Do ethnic minorities exclude themselves?

Ludi Simpson and Nissa Finney

Introduction

A decade ago in *Radical Statistics* Ruth Levitas reviewed the understanding and measurement of social inclusion. She identified three approaches to the European-wide interest in social exclusion, one of which concerns us here: a "moral underclass discourse, which emphasises moral and cultural causes of poverty and is centrally concerned with the moral hazard of 'dependency'... [It] tends to replay recurrent themes about 'dangerous classes' to focus on consequences of social exclusion for social order, and on particular groups, such as unemployed and potentially criminal young men, and lone parents, especially young never-married mothers' (Levitas, 1999, p12).[1]

This discourse contrasts with two others, "a redistributive discourse ... which sees social exclusion as a consequence of poverty" (p11), and "a discourse about social integration ... in which the key element is labour force attachment" (p12). These two approaches suggest that social exclusion is the result of poverty or worklessness. The moral underclass discourse "also posits a strong connection between poverty and social exclusion, but sees the causes of poverty as lying in cultural and moral (self) exclusion rather than the other way around" (pp12-13). As a result, the focus of policy is shifted away from inequality and disadvantage, toward correcting the behaviour of social groups seen as deviant, a threat both to themselves and through their danger and dependency, to the rest of society.

Had Ruth been writing just a few years later, she might have included Muslims in her list of groups regularly stigmatised as morally deviant. Her allusion to dangerous self-exclusion is a strong element in a cluster of negative views about immigration, racial segregation and social separateness of ethnic minorities in Britain. Jack Straw's initiation of a debate in 2006 on public use of the niqab (veil) was a prime example of this approach, in which Phil Woolas, the minister then in charge of government community cohesion policy blamed veil-wearers for inviting discrimination and racism: 'Most British-born Muslims who wear it do so as an assertion of their identity and religion. This can create fear and resentment among non-Muslims and lead to discrimination. Muslims then become even more determined to assert their identity, and so it becomes a vicious circle where the only beneficiaries are racists like the BNP [British National Party]'.

Five years earlier, Herman Ouseley had used equally strong language to introduce his report on Bradford's social relations:
We have focused on the very worrying drift towards self-segregation, the necessity of arresting and reversing this process.... The Bradford District has witnessed growing division among its population along race, ethnic, religious and social class lines – and now finds itself in the grip of fear.[2]

This paper draws on a review of evidence to investigate two particular claims that minority ethnic populations self-segregate: in terms of friendship groups and choice of schools. In both cases we are critical of influential public claims which would not have been made had better statistical information been used. A claim of 'alarmingly' narrow friendship groups by a senior politician was based on over-interpretation of a non-random survey. Similarly, claims of increasing race segregation between schools have not been based on the available evidence.

The full review is a book which covers many other claims, addressing immigration, population change, neighbourhood segregation and its supposed impact on terrorism, public opinion, and the opinions of young adults about the nature of the areas they wish to live in.[3] It shows that there are no ghettos in Britain and migration patterns are not ones of retreat or flight but rather of suburbanisation and moves out of cities, which are being desired and achieved irrespective of ethnicity. This migration is resulting in increasing numbers of areas that are ethnically mixed. Nevertheless, the fear of minority self-segregation persists.

This paper is not disputing the need to reduce social conflict where it exists, but challenges two specific claims of inward-looking self-isolation by minorities.

Is there an increase in same-ethnicity friendship groups?

One of the themes of the discourse of parallel lives and isolation is the lack of friendships that cross ethnic barriers. Having commissioned a survey from YouGov in 2004 and 2005, Trevor Phillips, the chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, reported in a speech that 'alarmingly, we showed that young people from ethnic minorities were twice as likely to have a circle of pals exclusively from their own community as were older ethnic minority folk.... It must surely be the most worrying fact of all that younger Britons appear to be integrating less well than

their parents'.[4] Phillips' speech continued to paint a dismal picture from the YouGov surveys of friendships:

> 'Behaviour in white Britain has not changed a bit. Last year, 94% of white Britons said that all or most of their friends are white. This year it is 95%.... What the figures tell us about the behaviour of ethnic minority Britons is even bleaker.... This year the figures show a marked turn for the worse. The 47% of ethnic minority Britons who last year said that most or all of their friends were white has now shrunk to 37%; and the proportion who have mainly or exclusively ethnic minority friends has grown from 31% to 37%. This is way beyond any statistical fluctuation.'[5]

