

Prejudice and the immigrant child

David Milner

The way coloured children in Britain feel could be crucial for the future. Research shows how prejudice 'feeds back' at a very early age.

The debate about the extent and intensity of racial prejudice in this country has been essentially one-sided. It has focused on the hosts' racial attitudes and discrimination practices, and on their anxieties about coloured immigrants. But it has paid little attention to the attitudes and aspirations of the immigrants themselves—or to their reactions to the social climate they have encountered. The bias is also reflected in social research, so that black attitudes towards whites have been given much less attention than white attitudes towards blacks.

Politicians and commentators have been falling over themselves to try and predict the course of race relations over the next few years. Yet there have been few attempts to gather information on part of the answer to this question—black attitudes. Most of the attempts at prediction hinge on rather vague transatlantic analogies between social, economic and political conditions here and in America; but additional attention should be paid to the subjective experience of "blackness," for, in the end, it is the individual whose behaviour is influenced.

The foundations of racial attitudes are laid in childhood, in both black and white children. A great deal of research has been done, describing the development of these attitudes. Much of this work took place in the United States, but it has been replicated in other countries where there are both greater and lesser degrees of racial tension—for example, in South Africa, New Zealand, Mexico and Hong Kong. And I have carried out research in this country which casts further light on this. But let me, first, spell out the general background.

In the white majority-group child, *racial awareness* (ie, the ability to recognise simple physical differences between racial groups), may appear as early as two and a half to three years. This ability improves rapidly over the next few years, as does the child's ability to identify himself in racial terms. The next phase has been called *racial orientation* or "incipient attitude." It is characterised by the first evidence of positive or negative feelings about certain racial groups, and it has been found in children of three to four years. Sentiments such as "I don't like coloureds"; "He's a stinky little boy, take him away"; "He's nasty, he's a blackie"—these have been recorded in various studies of white children in this age range.

Children begin to learn these evaluations at the time when they learn to distinguish between groups generally, for the two things are often inextricably linked in the information they receive. Moreover, as C. A. Renninger and J. E. Williams have shown, children learn to think of the words "black" as bad, and "white" as good, from the very beginning, and they say "it seems reasonable

that these meanings could generalise to groups of persons designated by the colour code as 'white' or 'black.' Thus, the convenient designation of racial groups by colour names may provide the child with a general evaluative frame of reference, within which the more specific learnings of prejudice can be easily incorporated."

Very much more important than this is the specific information passed on to the child about racial groups, through the racial attitudes current in the adult world. These come to the child via parents, brothers and sisters, friends, schools, books, television and comics. The third stage of development is marked by elementary versions of these attitudes, which are evident in children from about five years old and grow in sophistication thereafter. Children of this age often express stereotyped ideas of racial characteristics and the social roles associated with the various racial groups. In hypothetical test situations they have invariably allocated poor housing and menial employment to black people, and superior environments to whites.

These derogatory stereotypes may be quite complex, sometimes in advance of the child's general level of understanding of the issues. Here the influence of the parents is seen, for certain statements by the child are obviously a direct imitation of adult opinions. In one study, five year old American white children described Negro dolls in the following ways: "He is coming out of jail"; "They are gangsters"; "He would be digging dirt"; "He doesn't have no work"; "All ladies who are coloured are maids" (the latter perhaps a very American reaction). One investigator reports the reactions to black dolls of a young white boy in a study involving an imaginary inter-racial tea-party: "If I have to sit next to one of those I'll have a nervous breakdown." The fact that these opinions may be copied from the parents without full understanding does not lessen their importance, for the affective components are faithfully reproduced and they provide an evaluative basis onto which more advanced ideas can later be grafted.

To a considerable extent, then, the child absorbs the colour values of the community. At first, he learns simply the social valency of skin colour, and later, as his intellectual world broadens, the complex concepts which generate and rationalise adult racial attitudes. As he works out the differences between his own and other racial groups—or more exactly, the social significance of these differences—so does his identification with his own group, and preference for it, increase. This could be described as the "normal" pattern of racial attitude development for majority group children in multi racial societies (when the racial or ethnic groups also have different status).

