Not Enough Understanding?

STUDENT EXPERIENCES OF DIVERSITY IN UK UNIVERSITIES

A RUNNYMEDE COMMUNITY STUDY
BY JESSICA MAI SIMS

RUNNYMEDE

About Runnymede Community Studies

In reflecting on the changing nature of ethnic diversity in Britain, it becomes increasingly clear that we have to move beyond binary notions of white and non-white to explain the ways in which racisms operate, identities are formed and people live out their lives. The societies in which we live are becoming more diverse and will continue to diversify as migration patterns change, and the impacts of globalisation are reflected in labour markets as well as in transnational movement of capital.

This series of community studies aims to promote understanding of the diversity within and between different ethnic groups. Our intention is to build up a collection of studies which focus on communities; their demography, links to civil society, and key political and social issues. We hope that over time this will provide a rich resource for understanding how diversity is lived and experienced away from the necessarily crude ethnic monitoring form, in a vital and dynamic multi-ethnic society.

Not Enough Understanding?

Student Experiences of Diversity in UK Universities

JESSICA MAI SIMS

UK Universities at a Glance

Population and Geography—Students

- As of 2004/5 16 percent of the student body of UK universities were from BME backgrounds
- People from BME backgrounds have a greater Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR), than people of White backgrounds
- In England data from 2001/2 showed that people from Black African and Indian backgrounds had the highest HEIPR (both above 70 percent) while students from Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean backgrounds had the lowest participation rates (39 percent and 35 percent respectively)
- Around 60 percent of minority ethnic students in England are concentrated in London's 'new' universities
- All minority ethnic groups, with the exception of students from Chinese backgrounds, are more likely to be at 'new' institutions
- There are more students of Black Caribbean origin at London Metropolitan University than at all the Russell Group universities put together

Population and Geography—Universities

- Divisions of universities in the UK follow by: Russell Group, 1994 Group, the Campaign for Modern Universities (CMU), and the University Alliance
- Currently five Russell Group institutions (Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Imperial and University College London) receive almost a third of all research funding allocated to all universities
- CMU represents the largest group of universities and educates more than half a million students
- 7 percent of universities in the UK have BME student populations of 50 percent or more. 60 percent of universities have minority ethnic populations of less than 10 percent

Housing and Accommodation

- BME students accepted to first degree courses were more likely to travel less distance on average to university than White students, a greater proportion opting to live at home

Employment Prospects

- Studying at a Russell Group university can boost a graduate's earnings by between 3 and 6 percent compared to studying at a 'new' university
- In a survey of recruiters by The Guardian, just over a quarter of respondents felt that the 'new' universities produce lower quality graduates
- BME graduates are more than twice as likely to be unemployed after graduation as compared to White UK and White Irish students

Health

- In a survey conducted in 10 universities in the UK in 1996 11% respondents reported as non-drinkers, and of the drinkers, 61% of the men and 48% of the women exceeded "sensible" limits
- 20% reported regular cannabis use and 33% reported experience with other illicit drugs

Key Legislation

- Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 states that higher education institutions have the duty to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups
- Further and Higher Education Act 1992 changed polytechnics in the UK into universities

Religion

- Physical attacks and lack of respect shown for observant Jewish students and faculty are reportedly on the rise
- Muslim students have reported an increase of discrimination, or what they felt to be Islamophobia, on university campuses. 30 percent of Muslim students surveyed felt isolated at university for being Muslim.

Relevant Organisations and Websites

Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
95 Promenade
Cheltenham
GL50 1HZ
Tel: 012 4225 5577
Web: http://www.hesa.ac.uk/

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (Hefce)
London Office
28th Floor
Centre Point
103 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1DD
Tel: 020 7420 2200
Web: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/

Universities UK
Woburn House
20 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HQ
Tel: 020 7419 4111
Web:
http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk

Russell Group
1 Northumberland Avenue
London WC2N 5BW
Web:
http://www.russellgroup.ac.uk

The 1994 Group
Room 3.06
Gray's Inn Road Business
Centre
344-354 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8BP
Tel: 020 7164 2094
Web:
http://www.1994group.ac.uk/

Campaigning for Mainstream Universities (CMU)
Chief Executive
90 London Road
London SE1 6LN
Tel: 020 7717 1655
Email: cmu@cmu.ac.uk

National Hindu Students' Forum
PO Box 46016
London W9 1WS
Tel: 07092 377 304
Web:
www.watermarkpages.net/nhsf/

**Aim Higher
Action on Access**
Edge Hill University
Ormskirk
Lancashire L39 4QP
Tel: 01695 650 850
Web:
http://www.aimhigher.ac.uk

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT
Tel: 0870 000 2288
Web: http://www.dfes.gov.uk

Commission for Equality and Human Rights
Kingsgate House
66-74 Victoria Street
London SW1E 6SW
Web: www.cehr.org.uk

Federation Of Student Islamic Societies
38 Mapesbury Road
London
NW2 4JD
Tel: 0208 452 4493
Web: www.fosis.org.uk

Sutton Trust
111 Upper Richmond Road
Putney
London SW15 2TJ
Tel: 020 8788 3223
Web:
http://www.suttontrust.com

National Union of Students
2nd Floor
Centro 3
19 Mandela Street
London NW1 0DU
Tel: 0871 221 8221
Web: www.nusonline.co.uk

Equality Challenge Unit
7th floor, Queens House
55/56 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London
WC2A 3LJ
Tel: 020 7438 1010
Web: www.ecu.ac.uk

The Union of Jewish Students of Great Britain & Ireland
Hillel House
1 & 2 Endsleigh Street
London WC1H 0DS
Tel: 020 7387 4644
Web: www.ujs.org.uk

