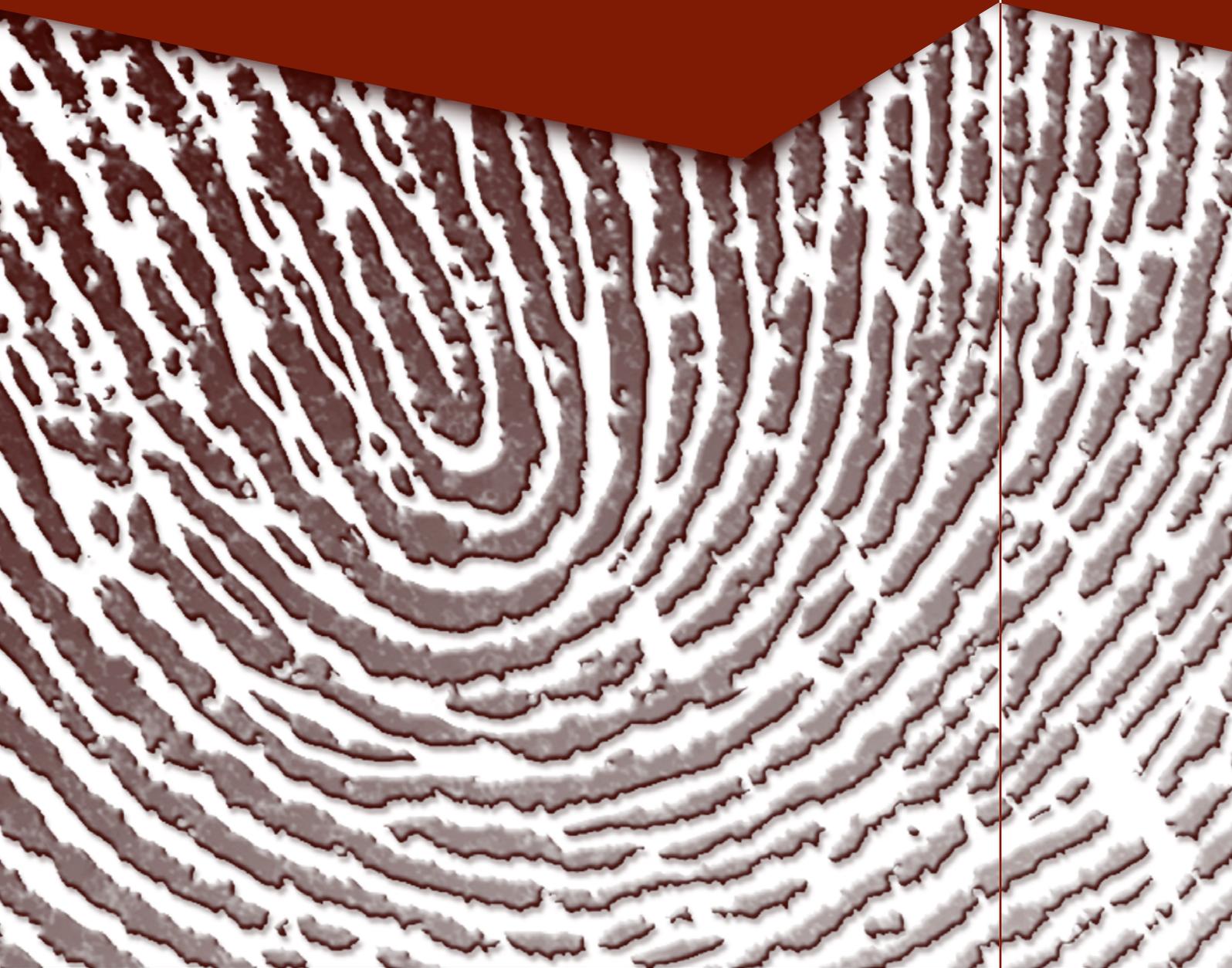


# Mixed Heritage – Identity, Policy and Practice



# About Runnymede

The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organization focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Educational Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships, and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship.

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

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# Foreword

Headlines, in the wake of the last Census and the latest demographic projections, have read 'Mixed-race Britons to become biggest minority'<sup>1</sup> and 'Mixed race is the UK's fastest growing ethnic minority group',<sup>2</sup> yet beyond such measurement there would appear to be little certainty about what this might mean for community relations or race equality in the UK. The incoming chair of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, Trevor Phillips, has made one foray into the debate noting that the expansion in mixed-race Britons:

is not an uncomplicated prospect. The mixed-race Britons are young and they show the highest employment rates of any minority group.

But they also exhibit the highest rates of lone parenthood and family breakdown, in some cases three times the average. They suffer the highest rates of drug treatment . . . Many people talk of identity stripping – children who grow up marooned between communities.<sup>3</sup>

In this short statement, he highlighted some of the key challenges in coming to terms with the experiences and needs of those racialized as mixed in our current race relations discourse – the re-emergence of 'race' as a categorization based on biological markers, an emphasis on community, ethnicity and culture as proxy markers of racialized difference, and the persistence of inequalities and racisms which impact daily on the life chances of members of our society.

Considering the experiences of people racialized as mixed in our society takes us to the frontiers and limits of our understandings of racialization and racisms in the UK. It poses a significant challenge to our acceptance of ethnic categorizations and tests our rhetoric on the fluidity and dynamism of identities, our acceptance of diversity within as well as between communities, and our models of community relations. It is for this reason that Runnymede has decided to focus on this crucial debate. Not to claim the final word, but because this discussion in itself has fruit to bear in disrupting our racialized discourses and shaking the complacency of categorizations that have roots in historical power relations and a diminishing relationship to the way in which people in the UK see themselves, their families and their society.

Despite an academic and theoretical acceptance that race has no basis in biology; that there is more variation within so-called races than between them, discussion about people racialized as mixed appears to return to the biological. Phenotype and physical characteristics are fore-grounded in common parlance. Discussions can resort to discussing people as 'half-' and 'quarter-'. Despite our recognition that all identities are hybrid, fluid and dynamic, there is a tendency to discuss people racialized as mixed as 'between' cultures and capable of being stripped of identity. Instead of challenging the racisms inherent in such discourses, it is easier to fall back on hegemonic patterns of categorization; seeing mixedness as an aberration from the norms of mono-racial/ethnic identity. This tendency to 'simplification' is espoused by people from both white and minority ethnic communities, and encapsulated in discussions about 'racial purity', essentialism and ethnic authentication.

Yet in the midst of this theoretical debate are real lives; lives that are often impacted by racisms. Identities are formed which make sense of the world for people and give them a sense of place and belonging; identities that recognize hybridity yet are not 'split'. For some there is at minimum a shared set of experiences for those racialized as mixed, and for others there is an emerging community of people who identify as mixed.

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<sup>1</sup> The Times, 1 Jan 2007

<sup>2</sup> The Guardian, 6 Sep 2006

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

In engaging in this debate, we hope to be able to support the development of policy and practice that responds more effectively to the needs of people racialized as mixed. In order for this policy to be effective, we need to be more nuanced in our analysis of Census categories, allow space for the voices of those racialized as mixed to be heard, and reject many of our assumptions about the fixity of ethnic categories. These principles are true for all ethnic groups, but as the numbers of those racialized as mixed increase and we learn more about the inequalities that they may face, generalizations and assertions must be replaced with evidence, and warm words with action to address their needs.

### **Interrogating mixedness and mixing**

As even a cursory reading of the articles collected here will show, there is not yet a consensus in terms of understanding the identities of people racialized as mixed and even less agreement about the right policy or practice responses. Understanding how to respond to the needs of people racialized as mixed presents a range of challenges to policymakers, as well as to our current understandings of race relations. Many of these are explored in the articles presented here.

*Charlie Owen* provides an analysis of the key data from the Census taken in 2001, and explains how we arrived at the current system of ethnic categorization. From the data collected at the Census and since, we now know something about the experiences of those who identify with these categories. Yet, just as you cannot taste a cake by weighing it, the data beg many further questions.

*Miri Song* and *Suki Ali* reflect on these questions and consider whether it makes sense to consider the diverse experiences of people racialized as mixed as representing a group experience. Their reflections highlight the complexities and challenges of relating lived experience to theoretical considerations. *Jessica Sims* explores further the diversity of those racialized as mixed through focusing on the experiences of a relatively small group: Thai-British families.

Moving on from some of these theoretical considerations to reflect on policy and practice, *Leon Tikly* reports on efforts made in school settings to respond to the needs of young people racialized as mixed, with a particular emphasis on those from a Mixed White and Black Caribbean background. *Mark Johnson* looks at health and social care policy, accentuating how many health interventions are intimately linked with biomedical considerations, thereby making heredity and genetics central to this debate. *Savita de Sousa* and *John Simmonds* tackle the often thorny issue of adoption and fostering; while *Chamion Caballero* reports on her research with mixed families and raises some challenges for the development of family policy which may be based on false assumptions about their experiences.

Our final three papers reflect on the actions of community organizations and prospects for activism. *Sharron Hall* makes a spirited argument for community development among people racialized as mixed; *Jill Olumide* reports on the work of her organization in creating spaces for people to share their experiences of mixedness and mixing; and *Linda Bellos* presents a counter-argument to these approaches, rejecting a mixed-race label in order to build solidarity between those who suffer discrimination.

Through publishing these papers, we aim to encourage debate and promote understanding. The papers themselves have already been discussed widely through an online conference<sup>4</sup> held in conjunction with the Commission for Racial Equality, the Department for Communities and Local Government, and the Families and Social Capital Research Group at London South Bank University. We will continue to discuss and develop our understanding of the needs and experiences of people racialized as mixed in order to ensure that discrimination is tackled where evident, and that our society is one in which all can hope to achieve their full potential.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.mixedness.org.uk](http://www.mixedness.org.uk) - the conference is also accessible from the Runnymede Trust website [www.runnymedetrust.org](http://www.runnymedetrust.org)

**A note on language**

A marker of how far from consensus we are on dealing with issues of mixedness, can be found in our collective inability to agree a common language. This is more than the archetypal academic debate regarding angels and pinheads; the debate about language highlights the many conundrums presented by the day-to-day experiences of those racialized as mixed. Both private language and the public language of policymaking processes can be slow to respond to the everyday. Identities can exist independently of any linguistic capacity to describe them satisfactorily. Mixed-race, mixed heritage, dual heritage, biracial, multiracial, mestizo, etc., all have limited acceptability and applicability. For the purpose of this publication, we at Runnymede have used the term 'mixed heritage', and we suggested to authors that they use their own preferred terminology. It is Olumide who suggests the most neutral of terms: 'racialized as mixed'. This allows the greatest room for manoeuvre – recognizing mixedness as a result of racialization processes while resisting arbitrary categorization.

**Dr Rob Berkeley**

Deputy Director of the Runnymede Trust

September 2007

# 1. Statistics: The Mixed Category in Census 2001

**Charlie Owen**

Thomas Coram Research Unit  
Institute of Education, University of London

## The Census Question

The first time an ethnic question was included in a British census was in 1991. Extensive testing of a possible ethnic question had been conducted. Some tested versions included an option of ticking more than one category, but multi-ticking was found to be unreliable.<sup>1</sup> Other versions included a separate category of 'mixed', but this too was rejected, despite the successful inclusion of such a category in the ethnic question for the Labour Force Survey (LFS) since its inception in 1973. The Office for Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) acknowledged the success of the LFS question, with a single 'mixed' category, but chose a different strategy; the wording that was adopted for the 1991 census was:

If the person is descended from more than one ethnic or racial group, please tick the group to which the person considers he/she belongs, or tick the 'Any other ethnic group' box and describe the person's ancestry in the space provided.

So there was no specific category of 'mixed' to tick. Instead people who wanted to identify as 'mixed' were encouraged to choose a single category, or failing that to write a description. OPCS coders were given detailed instructions on how to code these written answers, including three mixed categories: 'Black/White', 'Asian/White' and 'Other Mixed'.<sup>2</sup>

There was considerable dissatisfaction with the quality of the data on the mixed populations from the 1991 census. It was widely believed to be a significant undercount, because there was no category of mixed – and the instructions encouraged people who wanted to identify as mixed to tick just one box. There is some direct evidence for the census giving an undercount: prior to 1991 the LFS ethnic question included a specific category of mixed, so people could choose that

directly. Averaged over the three years prior to 1991, the LFS estimate was that all mixed groups combined formed 0.52 per cent of the total population, compared to an estimate of 0.42 per cent derived from the census.<sup>3</sup>

Partly as a result of the problems with the 1991 counts for mixed, partly in recognition of growing demographic significance of the mixed population, and also partly in recognition of the wish of many people from mixed backgrounds to be able to identify themselves as such, it was agreed that explicit categories of 'mixed' would be included in the ethnic question on the 2001 census.<sup>4</sup> The final wording for the census in England and Wales included the following:

### (b) Mixed

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other mixed background. Please describe:

## Census Results

The 2001 census estimated that in the United Kingdom, there were 677,000 people who identified as 'mixed' by choosing one of the mixed categories for the ethnic question. In percentage terms, the mixed population in the United Kingdom constituted 1.2 per cent of the total population of 58.8 million, but 14.6 per cent of the minority ethnic population. More detail is available for England and Wales than for the rest of the United Kingdom: the question in England and Wales had four mixed categories but Scotland and Northern Ireland each had only a single mixed category. Further results below are just for England and Wales.

