‘Mixed-race’ identity among young adults in the Britain

Contents Page

Abstract

Acknowledgements

List of plates and figures

1) Introduction

2) Literature review

Terminology

Race & Ethnicity

Nationalism & Culture

3) Practical methodology and limitations

Finding the Participants

Statistical Analysis

Self-Directed Photography

Follow-up Interviews

4) Brighton and Hove’s Ethnicity and Religion statistics

5) Results and analysis

Nationality & culture

Transnationalism

Childhood Family & Home

Visual appearance & racial markers of difference

6) Conclusion

Further Research

7) Bibliography

8) Appendix

Census Questions
Abstract

This article addresses the various processes through which ‘mixed-race identity is constructed with relation to a national British identity. A multiplicity of belongings which are negotiated on an everyday basis were explored and analysed, alongside theoretical issues and problematic terminology. Based on triangulate qualitative research on young ‘mixed-race’ adults in Brighton and Hove, this research found that many factors contributed to the ability to form a positive identity including the ability to define identity in itself, and the negative impact of being ascribed an identity by other parties. The research also found that many participants were able to positively negotiate an English identity irrespective of their race; contradictory to many theories, although predominantly a British identity was preferred as it allowed them to acknowledge other affiliations. However, factors such as transnational and ethnic practices, familial relations, and racial demographic either heightened or lessened their sense of multiple heritages. These multifaceted identities follow common theories of identity construction and highlight the transient nature of culture and nationality. The research adds to the current literature by exploring more diverse heritages and affiliations, building on current literature that primarily focuses on a black/white dichotomy.

Acknowledgements
I would like to thank Ben Rogaly for all his help and support throughout this project. I would also like to thank all of my participants who went above and beyond in sharing their incredible lives with me through their intimate and personal photographs and interviews. I would like to thank Evelyn Dodds and Alan Lester who were always ready and willing to help in any given moment. Finally, I would like to thank Chameon Caballero who offered her support and gave me some great contacts in the field.

List of plates and figures

Table 1: 2001 Census data.

Figure 1: Jessica celebrating Chinese year with the Asian society

Figure 2: The children from Tibet that Alex taught.
Introduction

‘Biologically we are all of us multiracial’
(Steve Jones, cited in Tizard & Phoenix, 2002, p.91)

The world saw Barack Obama, a black man become one of the most powerful people in the world; the president of the United States. However is Obama not a mixed-race individual? Why is he so consistently labelled as a black man? Is it because the black
identity has been oppressed for so long that this now represents a powerful political identity for black people? Or does it represent the traditionalist perceptions of binary categories in which only one identity may be chosen? Has Obama claimed this identity for himself, or has it been ascribed to him as part of a wider social stratification? All of these questions have led me to study ‘mixed-race’ identity. Race is an identity category which has been studied across many disciplines, yet race has now been dis-proven as a scientific concept. However, its legacy as a social construct continues to present itself in many societies today: therefore it is important to address the issues that arise alongside such binary categorisations. This is particularly important within the case of ‘mixed-race’ individuals who cross these often rigid social boundaries and occupy what may be perceived as a transitional or marginal space.

This research will focus on Britain, as it is an ever-changing state with more than 500,000 immigrants entering the country every year (UK National statistics, 2008). The number of ‘mixed-race’ individuals in Britain is growing, and with the highest rate of interracial couples in the world this figure is set to keep on rising (Parker & Song, 2001). In the 1980s many policies in Britain strove to embrace and celebrate multiculturalism due to pressure and support from grassroots organisations (Clayton, 2009). However, the British government is now moving away from multiculturalism as they perceive it as ‘essentially divisive, reifying differences’ (Clayton, 2009, p. 481). This change could become problematic for ethnic minorities in which multiple heritages are perceived as divisive, and assimilation is perceived as the key process as it represents being ‘British’. Therefore, race could be perceived as having diminishing importance as ‘culture’ takes its place.

However, the notion of a post-race or raceless society seems itself to be continually dis-proven with the constant emergence of debates surrounding race, ethnicity, nationality, patriotism and migration. The British National Party gained two seats in the European elections pushing the issues of race, ethnicity and nationalism to the front of the nation’s imagination. This project seeks to find out what a national identity means for ‘mixed-race’ individuals, and whether they consider themselves ‘included’ within it. It will look at the circumstances which move the focus towards a ‘mixed racial’ identity, and whether or not they feel more affiliation to one heritage than another. It will then analyse how they construct their primary identity, and how they prefer to be perceived alongside issues of ascription. The research will also analyse the practices of transnationalism as a growing phenomenon, to see whether it impacts upon their identity construction. This project aims to explore a diverse range
of themes and practices which both unify this group and also highlight the members' unique differences.

**Literature Review**

*We live in a world where identity matters.*

(Gilroy, 1997, p.301)

Persons of ‘mixed race’ challenge the theoretical and conceptual approaches to ethnic identity (Aspinall, 2003). Thus, the literature surrounding the topic is broad and covers various themes as well as spanning many subjects including geography, sociology and cultural studies. In order to analyse the literature, the review is broken down into three categories: Terminology, Race & Ethnicity, and Nationalism &
Culture. Through exploring these themes this section will analyse the various theories and research projects which have shaped the literature so far and will address the areas that require further research.

**Terminology**

The terminology surrounding ‘mixed-race’ is often contested and can be controversial therefore it is important to study its application and use. Many terms such as half-breed and half-blood have been and in some cases are still used to mark racial demarcation and negatively describe individuals (Tizard & Phoenix, 2002). Other debase terms such as half-caste are also used as self-description (Aspinall, 2003), thus blurring the boundary between what is, and what is not acceptable to use. Some terms can imply very different meanings, for example ‘mixed-race’ most commonly refers to those with one white and one black parent, whereas ‘mixed origins’ may suggest a more diverse geographical as well as racial background (Aspinall, 2003). Thus the implications of these terms and the different contexts in which they may be applied can affect their meaning.

