

Parenting ‘mixed’ children: negotiating difference and belonging in mixed race, ethnicity and faith families

Chamion Caballero, Rosalind Edwards and Shuby Puthussery

Insights into parenting ‘mixed’ children

More and more is known about the ‘mixed’ population of Britain – those brought up in families with different racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds. But less is known about their parents. Who are they and what are their experiences of bringing up their children?

This report aims to provide insights about parenting mixed children to inform debates about family life and professional strategies for support. Focusing on mothers and fathers living together, it:

- Investigates how parents from different racial, ethnic and/or faith backgrounds give their children a sense of belonging and identity.
- Examines parents’ approaches to cultural difference and how they pass on aspects of belonging and heritage across generations.
- Explores the opportunities, constraints, challenges and tensions in negotiating a sense of identity and heritage between parents.



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Preface

Terminology

In this preface, we explain the rationale behind our choice of the terms we have used in this report to refer to race, ethnicity and faith, and the crossing of boundaries between them, as well as to describe the characteristics of the people who have taken part in our research.

We make this explanation in the light of the fact that the language used to talk about people from mixed backgrounds and record them in surveys is subject to much heated ideological and political debate (Ali, 2003; Aspinall, 2003; Barn and Harman, 2006; Caballero, 2005; Ifekwunigwe, 1998; Tikly *et al.*, 2004; Wright *et al.*, 2003). A host of terminology abounds, from the more acceptable – albeit contested – ‘biethnic’, ‘biracial’, ‘dual heritage’, ‘interfaith’, ‘interracial’, ‘mixed ethnicity’, ‘mixed faith’, ‘mixed heritage’, ‘mixed origin’, ‘mixed parentage’, ‘mixed race’, ‘multi-ethnic’, ‘multiracial’, ‘multiple heritage’, ‘transcultural’, to now deplored terms such as ‘half-breed’, ‘half-caste’ and ‘mulatto’.

The terms above are descriptors attached predominantly to individuals rather than to couple relationships and families. In this report, however, our main focus is on ‘mixing’ between parent couples in bringing up their ‘mixed’ children. Our decision to use predominantly the terms ‘mixed’ without qualifiers and ‘mixing’ has been made for a number of reasons. They encompass the range of racial, ethnic and faith differences among the parents in the study (see Chapter 1 for a description of our interviewees). The terms thus have the advantage that the specificities of the ‘mixedness’ referred to have to be made clear when discussing the parents and their families in this report, rather than capturing them under one encompassing categorical qualifier. ‘Mixed’, while reflecting official census terminology, is also in common usage among the mixed couples and individuals in this study, as well as in others (e.g. Barrett *et al.*, 2006; Song *et al.*, in progress; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002). ‘Mixing’ allows us to signal the dynamic and relational processes in which the mothers and fathers interviewed for this study were actively involved. Although we recognise the limitations of these terms – ‘mixed’, ‘mixing’ and ‘mixedness’ – for now, we feel that they best denote our intentions.

Other words we use also have histories of debate and contestation: race, ethnicity, religion and faith (see Plante and Sherman, 2001, especially pp. 5–8; Song, 2003). For simplicity’s sake, in the context of this study, we use ‘race’ to refer to visible colour and physical attribute distinctions, ‘ethnicity’ to refer to cultural and national identities and values, ‘religion’ to refer to institutional faith systems, and ‘faith’ to refer to spiritual belief practices and norms.

We have also had to make decisions about how to refer to the characteristics of mixedness among the parent couples in our sample. As we detail in Chapter 1, the parents embody a diverse range of multiple mixing of race, ethnic and religious backgrounds within a couple and sometimes also for an individual. For the most part, when discussing the couples, we note the aspects of difference that are important to them. This means that, in some cases, we refer merely to a parent's or couple's racial and ethnic characteristics and, in others, we refer to their racial, ethnic and religious characteristics. The order in which we do this (race, ethnicity, faith) has no significance beyond a convention that we have adopted for regularity of style.

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Finally, we are indebted to the mothers and fathers who generously made time and offered hospitality despite busy lives, and shared their experiences and insights with us. We have changed their names and those of other people they talk about in their interviews to protect their privacy. We have endeavoured to match these pseudonyms as closely as possible to the original name, so that a sense of any specific cultural or faith meaning is kept intact.

1 Introduction

Couples from different racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds and their 'mixed' children are increasingly visible in the public eye. But, while more and more is known about those who themselves form the 'mixed' population of Britain, knowledge about their parents is less prevalent. Who are they and what are their experiences of bringing up their children? This report discusses the findings from a research study that looked at the increasing practice of parenting mixed children in the British context. It aims to provide insights into how parents from different backgrounds negotiate bringing up their children. The central focus is on mothers and fathers in couple relationships, rather than separated parents, so as to identify the ongoing negotiation of cultural difference between them as part of everyday family life.

Questions about the experience of mixed parenting are important where analyses of the 2001 UK Census indicate that the population who identify as being of 'mixed' ethnicity is the third largest and one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Britain (Salt and Rees, 2006), about half of whom are under the age of 16. Over half of these dependent children have married or cohabiting parents (Aspinall, 2003; Murphy, 2006; Owen, 2005). There are also increasing trends in marriage and cohabitation across religious boundaries (for example, Graham *et al.*, 2007; Morgan *et al.*, 1996; Voas, 2008).

Mixed parenting is also significant in the light of debates about multiculturalism in Britain, underpinned by concerns about the implications of minority cultural and religious identity. On the one hand, images of racial, ethnic and faith diversity are posed as though they were in opposition to unity and solidarity, with some arguing that the British welfare state is being undermined by the presence of racial, ethnic and religious cultural 'strangers', which is creating a crisis of cohesive social trust (e.g. Goodhart, 2004, 2006). Others advise the need to build cohesive communities in the face of majority and minority populations living segregated 'parallel' lives (Cantle, 2001; Denham, 2001; see also Dench *et al.* 2006; Phillips, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c).

On the other hand, there are 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 multiculturalism is an ordinary, unremarkable feature of everyday social life (Gilroy, 2004, 2006; Hall, 2000; Yuval Davies *et al.*, 2005). Further, the argument is that this multiculturalism contributes to, rather than diminishes, contemporary British society (e.g. Parekh, 2000).

Mixed relationships and children, where racial or ethnic mixing has received far more attention than religious mixing, are subject to a number of contradictory stereotypes, which in large part echo these debates.

Stereotypes about mixed children and their parents

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). In this perspective, there is an 'automatic presumption of underlying pathology in interracial 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*, 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' (*Daily Mirror*, 27 January 2006). Sometimes, the dire consequences of mixing across race and faith cultural difference are extended to stories of (most usually) fathers from Middle Eastern or Asian backgrounds removing children from their relationships with white British mothers and 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. (*Sunday Times*, 8 April 2007)

Mixed relationships are usually posed as short-lived in the mainstream media. Linked to this, sexist and racist images of both white working-class women and black men as promiscuous, and of black men as feckless 'babyfathers', seem particularly common (for example, discussions in 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 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 either black and Asian 'high flyers' being seen as facing difficulties in finding same-ethnic equals to partner, or 'partnering out' being 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 Commission for Racial Equality's comments about 'identity stripping – children who grow up marooned between communities' (Phillips, 2007). As is well documented, disproportionate numbers of mixed children in fostering and adoptive care, or at risk of educational underachievement,¹ are often associated with this 'identity confusion' (Barn *et al.*, 2005; Tikly *et al.*, 2004). On the other hand, there are arguments that people from mixed racial backgrounds are particularly attractive, with a stronger genetic profile, which means they are healthier and more intelligent (Ziv, 2006). These subnormal and supranormal conceptualisations stem from the premise that people from mixed backgrounds are somehow different to 'mono-racial' people (Caballero, 2005).

Literature on the topic

Although there is an increasing wealth of research on the experiences of racially or ethnically mixed individuals, especially those of black/white parentage, there has been somewhat less of a focus on those with mixed religious backgrounds. Discussion of the complexities of multiple mixedness (combining race, ethnicity and religion) is practically non-existent. Further, limited attention has been paid to parenting in mixed families, whether they encompass race, ethnic or religious difference. This situation has to be understood in the context of a relative lack of knowledge, especially in the UK, about parenting and ethnicity generally (Phoenix and Husain, 2007).

What literature that focuses specifically on parenting in mixed families there is emanates primarily from the United States, and considers largely the effect of parents' actions on children's identity development. We consider the main thrust of this literature, and the limited number of British studies, first in relation to racial and ethnic mixing, and second in relation to faith mixing, because the respective literatures are largely separate – an exception being Lester Murad's (2005) discussion of mixed-race and interfaith mothering with an auto-ethnographic focus on her American/Jewish and Palestinian/Muslim family).

The legacy of conceptions of people from mixed racial backgrounds as 'confused' and liable to identity crisis has influenced much of the research on mixed parenting. The focus has especially been on black/white mixes in this respect. Yet, in the British context, we need to bear in mind that black and white parentage represents under

half of the mixed population (48 per cent). In both the USA and the UK, work has engaged with the question of whether or not in particular white parents (especially white lone mothers) have the ability to raise their mixed black/white children with a 'healthy' sense of self. In this respect, Twine (2004) has developed the term 'racial literacy'. Byrd and Garwick (2004, 2006) discuss how black/white couples are subject to a 'dual reality' of feeling ordinary in their family lives alongside being perceived as different and subject to racism in wider society.

One strand of the literature on mixed race (which has been very influential on adoption and fostering practice) contends that children of black and white parentage should be raised as black, since it is presumed that this is inevitably how they will be perceived by society (Banks, 1996; Henriques, 1975; Ladner, 1977; Maximé, 1993; Prevatt-Goldstein, 1999). Another strand, which challenges this view, argues that parents need to raise their mixed children to recognise both or all of their heritages for a healthy identity (Milan and Keiley, 2000; Oriti *et al.*, 1996), sometimes with the mix regarded as producing a 'trans' culture (Crippen and Brew, 2007). Indeed, a number of publications are concerned with instructing parents how best to undertake this process (Nakazawa, 2003; Rockquemore and Laszloffy, 2005; Wardle, 1991, 1999, 2001; Wehrly, 2003; Wright, 1998). Work in both the 'should be raised as black' and 'should be raised as mixed' strands, as well as work that explores more generally the subject of mixedness, often recognises the racism and challenges that parents face from wider family and society (Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Olumide, 2002; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002; Twine, 1999, 2004), albeit that some studies also note that grandparents and so on may (after initial hostility) provide support (Ali, 2003; Katz, 1996; Tyler, 2005). Indeed, there are claims that parents of mixed-race children invest more time and money in them than same-race parents in an effort to compensate for social disadvantage (Cheng and Powell, 2007). Policy-makers and practitioners are also charged with inadequately addressing the needs of mixed race and ethnicity families (Breaux-Shropp, 2002; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002).

Another view, however, stresses that gender, class and nationhood are just as important in a sense of self for mixed children, in addition to their parents promoting particular versions of racial or ethnic belonging (e.g. Katz, 1996; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002). Further, more recently and especially in the UK, arguments that mixedness is a means to deconstruct and move beyond racial categorisation are emerging (e.g. Ali, 2003; Gilroy, 2000; Hall, 1992; Olumide, 2002) – albeit quite how to accomplish this is less clear (Caballero, 2005), as are the lessons that this contains for parenting. Luke and Luke (1998) nonetheless claim that mixed families are constructing new forms of cultural, social class and gender identities.

In some respects, the literature on mixed-faith parenting is similar to that on mixed race and ethnicity, in that it focuses largely on identity development and mirrors the preoccupation with black/white parentage through a concentration on a Jewish and Christian mix (Barbasch, 1993; Grossman, 1990; Heller and Wood 2000; Romain, 1996). It provides a sharp contrast, however, in acknowledging choice for parents in raising their children to have a stable sense of identity – often summarised as ‘one faith, both faiths, or no faith’ (Gruzen, 1987; see also Al-Yousuf and Birtwistle, 2007 in the UK context). Again, there is a burgeoning instructional literature targeted at parents, which stresses the need for them to present a consistent and united front, and, in the US context, often champions a mix of both faiths (Gruzen, 2001; Hawxhurst, 1998; Lerner, 1999; Yob, 1998). While the influence and effect of wider family support or opposition are also discussed (Kaplan, 2004; King, 1993; Levin, 2003), far less attention is paid to the supports and challenges offered by the broad social context than in the mixed-race and ethnicity literature.

Overall, then, in relation to race and ethnic mixing and faith mixing, there are arguments for and against ideas about, respectively, ‘one race, both races/ethnicities, beyond race’ and ‘one faith, both faiths, no faith’. There is, however, a lack of attention to the perspectives of parents in mixed relationships in the British context especially. Our research study is thus an explorative and descriptive project, identifying issues in the face of little knowledge in the field. Rather than what ‘should’ be, it is concerned with what ‘is’ – that is, mothers’ and fathers’ own experiences and constructions of difference and belonging. Our approach understands the parenting of children and family life generally as negotiated in variable ways between parents. It is also important to see these negotiations as occurring within the context of opportunities and constraints offered by wider society. (For example, Finch and Mason, 1993; McCarthy *et al.*, 2003; Morgan, 1999; Smart and Neale, 1999.)

