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Representations of ethnicity in people's accounts of local community participation : the context of health inequalities in England

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Abstract

This paper is located within the context of the current policy emphasis on the participation of socially excluded groups in "partnerships" with the government in initiatives to reduce health inequalities. We examine the impact of ethnic identity on the likelihood of such participation through semi-structured interviews with 75 residents of a deprived multi-ethnic area in south England. Informants described themselves as African-Caribbean, Pakistani and white English; half men and half women, aged 15-75. We draw attention to the way in which ethnic identities may be constructed in ways that undermine the likelihood of local community participation. We do this through an examination of the way in which stereotypical representations of ethnically defined in-groups and out-groups (the ethnic 'Other') constituted key symbolic resources used by our informants in accounting for their low levels of engagement with local community networks. We examine the content of these stereotypes, and highlight how their construction is shaped by historical, economic and social forces, within the 'institutional racism' that exists in England. Much scope exists for social psychological research into the interface between abstract policy prescriptions drawing on epidemiological research, and their implementation in the complex local contexts characteristic of multi-cultural Britain.

Keywords: health inequalities, ethnicity, identity, participation, partnerships, social capital, social representations, stereotypes, the Other.

1. Introduction

In this paper we examine the role of inter-ethnic stereotyping in the construction of social identities - as reflected in interviews with residents of a multi-ethnic community in a town in south England. This work is located against the backdrop of our broader interest in the impact of social identities on the likelihood of community participation by marginalised social groupings, in the context of social policies which advocate grassroots participation as a key strategy for reducing health inequalities.

Writers in the area of ethnicity have pointed to theoretical problems and political sensitivities associated with essentialist and stereotypical representations of, for example, "the African-Caribbean community in England" or "the white community in England". Such generalisations are dismissed as inaccurate social constructions which fail to take account of the differences within particular ethnic groups, as well as feeding into potentially racist and socially divisive stereotypes of the "ethnic Other" (Brah, 1996). Yet recent interviews we conducted with people who described themselves as African-Caribbean, Pakistani and white English suggest that beyond the world of the academy, the discourse of ordinary people is replete with essentialist descriptions of their own and other ethnic groups. In this paper we examine such stereotypical representations. We will argue that they are very real in their effects - insofar as they play a key role in influencing the likelihood that people will participate in local community networks in the multi-ethnic communities which are increasingly a feature of multi-cultural Britain.

Community participation is one important means through which a group of socially excluded people might work (either directly or indirectly) to collectively challenge their marginalised social status (Percy-Smith, 2000). Within this context, our interviews suggest that these stereotypical ethnic representations are deeply implicated in the perpetuation of various forms of social exclusion. Much work remains to be done in examining the content of these

representations, as well as their socially constructed nature. The latter task would entail a highlighting of their roots in both global and local systems of material and symbolic social exclusion - both in the historical present, as reflected in both people's contemporary daily experiences, and in people's collective memories of the historical past.

2. Participation as a strategy for reducing health inequalities in England.

Poverty is the main cause of ill-health amongst ethnic groups in England, with levels of health decreasing steadily down a gradient from the Social Class 1 to Social Class V (Acheson, 1998; Blane *et al.*, 1996). In addition, some minority ethnic groups suffer disproportionately high levels of ill health (Nazroo, 1997). These cannot be fully explained in terms of material inequalities, with various writers calling for more attention to be paid to factors specific to minority ethnic status, including racism, culture, identity and levels of participation in social and community networks (Nazroo, 1997, 1998; Smaje, 1996; Williams et al., 1997).

A range of policy documents have been put out by the Department of Health (1999a, 1999b) and the Social Exclusion Unit (2000) advocating various forms of grassroots participation and representation in local community activities, as an important means of addressing health inequalities. Three forms of participation are advocated. The first of these is the participation of people in community consultation networks regarding the design and delivery of health services. "Partnerships" between grassroots community members and health service providers are believed to have the potential to contribute to the identification and eradication of problems such as differential access, racism and cultural incompetence that undermine the quality of health care available to minority ethnic people in England in particular. Secondly, it is argued that local people should participate in community-based public health projects designed to promote healthy behaviours (e.g. exercise, the appropriate accessing of health services, compliance with medical treatment). People are most likely to change their

behaviour if they see that liked and trusted peers are changing theirs. Furthermore, grassroots participation in local health projects may also increase people's sense of perceived self-efficacy or empowerment, which may increase the likelihood that people will feel that they can take control over their health. In recruiting potential participants for such initiatives, particular emphasis has been placed on the importance of working with local minority ethnic community groups, voluntary groups and faith organisations (Dept. Health, 1999a, Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

Thirdly, a growing amount of attention is being paid to the possibility that people might be healthier in communities characterised by high levels of social capital, of which participation in local community networks is an important dimension. While much work remains to be done in this controversial area, a growing amount of attention is being paid to the hypothesis that high levels of involvement in local community organisations might contribute to increased levels of health-enhancing trust and social cohesion. Furthermore, it is argued that living in a cohesive community might be associated with increased access to health-enhancing social support and psychological empowerment as well as the reduced likelihood of health-damaging social anxiety. Against this background, public health researchers and policy makers are increasingly advocating the potential health benefits of general community strengthening activities, which seek to increase the involvement of local people in a wide range of voluntary organisations and local networks (Dept. Health, 1999a).

While we have no doubt that each the above-mentioned forms of participation have the potential to contribute to lowering health inequalities, a number of research studies in other countries have shown that participation in such local groupings and networks is most likely to take place amongst the most privileged members of society (Baum *et al*., 2000). As such, it has been argued that measures to increase local community participation could have the unintended consequence of increasing social inequalities rather than reducing them. For this reason we will argue that it is vitally important that policies that advocate participation as a

means of addressing social inequalities should not be blind to factors which promote or hinder the likelihood of such participation by socially excluded groups.