The term ‘mixed-race’ has been used within this project. Although using a racial term is problematic as it may enforce perceptions of race as fixed and naturalised categories (Parker & Song, 2001), it is the term which most aptly applies to the issues that the research will focus on. There are several terms used within the academic literature including ‘mixed-race’, ‘multiple heritage’, ‘mixed parentage’, and ‘mixed’. Although these terms are beneficial as they do not use race they still pertain negative connotations. ‘Mixed parentage’ and ‘mixed’ still imply and reproduce racialisation, and mixed heritage emphasises an essentialist notion of cultural heritage which is complex and intermixed, not genetically inherited (Tizard & Phoenix, 2002). Therefore the term mixed race is used as a provisional and imperfect term to define the individual’s identity, rather than as a definitive term.

**Race & ethnicity**

For Nayak: ‘*There is no such thing as race*’ (2006, p.411). This statement is not trying to deny racism nor its accountability; instead Nayak is merely highlighting the removal of scientific fact within the discourse of race (2006). However, the removal of race as a scientific concept has done very little to reduce its importance as a social construct (Nayak, 2006). As a concept, race is difficult, multi-faceted and complex, with no straightforward definition (Malik, 1996). It is increasingly argued that ‘racism
is a thing of the past’, yet Lentin believes that racism remains as a prominent feature within western societies (2008, p.88).

In some cases it seems that ethnicity has simply been used as term to replace race. However, as a concept ethnicity is generally associated with culture, descent, history, language, religion, and a link with a native homeland (Karner, 2007). Identity theories have adopted a discursive approach in which it is understood as a continual process (Hall & Du Gay, 1996). Therefore, fixed categories such as ethnicity must be understood as fluid social constructs that are context specific, and positioned in space as much as time (Karner, 2007). However many collective identities are perceived as fixed due to negative ascription processes such as stereotyping and racism. As an identity, ethnicity is often conflated with race and aesthetic appearance.

Then there is the notion of visibility: a marked difference may be associated with certain traits or characteristics. For example, the essentialist black subject (Hall, 1992), was constructed as a problematic threat to the national ‘we’ by the Conservative Government of the 1970s (Gilroy, 1987). Other negative stereotypical traits have become associated with particular races and ethnicities, often as a marker of difference against the dominant homogenised white race. ‘Whiteness’ is perceived as a naturalised race, and thus white people may be seen as ‘race-less’ individuals (Garner, 2007). However, theories of race and ethnicity do not sit comfortably with ‘mixed-race’ identity as they represent a continuum between such binary categories.

The literature on ‘mixed-race’ predominantly focuses on the black-white racial mix and often ignores more diverse and complex themes of a ‘mixed’ identity. Conceptions of ‘mixed-race’ identity have traditionally been associated with the biological inheritance of the non-white race, for example the ‘one drop rule’ in USA that made any person with a black ancestor, black in the eyes of the law (Miri & Song, 2001). Breger & Hall have explored more contemporary contestations that ‘mixed-race’ individuals face in everyday life with problems such as ambiguous loyalties, and feelings of betrayal where the individual is: ‘trying to please both sides’ (1998, p.211).

The notion that ‘mixed-race’ individuals occupy a marginal space is commonly explored within the literature (Wilson, 1984). For Tizard and Phoenix ‘mixed-race’ children are liable to rejection from both the black and the white community (2002). This signifies one of many ‘problems’ associated with ‘mixed-race’ identity, it also follows the widespread belief that people from a ‘mixed racial’ background are more
likely to suffer from identity problems, problem behaviour and low self-esteem (Tizard & Phoenix, 2002). This negative perception of mixed-race identity construction was also explored by Twine who addressed the importance of visual markers of difference, which created a limit to her participants ‘white’ identity once they moved to political spaces (Twine, 1996). Visual differentiation alongside cultural and religious practices can play an important role in the creation of an ‘other’.

However, for Wilson ‘mixed-race’ is a ‘meaningless category,’ as all humans are of mixed ancestry (1984, p.43). Therefore we must consider what it means to be ‘mixed race’ and who is ‘mixed-race’? This literature is important in helping to gain a more complex understanding of ‘black/white’ ‘mixed-race’ individuals. However, further analysis and research into the complexities of what it means to be mixed-race and who is mixed-race will enable a greater understanding. The notion of ‘mixed-race’ is increasingly being challenged as a new wave of British research is beginning to confront these traditional conceptualisations (Caballero et al., 2007).

Caballero et al. have developed their focus from a ‘black/white mix’ (2008), by analysing ‘mixed race’ and inter-faith couples. The research found that the parents used one of three methods to raise their child: Individually, Mixed or Single. That is the child was either brought up:

- Individually, where the child’s mixed background was not their primary sense of belonging.
- Mixed, where all aspects of their mixed background were emphasised and taught as part of their identity.
- Single, where the parents chose to stress only one aspect of the child’s mixed parentage.

These categories will be very important when analysing my participants' childhood and family backgrounds. However, the primary result of the research was that most parents found that other aspects, such as the child's health and safety, were their most important concern in raising a child, suggesting that racial, ethnic and cultural differences did not play a dominant role in the child’s upbringing. This research analysed couples and therefore did not look at single parenting which may have produced different results. As an identity race may conflict or conflate with other such categories; for example, nationalism.

Nationalism & culture

The context of this study will be set within the collective identity of ‘Britishness’. Due to increased migration, globalisation, and transnational processes, the nation state
may be perceived as having diminishing importance. For Anderson the notion of nationalism will never be more than an 'imagined community' (1983). However, the emotional geographies and the political and legal ties which bind nations (Glick-Schiller, cited in Jackson et al. 2004) continue to reinforce collective national identities. These can simultaneously re-enforce the notion of a 'collective British we' and create a separate excluded identity of the 'other'. For Malik an individual cannot realise oneself in isolation, instead he believes that individual values arise from a direct relationship with the state (1996). Therefore a negative ascription towards particular identities can be exclusive and create negative hierarchies of power.

