

# Lone Mothers of Mixed Racial and Ethnic Children: Then and Now

Chamion Caballero and Rosalind Edwards

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# Foreword

Racisms take many forms. Racist ideologies take a bespoke rather than an off-the-peg approach; mutating and twisting in order to exclude and denigrate the supposed 'other'. Our work focused on those racialized as mixed (Sims et al., 2007) has highlighted the ways in which racisms can impact differently on different people. Though stemming from the same root, the routes of racism can differ markedly. The effect can be to constrain the freedom of individuals in asserting their identities, to create potential isolation from others who may be experiencing similar forms of discrimination, and to sustain unjustifiable stereotyping and the discrimination that too often ensues. Racisms that are so mutable can also extend to those who would not necessarily define themselves as belonging to a minority ethnic community but whose family members do.

In this paper Dr Chamion Caballero and Professor Rosalind Edwards look at the experience of one such group – lone mothers of mixed ethnic and racial children. It is a common feature of public policy debates about family in the UK for there to be an undue focus on lone parents. The debate routinely fails to recognize the complexity of the experiences of lone parents and is quick to apportion blame for all of the ills of society on an often marginalized group. When race is brought into this equation, there is an escalation of vitriol creating a bilious cocktail of blaming and shaming. Lone parenthood is seen by some as both a symptom and product of a broken society. Often, the same commentators see the ethnic diversity of our society in itself as further evidence of societal breakdown. In this light, lone mothers of ethnic and racially mixed children embody a problem for society.

However, little is known about their experiences; about how they respond to the discrimination they face, build alliances and support networks, or deal with the challenges of parenting. Even less is known about how these experiences have changed over time as society more broadly has changed. For this reason we are pleased to be able to publish this paper in order to reflect on what has changed and what has remained the same for lone mothers of ethnic and racially mixed children. The authors' insights are based on an innovative mix of archival research and contemporary ethnography.

As with all of the papers in this series, we publish it not to present the final word on these issues, but to encourage debate and discussion. As the twists, turns and reinventions of the forms of racism continue, it becomes increasingly important to use research like this to highlight its current shape. If we are to be successful in creating a society in which racism has no hold on people's life chances, it is incumbent on us to understand the ways in which it has an impact and what this may mean for both policy and practice in working to eliminate racism. Understanding the ways in which those who are racialized as mixed and their families experience racism is a crucial part of this enterprise.

**Dr Rob Berkeley**  
Director, Runnymede

# Introduction

Census data indicate that parents of children from mixed racial or ethnic backgrounds constitute one of the highest lone parent groups in the UK: 45 per cent of dependent children in the 2001 'Mixed' Census ethnic group category live in families that are headed by a lone parent, compared with 25 per cent of those in the 'White' ethnic group. Like other lone parent families, these are overwhelmingly headed by mothers.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst the inclusion of the 'Mixed' category for the first time in the 2001 Census has highlighted the presence of racially and ethnically mixed people and families in the UK, their existence is by no means a new phenomenon. Families from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, including those headed by lone mothers, have long been part of the social fabric of Britain. What is new, however, is the way in which we are beginning to understand who these families were and their experiences have been. In addition to contemporary studies, the discovery of racially and ethnically mixed people and families in datasets largely unconcerned with race and ethnicity – such as Dennis Marsden's work on fatherless families in the mid-1960s (Marsden, 1969) – allows us to revisit longstanding assumptions and conceptualizations about 'mixing' and 'mixedness' in Britain. Most importantly, it allows us to do so through the voices of mixed racial and ethnic people and families themselves.

Drawing on firsthand accounts of lone mothers with mixed racial and ethnic children, this report thus considers whether and how things have changed for such mothers over the past half a century. Did children's racial and ethnic background hold the same significance for lone mothering in the 1960s as it does now? Has the part played in their children's lives by non-resident fathers and their family of origin increased over time? What sort of attitudes and support did lone mothers experience from their families, their local community and officials in the 1960s, and have these changed or persisted? In order to answer such questions, the report places, side-by-side, views from lone mothers bringing up children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds from the mid-1960s (then) and early 2000s (now).

The 1960s are often pointed to as a period when social changes took hold that we are still feeling the effects of today, including changes in the family forms within which children are brought up, and diversification of some communities with immigration. A number of classic social research studies were carried out during the 1960s as part of concerns about post-war changes. One of these was the study of 'fatherless families' that we draw on in this report, placing the accounts of lone mothers of mixed children from that time alongside perspectives from contemporary mothers. Details of the studies themselves are given later on in this introductory chapter, which also now sets the wider scene for the historical comparison of lone mothers' accounts.

## Lone Mothers Then and Now

Generally, mothers bringing up children without a resident man have long been seen as transgressing various boundaries and denoting the state of the nation in some way. A recurring question has focused on economic issues – in the absence of a male breadwinner to provide financially, should these women be treated as breadwinners who must earn a living to support themselves and their children, or understood as mothers who are homemakers caring for children who need either to be supported by the State or by the 'absent' father of their children? Indeed, the history of lone motherhood during the 20th century is characterized by pendulum shifts between these various 'solutions' to the vexed question of financial provision (Duncan and Edwards, 1999; Kiernan et al., 1998). But there are also moral concerns associated with lone motherhood, notably stemming from the amount of choice that is associated with the route into their position, and the consequences for society that are attached to bringing up children without their fathers.

'Lone mother families' is a relatively modern umbrella term for mothers with dependent children but without fathers, as a consequence variously of never being partnered, being separated or divorced, or the death of a partner. During the 1960s, for example, the term was virtually unknown, and separate routes into the status were considered important in how 'deserving' a lone

<sup>1</sup> Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics.

mother was of services and supports: widowed mothers were seen as being in such a position through no fault of their own, mothers who were divorced or separated from their husbands were regarded as somewhat more culpable, but mothers who had children illegitimately (never-married) were seen as being morally questionable. At the time, most lone mothers were widowed, but over the latter part of the 1960s divorce began to eclipse death as the primary route into lone motherhood. Nonetheless, rooted in the post-war welfare settlement, government policies were concerned with pursuing redistribution to reduce inequalities. Government assumed responsibility for supporting lone mothers as home-based carers while their children were school-aged – albeit that widows received higher level benefits, and unmarried mothers could be subject to some pressure to take up paid employment in contrast to widowed and divorced. To the extent that elements of the lone mother population were regarded as part of an ‘underclass’ living outside of society, this was mostly associated with structural aspects of poverty (e.g. Marsden, 1969).

By the first decade of the 21st century, there had been two dramatic shifts. One was a rapid growth in lone mother families as a proportion of households with dependent children. The other was towards a preponderance of divorced and never-married lone mothers. Both of these shifts were felt to be the result of these women’s lifestyle choices rather than associated with unavoidable circumstances or mistakes (Kiernan et al., 1998). Indeed the 1990s saw a period of intense and strident political and media castigation of lone mothers as the source of most social ills afflicting British society (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Lone mothers generally were regarded as members of an underclass whose behaviour and values were spawning anti-social children and corroding the nation (e.g. Murray, 1994). Financial and housing provision by the State was seen as key in providing perverse incentives for both divorce and unmarried motherhood, and the thrust of policy was on lone mothers supporting themselves alongside enforcement of biological fathers’ responsibility to maintain their children. The contemporary financial (re)attachment of fathers to their children has been accompanied by an equally recent stress on the need for all fathers to be ‘involved’ (Gillies, 2009), and thus for ‘absent’ fathers to be active participants in their children’s lives in order to secure their optimal development and give them a stable sense of ‘who they are’.

## Lone Mothers of Mixed Racial and Ethnic Children Then and Now

For lone mothers bringing up children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, such moral concerns are often further and greatly compounded. Gendered and racialized constructions have long articulated themselves in particular ways in the case of mothers with mixed racial and ethnic children generally, whether this be around their socio-economic profiles, the types of relationships they enter into, or their ability to raise their children with healthy identities (e.g. Katz, 1996; Barn, 1999; Twine, 1999a, 1999b, 2004; Olumide, 2002; Harman and Barn, 2005; Tyler, 2005; Harman, 2008, 2010). Although such concerns have a documented presence in British popular thought dating back to the 18th century,<sup>2</sup> it was in the 20th century that assumptions about mixed racial and ethnic families became entrenched as ‘fact’ through the authority of social science. From the late 1920s onwards, a number of methodologically dubious but influential research studies on racial mixing in Liverpool and Cardiff painted highly negative pictures of the families involved, stigmatizing the parents as lacking in principles and responsibility and their children as marginalized and confused. Such conceptualizations were particularly vivid in the case of white mothers who had partnered black men, who were generally assumed to be living at the edges of society, isolated and ignorant and with low social and sexual morals (Rich, 1986; Bland, 2007; Christian, 2008). Although these findings were furiously rejected by the communities themselves and challenged by several social scientists (Rich, 1986; Christian, 2008), by the time of mass immigration in the 1950s, such attitudes were firmly established in British popular and institutional thought.