The language used here is intemperate at least. The survey asked 816 minority ethnic Britons in 2004 and 470 in 2005 whether their friends were all or mainly White, all or mainly ethnic minorities, or roughly half White. The proportions with roughly half White friends were 23% in 2004 and 26% in 2005. If these figures are added to those in the quote above, for the majority of minority ethnic Britons in both years half or more of their friends were White. Descriptions of 'even bleaker' and 'marked turn for the worse' to describe a situation where most minority ethnic Britons have either about half or more than half White friends, is again exaggerating the evidence. What of the claim that the change in one year is 'way beyond any statistical fluctuation'? A change from 31% to 37% based on separate samples of 470 and 870 people would be considered by statisticians as only just significant. Samples of those sizes could have produced such a difference when the real population proportions had not changed at all. This is so if the survey were what statisticians call a probability sample, where everyone has a known chance of being included. But YouGov is an online survey of a self-selected panel, which is 'quota sampled' to ensure appropriate numbers at each age and sex. YouGov does not use standard sample design methods to ensure a set of people or views representative of the population. Hence the phrase 'beyond any statistical fluctuation' is inappropriate as well as misleading.

One should be especially suspicious of the Commission for Racial Equality friendship survey results because they are contradicted by better-designed studies. Standard methods to ensure representative samples are used in the government's Citizenship Survey. It asked similar questions in both 2003 and 2005 and the results suggest that minorities born in Britain are *less* likely to have exclusively minority friends than those born outside Britain[6]. The survey reported that:

> 'As might be expected, people who lived in areas with higher minority ethnic populations were more likely to have friends

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from different ethnic groups to themselves. Eighty-three per cent of people who lived in the ten per cent highest minority ethnic density areas had friends from different ethnic groups to themselves compared to 31 per cent from the ten per cent lowest density areas.'[7]

Narrow friendship groups (in the sense of within the same ethnicity) are less likely in ethnically diverse areas than in the monolithically White areas. There were no changes in composition of friendship groups between 2003 and 2005 for the White, Asian or Black groups, in spite of samples much bigger than those used by YouGov. It is debatable whether the leading servant of a public body should make a high-profile alarming media message from statistics that reflect unexceptional population change.

The Citizenship Survey report has a tone quite different from the Commission for Racial Equality speech (although both were publicly funded). The Citizenship Survey report is based on large samples and has a measured account of its important findings. An academic analysis of the same data finds similar results – that over half of the White population have friends exclusively among the White population, while less than 20% of minorities born in Britain have friends only from their own group, including the Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups that make up most of the Muslim population in Britain.

> 'It is in fact the Whites who are by far the most likely to have friends only from their own race – that is other Whites. Given the much larger number of Whites in Britain, and the geographical concentration of ethnic minorities in large conurbations, many Whites will not have opportunity to meet ethnic minorities. However, the very high proportions of the ethnic minorities who report having some friends from other races are quite striking.'[8]

The 'worrying' proportion of young people with 'pals exclusively from their own community' has not been released by the Commission for Racial Equality, but is less than 20% according to that alternative analysis. How worrying is this? How worrying is the much higher figure of 56% for the White population? Perhaps neither figure is surprising given the demographics and geographies of Britain's ethnic group populations.

That 'most worrying fact of all' is put in context by some simple demographics, presented in Table 1. Even if there were increasingly mono-ethnic friendship groups, this may well be a result of demographic shifts rather than self-segregation. There are twice as

many Black and Asian young people aged in their twenties than aged in their fifties: for example 18% of the Indian population of England and Wales is aged 20-29 but only 9% are aged 50-59. The Pakistani and Bangladeshi populations are still more youthful with only 5% or less aged in their fifties and more than three times this number aged in their twenties.[9] That young age structure is typical of immigrant-origin populations and demographers expect the age structure to 'settle down' only after several generations have been born in Britain. The youthfulness is greatest for the African and Bangladeshi groups who immigrated to Britain most recently and less pronounced for the Indian and Caribbean groups, with Pakistani youthfulness somewhere between. But all have much younger populations than the White British where the number of older and younger people is approximately in balance.

Table 1: Proportion of the population in their twenties, thirties, forties and fifties

	Age group			
	20 - 29	30 - 39	40 - 49	50 - 59
White Briton	12%	15%	13%	13%
Indian	18%	17%	15%	9%
Pakistani	20%	14%	10%	5%
Bangladeshi	21%	13%	8%	4%
Caribbean	12%	23%	15%	8%
African	18%	24%	13%	5%
Chinese	23%	17%	16%	8%

Source: 2001 Census table ST101

A potential consequence of these differing age structures for friendship patterns is that older pioneer immigrants could have been exposed to more White friends and neighbours than their children and grandchildren. Young Black and Asian adults may speak with a Yorkshire, Midlands or London accent that their elders never acquired, but their family and neighbourhood environment from which friends are drawn is more populated by their own ethnic group than was the case for their elders. In this context, the reliable findings of the Citizenship Survey, of increased ethnic mixing in friendship groups, are an even greater challenge to the claim of self-segregation.

