

Diversity, difference and belonging in childhood: Issues for foster care and identities

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1 Introduction

Since the 1970s, issues of ‘transracial’ fostering and adoption have been debated, often heatedly, in the UK and USA (Phoenix and Simmonds, 2012). In countries where intercountry adoption is the common form of adoption, the debates have been about how the identities of children adopted from other countries should have their origins and backgrounds represented and affirmed without treating the children as inherently outsiders to the nation (Lind, 2012). In countries where ‘transracial’ placements are of children born in the country where they are placed, views on transracial placements are frequently polarised (Barn & Kirton, 2012). Proponents of transracial adoption point to its success in terms of producing secure and psychologically well functioning children and argue that it constitutes a better option than leaving children in state care for long periods while a suitable ‘match’ is found (Selwyn, 2010).

The current research literature on psychological outcome, racial/ethnic identity development, and cultural socialization suggests that transracial adoptees—both domestic and international—are psychologically well adjusted, exhibit variability in their racial/ethnic identity development, and along with their parents, engage in a variety of cultural socialization strategies to overcome the transracial adoption paradox. (Lee, 2003, p. 725)

The ‘transracial paradox’ to which Lee refers arises because there is also evidence that transracial adoption has some deleterious consequences. Opponents often draw on the same studies as proponents to argue that transracial adoption produces ‘identity confusion’ where black children are unable to relate to other black people and to deal with rejections from white society. Racism, they argue, is difficult to deal with and has long-term negative consequences (Harris, 2012). It is this apparently contradictory evidence that is referred to as ‘the transracial paradox’.

In transracial placements, diversity, difference and belonging are at the heart of developments in foster care and adoption. Yet, as Lee (2003) suggests, relatively little is currently known about how these issues impact on family practices and experiences in society in general.

‘Issues of family diversity are becoming of critical importance as the demographics of families in this country and, indeed, the world, change ...; yet they are often an ignored part of the broader diversity discussions.’ (Turner-Vorbeck, 2014, p. 24)

This paper aims to contribute to understanding of these issues by considering the question of how background issues relevant to difference and identities are important to policies and practices in foster care. It does so by examining how diversity, difference and belonging are part of the lives of children from minoritised ethnic groups who live with their birth parents. It first considers issues of diversity and difference in foster and adoptive care. It then presents

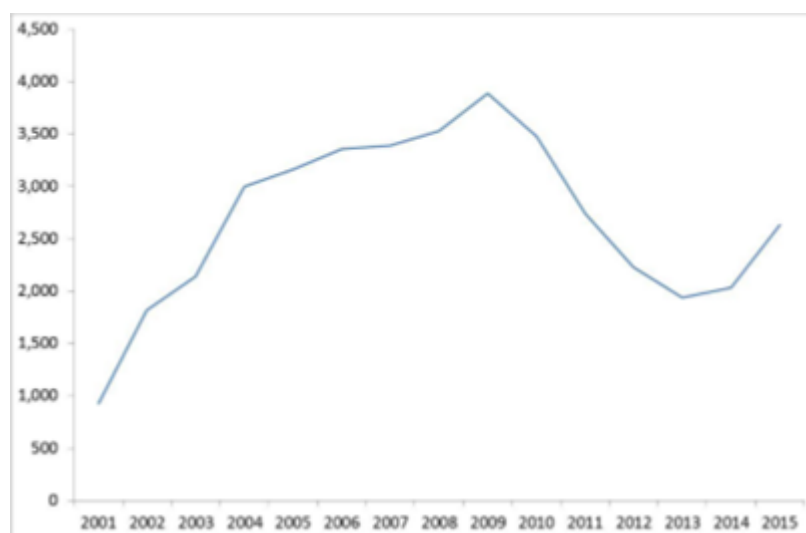
theoretical issues important to the understanding of fostering in multicultures, especially, ‘transracial’ fostering. In particular, it introduces and considers intersectionality, racialisation/ethnicisation, belonging and identities. The final part of the paper presents some findings from a study of adults who have grown up in visibly ethnically different households and examines their narratives of their childhood experiences. In doing so, the paper helps to illuminate how adults consider that their experiences of growing up in visibly ethnically different households have impacted on their lives over time. The paper concludes by presenting some implications for foster care.

