

Ethnic-Racial Socialisation in the UK:  
The Use of Egalitarianism in Explaining Meanings of Race and Ethnicity in Non-  
immigrant White and British South Asian Families

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Like much of the rest of the world, Britain has felt the effects of increased globalisation. One of the main outcomes of this has been a rise in immigration on an unprecedented magnitude. Of course, Britain has never been a stranger to immigration. Following the Second World War large influxes of migrants arrived from the former colonies. However, in the past few decades its scale has increased exponentially resulting in 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007) across much of the UK. Many former migrants, such as those from India and Pakistan now have children and grandchildren who are British born and well into their second and third generations. They have formed large ethnic groups with unique cultural practices and traditions. Immigration has also meant that ethnic groups (including the White majority ethnic group) have had to live in close vicinity with one another in multicultural Britain and engage in intergroup contact. Yet, Prime Minister David Cameron recently described the 'doctrine of state multiculturalism' as conceptually 'failed,' due to the 'existence of segregated communities' in the UK and lack of civic integration (Cameron, 2011). It is thus important to probe further into the realm of intergroup contact particularly at the family level. Just how is family life affected when people with different beliefs, cultural backgrounds and worldviews live in the vicinity of one another? Do British born families view race and ethnicity as being important today? To what extent does living in a multicultural neighbourhood influence whether parents choose to socialise children about ethnic and racial difference?

This chapter will explore these questions by focussing specifically on egalitarianism, and its use by families from the three largest ethnic groups in the UK living in ethnically diverse urban neighbourhoods, i.e., non-immigrant White, British Indian and British Pakistani. Egalitarianism is a type of ethnic-racial socialisation strategy in which caregivers emphasise individual qualities over ethnic and racial group membership. Studies have shown it to be a popular form of socialisation used in plural communities. Yet, few studies exist which explore the ins and outs of this type of socialisation, and fewer still which do so in a British context. Here, it will be argued that British born parents seem to use egalitarianism frequently as an important parenting tool in preventing experiences of discrimination as well as protecting children from such experiences. This will be achieved, by reviewing the current literature on egalitarianism, as well as drawing upon new empirical research. It will also be suggested that in the public domain of schools, egalitarianism is the most used means of socialisation by teachers at schools as it is most in line with the larger multicultural agenda of the UK.

### **Egalitarianism as a Form of Ethnic-Racial Socialisation**

Ethnic-racial socialisation (ERS) is a term which describes how caregivers transmit information, perspectives and values relating to race and ethnicity to their children (Hughes, et al., 2006; Hughes et al., 2008). These include implicit and explicit messages about the importance and meaning of race and ethnicity, the meaning of belonging to a particular racial or ethnic group and how to manage discrimination (Coard & Sellers, 2005; Neblett, Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). Much of the literature around ERS first emerged in the US in relation to specific groups including African American, Latino and Chinese parents (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 highlighted the extremely multifaceted nature of ERS, and the need for it to be understood in terms of its content, mode of its transmission and the underlying beliefs and aims behind it.

The literature has also revealed that different forms of ERS exist including, *cultural socialisation, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust and egalitarianism*. Parents most often use the different forms with children according to particular circumstances and environmental factors. Moreover, these forms can exist simultaneously within the same instance of ethnic-racial socialisation (Hughes et al., 2006; Hughes et al., 2008).

*Cultural socialisation* relates to those parenting practices in which children are taught about their racial heritage and history and which encourage traditions and cultural customs and children's pride in their ethnicity or race (Boykin & Toms, 1985; Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006; Hughes, Bachman, Ruble, & Fuglini, 2006b; Thornton et al., 1990; Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2004). *Preparation for bias* relates to parenting practices that aim to make children aware of discrimination and how to deal with it. *Promotion of mistrust* refers to parenting practices that encourage distrust and carefulness in interracial communication (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Hughes et al., 2006;). Finally, egalitarianism is discussed in more detail below.

### **Egalitarianism**

Egalitarianism occurs when parents teach children the importance of individual qualities as opposed to membership in a racial or ethnic group. 'Mainstream socialisation' (Boykin

& Toms, 1985) is a term which has been used to refer to those egalitarianism based practices with the key intent being assimilation into mainstream culture. However, assimilation into mainstream culture is not an end point for many ethnic groups particularly in the UK, who choose to integrate. Parents using this strategy discuss their appreciation for diversity and the desire for their children to mix and learn from others. Parents may also stress the importance of hard work, equality, morality and self worth to be more important than ethnicity.