This paper draws on interview material from a larger research project which critically examines the way in which the construction of ethnic identities shapes and constrains the likelihood of such local participation by members of socially disadvantaged groups in England. In particular, the project seeks to highlight the way in which identities are shaped by the material and symbolic social exclusion faced by minority ethnic group members, and the material exclusion faced by poor white people living in deprived areas. The starting point of this larger project is that unless health inequalities policies take account of obstacles to participation, and actively seek to address them, policy recommendations advocating so-called "partnerships" between the government and socially excluded communities are likely to have limited impact.

3. Conceptual framework of our research

Our research draws on the concepts of social capital, social identity and social representations as conceptual tools for the development of a "social psychology of participation" (Campbell and Jovchelovitch, 2000), which accounts for the social psychological processes shaping the likelihood of community participation. According to Bourdieu (1986), social inequalities should be understood in terms of the unequal distribution of four inter-connected forms of 'capital' within a society: economic capital, symbolic capital, cultural capital and social capital. Within such a context, participation in social networks and the benefits that result from this, constitutes a form of 'social capital', which is unequally distributed within a particular society. In this paper we take Bourdieu's framework as a starting point, defining social capital in terms of people's participation in local community networks. If increased participation is indeed one of the ways in which a group of socially excluded people is able to advance their social interests and improve their health, attention to the way in which ethnic

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identity construction serves to undermine such participation could contribute to understandings of some of the the micro-social mechanisms whereby social inequalities are perpetuated.

According to Leonard (1984), social identities are constructed and reconstructed within a range of material and symbolic constraints which often place limits on the extent to which people are able to construct images of themselves and their claimed group memberships that fully reflect their potentialities and interests. The "institutional racism" (MacPherson, 1999) which characterises English society presents a number of constraints of this nature, both in the form of higher levels of poverty (material exclusion), and lower levels of social respect and recognition (symbolic exclusion). However, Leonard argues that at particular historical moments, often through participation in collective projects and networks, members of socially excluded groupings may work together to construct identities that challenge their marginalised status. In some circumstances, participation may take the form of participation in collective networks which serves either directly or indirectly to improve people's material life circumstances, or to raise the group's levels of perceived empowerment and of the social recognition they receive from other groups. Within such a context, social identities and participation have the potential to serve as important mechanisms for social change.

Social representations constitute the symbolic raw materials used by a group of people to make sense of their social world (Moscovici, 1988). Social representations and social identities are intimately intertwined insofar as our social identities are constructed out of the symbolic resources provided by our own and others representations of our claimed group memberships (Jovchelovitch and Gervais, 1999). The role of representations of the 'other' (referring both to the other's representation of the self, and the self's representation of the other) has received much attention in work on social representations (Joffe, 1999).
In her work on power and representation in Brazil, Jovchelovitch (1997, p. 20) highlights how "history, economy and society are tangled with the universe of representations which

shape the power of a group of people". The construction of Brazilian identities may often reflect Brazilian people's internalisation of negative colonial representations of themselves - in ways that undermine the effectiveness of the government and economy. On the one hand ethnic or national identities, and the social representations which shape them are historically contingent, constructed and reconstructed from one moment to the next. Yet, as Jovchelovitch emphasises, they are simultaneously profoundly and deeply socially structured, bearing traces of a group's collective memories of its history, as well as being shaped by the material and symbolic contexts and the complex sets of power relations within which a particular social grouping is located.

Jovchelovitch focuses on the role of unequal power relations in shaping the content of particular social representations. However, much work remains to be done in exploring the way in which such representational content in turn contributes to the reproduction and transformation of these power relations in people's daily lives. In our view, attention to the way in which people's social representations of their own and other ethnic groups shapes or constrains the likelihood that they will participate in local community networks has the potential to contribute to our understandings of these processes.

Hall too portrays the process of identity construction as a dynamic interaction between the stereotypical representations held by self and other, and of self and other, drawing on Bakhtin's claim that meaning is constructed through a dialogue with the 'other', (Hall, 1997; Hall and du Gay, 1997). In this context, much has been written about the role of the 'Other' in the perpetuation of unequal power hierarchies between white and black (Hall, 1997), West and East (Said, 1987), and Jewish and non-Jewish people (Gilman, 1985). Here too writers emphasise the way in which socially disadvantaged groups internalise the negative representations which more powerful groups have formed about them. They emphasise the role that these internalised negative stereotypes play in undermining the confidence and agency of disadvantaged people. However, no attention is given to the detailed mechanisms

whereby these stereotypes serve to undermine disadvantaged groups. In this paper we seek to contribute to understandings of the way in which social representations may serve to perpetuate forms of social exclusion. We do so through an examination of the way in which people's social representations of their own and others' ethnic groups impact on the likelihood that members of marginalised groups will participate in local community networks.

4. Methodology

Our research takes the form of an in-depth case study of ethnic identities in a small multi-ethnic community. In the light of the controversies surrounding the notion of community, we must specify at the outset that we defined 'community' in geographical terms, focusing on two adjacent wards (administrative districts) in our town of interest. This decision was made in line with the fact that the majority of local health and community development funding and resources in our town of interest are targeted at geographically demarcated wards. Furthermore national policy attention to health inequalities often goes hand in hand with policies focusing on local neighbourhood renewal (e.g. Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

Our wards of interest have the highest concentration of minority ethnic residents (5% African-Caribbean, 30% Pakistani, 15% Bangladeshi, 5% Indian and 45% white). They were the two most deprived wards in the town (Jarman index score of 46 and 41, and falling within the top 5% of the most deprived wards in England and Wales according to 1991 census data).[1]

Our case study took the form of three-hour semi-structured in-depth interviews with 75 residents, equally divided amongst people who identified themselves as African-Caribbean, Pakistani Kashmiri and white English. Within each ethnic group, informants were half men

and half women, spread over the 15 to 75 year age range. Interviewees were selected by a purposive snowball sampling technique . Three methods of recruitment were used: 1) advertisements and articles in local media, which worked best for recruiting white English informants; 2) institutional contacts through local voluntary organisations, which worked best for recruiting African-Caribbean informants; and 3) interpersonal contacts, referrals and snowballing which were crucial in recruiting Pakistani-Kashmiri informants (see McLean and Campbell, 2001, for a detailed account of the recruiting process).

