'Troubling race. Using Judith Butler's work to think about racialised bodies and selves'

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First the usual disclaimers, only I have to admit they're quite serious. I'm afraid I'm not here to talk about development or to speak directly to queer theory or queer politics, let alone contribute to the very worthwhile and fascinating project of bringing the two together. But I hope that what I am going to talk about raises issues that are relevant to that project.

What I am going to talk about is work that I am doing for my DPhil which is concerned with white subjectivities and how they are racialised. This research came largely from my reading of black feminist challenges to white feminists in the 1980s that criticised theory and practice produced by white feminists which, whilst it laid claim to inclusion and universal 'sisterhood', actually excluded and ignored the experience of black women. Along with lesbian and working class feminists, black feminists criticised white, middle-class, heterosexual feminists for generalising from their own particular experience to all women. The importance of recognising and analysing different experiences and positions was stressed.

In addition to calling attention to and researching the different position of black women, black feminists called on their white colleagues to face up to their own racism, the racist implications of their work and the fact that they are not racially neutral, but are positioned as white. My research on whiteness is an attempt to respond to this rather than to reassert the centrality or dominance of whiteness. By placing white experience and discourses as objects of study, dominance is undermined. Or so the idea goes.

I set out in my research to interview white women as white and to try to examine how their experience and subjectivities could be understood as racialised. This had not often been done, but was following notably in the example of Ruth Frankenberg who had done a qualitative study in the US - called White Women Race Matters. I set out to interview white mothers of pre- and primary school age children living in two different areas of London. I chose to interview mothers because I anticipated that asking white women directly what they think about race and their own whiteness would not be very productive as a line of questioning. Whereas asking women about their children, how they bring them up, what matters to them in education, in schools, in their children's social life and whether issues of race class and gender come up for them would be more productive. I think this approach has largely been successful. I will use some material from the interviews, but will not go into any more detail about the fieldwork site or method - you can always ask about this later.

A central question for the paper is how to theorise or analyse race itself. What does it mean to say that I want to understand racialised subjectivities and in particular those that

are positioned as white? What is race and racialisation? 'Race' as a concept has been scientifically, politically and philosophically repudiated. Biologically speaking, it is a meaningless concept. Yet it continues to have a profound impact on people's lives. In Britain at least, it effects educational outcomes, job prospects, relations with the police and justice system, political participation, safety on the street and in homes and personal relations. How can this paradox be understood and dealt with? How can we acknowledge and analyse the salience of race in people's lives without re-endowing the concept itself with "respectability" and essential meaning? How can I examine the experience of people as racialised without adhering to concepts produced by racist ideologies?

In order to try to resolve this problem I have turned to the work of Judith Butler to see what she has to offer the analysis of race and identity.[1] To some extent, what I am attempting is a 'translation' Judith Butler's work to the analysis of race. Whilst this is something that I argue Butler would herself advocate, translations are never straightforward, as this paper will illustrate. Race and gender are not necessarily comparable concepts and indeed they intersect and are often mutually constitutive. At the same time as making this theoretical move, I want to keep in the mind's eye, those lives in which 'race' and racialised identities have had a profound impact. In fact my thesis is trying to argue for further examination of the processes of racialisation on lives which are often considered to be untouched or 'unblemished' by race - that of people positioned as white.

I will begin by drawing out the implications of Butler's work for my research. I will then go on to trace how some of the questions raised by this theoretical approach emerged in the interviews I undertook for my fieldwork.

Butler's book *Gender Trouble* is concerned with examining how gender categories are produced by discursive regimes rather than being ontological categories. For Butler, the categories of man, woman, heterosexual, homosexual are not essential or inherent characteristics but are the "effects of a specific formulation of power" (pix). Butler is concerned with the ways in which the body (and therefore the experience of the body) are discursively constructed. Butler grants neither sex nor gender a material 'reality' (which is not to say that there is no material body, only that it is not experienced prior to or outside of discourse). The construction of gender (and thereby the establishment of the norms of sexual difference) is achieved through the continual reiteration and 'performance' of particular discourses. Butler writes *"gender proves to be performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed .... There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender ... gender is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' which are said to be its results"* (Butler 1990, p24-25).