The contemporary constructions of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children are thus rooted in a long history of pathologizing mixing and mixedness as abnormal, undesirable and inevitably doomed. For example, with interracial or interethnic relationships often assumed to be more difficult to maintain due to the notion of an inherent ‘culture clash’, lone mothers may face criticism for recklessly entering into relationships that are ‘set up to fail’ (Olumide, 2002), whilst white lone mothers in particular are frequently questioned over their ability to raise their children with a strong

<sup>2</sup> See Caballero, 2005.



sense of cultural belonging or a capacity to deal with racism (Katz, 1996; Olumide, 2002; Twine, 2004; Harman and Barn, 2005). Furthermore, it has also been observed that through entering into relationships with someone from a minority ethnic group, mothers can also encounter hitherto unknown experiences of racism and prejudice – towards themselves, the child’s father and the children (Harman, 2010), experiences which may be difficult to deal with alone (Banks, 1996; Barn, 1999).

Whilst emerging work is challenging assumptions of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children as inherently socially and culturally isolated or ignorant (Mackenzie, work-in-progress; Caballero, 2010), such perceptions continue to be strongly held. The legacy of these understandings about lone mother mixed racial and ethnic families continues to reverberate; indeed, it has been noted that the numerous negative assumptions about their abilities to parent their children may have critical implications for white lone mother mixed racial and ethnic families, particularly as regards professional and practitioner understandings and the likelihood of social service intervention and fostering and adoption placements (Katz, 1996; Olumide, 2005; Goodyer, 2005).

With little substantive research available on lone mothers with children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds in Britain – both now and then - access to more grounded knowledge about this group who are often the focus of negative stereotyping and assumptions is crucial. Moreover, in learning more about them, it is important to do so through a process which not only places their experiences and needs at the centre of the discussion, but also within appropriate wider social and historical contexts. Such is the aim of this case study project.

## The Studies: Then and Now

This comparative case study offers a unique opportunity to explore what social progress has been made for lone mothers bringing up children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, and what issues they still face, through an intensive comparison of their experiences in the mid-1960s and today. The project draws on in-depth interviews with lone mothers of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds from two research projects carried out nearly half a century apart:

1. The ‘Mothers Alone’ study by Dennis Marsden in 1965-6 (Marsden, 1969), examining the lives of lone mothers and their children living on state benefits, archived through Qualidata, Essex University. Of the 116 mothers interviewed, 11 were noted as having dependent children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds.<sup>3</sup>

2. A contemporary case study by Chamion Caballero in 2008 in conjunction with Single Parent Network (SPAN), exploring the experiences and views of 10 lone mothers of dependent children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds (Caballero, 2010).

## The 1960s Study

The sample of lone mothers who were bringing up children with mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds in the mid-1960s were drawn from a larger study of 116 ‘fatherless families’ who were living on state benefits, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Memorial Trust and carried out by Dennis Marsden in 1965-66.<sup>4</sup> The fatherless families study was itself a pilot for a larger national study of poverty and standards of living, shaped by a concern about the structural causes of poverty and whether or not there was a ‘poverty line’ whereby those who fell below a certain income level were unable to participate in everyday community life and shut off from society.

The study, published in 1969 as *Mothers Alone*, was path-breaking in its time, through its stress on ‘the mother’s viewpoint’ and in addressing ‘fatherless families’ generally rather than automatically distinguishing and dividing them by marital status. Nonetheless, the focus on lone mothers with dependent children living on the state means-tested ‘National Assistance’ benefit was not automatically equated with circumstances and experiences for all lone mothers, where Marsden estimated that over half the population of ‘fatherless families’ was not drawing the benefit

3 The data set is archived by Qualidata and is available through the UK Data archive: Marsden, D., *Mothers Alone: Poverty and the Fatherless Family, 1965-66* [computer file]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive [distributor], February 2005. SN: 5072.

4 We realized that a proportion of the lone mother participants in Marsden’s study were bringing up children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds as part of an investigation of the potential of the whole of the ‘fatherless families’ data set for historical comparative work. That initiating project, ‘Historical Comparative Analysis of Family and Parenting: A Feasibility Study Across Sources and Timeframes’, is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council under grant number RES-000-22-3337, 2009-2010, and is being carried out by Val Gillies and Ros Edwards. The ‘fatherless families’ data set is archived by Qualidata and available through the UK Data Archive.

(supported by the children's father or the extended family, and/or in employment). He notes that his sample is 'largely working class'.

The 1965/66 'fatherless families' study was not concerned with the racial or ethnic backgrounds of mothers or their children of course, other than as a background social characteristic. It is interesting then, that the general request for interviewees through the National Assistance Board records resulted in just under 10 per cent of the 'fatherless families' sample having children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds.

The two main areas in which the sample lived were Huddersfield and Colchester (renamed Northborough and Seaton in the Mothers Alone book). Most of the mothers with mixed racial and ethnic children were living in the Huddersfield area, described as an industrial town with recent inward migration from 'West Indians and Pakistanis'. Lone mothers with children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds living in the market town of Colchester had largely been associated with the two nearby large camps of British and US forces.

The interviews with mothers were centrally focused on issues of poverty and the provision of state benefits, but as part of the study's concern with how this might militate against participation in society, discussion covered the mothers' relationships with, variously, their children, the father(s) of their children and the wider community. They were carried out in the mothers' homes and on average lasted for over two hours.

Six of the mothers were from white British backgrounds and had children with men from what are described in the interview fieldnotes as West Indian, Pakistani, Italian and Hungarian backgrounds, whilst five of the mothers were from Western or Eastern European backgrounds and had children with white British men.

Mothers had from two to eleven children whose ages ranged from newborns to 25 years old. In several cases, mothers had children from both mixed racial and ethnic as well as white backgrounds.

*Names and Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds of the Mothers of Mixed Racial/Ethnic Children from the*

#### *Mid-1960s Study*<sup>5</sup>

<i>Mrs Casey</i> - White British	<i>Mrs Prentice</i> - German
<i>Mrs Douglas</i> - German/ Austrian	<i>Mrs Sola</i> - White British
<i>Mrs Grant</i> - Hungarian	<i>Mrs Seaton</i> - German
<i>Mrs Jagger</i> - White British	<i>Mrs Whiteman</i> - White British
<i>Mrs Milo</i> - White British	<i>Mrs Wigmore</i> - White British
<i>Mrs Monk</i> - Romanian 'Gypsy'	

## The Contemporary Study

The contemporary study, conducted in 2008, explores the experiences of 10 lone mothers of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds who live, work, socialize or educate their children in or around a multicultural ward in a city in South West England.<sup>6</sup> The study was funded by London South Bank University's Research Opportunity Fund and conducted in collaboration with Single Parent Action Network (SPAN), a South West-based charity organization who support one parent families and who are interested in learning more about a family group to which many of their users and members belong. As an exploratory case study project, the research sought to contribute to furthering understandings of the everyday experiences of lone mothers of mixed race children, in particular what they think about raising their children and what support or challenges they encounter. Primarily, it looks to place the voices of the lone mothers at the centre of the discussion.

The interviews look at the ways in which the participating mothers seek to provide a sense of identity and belonging for their children and the opportunities or constraints they encounter – both inside and outside their family – when doing so. In particular, they explore the negotiations that mothers engage in around providing this sense of identity and belonging. These negotiations take place with their children, families and, where relevant, the children's father and relatives, as well as taking place in the local community and wider society.

Mothers were recruited through SPAN, who provided access to participants through their

<sup>5</sup> The mothers' backgrounds are as described on the interview notes. As with the fathers' backgrounds, these often are as assessed by Marsden rather than the mothers' own identifications. The names are as given in the interview notes, which are available online.

<sup>6</sup> See Caballero, C. (2010).



membership network. Ten mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children participated in the research. Six of the mothers are from white British backgrounds, two are from Black British backgrounds, one from a Mixed Ethnic background and one from a Latin American background. The children's fathers are from Black African, African American, Black British, white British, white British/European, Eastern European, and British Asian backgrounds. Three of the mothers identify themselves as coming from middle class backgrounds. Mothers self-identified their own and the children's fathers' racial or ethnic backgrounds. The mothers have from one to four children, whose ages ranged at the time of interview from 4 to 17.

*Names and Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds of the Mothers of Mixed Racial/Ethnic Children from the Contemporary Study<sup>7</sup>*

Chloe – White British	Jane - White British
Christine - Black British	Lucy - White British
Clare - White British	Melanie - White British
Debbie - Black British	Sara - Mixed Ethnic Background
Estelle - Latin American	Zoe - White British

## Issues in Historical Comparison

In the chapters that follow, when comparing the mothers' accounts across different time periods, we use an historical comparative analytic method to provide 'thick description' of the mothers' lives, offering insights rather than generalizations. Indeed, although we are able to discuss parallels or differences between the experiences of the mothers on certain issues, we are also aware that there are limitations to the extent we are able to do so on others. For example, whilst the mothers in the mid-1960s study resided in two separate areas of north and south England, the mothers in the contemporary study live quite closely together in a particular set of neighbourhoods in one city in the South West. Recent research has noted the importance of neighbourhood and the differing types of social networks in different locales in the lives of lone mothers with mixed racial and ethnic children (McKenzie, 2009; Caballero, forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> The mothers' backgrounds are as they themselves identified them. All the names are pseudonyms to protect the mothers' identity. Also, in the interests of maintaining confidentiality, mothers have not been described in relation to the racial or ethnic background of the children's fathers throughout the report.

Thus, the experiences of the mothers in both of the studies were, and are, not to be immediately equated with the experiences of mothers of mixed children nationwide.