UCAS
Web: http://www.ucas.ac.uk

Directgov
Web: http://www.direct.gov.uk
Higher Education and Research Opportunities in the UK (HERO)
Web: http://www.hero.ac.uk/
uk/home/index.cfm

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)
Web:
http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Shelter
Web: www.shelter.org.uk

Skill: National Bureau for Students with Disabilities
Web: http://www.skill.org.uk

Introduction

The first three community studies conducted by The RunnymedeTrust focused on 'invisible' minority ethnic communities; namely the Vietnamese, Bolivian and Francophone Cameroonian communities, in an effort to move our understanding of communities in the UK beyond the broad census categorisations of Asian, Black, White and Other. However, community is a term which can refer to many kinds of social groupings, not only ethnically bound social groups. This study focuses on a London university student community which is in turn comprised of many ethnic, national and faith groupings. Much like society at large, the university is a site where issues surrounding equality, difference and cohesion are becoming more pronounced. With policies intending to provide greater opportunities for 'non-traditional' students—students coming from underrepresented ethnic, racial, age, ability and socioeconomic groups—more attention must be paid to building the university environment into a more inclusive environment for all potential students. Besides it being in the students' best interest for universities to provide equal opportunity of access, they have the legal duty under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups.[1]

Universities are already implementing policies to widen participation, ensure equal access and to improve the attainment of students, but have faltered on some of the more social aspects of diversity which also effect students' academic and social experience. While it is vital that universities provide equal opportunities, they must not forget the 'good relations' aspect of their duty. The mere presence of a group of black and minority ethnic (BME) students does not automatically equate to a student community where there is equal access, participation and opportunity. The strength of the university community is based on what the students identify with and if they feel they belong to something

greater; that they identify with the collective.[2]

Considering that the higher education participation rate for first time entrants is currently 43 percent of all young people, the role that universities play in preparing and training individuals to contribute to society is great, and it follows that, universities can influence individuals to be more tolerant and empathetic citizens. University is a space that greatly influences the individual's political and social consciousness and this community, though constantly changing and evolving according to its members, is an important location in building a successful multi-ethnic society. The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) states that some of the benefits that follow from universities meeting their duties under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act include that they will, "create a positive atmosphere, where there is a shared commitment to value diversity and respect difference," and, "prepare students to be full citizens in today's multi-ethnic society."[3] As government policy pushes for more young people to attend university, the role of universities in promoting good race relations can only increase. In the United States more research has focused on fostering university communities, and has looked at the impact of positive race relations on campus on individuals. One study that focused on positive race relations on US campuses stated that,

> students who have higher levels of cross-racial interaction at university tend to report significantly larger gains made in their knowledge of and ability to accept different races and cultures, growth in general knowledge, critical thinking ability, and problem-solving skills, and intellectual and social self-confidence than their peers who had lower levels of interaction.[4]

The study also noted that students who may not have personal interactions with others of a different race or ethnicity but are enrolled in an institution that sustains positive race relations still report higher acceptance towards others.[5] The impact of positive experiences of diversity during

1 RRA (2000)

2 McNay (2005: 43)

3 CRE (2002: 4)

4 Chang et al.(2006: 449)

5 Chang et al. (2006: 434)

university tenure appears to be greater tolerance for others in society.

The first part of this report focuses on diversity in higher education in the UK, who is going, how well they are doing, and what their prospects are upon graduation. In order to explore how diversity operates on a university campus after the brief sketch of national themes, the second half of this report looks into the experiences and opinion of one university's politics students. The particular student community case study provides an interesting insight into the dynamic of student life on campus focusing on interaction between members of different ethnic groups, while also exploring the factors that bring students together. Students shared accounts of racial division on campus and anecdotes of peer rejection, but also stressed visible examples of inter-ethnic contact and positive personal experiences with diversity. Many students held the belief that their university's strength was its diversity. Through their discussions of community and campus race relations, they briefly set out how they think better campus relations could be achieved.

Methodology

Relatively few studies have focused on the BME student experience or race relations in UK universities.[6] This report, while exploring issues affecting BME students in the university will also seek to unearth racial dynamics for a university student community in a diverse setting. Although not being representative of an entire university's student opinion, the case study was built around two focus groups of ten students enrolled in an Introduction to Politics course, and two in-depth interviews: one with the President of the Student Union and one with a university staff member in charge of student affairs. Focus groups were chosen for the student participants in order to get a sense of students' perceptions and opinions during a process of engaging with each other; what is important in this case is not only the individual responses of the participants but the possible negotiation of the experience of the student community by bringing the students together. The follow-up interviews with the Student Union President and the university staff member were primarily conducted to understand how the Student Union and administration have developed policy and practice to embrace diversity and promote good race relations on campus.[7]

Firstly, the case university was chosen, not for its typical university profile, but precisely for its uniqueness. The university—referred to as 'State University' in the discussion—is one of few that has a highly diverse student intake of minorities from both UK home and abroad; the UK home BME student population is over 50 percent. Also notable is that the university is not a former polytechnic. Choosing a highly diverse university that also has good national standing provides a useful example for future comparison with less diverse older universities. The discussion shows that mere numbers of BME students is not sufficient for good campus relations or ensuring equal opportunities. Politics students in this instance were chosen because of their academic interests, and the stage that they had reached in their course (covering theoretical issues of equality, justice and multiculturalism). First year students were seen as desirable participants, as they are early in the process of forming and participating in a university community, having a fresh perspective of the existing social dynamics at the university as being new community initiates. Themes discussed in the focus groups were chosen to gauge the 'community' feeling among the students, among these were: the definitions of a community, the sense of belonging to a student community, the perception of cohesion or fragmentation between groups at the university, any perceived barriers that certain groups may have in accessing aspects of the community or university, and the benefits or challenges of diversity.

