, and energy to attend fully to the emotional needs of their children, especially if they were single parents who struggled with the day to day concerns with survival. This was the case for some working-class participants who had been single parents while raising their children, as experienced by Tara (Black/White, 50):

*Becky [her elder daughter] got very upset and she said to me… you didn’t pass anything on to me. [Laughter] I was really upset and …I thought back and it was true because when Becky was fourteen/fifteen I didn’t know anything about myself….I was actually really busy trying to survive being a single parent, you know, with two children and really juggling life, and also I have a very, very difficult family history.*

Although explicit discussions with especially young children about ‘race’ or notions of prejudice were relatively rare, parents who lived in predominantly White areas outside of metropolitan centres could be especially vigilant about their children’s reactions to others and how they appeared to be learning or thinking about race and difference, often through the signifier of skin colour. They then used their children’s comments or observations about others’ physical appearance to start discussions with their children, and diffuse negative conceptions of difference, or any brewing wariness towards non-White ‘others’. So while some parents consciously addressed particular concerns with their children concerning ‘race’ or their identities, others wanted to (in the words of one parent) ‘keep things simple’, especially in the case of younger children. Clearly, these accounts reveal parenting as an on-going process, and as children grew older, parents were able to interact with them in ways which acknowledged the individual personalities and proclivities of their children.

After a comprehensive review of all 62 interview transcripts, we identified 4 modes of parenting practices by these multiracial parents (with missing/incomplete data in 3 cases):

- Raised as British (8)

- Mostly British with ethnic symbolism (9)

- Emphasis on minority heritage (8)

- Cosmopolitanism (34)

While there are always some cases which are ambiguous or may appear to fit more than one code, the coding typology was specific enough to allow us to ‘place’ each case into a category which captured the main mode of upbringing reported by each participant. Of the 62 participants, the most common mode of parenting was an emphasis on cosmopolitanism (n = 34), comprising just over half of the sample (55%). In fact, a cosmopolitan emphasis was also *the most common among each of the 3 types of mixed respondents*: 18 (of 32) Black/White, 10 (of 19) South Asian/White, and 6 (of 11) East Asian/White. So among all 3 types of mixed participants, cosmopolitanism was emphasized in just over half the cases. Less common modes were *raised as British* (8), *mostly British with symbolic ethnicity* (9), and an *emphasis on minority culture or background* (8).

While there was some evidence of continuity in how participants had been raised, and how they themselves raised their own children, on balance, many of our participants tended to report a notable shift from their own childhoods and upbringing, to how they raised their own children, primarily in terms of a marked shift toward cosmopolitanism and the valuing of ethnic diversity. I first discuss the less common modes of parenting, and end with a discussion of the most common mode, which had an emphasis on cosmopolitanism.

**Raised as British**

In our sample of 62 parents, 8 participants reported that their children were raised as British. By ‘British’, these participants meant that their children were raised without any other specific ethnic emphasis. For most of these participants, Britishness was understood in terms of norms and practices associated with a primarily White mainstream (though one which was increasingly inflected with ‘diversity’). Perhaps not surprisingly, most of these parents reported that their minority heritage was not particularly important to them. A key theme reported here was the distance one felt from one’s ethnic ancestry, and this was heightened by a sense of genealogical distancing, too, for some (though not all) 2nd generation mixed respondents. Generally speaking, these parents did not engage in practices which highlighted an ethnic ancestry or identity other than Britishness, and they reported that their own parents had not raised them with any other ethnic emphasis. Additionally, some participants had not been raised with their minority parent, so that their exposure to any other cultural background had been either nil or extremely limited.

For instance, when asked about how she and her White English husband raised their son, Aisha (South Asian/White, 50), said that she was simply British, and that she had made no effort to play up the fact of her Indian father’s heritage. She had grown up with her English mother, after her parents had split up when she was extremely young. As such, she’d had no meaningful contact with her father, and felt no sense of connection to Indian people or heritage.

Aisha reported that her 13 year old son hadn’t shown much curiosity about her father or her Indian background. Aisha herself knew very little about India and had had virtually no cultural exposure so she couldn’t tell her son much about her Indian heritage. As she put it, ‘there’s no concealment, not wanting to talk about it’ – it just didn’t naturally arise for them.’

