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# When is a migrant not a migrant? Exploring white middle-class perceptions of difference in a 'liberal' British city

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**Abstract**

Drawing on theories of 'belonging' and the 'politics of belonging', this paper addresses the question of how and why some migrants, but not others, are able to shed a label of difference to become full members of Britain's community of belonging. This is achieved through investigation of the perceptions of difference which are held by members of the nation's dominant group, the understudied white British middle-classes. The paper is based on interviews with twelve young middle-class white British people in Brighton, a self-proclaimed 'liberal' city, and is situated within a wider debate of the racialisation of Britishness. Interviews reveal a normative link between 'Britishness' and 'whiteness' underlying white middle-class perceptions of 'the migrant', but labels of difference associated with visible colour are found to be countered by similarities of language and culture and outweighed by social proximity.

**Introduction**

> This is my country and since I was eight years old this is where I grew up. This is where I started life. This is where I went to uni. This is where the people I know are, this is my country and when I put on my Great Britain vest I'm proud, very proud, that it's my country (Mo Farah quoted in Williamson, 8 August 2012).

Having won two gold medals for Great Britain at the London 2012 Olympics, Somali-born Farah was asked if his medals would mean more had they been won for Somalia. This question, which provoked the above comment, is evidence of the normative exclusion of immigrants from a national British identity, regardless of self-identification or formal citizenship. The incident followed a tabloid scandal over 'plastic Brits', a termed coined by *The Daily Mail* to describe anyone with a migration background, which proved that 'Britishness' is still widely understood as contingent on birthplace and descent (Mail Online 11 July 2012; also Katwala 2012).

Since the early 1950s Britain has accepted numerous waves of immigrants from around the world; however, these immigrants have rarely been accepted in the full sense of the word, let alone welcomed (Ford 2011). Although much has changed since the days of Enoch Powell, when 'native' hostility towards immigrants was vociferous and unequivocally racist, there remains a strong link between immigration, race and 'difference' (Anderson 2012; Blinder 2012; Rogaly and Taylor 2010). As the title of this paper suggests, there is also a discursive difference between a migrant – as a person 'who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year [….] so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence' (Blinder 2012: 3) – and 'the migrant' as a person of difference. In media and political discourse, 'the migrant' has come to represent a 'folk devil', poor and overtly racialised, and standing in direct contrast to the 'Good Citizen' (Anderson 2012: 5). Migrant labels are frequently determined by perceived deviance from the 'norm', rather than legal status, so 'migrant' comes to symbolise 'difference'

(Anderson 2012).[1] Not all migrants are seen as 'migrants'; some immigrants are able to evade a 'migrant' label or appear so 'like us' that they are not recognised as different and seem to naturally belong within the collective community.

The differential inclusion of migrants within Britain's 'community of belonging' is often theorised in relation to race. Race is one form of identification by which boundaries are constructed between 'belongers' and 'non-belongers' (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992) and is particularly salient in the context of postcolonial Britain where colonial frameworks, which depict minorities as homogenous 'others', still shape perceptions of difference (Rogaly and Taylor 2010). A link between immigration and race has also led to the conflation of 'immigrants' with 'ethnic minorities' (Gilroy 2002[1987]; Rogaly and Taylor 2010), and more recently 'Muslims' (Kundnani 2007; Lentin 2008). While some immigrants are not recognised as 'migrants', others are, and even non-migrants can be included within discourses of migration and integration as a result of their ethnicity. The inclusion of *British* ethnic and faith minorities in these discourses, irrespective of citizenship or birthplace, blurs the boundaries of who is and is not a migrant. The potential for any non-white person to be positioned as 'immigrant' also affects discourses of national identity and adds weight to accusations that 'Britishness' is inherently 'white' (Parekh 2000).

Given that the conditions for inclusion and exclusion to a collective are determined by the established majority,[2] it is essential that scholars of migrant inclusion understand why Britain's dominant group make the decisions they do regarding who does and does not belong and how they determine who is 'one of us' and who is 'different'. Despite the obvious significance of white British perceptions of difference, their opinions are largely absent within a migration literature which privileges more marginal and exotic groups (Skey 2010: 1). There is, however, growing consensus that more attention needs to be given to dominant groups who construct the boundaries of belonging (Antonsich 2012; Nagel 2009; Skey 2010). By understanding how and why people are positioned inside/outside of the national community of belonging, we can better understand how difference is constructed by the majority and what marks people out as intrinsically 'different' in their eyes.

This paper seeks to answer the question of how and why some immigrants, but not others, are able to shed a 'migrant' label to become full members of Britain's community of belonging in the eyes of the dominant group. This is achieved through analysis of white middle-class perceptions of difference. Who is and is not considered a 'migrant'? Who is 'different'? And how did those migrants who are not perceived as different manage to evade a 'migrant' status? The intention is not to ignore or belittle migrants' agency but to highlight the power asymmetries inherent in processes of integration and belonging and the ways in which public perceptions of 'the migrant' work to exclude *particular* migrants (and non-migrants) from the national community. Given the link between immigration, race and nation, and the history of racialised immigration discourses in the UK, discussion is centred around the question of whether visible difference is a structural force behind white British perceptions of 'the migrant' and what this tells us about the possibilities for migrant inclusion within the national community.

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[1] Throughout this paper 'the migrant' as a person of difference is written in inverted commas in order to distinguish it from migrants in an official sense.

[2] A majority/minority binary is problematic but, following Bond, I use it to distinguish between 'those for whom national identity is likely to be of a taken for granted nature, and those for whom it may be more problematic' (2006: 624). The majority possesses all three 'prominent markers of national identity' – residence, birth and ancestry – and are predominantly white (2006: 611).

The paper begins with a section on 'belonging' where I distinguish between integration and belonging and use the 'politics of belonging' to explain how boundaries are constructed around a collective. Following this, I situate the paper within discourses of (racialised) Britishness and in relation to existing research on white British attitudes towards immigration and diversity. The paper is based on twelve interviews conducted with young, educated, middle-class white Brits in Brighton but before engaging in discussion of those interviews, a section on methodology explains the methods and approaches used. Analysis is then divided into five sections. Firstly I discuss the ways in which self-identified 'liberals' talk about migrants and the benefits of qualitative research. Section two looks at whether visible differences affect participants' perceptions of difference and the extent to which British belonging is racialised. The third section debates the role of language as a marker of difference, following which I discuss the importance of cultural similarity and finally the effect of social distance on perception of difference. The final part of the paper then summarises the findings and draws conclusions about migrants' possibilities for inclusion in (white) British society.

**Integration and belonging**

Heckmann defines integration as 'a long-lasting process of inclusion and acceptance of migrants in the core institutions, relations and statuses of the receiving society' and explains that integration may be structural, cultural, interactive or identificational (2005, cited in King and Skeldon 2010: 1634-1635). However, while academics refer to integration as a two-way *process* of adaptation, policymakers regularly use it to describe an end goal or state of being (Spencer 2011). Importantly, integration is *not* the same as 'belonging' and, although identificational integration involves attachment and feelings of belonging, individuals can be integrated without belonging.