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[1]I am not alone in asking this. For example in 1996 Stuart Hall pointed to the importance of Butler in bringing together the discursive and psychic elements of identification and argues that these work needs to be developed "if the constitution of subjects in and through the normalizing regulatory effects of racial discourse is to acquire the theoretical development hitherto reserved for gender and sexuality" (Hall 1996).

What is the impact of racialising this formulation? Can we do so without reserving primacy for sexual difference. Butler points out that the primacy given to sexual difference is what marks psychoanalytic feminism as white. She claims that the assumption in much white feminism is "not only that sexual difference is more fundamental, but that there is a relationship called 'sexual difference' that is itself unmarked by race" (Butler, 1993, p181) The question then becomes one of tracing how 'white', 'black' or 'brown' bodies are produced. And Butler's formulation on gender would become: *"race proves to be performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, race is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed .... There is no racial identity behind the expressions of race ... race is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' which are said to be its results".*

This formulation leads to various questions: What does it mean for race to be performative? What kind of "doing" and "expressions" does this involve? What processes of subjection and identification are being proposed? What are the possibilities for agency within discourses or in creating new discourses?

So, how to understand racialised bodies. Butler contends that bodies are materialised as 'sexed' through the performative repetition of norms. By performative, Butler means that sex is reproduced in a process of constant re-citation of norms. She argues that through this citation of norms "the 'one' becomes viable" and a body is qualified "for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (Butler 1993, p2). This is not merely a matter of social regulation, but involves psychic processes.

Butler's argument is that, from the moment they are born individuals are produced as subjects through a process of gendering:

> "Consider the medical interpellation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or a 'he', and in that naming, the girl is 'girled' brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that 'girling' of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm"
> (Butler 1993, p8).

This process not only shapes how individuals enter into society but also their own psychic processes - their desires and impulses. In this process, norms of heteronormativity are also established. Girls and boys are produced who achieve acceptability through desiring the opposite sex. This norm is established by the creation of those 'abject subjects' who define that which the subjects are not - homosexuals. Butler argues that homosexuality

forms what she calls the 'constitutive outside' to heterosexuality and is essential in defining the boundary of what lies within the position of the norm.

But just as one cannot be a person without being a boy or a girl, one cannot be a person without having a, similarly embodied, racial identification. Indeed one is a white/black/Asian/mixed-race girl or boy. The gendering is racialised and the racing is gendered, and sexualities are raced.

Just as it is the first question that people often ask about a new-born baby - 'is it a girl or a boy?', in a similar way, there is often heightened pre-birth concern and curiosity about what 'colour' the child of a 'mixed-race' parentage will be. The question of 'who the baby takes after' has added piquancy. This concern to trace parentage or to race will continue throughout a person's life as racialised norms are repeatedly invoked, as Linda Martin Alcoff describes in the following extract:

> "When mythic bloodlines which are thought to determine identity fail to match the visible markers used by identity discourses to signify race, one often encounters these odd responses by acquaintances announcing with arrogant certainty 'But you don't look like...' or then retreating to a measured acknowledgement 'Now that you mention it, I can sort of see ...' to feel one's face studied with great seriousness, not for its (hoped for) character lines, or its distinctiveness, but for its telltale racial trace, can be a particularly unsettling experience"
> (Martin Alcoff 1999, p31).

Therefore we need to ask how are subjects constructed not just through the reiteration of gendered norms but also racialised ones. How are gendered norms racialised? How are the psychic processes of subjection racialised? Can one talk of the regulatory apparatus of whiteness (or, as Stuart Hall calls it 'compulsive Eurocentrism' (Hall 1996, p16)) as well as that of heterosexuality? And importantly for my purposes, how can we theorise and research this?