The emotional geographies which constitute a connection with or a boundary from a British identity may play a vital role within identity construction, particularly for ethnic minorities within Britain. Fortier believes that Britishness has always been multicultural (2005), yet this does not imply that it has always been tolerant and accepting of different cultures. What is culture? According to Oakes and Price culture is 'one of the most complicating and bewildering words in the English language' (2008, p.11). Therefore this dissertation is unable to explore all of its complexities. However, cultures are always hybrids to which there is no essential core (Crang, 1998). Yet, it may be perceived as a fixed concept, in a similar process that has been applied to race, ethnicity and nationalism.

For Gilroy the notion of Britishness is negatively associated with imperial greatness (1987) thus reinforcing negative racial stereotypes and inequalities. What does this mean for mixed-race individuals who have conflicting cultures or heritages? In order to move forward the Parekh Report concluded that we must acknowledge the racially conotated notions of Britishness and the historical legacies of imperialism (Fortier, 2005). Therefore the acceptance of a historically racist society could lead to the creation of a more positive multicultural society within the future. Does this hold true for my participants?

The Parekh Report was criticised by McCrane for focusing 'the discussion almost entirely in terms of a homogeneous 'British', that is, English, identity' (2002, p.305). The notion of a British civic identity may be blurred with a national English identity for white English people (McCrane, 2002, CRE, 2005). However, ethnic minorities have found that Englishness is often associated with 'whiteness' (CRE, 2005), and that popular definitions of Britishness and in particular Englishness exclude them from a membership to the nation (Jacobson, 1997). Although the meaning of Britishness is difficult and contested, it is still a necessary element of self characterization of most inhabitants of the UK (Saeed et al., 1999). Therefore its use as a category of self
identification and also the processes through which it is ascribed will play a vital role within this project.

According to Modood, there are new types of Britishness which allow various ethnicities to make a claim upon it (cited in Saeed 1999). However Jacobson believes that the British identity constitutes three boundaries: culture, race and civility (1997), thus many people within Britain continue to be excluded from the notion of Britishness. Similarly Anthias believes it is the (white) English Ethnic group, whose culture is most fully represented within the British State (2001). Yet, the construction of ethnicity does not need to come at the expense of the nation state; instead it can extend, rather than undermine, its importance (Gerstle & Mollenkopf, 2001).

‘Citizens are both individuals and members of particular religious, ethnic, cultural and regional communities. Britain is both a community of citizens and a community of communities’ (Parekh, 2000, Introduction). If various collective identities are able to exist alongside rather than at the expense of other categorisations then this may pave the way for a new generation of ‘multi racial’ British citizens to live in racial equality. Transnationalism may also be seen as a process which diversifies nationalism.

Transnationalism does not have a fixed definition and thus suffers some ambiguity. However for the purpose of this project, it shall be referred to as the: ‘social, cultural, economic and political relations which are between, above or beyond the nation-state’ (Grillo, 2004, p.864). Transnationals may be perceived as living in liminality, a state of ‘in-between-ness’ (Mavroudi, 2007, p.407), similar to many traditional views of ‘mixed-race’ individuals (Caballero et al., 2007). Multiple belongings and issues of exclusion can be viewed alongside narrations of belonging and otherness; however, these cannot be addressed adequately unless they are located within other constructions of difference and identity (Anthias, 2001). This plurality of affiliations among immigrants has been acknowledged by Vertovec who believes that there is: ‘much to be gained by a multi-dimensional perspective on diversity, both in terms of moving beyond the ethnic group as either the unit analysis or the sole object of study’ (2007, p. 1026).

The literature review has shown that there is still a limited study into the diversity of mixed-race individuals and the intrinsic relationship between ethnicity and nationalism. The literature looking at ‘mixed-race’ individuals continues to focus on people who have both a black and a white parent, failing to recognise the racial diversity of ‘mixedness’ and also ignoring ‘mixed-race’ individuals with more than two
different backgrounds. Within the project ‘mixed-race’ will be used as more than simply an identity in itself, but as a way of analysing the multifaceted and textured layers that create identities (Parker & Song, 2001). Terms such as nationalism, culture, race and ethnicity are simultaneously conflated and yet separate. The fluidity of these concepts will be explored to see how they are negotiated in the everyday experiences of my participants.

**Practical Methodology & Limitations**

Berg has noted that adopting more than one technique allows for better analysis, and can also act as a counter for invalidities (2007). Therefore the research was conducted using three techniques: statistical analysis of the racial and ethnic data for both Britain and, Brighton and Hove, self-directed photography and follow up interviews. Using triangulation and applying it to various theories will maximise the understanding of the research questions (Valentine, 2005).

**Finding the participants**

Various methods were used to try and find participants, these included: social forums on the internet, word of mouth, contacting local religious groups and mixed-race charities, as well as distributing posters and flyers throughout Brighton and Hove. The internet social forums and ‘word of mouth’ were the most successful techniques in finding participants. These ‘snowballing techniques’ enabled me to reach a much wider set of people through using multiple initial contact groups such as friends, work colleagues and local charities (Valentine, 2005). No response was received from the posters and flyers, probably due to the fact that there was no prior contact and no reward offered for the participant to take part.

All of the participants are either currently studying at university or have completed a university education. This particular group of people are also predominantly from middle-class backgrounds and without strong religious beliefs; these factors will be
taken into account within the analysis. The study focused on people who live within the area of Brighton and Hove, who are aged between eighteen to twenty-five years old. This age group was chosen as it is a critical stage in identity construction in which the participants have moved out of home and into the more independent and politicised space of university (Twine, 1996). Some of the participants dropped out due to time constraints, or other unspecified reasons. In total twelve participants completed the process of both collecting the photographs and taking part in an interview.