'Belonging' is a fluid process of association with a collective group which is 'sentimental', 'symbolic' (Jones and Krzyanowski 2008: 44) and 'naturalised' (Yuval-Davis 2006: 197). According to Yuval-Davis, 'Belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling "at home" and… feeling "safe"'; however, it is also highly politicised (2006: 197). While an individual's self-identification, attachments and feelings are fundamental to their belonging to any collective, Jones and Krzyanowski explain that 'at some level belonging needs to be supplemented and recognised by the 'others', those who already belong to the group' (2008: 49). 'Communities of belonging' are maintained by a 'politics of belonging' in which those already positioned within the group decide who belongs inside/outside of its boundary (Yuval-Davis 2006: 204). The criteria for inclusion are constructed by members' on-going deliberation and reworking of boundaries (Yuval-Davis 2006). *They* determine 'the conditions for acceptance as one of "us" and the markers which identify an individual or group as being part of "them"' (Enright 2009: 334). Boundaries or thresholds of belonging can be formal – e.g. citizenship – or informal – i.e. based on collective perceptions of difference. However, according to Enright, formal citizenship is insufficient to guarantee *full* belonging as a 'national'. Full, substantive belonging instead relies on an individual's acceptance as part of the collective in the eyes of its members (Enright 2009). A migrant will therefore be included within a national community of belonging when they move within the 'boundary of belonging', to a position where they are not perceived as 'different' and belonging appears naturalised.

As the dominant ethnic group in the UK, white British people, and particularly the 'normal' middle-classes, represent normative British culture and identity (Tyler 2012). Their 'belonging' to an imagined national community is natural and unquestioned (Skey 2010). White middle-class Brits can

therefore be understood as the informal 'gatekeepers' of Britishness, imposing and reinforcing the 'cultural standards and behavioural norms' that separate 'us' from 'them' (Younge 2010: 92-94). It is the informal, naturalised, yet changeable, threshold of authenticity they maintain which protects normative 'Britishness' from 'foreign' influences and it is, therefore, also this threshold which excludes immigrants and minority groups from the national community.

Current integration discourses are 'marked by the assertion that the primary responsibility for integration and constructing a sense of belonging lies with migrants and those defined as minorities' (Hamaz and Vasta 2009: 10). This one-sided approach to integration, evident in Home Office papers (e.g. Home Office 2002; 2008), ignores the fact that integration is a 'two-way process' (Spencer 2011: 4). Migrants cannot integrate unless society accepts them and likewise they cannot *fully* belong until they are recognised as 'belongers' by existing members. In any discussion of integration and belonging, therefore, migrant agency *must* be balanced with an appreciation that immigrants' ability to belong is partly determined by the majority's decisions over 'the terms and conditions of sameness' (Nagel 2009: 404).

Given these power asymmetries, it is essential that more attention is given to the role of society in processes of belonging. Various authors stress the importance of studying dominant groups in the context of migration. For example, Skey suggests that 'by attending to the lives of people whose sense of belonging, and entitlement, remains largely "beyond question", we may be in a better position to explain why national forms of identification and organisation matter' (2010: 2). Similarly, Antonsich suggests studying dominant groups 'to enrich our understanding of the multiple dynamics and (provisional) outcomes of the assimilation process' (2012: 73). This is also an argument used by Nagel who defines assimilation as a 'process of making sameness' involving the 'creation and reproduction of collective understandings of "who we are"' (2009: 403). Assimilation is a 'discursive construction of the mainstream', a process in which some differences become normalised, while others are 'marked as deviant' (2009: 403). In order to understand how people assimilate, and which differences prevent them from doing so, Nagel therefore proposes focusing on 'the messy conflicts over cultural belonging and membership' which maintain the 'mainstream' (2009: 405).


**Existing literature**

Before presenting the empirical research on which this paper is based it is necessary to situate it in a socio-historic context and in relation to existing literature. This discussion is therefore divided into two sections. The first examines the role of race in UK discourses looking at historical discourses of immigration and current debate over Britishness. The second presents existing research on white British attitudes to immigration and highlights gaps and limitations in the literature.

*Race and Britishness*

In 2000 a Runnymede Trust report on *The Future of Multiethnic Britain* asserted that 'Britishness' had been racialised as 'white' with 'systematic, largely unspoken, racial connotations' (Parekh 2000: 38). It has widely been argued that British, and more commonly English national identities are tainted by ethnic and racial connotations which exclude British citizens of ethnic minority background (Bond 2006; Byrne 2007; Gilroy 2002[1987]; Mann 2011; Parekh 2000). The racialisation of Britishness dates back at least as far as 1945 (Hampshire 2005) – if not earlier (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992:

40-41, 48) – and is manifest in both legislative decision-making (Hampshire 2005; Paul 1997; Wilson 2007) and public discourses of nation (Fortier 2005).

In 1948 the British Nationality Act created the new status of 'Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies' (CUKC) which gave equal citizenship rights to everyone born or naturalised in the UK or its colonies. Having granted citizenship and residency rights to *all* Commonwealth citizens, however, successive governments have legislated to keep Britain 'white' (Paul 1997). For example, Hampshire explains that the 1962 and 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Acts, which aimed to control the immigration of Commonwealth citizens, were underpinned by a normative division of 'citizens who belong' and 'citizens who do not belong' (2005: 12). After 1968, citizenship law clearly defined formal belonging to Britain in terms of descent. To belong, an individual had to be born, or have a parent who had been born in the UK. The use of descent as the basis for belonging excluded citizens from the New Commonwealth, who effectively became second-tier citizens, while privileging those of the Old (white) Commonwealth. Aided by 1950s and 60s political discourse which worked to racialise immigration (McLaren and Johnson 2007), British *citizens* from the colonies were framed as 'non-belongers' and constructed as 'migrants' in their supposed motherland (Hampshire 2005: 17). The British citizenry was divided formally and normatively between 'coloured' immigrants/CUKCs and 'proper' white Brits, a binary built upon racialised discourses of nation which saw substantive membership as 'derived from the historic ties of language, custom and "race"' (Gilroy 2002[1987]).

'Britishness' is notoriously difficult to define, largely because of its innately 'fuzzy frontiers' (Cohen 1994: 7). The very make-up of The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland as composing four separate nations, each with varying degrees of devolved power, means that any attempt at defining 'Britishness', as opposed to 'Englishness', 'Scottishness', 'Irishness' or 'Welshness', is virtually impossible. Add to this the nation's imperial decline and increasing multiculturalism, and the task of defining 'Britishness' becomes even more challenging. The significance of national identity exists in its *perceived* reality and the consequences of that reality (Jenkins 1996) and, as Byrne explains, it continues to have 'a powerful pull on the imagination of self'' (Byrne 2007: 141). Although nations are 'imagined communities' (Anderson 1983) and national identity is just one of many possible forms of identification (Jenkins 1996), national frameworks saturate everyday life and structure how we understand the world (Billig 1995; Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002). National identity *is* important to understandings of 'self' and as a result academics, politicians and social commentators have continued to grapple with definitions of Britishness.