A detailed age breakdown, into 5-year age bands is shown in Table 1. Looking at the totals, it is clear that the largest of the mixed groups was the 'White and Black Caribbean' group. They numbered 237,000, or 35.9 per cent of all people who identified as mixed. Next was 'White and Asian' at 189,000 or 28.6 per cent of all mixed. 'White and Black African' were 79,000 or 11.9 per cent. The final group of 'Other Mixed' was larger, at 156,000 (23.6 per cent). People who ticked the 'Any other mixed background' category

1 Sillitoe (1978:17)

2 Bulmer (1996)

3 Phoenix & Owen (1996)

4 See: Aspinall (1996)

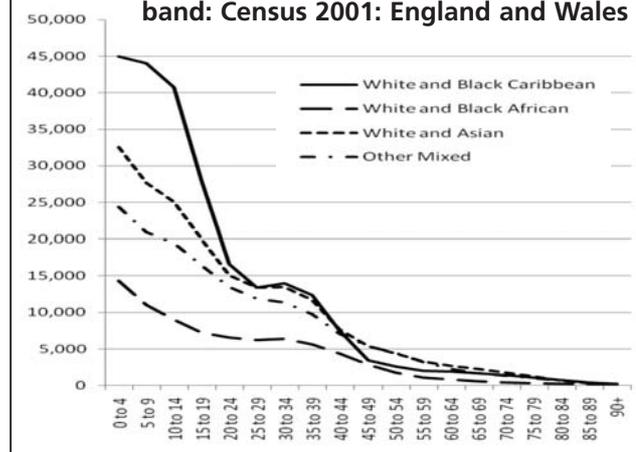
**Table 1: Numbers in categories of mixed: Census 2001: England and Wales**

	Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	Mixed: White and Black African	Mixed: White and Asian	Mixed: Other Mixed	Total
0 to 4	44,985	14,310	32,521	24,381	116,197
5 to 9	44,065	10,987	27,677	20,931	103,660
10 to 14	40,766	8,993	25,020	19,456	94,235
15 to 19	27,965	7,221	19,951	16,461	71,598
20 to 24	16,654	6,584	15,116	13,470	51,824
25 to 29	13,434	6,231	13,388	11,939	44,992
30 to 34	13,966	6,391	13,522	11,387	45,266
35 to 39	12,429	5,632	11,724	9,795	39,580
40 to 44	7,526	4,344	7,655	7,131	26,656
45 to 49	3,462	2,831	5,377	5,404	17,074
50 to 54	2,607	1,715	4,393	4,466	13,181
55 to 59	2,003	1,107	3,279	3,213	9,602
60 to 64	1,955	793	2,744	2,309	7,801
65 to 69	1,693	607	2,267	1,713	6,280
70 to 74	1,471	438	1,799	1,335	5,043
75 to 79	1,073	327	1,311	1,009	3,720
80 to 84	722	220	708	706	2,356
85 to 89	394	113	368	387	1,262
90+	250	67	195	195	707
<b>Total</b>	<b>237,420</b>	<b>78,911</b>	<b>189,015</b>	<b>155,688</b>	<b>661,034</b>

were asked to give further details. The Office for National Statistics has published an analysis of these written answers.<sup>5</sup> This showed that the most common written description was 'Chinese and White' (10 per cent of the 'Other Mixed' answers); the next was 'Black and White' (7 per cent), then 'Black and Asian' (4 per cent).

The data in Table 1 are also shown in Figure 1. This shows that the numbers are much higher among the younger age groups. This is shown more clearly in Table 2, which shows, within each of the mixed categories, the percentage of the group in each age band. Taking the total mixed population, over 17 per cent were children aged under 5: this percentage was slightly higher for the 'White and Black Caribbean' group (18.95 per cent) and the 'White and Black African' group (18.13 per cent). This compares with just 5.95 per cent in this age band for all people (the final column of the table). In fact, the percentages in each 5-year age band are fairly consistent in this column, at around six to seven per cent. The pattern for each of the mixed groups is quite different: they all show much higher percentages amongst children and young people. Indeed, almost half (47.52 per cent) of the mixed population were children aged under 15, whereas for all people the corresponding percentage was under one-fifth (18.89 per cent). The pattern is most extreme for the 'White and Black Caribbean' group,

<sup>5</sup> Bradford (2006)

**Figure 1: Numbers identified as mixed by age band: Census 2001: England and Wales**

where more than half of the group were under 15 (54.68 per cent). At older ages the percentage for each of the mixed groups is much smaller.

Another way of considering the data is in terms of what percentage of all people are in each mixed group. This is shown in Table 3: although this looks like Table 2, in Table 3 the percentages within an age band sum to 100, whereas in Table 2 it is the percentages within each mixed group that sum to 100. Taking the total row, at the bottom of the table, it can be seen that 1.27 per cent of the total population in 2001 were classified, by their answers to the census question, as mixed. Of course,

**Table 2: Percentage within each mixed category in each age band: Census 2001: England and Wales**

	Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	Mixed: White and Black African	Mixed: White and Asian	Mixed: Other Mixed	Mixed: Total	All People
0 to 4	18.95	18.13	17.21	15.66	17.58	5.95
5 to 9	18.56	13.92	14.64	13.44	15.68	6.36
10 to 14	17.17	11.40	13.24	12.50	14.26	6.58
15 to 19	11.78	9.15	10.56	10.57	10.83	6.18
20 to 24	7.01	8.34	8.00	8.65	7.84	6.00
25 to 29	5.66	7.90	7.08	7.67	6.81	6.60
30 to 34	5.88	8.10	7.15	7.31	6.85	7.66
35 to 39	5.24	7.14	6.20	6.29	5.99	7.87
40 to 44	3.17	5.50	4.05	4.58	4.03	7.03
45 to 49	1.46	3.59	2.84	3.47	2.58	6.33
50 to 54	1.10	2.17	2.32	2.87	1.99	6.90
55 to 59	0.84	1.40	1.73	2.06	1.45	5.69
60 to 64	0.82	1.00	1.45	1.48	1.18	4.89
65 to 69	0.71	0.77	1.20	1.10	0.95	4.41
70 to 74	0.62	0.56	0.95	0.86	0.76	3.99
75 to 79	0.45	0.41	0.69	0.65	0.56	3.37
80 to 84	0.30	0.28	0.37	0.45	0.36	2.26
85 to 89	0.17	0.14	0.19	0.25	0.19	1.30
90+	0.11	0.08	0.10	0.13	0.11	0.65
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 3: Percentage within each age band in each mixed category: Census 2001: England and Wales**

	Mixed: White and Black Caribbean	Mixed: White and Black African	Mixed: White and Asian	Mixed: Other Mixed	Mixed: Total	All People
0 to 4	1.45	0.46	1.05	0.79	3.76	100
5 to 9	1.33	0.33	0.84	0.63	3.13	100
10 to 14	1.19	0.26	0.73	0.57	2.75	100
15 to 19	0.87	0.22	0.62	0.51	2.23	100
20 to 24	0.53	0.21	0.48	0.43	1.66	100
25 to 29	0.39	0.18	0.39	0.35	1.31	100
30 to 34	0.35	0.16	0.34	0.29	1.14	100
35 to 39	0.30	0.14	0.29	0.24	0.97	100
40 to 44	0.21	0.12	0.21	0.20	0.73	100
45 to 49	0.11	0.09	0.16	0.16	0.52	100
50 to 54	0.07	0.05	0.12	0.12	0.37	100
55 to 59	0.07	0.04	0.11	0.11	0.32	100
60 to 64	0.08	0.03	0.11	0.09	0.31	100
65 to 69	0.07	0.03	0.10	0.07	0.27	100
70 to 74	0.07	0.02	0.09	0.06	0.24	100
75 to 79	0.06	0.02	0.07	0.06	0.21	100
80 to 84	0.06	0.02	0.06	0.06	0.20	100
85 to 89	0.06	0.02	0.05	0.06	0.19	100
90+	0.07	0.02	0.06	0.06	0.21	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>1.27</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4: Mixed and main minority ethnic groups by age band: Census 2001: England and Wales**

	<b>Black Caribbean</b>	<b>Mixed: White and Black African</b>	<b>Black African</b>	<b>Mixed: White and Black African</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Mixed: White</b>
0 to 4	32,205	44,985	50,815	14,310	208,557	32,521
5 to 9	35,759	44,065	46,402	10,987	200,093	27,677
10 to 14	38,925	40,766	39,898	8,993	201,451	25,020
15 to 19	37,625	27,965	38,964	7,221	215,147	19,951
20 to 24	30,987	16,654	38,593	6,584	219,749	15,116
25 to 29	34,524	13,434	47,201	6,231	216,779	13,388
30 to 34	57,875	13,966	60,788	6,391	203,780	13,522
35 to 39	74,429	12,429	53,327	5,632	160,051	11,724
40 to 44	53,796	7,526	37,931	4,344	154,881	7,655
45 to 49	32,084	3,462	22,105	2,831	138,914	5,377
50 to 54	20,742	2,607	14,553	1,715	97,103	4,393
55 to 59	23,539	2,003	9,637	1,107	67,782	3,279
60 to 64	31,491	1,955	8,319	793	69,390	2,744
65 to 69	26,664	1,693	4,936	607	52,638	2,267
70 to 74	17,777	1,471	2,929	438	33,041	1,799
75 to 79	9,136	1,073	1,648	327	17,888	1,311
80 to 84	4,111	722	1,021	220	10,345	708
85 to 89	1,474	394	360	113	3,837	368
90+	700	250	238	67	2,311	195
<b>Total</b>	<b>563,843</b>	<b>237,420</b>	<b>479,665</b>	<b>78,911</b>	<b>2,273,737</b>	<b>189,015</b>

because of the young age profile of the mixed groups compared to the overall population, the percentage of the population who are mixed is higher at the younger ages. As can be seen in Table 3, almost 4 per cent of all under-5s in England and Wales in 2001 were mixed (3.76 per cent). This is still quite a small percentage. But remember, in the 2001 census, 91 per cent of the population in England and Wales were identified as 'white': the mixed group as a percentage of the minority ethnic population is much larger – 14.6 per cent; of the minority ethnic under-5 population, the mixed groups made up over a quarter (26.2 per cent).

Table 4 shows the numbers in three of the mixed groups alongside the ethnic group that is mixed with white in the 'mixed' category. So 'Black Caribbean' is next to 'Mixed: White and Black Caribbean'; 'Black African' is next to 'Mixed: White and Black African'; 'Asian' is next to 'Mixed: White and Asian' ('Asian' here is the sum of four columns in the main census tables: 'Indian', 'Pakistani', 'Bangladeshi' and 'Other Asian').

The 'White and Asian' group is the smallest relative to the main Asian group, 8.31 per cent. The percentage is highest among the younger age groups, with the mixed group equal to 15.59 per cent of the Asian under-5 group. The 'Mixed: White and Black African' group is larger relative to the 'Black African' group: overall the percentage is 16.45. As with the mixed white and Asian

group, the numbers are higher for the younger ages: taking the youngest group, the under-5s, the mixed are equivalent to 28.16 per cent of the Black African group – more than a quarter.

Finally, to the 'Mixed: White and Black Caribbean' group as a percentage of the 'Black Caribbean' group. Overall the percentage is 42.11. However, the high percentage at the younger ages is even more pronounced here. Indeed, for each of the three age bands 0 to 4, 5 to 9 and 10 to 14 there were more children of mixed white and black Caribbean origin than of black Caribbean origin. Looked at another way, taking all children who had at least one black Caribbean parent, there were more where the second parent was white than where the second parent was also black Caribbean.

## Conclusion

In the 2001 census, one and a quarter percent of all people in England and Wales were of mixed origin: one sixth of the minority ethnic population were of mixed origin. Almost four percent of all under-5s in England and Wales were of mixed origin: one quarter of the minority ethnic population of under-5s were of mixed origin. This is a huge demographic shift in the population. What is most striking is not just the growth of the mixed populations as a percentage of the total population – but as a percentage of the minority ethnic population. ■

## 2. The Diversity of ‘the’ Mixed Race Population in Britain<sup>6</sup>

**Miri Song**

University of Kent

### Introduction

The growth of ‘mixed race’ (MR) people and relationships today makes nonsense out of the idea that there exist distinct, ‘natural’ ‘races’ among people in multi-ethnic societies around the world. The population of the UK is becoming increasingly diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, and national identity.

For the first time, the growth in MR people was officially recognized by the inclusion of a “mixed” group in the 2001 UK Census, in which about **674,000** people were identified as ‘mixed’. Demographers have identified the “mixed” group as one of the fastest growing of all ethnic groups, estimating that by 2010 it will have increased by more than 40 per cent (or by more than 80 per cent by 2020) compared with 2001.<sup>7</sup>

Yet in spite of its growing importance in demographic terms and its entry into ‘official’ data collection, relatively little is known about the life experiences of so-called ‘mixed’ people, or how this new population grouping identifies in ethnic and racial terms – information which is crucial for our understandings of cultural diversity and the delivery of culturally competent public services.

Important research (both in the USA and Britain) has debunked historical depictions of ‘mixed’ people as fragmented, marginal, and necessarily confused. Recent qualitative studies have demonstrated that ‘mixed’ people can and do make choices about their ethnic and racial identities (within structured parameters of ‘choice’), but there is a multiplicity of views (both academic and popular) about what the growth of ‘mixed’ relationships and people augurs, in terms of social and political divisions and race relations.

Trevor Phillips’ highly generalized remarks (in a recent speech) about MR people being potentially disadvantaged, potentially vulnerable to, “identity stripping” (with children growing up marooned between communities), was rather typical of how some analysts and policymakers conceive of the ‘mixed’ population in Britain. The biggest challenge facing policymakers looking at the ‘mixed race’ population is the urgent

need to investigate the great diversity of ‘mixed’ experiences, whether in their families, schools, neighbourhoods, and regions.

It is problematic to refer to ‘mixed’ people in Britain as ‘the single largest minority group in the country’, as they do not comprise a meaningful group/community in of itself. Without further empirical study, it would be erroneous to presume certain commonalities of experience across this population. While ‘mixed’ people do grow up in families in which they may (or may not!) recognize ‘difference’ between their parents, we cannot make sweeping policy recommendations about people who vary in relation to phenotype, class, etc. For example, policies appropriate for working class Black/White men may not be relevant for the needs/concerns of middle class Anglo-Indian women.

We should also avoid using terminology and categories which suggest that MR people are somehow separate from existing (monoracial) minority and White communities. In many respects, ‘mixed’ people’s experiences may not differ significantly from those of many monoracial minorities, for instance, in terms of their being regarded as minorities, or the targets of racial prejudice (but again, this is dependent on all the factors discussed above, such as phenotype, gender, etc.). Thus we should not draw unfounded distinctions between monoracial minorities and ‘mixed’ people and isolate ‘mixed’ people as a distinct group in society.

### Some Key Questions/ Issues for Policymakers

#### Type of ‘Mix’ May Make a Difference

How do different types of MR young people describe themselves and what kinds of choices do they perceive? Some key variables to examine include:

1. Physical appearance: while it is possible to mediate our appearance via speech, dress, and modes of behaviour, we cannot change our physical selves. In many social interactions, each of us is racially assigned by others.
2. Social class: how may a more privileged class upbringing (versus a relatively poor, working class upbringing) shape one’s experience of being ‘mixed’, and how may this class effect

<sup>6</sup> This paper is drawn from ongoing research on an ESRC funded project ‘The ethnic options of mixed race young people in Britain’, with Peter Aspinall and Ferhana Hashem (both at CHSS, University of Kent).

<sup>7</sup> ONS (2001)

influence how different types of MR young people identify themselves?

