Multicultural parenting: Preparation for bias socialisation in British South Asian and White families in the UK

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A B S T R A C T

Ethnic–racial socialisation describes how parents transmit information, perspectives and values relating to race and ethnicity to their children in highly multicultural societies such as the United Kingdom. It serves as an important parenting tool to manage increased diversity. One type of ethnic–racial socialisation is preparation for bias, in which parents aim to make children aware of discrimination and how to deal with it. Current research in the UK has neglected this area, particularly for second generation families, members of the host society and younger children. This paper discusses qualitative findings from an in-depth cross-cultural study focusing on 36 British non-immigrant White, Indian and Pakistani families with children between 5-7 years old. Using semi-structured interviews, the study aimed to understand mothers' use of preparation for bias strategies in anticipation of their children experiencing discrimination or following racist incidents in highly multicultural environments.

Mothers and children from all groups were found to have experienced discrimination and subsequently preparation for bias socialisation was used frequently by parents. The majority of British Pakistani families reported using preparation strategies whilst it was least reported in the British Indian families, with White families reporting intermediary use. Setting was particularly important in White families who discussed 'informal segregation' as causing a transformation in their neighbourhood and causing them to feel they were in the minority and thus more prone to experiencing discrimination. The study contributes to and increases understandings of ethnic-racial socialisation and will inform policy and theory on family life in relation to intercultural relations between both ethnic minority and majority groups.

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1. Introduction

In highly multicultural societies, people from different backgrounds come in contact and interact on a frequent basis. The dynamics of this interaction will depend on a number of factors, one of which is the way individuals are socialised to engage with those different from themselves. This interaction is not always positive and can lead to discrimination and prejudice in intergroup relations. The model of ethnic–racial socialisation (ERS) is helpful in understanding how socialisation occurs at the level of the child. It describes the ways parents transmit information, perspectives and values relating to race and

ethnicity to their children in diverse societies such as the United Kingdom (Hughes, Bachman, Ruble, & Fuligni, 2006; Hughes et al., 2008; Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). This paper will explore one type of ERS namely preparation for bias socialisation within the UK amongst British-born Indian, Pakistani and non-immigrant White families with children aged 5–7 years old. Preparation for bias is a term used to describe practices in which parents aim to make children aware of discrimination and how to deal with it. Studies have shown that this type of socialisation is used more frequently by minority ethnic groups, yet few studies have explored its use by majority ethnic groups and fewer still have looked at this form of socialisation in a British context. Also, studies tend to examine these processes in adolescents and ignore younger children.

Data presented here draws from a larger mixed-methods study on similarities and differences in parenting and child development in 90 second generation British Indian, Pakistani and White non-immigrant families with young children living in multicultural urban settings (Iqbal, 2012). The qualitative section of the study aimed to explore cultural and contextual factors in family life including intergroup relations, experiences of discrimination and ethnic–racial socialisation used by parents. This paper focuses on two aspects of the wider research specifically relating to preparation for bias. Research questions explore: (1) how and how frequently British mothers socialised young children around race and ethnicity, particularly in relation to negative aspects of this (such as discrimination) and (2) whether similarities and differences in preparation for bias (ethnic–racial socialisation) existed in the three groups, and the reasons for this similarity/difference. The paper argues that increased diversity in the UK has caused host society members as well as certain minority ethnic group members to adapt parenting strategies according to their surrounds. This is particularly the case for groups which are experiencing wider societal pressures such as Islamophobia (in British Pakistani Muslims) and the effects of rapid shifts in the demographics and ethnic compositions of areas, such as certain White British families living in diverse neighbourhoods where they no longer represent the majority ethnic group. Current literature on preparation for bias and new empirical research from the present study of family life in multicultural Britain will be used to argue this claim.

2. Preparation for bias as a form of ethnic–racial socialisation

Ethnic–racial socialisation (ERS) is a concept which describes the ways in which caregivers transmit information, perspectives and values relating to race and ethnicity to their children. Implicit and explicit messages about the meaning and significance of race and ethnicity, the meaning of belonging to a particular ethnic or racial group and ways of managing discrimination are all aspects of ERS (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Neblett et al., 2012). A large part of the literature has been developed in the US particularly in relation to African American, Latino and Chinese families (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Knight, Bernal, Cota, Garza, & Ocampo, 1993; Knight, Bernal, Garza, Cota, & Ocampo, 1993; Ou & McAdoo, 1993; Peters, 1985; Quintana & Vera, 1999; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Tatum, 1987; Thornton, Chatters, Taylor, & Allen, 1990). These studies have revealed the highly multifaceted nature of ERS and the importance of it being understood with relation to its content, mode of transmission and the underlying beliefs and aims behind it. Different forms of socialisation exist including *cultural socialisation, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust* and *egalitarianism*. Depending on circumstances and particular environmental factors, parents utilise particular forms. These forms are by no means mutually exclusive and can exist within the same instance of socialisation (Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006; Hughes et al., 2008).

In *cultural socialisation*, parents teach children about their racial heritage and history. Such socialisation encourages understanding of traditions and cultural customs and children's pride in ethnicity or race (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes, Rodriguez, et al., 2006; Thornton et al., 1990; Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2004). Egalitarianism occurs when parents teach children the significance of individual qualities as opposed to membership in a racial or ethnic group (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hamm, 2001; Hughes & Chen, 1999; Iqbal, 2014; Phinney & Chavira, 1995). *Promotion of mistrust* involves parenting practices that encourage distrust and carefulness in interracial communication (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes, Bachman, et al., 2006). Lastly, *preparation for bias* is a socialisation type which forms the core of this paper and will be discussed further below.

2.1. Preparation for bias

Preparation for bias relates to parenting practices that aim to make children aware of discrimination and teach them how to deal with it (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes, Bachman, et al., 2006). This form of socialisation has been examined with particular reference to the African American group, and can be linked to their history of marginalisation. Hughes et al. (2008) found preparation for bias was reported most often in discussions relating to discrimination or unfair treatment, with the aim of instilling coping mechanisms in children. Both children and parents may initiate preparation for bias, and two types of preparation strategies exist: proactive and reactive (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Stevenson, 1997). Proactive strategies are used when parents believe that their children will encounter discrimination and try to equip them with useful skills. Reactive strategies relate to discussions following incidents that have already occurred. Parental guidance when engaging in these discussions varies. Some parents downplay race-related events and encourage children to ignore them in order to help them cope, while others address the incident directly.

ERS practices vary on both an individual level (depending on the specific characteristics of the parent and the child), and a group level (depending on the characteristics of the ethnic group and other contextual factors). At the group level, studies have shown that preparation for bias may be related to the views of the larger society about a particular ethnic group