When New Labour came to power in 1997 they attempted to re-brand Britishness by asserting pride in national symbols and linking national identity to multi-culture (Solomos 2003). In response to Parekh's 2000 report, media commentators and politicians emphasised 'a conception of Britishness that centres on ideas of inherent diversity and mixity' (Fortier 2005: 560). For example, in 2001 Foreign Secretary Robin Cook declared that Chicken Tikka Masala was the national dish explaining it as 'a perfect illustration of the way Britain absorbs and adapts external influences' (Solomos 2003: 220). By reframing the nation as inherently multicultural, media and political elites attempted to foster a 'multiculturalist nationalism' capable of removing any racial connotations of nationhood (Fortier 2005: 560). 'Britishness' was put forward as a national identity capable of incorporating ethnic differences in a way that 'Englishness' (Mann 2011) and 'Scotishness' (Bond 2006) could not. However, within multiculturalist discourses of 'Britishness', non-white Britons and culturally non-English artefacts like Chicken Tikka Masala are frequently chosen to symbolise the success of British multiculturalism. In choosing these people and things precisely 'as racialised subjects', supposedly

inclusive discourses actually reconstitute non-white Brits as 'other' in 'a double process of de-racialization and re-racialization' (Fortier 2005: 562). Similar processes are also evident in post-London 2012 discourses of Britishness which highlight the migration histories of medal-winners to exemplify an integrated and diverse Britain.

According to Lentin, belonging to the nation is increasingly 'ethnically defined' (2008: 122). Ethnic minorities' ability to self-identify as 'British' is limited by official categories which qualify the Britishness of ethnic minorities – e.g. British Asian or Black British. For Raj, this creates a state of 'perpetual difference' in which ethnic minority Brits are positioned as 'forever non-British and never belonging' (2003: 201). The freedom to assert an unqualified British identity remains the privilege of white British society. The exclusion of ethnic minority Brits from full national belonging is also evident in the use of the term 'immigrant' to refer to Black and Asian people, regardless of migration history or citizenship (Gilroy 2002[1987]; Rogaly and Taylor 2010), and Muslims are particularly vulnerable to blanket labelling as 'immigrants' (Lentin 2008). The fact that the British-born descendants of migrants are also discussed as migrants ('second/third-generation migrants') also works to exclude *British* people from full national belonging by connecting them permanently to an ancestral homeland.

The conflation of ethnic minorities and immigrants supports Paul's claim that British society is still guided by historical perspectives that consider 'some Britons as more British than others', (1997: xiv). However, while she attributes the contemporary marginalisation of non-white Brits to successive governments' efforts to classify them as 'something other than British', other authors suggest that the binary division of white-British/Coloured-Other was constructed during colonialism (Gilroy 2004; Rogaly and Taylor 2010). The frameworks which facilitated nation-building during the colonial era 'served to homogenize and valorize the national culture… and popularize the notion that it was a unitary and bounded society, distinguished from the subordinated people by a racial divide' (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002: 314). Western imperialism was fortified by the construction of the Orient as 'other' (Said 2003[1978]) and colonial frameworks constructed people as belonging to bounded categories: colonised/coloniser, white/Black, immigrant/native (Fanon 1986[1952]). In their work, Rogaly and Taylor (2010) have shown such categories to hold continued salience within contemporary discourses. Their participants understand 'others' as a homogenous mass, existing in opposition to them.

The debate over Britishness, and how it does or does not manage to include its minority groups, is on-going (see britishfuture.org), and my discussion here merely touches the surface of a literature which spans both academic disciplines and decades. Clearly any underlying framework that conceptualises Britishness as 'white' is problematic in a modern Britain where 7.9% of the population are of an ethnic minority background, the majority of which are British-born descendants of Commonwealth migrants (Castles et al. 2001: 253). The recent finding that 'all minorities (other than mixed) identify more strongly as British than the white majority (Understanding Society, 2012), alongside the fact that white Brits use the term 'English' rather than 'British' to label 'white' places (Mann 2011), suggests that attempts to make Britishness more inclusive have to some extent succeeded. However while past exclusion of non-whites is widely reported, the literature presented here shows the lack of consensus surrounding the role of 'race' in current discourses of national identity.

*White British attitudes to immigration*

In his recent work, Skey (2010) explains that those people whose belonging appears unmarked and unquestioned have been largely ignored by academics, whose interest has fallen on more marginal groups. This interest has often originated in concern with racism or social injustice, yet also reflects the invisibility and banality of dominant groups (Byrne 2007; Skey 2010; Twine 1996). Some subsets of white British society have been studied; for example, at the end of the last decade the white working-class received a swell of interest (e.g. BBC White Season 2008; Runnymede 2009). 'Whiteness' is gradually gaining academic attention, but in Britain this has focused primarily on working-class communities, who have become increasingly visible through discourses of the 'Chav' and 'beleaguered natives' (Rogaly and Taylor 2009, 2010). The visibility of the white working-class in public discourses demonstrates that the invisibility of whiteness described by Garner (2007) is a predominantly middle-class phenomenon. The middle-classes remain largely beyond academic gaze in a privileged position of 'normalcy' (Tyler 2012) and are often treated as a homogenous mass, referred to, for example, as 'middle-class media' (e.g. Rogaly and Taylor 2010: 1335).

Evidence from large-scale opinion polls reveals the British public to be more negative about immigration than several other Western countries, particularly in relation to illegal migration and concerns over welfare (Ford 2012). However, surveys also show that opposition to immigration is driven mainly by perceptions of 'symbolic threat' (McLaren and Johnson 2007: 727) and 'concern about the unity of the[ir] national community' (Iversflaten 2005: 42). McLaren and Johnson find that the desire to reduce immigration is driven by 'concerns about the group, or British society, as a whole', often linked to fear over potential threats to British values and way of life (2007: 725). Despite the mutability of identity and fact that national identities have no innate or authentic meaning, these findings show that 'the migrant', who is understood as having 'fundamentally different values', represents a significant symbolic threat to those identities (2007: 715).