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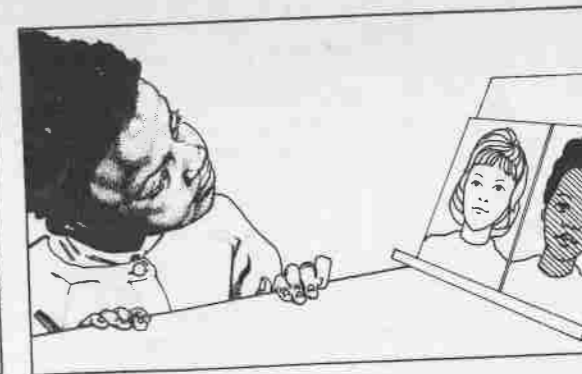
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similar course of development, but with very different consequences. In many societies black minorities exist in a social world where the white majority is more or less dominant. White culture and its values (including racial values) pervade all the institutions and social life of the society. Just as the white child absorbs these attitudes and values, so does the black child; but the significance of them for each child is obviously quite different.

The black child encounters a portrayal of his group which is essentially derogatory, and it is difficult for him to escape its implications for himself. A crucial aspect of his identity—his group membership—is devalued, in some cases making it unacceptable and perhaps rejected. So, as the white child develops a positive identification with his group, and preference for it over others, the black child may develop a very much more ambivalent pattern of identification and preference. Studies of young black American children—for example, by Kenneth Clark, M. E. Goodman and J. K. Morland—bear on this issue. They show that a large proportion show essentially the same racial attitudes as their white counterparts—that is, a preference for the white group and a rejection of the black group.

In experiments, these attitudes are shown in a consistent preference for figures (usually dolls or pictures) representing whites, and an attribution of good characteristics and superior social roles to these figures. In story-telling tests administered in another study, black figures were less often preferred, and were more frequently cast as the "badman," the loser in a contest, the aggressor, and so on.

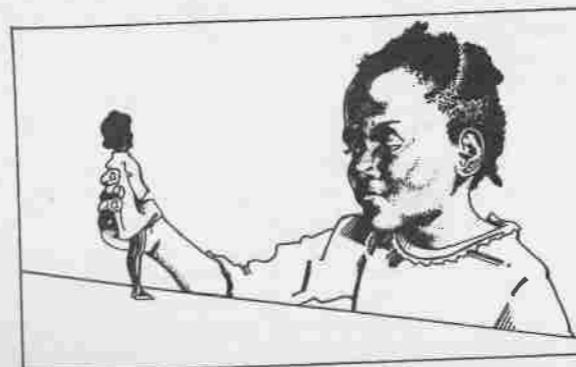
Perhaps the most dramatic results were found in the identification tests. In these tests the children are simply asked which, of a black and a white figure, "looks most like you?" A substantial minority of black children (in some studies nearly 50 per cent) indicate the *white* figure in response and this has been observed with Maori and Bantu children, also. The suggestion that this "mistake" might be simple perceptual error is dis-

counted by the finding that the children concerned also have a well-developed ability to discriminate racial differences.

It would seem to be that the children are quite deliberately mis-identifying because of the relative desirability of the two "identities" that they must choose from. Goodman summarises it this way: "The relative inaccuracy of Negro identification reflects not simple ignorance of self, but unwillingness or psychological inability to identify with the brown doll, because the child wants to look like the white doll." However, in order to identify with the white figure, the child must deny objective reality—that is, he must make the wrong choice in a situation where the right choice is quite obvious and where he is open to immediate contradiction.

These tests have invariably taken place in schools—an environment where there is a high premium on the right answers to questions. This suggests, then, that the child's internal need or desire to identify himself with the white group is extremely strong if it can overcome these contrary pressures. (Other tests confirm this general interpretation. When Morland asked his black subjects "Which doll would you rather be?" some 66 per cent indicated the white figure; in other words, whereas in many studies a minority of black children actually *identified* themselves with the white figures, a majority would *rather be* one of that group.) Mis-identification appears to decline from the age of eight or nine, presumably as reality obtrudes too strongly for the child to maintain these fictions. Whatever else, this reaction shows the pressures that social colour values exert on the black child and the conflicts these bring him.

The evidence from other countries suggests that these pressures are not restricted to American society. Is it the case, then, that the children of coloured immigrants to Britain experience these same conflicts through belonging to disadvantaged racial minorities? A recent study that I carried out, designed to test this idea, suggests that this may be so. This study also investigated the possi-



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bility of different reactions to minority-group status within the coloured community. So discussion of coloured immigrants in the press, radio and TV has tended to treat them as a homogeneous group, and conceal the differences in cultural backgrounds, attitudes and aspirations between the various groups. Such differences are particularly marked between the West Indians, on one hand, and the Indians and Pakistanis, on the other.

