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What Constitutes Intermarriage for Multiracial People in Britain?

By
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Intermarriage is of great interest to analysts because a group's tendency to partner across ethnic boundaries is usually seen as a key indicator of the social distance between groups in a multiethnic society. Theories of intermarriage as a key indicator of integration are, however, typically premised upon the union of white and nonwhite individuals, and we know very little about what happens in the unions of multiracial people, who are the children of intermarried couples. What constitutes intermarriage for multiracial people? Do multiracial individuals think that ethnic or racial ancestries are a defining aspect of their relationships with their partners? In this article, I argue that there are no conventions for how we characterize endogamous or exogamous relationships for multiracial people. I then draw on examples of how multiracial people and their partners in Britain regard their relationships with their partners and the significance of their and their partners' ethnic and racial backgrounds. I argue that partners' specific ancestries do not necessarily predict the ways in which multiracial individuals regard their partners' ethnic and racial backgrounds as constituting difference or commonality within their relationships.

Keywords: intermarriage; multiracial people; relationships; partners; ancestry

There are now a growing number of studies on intermarriage in Western multiethnic societies, where such unions are increasingly common, especially in countries with postcolonial migrants (and their descendants). Britain is witnessing various streams of migration, as well as high rates of interracial and interethnic partnering across the second (and now third) generations. With the relatively recent enlargement of the European Union (EU), the settlement and eventual growth

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of that (EU) second generation also raises interesting questions about how we conceptualize and document these trends in Britain.

Intermarriage is of great interest to analysts because a group's tendency to partner across ethnic boundaries is considered a key indicator of the social distance between groups in a multiethnic society. However, we know very little about what happens the next generation down: the unions of multiracial people, who are the children of intermarried couples. The 2011 England Wales Census revealed that the "mixed/multiple ethnic groups" grew from 1.2 percent in 2001 to 2.2 percent of the population in 2011 (Office for National Statistics [ONS] 2012), but this is unquestionably an undercount if the population of mixed people is based on the number of people of interracial parentage, as opposed to those who self-identify as mixed on official forms (Nandi and Platt 2012). The mixed population is certainly one of the fastest-growing sectors of the British population (Coleman 2010).

Studies of "multiracial" (or "mixed race") people and families are now well established, especially in North America (see Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Root 1996; Spickard 1989; Bratter 2010, to name just a few), but increasingly, also, in Britain (see Aspinall and Song 2013; Tizard and Phoenix 1993; Ali 2003; Twine 2010; Caballero, Edwards, and Smith 2008). By "multiracial," I mean someone with ancestors from more than one "racial" group, for example, black/white or Asian/white. Most of these studies are about multiracial young people or children, and none of these studies has specifically explored *the partnering of multiracial people* in Britain—something that provides a revealing snapshot of contemporary ethnic and racial boundaries and social divisions. Because multiracial individuals are by definition mixed, their very mixedness illustrates the limited utility of theorizing (about intermarriage and integration) based upon monoracial groups, which are seen as occupying relatively stable positions in a racially stratified society (Song 2003).

In Britain, most multiracial people (most of whom are part white) partner with white individuals (ONS 2005). Does this constitute intermarriage or not, and how do multiracial people regard the nature of their relationships with their partners? In this article, I first argue that there are no conventions for how we characterize endogamous or exogamous relationships for multiracial people. I then draw on a few examples of how multiracial people and their partners (from a Leverhulme Trust–funded research project in Britain) regard their relationships with their partners. Do multiracial individuals in Britain think that their ethnic or racial backgrounds are a defining aspect of their relationships with their partners? Is a shared ethnicity or race (overlap) an important basis for their relationships with one another? A focus upon the case of multiracial people and their partners addresses increasingly pressing questions about generational change, multiple axes of difference (and commonality), and the salience of ethnic and racial difference.

Intermarriage as an Indicator of Integration

On the whole, there is evidence that attitudes toward interracial relationships have relaxed in Britain and other societies, such as the U.S. By "interracial"

unions, I mean those involving people seen as belonging to visibly different "races," as opposed to "inter-ethnic" unions, which may involve individuals of disparate ethnic but not "racial" backgrounds, such as French/English or Chinese/Korean. One prominent report in Britain by the think tank British Future found that the number of people concerned about interracial relationships fell from 50 percent in the 1980s to only 15 percent in 2012 (Ford et al. 2012). In general, there is growing evidence in Britain of what Caballero, Edwards, and Smith (2008) call "cultures of mixing," which can involve partners from different racial, ethnic, and/or religious backgrounds (and many of whom are middle class) and increasingly comprise normal, everyday life in many urban and suburban regions. Despite the growing commonality of interracial dating and partnering, there is little doubt that the "public" in much of the Western (and indeed, wider) world is still inordinately sensitive to and aware of instances of (visible) interracial partnering.