McLaren and Johnson (2007) demonstrate that people with higher incomes are just as hostile as those of lower status and income, discrediting the common assumption that working-class people are the most anti-immigrant. Education, however, *is* shown to be statistically significant and degree holders show least concern about the effects of immigration. This is likely a combination of confidence in their ability to secure jobs and more tolerant attitudes, encouraged by education. While McLaren and Johnson focus on socio-economic indicators, Ford (2011, 2012) focuses on demographic influences, particularly the effect of age on attitudes to immigration. Looking at British Social Attitudes (2011) and Transatlantic Trends Immigration surveys (2012), he finds substantial generational differences in attitudes towards immigration and suggests distinguishing between the highly qualified 'cosmopolitan young' and less-educated 'parochial pensioners' (2012). Not only are younger Britons, who have grown up in more mobile and diverse communities, more favourable towards immigration but they are also less concerned about migrants' origins (Ford 2011). This suggests that public opinion will become more favourable to immigration as more liberal and tolerant generations take over from older ones.

A major problem with survey data is that questions rarely define what is meant by 'immigrant' and therefore responses relate to 'imagined immigration' rather than actual immigration (Blinder 2011). Blinder's research aims to encourage better understanding of survey data by investigating how immigrants are 'imagined' by the British public. He finds that, when asked about immigration, British people imagine an immigrant who is an asylum-seeker or permanent settler and always a foreign national; they do not think of businessmen, students or British nationals born abroad. The fact that

'immigrants' are always imagined as foreign nationals is problematised by Rogaly and Taylor (2010) who suggest emphasising white British emigration as a means of de-racialising immigration.

In contrast to suggestions that the racialised nature of immigration discourses means that ethnic minorities are conflated with immigrants (e.g. Gilroy 2002[1987]; Paul 1997; Raj 2003; Rogaly and Taylor 2010), Blinder (2011) finds that few people imagine the British-born children of immigrants as 'immigrants'. However, the tick-box nature of survey data gives respondents the opportunity to choose 'correct' answers and therefore cannot reveal underlying assumptions that structure everyday life. The fact that respondents did not agree that the British-born children of immigrants are 'immigrants' when asked directly, does not necessarily mean that the same respondents do not assume migration status based on ethnicity or 'race'. In fact, Dustmann and Preston (2007) find that attitudes towards immigrants *are* affected by ethno-racial differences. Their analysis of the British Social Attitudes Survey demonstrates that public opposition is stronger towards immigrants who are more ethnically distant, regardless of skill or education. Similarly Ford (2011) finds that white immigrants are routinely preferred to non-whites; however, he suggests that the picture is more complex as the British public also discriminates within racial groups according to perceptions of cultural and political similarity. Meanwhile McLaren and Johnson find race to be *less* important than shared customs and values, with 72% of respondents disagreeing that 'to be truly British you have to be white – rather than Black or Asian' (2007: 721). Again, given the survey style of questioning which produced this finding, responses may reflect considered opinions rather than naturally occurring thoughts which would reveal underlying assumptions of difference.

As shown, research into public attitudes towards immigration has predominantly consisted of quantitative analysis of opinion polls and national surveys (e.g. Dustmann and Preston 2007; Ford 2011 and 2012; Iversflaten 2005; McLaren and Johnson 2007) and there is surprisingly little qualitative research into the opinions of white British individuals. One notable exception is Antonsich's study of local elites – he finds that assimilation is 'largely perceived as a one-way process' (2012: 72) in which migrants are expected to 'to act, behave and, at times, also think and feel according to the dominant group' (2012: 68). In uncovering the multifaceted nature of assimilation, which is not a 'singular, undifferentiated concept', Antonsich demonstrates how qualitative analysis improves understanding of perspective (2012: 72). By engaging people in conversation, qualitative interviewing can reveal the underlying demands and expectations which are obscured in questionnaires.

**Methodology and theoretical framework**

The inherent variation within any group of people, and the fact that all identities are intersected by a range of other social identities, makes it impossible to study any sizeable group in a representative way. Given the impossibility of representation, the research presented here is purely exploratory and the data is illustrative of the ways that 'difference' is perceived, rather than the frequency of those perceptions.

Interviews were conducted with twelve graduates aged 22-30, all of whom had lived in Brighton for at least one year and self-identified as white, middle-class and British. Twelve participants was felt to be sufficient for an exploratory piece of research, especially given time and resource restrictions. Participants were snowball-sampled from people I already knew, the intention being that where participants perceive common experience they will open up more because of assumptions that I will 'get it'. This is a common principle of insider research (Edwards 2002; Warr et al. 2011). In

addition to eight individual interviews I conducted one four-person group interview to give insight into the social acceptability of different opinions (Fielding and Thomas 2008).

Interviews consisted of 45-60 minute conversations about migrant integration which were recorded and transcribed verbatim. By looking at who is included in discourses of migrant integration, it is possible to reveal who is perceived as needing to integrate, and is therefore 'different' in some way from 'mainstream' society. Following Kvale and Brinkermann (2008), I treated interviews as 'conversations' in which knowledge is created through interaction. I conducted 'conversations' following a participatory approach and in line with feminist theories which promote 'genuine interplay between researcher and researched' (Fielding and Thomas 2008). Since open dialogue is the most natural way of talking to people already known personally, conversations were non-standardised, unstructured and informal, although prompts and participatory activities were used to aid the flow of conversation where necessary. I also included my own thoughts and reflections when appropriate.

Since I am similar in age, background and experience to my participants (and known to them personally), I self-identified as part of the researched group. However, in the very act of conducting research Edwards (2002) explains that an insider-researcher can be repositioned 'outside'. I have worked to limit any researcher-participant divide by using a participatory approach which gives participants a say in the interview process and an opportunity to comment on their transcript, and therefore affect their own representation. Participatory research is defined not by its methods but 'the methodological contexts of their application' and particularly the 'location of power' (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995: 1667-1668).

For the specificities of this project my insider status was invaluable in providing prior knowledge of participants' life-worlds and social networks. This meant that I could assess the extent to which statements such as 'I can't really…in Brighton…I can't think of anyone that has had to integrate' reflected a lack of social interaction with migrants or complete non-recognition of known migrants as 'migrants' who are 'different' and would therefore need to integrate. Thus, knowledge of participants' lives has facilitated and contextualised the analysis of their responses. However, social proximity can complicate data collection, especially when researching controversial topics. For example, peer researchers may provoke fear of judgement or compromised confidentiality (Ryan et al. 2011). The fact that I am known to study migration, and will likely have opinions on the issues, may have provoked concern among participants who felt relatively ill-informed, perhaps encouraging more cautious or uncontroversial opinions. I attempted to avoid this problem by offering reassurance and being honest about my own uncertainties. I have also had to consider how participant proximity could limit my ability to critically engage with the data. However, as Maier and Monahan (2010) explain, issues of proximity are surmountable through critical self-reflection.