It is also important to remember that whilst the contemporary study focuses specifically on mothers with mixed racial and ethnic children, the mid-1960s study did not. With the two studies aiming to access different types of information about lone mothers' experiences, we should also bear in mind that the presence or absence of certain information in mothers' accounts may just as well be shaped by the design of the interview schedules, as it is a reflection of whether or not mothers were exercised or unconcerned about particular issues in their lives. Similarly, attention should also be drawn to the significant shift that has occurred in the collection of interviews in research methodologies, largely due to the emergence of new technologies.

As is usual in research nowadays, interviews in the contemporary study were conducted with the aid of an easily portable digital recorder, allowing both the straightforward capture of hours of material as well as the exact transcription of the discussion between the interviewer and the participant.

In the 1960s, however, the practical difficulties of transporting heavy recording machines and the large stockpile of tapes that accompanied them meant that social scientists relied as much on fieldnotes as they did on recorded material. The interviews from the mid-1960s study are thus a series of recollected fieldnotes interspersed with direct quotes from the mothers themselves.

Changes in the interview processes mean that there are differences in the presentation of quotations in this report. All the quotes from the contemporary study material are a direct transcription of what mothers said. Direct quotes from the mid-1960s mothers are indicated using quotation marks, with the remainder of the text being interviewer notes.

Despite these caveats around this historical comparison, we nevertheless believe that, with so little material available to date, the insights generated by the comparison can play an important and valuable part in stimulating discussion and highlighting implications for policy, practice and future research. We hope that this report will be both beneficial and useful in assessing how much has or has not changed

for lone mothers bringing up children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds over the past half a century, and thus for understanding the experiences and needs of lone mothers of mixed children in Britain.

# 1. Assumptions and Strategies

In this chapter, we discuss the gendered and racialized ways in which lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children tend to be viewed, and the extent to which the mothers in the studies were aware of or experienced these perceptions. We also look at the ways in which their everyday lives challenge or support the suppositions circulating around them, especially around racial and cultural literacy strategies. In particular, we identify how social assumptions about white women who have partnered black men still remain strongly in place over the half century between the studies.

## Attitudes and Assumptions

Although mixing between different racial and ethnic groups was common in the 1960s – as indeed it had been throughout and prior to the 20th century – for the most part such mixing was popularly thought of as being something undesirable, especially if it involved white women (Caballero and Aspinall, forthcoming; Bland, 2005, 2007). Since the 1930s, in particular, social scientific attitudes had crystallized longstanding assumptions about the nature of relationships between white women and minority ethnic men, particularly black men, implying the hypersexual, deviant and socially dangerous nature of such liaisons (Christian, 2008). By the time of mass immigration from the 1950s onwards, therefore, the idea that white women who entered into relationships with men from a different race were morally loose or feckless women, who wilfully transgressed important social racialized boundaries, was engrained in popular as well as institutional thinking.

The interviews from 1965/6 demonstrate the ways in which such popular and institutional lines of thought resonated in the lives of many of the women with mixed racial and ethnic children Marsden spoke to. Those who had children from white and black mixed backgrounds seemed to be particularly susceptible to experiencing this type of social prejudice, as in the case of Mrs Jagger, a White British woman living in Huddersfield with three children from her relationship with her black West Indian boyfriend. Mrs Jagger was very aware of the types of social assumptions made about her moral standards and behaviour, as demonstrated by her neighbours on first moving into her area:

*As soon as I came here, the people next door saw I'd got coloured children and they put a fence up, after that they were alright and some other neighbour came on and said that at first when they saw the coloured children, they thought they'd get some right dirty people in this house.*

In Mrs Jagger's experience, such reactions to white women and their mixed racial children were a common occurrence in society:

*If you've got coloured children, they'll class you as if you were a prostitute. In shops sometimes, when you go in and you'll see the salesgirls all dolled up, well, they look at you as if you were going to pinch summat, and I don't like them to do that because I've been as good as them, and then on the bus sometimes, you get these old women looking at you from head to foot, but they stop looking when I start looking back at them, and then one woman was walking past me on the bus, and I heard her say "Disgusting".*

Although shifts in popular and institutional thought on race in the UK have shifted considerably since Mrs Jagger's time, including towards racial mixing, it is nevertheless the case that the insidious nature of some assumptions and stereotypes about white women and black men still exist. In the contemporary interviews, Chloe, Lucy and Zoe, who have children from their relationships with their former black partners, discuss how they feel they and their children are commonly seen by society at large:

*Yeah. I think there's a stereotype around white women with black children. And we are perceived to be a bit rough, a bit common, a bit like we don't care who we sleep with, even if they are black! [...] I think that people always expect your child to be behaving badly when you have a white parent with a black child because you're a bit loose and*

*with a black child because you're a bit loose and feckless. (Chloe)*

*Society does portray such a bad image... that basically you're a slag who went out one night and went with a black man because he had a big willy! (Lucy)*

*Being white with a mixed race child, I am judged. I feel like I am judged. (Zoe)*

Nevertheless, the contemporary mothers appear to experience these social attitudes in quite different ways to the mothers in the mid-1960s study. For the most part, the 21st century mothers' accounts of experiencing assumption and prejudice take subtle, rather than more direct forms, particularly as regards any official or institutional dealings. Chloe recounts such an incident when seeking medical help to deal with her son's disability:

*I went into this meeting [at her son's school] and because I've had problems with [the medical establishment], I kind of play the game a little bit. So I don't go in looking rough, I go in with my suit on, my handbag, my briefcase, my overcoat, my leather gloves and I walked into this meeting, put my briefcase down, got my diary out, took my gloves off, my coat off, sat down and went 'hello' to the people that were already seated and we were waiting for some other people and the guy said [hushed, patronising voice] 'We're waiting for the mother. Late as per usual'. I said, 'I am the mother'. And I know that he was working in an inner city school with a mixed race child who had behavioural difficulties and I am not what he was expecting.*

Mothers in the mid-1960s study, however, recounted much more direct prejudice at an institutional level. Officials at the National Assistance Board (NAB) seemed to be particularly virulent in their condemnation of white mothers who had had children with men from different racial or ethnic backgrounds. The National Assistance Board was required to maintain people who had no other source of income at a low subsistence level, taking into account people's different basic needs. The officers who assessed people's needs had considerable discretionary powers in doing this, and inconsistent and harsh decisions were said to be commonplace (Hill, 1969). Lone mothers, or particular sorts of lone mothers, could be subject to the prejudices of the National Assistance Board officers – a key finding of the 1965/66 study.<sup>1</sup> Mrs Whiteman, a white British woman living in

Huddersfield, the youngest of whose five children had a West Indian father, had first-hand experience of prejudice from NAB officers:

*Miss Sawyers (National Assistance Board [illegible] Manager) says to me, 'Don't come here with your coloured children and your half-caste children. You go back where you belong. What will the children think when they grow up and their brother's half-caste' [...] They say at the National Assistance Board we shouldn't go out with coloured men, we should go out with our own.*

Mrs Jagger had also encountered such attitudes in her dealings with National Assistance Board officials:

*The first one [from the Assistance Board] that came along, he tried to be a bit clever, you know, when you've got coloured children some people are funny, they look at you and see you've got coloured children and they think you're dirt straight away. They think you're just like a prostitute, well, I've not been like that, I've been with the same one all the time, but this one, he was a bit like that, so I told him, I said, 'Look here, I'm an Englishwoman' and I said, 'I've been working as far back as ever I can remember,' and I said, 'The money's not all coming out of your pocket, you know, it's coming little bits out of everyone's pockets' and when the Manager came round, I told him, that I didn't like it, the way I'd been treated, but after that I've never had any bother.*

Such attitudes and judgements infused social research and social researchers at the time as well. The field note comments on Mrs Whiteman's friend, who was present at the time of her interview and also had two children from mixed racial backgrounds, state:

*Mrs Whiteman's friend from London looked a real slut, a greasy, obese young woman, but carefree enough, and the children were beautifully dressed. She looked as though she might be a prostitute. She was the one who had led to Mrs Whiteman meeting Stephen's father in the first place.*

As with many of the National Assistance Board officials and 1960s society generally, the fieldnotes also comment on incidents of white/black racial mixing. When the black boyfriend of another friend of Mrs Whiteman's, who was also present at the interview, called by, the notes state:

*One got the impression talking to Mrs Whiteman that the street was full of eyes watching her*

<sup>1</sup> The study just preceded the disestablishment of the NAB and its replacement by the Supplementary Benefits Commission (Marsden, 1969).

*behaviour. It probably is actually because while I was there, just at the end of the interview, a coloured boy came up, the boyfriend of the girl who was stopping there for a day or two. He brought in a bottle, but it turned out to be a Lucozade for them to take to the hospital for her. He came in a big Ford Zephyr, and I realised what a powerful emotive image a black man in a large new car could be, especially calling on a deserted woman.*

Indeed, it is interesting to note that very few of the 1960s mothers who had children from ethnically, as opposed to racially, mixed backgrounds commented on experiencing prejudice. The most direct account of this from the ethnically mixed group was from Mrs Douglas, a German/Austrian woman who had had two children with her white British ex-husband. Mrs Douglas had experienced a great deal of hostility from her neighbours on the Colchester estate where she lived. In part, she felt this was due to some bad publicity in the local newspaper related to her and her ex-husband, as well as her German/Austrian background being targeted in the post-war period:

*We wanted privacy and a garden, but every time, when we'd been there two years, the neighbours, because I was an Austrian, they pick on me, they call me Nazi, up at Wilson Marriage Road, I get written in the snow, Mrs Douglas is a Nazi, they say to me, we don't want you, that's an awful thing to say, they say, you foreigners coming here and taking all the National Assistance, and we keeping you. I often think if it was only their own people, they would not talk like that.*

In another interview, Mrs Sola, a white British mother who had five children, implied that the children's father had experienced some problems in gaining employment because he was Italian. As with Mrs Douglas, however, it seemed that the focus of the prejudice was directed towards the nationality of the person concerned, rather than relating to the mixed relationship. Then, as now, it appears that certain boundaries potentially are more transgressive than others.