For Butler, regulatory schemas function as "historically revisable criteria or intelligibility which produce and vanquish bodies that matter" (Butler 1993, p14). They achieve their power through citation. This repeated, compulsive citation of the norm is what Butler terms performativity. But what does it mean to say that race is performative? What kind of analysis would this produce? In *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler described gender as "a repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 1990, p33). This work initially prompted many studies which embraced the idea of "stylised" performance and in particular focused on the subversive potentials of drag and 'gender bending' (refs). It would be possible to repeat these kinds of analysis for race. To examine ways in which race can be 'acted up'. The comedian/interviewer 'Ali G' immediately springs to mind as someone who is performing 'drag' in race terms and at times the boxer Chris Eubank seems to be performing a similar 'bending' of race.

Another area for study could be the many different ways in which 'passing' occurs across racialised boundaries. However, in her second book, Judith Butler sought to clarify her theorisation of performativity to question those accounts which had suggested a free or voluntaristic notion. *"Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity"* (Butler 1993, p95). One does not wake up each morning and decide which race or gender to be - it is not an arena of free play but is shaped by the "reiterative power of discourse" (Butler 1993, p2).

So, how does this work for race? How are racialised subjects produced, regulated and constrained. I would argue that this would lead us to go beyond the prevailing, much cited orthodoxy that race has no biological or 'scientific' basis. This approach tends to rehearse (and therefore risk legitimising) different categories of colour and physiognomy whilst claiming at the same time to downplay their significance. Instead, I would argue that it is necessary to further deconstruct the perceptual practices on which racial theories are built. Why do we see, notice, act upon skin colour and certain other visible physical features and not others. These ways of seeing are not natural, but learnt. As Paul Gilroy points out "when it comes to the visualisation of 'race', a great deal of fine tuning has been required". It is through the reiteration of these perceptual practices that racialised performativity occurs and racialised subjectivity produced. Therefore, perceived and particularly visual differences are key signifiers.

It is clear that who is visibly 'black' or 'white' changes over time and in different contexts. There have recently been several books, such as Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*, which explore historically the contested and changing racial positioning, and allied visual reinscription of, certain ethnic or national groups. The Irish Jews to name but two have been both visibly different from, and the same as, whites at different times and these visual differences have been ascribed to both biological and cultural roots. Equally, some black people may 'pass' for white, but may still be constructed as black. As these example indicates, despite the function of the visible as a key signifier of race, the visibility of race is not always clear or evident. There are unsettling and unclear borderlands between racial identifications, just as queer studies has shown some of the unsettling and unclear borderlands between genders. Unsettling to dominant discourses, that is.

As race is regulated through regimes of perceptions, these fields of the visual and visibility function in different ways according to how subjects are positioned in dominant discourses. Perceptual schemas become a modality of power. An example of this would be the widespread notion in the emerging field of 'white studies' that whiteness maintains its power through its invisibility. Many writers take Richard Dyer's early statement as a starting point: "White power secures its dominance by seeming not to be anything in particular" (Dyer 1988, p44). Yet I would argue that it is only from a standpoint of dominance that whiteness looks invisible, and only because white people want it to be so. An interview by the journalist Simon Hattenstone illustrates this point. He was talking

with the African-American actor Samuel L. Jackson about how unlike black characters, white characters in films are not defined by their whiteness, they just 'happen to be white', Samuel L. Jackson's response is striking: Hattenstone writes that "Jackson laughs so loud that, when I'm playing back the tape on headphones a colleague jumps. 'That's what *you* think. You just dismiss the fact they're white'". Thus invisibility of whiteness is, at least in part, a fantasy in the minds of white people.