Brighton was chosen as the site for this study because of its self-proclaimed liberalism and tolerance. As Britain's 'gay capital', 14% of residents are from the LGBT community and the city has the largest Pride festival in the UK (Brighton and Hove Council 2011). Brighton was also the first UK constituency to elect a Green MP and with naked bike rides, vegetarian shoes and a relaxed drink and drugs culture, its residents generally embrace its liberal image (Petridis 2010). Brighton has an estimated student population of 40,000, with around 35,000 extra language students each year (Brighton and Hove Council 2011). According to the council, 48% of residents can be described as 'young, well-educated city dwellers' (2011: 3).

Given this profile, Brighton seems a good example of a 'liberal' British city; although I use inverted commas here to suggest that the liberalism and tolerance proclaimed by residents may be

more idealised self-perception than fact. If the 'cosmopolitan young' in Brighton exclude immigrants and minorities, there seems little hope of more inclusive attitudes elsewhere.


**Analysis**

The second half of the paper analyses the data collected in conversation with the twelve middle-class white Brits who participated in the research, and is divided into five sections. The first discusses the complexities and contradictions evident in how participants talk about migrants. The second explores whether visible difference is a factor underpinning white middle-class perceptions of difference and, therefore, the extent to which 'belonging' in Britain is racialised. Discussion then turns to the role of language, focusing on how accents mark people as 'us'/'them', following which the importance of cultural similarity is debated. Finally the fifth section looks at the effect of social distance on perception of difference.


*'Liberal' articulation of difference*

Existing research on attitudes to immigration has demonstrated that young, educated people are generally more positive about immigration and integration than other segments of British society (Ford 2011, 2012). The participants of this study, who are aged between 22 and 30, have at least bachelor-level education and live in a self-proclaimed 'liberal' city; therefore they fit neatly within an assumed liberal demographic. As I embarked on this project I was repeatedly asked how I hoped to extract honest opinions about such a controversial topic. Surely participants would want to present themselves as models of liberalism? However, analysing the ways that people who think of themselves as 'liberal' articulate their opinions has provided an array of interesting material. Qualitative interviewing has helped to uncover less-liberal understandings, often based on normative frameworks which underlie stated liberal opinions. Meanwhile contradictions and uncertainties demonstrate the difficulty people have talking about migrants.

Participants were highly aware of the social acceptability of some views and unacceptability of others, however, many still explained feeling unconfident in articulating their opinions because of a fear of using the 'wrong' word or saying something that could be conceived of as racist:

> I don't even know how to say like a Black, African, Afro-Caribbean British person. Like… what do you say? Do you say British person? I dunno. – Sarah[3]

> I think it's hot coals as well, you always feel like, 'Oh I can't…' like part of you, you're always worried about what you say […] It's typical… 'I'm not racist! I'm not tryin' to…' and you wanna to be really clear that you're not racist but you have to give examples, you have to explain. Like you always feel like you have to be careful… – Sophie

As self-identifying liberals these participants spoke with caution, and feared misinterpretation. Some participants also recognised their role as young, educated people in policing the views of less-liberal older generations and felt a responsibility to be socially progressive.

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[3] All names are pseudonyms and identifying features have been removed or altered to protect confidentiality.

In addition to a strong awareness of political correctness, which left some participants preferring to say nothing rather than to risk saying something 'wrong', all participants asserted strong support for liberal ideals. This was especially evident in efforts to empathise with migrants:

> If they're failing to integrate it could be for personal reasons, maybe they're just not very outgoing people […] It could be just general social issues, like they're just not a very sociable person or they have sort of social issues or disabilities… or it could be down to their environment that they were in before – Michael

> What I'd like if I was moving to a different country, I'd like things to be accessible to me… houses and services to be accessible and places to meet people […] but also a bit of space to sort of do what I like to do; space to be different as well as space to include myself – Ed

Participants empathised with migrants and attempted to put themselves in migrants' shoes. These empathetic discourses reveal deeply-embedded assumptions that migrants have problems and need help. Ed was particularly keen to assert what society should do to help migrants, who he clearly assumes are poor and vulnerable:

> You need groups to voice views of migrant issues, like migrant communities. So if they're being discriminated there needs to be a safe place for people to be able to talk about those issues and to voice them […] It's such an expensive place to live and so it's quite, it's hard to think like… coffee shops or the [pub] or somewhere like that where you kind of hang out regularly they're just gonna price people out.

A 'we should help them' discourse based on the assumption that migrants are poor, vulnerable and in need was articulated in conversation with several participants. This image of 'the migrant' supports Blinder's finding that immigrants are imagined as primarily poor migrants and asylum seekers (2011). However, in the case of young middle-class white Brits, such imagery is not used to defend negative feelings towards immigrants or legitimise concern over welfare, but to emphasise the structural difficulties faced by migrants. 'The migrant' provides an opportunity for participants to assert their own liberalism against the injustices of society.

The universalism of empathetic opinions was likely encouraged by a desire to appear liberal and tolerant in front of a researcher/friend/voice-recorder. However, Plant and Devine (1998) warn against assuming that, in the absence of external pressures, people will express prejudice. They argue that self-perception and internal motivations for non-prejudice can be equally, if not more important than external-perception. Liberalism was important to participants' self-perception, especially in a city which asserts such a strong liberal image. So, while they want to appear 'liberal' to others, their articulation of liberal values is equally important to their understandings of 'self'.

Plant and Devine (1998) also assert that non-prejudiced attitudes and behaviours are imperfectly internalised. This was evident among the participants who occasionally used politically 'incorrect' terminology or whose extended explanations did not match up with the liberal opinions they asserted. At the same time as articulating positive attitudes towards multiculturalism, empathy with migrants and condemnation of racism, the majority of participants limited and contradicted themselves by referring back to less liberal normative assumptions. For example, despite discrediting

the significance of religion to integration, several participants used Islam (unprompted) as a symbol of difference. Despite explicitly stating 'I don't care about religion', Ed used a mosque as an example of where immigrants might meet people:

> I can't actually think where they would go as a place to meet other people… I mean there's definitely a mosque, there's a massive mosque there, and… yeah I don't know.

This statement reveals an underlying assumption that immigrants are Muslim, a link embedded in UK discourses of difference and often used to further demonise Muslims and immigrants (Kundnani 2007; Lentin 2008). Despite claiming that religion is irrelevant, its role in dominant discourses of the 'other' has clearly affected Ed's perception of difference. Adoption of dominant frames of reference was also evident in participants' expectations of simultaneous assimilation *and* multiculturalism, as well as the emphasis placed on migrants' agency within the integration process.

Liberal idealism was evident in participants' empathetic approach to thinking about integration, their awareness of structural limitations and desire for society to make more effort. However, the deliberations and contradictions which are revealed in conversation highlight the complex and multi-faceted nature of opinion which is obscured in large survey opinion polls. Studying the ways that self-identified 'liberal' adults talk about migrants reveals the difficulties they face in balancing liberal ideals with underlying perceptions of difference based on less liberal normative frameworks.