1.1 Difference, diversity and foster care

Issues of diversity, difference and belonging are, arguably, increasingly pressing in a context where global migration has become ubiquitous and most countries in the global north have become multicultures (Cohen, 1988; Gilroy, 2006). Steve Vertovec (2007) argues that contemporary global migration makes societies ‘super diverse’, not just in terms ethnicity, but also on the basis of differences in legal statuses, age, gender and geography amongst other factors. Such complex social differences are not, however, new. The broad definition of culture as everyday practices that comes from anthropology alerts us to the fact that people can be from the same ethnic group, but have different cultures because they live in different nations, belong to different social classes or live in different regions.

In many countries, there are an increasing number of mixed relationships and so children whose parents come from different ethnicities (Morning, 2012; Owen, 2007, 2012). Diversity and difference are, therefore, important to foster care relations in two ways. First, foster care necessarily entails bringing together children and adults who have different everyday practices and, second, it is inextricably linked with global developments. This can be seen at a glance in the graph of the figures for ‘looked after’ unaccompanied asylum seeking children in England (in Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Unaccompanied asylum seeking children looked after at 31 March 2001 to 2015



Source: Department for Education Statistical First Release 34/2015

There were 69,540 children ‘looked after’ at 31 March 2015. Four percent of them were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (2,630). That number had been falling since 2009, but increased by five percent between 2013 and 2014 and then by 29% between 2014 and 2015. This increase is clearly linked to the global situation of refugees moving from events such as the Syrian War and war and unrest in countries such as Afghanistan, Sudan and South Sudan. As a result, foster care increasingly involves children and parents from different ethnicities, nations and religions who have different cultural practices.

There are also persistent differences between the proportion of children of different ethnicised groupings in society and their proportion in ‘looked after’ statistics. In the UK, for example, children of mixed parentage are over-represented, as are black children, while children from south Asian groups are underrepresented, in the looked after children population (Department for Education, 2015). Since there are relatively few black and Asian foster carers in the UK, this necessitates some transracial placements (Wainwright & Ridley, 2012). These disproportions have fuelled drives in the UK to recruit more foster parents from minoritised ethnic groups (Thoburn, Chand & Procter, 2005). Yet, in many countries, there are difficulties in recruiting and retaining foster carers, whatever the cultural group from which they come (Colton, Roberts & Williams, 2008; Page, Whitting & Mclean, 2007). Given the heated debates about transracial placements and the difficulty of recruiting and retaining foster parents, it is important to disentangle the complex issues about how racialisation and ethnicisation are experienced in, and impact on, family life, particularly where families are of mixed ethnicity.

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of these complex issues. It attempts to establish whether ethnicised and racialised issues appear to have long-lasting impacts on children growing up with birth parent(s) in visibly ethnically different households. While appreciation of background issues will not in itself increase recruitment and retention of foster carers, it is crucial for recognition of the issues that need to be addressed in foster care (transracial and other) and which of these issues are particular to foster care. The following section discusses four interlinked theoretical concepts that, together, provide conceptual tools for understanding issues of diversity in foster care and in family life more broadly. These are: intersectionality, racialisation, belonging and identities.

1.2 Theoretical issues of relevance to consideration of diversity and fostering

The UK Foster and Adoptive Family Services (2014) statement argues that:

Foster care, by its nature, is culturally diverse. Abused and neglected children are placed in strangers’ homes, where expectations and communication styles are very different from where they came from. (Foster and Adoptive Family Services, 2014).

This notion foregrounds the fact that people differ from each other in multiple ways. The everyday practices that include family rules and traditions are informed by the multiple social categories in which everybody is positioned, including social class, gender, ethnicity and religion. The theoretical concept of intersectionality has come to be recognised as particularly fruitful in analysing and explaining the complexity and plurality of contemporary life.