Studies have shown that egalitarianism is important to parents and exists across different ethnic groups. In a qualitative study based in the US, Hamm (2001) found that egalitarianism was most popular amongst White parents. These parents instilled in their children, the importance of forming friendships regardless of race/ethnicity or encouraged them to engage in cross-racial friendships to learn about others. Other quantitative studies have found that more than two-thirds of parents from diverse ethnicities reported using egalitarianism in their day to day parenting (Hughes & Chen, 1999; Phinney & Chavira, 1995).

One way in which parents practice egalitarianism is through silence around the topic of race and ethnicity. By not acknowledging race and ethnicity, they indirectly emanate the idea of the equality of everyone and that race and ethnicity should not be a basis for discussion (Spencer, 1983; Hughes et al., 2006). However, silence about race represents only one type of egalitarianism strategy, which is now increasingly being examined as a standalone form of socialisation.

The type of socialisation strategy that parents use is also related to child and parental characteristics such as socio-economic status, ethnic identity, geographical

location and past experiences of racism. At the individual level, the age of the child is an important predictor of ERS practices. Some studies have shown that parents are less likely to use ERS practices with younger children, which require them to have an understanding of the complex concepts of discrimination and intergroup relations (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes et al., 2006; Hughes et al., 2008; McHale et al., 2006). Therefore, egalitarianism (in which individual qualities are emphasised) could represent a more frequently used form of socialisation in younger children.

Unlike in the US, in Britain few researchers have worked on this topic. Studies that do exist on ERS, are most often limited to understanding cultural socialisation practices such as transmission of culture in ethnic groups and acculturation processes (Barn, Ladino, & Rogers, 2006), while less often relating to practices (such as egalitarianism) resulting from intergroup contact. Moreover, studies often tend to ignore the majority ethnic group when thinking about transmission of information around race and ethnicity in parenting practices. Literature exploring ERS among the white majority ethnic group in a British context includes that of Holden (2006) who examined the views of young people and teachers in two northern cities in the UK with an emphasis on interfaith dialogue. The research revealed that efforts among teachers to incorporate egalitarian based multicultural elements to the curriculum and discuss diversity experienced objections from parents who found that it undermined being British. On the other hand Reay, as cited in Phoenix and Husain (2007) identified White middle class families from three areas in England who chose to place their children in ethnically mixed secondary schools to allow them to experience diversity and build up cultural capital.

### **Why is Egalitarianism Important?**

Stressful environments and ethnic inequalities have been found to be associated with unfavourable developmental profiles in children. Numerous studies have highlighted the negative association between discrimination and developmental outcomes such as socioemotional adjustment (Brody et al., 2006; Coker, 2009; Hughes, Witherspoon, et al., 2009; Rivas-Drake, Hughes, & Way, 2008). Many of these studies have taken place in a US context and among ethnic minority youth. However, a recent study in the UK found data that supported this association in a British context also. Mothers' experiences of racism were linked to markers of early child health and development in five year old children, including a higher risk of child obesity. Additionally, mothers' perceptions of racism in residential areas were associated with socio-emotional difficulties in children (Kelly, Becares, & Nazroo, 2012).

How does ethnic-racial socialisation and in particular, egalitarianism relate to this? Research in the US has described ethnic-racial socialisation practices as protective buffering factors between racial and ethnic discrimination and developmental outcomes. A recent integrative conceptual model developed by Neblett et al. (2012) offers a possible explanation of factors which may interact to shape positive development in youth. These include racial and ethnic identity, ERS and cultural orientation as important components. Ethnic Racial Socialisation functions in the model as a means by which youth prepare to perceive the world in a certain way. Self-concepts, cognitive appraisal processes (how youth take part, understand and make sense of the world) and coping are all important protective mechanisms in this model. Importantly, it stresses that racial/ethnic identity development, the instilling of family values and ethnic socialisation begin early in life,

and evolve though time. Thus, it is important to explore these processes in children as well as through key developmental periods. Moreover, it is important to investigate the role of egalitarianism in this protective process and in relation to child outcomes.