In addition to survey results and demographic changes, there is one vivid indicator of how Britain is increasingly becoming a place of friendship across ethnic groups: the growth of the Mixed ethnic group. Someone of Mixed ethnicity has parents of different ethnicities from

each other. The size and growth of the Mixed group therefore indicates the most intimate form of friendship. There are 650,000 people of Mixed ethnic group in England alone, making it the third largest minority after Indian and Pakistani groups. It is one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups.[10] Similarly, there is growth in marriage between people of different ethnic groups. Asian Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus all marry out of their own groups just as often as do White Christians.[11]

The claim that friendship groups are increasingly within rather than across ethnic groups is therefore highly questionable. Through a judicious compound of alarmist language and false claim to scientific rigour, the Commission for Racial Equality created a striking message about friendship groups, unsupported by the evidence, of dangerous inward-looking communities, harbingers of a bleak future for Britain.

Is school choice creating segregation?

One of the strongest assumptions in British race relations is that school segregation is high and increasing, and that where there is a choice of school then parents will choose on the basis of ethnicity and by so doing create mono-ethnic schools. Rarely is any evidence used to discuss the claim. There are two claims mixed in here. First that some schools have a very different ethnic mix than others, and second that parental choice divides schools by ethnicity even when their neighbourhoods are mixed.

The first claim is undisputed: some schools do have a very different mix than others. Of Bradford's 24 secondary schools, 10 have either more than 90% or less than 10% White pupils. The same can be said of most other metropolitan districts, simply because the White population makes up the vast majority of the population. It is also simply a reflection of the clustered patterns of residence, which are largely a result of a sequence of labour shortages, immigration, natural growth and suburbanisation. This type of unremarkable 'school segregation', measured by a very different ethnic composition of schools, was evident again when the government published statistics of pupil ethnicity in May 2007. Nonetheless, those statistics and no others were the basis of front-page headlines with an interpretation far beyond this simple picture. The main story in *The Observer* headlined 'Revealed: UK schools dividing on race lines' declared that 'A majority of pupils in many areas of the country … have little contact with children from different ethnic backgrounds, even though they live in close proximity'. But the statistics had given no information at all on living patterns, and therefore no evidence to support that key phrase 'even though they live in close proximity'.

There was no evidence in the government or journalist's reports from which to draw the conclusion that schools were any more 'divided' than neighbourhoods. Rather, the piece was an opportunity for the Conservative Party to announce a new policy:

> 'David Willetts, the shadow education secretary, told *The Observer*: 'There are towns which have been divided into two where social, ethnic and religious divisions are all aligned and create enormous tensions. Schools in these towns are becoming more and more segregated. One way to tackle them is, if you're creating an academy, you set a target that it should take its students from both communities'.'[12]

Thus, the claim that schools are divided more than their neighbourhoods has such momentum that it can be front-page news, hooked on evidence that does not support it, in order to trumpet a new policy platform for a political party. *The Observer* subtitles its front page with 'A remarkable picture of how Britain is "sleepwalking" towards US-style segregation', and adds comments about 'increased racial tensions' created by segregation, in order to emphasise its message.[13] The article gives no evidence at all that schools 'are becoming more and more segregated', or that 'schools are dividing on race lines' but these claims are the headline news. It would be surprising if schools were becoming more segregated, since neighbourhoods are becoming less segregated and more diverse[14]. Nonetheless, in January 2008 the head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission went a little further by claiming that 'We all know that schools are becoming more segregated than the areas they sit in'.[15] So now we turn to ask, what we do know?

School social segregation has been studied most recently through the national database of school pupils in England, which contains each young person's ethnicity, home address and school. One can use the database to compare actual school ethnic diversity over time, and to compare it with the outcome if every pupil went to their nearest school.

If one measures the average proportion of an ethnic group in the schools where it is found, then it has been increasing slightly for those groups whose share of the population has been increasing. But the evidence is clear that for primary and secondary schools in England over the period 1997/98 to 2003, 'there has been some increase in segregation levels in some cities, but only to the expected extent given the changing relative size of the ethnic minority populations there'.[16] Does this lay to rest the claim that 'schools are becoming more segregated than the areas they sit in'? It certainly suggests that the

difference between schools and their neighbourhoods has not been increasing, but is there a difference at all?

