

# Difference and Belonging, Hopes and Fears: Parenting 'mixed' children and the implications for career development

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## Difference and Belonging, Hopes and Fears:

**Rosalind Edwards**, Professor in Social Policy and Director of the Families & Social Capital Research Group, at London South Bank University, discusses parenting issues and their implications for career development at the CeGS 10th Annual Lecture held at the University of Derby on 18th December 2007.

Rosalind has researched and published widely on a range of issues concerning family policy, with a focus on the perspectives of family members themselves. Her recent book publications include: Assessing Social Capital (ed. with J. Holland and J. Franklin, 2007, Cambridge Scholars Press); Sibling Identity and Relationships: Sisters and Brothers (with L. Hadfield, H. Lucey and M. Mauthner, 2006, Routledge); Making Families: Moral Tales of Parenting and Step-parenting (with J. Ribbens McCarthy and V. Gillies, 2003, Sociology Press) and Children, Home and School: Resistance, Autonomy or Connection? (ed., 2002, Routledge Falmer). Rosalind's report (with C. Caballero and S. Puthussery) on 'Parenting 'mixed' children: negotiating difference and belonging in mixed race, ethnicity and faith families' will be published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation later this year. Rosalind is also co-editor of the International Journal of Social Research Methodology.

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## Aimhigher...



In December 2007, the Centre for Guidance Studies (CeGS) announced plans to celebrate throughout the UK and further afield its 10th anniversary. In recognition of the Centre's significant national and international achievements, Professor John Coyne, Vice-Chancellor, announced a new and exciting agenda set within the context of establishing a new International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS). A formal launch is scheduled in April 2008.

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# Parenting 'mixed' children and the implications for career development

I am very pleased to give the International Centre for Guidance Studies 10th annual lecture, and to indicate some of the implications of our research on 'mixed' families for your field of career development and guidance. I must stress, though, that I am no expert in your field. My interest and experience lies in people's family lives in general. So, I will do my best in making links between my interest and yours, and I hope that you will be able to fill in any gaps.

In my lecture, I will address some of the debates about how to refer to children and young people who are from a 'mixed' racial or ethnic, and maybe also a 'mixed' faith, background, and how these relate to the politics of identity. I hope that this will explain to any of you who are perplexed as to why my lecture title refers to 'mixed' children. Having done that, I will be moving on to more important issues. I will give you a picture of 'mixed' families across Britain, before looking at the ways that parents from different backgrounds attempt to deal with difference and a sense of belonging for their children, how schools may be a resource in this, and their hopes for their children's future.

The research that I draw on is being carried out with several colleagues – Chamion Caballero, Shuby Puthussery and Darren Smith<sup>1</sup>. I will be using data from our own and others' analyses of the 2001 UK Census in the main, and from in-depth interviews we carried out with parents from different race, ethnic and faith backgrounds about how, if at all, they sought to pass on their heritages to their children, and which aspects, of which heritage, to pass on (see Caballero et al. 2008a, 2008b; Edwards and Caballero 2008).

Throughout, I am going to challenge some of the simplistic assumptions and politics around 'mixed' children and their families. One of the key messages emerging from our own work as well as that of other recent studies is that we have to beware negative stereotypes.

Questions about the experiences of 'mixed' children, and their parenting, are important where nearly 680,000 people in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland chose the new 'Mixed' category of the 2001 UK Census. Analyses of the Census ethnicity data indicate that the population who identify as 'Mixed' is the third largest and one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Britain (Salt and Rees 2006). There are also increasing trends in marriage and cohabitation across religious boundaries, which can overlap with mixing race or ethnicity (Graham et al. 2007; Morgan et al. 1995). About half of the 'Mixed' population are under the age of 16 (Aspinall 2003; Owen 2005), so they are an important group to consider in relation to career development.