Recently released data from the 2011 England and Wales census found that 9 percent of people were living as part of an "inter-ethnic" (the term used by the ONS) relationship. The analysis also showed that people of "mixed/multiple ethnic groups" had the highest propensity to be in such a relationship (85 percent) (Arnett 2014). Furthermore, this census analysis found that 7 percent of dependent children lived in households with an interethnic relationship (Arnett 2014).

Many studies of intermarriage have focused upon the demographic characteristics of who does and does not intermarry (see Kalmijn 1998; Van Tubergen and Maas 2007; Qian and Lichter 2007). Various factors are shown to influence the propensity to intermarry: generational status, opportunity structures, the availability of coethnic partners, as well as educational attainment. In a review of who intermarries in Britain, Muttarak and Heath (2010) found that while second-generation minority individuals are significantly more likely to intermarry than members of the first generation (by responding similarly to opportunity structures and generational change), they argued that ethnic differences should not be overlooked. For example, British people of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi origin were less likely to be exogamous than were, for instance, people of Chinese, black Caribbean, or black African backgrounds.

It is now largely regarded as a truism that intermarriage is the ultimate indicator of a group's integration into the wider society (see Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 2003, Lee and Bean 2004). According to Alba and Nee (2003, 90), "It [intermarriage] is generally regarded, with justification, as the litmus test of assimilation. A high rate of intermarriage signals that the social distance between the groups involved is small and that individuals of putatively different ethnic backgrounds no longer perceive social and cultural differences significant enough to create a barrier to long-term union." Because intermarriage is said to signal a genuine social acceptance of ethnic minority people as equals, as opposed to lesser "others," it is usually regarded as a desirable outcome; and the story tends to stop there, with the implicit view that those who intermarry with whites will have been successfully "incorporated" and do not pose social or political problems for mainstream society (Rodríguez-García 2006; Song 2009).

Such intermarriage is also understood to signal the gradual erosion of the ethnic and racial distinctiveness of that minority group. The strong implication is that the children of such unions are likely to further this integration process. However, such assumptions are still speculative, as are those about the nature of interracial unions and the status of the minority partner in such unions (with whites). Furthermore, much theorizing on intermarriage does not differentiate between economic and social forms of "integration" (Song 2009; and see Meng and Gregory 2005).

Generalizations about the link between intermarriage and integration are especially problematic in light of the very significant differences found among multiracial people. In a study of children in families of mixed parentage in Britain, Platt (2012) argues that out-marriage as a "barometer of openness of society" can obscure important variations (especially across disparate ethnic groups) in how the partners and children in such unions can fare, especially in socioeconomic terms. Platt (2012) found that some children growing up in such interethnic households are more vulnerable to parental worklessness than children from majority families in Britain. Furthermore, analysts such as Rodríguez-García et al. (this volume) argue that whether intermarriage causes integration, or the other way around, is difficult to establish, and that the relationship between intermarriage and integration is multidirectional and segmented.

In the case of multiracial people, will they simply keep "integrating" into the white mainstream, and does this suggest the gradual demise (altogether) of ethnic and racial distinctiveness? Looking a further generation down, at multiracial individuals, the question of whom multiracial people partner with is especially pertinent now, as there is growing attention to the racial positioning and status of multiracial people in multiethnic societies. Because many societies conceive of minority experiences in terms of the white and nonwhite binary, there is still relatively little known about the perceived social distance between multiracial people and white and monoracial minority people, respectively (though see Smith and Moore 2000; Shih and Sanchez 2005).

Studies of the social class backgrounds of those who intermarry are still few, but are now countering the often ridiculously polarized depictions of mixing (and of mixed people) as either wholly disadvantaged or "the exceptional multiracial" (see Aspinall 2015). For instance, Muttarak's (2004) analysis of Labour Force Survey data found that a higher proportion of white women in mixed unions were in Social Class I (professional and managerial) than women in coethnic unions. Another study found that multiracial people are relatively socioeconomically advantaged in comparison with monoracial minority people (Panico and Nazroo 2011). However, these studies reveal the difficulty of speaking of "multiracial" people (or forms of intermarriage) as an undifferentiated category, in terms of ethnicity, class, generational locus of minority ancestry, and regional location (Song 2010).

Studies of intermarriage and studies of multiracial people and families have been oddly disconnected, as quite separate bodies of research (though there may be passing references to each other). While most studies of "intermarriage" are primarily interested in it as an indicator of social integration, much of the earlier

literature on multiracial (or "mixed race") people in North America in particular has addressed the identification and belonging of multiracial people. In this respect, this article is one attempt to join the key theoretical concerns of studies on intermarriage and multiracial people.

How Do We Conceptualize Multiracial People's Unions?