Visibility or invisibility are mediated by power. The consequences of either depends on one's position within normative regimes. This is illustrated by the many different ways in which visibility and invisibility is written about. As Dyer and others writing about whiteness point out, racial invisibility can potentially ensure the endurance of a position of privilege and power. While whiteness remains unmarked, it stays unchallenged. This means that white people are visible as individuals, but unmarked as a racial group - at least to themselves and within normative discourses. But invisibility can also mean marginalisation - for example the writer Yasmin Alibhai-Brown refers to the "growing invisibility of Asians" in the media industry (Alibhai-Brown 1998), or one might discuss the invisibility of race of black people in white people's accounts. This raises the question of the relationship to normative discourses and links to Butler's discussion of subject and abject. For Butler, the normative position of subject is defined by, and dependant for its position on what is excluded, its 'constitutive outside'. The subject comes into being through a process of identifications formed through the "repudiation which produces a domain of abjection, a repudiation without which the subject cannot emerge" (Butler 1993, p3). In terms of the heterosexual norm, the other is the homosexual. However this is not the only 'abjected' position. For instance Butler discussed the representation of Turkish refugees in the German press:

"But no Turk has a complex family or psychological history that Die Zeit ever writes about, or at least not that I have seen in my reading of this material. So, we get a kind of differential production of the human or a differential materialization of the human. And we also get, I think, a production of the abject. So, it is not as if the unthinkable, the unliveable, the unintelligible has no discursive life; it does have one. It just lives within discourse as the radically uninterrogated and as the shadowy contentless figure for something that is not yet made real." (Costera Meijer and Prins 1998, p281)

Visibility and invisibility also raise the question of the acts of seeing and looking. It is this question which I will examine through analysis of some of the interview material.

Patricia Williams (Williams 1997) writes of the tensions around race, the 'forbidden gaze' of race and what one is are 'cultured to see or not see'. To see or not to see 'race' or difference is a political act and one which, as the interview material shows is riven with doubts and confusion fro the white people I interviewed. In the interviews I undertook for the research, the issue of 'seeing' race or colour came up when I asked the mothers whether they thought their children (both pre-school and primary school age) had any understanding of 'race'. This question was designed to prompt the women to talk in a

way which would illuminate their own thinking on race. At the same time, I also asked similar questions about class and gender.

Race is a sensitive issue for white people to talk about. It is a modern taboo. When I started the pilot interviews for this research, I soon discovered the urgent need for a good external microphone. The microphone on the tape recorder would pick up much of what was said in the interviews, but often the introduction of the subject of race would cause a sudden drop in volume and what the interviewee said would be lost. This was not something that I noticed at the time but became frustratingly clear when I played back the tape afterwards. Dropping the volume when one speaks suggests a sensitive topic has been introduced, which has to be dealt with carefully and where one would not want to be misunderstood or overheard. It also creates a conspiratorial atmosphere and suggests a relationship of trust where confidences are shared. The dropped volume when talking about race indicates the sensitivity of the subject. White people (apart from those espousing extreme racist white power positions) are generally anxious not to be seen as racist - hence the cliched coupling of a prejudicial or racialised statement with 'I'm not a racist but...'. The simplest way not to appear racist is to avoid talking about race altogether. This was a strong instinct for many interviewees. They did not refuse to talk about race, but it was not a topic of choice. Perhaps due to my hesitancy to introduce what I knew was a sensitive topic too directly, I would often introduce questions about race in a way in which they were coupled with either class or gender or even both. For instance 'do issues of race or class ever come up with your children'. This 'weak' form of questioning gave an exit route for those who wanted to avoid talking about race and it was very rare for someone to choose to respond to the race element of the question first.