*Equally I don’t know a lot to tell him, so it’s…. and I don’t know whether that might change. I don’t think so, I’ve never had particularly an urge whereas a lot of people like X [a close friend], say: ‘Oh how interesting, how fascinating, you must want to find out more? Or you must want to go there [India]?’ Well, no, not really.*

Aisha often encountered others’ expectations that her Indian background was somehow significant to her – even though it wasn’t. Such expectations were compounded by the fact that she looked completely ‘Asian’ to others (and had an identifiably Asian name). This racial assignment of her, as Asian, clearly irritated Aisha at times, as she simply did not see herself in this way. Furthermore, although she saw herself and her son as British, Aisha regarded herself as someone who was very interested in a pervasive multiculture in her city and social networks. For example, many of her friends were ‘international’ (her words), and she reported that she enjoyed living in a relatively ethnically diverse setting.

For those participants who grew up in almost entirely White settings, an emphasis upon a British upbringing was understood as a ‘natural’ outcome, rather than a deliberate fostering of White Britishness per se – it was effectively the default mode of childrearing. Elise (44), who was Black and White, and who was not partnered at the time of interview, lived in a very small and White village in the Southeast with her five children (ranging in age between 26 and 7) – though the eldest no longer lived at home. Elise reported that she felt very British and that her children were raised in this way. Although she looked Black to others, she had lived in only White semi-rural settings, and all of her partners had been White British. Like Aisha, discussed above, Elise had had no cultural exposure to her Black (father’s) heritage growing up, and felt, at most, a sense of curiosity, but not one that had motivated her to delve into her Black ancestry:

*Erm... [Pause] I’ve never really felt that it was important. But as I’ve got older, and I think it’s more of a curiosity I think, it’s just a curiosity of knowing where your ancestry is and that’s more really, it’s just curiosity, it’s not, it’s not important in terms of that’s what I feel that I should be teaching my children, that type of thing. We should adopt, sort of like, a black culture or anything like that. I, you know, it’s just of more for me personally it’s more a curiosity really.*

However, parents such as Elise, who did not emphasize any ethnic and cultural heritage other than English or British, could still emphasize the importance of instilling racial awareness in her children, especially because some of her children looked ‘Black’ to others.

In fact, some parents who were raising boys and young men who might be perceived as Black, either due to visible signifiers such as skin colour and hair type, or through their more socio-cultural performances of ‘black culture’ (music/rap/clothing/walking), or being attached to groups of black boys or ‘gang-culture’, expressed their concerns about preparing their sons for the possibility of being viewed in negative and stereotypical ways. Similarly, the parents of girls often spoke of the need to be extra vigilant about their daughters’ perceptions of themselves and their developing conceptions of beauty.

Thus, those who reported raising their children as British were less attached to their ethnic minority backgrounds, and made no concerted efforts to expose their children to their minority heritage via discussions or targeted activities. Nevertheless, many of these participants still tended to value and participate in low-level forms of multiculture which were endemic in the wider society. For instance, to cook and eat ‘ethnic’ foods, or to attend ethnically inflected events, or to have some friends of different ethnic backgrounds, was not particularly unusual, and increasingly constituted parts of ‘normal’ mainstream family life in Britain.

**Mostly British but with symbolic ethnicity**

The 9 participants in this category reported that while their children were primarily raised as British, it was important to retain certain symbolic ethnic and cultural practices, and to impart some sense of their minority ancestry to their children. What distinguished these participants from those who raised their children as British (former discussion) was their *emotional and symbolic attachment to their minority ethnicity*. While such practices were not central to their everyday lives, these participants regarded their ethnic backgrounds as personally important. Jeremy, who was South Asian/White (aged 35), and who had children aged 5 and 8 years old with his White British partner, exemplified this mode of socialization and family life: ‘*Whilst we kind of celebrate the bits and bobs, we’re generally quite interested in it all… but we’re mostly British? That’s the world we live in really*.’ Nevertheless, he valued his Indian background and he reported that it was important that his children developed a sense of this minority heritage as they grew up.