So far, we have identified a number of reasons for our focus on exploring mixed parenting – the growth in the population who identify as ‘mixed’ in the context of debates about multiculturalism and a real lack of research knowledge about mixed parenting in the British context. Since our study focuses on ‘ordinary’ mixed families, rather than those who had contacted or been identified by welfare services as in need of support, it will help towards our understanding of everyday parenting practices, relationships between parents and children, and especially negotiations between parents around childrearing. Indeed, knowledge about what mothers and fathers see as significant and how they seek to bring up their children provides us with a grounded understanding, in a context where parenting *per se* has become an area of explicit policy intervention and parenting practice has been pushed to the centre stage of the social policy curriculum (Edwards and Gillies, 2004; Wasoff and Hill, 2002).

Our research study

The research on which this report is based aimed to:

- investigate how parent couples from different racial, ethnic and/or religious backgrounds seek to give their children a sense of belonging and identity;
- examine parents' negotiations and everyday practices about the significance of cultural difference and passing on of aspects of belonging and heritage across the generations;
- explore the opportunities, constraints, challenges and tensions in negotiating a sense of identity and heritage between parents, in the context of wider society;
- provide insights about parenting mixed children that can make a contribution to debates about family life and relationships, and to professional strategies for support.

The research process reported on here had three main stages:

- 1 analysis of census data;
- 2 a survey of parents;
- 3 interviews with parents in mixed couples.

Stage 1: analysis of census data

We undertook an initial analysis of data from the 2001 UK Census to 'map' the main neighbourhoods where mixed families lived and look at the socio-economic characteristics of mixed households.

Stage 2: a survey of parents

We distributed a survey to parents generally through schools located in neighbourhoods throughout England and Wales that our census analysis identified as having high proportions of mixed families. The survey had two purposes. First, we asked general questions about issues regarding parents passing on their heritage to their children. Second, we asked parents to supply us with their family characteristics

and, if they were prepared to take part in further research, their contact details. This enabled us to identify mixed families who we could approach to take part in our study.

Stage 3: interviews with parents in mixed couples

The third stage of our research forms the main substance of our study. It involved individual in-depth interviews with mothers and fathers from 35 mixed couples (including one lesbian couple). In five cases, the father did not want to participate in the research and so we have the mother's perspectives only in these instances. All the families contained at least one 'mixed' child between the ages of 7 and 12. We chose this age profile for children because, by then, parents will have established a mode of negotiating difference and belonging, as well as having negotiated their everyday practices with their children.

Around a third of our interviewees were contacted through responding to our survey (eleven couples). We also approached agencies working in the field, such as voluntary sector organisations that specifically serve mixed families and religious bodies that welcome them, and some of our interviewees were recruited in this way (six couples). Most, however – about half – were accessed through informal contacts (18 couples).

We did not ourselves, as researchers, impose a specific definition as to what constituted being in a mixed relationship and bringing up mixed children. Not only were we aware of the limitations of existing categorisations of mixedness (see Chapter 6), but we wanted also to focus on parents who were themselves aware of a difference between them because of our focus on negotiation around their children's sense of belonging. The parents who took part in our research thus embody a diverse range of mixing in relationships, and indeed around a quarter of our interviewees were from mixed backgrounds themselves.

Despite the diversity of difference among the couples, as will become clear in this report, some illuminating sets of recurring themes about approaches to creating belonging for their children emerged. Nonetheless, we do have to bear in mind that this is a small-scale, exploratory study, which serves as a starting point in developing knowledge about parent couples from different racial, ethnic and/or religious backgrounds, and their negotiations and everyday practices around their children's sense of belonging and identity, rather than a definitive account.

As Table 1 shows, the majority of the couples potentially involved multiple mixing, where racial or ethnic difference also overlapped with a religious one, such as

Ghanaian/Christian and British/Jewish, Turkish Cypriot/Muslim and Sri Lankan/Hindu, and Moroccan/Muslim and British/Christian. Most of the other couples involved shared religious background (predominantly Christian) but racial or ethnic difference. These comprised mainly racial differences such as Chinese and British, and black British and white British, but a mono-racial minority ethnic difference is a Jamaican and Ghanaian couple. The remaining couples are a white British religious mix, both Jewish and Christian.² About a quarter of our interviewees were, in fact, from mixed racial, ethnic and/or faith backgrounds themselves. For them, mixedness was part of their own identity and experiences, as well as being an issue in parenting their children.

Table 1 Types of mixing among our interviewees

Race/ethnic and religious difference	Race/ethnic difference	Religious difference
23 couples	10 couples	2 couples

It is important to bear in mind, however, that there is a distinction between researchers identifying potential difference between a couple and how the parents themselves see it. Our interviewees did not regard every facet of their racial, ethnic or religious difference from each other as important. For example, Judith is Jewish and from a mixed Austrian/Russian background, while her husband Eddie is British and ambivalent about his Christian background. In a predominantly white society, their ethnic difference is of little significance to them for their son’s sense of belonging, but faith is. In contrast, Nicola is from a Catholic background, with a white British father and a British mother who is an Irish/Pakistani mix. Her black Trinidadian husband, Leo, eschews religion. For them, faith is of no significance in bringing up their child to have a sense of identity, but both want to acknowledge all four elements of their racial and ethnic mix.

Our interviewees lived in a range of cities, towns and villages located across England and Wales. Around two-thirds were middle class, based on occupation. (We look at issues of residence and class background in Chapter 2.) The views and approaches of middle-class mothers and fathers are thus quite a strong presence in this research, though we have made especial efforts to listen closely and to present the experiences of working-class parents.

The interviews with parents were open-ended and focused on their considerations and negotiations with each other around how, if at all, to pass on their heritage to their children, and which aspects of which heritage to pass on. We asked them about their everyday practices to these ends, about their interactions with other people in their families and, more generally, about the relationships and resources that they

felt helped or hindered them. We were careful to pay the same amount of attention to accounts of support and cohesion as we were to pursuing incidents of conflict and tension in the interviews, since the former can often be passed over by researchers in studying mixed families (Twine, 2006).

The exploratory small-scale nature of our research and associated specificities of our sample (particularly in relation to class, noted above) mean that we have to be careful about the extent to which we can extrapolate the findings from our particular study to mixed families more widely. The main basis for the ‘transferability’ of the lessons of qualitative research is what is called ‘thick description’; that is, giving the reader enough rich contextual information to fully understand the findings, so that they can judge whether or not the arguments being put forward are applicable to or ‘fit’ with other contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). We have sought to do this by situating the views and experiences of the mothers and fathers who participated in our research within details about their life circumstances. Our report aims to provide insights rather than generalisations.

Report structure

We overview the main findings from the first two stages of our research – the analysis of 2001 UK census data and findings from our survey of parents – in Chapter 2. We draw on the Census to look at the areas in England and Wales where parent couples from different ethnic backgrounds are most likely to live and examine their socio-economic circumstances. In turn, the survey material tells us how parents generally view heritage issues and mixed race, ethnic or faith parenting.

Following our general outline of the geographical and social context in which mixed-parent couples bring up their children, Chapters 3, 4 and 5 bring us to the main substance of our research and are based on the interviews with parents. Chapter 3 looks at how the mothers and fathers we interviewed viewed difference and belonging. It draws on their perspectives to identify three typical sorts of approaches and elaborates the underlying facets of understanding that comprise them. Chapter 4 builds on this to explore how parents can each hold a mix of approaches, and how parent couples who have either shared or divergent approaches negotiate and accommodate their varying understandings. This is followed by Chapter 5’s examination of the everyday resources and relationships that parents feel are supportive and constraining in their attempts to create a sense of belonging for their children.

In the final chapter, Chapter 6, we revisit the findings from our research to look at the main issues that are raised for understanding how mothers and fathers from different racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds negotiate difference and attempt to give their children a sense of belonging, and we point to some of the implications for policy and practice.

2 Patterns of mixing – geographical and social context

Where families live can play an important part in how all parents bring up their children, and it is certainly a consideration for parent couples from different racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds (see Chapter 5; also Holloway *et al.*, 2005; Katz, 1996; Luke and Luke, 1998). Some areas are multi-ethnic and multi-faith, while others show far less diversity (with the fears about ‘parallel lives’ noted in Chapter 1). Living in a multicultural neighbourhood where their family ‘fits in’, or in one where their mixed family stands out, may well be a factor in how parents negotiate difference and attempt to give their children a sense of belonging.

We have touched in the previous chapter on stereotypes about people who partner ‘out’ and have children, but there are also preconceptions about the residential location and social class of mixed families. These are summed up in the following extract from a newspaper column:

Although council estates are full of mixed-race babies, and its inner cities teem with interracial couples busily getting jiggy with it, the liberal elite has arrived late at Britain’s multicultural street party. (Nirpal Singh Dhaliwal, *The Times*, 16 April 2005)

In the first half of this chapter, we use the 2001 UK census data to take a bird’s-eye look at where parent couples from different ethnic backgrounds live and the sort of people they are.

Our introductory chapter also noted how partnering across race, ethnic and faith categories is presented as fraught with difficulties. The assumptions and attitudes of people around them will have a bearing on how parent couples understand bringing up their children. In the second part of this chapter, we draw on our schools-based survey of parents. We look at what issues they believe are involved in giving children a sense of who they are generally, and specifically under circumstances where the parents come from different ethnic or racial backgrounds, or have different religious faiths.

Initially, however, we need to explain briefly why we have had to focus on mixed-ethnicity families only in our analysis of the 2001 UK census data and have not included mixed-faith and multiply mixed families. We also need to explain how we have analysed this data (for fuller discussion, see Smith *et al.*, 2008).

Analysing the census data

Recent advances in how people can use data from the Census enabled us to construct a snapshot of the main sorts of neighbourhoods (at the census ward level) in England and Wales¹ where parent couples who have different ethnic backgrounds live. We have identified 50 top 'hotspot' wards for mixed households and used the ONS area-level classification sub-groups to categorise what types of area these are. We also used the Sample of Anonymised Records (SARs), which is a 3 per cent individual micro-data sample from the 2001 UK Census, to look at the socio-economic characteristics of mixed families.

Unfortunately, we were not able to do the same for couple parents of different religious backgrounds, because the data does not allow a reconstruction of families on this basis. Nonetheless, the exercise has allowed us to understand the sorts of areas where the parents interviewed in stage 3 of our research live (see Chapter 1).

Where mixed families live

Looking at the census data as a whole, the top 50 'hotspot' wards for mixed couples are located mainly in outer London (58 per cent), with substantial proportions in Birmingham (22 per cent) and inner London (21 per cent). While this bears out the popular assumption that mixing is most likely to occur in cities, it does not bear out the stereotype that this is an inner-city phenomenon. Moreover, while cities such as Bristol, Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester might be assumed to be potential areas for mixed couples because of their ethnic diversity, they are not represented in the top 50 neighbourhoods (see Caballero *et al.*, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 2008 for fuller discussions).

Table 2 shows that, overall, mixed-parent couples with dependent children are 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 wards because they want their children to grow up in more racially and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods. In Chapter 5, we will see that bringing up their children in a racially and ethnically diverse area can be important to the mixed parents we have interviewed (see also Holloway *et al.*, 2005). Mixed couples with children may (also) move into these areas because they need larger accommodation and housing is often cheaper in 'multicultural' wards.

Table 2 Mixed-ethnicity couples with dependent children, by area classification, England and Wales (per cent)

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	8	2
Industrial hinterland	–	–	12	–
Built-up	–	2	–	–
Coastal and countryside	–	–	–	–
Accessible countryside	–	–	–	–

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’ wards – notably, white/Asian mixed couples; or traditional manufacturing areas where there are lower housing costs – largely white/African Caribbean and ‘other’ mixed couples. The former areas (prosperous and suburban) certainly fall outside of the inner-city, working-class stereotype and this sort of image is challenged further if we look at the socio-economic circumstances of mixed-ethnicity families.

Socio-economic circumstances

In the context of assertions of inherent difficulties for mixed-couple relationships because of cultural clashes, it is important to note that, among mixed-couple households with dependent children, in the majority of cases the children all ‘belong’ to both members of the couple, i.e. they are living with both their biological parents (87 per cent). Indeed, this is significantly higher than the national average for all couples with dependent children (65 per cent). In other words, mixed-couple parents are usually in sustained relationships (rather than being stepfamilies following on from lone motherhood or relationship dissolution and repartnering).

The SARs data in Table 3 shows that mixed couples also tend to be owner-occupiers, rather than renting their accommodation. This is almost in line with the national average for couples (81 per cent). Moreover, they live mainly in detached (26 per cent), semi-detached (29 per cent) or terraced (25 per cent) houses, rather than flats or shared houses.

Table 3 Tenure of accommodation, England and Wales

Tenure of accommodation	%
Home-owner (outright or mortgage)	75.5
Public rental (local authority or housing association)	11.5
Private rental	13.0

A high proportion of mixed couples 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 per cent). In half of mixed couples (51 per cent), both members of the couple have employment. This is somewhat lower than the average for couples generally (72 per cent), and generally under a fifth of people in mixed couples are unemployed or economically inactive. Nearly all mixed-couple households own a car (88 per cent), and indeed two-fifths (41 per cent) own two or more cars. Table 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.