This report does not purport to show a typical 'student community' or even the typical student. Instead, a voice was given to some students to express their opinion on their student community. Despite the small sample size, the focus groups and interviews provided an outline of social relations in a diverse community. Thus, the vignette in the second half of the report aims to flesh out some issues that may also be experienced at other universities in order to facilitate a process of dialogue on how universities can maintain a sense of student community, and how they can more effectively promote good race relations that will extend beyond the educational setting.

6 e.g. Hussain & Bagguley (forthcoming 2007); Bird (1996); Connor et al., (2004); Osler (1999); Read et al. (2003)

7 The names of the participants and the university have been changed in order to maintain anonymity. However the ages, genders and ethnicities are used with the intention of conveying a profile of the participants in the report.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UK

British universities all have their own unique history and environment positioning them competitively for prospective students. Over the past ten years universities have divided into groups in order to represent member institutions' shared interests. The first group to form, the Russell Group Universities, represents the UK's leading research intensive universities.[8] As an indication of their academic rigour, these 20 universities were allocated approximately 64% of the total quality-related research funding by the Funding Councils during 2004/5, and accounted for 65% of UK Universities' research grant and contract income. Currently the five institutions of Oxford, Cambridge, Manchester, Imperial and University College London receive almost a third of all research funding in the UK.[9]

Increasing the divisions in higher education, three more groups of universities emerged as a response to the Russell Group to protect their own collective interests. The 1994 Group, a coalition of research-led universities; [10] the Campaign for Modern Universities (formerly Coalition of Modern Universities)which consists of the 'new' universities or former polytechnics;[11] and University Alliance comprised of both 'new' and old universities that are not aligned to the other three university lobbying groups.[12]

Participation in Higher Education

In the UK, participation of people from BME backgrounds in higher education (HE) has been a source of optimism for race equality. As an indication of increasing opportunities, the years of 2001/2002 saw participation rates of undergraduate students from BME backgrounds at almost 15 percent of the total students, gradually increasing to a little over 16 percent in 2004/2005. BME young people are more likely than White young people to take the opportunity of HE; all BME groups have a greater Higher Education Initial Participation Rate (HEIPR), than that of the White group.[13]

Comparing different ethnic group participation rates reveals a more complicated situation. Connor and her colleagues revealed from 2001/2 data that in England students from Black African and Indian backgrounds had the highest HEIPR (both above 70 percent) while students from Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean backgrounds had the lowest participation rates among minority ethnic groups (39 percent and 35 percent respectively).[14] Further disaggregating figures, participation rates disclose gender disparities within and between BME groups. The participation rate of Black Caribbean men is only slightly above participation rates of White men (36 percent and 34 percent respectively).[15] Moreover, whilst women from BME backgrounds are not on average underrepresented in HE, Bangladeshi women with HEIPR rate of 39 percent are the only group that have a lower participation rate than White women (HEIPR rate of 41 percent).[16] Therefore whilst BME students have higher participation rates than White students, the difference within and between BME groups vary to such a degree that one cannot make the simple comparison of White versus BME groups. Table 1.1[17] below compares HEIPR by ethnicity and gender.

Table1.1 HE Participation by Ethnicity and Gender (England) 2001/2

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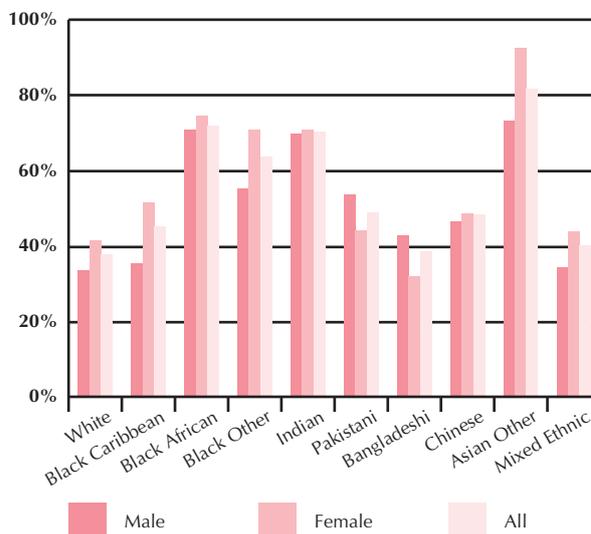
8 'The Russell Group' (2007)

9 Blair (2006b)

10 'The Russell Group' (2007)

11 Former polytechnics (also called 'post-1992', 'modern', and 'new' universities) received university status when the Further and Higher Education Act, 1992 came into effect allowing them to award academic degrees

12 MacLeod (2006); for a list of the four coalitions and membership, see Appendix I.

13 Broecke & Nicholls (2007: 3)

14 Connor et al. (2004: 43)

15 Connor et al. recommend that individual ethnic/gender HEIPRs in their report should be treated with caution and viewed as provisional because of the weaknesses in Census estimates and the problems associated with using two sources to make the HEIPR calculations. For more see: Connor et al. (2004: 43 & 44)

16 For more information on participation of South Asian women, including the growing participation of Bangladeshi women, in HE see Hussain & Bagguley (forthcoming) (2007)

17 Connor et al. (2004:150)

Diversity on campus: Where BME students choose to go?

Initiatives such as Aim Higher were created to widen HE participation among underrepresented groups, however it focuses on the numbers of students entering HE and not the structure of the university hierarchy or the reproduction of social stratification of graduates. Even though all ethnic groups, including White (with the exception of students from Chinese backgrounds) are more likely to be at 'new' institutions, 'new' institutions have the two-fold reputation for being less influential and more socially diverse (read less exclusive).[18] As an indication of their diversity, around 60 percent of BME students in England are concentrated in London's 'new' universities'.[19] Research into education choice has shown that, "the desire to 'fit in' and belong at university impacts on choice of institution among working-class and minority ethnic applicants," which may in turn influence 'non-traditional' students to apply to more diverse universities—the former polytechnics.[20] Shockingly, there are more students of Black Caribbean origin at London Metropolitan University than at all the Russell Group universities put together. [21] This figure clearly illustrates the gap in proportional representation in universities, or perhaps even the extent of institutional barriers which prevent people from certain groups from accessing the best resources and most prominent universities.