3. Ethnic/racial composition of neighbourhood/school/region: how may growing up in a multi-ethnic area with other minorities and MR people (versus growing up in a predominantly White area) influence MR people's sense of selves?
4. Gender: how may gender mediate one's experiences of being 'mixed'?
5. 'Thin' and 'thick' ties with White and minority communities: how influential are the social networks and ties with people of each parent's heritage?

### **What Does Being 'Mixed' Mean in Everyday Life?**

What does being MR mean, in practice, in everyday life? The racial terms and categories we report to use, *per se*, may not tell us as much as we may think. There is no automatic correspondence between a claimed identity and specific behaviours/attitudes/everyday interactions. Also, one's status as 'mixed' may be central to one person's sense of self, while it may seem to be an afterthought for another individual. What it means to be 'mixed' must be understood in relation to the many other aspects of a person's being: gender, religion, class, hobbies, etc.

### **Is Being 'Mixed' a Racial Disadvantage?**

Is being MR perceived and experienced as a disadvantaged status, and how may this differ across different kinds of MR people? This is an important question, but as argued earlier, it is not possible to address this question without differentiating 'the' mixed experience according to the type of 'mixed' people we are talking about in specific regional contexts: for how may the experience of being a Chinese/English woman differ from that of a Egyptian/English man (or an Indian/Barbadian man)? In addition to the specific 'mix', class and physical appearance, we also need to consider how perceptions and experiences of racial disadvantage may be gendered. The emergence of a large number of MR people does signal that certain ethnic/racial boundaries are eroding, but it in no way means that we are (straightforwardly) in an era of declining racial inequalities or prejudice. Nor does this mean that all MR people are somehow racially disadvantaged.

### **Do Official Surveys Accurately Capture How 'Mixed' People Describe/See Themselves?**

To what extent does official data collection accurately represent the ways in which young adults choose to

describe their mixed origins? Analyses of Census data may provide an important snapshot of how certain Britons racially identify themselves. However, it is also possible that people identify and describe themselves differently on official forms, as opposed to how they describe themselves in 'real life' interactions – with their neighbours, friends, family members, and colleagues. For instance, the Indian mother and White Scottish father of a daughter may describe her on official forms as 'White' or 'Asian' (both monoracial possibilities), or 'mixed race' (when it is possible) on forms, but may raise her as 'Gujarati and Scottish', and may identify her as such to the people in their social networks.

There is also emerging evidence that many respondents are highly critical of existing racial/ethnic classifications on the myriad official forms they encounter. There is likely to be some inconsistency and fluidity in how people tick boxes (and/or use write-ins), depending on the forms they are asked complete. We should always keep in mind (as Richard Berthoud has argued in the past) that we need information about both a) actual parental heritage; b) how MR people identify themselves – the two may or may not be the same.

### **Why Does it Matter?**

First, it is imperative that more comparative empirical work is carried out on 'mixed race' people because many policies are based on assumptions about how 'mixed' families may or may not operate, or about how disadvantaged 'mixed race' people are today. I would argue that so much of existing survey work, while important, is still highly speculative and needs further investigation through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Research, such as by Ros Edwards and Chamion Caballero on the JRF project on parenting mixed heritage children,<sup>8</sup> shows us that little is known about how parents from different racial/ethnic/religious backgrounds actually negotiate their children's sense of identity and belonging. While common sense tells us that parents do influence their children's sense of identity, we do not know how much difference this may make, for instance, compared with peer influences as children grow into adolescents and young adults. It may be that some parents simply do not talk with their children about 'race' or about the fact that their family is 'different'.

Second, on a political level, some (American) research on 'race' and 'mixed race' is now driven by controversial theorizing about how and why people racially designate themselves (or their children) in the ways they do. For instance, George Yancey argues that the emergence of more and more Black/White Americans, and the possibility of choosing a 'mixed'

<sup>8</sup> *Parenting 'Mixed' Children: Negotiating Difference and Belonging* will be published early 2008 by JRF.

identity (as opposed to Black) may worsen the status of monoracial Black people, but may also endanger a commitment to racial justice. This argument is based upon the belief that people who are part-White (including White/Black people) will not be as concerned with or committed to issues of racial justice as monoracial minorities have in the past. Such an argument needs empirical investigation.

The identification of people as ‘mixed’, as opposed to Black or Asian, for instance, in the US has been

opposed by various minority groups/coalitions that fear the consequences of reduced enumeration and representation of their group in multi-ethnic America. This concern was instrumental in the US Census bureau deciding on a ‘tick all that apply’ (multiple tick boxes), as opposed to the provision of a ‘mixed race’ box in Britain. While trans-Atlantic comparisons must be made with caution, the political reverberations of the growing number of ‘mixed’ people in the USA are also likely to be felt here in Britain. ■

### 3. Gendering Mixed-Race, Deconstructing Mixedness<sup>9</sup>

**Suki Ali**

London School of Economics and Political Science

This short paper arises from the workshop of the same title from which this collection comes, where we presented some of our perspectives on the contemporary interest in mixedness. As such, this paper aims to add some thoughts to an ongoing debate about research into mixed-race, and how this is and might be configured by the current debates about mixedness in the UK. This then is not an academic paper *per se*, but draws upon my own research in this area; it is a beginning not an end. I particularly welcome the emphasis for the need of continued dialogue, debate and informed dissent on issues of mixed heritage, as it is here referred to. It seems to me that this area is in some considerable danger of being carried along on the tide of albeit well meaning concern into reactive responses to this ‘at risk’ group. Jane Ifekwunigwe (2004) has argued that discussions on mixed-race have been ‘characterized’ by different approaches in particular eras or epochs. I do not agree with this analysis as it seems to me that there are always competing discourses to be found within ‘eras’ – it is just that some are heard more loudly than others. Currently we are definitely being assailed by the media and from government and other public institutions by two very different discourses – one of the brave and beautiful new potential of the ‘exotic’ mixed-race individual,<sup>10</sup> the

other of the difficulties attached to mixed-race identities and by default the extraordinary problems faced by mixed-race people.<sup>11</sup>

I want to, unsurprisingly, raise several objections to these simplistic positions, but also for the purposes of this piece to consider what difference it makes to think about gender as a central component to these discussions. Although I welcome the opportunity to introduce gender as a specific topic I would, like many others, suggest that the issue of gender is one that runs through all of the other areas under discussion. If gender is key to processes of racialization, then it must surely be the case that it matters to the racial politics of health, education, anti-racism and so on, in which mixed-race people feature. Perhaps for me the more complete way to think about this is to make more of our continuing struggles to articulate racialization with other kinds of social differentiation – the full range of differences that make a difference. The continuing problem of intersectionality and multiplicity, not only for theory and policy, but in very grounded and everyday ways, should be at the forefront of our research agendas. If it is important to note that experiences of mixedness are mediated through and with gender (and sexuality for that matter) so they are by different kinds of racialization, by cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as by class, ability and by location. My own research has shown that, for example, class is a very important feature in relation to experiences of racism, and location is crucial to understanding the contextual nature of racialization.<sup>12</sup> Given the immense difficulty in trying

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful for comments from Hamish Macpherson and Jill Olumide on the draft of this piece.

<sup>10</sup> c.f. Ali (2005)

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Trevor Phillips’ (2006) comments on ‘identity stripping’

<sup>12</sup> See Ali (2003 a)

to unravel the relationships between these issues and their impact on 'life chances' or 'outcomes', I do not think we are yet in a position to form policy at this stage of our discussions. If the 'mixed' category is so diverse how can we address it in policy terms?

One of the most effective ways for me to begin to think about this whole area is to interrogate the invocation of the category of mixed-race that homogenizes such a wide range of experiences (as above). I am grateful that we have had expert intervention on the theme of statistics from Charlie Owen as it seems that much of the categorical anxiety seems to hinge on some dubious interpretations of statistical data. We surely need this data and demographic 'changes' are not only interesting but significant, however these discussions are often flawed from the outset in that they take as their starting point a somewhat misplaced faith in data collection as reflecting accurately the way in which people seek to identify and thus form groups. So my initial concern is that we cannot (yet?) identify a singular group of mixed-race individuals. It seems important that we would not do this for any other racial or ethnic group – simply talk about Black people or Catholics as if they were all the same in all locations, but we are being forced to do so about this group.

If we continue to elide differences amongst mixed people, we evade what I believe is any key aim in this work – to tackle inequality and discrimination. These two may be linked, but it is not always clear what the links are. It seems to me that the major problem in focusing on a singular mixed-race category is that it starts from an end point – that we know that there is a category. For me, it is the construction of the category and the meanings that it conveys that is still up for grabs. Miri Song's paper deals with this in relation to identity as does Chamion Caballero's, but it is equally important in relation to policy in education and anti-racism concerns around health and well-being. If we take for granted that the end product is a group of individuals who share this identity as the overriding feature of their life, then we find ourselves perpetuating this problematic simplification. Let me make it absolutely clear that I am not suggesting that people should refuse to identify as mixed – or should not be allowed to, or that this is not meaningful for many people – it is for me so why should it not be to others? I *am* saying that the core problematic is untangling the way in which the self-chosen (or for that matter ascribed) category is now completely caught up in the performative of 'mixed' – 'race', heritage, parentage – and

how this is becoming something which has become the collective category of a singular ethnic minority group – it is *that* with which we have to grapple. It is not a new problem; this is a newer incarnation of the difficulty we have been working with in relation to collectivized race politics for decades. To return to my earlier point about the collectivization of Blackness – we know that there have been reasons why the term has been used in research, policy, practice, theory and politics as a way of signalling affiliation and communality. It might be true to say that in fact we *do* sometimes use the word in a way that might be seen to be simplifying. This term used as a collective does tend in my mind to foreground one particular aspect of Blackness and that is 'race' as physiology, not in fact cultural or ethnic diversity. Hence my concern with making clear if we talk about mixed-race that 'race' is indeed the most salient feature.

So how does adding gender into the mix help this? Well it doesn't – not if we take the 'add and stir' approach and apply it on its own and for its own sake. There are perhaps two main ways in which gendered interventions might impact upon debates about and research on mixedness, at the level of theory and as an object of study. To use a more grounded example here I want to mention a particular area of interest of mine: how the whole idea of mixedness relies upon discourses of reproduction, kinship and belonging that are of course gendered, and how the 'mixed' identity category is destabilized by incorporating gender. If one centralises the issue of gender at the level of theory, then we might consider how certain kinds of gendered theories are being used in the service of work on mixedness. We might, if we took a feminist or queer approach, insist on revealing ways of understanding the world that continue to serve particular political agendas, whilst being open and reflexive about our own. We might be very concerned about how heteronormative discussions of families could be perpetuating familial models that are in some ways conservative and reactionary and are certainly pathologizing. Or, we might look at the continued demonization of single mothers (or absent fathers) and how this is racialized and racializing. Gender also impacts upon the way that the biological sciences are returning to central stage in discussions about racialized health issues, bringing us back to a form of scientific racism that is highly problematic.<sup>13</sup> In discussions about mixed families or mixed people's health problems, we see notions of reproduction and family formation that are normative and highly naturalized; thus both implicitly and explicitly formed upon and through particular ideas about gender, sexuality and social

<sup>13</sup> See Mark Johnson in this collection

organization.

Secondly, we might insist that gender should not just be referred to as a minor variable, but rather centralized in research and practice that concerns any conception of mixed heritage or mixed-race. We might note that it is already there, but needs to be built upon, particularly in policy based work. It is surely not helpful to consider mixed-race as ungendered any more than other so-called monoracial identities; for example, in education we know Black Caribbean boys face problems different to Black Caribbean girls. This is not solely about identity but about structural and institutional constraints and prejudices. How would it be less so for a singular category of 'mixed children'?<sup>14</sup> Using families as a point of intervention, the notion of 'parenting' a mixed-race child is in fact slightly misleading.<sup>15</sup> There are very few parents who don't fall into the category of mother or father, or gendered replacement for one or both of these. In relation to mixedness, and in particular mixed-race, this becomes crucial to the debate. It has been suggested for example that white mothers cannot mother black mixed-race boys; meaning problems arise from the absence of their black fathers. It is impossible to separate gender from 'race' here, nor ethnicity and, to a lesser extent, culture. Most importantly, class, poverty and location all but transform these discussions. In my own research it was very clear that no straightforward or predictive links could be made between these areas and parenting practices, and how they impact upon identity formation. Further, it was evident that for young children negotiating heterosexuality and gender positions is often seen as more important to them. This worked in relation to identification with parents and also in peer relationships.<sup>16</sup> While I believe that these processes are also profoundly classed, what is significant for this piece is that the respondents themselves considered gender as key.

Finally, at various points I have used the term mixedness and at others mixed-race and mixed heritage. This is not accidental. There is a wealth of writing on the problems of terminology which I won't go into here, however, I remain convinced it is at the heart of the concerns on the invocation of mixed-race as an ethnic group, which is not only nonsensical but I would suggest a worrying development. Such collectivization allows for the develop-

ment of debates in which mixed people become demonized or idealized. These in turn map on to wider sociological concerns about what Zygmunt Bauman has called 'mixophobia' or the distrust of difference, the 'death of multiculturalism'<sup>17</sup> or integration and cohesion and community formation, and the continued struggle against discrimination and prejudice. Throughout history, mixedness and mixing have troubled boundaries<sup>18</sup> and this is true of the current UK political situation. As ever, the so-called mixed-race person comes to literally embody these anxieties and as such becomes the focus of a gaze which, although perhaps having benign intentions, can have negative consequences. These negative consequences concern not only those who currently identify as mixed-race but also those who are managing other kinds of mixedness and those who are continuing to grapple with other kinds of racialized and ethnicized prejudice – for example, the rising tide of Islamophobia.

So, in conclusion, I would like to caution against taking the idea of mixed-race or mixed heritage for granted as a category of analysis. At the workshop I raised a series of questions to help us think through our points of congruence and dissent, our politics and theoretical differences and affinities, and our diverse experiences of mixedness:

1. What is a mixed-race population? What is the difference between mixed-race and mixed heritage? Is either an ethnic identity?
2. How might gender reframe our research into mixedness?
3. Should we abandon research into mixed-race/heritage?