Table 4 Social grade of household reference person

Social grade	%
Professional/middle managers (A/B)	35.0
Other non-manual (C1)	29.7
Skilled manual (C2)	14.2
Semi-skilled/unskilled manual	14.1
Benefits/unemployed	7.0

This profile of a middle-class dimension to mixed families provides an answer to speculation in in-depth studies of mixed-race children and young people about whether or not the high incidence of middle-class backgrounds in their samples are representative of mixed-parentage young children in Britain in general (for example, Tizard and Phoenix, 2002, p. 91; Wilson, 1987, p. 222). It also goes some way to explaining the prevalence of middle-class interviewees in our own study. The middle-class profile further questions the dominant underclass stereotype, and also provides an underacknowledged material dimension to discussion of mixed and mixing populations.

Survey of parents’ views of ‘passing on’ heritage

We now turn to stage 2 of our research process – a survey of parents’ opinions about passing on heritage to children. We distributed our short self-completion survey (with stamped addressed envelope for its return) through 17 schools across England and

Wales. Seven schools were located in neighbourhoods that fell within our 50 hotspot areas (outer and inner London, and Birmingham), with the remaining ten outside of them in order to gain broader geographical coverage (Bedford, Cardiff, Leeds, Liverpool, Newcastle and Stockport).

The survey was sent to all parents – regardless of their racial, ethnic or religious background – of children in years 4 and 5, and in schools with smaller intakes also year 6, via their children. Unfortunately, there was only a 12 per cent response rate to the survey on average across the schools (214 returns). The lowest rate was 6 per cent in two schools with higher than average uptake of free school meals, while the highest proportions of returns were 19 and 20 per cent in two schools located in more affluent areas. We need, therefore, to be very careful about drawing conclusions from this exercise.

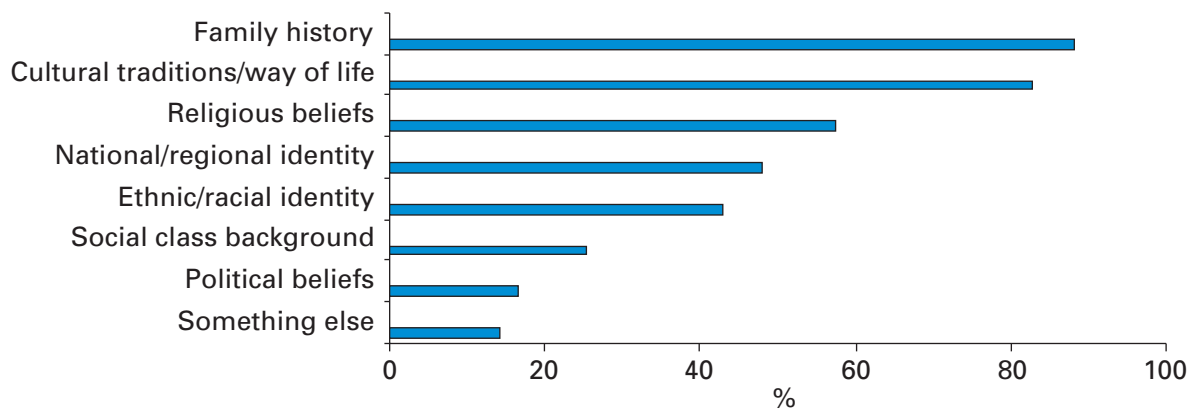
The survey was completed mainly by mothers (86 per cent), living in two-parent (nuclear) families (79 per cent), many of whom described themselves as from a white British or European background (62 per cent) and reported their religion as Christian (64 per cent). A minority had children with a different racial or ethnic background to themselves (15 per cent) and lived with a partner from a different racial or ethnic background (16 per cent). In some contrast, a substantial minority had children with a different religious background from themselves (27 per cent) and lived with a partner from a different religious background (28 per cent).

The survey findings highlight a number of issues that the parents who completed it considered important as regards passing on heritage to children. In addition to giving their opinions on what aspects of heritage should be passed on, parents also answered questions on who or what they thought had an important influence on children's identities, as well as whether or not they thought there were particular issues for children if they had parents from different racial, ethnic or faith backgrounds.

Issues that are important for parents to pass on to children to give them a sense of who they are

The most important things for parents to pass on to children are family history and cultural traditions or way of life, with nearly all parents citing these (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Issues that are important for parents to pass on to children to give them a sense of who they are



The relatively less frequent citing of ethnic and racial identity in comparison with religious beliefs and national/regional identity might reflect the racial composition of the responding parents.

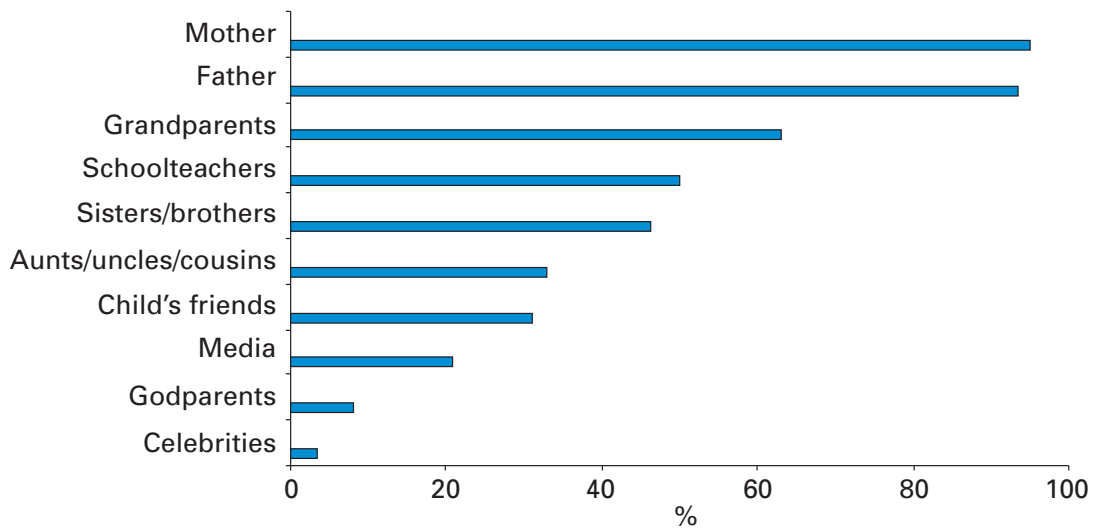
In addition to the issues noted above, under 'something else', a few parents included free-written responses about the importance of passing on humanistic and civic values such as 'tolerance', 'respect', 'self-esteem' and 'open-mindedness'. As we will see in the next chapter, these could be central to some of our interviewees' approach to difference and belonging in their parenting.

People or sources that have the most influence in giving children a sense of who they are

It is mainly family members, especially parents, who are seen as influencing children's identity, although schoolteachers are also seen as important (Figure 2).

The key influence accorded to both mothers and fathers has to be understood in the context of the prevalence of two-parent families among the responding parents. This picture changes slightly if we look at who parents thought was the 'most important' person or source influencing children's sense of self. Mothers received the most citations (42 per cent) – in other words, given that the survey was completed mainly by mothers, they saw themselves as most important. As we will see in Chapter 4, it was indeed mothers who were most involved in the daily upbringing of the children among the parents we interviewed. With reference to the inclusion of schoolteachers among key influences, we will also see the importance that parents could place on schooling in Chapter 5 in particular.

Figure 2 People or sources that have influence in giving children a sense of who they are



Particular issues if each of a child's parents has a different religious faith or a different ethnic or racial background

A majority of parents do not feel that there are particular issues if each of a child's parents has a different religion, but there is more ambivalence about ethnic or racial difference in backgrounds (Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3 Particular issues if each of a child's parents has a different religious faith

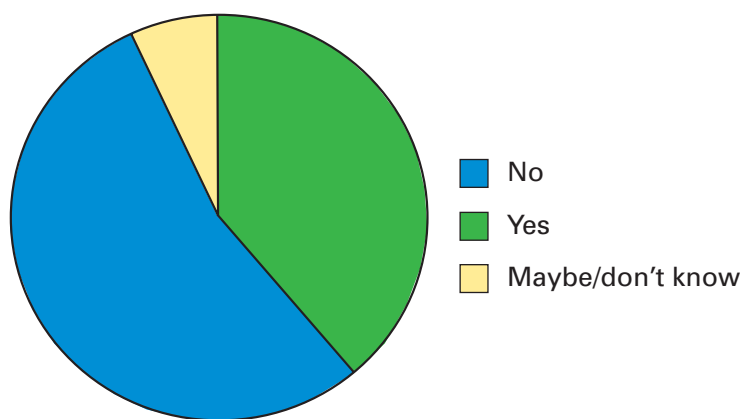
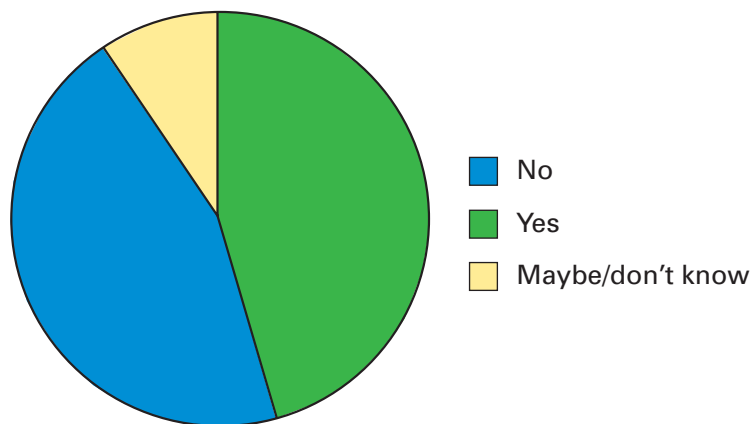


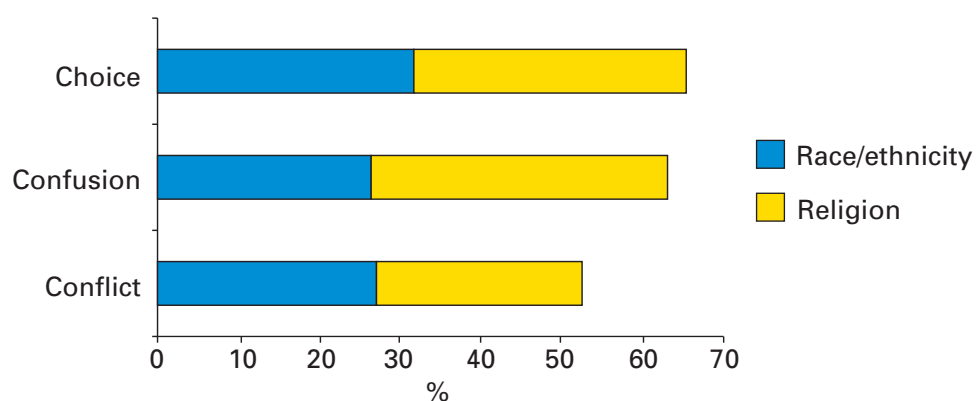
Figure 4 Particular issues if each of a child's parents has a different ethnic or racial background



While many parents did not feel, overall, that parents from different backgrounds would face particular issues (that implicitly would not be encountered by 'same' parents), a good proportion felt that they would. This was particularly so where they had different racial and ethnic backgrounds, rather than a different religious faith. This echoes the 'culture clash' stereotype that we raised in Chapter 1. It needs to be understood in the context of the fact that many of our survey respondents were white, and that experience of different faith backgrounds in a family was more common among them than experience of different ethnic or racial backgrounds.

So, what were the circumstances that the parents in our survey thought that parents from different backgrounds faced? We asked them to tell us in their own words. For racial and ethnic, and religious, differences, the issues that parents identified concerned: the importance of children being able to choose their own sense of belonging and affiliation; the potential for children to be confused; and worries about conflict between parents or with wider family (see Figure 5).

Figure 5 Issues where parents come from different backgrounds (race/ethnicity and religion)



Below are examples of the sorts of issues that parents who completed the survey thought that children from mixed racial, ethnic or faith backgrounds, and the parents themselves, might face.

Children being able to choose their affiliation

Child needs to be confident in themselves to decide to follow or think about the ethnic/race background of each parent. (British Christian mother with British Christian partner and children)²

Parents not to be biased to one faith/child to be given choice of beliefs. (British Indian Sikh mother with British Indian Sikh partner and children)

Children being confused

Where there is more than one ethnic background, there is less connection to the cultures, sometimes children are not sure where they belong. (British African Christian mother with African Christian partner and British African Christian children)

[If parents have different faiths] children may be confused as to who they are. (White British mother with white British partner and children)

Parental or family conflict

[If parents have different racial or ethnic backgrounds] problems may arise if either parent is more dominant and resents the influence of the other parent. (British Christian mother with British Christian partner and children)

Depends on how indoctrinated [in the religions] the parents are themselves, but it could cause problems with extended family. (White British mother with white-African Caribbean partner and white-African children)

The idea that children should have a 'choice' in their racial and ethnic affiliation as well as in their religion (not just with regard to faith as in the literature) seems to be in direct contradiction to ideas about the confusion posed for children unless they have just one path towards a sense of belonging (in the form of 'same' parents), and about clashes between parents and with the wider family. Underneath images of confusion and conflict is also the idea that parents need to present a united front in how they approach bringing up their children – an issue to which we return in the next chapter.