*Race*

During conversations I referred to migrants generally and was careful not to lead the discussion towards any particular group. Discourses of integration necessarily involve decisions over who is involved, and as such conversations about integration can be used to reveal internal assumptions of difference. By looking at who is included in discourses of migrant integration it is possible to reveal who is perceived as being in some way 'different' from the mainstream, and is therefore required to integrate, and whose inclusion is naturalised. For example, any group/individual discussed in response to a question such as, 'Do you think immigrants are well integrated?' is clearly considered different enough to require integration.

While evidence has shown that younger cohorts are less affected by migrants' origins than older generations (Ford 2012), my research shows that race has latent significance to white middle-class perceptions of difference. When asked whether immigrants are well integrated where they live/come from participants frequently launched into discussion of ethnic groups and used the adjective 'white' to describe an area with few immigrants:

> I've only ever lived in very white communities. In the town I come from at home there's three Black families, there's no other ethnicities – Becca

> Apart from my friend who's Indian, whose parents run a newsagents, I don't think I know anyone [where I'm from] who's not white – Ed

> Brighton's a very white city and I don't think there are very many…it doesn't ever feel like Brighton's particularly multicultural – Ana

> I'd say Brighton's not actually that multicultural. There's lots of cultures here but it's very…predominantly white I would say… – Tim

The framework by which these participants understand integration is based on a binary distinction between 'non-white immigrants' and 'white natives', proving the link between immigration and race. In the last two quotes whiteness is also constructed as antithetical to multi-culture, revealing participants' underlying assumptions that a place is only 'multicultural' when it contains non-white people. Mann observed similar assumptions among his interviewees who routinely distinguished between 'English places' and 'multi-ethnic places', though for him this proved Byrne's assertion that 'Englishness' is an ethnic label (Mann 2011).

Participants universally disagreed that Britishness is an exclusively white identity. However, internalised frameworks which distinguish immigrants from natives by skin colour suggest that Britishness is racialised, supporting those who argue that Britishness carries connotations of 'whiteness' (Gilroy 2002[1987]; Parekh 2000; Paul 1997; Raj 2003). Where immigrants are constructed as non-white, non-migrant ethnic minorities risk being perceived as immigrants. Sarah demonstrated the power of the link between race and migration status when she presumes that Black people are immigrants:

> In London, where my sister lives, there's loads of Black African… British African… I don't know I guess they're people that have migrated here.

Sarah's assumption that the people where her sister lives are immigrants because they are Black can be contrasted with her inability to think of any immigrants in Brighton, despite having migrant friends from Australia, the Netherlands and United States (all white). Her assumptions over who is and is not a 'migrant' shows that visible differences are highly significant to her perception of difference. Some participants acknowledged the significance of race as a marker of difference, although this was always lamented. For example, Becca admitted that Black people 'stand out' to her but explained: 'I wish it didn't so much because it makes me worried that it shouldn't'. Even those who denied the significance of visible difference and condemn racism worked with underlying frameworks which understand non-whites as 'migrants' (e.g. Ed, Ana and Tim above).

Much academic attention has been given to the position of the 'second generation' within discourses of Britishness. The participants in this study all considered the British-born second generation as *fully* British (with just one exception), however Black and Asian second (and even third) generation 'migrants' were repeatedly included in conversations about *immigrant* integration. For example, Michael used a group of second-generation Asians as a 'perfect example' of integration:

> To be honest I think if a bunch of Asian guys want to support India and go to a cricket match… and then talk to a load of English supporters and you get a bit of banter and you get a bit of conversation, that's integration. In fact, that's a perfect example of how they've made an effort to integrate, despite not supporting the home team.

Where second-generation 'migrants' were included in discourses of integration it was always to make a positive comment about their integration. However, the fact that they are included in a debate over *migrant* integration at all shows that on some level they are perceived to be part of the group having

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to integrate, rather than the group being integrated into. This limits Blinder's finding that few people imagine 'the children of foreign-national immigrants' when thinking about immigration (2011: 9).

The British-born descendants of migrants *are* marked as 'different' because of their migrant ancestry, yet the second/third-generation migrants discussed by participants were *always* non-white. Descendants of white immigrants are not thought of as migrants; their belonging appears natural because they appear more 'normal' in a racialised nation. This supports Gilroy's claim that the British-born children of Black immigrants 'are denied authentic national membership on the basis of their "race" and, at the same time, prevented from aligning themselves within the "British race"' (2002[1987]: 46). Thus, 'British subjects of color still have to fight to identify themselves as British' (Paul 1997: xiv). This is likely encouraged by the use of terms like 'second-generation *migrant'* and hyphenated labels – e.g. British-Asian – which qualify the Britishness of ethnic minorities (Raj 2003).

Although visible difference continues to be a factor in white middle-class perceptions of difference, among these young Brits who have grown up in a multicultural Britain, it is not the most important factor in how they perceive difference. Polish migrants are perceived as 'different' not because of their colour but because of other factors. For Michael, people of South Asian origin (India/Pakistan) are less 'different' than Polish migrants because they do 'normal' things: 'they're actually kind of going to the universities, they're running the shops, they're doing all sorts of things…' While both groups were still 'different', the relative inclusion of non-white Indian/Pakistani originating communities over white Poles proves that racial markers alone are insufficient to fully understand constructions of 'difference'. There were also suggestions that visible differences could be overcome through communication:

> If your communication skills are good then I don't see how it [wearing a burqa] would be a problem […] It might make a difference initially but I think if you're a social person that's more… it would be fine through your personality and stuff. – Becca

The idea that visible differences can be overcome supports Ford's assertion that, although a factor behind British attitudes to immigration, 'race' is insufficient to explain attitudes (2011). Following Ford, the following three sections attempt a 'multidimensional understanding of how attitudes to ethnic groups form' (2011: 1033), looking at attributes which can 'trump' visible markers of difference and may, therefore, better explain patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

*Language*

Language has been relatively uncontroversial within discourses of integration and the government has repeatedly stressed the importance of migrants' language skills (e.g. Home Office 2002). When asked what are the most important features of 'successful integration', the majority of participants said language; however, when expanding on their decision, they explained the importance of interaction rather than language per se. In fact, while a *desire* to socialise within the community was generally deemed essential, language was not:

> If you want to be integrated into a certain society you will probably make more effort to learn the language but, you don't necessarily have to speak the language straight away… I think you can go to a place where you want to really be part of the culture and the community but

not necessarily be able to communicate 100%... very well with people but then learn that over time because you're really dedicated to being integrated. – Michael

Although participants believed that communication and a willingness/desire to mix would facilitate integration, it was insufficient to move an immigrant within the boundary of belonging. Language proficiency and accent meanwhile were fundamental to how participants decide who is a 'migrant'.