Our interview topic guide had 3 parts. The first took the form of an open-ended life history interview. The second consisted of 40 structured questions from Putnam's (1993) social capital questionnaire (focusing on the quality of local community life, including attention to factors such as perceptions of trust, reciprocity, local identity, various forms of civic engagement, and satisfaction with local community facilities and services). The final section included a series of open-ended questions about the way in which ethnic identities were likely to shape participation in (i) informal neighbourhood networks; (ii) in local voluntary organisations linked to personal support and development as well as hobbies and leisure activities; and (iii) in community consultation and activist forums linked to issues such as health promotion, policing and neighbourhood regeneration (see Campbell, Wood and Kelly, 1999, for a copy of the interview topic guide).

Interviews yielded 7000 typed pages of single-spaced typed transcript, which were analysed using NUD*ST. We provide generalised accounts of these interviews elsewhere (Campbell and McLean, 2001a, 2001b and 2001c). In this paper we seek to draw specifically on one very specific aspect of our data, viz: the way in which stereotypes of ethnically defined in-groups and out-groups (the ethnic 'Other') constituted key representational resources used by our informants in accounting for their engagement with local community networks. In the

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[1] We are not at liberty to disclose the identity of the town in line with conditions negotiated with interview

case of our African-Caribbean and Pakistani informants, we will begin to point to ways in which these representational resources are structured by the institutionalised racism which characterises English society (McPherson, 1999). This racism exists both at the material level, where members of many minority ethnic groups experience disproportionately high levels of material deprivation, and at the symbolic level, relating to experiences of racialised hostility and lack of respect and recognition experienced by many minority ethnic group people. In the case of our white English informants, we will highlight the way in which these stereotypes are shaped by the ambiguity of their social location. While they are members of the dominant ethnic group, they occupy a low status position on the economic hierarchy, with the associated stigma facing poor people irrespective of ethnic group membership.

The extent to which the *content* of our case study's findings about the nature of inter-ethnic stereotypes could be generalised beyond our particular multi-ethnic community of interest is a matter for empirical investigation. Rather the aim of this paper is to provide an illustration of the *processes* whereby identities might be constructed in ways that undermine the likelihood of local community participation in multi-ethnic communities, and the role of in-group and out-group stereotypes in such processes.

At this stage we must emphasise that our interest in this paper is in peoples' *subjective* representations of their own and other ethnic groups, irrespective of the extent to which these representations constitute an accurate description of features of local community life. Thus for example, we will highlight the way in which all three ethnic groups stereotyped the local Asian community as economically successful and characterised by strong supportive families. This stereotype belies the fact that while there are indeed some members of the Asian community who are economically successful, the vast majority in our area of interest are not, with most Asian people facing high levels of poverty. This stereotype also masks the

informants, in the interests of confidentiality.

fact that while some Asian families are indeed strong and supportive, this is often not the case, with high levels of family conflict and breakdown. In the conclusion to this paper we will point to the need for further research to untangle the social, historical and cultural processes which lead to the construction of these stereotypes, and we will point to some of the factors that we believe would need to be taken into account in such an enterprise. However a detailed account of the processes whereby inter-ethnic representations are constructed is beyond the scope of this paper, which seeks to highlight the *content* of peoples' accounts, taking these at face value. We do so on the basis of our assumption that these subjective perceptions of local community life play an important role in shaping the likelihood of local participation, and as such are worthy of interest in their own right.

5. The interviews

Our interviews suggested that there was little sense of cross-ethnic solidarity in our area of interest, as well as little contact amongst people from different ethnic groups in our multi-ethnic community. People tended to choose their closest friends and associates from within their own ethnic groups. The exception here was some degree of friendship and some level of sexual mixing amongst younger white and African-Caribbean people. Despite this general lack of mixing, nearly every informant from each ethnic group spoke of civil and positive relationships between residents of different ethnic groups. They said that people tended to be polite and friendly to one another, if somewhat distant, in their limited encounters. The only exceptions here were the interviews with young men. They spoke of the antagonism that sometimes existed between ethnically demarcated groups of white and Asian men, and groups of Asian and African-Caribbean men, which sometimes spilled over into physical fighting.

Despite fairly low levels of contact between different groups, however, informants did often draw on stereotypes of their own and other ethnic groups as rhetorical devices in giving an

account of their lives in the local community. In this section we examine the content of these stereotypes. The most coherent and frequently mentioned stereotypical representation across our African-Caribbean, Pakistani and white interviews was that of the 'Asian' community which constituted 55% of the local population, and which was depicted as powerful, politically sophisticated and united. Both African-Caribbean and Pakistani informants frequently referred to the 'white' community in their interviews. On the other hand, white informants had little corresponding sense of their own ethnic identity, hardly referring to it at all, and battling to give it content when pressed. Hardly any reference was made to African-Caribbean people (constituting only 5% of the local population), either by white or Pakistani informants.

'African Caribbean' interviews

While a strong sense of African-Caribbean identity existed amongst our African-Caribbean informants, this did not translate into a resource mobilising people at the level of local community networks in our area of interest, where levels of participation in local community networks were low. African-Caribbean identities were central to people's life narratives, described as a positive source of pride and personal empowerment in the inter-personal dimensions of people's lives. Close family and friendship ties were cited as a key aspect of African-Caribbean identity. People drew sharp contrasts between African-Caribbean and white English family relationships, describing their own families as stronger, and with higher levels of support and loyalty.