Up to now, studies of intermarriage have focused upon monoracial individuals partnering with each other and have not considered the "product" of such unions. Theorizing on intermarriage, as a key indicator of integration, is typically premised upon the union (usually) of a white and nonwhite individual (that is, the union of two disparate monoracial individuals). Since theorizing on intermarriage is based on a union of monoracial individuals, how do we conceptualize the relationships of multiracial individuals? What would constitute "intermarriage" for such individuals, and is such a term even applicable? And because mixed people are (usually) both white and nonwhite, they are neither indisputably part of the "majority" or "minority."

One immediate difficulty with this question is that there is no clear or widely accepted convention for how to conceptualize and measure intermarriage across (or even within) countries such as Britain. As shown below, the ethnic categories used in several high-profile national surveys in Britain can differ in terms of how broad or finely graded they are, which complicates the comparability of findings in studies of intermarriage.

In a recent study of intermarriage in Britain, Muttarak and Heath (2010, 283) use the following nine ethnic categories used in the (now-defunct) British General Household Survey (now called the General Lifestyle Survey): "White British, Black Caribbean, Black African, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Mixed and Other ethnic group." They readily note that one key problem concerns the diversity of individuals within the "Mixed" category, as well as the fact that "Mixed" does not constitute an ethnic group as such (Song 2010). As with most other measures of intermarriage, the categorization of relationships relies upon the notion that each of the above categories is distinct, but the "Mixed" category already constitutes a great deal of heterogeneity and does not fit easily with the other eight categories.

In their study, Muttarak and Heath (2010) identify three types of "partnerships": coethnic, majority-minority and minority-minority; and the term "interethnic" refers to both majority-minority and minority-minority partnerships. According to this three-way typology, a coethnic partnership is a marriage or cohabitation between a man and woman from "the same ethnic group (as measured in the GHS)"; a "majority/minority partnership" is defined as "a marriage or cohabitation between an ethnic minority individual with a member of the majority group, that is with a White British person"; and a "minority/minority partnership" is one between an ethnic minority man and woman from "different ethnic minority groups" (p. 283). What is never clear, however, are the criteria by which

the unions of "Mixed" people are classified in this three-way typology. On what basis would relationships for "Mixed" people be considered coethnic, majority/minority, or minority/minority? Presumably, someone who was "Mixed" would be considered to be in a coethnic partnership with someone if that person also identified as "Mixed," irrespective of their specific ancestries (see Aspinall [2009] for a helpful discussion).

Using broad panethnic measures of "co-ethnic" and "inter-ethnic" unions can pose difficulties, especially in relation to the multiracial population. In the 2001 England and Wales Census,

> "Inter-ethnic" marriages are defined as marriages between people from different *aggregate ethnic groups*, where the ethnic group categories are: White, Mixed, Asian [meaning South Asian], Black, Chinese, Other ethnic group. For example, a White British person married to someone from a non-White ethnic group or a Pakistani person married to someone from a non-Asian ethnic group." (ONS 2005, emphasis added)

It is notable that the England and Wales census employs the term "inter-ethnic" but uses what I would call racial categories (such as white, black, Asian), with the exception of the category "Chinese." It is also interesting that while there is no mention (one could even say avoidance, as in much of Europe) of the word "race" or "racial group," the ONS's use of the term "aggregate ethnic groups" approximates what we understand to be racial groups.

In the case of "Mixed" persons, their union with someone from any of the categories other than "Mixed" would constitute an interethnic marriage by the ONS's definition (including marriages with nonmixed individuals in which there is a shared white or minority "race"). In the ONS discussion of "interethnic marriages," it explains,

> The *Mixed ethnic group* is relatively small and there are limited opportunities to marry someone from the same ethnic group. However, *mixed race people* are often married to someone from a related ethnic group. For example, among men who described their own ethnic group as "Mixed – White and Black Caribbean," 76 per cent were married to White women, 8 percent to Black Caribbean women and 11 per cent to "Mixed – White and Black Caribbean" women. (ONS 2005, 4, emphasis added)

Complicating the discussion of intermarriage is that there is often no clarity about what constitutes "ethnic" versus "racial" groups. While space limitations do not allow a fuller discussion of this issue, many analysts (such as Van den Berghe 1978) have tended to regard "race" as socially defined, but on the basis of physical criteria; while ethnicity is also socially defined, but on the basis of cultural criteria such as customs and languages. In fact, I have argued elsewhere that the neat analytical distinction between "race" and "ethnicity" often overlooks the slippery and blurred boundaries between the two terms and the contingent ways in which they can intertwine in relation to particular groups (Song 2003).

The excerpt from the ONS above is a case in point; it refers to both "Mixed ethnic group" and to "mixed race people," without an explanation of these terms.

One possible inference is that "Mixed" people constitute an "ethnic group" in officialdom, while Britons tend to use the term "mixed race" colloquially in relation to individuals.

The ONS's reference to marriages to someone from a "related ethnic group" refers to the idea of an ethnic or racial overlap. But because the ONS would still count a "Mixed" person's partnerships with anyone other than someone who also ticked "Mixed" (including someone with a shared ethnicity) as intermarriage (e.g., a white/Chinese person with a Chinese person), the high rate of intermarriage reported for "Mixed" people as a whole (85 percent in the 2011 Census) presents a rather misleading picture, as it does not capture any instances of ethnic or racial overlap.

