



# **Lone Mothers of Children from Mixed Racial and Ethnic Backgrounds: A Case Study**

**Chamion Caballero  
London South Bank University**

**Lone Mothers of Children from Mixed Racial and Ethnic  
Backgrounds: A Case Study**

Chamion Caballero  
Senior Research Fellow  
Families & Social Capital Research Group  
London South Bank University  
103 Borough Road  
London SE1 0AA

[www.lsbu.ac.uk/families](http://www.lsbu.ac.uk/families)

Published by SPAN  
SPAN  
Millpond  
Baptist Street  
Easton  
Bristol BS5 0YW

January 2010

## **Acknowledgements**

The 'Lone Mothers of Children from Mixed Racial and Ethnic backgrounds' project would like to thank the Research Opportunities Fund at London South Bank University for providing the core funding to conduct the project.

Thanks are also very much due to Tove Samzelius, who facilitated the collaboration with SPAN and provided great support and insights throughout the research process, and Rosalind Edwards at London South Bank University for her ongoing support and advice.

Finally, and above all, the project is indebted to the mothers who took part in the research. We would like to give a sincere and very heartfelt thank you to all those who gave up their time and offered their kind hospitality to share their experiences and insights.

# **Lone Mothers of Children From Mixed Racial And Ethnic Backgrounds: A Case Study**

## Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>p5</b>
<b>Section 1: Lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children</b>	<b>p7</b>
<b>Section 2: About this study</b>	<b>p10</b>
The project	p10
The sample	p10
The interviews	p11
Terminology	p11
<b>Section 3: Challenging assumptions and stereotypes</b>	<b>p12</b>
Awareness of assumptions and stereotypes	p12
Racial and cultural literacy	p12
<b>Section 4: Relationships and interactions with fathers and family</b>	<b>p16</b>
Interactions with fathers	p16
Interactions with family	p20
<b>Section 5: Identity and terminology</b>	<b>p25</b>
Approaches to identity	p25
Terminology – usage and preferences	p28
<b>Section 6: Neighbourhood and community</b>	<b>p30</b>
‘Ordinariness’ – fitting in	p30
Community – assumptions and interactions	p32
<b>Section 7: Concerns and Support</b>	<b>p36</b>
Concerns	p36
Informal support	p38
Formal support and resources	p40
<b>Section 8: Conclusion and implications</b>	<b>p44</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>p49</b>

## Executive Summary

This report draws on case study findings with 10 lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children to look at their everyday experiences of raising their children, particularly the ways in which they seek to give their children a sense of identity and belonging and what support or challenges they face in doing so. The research found that:

- Mothers were aware of the types of stereotypes and assumptions surrounding their relationship profiles and history, lifestyles and parenting skills. Contrary to these assumptions, the majority of mothers were not only in contact with their own families but also sought, maintained and negotiated links with the non-resident father, his family or community in order to provide a sense of racial and cultural awareness and belonging for their children, as well as for themselves.
- Although many mothers had relationships with their own families, the children's father and his family, maintaining these links and negotiating aspects of parenting was not always easy. Mothers, however, tended to feel that keeping these links was important for the children, particularly in relation to providing cultural and familial knowledge.
- The vast majority of the mothers saw their children as clearly having a 'mixed' racial or ethnic identity, which both they and their children felt to be positive. Mothers also saw their children's 'mixed' identities as fluid and part of a wider identity picture, where sometimes particular elements of their children's mixed backgrounds – or other identities – were more salient for them and those around them than others.
- The vast majority of mothers preferred to use the term 'mixed race' to describe their children, and reported that their children also did so too. Many mothers disliked terms that used phrases such as 'heritage' and 'parentage' as they felt these were too removed from their lives or imposed on them by professionals.
- The majority of the participating mothers considered the benefits of living in or schooling their children in neighbourhoods in which their families' mixed racial or ethnic backgrounds are considered 'ordinary' generally outweighed concerns regarding other neighbourhood effects, such as levels of crime and deprivation. At the same time, mothers also acknowledged that this 'ordinariness' often sat alongside particular assumptions and stereotypes found in the community about racial and ethnic mixing and groups generally.
- The majority of the mothers had strong social networks that played an important role in supporting their parenting, particularly around

having mixed racial and ethnic children. A number of the mothers also drew on more formal sources of support around parenting, such as those offered by SPAN, whilst some had also accessed resources specifically targeted at mixed racial or ethnic families. Nevertheless, many of the mothers did feel that more formal and informal support would be useful, as they were aware that their situation, concerns and needs – and that of their children – did and could change over time.

- The insights generated by the report suggest a number of policy, practice and research implications. These include:
  - Moving away from essentialising or assuming the demographics, experiences or needs of lone mothers of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, who are a diverse group.
  - Ensuring that professionals recognise the terminology that families choose to identify themselves with might be different from popular official usage, and respecting and understanding these different choices.
  - Working to provide different *forms* of support for lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children and different *types* of content within that support, as well as ensuring that this support is targeted, sustained and made widely available.
  - Recognising that standardised census categories cannot fully capture the subtlety and complexity of the experience and patterns common to mixed families and people from mixed backgrounds and is therefore indicative, rather than definitive, by nature.
  - Exploring research that brings together multiple family perspectives on mixedness so that the important processes of negotiation within families are illuminated.
  - Developing research frameworks which seek to understand mixedness in the British context – both national and localised – as a means of better informing policy and practice.

## Section 1 Lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children

*'Picture the parents of a mixed-race child, and what do you see? If you believe the stereotypes, you will probably imagine a youngish white mother, probably on a council estate, pushing her frizzy-haired baby in a buggy, with the unreliable black father nowhere to be seen.'*

*The Guardian*, 26 September 2007

As vividly described by the *Guardian's* Laura Smith, the stereotype of parents of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds is one which is firmly rooted in the image of lone motherhood, deprivation and the absence of the father. Yet, with little research conducted on lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children, what do we really know about the situations of this group and their experiences of bringing up their children?

Recent research indicates that lone motherhood is not the defining picture of mixed racial and ethnic families in Britain. According to 2001 Census data, 55% of dependent children in the 'Mixed' ethnic group category live in families headed by married or cohabiting parents, whose socio-economic profile has a strong middle-class dimension (Murphy, 2006; Caballero *et. al.*, 2008). Contrary to the dominant stereotype, it is therefore more likely that a child from a mixed racial and ethnic background in Britain lives with both their parents

Nevertheless, it must also be recognised that parents of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds do constitute one of the highest lone parent groups in Britain: 45% of dependent children in the 2001 'Mixed' Census ethnic group category live in families that are headed by a lone parent, compared with 25% of those in the 'White' ethnic group. Like other lone parent families, these are overwhelmingly headed by mothers.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of knowledge about these mothers is of particular concern. Whilst research suggests that parents of mixed racial and ethnic children generally continue to be subject to enduring negative assumptions regarding their backgrounds, relationships and parenting skills (Wilson 1987; Alibhai-Brown 2001; Tizard & Phoenix 2002), lone mothers of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds may be especially vulnerable to such stereotypes (e.g. Katz 1996; Barn 1999; Twine 1999a&b, 2004; Olumide 2002; Harman & Barn 2005; Tyler 2005; Harman 2008, 2010). For example, with interracial or interethnic relationships often assumed to be more difficult due to the notion of an inherent 'culture clash', lone mothers may face criticism for recklessly entering into relationships that are 'set up to fail' (Olumide, 2002). White lone mothers may be particularly questioned over their ability to raise their children with a sense of cultural belonging or a capacity to deal with racism (Katz 1996; Twine 2000; Olumide 2002; Harman & Barn 2005). Furthermore, it has also been observed that due to their mixed racial or ethnic relationship, mothers can also encounter hitherto unknown experiences of racism and prejudice – towards themselves, the child's father or their children (Banks 1996; Barn 1999; Harman 2010).

---

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

It has been noted that the numerous negative assumptions about their abilities to raise their children with healthy racialised identities may have critical implications for white lone mothers, particularly as regards practitioner understandings or social work intervention (Katz 1996; Olumide 2005; Goodyer 2005; Harman 2008). Whilst more research needs to be conducted in this area, there is also a need to explore the everyday practices of lone mothers outside the social service system, as their experiences may be significantly different. Indeed, there has long been a perception that in addition to a lack of support from their own families, lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children also have little or no input from their children's father, his family or community thus resulting in both the mothers' social isolation and the children's cultural isolation (Banks 1996; Boushel 1996). Recent research, however, indicates that many lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children actively maintain these relationships in order to provide a sense of cultural awareness and belonging for their children, as well as for themselves (Ali 2003; McKenzie work-in-progress).

Work with couple and lone parents of mixed racial and ethnic children also suggests the importance of neighbourhood and support networks in family life (Caballero *et al.* 2008; Harman, 2008). Neighbourhood social networks have been shown to be particularly important in how lone mothers think about bringing up their children (Duncan & Edwards 1999), which points to the way in which they may also play a critical role in the lives of lone mothers with children from mixed racial or ethnic backgrounds. For example, whilst being the lone mother of a child from a mixed racial or ethnic background may identify them as 'outsiders' in some neighbourhoods (Head 2005), in other areas it is this which provides them with 'insider' status (Mckenzie, work-in-progress) and a sense of belonging.