Few studies exist which investigate the outcomes of egalitarianism on youth or children. In these, egalitarian messages have been found to be predictors of positive self-concept in children (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Davis & Stevenson, 2006). Moreover, Bowman and Howard (1985) found that silence about race was associated with lower grades in children. They argued that children whose parents had avoided discussing race with them felt unprepared in a multicultural environment. Thus, findings in this area have been inconsistent, and research relating to egalitarianism, child behaviour and psychological adjustment outcomes is less developed, often conflicting and incomparable because of methodological issues such as sample characteristics and data analysis techniques (Hughes et al., 2008).

### **A Study of Egalitarianism Parenting in the UK**

Given that studies have shown cultural socialisation is used by parents in British samples, it is important to investigate whether other types of ERS parenting practices such as egalitarianism are also present in a UK context. In an increasingly multicultural Britain, to what extent does the degree of diversity in which children grow up influence the use of egalitarianism? And does being born British mean you are likely to use this type of socialisation more? In attempting to answer these questions, I now draw on some findings from a recent mixed-methods study<sup>1</sup> carried out with 36<sup>2</sup> British born mothers from the UK, with children between the ages of 5-7 years, living in highly plural neighbourhoods. These 36 mothers represent a subset of a sample of 90 mothers, from a

larger study comparing parenting and family life in multi-ethnic Britain in non immigrant White and second generation South Asian families.

Mothers and children were recruited mainly through state primary schools in London. Following ethical approval, primary schools which were located in boroughs with high concentrations of Indian and Pakistani ethnic minorities as well as sizable non-immigrant White populations were contacted. In total, children were recruited from 40 schools. The study was conducted in London, as it represents the most multicultural city in the UK, being home to almost half (49 per cent) of ethnic minority groups in the country. It was important for the study that an area in which communities were in close proximity to one another was selected in order to explore the impact cultural and ethnic diversity on family life. The researcher was trained in the study techniques and visited the families at home. Each visit lasted approximately 2 - 2.5 hours and consisted of an in-depth interview with mothers, questionnaires, a child-test and observational measures. Only data from the qualitative part of the interview are presented here.

The sample was matched and selected according to strict criteria. Data from the most recent population Census 2001 for the London area was used to achieve this. For the qualitative part of the study, a purposive sampling approach was used to obtain a good cross-representation of the larger quantitative sample. By using a purposive sample, the range of viewpoints of mothers from the total sample was more adequately represented. There was a balance in the range of socio-economic status as well as a reasonable balance of children's gender between groups. A thematic analysis approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke, 2006 was used to identify emerging and comparative themes in the data.

Before the findings are presented, some of the features of the ethnic groups being studied will be briefly presented.

### **A Snapshot of the Groups Being Studied<sup>3</sup>**

In 2001, the ethnic minority population in the United Kingdom comprised 8% of the population<sup>4</sup> (Connolly & White, 2006); of which 23% were Indian<sup>5</sup> and 16% were Pakistani<sup>6</sup> making these the two largest ethnic minority groups in the UK.

The Indian community began to mass migrate to the UK in the 1950s and 1960s (Robinson, 1986). The population today is non-homogeneous consisting of different groups, including Sikhs and Hindus from Punjab and a large number of Gujaratis, both Hindu and Muslim. According to the 2001 census, approximately half of all Indians in the United Kingdom were born in Britain, and the Indian ethnic group held a more advantageous position in British society as compared to the Pakistani ethnic group (Connolly & White, 2006).

The Pakistani community saw two periods of migration from Pakistan. The 1960s marked the migration of male Pakistanis, but it was not until the 70s and 80s that Pakistani women and children migrated to be with their husbands and fathers. By 2001, 55% of the population was British born and the majority was Muslim. Unlike the Indian community, the Pakistanis are generally less advantaged socio-economically.

In 2001 Britain comprised of 50 million White British people. This group has historically been the indigenous population in the United Kingdom and represents the largest ethnic group in the UK (Connolly & White, 2006). Although most non-immigrant White individuals classified themselves as belonging to the 'White group', their notions of 'national identity' were a reflection of the country they shared an identification with- that

is British, English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish or some other identity. Fifty-eight per cent of individuals from the white British group were more likely to describe themselves as English. A huge socio-economic variability exists within the White British population (Connolly & White, 2006).