All of the participants were adults of able body and mind, and thus did not require the use of an extended ethics form. Each participant was offered anonymity in order to ensure that they were able to speak freely due to the intimate nature of the photographs and the questions that they were answering. However, each participant was willing to allow both their names and photographs to be used.

**Statistical analysis**

An analysis of the racial and ethnic statistical data for both the UK and also the specific research area of Brighton and Hove provided context to the research. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative research can enable the researcher to conduct a more in-depth study; using quantitative data to analyse the broader context of the study and then combining it with qualitative data on a more limited area in greater depth (Bryman, 2004). The last national consensus was conducted in 2001 and the data is now almost ten years out of date. However, the statistics were used as an official source of data which has provided useful insight into the racial and ethnic make-up of the area. It must be noted that all sources contain some degree of measurement error (Shaw & Wheeler, 1998) this is particularly true for statistics measuring such ambiguous concepts as race and ethnicity.

The latest version of the census questions, which were used in the 2009 Census test, and which are expected to remain the same in the 2011 census was distributed to each participant (ONS, 2009). 2001 was the first year that a subdivided mixed category was made available on the census forms (Aspinall, 2003), reflecting a marked change in state perception. This project will analyse whether mixed-race individuals feel that the options available are sufficient or even necessary. Therefore each participant was given a copy of the census questions and asked to fill it out. If the participants did not wish to fill out the form they were asked to write down the reasons why. As an identity category ‘mixed-race’ may not be claimed but ascribed to
the individual. Thus the significance of a racial identity with relation to the state is very important.

**Self-directed photography**

The main concept for the methodology was developed from Gillian Rose’s *Visual Methodologies* (2007). Rose analyses two ways in which photographs can be used within research, as either supportive or supplemental. Prosser and Schwartz believe that photos can make a valuable contribution to both the practice and presentation of research (1998). For this project, the photographs are supportive to the research and have provided the main stimulus for discussion within the interviews. After each participant had agreed to take part they were asked to gather a range of photographs that they felt best represented their identity.

The importance of the photographer, whether the photographs are taken by the researcher or the participants, can affect the results (Rose, 2007). Originally the participants were going to take their own photos within a set period of time in order to create both accurate and intimate images. However, many participants wanted to use photos from their childhood, or pictures that their friends had taken as they felt that this would present a more intimate representation of how their identity formed. For that reason the participants were told to collect both new and old photos to allow a complete picture of their identity as it has developed throughout their lives, using the images as a process of biographical memory (Lister, 1995).

Each participant was given a simple brief which allowed them to individually interpret its meaning. This was done in order to allow diversity rather than choosing specific areas such as family or friends, which may not hold the same significant importance for each participant. Through this method a variety of images were obtained and many personal relationships and life experiences which may not have otherwise been uncovered, were revealed (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998). However, the presence of a camera may be perceived as problematic due to the sometimes staged and performative nature of taking photographs. Yet, for Goffman, who has focused on an analysis of everyday interaction, identity is dramaturgical and information can be given intentionally or unintentionally (1959). Therefore, whether people deliberately chose to project an identity or if they reveal things unknowingly, can all be perceived as part of an identity construction. Thus, the photographs are an extension of this.

Another criticism of using visual methods within research is that they can suffer the problem of perspective (Pink, 2007). Prosser and Schwartz believe that the analyses
of photographs are invaluable without context (1998). For this reason each participant was asked to annotate their photographs, writing a brief description about what was in the photograph and the thoughts and feelings that it evoked (Rose, 2007). These descriptions added some context to the photos which were developed further through the interviews.

**Follow-up interviews**

Once each participant had collected and annotated 15-20 photographs, semi-structured interviews based around the photographs and the descriptions that they had provided were held. Collier believes that photographs can help to sharpen the memory and also to give the interview character (1967). As the photographs were digital they were used within the interviews to stimulate discussion, this created a heightened sense of intimacy and acted as a very efficient memory prompt.

The decision to use semi-structured interviews was made in order to ensure that the key themes were covered, and to enable the development of new leads (Russell Bernard, 2000). Due to the difficulties encountered finding and committing each participant, there was only the possibility to speak to them all individually once. Therefore semi-structured interviews were the most effective method at providing both structure and freedom (Russell Bernard, 2000). The interviews were structured around the photographs and five main themes: childhood, nationalism, family, home and religion.

Face to face interaction is the fullest condition for participating in the mind of another human being (Bryman, 2004). Therefore each interview was conducted privately, and wherever possible took place in their homes. This created a further sense of ease, comfort and familiarity for the participants and thus helped to stimulate a more intimate interview. Visiting the participant's in their own homes also provided a greater insight into their lives (Valentine, 2005). This was particularly true when participants had photographs on their walls which stimulated further discussions. However, due to time restrictions and participant availability this was not always possible, when unable to hold the interviews in their homes they were conducted in a private and safe area.

I was also able to use my age and position as a student to create a rapport with my participants, using our similarities to create a sense of mutual understanding (Valentine, 2005). However, as the interviewee I am also aware of the limitations that my presence may present. As a white individual I was aware that my skin colour may
have an impact on how freely my participants were willing to engage with me and also the effect that this may have on what they were willing to talk about. I was also aware of my presentation and due to the informal nature of the interviews I dressed casually (Russell Bernard, 2000).