In the following example, is an illustration of the difficulty of maintaining race as a topic of conversation

BB "So it must, I mean the kind of racial mix that you grew up with must be very different from here?"
Helen "Totally, absolutely, completely different, yeah. Where I live, I actually went to a school which was 20 miles away from where I lived. Which is another thing I don't want my children to have. I want them to go to a school that's round the corner and to be able to see their friends after school. For me that just wasn't an option. I used to catch three buses to get to school, every morning. I used to leave home at 20 past 7 to get to school at quarter to 9, from the age of 11. It's just too much, I wouldn't want my children ... , and all my friends lived miles a way, so as I said it was just staying over, it was a bigger deal than just going for tea, I missed out on that completely. And in the summer, a lot of the time I was just on my own. My brother and sister are a lot older than me, so in a way I was an only child. And the racial mix was completely ... my parents I would say had become middle-class, but say for example, both my grandparents were miners. One was a lead miner and one was a coal miner and very much working class. They decided that they didn't want their own children from fairly enormous families to become miners. And so they moved from, down to the valley, if you like and the whole family clubbed together and bought a farm."

(Helen, Interview 12)

Helen appears initially to answer the question about race directly and even emphatically. But she finds it difficult to sustain a discussion on race and goes on to explain other features of her childhood environment and geography. Nonetheless, race is implicated in her account of her family's history and class position. She is describing a social geography which *is* raced, in that it is almost completely, but not entirely, white. However, Helen cannot quite find the words to say this directly, she approaches the question "And the race mix was completely..." but loses courage at the final hurdle and diverts away from it. The most interesting feature of her childhood for Helen is its classed nature. Class, geography and family all have more immediate relevance and interest to her than race. They are also easier to talk about. This extract illustrates both the seeming irrelevance of race to white lives and some of the reluctance on the part of some white people to talk about race. Toni Morrison has also written about this delicacy among white American literary critics:

"The habit of ignoring race is understood to be a graceful, even generous liberal gesture. To notice is to recognise an already discredited difference. To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body. According to this logic, every well bred instinct argues *against* noticing and forecloses adult discourse"
(Morrison 1992, p9-10)

In contrast to their discussions on race, many of the interviewees gave lengthy responses to questions about their children's gender development and their understanding of gender differences. In the vast majority of cases, the interviewees stated that they wanted to bring up their children 'equally' or without reference to gender stereotypes and that to this end they endeavoured to buy a wide range of toys and books for their children to play with. The mothers also almost all stated that these attempts were futile and, in the face of girls' desire to wear pink or boys' desires to play with cars and trains, had to be abandoned. Girls will be girls and boys will be boys. These gender categories were usually accepted totally unproblematically. Sexuality did not feature in the conversations about children, apart from the occasional reference to cross-dressing and how it was really nothing to worry about. But there was less consensus on the subject of race, the development of their children's racial identities or conceptions of race. For those mothers whose children would be positioned as white, there was no discussion of their children's own racial identity. Race was always about being black, Asian or otherwise 'non-white'. In terms of other racial positions, the mothers had widely differing opinions on the perceptual practices of their babies, toddlers and young children. There was also less reflection on the role of the parent in directing the children's' vision and understanding compared to gender. For some of the women that I interviewed both the act of seeing and the notion of colour lay at the heart of their attitude to race and whiteness. For these women, colour-blindness functioned literally as a claim to be blind to - unseeing of - colour - where

colour means blackness - or non-whiteness.[2] It would seem that there was nothing for a parent to do but to step back and keep quiet. Seeing physical (racialised) differences is clearly much more contentious and complicated than seeing gender differences. This did not produce a total denial of difference, however. Difference has instead been redefined, with its boundaries redrawn. The key term here is culture. Rather than speak of race, many of the interviewees would focus instead on questions of cultural difference. This raises the question of what this notion of 'difference' is different from. Are we all different in our own ways or is there an undefined (unseen) core from which 'others' are demarcated by their 'difference'? In Butlerian terms, is there a realm of the abject which is defining the boundaries of whiteness?

