INSIDE THE BOX

ETHNIC CHOICE & ETHNIC CHANGE FOR MIXED PEOPLE IN THE UK

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ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
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ABOUT THE STUDY

What

A mixed-methods study asking: *Why do people with multiple ethnic ancestry make particular ethnic choices on forms and in their daily lives – including changing their reported ethnicity or lived ethnic identity?*

Why

- Important for understanding how we assume racialization and social hierarchy works and reproduces itself - e.g. 'Whitening' with success? *(Saperstein & Penney, 2012; Schwartzmann, 2007; Alba, 2016)*

- Important for understanding whether we are measuring what we think we are measuring – e.g. the implications of 'ethnic attrition' for inequalities work *(Emeka & Vallejo, 2011; Duncan & Trejo, 2011).*

COVERING TODAY

- **Briefly: quantitative findings – some are counterintuitive!**

- **Using qualitative methods to explain quantitative findings**

  - The value of a nested sampling approach
  - Context of data generation – cognitive questionnaire testing
  - Thematic analysis & discourse analysis
    - Sorting qual data (e.g. statements) by 'outcome variables' as 'cross-sectional'/'wide-form' analysis equivalent
    - Sorting outcomes by case characteristics
  - Comparative case selection approach
    - Selecting on case characteristics, e.g. 'most similar cases'
    - Narrative analysis as 'longitudinal' analysis equivalent
  - Pathway cases & Bayesian process tracing
    - Explorations of hypothesis-testing using single qualitative case studies / pathway cases
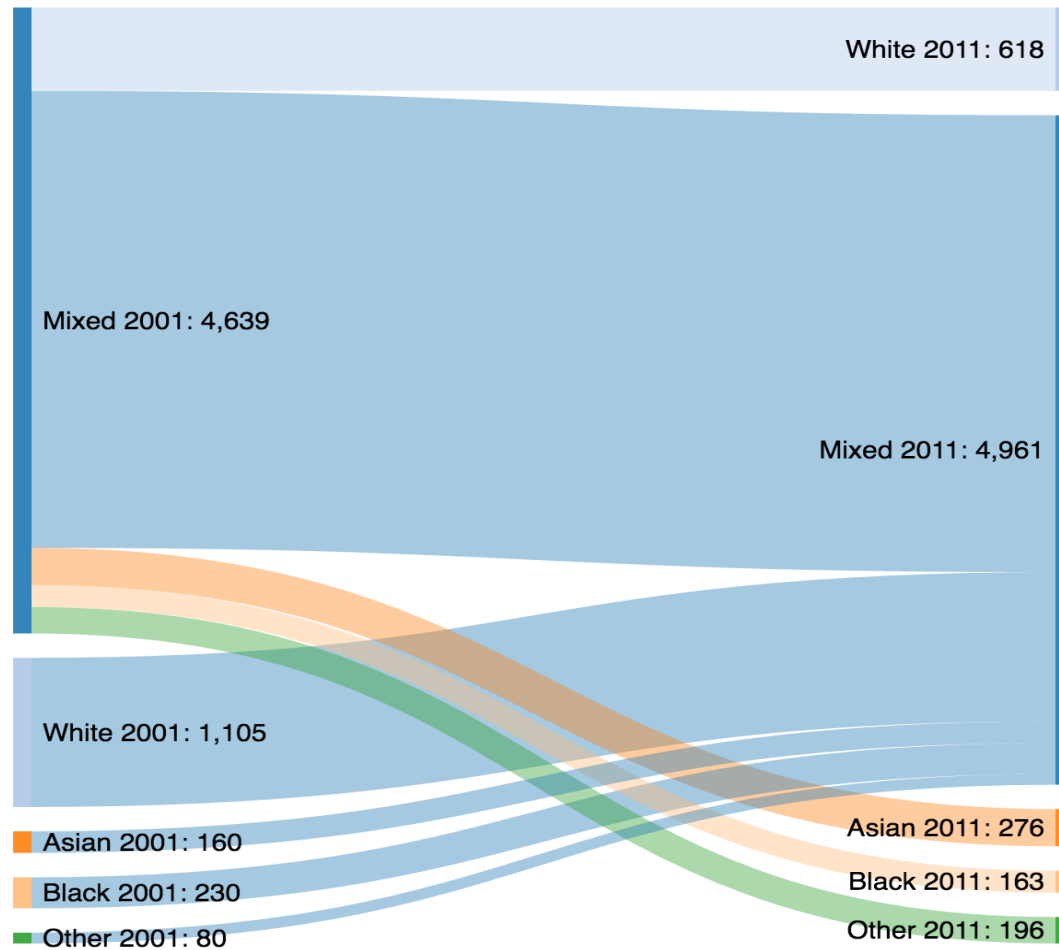
UK CONTEXT

- High rate of interethnic partnering (for Europe anyway).

- Direct ethnic question in England & Wales Census only since **1991**
    - Single-tick
    - High level of category 'instability'