A few of the responding parents noted that, in the case of racial and ethnic differences, the issues facing parents and their children would come from outside the family rather than within it (similar to the presence of this issue in the racial and ethnic mix literature, and its relative absence in the faith mix literature):

I think in this case it is social issues that can affect the child. They may be confident with parents from different ethnic/racial backgrounds and their race, but society will then label the child as one or the other. (Black British Christian mother with black British children)

Parents need to be aware that children may be affected by racism or other prejudice. (White British mother with white British partner and children)

Nonetheless, as we have noted, most responding parents did not feel that there were particular issues facing parents where they were from different backgrounds, and some pointed to possible benefits for children. For example:

[Where parents are from different racial or ethnic backgrounds] it could be a positive thing creating greater understanding and respect. (White British Christian mother with white British partner and children)

[Where parents have different religious faiths] if handled positively it can provide the child with a broader view and deeper sense of faith. (British Caribbean Christian mother with black British Christian children)

Conclusion

Our analyses of the 2001 UK Census and its SARs data challenge many of the traditional assumptions about the location and socio-economic circumstances of mixed families, where parents are from different ethnic backgrounds. Rather than living only in multicultural inner-city areas, they are also located in other sorts of

neighbourhoods, including prosperous and suburban wards. Moreover, there is a strong middle-class dimension to 'mixed' families.

The findings of the schools survey also question aspects of stereotypes, as they suggest that the parents who took part do not necessarily see mixed families as inherently problematic. Nevertheless, there seem to be contradictory ideas about whether or not parents from different racial, ethnic or faith backgrounds will face any particular issues in bringing up their children to have a sense of belonging. But what are the approaches and experiences of parents who are actually raising their children in situations of difference? We turn to these in the following chapters.

3 Diverse approaches to dealing with difference and belonging

In this chapter, we look at how the parents we spoke to in depth understood difference and approached giving their children a sense of identity. Between and within couples, the mothers and fathers had a diversity of approaches to creating a sense of belonging for their children. This is because they developed particular understandings about racial, ethnic and faith difference, and how best to bring up their children in the specific contexts in which they had lived and were living (rather than their children's identity development being merely the acquisition of characteristics and traits, see Katz, 1996). Indeed, it will also become clear that these contexts could mean that issues other than dealing with mixedness were at the forefront of mothers' and fathers' thoughts in bringing up their children.

We should stress that we are not concerned here with parenting 'styles' (using universal scales that are often ethnocentric – see Phoenix and Husain, 2007). Rather, our focus is on understanding mothers' and fathers' approaches to, and experiences of, dealing with difference and belonging from their point of view. In the following sections of this chapter, we first discuss three typical sorts of approach that parents use to understand difference and create belonging in bringing up their children. We then highlight other aspects of daily life that might play an important role in shaping parents' experiences of dealing with difference, and conclude by discussing how some everyday issues that parents face may overshadow the question of racial, ethnic or faith affiliation.

Typifications of difference and belonging

Looking across all the mothers' and fathers' accounts of dealing with difference and belonging for their children, we can identify a number of 'typifications' (Schutz, 1979) – that is, taken-for-granted, common-sense frameworks concerning the constitution and implications of difference and belonging that parents use to make sense of bringing up their mixed children. We have abstracted three 'typical' approaches, which we explain here: 'individual', 'mix' and 'single'. Each involves a particular range of underlying key features and facets, on which we now elaborate.

The individual approach

The key feature of the individual typification is that children's identity and sense of belonging are not seen as necessarily rooted in their particular racial, ethnic or faith backgrounds. Rather, children are encouraged to think beyond ethnic, racial and faith labels or categories, or to explore other facets of their identities.

Parents who take an individual approach do so in a number of ways. One way that it might be expressed is through a notion of being *cosmopolitan*, where the children's mixedness is seen as enabling them to access endless and flexible possibilities of place, ethnic or faith belonging. Parents see their children's mixedness as enabling them to be 'citizens of the world' who are often able to fit in or identify with other communities and cultures. Daniel, a teacher, is a mixed white British/white Other and Christian/Jewish man who is married to Meena, a British Indian Sikh woman. The family live in a central-city neighbourhood with a mixed professional and student population, and they have travelled to and have lived in other countries. Daniel feels that it is important that his son and daughter are able to draw on their different heritages rather than be limited by them:

Because I think the fundamental thing for them is that they are, as I say, happy with whom they feel they are and able to articulate that and be a bit cosmopolitan, and move things around instrumentally as well when they need to or want to.

An individual approach might also manifest itself in the notion of an *organic self*, where children are encouraged to develop and be true to the potential and abilities that lie within themselves, rather than having cultural norms or expectations imposed on them. This aspect of the individual approach is evident in Imogen's account. She is a mixed white/Lebanese mother whose husband, Will, is white British. They live with their two daughters, Molly and Amber, in a suburban area that contains a mix of professional families and students. Imogen currently looks after the children on a full-time basis. For her, it is important that her children develop their own individual and intrinsic sense of self and identity:

I think we both are really firm believers in them finding their own path and knowing their way. So anything I would pass on, I would always make sure that [Molly] understood that this was one way, that she will find her own way and she will intuitively know her own way.

The idea of *choice* is another facet of an individual approach. Children are encouraged to see that they have options in terms of whether or not they adopt, leave aside or continue their parents' racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds as part

of their identity. Matthew, a white British Christian father who works in the music industry, is married to Esther who is white British Jewish. They and their four children live in a small village. Matthew is strongly supportive of Esther bringing up the children as Jewish, but he believes that they should have the freedom to choose their faith identity in the future:

My own view is that I'd like them to be aware of all religions, but Judaism for sure, but make their minds up later on. I'm not sure how actually feasible that actually is. You tend to follow the background you've had. But nevertheless that's kind of roughly how I feel about it ... I want them to come out having a balanced view of religion and to be able to make their minds up when they're sort of 18 to 20. I'd like them to have the option to discover themselves and not be limited in what they are going to choose.

An individual approach might also involve *colour transcendence*, where race or ethnicity is considered incidental to how children should be seen or how they should view others. This can be expressed through ideas about *new modernity*, where difference is considered so commonplace that the problems that used to be associated with it have (or should have) been left behind in the past. Jane is a white British mother who works in the media and lives in a diverse metropolitan area with her black British partner Theo, their daughter and two sons. The family are practising Christians. For Jane, in this day and age, social attitudes support her view that colour difference is incidental to the individuality of her children:

We've never encountered racist comments or looks, where I think maybe then or 20 years ago you would have done ... Never, ever had a problem. But then I think there is so many mixed couples now and mixed-race children ... I actually think that the colour thing is less an issue than people's personalities, their set-up.

Where a very strong individual typification infused parents' accounts, this was evident among middle-class parents only from our sample. This social class specificity may well reflect the resources, such as foreign travel and the ability to choose which neighbourhood to live in, that these parents are able to provide, meaning that there are a range of identity options and life choices available to their children. Although working-class parents did adopt some elements of an individual approach, other typifications were just as strong or stronger in their accounts – as indeed they were for some middle-class parents. We now turn to these other understandings.

The mix approach

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

There are two main aspects to this approach. One is that parents can encourage their children to acknowledge and engage with the different parts of their heritage through the sense of *specific mix* – where both or all of the salient ethnic or faith identities of the parents are important. John is white British and lives in the suburbs of a city with his wife Lisa, who is Chinese, and their two daughters Sarah and Amy. John works in the legal profession and, like the rest of the family, is a practising Christian. He encourages his children to identify with both aspects of their cultural heritage:

They've got friends at school who come from mixed-race backgrounds, and one of them described his daughter – he is English and I think his wife is Indian. And he described her as a 'harmony child'. And then [Sarah and Amy] said to us, 'oh, we are harmony children aren't we?', and I said, 'well, yes, that is right'. That is as good a way of describing it as any. And we talked about, you know, the fact that I am English and come from an English background and Lisa comes from a Chinese background, and we just said that that means that you have got a bit of both in you and you can learn from other cultures. The way we portray it, it is a blessing and it is a benefit for them. And I think it is.

Similarly, Keira feels that it is important that her daughters are brought up with a sense of all their ethnic heritages. She is a white Irish Catholic mother married to Darren, a mixed Jamaican and white British man from a Church of England background. Keira works part-time in health and community welfare, and the family live in a multicultural area of a large city:

When we had the kids it was like, OK, you are mixed so you need to know where you're from. So we have three flags there [Irish, Jamaican, English]. We celebrate our celebrations ... We make a big deal of you're this, this and this. No one can change that. This is who you are, be proud of who you are. Don't hide it from nobody. You are. And if someone says to the kids, 'what are you?', they quite happily say, 'I'm a little bit English, I'm a little bit Jamaican, I'm a little bit Irish'.

The second main aspect of a mix approach is engagement with difference and belonging through a general notion of *mixedness* as an identity in and of itself. Leo is an example of someone who understands his daughter Nita's identity in this way,

as well as through a sense of specific mix. He is a black Trinidadian who draws on his cultural heritage in his work as an artist and writer. He and his wife Nicola, who is from a mixed white British/Irish/Pakistani background, live with their daughter on a small housing estate in a multicultural metropolitan area:

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 [Nita] at 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'.

Notably, a mix typification was evident in relation only to race and ethnicity among the parents in our research. There was no evidence of 'dual' faith or faith mixing.¹

The single approach

The key feature of the single typification is that only one aspect of children's background is stressed and a sense of belonging is promoted for them through that. As with the other typifications, there are several aspects to this approach.

One of these aspects takes the form of an emphasis on the importance of the set of *rules and values* for living life that a single aspect of the family's heritage supplies. Maryam is a white British woman who demonstrates this in her approach to providing her children with a sense of belonging. She experienced a complex and chaotic family upbringing in her youth, and often truanted from school. On meeting her Pakistani Muslim husband, she converted to Islam, and they are bringing up their three sons in the faith. The family live in a city suburb with a large Asian population. For Maryam, a Muslim identity and practice is important in bringing up her children, helping her to instil an institutionalised set of values:

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]. It's a simple way of life and they don't need to do all these designer names and fashion and stuff and everything, I don't believe in all of that ... I just don't want my kids to go wrong ... [I told one of my sons] 'you are mixed white and Pakistani', I said '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'.

Maram's prioritising of religious identity over a racialised identity for her children also demonstrates how a single approach can take the form of *colour transcendence*. Another example of how racial or ethnic identity can be less important than other affiliations, usually faith, is Stefano. He is from a mixed white British and Italian background, is a skilled manual worker and is married to Yvonne, who is black British Caribbean. They are both practising Christians. The couple live with their three sons (one from Yvonne's previous relationship) in a prospering metropolitan area. For Stefano, the children's racial and ethnic identity is of less importance than their faith:

We believe that our relationship with God is paramount, and God is really the pinnacle of what we are doing ... The main thing is obviously to get [our children] to know who they are and not like, not what they are! ... As they grow into young men I'll instil into them that God made them and it's not what other people say they are.

A single approach may also emanate from a deeply held personal commitment and sense of ontology, so that a particular aspect of heritage is seen as an *intrinsic* part of the family and children's identity. For example, Kojo is black Ghanaian and his wife Jacklyn is black British Jamaican. They and their daughter, along with Jacklyn's two children from a previous relationship, live in a multicultural area of a large city. Kojo works in the arts field. He takes a firm pan-African approach to giving his daughter a sense of belonging:

For her to be able to identify herself as African is the first and foremost ... I would want her to be able to identify herself as African before identifying herself as black because of the negative aspects of the word 'black' itself ... For her to know that she belongs somewhere, which is maybe Ghana where I'm originally from.

The single approach as related to race and ethnicity could also have a political dimension, which we discuss further in the next chapter.

For the most part, however, parents in our sample who espoused a strong single typification were promoting a single-faith identity.

Overview of typifications

The 'individual', 'mix' and 'single' approaches to difference and belonging have been identified from the accounts of the parents who took part in interviews for our research. On the face of it, they appear to map quite readily onto the 'beyond/none',

'both' or 'one' debates about the identity of children from mixed race, ethnicity and faith backgrounds, and how parents should seek to give them a sense of belonging, which we discussed in our review of literature on the topic in Chapter 1. As our discussion has shown, however, the typifications that we have abstracted are far more subtle than this, given the range of underlying key features and facets that comprise them.

Additionally, there was little in the way of particular typifications being associated with particular racial, ethnic and/or faith combinations. For example, contrary to the direction of most contemporary instructional literature (see Chapter 1), not all black/white mix couples took a mix approach to dealing with difference and a sense of identity for their children. Nonetheless, there was some patterning in who held particular understandings among the mothers and fathers we spoke to. Notably, where parents espoused a strong individual approach, these were all drawn from the middle-class element of our sample. In addition, a single approach being taken by parents to their children's sense of belonging was related more strongly to faith than to race or ethnicity.

Further complexity is introduced when we see that the typifications co-exist with, or are secondary in the face of, other factors in bringing up children.

Mixed parenting is not just about mixedness

Parents' understandings of difference and approaches to giving their children a sense of belonging were not the only issues that featured in the mothers' and fathers' accounts of bringing up their children. Indeed, these issues could pale into insignificance when compared with other considerations they face in their everyday parenting. In this sense, parents in mixed relationships have very similar concerns to parents with shared backgrounds, and thus see their family lives as 'ordinary'.² Here we look at four particular topics that recurred in many parents' accounts: children's safety, parental unity over discipline, health and financial security.