## Racial and Cultural Literacy

One of the biggest differences between the 1960s and contemporary studies is around the question of racial and cultural knowledge and the transmission of this within families. Perspectives on white lone mother-headed mixed racial and ethnic

families have tended to presume a lack of what Twine (2004) has called 'racial literacy'. This term refers to those cultural strategies and practices used by parents to instil a positive sense of identity and belonging in their children and to help them counter racism and prejudice. All the mothers in the contemporary study talk about the importance of passing on racial and cultural knowledge to children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds and, importantly, they highlight the ways in which they actively do so. Mothers use a variety of resources to do this, including food, travel, books, places of worship, language and contact with the child's father, his family and community:

*With my son, his father's from Jamaica and we eat Jamaican food, you know, we have aki and saltfish and callaloo and we have jerk chicken, rice and peas and I make those foods. You know, I downloaded the recipes off the internet.... (Jane)*

*The school I chose, the kids in the class, there are Japanese kids, there's Korean kids – again they are mixed, half English – there is about three, four Jamaicans, there is like five Somalians, something like this, there's a half... Pakistani girl. So he's gone into a class there's a lot of kids that are brown, have black hair and there's a blonde with blue eyes. So he's going to see that, actually, I'm not the only one. (Estelle)*

It is clear from the contemporary research that the majority of the mothers strongly feel a responsibility to impart racial and cultural literacy to their children. In instances where they believe they have observed other mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children failing to do or attempt this, they are often critical of this behaviour. They see this lack of action as having a potentially negative effect on the children, as Zoe and Jane comment:

*It's a lot about the parents [...]. If you want to live on a white estate and never acknowledge the fact that your child's mixed race... then, ok, I don't have a judgement on people who want to do that. But on the other hand, I think you're going to experience more problems as a parent and I think that child's going to experience more problems psychologically for that reason. (Zoe)*

*I know quite a few people who don't actually know who their kids' dads are. But then I think, if you don't know, you can always find out about [their culture] and I do think that you have to make that effort. (Jane)*

Contrary to popular stereotypes, therefore, the mothers in the contemporary study are extremely



culturally and racially literate and feel a keen sense of responsibility for the passing on of cultural knowledge to their children. It is interesting to note that in this respect they are no different to mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children who live in couple parent families. Recent research indicates that where mixed racial and ethnic couples live together, mothers frequently take a dominant and active role in the transmission of cultural knowledge, both of their own and the father's cultural background (Caballero et al., 2008).

In the 1960s study, however, hardly any reference at all was made to the necessity for racial or cultural awareness by mothers. The complete absence of the topic, even whilst other racial or culturally related issues were acknowledged, appears on the one hand to suggest that there is a significant difference in the way that cultural and racial identities of mixed racial and ethnic children were understood by the mothers. In a couple of instances among the 1960s lone mothers, presumptions about the children's emotional or physical states, linked to their racial or ethnic backgrounds, appear to have been made by people in contact with the children, with little or no comment passed by the mothers. Miss Wigmore was a White British woman living in Huddersfield with her two daughters from her relationships with two Pakistani men, and her daughter to her West Indian boyfriend, to whom at the time of interview she was also pregnant. Miss Wigmore appeared to accept now outmoded thinking around the physical effects of racial mixing on children:

*I saw the children undressed. Both the girls were covered with sores which looked like heat lumps. Their mother said it was because they'd got mixed blood and it heated up, but this seemed unlikely. She reckoned this is what the doctor had said.*

A similar example is provided by Mrs Casey, a White British woman living in Huddersfield who had eleven children. Her youngest son, Stephen, who was two years old, had a West Indian father. The fieldnotes state that Mrs Casey and her own mother had concerns about Stephen's attraction to Mrs Casey's clothing. The language in which this is described seems linked to longstanding ideas of children from mixed racial backgrounds as inheriting the hypersexual nature of a black parent, though with little further explanation or context, this is difficult to ascertain for certain:

*What did worry her about Stephen was that he liked to feel silky things 'And it's not nice because he feels inside my dress and after my straps. My*

*mother thinks it's shocking and she smacks him for it. She says he's oversexed!'*

As was the case with social class status (Savage, 2007), the 1960s interviews thus suggest that social identities were regarded more as an ascribed product of birth and breeding, rather than as something that needed to be inculcated through parenting practices. In other words, racial and ethnic identity was something one had, rather than something to be achieved. Yet, as we noted earlier, it is also possible the absence of this topic may largely be due to the focus of the interviews and the lack of opportunity to discuss this part of their lives.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, based on the interview material itself, there certainly appears to be a difference in understanding between the two groups of mothers as regards the emphasis they placed on the importance of racial and cultural literacy. Mothers in the contemporary study are generally very aware of the availability of resources for parents of mixed racial children, and for the children themselves, even if they do not always utilize these. Many of these mothers also speak of how they feel that these resources could be improved, as well as the responsibility they believe that institutions and practitioners have to ensure such resources are created and available. Such discussions were not part of the interviews with the 1960s mothers who, in many cases, had more pressing material and financial concerns, as we discuss in Chapter 3. Overall, the difference between the two research studies on this issue is not only likely to be connected to changing social attitudes towards race, but also to the reformulation and extension of children's needs, and the type of parental effort required to meet them, beyond material provisions towards a stress on the skills required to ensure emotional development and secure identity (Lewis, 1986; Ramaekers and Suissa, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it is important to note that research which specifically included a focus on mixed racial and ethnic families in the 1950s suggests that cultural and racial literacy was often an important part of family life. The study indicates that 'Muslim' or Chinese men who had white partners strongly sought to pass on their cultural knowledge and practices to their children. Meanwhile, although West Indian or West African men preferred their children to take on British practices to aid their social integration, it was noted that their white partners often learnt to cook dishes from the men's home countries or to spice up the English 'plain cooking' (Collins, 1957). These observations were mainly made about couples who lived together, so we should be careful not to apply the findings overly to lone mothers' practices.

## 2. Lone Mothers and the Relationships in their Lives

Lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children are often assumed to have little contact both with their own families and the father of their children, thus experiencing high degrees of social, as well as cultural isolation. In this chapter, we look at what types of relationships the mothers in both studies had in their lives and discuss the changing roles and expectations of both mothers and fathers in these situations.

There has long been a perception that mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children are likely to be lone parents who have little social contact, with white mothers in particular being abandoned by the children's father, isolated from his family and ostracized by their own. Certainly studies conducted in the 1950s and 1960s on black communities which discussed mixed marriages between West Indian men and white women suggested that these relationships frequently led to the estrangement of the women from their white family and friends (Banton, 1959; Richmond, 1961). Contemporary research has also indicated such patterns. As Tizard and Phoenix note, evidence from a number of studies conducted throughout the 1990s and early 2000s indicates that white families may be hostile to, or concerned about, their white relatives having children with people from another ethnic or racial background (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002). Moreover, whilst some minority ethnic groups – particularly Black Caribbean populations – may be considered more open to mixed racial and ethnic relationships, it is not necessarily the case that 'partnering out' is viewed as desirable or unproblematic (Song and Edwards, 1997; Okitikpi, 2009).

Conducting relationships against a backdrop of implicit or explicit condemnation can understandably be very difficult for couples, who may then be confronted with a lack of familial support if the relationship fails. For lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children, particularly white mothers, such isolation can be particularly difficult if they are struggling to deal with racism and prejudice on their own (Olumide, 2002; Twine, 1999b; Harman, 2010).

Although lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children may certainly experience social isolation, as with lone mothers generally, it should not be

presumed that this is automatically the case (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Both the 1960s and contemporary studies indicate that, as in family life generally, there is likely to be a diversity of experiences between groups of lone mothers.

### Relationships with Fathers

Contrary to popular assumptions of 'absent' fathers, mothers in both studies tended to be in contact with their children's fathers, with several of the fathers contributing practical or financial support. In the contemporary study, seven of the ten mothers say that their children do see their fathers (although in two cases, their children have different fathers and one of the children has no contact). Even in the families where there is currently no contact with the father, two fathers previously had sustained contact with their children and the mothers are open to re-establishing contact with them in the future if he or the children wish to do so.