- Limited mainstream & institutional reflection on legacy of colonial racism

- Little research on ethnic mobility, ethnic attrition, or the 'hidden' population with multiple ethnic ancestry
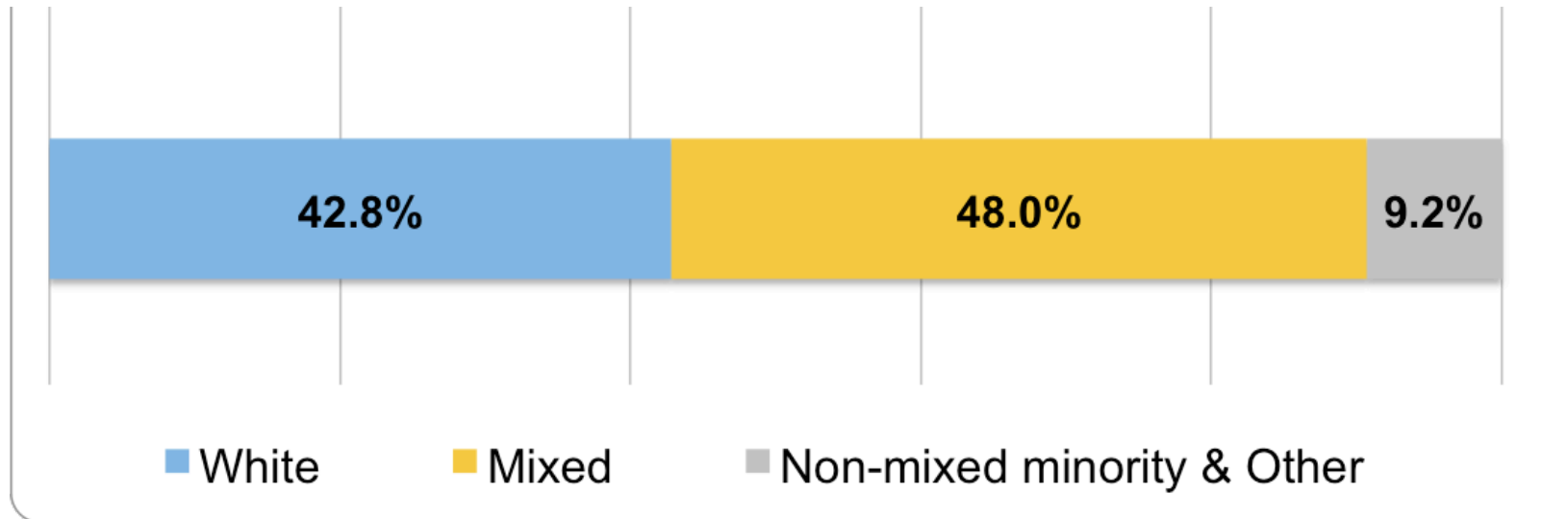

Couple with a baby, 2019
(photo: Getty)

UK CONTEXT

16 What is your ethnic group?

↻ Choose **one** section from A to E, then tick **one** box to best describe your ethnic group or background

A White

☐ English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
☐ Irish
☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
☐ Any other White background, write in

B Mixed/multiple ethnic groups

☐ White and Black Caribbean
☐ White and Black African
☐ White and Asian
☐ Any other Mixed/multiple ethnic background, write in

C Asian/Asian British

☐ Indian
☐ Pakistani
☐ Bangladeshi
☐ Chinese
☐ Any other Asian background, write in

D Black/African/Caribbean/Black British

☐ African
☐ Caribbean
☐ Any other Black/African/Caribbean background, write in

E Other ethnic group

☐ Arab
☐ Any other ethnic group, write in

Copyright: ONS

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

ETHNIC CHOICE: ALL POSSIBLE MIXED

| 42.8% | 48.0% | 9.2% |

■ White   ■ Mixed   ■ Non-mixed minority & Other

Ethnic choices of all likely respondents with multiple ethnic ancestry in Understanding Society Wave 1, 2009-2010 (based on reported ethnic group of respondent and parents), n=1337 weighted percentages

CONCEPTS OF ETHNIC CHOICE

1. Horizontal/relational choices between identities: 'Achieved' identity, acculturation theory, life courses & destabilisation *(Phinney 1990, Berry 1995, Carter et.al. 2009, Didham 2017)*

2. Vertical/hierarchical choices about status: Strategic/aspirational 'whitening', ('passing', ethnic attrition) vs 'mixed privilege theories *(Alba 2016, Emeka & Vallejo 2014, Townsend et.al 2012, Telles, 2014, Mok 2018)*

3. Contextual/ contingent choices: Identity as performative, interpretative *(Bhaba 1994, Ahmed 2014, Hall 1985, Ali 2003)*

DATA

ONS Longitudinal Study ('The LS')

- Longitudinally linked subsample of the Census for England and Wales

- Samples and links decennial Census data of all people born
  on four particular dates in the year.

- Includes linked life-events data (incl. births, deaths)

- UK's largest longitudinal study

- 'Mixed' ethnic group categories appeared in 2001 and 2011.

DATA

UK Household Longitudinal Study ("Understanding Society")

- Large-scale, high quality, stratified national probability sample with an ethnic minority 'boost'.

- Cross-sectional sample at Wave 1 used (2008), where both respondent ethnic group and respondent parents' ethnic group reported

- Individuals aged 16+

- 30 qualitative interviews mostly sampled from Understanding Society through a collaborative study with ISER – Essex University.

https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/understanding-society

Understanding Society
THE UK HOUSEHOLD LONGITUDINAL STUDY

WHY MIXED METHODS NEEDED?

Quantitative associations

- Constructing samples and descriptive typologies based on repeated measures, personal reported ethnic group, and parental ethnic group.
- Regression analysis of particular ethnic choices

Qualitative explanations

- Nested sampling of quantitative survey, to allow for targeted recruitment of these overlooked subgroups

- Systematic approach to comparing subgroup outcomes, and to comparative case selection

QUANTITATIVE ANALYIS

Ethnic choice:
(Understanding Society)

Descriptive typologies of 'all possible mixed' groups

Multinomial logistic regression exploiting cross-sectional measures of respondent ethnic group and parental ethnic group.

Dependent variable:
3-category ethnic choice: Mixed, White, non-mixed minority

Ethnic change:
(ONS LS data)

Binary and multinomial logistic regression exploiting repeated measures of ethnic group

Dependent variables:
M1. Dummy variable indicating any ethnic change

M2. 3-category ethnic choice: Stable mixed, moving towards white, moving towards minority

M3. 3-category ethnic choice: Stable mixed, moving into mixed, moving out of mixed

DESCRIPTIVE TYPOLOGY: 6 'MIXED' GROUPS

Closer to White	'Midway'	Closer to minority
White choice: 1 White parent	Mixed choice: 1 White parent	Mixed choice: 0 White parents
'Other ethnic group' choice: 1 White parent		Non-mixed Minority choice: 1 White parent
Mixed choice: 2 White parents		