Children's safety

While parents could mention 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:

Well I think [my worries are] just the same as any parent. Drugs, crime, getting in with the wrong crowd and all them things. (Hannah, white Irish Catholic with a black British Jamaican Protestant husband)

Parental unity

Ensuring safety for children also raised the frequently repeated issue of discipline and boundaries. Parents presenting a united front to children, where they both agree on what is and is not acceptable behaviour and support each other in any disciplinary actions, was regarded as crucial.³ Quite often it was mothers who initiated the negotiations with their partner, or took steps, that ensured this:

We do kind of make sure we set boundaries for the children and maintain it. It's not like 'oh yes, oh well', you know, we have got to actually do as we say ... We know that we have to stand by what – and also try to stand by what the other person says [whispers] even though we don't quite agree with it all! (Lisa, Chinese with a white British husband)

Parents could also feel that their shared values about providing their children with a moral or behavioural code – especially in the case of religion – overshadowed any cultural differences between them.

Health

Several mothers and fathers who took part in the study discussed how the health or disability of parents or children was a more pressing issue for them than cultural or racial difference.⁴ The quote below is from the father of two children with autism:

[Our parenting] is very much guided by what they need rather than what I want. I think it is something where our focus is very much on their needs, sort of thing. (Brian, white British with a Chinese wife)

Financial concerns

Money concerns were also a preoccupation for some parents, in terms of their present and future circumstances. 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. Passing on values concerning financial security to children could also be important:

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. But you basically look after yourself as much as possible. (Roger, black British Jamaican Protestant with a white Irish Catholic wife)

Conclusion

The mothers and fathers we interviewed understood difference and approached giving their children a sense of belonging and identity in a variety of ways. We have identified three main sorts of typifications, or types of understanding, and the various aspects that comprise them: individual, mix and single.

In this chapter, we have laid out the diversity of approaches across our relatively small sample of parents. There are no universal and 'right' ways in which parents do – or indeed should – understand difference and belonging for their children. This is because their understandings are developed and situated in different contexts related to individual biography, geographical and class locations, gender, and the relevance of religion in their lives, as well as other social and material factors. Indeed, as we discussed, other considerations as part of everyday parenting – such as safety, discipline, health and finances – can have greater significance and implications for parents and parenting than their own and their children's mixedness.

In the next chapter, we continue our focus on the typical ways in which parents understand difference and belonging, and the various facets underpinning this, and look at how they combine, negotiate and accommodate distinct approaches.

4 Negotiating difference and belonging for parent couples

Our sample of parent couples is very diverse, involving various mixings of race, ethnicity and faith. Nonetheless, one issue they all had in common was that they were in the process of dealing with difference and belonging. Further, given that their children were aged 7 or older, in relation to childrearing they had been doing so for at least that period of time.

The previous chapter laid out the three main approaches through which the mothers and fathers we spoke to typically understood giving their children a sense of identity: individual, mix and single. In this chapter, we build on that discussion to explore how parents negotiate and accommodate approaches. We look at the ways in which individual mothers and fathers can combine and hold complex views drawn from various approaches. We then move on to consider how couples accommodated understandings between them, whether their approaches to dealing with difference and creating a sense of belonging are similar or divergent. Finally, though, we highlight how, regardless of parents' approaches or negotiations, gender difference plays a significant role in which parent carries out the everyday passing on of knowledge and awareness of cultural backgrounds to children.

One parent – several approaches

Some of the mothers and fathers talked about approaches to difference and belonging that were located very firmly within one typification – individual, or mix, or single. Most, however, held understandings that fitted with more than one approach, even if such combinations might at first appear contradictory.

Christine, for example, is a white British mother from a Christian background who has been with her husband Samir, a Muslim originally from North Africa, for 16 years. Christine works in the health service and Samir in manufacturing. They have twin daughters, Leila and Inaya (age 9), and a son, Faisal (age 3). The family live near to Christine's parents in a small town with a predominantly white population. Running together through Christine's account are viewpoints related to all three typifications. In line with a 'single' approach, she sees raising her children in the Muslim faith as a means of providing them with a good basic set of rules and values that will guide them into the future:

[My daughters] need to have the tools to say 'no' to people ... I didn't have that when I was a teenager and I found it very difficult at that stage. So having Samir by my side, it's easier in a way because he communicates those things to them quite easily through his religion. That sense of modesty and shyness and what is right and what isn't and how you should behave.

At the same time, related to a mix approach, Christine talks about encouraging her children to acknowledge the positive aspects of their mixed North African and British heritages:

I think that children who have come from two different backgrounds are richer in every way ... I just think that they – because they are coming from two different places – they are just richer and that's what I tell them.

Alongside these two approaches, Christine demonstrates elements of an individual approach in her cosmopolitan outlook and her belief in her children's freedom to choose their identities in the future:

I've always found it very important to impress on them that the world that they see around them here is not the only world ... I think for me that is very important, that they always understand that there's other ways of looking at things.

Another example of someone who holds aspects of the three approaches together is Tyler, a black Caribbean father who works in education. He lives with his white British wife, Sophie, and their three children – Connor (age 15), Alyssa (age 11) and Joe (age 4) – in a relatively diverse suburb of a large city. The family are practising Christians. For Tyler, a mix approach that acknowledges both sides of the children's racial and ethnic backgrounds is an important part of creating a sense of identity and belonging for them:

We do talk about [being a mixed family] and we talk about it a lot. And part of why we talk about it a lot is because they have to be out there. I am not of mixed parentage. I'm not of mixed race, not in that space anyway. Neither is Sophie. And we have – do we have to? I don't know if we have to or whether we just do. We have that dialogue. So it's on the family agenda.

Alongside this mix emphasis, though, Tyler asserts the importance of one side of his children's racial background. He draws on a single approach to difference and

belonging in discussing the need to recognise his children's black heritage as a political identity. Talking about Connor, he said:

We are raising a black child who is going to be looked on very, very differently, and he needs to be able to hold his own and he needs to be seen to be doing the right thing ... It's about 'son, this is what some of the jugular issues are. When they arrest you, when they deny you access to work, when they discriminate against you, it's not going to be because your mum was white, it's going to be because your dad was black.'

Tyler's account shifts according to context, foregrounding a mix approach when he is referring to racial and ethnic difference and belonging within the family, and then a single approach when the topic is his children's racial identity outside of it. The same shifting approach to their children's sense of self depending on context is also evident in Tyler's wife Sophie's account. They thus shared a common perspective on bringing up their children.

Sharing the same approach or combination of approaches to difference and belonging, however, did not mean that couples had little to negotiate between them in bringing up their children. They could face continuing or periodic difficulties in maintaining their common understanding.

Maintaining shared approaches

Within primarily similar viewpoints on how to deal with passing on a sense of identity to their children, mothers and fathers could experience ongoing threads of discomfort. For example, Terry is black British from a mixed Caribbean and African origin, and his wife, Poppy, is from a white British background. They have been married for eight years and both are employed as education professionals. Terry and Poppy have two children – Kiki (age 9) from Poppy's previous relationship with a black African man and Dominique (age 6) – and the family live in a multicultural, inner-city area. The couple take a strong and unified mix approach to the racial and ethnic differences between them, and to passing on a sense of belonging to their children, as Poppy notes:

I'd say we were very similar. I mean we just – yeah, we're sort of so aware of [being a mixed-race family] because Terry sort of lectures on these issues and we're always talking about it!

Terry and Poppy want Kiki and Dominique to acknowledge and engage with all the different aspects – African, Caribbean and English – of their heritage. As Terry explains, they regard mixedness both as a balance of its constituent parts and as an identity in itself, and they encourage this sense of belonging for their children:

We try to make them aware that they are mixed race without hammering it into them. We try to make them aware who they are, and we try to give them as much of a balance as we can in terms of how that one doesn't dominate the other. And now, obviously, we've reached a point where it's an experience in itself.

Poppy and Terry draw on a number of resources to help them achieve the balanced identity mix for their children that they seek, including welcoming the involvement of both sets of grandparents (see Chapter 5 for discussion of the resources that parents draw on). Nonetheless, Terry is not very comfortable about the annual holiday with Poppy's extended family in a predominantly white seaside town and does not always go. He wonders about his children absorbing a sense of white supremacy or developing an identity as 'acceptable' blacks for white people:

[I'm concerned] that the children see whiteness as having the ultimate – so subconsciously they take in this idea. So I just wonder about that sometimes, whites predominantly there, holidays to white places ... My point is that whites are seen as the giver/provider, who provides safety and things like that ... My other fear is that I hope my children don't become exoticised and they don't occupy this space where [they are seen] as a kind of what I call 'user-friendly black', do you know what I mean?

Terry also feels that social class is bound up in his unease, given his own working-class background and Poppy's distinctly middle-class family. For her part, Poppy acknowledges that these holidays sometimes 'get to' Terry, as she puts it, and she understands why. Thus, while the rooted and balanced mix that Poppy and Terry seek to achieve in bringing up their children is a shared endeavour, they are both aware that even such a closely shared approach can involve elements of discomfort that require ongoing monitoring and understanding.

Shared approaches could also be challenged by unexpected issues or events. Isobel is from a white Scottish and Christian background, while Simon is a white British/East European mix and from a Jewish background. Simon works in logistics management and Isobel in health. They have been married for twelve years and live with their three children – Josh (age 10), Seb (age 6) and Sarah Louise (age 2) – in

the suburb of a large city. Isobel and Simon have consciously developed an individual approach to dealing with difference between them on the basis of religion in order to create a sense of belonging for their children, particularly through an emphasis on transcending categorical identity boundaries and belief systems that stress their children's essential humanity and spirituality.

Despite their shared approach to difference, the couple faced a difficult situation when their sons were born. Simon experienced a very strong but totally unexpected emotional need to have them circumcised, in the Jewish tradition, to which Isobel says she unwillingly gave in 'for the sake of the marriage'. Each time, the circumcisions created a serious rupture in their relationship and joint individual parenting project, which, as Simon said, still resonated:

The one time that [a sense of Jewishness] raised an issue is when the boys were born, because Jewish boys get circumcised and I found that this was something I wanted enormously. Not passionately but very, very strongly. The only time in our twelve years of marriage that I've ever said to my wife, 'look, I can't explain it and I understand what you think but I don't care, this is important to me' ... I think she'll tell you that she's still not over it, letting herself be persuaded, all these years on.

Isobel reframes the possibility that their sons might be Bar Mitzvahed¹ when they come of age as a celebration of the children themselves, in line with her emphasis on their individual humanity, rather than because it has religious connotations – something that she has felt unable to do in relation to their circumcision:

It won't be so much of a conflict because, suppose there's a Bar Mitzvah, we can make it something that's about Josh and not something that's just one religion or another. It then becomes a celebration of him and who he is, and to me that would be completely different and I could go for that and support it.

This assertion of what 'we' can turn the celebration into also puts Isobel and Simon back onto their shared parenting track. Not all parents held similar approaches as the basis of their parenting, however.

Negotiating divergent approaches

Where parents did not share the same typificatory approach, this does not necessarily mean there was conflict between them. Just as an individual parent can

manage to weave several typifications together in their own understandings, the seemingly divergent approaches of a parent couple could complement each other and therefore work well for the family involved.

Nancy and Andrew are a white South African Jewish and white British atheist couple who live in a suburban area of a city with their two children, Rebecca (age 13) and Isaac (age 9). They have been married for over 20 years. They both work in the public sector, in health and social services respectively. Nancy has a firm single approach to difference and belonging. While she is not bothered about passing on her South African ethnicity, she is bringing up her children as practising Jews because she sees this as an intrinsic part of her – and therefore her children's – identity:

I didn't come from a very observant background at all but being Jewish was kind of very much part of the family ... Just because it was so much part of my identity, even though it was not really the religious thing ... I was just very sure that I wanted my children to have that because I feel it's given me quite a lot, not abandoning being Jewish.

Andrew, meanwhile, espouses a clear individual approach. He believes that it is very important that his children have a sense of themselves as individuals, rather than being part of any particular group. Nevertheless, despite their divergent approaches, Andrew sees the Jewish values that Nancy is instilling in their children as able to coincide with his atheist and socialist beliefs, specifically being open and tolerant in a diverse society, and providing Rebecca and Isaac with a sense of who they are:

I'm an atheist, I have no religious belief at all. It's all a load of hocus-pocus and junk. But I value the kind of, you know, sense of self that brings to people ... Well, I think, you know, it's an important part of the kid's life. I think also it's sort of got benefits and things. A sense of self, a sense of worth, being part of a community. A sense of cultural heritage ... What's important for them to know is that I have a different belief. I think sometimes that's the most important thing, to understand that it's OK for people to have different beliefs ... You see I don't think for me the Jewish bit is a challenge or a problem. I don't see it as something which I think, you know, they shouldn't be Jewish, they shouldn't believe. Whereas if they had been rude to someone then that would be of some concern. Or if they were unkind to others, I would challenge that.

Nancy and Andrew illustrate that it is an ability to accommodate divergent approaches that can be important, rather than turning them into a shared approach or possessing one from the outset. Negotiating such an accord was not always so

easy, however. Some parents highlighted the effort that they had gone through, or were still going through, to reach this.

Ling and Howard are a Chinese and white British couple who live in an outer suburb of a large city with their son Ross (age 9). They have been married for ten years and both work in education. Although Ling does understand Ross's sense of belonging through a mix approach, she heavily emphasises the single Chinese aspect of his upbringing:

When we were early stages [in childrearing], we were talking about cultural differences [in how to bring Ross up] and we went to Relate,² because we had rows and things ... In China we work very hard to reach a higher aim in life, but [Howard]'s much more laid back. So the school is not competitive school but the world is competitive world, so you need to prepare yourself to face that kind of thing. So I will, you know, I try to ask Ross to be more strict and working harder and challenge his boundaries ... We speak to [Ross] in Chinese. [Oh, so Howard can speak Chinese?] No, no, no ... [Ross] went to China with [me and my mother] two years ago and he learned it, and [again] we went to China and lived with my brother and his big cousin, and when he came back his Chinese was fluent.