> In the hospital I see a lot of it, because of working in the old people's ward - if they put
> their mum or dad there, they don't visit every day, and they come empty-handed, they
> don't bring food or drinks or anything. All they're interested to know is what money the

old people will have. No, I don't think they look after their old people - no, not like us. (F652)

Younger people spoke of their surprise when visiting white friends, who would go straight to their rooms on returning home without greeting their parents. They compared this to the respect their parents expected, linking this specifically to their African-Caribbean origins.

However, while serving as a source of empowerment and solidarity at the inter-personal level, African-Caribbean identity often served as a source of alienation in other spheres of people's lives. People spoke of numerous incidents where they had felt that their ethnicity set them apart at school and in the workplace, for example, and many incidents where they had suffered racism. It was this very sense of being a member of a socially excluded out-group which had contributed to the strength of the solidarity some informants spoke of feeling with other African-Caribbean people.

> There's that empathy, that sharing. I mean, we're walking down the street in the night, people will cross the road because they see us, we're both going to share that. They're both going to think that we're going to get mugged because we're big, powerful looking guys. You know, so we will share empathy. It's something unwritten and unseen but it binds us all together. (M29)

Within our African-Caribbean interviews, people's attitudes to work varied across age and gender. Older informants had worked in relatively unskilled occupations, often for long hours in hard jobs, but spoke of them positively. Positive attitudes to work were also held by some of the younger women in our sample, who had risen up to good managerial posts in various contexts. They referred to their work with a strong sense of purpose, and looked ahead towards a challenging and positive career path. In contrast, the young men in our sample

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[2] Informants are numbered according to gender (M and F), followed by age.

were negative about work, which was not experienced as a source of dignity or of confidence. They said that available jobs were menial and unfulfilling, with work being seen as a source of low self-esteem rather than the pride and actualisation that young men hoped for.

> At the end you are on the lowest rung, because you are black and you are unskilled. You're the lowest rung of the lowest. You know, and they're prepared to treat you - you know I came late a couple of times and the man would say: 'If you're late again, you're going.' There's no love between you. You get a feeling you can be replaced easily. So how can you feel confident there? You go to work to be a man, yet still at work they're treating you like a boy, like a child, just belittling you. And a lot of people just take this crap. (M32)

While people acknowledged the strength of African-Caribbean people in areas such as sport and culture, they frequently referred to the lack of African-Caribbean role models in politics and business. Several informants spoke of how their African-Caribbean identity had shaped the sense of exclusion they felt in the educational sphere and in the labour market, where as African-Caribbean people they were generally in the numerical minority.

In talking about relationships with family and friends, as well as about social exclusion at school and at work, African-Caribbean people tended to articulate their sense of exclusion in relation to white people - who were generally the majority group in the latter contexts. In discussing the likelihood of African-Caribbean participation in local community networks and organisations, however, people compared themselves to the Asian community, which constituted the numerical majority in our particular local area of interest. Our African-Caribbean informants associated high levels of residential concentration of Asian people in our local area of interest with what they described as the relatively strong sense of local Asian solidarity and the Asian community's superior political skills in mobilising resources to protect local Asian interests. This confidence and political skill had resulted in a series of

visible local achievements (such as local mosques, and Asian-specific services) which further served to bind and empower Asian people

> Powerful and strong, yeah. That's how the Asian people get their place (community hall) down the road because they went and they volunteer to do things and they put in their petitions and they said they wanted places for their people to come and sit down and chat and they get it. (F68).

African-Caribbean people often used the word "swamped" when speaking of local Asian people.

> I don't really feel comfortable in this area, because they make you feel as if it's their area and not yours. (M16)

In contrast to the assertiveness of local Asian people, African-Caribbean described themselves as lacking in political confidence.

> If we get more people to sit down and complain about things like the Asians have done ……. with the West Indian community, I don't think we try hard enough you know. Or it wants more people to protest and complain about it, I don't know why we don't complain more. (M64)

In supporting this claim, people often referred to both the more distant historical legacy of slavery and colonialism, and more recent experiences of racial prejudice.

> The Asian people have confidence. Not like the enslaved black population, living in the culture of the Windrush generation .... The reason why today we see the advancements made in the Asian community and the lack of advancement in the Black community, is the Windrush mentality. Asians are not enslaved. Black people are still very much, whether they accept it or not, enslaved. (F35)

Within the social psychology literature on preconditions for collective action, two factors are cited: firstly the sense of collective identity which we have referred to above, and secondly a sense of collective agency or empowerment. In terms of the latter, in various ways our interview informants represented the African-Caribbean community as small, dispersed and lacking in confidence, in the shadow of the more powerful Asian community. We have already highlighted how while a strong and positive African-Caribbean identity did exist, this was centred around the private and personal spheres of friends and family, rather than the more public spheres of local community, work or politics. Furthermore, these personal networks were often not located in the immediate geographical neighbourhoods, given the high levels of mobility reported by informants.

Peoples' accounts reflected their sense of a patchy dialectic of exclusion and inclusion in relation to mainstream English society. This further undermined the likelihood of the development of a collective African-Caribbean identity. In some respects people felt that aspects of what were originally experienced as distinctively African-Caribbean ways of being - in relation to factors such as interpersonal styles, youth culture and music - had been welcomed and incorporated into the mainstream white majority culture. These aspects of what people depicted as African-Caribbean culture were no longer experienced in an ethnically defined way, undermining a potential resource for bringing African-Caribbean people together.

Some informants spoke of the positive influence of the black power struggle culture and music of the 70s and early 80s. They felt this influence had become diluted as time passed and as black people became more integrated into the mainstream British society. Several informants suggested that the relative integration of the African-Caribbean community into the mainstream culture was one important reason why it was so difficult to mobilise African-Caribbean people together around a sense of common interests.