The issue for the contemporary lone mothers, therefore, is more about the form and quality of contact, rather than its existence. Some children see their fathers regularly, whilst for others contact is more intermittent:

*He comes up every two weekends [...] Yeah, there is contact and he does love his little boy. (Estelle)*

*Yeah, they see him, yeah. They see him loads. (Jane)*

*He came round a couple of weekends ago but that's the first time he's seen [his son] this year. I've seen him on one other occasion this year and we might have a conversation once every six weeks or so, you know. So he's still a friend, but a fairly distant friend. (Clare)*

*Their father is involved in their life to a greater or lesser extent depending on what time of the month to him. (Christine)*

Those fathers who have regular contact contribute to family life in a variety of way, from providing practical and financial support and childcare to transmitting cultural knowledge, as Melanie and Estelle recount:

*His father lives locally and spends quite a bit of time with him. When I was working over the summer for the last three months he was picking him up daily from school and looking after him until five o'clock. (Melanie)*

*Every year he goes to London to celebrate [a major cultural festival]. So his dad always insists to take him there and I'm very happy for him to see things like that. (Estelle)*

The Child Support Act, passed in 1991, established an obligation on contemporary non-resident parents, overwhelmingly fathers, to support their biological children financially. Such material responsibilities have also been accompanied by policy and social expectations that fathers need to contribute to their children's emotional well-being and development.

Although such policy and social frameworks were not in place during the 1960s, it is clear that fathers in the mid-1960s study were often present in the mothers' and children's lives. Nevertheless, as in the contemporary study, their contact and contributions varied. Some of the 1960s fathers appeared to have no or intermittent contact with the lone mothers and their children. Others, however, provided financial assistance and childcare, as the accounts of Mrs Whiteman, Mrs Jagger and Miss Wigmore demonstrate:

*When I was having Stephen and I was poorly, Stephen's father had a couple of weeks off work, and he stopped here to help me. He helped to get the children ready for school and to cook the meals. (Mrs Whiteman)*

*Where the father does help, is with clothes. She'd had some nighties given for the baby when it was born, but apart from this, the father had bought all the clothes it has got. (Mrs Jagger)*

*She has a voluntary agreement with Danny's father whereby he comes up once a week and pays her £1. (Miss Wigmore)*

Interestingly, the majority of the 1960s fathers who

were active in the children's lives appeared to be those from what the study notes as 'West Indian' backgrounds:

*It seemed that the men most likely to support their children were older men with local roots, or the West Indians, who were said not to object to other men's children. (Marsden, 1969: 118)*

Indeed, where the 1960s mothers had children with West Indian men, some of them – or other West Indian men – appeared to want to marry the women, again challenging the stereotype of the uncommitted, feckless black father:

*Derek's always asking me to go and live with him, and when I went down to see my friend yesterday, there were a couple of cases in her room, so I went down to Derek and I said, 'I've left home, my cases are in Margaret's room. Can I bring them down here?' And he said, 'Sure, you come and live with me'. Well, it got so far, I had to tell him in the end, he was furious. (Mrs Whiteman)*

*She has never actually lived with her boyfriend, although he seems reasonably anxious to marry her. (Mrs Jagger)*

Similar comments about the presence of black, as well as other minority ethnic fathers, in the lives of mixed racial or ethnic families can also be found in the accounts of other social scientists during the mid-20th century, such as Collins who reported the tendency of 'coloured' men to display noticeable and touching familial devotion to their wives and children (Collins, 1957). Others, however, were simply astonished to find that many white women 'preferred' these relationships because they felt that the men made good fathers or treated them and their children better than white men (e.g. see Fleming, 1927). Such observations are of particular interest in light of popular assumptions about the absence of black fathers in both black and mixed racial families (Reynolds, 2005).

Whilst the nature of contact with fathers differed between individuals across the two studies, overall it is the case that the contemporary fathers appear to be more involved in their children's lives – or at least, the contemporary mothers spoke more about this involvement. There is certainly a significant difference in the expectations of the two groups of mothers. Even where there is regular sustained contact, mothers in the contemporary study frequently talk of wanting more involvement from fathers, as well as detailing the efforts that they make to sustain the relationship with the father.

Many see this relationship as a potentially crucial issue for children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, as Zoe explains:

*I put in like 90-95 per cent of my efforts 100 per cent of the time, I'm only supposed to put in 50 [...] I mean it wasn't roses at all, it was just...it was a lot of me investing and it got to the point sometimes, I would take [our daughter] to him, she wouldn't want to go, he'd be fucking around with the arrangements, I'd be the only person consistent and trying the whole thing and I'm the one that shouldn't be doing it! But... and I've always done that [...] I think it's important enough for a child to have a father or a mother both in their life or know who they are, especially when they're dual heritage. And I think that for me, I thought if I can possibly, possibly do anything to keep that role in her life in whatever way I will do it. (Zoe)*

Amongst the 1960s mothers, however, there was no discussion of the role of fathers in their children's lives, whether in relation to being from mixed racial or ethnic backgrounds or just generally. It is interesting that, despite the social stigma of being a lone mother, the 1960s mothers seemed reluctant to enter into permanent relationships with the men in their lives or with men at all, though this often appeared to be an option for them. Mrs Casey spoke about her reluctance to 'take on' Stephen's father, because she 'didn't want to get left again'. Some of the mothers recounted how they had turned down or put off offers of marriage from their current partners, largely it appeared to maintain their independence:

*She really seems to have had such a dose of subservience in marriage that she's anxious not to get married again until she's got complete economic independence [...] She expects she might get married eventually, but it won't be for a few years until she's independent. 'Since this baby came, I want to get married less than ever. I prefer to live like this. You have to be cautious. I'm frightened he might change if I married him. I think it's better to go on like this. You've got to be sure. (Mrs Jagger)*

*No, I wouldn't get married now, not even if he asked me. I think he said he wanted to marry me but if he really wanted to marry me he would have married me before the baby came wouldn't he? But he hangs on and he hangs on. I wouldn't want to marry him now. They're all the same these men. I've brought the kids up so far and I think I can bring them up the rest of the way myself. (Miss Wigmore)*

At the same time, it is important to note that the relationships the 1960s mothers had with their children's fathers were not necessarily transient or uncommitted, as is often assumed to be the case in mixed racial or ethnic relationships. Many had been in regular, sustained relationships with the children's fathers, such as in the case of Miss Wigmore. She had been in two relationships with Pakistani men to whom she had had children, before her current relationship with the West Indian father of her child and forthcoming baby. The fieldnotes state:

*Miss Wigmore 'caught for' Gabeen after she had been living with a Pakistani in Bradford for almost three years. She seems to have had quite a good life. She looked after the shop for him while he went to work in the evenings and he had the shop during the day. When she became pregnant he went back to Pakistan and she understood that he was going to come back and marry her but in fact he got married over in Pakistan, she found out from his brother. This was the first time she received National Assistance.*

The breakdown of relationships for many of the 1960s mothers appeared a complex process – as it often is in the case of the contemporary mothers. Lucy and Melanie strongly challenged the notion of transience and lack of commitment in their interviews:

*Because, I mean, I still get that prejudice. People... I mean, I was with her dad for four years before she came and you know I think, 'I had a relationship, thank you'. It wasn't just that we got together and I got pregnant, we lived together, we loved together, we spent a long time living our lives together. (Lucy)*

*I met [my son's] dad [and] just obviously I think completely fell head over heels. I mean, just like that and that was it, we stayed together for, it was immediately from then onwards, we stayed together for about three, yeah, three years. I mean we worked it out for three years, we did try it for three years but it was incredibly hard work. (Melanie)*

The descriptions of the presence of fathers in mothers' lives in both studies, variable as they may be, certainly challenge the idea of the inevitable absence of the father – or father figure – from the children's lives. Similarly, mothers' descriptions of their relationships and interactions with family suggest that these relationships are also not as simplistically stereotypical as is often thought.



## Relationships with Family

Although research has indicated that white families are often hostile to or concerned about their white relatives having children with people from another ethnic or racial background, in both the 1960s and contemporary studies there was little indication of hostility to or concern about the racial mixing from white mothers' families. None of the 1960s mothers spoke of experiencing rejection by their family. Nevertheless, as race and racism was not a specific focus of the interviews with the mothers, the extent of the situation is more difficult to glean. In Mrs Whiteman's case, for example, the fieldnotes throw doubt on her claim of not experiencing family problems (though this of course may say more about prevalent social assumptions than it does about Mrs Whiteman's situation):

*She said that her father didn't think anything wrong about her having a baby that was half-caste, but it transpired that she hasn't seen her father for a long time, not since she had the baby and didn't even know what health he was in.*

Glimpses of underlying issues with family are found in the fieldnotes on Mrs Jagger, though there is no comment on how this might have affected her own situation:

*Her brother is on the buses and knows lots of them on friendly terms, quote, 'He's not against the coloured people, he's not prejudiced, but he just doesn't believe in mixed marriages'.*

It is clear from the 1960s interviews, however, that many of the mothers were in contact with their own families as was certainly the case for the contemporary mothers. Like Jane and Melanie, the overwhelming majority of contemporary mothers report no outright opposition from their family to their having been in a mixed racial or ethnic relationship:

*No, they've been racist in like, 'Oh no, do not bring him in the house or', no, they were never like that. (Jane)*

*[There was] nothing at all. No 'No, you mustn't see a black man', no, nothing like that, no'. (Melanie)*

Whilst mothers in the contemporary study also do not speak of direct forms of opposition or demonstrate concern about family attitudes in their accounts, nonetheless several of the white mothers do point to evidence of more subtle, underlying prejudice within their families. Most of this takes the form of family members, especially older relatives,

making passing comments or expressing views about ethnic minorities generally:

*My dad still calls [black people] darkies [...]. He's, I think it's because he's getting a bit of dementia, so I think he just, so I've kind of given up. My mum's OK, she doesn't do it anymore. (Jane)*

*I mean, my family, my family are kind of a bit peculiar in that sense because they come, they still use....they still do use kind of racist terminology when it comes to certain things. (Melanie)*