### **Findings**

Following interviews with mothers from each of these groups, a range of issues relating to ethnic identification, cultural practices, cultural maintenance, experiences of racism and language use were discussed which helped uncover how race and ethnicity influenced their children and their own lives. The different ethnic-socialisation forms of cultural socialisation, preparation for bias, promotion of mistrust and egalitarianism were identified in the parenting practices of the sample. However, these varied in expression and use across groups, and also compared to past findings in the US. The young age of the children in the sample may have had something to do with this. Yet despite the age of the children, ERS seemed to be an important part of life for families.

The present study also found that Pakistanis experienced the most discrimination compared with other groups. Pakistani mothers discussed feeling victimised because of their religious beliefs, and they blamed the media and political events for creating a highly Islamophobic environment in Britain. Both White and Indian mothers also mentioned Muslims as a group that was experiencing much discrimination in contemporary society. Interestingly discrimination was also experienced by White families. Non-immigrant White mothers spoke of feeling stereotyped in increasingly ethnically-diverse neighbourhoods. They gave examples of not being treated equally in public, of worrying that their children were alienated at school and of feeling that other

ethnic groups were quick to label them as bigots. Indian mothers reported experiencing the least discrimination. Whether the families experienced discrimination is important, as it possibly influences caregivers' decision to use egalitarian messages in parenting. More about the use of egalitarianism by mothers in my study is now presented.

**Egalitarianism: '...The insides of us is exactly the same to everybody'**

The above statement made by a non-immigrant White mother, named Tracy<sup>7</sup> summarises the ethos behind egalitarianism based parenting. In the non-immigrant White and British Indian groups, this was the most common form of ERS practice used by parents. It was mentioned less in the discussion with British Pakistani mothers who used cultural and religious socialisation more. The three groups could be thought of as existing on a spectrum with White families at one end, Pakistani families at the other, and Indian families between the two in terms of their use of egalitarian socialisation. Interestingly, some instances of religio-cultural socialisation occurred alongside egalitarianism in the families. This finding is in line with other literature which reports the popular and sometimes simultaneous of these two socialisation practices by parents (Hughes & Chen, 1997, 1999; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Hughes et al, 2008). The egalitarianism style of parenting was found to be multifaceted, and was discussed in four main ways: 1) *openness*, 2) *proactive conversation based* 3) *reactive conversation based* and 4) *egalitarianism celebrating diversity*. These principles were similar in each group, although the extent to which they were shown was different.

**Openness.** Openness revolved around the discussions mothers had about disregarding differences between groups and of not using race as a basis for making decisions. Such parenting was rooted in acceptance of diversity and involved mothers

often having friendship patterns, community links, neighbourhoods and work environments which were plural. This was the most frequently discussed type of egalitarianism principle. Mothers spoke of it being wrong to 'be unkind to someone because of the way they looked or because they couldn't speak English', as well as of individuals 'all being human beings', and 'equal.' This set of mothers viewed peoples' skin colour and religion as unimportant and they transmitted these messages to their children. A number of mothers discussed how their children had friends from different races and faiths and how their children didn't see them as different. One British Indian mother named Deepa discussed how she felt it was important to teach her child about what it meant to be a good person and about the qualities that made a good friend.

*"My kids are very accepting of all. I said to them: 'Chinese, Black, White, whatever. It's the person. We all look different, it doesn't make any, you know. It's the person'. And I always teach them if someone is a good friend if they like you for what you are, that is important."*

Deepa, British Indian mother

Another mother Olivia spoke about her child's and her own friends.

*"A lot of our friends we have are mixed, different races. Mixed Spanish, French, Afro-Caribbean."*

Olivia, non-immigrant White mother

A few British Pakistani mothers discussed how their religious beliefs required them to hold egalitarianism beliefs and how they found it particularly important to socialise their children using such messages. Furthermore, some discussed using religion as a tool for the explanation of egalitarianism, to avoid getting into complicated

discussions about race and ethnicity. One practicing Muslim mother, Hira discussed that she chose to send her child to a state mixed school rather than a private faith school as she felt her child would learn more about the importance of treating individuals equally and other valuable life lessons.