The term ‘intersectionality’ was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to account, theoretically, for what she perceived as the systematic invisibility of black women in US legal processes. Crenshaw provided examples of how Black women’s experiences of discrimination are distorted by focusing on a single category of social inequality (either

'femaleness' or 'blackness', 1989). She argued that black women's positioning and the discrimination to which they are subjected are not the result of a simple summation of category memberships but is 'greater than the sum of racism and sexism' (1989: 140). According to Crenshaw, simple additive models are, therefore, inadequate to the analysis of the simultaneity of gender and racialisation. The term intersectionality alerts us to the fact that social inequality cannot be fully understood if only one social category is considered (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Collins & Chepp, 2013). While not all the possible categories of difference and inequality are relevant in every context, it is important to analyse the multiple social categories that are relevant to understanding, for example, which issues impact on transracial fostering. Cho, Crenshaw & McCall, 2013 suggest that social categories have to be viewed "... not as distinct but always permeated by other categories, fluid and changing, always in the process of being created by dynamics of power..." (Cho et al., 2013: 795). Foster care policy thus has to be devised with recognition of the ways in which simultaneous intersectional positioning is part of children's and foster carers' lives.

If social categories are not fixed, but permeate and mutually constitute each other, it follows that any individual category is also dynamic and changing, rather than fixed. The term *racialisation*, coined by Fanon (1967) conceptualises this process. Fanon was particularly concerned with 'race' as relational. For example, he pointed out that the category 'white' depends for its meaning on its negation, 'black'. Neither 'black', nor 'white' exists without the other. Fanon argued that both came into being with imperial conquest and, given their relational history, the colonizer/colonized relationship is normalized in the psyche. Racialisation thus signifies that 'race' is socially constructed, involves power relations and is made socially significant through social, economic, cultural, and psychological processes. The dynamism of the processes Fanon described is evident in the increasing numbers of people of mixed parentage in many countries, who have long resisted having to identify themselves as white or black, where each is seen as diametrically opposite to the other (Tizard & Phoenix, 2002). They have helped to illuminate that categorical oppositions of black and white are no longer useful (Caballero, et al., 2012). The term ethnicisation is now used to do similar work with ethnicity. In transracial fostering, the terms racialisation and ethnicisation can help with the analysis of how and why ethnicity is made significant as one amongst many intersecting social categories.

From an intersectional perspective, social categories are provisional, often decentred by their intersections with other social categories and relational. Social categories are said to be decentred because any social category is only meaningful in relation to others. For example, what it means to be 'young' is only meaningful and significant in relation to what it means to be 'old' or 'middle aged'. Partly as a result of this, absolute separations between social categories, such as 'black people' and 'white people' are not natural, but constructed so that commonalities between categories are minimised and differences highlighted. They also change over time and so there is no absolute, central meaning of a category that lasts forever. In addition, everybody simultaneously occupies multiple social categories such that no one category is the core of anybody's identities (even if felt to be so). This makes the question of belonging, whether to a family, a culture or a nation, a continually negotiated process, rather than established once and for all. Yuval-Davis (2011: 199) suggests that:

People can 'belong' in many different ways and to many different objects of attachments. These can vary from a particular person to the whole of humanity, in a concrete or abstract way; belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way. Even in its most stable 'primordial'

forms, however, belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity, which is only a naturalized construction of a particular hegemonic form of power relations. (p. 199)

For Yuval-Davis, belonging and the politics of belonging are constituted, valued and judged as: social locations (i.e. how people are positioned in the intersection of age, class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality); identifications and emotional attachments and ethical and political values. It is also psychosocial, being about social acceptance and exclusion as well as self-positioning and emotional feelings of homeliness and security.