There are a number of services that have been specifically set up to support 'mixed' families and individuals, some with national reach, some more locally based. I will just give you a taste of a few of these, and you may well know of others in your local area. Intermix is a national website 'for the benefit of mixed-race families, individuals and anyone who feels they have a multiracial identity'. The Multiple Heritage Project is for young people experiencing 'a mixed race identity', their parents, and professionals dealing with them. People in Harmony is 'an interracial, anti-racist organisation ... for people from different ethnic and cultural groups, people in interracial relationships and families, and people of mixed parentage'. They mainly cover Reading, Slough and London. In Brighton, there is Mosaic, for 'Black, minority ethnic and mixed parentage families and individuals'. In Swindon, there is the Mixed Race Dual Heritage Group for 'children from mixed race and dual heritage backgrounds'. In Devon, there is Planet Rainbow for 'mixed heritage families and young people'. In Staffordshire, there is Shades for 'the mixed heritage community'. In Oxford, there is the Starlight Black Child Mixed Heritage Group for 'friends and families of black children of mixed heritage'.

<sup>1</sup> Our research, 'Parenting 'mixed' children: negotiating difference and belonging' was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It encompasses mapping the prevalence and location of parent couples from different racial/ethnic backgrounds in areas of England and Wales using data from the 2001 UK Census, a survey of parents (whatever their backgrounds and relationships) of children in years 4-6 from 17 schools located across England and Wales, in-depth interviews with 35 parent couples from different race, ethnic and/or faith backgrounds, and three intergenerational case studies involving semi-structured interviews with children and grandparents as well as the parents.

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The descriptors of 'mixed' people that I have used in mentioning these groups are taken from their websites or literature: interracial, mixed parentage, mixed race, multiracial, dual heritage, mixed heritage, and black children of mixed heritage. There are also lots of other terms that are used, from the more acceptable biethnic, biracial, mixed ethnicity, mixed origin, multiethnic, multiple heritage, transracial, transcultural, and people racialised as mixed, to now deplored terms such as half breed, half caste and mulatto. And, of course, I have been using the term 'mixed' without any qualifiers.

### Debates About Terminology

The language used to talk about people from 'mixed' backgrounds, and record them in surveys, is a topic of heated and passionate debate (e.g. Ali 2003; Aspinall 2003; Barn and Harman 2006; Caballero 2005; Ifkewunigwe 1998; Sim 2007; Tikly et al. 2005; Wright et al. 2003), especially among practitioners, and it can leave people nervous about saying the wrong thing. You might find this in your own work, but it also applies to people who are living the situation. Here are a few quotes on the topic from parents in our study:

*Mixed parentage, that was the one I always used to use ... I did change to mixed race ... [It's about] targeting people and it is not always in a bad way ... If some people like the Lee Jaspers of this world, tell everybody that there is no such a thing as mixed race and we are all mixed race, well, no we can't all give bone marrow to mixed race people, sorry! You know, those sorts of things. I think it's quite negative, you know ... I don't necessarily like this dual parentage or dual heritage and I thought it was quite classic what Oona King said about [stately homes].*

(A 'mixed' Black Ghanian/White Irish and British mother who is married to a White British man and has two children)

*I would use mixed race [not mixed parentage]. Because my children are not going to be hounded or persecuted because of their parentages, they are going to be hounded and*

*all that kind of hoopla because of their race.*  
(A Black British Caribbean father who is married to a White British woman and has three children)

*Well, I used to use mixed race, and then somebody at work said 'Oh no, we don't use that anymore, oh no. You have to use dual heritage'.*

(A White mother from a Christian background who is married to an Indian Muslim man and has two children)

These people respectively work for central government, in further education, and for a national umbrella organisation of agencies working with children and young people.

Arguments concerning belonging and identity for 'mixed' race people in particular tend to be either 'pro-race' or 'post-race' (Caballero 2005), and are overwhelmingly preoccupied with Black-White parentage.

The pro-race position has two main strands. The first argues that children of Black and White parentage should identify and be raised as Black, since this is how they will be perceived by society (Banks 1996; Henriques 1975; Ladner 1977; Maximé 1993; Prevatt-Goldstein 1999). The second pro-race strand challenges this view while retaining a focus on race, in understanding mixedness as a legitimate racial identity. It is argued that parents need to raise their 'mixed' children to recognise both or all of their heritages for a healthy identity (Crippen and Brew 2007; Milan and Kelly 2000; Oriti et al. 1996; Rockquemore and Laszloffy 2005; Wehrly 2003). In both cases, White parents are seen as needing to develop 'racial literacy' in order to manage their children's identity (Twine 2004).