School sorting by income and ethnicity does occur, and this is not surprising. Some families choose schools that are not nearest to their homes, and are schools that have a greater proportion of their own ethnic group.[17] The Department for Children, Schools and Families has published a comparison of how pupils from families on a low income are spread between schools. Using the home addresses of all Year 7 pupils (the first year of secondary) in state schools in England, it allocates them to their closest school, keeping the same number of schools and their same capacity. There is a considerable degree of segregation even when children are allocated to their closest school, because Britain is socially segregated, especially through the housing market. The government report then finds that schools and parents have managed to sort themselves by income even more than in their 'natural' catchment areas, raising their 'index of dissimilarity' by 0.06 or 18%. This demonstrates that school choice tends to create a lower diversity of income within school populations than if pupils went to their nearest school. The report shows that sorting also occurs by ethnicity, creating more school concentrations of minority pupils than in neighbourhoods, but the increase in sorting by ethnicity is less than the increase in sorting by income: it varies for each ethnic group but in no case is it more than 0.03 or 5%, half the additional sorting by income (see Table 2 in relation to Bangladeshi sorting). Thus, there is definitely selection of schools that increases the concentrations of White and minority pupils, but it is less than the social selection by income. It may be that the two types of school selection are confounded: because income (or class) and ethnicity are correlated; when pupils bypass their local school one cannot distinguish whether it is their ethnicity or their income that is associated with that behaviour.

Table 2: Index of Dissimilarity for ethnic and income segregation

	Pupils in the schools attended	If pupils were in their closest school
Segregation of Bangladeshis from all others	0.76	0.73
Segregation of those receiving Free School Meals from all others	0.39	0.33

DCSF (2008). See note 18.

If school choice is leading to less mixed schools than is thought to be desirable, it is important to consider how that system of choice operates. Research by the Runnymede Trust has asked exactly this question, revealing the complexities of school choice decision making and the discrepancies between choice and outcome.[19] Ability to negotiate the school system is not equal across social groups: groups that are socioeconomically disadvantaged – among which ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented – have less capacity to achieve the school place that they most desire. What was clear in this research was that there were overall preferences among minority ethnic parents for their children to attend ethnically mixed schools. As the following Pakistani parent comments, mixed schools were seen as important both in terms of providing a context for education about ethnic diversity and having a smaller risk of racial bullying: 'I believe mixed multicultural schools are very good because children learn about different cultures and interact with children [from] a variety of ethnic backgrounds'.

Other authors have also stressed the importance of not assuming racial explanations for school sorting:

> 'It should not be concluded that ethnic groups actively avoid each other. A preference to be schooled with children of the same ethnicity (if that is what we are observing) is not, in itself, a process of avoidance but of seeking ethnic peers, or of seeking a particular type of education in particular types of school.'[20]

Schooling of our children is of prime and personal importance. Many schools have an entirely White roll, but schools in urban areas often have a diverse roll and some have very few White pupils. There is evidence that pupils and parents choose schools in a way that increases the concentrations of White pupils in some schools and minority pupils in other schools, and possibly of particular minorities. But this ethnic sorting is less than the sorting by family income and both may be a symptom of greater effective choice by those with more resources. The system of school choice does not operate equally across social groups and arguably prevents schools from meeting their responsibilities for promoting good race relations and community cohesion. For those who favour community schools drawing all children from the same locality, then a range of school ethnic compositions is a consequence and need not be a concern. For those who feel that ethnic mixes at school must be engineered as a positive policy for integration, then a very great amount of bussing would be involved with potentially detrimental effects. For those who accept the current system of market choice in schooling, social selection by income and ethnicity are an expected consequence.

Conclusion

We have addressed two claims that minorities are unwilling to engage with the mainstream of British society, due to who we have as friends and which schools we go to. Unwillingness to engage leads to parallel lives and physical segregation, it is said, and physical segregation leads not only to further disengagement but also to conflict and violence.

If one turns 'unwillingness to engage with others' on its head and talks of positive engagement with those like ourselves, then undoubtedly we all enjoy the comfort zones of family, friends and the neighbourhoods we know best. That social networks are often with our own social and ethnic groups is not surprising. On the contrary, it is surprising that it is not more so than we have found to be the case. The majority of minority residents have half or more of their friends from other groups, and this is a far higher proportion than for White residents.

Other evidence shows that White and Asian young adults living in northern cities share similar housing aspirations: better environments, well-built housing, not too far from family and friends and free from anti-social behaviour. Asian young women in particular want their children to grow up in mixed areas, and the migration statistics show this is exactly what they do: seek housing in the suburbs.

We have shown that school ethnic composition is a little more polarised than residential polarisation, but the difference is not more than one would expect from social selection by income, and is not growing over time.