*“With her I say, ‘Allah made everybody, everybody in sight of Allah is equal. We are not here to judge anybody’ . . . it’s always like be good to other people. Allah will be happy with you.”*

Hira, British Pakistani mother

Hughes et al. (2008) found that White mothers used this type of egalitarianism frequently, however sometimes a contradiction occurred between parents’ views and their actions in relation to egalitarianism. Although parents described the importance of the ideals of egalitarianism, such as mixed friendship patterns and diverse neighbourhoods for their children and themselves, in actuality they resided and interacted in ethnically homogenous areas reflecting a contradiction in their beliefs and practices. In my sample it was not clear whether mothers actually had friends from mixed groups, although most described that they did. It does seem likely, given all of the mothers lived in diverse neighbourhoods. Yet, some reported feeling that they would like to move away in the future to neighbourhoods where they felt there was more of a balance.

**Proactive conversation based egalitarianism.** The second way mothers used the egalitarianism parenting approach was in direct conversations with their children. These could be either proactive or reactive in nature. Proactive based conversations usually formed part of an egalitarianism based parenting agenda and represented more planned discussions. For example, one British Indian mother, Madhu discussed how she often had

discussions about equality with her child when her own friends from different backgrounds were around. Further, she actively encouraged her friends in this and often initiated discussions. Another British Pakistani mother, Shazia discussed how she saw it as her ‘responsibility’ to ensure that her child was exposed to multiculturalism and diversity. In this way her child would see that it was individuals’ qualities that were important and not the way they looked. This type of egalitarianism was less common than reactive based parenting.

*“That is my responsibility to make sure she has an idea of what multiculturalism is. I have a lot of friends who are not Muslim, who are not even Asian, who are Black, who are White, who are Catholic, who are Hindu, who are Sikh, and I make sure that she is aware of that, and she is aware that we live in a society which is not just Muslim. So it’s my responsibility and my husband’s as well, and I have taken that on and I understand I have that responsibility.”*

Shazia, British Pakistani mother

**Reactive conversation based egalitarianism.** Reactive egalitarian based conversations occurred in response to events which could be based on mothers and children witnessing discrimination, being victims of discrimination or through children being exposed to media around this topic. One non-immigrant White mother; Helen, discussed how she came to learn in a conversation with her child that one particular group was being targeted by other children at school. She discussed how she spoke to her child about standing up to racism and about how wrong it was to be intolerant because of where someone came from.

*“One of the things that the girls have told me at school, [is that] there’s quite a large Roma community now, and she said a lot of the children at school are really horrible. Calling them gypsies and things... so I said to [the child]. You really need to challenge people if they’re saying things like that.”*

Helen, non-immigrant White mother

Mothers also spoke about how they had egalitarianism based conversations with their children following gatherings with relatives, who had racist opinions about other groups. One example of this came from a discussion with a British Indian mother named Smita, who discussed her brother’s Islamophobic views. Smita disagreed with these views and spoke of how he often discussed these negative feelings in front of her daughter. She made an active effort to ensure her daughter did not pick up similar views and spoke to her about the equality of everyone.

*“I’ve got loads of Muslim friends and like I’ve got people saying, ‘You sure you can trust them mate?’, they make stupid snide remarks and I just say, ‘Look just don’t do that in front of my kids’. Even my brother does, and I sort of look at him, and like, he’s going through this anti-Muslim cycle, but . . . I would never be like that with my daughter.”*

Smita, British Indian mother

As discussed earlier, some ERS parenting could occur simultaneously. For example, egalitarianism sometimes occurred alongside preparation for bias. In this way, egalitarianism was used as a means of instilling self worth in children. This type of dual socialisation was found mainly in non-immigrant White families and British Pakistani families. It often occurred in direct response to a racist incident. An example of this

emerged in a discussion with a non-immigrant White mother named Tracy when she spoke of the racism experienced by her child and how she used egalitarianism based discussions to make him stronger and prepare him for any further bias he may encounter.

*“We’ve got a girl that lives on the top floor. Um she had some friends over and obviously they’re not White, and he was playing downstairs with some friends and they were calling them like ‘White rats’. And – the names...I just sit there and my attitude is: you’re no different, you are a different colour but you’re no different to us. So I do explain to him, you know, ‘I won’t have it. I won’t have racism at all’. I don’t agree with it, because I do believe we’re just all the same. It doesn’t matter where we’re from or who we are. We’re still human. We still have feelings, you know.”*

Tracy, non-immigrant White mother

Some mothers, who were silent about race, discussed doing so strategically as part of an egalitarianism parenting practice. One example was in the discussion with a British Pakistani mother named Saima. She felt that it was important not to highlight differences to her child as they did ‘not see colour’. She wanted to keep things this way.