"We are too ready to integrate… to take on board the influences of another culture .... even my mum and dad's education (growing up in the West Indies) was sent over from Britain. The books they read were British. We speak English. What do we really have? We have maybe a national food, a few dishes. Maybe we have certain music that people will always associate with the West Indies, or maybe specifically Jamaica, but we don't have a method of dress that is particularly Jamaican, do we? We eat McDonalds, we eat pasta, we eat salt fish. But we watch East Enders, we don't have our own channel. We don't have anything more specific, they are the things that keep people tight. We don't have a religion that spans across the whole black community. So maybe that's why we don't have such a strong community." (F32).

This sense of inclusion is not a straightforward one, and goes hand in hand with many experiences of exclusion - in the workplace, in politics, at school and so on - overshadowed by the experience of living with the ever-present predictable and unpredictable experiences of racialised hostility or insult. In short, people's accounts suggested that their experience of partial inclusion into the English mainstream had in some ways undermined the sense of solidarity which would serve to unite people in the face of partial exclusion.

'Pakistani' interviews

We turn now to our Pakistani informants. Here we must emphasise that in talking about their ethnicities, people did so with varying levels of inclusiveness - sometimes referring to themselves as 'Pakistani', sometimes as 'Kashmiri'[3], sometimes 'Muslim' and sometimes the more generic 'Asian'. Of the three ethnic groups in our interview study, Pakistani informants presented the most coherent and confident sense of a common ethnic identity. Interviews highlighted the way in which perceptions of overlapping cultural and religious identities, as well as shared loyalties to the geographical Pakistani/ Kashmiri homeland, serve as a shared

reference point which sometimes serves to unite people in networks which mobilised very successfully around particular community issues. As was frequently referred to in our interviews with white English as well as African-Caribbean informants, our local area of interest had ten mosques, as well as a number of Asian specific community services, all achievements resting on hard work and mobilising by members of various sectors of the local Asian community. However, our interviews also suggested that these achievements were the result of the efforts of a small group of older men, and that on the whole women and younger men tended not to become involved in local community networks. Furthermore, as we will discuss below, such ethnically demarcated identities also serve as sources of division and even friction in other instances. As such, they had a complex and ambiguous influence on the likelihood of community participation by a Pakistani people in our area of interest.

Pakistani informants often defined their identities in sharp contrast to their stereotype of the white English community. In the interviews they repeatedly referred to layer upon layer of difference between whites and 'Pakistani's' or 'Asians' in relation to factors such as language, dress, culture, the behaviour of women, religion and diet. As opposed to the African-Caribbean community, which saw itself as relatively integrated with the mainstream white culture in all sorts of ways, our Pakistani informants had a clearly defined representation of the Pakistani community -- located at the intersection of the Muslim religion, homeland links (with Pakistan and Kashmir) and culture. Although this identity was contested in all sorts of ways, it was a key reference point in people's accounts of their daily lives.

> If you give an opinion, and you're a Pakistani, it's going to be different to what another
> religion thinks .... the way you live, the way you dress, the way you think, it'll be more
> related to what your parents think, and with white people it's obviously a bit more open -
> I mean as we see how a woman should be dressed, how she should live her life, the way
> she should be, it will be completely different to what white people think. (F15)

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[3] The majority of Pakistani people in our area of interest originate from the Pakistani region of Kashmir.

Central to people's accounts was a representation of the extended family, characterised by high levels of mutual responsibility and reciprocity, norms such as reverence for elders, and an emphasis on the importance of safeguarding the sexuality of women family members. There was also much emphasis on the way in which the conduct of every individual family member contributed to the reputation of the collective family unit.

Compared to the African-Caribbean community who regretted their social exclusion from the English mainstream, many members of the Pakistani community actively worked towards exclusion in the private spheres of their lives, striving to keep their daily lives and customs as free as possible from "western" influence. This was particularly the case with religious informants of all age groups, who saw non-integration as a positive community strength.

In the public arena (particularly in relation to business and politics), people felt that while the first generation of Pakistanis had been disadvantaged as members of a minority ethnic group, successive generations were overcoming this disadvantage. This occurred as they became increasingly educated, with Pakistani people gradually becoming more successful in England. People communicated a clear sense of having a political and economic place in British society – albeit if this place involved a degree of self-imposed isolation from the mainstream culture.

Pakistani informants frequently compared what they described as an Asian commitment to education and upward mobility to the lack of such commitment in the white English community.

> I know a lot of white people who just don't go on to further education after High School.
> And I can say that a majority of Asian families now would say "Yes, go to college,
> university. Become something - a doctor, accountant, make something of yourself". Like

even my doctor, he's an Asian doctor, a Muslim, I went the other day to get an injection. It's like, "Ah, what you doing? Make sure you get a good job." I'm sure if white people go up to their doctor, they just don't talk about things like that. (F20)

Our interviewees communicated a clear sense that Pakistani people had come to England on their own terms. Initially earlier generations had come from Pakistan with the explicit aim of making money, but keeping homes and primary loyalties in Pakistan. As time passed people had found it increasingly convenient to bring over their families, and take advantage of the advantages England had to offer – in relation to superior education and job opportunities. There was a strong sense of people adopting those aspects of life in England that they liked, and ignoring those that they did not.

This is not to say that people were not aware of high levels of material deprivation and unemployment amongst certain sectors of the Pakistani community. However, on the whole they tended to blame such disadvantage on families who did not adequately value education, or poorly motivated young people not working hard enough. There was no sense in which such disadvantage was ascribed to any sort of social injustice.

On the one hand, informants spoke of a strong and united local Pakistani community, binding people through supportive extended families and a common commitment to educational and professional advancement. Superficially this would seem to point towards the possibility of strong Pakistani participation in local community networks. However there were layers of ambiguity in the implications of this identity for sense of common interest in community. Behind the stereotype of a cohesive and distinctive cultural group, people's accounts suggested that the process of negotiating an ethnic identity in UK society involved a range of complexities which undermined the likelihood that such identities would serve to pull people together in representative local community groups, in interests of pursuing mutually defined interests, along the lines suggested by health inequalities policy documents.