These questions raised quite diffuse responses, but we all agreed that we still had a lot to learn from each other. In the light of the lack of understanding about the meanings and experiences of mixedness, I believe that we should not and cannot make meaningful policy interventions that would address a 'group' that are not yet formed as such. In particular, we need to be wary of assuming that it is 'mixed-race identity' that gives rise to greater risks. While we need to look at the experiences of those who claim mixedness, we need to be careful not to continue to understand it as a fixed category of identity or being, but with the idea that it might help to see how such experiences form and reform the wider racial and ethnic landscapes in the UK. ■

14 See Leon Tikly in this collection

15 See Chamion Caballero in this collection

16 e.g. Ali (2003 b)

17 See e.g. Kundnani (2002); Phillips (2005)

18 See e.g. Tizard & Phoenix (1993); Olumide (2002); Ifekwunigwe (2004)

# 4. Thai-British Families: Towards a Deeper Understanding of ‘Mixedness’

Jessica Mai Sims

Runnymede Trust

## Introduction

Currently most research and attention to mixed identities focuses on the largest single mixed category, the Mixed White/Black Caribbean group. However, as the demographic of these single categories will change over time, other mixed groups will grow in numbers, adding pressure on our understanding (if not our recognition) of the diversity of culture and experience within the mixed group.<sup>19</sup> For example, as recent CLG findings in educational achievement presented more positive results for the Mixed White/Asian<sup>20</sup> group than the Mixed White/Black Caribbean and Mixed White/Black African groups, policy directed at a unitary mixed category in this area may not be useful or effective.<sup>21</sup>

In an effort to broaden the conception of what it means to be ‘mixed’ in Britain today, I present a small study of the relationships between (or the ‘mixing’ of) Thai<sup>22</sup> and White British people and the subsequent ethnic ‘mixedness’ of the children from these relationships. Although a relatively small number of individuals, the number of Thai-White British relationships has implications for recognizing the hidden diversity and experience for a unitary ‘mixed’ category. This article will explore the challenges Thai-White British relationships face as ethnically mixed relationships, the strate-

gies couples employ to confront stereotypes and the implications of the lack of positive images of Thai culture and mixed Thai relationships for mixed Thai/British children and young people.

## Thais in Britain

Large scale research has not been conducted on Thai people in the UK; therefore definitive information does not yet exist. Nonetheless from a variety of statistics, a picture does emerge for persons born in Thailand, residing in England and Wales. From Census data there were a reported 16,256 people born in Thailand living in England and Wales, of which the majority were women (72 per cent). Just under a third of the total people born in Thailand were reported to live in London (4,824), of which the majority were women (68 per cent).<sup>23</sup> Through Home Office records of grants of British citizenship we see that the majority of Thai nationals naturalized between the years of 2001 and 2006 came primarily as marriage migrants (only one-third of citizenship grants occurred through residence).<sup>24</sup> Additionally, between the years of 2003 to 2005, roughly 64 per cent of total settlement grants for Thai nationals were given to ‘wives’, while husbands only accounted for 3 per cent.<sup>25</sup> Because of the high gender imbalance we can infer that many Thai women are in mixed relationships.

This article draws mostly on primary information gathered for a broader study into the Thai community as part of Runnymede’s ongoing Community Studies series. While the research focused on people’s lives and experiences in Britain in general, this article will limit discussion to their experiences as being in mixed relationships or as being from a mixed ethnic background. Through interview, focus group and survey material, it became clear the experiences of the participants were inextricably tied to their ‘mixing’ – being in ethnically mixed relationships – or their ‘mixedness’ – being Mixed Thai/White British.<sup>26</sup> Due to the mixed nature of relationships (and people), the research methods employed attempted to include

19 In recent estimates published by Communities and Local Government, the growth of individual mixed categories sketched a changing demographic of the mixed group as a whole. While the biggest estimated change was of the Mixed White/Black African group (22 per cent), Mixed White/Asian and Mixed Other had a higher growth (18 per cent and 17 per cent respectively) than Mixed White/Black Caribbean (10 per cent). For more see: CLG (2007: 127)

20 In the UK ‘Asian’ has tended to refer to people who have ethnic backgrounds from the Asia’s sub-continent. Despite this meaning, during the interviews participants identified themselves as ‘Asians’, which may mean for the purposes of data collection, such as for ethnic monitoring forms, they also categorise themselves as ‘Asian’ or ‘Asian Other’ rather than just ‘Other’.

21 CLG (2007: 243)

22 For the purposes of the study, ‘Thai’ refers to people who are either Thai citizens or people who are ethnically Thai.

23 Finella (2005)

24 Dudley & Hesketh (2002); Dudley & Woollacott (2003); Dudley & Woollacott (2004); Mensah (2006); Mensah (2007); Woollacott (2005)

25 Home Office (2004); Home Office (2005); Home Office (2006)

26 All but one of the Thai women in the interviews and focus groups currently in relationships were in relationships with a White British man. Similarly in the surveys nearly all couples were Thai and White British.

voices of not only Thais, but also spouses who may not be Thai, and also people who are of Mixed Thai descent.<sup>27</sup>

### Perceptions and Experiences

The large gender imbalance in the figures gives shape to popular perception of the Thai population in Britain: Thai women migrating to the UK as individuals (and sometimes with their children) as the wives of White British men.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, with the image of the ‘Thai bride’ – which is shorthand for Thai mail-order bride – come hypersexualized stereotypes. As Enteen puts it, Thai women have the image of being, “exotic, young, alluring, yet potentially HIV-positive ‘hookers’, eager to please western clients; or dutiful, devoted wives of western men who dismiss the tenets of western feminism and appreciate the financial and emotional generosity of their husbands”.<sup>29</sup> These sexualized stereotypes of Thai women who seek relationships with western (White) men were well known to all of the interview and focus group participants. Jane, a second generation Mixed Thai/White British woman described it bluntly, “the stereotypes are that women are sex objects – that the women are here because they’re sex objects – they work in the service industry as massage girls, bar girls, prostitutes, or in Thai restaurants”.

An unlikely commentator on what some have called, ‘the Thai Bride boom’<sup>30</sup> in the UK is the television programme *Little Britain*, with its ‘Thai bride’ character Ting Tong Macadangdang. This has resulted in the characters Ting Tong and her White British husband Dudley, as being the most renowned Thai-White British relationship. As perhaps the only representation of Thai people and Thai-White British mixed relationships in British media, many research participants were embarrassed by the programme: “It has given a name to the stereotype, ‘Oh so you’re a Ting

Tong”’, Jane explained, “It makes it worse; it gives an image to the caricature”. When the sketch first appeared, one report introduced the topic as,

For more than 30 years it has been the marriage that dared not speak its name; now the life of the only Thai bride in the village is about to get a great deal tougher. Britain’s growing legion of middle-aged men and their “internet-order” Thai wives have long suffered social disapproval after their marriages. But their struggle for acceptance is about to be dealt a further blow, by the television show *Little Britain*.<sup>31</sup>

The *Little Britain* sketch, and press (such as the aforementioned article), have set the standard profile of the life of a Thai woman in Britain, not as a woman, or someone of Thai ethnicity, but as a ‘Thai Bride’ found on the internet through dating agencies. Interestingly, the article continues to talk of how the programme will affect the couples introduced through internet agencies, but no acknowledgement is made to the possible discrimination couples may face for being perceived as arranged (or ordered), or to Thai women who may not see their marital status as their one defining feature.<sup>32</sup>

The stereotypes of Thai women as synonymous with mail-order brides, prostitutes and subservient wives featured prominently in the daily lives of most of the Thai women interviewed – and their partners. In one focus group, the women discussed the preconceptions others had of their marriages, which had in turn made them more guarded of their personal lives. During an interview with Tom and Nid, a mixed couple living in London, Nid expressed how she did not feel she was accepted by White British people; that, “...being here its going to be hard anyway because people are really against mixed couples... people have a lot of negative ideas about us”. A Thai woman living in Glasgow explained in her survey response some of the common questions she hears: “How old is your husband? How much did you pay for your wife?” making reference to the widely held assumptions that women come as mail-order brides for much older western men.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, mixed relationships between Thai men and White British women are not immune to discrimination. In another survey response, a White British woman voiced her annoyance over comments she and her husband often hear,

People assume I eat green curry all the time and ask if my husband eats dog. People also feel the need to discuss the topic of Thai bar

27 At the stage of writing, in depth interviews have been conducted with seven individuals, two White British men married to Thai women and who had set up websites for White British-Thai families, one mixed Thai and White British couple, two second generation Mixed Thai and White British people and one Thai overseas student. In addition, two focus groups had been conducted in Eastbourne and Milton Keynes with nine Thai women in total. Additionally, in an effort to include Thais living outside South East England, a survey was distributed (available both in electronic and paper format and in Thai and English language) through networks and advertised on British Thai websites. At the time of writing, 21 surveys were completed in Thai, and 45 surveys were completed in English. With the exception of Jon, the names of the interview and focus group participants have been changed by the author.

28 There is evidence through grants of settlement and grants of citizenship that Thai children migrate to Britain with at least one Thai parent. Some of the research participants, for example, had migrated with their children (from a previous relationship) to the UK to join their British spouses.

29 Enteen (2005: 458)

30 Head (2006)

31 Pavia (2005)

32 For more on the critique of Asian women’s simultaneous identities of wives, workers and citizens, see: Piper & Rocas (2003: 1-21)

33 This stereotype is not only limited to relationships between Thai women and British men. See Humbeck (1996) for discussion on the experiences of Thai women in Germany.

girls and the sex industry. When people hear that I am married to a Thai they always want to tell me a story which is along the lines of: a guy who's a friend of a friend who was an old guy who took a young girl from Thailand who stole all his money and ran off (this seems to be an urban myth). I feel that this is a prejudice which people in the UK hold...

Many involved in the research, felt their mixed relationships have been looked down on because of the perception that most Thai-British relationships are mail or internet-order and thus morally distasteful. They recounted "incidents"; rude comments from both men and women who were co-workers, clients, strangers, children, and even extended family members; discrimination and ignorance of Thais and mixed couples were not seen to be limited to any one group. These comments and assumptions prompted some to actively challenge these stereotypes and promote what they felt was the reality of mixed Thai-British couples.

### Resistance

Some of the participants, such as women in a focus group in Eastbourne, sought to counter the negative representations of Thai people, and also their mixed relationships, by showing the 'real Thai culture'. For example, together with their husbands and friends, the women participated in a multicultural festival by demonstrating Thai dance, massage, and cuisine. It was hoped that showing these cultural expressions would give local residents positive representations of their families and Thai culture. Additionally, it was not only important to circulate positive images for the general public; the women felt that the sexualized stereotypes were unfair and would make Thai women and their children ashamed of their Thai heritage. By providing the general public with alternative representations of Thai people and Thai culture, the women in Eastbourne hoped to supplant negative opinions about mixed Thai-British relationships and families.

Similarly, Jon, a White British man whose wife is Thai, developed the website Thai-UK.org to provide information for Thais living in Britain and as a support resource for mixed families and Mixed Thai/British children. Distressed at the lack of Thai positive images and role models in Britain for his Mixed Thai/White British children, he was prompted to action, "I want my children to speak Thai, feel positive about being Thai and proud that they are of dual heritage". Even

though some parents did not want to pressure their children to speak Thai,<sup>34</sup> others, like Jon, felt knowing Thai and English would support identification with both ethnic communities. A few people mentioned how Thai was encouraged in the home, but also found this difficult to sustain because of a lack of other Thai speakers in their area.<sup>35</sup>

While expressing children's 'Thainess' involved dedication, by nature of living in Britain and attending school parents felt their children could easily express their English or British identities. Charles, who is second generation Mixed Thai/White British, was thankful that his parents encouraged him to go to Thai supplementary school throughout his childhood. He felt fortunate to live near the Buddhapadipa Buddhist Temple in Wimbledon because it provided a social environment for interaction with other Thai and mixed Thai-British people and families. As an adult Charles realized growing up in a combination of cultures had been useful; he did not give the impression of being caught in-between two worlds or marooned between communities, but rather that his identity was fluid: neither only Thai, only British, or only mixed.

Having a very different upbringing from Charles, Jane was raised by her mother and her family, "who are absolutely English-English, middle class, from London", without any Thai influence. Despite her mother being fluent in Thai, Jane suspected that her mother did not teach it to her and her sister for fear of confusing them, especially as they did not have any Thais in their life to identify with. Jane recounted a story of her aunt taking her to a Thai cultural exhibition at the Barbican, and how it changed her attitude of feeling like an outcast for having "looked different":

I was two when I arrived and didn't go back until I was thirteen, so my whole childhood I had only heard of this place called Thailand. I had no concept, no idea... I couldn't visualize it; it was this fictional place. There were pictures of Bangkok and the King and Queen there, and I remember being really impacted by it, and it gave me a sense of identity.

Even though she could not speak Thai, Jane felt having access to positive cultural images gave her pride in her Thai background. Moreover having knowledge of both cultures had given both Charles and Jane a sense of comfort in operating within and between the contexts of each community. Identification with 'Thainess', 'Britishness', or even 'mixedness' will no doubt vary according to individual mixed Thai/White British people, although for Jane and Charles, their dual

34 These responses were true for both mixed families with Thai children and mixed families with Mixed Thai/British children.

35 In the focus groups and interviews there were two cases where both Thai and British parents spoke to their children both in Thai and English.

citizenship, personal experience in both Thailand and Britain, and positive outlook on both backgrounds, have shaped their mixed identities.

### Conclusions

The case study presented here of mixed Thai-White British families and mixed Thai/White British people has sought to present a deeper understanding on the meaning of 'mixing' and 'mixedness' for Britain. Due to the sexualized stereotypes of Thai women and the stigma of the mail-order Thai-British marriage, Thai people have mobilized themselves and their families in different parts of the country through cultural events and electronic media to present their experience as Thai people and being in mixed Thai-British relationships. Besides targeting people's ignorance and prejudices, parents have also promoted positive images for the development of their children's pride in their backgrounds in order to enhance their Thai and mixed Thai/White British children's self-confidence.

This study has highlighted that one feature of the Thai community in Britain may be its 'mixedness' because of the prevalence of mixed families and Mixed Thai/White British children. Policy that may be directed at the 'Thai community' should keep its mixed composition in mind, and likewise policy directed at the 'mixed-race/heritage community' should take note of its own varied membership. One way some local authorities have supported local Thai communities and their families is through Thai summer festivals which have in turn provided an opportunity for local residents to have meaningful contact with Thai culture and subsequently with mixed families. Festivals such as these also provide an environment of 'normality', as Chamion Caballero has described in this volume, of mixed families interacting with other families in the area. As well, an environment of neutrality could be fostered where individuals and families have a space free of the preconceptions of others; namely, of particular 'mixes' or mixed relationships. ■

## 5. Meeting the Educational Needs of Mixed Heritage Pupils: Challenges for Policy and Practice

**Leon Tikly**  
University of Bristol

### Introduction

The aim of the article is to present evidence concerning the educational needs of mixed heritage pupils, in particular those of White/Black Caribbean, origin and to outline the challenges for policy and practice in meeting the needs of these learners. The article draws on and extends the findings of original research which was sponsored by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) and is the largest and most comprehensive study of its kind.<sup>36</sup> The article will begin by outlining the evidence relating to the achievement of White/Black Caribbean pupils and the nature of the barriers to achievement facing this group. This will provide a basis for a discussion in the second part of the article about the challenges facing policy-makers and practitioners.