*“Never. I don’t even want her to be aware of such a problem, because she’s never actually questioned why some people are black and why some people are white. We talk about colour of skin . . . but it’s just seen as a matter of fact. Because it’s not really an issue.”*

Saima, British Pakistani mother

Egalitarianism socialisation also occurred when mothers noted that their own children had been involved in discrimination. Mothers used discussions about the equality of all to help children understand intolerance was wrong. This type of parenting

was discussed only by non-immigrant White mothers. An example was found in the case of Anna.

*“The teacher rang up the other day saying that [the child] made a racist remark, and she didn’t know where she’d got it from...something like, ‘I don’t like playing with little Black girls’ ... I don’t know where she got that from, but um, and I was quite shocked . Well, I suppose, I can’t remember exactly what I said, but something along the lines of: ‘you know you can’t dislike somebody just because of the colour of their skin. Or because of what they believe in, or whatever’.”*

Anna, non-immigrant White mother

**Egalitarianism celebrating diversity.** The fourth type of egalitarian socialisation was found in many families and was proactive in nature. It occurred when mothers exposed their children to diverse practices, foods, cultural artefacts and other multicultural activities. Mothers spoke of the importance of learning about diversity, different religions and tolerance. One non-immigrant mother, Emily spoke about how she celebrated different festivals with her child and took her to different religious places of worship. Other families discussed how they actively celebrated different religious festivals. Madhu, an Indian mother spoke about this.

*“I think she’s aware, that in a class of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians she is, a Sikh, but we have a Christmas tree up in the front room so you know I don’t think that causes confusion. It’s just Sikhs are quite good about sort of embracing other religions and learning from them anyway. So I don’t find that a contradiction or anything. Some people would find that really weird.”*

Madhu, British Indian mother

*“I think it is important to be exposed to different cultures. Different races, different faiths so that you become respectful of other people .I would like to want him to know about Hinduism. I would want him to know about Judaism and Christianity and respect their faiths, festivals and things, because we were brought up like that.”*

Parveen, British Pakistani mother

Reactive discussion based approaches to egalitarianism, as well as proactive discussions and demonstrations of egalitarianism (when mothers expose their children to diversity) have also been reported in past literature (Hughes et al., 2008).

### **Why Egalitarianism?**

As a whole, egalitarian parenting was used as the main form of ethnic-racial socialisation by White families in the study. Indian families discussed using egalitarian parenting more often than Pakistani families (who used cultural socialisation the most). However, both Indian and Pakistani families used egalitarian socialisation messages alongside cultural socialisation ones. Interestingly, the use of egalitarian messages as a form of preparation for bias in children was found mainly in White and Pakistani families, and rarely discussed by Indian mothers. Perhaps this reflected the more positive experiences with multiculturalism (and less experiences of discrimination) that Indian families had. Aside from the use of egalitarian socialisation in this way, why else did mothers choose to use this form of socialisation?

A number of reasons were found. These included humanitarian reasons, as well as more practical ones. Mothers spoke of the importance of their children learning tolerance and being exposed to different cultures and religions and not having ‘a line of judgement.’ Diversity as harnessing creativity in children was also discussed. Further,

some mothers discussed that egalitarianism gave children understanding of how to function well in diverse neighbourhoods in their interactions with others. One British Indian mother, Shilpa described her personal experiences of being raised in a diverse neighbourhood as being positive as they made her a 'tougher' person. She wanted her child to also develop same 'rough edge,' which she developed through multiculturalism. A number of parents wanted to convey the message to their children to treat people respectfully. Others felt that by emphasising the equality of all, their own children would remain confident and proud about their own culture, religion and beliefs and would enable them to maintain a strong identity and strong self esteem.

The egalitarianism-based parenting approach was therefore a very dynamic one, often used by parents to help children understand their surrounding environment. The ethos behind it also seemed to be most in line with multicultural governmental policy. However, in the non-immigrant White group, a few mothers discussed how they found it difficult to parent this way. They felt that the communities in which their children were growing up were minority dominated and imbalanced. One mother named Emma spoke about how she actively decided to live in a diverse community, but that she only realised it was not truly diverse when her children started school.