For the West Indian immigrant, the historical and cultural relationship of his home society and Britain, reflected in similar language, social institution and customs, strongly disposed him towards the white community here. The racial ordering attitudes of his own country supported his feelings; in 1953, Henriques wrote of the Jamaican social order: "The whole colour-class system is dependent on the almost complete acceptance by each group of the superiority of the white and the inferiority of the black." Colour and class are so well correlated that one may be expressed in terms of the other—for example, a person may be described as "white" because of his success in business. Desire for acceptance by whites in this country was a natural consequence of this situation. Whatever has been the result of the reception that met these ambitions, or the subsequent changes in West Indian society, these were certainly the hopes of the majority of the immigrants in the late fifties and early sixties.

In contrast, the Indian and Pakistani immigrants had uprooted themselves from ancient, tradition-based societies—with religions, languages, cultural ways and institutions which were quite alien to British ones. The Asian immigrants' principal purpose was to work hard, remit money to the peasant villages from which they came, and to return as soon as possible. They were also very concerned to protect their cultural ways against western corrosion while they were here. As a result, the Asian communities have maintained a very much more detached and independent relationship with British society.

It seemed to me that these contrasts might be evident in the children of the immigrants. The West Indian children's disposition towards the white group might be greater than the Asians'. I have investigated these issues in a research project conducted in two large English cities with substantial immigrant populations, over the last two years. We interviewed some 400 children between the ages of five and eight, of West Indian, Indian, Pakistani and English parentage in their schools. These varied between having more than 50 per cent immigrant pupils, and less than 10 per cent.

Our tests all involved the same basic situation (see table 1). The immigrant child was asked to choose between two pictures or dolls—an "own-group" figure (West Indian or Asian, as appropriate) and a white figure—on the basis of questions put by the interviewer. The English children were asked to choose between white figures and figures representing whichever immigrant group predominated in the area.

We used a different set of dolls or pictures for each question. For example, in the identity section of the tests a West Indian boy would be shown a West Indian boy doll and an English boy doll, and asked, "Which one of these looks most like you?" He would then be shown another pair of boy figures, and asked, "If you could be one of these two, which one would you choose?" The other two questions in this section required him to

Table 1: Children's response to test of actual identity: 'Which doll looks most like you?'

	% choosing own-group figure	% choosing other-group figure
English	100	0
Asian	76	*24
West Indian	52	*48

*ie, white figure

identify a number of family members.

It was this section of the tests which provided some of the most clear-cut results of our study. As with black American children, a proportion of both immigrant groups maintained that the white figure "looked more like them." Nearly half of the West Indian children made this response, while none of the English group mis-identified themselves.

A similar pattern emerged from our family identification tests; some 35 per cent of the West Indian children and 20 per cent of the Asian children mis-identified either their mother or brother and sister, or both. (No children of mixed parentage were included in the sample.) Again, none of the English children mis-identified family members. Even more significant, perhaps, is the number of children from each group who would "rather be" the white figure than the relevant immigrant figure: 100 per cent of the English children, 82 per cent of the West Indians, and 65 per cent of the Asians.

There are, then, clear differences between the immigrant groups taken together, and the English group. The English children show much stronger identification with their own group than the immigrants do with theirs. Secondly, there are differences between the immigrant groups themselves, with the West Indians being more drawn towards the white group than the Asians. Both of these differences attain a high level of statistical significance.

In the information collected on the children's ethnic preferences—ie, their choice of the figures they "liked best"; "would like to play with in the playground"; "would share their sweets with"; and "would like to sit next to in class"—the differences between the immigrant groups disappear. But both groups once again diverge strongly from the English children's pattern.

We found the same trends in the sections of the study. Our third set of tests required the children to attribute favourable and unfavourable characteristics to the figures from each group—a juvenile version of adult stereotyping. Though "adult" reactions were often found, one could not assume their presence. It would have been fruitless to ask the child, "Which doll lives on National Assistance?" We simply asked the children to indicate the "bad" doll of the pair, the "nicest" of another pair, and the "ugly" one of a third. All the dolls were dressed identically. So the only distinction between them was their racial characteristics.