In one of the few explicit discussions of the difficulties of conceptualizing and categorizing "inter-ethnic" and "co-ethnic" partnerships in relation to multiracial people, Platt (2009) notes, *"However, it makes no sense to consider a union between one person who defines themselves as of mixed ethnicity and another person who defines themselves as of mixed ethnicity as a co-ethnic union, since the particular multiple heritages may have no overlap"* (p. 13, emphasis added).

Clearly, there are various ways in which we can conceive of a coethnic union in relation to a mixed person, using broader or stricter criteria. For instance, it is possible to consider a coethnic union as one where *either* element of "mixture" is found in the partner, so a black Caribbean/white person could be considered to be in a coethnic union if she or he were in a partnership either with a white partner or a black Caribbean partner or with a multiracial black Caribbean/white partner. Alternatively, one could prioritize the minority ethnicity, so that a relationship with a black Caribbean partner or with a black Caribbean/white partner would constitute a coethnic union, but not a partnership with a white partner (Platt 2009).

Muttarak and Heath's (2010) three-way model is more refined than the usual binary of endogamy/exogamy or in-marriage/out-marriage. However, as I discuss in this article, the increasingly varied forms of interethnic and interracial partnering (or those which are *both* interethnic and interracial) suggest that their typology—coethnic, majority/minority, minority/minority—while helpful, is not sufficiently refined to capture all the possible diversity emerging among intermarried and cohabiting couple households. Furthermore, it is not possible to categorize "Mixed" people within their three-way model in a way that captures racial or ethnic overlap. As Platt (2009) notes above, different conventions can apply in the case of multiracial people, so that what constitutes a coethnic relationship can be operationalized in relation to a shared "majority" (white), "minority" (nonwhite), or even multiracial background.

The Study

In this article, I draw on findings from a broader Leverhulme Trust research project on multiracial people and the identification and socialization of their

children in Britain (Song, forthcoming). I focus here on whom multiracial participants partnered with and the ways in which they regarded their unions with their partners. In this small sample study, sixty-two multiracial individuals (thirty-seven women, twenty-five men; thirty-two black/white, nineteen South Asian/white, eleven East Asian/white) were recruited through a variety of methods, including via primary and secondary schools (nineteen), websites (twenty-two), and snowballing (twenty-one). Through discussions with key gatekeepers (such as headteachers), brief letters describing the nature and aims of the project were disseminated by schools directly, either in the form of hard copies or via email attachments sent out to all parents. Advertisements were also placed on websites aimed at mixed individuals and families in Britain. Snowball sampling was also used after these recruitment avenues were exhausted. Overall, I did not discern any significant differences in the participants or data, based upon the mode of recruitment—though those who were recruited via websites aimed at "mixed" people and families could have had a heightened interest and awareness in their status as mixed people.

After filling in an online survey, in which they were asked to provide personal background information about themselves and their families, they participated in in-depth face-to-face interviews, which lasted from 1.5 to 2.5 hours. All interviews were recorded on digital voice recorders and subsequently transcribed. Pseudonyms were used throughout.

Most of the participants were aged between 26 and 50 (ten of sixty-two participants were between 50 and 58, and one was 62—the oldest in the sample). Fourteen of sixty-two participants were not partnered at the time of the study, with most of these being divorced from their former partners. Most participants (46 of 62) had white British or white Other partners with whom they had children.

The participants were predominantly (though not exclusively) middle class: they had either a first degree in higher education and/or professional forms of employment, while ten of the sixty-two participants had relatively low-skilled and/or clerical forms of employment. In this respect, the sample is skewed in favor of a middle-class bias, and the findings are therefore limited in relation to more working-class mixed people. While the majority resided in the Greater London area and the Southeast, a smaller proportion lived in the Midlands and the North of England. Most of these participants had been born and raised in Britain, while a very small number of participants arrived in Britain as young adults.

While most (fifty-four of sixty-two) participants were "first-generation" mixed, with one white and one nonwhite minority parent, seven participants were "second-generation" mixed (meaning they had at least one parent who was multiracial), and one participant was unsure if she was first- or second-generation mixed. In this article, I use the terms "mixed race" and "multiracial" interchangeably, as there is no one accepted terminology among analysts. The participants in this study are individuals who had parents who were considered to be of two distinct "races," and visibly different from each other, according to prevailing social norms.

How Do "Mixed" People See Their Relationships with Their Partners?

As discussed above, as many multiethnic societies become ever more diverse demographically, existing notions of intermarriage are increasingly ill-equipped to make sense of the multiple and varied forms of interethnic and interracial partnerships and dating that are ever more common.