In contrast, Howard takes a strong individual approach and regards ethnic and racial identification as limiting and unimportant:

I never can see things with cultural differences anyway, I'm not a naturally culturalist person, whatever. I just don't think – everyone is different and people's characters are what they are ... Viewing someone as part of a group in a way stops you from viewing them based on your experience of them as a person ... And, although heritage is important, if you tell people it's desperately important they remember their heritage or they will forget who they are, that's wrong.

Both Ling and Howard said that their divergent understandings proved a source of some conflict between them. Nonetheless, they feel that they are managing to negotiate a shift. Ling is trying to pose their problems over bringing up Ross as less to do with culture and more to do with personality issues that can be addressed through counselling, while Howard attempts to understand the focus on Ross's Chinese heritage as a means of providing him with important and interesting knowledge and skills.

Ling's efforts to revise her understanding of the issues she faces with Howard in bringing up their son, away from culture, bring up a theme running through the accounts of several parents.

Reframing cultural difference

One way that parents dealt with ongoing or unexpected challenges and difficulties in how they understood difference between them, and approached their children's sense of identity and belonging, was to move away from understanding the problem as rooted in cultural difference, towards seeing it as a viewpoint shaped more by choice than ascription. Examples of this practice include: Isobel's reframing of the possibility of her sons being Bar Mitzvahed as a celebration of their humanity rather than a religious ceremony; Andrew's reframing of Jewish values as coinciding with his more political principles of openness and tolerance; and Ling's struggles to reframe her parenting style as based on her personality rather than Chinese culture.

It may be that to understand an approach as embedded in deeply rooted and deeply experienced racial, ethnic or faith culture means that parents feel that practices are institutional, entrenched and fixed, rather than amenable to negotiation and accommodation. Reframing cultural difference as difference that stems from the self and choice – such as humanistic, political or personality viewpoints – may offer the mothers and fathers concerned the possibility of resolution of difficulties.

Regardless of the diversity of approaches to difference and belonging, regardless of whether couples largely took shared or divergent approaches, and regardless of how they negotiated with or accommodated each other, however, it is evident that one parent was usually more involved in the ongoing daily and practical upbringing of their children than the other.

Who does the childrearing? Gender

While nearly all of the fathers in our study played a significant role in their children's lives, and placed great importance on developing close relationships with them, in reality it was mothers who largely took the primary responsibility for, and carried out the daily practice of, children's upbringing. This is not unusual among British families, where fathers tend to work long hours in comparison with other European countries (Gray, 2006; Lewis *et al.*, 2002; O'Brien and Shermit, 2003).

The fathers we spoke to could acknowledge that the mothers tended to be the primary carers:

I suppose [my wife] would have the most influence, but that's not because she's taken the most influence, it's just due to circumstances. Plus, you know, she gets to spend a bit more time with [our son] when he's more receptive in the evenings and stuff, because I'm working. You know, my work goes on – sometimes I'm there till about 7 or 8 at night, so I miss him completely. (Noah, white British father working in marketing, married to mixed Ghanaian/white Irish/white British mother)

[My wife] has more [influence] with the kids. I chip in little bits. If I see something that is wrong, I will say 'no'. I will watch what she is doing with the kids and I will say, 'I didn't like that'. (Darren, mixed English/Jamaican father working in construction industry, married to a white Irish mother)

[My wife's] got more influence than me, because [she's] here all day with them. I'm at work. I've been at work for twelve, 13 hours a day so far. (Mike, white British atheist father working as a driver, married to a British Asian [Kenyan Indian] Muslim mother)

Referring back to our discussion in Chapter 3 about parental unity over discipline as an aspect of parenting in families that was not specific to their mixedness, it was often mothers who were instrumental in instigating the negotiations that ensured a united front:

[Our discipline styles are] different probably, but we're learning from each other. So I think we both try to be mature, and try and talk about it, and try and think about if they're – more me probably than him. Probably because I'm a woman I'm more likely to go over things. (Katy, white British and from a mixed secular/Jewish background, with a black British African and Christian partner)

Further, mothers not only were usually the primary carers and instigators of negotiation, but also could take greater responsibility for passing on knowledge and awareness of their children's cultural backgrounds. They could assume the task of overseeing faith instruction or knowledge, even where this was not their own or their original religious background. For example, Diane is a white British Islamic convert who is married to Majid, a Malaysian Muslim. Their three children are being brought up as Muslims and it is Diane who is educating the children in their faith:

I mean I teach them Koran and – that's interesting as well because it's me that does it rather than him. But I've always been the teaching one because he trusts me to do that and he thinks I'm better at it than he is.

Mothers taking on responsibility for the passing on of cultural knowledge concerning race or ethnicity was also often the case, regardless of their or their partner's approach to difference and belonging. White mothers in particular could be aware of the assumptions and stereotypes around their ability to instil a positive and healthy sense of racial or ethnic belonging in their 'mixed' children (discussed in Chapter 1). Nicola, for example, is from a mixed white British/Pakistani background and has a black Trinidadian partner:

Yeah I've been through the whole white woman and brown child ... I got a [black] friend to show me how to cornrow³ because I'd read so much about this whole sort of white women don't know how to look after their mixed-race kids and I thought, 'no, I'm not going to be one of those!'

While the fathers we spoke to were often involved in passing on a sense of cultural heritage to their children in various ways, it is clear that the mothers usually took a dominant and active part in terms of everyday childrearing. In this respect, then, difference on the basis of gender cross-cuts with difference relating to race, ethnicity and religion.

Conclusion

This chapter has laid out some of the complexities of understandings of difference and the passing on of a sense of belonging to children in the case of both individual mothers and fathers, and their negotiation between couples. Mothers and fathers did not necessarily each espouse views that fell into one typification – be it individual, mix or single – but could combine elements from more than one approach in their understandings, which might shift according to context. Couples who shared the same approach or combination of approaches did not necessarily avoid problems between them in how they sought to give their children a sense of identity. They might still experience ongoing issues or face unexpected challenges. Alternatively, parents who took quite divergent approaches to bringing up their children did not necessarily experience conflict between them. Rather, they could accommodate each other's understandings as complementary to their own. Further, one way that parents might deal with any difficulties between them was to shift away from regarding these as rooted in ascribed and rigid cultural difference. They reframed their understanding of the problems, to see them as arising from self-chosen values or inclinations that could be negotiated and accommodated.

It is also the case that, whatever approaches mothers and fathers might feel were best for giving their children a sense of who they are, the understandings of one parent could be more to the fore in children's daily upbringing than the other. Mothers were often the children's primary caregivers and could bear the main responsibility for passing on knowledge and awareness of their own and their partner's cultural backgrounds.

Given the complexities involved in parents' approaches to difference and belonging, and the fact that these are shaped by social and personal contexts, it is clear that there is no universal 'right' way in which parents do – or indeed should – bring up their 'mixed' children. The mothers and fathers we spoke to feel that their own practice 'works' for their family. Certainly it appeared to have worked for them so far, in that they had been bringing up their children together for nearly a decade or more. This is not to say, however, that couples did not face particular difficulties and challenges as a result of being in a mixed family, and in the next chapter we look at some of the resources and relationships that parents might draw on to help them deal with them.

5 Help and hindrance

In this chapter, we continue our focus on how parents understood and negotiated difference, to look at the everyday resources and relationships that they identified as supporting or constraining them in their attempts at creating a sense of belonging for their children.

The main helps and hindrances that parents identified include: the neighbourhood they live in and, linked to this, the schools their children attend; resources in the form of travel, languages, books and organisations; the reactions and input of their extended families, especially the children's grandparents; and children's physical appearance and own preferences concerning their identity. We address each of these in turn here. As we will see, whether and how these resources and relationships are, in fact, regarded as helpful or not by parents often relates to their approach to dealing with difference and belonging for their children.

Neighbourhoods and schools

As we noted in Chapter 2, mixed couples with dependent children generally tend to live in metropolitan multicultural areas, though this can vary by the mixed backgrounds of the couples involved. Bringing up their children in a neighbourhood that was diverse, and sending their children to a school that reflected this multiculturalism, was often important to parents.

Bradley is black British Caribbean and his wife is from a mixed Dominican and white British background. They and their children live in a diverse and upcoming area of a large city. Bradley and his wife take a largely mixed approach to their children's sense of racial and ethnic belonging, allied with a single approach to the Christianity they both practise. Bradley described how the multicultural nature of the area was one of the key factors in the move to the neighbourhood in which they lived, supporting the way that they approached difference for their children:

That's one of the reasons why we did come and move across to here, one of the reasons definitely, without any shadow of a doubt in my mind, was that I felt they needed to integrate with more people of colour than where we were living previously ... You like to be near the people who you are. But I think, conversely, I wouldn't like them to live in an area which is predominantly black because I think that breeds certain, you know, negative vibes as well.

Yet some parents did not feel that diversity or people 'like us' living locally was essential. Jafar is British Asian from a Pakistani Muslim background, and his wife is white British from a Christian background. They are both bringing their children up with a combination of individual and mix approaches, with more of a focus on race and ethnicity than religion. They live in a predominantly white, middle-class area of a large city, which Jafar did not feel was a problem:

I think, because it's a middle-classy kind of liberal enough area overall, then you feel comfortable and there isn't really issues, and there isn't the kind of 'oh, look at them' sort of thing ... It's not a multicultural area by any means but I think it's an area where people are more accepted.

We have also seen in Chapter 3 that lack of diversity in the neighbourhood did not pose a crucial issue for Maryam, a white British Islamic convert who lives with her Pakistani Muslim husband and three sons in a largely Pakistani Muslim city suburb, since the children are being brought up in a single approach that stresses their religious affiliation.

Some parents, however, saw a lack of a particular sort of diversity where they lived as unsupportive in how they attempted to give their children a sense of belonging. Esther is white and Jewish, and her husband Paul is white from a Christian background. Esther takes a single approach to her children's identity, bringing them up as practising Jews, while Paul supports this through an individual approach (see Paul's view in Chapter 3, and also Nancy and Andrew in Chapter 4). The family live in a village and, although the rural location has many advantages for them, Esther does not feel that it helps her in terms of bringing up her children in the Jewish religion:

Well there aren't any Jewish families, so I have spent all my time being, probably, the first Jew anybody's met and as such you always have to justify Israel ... [It] makes my children stick out, which I don't like.

Most parents in our sample sent their children to local schools that reflected the racial, ethnic and religious make-up of the neighbourhoods in which they lived. The variety of parents' feelings about the supportiveness or otherwise of neighbourhoods to the way they were bringing up their children is also reflected in their evaluation of schools. Many who were taking an individual or mix approach, for example, pointed to the diversity of pupil intake, and schools taking advantage of this, as helpful. They appreciated the assortment of ethnic and religious celebrations, involving music, art, dance, language, stories and food from a range of traditions and cultures, in which their children could participate:

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 ... 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 [my daughters] 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. It was fantastic being at a school that was like that. (Katy, a white British mother from a mixed secular/Jewish background, with a black British Ghanaian Christian partner)

Some parents – especially those pursuing a single-faith-based approach – found lack of awareness of religious diversity at their children's school, as with their neighbourhood, posed a problem. Nancy, a white Jewish mother of South African origin who we referred to in Chapter 4, for example, reported:

[My daughter] was worried that she had maybe eaten pork at school, although I'd written to say that they weren't supposed to have any. So I wrote again saying that I was worried that maybe she had been given pork sausages by the dinner lady, can you just remind them that she doesn't eat pork? ... When I picked her up from school next day ... she was a bit upset. They had put a sticky label on her tunic that said, in capital letters, 'no pork' exclamation mark, exclamation mark, in big letters ... A friend of mine was saying 'I don't know why they don't make it into a yellow Star of David!'¹

It is notable, though, that, while awareness of diversity or lack of it was a consideration for parents in terms of the school their children attended, of far more importance was that the school was academically 'good'. All the parents we spoke to wanted their children to do well educationally. They were often prepared to put up with other sorts of shortcomings, or place themselves under financial pressure, to give their children the best education:

We've hoped that [our daughter]'ll get into a good school, even if it means we have to remortgage ... 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. (Barry, a white British father with a mixed white English/black Trinidadian partner)

Thus, while parents' approaches to difference and ways of giving their children a sense of belonging are important when it comes to schooling, concerns about the standard of their children's education can outweigh evaluations of whether or not schools are supportive of these approaches.

Resources and organisations

Parents made reference to a range of resources and organisations that they felt helped them in giving their children a sense of belonging. For each of these potential supports, their significance and implications varied according to the approach to difference that parents pursued. Most obviously, religious institutions such as churches, temples, mosques and synagogues were important to parents taking a single approach in terms of their children's faith upbringing, but were of little relevance to parents taking a mix approach that prioritised racial or ethnic mix, or those who stressed an individual approach to their children's affiliations. In this section, we look at travel, languages, books and organisations for people in 'mixed' relationships.