Heather was the only interviewees who was prepared to suggest that her baby had a strong reaction to the visual impact of racialised physical differences and skin tone in particular:

Heather "I've just got one, and she's 10 months - although you do get an interesting reaction that she definitely ... we have a couple of black friends but not a lot of ... so she tends to stare at black people."
BB "Really..."
Heather "Because they're different, so she's aware there's something different. We had a guy come round to do a survey - we seem to be on everyone's survey list, and he was, I think he was probably Nigerian 'cos he was very, very dark, you know, with that almost navy blue, it's so black, and she was absolutely transfixed. Completely fascinated because it was different, it was something new, which was what babies absolutely love, so it was interesting to see that they are aware, that people look different. [...] You know, it's very obvious, it's like she'd stare at somebody with glasses or at somebody that had very, very bleached blonde hair or something. They'd all be things that would be eye-catching to her, so that she would, you know, comment on it in her way.
(Interview 15)

Heather does feel the need to assert her baby's innocence - the attention she gives to black people is no different from that she would give to blonde or glasses wearing people. The fact that she says this perhaps suggests a level of anxiety about it. Although at the same time she suggests a possible social explanation in that part of her daughter's interest is due to the infrequency of her daughter meeting people who have darker skin than her. Other interviewees, whose children also commented on racialised physical differences, were also at pains to point out that the lack of racism underlying these comments. Asking about the colour of a person was the same as asking about the colour of a toy only "probably even more interesting" (interview 17), or commenting on someone's skin colour "that's just the same as them saying they've got blonde hair" (interview 20). It is interesting how in two of these examples, what comes to mind as a contrast to blackness is blonde hair - perhaps an iconic formulation of whiteness.

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[2]See (Dyer 1997, p46-48) on white as a colour.

In contrast to Heather, Sue, whose son is two, is more representative. She did not think that her son notices colour difference. Yet at the same time she feels he has grappled with and mastered the complex notion of gender difference.

I mean, I would say, race, not at all. He doesn't seem to recognise that when he's with any black children, they are a different colour. He doesn't seem to even recognise it, never mind comment on it. And gender, he knows now that he's a boy, and he knows there are girls but it took a while, everything was a boy for a while, which I guess is fairly normal. But I think that's really all. He knows the difference between men and women, he can recognise them, I guess, through those characteristics, and boys and girls, but I mean he's not that acute that he can recognise them that well. So there is some mix-up, but he knows that some are and some aren't.
(Interview 34)

Clearly, gender is something that she has spent some time discussing with her child, establishing what he knows and does not know and helping him to gain a surer grasp of masculinity and femininity. This is not something that she would do around other physical or phenotypic features, these are things that it is better not to see, even as they are unavoidable. Patricia Williams writes of the repression involved in this 'non-seeing'.

> "In a sense, race matters are resented and repressed in much the same way as matters of sex and scandal: the subject is considered a rude and transgressive one in mixed company, a matter whose observation is sometimes inevitable, but about which, once seen, little should be heard none the less. Race thus tends to be treated as through it were an especially delicate category of social infirment - so called - like extreme obesity or disfigurement. [....] And thus we are coached upon pain of punishment not to see a thing."
> (Williams 1997, p6)

Given multicultural discourses, and I would argue, the racialisation of culture, it was easier for parents to suggest that their children might notice cultural difference than visual markers of race. Indeed, the women mentioned the "different cultural outlooks"; "different names"; different diets"; "sari's" that their children might notice as well as, inevitably, the different religious festivals.

I would suggest that this avoidance or evasion of race and particularly its visual 'markers' is more available to white people than to black people. Certainly, all of the mothers of mixed race children noted that their children had relatively complex responses to colour differences.