The Russell Group has the reputation for being the HE transition route for White private school students, which may not be completely unfounded. In 2005/6 the proportion of students from state schools was down in 14 member universities from the previous year. In 2006, only 51.4 percent of Oxford's students and 56 percent Cambridge's students were from state schools; these two universities also admit the lowest number of students from poor backgrounds out of the Russell Group.[22] Just as people from BME backgrounds are unevenly distributed across the

country, BME students are unequally distributed across the HE sector; the Russell Group member universities with the highest participation rates (between 30 and 47 percent) of BME students are at UCL, Imperial, LSE, and Kings; universities in London, the city where approximately half (44.6 percent) of the BME population of the UK lives.[23] Further, out of all UK universities, 11 (i.e. almost 7 percent of all UK universities) have BME student populations of 50 percent or more. Further, all of these universities are located in the greater London area and seven are former polytechnics. BME students accepted to first degree courses were more likely to travel less distance on average to university than White students, which may be one reason for the unequal geographic distribution of BME students.[24] Table 1.2 below compares the number of universities in the UK by proportion of enrolled BME students.[25]

Table 1.2 Percent of BME Students Enrolled in UK Universities 2003/4
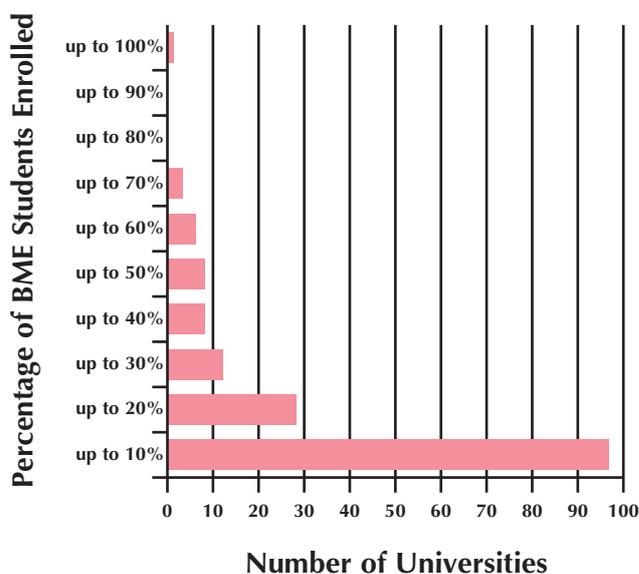
It is also important to note that aside from the social make-up of the institution; Russell Group universities' competitive entry qualifications exclude many applicants: students from BME backgrounds are more likely than their White counterparts to have vocational rather than academic entry qualifications, which ultimately limit their choice of university.[26] Students from BME backgrounds who do have the necessary qualifications for the top universities are of the brightest; the BME students who attend these universities are more likely to perform better than

18 Connor et al. (2004:44)

19 Bhattacharyya et al. (2003: 28)

20 Read et al. (2003: 261)

21 Curtis (2006)

22 Blair (2006a) & Blair (2006b)

23 Bhattacharyya et al. (2003: 5)

24 Curtis (2006) & Bhattacharyya et al. (2003: 28)

25 Curtis (2006)

26 Bhattacharyya et al. (2003: 27)

their non-Russell Group peers.[27] Students enrolled in Russell Group universities benefit from a high quality education because of the quality and amount of resources these universities have. For instance, it has been estimated that the combined resources of the colleges in either Oxford or Cambridge overshadow the entire spending of universities elsewhere in the UK.[28]

Yet choice of university does not just have implications for the quality of education or university social experience. Universities with an abundance of available learning resources impact on quality of tuition and thus the opportunities for self-development and also employment; it follows that students from certain institutions are more likely to be employed and employed in roles which gain greater monetary reward than others. Studying at a Russell Group university can boost a graduate's earnings by 3 percent to 6 percent compared to studying at a 'new' university.[29] The perception from recruiters may not be that Russell Group students deserve more, but rather graduates from 'new' universities deserve less—in a survey of recruiters, just over a quarter of respondents felt that the 'new' universities produce lower quality graduates.[30] Students concerned with increasing their career prospects will benefit from having gone to a 'good' university. Similarly, having a good degree—a first and upper second class degree—gives them a competitive edge. In spite of high HEIPR, BME graduates are less likely to have gone to a top university, they are less likely to have a good degree upon graduation,[31] and are more than twice as likely to be unemployed after graduation as compared to White UK and Irish students.[32]

27 Broecke & Nicholls. (2007:4)

28 Bahra, et al. (2002)

29 Chevalier & Conlon (2003)

30 'Graduates in the Eyes of Employers' (2002: 20)

31 Broecke & Nicholls. (2007: 16)

32 When comparing 'good' degree attainment by BME graduates, the unemployment rate is lower than for all BME graduates, but still twice as high as their white counterparts; see: Connor et al (2004: 80 & 92)

33 Read et al. (2003: 267)

34 Black referring to people of African, Arab, Asian, and Caribbean decent

35 NUS (2007b)

36 NUS (2007b)

37 Taylor (2006); Butt, (2006); and Campbell (2006)

38 'Racist graffiti on campus' (2007)

39 Glees (2005)

40 NUS (2007a)

41 'Hindu girls targeted by extremists' (2007) & 'Met and Hindus to work closer to build community confidence' (2007)