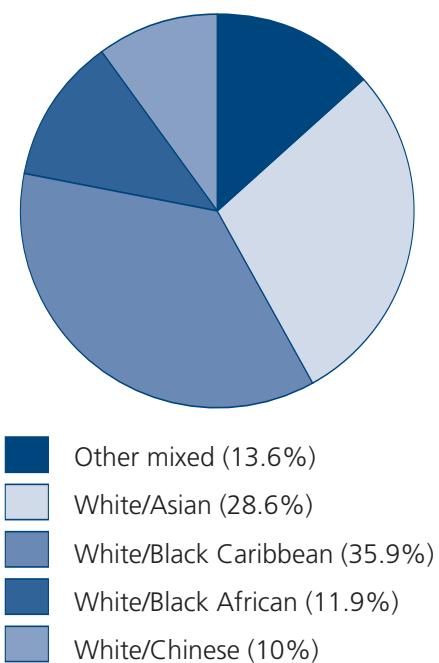
Post-race positions go further to regard mixedness as deconstructing notions of race and a means of moving beyond them, as part of what Stuart Hall calls 'new ethnicities' (1992, p.257) whereby unified, simple racialised identity is disrupted and challenged by cultural ethnic plurality. Thus the racial hybridity embodied by 'mixed' people allows us to glimpse the possibilities for a cosmopolitan and democratic society, freed from divisive hierarchies and boundaries of racialised

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categorisation and discourse (Ali 2003; Gilroy 2000; Olumide 2002; Sims 2007).

As I said, quite often terms and identity debates are preoccupied with Black/White mixes. Yet mixedness is far wider than this: Black and White parentage accounts for just under half of the population who identified themselves as 'Mixed' in the 2001 UK Census, as Figure 1 shows:

**Figure 1: Categories of 'Mixed' ethnicity, UK Census 2001**



*Source: developed from Owen 2007*

Because of all the different forms of mixing, not just Black and White, and also because faith differences can be bound up in this, in our work we predominantly use the term 'mixed' without qualifiers. As Suki Ali (2003, 2007) has argued, this has the advantage that the specificities of the mixedness referred to have to be made clear in each case, rather than capturing people under one encompassing categorical qualifier and assuming they all have identities and experiences in common. Further, 'Mixed' not only reflects official census terminology but, as was indicated in the quotes I gave you earlier, our own and other studies are repeatedly finding that mixed and mixed race are

the terms most commonly used by 'mixed' people and their parents (e.g. Barrett et al. 2006; Song et al. in progress; Tizard and Phoenix 1993). This then raises questions about who it is that is deciding what language people 'should' use?

The whole issue of mixedness is also significant in the light of sometimes heated debates about multiculturalism in Britain, underpinned by concerns about the implications of minority cultural and religious identity. On the one hand, we have images of racial, ethnic and faith diversity that are posed in opposition to unity and solidarity. Some argue that the British welfare state is being undermined by the presence of racial, ethnic and religious cultural 'strangers', creating a crisis of cohesive social trust (Goodhart 2004, 2006). Others advise the need to build cohesive communities in the face of majority and minority populations living segregated 'parallel' lives (see the Cantle and Denham Reports, both 2001; also Dench et al. 2006; Phillips 2005a, b, c).

On the other hand, resonating with post-race positions, we have assertions that the portrayals of segregation and conflict ignore the reality of ongoing interactions between a mix of minority and majority racial, ethnic and religious cultures, where multi-culture is an ordinary, unremarkable, feature of everyday social life, and that this multi-culture contributes to, rather than diminishes, contemporary British society (Gilroy 2004, 2006; Hall 2000, Yuval Davies et al. 2005).

'Mixed' families and in particular their children are drawn into both sides of this wider political debate, mainly through ideas about hybridity as either a weakness or a strength, both in terms of the 'mixed' individual themselves, and in terms of the state of society (Caballero 2005; Young 1995). These images seep into our minds.