A number of East Asian/White (4) and South Asian/White (3) parents comprised this category. These parents tended to describe their symbolic ethnic practices (Gans 1979; Waters 1990) in ways which were reminiscent of White Americans who engaged in forms of ethnic symbolism, and for whom their ethnicities were ‘optional’. However, our participants reported a stronger emotional attachment to their minority backgrounds than in the US studies of Americans with a more distant European heritage.

For example, Beverly (East Asian/White, 43) who lived in a mostly White town in the Southeast with her White British husband and daughters (aged 8 and 10) reported that her family’s day to day lives were accented with Chinese food, some Chinese expressions, and the occasional Chinese celebration. For instance, she talked of ‘little rituals’ like giving her children the red envelopes for Chinese New year, which contained money, or meeting relatives for dim sum in London’s Chinatown. So while her attachment to Chineseness was symbolically important to her, she was aware of her relatively superficial knowledge of her Chinese background. She also exhibited some self-consciousness about a lack of cultural knowledge about her Asian ancestry, coupled with an anxiety about not being ethnically ‘authentic’ (Song 2003). Various East Asian/White participants articulated the concern that many White people expected them to demonstrate their ethnic and cultural otherness (for instance, by demonstrating fluency in a Chinese dialect, or knowing about some aspect of East Asian culture or history). By comparison, Black/White participants were not usually subject to expectations that they demonstrate knowledge of other languages or distinctive cultural practices.

Some participants who had little knowledge of their East Asian heritage relied upon their parents to provide that cultural link with their own children. Nicole (East Asian/White, 28) expressed concern that without her Indonesian mother present (they were thinking of moving abroad), she would be unable to provide a meaningful link for her 6 month-old son to his Indonesian heritage, as she herself did not know enough about it (and her partner was a White British man):

*....because I see my mum and I was with her when I was growing up and I know that’s she’s from somewhere else, you know, it sort of all goes in, whereas, with me, you know, I’ll always speak to him probably in English, and you know, [her husband] and I will always be conversing in English and there probably won’t be that much influence or apparent influence to him that I’m actually Indonesian, so…*

Participants like Nicole expressed a degree of anxiety about the tenuous connection they felt to an ethnic minority heritage and background. Nicole lived in a predominantly White suburb in the South, so the presence of her Indonesian mother was crucial in exposing her young son to his Asian heritage. Because these respondents tended to have very little cultural knowledge in terms of language fluency or knowledge of distinctive cultural practices (and were not part of a wider ethnic social network), there was the real possibility that, in the case of their children, there could be a complete disconnection with that particular ethnic heritage (as in Nicole’s case). But not all participants who felt the symbolic importance of their minority heritage, like Jeremy (above), experienced such concerns about ethnic and cultural loss.

**Retaining minority culture**

In comparison with the participants discussed above, a small number of participants were very clear that they wanted to raise their children in relation to a specific minority heritage. Interestingly, 6 of the 8 respondents emphasizing the retention of minority culture were Black/White, though these 6 Black/White participants comprised less than a quarter of their ethnic sub-group. Only 2 other respondents, who were South Asian/White, reported this emphasis – though what this meant in practice could differ.

These participants reported that they had to make a concerted effort to keep their minority heritage/culture alive – though their motivations for doing so could vary. For instance, Amanda (47), who was Black/White, made a point of talking with her children (aged 9, 11, 14) about her father’s Black ancestry and ‘exposing’ her children to other Black people. Her children’s schools and their neighbourhood were primarily White, and in their day to day lives, her children were mostly around White people, including her own White British husband – though he was very active in talking with his children about possible forms of racism and introducing them to African music and art. This emphasis on minority heritage could also entail an explicit valuing of minority people and backgrounds, as a counter to the negative portrayals of minority people and cultures they encountered in the media and wider society.

In one case, Dennis (Black/White, 45) had been adopted at a very young age by a White couple in the East Midlands. While he thought his parents had been loving and well meaning, they had not been able to provide any link to his Black Caribbean heritage, and this made him determined to impart this heritage to his own children.