Finally a test to discriminate racial differences was given, without which the other tests would

Table 2: Percentage of each ethnic group making a majority of 'other-group' choices on all sections of the tests

	preferences	stereotypes
English	6	0
Asian	74	65
West Indian	72	72

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be invalid. All the children passed this. Table 2 shows the proportion of each group which made a majority of "other-group" choices throughout. It is clear that, on all the tests, both immigrant groups predominantly favour the white figures, attribute good characteristics to them and bad ones to their own-group figures, and prefer them as future neighbours, companions and so on. Only a tiny minority of the English children reciprocate this bias. We noted no age differences; nor were there any differences between boys and girls, or differences according to the numbers of immigrants in the schools.

Our results show that children of five to eight years old already have a sound grasp of the position of coloured immigrants in the English social structure, in simple evaluative terms. This is evident both in their consistent preference for white figures over the less acceptable coloured ones, and in their spontaneous remarks during the interviews. As in the American studies, a rudimentary grasp of adult views was sometimes evident. One five year old English boy said that the black doll was the "bad" one "because he should have learned the language before he came over here." More important than this was the simple awareness of the good and bad connotations of the two groups, white and coloured.

The identity section seems to indicate that for some immigrant children, this evaluation has penetrated far enough to cause them to avoid identifying with their own group, and to identify with the white group instead. Here, though, there are differences between the immigrants, this tendency being less pronounced in the Asian group. This most probably results from insulation against these influences by the strong cultural and religious emphases in the home and the Asian communities—these factors providing a positive sense of identity.

What relation do our findings bear to the everyday behaviour of our children? Several sociometric studies in this country show that there is increasing division between the immigrant and

white children from this age onwards. While this situation agrees with the English children's preferences, outlined above, it is the opposite of the immigrant children's wishes. However, their wishes have to contend with the *realpolitik* of playground and classroom, and are therefore frustrated. Probably more damaging is the effect on the immigrant child's self-esteem of the derogatory portrayal of his group. The conflicts of identification manifested in these tests may indicate real-life identity conflicts, which are less easily resolved.

Quantitative comparisons between these findings and other studies are perhaps questionable. But we can say that some coloured immigrant children are showing qualitatively similar reactions to their predicament to black American children, and those of disadvantaged racial minorities elsewhere. Insofar as a positive self-image or sense of identity is almost a prerequisite of mental health, these ambivalent or even negative self-and group-attitudes are the cause for extreme concern.

Remedies are not easy. Faced with problems which derive directly from the structure of our society—the social and economic status relations between immigrants and ourselves, and the values surrounding them—it is difficult to see how "compensatory education" (see, too, Henry Acland's articles on the Plowden report, 9 and 16 September) can cure very much more than the symptoms of the malaise, at least in the short term. Certain aspects of this, for example, taking immigrant children by bus into surrounding white areas, may simply add further stigma, whatever educational benefits accrue.

Many of the problems that are involved are circular: aspirations which would be considered laudable in white children have been described as "unrealistically" high for immigrants. Many of the barriers to the achievement of such aspirations are erected by our white adult attitudes, which progressive legislation and enlightened educational practices can only slowly change.

The hazards of population forecasts

Colin Stewart

Too much is expected of demographic projections. A retrospect on 'yesterday's future' shows the flaws.

In 1944 the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, said, "There is no branch of human knowledge in which we can pierce the mysteries of the future so clearly as in the trend of population. . . . Here the searchlight of statistics ranges with accuracy for 30 or 40 years ahead." Five years later, in 1949, the Royal Commission on Population was rather less dogmatic than this, but still felt able to say: "One future development, however, we can forecast with a good deal of confidence, namely, a substantial decline in the annual number of births over the next 15 years." It is common knowledge that the royal commission was mistaken in its confident prediction regarding births which, in fact,

rose during the following 15 years, and, although the annual numbers have declined since 1965, they still remain well above the highest of the royal commission's assumptions.

Few people today would claim to be able to forecast the future population or the numbers of births in future years (which is that side of population change least susceptible to prediction), particularly those responsible for the official population projections, who are at great pains to point out, whenever the opportunity arises, that a population projection is not a forecast, but an illustration of what would happen on the basis of certain assumptions concerning future mortality, fertility

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