Although research on 'mixedness' is increasingly being conducted in Britain, there is still only a relatively small body of work which specifically interrogates the vast amount of stereotypes and assumptions made about lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children. There is a need, therefore, to ask questions which place their experiences at the centre of research studies. In what ways do lone mothers of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds seek to give their children a sense of belonging and identity? What challenges do they face when parenting their children? What are their everyday experiences of race and racism? To what extent does the neighbourhood in which the mothers live shape and influence the ways in which they raise their children, particularly in relation to their experiences and understandings of their own and their children's identities? What supports or challenges in raising their children do the mothers face in their everyday lives and who or what helps or hinders them in doing so?

This case study starts from this premise and these questions. It seeks to explore the everyday experiences of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children who live, work and socialise in a particular neighbourhood of England, and to understand what types of support and resources they do or would find beneficial. It is hoped that the findings from the study will point both to the ways in which policy and practice might be developed to better understand such families, as well as highlight useful directions for future research.

## **Section 2 About this study**

This study explored the experiences of 10 lone mothers of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds who lived, worked, socialised or educated their children in or around a multicultural ward in inner-city Bristol. The study was funded by London South Bank University's Research Opportunity Fund and conducted in collaboration with Single Parent Action Network (SPAN), a Bristol-based charity organisation who support one parent families and who were interested in learning more about a family group to whom many of their users and members belong.

### **The project**

As an exploratory case study project, the research sought to contribute to furthering understandings of the everyday experiences of lone mothers of mixed race children, in particular what they think about raising their children and what support or challenges they encounter. Primarily, it looked to place the voices of the lone mothers at the centre of the discussion and to identify issues that would inform the working practices of SPAN and other relevant organisations, as well as suggesting possible directions for future research in this area. As such, the research provides insights into the everyday experiences of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children, rather than generalisations.

### **The sample**

Mothers were recruited through SPAN, who provided access to participants through their membership network. With the provision of a leaflet explaining the research, a SPAN gatekeeper approached mothers who had previously self-identified informally to the gatekeeper, or formally as part of a SPAN network, as being the lone parent of mixed racial or ethnic children. It was made clear to mothers that they were under no obligation to participate in the research, and were free to withdraw from the project at any time.

Ten mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children participated in the research. Six of the mothers were from White British backgrounds, two were from Black British backgrounds, one from a Mixed Ethnic background and one from a Latin American background. The children's fathers were from Black African, African American, Black British, White British, White British/European, Eastern European, and British Asian backgrounds. Three of the mothers identified themselves as coming from middle class backgrounds. Mothers had from one to four children, whose ages ranged at the time of interview from 4 to 17. All the mothers lived, worked, socialised or educated their children in or around a multicultural ward in inner-city Bristol.

In the interests of anonymity, all names have been changed and key identifying details removed from transcript excerpts and kept to a minimum in the report generally. The mothers are identified in the report as follows:

*Christine* – Black British background  
*Debbie* – Black British background  
*Estelle* – Latin American background  
*Zoe* – White British background  
*Sara* – Mixed Ethnic background

*Chloe* – White British background  
*Clare* – White British background  
*Jane* – White British background  
*Melanie* – White British background  
*Lucy* – White British background

## **The interviews**

The interviews took place over the course of September 2008 – December 2008. Transcription, analysis and report writing was conducted during 2009. Each interview lasted between one and three hours.

The interviews looked at the ways in which the participating mothers sought to provide a sense of identity and belonging for their children and the opportunities or constraints they encountered – both inside and outside the family – when doing so. In particular, they explored the negotiations that mothers engaged in with their children, families and, where relevant, the children's father and relatives around providing this sense of identity and belonging, as well as those negotiations that took place in the local community and more generally. They also discussed how the mothers identified themselves and their children in terms of their racial, ethnic, cultural or class identification – if at all – and to what extent these definitions and any accompanying sense of belonging were challenged or supported by their children, family members and other people around them.

## **Terminology**

The terminology and categorisation of people from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds is generally a much debated and emotive issue (Ali 2003; Barn & Harman 2006; Ifekwunigwe 1998; Tikly *et al.* 2004), with particular criticism being levelled at the restrictive nature of official ethnic group categories (Aspinall, 2003, Caballero, 2005), as well as the dangers of reifying mixedness through the prior identification of certain populations or relationships as 'mixed' at the start of research projects.<sup>2</sup> Whilst by its very nature, 'mixedness' will always be in danger of reification, since the notion of mixedness itself emerges from and largely inhabits an essentialist and bipolar state (Phoenix and Owen, 1996), it is nevertheless important that contemporary notions of mixedness are reflected on, rather than assumed. As such, in this study, understandings of who was from a mixed racial or ethnic background were largely determined by the self-definitions of participants, and discussion of identification and terminology usage formed a central part of the interview process (see section 5).

---

<sup>2</sup> Discussions at ESRC seminar series 'Thinking about mixedness and mixing: international and interdisciplinary dialogue', London South Bank University, Dec 2008; one day seminar (jointly organised by London South Bank University/the Commission for Racial Equality/the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Runnymede Trust) 'Mixedness and Mixing: exploring issues for research, policy and practice', London South Bank University, Sept 2007.

### **Section 3 Challenging assumptions and stereotypes**

The particular forms that the stereotypes and assumptions surrounding lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children take regarding their ethnic profiles, relationship history, social isolation and parenting skills were certainly familiar to the mothers who participated in the study. What emerged strongly from mothers' everyday accounts of their lives, however, was how crude such portrayals of their lives were. As also indicated in other studies (Ali 2003; McKenzie work-in-progress), mothers in this project demonstrated that far from being socially and culturally isolated, the majority were not only in contact with their own families but also sought, maintained and negotiated links with the non-resident father, his family or community in order to provide a sense of racial and cultural awareness and belonging for their children, as well as for themselves.

#### **Awareness of stereotypes and assumptions**

The mothers we spoke to were certainly aware of the stereotyped ways in which they were frequently perceived, particularly if they were from white ethnic backgrounds. Indeed, whilst none of the mothers from minority ethnic backgrounds commented on popular assumptions regarding their having children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, the majority of the white mothers were conscious of the types of judgements made about them:

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

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

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

Such assumptions were frustrating for the mothers, who resented the complexity and emotional depth of their family lives being represented in such crude and simplistic ways. Many of the mothers commented that their participation in the study was motivated by the opportunity to challenge the stereotypes about them, particularly their supposed lack of racial and cultural literacy and social isolation.

#### **Racial and cultural literacy**

Traditional perspectives on lone mother mixed racial and ethnic families have tended to presume a lack of what Twine (2004) has called 'racial literacy' – those cultural strategies and practices parents use to instil a positive sense of identity and belonging in their children and to help them counter racism and prejudice. Like Chloe, the mothers in this study were, once again, aware not only aware of this assumption, but strongly refuted this as part of their personal experience:

*It's been suggested that I wouldn't be able to instil in him a sense of identity because his father wasn't around which I really object to.*

All the mothers not only spoke about the importance of passing on racial and cultural knowledge to children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds, but also highlighted the ways in which they did so. Whilst mothers did discuss racial and ethnic difference directly with their children (see section 5), for the most part cultural and racial awareness was passed on by mothers indirectly, through everyday practice and behaviour. For example, food was overwhelming one of the key ways through which mothers imparted cultural and racial knowledge to their children.

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

*I cook both food for him, you know, I cook, he love curries, he loves curries and rotis, you know, we make a roti and things like that. (Estelle)*

*The food part [...] is a way of keeping things very much, you know, at the forefront. (Melanie)*

Ensuring that their children were familiar and comfortable with food from their cultural backgrounds was important to many of the mothers, who saw this knowledge as a key means for their children not only to learn about their culture but also to identify and 'fit in' with it:

*He loves his Jamaican food [...] I think he's a little bit nervous sometimes of how black people will perceive him because he doesn't actually look black but he knows that he has got something into their culture, you know, when they're talking about food and stuff, he knows carrot juice is good as punch, you know, he knows all the references. (Sara)*

Cultural knowledge that would help children 'fit in' and feel a sense of belonging was also imparted to children by some mothers through their school and neighbourhood choices. Feeling that their children were able to access cultural knowledge or would not 'stand out' through living in close proximity to members of part of their ethnic or cultural community, was important to a number of mothers (although as discussed in section 6, for others these choices were conflicted by educational dilemmas).

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

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

For those white mothers who had children of African/Caribbean descent – particularly girls - knowledge of how to care for and style their hair was an important sign of their own cultural literacy. Mothers took great pride in their ability to look after their children's hair and commented on how people were often surprised by their hairdressing skills, as Zoe commented:

*The issue of hair is a HUGE issue! As soon as you start talking about anyone mixed race, they go, 'do they know how to do her hair though? Can they cane row?!' [laughter] But it's the biggest issue people have. It's fucking hair! [laughter] But I can cane row. I've always been able to cane row. (Zoe)*

Mothers also drew on resources, such as travel, books, visits to places of worship and supplementary schools for African Caribbean pupils, to impart cultural and racial literacy to their children. One mother, who did not speak English as her first language, also highlighted the importance of passing her language on to her son as a means to connect him to his heritage.

It was clear from the interviews that the majority of the mothers strongly felt a responsibility to impart racial and cultural literacy to their children. In instances where they believed they had observed other mothers of mixed racial or ethnic children failing to do or attempt this, they were often critical of this behaviour:

*You can – even if you've got really limited resources, if your child's from a different culture, you can go to the library. You know, you can, if your child's father is black British and his parents actually came to this country in the 60s, then find out about it. Even if he says he wants nothing to do with that child, that child still needs to know. (Chloe)*

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

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

It is interesting to note that in relation to cultural and racial literacy, the lone mothers were no different to mothers who live in couple parent families; recent research has indicated that even where couples live together, mothers in mixed racial, ethnic and faith families frequently usually take a dominant and active role in the transmission of cultural knowledge, both of their own and the father's cultural background (Caballero *et al.*, 2008). Nevertheless, whilst the lone mothers in this study felt that they were fully capable of providing their children with a strong and positive sense of racial and cultural identity and belonging, many indicated that they also felt it was beneficial if the children's father or his family were or could be involved in the children's lives.