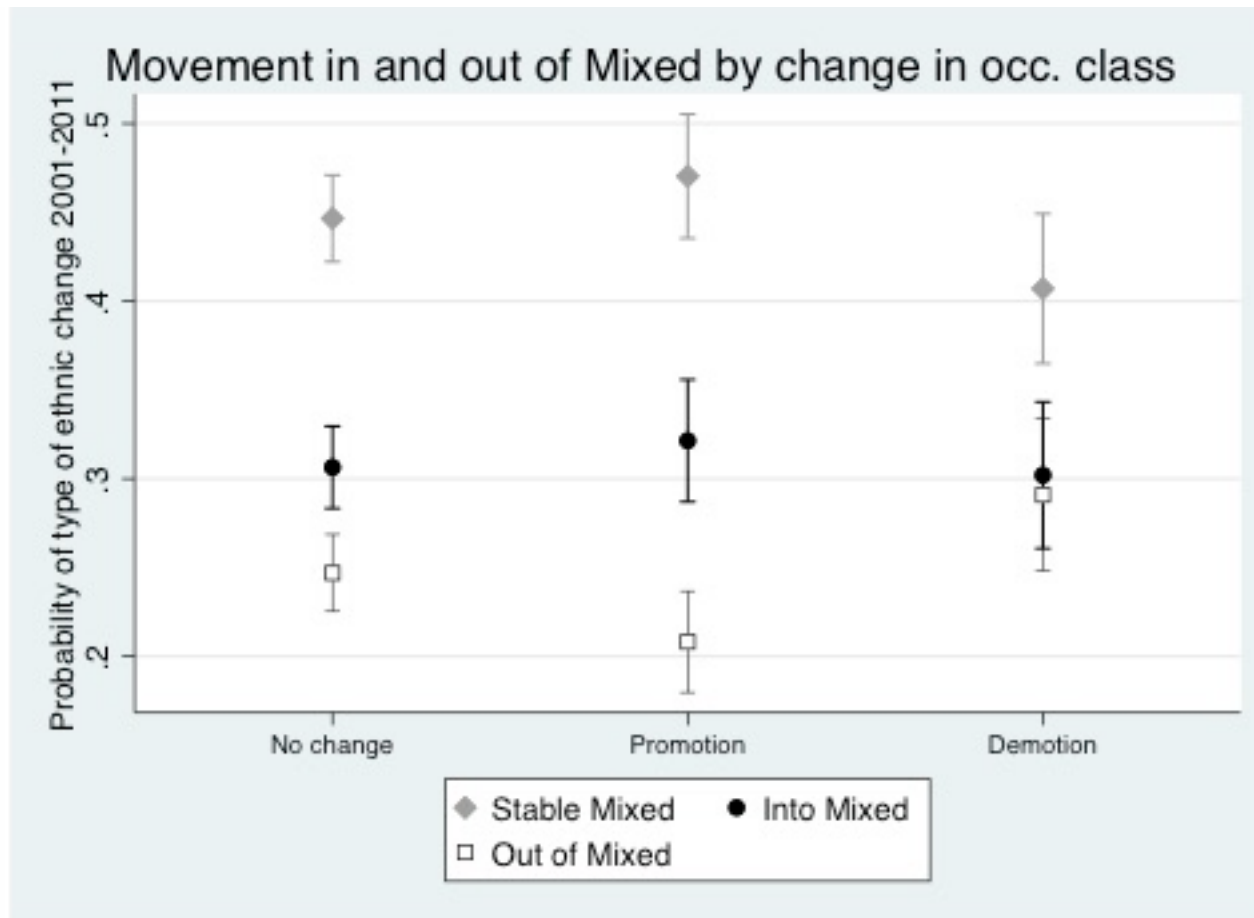*Source: Understanding Society*

ETHNIC CHOICE PREDICTORS FOR THE 'BIRACIAL' GROUPS

AMEs: All with a White & non-White parent
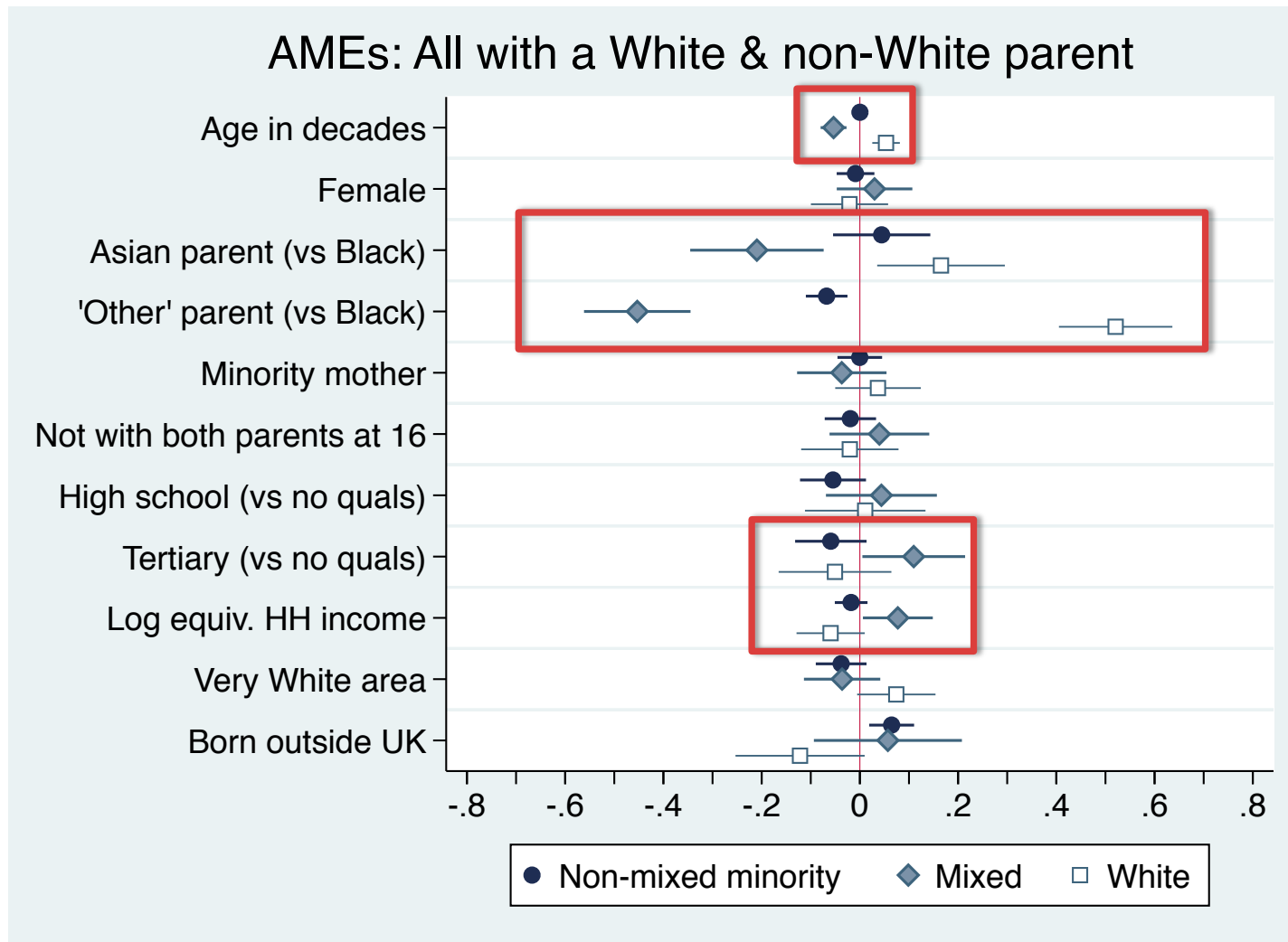
Source: Understanding Society