### Stereotypes

Mixing and mixedness are often posed as fraught with difficulty in common assumptions and media portrayals. The notion of 'culture clash' is frequently used to explain the supposed transient and problematic nature of 'mixed' relationships (e.g. Crippen and Brew 2007). There is an 'automatic presumption of underlying pathology in interracial

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relationships' (Reddy 1994, p.10), warning that attempts to cross the barrier of cultural difference lead to emotionally difficult relationships and lifestyles. For example, in her column for *The Daily Mirror* (27.1.06), Miriam Stoppard gave the following advice, 'to form a lasting relationship, you have to be strong and determined. That's true of everyone and especially true of inter-racial relationships'.

The dire consequences of mixing across race and faith cultural difference are often combined in stories of (most usually) fathers from Middle Eastern or Asian backgrounds removing children from their relationships with White British mothers, taking them back to their country of origin: 'The number of children being taken illegally to Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, India and Dubai – all non-signatories of the Hague Convention – is rising as 'mixed' marriages and divorces become more frequent' (*The Sunday Times* 8.4.07).

'Mixed' relationships are posed as short-lived in the mainstream media. In particular, sexist and racist images of both white working class women and black men as promiscuous, and of black men as feckless 'babyfathers' are common (for example, the 2003 Channel 4 documentaries 'Forbidden Fruit' and 'White Girls Are Easy', and the characters of Vicky Pollard and her boyfriend Jermaine from BBC's 'Little Britain'). Interestingly, the innercity underclass race-mixing stereotypes peppering the mainstream media are often turned on their head in minority-based media, where relationships with White people can be portrayed as a problematic aspect of upward social mobility, with Black and Asian 'high flyers' either seen as facing difficulties in finding same-ethnic equals to partner, or 'partnering out' viewed as a form of 'selling out' (Song and Edwards 1997).

Children from 'mixed' relationships are also subject to sharply differing perceptions, of 'hybrid degeneration' or 'hybrid vigour'. On the one hand, they have been viewed as genetically weak, and consigned to the marginal and tragic 'between two worlds' status originally envisaged by Stonequist (1937). This image was recently revived by the Chair of the (then) Commission for Racial Equality's comments about 'identity stripping – children who grow up marooned between communities' (Phillips 2007). Disproportionate numbers of 'mixed'

children in fostering and adoptive care, or at risk of educational underachievement, are often associated with this 'identity confusion' (Barn et al. 2005; Tikly et al. 2005). On the other hand, there are arguments that 'mixed' children are 'exquisitely beautiful' (Alibhai Brown 2001, p.82), with a stronger genetic profile that means they are healthier and more intelligent (Ziv 2006). These sub-normal and supra-normal conceptualisations both stem from the premise that people from 'mixed' backgrounds are somehow different to 'mono-racial' people (Caballero 2005).

So, are these images born out in reality? I will now turn to look at what sorts of families are 'mixed' and where they live, largely focusing on the parent couples who form the subject of our research. Indeed, rather than always being subject to instability, over half of 'mixed' dependent children live with their married or cohabiting parents (Murphy 2006). I am going to look at the geographical and social location of these families.

### Geographical Location

Looking at the 2001 Census data as a whole, the top 50 'hotspot' wards for 'mixed' couples are mainly located in Outer London (58%), with substantial proportions in Birmingham (22%) and Inner London (21%) (see Caballero et al. 2007 for fuller discussion). Table 1 shows that, overall, 'mixed' parent couples with dependent children are most likely to be living in 'multicultural metropolitan' areas – although they are distributed in other areas too.

There may be several reasons for the clustering of 'mixed' couples with dependent children in 'multicultural metropolitan' areas. One explanation may be that they have always lived in such a neighbourhood and remain there. Another might be that 'mixed' couples move to these areas because they want their children to grow up in more racially and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, which we found was often important to the 'mixed' parents who we interviewed (Caballero et al. 2008a; see also Holloway et al. 2005). 'Mixed' couples may (also) move into these areas because they need larger accommodation and housing is cheaper in 'multicultural' neighbourhoods.