Diversity on campus: Campus race relations

Along with efforts to raise attendance, attainment and opportunity for BME students in HE, there is a drive for greater participation in university life. The desire to 'fit in' may prompt students from minority ethnic backgrounds to apply to certain universities that are seen to be more diverse, still, absolute numbers do not necessarily ensure good campus relations between groups or that all aspects of university life can be equally accessible.[33] The National Union of Students (NUS) hopes to increase the involvement, representation and opportunity of black students on campus through their Black Students Campaign.[34] Apparently although 20 percent of NUS membership is from members of BME backgrounds, they account for less than 4 percent of the elected officers and sabbaticals.[35] Believing that increased representation will provide greater equality in HE, they have stated that, "anecdotal evidence shows that where Black Officer posts have been created, participation of Black students increases and issues like fighting racism and campaigns for anonymous marking, a prayer room in every college, Votes are Power and recognising Black history are prioritised."[36] On the whole, literature looking into campus race relations in UK universities is slim. Recently attention has been focused on student protest against a few professors for their controversial views on immigrants and people from BME backgrounds[37] and the occasional case of racist graffiti.[38] There is more substantial literature focusing on faith groups at universities, though often from the point of view of fear of Islam.[39]

As a response to racism on university campuses the NUS have instituted a 'No Platform' policy on specific groups, meaning they do not allow certain organisations space on university campuses to raise their ideological platforms. Organisations like the British National Party, Hizb ut-Tahrir and Muslim Public Affairs Committee, (MPACUK) have been banned because they are seen to spread hatred on campuses that in turn violate other students' freedoms and generally detract from good campus relations.[40] Recently it was reported that a representative from the Hindu Forum of Britain accused Muslim extremists of making, "life miserable for Hindu girls" by trying to forcibly convert them to Islam.[41] To add to religious tensions, a report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against Antisemitism recorded abuses on

university campuses such as physical attacks and lack of respect shown for Jewish students and faculty by other students, staff and sometimes members of extreme Muslim groups. Equally, Muslim students have reported an increase of discrimination, or what they felt to be Islamophobia on university campuses. In line with feeling more vulnerable since the July 7th bombings, 30 percent of Muslim students felt isolated at university for being Muslim.[42]

UNIVERSITY STUDENT COMMUNITY

As previously mentioned, few studies have explored students' experiences of diversity on university campuses. Hence the following case study discusses the management of diversity at 'State University' (SU) and the implications for a student community. Albeit far from expressing the opinion of the entire student community, the student focus group participants involved considered the issues they believed important for strong community building at university. Their insights into their own experiences in a diverse campus community provide a sketch of how inclusive communities can be fostered.

Diversity on campus: A Lived Experience
The students felt that there was a feeling of community at SU, and that they contributed to it through participation in clubs, societies, and new friendships and even by living in halls of residence. Many felt that the fundamental link between students was their choice to enrol at SU, and while they were separated by different departments, they were together going through the process of a degree qualification. University was seen to offer a new beginning for students; SU represented new found freedoms not accessible before because of familial and home community pressures. Students described how members of the SU community are free to choose their friends, their social affiliations, and a new identity for themselves. Rather than being bounded to a community through birth or familial ties, choice was the most prominent characteristic of their community. Ashley, a first

year student, described university as a liberating experience,

> I think when you come to university you can build a totally different image of yourself as part of the community. Whereas back home you go to the same school and have the same friends for 15 or so odd years, and you're known as the quiet kid or the funny kid. When you start university no one really knows you and you can be whoever you want. You can create a whole new persona (Female White British 19).

Similarly, speaking positively about the university experience, Anjali related how, "being a first year, it means finding people you can learn from, you can associate with, you can feel comfortable with, and feeling that you're not on your own. You've got people going through the same process or have been through… a home away from home," (Female, British Asian, 19).

Social activities and the extent to which a university is campus-centred were stated as being leading characteristics of a strong student community. Brandon, a second year student, felt the lack of adequate on-site housing was a principal barrier for students to have a community, which he found was a fault of the university; he believed that in particular London students are missing out on the student experience because they are less likely to be offered halls of residence. Living in halls allowed for a greater proximity to peers that was seen as necessary to building strong relationships with other students, and thus strongly feeling part of a university community. Two international students, neither of whom lived on campus, discussed how campus housing shapes community building:

> Paavo: At [SU] there seems to be quite a division here for those who live on campus and those who don't. The sense of the community isn't that strong for those who don't live on campus, and that's a shame really (Male Finnish 23).
> Keyvan: You can't really expect more though. People spending day and night together, they will form a sense of community to make their lives more

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42 Federation of Student Islamic Societies (2005: 20)

enjoyable… there is a level of acceptance that they give, and if you spend more time with them then they will accept you easier (Male Iranian 19).

A sense of community is also related to time spent interacting with each other. Halls of residence were a space that offered an easy transition to making new friendship for students from outside London; living in halls meant an instant social network, a sort of community initiation. Those living on campus would have the opportunity to spend more time getting to know each other precisely because their life is physically centred on university. However proximity and time were acknowledged as not being a luxury readily available for all students, especially students working through term-time. Some students spend only as much time on campus as needed to complete their scholastic duties; time and proximity as resources for strong relationships is dependent on students' other commitments. Thus, it was widely felt that students working during term-time and students living off campus would not experience the most of the university's social aspects.

Having the opportunity to have meaningful interaction with other students is crucial to building a university community. Lack of interaction, as expressed by the students as social mix, was seen as visible signs of a divided campus community; groups made from members who were visibly similar were cited as examples of segregation and possible hostility to engaging with others. The presence of seemingly homogeneous groups deterred some students from making the first move out of intimidation. Ashley explained her limitations to engaging with others, "if there is a group of people that all look the same or act the same way, then I think that's a barrier… I'll approach a person on their own, but when it's a big group of like Barbie girls, it's just like high school," (Female White British 19).