Thus for example, while people frequently referred to the supportive nature of Pakistani families in general, in particular they cited one instance after another where family relationships had been a source of strain rather than support. Young women who had come to England to get married - with little education and poor English language skills - were particularly vulnerable when family relationships went wrong. People spoke of tremendous pressure on families when one of their members went astray. One woman spoke of how she dreaded leaving the house for fear of gossip about her drug-dealing son, and her sense that community members would blame this problem on her failure as a mother. In many ways, there was evidence that this common definition of a strong supportive extended family served as both a source of strain and division as often as it served as a source of support.

Unsurprisingly, there was tremendous diversity in the extent to which people observed what they referred to as 'traditional' ways of life. The interviews pointed to strong differences between two groups of young women, both of whom expressed an equally strong allegiance to a Pakistani identity, for example. On the one hand, there were young Pakistan women with little education and no English language skills, who lived extremely secluded and restricted lives, seldom leaving their homes and having no contact with anyone except for their husbands and in-laws. For these women, participation in local community activities or voluntary associations of any sort was out of the question. On the other hand, there were British born college students, women of the same age and living in the same streets, whose parents actively encouraged their independence and whose up-bringing had been geared towards encouraging them to advance in their education and "stand on their own two feet". For them, the very essence of their Pakistani or Asian identities lay in the superior encouragement they had received in gaining their own independence and power. Such dramatic differences in identity construction between two groups of people so similar in age, gender and ethnicity, illustrate the way in which within-group differences are likely to

undermine the likelihood of Pakistani people getting together at the local community level around commonly defined interests.

Another dimension influencing how people negotiated their ethnically demarcated identities was linked to their degree of active commitment to the Muslim faith. This was particularly apparent in interviews with older men. Virtually every informant expressed generalised commitment to Muslim principles. However beyond this there were stark differences in the ways in which these principles interpreted. More religious informants characterised what they described as mainstream life in England - with its opportunities for behaviours such as smoking, gambling, drinking and casual sex - as deeply threatening to their valued social norms. However, for others, the relative social freedoms of mainstream English life (compared to what they described as the restrictions of life in Pakistan) were regarded as extremely positive. One older man spoke of the pleasures he derived from card games and the occasional drink, behaviours that are strongly at variance with traditional Muslim precepts. Another compared the relative freedom of his life, with the life he said he would have had in Pakistan, burdened with the crippling responsibilities of large number of family members, as was the case with his brothers.

Here again we have people of similar age and gender, expressing equally strong commitments to a Pakistani identity, and equally keen for their children to be educated in Muslim values. Yet they had interpreted the parameters of these ethnic and religious identities in very different ways. This is one more example of the dialectic of unity and difference underlying 'Pakistani' identities, which suggests that such identities do not necessarily have the potential to serve as resources for mobilising local people around common interests.

'white English' interviews

On the whole, 'being white' was not a salient identity for our informants. As one informant said when we asked her to tell us about how she felt about being white:

> I've never even thought about being white, I just am white. (Pause) What more is there I can say? (F50)

Others referred more specifically and self-consciously to what they experienced as their lack of a recognisable and definable ethnic identity. Several people referred positively and enviously to the close and supportive nature of Asian families. One man compared what he perceived as his own lack of cultural or ethnic identity as a white English person to his wife's Jewish family, saying how his life had become enriched since he had married her and become included in her family circle. Another person referred enviously to a relative who was deaf, and whose deafness gave her access to a close and clearly defined identity group. She had married into this group, and had made most of her friends within it. In his view, being deaf had given his relative a clearly defined set of friends and an identity which he felt was lacking in his own life.

While people generally had more to say about whether or not they felt 'English' or 'British', they battled to give content to this category. A few people did unpack this category in ethnically defined terms, saying that they preferred to call themselves 'English' than 'British'. They justified their preference in terms of their perception that the category of 'English' referred narrowly to people who were white, and whose parents had been born in England. They rejected the category of 'British' because it was too broad and inclusive of people of other ethnic origins. Others preferred to call themselves 'British' rather than 'English' out of an explicit desire for a more inclusive and non-ethnically specific label. These included a number of white informants who had had relationships or children with African-Caribbean people, or had family members who had had such relationships.

When pressed to give some content to their English identity, people made vague and fragmentary references to how proud they had been of particular English football successes, for example. But references to football success were frequently quickly countered by their expressions of shame at the behaviour of English football hooligans. One young man in our sample, who had Italian relatives, made positive comparisons about the relative punctuality of trains in England, compared to Italy. Apart from one older man who spoke of the way in which the Second World War had engendered a sense of strong national pride, other informants who mentioned English history referred to the country's colonial history, and made these references with embarrassment.

Contemporary theories (and indeed our own interviews with African-Caribbean and Pakistani people) highlight the way in which the construction of ethnic identities is a shifting, fragmentary and dynamic process. Yet understandings of ethnic identity were relatively straightforward, stable and clear for our African-Caribbean and Pakistani interviewees in a way that was not true for white English informants. In short, people did not have the same easy access to any kind of representation of the white English community in the way that our Pakistani and African-Caribbean informants had of their particular ethnically defined communities.

The potential implications of what appears to be a 'lack of identity' are complex. On the one hand, as Mercer (1991) says, social identities only become salient in conditions where they are problematised. People's almost total lack of critical awareness of their ethnicity reflects the way in which 'whiteness' is the norm in people's daily working, schooling and living environments. These environments are experienced as so identical with people's needs and interests that they have no need to form a representation of their ethnicity in the same way as their ethnic minority counterparts. As the majority, dominant population, white English people may not have to reflect on the nature of their own ethnic identities in ways that minority ethnic groups do.