There was a notable difference between the two studies, however, in relation to the issue of contact with the father's family. The common assumption that lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children are culturally isolated and ignorant is further challenged by the contemporary study. The majority of the mothers have contact with the father's family, many on a regular basis. Again, as with fathers, the type and quality of this contact varies amongst families. In Lucy's case, a good relationship had tailed off as the relationship with the children's father ended:

*Well, I always got on with his mum. She always said, 'I'm her grandmother, whatever happens I want to be part of her life'. She used to call me her daughter-in-law and I was very proud that we had that kind of relationship [...]. And then she stopped speaking to me and then she wrote me some nasty letters and I saw her [...] a couple of years ago and I was running over to her, ready to put my arms around her and she put her fist in my chest and she went, 'Don't come by me, don't talk to me, don't look at me, who do you think you are, blah, blah, blah'. So I kind of left it. Which is a shame. But she always sends a birthday and Christmas card to [my daughter]. (Lucy)*

For Debbie, the relationship with her children's grandmother is enhanced in response to lack of input from their father:

*We are in touch with his mum. His mum's lovely and very good and very... and we go, every now and again, like we go, we invite her to come to the zoo and stuff, so they've got that link. So if ever he does get a bit of common sense into him, it's an easy way through his mum to get back to them, kind of thing. So I'm quite...determined to keep that so that they've got that link with him, via his mum [...] we're kind of getting to know each other more now actually since [the children's father] hasn't had anything to do with them. (Debbie)*

Meanwhile, in Zoe's case, her positive relationship



with her daughter's father's parents continues:

*My relationship with her and her husband [...] has been consistent. From then, she's always like, bought nappies, been in [my daughter's] life weekly, had her overnight, until now. So she's been consistent the whole time. And, you know... my daughter has a good relationship with her and that side of the family. (Zoe)*

Mothers tend to value these relationships with the child's father's family, feeling that they bring cultural and familial rewards for their children. Such benefits encourage mothers to work to keep these relationships, even when they are not necessarily easy.

In the 1960s study, however, hardly any mention of contact with the father's family was made. Of course, when we consider patterns of migration and settlement for minority ethnic men at that time, particularly for the West Indian or Pakistani fathers who would most likely have travelled to England alone (Goulbourne, 1998), this is not overly unexpected. More interestingly, there is also little mention of their in-laws amongst the European women who had relationships with British men. For example, the fieldnotes on Mrs Douglas, of German/Austrian origin, state that she had 'not much contact with her in-laws, her sister in law used to give her a few clothes, but not lately'.

The variable nature of family support, both then and now, means that such relationships could be as much of a hindrance as they could be helpful. As such, other forms of support, both formal and informal, could play an important part in mothers' lives.

## 3. Concerns and Support

In this chapter we discuss the everyday concerns that mothers expressed in relation to raising their children and the types of support that they drew upon, including how these have changed over time. In addition to highlighting the differing needs for the mothers and children, we also discuss the consistency of some support resources. In particular we demonstrate the importance of friendship networks – especially with other women with mixed racial and ethnic children – in the mothers’ lives.

### Concerns

We have seen that one of the dominant perceptions of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children is that of their cultural and social isolation, and particularly how this affects the identity of their children. In the contemporary study, it is clear that the majority of the mothers are involved in, or have developed, strong social networks that play an important role in supporting their parenting overall – as with lone mothers generally (e.g. Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Moreover, as highlighted in Chapter 1, the contemporary mothers pride themselves on their racial and cultural literacy and feel that they are doing a good job in raising their children to have a healthy sense of identity and belonging. For the most part, therefore, although the contemporary mothers are interested in continuing to learn how to support their children’s mixed racial and ethnic identities, the concerns that they have about their children do not predominantly centre on this issue. (Albeit some mothers who have sons with white and black mixed backgrounds have concerns generally around social patterns and outcomes for African Caribbean young men, particularly in relation to knife crime and educational achievement.) Rather, as with research on couple parents (Caballero et al., 2008), it is clear that issues other than their children’s mixedness are often more dominant in mothers’ lives, such as health issues, material or financial concerns, as Clare, Estelle and Chloe discuss:

*So I’m in that stage where I’m saying, well, I’m not really properly working and obviously because I’m still in the benefits system, I can’t earn more than £20 a week so I’ve got to decide whether I can [undertake work] on a part-time basis and change the benefits to family credit [...] it’s really, really hard kind of decision to make because I could lose out very heavily. (Clare)*

*I get paid for volunteer jobs I do, but if I get – that’s another thing that makes it really hard – if I go back into work, say if I go back into work, if I don’t have a really good job that gets me thirty grand a year, I won’t be able to pay the rent and the house, the council tax and the bills. So if I’m a single parent and I don’t have somebody to help me at home, how hard is it for a single parent to go back to work? You have to get paid thirty grand a year to be able to pay. (Estelle)*

*I have to say, if we have any issues, they are around [my child’s] disabilities, not around his colour. (Chloe)*

Such financial and material concerns were also pressing for the mothers in the 1960s study and, for the most part, to an even greater degree. Whilst half of the contemporary sample of mothers have paid work, with the rest living on Income Support, since the 1960s sample was drawn from National Assistance Board records, all eleven mothers in the earlier study were claiming the means-tested benefit for people with no other form of support and many experienced high degrees of poverty and hardship. In addition to difficulties in heating and furnishing their homes, many of the mothers struggled to clothe and feed themselves and their children. Fieldnotes show that many of the mothers only ate one meal a day, and sometimes, as in Mrs Jagger’s case, nothing at all:

*I’d rather the children had the food than I did, it seems to satisfy me more. They don’t go short; I do, but I put my mind to it and try to think about something else and I drink a lot of coffee, it makes me feel a bit sick and I get a bit tired, but I still can’t sleep when I go to bed.’ Yesterday she ate nothing at all, literally nothing. [...] ‘I think we’ve been short of food for so long and not eating much, my appetite’s dwindled down’ [...] She looked as though she could do with a square meal and although quite a big frame, she was lean, she said she’d lost about over half a stone.*

Due to their hardships, some of the mothers felt that they were on the verge of nervous breakdowns, but said that the realization that there was no-one else to look after the children or that they did not want the children to go into local authority care kept them struggling on somehow. Nevertheless, some mothers gave serious consideration to having their children taken into care, or had requested this process, as a respite from the burden of being the sole and continual carer. This was the case for Mrs Prentice a German woman who had three children with her White British husband. The fieldnotes explain:

*Basically what Mrs Prentice would like to do would be to send the children away somewhere either into foster care or back to Germany where they would attend an English school for about two years until she could work and get some money together to get a home together. She's been down to the Child Welfare Department but they told her that if she wanted to put the children in care she would have to pay for a foster mother.*

Although mothers who discussed putting their children in care were often reluctant to do so, they frequently felt as if this was their only option for a break, both for themselves and, at times, for the children. The emotional effects of these decisions on the children were not often talked about in the interviews. Indeed, although both the 1960s and contemporary mothers expressed concerns about their financial and material situations, there was a noticeable difference between their discussions of how being a lone parent might affect their children. Understandings of what constitutes 'good mothering' and children's needs have shifted over the time period between the two studies. The 1960s mothers' worries were mostly related to the everyday practicalities of raising and providing for their children on such low incomes, making sure that they had enough food to eat or suitable clothes to wear:

*The children had been off school because they've had no shoes. 'Yes, one of them was off a week once, and the Welfare man came, and they said I should see the Assistance so they wrote to the Assistance but they wouldn't do anything and in the end the Education had to buy them some shoes.'* (Mrs Whiteman)

For the contemporary mothers, however, worries around lone parenting also include an emotional dimension; namely how their lone parenthood, and particularly the absence of their fathers, might

affect the children's well-being. For many, this is much more of a pressing issue than the children's mixed racial and ethnic identities:

*But his class now is full of mum and dad happy kids. And kids are quite cruel. It hasn't started yet, but kids are quite cruel, they pick on things like that.* (Estelle)

*Like me, I'm like, 'Oh, it's fine, I don't have a man, I'll just get on with whatever, me and my daughter', stuff like that but you're never quite sure what sort of effect it has not to have a relationship in the house.* (Zoe)

*I mean for me actually, personally I think the bigger issue for probably me and them is the fact that they're being brought up in a single home. Because I think the actual, not having that father figure is a bigger issue than the kind of colour of their skin.* (Debbie)

In contrast, while mothers in the 1965/66 study also worried about their children's well-being, this was more in relation to how the stress of their living situations could affect the children's physical or psychological health. Several of the mothers reported ill health in their children, such as Mrs Milo, a White British woman who had seven children, most of whom were to her former husband, a Hungarian miner. One of her sons suffered from alopecia:

*It's a nervous complaint and, and I went to see them at the hospital, and they said it might be his home life that has caused it because I am short-tempered, I admit it. And sometimes I take it out on the children, being in this situation, I know it's not their fault and I shouldn't do, but there are times when the slightest thing gets on your nerves and I know I've gone too far shouting.*

None of the 1960s mothers, however, raised the issue of the children's emotional state or experiences in connection to the absence of their father, highlighting how what is considered important to children's needs has significantly shifted over the last half century in terms of whether contact with their biological fathers is necessary (e.g. Ribbens McCarthy et al., 2003).