In order to avoid distracting the recipient’s notes were not taken during the interviews, instead thoughts and feelings were written down afterwards. Each interview was recorded and was then transcribed to allow in-depth analysis. Using a voice recorder provides an accurate and permanent record of primary information (Russell Bernard, 2000), and allowed me to focus on the discussion. However, the voice recorder can be off-putting for the participant (Valentine, 2005), and thus after obtaining their permission to record, it was used as discretely as possible. During the interviews the participants took the lead role within the discussion which allowed a deeper rapport to develop throughout and thus enabled more abstract and intimate questions to be asked (Valentine, 2005).
**Brighton and Hove’s Ethnicity and Religion statistics**

On the visitbrighton website the city is described as ‘one of the most vibrant, colourful and creative cities in Europe. Cosmopolitan, compact, energetic, unique, fun, lively, historic, young, exotic and free-spirited, it's a city like no other’ (visitbrighton, 2009). Brighton likes to celebrate diversity and prides itself on embracing multiculturalism. This study will explore whether or not this holds true for the ‘mixed-race’ participants. Primary analysis of the racial and ethnic make-up of Brighton and Hove will contextualise the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>All people</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Mixed</th>
<th>Asian or Asian British</th>
<th>Black or Black British</th>
<th>Chinese &amp; Other groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Other White</td>
<td>White and Black Caribbean</td>
<td>White and Black African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton &amp; Hove</td>
<td>247,817</td>
<td>216,134</td>
<td>3,065</td>
<td>11,463</td>
<td>1,520</td>
<td>1,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton &amp; Hove as a percentage</td>
<td>88.02</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East as a percentage</td>
<td>91.30</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England &amp; Wales as a percentage</td>
<td>86.99</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: (Brighton & Hove City Council,

The largest ethnic group in Brighton and Hove is white 94.3%. This is higher than the national average, which is 90.92% in England & Wales, but slightly below the South East average of 95.1%. Due to the unequal distribution of ethnic minorities across Britain, Brighton and Hove cannot be perceived as an area representative of the United Kingdom. Nonetheless it is important to explore themes of diversity across the whole of the UK whether ethnic diversity is high or low. The large proportion of white people in Brighton and Hove may have an impact upon the identity construction of ‘mixed-race’ individuals (Tizard & Phoenix, 2002).

However, the non-white population in Brighton & Hove has grown to 5.8% in 2001, from 3.1% in 1991. And people from mixed origin are the largest ethnic group at 1.9, yet this still represents a minority within Brighton. Although all of my participants now live in Brighton, many grew up in other parts of the United Kingdom or even other parts of the world in areas that may have a lesser or greater racial diversity. The
statistics provide a general overview of the complex identities, but does not acknowledge a ‘mixed white’ background. Therefore the participants personally feelings about the census questions shall be discussed later on.

Research and Analysis

For Malik, identities do not exist independently, and are formed in relation to the state (1996). Alongside the influence of the state are various other factors and processes through which identities are constructed. In order to analyse the multiplicity of identity this section will be broken down into four sections: Nationality & culture, Transnationalism, Childhood Family & Home, and Visual appearance & racial markers of difference. Under these headings this section will analyse how the participants construct their ‘mixed-race’ identities.

Nationality & culture

When many of the participants were discussing nationality and culture they often moved transiently between Britain and England. Also, some participants actively asserted their English identity over British when questioned about their nationality. This contradicts McCrane’s notion that only the white ethnicities identify with an English identity (2002), having one white English parent may have created a greater sense of ease for these mixed-raced individuals to feel ‘English’. However, the census questions revealed that the majority of my participants ticked British rather than English which could represent a sense of removal or displacement from an English identity (CRE, 2008).

Two of the participants: Jessica and Dom rejected the English identity. Jessica did not feel English as she felt: ‘a person who’s English who’s like kinda white skin kind of thing’. Instead Jessica prefers to call herself British-Chinese as she feels that the British identity can be about where you are born without signifying a particular racial identity and is thus more inclusive. This compliments McCrane’s theory that the British identity allows a greater scope of identity negotiation in comparison to the naturalised white identity of England (2002). Dom’s belief stemmed from the theories of academics such as Anderson and Gilroy. Dom does not feel affinity with northern counterparts and sees nationalism as little more than ‘imagined communities’ (Anderson, 1983). He also rejected the notion of nationalism as he felt that his: ‘family has been on the negative kind of side of that fairly xenophobic kind of racist nationalism’. In line with Jacobson’s theories on the ‘boundaries’ of Britishness (1997), the emotional geographies of nationalism and national rhetoric have led to
Dom’s exclusion. Therefore, it is his civic identity that defines his nationality but he doesn’t see himself as being British beyond that.

In order to analyse how each participant felt about their identity in relation to the state the participants filled out the ethnicity, race and religion section in the census form. Some of the participants requested to not answer as they felt uncomfortable ticking boxes; this reflects a conflict between state ascriptions and self-identification (Aspinall, 2003). For Danny and Andy, ticking mixed-race could give them an advantage when applying for a job. However, they did not see this as a positive and felt that they would like to get a place on their own merit rather than due to their racial background. For others such as Chanse and Clare the options held little emotional value, for them it is simply a small part of who they are and they were fairly indifferent to the questions.

For all of my participants English was their first language, which may unconsciously heighten their sense of a national British identity and sense of belonging. For Alexander et al.: ‘to be British is to speak English’ (2007, p.785), and thus the importance of speaking the national language must be acknowledged when analysing national identity. However for many the ability to speak or understand another language heightened or reduced their connections with their ‘other’ heritage. For example Danny has visited India several times to attend family weddings. However, Danny is unable to speak the local language and thus feels that the: ‘absence of it forms my identity cos I feel like I don't know who these people are, I don’t speak their language’. For Nicole and Jessica it is the ability to speak Greek and Cantonese respectively that has further heightened their connection to their cultures. And thus reflects the important role that language can play within the construction of an ethnic identity (Fraught, 2006). For both girls the ability to visit their parent’s homelands also heightened their connections.