#### **Section 4 Relationships and interactions with fathers and family**

There has long been a perception that lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children are likely to have little family contact. Certainly, evidence from a number of studies indicates that white families may be hostile to or concerned about their relatives having children with someone from another ethnic or racial background (Tizard and Phoenix, 2002). Moreover, whilst some minority ethnic groups – particularly Black Caribbean populations – may be considered more open to mixed racial and ethnic relationships, ‘partnering out’ is not always viewed as desirable or unproblematic (Song and Edwards 1997). Conducting relationships against a backdrop of implicit or explicit condemnation can, understandably, be very difficult for couples, particularly if the relationship fails (Harman 2010). Yet such patterns were not inherent for the mothers in this study, all of whom had contact with their own families, with many also maintaining relationships with the children’s father and his family.

#### **Interactions with fathers**

The assumption that mixed racial and ethnic children in lone mother families have no contact with their fathers did not hold true in this study. Seven of the ten mothers said that their children did see their fathers (although in two cases, where children had different fathers, in both cases one child had no contact). Even in the families without contact, two of the fathers had previously been present in the children’s lives and the mothers were open to re-establishing contact in the future if the father or the children were willing.

Of the children who saw their fathers, some did so intermittently whilst others had more regular contact, ranging from at least once a week to fortnightly. As experiences of contact differed from family to family, the issue for the lone mothers in this study was more about the form and quality of contact, rather than its existence. Those fathers who had regular contact contributed to family life in a variety of ways, from providing practical and financial support and childcare to transmitting cultural knowledge:

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

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

The role that fathers could play in transmitting cultural knowledge or connecting the children to their heritage was important to many of the mothers – particularly white mothers – even though they felt themselves to be culturally literate (see section 3):

*I think it’s important enough for a child to have a father or a mother both in their life or know who they are, especially when they’re dual heritage. And I think that for me, I thought if I can possibly, possibly do anything to keep that role in her life in whatever way I will do it. (Zoe)*

*Because I can also cook rice and stew as well but I don't do it because I think it's, it's his thing that he has when he goes to his dad's...when he gets older I'll probably cook it more so for him but at the moment it's just a little thing that they do together. (Melanie)*

Yet, although mothers were appreciative of these types of contributions, it was nevertheless very clear that the majority felt these could be improved. Fathers' involvement in their children's lives was not as reliable or adequate as the vast majority of mothers would have liked, even for those who had regular contact:

*I put in like 90%-95% of my efforts 100% of the time, I'm only supposed to put in 50. (Zoe)*

*I would like more [practical support]. Absolutely I would like more. (Melanie)*

Furthermore, it was also apparent that, where there was or had been contact, many mothers felt very strongly that this was the result of their own sustained and concerted efforts:

*I mean it wasn't roses at all, it was just...it was a lot of me investing and it got to the point sometimes, I would take [our daughter] to him, she wouldn't want to go, he'd be fucking around with the arrangements, I'd be the only person consistent and trying the whole thing and I'm the one that shouldn't be doing it! But...and I've always done that. (Zoe)*

Negotiating as well as sustaining contact for mothers was often ongoing. A number of mothers highlighted how contact patterns could shift over time. This could be from negative to positive, as in Zoe's case, whose child's father rarely saw their daughter when she was born but, almost a decade later, now had fortnightly contact. For Debbie, however, the shift had been negative. Although the children's father saw them regularly in the first few years of their life, a year or so later, he ceased all contact. Mothers gave a variety of reasons for these patterns, including patterns of harmonious or difficult communication with fathers, the presence (or absence) of fathers' violent or unacceptable behaviour, children's interest in seeing their fathers and, most particularly, fathers' willingness or reluctance to take responsibility.

Where there was contact, mothers were also often faced with negotiations around parenting issues. Mothers and fathers could have quite different parenting styles which could lead to tension. Overall, this was primarily identified by mothers as linked to personal preferences rather than to cultural differences. As the primary carer, mothers were the ones to establish the parenting style, although where fathers had regular, sustained contact with their children, mothers appeared more likely to accept fathers' input. This was more difficult where contact was less frequent or fathers less responsible. Debbie, whose children's father recently stopped all contact, talked about the tension that occurred during the infrequent times he did see them:

*He would kind of, you know, waltz in and then he'd criticise, you know, if they were playing up, which they did, because they'd be competing against each other for his attention, and they'd do that in a competitive way, you know, as children*

*do. And then it would be like, 'oh, they're so undisciplined' and it was just....In some ways I was more tense about it than I am now.*

Negotiations around parenting for mothers were not always confined to the children's fathers. A number of the mothers had new partners – or had had partners previously – who, again, had differing roles in their lives. For some, such as Lucy, her new partner was very much a central and supportive figure in her daughter's life, whilst for others, such as Sara, her current long term partner was not so involved in a parental role, but her previous partner had been. Whilst other accounts have indicated that being part of a stepfamily can be a particular issue for children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds,<sup>3</sup> the two mothers who did speak in some detail about this did not believe that the ethnicity of new partners was significant. Lucy, in particular felt very strongly about this:

*But that's the thing again, it's not about race, it's not about colour, they [her daughter and partner] love each other. I love him, he loves her, he loves me so it doesn't matter if he's black or white or red, does it?*

As relationships with new partners were not a main focus of the study, we should be careful not to draw any significant conclusions from the brief discussions around this subject. It is clear, however, that such relationships are likely to be present in the lives of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children. Again, knowledge of these relationships may also challenge assumptions about mothers' experiences. Certainly, mothers – and the white mothers in particular – were aware that assumptions were often made about the transient nature of their relationships with men:

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

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

For the overwhelming majority of mothers, their lone parenthood was the result of the breakdown of a committed relationship. Even in the case of the family where the father had never had contact with the child, the mother had been in a longstanding relationship with the father beforehand. Again, contrary to popular thought which presumes greater effort is automatically involved in maintaining mixed racial or ethnic relationships,<sup>4</sup> only one of the mothers, Estelle, mentioned that she thought cultural differences were a factor in the breakdown of her relationship, which she felt was largely exacerbated by deep-rooted issues in her

---

<sup>3</sup> See Yasmin Alibhai-Brown's articles on mixed race stepfamilies: *The Guardian*, 18 July 2001; *The Independent*, 22 Aug 2009.

<sup>4</sup> For example, see Dr Miriam Stoppard in *The Daily Mirror*, 27<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

the father's family. And even here, the difficulties of the relationship did not define it – as she says, *'we were very happy when we were happy, you know'*.

Whilst relationships with fathers were often complex and challenging for the lone mothers in the study, they could also be supportive and beneficial, both to them and their children. Relationships with family members – both the mothers' own and the fathers' families – also played an important role in their lives.

### **Interactions with family**

In mothers' accounts in this study, there was very little indication of hostility to or concern from mothers' families, whether mothers were from white or minority ethnic backgrounds. Contrary to popular assumption, all of the mothers were in contact with their own families and the overwhelming majority reported no outright opposition from family – their own or the children's fathers – to their having been in a mixed racial or ethnic relationship. In some cases, mothers said that their families had actually been welcoming to their partners:

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

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

Nevertheless, several of the white mothers did point to evidence of more subtle, underlying prejudice within their families. Most of this took the form of family members, especially older relatives, expressing views about ethnic minorities generally:

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

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

Mothers whose families displayed this sort of behaviour stated, however, that their families never made such comments around the children and, moreover, that they constantly challenged their families on these issues.

*They say it just like in conversation. You know. My dad went, 'this coloured guy' and I was like [mimes jaw open], 'they're not coloured. They're not pink and green. You know. They're black. You've got to call them black. You can't do that and you've got grandchildren that are mixed race, you can't call them coloured.' (Jane)*

*They would never say anything like that when [my child's] there. So...the only thing I've heard them say is 'paki', which I don't like either. But that's not directly to [my child] but it's still very racist and it's still something that I have explained to them and my sister that I don't say. (Melanie)*

Challenging their families often appeared to modify family behaviour, as in Chloe's case. Chloe was the only mother who discussed experiencing more unwelcome and prejudiced reactions from her family when her son was young. She described, however, how these initial reactions had changed over time:

*My mum at first, looking back I was angry with her, but she was probably quite frightened about how it would be perceived. At one point she said, 'he's so light and his hair's straight that he could pass for white'. I said, 'I don't want him to pass for anything.' [...] But what I decided was, they are my family and I do need them to a certain degree and so does [my son], so I had two options, I could say, I can't deal with you, you're racist and leave them, or I could continue to try and deal with them and get the support I needed and challenge the racism. And actually I have to say now, my mum would be the first person if she heard anything to say, 'actually, no.'*

Despite these incidents, all of the mothers said they were satisfied with the way their families treated their children. Mothers expressed varying levels of satisfaction, however, with the level of practical support provided by their families. A number of participants wished their close family, particularly their mothers, were more 'hands on' (see section 8).