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**Table 1: Mixed ethnicity couples with dependent children – % by area classification, England & Wales**

ONS Area Classification	White/Asian couple parents	White/Black African couple parents	White/Black Caribbean couple parents	Other Mixed couple parents
Multicultural metropolitan	36	74	40	48
Suburbs and small towns	38	12	8	20
Prospering metropolitan	16	6	—	30
Traditional manufacturing	—	4	32	—
Student communities	10	2	—	2
Built-up	—	2	—	—
Coastal and countryside	—	—	—	—
Accessible countryside	—	—	—	—

Source: Caballero et al. 2008b

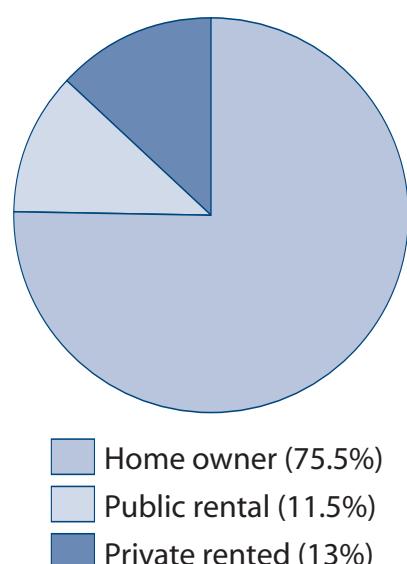
Nonetheless, not all 'mixed' couples with dependent children are living in diverse 'multicultural' neighbourhoods, but are remaining in or moving to 'prosperous metropolitan' and 'suburban' areas – notably Other Mixed and White/Asian families; or traditional manufacturing ones where there are lower housing costs – largely White/African Caribbean families.

These variations in the sorts of neighbourhood in which different sorts of 'mixed' families live point to the need for service providers to think about the types of mix that might be dominant in their local area. It also brings into the picture the issue of class, and how it cross-cuts with race and ethnicity.

### Socio-Economic Circumstances

'Mixed' couples tend to be owner-occupiers, rather than renting their accommodation, as Figure 2 shows. Moreover, they mainly live in detached (26%), semi-detached (29%) or terraced (25%) houses, rather than flats or shared houses.

**Figure 2: Tenure of accommodation, England & Wales (2001 Census)**

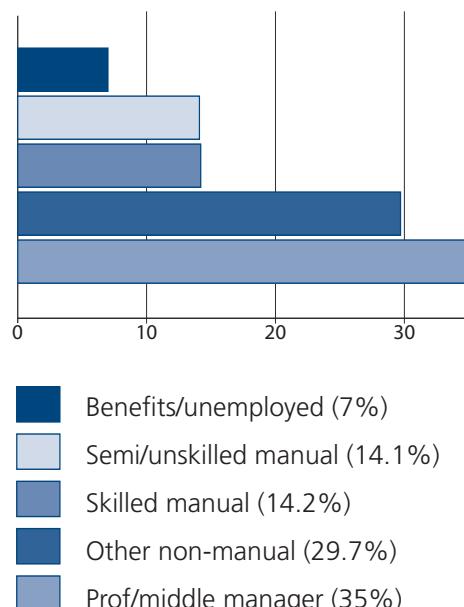


A high proportion of them are well qualified, with 36 per cent holding Level 4/5 qualifications (i.e. first degree, higher degree, NVQ level 4/5, HNC, HND, or qualified teacher status), and a similar proportion also have professional qualifications (34%). In half of 'mixed' couples (51%), both members of the couple have employment, and generally under a fifth are unemployed or economically inactive.

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Nearly all 'mixed' couple households own a car (88%), and indeed two-fifths (41%) own two or more cars. Figure 4 reports on the social grade of the household reference person for the census – an indication of their social class status – revealing that a good proportion are middle class.