However, despite the absence of any positive sense of what might comprise a 'white English' identity, as we shall discuss below, participants often reported feeling disempowered and 'swamped' in relation to Asian people, suggesting that some notion of white ethnicity was in operation, albeit an inexplicit one.

Furthermore, people did sometimes refer enviously to their perception that compared to other groups they were prevented from mobilising around a sense of white or an English identity -- in a social context where any attempt to assert their whiteness or their Englishness was regarded as a sign of racism. Thus one informant expressed resentment that while the local community centre held special days for African-Caribbean and Pakistani residents, there was no similar ethnically defined day where white English people could get together as a group. Some informants regretted their perception that while ethnicity served as a positive resource for ethnic minorities, any attempts by the majority group to claim an ethnic identity were seen as racist.

Our interview team had no problem when they put up signs advertising for African-Caribbean or Pakistani informants in local shops and community centres, but generated several complaints when they put up a sign in a shop advertising for white English informants. One shopkeeper had to remove the advert after being told that it was offensive. Our research interest in 'white English' had racist overtones to many community members.

white English people occupy an ambiguous position. By virtue of their whiteness, they are members of the dominant group in England relative to minority ethnic groups. However, within this local community they constituted a numerical minority. Furthermore, white residents of our local community (which fell within the top 5% of deprived communities in England and Wales) are disadvantaged compared with the majority of white English people

in the country as a whole. Thus, compared to more affluent white people, they are relatively disadvantaged.

Within the context of this relative disadvantage, white ethnic identity is a blunt instrument. It fails to give people in deprived settings a forum for articulating their collective needs and interests. This is a particular disadvantage in multi-ethnic communities where local resources and opportunities - such as council related services - are often claimed by other groups on an ethnically contested basis.

One of the few occasions that people's "whiteness" did play a role in their life narratives was in the context of their perception that whites were gradually being outnumbered by Asian people in the community. As was the case in some of our African-Caribbean interviews, some white English people complained about the numerical dominance of Asian children at the local school. They and their African-Caribbean counterparts spoke of how their children's educational development was held back, because teachers were forced to devote their scarce energies and resources to helping Asian children who couldn't speak English. One white English woman living in a very sparse council flat spoke of her and her husband's central ambition being to try to relocate to a less ethnically diverse area, so that her four-year-old son did not grow up, in her own words, as "a stranger in his own country".

Conclusion

This paper is located within the context of our broader interest in the links between the construction of ethnic identities and social exclusion. Our case study focused on three groups, marginalised along varying dimensions of structural exclusion, including both the material and the symbolic. At the material level, our local area ranks amongst the 5% of poorest neighbourhoods in England and Wales. At the symbolic level, there is the social stigma associated with poverty irrespective of ethnicity. In addition to this, much attention has been

given to the institutional racism that characterises English society. In our particular study, minority ethnic informants referred to the actuality or possibility of being victims of racism. Some of our white English interviews contained evidence of either racially motivated prejudice against minority ethnic groups, or of the assumption that white English people should be entitled to preferential treatment.

Our first group of interest, African-Caribbean people, articulated a sense of exclusion along three dimensions. These included the material dimension (in terms of economic deprivation), the symbolic (in terms of their minority ethnic status) as well as the numerical dimension (in terms of the low /residential concentration of African-Caribbean people in our area of interest). Objectively speaking, Pakistani people are excluded along both the material and symbolic dimensions (although there was some degree of variation in our Pakistani informants' subjective perception of being excluded along these dimensions). Numerically they constituted a majority in terms of their close identification with the broader category of Asian people. Our third group, white English people, whilst belonging to the nationally dominant majority ethnic group, suffered from material deprivation, as well as feeling numerically marginalised by the presence of significant numbers of minority ethnic people in their local area.

Within this context, this paper has sought to highlight the way in which ethnic identities may sometimes be constructed in ways that undermine the likelihood of widespread involvement in local community networks. More particularly we have sought to point to the role of inter-ethnic comparisons in this process - through focusing on the content of informants' social representations of their own and other ethnic groups. Much work remains to be done in untangling the processes whereby this content is shaped and constrained by social and historical factors. While emphasising the flexible and dynamically constructed nature of ethnic identities, Jovchelovitch (199x) emphasises that such identities are simultaneously deeply socially structured. In the latter respect, they bear traces of the broader social,

historical and institutional factors that shape inter-group relations in a particular society. Above we have talked of the dialectic of unity and difference in the accounts people gave of their ethnicity. The socially structured nature of identities, of which Jovchelovitch speaks, would need to be taken account of in the task of accounting for the within-group ethnic unity that exists, even within the diversity of informants' accounts of their ethnic identities.

Within this context researchers in this area are faced with inter-linking challenges. The first is to begin to tease out and untangle the processes whereby the types of stereotypical representations which we have highlighted in this paper are shaped and constrained by a range of material and ideological factors. The second is to focus on the processes whereby such stereotypes can serve not only to reproduce various forms of social exclusion, but also as arenas of struggle, serving to mobilise people in forms of collective action aimed at challenging social inequalities. In the conclusion of this paper we start to address the first of these challenges, seeking to indicate ways in which stereotypes are shaped by material and ideological factors. While we are aware that our findings raise more questions than answers, our data do point towards possible starting points for this task of untangling their socially constructed nature.

To start with one of the most obvious social factors, a key influence on peoples' views their own and other ethnic groups - and a factor which was self-consciously articulated by many informants - lay in the numerical breakdown of ethnic groups in our area of interest. Thus, for example, beyond the inter-personal level, our African-Caribbean informants represented their own group as weak and lacking in confidence, and white and Pakistani informants had little or no representation of the African-Caribbean community at all. This representation was consistent with low levels of African-Caribbean participation in local community networks, and with the fact that African-Caribbean people constituted only 5% of the local population. On the other hand, many informants from all ethnic groups had a rich and coherent representation of the Asian community as strong, united and politically successful - a

representation that was consistent with the numerical majority of Asian people (55%). This was also consistent with the fact that in our area of interest Asian people are indeed the most successful in mobilising the council for ethnically contested resources, and in raising their own money for ethnic specific mosques, which served as visible markers of an Asian identity. In this regard, any ethnic competition that might have come from local white people (45% of the population) would have been undermined by the lack of a coherent and identifiable white identity.