PREDICTORS OF ETHNIC CHANGE
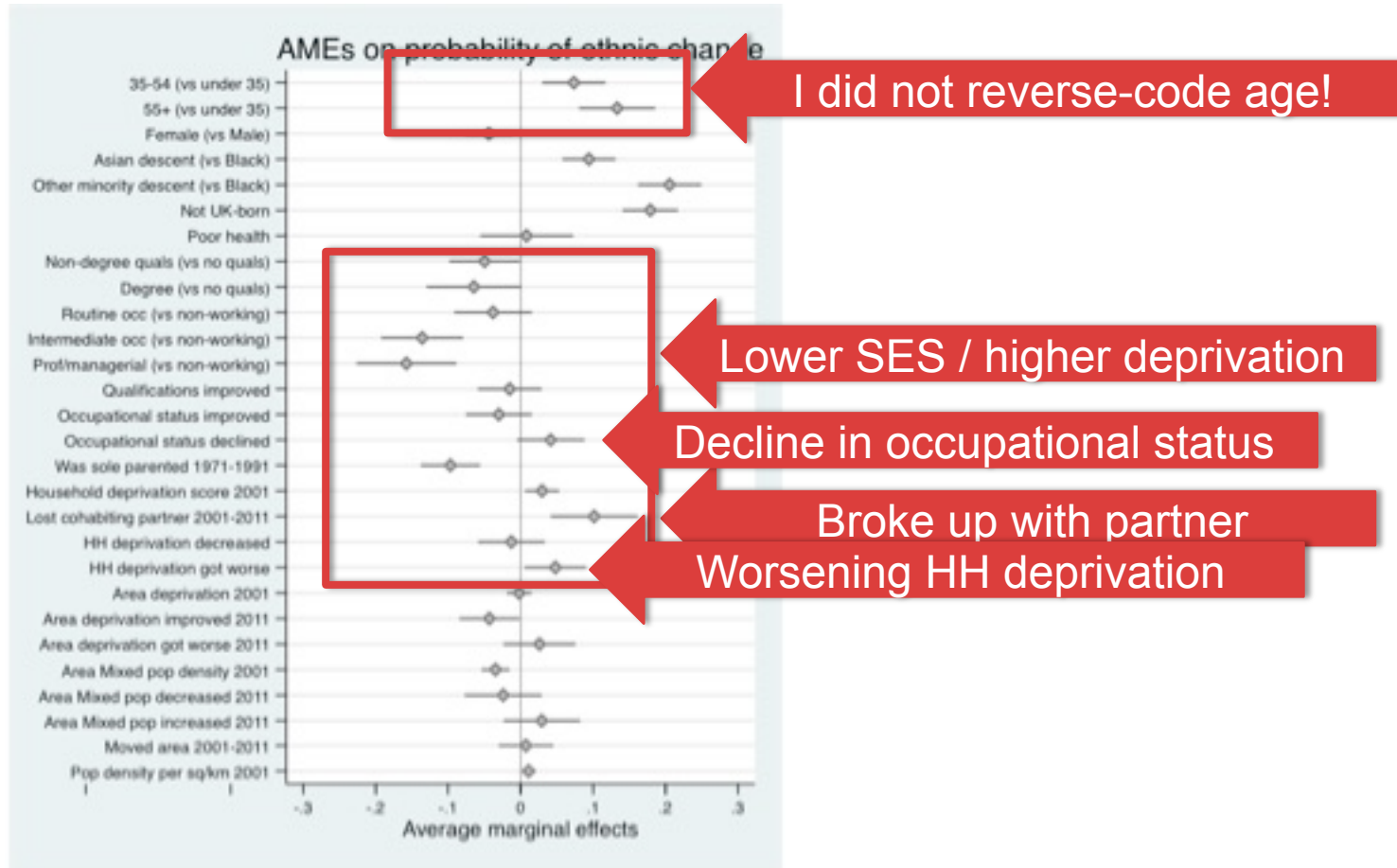
Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