In addition to the fact that existing theories of intermarriage cannot accommodate the case of multiracial people, discussions of intermarriage are increasingly complicated in two respects: first, in terms of ambiguities around which ethnic-racial criteria are applied to our definitions of it. Is it confined to interracial partnering, or should it include forms of interethnic partnering (with no visible "racial" differences)? And do we factor in the generational locus of "mixture" in people's genealogies in determining whether a union is interracial? For instance, should someone who has a multiracial parent (i.e., a second-generation mixed person) count as mixed?

The notion of racial overlap is useful in the study of multiracial individuals because many of the participants in the Leverhulme study were aware of the specific ethnicities of their partners and whether they shared any ethnic or racial ancestries. Mapping out the unions of people, including those of multiracial people (e.g., partnering with white people) is revealing and important, but we should not then assume, a priori, the salience or meaningfulness of particular lines of difference or of racial overlap in the unions of multiracial people. Various top-down models and typologies (or the ways in which ethnic/racial boundaries are conceived by analysts or "the public") may not correspond neatly to how multiracial people "on the ground" think about and experience their relationships.

Instead of working within the binary model, and theorizing unions as either endogamous or exogamous, we need to ask: what is the nature of ethnic/racial overlap (if any), and in what way is this overlap meaningful (or not) for multiracial people and their partners? Was ethnic or racial difference and/or commonality considered significant in relation to partners, or was there another dimension of identification or experience deemed to be a more defining quality of their relationship? Multiracial individuals had varying narratives about if and how ethnic and racial differences and commonalities mattered or not, both in relation to their partners and their children.

Various permutations of overlap are possible in relation to multiracial people and their partners, such as (1) overlap with white heritage, (2) overlap with minority heritage, (3) exact match of mixed heritage (complete overlap), and (4) no overlap at all. In addition to these possibilities, if one introduces ethnic/national differences in addition to "racial" differences or religious differences (see Caballero, Edwards, and Smith 2008), further forms and layers of differentiation can be noted. As I will discuss below, what these forms of overlap mean, and what aspects of identification or experience are deemed to be different or shared in common, could vary considerably for mixed people.

In the remainder of the article, I draw on some specific examples of multiracial individuals and their partners to illustrate the multiple and variable ways in which they regarded and experienced their unions with their partners. In other words, being a specific ethnic "mix," and having a partner of a particular ethnic/racial background, did not necessarily predict the ways in which the participants thought about, and understood, their relationships with their partners and children. While these cases are not an exhaustive catalogue of all the possible ways in which ethnic and racial differences and commonalities were perceived and understood, they provide an overview of the range of possible responses.

A shared white "race"

All of the sixty-two participants in the study were part white. So for those with white partners, whiteness was shared between the partners; but what having a white partner meant for multiracial individuals was variable, so that while some emphasized a sense of commonality with their white partner (not a pronounced sense of racial difference), others perceived a meaningful racial divide. While many factors, of course, influenced how multiracial individuals regarded their unions with their white partners, their own upbringing by parents, physical appearance, and experiences of racial "othering" and racism appeared to be especially significant.

Aisha, who was South Asian/white (50), and whose partner was white British, did not conceive of any meaningful difference between her and her husband, because she had been raised in Britain by her white British mother. She had had very little contact with her Indian father, as her parents separated when she was very young. Having grown up in predominantly white places, Aisha reported that she did not feel any different from those around her, though she still occasionally felt racially "othered" in certain contexts. Significantly, she reported that she looked Asian to others and had an Asian first and surname, which marked her as "different." Nevertheless, this did not translate into seeing herself as anything other than British, and she did not regard her relationship with her husband as one that was "mixed" (though she realized that others saw them as a mixed couple); rather, her Indian parentage was simply an accident of birth. Her detachment from her Indian background also meant that she did not "pass down" this heritage to her son:

> Interviewer: So … I just wonder, I realise that your father's Indian heritage did not play a big part of your upbringing or how you thought of yourself. Is this something that you've talked to John [son] about at all?
> Aisha: Not a lot. … I mean I've got a few pictures and I know a little bit about his [father's] life and a few things like that but … and there are a huge amount of relatives out in India that I know exist but I've never really had an urge to go and visit them, but I've told John a little bit, not an awful lot. But I don't know an awful lot. But I mean there's no, there's no sort of concealment, not wanting to talk about it.

While some participants appeared to be committed to the disavowal of racial differences between themselves and their partners, others made a point of directly addressing it and being racially conscious and aware of such differences both within and outside their households. For instance, Elaine (black/white, 32) had a white British husband, and she was absolutely clear that they constituted an interracial relationship. While their shared white English background was implicit, her experiences of being seen as a black person (albeit light-skinned) all of her life registered as a key and meaningful difference between her and her white husband. Elaine was highly aware that they, as mixed and white individuals, respectively, experienced their social worlds very differently, as well as the fact that they were seen as a mixed family in public settings. However, a strong unifying bond between her and her husband was their commitment to racial awareness—something that was central to the way in which they socialized their children, and to everyday discussions in family life. Thus, in comparison with Aisha (above, who was also partnered with a white British man), Elaine discussed the ways in which racial difference mattered in her relationship with her white partner.