The power of language in marking someone as 'same' or 'different' was recognised by Fanon who wrote: "The negro of the Antilles will be proportionally whiter – that is, he will come closer to being a real human being – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language" (1986[1952]: 18). Fanon saw language as fundamental to colonial constructions of difference and believed that Black people became 'whiter' with language. In the UK, however, for a person to evade a label of difference, and 'belong' unquestioned to a British national collectivity, accent is vital. Many participants acknowledged the importance of accent to perceptions of difference:

> Even subconsciously, people pick up on an accent that's different and then they will appropriate, sort of, a label in their head of 'other'. I mean not in that they'll think any less of them, or take their opinion less seriously but they will perceive that difference and then that difference will probably prime them to notice other differences. Say if I'd said something and they recognise me as fully British then they'd say, 'That's… He's got this quirky opinion', whereas if I was a first-generation immigrant saying it with a slightly different accent to what they're used to they might say, 'Oh because he is this he believes this'. – Stephen

> …like, the difference between speaking to Priya, who obviously has an Indian accent, and all my friends from school that very obviously have London accents… there's definitely a difference… like immediately I'd talk to them… I think I'd be like, 'Oh Priya, are you from India? That's so exciting, where abouts in India are you from?' whereas if you're from Watford I'd talk about what I bought at the shops like, do you know what I mean? Accent's massive. – Sophie

As Stephen suggests, the 'othering' effects of accent are hard to shake. A combination of linguistic fluency and accent can aid migrants' inclusion within an imagined national community but this is also dependant on common cultural references, colloquialisms and dialect.

A migrant's ability to master the finer aspects of language marks them as a natural 'belonger'. For second/third-generation 'migrants', their natural language skills make any label of 'other' based on physical difference easily shed. Thus, Stephen explains that the third generation 'never strike [him] as being in some way "other"':

> Culturally there's a complete sort of understanding, there's never a misinterpretation of say the metaphors or similes that I might use or the cultural references that I refer to. They always have exactly the same of them so they're exactly the same as I do marginally, give or take whatever our particular interests are... so, in that respect, communicating with them seems no different to communicating with anybody else. – Stephen

In terms of language, second/third-generation 'migrants' are positioned securely within the collective boundary of belonging. Through speech their Britishness becomes unquestionable, demonstrating the utility of language in overcoming visible markers of difference.

Language is a form of identity symbolisation which facilitates recognition of fellow group members (Jenkins 1996: 115) and is also an important symbol of belonging because 'To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture' (Fanon 1986[1952]: 38). Participants were prepared to drop assumed labels of 'difference' when they hear someone talk. Thus, whereas Fanon noted that 'the European has a fixed concept of the Negro' as speaking 'pidgin' (1986[1952]: 35), visibly 'different' [i.e. non-white] people are not static in the eyes of young, educated, white middle-class adults. This suggests that through the mastery of language anybody can be accepted as belonging, regardless of background or skin colour. However, the subtleties of language and accent, as well as the cultural references required by participants means that migrants from non-English speaking countries will have a much harder, near impossible job meeting the 'terms and conditions of sameness' (Nagel 2009).

*Cultural similarity*

Most participants understood integration as a two-way process – in line with academic definitions (Spencer 2011) – and acknowledged the importance of structural adaptation. However, the majority also showed underlying expectations of assimilation. Twenty-first-century discourses have 'redefined integration as, effectively, assimilation to British values' and demand that ethnic minorities embody supposed 'British' values (Kundnani 2007: 123). The political move towards assimilation is evident in participants' underlying values, where they understand acculturation as good. For example, Stephen believed that migrant cultures should be 'Britishified':

> Over like the last 50 years there's been a lot of influxes of lots of different communities and as far as I can tell 30 years later, 50 years later it only means good things regardless of whatever people were worried about. And so I'm not upset if people [maintain cultural traditions] because it can make the place more vibrant, more interesting, you get more opinions… just so long as it's, sort of, it becomes slightly sort of Britishified in terms of like basic sort of… core, very basic values.

Stephen did not see any contradiction between multi-culture and assimilation and declared support for cultural diversity in the same breath as expecting those cultures to assimilate. Expectations of assimilation were implicit in several conversations but were always couched, as above, in articulation of liberal attitudes to immigration and support for multiculturalism.

Having grown up in New Labour's multiculturalist era participants have internalised ideals of diversity and tolerance; however, some struggled to recognise culturally 'different' people as part of their collective. For example, both comments below were from Sarah who, despite supporting diversity ['I do think that there should be more of a multicultural society around so that they can kind of feel like they can just be proud of their roots but live in our society'], cannot accept cultural differences as 'normal':

> If you're sitting there, like every lunchtime and you're having your, you know… crazy broth, like… you're a Chinese immigrant and you sit there with your broth with your, you know,

with these crazy like fish sauce ingredients and things like that then people are looking at you like… If your tastes are British you're gonna be more treated British.

People are afraid of people walking around in burkas and stuff. Like, you kind of go on the tube in London and you see someone in a burka... as someone that doesn't live in London, doesn't go on the tube very much I find that really intimidating.

Sarah has difficulty seeing people who eat or dress 'differently' as belonging to the same group as her; she cannot comprehend cultural difference within collective Britishness. This example shows that *accepting* difference is very different to seeing those differences as *part of* the collective. The fact that full British membership is negotiated in relation to cultural similarity/difference undermines the multicultural nationalism articulated by participants like Sarah.

Ford finds that *within* racial categories, people prefer migrants from places with stronger cultural and political links to Britain, thus creating an 'ethnic hierarchy' (2011: 15). Accordingly, a migrant's acceptability, and ability to belong within a British collective, will depend on *how* different their place of origin is perceived to be. Some first-generation immigrants are able to cross the boundary of the 'mainstream'; however these are almost exclusively immigrants from other Western nations. For example, where they were recognised as migrants, immigrants from the US were described as 'acceptably different':

If an American person moves over here not many people actually consider them to be 'immigrants' if you get what I mean […]  I'd consider them to be integrated within a couple of weeks. I'd just expect them to look at the TV times and have an idea of what I'm talking about! – Stephen

 If an American moved next door to you you'd be like 'Oh you're from the States?!' and it's like, I dunno, quite exciting. –Lydia

Americans' differences were seen as exciting and easily incorporated within British society to the point that they were rarely considered 'migrants'. Much more was expected of non-Western migrants from non-English speaking countries. The quote below exemplifies this finding:

There's no reason why somebody from Afghanistan couldn't come over and be integrated, especially if they'd gone and studied in America, or Holland or anyway say for four years when they were younger, they picked up a lot of Western principles, they moved back to Afghanistan, they were campaigning for human rights or whatever there and then they, because of some danger to their life had to move to the UK and gain asylum, they could be integrated within… I dunno… they could be immediately integrated or integrated very quickly into the society. – Stephen

Stephen's example of how someone 'different' – notably the archetypal 'Other': immigrant, potential terrorist and Muslim (Lentin 2008) – can integrate shows that 'belonging' is dependent on being 'like us'. Again, the requirement that immigrants 'perform' assimilation (Antonsich 2012) is embedded within a liberal assertion that anyone can integrate.