Mothers also had a large degree of contact with the children's father's family. Seven of the ten mothers mentioned that they or their children were in touch with the father's family and many on a regular basis. The contact could take a variety of forms, from letter and postal contact to personal interactions:

*[The children's father]'s in contact with his siblings and his sister, they're in [name of country] and stuff like that so, you know, he keeps in contact, they phone the kids on their birthday and they send [parcels]. You know, like Christmas especially, they get a box and there'll be a little present in there from each and [...] we send them pictures. (Jane)*

*He goes up to stay with them for about a week or two weeks a year when they go [abroad] in the summer holidays and throughout the year at weekends and things like that so...he spends quite a bit of time with them. (Melanie)*

*[My daughter] and his family went [abroad], her, her dad, her dad's mum and husband went [abroad] for a week. Which is...it's the aim that he wanted, because he always wanted to have [my daughter] on his own, and it's the aim that I wanted, which is she knows who her family are and she feels accepted by them. (Zoe)*

As with mothers' own families, support from the children's fathers' families also differed from case to case. Relationships could also change over time, as in Lucy's case. Although she used to be close to her daughter's grandmother, they lost touch after the relationship with her child's father broke down. Nevertheless, Lucy's daughter still has some form of contact with her grandmother:

*Well, I always got on with his mum. She always said, 'I'm her grandmother, whatever happens I want to be part of her life'. She used to call me her daughter-in-law and I was very proud that we had that kind of relationship. And then she*

*stopped speaking to me and then she wrote me some nasty letters and I saw her a couple of years ago and I was running over to her, ready to put my arms around her and she put her fist in my chest and she went, 'don't come by me, don't talk to me, don't look at me, who do you think you are, blah, blah, blah'. So I kind of left it. Which is a shame. But she always sends a birthday and Christmas card to [my daughter]. (Lucy)*

Melanie, meanwhile, has sometimes clashed with her son's grandmother but has always maintained their relationships, which has improved over time:

*She's not an easy woman to get on with, but we respect each other in a sense where we can kind of know the benefits that are coming out of each other's interactions with [my son] and in that sense, yeah, it works out quite nicely. (Melanie)*

For Zoe, however, her positive relationship with her child's father's mother has been consistent from the outset, even during periods when she had no contact with her child's father:

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

Having contact with the father's family even when there was no interaction with the father, was also a possibility for some mothers and the children. This was the case for Debbie, whose growing relationship with her children's grandmother was an increasing support since their father ceased contact:

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

Overall, mothers who talked about having contact were pleased that their children had these relationships with their father's families as a means not only of accessing their family histories, but also aspects of their cultural heritages, as in Melanie's case:

*He likes going to his granny's as well and having their food and things like that, so...yeah. [His grandmother], she's very proud [African background] so she's got an awful lot of that which just comes out naturally in her character so that is just, being around her is fantastic for [my son], to get that real kind of [education].*

For one mother, the loss of contact and thus potential cultural input from the father's family was something she felt quite keenly:

*I got sad because this Ms Dynamite song says about going to see your grandma and having pineapple punch and eating rice and peas and something and I was laughing and [my daughter] was going, 'why is it so funny?' And I said, 'if you knew your grandma, your nanny, you'd be going down there on a Sunday and drinking pineapple punch', and I kind of felt sad about it but, like my friend said, you can't give her something you haven't got to give, so.... (Lucy)*

However, another mother felt that even though her child was benefiting from her close relationship with her father's family – who were of African Caribbean descent – this was not necessarily to do with their cultural input:

*One of the things is that a lot of people say, as a single parent that that part of passing down the cultural values and the heritage from that side of the family is missing because that side of the family is missing. But I've got that side of the family and it doesn't come down anyway. My mum is more culturally informative to my daughter than his family is. (Zoe)*

None of the mothers reported experiencing hostility from the children's father's families. Where there was contact, the overwhelming majority said that they were happy with the way that the families treated the children. In several of the fathers' families who were from minority ethnic backgrounds, the families themselves were racially or ethnically mixed. Zoe commented that she found this familiarity with mixedness beneficial in relation to 'fitting in':

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

The question of fitting in, particularly as it related to children's identity formed a key part of interview discussions. In the next section, we look at mothers' understanding of their children's identities and issues surrounding these.

## Section 5 Identity and terminology

The last fifteen years have seen a notable challenge to traditional concepts of mixedness that brand those of perceivably different racial or ethnic origins as inherently 'confused' and 'marginalised'. Contemporary research studies argue instead that people from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds generally perceive their identities as fluid but stable and positive, and this perspective was certainly supported by mothers' accounts of their children's experiences in this study. Mothers' discussion of their children's identities indicated that they did not see 'mixedness' as being problematic. What was problematic were the debates around the terminology used to express mixedness (Wilson 1987; Tizard and Phoenix 2002; Ali 2003; Tikly *et al.* 2004; Barrett 2006; Song *et al.* work-in-progress).

### Approaches to identity

Recent research with couple parents of children from mixed racial or ethnic backgrounds has indicated that there are a number of ways in which parents approach and view difference and belonging in their families. These include taking an 'individual' approach, where a sense of identity and belonging is more closely linked to individual qualities rather than racial or ethnic background; a 'mix' approach which a sense of identity and belonging is created around both or all of the children's racial and ethnic backgrounds; and a 'single' approach, where a sense of identity and belonging based on one particular aspect of the children's racial, ethnic or faith identity is encouraged (Edwards *et al.*, forthcoming).

In this study, the vast majority of mothers saw their children as clearly having a 'mixed' racial or ethnic identity:

*I've just said to say that they're mixed race, do you know what I mean? (Jane)*

*I've always said to them that they're, you know, mixed race. (Debbie)*

*We've always, I've always used the phrase 'mixed race' (Clare)*

Yet, as with the couple parents study, approaches were not fixed and many held understandings that combined aspects of different approaches. Clare, for example, whilst clearly seeing her children as mixed race, thought it was important '*not to let [her children] think that a label is who they are*', thus combining her 'mix' approach with an 'individual' one. A number of other mothers meanwhile - who all had children of mixed white/black descent - also demonstrated a strong 'single' approach regarding their children's black identity. This was the case for both the black British mothers, as well as one white British mother:

*I perceive my daughter as being black. I perceive my children as black. (Christine)*

*They'll always be looked at as being black, you know. It doesn't matter how light, you know, you may not even look black but if you have one [black parent], you will always be, won't you? (Debbie)*

In a few cases, mothers also talked about fathers' approaches to difference and belonging. As with mothers, the fathers took varied approaches, some of which were shared with the mother, as in Clare's case, and some of which differed, as in Jane's case:

*He said, you're not half of anything, you're not even a mixed heritage, you are [child's name] and that's the thing that you need to hold onto. So, that was kind of nice, coming from him. (Clare)*

*He will say, you know, he...it's a thing amongst black people that I've noticed, if you ask a black person, they will say their children are black, even if they're mixed race, they're black. Now I, myself, I say, 'no, they're mixed race', because they've got white, that's a mixed race, it's not they're black, because they have a different, another heritage in there. So there's two things, they're not just black! So I'm kind of adamant about that. He's not too, he's not like...what is [the word]? But if you ask him he'll say they're black. (Jane)*

On the question of the children's own perspectives on their identities, for the most part mothers said that they thought their children also tended to think of themselves as mixed race or as having a mixed identity. This was the case even where parents tended towards a more 'single' identity for their children:

*I think she'd say [she was] mixed race. She'd say mixed race. And she'd probably say my dad's black and my mum's white. (Zoe)*

*[My son] says, 'I'm mixed race'. And I sense that he's really proud of it. (Sara)*

*[My son] tells people that his dad is, that he's a mix of both, and, that his dad is white, his mum is black and he's a mix of both. (Debbie)*

*I perceive my children as black. But then, you know, she, they don't perceive themselves as being black and so when, you know, the times we have that kind of dialogue and I sort of find...you know, I just find it interesting – not necessarily difficult – but I find it interesting because I just, 'but you're black'. 'I'm not black' [...] Yeah, she's used that terminology, 'I'm mixed race', you know. (Christine)*

Nevertheless, as research into the identity choices and options of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds has shown generally, children's identification as 'mixed' did not exclude other senses of racial or cultural identification or belonging (e.g. Tizard and Phoenix, 2002). In addition to their mixed identities, mothers reported that children often balanced these with other identifications, such as those tied to a particular side of their racial or ethnic heritage, or to geographical or national identities:

*[My son] identifies as black or mixed race. And it doesn't mean – and I think this is what people understand – that he's not acknowledging he has a white side of the family, what he's saying is if you're not white in this country, you certainly, people treat you differently. (Chloe)*

*But no, she doesn't really like that she's Bristolian but she's definitely English, there's no doubt about that (Lucy)*

Engaging in conversations with their children around identity and belonging was common amongst mothers and, often with fathers too. These conversations could be initiated both by the parents themselves or, quite frequently, in response to children's enquiries. It seemed that in many families, difference in physical appearance was often the stimulus for these types of conversations:

*It's that whole, it's happened before, her dad's been sitting there and [my daughter's] in-between and I'm there and she'll go, look, put your arms together. You're white, I'm brown and he's black! You know, it's like, so you're black, I'm white... it's that whole...and she'll sit there looking at him and looking at me! (Zoe)*

*He says that, 'why is he brown and I'm brown and his daddy's black?' [laughs] Because [his father] is a lot darker than us. So he asks questions. (Estelle)*

*But [my son] has now, he was sitting on the bed with me the other day and saying, 'we're not the same colour'. So he's opening up lines of talking about it and stuff like that [...], you know – 'my mum's white, my dad's black, I'm brown'. (Melanie)*