Belonging is a central concern for fostered and adopted children and particularly those who are visibly ethnically different, or come from different countries, from their foster parents (Connolly, 2014; Madigan, Quayle & Crossar, 2013; Richards, 2012). As discussed above, there is a great deal of evidence that transracial fostering and adoption can produce psychologically well-adjusted young people, but that it can simultaneously generate psychological distress and feelings of alienation (Ali, 2013; Boivin and Hassan, 2015; Fong and McRoy 2016). Children growing up with their birth parents can also feel that they do not belong within their families. Visible ethnic difference, for example, occurs ‘naturally’ in ‘mixed-parentage’, and some other, families (Caballero et al., 2008; Holmes, 1995; Tizard & Phoenix, 2002). In that context, it is perhaps not surprising that fostered and adopted children’s insecurity can be exacerbated by parental and state efforts to maintain fostered and adopted children’s cultural ‘roots’ in ways that highlight difference and that many experience as exclusionary (Hübinette & Andersson, 2012; Lind, 2012).

Janet Finch (2007) introduced the concept of family display as one of the ways in which families put boundaries around those who are accepted as belonging in successful families (Finch 2007). Foster families (and other ‘chosen’ families) seek legitimacy, often through ‘displaying’ that they fit with cultural ideals or expectations of family (Schofield, Beek & Ward, 2012). This notion of family display is important to the ways in which family members understand themselves and the stories they tell to themselves and to others about their family relationships (their narratives) (Finch, 2007). Biographical narratives are also important to how children and young people in foster care make sense of their experiences (Reimer & Schafer, 2015).

The three theoretical constructs discussed above: intersectionality; racialisation/ethnicisation and belonging are all about the ways in which people position themselves and are positioned by others. They are, therefore, interlinked with identities, and at the heart of issues of transracial fostering/adoption. The evidence available suggests that transracially fostered/adopted children can experience their difference from other family members as painful and that this can lead to the development of racialized identities where exclusion is central, particularly in contexts marked by racism. Adoptive and foster parents can be caught between desire to minimise difference within the family and trying to make their children comfortable with difference and with their cultural backgrounds (Richards, 2012), particularly where children continue to have relationships with their birth families.

The theorisation of identities helps to clarify why some transracially fostered and adopted children might find it painful to negotiate their difference from, and belonging with, their families. Although there are many different theories of identities, it is generally accepted that identity is a subjective individual achievement. People craft understandings of who they are from understandings of how they differ from some people and are like others. Subjective

understandings of identities guide how people feel they should behave in particular contexts (Wetherell, 2009). In other words, identities and social action are interlinked because the ways in which we identify with other people affect what we do (Hopkins, Kahani-Hopkins & Reicher, 2006). Identities are, therefore, social as well as subjective and personal. They can be used as a social resource in that people often present themselves and others in ways that mobilize and draw on particular identities (Widdicombe, 1998). Identities then are complex and dynamic, changing over time. Yet, attempts to support the racialised, ethnicised and national identities of fostered and adopted children frequently treat identity as if it is about the past ('roots') at least as much as about the present. Yet, the focus on children's family traditions as central to who they are neglects the fact that identity is as much about the future ('routes') as about the past (Hall, 1996; Wetherell, 2010).

According to narrative theory, identities are stories that people tell themselves and others about who they are, who they are not and what they can become in the future (Bruner, 2004). As Yuval-Davis (2011:) suggests, '[t]hese stories have a particular emotional charge in times of threat and insecurity'. In societies where ethnicisation, racialisation and anti-immigrant discourses are strong, it is not surprising that transracially or intercountry adoptees have to negotiate their identities and issues of belonging in their families and that the politics of identity have an impact on their identities. Yet, precisely because it is difficult to unravel the complex issues entangled in such adoptions, it is important to draw on theoretical tools such as those described above to understand fostering, adoption and the intersections of racialisation, migration and other social positionings. In order to make a contribution to this disentanglement, the section below examines issues raised by young adults looking back on their childhood experiences of growing up as mixed parentage young people in the UK, and evaluating its significance for their lives.