### The Achievement of Mixed Heritage Pupils

The achievement patterns of mixed heritage pupils can be summarized as follows;

- the attainment of White/Black Caribbean pupils is below average in primary and secondary schools, the attainment of White/Black African pupils is close to average in primary schools and slightly below average in secondary schools, and that the attainment of White/Asian pupils is above average. Furthermore, relative rates of progress are below average for White/Black Caribbean pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4, particularly for boys at Key Stage 4.
- Part of the reason for these differences appears to be associated with differences in relative levels of deprivation, as measured by the proportion of

<sup>36</sup> Tikly et al. (2004)

pupils eligible for free school meals. However, this is not the full picture.

- Although numbers are relatively small, the latest statistics on permanent exclusions show that White/Black Caribbean and White/Black African pupils are over-represented.<sup>37</sup>

On the basis of the statistical evidence summarized above, particular attention was given in the original study to an examination of the factors affecting the achievement of White/Black Caribbean pupils in secondary schools. This focus is reflected in the current article.

### Barriers to Achievement

We have discussed the complex and often subtle barriers to achievement facing White/Black Caribbean pupils at length elsewhere.<sup>38</sup> Like their Black Caribbean peers, White/Black Caribbean pupils' achievement in school is negatively affected by low socio-economic status, low teacher expectations and behavioural issues related to peer group pressure. However, these take on a specific form for White/Black Caribbean pupils.

With respect to teacher expectations, we found that the views of teachers within any one school concerning the achievement and behaviour of White/Black Caribbean pupils were complex and contradictory.<sup>39</sup> Views were also often implicit rather than explicit, reflecting only a partial and tentative awareness of White/Black Caribbean pupils as a group with distinctive educational needs. However, many teachers assumed/believed that some White/Black Caribbean learners faced 'identity problems' linked to fragmented home environments and because they were of mixed heritage. More research needs to be undertaken into the home backgrounds of White/Black Caribbean pupils most at risk of underachieving and if any link between fragmented home backgrounds and achievement exists. Nonetheless, it was clear from speaking to the mixed heritage pupils in our sample and to their parents that a positive image of mixed identities was often reinforced in the home, which reflects research into mixed heritage children and their sense of

identity.<sup>40</sup> This was not the case, however, in the school context, where their mixed identities were seldom recognized by teachers or were seen in similar terms to Black Caribbean identities. Like their Black Caribbean peers, White/Black Caribbean pupils, particularly boys, were often perceived to have behavioural problems at school.

Low teacher expectations were sometimes reinforced by low academic expectations and future aspirations on the part of the mixed heritage pupils themselves and, occasionally, parents. As Sewell has pointed out, Black Caribbean pupils, particularly boys, may experience considerable pressure by their peers to adopt the norms of an 'urban' or 'street' subculture in which academic interest and success are seen as undesirable and useless.<sup>41</sup> We found this to be equally true for White/Black Caribbean heritage pupils in our study, particularly at secondary school and particularly for boys, and peer group pressures were exacerbated by name-calling and forms of exclusion by both White and Black peers. High achievement or efforts to succeed were viewed as contrary to the values of this dominant sub-culture and credence was given to unruly behaviour with teachers and antagonistic behaviour with other pupils. Often high achievement attitudes and cooperative behaviour were more associated with a particular class-based notion of 'Whiteness', which was understood as 'posh' and/or 'geeky'.

According to one Local Authority (LA) advisor who had worked closely with mixed heritage pupils over a number of years, these factors together contributed to a phenomenon where some White/Black Caribbean pupils tended to act out particularly extreme and rebellious 'Black identities'. These patterns of behaviour then reinforce low teacher expectations in a negative feedback loop. One area where it is 'cool' or permissible in terms of Black street culture for pupils to excel is in the area of sports and here positive aspirations on the part of pupils reinforce teacher stereotypes. Thus whereas the White/Black Caribbean pupils were underachieving academically, there was plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that they were over-represented in non-academic activities such as sport. On the one hand, participation in sport and music was clearly a source of affirmation for many of the pupils in the sample, but on the other hand, encouraging White/Black Caribbean pupils to focus their aspirations on sport at the expense of other subject areas is unlikely to help any but a very few to gain access into the labour market.

There are also factors operating in schools that affect the broader educational needs of all mixed

37 Tikly et al. (2004)

38 Haynes et al. (2006); Caballero et al. (forthcoming)

39 Contradictory views were often held by teachers within the same school and sometimes even by the same teacher. Teacher statements on high expectations were on other occasions contradicted by pupils and parents from the same school who reported a more negative experience of teacher expectations.

40 Tizard & Phoenix (1993)

41 Sewell (1997)

heritage pupils (White/Black Caribbean, White/Black African and White/Asian) i.e. needs relating to having their identities recognized and understood in the curriculum as part of the overall diversity of society and to be protected from racist abuse. Whereas these factors may not serve as a barrier to achievement for all mixed heritage pupils, they form part of a climate in which schools are unable to effectively respond to the barriers to achievement facing White/Black Caribbean pupils, as noted above, because of their relative 'invisibility' at the level of LA and school policy.<sup>42</sup> This parallels the findings of studies into mixed heritage pupils in the USA.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, we found little evidence that across the LAs there was any great awareness of the needs of mixed heritage pupils. Across all the schools we visited awareness of the educational needs of mixed heritage pupils was limited amongst the teachers we spoke to and tended to be isolated amongst senior managers and specialist EMAS staff. We found that whilst school policy statements expressed a commitment to tackle discrimination, racism and underachievement, these phenomena were expressed in 'mono heritage' terms that did not acknowledge the existence of mixed heritage pupils in the school or the specific barriers to learning faced by White/Black Caribbean learners.

A telling indicator of the lack of attention given to issues affecting mixed heritage pupils is the uncertainty around the terminology used to describe them. Whilst this is of course an issue that is wider than the school context, the absence of discussion in this area means that many teachers are unsure of the 'correct' terminology and as such are often hesitant to talk about this group for fear of using the 'wrong' term. Within the school environment, we found that a range of terms were used to refer to pupils from mixed heritage backgrounds, and that different groups tended to use different terms. Moreover, pupils of White/Black Caribbean and White/Black African heritage are sometimes lumped together within a broader group of African Caribbean learners and on other occasions they are not. The lack of discussion at school level is equally represented by the general absence of references to the experiences of this group of pupils in official statements issued by the government, by LAs as well as those contained in

<sup>42</sup> We acknowledge that many of these factors may also apply to other minority ethnic groups of pupils albeit in different ways and with different emphases. Chinese learners, for example, are often almost entirely absent from policy statements on equality and are poorly represented in the curriculum. The extent of data monitoring for all groups is often patchy and sporadic. The aim here, however, is to show how these factors specifically impact on the experiences of mixed heritage pupils.

<sup>43</sup> Wardle (1999)

<sup>44</sup> Fullan (2001)

school documents relating to equal opportunities and race equality. Such an absence reinforces the invisibility of mixed heritage groups and provides little guidance to teachers regarding the needs that these pupil groups might have. Moreover, we found that the existence of data monitoring systems and of the requisite skills and/or the will to effectively monitor performance data relating to ethnicity was patchy across the sample of schools as a whole, which affected the ability of schools to set challenging targets to raise the achievement of minority ethnic learners at risk of underachieving. The problem was particularly acute for groups of mixed heritage learners because the numbers involved are often relatively small which makes data relating to their achievement sometimes harder to interpret. The lack of attention to the academic performance of White/Black Caribbean (and other mixed heritage pupils) can serve to reinforce the widely held and false perception that 'there is no problem here'.

A further aspect of the invisibility we refer to above is the almost total absence of references to mixed heritage people and experiences in the curriculum. At present the mainstream curriculum does little in the way of acknowledging Black experiences and identities. Where it does do this, little attention is given to mixed heritage people within this broader focus. Finally, there is a lack of accessible role models for mixed heritage pupils in schools. These last two issues, however, raise complex issues around the relationship between mixed heritage and other Black learners that we discuss in more depth below.

## Challenges for Policy and Practice

### Challenges for Policy

Implementing educational changes such as those required to meet the educational needs of mixed heritage pupils requires a mixture of top down and bottom up approaches.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, schools in England are locally managed and have control over their budgets, and they are expected to use this autonomy to meet the needs of the local communities they serve. In other respects, the English system is highly centralized and schools must operate within the confines of a prescriptive national curriculum and a plethora of central initiatives and targets. They must also perform this balancing act in a context of a quasi-market in which they must compete with other schools to attract students and are made accountable through the publication of their examination results. Notwithstanding the recent strengthening of race relations legislation, it remains painfully obvious that in this context issues such as those facing mixed

heritage and other minority ethnic pupils tend to get pushed down the educational agendas of schools. In this respect, if the government is serious about meeting the needs of this group then it must realize its own responsibilities and role in leading change.

Policymakers need to be aware, however, of some of the political and other sensitivities surrounding mixed heritage pupils mentioned above and to take into account the reality that many teachers continue to struggle to come to terms with existing policies targeted at 'mono heritage', minority ethnic groups let alone possible future ones targeted at mixed heritage pupils. Some teaching staff feel that there is already an over-emphasis on the achievement of minority groups, and that the major achievement issue in their schools was related to pupils from low socio-economic backgrounds and in particular to white, working class boys.<sup>45</sup> To some extent these views are supported by the achievement data reported above; i.e. that the proportion of pupils within any ethnic group that is entitled to free school meals is a strong predictor of the overall achievement scores for that group.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, as we also suggested above, even if socio-economic factors are controlled for, there remain issues of underachievement amongst some minority ethnic groups including pupils of White/Black Caribbean origin that are irreducible simply to socio-economic background and that these also need to be addressed by schools.

The case needs to be more effectively put by policymakers for the needs of *all* pupils to be addressed in schools, in a way which recognizes diversity. In the case of mixed heritage groups, this can be achieved through presenting the facts relating to the changing demographics, the relative achievement and patterns of exclusion from school of different mixed heritage groups along with evidence concerning barriers to achievement and effective strategies for overcoming them. One obvious way in which central and local government can raise the visibility of mixed heritage pupils is through providing clear and unambiguous directives to schools about the use of language and terminology to refer to them and to be consistent in the use of appropriate terminology in its own policy

45 See also DfES (2003 b)

46 Indeed, the relationship between low socio-economic class and educational underachievement has been pointed out for many years by researchers and has recently been reiterated by the chief inspector of schools. It is unclear whether existing government strategies such as *Excellence in Cities* (EiC) which is a targeted programme of support for schools in deprived areas of the country, will have any significant impact on this most deep rooted of problems. (For more information on EiC go refer to <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/sie/eic/>)

47 Gillborn & Gipps (1996); Blair et al. (1998); Runnymede Trust (1998); OFSTED (2002 a); OFSTED (2002 b); Bhattacharyya et al. (2003)

pronouncements. The DfES can also work in partnership with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to ensure that both mixed and 'mono heritage' identities and experiences are reflected in the national curriculum. The government could also take a lead in working with educational publishers to ensure that mixed as well as Black and minority 'mono heritage' identities and experiences are reflected in educational materials used by schools including pictures and text.

LAs also have a key strategic role to play in raising the achievement of White/Black Caribbean pupils. Some isolated examples of pilot projects were found in three of the LAs we visited during the course of our study, such as curriculum resources that presented positive role models, in-service training sessions for teachers and governors focusing specifically on the needs of White/Black Caribbean pupils, and having books and other materials reflecting both Black and White/Black Caribbean heritages.

### Challenges for Practice: the Culturally Learning School

Recent research into how schools can raise the achievement of minority ethnic groups at risk of underachieving<sup>47</sup> has highlighted the need for a whole school approach. Considering the needs of White/Black Caribbean and other mixed heritage pupils draws attention to a dimension of the existing model of a whole school approach that up until now has been under-emphasized, namely, that of the need to create 'culturally learning schools'. The concept of a culturally learning school affirms yet also seeks to go beyond the existing whole school approach for tackling minority ethnic underachievement. It does this principally by laying greater emphasis on building the capacity for schools to effectively manage change. There is also recognition in these schools that developing an understanding of the identities and experiences of mixed heritage pupils is not just of benefit to these pupils but to all pupils in a rapidly diversifying and increasingly 'mixed' local, national and global context. Finally, culturally learning schools work in active partnership with central and local government whose job it is to support and challenge schools to realize race equality objectives. These objectives must include meeting the needs of mixed heritage pupils. ■

# 6. Mixed Heritage: Perspectives on Health and Welfare

**Mark R D Johnson**

De Montfort University

## Introduction

To a significant extent, the development of the UK social care system was intimately affected by the growth of populations of mixed heritage, or 'mixed race'; the result often of liaison between Black (African and Asian) workers in the merchant marine and women in major port towns such as Liverpool. The subsequent children, whose presence sparked something of a moral panic in the early twentieth century,<sup>48</sup> drew that attention of social reformers and charitably inclined researchers, and became the focus for the work of organizations like the Liverpool 'Settlement' (on the same model as the Oxford and Cambridge 'settlements' in inner-city London). The focus in social care on the welfare (and management) of 'mixed-race' children continued well up until the end of the century, and has not disappeared from current literature and policy. The same concerns were also present in health care and policy, especially in regard to the development of 'port health' and health promotion initiatives in the middle part of that century. It is to be hoped that by now there is a more mature understanding of the issues and less concern about 'miscegenation' and 'racial purity' – and recognition that public health is not threatened by bicultural couples. However, it is clear that underlying concerns or lack of awareness, understanding and empathy (or sympathy) among health and social care workers remain, and may poison the relationship between the health/welfare care system and communities of dual or multiple heritage. The problem would appear to be that throughout all health and social care research, while attention has been paid to a number of specific minority ethnic communities, as defined in terms of geographical origin, language or religion, the concerns of people defined as being of 'Mixed', dual or multiple ethnic heritage are almost never separated out from those of the 'BME' main groups (whether the Census' 16 headings or the four major groups: White, Asian,

'Black' and 'Other') but are included in that 'Other' catchall residual category, and if identified at all, are regarded as a pathogenic group.