Sometimes, mothers noted that these conversations around appearance, identity and belonging were also provoked by other people's attitudes towards the children's appearance. Often in the case of the children from mixed black and white backgrounds with 'lighter' skin tones, their racial identities could be called into question by others. Although it is not frequently discussed within the literature, there is some evidence to indicate that the physical appearance of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds can have a significant bearing on their identification processes and experiences, as demonstrated by the differing identity experiences, choices and options within sibling groups (e.g. Caballero *et al.* 2008). In this project, it also seemed that how children looked could affect their experiences and options regarding their identity and belonging:

*There was a phase a couple of years ago with [my daughter] and some of her, her friends that were mixed race actually, telling her that she wasn't mixed race, because her skin's too light. And the funny thing is that her friend, you know, on the odd occasion her dad's picked her up from school so they know who her dad is, they know who I am, so they know she's mixed race [...] And they were telling her she's white. (Jane)*

*People kind of, not until they've realised that he's mixed race or, you know, has got a black family, that they look at him a little bit differently. People that don't know [my son] just think he's white, but...and he gets annoyed with that, because – this is the interesting bit – he doesn't feel just totally white [...] He knows that's how he's perceived, he has said, 'well, people look at me and see me as white', but he says, 'but [...] I have a black family'. [Sara]*

Where such experiences occurred, mothers noted that they took care to discuss issues of identity and belonging that arose from these occasions with their

children. For the most part, however, mothers said that their children had reported very little negative experiences regarding their mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds or racial and ethnic identities. Although mothers were concerned about their children encountering racism and prejudice in British society generally, they felt this was not part of the children's everyday lives. As discussed in section 6, for many mothers, the absence of everyday racism and prejudice in their children's lives was often attributed to living in an area where families like theirs were commonplace.

### **Terminology usage and preferences**

The terminology and categorisation of people from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds is a much debated and emotive issue (Ali 2003; Barn & Harman 2006; Ifekwunigwe 1998; Tikly *et al.* 2004). Whilst the actual identification of people as having 'mixed' identities can in itself cause controversy,<sup>5</sup> current debates tend to focus more on the language that is used to express the idea of mixedness. Certainly, within academic, professional and practitioner circles in the UK, there is no common consensus on the terminology and a wide range of expressions – 'mixed race', 'mixed', 'mixed/dual heritage', 'mixed/dual parentage', 'multiple heritage', etc. – are used.

Nevertheless, a number of research projects have begun to explore what terms people who are in or from mixed racial and ethnic relationships prefer to use (Tikly *et al.* 2004; Barrett *et al.* 2006; Song *et al.* forthcoming). Exploring the terminology usage and preferences of participants was also an important part of this study. The findings in this area support those of existing research. They indicate that, outside of academic, professional and practitioner circles, the term 'mixed race' appears to be most commonly used and preferred terminology of people in or from mixed racial and ethnic relationships.

Indeed, as discussed previously, the mothers who were interviewed for this project overwhelmingly used the term 'mixed race' to describe their children's identities and reported that their children did too. Mothers and children generally preferred this term to all others, seeing it as both ordinary and commonplace:

*'Mixed race' is normal for me. (Estelle)*

*I only use mixed race really. (Debbie)*

*For [my son], mixed race is the thing that just cuts through and says exactly what he is and doesn't need lots of explanation [...] If you look at all, if you research what young people actually call themselves, it is what they use. [Chloe]*

Only two of the mothers preferred terms that did not emphasise the racial aspect of mixing, such as 'mixed or dual heritage/parentage'. Interestingly, whilst some of the other mothers did occasionally use these terms, they tended to do so only in a professional capacity where they felt under pressure to use the 'right term':

*Well we had, in my other job [...] we had this woman who was doing an ethnic diversity training, and they said, 'what do you call people with parents from*

---

<sup>5</sup> See for example Darcus Howe in *The New Statesman*, 26 January 2004; *The Voice*, 17 November 2008.

*different...?’ and I went, ‘oh, mixed race’ and she went. ‘No’. And I was like, ‘what?’ and she said, ‘it’s dual heritage’, that’s what is the accepted word’ and I said, ‘well, I’ve been calling my daughter mixed race for years’ and I went home and I said, ‘[daughter’s name], you’re not mixed race, you’re dual heritage!’ And we made a big joke out of it. (Lucy)*

*I like mixed race, but I don’t even know if it’s still politically correct but dual heritage is the most recent politically correct term. So, because I work in a professional environment I have to use dual heritage. (Zoe)*

As such, there was a sense for many of the mothers that those terms that emphasised heritage or parentage did not describe their or their children’s lives or experiences, but rather were a form of meaningless and arbitrary ‘political correctness’ imposed on them by professionals:

*[Dual heritage] just sounds too politically correct – oh, you know you’re dual heritage before you’re a human being! It’s just like bloody National Trust! (Sara)*

*Because they keep, PC what is it, keeps changing it, doesn’t it?! Dual heritage, I can’t remember what the recent one was. [Jane]*

*Mixed race, I like. But is it dual heritage the most up to date one? Because I heard it changed again? [Zoe]*

*Why should it be the white middle class person who decides the title? It just starts getting a bit, I think with the heritage thing, it just starts getting all into the political correctness...But I don’t know who decides, who is it that decides?! [...] It’s a very...it just smacks of that whole superiority. We know what’s best for you. Well, actually, you need to go round and ask people what they want to be called. Or what do they use in their homes. (Debbie)*

The distance the mothers felt existed between the language employed by professionals to describe families from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds and the language used by the families themselves reflects similar findings elsewhere (Tikly *et al.*) and highlights how widely understandings of mixedness can vary. In the next section, we discuss aspects of these understandings further, particularly the ways in which they are expressed and shaped by space and place.

## Section 6 Neighbourhood and community

Research has shown that where parents of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds live can have a significant influence on their everyday experiences as a family, including in relation to how they and their children understand their own and others' racial and ethnic differences (Caballero *et al.*, 2008). With findings also demonstrating the importance of neighbourhood social networks in the lives of lone mothers generally (Duncan & Edwards 1999), exploring the roles of neighbourhood, place and community formed a key part of this study. The majority of the participating mothers considered the benefits of living in an area in which their family's racial or ethnic backgrounds – and particularly their 'mixedness' – are considered 'ordinary', generally outweighed concerns regarding other neighbourhood effects, such as local levels of crime and deprivation. At the same time, mothers also acknowledged that this 'ordinariness' often sat alongside particular assumptions and stereotypes found in the community about racial and ethnic mixing and groups generally.

### 'Ordinariness' – fitting in

For the vast majority of mothers, one of the greatest benefits of the neighbourhoods in which they and their children lived, worked and were educated was their racial and ethnic diversity, particularly the noticeable presence of other families like theirs. None of the mothers felt that being the lone parent of children from a mixed racial or ethnic background made them stand out as different. Rather, many mothers felt that their families' mixedness was seen as quite ordinary in their neighbourhood:

*In this area, the issue of kind of mixed relationships and therefore mixed children is kind of very much the norm, it's very much the norm. (Christine)*

*There are many, many families like me. Lots of white women with mixed race children. (Chloe)*

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

*No, we don't stand out. [The children] just see themselves as just like anybody else. (Jane)*

This sense of ordinariness meant that many of the mothers felt that the diversity in the area outweighed the negative elements present in the neighbourhoods in which they lived. Though a number of mothers expressed concerns about crime and deprivation, they saw the multicultural influences of the neighbourhoods and schools their children attended as providing important cultural resources that they might not be able to access in more affluent but more monoracial/ethnic areas:

*[So I moved into] an area where resources were really crap in terms of housing and schools and what have you but I kind of weighed up and just thought, actually it's going to be, I think, the most important thing for him is the colour of his skin and who he is and what that means and I wanted that, I thought, if he can be comfortable in that then the rest would kind of follow. (Chloe)*

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

Moreover, several of the mothers spoke about the active choices that they had made around space and place, whether in terms of seeking to move into or to stay in the area, or to send their children to schools with a diverse student population. The decision-processes of these mothers again challenge the assumption that lone mothers of mixed race children, particularly white lone mothers, are unaware of or uninvolved in supporting the particular needs or experiences that their children might have:

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

*I think one of the most important things for me as a parent is [...] to make a conscious decision to do things differently. Particularly around self-esteem [...]. And then particularly around parenting a mixed race child. About him having a sense of identity, a healthy sense of identity, knowing who he is and where he's from and for that reason I actually moved into [the area] when he was young because I didn't want him to be brought up in an area where there weren't many people like him. (Chloe)*

*She goes to quite a mixed school really and there's, you know, quite a lot of different, children of different ethnic backgrounds, Muslim children, Sikh, black, white, which is why I chose that school, I think as well. I mean my main thing as a parent is security, that's just, I just want to always keep [my daughter] safe, but secondary to that, yeah, it's really mixed, mixed cultures in her school. (Zoe)*

It is also important to note, however, that what some parents may view as a resource may not be shared by all parents. As in research with couple parents (Caballero et al., 2008), those factors that lone mothers viewed as important for their children's upbringing varied depending on mothers' approaches and priorities. For example, for a few of the mothers, particularly the two mothers from Black British backgrounds, the ethnic diversity in the neighbourhoods and schools, although welcomed, played a less central role in their lives than issues related to education:

*I mean, there's plenty of schools that they could have gone to which are much more... multicultural, etc. But then you get the issue of how...that they're not actually that good a school as well. And that sounds awful but the difficulties with the kind of schools - I think they do a brilliant job, the teachers, I think it's very, very difficult when you have a class of children where the majority are learning the language. It's very hard to bring up everybody to the levels that they should be. So that's why I made the decision that they needed to go to a school whose sort of track record and all that kind of stuff. (Debbie)*

*[I would consider moving from here]. Of course I would. I would consider trying to get a better house, a bigger this a bigger that [...] I would go to an all typically white area if they had a beautiful house there and...it doesn't matter, you know,*

*and so I don't even, I'm not necessarily bothered about necessarily the area that I would live in with them in terms of, there are some areas that I wouldn't live in but...yeah, I'd definitely move, and I'd move to a non, typical area like...just to, for, to improve my children's prospects at school and wherever it might be.*  
(Christine)

Many of the mothers thus demonstrated a sense of ongoing consideration and negotiation in respect to the benefits and challenges of raising their children in areas which offered rich cultural resources but poorer material ones. As such, mothers talked frequently about the ways in which they worked to supplement their children's education, for example, through travel, supplementary classes, extra-curricular activities and other learning-related activities, as well as how they tried to highlight and steer their children away from negative influences in the neighbourhood. A number of the mothers noted that although additional learning opportunities and activities were available in their neighbourhoods for their children, it often involved great efforts on the part of parents to find out about or participate in them, both time-wise and financially.