**Figure 3: Social grade of household reference person - %**



Source: Caballero et al. 2008b

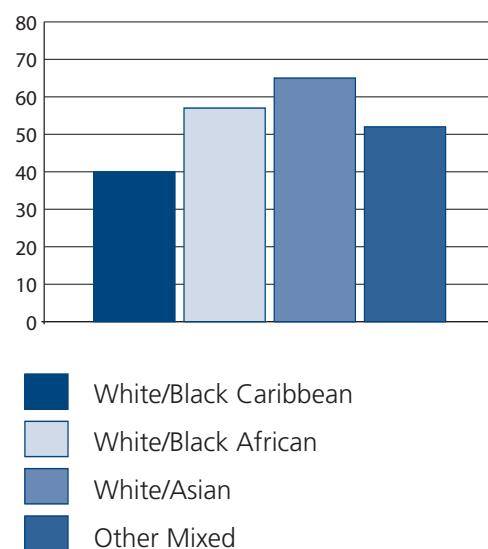
This profile of a middle class dimension to 'mixed' families questions the dominant underclass stereotype, and also provides an under-acknowledged material dimension to discussion of 'mixed' populations. Not all 'mixed' young people are necessarily at risk because of living in deprived circumstances, and this again is something that needs to be taken into account in thinking about career development and guidance. I will now turn to their educational attainment.

### 'Mixed' Children and Young People's Educational Attainment

Data from the Department for Education and Skills (Bradford 2006) shows that there are variations between different 'Mixed' groups when looking at the educational attainment of 15 year olds. Half (50%) are achieving five or more GCSE grades at A\*

to C (or equivalent). Within this overall achievement, however, Figure 4 shows that 'Mixed' White/Asian pupils get higher results than their counterparts from other 'Mixed' groups.

**Figure 4: Five+ A\*— C GCSE grades: pupils from Mixed ethnic groups %**



Source: adapted from Bradford 2006

For White/Black 'Mixed' pupils, this level of attainment places them somewhere between their two comprising origins. Pupils from the two 'Mixed' White and Black groups got lower GCSE results than White British pupils, but higher results than Black Caribbean and Black African pupils. In the case of White/Asian 'Mixed' pupils, their GCSE results were very similar to those for Indian pupils, but higher than White, Pakistani or Bangladeshi pupils. Again, this points to issues such as class, and also to teacher expectations, with implications for career guidance and development providers. I also suspect there are gender differences hidden within the statistics.

Having overviewed the variable composition of the all-encompassing 'Mixed' category of families and people, I want now to move away from statistics to looking at experiences. I will revisit some of the issues I have discussed above regarding identity and achievement from the perspective of the 'mixed' couple parents we interviewed in relation to their children.

## Parents' Approaches to Children's Difference and Sense of Belonging

As mentioned earlier, we interviewed 65 parents in 35 couples who were from different race, ethnic and faith backgrounds living in different areas of England and Wales. Around two-thirds were middle class, which is not unusual in the context of what I have just said about the social class profile of such couples. All had at least one child aged between 8 and 12 years, so they had been together for that amount of time at least.

The majority of the couples involved multiple mixing, where racial or ethnic difference also overlapped with a religious one, such as Ghanaian/Christian and White British/Jewish, Turkish Cypriot/Muslim and Sri Lankan/Hindu, and Moroccan/Muslim and White British/Christian. Further complexity of multiple mixing is also the case. About a quarter of our interviewees were from 'mixed' racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds themselves, for example a White British/Pakistani/Irish mix mother. For these parents, mixedness was part of their own identity and experiences, as well as being an issue in parenting their children. This again challenges notions of simple dual types of mixing.

Although their situations cover a variety of sorts of mixing, one thing all the parents had in common was that they were in a process of negotiating difference between them. Beyond this, however, there was a diversity of approaches to creating a sense of belonging for their children. We have identified three main approaches, which we call 'open', 'mix' and 'single'. I want to stress that each of these approaches 'worked' for the family concerned. I also want to stress that there was little in the way of particular approaches being associated with particular racial, ethnic or faith combinations. For example, the 'mixed' Black/White parent couples in our sample did not all take the same approach.

### • The open approach

The key feature of the open approach is that children are encouraged to think beyond ethnic, racial and faith labels categories; their identity and sense of belonging is not seen as necessarily rooted

in their particular racial, ethnic or faith backgrounds.