## Child Care Issues

While the issues of Adoption and Fostering are addressed by Savita de Sousa and John Simmonds in this volume, we cannot ignore the issue of children of multiple or dual heritage admitted to care – especially because this has considerable implications for their own well-being and mental health. As Barn (1999) and others have repeatedly stated, in the 1970s and 1980s at least, young people of 'mixed race' origins were significantly over-represented in the numbers admitted to care, although Banks (2004) and some others have recently disputed the extent to which this group really is over-represented in the care system, given the poor data we have on the population as a whole. Whatever the facts, it remains true that there has existed, and continues to exist, a 'moral panic' or folk devil around the issue. For the individual child or young person, the experience of being taken into care because of a lack of familial or community support remains psychologically damaging.

Debates over appropriate 'matching' of children and foster-parents or other care providers have also raised anxieties and public controversy, and worse, have led to significant delays in moving from an institutional to a 'family' setting.<sup>49</sup> While it is undoubtedly true that carers from or sharing the same cultural identity(ies) should know more about the specific needs of the young person, it is not necessarily true that they will, or that such knowledge cannot be held or acquired by well-intentioned others. There are also many examples of people who have been brought up 'outside' their birth-communities but who have retained an awareness of and ability to engage with that culture, and of course there are those who might formally meet the criteria but have no real empathy with the cultures into which they were born themselves, or the culture of their partners!<sup>50</sup> The debate about identity formation, self-awareness and self-esteem, learning techniques to cope with racism and the relevance of matching will continue:<sup>51</sup> to date it does not seem to have been conclusively determined.<sup>52</sup>

48 Ifekwunigwe (2004)

49 Selwyn et al. (2004)

50 Banks (1998)

51 Banks (1992)

52 Tizard & Phoenix (1994)

## Mental Health

Issues of mental health tend to cross the boundary between social care and bio-medicine and consequently there may be issues of culture and upbringing, social expectation and reception, and 'clinical susceptibility' involved in the detection, diagnosis and care of people with mental health problems. Some of these, again, depend on the stereotypes and views held by practitioners, in the way they define and describe those they care for and the conditions that they treat.

Consequently, early social writings on the position of those 'between two cultures' have tended to pathologize this situation, and suggest that coping with this position may engender greater mental distress and mental illness. If a diagnosis such as 'cannabis psychosis' or the need for restraint and forcible medication is associated with a specific 'ethnic identity' (in this case, usually males of African/Caribbean heritage), then it is probable that the minority identity associated with the worst-case scenario (or highest tariff treatment) will be applied to an individual who might regard themselves as being able to negotiate or move between that 'racialized' identity and another, including the 'majority' one.

In reality, of course, there is plenty of evidence that those who are able to adopt more than one identity and be happy in either and/or both of them, are generally more resistant to such threats to well-being and mental ill-health as excessive use or abuse of alcohol,<sup>53</sup> although some other data suggests higher usage of illicit drugs among people from a 'mixed' background:<sup>54</sup> the differences between these findings has not yet been explored. Similarly, Sinha et al. (2005) suggest that early sexual activity is more frequent among young males of 'Black Caribbean and Mixed ethnicity' (but did not examine differences within the 'mixed' group' or if there was an 'Asian Mixed' group, suggesting perhaps that 'Black Mixed' men simply behaved like their Black peers). I do not believe that the data (whichever way they show the differential) actually help to show causation or that the mixed heritage of the people concerned is necessarily significant, and feel that this is something that needs to be properly and sensitively researched.

## Biomedical Risks

Medical issues are different, insofar as they relate to infectious and inherited organic diseases, which are increasingly being recognized as having a close associa-

tion with the genetic makeup ('genome') of the individual, and there may be some sense in recognizing that a shared genetic heritage carries risks for the individual which merit special attention. Genomic medicine is still an emergent science about which more is being discovered daily, and which may one day show that membership of a specific ethnic group, particularly if it is one marked by 'endogamy' (marriage within the group, rather than 'out' of it) raises risks of specific conditions. There are, for example, several medical conditions which are commonly referred to as 'ethnic' diseases because of their close association with one or other ethnic group. This is true not only for the minority groups who have Black/African, Asian, Jewish or Mediterranean ancestral origins: the white 'majority' community also carries genetic markers for conditions such as cystic fibrosis, and 'factor V Leiden' (relating to blood clotting and the risk of heart attacks, especially among those of northern European ancestry). Even simple problems like dietary allergies or intolerance may be associated (in a probabilistic manner) with membership of certain ethnic groups<sup>55</sup> – but probability is not the same as causation or determination – that is the risk of and the cause of stereotypes. However, they may be useful in raising the 'index of suspicion' – leading the medical practitioner to consider an alternative 'differential diagnosis' which can be a life-saving action – and should therefore be kept as a benefit of having some knowledge of and access to the 'stereotypes' of ethnic groups.

People of mixed heritage may be ignorant of the risks associated with one or other of their heritages, and those charged with their medical care may also ignore or fail to recognize the presence of those other risk factors. This has been classically demonstrated in relation to the blood disorder 'Sickle Cell Disease', a haemoglobinopathy associated particularly, but not exclusively, with people of West African descent.<sup>56</sup> Cases have been observed in 'white blonde Yorkshire' children, which may or may not be related to the early presence of Roman soldiers of Mediterranean and African origin in York in the first centuries of the Christian era. The risks to people of more recent linkages to the areas of the world where this disease is prevalent are considerable and have recently been recognized by the implementation of a national screening programme to ascertain and warn prospective parents. However, during the trial period when this screening was being developed, it became apparent that not all health professionals were asking all those who might be at risk about their ethnic background, and that significant numbers of people were not asked, probably on the basis of the sorts of stereotypes referred to above.<sup>57</sup>

53 Purser et al. (2001); Orford et al. (2004)

54 Aust & Smith (2003)

55 Bhatnagar & Aggarwal (2007)

56 Dyson (1998)

57 Dyson et al. (2007)

## Conclusions

The implication for policy and practice is that once again, the focus is on the preparedness and ability of health care staff to recognize and address, without fear or prejudice, the possibility that people have more than one heritage and may be at risk from a wider range of conditions. Therefore, it is not only legitimate but essential to undertake 'ethnic monitoring', or rather, to ask sensitively and intelligently about a person's ethnic identity and not to insist on forcing responses into one of the simple 'classic' boxes, and of

course equally important, that people of multiple heritages will need to feel comfortable in responding to such enquiries. At the same time, it is crucial that families educate their members fully in their ethnic heritage and history, to avoid a failure to recognize where a genetically transmitted risk may exist. In both cases, this means people being comfortable with the concept of mixed heritage and the right of people to assert their diverse origins and to move between and exist in more than one 'universe', if necessary at the same time! ■

# 7. Adoption and Fostering Issues: 'Judgement of Solomon'

**Savita de Sousa & John Simmonds**

British Association for Adoption and Fostering

## Introduction

The subtitle of this paper comes from the story of King Solomon making a judgement between two women coming before him carrying two babies, one dead and one living, with each claiming the living child as her own. As a solution, Solomon ordered that the living child be cut in two, with one half returned to each mother. When one of women gave up her claim rather than see the child killed, Solomon at once recognized her as the true mother. This powerful story is indicative of the kind of judgement that social workers are often in the position of making when deciding with which family to place a 'looked after' child; including those of mixed heritage.

Social workers constantly have to reconcile conflicting perspectives about children's needs when placing them with foster carers or adopters. Even in cases when needs are assessed, there may well have to be compromises when available carers do not meet the ideal profile to best meet those needs. The picture of dispassionate, evidence based assessment and planning in the interests of children often proves to be somewhat different as these issues work themselves out in practice. For mixed heritage children, the social worker's greatest dilemma is how to match him/her with the right family, avoiding unnecessary delay and

taking into account the wishes of the birth family. In other words, social workers constantly have to 'balance' competing demands and needs and come to judgement where, in effect, they are taking on the role of King Solomon.

## Adoption and Fostering in Context

Through the 1950s and 60's children of black and mixed heritage were considered to be at best, 'hard to place'. Adoption practice at the time was dominated by racialized and exclusionary practices, as well as 'matching' preferences on the basis of physical characteristics.<sup>58</sup> Societal tensions about post-war migration to Britain undoubtedly contributed to this. The British Adoption Project was set up to challenge the notion that black and minority ethnic children, including those of mixed heritage were unadoptable. This was the beginning of the growth of transracial adoption as agencies argued and found that white families would consider taking black and mixed heritage children. Further, literature such as the publication of *Adoption and Race: Black, Asian, and Mixed Race Children in White Families*,<sup>59</sup> supported the view that children in these placements did well. Findings such as these on transracial adoption were not immune to resistance; the Association of Black Social Workers and Allied Professionals in Britain (ABSWAP)<sup>60</sup> argued in the 1980s that transracial placements negated the importance of an individual's racial identity and cultural heritage. The acceptability of such placements were

58 Kirton (2000)

59 Gill & Jackson (1983)

60 Kirton (2000)

seen to be a part of the racist nature of society, where 'black' was considered to be easily and necessarily incorporated into dominant white ways of thinking, believing and being. The views of ABSWAP gained considerable momentum with other groups, such as the British Association for Adoption and Fostering's Black Perspective's Advisory Committee, which took an active role in opposing transracial placements of any kind. Through the 1980's the evolution of anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice in social work training and practice became dominant themes, which then in turn became powerful forces in the profession. 'Same race' placements thus became the placement of choice, a policy and practice framework that has remained unchanged to the present time.

Over time some of the serious practical problems associated with the 'same race' policy became apparent; namely, there were serious delays in placing black and mixed race children, or adoption was not being made available as a 'same race' placement was unlikely to be found. Due to the negative impact of this on children's welfare, the Department of Health issued a circular (LAC 98(20)) advising local authorities that no child should be deprived of a 'loving home' simply because of the lack of a racial match. It was an important document that introduced some flexibility into the system, although it did not amount to a return to transracial placements. The child's racial and cultural heritage was still core to the placement, and prospective carers were expected to clearly identify how they had prepared themselves and would proactively support the child's identity. Paralleling this issue, there have also been serious difficulties in recruiting enough black or mixed race adopters or foster carers. Specialized projects often have been more successful because of their use of black staff with detailed knowledge of the issues with helpful routes into the black community. However, the pool of available black and mixed race adopters and foster carers is still small, and the availability of resources to support them is limited. Overall, black and mixed race children are seriously disadvantaged in the competition for placement resources and it remains unclear whether anything done to date will substantially improve this situation.

### **Placement Considerations for Mixed Heritage Children**

In practice, the issues facing social workers in making the 'right' decisions for mixed race children are more complex than the 'same race'/transracial placement debate captures. Unlike in the USA, where consideration of a child's racial background is unlawful in making a placement, in the UK the argument for placing the child's ethnic identity and cultural

heritage at the forefront of a search for a family has been reinforced over the years. The profiles of children in family finding publications such as 'Be My Parent' clearly identifies the continuing prominence of this issue and the lengths that social workers will go to meet it. Still, it is also clear that many of the children needing a placement have complex backgrounds; even if their background can be accurately and meaningfully identified, in some circumstances even the grandparents may be widely diverse in their ethnicity (Afro-Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Chinese, European), and further, there is likely to be added diversity through culture, language, religion and other significant factors. Additionally, each of the child's parents may be strongly embedded in their heritage, loosely linked to it or may have rejected it altogether. The parents' identification with their own heritage may influence their views on the placement for their child, either being clear or conflicting, or quite possibly absent because they may have disappeared. The child's experience of any of this will also be wide ranging. For some, experience of a particular culture will have been an important part of their early experience and form a significant part of their ethnic identity. For others who have been removed from their parents at birth or shortly afterwards; their heritage may exist as a set of complex facts about them and who they might become, but remain unrealized in actual lived experience. When these issues are also set within the context of other important factors - the child may have full or half siblings, be dealing with the consequences of maltreatment, have complex health needs, be disabled, or some of what has happened to them may be unclear or unrecorded - ethnic identity and cultural heritage clearly cannot be the only consideration taken into account in placement planning and placement finding.

The primary question in placement planning is trying to identify the social worker's aims in making a placement. Broadly the focus must be on finding a family that is most likely to meet the assessed needs of the child over their childhood and adolescence, including promoting their identity and heritage. But, are the family being given the task of preserving an identity that already exists, or are they creating the conditions that will allow those aspects of the child's inherited identity and heritage to emerge as a positive factor in the future? This assumes of course that any of these factors are known and stable, and as suggested above, they are not. Children bring a blend of known and the unknown, consistent and inconsistent factors with them. It is the role of the parents with the child to make something of these factors and forge them

into an identity that will be meaningful and stand the child in good stead in the future. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that adolescence is a period when identities are formed partly in opposition to parents' values, circumstances and past. Identity may emerge through a blending of parts, a true mix, but also may involve opposition and rejection of parents' values. All of this raises the complexity of understanding the influence of parents' culture and context on the development of children. Does a secure, open and flexible parent-child relationship create the conditions where the child's identity is most likely to emerge as secure, as attachment theory would suggest? If this is the case, are those factors that create secure attachments in parents dependant or independent of issues of ethnic identity and cultural heritage?

One thing that can be certain is that the placement of a child is a radical intervention that will change the child forever. Even the factors that have some stability and continuity to them, such as the child's genetic, cultural and social history, will be influenced by the new circumstances and context of the placement. Whatever the intention during a placement to preserve the past, it will be changed, and it becomes the responsibility of the new parent to ensure as far as possible that the change works well for the child and becomes meaningful for them. However, in the argument for 'same race' placements, the capacity of parents to prepare and support children in meeting the challenges they may encounter in society becomes another important factor. In this sense, the structuring and stratification of society along ethnic, gender, sexual, religious and class divisions has been crucial in family placement practice. Children need to come to value who they are, but they will also need the confidence, resilience and support to manage institutional and personal experiences of discrimination, suspicion and hatred that they may encounter. Those of a 'same race' are more likely to be in a position to support the child with this because of their own experiences.