By comparison, mixed individuals with a white (but non-British) partner often tended to draw the key line of difference in their union in relation to their partner's non-British ethnicity and cultural background (and not their whiteness per se), even if those ethnic differences were not always visible to "the public," depending upon the physical appearance of the multiracial parent.

For instance, Allan (South Asian/white, 53), who had a Bangladeshi father and white English mother, partnered with a white Polish woman who came to Britain as a young adult. Allan did not feel particularly "English" or "British," and regarded himself as a mixed person who had felt on the margins of British society growing up:

> So British is … I don't relate to a Union Jack, even the cub scouts movement, I have great problems with St. George. So English, I definitely do not relate to in any shape or form.

And in contrast with Aisha, who was not particularly interested in, or invested in, her minority background, it was important to Allan that his children learned of both his Bangladeshi, and his wife's Polish, heritages. While he and his wife shared white ancestry, Allan identified as a mixed person, looked physically ambiguous, and had not been seen as white growing up. Thus, his experiences of being racially othered meant that he did not really regard a shared white heritage as a meaningful point of commonality with his wife. And while her Polishness constituted a line of difference between them, Allan and his wife both shared a sense of not being part of the white British mainstream. Rather, he regarded his relationship with his Polish wife as one characterized by a shared cosmopolitanism and an appreciation of cultural mélange.

A shared minority "race"

In some cases, a shared minority "race" between a couple could constitute a shared sense of commonality or identification, as this could be meaningful or

valued in different ways (and to different degrees). For instance, Victor (39) was second-generation mixed black/white. His father was black/white mixed, and his mother was white Irish, and his partner was a black African woman who grew up in Africa. Victor valued, and was proud of, his wife's black African heritage, and he regarded it as an important part of their family life. To partner with a black woman seemed to be a concerted decision on his part to address his implied concerns about racial "dilution" and his wish to raise their young son with a knowledge and appreciation of his partner's African language and culture (Song and O'Neill Gutierrez 2015). Interestingly, despite the many points of difference here—where they were born and raised, their parentage, their first languages— what Victor emphasized was a shared African-origin heritage (though he was "only" one-quarter black). So while he recognized that he was very mixed, with considerable white ancestry, he also regarded himself as a black person; and in this respect, he did not see his union with his wife as one defined by racial differ- ence but, rather, commonality.

However, a shared minority "race" did not necessarily mean that the multira- cial individual straightforwardly perceived a sense of commonality with a partner. For instance, Louise (44) was black/white and strongly identified as a mixed woman. The father of her son was a black British man. While Louise recognized that she and her ex-partner shared a black heritage, she (unlike Victor) empha- sized a racial and experiential distinction between herself, as a mixed person, and her partner, as a black person, respectively. Louise saw her relationship with her ex-partner as a "mixed" (as opposed to a coethnic) relationship:

> Because … my identity is something that I pass on. My state of being mixed race I pass on. Whenever I've been in relationships with white men, it's automatically been a mixed race relationship, but when I was in a relationship with my son's father, it was a black relationship, which always pissed me off. That annoyed me. I'm mixed race so no matter what relationship I have, it'll always be a mixed race relationship, as far as I am con- cerned. So any child I have, doesn't matter who their father is, will be mixed race, because I am. It's really as simple as that.

While her mixed background was frustratingly invisible (and possibly inconsequen- tial) to others when they saw her with her ex-partner, as Louise reasons, any rela- tionship she had with someone else will be "a mixed race relationship," because (presumably) other than the exact same "mixture" as hers, any other relationship constituted a form of racial difference. While it was important that her son identi- fied with his black father, and developed a sense of pride in being a black boy/man, Louise did not see herself as (solely) black, and she also wanted to convey that sense of mixed identity to her son. Her insistence upon seeing her relationship with her partner as "mixed" was also motivated by the fact that she felt less immersed in a predominantly black culture and network than her ex-partner.

An "exact match" or an emphasis on difference?

In some cases, multiracial individuals partnered with those who were also mixed—though the perception of ethnic or racial difference and/or commonality

could, again, vary, depending upon various factors, including the specific ancestries involved in the "mix." For instance, one participant, Bina (South Asian/white, 47), had a French mother and Indian father, and her ex-partner was a man who had a Japanese mother and white American father. While on an official form such as the England and Wales Census, this would be seen as a coethnic union (if both partners ticked "Mixed"), such a categorization of this union would obscure the many different ethnic backgrounds shared between Bina and her ex-partner.