Whilst mothers in both sets of interviews did often cope alone when dealing with these concerns about bringing up their children, they also drew on a number of formal and informal support networks for emotional and practical guidance and help, although the need for and usefulness of these varied from family to family.

## Formal Support

In the time period between the two studies, considerable shifts have taken place in relation to the formal support available for lone mothers. In addition to changing policy contexts which provide mothers with recourse to legal action to obtain financial maintenance for their children, there are numerous specialist organizations which provide advice, information and support to lone mothers.<sup>1</sup> For mothers in the 1965/6 study, outside the National Assistance Board, little formal support appears to have been available. Some mothers mentioned charitable organizations that they had heard they could approach for help with extra clothing or finances, such as the NSPCC or The Cinderella Society. Others, however, said they had never heard of such agencies or that they found the process of claiming help too confusing or bureaucratic. Avenues also appeared extremely limited for formal support in caring for their children beyond financial and material means. As mentioned earlier, a number of the children appeared to be suffering from psychological or emotional distress, but help seemed patchy or non-existent. For example, the fieldnotes state that one of Mrs Casey's daughters, whose father was White British, 'goes to the psychiatrist at the Child Guidance Clinic because she's hysterical and screams a lot', whilst another of her daughters, who was said often to be violent towards her mother, was not receiving any help from the Child Guidance Clinic although Mrs Casey thought she should be.

Some mothers, particularly those with larger families, said they often struggled with their situations but had few alternatives other than to carry on, as the fieldnotes report for Mrs Whiteman:

*The gas has been cut off so she now uses electricity. She had tried to gas herself once but the shilling ran out. A thing she looks back on now with wry amusement. 'Oh yes, many a time I wish I'd succeeded, and sometimes I feel I could just walk away. You know what I mean? I once rang up Inspector Hawk (of the NSPCC). I told him to come up because I was going, I couldn't stand it any longer. No, I didn't go that time, but I remember one time when I was late back from a friend's and when I came up the children had thought I had gone. They were all sitting out on the back crying.'*

For the mothers in the contemporary study, the formal support picture is very different. Mothers

speak of a number of resources they are aware they can access for support in their parenting, including the Single Parent Action Network through which the participants for the project had been recruited. Mothers such as Lucy and Debbie hold SPAN in high regard for the range of study, training and advice provided, but also for the sense of belonging and understanding that they find there:

*There's that understanding, you know, there's none of that... I think there's so much pressure when you're a single parent, the guilt and that you've failed, and it's all on you and you don't understand why and then you come here and people are just like, 'Hi, how are you?' and you think, 'Don't I look like a weirdo, don't I look like there's something wrong with me?!' (Lucy)*

*I did one of the life courses, which is more to do with career but it kind of I suppose in a lot of ways it ties in [with parenting]. That was brilliant, that was really good. Really, really good. I did one course which was... all about kind of... what, which is more to do with your outlook on life. Which was brilliant. And then I did another one which was about careers and trying to find what you wanted to do and that was very good and kind of, yeah, yeah, that was very good. (Debbie)*

Interestingly, however, although some mothers note that the provision of free or low-cost childcare when the children are small has been a great help, for the most part the mothers said that they do not access formal support networks around parenting. Either they felt that they do not need these forms of support or, like Lucy and Estelle, think that these forms of support are not for them:

*I did go to some National Health parenting programme actually, which I only went for a few times because I didn't like them. (Lucy)*

*Parenting groups are terrible places to go for mixed race kids. They're terrible places. [They're full of] the white middle class from [names of neighbourhoods]. And they all know each other and I went there as a parent and it was really sad because I was sitting in circles and they know each other and they lunch at each other's places and they're very close and they don't let anybody else come into this. (Estelle)*

Indeed, apart from the parenting programmes and resources offered by SPAN, which mothers say are very multicultural, many of the mothers feel that most of the formal support networks and resources around parenting are not relevant to their lives, both as lone mothers as well as parents of mixed

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Gingerbread/One Parent Families, Single Parent Action Network, etc.



racial and ethnic children. Books and magazines on parenting in particular are heavily criticized for their lack of diversity. Some of the mothers feel that although they generally like to access information through written material, they are disappointed by the lack of information about mixed race families or the representation of family types in much of the parenting literature that is available, as in Melanie's case:

*Very early on I bought a book on how to raise a boy and there was a picture of a white boy on the front of the book! [...] When you say parents and you go into a shop and you see these parenting magazines, you know, they're all very much, they don't seem to be catered to mothers like myself so that's also very interesting is that when you just put the word 'parenting' in there, that can also get a little bit misinterpreted in so many ways.*

The contemporary mothers thus feel that there is a need for more targeted and nuanced information about the experiences of mixed racial and ethnic people, children, couples and families, and the delivery of this should take different forms so that it suits mothers' preferred needs and means of learning and interaction. Such expressions of need are strikingly different from those of the mothers in the 1960s study, who as we have seen were more concerned with material aspects of daily survival. Nevertheless, with little provision made then for the emotional needs of mothers and children generally, and against a social climate in which biological and essentialist understandings of race were only slowly being challenged, the absence of such expressed needs amongst the mothers in the 1960s study is not surprising. Nor, in this respect, is the extent to which mothers drew on alternative sources of support.

## Informal Support: Neighbourhood, Friendship and Family Networks

The area where lone mothers of racial and ethnic children live can have a significant bearing on their experiences, not only in terms of developing a sense of identity and belonging for their children, but also on the everyday lives of the mothers themselves (Head, 2005; Caballero, 2010). Certainly, in the contemporary study, many mothers acknowledged these benefits. Indeed, many of the mothers actively choose to live in such neighbourhoods or to send their children to schools where they will not necessarily 'stand out' as they consider the ability to fit in to be important

for their children:

*You don't stand out like a sore thumb. Oh definitely, yeah. Definitely. I definitely think there's a lot of mixed kids. (Estelle)*

*I personally think it's better for them to be brought up in the inner city than being brought up in some, like where my parents live, which is... you know, very kind of, what's the word...? Not very diverse. (Debbie)*

*[It's] about him having a sense of identity, a healthy sense of identity, knowing who he is and where he's from and for that reason I actually moved into [the area] when he was young because I didn't want him to be brought up in an area where there weren't many people like him. (Chloe)*

*I love them growing up in that [diversity]... I'd prefer that actually, that's why I'm having problems getting rehoused, because I won't move! Won't move out of the area! (Jane)*

Expressions about the benefits of raising their children in neighbourhoods which contained others from mixed racial or ethnic backgrounds – as well as members of the fathers' communities – echo other recent findings on lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children (McKenzie, 2009). Being around other women with similar family patterns can be a strong support mechanism for mothers, particularly white women, as Zoe explains:

*A lot of my friends have mixed race children [...] I think the reason why white women stick together with mixed race children is because they feel accepted. Because they don't have to deal with the criticism and the racism.*

Glimpses of these neighbourhood support networks of 'mixedness' can also be seen in the 1960s research. Three of the four mothers who had children with West Indian fathers spoke about having social networks that included friendships with mothers in similar situations. The fieldnotes on Mrs Jagger recounted how she came to have relationships with West Indian men:

*I started going [out] with a friend of mine, do you know, I'd never been in a pub until then and this was a girl who lived nearby and we started going off together, that was how it started really, that was how I started going with the coloureds.' [...] She left her husband in 1960, five years after they had been married. She didn't go off with the coloured men, but went completely away to the other side of Manchester to live with friends for three months to decide, quote, 'To see which I wanted and I*



*made up my mind that it was coloured'. [...] She seems to know lots of coloured people a coloured woman and her friend up the road is married to a coloured man, and her other little half-caste child was playing in the house. She reckons integration is proceeding quite fast, from her experience of the Fraternity Hall. There are more white people coming than ever before.*

Similarly, the fieldnotes record that Mrs Whiteman had developed a network of friends who also had children with West Indian men:

*The interview took place under conditions of extreme difficulty. In addition to Mrs Whiteman and her son Stephen, three, who caused a great deal of trouble, a very aggressive child – very whiny, there was also her friend, a Scottish girl with three coloured children who lives down Bankfield Road. She had three young children, the eldest one looked about four. Then later on, another friend turned up, a fat woman who was possibly quite young who had lived with Mrs Whiteman for a short time before she married a coloured man. Now she has left the coloured man and has two children in a home and lives in London, I'd never quite managed to find out how she had got up here, but she seemed to be up on a visit. She had the two children with her so that sometimes all the children were in together.*

Whilst the mothers themselves do not discuss these networks, it would appear from the field note comments about the intimacy and nature of the friendships that these were significant relationships for them. They suggest a degree of integration running contrary to stereotypes of such mothers' everyday lives, as in the following note about Mrs Whiteman:

*It was curious that Mrs Whiteman had been going with coloured people so long that she had picked up one of their inflections, a habit of saying 'Man', at the end of each sentence, even when talking to her girlfriend. For all that they lived in this curious theme of life, Mrs Whiteman had very strong codes about her children.*

Moreover, in two of the cases, these networks of mixing were not just confined to friends but were also present within the mothers' own families, as noted for Mrs Jagger and Mrs Casey:

*There is a strong streak of association with the coloured people in her family, her sister is married to a coloured man, another of her sisters goes out with them. (Mrs Jagger)*

*Her second oldest daughter (Rita, 23) is divorced and remarried to 'a coloured boy', her third oldest*

*daughter (Susan, 19) has 'two small coloured children' and lives at home. She is not married. (Mrs Casey)*