The relatively high ethnic concentration of Asian people would have to carry some burden of explanation for the representation of Asian people as strong, united and successful, given that a range of factors existed which might have undermined such a stereotype. We have, for example, pointed to a range of divisions and differences in the way in which Pakistani identities were negotiated (e.g. along differing demographic intersections of axes such as age, gender and migration history, as well as factors such as differing experiences of perceived agency). We have also highlighted the fact that contrary to the stereotype, the majority of Asian people in our community of interest - including Pakistani people - suffer from particularly high levels of unemployment and economic deprivation, as well as poor health, with young men also being the targets of racial hostility.

A cultural factor which might have contributed to the stereotype of the strong Asian community, might be related to the relative coherence of ethnic identities as articulated by Pakistani informants. This relative coherence centred around (albeit varying levels of) identification with the Pakistani-Kashmiri homeland, the Muslim religion, and a series of extended family norms - all themes that were articulated in the Pakistani interviews. Even within the context of the great differences in the way in which Pakistani identities were constructed, Pakistani people's ethnic identities were relatively coherent and unified compared to other groups. This relative coherence stood in contrast to their ethnically invisible white English counterparts, and their African-Caribbean counterparts' account of

their relative integration into the mainstream of English life, albeit in the context of the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion faced by African-Caribbean people.

In providing an account of their identities, African-Caribbean informants' representations of their own ethnic identities bore traces of the types of recent and distant historical factors which would also need to be taken account of in any untangling of the processes underlying the social construction of people's ethnic representations. We have referred to differences in representations of work held by young African-Caribbean men, compared to young African-Caribbean women and older people, with younger men expressing relatively negative views of the working opportunities available to African-Caribbean people in England. Recent economic history will have had some influence on age differences here, insofar as the past few years have seen a particularly dramatic decline in the manufacturing industry in our town. This has meant that employment opportunities for younger people are fewer and less secure than was the case in their parents' day. Furthermore, recent statistic show that levels of employment amongst African-Caribbean women are higher than the national average of female employment in England, as opposed to levels of unemployment amongst men, which are considerably lower than the national average (Health Education Authority, 2000). Such economic trends must certainly be structurally bound up with people's work-related identities.

In relation to more distant historical events, collective historical memories of slavery and colonialism penetrated the accounts that many African-Caribbean informants gave of the likelihood that African-Caribbean people would participate in local community networks or initiatives in pursuing their ethnically defined interests. This sense of distant historical racism and exploitation had its contemporary echoes in the accounts of first-hand experiences of racial prejudice experienced by some of our African-Caribbean informants.

The differing role which historical memories of racial prejudice and exploitation play in peoples' accounts of their ethnic identity is also an important area for future research.

Compared to their African-Caribbean counterparts, whose collective memories of slavery and racial abuse were very salient, many of our Pakistani informants reconstructed their histories in ways which served to screen out some of the tremendous hardships and high levels of racial abuse experienced by early Pakistani immigrants to England. (Brah, 1996, provides an account of some of these difficulties).

Explicit references to ethnic identity were least evident in our interviews with white English people. Much interesting work remains to be done on white identity in England, particularly in the context of economically deprived, multi-ethnic communities, such as our community of interest. Our white informants were located within a complex configuration of social advantage and disadvantage, faced with the historically recent experience of being a minority ethnic group, if only at the local community level, and lacking a clearly identifiable or socially acceptable ethnic identity around which to mobilise. The extent to which white English people respond to such situations by integrating with other groups (an option described by many African-Caribbean people in our sample, and by those of our white informants who had mixed race children or relatives through white-African-Caribbean partnerships), or by seeking to retain an exclusive ethnic identity (as was the case with some Pakistani people in our sample, although not others) remains to be seen.

Further research will also need to pay more attention to case studies of situations where ethnic identities did indeed constitute a political resource for uniting people around collectively defined interests. Given our particular case study's emphasis on the influence of ethnic identities on community participation in a geographically defined local area where levels of community participation were low, our particular interviews did not contain much evidence of this nature. This gap will need to be addressed by further case studies of geographical communities where levels of local community participation are higher, as well as studies of communities which are not defined in terms of geographical location as was the case in this study. There is a need to examine communities of interest or identity which

transcend geographical boundaries, and to examine the extent to which ethnicity does or could serve as a mobilising force across non-local networks and relationships.

We are aware that our topic of interest represents a potential minefield in terms of the political sensitivities associated with issues of ethnicity. This is particularly the case at the end of a century in which inter-ethnic prejudice and exploitation has continued to be the basis of much suffering and conflict. However, given the role which categories such as ethnicity will need to play in policies to reduce social inequalities, it is our view that there is much scope for social psychologists to contribute to wider multi-disciplinary accounts of the processes whereby ethnic identities serve either as sources of material and symbolic disadvantage, or as an arena for resisting such disadvantage. In our view, social psychology has an important contribution to make to our understandings of the potential disjunctions between health policies shaped by large-scale epidemiological research, and the possibility of their successful application in real-life contexts in small local communities. No matter how significant a category such as 'Pakistani' or 'African-Caribbean' might be in statistical analyses of health inequalities, epidemiological categories of this nature cannot simply be 'mapped' onto policy recommendations - particularly policy directives involving complex and richly textured social-psychological and community-level phenomena such as social identity or participation. Much remains to be learned about the complex micro-social processes which shape the construction of identities and the likelihood of participation which are presupposed by such health policies.

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