**Transnationalism**

Many of the participants were involved in transnational activities. Dom is able to maintain a relationship with his siblings (who now live in Hungary) through the internet on Skype. For Dom, this form of relationship is unusual: ‘normally it is more based on person to person, but it seems to be working’. Such relationships have been enabled through new technologies which have heightened the immediacy and frequency of contact (Parrenas, 2005). However, Dom remains unsure about the development of such a relationship which has occurred with minimal physical contact.
For others their connections with extended family and their parent’s homeland was maintained through regular visits. For example Jessica has been out to Hong Kong to visit her extended family several times. However, for Jessica these visits were often boring as she was simply meeting the older generations of her family. During recent years she has become more interested in participating in and celebrating her Chinese heritage, this is partly due to her most recent visit to Hong Kong in which she travelled with her sister and met some of the younger generations within her family and was able to experience a younger perception of Hong Kong. This reflects the transient nature of culture, as it has developed through the generations (Crang, 1998). Her connection has also increased through meeting a group of Asian friends at a university society. Through this friendship group she was able to celebrate Chinese New Year, something that she had not done before. ‘It’s really nice to get the practice of actually speaking and being back in my culture’.

Jessica is able to successfully negotiate both her Chinese and her British identities although it times she finds it a struggle to negotiate her Chinese and English friends which she sees as two very separate groups and with each she shows a different part of her identity. Rather than being rejected by both communities as Tizard and Phoenix have suggested (2002), Jessica is able to mix with both groups but changes her identity in order to please both sides (Breger & Hall, 1998).
The importance of travelling and visiting the homeland was also apparent for Alex. In his gap year he went to India to visit and teach in the Tibetan school where his dad was taught. Whilst teaching at the school Alex met many young children who had to leave Tibet on foot through the Himalayas which his father had also experienced. This heightened Alex’s connection to their struggles and way of life. He felt that: ‘after I had been in that situation that I had met people who had been through so much, I definitely want to try and get involved in it’. Upon returning to England Alex has taken part in many Free Tibet protests in London. However, he is aware that his connection with Tibet is tenuous and although he is very proud of his Tibetan heritage, he believes that his connection with the country is not very strong. Would his link be stronger were Tibet easier to access?

Nicole’s father’s family are from Cyprus, a country which she frequents annually and is thus greater enabled to have a stronger connection. Within her photographs, Nicole had a photo of the Flag of Cyprus but did not choose to use the Union Jack. For Nicole the Cypriotes flag embodies pride and represents ‘holiday and fun’, whereas the British flag ‘just makes [her] think of rain’. Symbolic images such as a national flag can evoke pride and national sentiment (CRE, 2008), however if a
national identity is problematic for an individual the flag may obtain negative associations.

Childhood, family & home

Transnational literature has addressed how the emotional, imagined or physical space of the home plays a vital role as a space for providing comfort and familiarity for those with a multiplicity of belongings (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). In contrast to this, ‘home’ did not hold significant importance for the majority of my participants. For many home, was simply the place that they were living and therefore held little emotional significance. Generally emotion was attached to an area, rather than a specific building, often the town where they grew up, or the town that they live in now. This seems to relate to the longevity of their stay in a particular place. For example several of my participant’s families had moved to another home or area whilst they were at university and thus their place of birth or familial home held very little emotional attachment. It also related to their experience in Brighton. The importance of friendships often related directly to an emotional connection with an area. For Clare and Jessica, Brighton is the place that they feel they belong. For Jessica it is an area in which she has been able to connect with ‘friends for life’, making Brighton a very significant space for her identity.

Yet, others commented on the link between family and their home. For example Andy and Alex described home as the place where there family live. The notion of family can create a much stronger sense of comfort and familiarity (Blunt & Dowling, 2006). Family takes on a very important role, in particular who has raised them, for example Andy’s Black Basian father left the country when he was only three, and he was then raised by his white mother and a white English man. For Andy the people who raised him are his parents, and his brothers, although biologically only half his, are completely his brothers: ‘it’s not even something I have to consciously decide, it’s just how it is.’ This shows the importance of who you are raised by. Although Andy is happy to self-identify as ‘mixed-race’ he does not see this identity as separate from his relationship with his white brothers. This supports Karner’s criticism of
essentialism (2007), showing that identities are not determined through biology.

As a result of being raised in a white family, Andy has very little connection to his Basian heritage. Andy also explained his discomfort at first when he moved to Kingston for a year; an area with a large number of ethnic minorities. Although this discomfort was quickly dispelled, its presence shows the significance of the area in which they were raised and who they are raised by. This is synonymous with Tizard and Phoenix's findings that middle-class families were more likely to grow up in predominantly white areas and where therefore less comfortable with other races, than may have been expected (2002). This was also the case for Clare who was raised by both her black father and white mother. Clare’s parents are ‘culturally’ similar; however, when cultural practices such as food, dress or religion are very different from everyday experiences of ‘British culture’, they may hold more significance.

It was apparent in many families that when the parent from the so-called ‘foreign culture’ made a conscious effort to teach their children about their heritage then the culture was much more a part of them. Also, the culture that they associate with their non-British parent may be more appealing and exciting due to its differences and relative absence within everyday life. For Alex, his father’s Tibetan history and culture was far more interesting and exciting than his mother’s Scottish background, which he perceived as very similar to England. Alex’s father taught all of his siblings about Tibetan culture and food. From a young age Alex has had a strong sense of his
Tibetan culture instilled in him and he continues to feel very proud of these roots today. This follows Caballero et al.’s findings where one parent’s heritage is consciously taught to the children over the other (2008). Taking part in such cultural activities as a family unit plays a vital importance in how their ethnic identities are formed. For Nicole participating in Greek Church was a way of connecting with her family.

However, Anton, whose parents separated when he was seven, knows very little about his mixed heritage. Anton is the biological child of a sperm donor as his parents could not conceive a child naturally. Anton’s father is of mixed parentage himself: Sri-Lankan, Dutch and Portuguese, therefore they simply requested to have a donor from one or more of those nationalities. As a result, Anton is unaware of his biological father’s heritage. The man who raised him, his father, was predominantly raised in England and subsequently he was brought up with very little awareness of his genetic heritage and as a result his race holds very little significance within his identity. This was also the case for Chanse whose father has Jamaican parents, but whom himself, was raised in England. Although Chanse does have a connection with the Jamaican side of the family, their strict beliefs and rules meant that as a child he rejected their culture and although he has their heritage, he knows: ‘little more than the average English person about Jamaican culture.’ Although culturally Chanse felt accepted, the darkness of his skin colour made him aware of his differences.