 *… I was brought up in a predominately white area so I was kind of the only black kid. I didn’t really know about mixed race in them days, I was just black, everybody else was white and I was black, so...it was, yeah it was hard growing up, it was hard growing up. But I looked to these people [his parents], they’d chosen me regardless of my colour so, you know, it was good.… [but] There was no cultural fulfilment or anything at all during my childhood. So...I just grew up knowing I was different, you know.*

As a result of feeling that there had been no ‘cultural fulfillment’, and his experiences of racism growing up, Dennis was clear that he wanted to build a life for himself among Black people, and he reported that he’d consciously had Black or part Black partners, and raised his children as ‘culturally Black’.

Dennis’ response to his own upbringing is interesting because in contrast with Aisha, above, whose lack of exposure to her minority parent had led her to disregard her Indian heritage, Dennis went in the other direction and reclaimed this ‘lost’ heritage – though their family circumstances (he had been adopted) were not similar. These cases reveal that people who had little exposure to minority heritages could react quite differently when they became parents themselves, in terms of how they made sense of, and valued (or not) a minority background and culture.

Like Dennis, Victor was concerned about revitalizing his Black ancestry in relation to his young son. Victor (2nd generation Black/White) was married to a Black African woman. When asked if it was important to pass down his Black heritage to his two-year-old son, he said:

*I think it’s very important because…. Like the Sankofa bird…. It’s a bird that comes from Ghana that’s called the Sankofa bird. As the bird walks forward he has his head back. He’s kind of like an African brother because he never forgets where he came from. And I think it’s very important to always remember your past as you go forward. And I’d like to embrace my son in both cultures.*

Victor noted that while his Irish background was important to him, and he was close to his White Irish mother, he wanted to pass down a Black cultural heritage, especially that of his Black African wife. As a 2nd generation mixed person, whose own father was (1st generation) mixed, Victor was very fair, and he had to work at asserting his Black heritage. Moreover, Victor ruefully reported that his father had not raised him with any appreciation of his Black Caribbean ancestry. As such, Victor was concerned that his son developed a pride in his Black ancestry, as a bulwark against racial prejudice which Victor believed he would surely encounter, as he grew up, especially since his son was phenotypically much more ‘Black’ than he himself was. Victor’s son was thus given an identifiably African name and was taught to speak in an African dialect by his mother.

As in the cases of Dennis and Victor, above, the presence of an ethnic minority (and/or) foreign spouse could be significant in terms of an emphasis upon a shared minority heritage. For instance, Laila’s (South Asian/White, 42) husband was Bangladeshi, and they had met in Bangladesh, where she had been working. Laila’s childhood in a White, suburban part of the Southeast was marked by experiences in which she felt largely denigrated by the White mainstream, and she was clear that she would not have wanted a White British partner, despite being part White herself. While Laila reported that they did not neglect her White mother’s background, they made an effort to teach their daughters (aged 10 and 12) Bengali, and to be proud of their Asian ancestry.

As illustrated above, the theme of cultural and racial loss and revitalization (Song & Gutierrez 2015), combined with a conscious effort to counter dominant and negative images and thinking about minority people, informed many of these respondents’ ways of thinking about their children’s upbringing. The specific attributes of partners were clearly significant in shaping children’s upbringing; and while it seemed that our multiracial participants were more likely to raise their children with a specific minority emphasis if there was a shared minority ‘race’ or ethnicity with their partners, this alone did not straightforwardly determine the ways in which these parents raised their children.

**Emphasis on cosmopolitanism**

Just over half of the participants (34 of 62) emphasized a cosmopolitan mode of raising their children. We use the term ‘cosmopolitan’ to refer to the ways in which these parents spoke of ideals around the appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity in contemporary British society, in which many different types of people, and hybrid cultural formations, are regarded with mutual respect (and see Caballero, Edwards, Puthussery 2008). Furthermore, the participants who articulated this cosmopolitan sensibility also saw themselves and their children as constitutive of an increasingly interconnected global humanity and/or citizenship. Such a lay person’s conceptualization of cosmopolitan values draws on the theorizing of analysts such as Appiah (2006), and Gilroy (2006), who writes of ‘multicultural conviviality’ found in contemporary British cities. While a few respondents actually used the term ‘cosmopolitan’, others referred to this concept in other ways, through descriptions of their everyday lives and their varied interactions and networks with others.