*"It does concern me a little bit. Um, that there isn't more of a mixture in his school now. We went through a stage a couple of years ago with my older son, when he came home and said he didn't want blonde hair. Because everyone was dark . . . and he was the only one, so it was really like having the tide turn. And made you feel bad, because I've always said to them, it's great that they've got so many different friends from different backgrounds."*

Emma, non-immigrant White mother

A number of mothers also discussed how they found political correctness to be hindrance in effectively discussing issues relating to race with their children. They feared that their children may repeat things at school, which may be taken the wrong way. For these mothers, egalitarianism based parenting strategies sometimes diverged from reality.

*“[The child] said the other day . . . ‘Oh look at the Muslim in the long dress.’ And [the sibling] said, ‘Don’t say that, it’s not very nice!’ And I said, but it’s true . . . he’s just stating fact, being at his age, and if you saw a man in a kilt, you might say look at that Scottish man - in a skirt, but that doesn’t mean you know, that’s wrong, because it’s true. You know a lot of the time, I find in schools, if a child was heard saying that . . . they would probably say, ‘Oh that’s a bit wrong.’”*

Hannah, non-immigrant White mother

Past studies have echoed some of the underlying goals of egalitarianism, including instilling moral principles in children, as well as instrumentally ensuring that children have the tools to interact in a multicultural society (Hughes et al., 2008).

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

The present study is one of few to investigate egalitarianism based parenting of young children living in the UK. It thus contributes to understandings of ethnic-racial socialisation in contemporary multicultural societies. It was found that Indian, Pakistani and White families were encountering issues on race, ethnicity and culture on a frequent if not daily basis and that caregivers were using egalitarian practices extensively. This type of socialisation was found to be multifaceted, to occur across different contexts and have numerous functions. The frequency with which it was used was also different in

each family type. The highest incidence was reported in White families, while Pakistani mothers used this type of socialisation less often. Indian families lay between the two groups in terms of how much they used egalitarianism.

Going back to the initial questions that this chapter posed, the study has revealed much about how diversity influences parents and children in multicultural societies such as the UK. Encouraging children to emphasise individual qualities over ethnic and racial characteristics represented one type of strategy used by parents. The findings have important implications. They shed light on the socio-cultural adaptation of families in the study, highlighting that more families opted for integration strategies (such as egalitarianism) as opposed to separation parenting strategies (such as promotion of mistrust).

Interviews with mothers further revealed the broader environment, including schools and media also influenced this type of socialisation. Schools, in particular were seen to play a strong role in encouraging egalitarianism and many mothers spoke of this. Not only was school a place where children were exposed to diversity through other pupils but it was also a setting where children actively learned about other cultural practices and differences.

One mother named Arthi spoke about how the process of making her child's school a multicultural friendly environment had been a slow but successful one.

*“Like I said he has come up with, ‘oh he’s white and I’m not’, and they do talk about that at school. As far as White people are different. Where they come from in the world. And stuff like that, but it’s never been a case of ... oh that makes him lesser than me, or whatever. The school has come a long way in that respect...it hasn’t suddenly*

*become multi-cultural.... they've picked up on that, and they've mixed it ... I think very well from an early age. We all come from different places."*

Arthi, British Indian mother

Another mother, Emma discussed how she found that the zero tolerance policy towards racism held by schools and lessons in equality helped her as a parent.

*"But their school's very good. I think it's always good, sort of mixture of kids and if anything's heard by teachers, or anything's reported, they do pick it up very quickly which is great."*

Emma, non-immigrant White mother

It seems that state schools in the UK seem to opt for egalitarianism based socialisation which acts as a buffer for countering discrimination and can instil a sense of equality in children. Yet, how important is it for children to experience diversity in a classroom in order for them to truly appreciate and understand egalitarianism? While egalitarianism may be in line with the state multicultural view, in situations where more homogenous minority-majority neighbourhoods are developing in parts of the UK, the question of whether children will fully conceptualise the important messages of egalitarianism is an important one.