PREDICTED 'DIRECTIONAL' CHANGE

Source: ONS Longitudinal Study

PREDICTED 'DIRECTIONAL' CHANGE
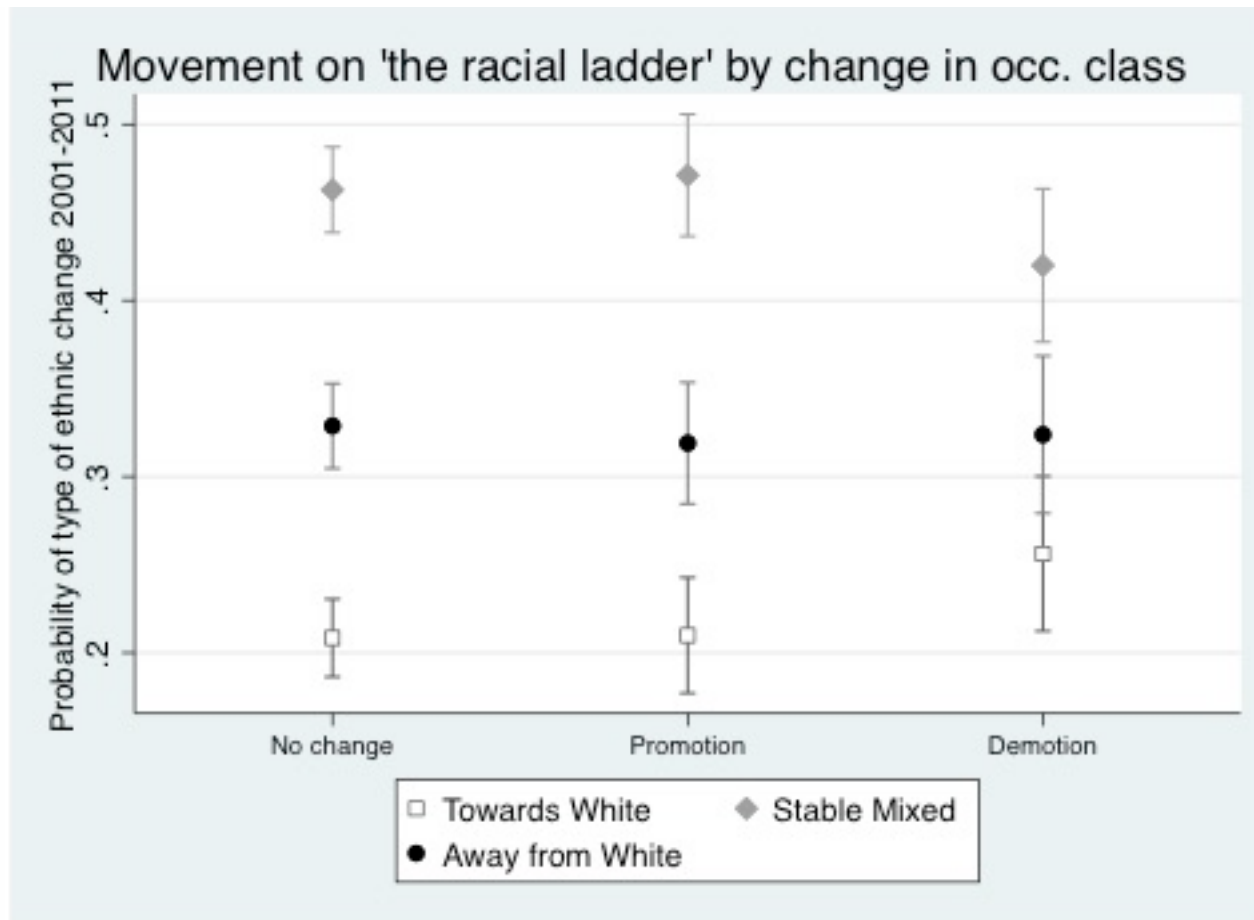
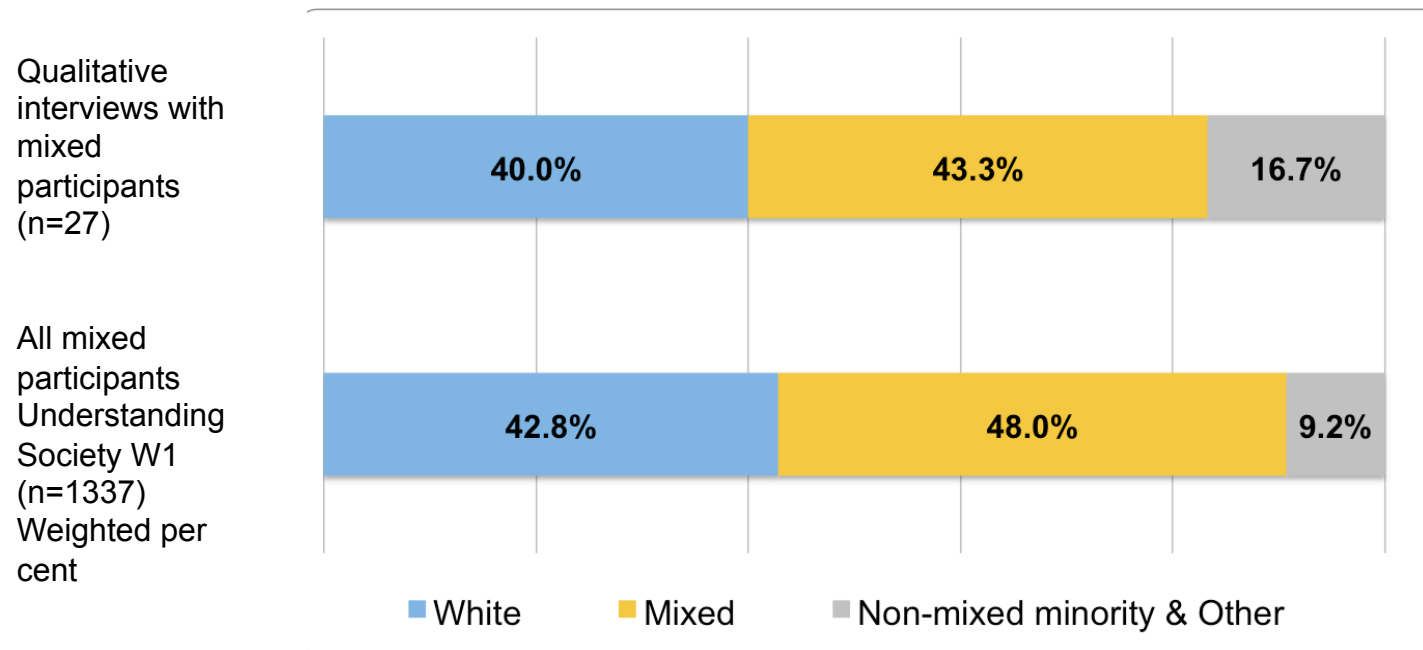*Source: ONS Longitudinal Study*

SEEKING EXPLANATIONS

Counterintuitive findings, no settled theories or evidence:

- **Older age/greater change in ethnic group 2001/2011**

  - ?????