Self-consciousness provides a barrier to engagement, as John, a native Londoner, guessed, "… foreign students especially from China and Thailand, don't integrate—and I don't say that in a negative way, but they stick together and they speak in their own language… some people put up their own barriers, maybe it's a defence mechanism or something, I don't know," (Male British Asian 19). Similarly, students' self-consciousness towards

other cultures could provide a barrier to engaging with other students. Keyvan believed first impressions would determine many people's interactions for the next three years at university:

> it is the case of luck that when you approach a British person—if they accept you for the first time then you'll be accepted in the rest of the groups that you go to. But if you don't, then you'll have this perception on your side that British people won't accept me. And British people feel the same way as well… (Male Iranian 19).

As an example of John's defence mechanism hypothesis, Brandon confessed how he and some friends formed a, "we wish we were at a different university" club, with the reasoning that, "if you're White, went to private school… you feel out of place [at SU]," (Male White British 21). The examples that the students gave were believed to be natural, but they felt that some kind of intervention was needed to ensure that students would be able to meet others of different backgrounds, and that too many ethnically defined cliques would result in poor race relations on campus.

Issues of Race and Racism
Aside from poor race relations, social groups forming along race, ethnicity and faith lines were seen as ultimately normal though possibly threatening when they positioned to exclude others out of racist convictions. Keyvan felt that despite feeling comfortable in British culture and going to parties, other White British students rejected him as one of them, either because he is a foreigner or because he's a Middle Easterner. Similarly, Julia, from Sweden, and Paavo, from Finland, acknowledged they could blend into social situations better as Europeans, but Paavo still felt being an international student was in itself a barrier engage with home UK students.

As already expressed, students generally chose to live in halls of residence for an enhanced university experience—more social interaction with peers equated to being able to identify more with both peers and the institution. However two students cited personal experiences of racism whilst living in halls. In fact these two, with the exception of

Keyvan, were the only ones who spoke of personal experiences of direct discrimination on campus. Halls are a site which presents students with a closer understanding of others whether good or bad; the proximity of living with people with other customs and cultures can either be a space of learning or rejection. Anjali mentioned how she felt targeted by a White housemate who sometimes would call her by derogatory names. Brandon felt intimidated by what he called a race divide in halls, feeling after one incident that 'cross-racial' friendships were frowned upon by particular ethnic groups. Neither Anjali nor Brandon indicated that they had challenged the action of the offending cohabitants; Anjali dismissed her incident more as a case of ignorance rather than racism, whilst Brandon chose to move back to his parents' home.

Upon hearing Anjali's experience, Ashley, another resident of halls, could not believe SU students could be racist because of the diverse community they chose to join. She suspected that students and administration, despite choosing a diverse university, may not be properly equipped to feel at ease with people from other backgrounds. As she explained:

> I don't think that there is enough of an understanding, I don't know enough about Hinduism or Islam to know that I'm not offending someone—and with political correctness you become worried about offending someone. I think that the administration is quite aware of that so they tiptoe around the subject instead of doing something about it.

The presence of diversity on campus does not necessarily mean that students will have an improved understanding of each other or of diversity; the value of diversity is not inherent but rather appears to depend on whether it leads to greater levels of engagement.[43] Ashley was particularly proactive at making friends from different backgrounds, but still was concerned with her own cultural confidence. For those with minimum interaction in diverse settings, the SU experience may be overwhelming. Brandon expressed mostly negative views of his university experience, feeling almost betrayed by SU for his

lack of meaningful engagement with diversity:

> And that's partially why I chose to come here—I thought I would broaden my horizons. I was very ashamed to say that…I knew very little about ethnic minorities… so I wanted to do something about this and find out more, and be more opened minded than my friends who went to Oxford and Cambridge. Having done that, it's really something that I should have done in a one month holiday or something like that, than endure three years (Male White British 21).

Institutions have a role to play in facilitating engagement with diversity, but engagement does largely depend on the motivation of the individual. For example, even though Brandon was disappointed in his time at SU, he gave little indication of attempting 'cross-racial' relationship-building. Besides Brandon, no one else spoke about extreme racial tensions on campus; however they did acknowledge that relations were not ideal. Students believed that it was the administration's responsibility to promote good relations between groups at the university, although none knew that the administration was legally obligated to do so. Anjali felt that the administration promoted good relations by providing students with clubs and societies but that these associations did not necessarily work together to contribute good relations but more or less acted as autonomous social units.

Student Association or Student Segregation?
Often students opt for joining clubs and societies offered by the university as a means for meeting others for either social or academic interests. Anjali enjoyed being part of the Hindu society because of its diverse membership while Ketan joined the politics society for a space to develop his political convictions. Ashley was attracted to the swimming club not just for the sports aspect, but also the camaraderie that helped to develop her social life. Interestingly, while Anjali commended the Hindu society for its diversity (of Hindus and non-Hindus, and Hindus both from different parts of the world and different parts of India), some students felt that clubs and associations along ethnic and faith lines were exclusionary. Often BME students chose to

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43 Chang et al. (2006: 432)

participate in ethnic oriented clubs not only because there is less threat to their social identities but also the space these clubs provide to develop their identities and be included in campus life.[44] Again, it was understood that students would naturally choose to associate themselves with others who share a common interest, but the existence of clubs and societies along ethnic and faith lines were seen to have more complicated origins.

Students felt that societies offered an extensive range of interest and relationship building opportunities, but mainly for people that already have a previous link to that particular society/community either through cultural affiliation or personal acquaintances, or for those who in some way already were made to feel welcome. There was a feeling that societies did not do enough to reach out to non-traditional potential members. For example, Paavo cited how despite wanting to participate in events held by the Japanese Society, he had not because he was unable to read the Japanese flyers. In this instance, the Japanese society was seen as excluding non-Japanese literate students. Societies built around a particular culture seemed fair, but students felt different approaches would allow greater participation, such as the feature of bi-lingual advertisements for society meetings or events.