Meena provides a good example here. She is an Indian Sikh married to a White British man who is from a 'mixed' White British Christian and Polish/South African Jewish background. They have two children. Meena talked about how identity options for her children should not be closed down, and felt that they could fit in anywhere:

*I'd like [them] to always have the flexibility of living here or in India, or in any part of the world that [they] kind of choose, the ability to live anywhere in the world ... We both feel that faith is important and there's something good about faith. It doesn't really matter which faith it is. I don't think it's hard for them to make the choice later ... [My daughter] is very keen to learn Punjabi ... [and] she's fluent in Bengali ... We've got a really positive attitude to any language, every language they're going to learn ... They really like Spanish and they like to learn Spanish ... [My daughter], you know, she can actually look very Indian and also look very Mexican as well.*

Interestingly, all the parents who took a strong open approach were middle class. This may well reflect the resources, such as foreign travel, that these parents are able to provide for their children, helping them to feel that there are a range of identity options and life choices available.

### • The mix approach

The key feature of the mix approach is that children's racial and ethnic background is understood as a rooted and factual part of their identity.

Leo is an example of someone who understands his daughter's identity in this way. He is a Black Trinidadian and his wife is from a 'mixed' White British/Irish/Pakistani background:

*I feel a lot of times I've got to protect her Trinidadianess or her Blackness. I have to make sure that, for me, that she remembers that she's half and half and not get carried away and think that she's just White. That's kind of important to me ... We taught her at*

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*an early age to not get caught up in colour or race. If you ask her what she is, she'll say she's a 'mixie'.*

- **The single approach**

The key feature of the single approach is that only one aspect of children's background is stressed and a sense of belonging is promoted for them through that.

Maryam is a White British woman who, on marrying her Pakistani Muslim husband, converted to Islam, and they are bringing up their three sons in the faith, which over-rides their racial difference:

*Islam is a way of life and that's how it is, it's simple and that's how I'd like to follow them, that's how I teach [the children]. I just don't want my kids to go wrong ... [I told one of my sons] 'you know your religion is Islam, you are a Muslim'. I said to him 'whatever, doesn't matter what that boy says, doesn't matter what colour your skin is, at the end of the day anybody could be a Muslim.'*

And in this single approach, some of the Black/White parent couples were bringing their 'mixed' children up with a largely Black identity. Sophie is a White British woman married to a Black British Caribbean man. They have three children:

*I mean [our oldest son] is a good example because right from the beginning really we've been very clear with [him], well all of them, that they're black but they're mixed race. Because we know that when push comes to shove out there and they're confronted by an overtly racist incident, they're perceived as black. None of them are interested in whether they're half or a quarter or whatever you want to describe it as, they're black. So we're a black family and that's the general sort of view that we raise our children with.*

### **'Mixed' Parenting Is Not Just About Mixedness**

The three approaches above demonstrate that there is no, one, universal way for parents to bring up their children in terms of identity. All these different

approaches work for the family concerned. But, when it comes to putting an approach to difference and belonging for 'mixed' children into practice, in reality it was mothers who largely took the primary responsibility for, and carried out the daily practice of, children's upbringing. As part of this, they also took greater responsibility for passing on knowledge and awareness of the children's various backgrounds.

Importantly, though, we need to be careful about assuming that mixedness is the main issue in these families' lives. Far from parents experiencing one 'culture clash' battle after another, such difference may pale into insignificance when compared with other issues they face in their everyday parenting. For example, while many mentioned wanting to protect their children from the dangers posed by racial, ethnic or religious prejudice, they were often just as or more worried about general social threats to their children's welfare, such as drug and alcohol abuse, gang violence and teenage pregnancy. And some discussed how the health or disability of themselves or their children was a more pressing issue for them than that of cultural or racial difference. Financial concerns were also a preoccupation for some. Several fathers spoke about the financial pressure they felt they were under, for example to meet the costs of living in a certain area, supporting their families and maintaining a particular standard of living, providing for both needs and treats, and the concomitant difficulties of balancing work hours and family life.