The problem of mixed race or ethnicity in family placement is that the act of placing a child involves a mix of everything. Yet the primary responsibility of the parent and eventually the child is to create something out of this powerful mix that establishes a positive, stable sense of identity, self esteem, competence and resilience for and in the child that enables them to make their way in the world. The complexity of establishing an identity and integrating cultures is portrayed in the following:

61 A black adopted person quoted in Harris (2006)

62 Gorham (2006)

Like most kids I craved the experience and acceptance of my peers, but they seemed so different to me. They seemed to know something secret. Although I had been told from an early age that I was adopted, that my African father and English mother could not look after me so I have been specially chosen, I did not really understand the full implications of being an 'off the peg' baby. I remember going to a party organised by the adoption agency and being interviewed by a Radio 4 journalist on what it was like to be adopted. 'It means that I was specially picked out by mummy and daddy.' I was asked if I knew why I was a different colour to mummy and daddy. 'Because I have been in the sun too long' I replied much to the shock of my parents.<sup>61</sup>

I went through school with racial impunity, mainly because I was oblivious to it. I hadn't been primed to expect it by my parents, nor given means to defend against it, therefore I wasn't aware of any racist innuendos made by the teachers or other pupils. My parents just loved me as their child, not as a colour that might be discriminated against.<sup>62</sup>

Social workers are at the focus of resolving the complex issues of securing the best for the child within the context of competing explanations of how 'the best' occurs; they have to judge whether one family is better than another and at the same time whether the child will meet the needs of one adoptive family or foster carer as opposed to another. It may be sensible for the government to suggest that social workers take a 'balanced' approach in such matters, but as the argument above makes clear, this is probably more akin to workers taking a 'King Solomon like' approach in balancing the needs of mixed heritage children, and the wishes, feelings, perceptions and convictions of their birth families, adoptive parents, communities, academics and government.

## Conclusion

The placement of children with a mixed ethnic and cultural background focuses the debate about the nature of 'mixed' in a powerful way. In practice, the resolution of these issues does not lend itself to simplified notions of 'same' or 'transracial' placements, but it is core to family placement practice. Social workers are required to be the modern day Solomons of the professional world. ■

# 8. 'Mixed' Families: Assumptions and New Approaches

**Chamion Caballero**

London South Bank University

Couples from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and their 'mixed' children are increasingly visible in the public eye. Though Britain has long been host to mixed relationships and population groups, since the 1990s there has been a noticeable public interest in those who are part of, or a product of, mixed relationships; what has been dubbed 'Beige' or 'Brown Britain'.

However, whilst more and more is known about those who identify themselves as belonging to the group the Census has called 'Mixed',<sup>63</sup> parents of mixed children in Britain continue to be subject to longstanding assumptions and stereotypes, ones which often presume their racial, ethnic and socioeconomic profiles, their inability to raise their children with healthy racialized identities or the hypersexual nature of their marriage or relationship. Indeed, there is a strong tradition in British popular thought of conceiving mixed relationships as constituting a sexually promiscuous 'underclass' of white women producing children with feckless, hypersexual black men; contemporary examples of which can be found in television comedy sketches such as *Little Britain's* Vicky Pollard ("me got me man Jermaine now and we just been round the back of the waterslides making baby") or *Harry Enfield and Chums* Waynetta Slob ("I wanna brown baby like all the other mums on the estate").

Unsurprisingly, such stereotypes are commonly accompanied by notions of 'mixed' relationships as inherently problematic. For example, in her advice column for *The Daily Mirror*, Miriam Stoppard advised that, "to form a lasting relationship, you have to be strong and determined. That's true of everyone and especially true of inter-racial relationships".<sup>64</sup> Such 'truisms' reflect the notion of 'culture clash', which is frequently used to explain the supposed transient and

problematic nature of mixed relationships.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, advice from 'experts' on mixed relationships frequently supports what Maureen Reddy calls, "the automatic presumption of underlying pathology in interracial relationships",<sup>66</sup> with its warnings that attempts to cross the barrier of 'cultural differences' lead to emotionally difficult relationships and damaged children.

Consequently, those who cross the colour and faith line are led to understand that they may not only be consigning their children to the marginal and tragic 'between two worlds' status envisaged by early twentieth century sociologists (recently revived by Trevor Phillips' comments on mixed children suffering from "identity stripping," and being, "marooned between communities"), but as the popularity of media accounts of children being abducted abroad by their Middle Eastern or Asian fathers suggests, may lose their children altogether.<sup>67</sup>

Behind the stereotypes, what of the actual families who are mixing race, ethnicity and faith in Britain today? How do their lived experiences challenge current assumptions and stereotypes? As several papers in this collection point out, what has long been missing in discussions of people who are of mixed – and are mixing – race, ethnicity and faith is empirical research that seeks to understand the diversity and complexity of the mixed experience, as well as its commonalities. Consequently, a recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded project<sup>68</sup> has attempted to address the need for contemporary empirical knowledge about parents in mixed families in the UK, in particular their experiences of parenting and the choices and negotiations they make around raising their children.

The emergent findings from the project challenge longstanding ideas of 'mixed' families on several levels. Over half of dependent 'mixed' children have married or cohabiting parents, whose socio-economic circumstances denote a strong middle class dimension to mixed families. This profile of mixed families having strong middle class dimensions confirms speculation in other in-depth studies of mixed race children and young people; whether the high incidence of children from middle class backgrounds in their samples are representative of young mixed children in Britain in

63 See for example, Ali (2003); Tizard & Phoenix (2003); Tikly et al. (2004); Bradford (2006); Barrett et al. (2006)

64 Stoppard (2006)

65 See, for example, Waters (1990: 102)

66 Reddy (1994: 10)

67 See for example, Hendry (2003), Pearce (2007) & Sunday Mirror (2007)

68 The report on the JRF project 'Parenting 'Mixed' Children: Negotiating Difference and Belonging' will be published early 2008. The project is headed by Professor Rosalind Edwards.

general.<sup>69</sup> It also, again, questions the dominant under-class stereotype and provides an under-acknowledged material dimension to discussion of mixed and mixing populations.<sup>70</sup>

Secondly, the emergent findings dispute the idea that mixed families suffer from inherent ‘culture clashes’, and that their children are doomed to be ‘identity stripped’ or ‘marooned between communities’. The overwhelming picture coming across from speaking to parents is just how ‘normal’ they feel their family is: for the majority of the parents, being in a mixed family is simply another part of their identities and lives. Indeed, data from the project suggests that negotiating belonging and difference for their children may not be parents’ main preoccupation. Contrary to what has been popularly assumed, life is not a series of one ‘culture clash’ battle after another. Indeed, racial, ethnic or faith difference may pale into insignificance when compared with issues such as juggling a work–life balance, making sure they present a united front in relation to discipline, concerns about their children’s health, and so on. In other words, mixedness is just one part of these family’s everyday lives.

As such, the parents in the study adopt a variety of everyday approaches to negotiate difference and create a sense of belonging for their children. Some parents do not encourage their children to see their identity as necessarily rooted in their particular racial, ethnic or faith backgrounds, but rather to see it as ‘open’. Other options for parents include promoting a sense of belonging based on a ‘single’ aspect of their children’s heritage, or alternatively stressing the ‘mix’, whether in terms of the specific heritages or a general sense of ‘mixedness’. It is important to emphasize that each of these approaches appears to work for the family concerned, and there is no evidence that one approach leads to better outcomes than another. The possibility of different, but equal, approaches is something that is often overlooked in much of the literature on mixed families, particularly that stemming from the States, most of which tends to be ‘instructional’ by informing parents of the ‘right’ way to raise their children so that they have positive ‘multiracial’ or ‘biracial’ identities.<sup>71</sup> Yet, as relatively little research has been conducted on families from mixed racial backgrounds – particularly beyond those of white and black mixed backgrounds or where race and ethnicity may overlap with faith – such prescriptions may need further evaluation, especially if applied in the UK, where racial and ethnic relations have

very different histories, forms and patterns.

The research emerging from the JRF project shows that there are certainly commonalities between the mixed families we spoke to, in line with what Jill Olumide has called “the mixed race condition”.<sup>72</sup> For example, many of the families mentioned the importance of the area where they live, the way they passed on their cultural heritages through food, as well as certain shared negative and positive reactions and assumptions of strangers – and sometimes family – to their mixedness. Yet, at the same time, our analysis is also starting to indicate that what may be helpful for developing a sense of belonging for children in one family’s case – relationships with grandparents, geographical location, physical appearance, etc. – may be a hindrance for another family. For example for some, relationships with grandparents are distant or problematic, but for others they provide a great source of support, not only practically but in helping children understand their cultural heritages. Similarly, those factors that may be helpful or a hindrance are not fixed, but may change over time. Moreover, the experiences of mixed families can be vastly different, not only between the type of mix, but within the mix itself. It is likely that parents with Jamaican and White British heritages may have a different approach or experience than a family with Chinese and White British heritages. Racism and prejudice take various forms, and has different impacts for different families.

Furthermore, as both Suki Ali and Miri Song point out in their papers, more attention needs to be paid to how the identities and experiences of those from mixed backgrounds is shaped, rather than assuming that it is a simple question of possessing what Twine has called ‘racial literacy’.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, key studies in the UK which focus on children and their parents outside the arena of social services provision highlight the importance of several other factors (for example, school environment, peers, location, gender and class), in developing a sense of identity – racialized or otherwise – for mixed children.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, our analysis of families in the JRF project so far indicates that, whilst parents across all classes and mixes may take a variety of approaches to negotiating difference and belonging – ‘open’, ‘mix’ and ‘single’ – it is only middle class parents who work to develop a sense of their children’s identities as ‘open’, which may reflect the resources – such as foreign travel, choice of schools, neighbourhood, etc. – that they are able to provide their children with. Possibly, such resources can help in supplying a range of identity options and life choices to children.

It should also be noted that whilst, as mentioned earlier, families may have different experiences across mixes, they may also have different experiences between mixes – a working class Jamaican and White British

69 See for example, Wilson (1987); Tizard & Phoenix (2002)

70 Caballero, Edwards & Smith (forthcoming)

71 See for example, Wright (1998); Nakazawa (2003)

72 Olumide (2002)

73 Twine (2004)

74 Wilson (1987); Katz (1996); Tizard & Phoenix (2002); Tikly et al. (2004)

family is not guaranteed to share approaches and experiences with a middle class family of the same background. Moreover, our project is confined to exploring the experiences of two parent families, whose experiences may no doubt be different to those of mixed lone parent families – indeed it often appears to be mixed lone parent families that bear the brunt of the kinds of stereotypes and assumptions outlined earlier.

Despite emergent findings from the JRF project regarding the make-up and everyday life of mixed families in Britain being fascinating and providing plenty of scope for discussion, knowledge about these groups is still at an early stage. Nevertheless, a clear picture of complex and multifaceted ‘mixed’ families is gradually being revealed. The question for policy makers is how to translate the complexity of the mixed experience emerging from this and other projects into workable and useful forms for effecting change. Answering this will not be easy. There is already a tendency to categorize and generalize about ‘mixed’ people, some of which is understandable if any useful information can begin to be gathered (e.g. ethnic data monitoring), some of which is not so (e.g. comments on ‘identity stripping’). Consequently, policy in this area must not run before it can walk. As far as policy development in this area is concerned, the findings from the JRF project suggest that engagement with a number of key questions is a necessary first step, namely:

1. What sort of support might mixed families need? Given that for many, it is the other daily issues that are just as important in their parenting, do they need support that is specifically targeted?
3. Does the prevalence of middle class mixed families involving couple parents mean that we need to think more about material equality in understanding the experiences of mixed families?
4. To what extent should the research and literature on mixed families that stems from the USA influence British understandings of mixed families, given the different histories, forms and patterns of racial and ethnic relations in the two countries?
5. Given that one of the most common experiences of the mixed families in the study appears to be dealing with certain assumptions or prejudice regarding their family by others, should the focus be on the parents and children, and the parenting of these children (i.e. inside the family) or does more work need to be done with professionals and society generally to help towards a climate of ‘normality’ (i.e. outside the family)?

The challenge is to identify what generalizations are useful, what complexities need to be acknowledged and how both of these can be practically engaged with. Working from specific understandings, rather than assumptions, is a start. Hopefully, the debate generated by the papers in this series, will help to move this understanding forward. ■

## 9. It’s Time for Foundation

**Sharron Hall**  
Intermix

As a working class mixed-race woman I do not see the mixed-race experience from an academic’s view. Instead I live it, feel it, and am hurt and comforted by it.

Ten years ago the term mixed-race wasn’t even in general UK circulation: white mothers were being advised to tell their mixed-race children they were black, and the idea of a mixed-race identity and history were dreams to people like me and nightmares to those who wanted to keep the races pure.

Identity and history are two words that are not commonly associated with the term mixed-race, except by those who say we are confused about our identity and have no history. Having met many mixed-race individuals both in my personal life and as the founder of Intermix, I can honestly say there are very few

mixed-race people who are confused about their identity. They know that they are not just one race, they are mixed. It is the rest of society that is confused about mixed-race individuals; for many it is hard to imagine what it must be like to live with more than one racial background, so they assign us a racial identity nearest to our physical appearance.

At present there is no talk of a mixed-race history, and many do not know of its existence—but it is there. The mixed-race experience is not a twentieth century phenomenon as some would believe. It has been around as long as the idea of race itself. Icons such as William Wells Brown, St Martin De Porres and Robert Wedderburn go as far back as the 1600s, and still others go further.

Having a mixed racial background does not necessarily mean that your experiences will always be different from that of monoracial people. We are all mixed to some extent; however, if your racial mix results in you looking different from other members of your family and many of those around you, then it can often affect how you are perceived and treated by others. To what degree that treatment will affect your well-being will depend on many different social factors: where you live, the experiences of your parents, the representation of racially mixed people in society, etc. Not everyone will want to identify as mixed-race but for those that do, and I believe that there are a great many, then that option should be available and acknowledged.

No two people's experience of being racially mixed will ever be the same, yet there will be some common elements. I see racially mixed people as a community! I see mixed-race families wanting to share experiences, wanting their children to know others like themselves, wanting to swap coping strategies and help each other through difficult times. I see individuals, who thought they were the only ones, find friends and partners who have some understanding of why they feel and act the way they do.

Yes we may come from different backgrounds and that in itself may mean that we lead very different lives but the things we have in common – our racial diversity, the way we can marry together different parts of our various cultures to create a balanced reflection, being able to step from one community to another and merge into each one – these things help bind us together. If that's not community, I don't know what is.

There is talk that mixed-race individuals cannot be seen as a coherent group because there is no empirical evidence: I disagree with this. We cannot say that the white community or the black community are coherent groups; there are groups within each community but there are just as many if not more, that do not participate. I believe a coherent mixed-race group is already present and growing.

I was recently asked what would I like to see happen in the future for mixed-race people and how we could improve their lives. Whilst there is a great amount of work to do to ensure that mixed-race people are treated equally within society there are two things that are of the utmost importance.