- **Mixed privilege/low status White dynamic**

  - 'Mixed identity' as individualistic and postmaterialist?

  - 'Mixed identity' as community-based?

  - 'Mixed Britain' as hegemonic narrative?

  - Two-parent family, middle-class self-selection?

  - Conditions and location of white working class communities?

QUALITATIVE METHODS

- The value of a nested sampling approach
- Context of data generation – cognitive questionnaire testing
- Thematic analysis & discourse analysis
- Comparative case selection approach
- Pathway cases/process tracing

NESTED SAMPLING

Qualitative interviews with mixed participants (n=27)

All mixed participants Understanding Society W1 (n=1337) Weighted per cent

40.0%	43.3%	16.7%
42.8%	48.0%	9.2%

■ White   ■ Mixed   ■ Non-mixed minority & Other

"Interview the control!" (Hangartner, 2014)
Mono-ethnic minority comparator cases who had made White choices also recruited

COGNITIVE TESTING

SHOWCARD G2

White

1. British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish

2. Irish

3. Gypsy or Irish Traveller

4. Any other white background

Mixed

5. White and Black Caribbean

6. White and Black African

7. White and Asian

8. Any other mixed background

Asian or Asian British

9. Indian

10. Pakistani

11. Bangladeshi

12. Chinese

13. Any other Asian background

Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

14. Caribbean

15. African

16. Any other Black background

Other ethnic group

17. Arab

97. Any other ethnic group

COGNITIVE TESTING

Older age, ethnic change and lagged effects?

I go for Mixed.

You go straight there?

I go straight there, and then tick number 8, any other mixed background

If you look down to the next section, which is Asian or Asian British...

.

Chinese!
[...] maybe I'll have to change my outlook now and go for number 7 [Mixed White/ Asian]. But it never was an option.

- Gary, Chinese father, White mother, 50s

COGNITIVE TESTING

Wider questions: Do assumptions and power relations inherent in the ethnic question affect response?

- Census & admin data collection as both ideological and repressive state apparatus, 'interpellating' / racially constructing the subject (Althusser, 1971)

- Agency of respondent in encoding/re-encoding meaning (Hall, 1973)

- Measurement error as meaningful data

- Is reliability valid?

COGNITIVE TESTING

Avoidance, evasion, hierarchy & satisficing

Yeah, I do look at it now and think, my god, there's 20 options… it just goes on forever, and it's easier to just tick the first option…

Terrence, Indian/ White mother, White father, 50s

COGNITIVE TESTING

Avoidance, evasion, hierarchy & satisficing

When you look at [the 'White British' category], what do you see first? The British first or the White first?

One.

You see the 'one' first?

Yeah, number one.

Slim, Turkish mono-ethnic comparator case, 50s

COGNITIVE TESTING

Active re-encoding / resistance

> *Why do you think you would choose White British as a way of expressing that [ethnic group/race] doesn't matter?*

> *...[Y]ou're only asking the question to identify people that are non-White British. Do you know what I mean? So they're only looking for something, for somebody that's different?*

Dwayne, Black Caribbean father, White mother, 50s

COGNITIVE TESTING

Active re-encoding / resistance

> *I am offended when I see that the categories are all listed in the same order, in the same racist order of life. White always being the first category.*
>
> *[...] I have often ticked a Black box... If there is a mixed category I might go for mixed, but when they break down that category – White is always the dominant one again. So I refuse to tick that box.*

Maxine, Black Caribbean father, White mother, 50s

(THE ORDER)

The Commonwealth Memorial Gate by Buckingham Palace, and the 1991 ethnic question in the Census for England and Wales