Related to this, is the question of how school curricula direct teachers to instruct pupils on such egalitarian issues. The use of an 'egalitarianism celebrating diversity' approach should result in the teaching of a wide range of cultures including the majority White culture. Yet, some non-immigrant White mothers felt that 'Englishness' was being sidelined in favour of the celebration of other cultures at schools. It is important that such feelings of discontent are recognised at an early stage and that schools and other

institutions provide a fair and equal celebration of all types of cultures. Discontent in such areas can sow the seeds for future inter-ethnic tension between groups. Overall, more understanding is needed about the positive and negative effects of particular types of socialisation at schools.

The use of egalitarianism as a form of preparation for bias socialisation strategy in White families was particularly interesting. In these families, mothers discussed feeling more 'ethicised' in highly multicultural environments. This finding has implications for the way researchers interpret the word 'White' and how much emphasis they place on this term as being a 'racial' rather than 'ethnic/cultural' term. Moreover, the type of ethnic and racial categories which surveys (as well as the census) allow participants to choose from, is important. When a group feels little identification with being a certain way, forcing them to choose a particular category may be distorting. It may give the impression that an individual has a more unified identity than actually is the case.

Past literature has found that different ethnic groups report different levels of importance of egalitarianism parenting. In Hughes et al. (2008), recent immigrant Chinese parents living in ethnically homogenous areas found it to be less important. The researchers suggested that their recent immigration status, the neighbourhood they lived in and the fact that egalitarianism may be an unfamiliar concept to Chinese mothers could be a reason for their finding. What about when mothers are born and raised in a host country such as Britain? My research suggests the Indian and Pakistani mothers are likely to use egalitarianism parenting more due to familiarity with the concept, past experiences with racism and an overall understanding of the strategic importance of promoting egalitarianism in their children. Non-immigrant white mothers are also likely to use this

parenting practice extensively, perhaps as an adaptive tool to cope with increasing diversity in communities where they are not a sizable majority. Although my findings represent only a small sample of mothers and children, it seems that egalitarianism acts as an important parenting strategy in families from all three groups, living in highly diverse parts of the UK.

There is a strong need for future research in this area. Particularly interesting would be a study comparing ethnic-racial socialisation in different areas of the UK, including ethnic minority-majority regions as well as ethnic majority regions, to examine whether the way in which parents speak to their children about race depends on surrounding environment. Also, more information is urgently needed on the protective effects of egalitarian socialisation in children and whether it always results in positive child outcomes.

The study additionally shows that it is important for policy makers and the media to take intra-group variability into account. Second generation families have been found to be very different to the immigrant generation before them. When recent reports such as the Cattle report (2001) speak about polarisation in educational and community institutions, places of work and of communities leading parallel lives, how true is this for second generation families? The present research seems to show that these families do not lead completely isolated lives

Regardless of ethnicity or place of birth, multiculturalism means families in the UK are encountering issues around race and ethnicity and culture on a frequent if not daily basis. The debate around multiculturalism has been highly politicised, received prominent media coverage, has been celebrated by some while heavily criticised by

others. Yet, diversity now makes up the fabric of British society, and is here to stay. Perhaps the acceptance of this fact and the investigation of how children and families learn to interact with one another and recognize concepts of culture, race and ethnicity are areas which should receive more focus. Understanding ethnic-racial socialisation practices such as egalitarianism across the life of an individual is an important way to achieve this.

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#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> This data has been gathered as part of multi-methods PhD research exploring parenting, parent-child relations, child psychological adjustment and parental social experiences of British Indian, British Pakistan and non-immigrant White families living in ethnically diverse regions of the UK (Iqbal, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> There were a total of 12 mothers from each group type (British Indian, British Pakistani and non-immigrant White). The 36 mothers ranged in demographic features and represented a broad spectrum of society and there was a balance in the range of socio-economic status between groups. The age of the child did not differ between groups and there were similar proportions of boys and girls in each group.

<sup>3</sup> The population statistics discussed here are taken mostly from data from the 2001 census which represents the most up to date data available (Connolly & White, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Based on results from the Census 2001, Office for National Statistics (Connolly & White, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> This was 1.8% of the total UK population in 2001 (1,053,000 people) (Connolly & White, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> This was 1.3% of the total UK population in 2001 (747, 285 people) (Connolly & White, 2006).

<sup>7</sup>Pseudonyms have been used throughout this chapter. Any identifying information has been removed or altered to protect the identity of participants and maintain confidentiality.