Visual appearance and racial markers of difference

People’s visual appearance and racial markers of difference arose as a common theme for creating tension and problems for the participants. Twine (1996) studied the ‘limits to whiteness’ within mixed-race girls in California. Although these girls were brought up in white communities with white identities, their visual appearances saw them marked out as black in the political space of college. Many of my participants discussed the issues they had encountered due to other peoples perceptions of their appearance.

Jason was a very interesting example; he is of white English and black Jamaican parentage, however his appearance is white. Jason grew up in a predominantly black community in Brixton and found it hard when other children did not accept him as black

‘like people said, you’re not black, how can you be black you’ve got blonde hair?’
Jason did not perceive this as racism, however he does acknowledge that it may have created identity issues for him as a child when he felt ‘more black, but looked more white’.

Although many of my participants felt that their appearance was unproblematic, several could remember racist taunts or incidences related to the way they looked. For example when I asked Theresa if she had experienced racism in her life she had said no. However, later on in the interview she described a taunt in which she was made fun of for being with a white boy. Similar experiences were expressed by several of my participants including Chanse being called a ‘Paki’ as a young child, and Hazel encountering derogatory remarks about Asian girls. This reflects the continuation of racism, despite its rejection from the scientific community (Nayak, 2006). Racism is offensive to many people irrelevant of their backgrounds and does not affect one race exclusively. Nevertheless, for Hazel her experiences of racism have affected her personally and she has felt hurt when her white friends did not stand up for her, thus enforcing the idea of ‘otherness’.

Hazel herself expresses being unaware of race as a young child as did many of the participants, however as they grew older many became more aware of their diverse backgrounds and gained an interest in exploring the multiplicities of their heritage. Both Chanse and Theresa expressed wanting to find a black community. For Chanse this happened when he was 17 and he decided to go to Kingston to live with his father as he felt he needed to ‘go be black’. In a white community, Chanse had always been perceived as black, the colour of his skin was his point of difference from his white friends reflecting Gilroy’s theory that identity construction is as much about difference as it is about shared a practices (1997). However, Chanse found that ‘being black’ was not about the colour of his skin, but more about his personality. Although he did not fit in, he did not feel judged either. For Chanse the experience reinforced: ‘the fact that I am who I am and I don’t have to try and be a black guy or anything like that’.

Other markers of ethnic difference such as a name can also play an important part in the construction of identity. Hazel grew up in Leicester where there is a large Asian community, as Hazels parents are not married, Hazel inherited her mother’s English name, rather than her father’s Indian name. For Hazel this meant that many people did not realise her Indian heritage and she was often thought of as ‘completely English’. Although skin colour or differences were unimportant to her as a child, she found that when she grew up that she was not part of the ‘Asian groups’ and instead hung around in ‘white groups’. For Danny his name holds less importance as he holds very little connection to his Indian heritage, however within the interview he did
acknowledge that 2 of his siblings had English names whilst the other two were given Indian names.

Yet, the most common theme by far which came up in the majority of interviews was the question: ‘Where are you from?’ For some of the participants this question was unproblematic. And they were very happy to explain their heritage to people, however for others it became problematic when people would not accept them as English or British. This reflects Jacobson’s finding that there are racial boundaries to Britishness (1997). Although the participants were able make a claim on Britishness for themselves (Saeed, 1999), this was limited due to the preconceptions of others. However, although several of my participants were able to recall negative and racist incidences, they had been small and infrequent and thus had not contributed to a negative conception of their appearance or their national identity.

For the majority of the participants religion was not an important factor within their own lives. Although several participants expressed some spiritual beliefs religion was rarely mentioned unless provoked. However when religion was important to family members, despite individual belief, it may play a more important role within their lives. For example when Nicole’s Greek family decided to accept her into their family as the child of an English woman she had to be christened again in a Greek church. This was to signify her beliefs of the important Greek traditions and allowed her to become part of the family.
However, Nicole still does not feel fully accepted by her Greek family: ‘they make jokes about my Greek being bad or going out with English boys.’ Although Nicole knows that her family loves her, she is aware that they would be happier if she immersed herself further into Greek culture. But these stigmas are changing and now less important to the younger generations.

This analysis has highlighted the similarities and differences through which my participants have constructed their identities. For some of my participants it was clear that their identities had to be negotiated as an active and conscious decision, whilst for others their identity was rarely tested. For these people the English identity was inclusive, however, several participants feelings reflected the dominant theories that Britishness is an exclusive identity (Jacobson, 1997). Race is understood as not simply a genetic inheritance but a cultural trait which is learnt and embodied. Therefore the influences of who raised them and where they were raised played a significant part in their identity construction. However, racial markers of difference from the dominant ethnicity: ‘whiteness,’ represents a challenge to their ability to claim a national or cultural identity.
Conclusion

Exploring themes of nationalism revealed that the majority of my participants felt comfortable in claiming a British and even an English identity. For some the English identity was of particular importance as it describes more about who they are. For others, the British identity allowed them to acknowledge their multiple affiliations whilst at the same time allowing them to recognise the place in which they were born and raised. For Saeed et al, the meaning of Britishness is often difficult and contested, yet nationality holds significant importance for most inhabitants of the UK (1999). This held true for most of my participants, as nationality appeared to be an integral part of their identity construction, and despite their ‘racial mixedness’ many were able to negotiate the ‘boundaries of Britishness’ (Jacobson, 2004). The popular opinion amongst my participants suggests that being British or even being English is no longer about simply being white, contradictory to many studies (Jacobson, 2004, CRE, 2005). For many of the participants it was the cultural and emotional spaces that played the most important role rather than the civic or racial. However, when the British identity was rejected by Dom it was both the racial and emotional geographies which played a significant part in separating him from a national identity. Although Dom is able to recognise his civic identity nationalism holds little emotional attachment for him.