2 Racialised intersectional identities and belonging

The narrative accounts analysed below come from a study of adults looking back on what might be called 'non-normative' childhoods¹. It aimed to understand how they perceive the impact of childhood experiences that have received little attention and are often invisible within society. It focused on adults from varied ethnicised groupings who grew up in three kinds of 'non-normative' contexts: (i) serial migration, where the adults came as children from the Caribbean to Britain to rejoin parents (N=53); (ii) adults who grew up in visibly ethnically different families (N=41); (iii) 'language brokers', who sometimes interpreted and/or translated for their parents in childhood (N=40). The recruitment of the sample was challenging in that these categories are not visible in everyday life. Participants were, therefore, recruited through advertising on the internet, in a local newspaper and by approaching organisations with an interest in the issues addressed by the study as well as by snowballing.

In all three studies, the interviews started by asking the participants to tell their story in relation to the study for which they had been recruited. The invitation was thus not to tell their life story, but particular to the topic of the research. This first question almost always produced extended answers, often lasting more than twenty minutes. The rest of the interview followed up the issues participants raised in response to the first question and asked other

¹ The 'Transforming Experiences: Re-conceptualising identities and 'non-normative' childhoods' project was an ESRC-funded Professorial Fellowship, Award number: RES-051-27-0181. Ann Phoenix was the professorial fellow and Elaine Bauer and Stephanie Davis-Gill were research fellows on the project.

questions about their identities and their retrospective understanding of their experiences. The interviews were thematically analysed to provide an overview of the findings and some interviews and questions were then analysed narratively. Narrative analysis is particularly suited to the study of 'non-normative' lives in that narratives are naturally occurring, ubiquitous and most likely to be developed in order to account for lives that differ from what is generally expected in the culture. (Riessman, 2008). On that basis, it would be expected that adults with histories of being fostered or adopted, for example, would generate narratives to explain their stories to themselves and/or other people. Narrative analysis also gives insight into the culture, making it possible to analyse canonical narratives about the way life ought to be lived in the culture (Bruner, 1990) and the narrative identities that are normative for a generation (McAdams and McLean, 2013).

This paper focuses on only one part of the study; adults who grew up in households where they were visibly ethnically different. Although this is a fast-growing group in many countries, studies have repeatedly shown that many are subjected to racism particular to their mixed parentage and that parents are sometimes unaware of this and sometimes uncertain how best to deal with it. There is, however, no one way in which parents attempt to bring up their children of mixed parentage (Edwards & Caballero, 2008; Tizard & Phoenix, 2002; Twine, 2010). The three examples presented below are designed to illuminate some of the ways in which adults of mixed parentage view their childhoods and how their racialised identities intersect with their other identities and impact on their sense of belonging to their families and society.

The first example comes from a man in his mid-30s who grew up in two separate ethnically different households. This positioning produced identities that were complex and intersectional.

[O]ne of the strongest parts of my identity I would say is, I feel I've been socialised in a predominantly white working class background, so I identify strongly with white working class lads from that background. However when I'm outside 'Old City', people think I'm, because I'm mixed race and I looked mixed race. People don't naturally associate me as connected with the white working class side of my cultural identity which to me is stronger than my mixed race identity. What I did do at some point was internalise external opinions of my identity, and I learnt that via the other adults around me, within the extended white family and also within my Jamaican family. Never been black enough to be black or white enough to be white and whenever an issue or discussion would happen around mixed identity, people would say oh stop trying to make yourself special, stop (.) talking about it. They would dismiss it. So I would in some ways have to minimise anything which was, externally different to a white background. So if I'd been to my father's for the weekend I would have to minimise talking Jamaican patois or the way I would walk or the way I would move because I was obviously looking to my father for some kind of behavioural identity. When I bring that behaviour back to my mum's it was always frowned upon, or I'm sure it wasn't on a conscious level, I'm sure it was very unconscious thing because lots of my family didn't understand my experiences within my Jamaican family, outside of them. So I had an absolute definite different experience with my father at weekends, than I did when I was back with my other white brothers. (.) And yeah it's just fascinating to see how I've kind of absorbed all those experiences and I wasn't able to articulate any of these emotions, feelings, thoughts at the time. I used to explain to my older white brothers that they were er- (.) they were always in a majority. I felt I was in a majority when I was at home, within my family house but when I came out of there I was in a minority

and because they were male, they were quite strong, and good looking guys they were never in a minority so they didn't understand that experience, and again I would have my identity brought into question, and get into trouble around that because people called me nigger or paki or all that ridiculous stuff that people do. (.) Yeah and that's how I learnt. ('Isaac', 40s, UK-born, of mixed-parentage)