### **Schools as Resources**

I want to return now to 'mixed' children's achievement, and look at how the parents we spoke to regarded their children's schooling. Many of them talked about schools as sites where their children would be able to mix with others from a variety of racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds, and could see school as a potential resource in supporting the diversity of the children's own 'mixed' backgrounds. For example, they often appreciated school celebrations and festivals involving music, art, dance, language, stories, food and traditions from different cultures in which their children could participate.

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Kate is a White British and Jewish mother with a Black British Ghanaian and Christian partner, who has three children. They understand their children's identity as a mix:

*They had a fantastic multicultural evening at school recently where all the parents brought food from their countries and it was fantastic. There were so many different things, and both the girls volunteered to compere ... We couldn't decide what food to take, and I thought I can't cook any Ghanaian food and I don't know what to do. So we went Jewish and took some bagels and smoked salmon in, and they helped me make it, and we took my dad along. But they both wore Ghanaian sort of smocks, and they looked beautiful and they were really proud to do it.*

Parents could also be quite upset when schools got it 'wrong' in terms of the sort of sense of belonging that they were passing on to their children, for example treating their 'mixed' children as Black if they themselves were taking an open or mix approach, or where they felt that racism and prejudice were not tackled satisfactorily.

Among our sample, schools were more important to parents in supporting their 'mixed' children than were organisations and groups specifically for 'mixed' children and families. While a few of the parents we spoke to were involved in these or at least aware of them, the majority were not.

But it is also notable that, while parents were concerned about diversity, the overwhelming consideration for them in terms of the schools their children attended was academic achievement. Barry, a White British father, and his partner, who is a White English and Black Trinidadian mix, combine elements of all three approaches in relation to their daughter's identity. He said about his daughter moving to secondary school:

*We hope that she'll get into a good school, even if it means we have to remortgage ... Primary school education is important but secondary school is paramount to her future really. So if we can't get her into a good school, we'll do whatever necessary. We'll even take out a loan or whatever so she can go to a private school. It's as simple as that. Her education is the most important thing.*

Obviously here, parents needed the financial resources to move to an area with a good school, or even buy a private education, so class again is an issue.

Class was also an issue in parents' career expectations for their children once they had left education. All the parents we spoke to wanted their children to be accepted for who they are, and happy, settled and secure in the future. Mainly they professed that their children's career choices were up to them. There were some differences in the reality of options that parents saw as available to their children, however. For example, Hasan is a Pakistani Muslim married to a White British convert. He is a taxi driver. He spoke about his ambitions for his three sons:

*Well education is very important. I hope they have a good education. Maybe a decent job, go into an apprenticeship or something like that when they get a bit older. I wouldn't let them go on the dole or anything like that. They'd have to get some sort of education or some sort of experience in plumbing, mechanic, plastering, whatever. It depends what they're going to be like, it's up to them, but as long as they choose a good profession.*

In contrast, Derek is a Black British Protestant married to a White Irish Catholic woman. They also have three sons. Derek works as a lecturer. While he is not prescriptive about career choices and his general ideas about self-sufficiency are similar to Hasan's, his concept of professional employment is quite different:

*I want to pass [self-sufficiency] on to my kids. It's very much about standing on your own two feet, contributing to society and not just taking. That's a very big thing. My parents never had a rented accommodation, you buy your own property ... We haven't got any defined – like we want [one of them] to be a doctor, [another] a lawyer and [another] an accountant ... Once you've got an education then do what the hell you like. It doesn't matter because you can always fall back on it. Once you're educated you can't have that taken away from you and you can't uneducate yourself.*

### Conclusion

Overall then, the main messages from this tour of terms, statistics and experiences of bringing up 'mixed' children are that many of the issues involved are not inherently to do with children's mixedness.

'Mixed' children and families are not necessarily 'mixed up'. Other issues, ones that face all parents, can be just as important to parents themselves in bringing up their children. And social class cuts across race and ethnicity for 'mixed' families in terms of their resources and expectations.

But a key issue that does relate to mixedness is others' perceptions of this. I think that our research points to a need for people working in career guidance and development, and other areas of service provision, to challenge stereotypical assumptions about 'mixed' children, and to address diversity in both a wider and more nuanced fashion; one that takes account of specific sorts of mixing within a broader context of socio-economic inequalities.

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