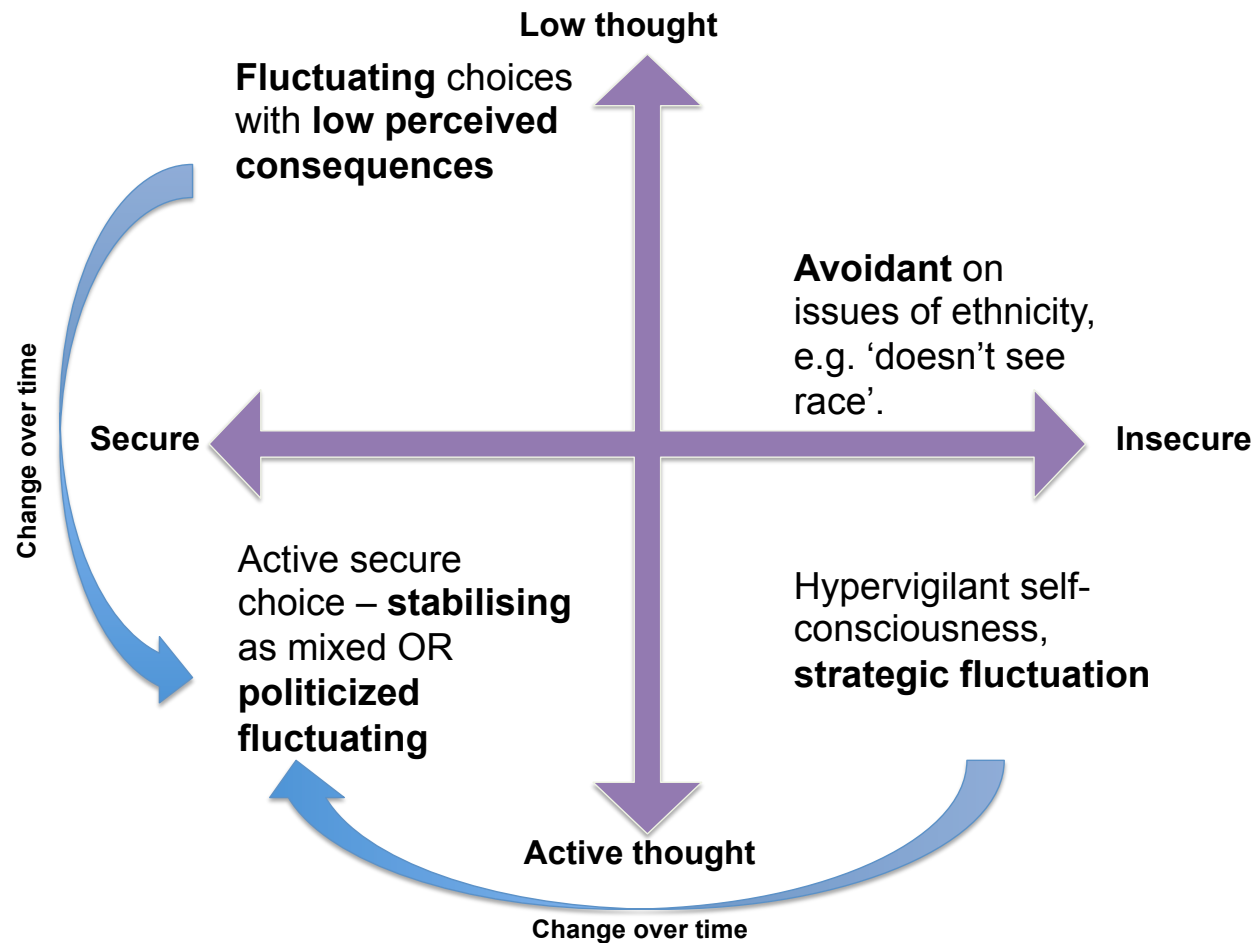# THEMATIC ANALYSIS: ETHNIC CHOICE

- **Purpose: Generate data and theory about mixed people's actual experiences and what it means to them, when they make different ethnic choices**

- **Approach:**

  - Semi-structured in-depth interviews, life-history narrative
  - Inductive/grounded approaches & discourse analysis in developing codeframe
  - Conventional thematic coding of transcripts
  - Case sorting and subgroup analysis
    - Sorting on Y/outcome (specific incidences in text of ethnic choices)
    - Mapping Y along thematic/discursive axes

THEMATIC ANALYSIS: ETHNIC CHOICE

Inclusion

Secure minority

Secure mixed

Secure White

Minority culture/ resources

White culture/ resources

Insecure White

Insecure mixed & minority

Exclusion

THEMATIC ANALYSIS: ETHNIC CHANGE

Low thought

Fluctuating choices with **low perceived consequences**

Avoidant on issues of ethnicity, e.g. 'doesn't see race'.

Change over time

Secure

Insecure

Active secure choice – **stabilising** as mixed OR **politicized fluctuating**

Hypervigilant self-consciousness, **strategic fluctuation**

Active thought

Change over time

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Typical themes & hypothesis generation

'Mixed privilege': Could higher SES be mediating…

- Maternal promotion of minority culture ✔
- Lack of experiences with severe racism as a child ✔
- High social trust/lack of racial self-consciousness ✔
- Grew up in multi-ethnic neighbourhood ✗

'Low status Whiteness': Could lower SES be mediating…

- Lack of contact with minority culture ✔
- Formative childhood experiences of racism ✔
- Hypervigilance to racial threats/low social trust ✔
- Grew up in White working-class neighbourhoods ✔

CASE SELECTION METHODS

Exploring hypotheses

- **Most similar cases**
  - Analogous to looking at effect of X1 on Y, controlling for X2

- **Diverse cases**
  - Analogous to looking at effects of extreme continuous values of X on Y

- **Deviant cases**
  - Atypical values of X test/extend theories

Gerring, John. 2006. Case Study Research: Principles and Practices. Cambridge University Press.

CASE SELECTION METHODS

Exploring hypotheses

- **Most similar cases – paired case studies differing on outcomes (ethnic choices/ethnic change pathways) and:**

  - Change in racial appearance with age
  - Quality of relationship with minority parent
  - Maternal education
  - Family's class status
  - Neighbourhood ethnic and class composition

MOST SIMILAR CASES

Mum, although she was White, was the one who made us understand about our culture, our history, our value generally. You know, she educated herself to educate us.

My parents were of the generation that were no use whatsoever, so I kind of had to educate myself. About really who I am? ...[My mum] used to get upset... She was just like, well, you know, this is who you are, so you're just going to have to get on with it really.

Maxine: Mother middle-class white

Rebecca: Mother working-class white

Both in 50s, Jamaican fathers, White mothers, 2-parent households, visibly Black-descended, White neighbourhoods when young, severe racism experienced, moved to Blacker neighbourhoods as young teens

MOST SIMILAR CASES

I ran into [more social contact with Black people] probably when I was about 14... I picked up two foot and went searching at speed for it. Because I wanted to be – around Black people.

...My first day at school in [the new area] and I walked in and all the Black children were sitting on one side of the classroom, and all the White children were sitting on the other side? And it was, it was terrifying for me. Because I didn't know – you know – I didn't know where to sit. […] I wasn't Black enough.

Maxine: Mother middle-class white

Rebecca: Mother working-class white

Both in 50s, Jamaican fathers, White mothers, 2-parent households, visibly Black-descended, White neighbourhoods when young, severe racism experienced, moved to Blacker neighbourhoods as young teens

MOST SIMILAR CASES

[My brother] would get some racist abuse when we were growing up I remember that... [I was] not overly impressed... for my brother and cousins ...who were darker-skinned it's always been more of an issue.