In the above example, Isaac gives an extended narrative of how he negotiates his gendered/racialised/classed and familial identifications as central to the development of his identities. He constructs these as relational in that he explains that he learned to take up particular versions of racialised identity by internalising what people around him thought of him and recognising the differences between the cultural practices at his mother's and his father's homes. His learning about the situatedness of practices and identities was not only disjunctive between the two households in which he grew up, but between 'at home', where he felt 'in the majority' and 'out' (where he was called racist names). In racialised terms, he suggests that both his black and white relatives attempted to deny him black, white and 'mixed' positionings. His 'mixed' identity was, therefore, developed as a result of struggle and in resistance to his family at the same time that he both identified with his black father and continues to identify most strongly with his 'white', working class, masculine (and local) identities. This account of struggle and resistance demonstrates Isaac's agency in negotiating everyday practices in three ways: producing explanations of his identities and positioning; his reactions to racism, including his resistance to racialised outsider ascriptions and his understanding of his emotions. Isaac presents a dynamic view of himself in that, in the rest of his narrative, he recognises that he and society have changed over time and that his experiences are geographically as well as historically located.

Isaac's account also demonstrates the now-accepted notion that siblings experience 'non-shared environments', even when they share households (Plomin, 2011). In Isaac's case an intersectional approach highlights how shared gender intersects with racialised difference to produce a complex and dynamic constellation of commonalities and differences (in addition to other differences that separate siblings' experiences). An intersectional analysis of Isaac's account thus highlights the complex and shifting nature of his positioning (over time and space) and of power relations in the development of his identities (Lutz, Herrera & Supik, 2011; Knapp, 2011).

The complex constellations of relational identities that Isaac presents also play a pivotal role in his feelings of belonging to his family and to society more generally. Since both sets of his family refused to countenance the racialised positioning that many people outside the family highlighted in painful ways, he gradually became less involved, emotionally and physically, with them. Isaac's narrative of his forging of his understanding of his identities required finding a space of belonging outside his family. This he felt he only achieved in adulthood once he developed a 'mixed race' identity separate from those his family sanctioned and in contradistinction from much that he learned in society.

The second example, from a woman of mixed parentage who was also in her mid-30s, documents how she puzzled over her positioning in working out her identities and coming to understand what racialisation was about, as well as her belonging in her family and society. Her narrative suggests that she does this through recognising difference and disjunctive experiences of being positioned differently in different circumstances and differently from other members of her family.

As soon as I hit the school age, there are things, there are some distinct memories so for example there was an Irish family who lived across further down the road, and a Pakistani family who lived opposite me, and the girls in the Pakistani family were good friends and we used to walk to school together but the Irish family were terrible racists and they had a dog and they us to set their dog on us to chase us up the road after school, and they didn't see any difference between me and the Caribbean family next door to me or the Pakistani family across the road. So I knew that I had things in common with those and yet the dog wouldn't be set on my white cousins when they came or the white friend I had who was further up the road, so you know that was probably from about the age of five so those sorts of things kind of set you apart from other members of your family or your peers who are white and it's all about being visibly different. Because I wasn't like the Pakistani girls, in this Pakistani household which had, which clearly differentiated itself, my household was essentially a white Anglo Saxon household you know. The food we ate, the language we spoke was, there was nothing that kind of set itself out as different, the only thing different thing was essentially the way I looked. ('Sylvia', mixed-parentage, 30s)