On the issue of greater outreach, the idea of 'tokenism' was also discussed; that in ethnic or faith centred clubs there are a few 'token' members of different backgrounds, and how in 'mainstream' clubs, like sports clubs and the university magazine, there are a few 'token' BME members. The students were sceptical that a few members equated to a welcoming environment or equal access, but rather illustrated the 'whiteness' of the group. Moving past tokenism requires individual enthusiasm, but also opportunity. The President of the Student Union explained that the most organised contact clubs and societies have with the student body are the first few weeks of the Autumn and Spring terms. Perhaps then, more coordinated, open and public events throughout the year would provide students, who would not otherwise feel comfortable enough to go to their first society meeting, the opportunity to try out different societies. Ashley, Ketan and Anjali suggested that

SU would benefit from societies interacting with each other more and could sponsor joint events or create 'solidarity societies', such as interfaith, interracial or geopolitical, in order to connect people from different groups. These solidarity societies would improve communication between groups, perhaps creating more inclusive social activities for students.

Although many societies were founded through cultural connections, there are no explicit White or British societies. Nonetheless many 'mainstream' associations were believed to be along ethnic and cultural lines because of the events and activities promoted; namely drinking. In the focus groups, all were very aware of the stereotype of a typical student as a big social drinker, and the non-drinker being excluded from the majority of social activities on campus. Muslim students were cited as examples as the majority of alcohol abstaining students at SU, though it was conceded that many other non-Muslim students are also not interested in drinking. Anjali stated that the campus bar was, "just not my place to be," and also resisted the stereotype of the student only interested in drinking, "there is a stigma that all students like to do it go out and drink, get hammered and laid and we don't," (Female British Mauritian 19). Ashley decided to avoid the rowing club because she felt members only row when they were not drinking whereas the swimming club offered social activities that did not centre on alcohol. Albert, from "not so-diverse" Hastings also reflected how the drinking centred campus social scene marginalises observant Muslim students:

> I think everything does revolve around drinking… in the first term we had a friend in our circle who was White, but she was Muslim and she would have problems because we would always go to the pub. She would come but because people drink she would feel uncomfortable. She's left the university because she didn't get on socially; there wasn't a lot for her to do. She didn't feel comfortable—she didn't feel comfortable with other Muslims because she was White and she felt rejected—even in Mosque not many people would talk to her (Male White British 19).

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44 Sidanius et al. (2004: 96)

What is particularly interesting about Albert's story above was not just that his friend felt alienated by the university drinking culture, but also by other Muslim students because she was White. Returning to the role of societies and clubs in university community building, greater attention should be paid to societies fostering greater inclusiveness. Just as greater understanding is needed between groups, greater understanding is needed within groups to recognise and value internal diversity.

The students interviewed felt it was the Student Union's responsibility to promote and encourage a myriad of activities that could potentially engage all students, but believed they fell short of this task because of the drink issue. The Student Union was not seen as facilitating communication or engagement between groups but rather only representing the 'mainstream' student culture, which was believed to be unfair as SU is far from the 'mainstream' student experience (i.e. predominately White British). Angry about discrimination towards different groups, Anjali stated, "It still hasn't clicked in [the Student Union's] heads that there are things other than drinking—and I don't think that it will ever change unless the president realises; its all at the top level," (Female British Mauritian 19). Nevertheless, the Student Union, as the President explained, was quite aware of the need for non-drinking activities, but was not sure what the solution was. He stressed that as a response to the large Muslim student population, the Student Union has become aware of the needs of a diverse student community and has the prayer room area. He also explained that the foyer of the prayer rooms could serve as an alternative social space for non-drinking activities. The President emphasised that SU was committed to enhancing the student experience at SU, and was in process of major renovations to that end. Another change towards creating more inclusive activities and a healthier lifestyle was supplanting the campus nightclub for a sports and fitness facility. Likewise acknowledging the changing nature of SU, the administrator in charge of student affairs explained the shift of the meaning of the 'typical student' and how that evolution was supported. As a liaison to the cricket club, he compared how

now the club meets for salt lassis instead of pints of beer and noted the dwindling interest in campus rugby, proof of the changing attitudes and tastes of the students.

It is important for students to have space to develop their interests and identities, but it is equally important to have those interests and identities supported campus -wide. Indeed, having prayer rooms is important for observant Muslim students to have a space on campus that respects and supports their faith and culture, yet equally they should feel comfortable in mainstream social activities. As Ashley and Anjali serve to illustrate, many non-Muslim students are also non-drinkers and from Albert's story we can surmise that Muslim students do not only want to meet and befriend other Muslims. Further, it is probably unlikely that the area surrounding the prayer rooms would be used as social spaces by non-Muslim non-drinking students for their activities. Therefore, just as more public events that bring together the different societies are needed for greater group understanding and cooperation at university, more alcohol-free public (or where alcohol does not feature as the main attraction) events should be held to try to promote better student inclusiveness.

Building a Cohesive Student Community
The administrator in charge of student affairs was optimistic about change at the university and the administration's role in facilitating that change. The President of the Student Union was likewise positive about the improvements SU had made to enhance student wellbeing. These messages of how the university was building greater inclusiveness had not been properly communicated to the focus group participants; they were unaware of SU's reforms or that the administration of the SU even realised change was needed to respond to the needs of students. This highlights how communication and positive messages are required on the part of the administration to promote a diverse university community.[45] The students complained about not knowing members of the administration, or even the names of key staff, which detracted from feeling part of a community. By better using communication to promote university ethos, policies, and leadership, universities can better influence and shape their community.