While these parents valued their children’s specific ethnic backgrounds, in contrast with those who emphasized the importance of passing down a *specific* minority heritage, these participants were more concerned with the idea of their children growing up exposed to a diverse set of people and practices which reflected the increasingly diverse and hybrid places and people they encountered. A number of ‘cosmopolitan’ participants even stated an antipathy to passing down a specific nationality. As Dominique (East Asian/White, 47), a lone parent, put it, ‘we don’t do Chinese, we don’t do French, we don’t do ‘English’. As illustrated in this excerpt, Dominique opposed particular nationalistic attachments. But it was still important to her that her 15 year old son remembered her Chinese father and grandparents and relatives – not because they were Chinese as such, but because they were part of her and her son’s family, just as her French relatives were important to her. By articulating an opposition to a singular nation, and nationality, Dominique asserts her appreciation of a more cosmopolitanism ethos.

Similarly, Drew (South Asian/White, 47), who had a White British partner, opposed the idea of a strong nationalistic affiliation and identity. In reflecting upon his upbringing by his Indian father and English mother, he noted that his father had not emphasized his Indian heritage:

*…. I mean one of the things I do remember my dad saying once was about, you know, nationality basically being an accident at birth and I think that’s kind of coloured my perception of the world, that, you know, ..I’ve always felt primarily that, you know, I’m a human being, if you like, and all the sort of grief and worrying and trouble caused by, you know, national identities is very hard for me to understand because, you know, we grew up in a sort of seamless mix of cultures where, you know, it just wasn’t an issue and there was no sort of flag-waving or….*

As a parent who lived in mostly White town in the Southeast, Drew advocated this anti-nationalist, ‘seamless mix of cultures’ view in his own children’s (aged 5 and 11) upbringing – though he also said his visits to India with his children were very important to him, to remain connected to his Indian relatives. Many of these ‘cosmopolitan’ parents also articulated notions of hope for a post-racial society, where our awareness of ethnic and racial difference would largely recede.

Another parent of two sons (aged 5 and 10), Rose (East Asian/White, 45), who was married to a White British man, exemplified this cosmopolitan sensibility, and even used the term itself:

*…And I don’t believe that there’s such a thing as a post-racial society but I kind of want him [her older son] to inhabit this sort of post-racial situation….and part of that is….and then me saying, “but your, you know, your grandfather was Chinese”, becomes part of that….so the … me telling him his grandfather was Chinese has a lot of facets to it and one of them is this sense that I want to bring him up in a …in a sort of cosmopolitan….kind of frame of mind*.

Many of the parents who lived in diverse, multi-ethnic London observed that their children would experience a melange of what Vertovec (2007) has called ‘super-diversity’. For example, Edward (East Asian/White, 33) and his Black British wife had recently become parents; he lived and worked in an extremely diverse part of London, and stressed both cosmopolitanism *and* the retention of minority culture. Reflecting upon the birth of his son, he noted that he wanted to do things differently from his Filipino mother, who had tried to direct him toward Filipino culture when he was growing up.

*Yeah, I think...I think he’s [his infant son] going to fit right in to where we are now, I think in the world I think...I think, I hope anyway that, you know, he can adapt to...because he’s got a very strong Jamaican family and he’s got a very strong Filipino family and a very strong British family as well and we all identify with our British-ness as well. So I think, I think that’s going to be great for him really anyway, to have that variety is amazing…I just want him…I think I just want him to be human, really, more than anything. I think just to be human and warm and be able to accept different things. To be able to celebrate – sounds a bit trite – but to celebrate difference is essential and to celebrate change and all of those things are just such important things…’*

In addition to an emphasis on ‘celebrat[ing] difference’, this understanding of cosmopolitanism also emphasized a global humanity which ideally transcended racial and ethnic differences. Thus, this cosmopolitan outlook was one in which some parents valorized and celebrated diversity per se, and their children’s curiosity and experience of many different cultures and places, not necessarily the privileging of their *own ethnic* ancestries.