Sylvia presents her burgeoning understanding as resulting from her recognition of difference. She could see that the Irish family racialised her as like Caribbean and Pakistani children and viewed her as different from her white cousins and friends. Yet, she could also see that her family had different cultural practices from the Pakistani family. The disjunction between how she was treated outside the house and in her family led her to come to the conclusion that her visible difference from her white family set her apart. As with Isaac, above, her account suggests that she came to understand the situational specificity of racialisation and to see her family as unusual in being visibly ethnically different and to see herself as the source of difference. At the same time, the fact that the Caribbean and Pakistani girls were also subject to attack meant that she could see that racism (which she later explains that she had not yet learned to recognise) did not result from her personal characteristics. While the intersection of racialisation and gender are explicit and social class implicit, age is also highlighted in her account because it is only when she is old enough to walk to school with friends that she reports being exposed to the disjunctions that fuelled her consciousness of racialisation. Sylvia also orients to issues of everyday cultural practices and household composition as central to the development of her identities. She identifies them as responsible for her professed determination to have black partners so that her own child(ren) will not share her experience of growing up in a visibly ethnically different household.

For Sylvia, these remembered experiences of racism and disjunction did not make her feel that she did not belong in her family. This was perhaps because (unlike Isaac's family) her mother did not minimise her difference in the household. In keeping with Isaac, however, she did have to forge her own understanding of her racialised identities from the contradictory and emotionally painful social resources available to her. In particular, being asked if she was 'half caste' by a black girl at primary school constituted a turning point for her racialised identity and allowed her to use her new identification as a resource to buttress her social relations at school.

As can be seen in the two examples above (Isaac and Sylvia), the invitation to reflect on the experience of growing up in visibly ethnically different households commonly produced accounts of disjunction. The memories they presented as salient resulted from recognising themselves to have been in relatively powerless positions and that how they were positioned in racialised terms was consequential for their experiences. In the final example examined in this paper, the participant below also considered that he learned racialised positioning through

disjunctions that he experienced as uncomfortably exclusionary. He reported that he was treated as if he did not belong with his white father in the UK and as if he was much more like his father than his mother when the family visited West Africa.

John: I suppose I was always (.) conscious that I, my parents were from obviously visibly very different, and at times I did actually feel uncomfortable. More with people's perceptions that there was something, somehow different something somehow strange about that, and I would be -- as a child I was embarrassed about that, (.) I think because I could sense other people's sort of confusion and I think that I picked up that they somehow considered there was something, just strange about it. I mean I never denied it I was always, to me it was highly normal so I felt I understood, for them it would be different. ... But I think to the wider sense of society it was always something that I was aware of as a child and a little bit uncomfortable of but more towards being with my dad actually in public, because I could sense er, that people were probably more (laughing) surprised, by that, than when I was with my mum. Because I think in terms of the continuum of sort of (laughing) colour. Obviously they perceived me being nearer to my mum's skin (laughing) colour and therefore closer in some way to her and more likely to be her genuine offspring than they did my father. But then when I was seventeen I went to [West Africa]. I went back to [West Africa] for the first time, and then I realized that the whole continuum of colour (laughing) was different and then for example, one time, in the market we met some of my mother's ...family,... and then when I met some of my mum's family in the market they sort of looked at me and looked at my father and mother and then said just how much I looked similar to my father, and that again (.) in a way, sort of further compounded my new realization that ... I wouldn't be fully accepted on face value in the UK (.) erm, neither would I be fully accepted in [West Africa] because to them I was actually very light skinned and they use a term ...for Europeans or if you translate it I think directly it would be sort of white. So to a lot of quite dark [West Africans] I would appear white. So at first I was quite miffed by that and felt a little bit sort of disappointed in a way that I wasn't going to fit in quite easily there either, and then (.) it made me just realise that some of that situation, that you wouldn't easily find that, that sort of niche ...