Overall, mothers generally felt positively about the neighbourhoods in which they and their children lived, worked and were educated, particularly with respect to the benefits of the area's cultural diversity on their children's identities and sense of belonging. This did not mean, however, that mothers felt there were no racial or ethnic issues in their communities. A number of mothers spoke at length about the local assumptions they felt existed about black men and white women and particularly the relationships that took place between them.

### **Community – assumptions and interactions**

For the most part, many of the local assumptions that mothers pointed to were the same as those found more widely, namely the construction of black men as overly sexualised, predatory and uninvolved or absent fathers, and white women as possessing low sexual morals or self-esteem and ignorant of the needs of their mixed racial or ethnic children. Although mothers strongly refuted these stereotypes as being part of their own experiences, several of the mothers spoke of other women and men in the area that they had encountered who they felt lived or played up to these assumptions. These mothers were highly critical of this behaviour as they felt that it reinforced traditional perceptions of white women and black men, which then impacted negatively on their own and their children's lives.

A number of mothers also felt that some of the assumptions, and indeed issues, around racial mixing were particularly dominant to or shaped by their neighbourhoods and areas. For example, whilst many of the mothers welcomed the strong sense of community found in their neighbourhoods, they also noted that it engendered a type of familiarity that could be assumptive and intrusive. Several of the white mothers felt that this familiarity led to specific assumptions about black and white people in the community and the types of relationships black men and white women had between them:

*[The thing] I find odd is that there's this sense of – I know it's because it's a small community and everybody knows everybody and there's a sense of safety in that [here], but people want to know 'who your babyfather?' and I say, you won't know*

*him. And they insist that they might. So then I say – it tends to be men that say that, they're checking you out. It's a way of checking out the women, who they know – so they say, 'who's your babyfather' and I say, 'you won't know him'. And then eventually – they won't listen to me when I say you won't know him – I say, he's in London. And they then say, I still might know him. And it's like, oh, come on, there's eight million people in London. (Chloe)*

*I mean I get loads of stick about, from white men, like, 'oh, you only go out with black men, you just like black men, don't you?' I don't know, it is an issue, it's a huge issue, but I think a lot of white men are...what's the word for it? Are threatened by black men. But then in another respect, I've walked down the street when my brother lived [here] years ago, I've walked down the street with him and I would get, 'why you with a fucking white man?!' And I'm white! It's my brother! So...I can't... it's a weird, weird [thing]. (Zoe)*

Relationships were not the only area of their lives that mothers felt were policed by the community. Several of the mothers, and again white mothers in particular, felt that their parenting skills were often under scrutiny, most frequently by black women, as Chloe noted:

*Well I remember once we were in a shop and [my son] spat his dummy out and I picked it up and put it back in his mouth and some black woman said about white women being dirty and poor little thing...like he was being brought up by them, like he belonged to them because he was black. It was almost like that they felt, my feeling was they feel they have the right to comment because my child is black.*

Most frequently, however, white mothers reported receiving comments from strangers in relation to their children's hair care. Such comments were often hurtful or frustrating to mothers, who prided themselves on their knowledge of and ability to care for their children's hair. As such, many of the white mothers said they felt under considerable and constant pressure to demonstrate that they knew how to do their children's hair. Like Zoe, some didn't feel comfortable leaving the house unless the children's hair was dressed properly:

*But there is a huge, huge, huge pressure on how to do their hair. I can do it, but I don't like going out the house without her hair done, because I feel pressure, I feel like people will judge me from that. I have to be able to keep her hair whatever, but this is the point for me, why should I? If I know I can do it, why should I? And I can't get away from that at the moment. I'm not in a place in my life when I really don't care. But a lot of my friends – white friends with mixed race children – all feel that pressure as well. And it's not that they can't do it, it's just that it's always there. So it is a huge issue. (Zoe)*

Although mothers found this type of policing around their childcare highly frustrating, several said that they did understand the social and historical reasons why the black community might feel overly concerned about how mixed race children of black descent were being raised. Nevertheless, the tendency to assume that all white women were not racially or culturally literate that mothers felt existed in parts of the community was very exasperating to them.

Despite these frustrations, overall the majority of mothers were satisfied with the way they and their children were treated in their neighbourhoods. Although some of the mothers felt that local assumptions and stereotypes, particularly about black men and white women, could have a bearing on how they were viewed in the community, there was barely any reference to experiencing overt or direct forms of racism and prejudice (one white mother mentioned that she had been called a 'black man's woman' by white males, whilst one black mother indicated that she had been received a few negative comments from black women who insinuated she was a 'sell out'). Although some of the mothers said that had or would contemplate moving elsewhere in the country for a better quality of life, for the most part they felt that the cultural benefits in their neighbourhoods outweighed the negative aspects. Moreover, of those who did talk about moving, there were often issues related to the implications of living as a mixed racial or ethnic family in another part of the country, particularly if the new location wasn't a multicultural urban environment. Again, whether they felt it was possible to live in a monoracial area or not, mothers were always very much aware of the possible implications of neighbourhood on their everyday family lives and were often informed by their own experiences of reactions to them when they did leave their neighbourhoods:

*I love it here, I don't want to move, because we've been talking about perhaps moving in five years somewhere else. [But] where do you go?! You know, we talked about Cornwall...Cornwall, it's next to the sea, but it's like they're quite racist down in Cornwall, they really stick to their own. I don't know. (Lucy)*

Whether feeling that the neighbourhoods and urban area in which they lived were supportive, intrusive or a balance between the two, the majority of mothers saw geographical location not only as a significant factor in shaping their own and their children's experiences but often as an important resource in supporting a sense of identity and belonging for their families. In the next section, we discuss further the types of resources used or sought after by mothers who participated in the study, as well as their concerns and the forms of support available to them.

## **Section 7 Concerns and support**

As discussed throughout this report, one of the dominant images of lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children is that of their cultural and social isolation, and particularly the way in which this affects the identity of their children. It was clear from the interviews, however, that as identified in work with lone mothers generally, the majority of the mothers were involved in, or had developed, strong social networks that played an important role in supporting their parenting. (e.g. Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Furthermore, a number of the mothers also drew on more formal sources of support, around parenting, such as those offered by SPAN, whilst some also accessed resources specifically targeted at mixed racial or ethnic families. Nevertheless, many of the mothers did feel that more formal and informal support would be useful, as they were aware that their situation, concerns and needs – and that of their children – did and could change over time.

### **Concerns**

As discussed in section 3, the mothers in the study prided themselves on their racial and cultural literacy and felt that they were doing a good job in raising their children to have a healthy sense of identity and belonging. For the most part, therefore, although mothers were very interested in continuing to learn how to support their children's mixed racial and ethnic identities, their concerns did not predominantly centre on this, although one mother, who said that due to her son's appearance he was not often identified as having a mixed racial heritage, did express some worries in this area:

*Oh, I really just hope that [my son] is going to be accepted by – it's sounds really silly me saying this, I hope it's not coming from a negative place – black people as he gets older. I really hope he doesn't have to fight to prove that he's part black [...] You know, so far he hasn't had that experience and that's really good. (Sara)*

Rather, mothers' concerns were focused on a wide range of general issues, including how their situation as lone parents might affect their children:

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

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

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

As with research on couple parents of mixed racial and ethnic children, it was clear that other issues were often more dominant in mothers' lives, such as health issues, material or financial concerns:

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

*I get paid for volunteer jobs I do, but if I get – that's another thing that makes it really hard – if I go back into work, say if I go back into work, if I don't have a really good job that gets me thirty grand a year, I won't be able to pay the rent and the house, the council tax and the bills. (Estelle)*

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

Mothers were also worried about their children's teenage years. Here, concerns about race and ethnicity did feature in the accounts of some of the mothers whose sons had black Caribbean or African heritage, with worries about the outcomes for young black men in society generally:

*I'm worried about my son being a teenage boy in society today, completely. (Melanie)*

*I mean, are they going to finish school at sixteen and be in prison by the time they're seventeen, you know?! You read things all the time and the stats aren't good for black men, from single parent families [they] are most likely to, they say, end up in prison, you know, so that sort of thing, I guess is the biggest worry. (Debbie)*

*I'm frightened all the time that he's out about who he's mixing with, where he is, whether the police decide they're going to bundle him into the back of a van. (Chloe)*

Although mothers did often cope alone when dealing with these concerns, they also drew on a number of informal and formal support networks for emotional and practical help, although the need for and usefulness of these varied.