In fact, the interview with Bina showed that while she recognized a shared experience of being multiracial, she also regarded her relationship with her former partner as one that was characterized by highly distinctive ethnic and national differences (that is, no overlap); Bina's own upbringing was one in which her mother's French, and her father's Indian, cultures were celebrated as distinctive. She did not conceive of a meaningful white racial overlap between her white French and her partner's white American parentage. Rather, she saw all the ethnic backgrounds as being culturally quite distinct—white American, Japanese, French, and Indian—in terms of cultural sensibilities, practices, and languages.

It was clear that Bina, as a multiracial person, had been attracted to the idea of partnering with, and interested in, the novelty of a partner whose mixed heritage was quite different from hers:

> The father of my kids, he's half Japanese, half American. I just thought we were going to have beautiful kids [she laughs]. That's what I thought! I have no idea what they're going to look like but … yeah, I just thought "they're going to have a great mixture."

What is conveyed here is a sense of a multiracial experience that celebrates the notion of diversity and cosmopolitanism per se. Bina delighted in the idea of people being confounded by what she believed others would see as an unlikely and unexpected "mix": "No, that is not possible!" But despite her recognition of ethnic specificity, she also emphasized the fact that both she and her partner *shared* the experience of being mixed (what Mengel [2001] refers to as a "third space") and had grown up in families that were both multiracial and multiethnic.

In comparison with Bina, some mixed respondents, especially black/white individuals, emphasized the significance of an "exact match" in multiracial background. Interestingly, given the growing commonality of being mixed in urban centers, such as London, some participants spoke of a wider network of multiracial (black/white) people and of what it meant to partner with someone else who was also mixed, black and white. For instance, Gemma (black/white, 33) referred to the fact that she and her partner were both multiracial in the same way, with a white mother and black father, and she referred to themselves as a "double mix": "If both your parents are mixed race then you're a "double mix" (she laughs).

According to Gemma, while mixed people like her could date black or white people in the past, they were now encountering other mixed people like themselves, and it was clear that the recognition of being mixed, as opposed to monoracially black, as implied in the use of the term "double mix," suggested a shared

experience that was somehow distinct from that of either a white or black person. For Gemma, the fact that she and her partner comprised a "double mix" translated into a strong basis for identification with one another, and the "exact match" between them was symbolic of family unity, also in relation to their daughter. In this respect, this notion of an exact racial match meant that Gemma understood her relationship as a coethnic union.

No racial overlap

One of the three categories Muttarak and Heath (2010) posed was that of "minority-minority," which constituted a form of intermarriage. While not very common in the current study, there were cases of participants who partnered with (monoracial) individuals with whom there was no shared ethnic or racial background. For instance, Josh (South Asian/white, 32) was married to a black British woman, and they had two children.

Interestingly, Josh insisted upon characterizing his relationship with his black partner (and also his relationship with their children) as one in which racial differences simply did not matter. While he was all too aware that, in public settings, they were quite visibly a mixed couple and family, embodied by racial difference, within their family, he was adamant that race meant nothing in their home lives (Ifekwunigwe 1999). When asked about how significant it was that he was South Asian/white while his wife was black British, he replied, "No, well, the thing is we're similar enough, to a certain extent anyway," meaning that he and his wife had both been raised in Britain and shared many of the same cultural references, despite having been raised in disparate household cultures. And later, he said, "It [perceived racial difference] would probably be significant to other people who need to tick their boxes, but we're all just individuals anyway."

So despite the fact that there was no racial overlap in their ancestries, Josh and his wife emphasized their shared Britishness, as well as a shared postracial sensibility about themselves, as individuals, with shared interests and outlooks, rather than dwelling upon, or legitimating, the idea that they were of different "races." There are, of course, other possible ways in which a minority/minority couple may conceive of their union. For instance, it is possible that one ethnic or racial background is dominant in a household.

Discussion and Conclusion

As these accounts reveal, multiracial people (whether partnered with white, minority, or multiracial individuals) could perceive, and make sense of, their partnerships in very different ways, in terms of where they perceived significant lines of difference and/or commonality in relation to each other. Because of their mixed heritage, these individuals tended to think about the salience/meanings of "difference" in ways that are somewhat distinct from the ways in which monoracial minority or white individuals may do so.

Given that most multiracial people in Britain have both white and ethnic minority ancestries, we need to rethink the assumed direction of "integration" and change in the unions of multiracial individuals. Traditional models of integration and assimilation have assumed that it is the minority individual who "integrates" into the white mainstream. But it is possible that some multiracial individuals may have white partners who are committed to revitalizing an ethnic minority heritage and/or identification for their children and their families more generally. Indeed, what is "mainstream" is changing.

Therefore, presumptions about automatic "dilution" or whitening (for multiracial people who partner with white people) need more investigation. While some participants with white partners were detached from their minority ancestries, others were not. And while some white partners of multiracial participants demonstrated little interest in their partner's minority heritage, some could be very invested in their partner's ethnicity and cultural background. Moreover, some white partners could be committed to being racially conscious on behalf of their partners and their children.