In John's narrative, the development of his racialised identity depended on the intersection of family appearance and place. When he was 17 years old, he was disappointed to realise that he was not accepted as fitting with one or the other of his parents nor the most common colour grouping either in the rural area in which he grew up in the UK or in West Africa. However, the disjunction between being seen as more black than white in the UK and more white than black in West Africa was also illuminating. It led John to a contextual understanding of racialisation as geographically and historically located and no country as an ideal place for him to fit in and be accepted as belonging. This was highly consequential in that it influenced his decisions to live in a variety of countries. His reasoning was that he could live anywhere because he would not be accepted as fitting in anywhere. Despite his reports of embarrassment, disappointment and upset at having been treated as not belonging with his parents or in either the UK or West Africa, he considered that colour is not the defining feature for belonging in a family and that being highly visible is not necessarily problematic. Thus, while John's account indicates that he was relatively powerless as a child in not being able to make people accept what they perceived as his difference from his parents, over time he developed agency in dealing with this in ways that proved satisfactory for him. For John, difference and diversity produced in the intersection of geography, generation and racialisation was responsible for his experience of strangers attempting to exclude him from full belonging to his family and society. Over time, however, as he

understood this process, he used such experiences as resources, enabling him to feel comfortable in a variety of countries, regardless of how other people positioned him.

All three examples above illuminate that the ways in which the adults reported they identified in terms of their racialized identities (and implicitly how those around them identified them) had an impact on what they did and felt. Their identities were interlinked with emotions, understandings and social action (Wetherell, 2010).

3 Diversity, difference and belonging: relevance for foster care and adoption

The issue of belonging is an important one in foster care. Biehal, Ellison, Baker and Sinclair (2010) found that ideas of family and belonging were complex for children in foster care and that they could shift over time. While it is often taken for granted that children living in households constituted by one or both of their birth parents are likely to feel that they belong in their families, the examples above trouble that assumption. They do so by showing that racialisation, in intersection with children's other characteristics, can decentre straightforward ideas of belonging. The puzzlement and discomfort that the adults reported that they felt as children, led them to question their place in their families and in the social world. Belonging was linked with how they made sense of their racialisation and understood their positioning in the social world and in their families. The disjunctions they experienced helped them to develop their understanding of their positioning and identities.

The process of destabilizing and puzzling reported by the adults reported above in response to racializing experiences, led them to craft new understandings of their positioning and identities in ways that foregrounded difference, diversity and complex, contingent belonging to their families.

By extension, such findings have implications for the understanding of belonging in foster and adoptive families, particularly where parents and children are of different ethnicities. They illuminate the fact that belonging is important to children and that feelings of not belonging are painful. It is, however, important not to romanticise belonging as natural and easily attained. The findings reported here, and those from other studies of children and parents of mixed parentage (e.g. Caballero et al., 2010; Tizard & Phoenix, 2002; Twine, 2010) indicate that where difference means that children are not given 'civil inattention' (Goffman, 1959) because of differences in colour or ethnicity, children in birth families have to learn to deal with this. Thus, while it is undoubtedly true that adults need to gain psychosocial understanding of children's racialized experiences and that more foster carers from more ethnic groups are urgently needed (McDermid et al., 2012), some children in their birth families also have such experiences and deal with them in different ways. In thinking of solutions then, 'one size does not fit all' (Luke et al., 2014).

The variable experiences of black and minority ethnic children in the looked after system indicate a critical need to develop social work understandings of identities and their intersection with ethnicity – including mixed ethnicity without being trapped into indecision, lack of timeliness and an adult, rather than child, focus. (Boddy 2013)

The findings discussed above give some insights into why attempts to achieve 'perfect ethnic matching' are oversimplistic (Ali, 2013; Wainwright & Ridley, 2012). They also indicate why attempts to make foster and adoptive children familiar with 'their' cultures, which many transracial adopters struggle to do (Richards, 2012), can serve to position transracially fostered or adopted children as outsiders to the nation and family (Lind, 2012). The notion

that constructed 'roots' are essential to healthy identities does not fit with current understandings of identities. However, the research findings available make clear that transracial adoptees continue to be subjected to racism (Rushton et al., 2012). Adoptive (and birth) parents, therefore, need to understand the forms of racism their children experience, in complex, rather than essentialist ways that recognise power relations. Equally, policy makers need to understand more about the complexities of racialized identities since their understandings inform practices and legislation on fostering and adoption as much as in other areas of social life (Foresight, 2013). These complexities include the varied and agentic ways in which, as they grow up, children make decisions about how to negotiate their racialised identities in the context of visible difference from their families, often in ways that facilitate their wellbeing.

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