Parents focusing on the specific mix of their children's background, or taking a single approach that stressed a racial or ethnic identity other than being British, often regarded visits back home and learning their own or their partner's mother tongue as important for their children's sense of identity. Jacklyn and Kojo are a black Jamaican and black Ghanaian couple who are both non-practising Christians. They are bringing up their children with a combination of mix and single approaches that involved a recognition of both of their ethnic heritages alongside a strong pan-African racial affiliation (see Chapter 3). Jacklyn talked about the importance of travel in this:

[The children] were born in England but they have to remember that their roots initially starts from Africa. So one of the first places they went to was Africa. Then after that I took them to Jamaica. You know, to be walking in the market where everywhere you look it's just black people speaking patois and playing reggae music, and selling fish and plantain. I think it was nice for them.

In contrast, parents taking an individual approach often saw travel abroad and learning other languages (not necessarily countries of origin and mother tongues) as part of broadening their children's horizons generally:

We've had discussions about what a great opportunity it is for [our children] to learn a language and to be in another country, and they've

lived in Mexico for three months as well so they managed to pick up some Spanish at that time. (Meena, a British Indian Sikh mother married to a mixed white British/white Other and Christian/Jewish man)

Not all parents could afford to provide their children with either broad horizons or a sense of identity through the medium of travel, however:

I'd love them to go to other places and further afield but it's cost ... I hope that we will get to travel more because that's definitely one thing I would like them to do and to experience, travel ... Hopefully we'll get to the Caribbean. (Derek, a black British Jamaican and Protestant father married to a white Irish Catholic woman)

Parents' use of books also related to their approach to difference and belonging, and tended to be mentioned by mothers who, as we saw in Chapter 4, often took daily responsibility for passing on cultural knowledge to their children. For example, Diane and Christine – both discussed in Chapter 4 – are white British mothers from Christian backgrounds who are married to practising Muslims of respectively Malaysian and Moroccan origin, and both have sought advice from books in bringing up their mixed children. Diane, who does not feel that religions can be mixed in the same way as race and ethnicity might be, takes a single approach in bringing up her children as practising Muslims. She talked about learning from books on Islam and Islam's expectations of parenting. In contrast, while Christine also acknowledges the influence of Islam on her children's upbringing, she has a strong sense of the importance of the mixed racial backgrounds of her children combined with an individual approach towards enabling them to choose their identity. Christine talked about reading books that were intended for parents in mixed families.

Parents taking a strong individual approach, however, tended to talk more about the wider sort of reading they and their children might find useful, which was not necessarily related to their own specific backgrounds:

Certain works and literatures I have pointed their way sometimes, like Nelson Mandela or Martin Luther King. People, great figures, who have struggled, and all those kinds of things. Like Marley² albums, they know the songs. (Daniel, from a mixed white British/white Other and Christian/Jewish background, married to a British Indian Sikh woman)

As well as the sorts of advice books intended to help parents from different backgrounds bring up their children, which Christine referred to above – some examples of which we referenced in Chapter 1 in reviewing the literature on

'mixedness' – there are a number of national and local organisations specifically for people who are from mixed racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds and their parents. A minority of the parents in our sample knew about such groups in their local area. Whether they were taking an individual, mix or single approach, they could either find them very supportive or feel that they were not really worthwhile. For example, Nicola is from a mixed white British/Irish/Pakistani background and married to a black Trinidadian man. She is very involved in an interracial anti-racist organisation:

I was quite interested in what they were about so I went to one of their meetings and went to one of their committee meetings and said that I had time to volunteer as a committee member ... And I think it's very important that the organisation is around really and that people give it the support that it needs ... It's quite important to the members, I think, to be able to sort of discuss the issues that are going on in everyday life.

In contrast, Vicky is Columbian/Italian and a practising Catholic, married to a Columbian/English husband who practises an Eastern religion.³ She and her daughter had searched on the internet and found a local group for black and mixed race families:

I started looking, I said 'come on, let's look for some ethnic stuff on the computer, this is what we're like as a family' ... [We found an organisation] and got the leaflet ... and then we just looked at the application form and it was – you know, they were asking for loads of details. And we just looked at each other and we couldn't be bothered.

Most of the parents we spoke to, though, seemed unaware of such organisations:

Well we did the NCT [National Childbirth Trust] classes when Jessie was born ... but no, nothing to do with parenting [mixed children]. What clubs are there? (Will, a white British father married to a mixed Lebanese/English woman)

Grandparents

Extended family were important to most of the parents we spoke to, providing support and helping in giving children a sense of identity and belonging, as well as posing difficulties and undermining their approaches to bringing up their children. Grandparents in particular could be both a help and a hindrance in this respect. As has been noted in other studies (see Chapter 1), in some cases, their attitudes

could shift over time, moving from initial hostility to their son or daughter partnering 'outside' their racial, ethnic or religious affiliation, to acceptance once grandchildren had been born. Jamila, a British Muslim from a Kenyan-Indian background, described a major rift with her parents and wider family because she lived with a white divorced man. The ice began to thaw once she and her partner had children, and finally good relations were firmly established at a family wedding:

We had trouble with my family about it all ... because he was divorced. [My mum said] 'He's left one so he'll leave you, white men, that's what they do!' ... My dad became very 'Oh we don't do that sort of thing'. He was worried about what the family was going to say and all the rest of it. So for quite a few years I didn't speak to my parents and they didn't want to know [my husband]... [Then] they came to visit when I had the baby. He was two weeks old and they came to visit him and after that things got a little better ... [Then when my cousin got married] mum spoke to my aunt, who lives around the corner, and she said yes, I could bring [my husband]. And from that day he's been a part of the family, it was like all the past never happened.

For most parents, though, grandparents were not so censorious about their relationship. Indeed, grandparents could not only act as a source of support in practical terms such as providing childcare where they lived locally, but also help to provide their grandchildren with a sense of cultural heritage. In Chapter 4, we discussed Ling and Howard, a Chinese and white British couple who had experienced some difficulties in their divergent approaches to bringing up their son Ross. Ling's mother had come from China to live with them. Both appreciated the childcare support that the grandmother provided, but also that she was giving Ross a grounding in aspects of Chinese culture:

Ling's mum is a very devout, whatever it is, Taoist or whatever, and she's always practised sort of Buddhist Taoist meditation type things ... I think [Ross] finds some of his grandmother's religious stuff quite attractive ... overall, he does like and respect her, so I wouldn't be surprised if he ended up becoming a devout Buddhist of some sort. (Howard)

Since my mum moved [to live with us] [Ross] started to speak Chinese ... Everybody thinks it is very good for him to be able to speak Chinese and that is something we never have any disagreement about. (Ling)

While relationships with grandparents and other family members were often valued, however, they were not unambiguously so. Hannah provides a good example of

this ambivalence. She is a white Irish Catholic woman who is married to Derek, a black British Jamaican Protestant man. Hannah talked appreciatively about Derek's mother's intelligence and assertiveness, but could also find these traits difficult when they cut across her own mothering of her children:

Derek's mother, while in a lot of ways she can be bitter and abrupt and this and that, she has got more about her ... The boys wanted their hair canerowed,⁴ you know like Rio Ferdinand.⁵ And it is her opinion that only girls have that done. And probably 40 years ago only girls did have it done, but now anyone has it done ... We went down for lunch and of course Derek [said] 'Oh, Lucas is having his hair canerowed' ... and she went 'No he's not'. And I went 'Excuse me, he's my son and he will have anything he likes done to his hair, it's not up to you to say' ... and it did erupt into a huge argument.

For some parents, though, relationships with grandparents were consistently distant and problematic. Eddie is a white British Christian man married to a white British Jewish woman. They took a shared single approach to bringing their son, Joel, up as a practising Jew. Eddie spoke about how this has caused difficulties between them and his parents:

Although they don't really express their feelings very much ... they certainly don't seem to take much interest in Joel going to the synagogue or that side of it, and we do wonder if they have some element of – because they actually dislike and they are actually upset that Joel is being brought up as Jewish ... I'll be honest, I don't get on particularly well with my parents.

As in Eddie's case, those mothers and fathers we spoke to who had more distant relationships with their own parents could indicate that these were often long-standing poor relationships. While partnering across racial, ethnic or faith boundaries, and bringing up children with a different affiliation, might have exacerbated the existing difficulties, mixing itself was not always the root cause of conflict or distance.

Children's physical appearance and preferences

Parents' approaches to difference and attempts to give their children a sense of belonging, in their own view, were not entirely within their control. They often saw these approaches as negotiated around their children's physical appearance and, sometimes related to this, children's own identity and affiliation preferences.

Those parents who were mixing race and ethnicity were often very proud of the physical appearance of their children, regarding them as attractively embodying the best of both sides of their genetic heritage (resonating somewhat with the hybrid vigour arguments noted in Chapter 1). They often felt that which of them their children most closely resembled, and therefore which racial and ethnic heritage their appearance most reflected, was a factor in their children's sense of identity. Christine, who we referred to earlier in discussing mothers' use of books, provides a good example in talking about two of her children. The family live in a village with an overwhelmingly white population:

One of my daughters, that's Leila, she looks like a little Moroccan girl ... My other daughter doesn't look so Moroccan ... [Leila] is quite brown and she will sometimes look at herself and say 'Why am I so brown and Inaya is really white and you're really white? I'm like daddy' ... I think that Leila feels that she is Moroccan British and the other one doesn't really think about it.

In relation to faith, parents could also perceive their children's preferences as playing a major role in shaping what were largely single approaches. For example, Lesley and her partner Susan are a lesbian couple. They have had a son by donor, with Lesley as the birth mother, and also adopted another child. Lesley is white British and Jewish, while Susan is white British and Christian. They had originally decided to bring up their children mainly as Jewish but also with a Christian input. Lesley, however, described how their son, Joseph's, own preferences meant that the Jewish side had come to take even more precedence:

In the time before [Joseph] went to school we just quite happily celebrated Hanukkah and then Christmas and Passover and then Easter ... and that worked really well. And we weren't synagogue-goers or anything like that, or churchgoers. And then when he started school he just said, quite shocked, 'But Mummy, where are the other Jewish children? Why am I the only one?' So then we found ourselves joining a local synagogue to do something about his Jewish identity, which I didn't feel I needed to do about mine. And he went on to develop a very, very strong sense of himself as a Jewish child, understanding which bits of him are Jewish and which bits aren't. His donor isn't Jewish, but he very strongly identified himself as a Jewish child. And he's been to the religion school and he'll have his Bar Mitzvah⁶ next year. Yes, he kind of had a real sense of himself, not a totally religious sense, but a deep sense of identity that he's made himself really.

And, as with racial or ethnic identity, children in the same family did not necessarily feel the same about religious identity. Daniel is a mixed white British/white Other and Christian/Jewish man who is married to a British Indian Sikh woman. Both take an individual approach to their children's sense of belonging, wanting to give them a sense of choice rather than impose a definite racial, ethnic or faith identity on them. The children, Heera and Amar, attend a Christian primary school, however, because – as discussed earlier – Daniel and his wife feel that it provides a good education. The secondary school that they have identified as best for Heera to attend requires children to be baptised, although Daniel says they have not told her about that stipulation. Daniel talked about the distinction between Heera and Amar in terms of their choices about religious affiliation:

It's like Heera is baptised and Amar isn't. Amar says he doesn't want to be baptised because he doesn't feel like he belongs to any religion, which is great ... We didn't ask [Heera] to be baptised [in order that she could go to the secondary school]. We made it clear to her that it was something she could do if she wanted to and we made the same thing clear to [Amar], that he could do if he wanted to. And it was very much [Heera] could see from our reaction to [Amar] saying that he didn't want to that it was fine, more than fine.

Conclusion

A key message from the discussion of the resources and relationships that parents find a help or a hindrance in bringing up their children to have a sense of belonging is that there are variable experiences that are often closely linked to a parent's approach to negotiating difference. What is regarded as supportive by some parents is seen as more of a drawback by others, or regarded as both at one and the same time. What is helpful or a hindrance can shift over time, which further complicates matters.

This diversity of experiences has implications for policy and practice initiatives. In our final chapter, we consider some of the lessons that our research provides for policy-makers and professionals.

6 Conclusion

'Mixed' couples and their children are increasingly visible in the public eye. Knowledge about these families, and particularly about the perspectives and experiences of mothers and fathers in bringing up their children, however, is less evident. The research on which this report is based aimed to broaden our knowledge of how parent couples from different racial, ethnic and/or religious backgrounds seek to give their children a sense of identity. In particular, through in-depth interviews with parents, the study explored their approaches to difference and creating a sense of belonging for their children, how they negotiated or accommodated their own approach with that of their partner, and the resources and relationships that mothers and fathers feel help and hinder them in bringing up their children.

The research focused on 'ordinary' mixed families, rather than those who had contacted or been contacted by services because they had particular needs or were experiencing problems. This means that the findings from the study provide insights into the realities of everyday parenting of mixed children, and negotiations and accommodations between parents to these ends. Such grounded knowledge can make a contribution to debates about policy initiatives and professional strategies for support for couples, parenting and family life as these relate to mixed families.

The 35 parent couples who took part in our study provide a diverse range of mixings of race, ethnicity and religion, not only between couples but also sometimes embodied in an individual mother or father themselves. Each couple had at least one child aged between 7 and 12, which means that they had been together for this length of time or longer, and thus had established a mode of negotiating parenting practices around their children's identity. The specificities of our sample – as couple parents of children in a particular age group – mean that we cannot comment on other areas that also deserve attention. One is the parenting of younger and, importantly, teenage children, which deserves attention. Another crucial area in which more knowledge is required is how lone mothers and non-resident fathers (as is usually the case) manage difference and belonging in bringing up their mixed children. Intergenerational perspectives also need further attention, prioritising the views of children and young people themselves on their parenting and family life, and also paying attention to the neglected experiences of grandparents in mixed families. In relation to our specific focus on parent couples, though, throughout this report we have offered rich descriptions of how they approach and negotiate giving their children a sense of belonging, such that the reader can judge the applicability or transferability of our findings to mixed families generally.