Such networks of mixing in communities and families were also noted by Collins (1957). In addition to finding that white women were often highly integrated into the 'coloured' community into which they had married, he also noted numerous cases of two or more sisters from white working class families marrying West Indian or West African men, and many more cases of sisters marrying 'Moslems' [sic]. Similarly, there are indications in recent research on mixed racial and ethnic families that many involve 'cultures of mixing', with grandparents, siblings and other relations also having partners from a different racial, ethnic or faith background to their own (Caballero et al., 2008). Indeed, although in the contemporary study there is little mention of this amongst the white mothers' families, it appears that several of the fathers from minority ethnic backgrounds have families with experience of mixing. In these cases, mothers comment on how this has helped them and their children 'fit in' to the family:

*I've been really lucky in the sense that [my daughter's] dad's mum is married to a white man [...] I think it's made a difference. (Zoe)*

As discussed in Chapter 2, most of the mothers in both studies had some contact with their own families although the level of contact and quality of interaction varied for reasons such as geographical distance, personality clashes, or work or personal responsibilities. There appears to be no distinction between the 1960s mothers and the contemporary mothers in this regard. Some, as noted for Mrs Casey and by Christine, had consistent and dedicated support from family members:

*Her mother had seemed to have moved about a fair bit, possibly to be near her daughter. She's now moved from right over the other side of town to just down the road. [Mrs Casey's mother's] been married three times and 'She's used all her savings to give me a place of my own with the children so that we can have a fresh start. So that we can have a life, I've never had a life, I just don't know what it's like outside'. (Mrs Casey)*

*I'm blessed with an extended family, my mum who lives not very far and works in the same area that I live. I have two sisters as well and they again live within [the city] and they're quite, you know, important, you know, in terms of, they, we, they help with childcare and the raising of the children. (Christine)*

Others, as noted for Mrs Jagger and reported by Sara, did not have the same level of practical input from their families:

*Although she sees a lot of her family, quote, 'My family's more for their own selves'. Her mother has only baby sat for her once because she works.*  
(Mrs Jagger)

*My mum never does any babysitting! She works full time and basically she's married and she's got quite a possessive husband and he kind of when she's not working, she's with him so she's not really, I love her to bits but she's not how I thought she was going to be.* (Sara)

Family could thus be a help or a hindrance, or just simply non-existent. In this respect, the variable relationships the mothers had with their families are no different from relationships in other family types.

## 4. Conclusion

With little known about the everyday lives of lone mothers with mixed racial and ethnic children, findings from this case study project – small-scale as they may be – are useful for generating much needed insights into the experiences and needs of these parents. This final chapter points to indications of what social progress has been made and what issues such lone mothers still face.

In the absence of little substantive knowledge about lone mothers with mixed racial and ethnic children in Britain, the experiences and needs of this group have often been assumed rather than explored. Such assumptions have long posited these mothers in distinctive ways, presuming homogeneity in their racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds and uniformity in their relationships with men, family, friends and communities, as well as their parenting skills and abilities.

Yet, as this report has highlighted, the demographics, experiences and needs of lone mother are far more complex and varied than often presupposed. Even within two small-scale samples at different points in time, we can see how lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children can come from a hugely diverse range of ethnic, racial and socio-economic backgrounds, as can the children's fathers. In addition to differences in their social backgrounds, the types of relationships mothers have with family, the child's father or new partners and friendship support networks can vary significantly, as can the types of support they feel they need, if at all. In families of more than one child, mothers can have different needs related to different children or, as recent research on couple parents of mixed racial and ethnic children has also indicated, they may have parenting or family needs that are not necessarily to do with 'mixedness', but are of a more general concern, such as health, financial, housing or childcare issues (Caballero et al., 2008).

Nevertheless, within this diversity of situations can also be found commonalities of experience. We have seen how mothers may experience social prejudice or face particular material or financial needs, as well as share concerns in relation to raising their children or negotiating and sustaining the relationships in their lives, whether these be with their former partners, their families and friends

– as well as new partners, an important area of change and influence in mothers' lives but one that is little discussed to date. Yet whether mothers remain lone parents or re-partner, it is clear that their situations are not static, though some of the issues they face may not seem to have changed as greatly as we might think over time.

We conclude, therefore, with an overview of the issues that the two sets of interviews raise about the lives of one mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children. In particular, we seek to highlight the indicative trajectories of change or constancy in circumstances for the mothers over the past half century. In doing so, we hope to provide a launch point for further discussion and research to develop understandings of the experiences and needs of this diverse and complex group.

- ***Racial prejudice and social assumptions***

In both sets of interviews, across time, mothers – particularly white mothers whose children's fathers were from black African or African Caribbean backgrounds – keenly felt that social judgements and assumptions were made about women who partnered outside of their own racial or ethnic backgrounds. Such attitudes were mostly directed towards the mothers' sense of morality and their sexual behaviour and, in this respect, had changed very little over the past half a century.

Nevertheless, the interviews indicated that there has been a change in the way in which such attitudes are expressed socially. Although overt forms of racism and prejudice can still be all too prevalent in the everyday lives of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children (Harman, 2008, 2010), for the contemporary mothers in this study, their experiences of assumption and prejudice take subtle, rather than more direct forms. This is most notably the case in relation to their

interactions with officials at an institutional level. Expressions of prejudice in these spheres towards the contemporary mothers are covert and implied, rather than made directly and explicitly as in the case of the 1960s mothers, particularly in their dealings with National Assistance Board officials.

### • **Raising children**

One of the most striking trajectory shifts between the two sets of mothers is related to changing understandings of children's needs since the 1960s. Although both the 1960s and contemporary mothers expressed worries about their financial and material situations, there is a noticeable difference between their discussions of how being a lone parent might affect their children. For the contemporary mothers, concerns around providing for their children materially are also accompanied by concerns about supporting their emotional well-being, both in relation to their racial and ethnic identities as well as being a child in a lone parent family. Such references were almost entirely absent in the discussions of the 1960s mothers.

It is likely that such significant differences are connected to wider social changes, not only in relation to understanding racial and ethnic identities but also to the reformulation and extension of the needs it felt that parents should meet to secure children's optimal development, including the shift towards foregrounding emotional development and identity as a key aspect of contemporary parenting skills (Ramaekers and Suissa, 2008).

### • **Roles of fathers**

The presence of fathers, both then and now, in the lives of the lone mothers strongly challenges many of the assumptions made about the experiences of lone parent mixed racial and ethnic families. As both sets of interviews clearly show, the absence of the father in the lives of mixed racial and ethnic lone parent families is not inevitable, yet it may of course be variable. Indeed, the variability of fathers' involvement has not necessarily changed over time. Within and across both sets of studies, the level of contact and contributions of fathers differed greatly, with some a noticeable, even constant presence, whilst others were more intermittent or absent entirely.

The social context, however, has shifted considerably. The responsibility that most of the contemporary mothers expect the biological fathers of their children to take is echoed in

government policy, which obliges the non-resident parent to contribute regular, reliable financial support towards maintaining their child – at least in principle (Ridge, 2005). Such policy obligations are also accompanied by social expectations, which see the presence or absence of fathers in children's lives as playing an important role in shaping children's identity and their general development. For the 1960s mothers, such obligations and expectations were not a part of their lives, on personal, societal or policy levels.

### • **Relationships with family**

Both the 1960s and the contemporary interviews challenge assumptions about the types of relationships that lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children have with their own parents and families. Again, both sets of interviews suggest that hostility, rejection and isolation from family can not be taken for granted as part of mothers' experiences, though of course there is a continuation of variability in mothers' experiences. Some may have close and supportive relationships with their families, whilst others may have more strained or difficult interactions and not necessarily due to the fact of having partnered outside their racial or ethnic group.

A significant trajectory shift indicated, however, is in the nature of the family relationships that contemporary mothers may now have with their children's father's families. This is particularly the case if those families are from ethnic or racial minority backgrounds. The majority of the contemporary mothers had contact with the father's family, many on a regular basis. Again, although the type and quality of this contact varied amongst families, it appears present in a way that was almost completely unknown amongst the 1960s mothers, due no doubt to the patterns of migration and settlement in Britain amongst minority ethnic families at the time. Such a shift suggests an additional support source for lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children, one which further challenges assumptions of them as inherently isolated, both culturally and socially.

### • **Support networks**

In the time period between the two studies, considerable development have taken place in relation to the formal support available for lone mothers. In addition to the changing policy context there are numerous specialist organizations which provide advice, information and support to lone mothers. Furthermore, the provision of resources

that help mothers support their children's racial or ethnic identity development, as well as other aspects of their children's emotional well-being, is also a significant change for mothers over time. This can be seen as a positive in that mothers are receiving support, but also as placing stresses on them in concerns about meeting their children's identity needs that were not a preoccupation for their counterparts half a century earlier.

What appears to have remained constant, however, is the type of informal daily support that lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children draw on. In addition to the roles that the children's father and mothers' own families may play in their lives, friendship networks feature highly in mothers' accounts, both then and now. In particular, though their importance is often overlooked in discussions of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children, friendship networks in which mothers can share commonality of experience appear to be of great importance in providing a support framework in mothers' lives. With such neighbourhood, family and friendship networks often providing much needed sources of everyday support in mothers' lives, it may be important to consider the effect of an absence of such networks may have, particularly if other resources are limited.



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