45 McNay (2005: 34)

Even without firm guidance from administration and the Student Union, the majority of the students participating in the focus groups felt that SU is already a positive environment for diversity as students were already working together. Again, the students also believed that SU could benefit from strong leadership working towards better understanding of diversity in order to have better relations between groups. Through the students' discussion, the aspect of the duty to promote good relations is an area that SU could improve upon.

It was felt that SU was an environment where you could meet people of all different backgrounds and learn from a range of cultures, but it was up to the individual. According to Anjali, the university community was not only about meeting others you have things in common with, but meeting others you could learn from. Learning through interaction with others was emphasised by the students as a benefit of university that would provide a resource throughout their lives. Ketan reflected how diversity can help a person to have control over their own actions and attitudes as, "you learn how to adjust around people, because what you say may be offensive to some and not to others," (Male Indian 23). Ashley agreed; she became more relaxed over the course of the first term at SU as residing on campus had taught her to be more understanding towards others.

CONCLUSIONS

Numerous studies have shown that interaction with close friends of a different race or ethnicity is a powerful way in which students accrue the educational benefits of enhanced self-confidence, motivation, intellectual and civic development, educational aspirations, cultural awareness and commitment to racial equity, from a racially diverse student body.[46] Those students in the focus groups who attempted to make new friends and learn about other backgrounds and cultures felt rewarded and had a positive outlook on campus relations. A few negative experiences were mentioned, but overall (with the exception of Brandon) they explained that there were not major divisions on campus. They were also largely unconcerned with the presence of

ethnically and culturally bound social groups but were also open to experience more diverse interaction.

Students voiced that they were attracted to SU for its student community's reputation and because it was located in a major metropolitan area which embraces difference and diversity. John seemed pleased with his choice, and recounted how alienated a school friend felt at a provincial campus university as a result of its lack of class and ethnic diversity. No doubt then, universities that have much smaller BME student populations experience a very different situation of race relations on campus than universities where White British students are the minority (as compared to BME students as a group), like at SU. Further research could be usefully undertaken into how diversity is experienced at different kinds of universities in different locations around the country. Another point to consider would be the role of student societies in shaping campus race relations at these different universities.

UK universities have a significant role to play in creating successful multi-ethnic societies, but it is a role that merits greater consideration. The university sector is some distance from eradicating inequalities or achieving a 'balanced' mix of students from minority ethnic communities. BME students are more likely to be concentrated at modern universities in London, are less likely to perform as well as their White peers, and are more likely to be unemployed after graduation. Additionally, the acceptance of ethnic and faith difference on campuses could benefit from greater intervention as certain faith groups have increasingly felt victimised and vulnerable on university campuses in recent years. The positive outlook for HE is that there is increasing ethnic, class and faith diversity and when properly utilised, this diversity has significant implications for a more tolerant society which is comfortable with its multi-ethnic character. However, besides improving the academic opportunity of BME students, universities must in turn place greater emphasis on social opportunity to foster university student communities as positive learning environments; environments that enable students to develop their understanding of and role in a successful multi-ethnic society.

45 Chang et al. (2006: 432) and Chang et al. (2005:525)

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Appendix I: University Groups

Russell Group
1. University of Birmingham
2. University of Bristol
3. University of Cambridge
4. Cardiff University
5. University of Edinburgh
6. University of Glasgow
7. Imperial College of Science, Technology & Medicine
8. University of Leeds
9. University of Liverpool
10. London School of Economics
11. University of Manchester
12. University of Newcastle Upon Tyne
13. University of Nottingham
14. The Queen's University of Belfast
15. University of Oxford
16. University of Sheffield
17. University of Southampton
18. University College London
19. University of Warwick

Campaigning for Mainstream Universities
1. University of Abertay Dundee
2. Anglia Ruskin University
3. University of Bedfordshire
4. University of Bolton
5. University of Central England in Birmingham
6. University of Central Lancashire
7. Coventry University
8. University of Derby
9. University of East London
10. University of Glamorgan
11. Glasgow Caledonian University
12. University of Gloucestershire
13. University of Greenwich
14. Kingston University
15. Leeds Metropolitan University
16. London Metropolitan University
17. London South Bank University
18. Middlesex University
19. Napier University
20. University of Wales, Newport
21. University of Paisley
22. University of Plymouth
23. Queen Margaret University College
24. Robert Gordon University
25. Roehampton University
26. Sheffield Hallam University
27. Staffordshire University
28. University of Sunderland
29. University of Teesside
30. Thames Valley University
31. University of Westminster
32. University of Wolverhampton

1994 Group
1. University of Bath
2. Birkbeck, University of London
3. Durham University
4. University of East Anglia
5. University of Essex
6. University of Exeter
7. Goldsmith College, University of London
8. Lancaster University
9. University of Leicester
10. Loughborough University
11. Queen Mary, University of London
12. University of Reading
13. Royal Holloway, University of London
14. School of Oriental and African Studies
15. University of St Andrews
16. University of Surrey
17. University of Sussex
18. University of Warwick
19. University of York

The University Alliance
1. Aston University
2. Bournemouth University
3. University of Bradford
4. Cranfield University
5. De Montfort University
6. University of Hertfordshire
7. Huddersfield
8. Institute of Education
9. University of Kent
10. University of Lincoln
11. Liverpool John Moores
12. Manchester Metropolitan University
13. University of Wales, Newport
14. Northumbria
15. Nottingham Trent University
16. Open University
17. Oxford Brookes University
18. University of Plymouth
19. University of Portsmouth
20. University of Salford
21. Sheffield Hallam University
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The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Educational Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships, and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship.

Since 1968, the date of Runnymede's foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.

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