For example, Bina (South Asian/White, 47) lived in London, and had had children with her ex-partner, who was also mixed (Japanese/White American). She spoke of how her daughter (23) became very attached to Greek culture, even though she had no Greek parentage as such:

*My sister being in Greece and having a son, their cousin, who’s Greek. And they spent quite a lot of time in Greece doing summer holidays, you know, go and visit her. So she [daughter] learnt Greek in fact. … And she wanted to become a Greek Orthodox, which kind of like, was like..(raises eyebrows and gives surprised face)…I didn’t really know how to deal with that! (she laughs). It’s like…ahhh….*

[and later]

*I know, it’s a bit weird, or a bit…it’s like, it’s expanding. Like if they* [children] *already didn’t have enough on their plate [in terms of their diverse ethnic ‘mix’], you know? But that’s part of who they are, and it’s part of where their curiosity leads them. And I’m all for that, I support it totally, I’m not going to say ‘NO, don’t learn Greek, why the hell do you want to learn Greek?!’ or ‘why don’t you learn Japanese instead’. No, I think it’s perfectly ok, it’s fine, it’s good. I mean, I support it totally, it’s just about opening up more and learning more.*

The ethnic and racial composition of people’s localities was clearly important in shaping parents’ socialization of their children. For parents like Edward and Bina (above), who were raising their children in a diverse part of London, their adoption of cosmopolitan norms and practices in their parenting was regarded as the norm in their locality and social networks. Yet, some parents who lived in much less ethnically diverse areas could also make a concerted effort to foster a cosmopolitan outlook with their children. For instance, Jonathon (East Asian/White, 42) had just moved from a relatively cosmopolitan city in Wales to a very White city in the Southwest with his White British wife and their two sons (5 and 11), and he was concerned to expose his children to a more diverse network of people:

*It’s really important for them to have a global view of the world…Faye [his wife] gets quite upset about discrimination, thoughtlessness, like thoughtless comments people might make…and she worries about it - it’s one of her anxieties about living in [city in the Southwest] actually, is the lack of diversity, whereas in the area that we lived in [before], was a very diverse area, and the school he went to he had lots of Asian friends….*

*[and later]*

*… I see them as Welsh, and I see them mixed race by line, but I’d like to see them as “people of the world”, it sounds like a very John Lennon thing to say, but they’re Welsh, they’re predominantly White, whatever that means, and they have German, Chinese and Scottish backgrounds, so that’s how I’d like to see them.*

Jonathon put an emphasis on his children being ‘people of the world’ – and Welsh, because they were born in Wales (not because of any Welsh ancestry). This brand of cosmopolitanism stresses the potential for multiple forms of belonging and identifications; importantly, it stresses *place* as much as ‘line’ (lineage).

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Interestingly, while most (though certainly not all) participants reported that their minority heritage was important to them, what this meant in practice in their everyday lives could differ considerably. There were four different modes of parenting practices reported among parents: raised as British, mostly British but with symbolic ethnicity, an emphasis on minority heritage, and an emphasis on cosmopolitanism. These main modes of parental upbringing are ideal types, and there was clearly some spillage between these categories. A relatively small number of participants reported raising their children as British, mostly British, or with a minority emphasis, while a majority of participants (of all ethnic ‘mixes’) reported an emphasis upon cosmopolitanism.

A number of factors were clearly important in shaping how our multiracial participants raised their children: the participants’ own identification and upbringing [including their own contact and exposure to their minority parent and their minority relatives and networks], the ethnicity and influence of their partner(s), the physical appearance of their children, the ethnic diversity of their neighbourhoods and children’s schools, and the participants’ class backgrounds. Some participants who had had little exposure to (or little contact with) a minority parent and extended family showed little attachment to their minority heritage, and this was also reflected in the fact that they did not cultivate an ethnic attachment for their children. On the other hand, in the case of a minority of participants, a lack of exposure to a minority heritage during their own childhoods galvanized some individuals to resuscitate their minority ancestry, largely through the ways in which they raised their children – as was evident in the cases of some of our Black/White participants.

Not surprisingly, both current and former partners could be influential in the raising of participants’ children. Those with a minority partner (with whom they shared a minority heritage) were more likely to emphasize that shared ancestry in the upbringing of their children, but the ethnicity of partners on its own did not determine the ways in which our participants engaged in their parenting. Furthermore, having a White British partner did not necessarily indicate a sole emphasis on White British socialization, as these White partners could be very invested in raising their children in a more cosmopolitan way (as shown above), or in fostering racial awareness in their children (cf. Twine’s 2010 findings about White mothers).