The ability to both claim or to be ascribed an identity still plays an important role for many of my participants. By claiming a hyphenated identity such as British-Chinese, or the ability to simply be English irrelevant of skin colour or racial background appears to be critical within mixed-race identity construction. The practices through which they are able to claim and define their own identity are very important when they face racial, ethnic or cultural boundaries to their national identity as well as in their everyday personal identities. Thus the question ‘where are you from?’ appeared to be particularly problematic for some. This question suggests a continued perception that to be British is to be white (CRE, 2005). Although many of my participants consider themselves ‘fully British’ this question represented a boundary that they faced in their acceptance from other people.

Familial relations proved very important within identity construction. In line with Caballero et al.’s work into mixed parentage I found that the processes and cultural practices through which the individuals were raised played significant importance within their ethnic identity construction (2008). For example the absence of both Andy’s and Chanse’s black father meant that they felt minimal connection to that
aspect of their heritage and considered themselves not as black men but as individuals. Yet for Alex and Nicole participating in cultural activities and visiting their respective parent’s homelands has instilled a stronger sense of their ‘mixed’ background within them. Social networks also play an important role as was seen with the Jessica and her introduction into an Asian society. Networking with people from her mixed background enabled her to gain a stronger cultural understanding of her mother’s heritage and has given her Chinese heritage a greater significance within her life.

A sense of belonging, a space where they could feel at home seemed of particular importance to the participants. Whether this occurred where they grew up or where they lived now is dependent on a variety of factors including family ties and how often they moved as a child. Although some participants expressed that Brighton did not feel like their true home, many suggested that it had been an enjoyable place to live and had provided a fun and comfortable, even ‘easy’ experience of living for them. This seems in line with Brighton’s cultural ethos of acceptance and liberality. However one participant who did not feel completely at home here was Hazel who grew up in Leicester. For Hazel there is a definite culture divide between North and South which always left her feeling like Brighton ‘is not completely home’. This re-enforces the cultural differences that occur within Britain as well as between other nations.

The importance of race as a sight of identification seemed to hold very little importance to the participants. And when such identities were acknowledged they seemed to be compatible with their Britishness (CRE, 2005). Racism appeared to occur infrequently or was completely absent from my participants lives. Multifaceted identities are negotiated, but not without difficulties. It seems that many participants had to change or show different aspects of their identity dependent upon the context of the situation that they found themselves in. This sits with the theories of Gilroy and Hall, that the processes of identification are continually defined and renegotiated (1997 & 1996). Overall, identity construction was primarily based upon their own life experiences rather than that of their parents. Many participants take part in various ‘traditional’ family customs and other practices which connect them to their heritage, yet these appeared to make up only a small part of who they are. Their everyday experience of Britain is negotiated around a multiplicity of identities including work, friends, studies and leisure, and is impacted by a variety of social factors such as gender and class.
The British and in particular the English national identity is constantly being renegotiated and redefined and is increasingly evolving away from a naturalised 'white we'. However with current government policy moving away from multiculturalism and turning back to assimilation and integration, the importance of race and ethnicity cannot be undermined. Many of the participants have successfully negotiated their ethnic and national identities, to form the people that they are today. Yet these identities' are not unproblematic. In a nation where the majority of the population (more than 94%) is white, the identity negotiations of racial 'others' could continue to be problematic (Tizard & Phoenix, 2002). For mixed-race individuals their identity does not sit in liminality. Although many participants find affinity with one race, culture or heritage more than other, the different parts which construct their identities do not have to come at the expense of another. They are able to construct their identities through the rhetoric of British nationalism, not as a homogenised identity, but as part of a collective hybrid nation.

Further Research

Given a longer period of study, this research project would have been extended. In particular, focus groups could enable the participants to engage with each other and discuss shared and different experiences of their ‘mixed-race’ identities. It could also be improved with a larger amount of participants, from a greater variety of backgrounds for example people without a university education. Another area that this project could explore is a comparison of different regions, to see how the construction of a mixed-race identity is affected in comparison to race and ethnic demographics. Finally, it would be interesting to further the contemporary understandings of ‘mixed-race’ individuals to look at those who are ‘mixed’ without a white heritage.

Bibliography


Appendix

Census Questions:
Person 1 - continued

15. How would you describe your national identity?  
   - English
   - Welsh
   - Scottish
   - Northern Irish
   - British
   - Other, write in _

16. What is your ethnic group?  
   - Choose one section from A to E, then tick one box to best describe your ethnic group or background

A. White
   - English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
   - Irish
   - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
   - Any other White background, write in _

B. Mixed / multiple ethnic groups
   - White and Black Caribbean
   - White and Black African
   - White and Asian
   - Any other Mixed/multiple ethnic background, write in _

C. Asian / Asian British
   - Indian
   - Pakistani
   - Bangladeshi
   - Chinese
   - Any other Asian background, write in _

D. Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
   - African
   - Caribbean
   - Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, write in _

E. Other ethnic group
   - Arab
   - Any other ethnic group, write in _

17. This question is intentionally left blank  ➔ Go to 18

18. What is your main language?  
   - English  ➔ Go to 19
   - Other, write in (including sign languages) _

19. How well can you speak English?  
   - Very well
   - Well
   - Not well
   - Not at all

20. What is your religion?  
   - This question is voluntary
   - No religion
   - Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
   - Buddhist
   - Hindu
   - Jewish
   - Muslim
   - Sikh
   - Any other religion, write in _

21. One year ago, what was your usual address?  
   - If you had no usual address one year ago, state the address where you were staying
   - The address on the front of this questionnaire
   - Student term-time/boarder school address in the UK, write in term-time address below
   - Another address in the UK, write in below

   - Postcode _

   OR
   - Outside the UK, write in country _