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WHO IS MULTIRACIAL ? INVESTIGATING THE EXPERIENCES OF "MULTIGENERATION" MULTIRACIALS

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While there has been significant growth in studies about multiracial (or mixed race) individuals – that is, the children of interracial unions – very few studies have investigated the experiences of people who are the descendants of multiracial individuals (such as the children of multiracial people).

In Britain, the majority of mixed people are known to partner with White Britons, therefore, their children, whose minority ancestries are at a generational remove, can be called ‘multigeneration’ (2nd or 3rd generation) multiracials. As ‘mixing’ continues in many societies, and down the generations, what are the social and theoretical implications of this?

Generational (and genealogical) distance from a minority ancestry means that some people may possess little awareness of or interest in a minority or multiracial heritage. I argue that increasingly, we must specify the generational locus of ‘mixing’ in studies of multiracial people, so that we clearly differentiate between 1st and 2nd (and even 3rd) generation mixed people, and explore the differential ways in which multigeneration multiracials do or do not value the generational transmission of minority ancestries. In doing so, in the case of individuals whose ancestries are predominantly White over successive generations, we can investigate whether there is a generational ‘tipping point’ at which one’s multiracial ancestry is no longer meaningful.

However, claims of an ineluctable trend toward ‘whitening’, as is alleged in relation to many mixed people in the USA, is unfounded, as it is also possible that multigeneration multiracials in many multiethnic societies may choose to partner with other mixed and ethnic minority individuals. This major demographic pattern will also require us to rethink our understandings of minority status and its automatic link with visible racialized bodies.