The specific ancestries of participants' partners did not necessarily predict whether their partners' ethnic and racial backgrounds constituted key lines of difference, or shared spaces of commonality, within their relationships. So rather than asking whether any (or only certain kinds of) ethnic or racial overlap (or an absence of overlap) should be conceptualized as coethnic or interethnic unions, I have argued that it is more fruitful to investigate what meanings and significance multiracial people attribute to their partners' own ethnic and racial backgrounds.

One implication of these findings is that we cannot presume the automatic centrality of racial or ethnic difference in such unions, since the relative salience of such difference intersects fundamentally with gender, religion, regional location, and class. However, the fact that some participants denied the significance of ethnic/racial differences in relation to their partner by professing to adopt a kind of color-blind view of their marriage did not necessarily mean that this was validated by others outside of their marriage.

While this article provides only a glimpse of the ways in which different types of multiracial people partnered with others, there appears to be an emergent set of experiences which are specific to the ways in which some black/white multiracial people are partnering either with other black people or with other mixed black/white individuals (though most of the black/white individuals in this study, and in the wider British population, had white partners). Possibly due to a geographical concentration in certain urban areas, along with other factors, such as a strong consciousness of black people and their histories, some black/white multiracial people evidenced a desire to partner with other black people (or with other mixed black/white people such as themselves).

How multiracial individuals conceived of their relationships with their partners (as constituting a form of intermarriage or not, or whether ethnic/racial difference was meaningful at all) depended very much on a combination of factors such as their own upbringing, their sense of ethnic/racial identity, experiences of racism, and their physical appearance. Not surprisingly, region and ethnic

composition mattered a great deal—in London or large cities, there was a greater possibility of meeting nonwhite people and a stronger sense of the normalcy of being in a mixed relationship and having mixed children.

Furthermore, more attention to ethnic and national specificity is increasingly important in our examination of mixed households, as broad racial categories can obscure important ethnic and national differences in them. Related to this point, a key consideration in studies of intermarriage is the differentiation of "race" and racial difference from that of foreign status and upbringing, even if both members of a couple are technically "white" or "black" (e.g., a black British person and a black Nigerian person raised in Nigeria).

Future studies of intermarriage should conceptualize intermarriage in quite broad terms, to include racial, ethnic (not visible), and religious bases of difference (and their layered intersections), so that there is no a priori assumption that any one dimension of difference is more significant than another. We have tended to assume that visible, racial difference is paramount in mixed relationships because of the historical hostility toward such unions and their offspring. However, it may be that a shared cultural upbringing, for example, as British (or a more regional one, for example, as someone from Liverpool or London), may be a strongly bonding experience that transcends a simplistic notion of racial difference within the family (Caballero, Edwards, and Smith 2008; Luke and Luke 1998).

Furthermore, future research should continue to investigate the potentially different implications of varying forms of ethnic and racial overlap in the unions of multiracial people, as these variations may be associated with differences in the socioeconomic outcomes of particular types of interracial relationships (as discussed earlier). The varied ethnic, educational, and class backgrounds of multiracial people in Britain is likely to make it increasingly difficult to speak of "mixed" people as a coherent group, in either social or economic terms.

Looking ahead, we can confidently predict that forms of interethnic and interracial partnering will continue to grow. But the fact that many multiracial people partner with white people does not automatically mean that their children will, too. In urban areas of superdiversity, there is a growing likelihood that multiple and overlapping forms of mixedness will characterize many social networks and relationships.

Focusing on multiracial individuals and their unions is also important because it forces us to reconsider how to conceptualize and measure "intermarriage" as we undergo generational change. As was alluded to by some participants above, how many generations should we go back before mixedness is deemed insignificant for the purposes of ethnic monitoring—either because of the "dilution" of minority heritage or the multiplicity of both white and ethnic minority ancestries in people's family trees? Increasingly, in the case of multiracial people with white partners, we must contend with people whose "mixture" lies several generations back (Morning 2000). Yet growing forms of "mixing" that do not involve white people also poses interesting questions about the legitimacy of extant ethnic and racial categories (see Mahtani and Moreno 2001; Spickard and Fong 1995). It may be that we need to distinguish between forms of mixing that appear to result

in "whitening" versus those which appear to result in hybridized layers of both difference and commonality.

All these complexities in conceptualizing and measuring intermarriage also prompt us to ask: what exactly are we measuring if we look at the partnering of multiracial people? As I have argued, the categorization of multiracial people's relationships (as exogamous or endogamous) yields limited information. Yet given the persistence of folk beliefs about race and racial difference, and the institutionalization of ethnic monitoring, it is unlikely that the state will cease the collection of such data, at least for the foreseeable future. Given the growing diversification of Britain, we need more nuanced ways of studying "intermarriage," including both marriages and cohabitations. This is especially the case when we look at the case of multiracial people and their unions.

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