Other research shows that Muslim political engagement with the British electoral system is greater than White engagement, and greater still in areas of Asian concentration.[21] All this says that minority residents by and large are perfectly willing to integrate and do engage. Although diversity and conflict are associated in political and academic literature, the evidence of a causal link is hard to find in practice.

Opinion polls would suggest that rather than minorities having a problem with engagement it is the majority White populations that are most isolated and least engaged with communities other than their own. However much this is at odds with the ruling myths of minority isolation and self-segregation, at one level this is a self-evident observation: as it is by far the largest group, the White population will be naturally more likely to bump into its own than the smaller groups

who tend to live in much more diverse areas. But there is a more worrying level to the isolation of the White population. It is they who on average are less tolerant, more suspicious and less willing to engage with the diversity of democratic Britain as it is emerging after 60 years of state-sponsored and worldwide international migration. An assimilationist agenda placing responsibility for integration exclusively on the shoulders of minorities is clearly not a viable option.

Notes

[1] Ruth Levitas (1999) Defining and measuring social exclusion: a critical overview of current proposals, *Radical Statistics* 71 (summer): 10-27. She wrote more extensively on the definitions and the politics of social exclusion policy in *The Inclusive Society?: Social Exclusion and New Labour*, 2nd edition, 2005, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

[2] Foreword of Ouseley (2001), *Community pride not prejudice, making diversity work in Bradford*, Bradford Vision, Bradford. The report was prepared before the riots in Bradford but published days after them.

[3] Nissa Finney and Ludi Simpson (2009) *'Sleepwalking to segregation'?: Challenging myths about race and migration*, Policy Press, Bristol. The full range of claims and evidence is summarised at http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/research/mrpd/MythsofRaceMig.html

[4] Phillips, T. (2005) *After 7/7: Sleepwalking to segregation*, speech to the Manchester Council for Community Relations, 22nd September. http://www.equalityhumanrights.com

[5] Ibid.

[6] Heath, A. and Li, Y. (2007) *Measuring the size of the employer contribution to the ethnic minority employment gap*, unpublished paper prepared for the Business Commission of the National Employment Panel, available from authors at Nuffield College, Oxford University OX1 1NF.

[7] p. 20 of Kitchen, S., Michaelson, J. and Wood, N. (2006) *2005 Citizenship Survey: Community Cohesion Topic Report*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government.

[8] Heath and Li (op cit).

[9] The figures are for 2001, from Census data.

[10] ONS statistics for England, 2001-05, from www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/PEEGCommentary.pdf

[11] 2001 Census, from Voas, D. (2009, in press) The maintenance and transformation of ethnicity: theory and evidence on mixed partnerships in Britain, *Journal of Migration and Ethnic Studies,* **35**(9).

[12] Nicholas Watt, *The Observer,* 27 May 2007, p 1.

[13] *The Observer* article draws on research by Simon Burgess and Deborah Wilson at the Centre for Market and Public Organisation (CMPO), University of Bristol.

[14] The evidence is reviewed in Chapter 6 of Finney and Simpson (2009, op cit).

[15] Trevor Phillips, *Today* programme, BBC Radio 4, 14 January 2008.

[16] Page 1 of Johnston, R., Burgess, S., Harris, R. and Wilson, D. (2006) *'Sleep-Walking Towards Segregation'? The Changing Ethnic Composition of English Schools, 1997-2003 – an Entry Cohort Analysis,* Centre for Market and Public Organisation Working Paper Series No. 06/155, Bristol.

[17] Harris, R. and Johnston, R. (2008) Primary Schools, Markets and Choice: Studying Polarization and the Core Catchment Areas of Schools, *Applied Spatial Analysis* **1**: 59-84

[18] DCSF (2008) *The composition of schools in England,* London: Department of Children, Schools and Families. http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SBU/b000796/index.shtml. Table 6.3 on ethnicity shows an increased segregation for ethnic groups, for example for Bangladeshi pupils from 0.73 to 0.76 in school attended. Personal communication from DCSF, 2 August 2008: 'The Attended school D index for FSM pupils is 0.39 compared to the allocated school D index of 0.33. The difference between the two is bigger than that observed for the ethnic groups in table 6.3'.

[19] Weekes-Bernard, D. (2007) *School Choice and Ethnic Segregation. Educational Decision Making among Black and Minority Ethnic Parents,* London: The Runnymede Trust.

[20] Harris and Johnston (2008, op cit), p 82.

[21] Fieldhouse, E. and Cutts, D. (2008) Mobilisation or marginalisation? Neighbourhood effects on Muslim electoral registration in 2001, *Political Studies,* **56**: 333–354

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