Rather than privileging any one ethnic or racial background (though many participants also fostered a connection to their ethnic backgrounds), per se, the cosmopolitan approach to parenting stressed the transcending of narrow modes of belonging, in terms of specific ethnic and racial affiliations. Being multiracial (for both themselves and their children) was often understood as exemplifying this ideal of cosmopolitanism. In large metropolitan areas, where forms of cultural melange were very present, this awareness of ongoing ‘mixture’ was strong – thus confirming the findings of Caballero, Edwards, and Puthussery (2008). And even parents who reported that they raised their children as ‘just’ British demonstrated ways of parenting which were clearly strongly influenced by the growing level of multiculture present in their daily lives.

In fact, this valuing of cosmopolitanism tended to draw upon a wider discourse of inclusion and ‘otherness’ in which being multiracial was only one dimension of the wider diversity (e.g. gay couples, alternative lifestyles) they saw as increasingly normal in British society. Despite the rather rose-tinted imagery and language used by some parents, they were all too aware of how this growing diversity could co-exist with continuing tensions and prejudices around difference.

Our findings, however, are limited by the middle class bias in our sample. Many of our predominantly middle class participants felt able to consume identities, or transcend or redefine them to their needs, even if such efforts were accompanied by some uncertainty or anxiety (since not all such assertions were validated by others). As Peony Faghen-Smith (2010) has argued, middle class multiracial people have a greater sense of entitlement, like other educated, middle class people. Nevertheless, some of our working class Black/White participants (e.g. Victor and Dennis, above) showed that they re-worked and revalued the meanings of a mixed Black/White identity and community for themselves and their children.

In comparison with how they themselves had been raised, our multiracial participants reported a marked shift in parenting practices and culture – toward one in which the valuing of ethnic and racial difference was much more pronounced, and also incorporated into their everyday family lives. While it had been rather uncommon for our participants to have been raised with a cosmopolitan emphasis themselves, or for their parents to have talked with them about issues concerning racial awareness or pride, this generation of multiracial parents appears to be better equipped to foster a sense of identity and belonging for their children, so that they are not marginalized on the basis of ethnic and racial difference.

This study extends the work of Caballero et al. (2008) and Caballero et al (2012), in that we also found a growing normalization around being multiracial and being part of a mixed family. Our findings suggest the importance of avoiding normative conclusions about the ‘best’ way for multiracial individuals (and families) to raise their children (cf Caballero et al. 2012). It would be erroneous to conclude that the minority of parents who raised their children with what they believed to be a solely British emphasis are somehow less attentive to their children’s multiple needs; as shown in the excerpts above, parents who had relatively little attachment to a minority heritage had no wish to try to manufacture a meaningful minority history or identification for their children if they themselves felt no such connection. Conversely, while the majority of parents in this study reported a cosmopolitan mode of raising their children, such an emphasis on cosmopolitanism should not be automatically assumed to be a healthier or more appropriate approach to parenting children in these households.

As the growth and normalization of mixed people (and their children) continues apace, more in-depth studies of how multiracial communities and networks may differ, not only across ethnic mixes, but also across different regions and class backgrounds, will be needed. Further investigation into how multiracial people (of different ethnic and racial backgrounds and disparate generational loci of ‘mixture’) raise their children will be needed for a fuller understanding of the multiracial population. Despite a strong emphasis on cosmopolitanism among our parents, there is every indication that ‘mixed’ people constitute a very heterogeneous sector of the population in terms of their social experiences, racial and ethnic identifications, and the parenting of their children.

By focusing specifically upon multiracial people who are parents, this study breaks new ground, and points to the importance of investigating the continuing salience (or not) or ethnic and racial difference (or an attachment to the idea of being mixed per se) a further generation down (Song 2015). As this next generation of individuals matures and partners, we will need to differentiate among different forms of ‘mixture’ – to acknowledge differences between having mostly White, as opposed to non-White, ancestry. We will also need to collect data which specifies the generational locus of ‘mixture’, and consider at what generational juncture claims of ‘mixedness’ may be of little social and political consequence.

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