 When physical racialised differences are seen and talked about by children, this raises the question for mothers of how they should be spoken about. Deborah, expressed some anxiety on how to respond to her nearly four year old son's mentioning people's colour. This, in the two examples she gave, was because he coupled a negative response to a particular person with a reference to his skin colour ("I don't like that black face."). She

does not say if her son ever made reference to anyone's 'white face'. Deborah had discussed these incidents with her husband and he helped reassure her that the statements were innocent. In the interview, Deborah also reassured herself that her son "goes to a nursery where there are kids from all sorts of different backgrounds, so I really don't know. But, I've just got to make sure that I don't get too sensitive about it, I think." Deborah also felt the issue of how to label her son's own skin colour required some delicacy:

For example, he said, maybe younger than 3, what colour am I? And I'd say, well, you're um sort of - and I did it on purpose just in case there was sort of anything about race involved in it - um, I don't say oh you're white. I said, oh, you're a lovely sort of pinky colour, you know, and you've got your nails which are a sort of a whitey colour, and you know, this kind of thing. And later on, he started saying what colour's, um, baby Roy, a little baby he knows, and what colour's so and so, and what colour's so and so, and I just ... he doesn't do it very often, it would just happen every so often. And I'd say, oh they're brown, you know, um, but he would do the same thing about his toys. (Interview 17)

By focusing on what mothers said about their children I have tried to demonstrate the sensitivity of the subject of race for white people. This material shows how even seeing is a political act and parents are in process of negotiating these difficulties when they talk to me. It also raises methodological problems of what to make of the material. I am not here raising the question of what the children actually thought - that is the subject of a whole different research project, but how to interpret what people say is equally difficult when it is governed by a fear not to appear racist. I will now go on to will consider what the interviewees saw when they did not allow themselves to think of race. In particular, I will trace some of the representations of blackness that emerged from the interviews. This will show the enduring power of certain images and meanings of blackness in the white imagination and suggests that the colour-blind position adopted by the interviewees was not necessarily their only way of seeing.

A recurring image in many accounts was that of 'the black man'. This was a stereotyped and racialised image where the blackness suggested was male and both threatening and attractive (not necessarily to the same people). It is not difficult to see how these images drew on representations of black men that have been both historically enduring but also adapting to particular political moments. Vron Ware (Ware 1992) and Catherine Hall (Hall 1992) for example both discuss colonial constructions of black men and the need to protect white women. The idea that white women need protection also features in new right and neo-racist ideologies. In the interviews, I did not directly ask what the white interviewees thought of black people or if they thought that they themselves were racist. However, I would argue that taking part in the interview and my questions prompted these questions internally for the women and shaped what they said to me. When the white women interviewees asked themselves 'what do I think of black people?' or 'am I

racist?' , the image of a threatening black man, or "gang" of black men was the first to suggest itself in several cases.

Jennifer gives another example of the readily available image of black gangs in the white imagination. Just as she is asserting her own (partial?) 'blindness' to colour and difference, an image occurs to her that directly contradicts this:

I've never been frightened or wary ... they've always been ... I suppose at that age I was probably quite inquisitive to know, but maybe that was because my parents were quite ... had made them out as being people ... people of different race being no different. Or they are different, but what's different about them is, you know, nothing to be frightened of, or ... I mean, if I see a gang of black kids now I still get anxious. If I'm out walking. But if I see a gang of anybody, I would still be anxious. I wouldn't be any more anxious because they were black. I would be more anxious because it's a gang, I think. Um, I don't know. (Interview 25)

The fact that Jennifer begins her consideration of her attitude to people who are different with consideration of whether she is frightened or wary of black people (this extract is part of a longer account where Jennifer provided a history of her encounters with people who were different from her), indicates the place that difference or blackness has in her mind. It is also significant the way in which black people are readily homogenised into "them" and "they". She herself does not seem to know how to deal with the contradiction of her fear of a 'gang of black kids' and her assertion that she was brought up in a way where people "of different race" were seen as "no different" or at least not frighteningly different. In another example, Heather also conjures up a law-breaking black man. This image appears in the middle of a empathetic account which is intended to show how, through being on a Kuwaiti Airline flight where she was the only white person, Heather realised what it is like to be a visual minority. Whilst Heather might innocently bump into someone on a crowded plane, the imagined black person is not a woman but a man and is committing a crime:

*Just about the fact that you stick out like a sore thumb. Everybody could see ... there was no kind of melting into the background. You know, if I brushed past somebody and then walked past the other way they would have said, oh, that was the girl who brushed past me a minute ago, and they would not have thought, oh, was it her or was it ...? Because it was so easy to recognise me out of everybody else. And that suddenly meant, you know, I suppose if you magnify it up you know it is so easy if somebody says who lives in a predominantly white area and they see a black guy break into someone's car, then they would be very keen to identify that black guy, you know, it becomes a very easy way, and I felt that if I bumped into somebody there would have been no question that it would have been me.
(Interview 15)*

In the interviews there were also references to another side of the threatening image of blackness, and black men in particular - that of exciting, vibrant, exotic and masculinised

blackness which may potentially provide an escape from the dullness of whiteness. The sexualisation of blackness, also has a long history and was perhaps first discussed by Franz Fanon (Fanon ?).

Emma one of the interviewees described an area in London and a school as being 'too white middle class' and 'kind of frigid'. In contrast, she presents the 'one black person in her childhood' (a common motif in the interviews) in sensual terms:

> Well there were no black people where I grew up, except for one who was
> married to a white woman. And he was gorgeous and everybody fancied him.
> So he was always considered to be 'ah look there, let's go to his dance class!"
> and all that kind of stuff.
> (Emma, Interview 16)

At a later point in the interview, Emma declares (without prompting) that: "if Lucy [her daughter] married someone who was black it wouldn't bother me at all. I wouldn't even think twice about it, it's who that person is." This was a statement made by several of the interviewees which would seem to illustrate a particular anxiety around blackness, whiteness and sexuality. As R.C. Young has emphasised, racial theories are critically about the possibilities of interracial sex:

One's reaction to the idea of one's son or daughter marrying a black person has become a popularised 'test' of anti-racist sentiment, as represented in the 1960s film *Guess who's coming to dinner*. Mixed race relationships are far from uncommon in Britain and the interviewees were asserting that they were comfortable with the idea. Nonetheless, the fact that they feel the need to say this indicates that there remains some ambivalence around the issue. It was also striking that in the hypothetical examples, it was always a daughter marrying a black man which sprung to mind.

Two interviewees used almost exactly the same language to describe positively the experience of having "different races that come into the house" (Jennifer Interview 25) or "we always had every nationality in the house" (Teresa, Interview 18). The underlying assumption is that 'difference' is good and even something to be proud of. None the less, the image is uneasy, with a sense of black intrusion into the otherwise white space of the home or house. This discourse of the excitingly different 'cultural other' appeared in many interviews and framed a particular view of whiteness as dull and boring in contrast to exotic otherness.

I have tried to show through a brief examination of some of the interview material that racialised subjectivities are created through the mediation of varied perceptual practices. The women I interviewed were engaged as mothers in negotiating the ways in which their children saw and understood the social world. This included consideration of racialised seeing and interpretation. I think that the material showed that the women understood that this was a complex process and found it sometimes difficult to know how to negotiate it. I would argue that they largely chose to deal with it by adopting a 'colour-blind' approach,

although their anxiety not to see also served to reproduce racialised modes of seeing. In different contexts, the material has also shown the enduring power of certain racialised imaginings. This ties into another important area of my research, which I have not been able to touch on here, that of racialised geographies.

But what if I were to step back from this research and consider the resonances between my work and the kind of work that many of you are involved in development? The objective of my research has been to try to understand how identities and subjectivities are formed within discursive practices. In this paper, I have tried to examine the ways in which perceptual practices are racialised. They are also classed and gendered, although I have not had time to discuss this here. Clearly development is engaged with and likely to have an impact on people's and societies identities so this is an important area which needs to be understood. At the same time, development practitioners and institutions are also engaged in and formed by discursive and perceptual practices which would merit examination.

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