### **Informal support**

As discussed previously, many of the mothers often turned to their own families for practical advice or help with childcare, particularly their mothers or sisters:

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

*[My mum] she has my daughter once a week for me, one night a week, that's a regular thing and we meet up for lunch once a week as well so we try to get some regularity there. (Zoe)*

*So I would say my extended family who's really supportive is my sister and my brother's ex-girlfriend. And we just kind of really help each other out with the childcare. (Sara)*

Nevertheless, mothers also often wished that they had more practical support from their families, though it is important to note that these feelings have also been identified amongst parents generally (Edwards and Gillies, 2005). However, issues such as living in different cities or areas from their families, the advanced age of parents, or family members' own responsibilities and interests meant that practical support was not as readily available or forthcoming as a number of mothers would have liked:

*I don't feel like I have enough support and if I lived in the same city I would expect more support but obviously, you know, [my family live in different English cities] so none of them are within reachable distance if I had a crisis. (Clare)*

*When I first had [my son] I was living with my folks. And I had part time work and my mum looked after him. But they had difficulty, health, different things so we don't see them so much now. I wish that they'd have them on their own without me around. Like grandparents, do you know what I mean? I went to stay with my grandparents when I was younger, I think I'd like that break really. (Jane)*

*My mum likes to think she helped me out a lot, but maybe once a year, twice a year. Great in an emergency but other than that, she wouldn't just...you know, lots of friends' mums would say, I'm going to the shops, let me take the baby and my mum just wouldn't do that, I'd go, 'oh, could you?' and she goes, 'oh, I don't know, I'll let you know.' (Lucy)*

For many of the mothers, particularly those who could not necessarily draw on support from their families, the networks they had developed with friends and neighbours provided a ready and much valued form of support, particularly those in similar situations:

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

*I have lots of friends who I'm blessed with, close friends, close to the children who, you know, where a relationship's been built because they've been attending the same school or nursery setting and stuff so they've got like lots of different people who are involved in their life, lots of different cultures. (Christine)*

Mothers who had new partners could also find these to be a form of support though again, as with fathers, the level of support varied according to the partner in question. In many of the mothers' cases, family and friendship networks were also supplemented by more formal networks of support, as well as other resources.

### **Formal support and resources**

One of the main formal support networks around parenting for mothers was Single Parent Action Network, through which the participants for the project had

been recruited. Mothers held SPAN in high regard for the wide range of study, training and advice that the organisation provided, as well as the sense of belonging and understanding that they found there:

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

For the most part, however, mothers had not accessed formal support networks around parenting. Some mothers noted that the provision of free or low-cost childcare when the children were small had been a great support. Two of the mothers had found that supplementary education offered by community organisations for pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds had also been useful. Overall, however, most mothers felt that either they did not need formal parenting support or that the support was unsuitable:

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

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

Indeed, apart from the parenting programmes and resources offered by SPAN, which mothers said were very multicultural, most generally felt that many formal support networks and resources around parenting were not relevant to their lives. This was in relation both to being lone mothers as well as parents of mixed racial and ethnic children. Books and magazines on parenting in particular were heavily criticised for their lack of diversity. A number of the mothers noted that although they generally liked to access information through written material, they were disappointed by the lack of information or representation of diverse family types in much of the available parenting literature:

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

Although a number of mothers were very pleased to have come across specific resources targeted at mixed racial and ethnic families, others were unaware that such resources were available:

*I've never seen that there is such a thing [books, websites, organisations]. I don't think, I don't even know about things like that. (Estelle)*

Unsurprisingly, when asked about what types of support and resources they would like to see more of, mothers said that they felt there was a need for more targeted and nuanced information about the experiences of mixed racial and ethnic people, children, couples and families. They also noted that the delivery of this should take different forms so that it suited mothers' preferred needs and means of learning and interaction. Written materials and discussion spaces were highlighted by a number of mothers:

*I really do think there's a need and probably not for just one thing, you know, and I don't mean that...I mean not just a magazine or a book, I actually think that everybody needs something different. I think that classes would suit some people, support groups would suit other people, books will suit certain people, you know, so not just in one form. Personally I would like a good book. (Clare)*

*I think just having parents to have some kind of maybe a place to go, to have a conversation about these things. Because obviously there are things that parents would like to talk about and issues and they would like to be able to speak about them without them being judged. But then again, some things do need to be judged because, you know, that's how you bring up issues. I think just having little forums or places, you know, where things could be discussed and talked about, in a relaxed environment. And if it gets a little bit challenging, the conversations, there are people there to mediate that and to, you know. So like debates, I suppose, in a sense, really but more of a community level rather than a national level. (Melanie)*

In addition to dissatisfaction with the general invisibility and absence of formal support and resources, mothers such as Christine also expressed frustration with the transient nature of those resources which did exist:

*I'd gone to a conference for multiple heritage children and as a result of this conference a group [for parents] was set up and I attended about three meetings of that group. And to this day I don't know what happened to this group and I don't know if the group was supported by any funding. I have not had any minutes for some time. But again, if it had achieved anything, surely I would have heard something whereas if it had achieved nothing then what will happen is that in a year's time they will have a big conference again, they'll have the same conversations and another group will form and the same thing will happen and then we'll be telling the same story, nothing changes. (Christine)*

It is clear from these interviews that the provision of targeted, sustained and effective resources for lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children would be both welcomed by and beneficial to this family group. In the final section, we discuss these and other implications for policy and practice raised by the case study research.

## **Section 8 Conclusion and implications**

With little known about the everyday lives of lone mothers with mixed racial and ethnic children, findings from this case study project – small-scale as they may be – are useful for generating much needed insights into the experiences and needs of these parents. They also allow us to begin highlighting a number of implications for policy and practice, as well as for research topics and designs.

The research found that the everyday experiences of this group of mothers strongly challenged the crude stereotypes and assumptions made about them, particularly their lack of racial and cultural literacy and their social isolation. Mothers were enmeshed in various familial, social and community networks which they worked hard to maintain. Drawing on these networks, as well as their own skills and resources, mothers worked to impart racial and cultural knowledge to their children to provide them with a sense of identity and belonging. They also frequently considered choices around residential location and schooling for these reasons. Nevertheless, mothers' largely positive accounts of raising their children in their neighbourhoods did not prevent them from encountering prejudice and judgements, which were often manifested in complex and subtle forms.

Despite these commonalities, however, mothers' experiences, situations and needs also differed, not only between themselves but also over time. The lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children in this sample came from a diverse range of backgrounds, as did the children's fathers. In addition to the diversity of their backgrounds, the types of familial, social and community relationships mothers had could influence the ways in which they viewed their children's racial and ethnic identities, as well as the types of support they felt they needed, if at all. Furthermore, in families of more than one child, mothers could have different needs related to different children. Mothers could also have parenting or family needs that were not necessarily to do with 'mixedness', but were of a general parental concern, such as material, financial or health issues.

These conclusions thus point to a number of policy and practice implications, which all form part of an important overall guideline: the need not to essentialise or assume the demographics or experiences of lone mothers of children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds. This fine line between understanding the diversity as well as the commonality of experiences for lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children points to a number of more specific policy and practice implications:

- ***Policy and practitioner sensitivity***

Policymakers and practitioners need to be wary of implementing initiatives on the grounds of 'mixedness', when family experience can vary greatly between families, even those who initially seem to share a form of mixing. Some lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children may need particular forms of support around raising their children to have a sense of identity and belonging whilst others may not. For instance, the high levels of racial and cultural literacy and embeddedness in family and community networks demonstrated by the mothers in this study is similar to that found in research with mothers living in a particular neighbourhood in the East Midlands (Mckenzie, work-in-progress). Yet studies with lone mothers living elsewhere in the UK reveal higher incidents of familial, cultural and

social isolation as well as experiences of racism and a lack of racial and cultural knowledge or awareness on the part of mothers (Twine 1999b; Harman 2010). We cannot and should not assume that all mixed racial and ethnic lone mother families are the same.

Such implications may have particular resonance for adoption and fostering policy, which has tended to advocate particular forms of identity upbringing or placement for looked after or adoptive children from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds (Okitikpi 2005). More nuanced policy and practitioner understandings of the different ways in which 'mixedness' is perceived, understood, challenged and supported is needed in order to ensure the most appropriate and beneficial delivery of services to lone mothers and their mixed racial and ethnic children.

- ***Terminology usage***

It is clear that there is often a marked difference between the commonly used terminology of 'mixedness' used by the mothers and the children to describe their families, and the terminology generally employed by policymakers and practitioners. This difference can contribute to families feeling misunderstood or patronised. More recognition by policymakers and practitioners of the terminology that families choose to identify themselves with, and engagement with the reasons they do so, is needed. In particular, an avoidance of insistence on 'right' and 'wrong' ways to refer to mixedness by policymakers and practitioners would be beneficial.

- ***Provision and availability of specific resources***

With many of the available resources around parenting identified as irrelevant or unsuitable, the development of more resources specifically targeted at lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children would be beneficial.

Again, however, the complexity of experiences for lone mothers of mixed racial and ethnic children means that practitioners cannot assume that these parents will necessarily find the same types of resources necessary or useful. Moreover, the diversity within families means that provision needs to be made for different *forms* of support (e.g. written material, websites, workshops, etc.) and different *types* of content within that support (e.g. hair care, dealing with racism within and outside the family, teenage issues etc.). Furthermore, it is important that support is not only targeted and sustained but that awareness of resources is made known and available to mothers.

## **Research implications**

The case study findings also have a number of implications for research in this area.