I was completely unaware of [racism] until I was in my early 20s... in the last few years, things seemed to have really stepped up... about a year ago [my mum] had somebody cycle past her and spit at her in the street for the first time in her entire life.

Larry: Working-class multi-ethnic neighbourhood, 40s

Edward: Middle class white neighbourhood, 30s

Both with white appearance, minority mother. Minority culture confined to home. Both white-identified when young, and made Mixed choices when older

MOST SIMILAR CASES

I would tick mixed race now... for medical reasons...My sister was very ill ...and with her being mixed race she couldn't find a donor. [And] a job application or something like that, maybe it would actually go in my favour.

I started, em, kind of being more upfront about it several years ago, when I sort of got into ...social justice awareness stuff, and I started thinking, you know maybe, maybe it is important to be, to make it visible that hey, I am the son of an immigrant.

Larry: Working-class multi-ethnic neighbourhood, 40s

Edward: Middle class white neighbourhood, 30s

Both with white appearance, minority mother. Minority culture confined to home. Both white-identified when young, and made Mixed choices when older

DEVIANT CASES

Turkish people – they're White… You're either White or you're Black …Is there any other colours? [laughs] I know some people would say Chinese are yellow, but that's stupid. You're either White or you're Black.

I guess people did know. At first to look at me they wouldn't know, because I'm White. I'm White, I just look English. I've got a brother …he's uh – uh – uh, darker skinned than I am so it's more apparent... And uh, I got quite a few cousins and stuff and most of them as well, they're darker skinned as well.

Slim, two Turkish parents, 50s

Larry, Bangladeshi/White mother, White father, 40s

Both middle-aged, working class White-identified. Good relationships with minority mother & siblings/family, raised & still living in multi-ethnic working class neighbourhoods

CASE SELECTION METHODS

Testing hypotheses

- **Pathway cases (Gerring, 2006)**
    - Typical case of X1 on Y, but where Z (background factors) are more likely to negatively bias H

- **Informal Bayesian process-tracing (Fairfield & Charman, 2015)**
    - Single case study. Pretend you are a detective.
    - "updating intuitively" about which hypothesis is most plausible, going from your prior odds to updated posterior odds.

PATHWAY CASE

Assumes **multiple paths** to Y. Shows which of the 'typical case' X are *sufficient but not necessary for Y*.

H0: Looking White (a typical X) is necessary for making secure White British choices

H1: Visible minorities make secure White British choices

> *I don't mind at all, even if someone says Indian is my nationality, I was born there, I was, but I'm a UK naturalised subject, my passport British and my citizen[ship] British, I'm proud of both [chuckles].*

Moe, Two Indian parents, reported White British at Understanding Society Wave 1

PATHWAY CASE

H0: Being white-passing (a typical X) is necessary for making secure White British choices

Characteristic	Necessary	Sufficient
White-passing	No	No
Feeling of inclusion within British national 'mainstream' culture	Yes	Yes
Emotional/physical distance from minority parent	No	No
Distance from traditional minority community	Yes	No

PROCESS TRACING

Laila had an Algerian father and White mother. She reported as 'Any other ethnic group' in Wave 1 of Understanding Society (2009). At interview (2017) she reported as White British, and stated that she had always done so. Why the contrast?

- **H0: The 'Any other ethnic group' entry was the result of the actions of the survey-taker**

  - H0a: Input error
  - H0b: Arbitrarily assigned

- **H1: Laila made the 'Any other ethnic group' choice at Wave 1**

  - H1a: Laila is denying her previous choice
  - H1b: Laila can't remember her previous choice

PROCESS TRACING

H0: The 'Any other ethnic group' entry was the result of the actions of the survey-taker (either their input/coding error or an arbitrary decision)

Priors: Evidence for H0
Laila says she would definitely have put White British

Evidence for/against H0a - input error

- 'Any other ethnic group' is code 97, very difficult to miscode as input error

Evidence for/against H0b - arbitrary assignment

- Personal ethnic question comes before parental ethnic question. Survey-taker would not have gathered information about Laila being mixed beforehand

- From her statements, Laila's mixed descent slightly visible but not clearly attributable

- The appropriate assignation would have been code for Mixed/Other even if based on information Laila provided before or after

PROCESS TRACING

H1: Laila made the 'Any other ethnic group' choice at Wave 1

Priors: Evidence for H1

It's in the dataset

Evidence for/against H1a – Laila is denying previous choices

- Coincides with substantial changes in relationship with father and brother

- Hypervigilance to Islamophobic threats following terrorist attacks

- Inconsistency in her descriptions of her physical appearance/white-passing (no-one notices vs she is often asked about her background)

- Inconsistency in her description of being comfortable/uncomfortable about being asked about her background

- Strong links and affection towards Algerian culture identity in Wave 1 dataset

PROCESS TRACING

H1: Laila made the 'Any other ethnic group' choice at Wave 1

Evidence for/against H1b – **Laila does not remember previous choices**

- Wave 1 was a long time ago

- A lot of life events and changing relationships in this time

- Signs of low mood, low function/depression in linked dataset

- Hypervigilance to Islamophobic threats following terrorist attacks

- Inconsistency in her descriptions of her physical appearance/white-passing (no-one notices vs she is often asked about her background)

- Inconsistency in her description of being comfortable/uncomfortable about being asked about her background

- *Ongoing* fond remembrances of warm relationship with Algerian family and household as a child, and ongoing good relationships with other relatives

- Asked if she would get in 'trouble' if she changed to 'Mixed'

CONCLUSIONS

- **'Aspirational' whitening among those with low/worsening status?**

    - Seeking inclusion/access to protective resources of whiteness
    - Greater environmental threat-perception / risks of being different
    - Working class discourses of race
    - 'Aspiring' to protection and security

- **'Mixed privilege'?**

    - Secure inclusive experiences & access to resources – material or cultural - provide resilience to experiences of racism
    - Individualistic/postmaterialist or community-based and aspiring to hegemonic status? Elements of both.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

QUESTIONS?

Working papers here:
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