Mixing and mixedness – main issues

The findings from our research offer a challenge to long-standing stereotypes about mixed families and people. Notably, these assumptions pose relationships across the boundaries of race, ethnicity and faith as inherently subject to dichotomous culture clashes, leading to difficult relationships between parent couples and identity confusion on the part of their mixed children. Images of transient couplings between members of the underclass in inner-city areas also abound.

In contrast to this, our analyses of the census data show that there is a noticeable middle-class profile to mixed couples, that they variously are located in a range of neighbourhoods other than the multicultural inner cities, and that their couple relationships are often sustained. Furthermore, the in-depth interviews with parents reveal that – rather than being constantly preoccupied with culture clashes – they see their family lives as ordinary, subject to the same everyday sorts of concerns as other families. Indeed, ideas about dichotomous culture clashes are difficult to sustain in the face of the fact that parents in mixed relationships may be mixed themselves.

Nonetheless, the mothers and fathers we spoke to were all in a process of negotiating a sense of belonging for their children, and dealing with society's reactions to difference. They did not do so in one prescribed way, however. We identified three typical approaches from the mothers' and fathers' accounts of bringing up their children.

- An individual approach, where children's identity is not necessarily related to their particular backgrounds. Parents could variously see their children as living cosmopolitan lives, developing their organic inner selves, making choices about their identities and transcending colour in the new modernity.
- A mix approach, where children's background is seen as a rooted and factual part of who they are. Parents could variously feel that it was important for their children to know and be proud of their specific heritages, and regard mixedness as an identity in and of itself.
- A single approach, where one aspect of children's background is given priority. Parents could variously stress the rules and values for life associated with the particular heritage, and see it as transcending other difference (notably faith over colour) and as being part of their children's intrinsic selves.

How parents approached giving their children a sense of belonging varied according to the specific contexts in which they lived and the situated understandings that they had developed. Indeed, there was little in the way of particular approaches being associated with particular racial, ethnic or faith combinations of mixing. Additionally, individual mothers and fathers did not necessarily follow one approach in how they brought up their children, but could hold elements of several approaches together, even if they might seem contradictory. This could include parents shifting their approach to difference and belonging for the children according to context, especially between being inside and outside of the family and home (see below).

Parent couples might share approaches or they might not. On the one hand, having a similar approach or combination of approaches to difference and belonging did not mean that couples had little to negotiate in bringing up their children. They could face ongoing or periodic difficulties in maintaining their common understanding. On the other hand, taking dissimilar approaches did not necessarily mean that couples faced conflict. Seemingly divergent understandings could complement each other, with mothers and fathers accommodating each other's particular viewpoints, or parents could negotiate new ways of seeing each other's parenting practices. Indeed, one way in which parent couples dealt with continuing or unexpected challenges in how they understood difference between them and approached their children's identity was to reframe the problem. Rather than ascribing their difficulties to a cultural difference between them, they could shift to seeing it as a difference that stemmed from personal preference, which was then more amenable to negotiation and accommodation.

The variable ways of handling difference and belonging in childrearing, for individual mothers and fathers and between parents, each work for the family concerned and show that there is no one 'best' way that parents can understand their children's identity.

Cutting across this diversity in how parents approached racial, ethnic and faith difference and belonging, however, were other aspects of difference within and between families, notably gender and social class. In the case of gender, within families, it was usually mothers who were the primary caregivers for children and whose approach to giving them a sense of belonging was part of their everyday childrearing. In the case of social class, between families, those parents who had a strong individual approach to understanding their children's identity were middle class only, while parents from across the social classes took mix and single approaches. This may well reflect the resources that middle-class parents are able to provide for their children.

The sorts of resources and relationships that parents find helpful in dealing with difference or hinder them in giving their children a sense of belonging depend on their approach. The same situation, resource or relationship – such as schools, books, organisations and grandparents – that is a support for one parent can either pose a difficulty or be of no consequence to another parent, or its significance can shift according to context or over time. Nonetheless, the sort of ‘ordinary’ concerns that preoccupy all parents can override concerns about racial, ethnic and faith difference – for example, in relation to their children’s safety and health, parental unity over disciplinary boundaries, the family’s financial security and academic excellence in choosing schools.

Indeed, often the most difficult issues for parents in bringing up mixed children can be the response of others to their mixedness. For example, our survey showed that, generally, while parents having a different religion from each other is not viewed as so much of a problem, there is more ambivalence about parents coming from different racial or ethnic backgrounds and some respondents thought that children might face difficulties outside of their families in wider society. Our interview findings show that situations outside the home, including in service provision, can pose problems for mixed children and their parents. These often stem from ingrained assumptions about mixed families and a limited knowledge about their racial, ethnic and faith diversity, and a lack of understanding of the range and complexity of approaches to belonging that parents can have in bringing up their mixed children. There are thus implications for policy and practice from our findings.

Implications for policy and practice

The inclusion of the ‘Mixed’ category in the 2001 UK census ethnic group question has been not only widely accepted but also influential in shaping other ethnic monitoring forms, as well as the visibility of a group of people who are labelled ‘Mixed’. On a general level, administrative categories are regarded as socially significant and have important consequences for perceptions of the state of society. Specifically here, there are implications for how mixedness is understood. The use of ethnic group categorisations like ‘Mixed’ need to be accompanied by an awareness that the ability of such frames of reference to identify ‘Mixed’ people, and to tell us who they are and what their experiences are, is limited (Caballero, 2005). The restrictive nature of standardised census categories cannot fully capture the subtlety and complexity of the experience and patterns common to mixed families and people from mixed backgrounds (see also Song *et al.*, in progress). The typical individual, mix and single approaches that parents adopt to difference and belonging that we

have identified here, for example, could lead to quite distinct identifications on the part of their children and their recording of these identifications on monitoring forms. We have also seen that parents in mixed relationships might be mixed themselves, and that parents can be aware that children's own preferences and physical resemblances mean that siblings in one mixed family can have quite different ideas about their affiliations. Thus policy-makers and others who draw on data based on census categorisations to identify issues for mixed families, and develop strategies and services to deal with those issues, should be aware that such data can only be indicative rather than definitive of patterns of experiences of mixedness and mixing.

At the same time, there is a need for a far more dynamic picture of the demographic profiles of mixed relationships, families and people. The findings from our analysis of the SARs census data, in challenging several stereotypes about the location and socio-economic circumstances of mixed couples and families, raise further questions. Longitudinal analyses of the sorts of residential areas that people in mixed relationships and mixed people themselves move to and from, and movements into and out of mixed partnerships over time, for example, would be useful, as would more in-depth material on the reasoning behind these trajectories.

The diversity and complexity of mixed families, and the range of approaches that the mothers and fathers we spoke to took in dealing with difference and belonging, also raise issues for service delivery, including parenting education and family support. Parenting has become an explicit focus for policy and professional concern, and those providing information, education and support services are keen to ensure that their provision does not exclude, and is appropriate to the needs of, minority ethnic families. It is important that parenting and family support services do not make assumptions about, and essentialise, mixed families, mixing and mixedness.

The parent couples in our study, as we have shown, encompassed a range of mixes of race, ethnicity and faith, each with its own distinctive experiences, and had a corresponding diversity of approaches as regards negotiating cultural difference and passing on a sense of belonging to their children. On this basis, there seem to be a number of ways that children can be brought up to have a positive sense of self. There is no one style or model of mixed parenting that can be taken as read or considered the 'right' way to bring up mixed children. Nor can parenting education and family support practitioners assume that parents will find particular neighbourhoods, resources or organisations comfortable and useful – even when it comes to groups that support mixed families and people. Depending on their approach to bringing up their children, parents could variously find the same resource a help, a hindrance, or irrelevant. There are no universal messages about the sorts of supports, or lack of supports, that are available to or are needed by

parents in mixed families. Further, as we have also said, the mothers and fathers we spoke to had many concerns in common with parents who are not mixing race, ethnicity or faith, such as children's safety, health, and behaviour. Practitioners need to be wary of implementing initiatives on the grounds of 'mixedness', when the implications can vary between families who, on the surface, seem to share a form of mixing and for whom mixedness might be insignificant when compared with other issues in their lives.

Similar points concerning the diversity of understandings between, and negotiations within, mixed couples are relevant to relationship counselling provision. In this context, practitioners need to listen closely to the understandings of the partners involved and pay attention to the specificities of their situation, rather than assuming that, because they are in a mixed racial, ethnic or faith relationship, culture clash is at the root of their problems.

The warnings resulting from our research, against assumptions about the best context for mixed children and young people to develop a sense of identity, can be extended to social care. Our study shows that mixed families work in many different ways, with parents taking a range of approaches to difference and belonging. In light of this, it may be that social work policies that advocate particular types of placement for looked after or adoptive children from mixed backgrounds, or promote particular forms of identity upbringing for them, need to be revisited. In our study, while cultural diversity was a part of mixed family life, the sense of identity that mixed-couple parents attempted to foster in their children was acquired rather than biologically determined, and differed according to social context and personal understandings and experiences. As others have also argued (such as Katz, 1996; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002) in relation to transracial adoption, parents' attitudes towards colour and racism, and their social class, are likely to have more impact on a child's development than the colour of the parents' skin.

More broadly, issues of belonging and identity for mixed children, and mixing between parents from different racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds, are significant in the light of current debates about multiculturalism in Britain. Many of the difficulties and challenges that the parents in our study pointed to in bringing up their children were related to wider social attitudes – in other words, 'outside' rather than 'inside' the family. For example, schools were not always aware of difference or supportive of parents' approaches to providing their children with a sense of belonging. Living in an area of racial, ethnic and religious diversity, or not, could also help to shape parenting practices. Across Britain, there has been a growth of organisations that aim to reach mixed people and mixed families, and they have an important role to play in providing support and helping to challenge and change wider attitudes. Some of

the mothers and fathers we spoke to found such organisations useful, others less so, but still more were unaware of their existence. Outside of this specifically targeted provision, however, it would seem that mixed families, as with minority ethnic families generally, would benefit from policies and professional practices that focused on a broader and more nuanced understanding of diversity, and on further tackling negative assumptions, discrimination and prejudice based on race, ethnicity and faith *per se*, as well as material inequality.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. In relation to educational attainment, there are variations between different mixed groups according to the ethnic mix involved (Bradford, 2006), and this also varies by gender within and across mixed groups (Tikly *et al.*, 2004).
2. We attempted to recruit more parents with religious difference only but often found, when we went to interview a couple we had accessed on that basis, that their difference also encompassed ethnicity. The example of Judith and Eddie below is one of these situations.

Chapter 2

1. More detail in terms of the 'Mixed' categories is available for England and Wales than for the rest of the United Kingdom.
2. Responding parents defined their own race, ethnicity and religion, and also that of the other members of their family. They did not always state all of these characteristics, or those of their partner and children.

Chapter 3

1. Further evidence of a 'none or one', rather than a mixed, approach to faith in the UK where parents are from different religious backgrounds is emerging from Dr Eleanor Nesbitt and Dr Elisabeth Arweck's ongoing study 'Investigating the religious identity formation of young people in mixed faith families' (Warwick University), at the time of writing. This is in contrast to what seems to be the case in the USA, evidenced by the use of terms such as 'Jewlic' or 'Cathjew' (Jewish and Catholic) and 'Chrismukkah' (merging Christmas and Hanukkah celebrations).
2. Byrd and Garwick (2004, 2006) report that black/white mix couples in the USA often talk about their family lives as 'normal' and ordinary.

3. Parental unity is also often regarded as crucial by parents where they share a background (see Ribbens, 1994).
4. A need to focus on their children's health was also the reason given by one couple who eventually declined to take part in our research.

Chapter 4

1. The term 'Bar Mitzvah' is commonly used to refer to a religious coming of age ceremony, which marks the taking on of adult responsibilities, including the right and obligation to take a formal role in religious observances. It occurs at the age of 13 for boys, with an equivalent Bat Mitzvah for girls at 12. Technically, a ceremonial process is not necessary to confer these rights and obligations.
2. Relate is a national service offering relationship advice and counselling.
3. A particular style of grooming hair of African origin where the hair is tightly braided close to the scalp.

Chapter 5

1. Nancy is invoking the cloth patch with a yellow Star of David and the word 'Jude' embroidered on it that Jewish people were compelled to sew on their outer garments in order to mark them out in public in Nazi Germany. Discriminatory requirements that Jewish people – and indeed people from other minority communities – wear particular colour clothing or badges to distinguish them also have a longer history.
2. Bob Marley was a Jamaican singer, songwriter, guitarist and activist, of mixed parentage, who is widely considered as the foremost reggae music icon.
3. A member of a movement started by Bhagvan Rajneesh, an Indian philosopher who taught a syncretistic spiritual path that combined elements from a range of religious and philosophic traditions.
4. See Chapter 4, note 3 above.
5. Rio Ferdinand is a mixed-race footballer who plays for Manchester United.
6. See Chapter 4, note 1 above.

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