- ***Categorisation of 'mixedness'***

The diversity of experience in mixed families highlights the need for researchers to be alert to sensitive interpretation of Census and other statistical data, particularly around defining 'mixed' samples and experiences. The use of ethnic group categorisations such as 'Mixed'

need to be accompanied by an awareness that the ability of such frames of reference to identify those from or in mixed racial and ethnic families, to tell us who they are and what their experiences are, is limited. 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. It is therefore useful for those drawing on such data to acknowledge its indicative, rather than definitive, nature.

- ***Comparison of different perspectives***

There is a tendency within the existing literature on mixedness to exclude the important processes of negotiation that take place between family members, including in lone mother headed families. In line with Smart and Neale's studies of post-divorce families, this case study has also indicated that patterns of parenting are renegotiated in gendered ways between resident mothers and non-resident fathers, and children are active in this process (1999, 2001).

As we start to gather more grounded knowledge about different members in mixed families research on 'family cases', which seeks to bring together these perspectives, would be most welcomed. Such triangulation of perspectives would greatly further understandings of the structures, experiences and needs of mixed racial and ethnic families in Britain today.

- ***Localised understandings***

Although there is an increasing body of work on 'mixedness' emerging in the UK, to date the majority of studies specifically exploring parenting in mixed racial or ethnic families has been conducted in the USA (e.g. Wright 2000; Breaux-Shropp, 2002; Nakazawa 2003; Rockquemore 2005; Byrd & Garwick 2004, 2006). Such studies can provide an insight into those general issues that British families from mixed racial and ethnic backgrounds might face. Yet they do not shed light on the issues that are particular to these families, whose minority and majority histories are different from their American counterparts (Model & Fisher 2002; Caballero 2005; Gilbert 2005).

The need for such grounded insights relevant to the British context is increasingly noted by practitioners, many of whom are themselves setting up or employing specialist units in the absence of wider knowledge.<sup>6</sup> Research which seeks to understand national and localised pictures of 'mixedness' is highly important, particularly as regards the informing and shaping of policy and practice.

---

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Sheffield's *Multiple Heritage Service*, Devon's *Planet Rainbow*, Swindon's *Mixed Race/Dual Heritage Group* and the *Multiple Heritage/Mix:d* project, which serves schools in Manchester, Birmingham, Leicester, Nottingham and London.

## Bibliography

- Ali, S. (2003) *Mixed-Race, Post-Race: Gender, New Ethnicities and Cultural Practices*, Oxford: Berg.
- Alibhai-Brown, Y. (2001) *Mixed Feelings: The Complex Lives of Mixed-race Britons*. London: The Women's Press.
- Aspinall, P. (2003) 'The conceptualisation and categorisation of mixed race/ethnicity in Britain and North America: identity options and the role of the state', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 27, No. 3, pp: 269-296.
- Banks, N. (1996) 'Young single white mothers with black children in therapy', *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp: 19-28.
- Barn, R. (1999) 'White Mothers, Mixed-Parentage Children and Child Welfare' in *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 29, pp:269-284.
- Barn, R. and Harman, V. (2006) 'A contested identity: an exploration of the competing social and political discourse concerning the identification and positioning of young people of inter-racial parentage', *British Journal of Social Work*, Vol. 36. No. 8, pp:1309-1324.
- Barrett, M., Eade, J., Cinnirella, M. and Garbin, D. (2006) 'New Ethnicities Among British Bangladeshi and Mixed-Heritage Youth'. Published reports from the Department of Psychology. Paper 2. [www.epubs.surrey.ac.uk/psyreports/2](http://www.epubs.surrey.ac.uk/psyreports/2) [accessed 15 Jan 09].
- Breaux-Shropp, A. (2002) *Parenting Biracial and Biethnic Children*, unpublished PhD thesis, Texas Women's University.
- Boushel, M. (1996) 'Vulnerable Multiracial Families' in *Children and Society*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp305-316.
- Byrd, M.M. and Garwick, A.W. (2004) 'A feminist critique of research on interracial family identity: implications for family health', *Journal of Family Nursing*, Vol. 10, No. 3, pp: 302-322.
- Byrd, M.M. and Garwick, A.W. (2006) 'Family identity: black-white interracial family health experiences', *Journal of Family Nursing*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp: 22-37.
- Caballero, C. (2005) *'Mixed Race Projects': Perceptions, Constructions and Implications of Mixed Race in the UK and USA*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol.
- Caballero, C., Edwards, R. and Puthussery, S. (2008) *Parenting 'Mixed' Children: Negotiating Difference and Belonging in Mixed Race, Ethnicity and Faith Families*. London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Duncan, S. and Edwards, R. (1999) *Lone Mothers, Paid Work and Gendered Moral Rationalities*. Macmillan: London.
- Edwards, R., Caballero, C. and Puthussery, S. (forthcoming) 'Parenting Children from 'Mixed' Racial, Ethnic and Faith Backgrounds: Typifications of Difference and Belonging' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.
- Edwards, R. and Gillies, V. (2004) 'Support in parenting: values and consensus concerning who to turn to', *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 33., No. 4, pp: 627-647.
- Gilbert, D. (2005) 'Interrogating Mixed-Race: A Crisis of Ambiguity?' in *Social Identities*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp55-74.
- Goodyer, A. (2005) 'Direct Work with Children of Mixed Parentage' in Okitikpi, T. (2005) *Working with Children of Mixed Parentage*. Dorset: Russell House Publishing.
- Harman, V. and Barn, R. (2005) 'Exploring the Discourse Concerning White Mothers of Mixed Parentage Children' in Okitikpi, T. (2005) *Working with Children of Mixed Parentage*. Dorset: Russell House Publishing.

- Harman, V. (2008) 'Social Work Practice and Lone White Mothers of Mixed-Parentage Children' in *British Journal of Social Work Advance Access* published February 6, 2009, doi:10.1093/bjsw/bcn164.
- Harman, V. (2010) 'Experiences of racism and the changing nature of white privilege among lone white mothers of mixed-parentage children in the UK' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 2, pp: 176-194.
- Head, E. (2005) 'The captive mother? The place of home in the lives of lone mothers', *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 10, No. 3.
- Ifekwunigwe, J.O. (1998) *Scattered Belongings*, London: Routledge.
- Katz, I. (1996) *The Construction of Racial Identity in Children of Mixed Parentage: Mixed Metaphors*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
- Mckenzie, L. (PhD in progress) 'Social or spatial exclusion: How white working class mothers of 'mixed race' children 'manage', accept or reject inequality, stigma, and stereotype'. University of Nottingham.
- Model, S. and Fisher, G. (2002) 'Unions Between Blacks and Whites: England and the US compared' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 25, no. 5, pp: 728-754.
- Murphy, M. (2006) 'Household and family – past, present and future', paper presented to the ESRC/BSPS/ONS Public Policy Seminar: 'Changing Household and Family Structure including Complex Living Arrangements', City Hall, London, 19 May.
- Nakazawa, D.J. (2003) *Does Anybody Else Look Like Me? A Parent's Guide to Raising Multiracial Children*, Cambridge, Ma: Perseus Press.
- Okitikpi, T. (1999) 'Children of mixed parentage in care; why such a high number?' in *Child Care in Practice*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp: 396-405.
- Okitikpi, T. (ed.) (2005) *Working with Children of Mixed Parentage*. Dorset: Russell House Publishing.
- Olumide, J. (2002) *Raiding the Gene Pool: The Social Construction of Mixed Race*, London: Pluto.
- Olumide, J. (2005) 'Mixed Race Children: Policy and Practice Considerations' in Phoenix, A. and Owen, C. (1996). 'From miscegenation to hybridity: mixed relationships and mixed parentage in profile' in B. Bernstein & J. Brannen (Eds.), *Children, Research and Policy*. London: Taylor & Francis, pp: 111-135.
- Rockquemore, K.A. and Laszloffy, T. (2005) *Raising Biracial Children*, Lanham: Alta Mira Press.
- Smart, C. and Neale, B. (1999) *Family Fragments*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smart, C., Neale, B. and Wade, A. (2001) *The Changing Experience of Childhood: Families and Divorce*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Song, M. and Edwards, R. (1997) 'Comment: raising questions about perspectives on black lone motherhood', *Journal of Social Policy*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp: 233-244.
- Song, M., Aspinall, P. and Hasham, F. (in progress) 'The ethnic options of 'mixed race' people in Britain', University of Kent.
- Tikly, L., Caballero, C., Haynes, J. and Hill, J. (2005) *Understanding the Educational Needs of Mixed Heritage Pupils*, London: Department for Education and Skills.
- Tizard, B. and Phoenix, A. (2002, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn) *Black, White or Mixed Race: Race and Racism in the Lives of Young People of Mixed Parentage*, London: Routledge.
- Twine, F.W. (1999a) 'Transracial mothering and antiracism: the case of white birth mothers of 'black' children in Britain', *Feminist Studies* Vol. 25, No. 3, pp: 729-746.

- Twine, F.W. (1999b) 'Bearing Blackness in Britain: the Meaning of Racial Difference for White Birth Mothers of African-Descent Children' in *Social Identities*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp185-210.
- Twine, F.W. (2004) 'A white side of black Britain: the concept of racial literacy', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 27, No.6: 878-907.
- Tyler, K. (2005) 'The genealogical imagination: the inheritance of interracial identities', *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 53, No. 3, pp: 476-494.
- Wilson, A. (1987) *Mixed Race Children: A Study of Identity*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- Wright, M.A. (1998) *I'm Chocolate, You're Vanilla: Raising Healthy Black and Biracial Children in a Race Conscious World: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.