Implicit in the above quote is the fact that a 'migrant' appears less different when they reject an 'other' culture. Despite universal agreement that integration does not necessitate cultural sacrifices, this fact was inferred from several participants:

> I wouldn't talk to Ameerah, for example, who's from India about [immigration], although actually Ameerah's quite cool and has nothing about her way of sort of going-about-daily-life which her dad would approve of at all […] She did really well [at integrating]! She was working in the Slug and Lettuce in a very white ethnic town, very close to where her family came from. She struggled a little bit 'cause she ran away from home for a little bit because her parents were forcing her to be something that she… You know, she wanted to go out drinking with some of her friends… she had, you know, the attitude of wanting to do that but wasn't allowed to. – Becca

By going against an 'other' set of cultural norms, the individuals described in the two quotes above became more 'like us'. This is precisely what Bhabha intends when he explains that 'to be different from those that are different makes you the same' (quoted in Fanon 1986[1952]: xvi). By not being like the 'other', not fitting the mould of 'immigrant', a migrant can lose a label of difference. Nonetheless cultural similarity is clearly influential in shaping understandings of who is a migrant and therefore does not belong.

*Social distance*

Collective Britishness relies on commonality yet the similarities on which membership is based are always 'imagined'. However, in their perceived reality they are not imaginary (Jenkins 1996). Collective identities form in the 'sharing of a symbolic repertoire' so the inclusion/exclusion of migrants relies on existing members' recognition of certain symbols (1986: 111). Language and cultural markers are important symbols of identification; however, the value of any symbol depends on social distance.

When an individual who might otherwise have been labelled 'migrant'/'other' was known personally, they were more easily accepted by participants as part of *their* collective. The importance of social distance was particularly evident in the inclusion of *known* ethnic-minority Brits. For example, Caroline clearly positioned her friend within collective Britishness:

> My friend was in Mexico and people kept asking her where she was from. They thought she was from Kenya and she was like, 'No I'm from England' and then they just didn't… She kept having to say she was from England and they were sure she was from Africa and she was like, 'Well my grandparents were from Jamaica so that's like why I'm Black'. But she would 100% think of her – although her heritage is from Jamaica because that's her grandparents. Her mum was born in England, she was born in England, she would definitely now call herself British because it's been two generations… three generations! […] They didn't believe that she was English and she was like, 'No I'm English!' and they'd… 'Oh where's your mum from?' …'She's from England!' [laughing]
>
> Me: So do you think she'd have the same problem in England?
>
> No, because she's got like a very London accent.

The question of whether her friend's national identity would be misinterpreted in England took Caroline by surprise. The anecdote was intended to show how extreme misunderstandings can be; it was obvious to her that the friend belonged within a collective Britishness. Similarly, participants who included 'second-generation Asians' in discussion of *migrant* integration did not include friends who would usually fall within that group. 'Second-generation Asians' are 'different' enough to be included in integration discourses but only at a group level. On a personal level they are not seen as 'migrants' in any sense.

Participants did not see their own friends/family as 'migrants', even where they bore symbols of difference – skin colour, accent etc. This shows the power of social proximity in removing labels of difference (whether cultural, linguistic or racial), although the degree of 'difference' remains significant. In one instance a participant suggested I interview a German friend, despite knowing that I was researching *British* perspectives. The friend was considered so 'like us' that her nationality, accent and short period of residency became irrelevant, proving that it is possible for immigrants to become 'one of us' in the eyes of the majority. However, in this case the immigrant was white, European, had good language skills and similar interests to the British participant; had she been Asian or had a stronger accent she may not have been so easily included.


## Conclusion

'Once a newcomer can you ever stop being a newcomer?' (Bauman 2004: 9)


Despite asserting liberal ideals and articulating support for multiculturalism, the white middle-class young adults who participated in this study held underlying frameworks which structured their perceptions of difference along racial lines. Most did not even realise the racialised assumptions they made in conversation. Given participants' persistent declarations of support for diversity, their use of racial frameworks is unintentional and more a result of deep-laid structures of understanding than personally-chosen values. 'Migrants' exist in contrast to 'good citizens' and are racialised as non-white, the 'other' to mainstream Britain (Anderson 2012). However, unlike colonial constructions of the 'other', which sought to demonise and subordinate, participants constructed the 'migrant-other' in terms of its need and vulnerability. Rather than 'folk devil' (Anderson 2012: 5), this construction of the 'migrant' provides a subject against which participants can assert liberal attitudes and bemoan the structural problems within society, helping them to feel like 'good liberals'.

Race is just one of many identities which can construct boundaries of belonging (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). While visible difference was significant to participants' underlying frameworks of 'us'/'them', it was not the only, or even the main, determinant of inclusion/exclusion within/from the national collective. The instability of visible markers was evident in participants' perceptions of the second generation, who are positioned securely within the collective as 'one of us', at least on an individual level. Labels of difference based on non-whiteness are not fixed and can be overcome by linguistic fluency, accent and style, as well as perceived cultural similarity – or at least departure from an 'other' culture. By reconstituting essentialised and racialised 'others' as individuals, social proximity is also able to displace markers of difference.

The fact that cultural similarity and accent affect white British perceptions of difference shows that 'Britishness' still lacks space for cultural variety, despite articulated desire for it to be otherwise.

Even among young, educated middle-class people, who are supposedly the most liberal group within society (Ford, 2011), culturally different (i.e. non-European/non-Western) migrants are rarely recognised as 'one of us'. Migrants from Australia, America or English-speaking Western-Europeans meanwhile, who *are* 'like us', can do so relatively quickly and easily. An Australian accent or Thanksgiving celebration simply does not bear the same significance as an Indian accent or the Hijab. Thus, while it is generally not until the second generation that 'unlike us' migrants can become 'one of us', 'like us' migrants can 'belong' almost immediately and are rarely expected to acculturate. Given migrants' differential opportunities for inclusion within mainstream Britishness, discourses which place the burden of integration on migrants must recognise the power structures at work in processes of integration and belonging. The white British 'mainstream' constructs the boundaries of 'Britishness' and can adjust that boundary to exclude anyone *perceived* to be 'different'. Since belonging is facilitated by recognition, migrants who are seen as fundamentally different will have more difficulty 'belonging' than those understood as 'similar'.

The evidence presented here is illustrative of the benefits to be gained from applying qualitative methods on a larger scale. Quantitative research into public attitudes can uncover the frequency of articulated opinions, yet boxes ticked or statements (dis)agreed with cannot reflect the complexities and inconsistences of individual perception. Conversations allow participants to explain their opinions, rather than simply stating them, and therefore allow stated opinions to be checked and relativised against underlying attitudes.

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