**First, we need to reach agreement on the most acceptable term to describe people who are racially mixed.**

<sup>75</sup> King (2006)

<sup>76</sup> Creekmore (2007)

Mixed-race is already the most used term to describe people who are racially mixed. When asked, most young people say it is the term they feel most comfortable using. There are some people who are using other terms such as mixed, dual or multiple heritage. What I would like is for us all to reach agreement to use one term and to stick to that term. This will stop any confusion.

I use the term mixed-race because it is the least offensive of all the terms to describe racial mixedness that I have come across. There are some who dislike the use of the term *race* and some who even deny such a term exists but I think it's important. It is because I am racially mixed that others have such difficulty accepting me. My existence is a reminder that racism exists. It will affect my life chances, first impressions and how others relate to me. Until the day when our racial background has no bearing on how society views and treats us then race needs to remain connected to the word mixed.

I don't accept the terms mixed heritage, dual heritage or multiple heritage because they say nothing about how the racial element affects my identity. Anyone can have more than one heritage, you can be Scottish and French or Swedish, Irish and Welsh but that does not mean that society will treat you differently say from someone who is English. The word heritage is associated with property: we are the property of no-one and considering the legacy of slavery that was imposed upon some of our ancestors; it is understandable why many of us could not accept such a title. Oona King recently stated that the term dual heritage, 'sounds like a stately home off a minor motorway'.<sup>75</sup> I'm sure that many using the term might not see or be offended by the connection to ownership but for those of us that do it will never be accepted. The term biracial is used more in the US. My only problem with this term is that it gives the idea that there are two races present and many people have more than two racial mixes.

**Second, we need to accept that people who are racially mixed have a different racial identity from those that are not, and they have the right to have that identity acknowledged and made visible throughout society.**

It's sad that you have to choose between the two groups. I don't even think that should be an issue. I have to rise above that stuff. I'm a part of both cultures. I can't be eternally conflicted with myself.<sup>76</sup>

They're growing up multiracial citizens of the world, born to two cultures, neither more worthy or intrinsically interesting than the other. Because passing for black is no better than passing for white.<sup>77</sup>

We need to acknowledge the existence of a mixed-race

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77 Dickerson (2007)

identity and see it reflected in society alongside that of others such as black, white, etc. If this is not done then there can be no accurate data gathered for mixed-race individuals because it will become blurred within other races. We also cannot get an accurate picture of the more subtle elements of racism that exist in society such as shadism.

Once we have addressed these two items we will have a firm foundation to move forward, and more importantly, so will countless others. ■

## 10. I loathe the term 'mixed race'...

**Linda Bellos**

Diversity Solutions

I loathe the term 'mixed race' almost as much I as I loath 'half-caste' as a description of who I am or part of who I am. What does 'full-caste' look like, I wonder? What exactly is a 'race' in terms of biology, genetics or societies?

These are some of the questions that arise when a racist society seeks to define individuals in terms of their 'race'.

I do acknowledge that racism exists, but I have difficulty recognizing a race, either pure or mixed. It is significant that being of mixed cultural heritage does not seem to include those who are, for example, a mixture of part French or German or Dutch or English or Danish. Such combinations of European peoples are not often described as mixed race, even where people refer to French or German race. So what seems to be going on is that mixed race is confined to visible mixtures which include European and Non-European heritage. I used to think that mixed race referred only to African and European mixes, but I note that it is applied to European and Indian/Pakistani/Sri Lankan as well as Chinese heritage. If I am correct, then the term mixed is even more worrying than I thought. In fact the word miscegenation seem have been coined to describe the mixing of races. One dictionary defines it thus: *marriage, cohabitation, or sexual intercourse between a white person and a member of another race*. In this definition Whiteness is a race just as Blackness is.

Notions of race come from the pseudo science of the nineteenth century in which the world's peoples are divided into 5 groups, with Mongoloid and Negroid at the bottom of this short pyramid. We know that a science was developed to provide proof that it

was justified to have enslaved or colonized African and Asian peoples who were deemed to be inferior races compared to Europeans.

What strikes me about defining a relationship to Blackness is that Black is not a Country, it is not a culture. It is a measurement of melanin, but it has become a measurement of negative human value. These days I describe myself as of African heritage; one by the way, I am intensely proud of. But when I was a small child I was encouraged to be ashamed of my African heritage. It was, without doubt, something one was made to feel should be hidden or denied. Playground bullying in the early to late 1950's for many of us featured a heavy dose of racism; for all the half-caste definitions, the racisms came in undiluted measures. I am glad to say that I have a strong (then) Black Consciousness, and recognized divide and rule when I saw it. But from the age of seven, there was no doubt that if I had to decide what I was, it was Black, not half Black or half White; I cannot ever recall being called 'a half nigger'. Racists make sure the world is either Black or White.

In a world that sees Africans as low achievers, without culture or history, it is surprising that so many of us are proud of our heritage. However, it is against this backdrop that we are measured and named. It does not have to be a conscious racism that sees Africans as less than full human beings, but there are a set of cultural assumptions about being of African heritage that assume a negative value judgment even if one was not intended.

It seems to me that the term mixed race has merely replaced the concept of miscegenation; a word of clear racist intent. Mixed race/mixed heritage are a politer

way of saying the same thing, that those called mixed race are the product of a relationship between a White person and a person of another race. In this context there is Black and White; Chinese people and those from the Indian subcontinent have been viewed and treated Anglo-Indians or their equivalent. These terms are the products of domination and conquest by Imperialism, and we are now many decades from the times when the rules and ethos of imperialism held sway, but their legacies live on, not least in the notion of mixed racial heritage. What is a race? The notion of a White race is explicit in the definition of miscegenation, but is there really a White race? A group of people with low melanin levels who also share other characteristics? Do they share a history or language? Clearly, White people have huge variations and differences, as do many African, Indians and Chinese people. In fact the concept of biological races has long been shown to be a fallacy, but we persist in referring to mixed race people, when in fact what we are naming is the presence of physical characteristics which are common in much of Africa.

What many of us of African heritage have been willing to do is engage in a discussion in which we deny any commonality with other African people on the grounds that we are part European (read White). This is a more recent phenomenon which seems to have arisen in the generations that were not born during the Civil Rights struggles in the USA. Those of us who were born before 1970 are more likely to have, what we then called, a 'Black Consciousness and pride'. These days we and younger generations call it an African Consciousness or even an Afrikan

Consciousness. It is not about exalting our Africaness but instead acknowledging with pride that we are of African heritage. It does not require us to deny any other aspect of our heritage. It is however an anomaly in British Society in the early twenty-first century to be proud to be African. I have been accused of denying other aspects of my heritage because I assert my Africaness. In fact I am intensely proud of my mother's Jewish heritage as well as my father's Nigerian culture and heritage, but it has to be said that in a racist society I am seen first for the colour of my skin.

The need to describe oneself as mixed, or the desire of society to define us as such is something which should be questioned. Let us not confuse the need to define our own identity with a rush to put us in a category which subtly but unmistakably names us as 'part Black' as though it was a taint. If one parent or grandparent is African we are right to call ourselves African if we wish, but it should not be mandatory. But if one is not proud of one's African heritage, it is not hidden by the term mixed. All it does is reinforce the notions that African or Black is not good - just like the old days. It is African heritage and Africa's history which must be reclaimed with pride and respect, with all of the nuances of the Caribbean, Manchester, London or Accra.

If we must be counted by skin colour, and personally I would prefer it if we were not, it must be for a reason. In fact, if we are to be counted for any reason I want to know what that reason is. If it is to tackle discrimination I am prepared to state all the things I am but not if you try to give me a label based solely upon the colour of my skin. ■

# 11. People in Harmony

**Jill Olumide**  
Swansea University

People in Harmony is a charity that has been active for some 35 years. It was formed as a self help group to offer a refuge to mixed race families and mixed race people from the onslaught of the politics of the time (the heyday of Enoch Powell) when the race card was often played with reference to the perceived unnatural and inappropriate (if not distasteful) practice and outcomes of race mixing. This was not necessarily a new approach to perceived race mixing (as older members recall), however perhaps the increase of New Commonwealth invitees (and the poor prepara-

tion for their welfare needs) and inevitable mixing with neighbours and workmates offered a sitting target.

Since then, politics and life in UK have progressed. However, throughout this time there have been differing issues to be met within the mixed race community (if such a community exists), and successive groups have looked to the charity for support and information. People in Harmony has always been a volunteer led organization and still operates without any serious funding, although this situation is increas-

ingly a problem if it is to develop and continue to offer a range of services. Need has not diminished, it has simply altered course over the years.

For the charity, the exclusion of a mixed race sensibility in areas of policy and professional practice has appeared to form the basis of many 'real life' problems. It is for this reason that the trustees, within the limits of their capacity, have been keen to offer support to people researching different areas of mixed race experience. Many of us who are researchers will understand that there are few sources through which a mixed race research population can be contacted. People in Harmony is able to facilitate such contacts through its membership and website, and has a broad access to a population which has self-defined itself and its interests as falling within a definition of 'mixed race' (the term 'racialized as mixed' is perhaps more accurate than 'mixed race' in finding the root of many an experience).

An example of this interest in research was the 2005 annual conference. There had been some notable research suggesting that mixed race children are generally not well catered for in schools. We were already aware of issues such as mixed racism in schools and the poor representation of mixed race families and children in children's books and these matters had already been addressed at previous events. In 2005 Chamion Caballero, Suki Ali and others with research or other interests to share, were invited to take the platform and discuss their work concerning mixed race and education. A conference report was produced with the help of the Zeena Ralph Memorial Fund and is now available from the charity. In addition, a synopsis of the research evidence was made available and a letter campaign amongst politicians and LEAs undertaken both to make them aware of the situation and to enquire into what was being done to address the question of mixed race children in schools. The response has not been greatly encouraging.

As research interest in mixed race matters grows, other areas of neglect or misperception emerge. This year the charity has taken the theme of health for its study conference. Although there seems to be little direct research on mixed race and mental and physical well-being underway, the last Census (as well as other big surveys) offers insights into the health of the mixed race population, but this also appears to be an area in need of further investigation. So too does the criminal justice system, where those wishing to identify as mixed and have their sensibilities respected often have limited opportunities.

Social services is an area of some long standing concern and has been a source of 'unusual' practice,

not just in the disproportionate numbers of mixed race children in the public care system and the apparent lack of consultation available about identification, but in the statements publicly issued surrounding the 'oughts' of mixed race families more widely. People in Harmony offers space to all parties in the adoption process to explore their experiences, and makes no judgement about the 'rights and wrongs' of so-called transracial adoption and fostering. Adoptees, for example, sometimes explore what is often a position of ambivalence over their experiences through the charity's newsletter and web pages. In a very similar manner, members have explored their journeys to find 'lost' aspects of their parental make up and describe meeting up with families absent during their formative years. Until quite recently, space to unpack these life experiences, let alone to compare them with similar lives, has been very limited.

Sometimes families, as well as 'professionals' and institutions, are a source of oppression both to mixed race people and to their parents. Absent parents denying contact, rejecting parents who refuse contact with mixed race partners and children, and families in outright opposition who wish to prevent marriages or liaisons from taking place all cause a weakening in the defenses of mixed race families and seem to cause all parties (but particularly the children, once independent) to pause, at a suitable moment in their lives, to attempt to recoup the 'lost' aspects of themselves and to examine meanings of suppression. Even within mixed race families, opportunities to reflect and to define selfhood are sometimes restricted. These (and many other) unique aspects of mixed race experience need to be understood more widely and space needs to be made within policy and practice.

There needs to be caution in 'fixing' knowledge about the mixed race community (and as so often seems to be the case, about *all* groups of people). There can be no development of 'experts' professing a stereotypical view of mixed race allowed. We have seen the difficulties which this causes in social services in recent decades. Miri Song, in her paper, suggests that there is no 'one size fits all' view of mixed race, and this is quite right (and not just for mixed race). However there are patterns, in particular those settling around class and gender. For example the experiences of single parents of mixed race children appear to be influenced by gender as well as perceived ethnicity, with white mothers finding both professional and societal disapprobation often to be acute and destabilizing. Whilst it may be difficult to identify a 'mixed race community' because of the differences in

background and class, this must also be true of 'the black community' or the 'British People'. Yet there are traces of recognition to be found, familiarity of faintly yet recognisably shared experiences, some common ground.

In the area of class, a piece of research into Probation and Race<sup>78</sup> identified a subgroup of offenders who doggedly refused to be classified under any of the ethnic labels available to them and insisted the researchers used variants on the 'mixed' theme when referring to them. It was then possible to identify, during analysis, that this 'mixed' group had the worst record of school exclusions and attainment of qualifications, were least likely to have been able to secure work, had higher levels of poverty, drug and alcohol consumption, were most likely to have spent time in care and other adverse markers than other ethnic categories. It is difficult to say how widespread this pattern is amongst the poorest people in the mixed race group in our society, particularly from a piece of research that had not set out to investigate mixed race in particular. However, when included with other information such as school exclusions, self reported health and access to decent work, it becomes pressing to investigate links between mixed race and social class. Whilst the well educated and more privileged members of the UK mixed race 'community' are free to explore, like their US cousins, their individual responses to being mixed race, there are many against whom the odds seem to be stacked.

This seems to be one of the ambiguities of mixed race experience – whilst there are those for whom privilege has (historically) been an experience and who contend with issues such as ambivalence, 'brown guilt' and creatively exploring their experiences, there are others who receive disproportionately negative experiences and appear, in consequence, to be particularly disadvantaged – more so than those in 'monoracial' groups.

It seems to be to this section of society that the attention of politics and policy must turn; not with a view to organizing and regulating (as has sometimes happened in the past) but to seeking to identify the social causes of disadvantage through serious investigation and consultation. One example of an attempt to address these concerns has been Simon Barth's work in Sheffield with mixed race children from mainly poor backgrounds in an attempt to build their confidence and self esteem. At the 2004 People in Harmony annual conference he shared some of the issues facing the children and the work being done to restore faith in themselves and their lives. Old questions of negative and acceptable terminology for mixed race were raised, and this seems to be a

perennial question that is never quite resolved to everyone's satisfaction. This seems to be indicative of the many ways in which mixed race and race mixing is portrayed and a general ambivalence engendered around the whole question. In itself this ambivalence requires serious analysis.

A survey of PIH members is currently being undertaken to complement the charity's existing information. Although many wants and interests have moved on from the early days when there was an emphasis on physical meeting and information sharing, a primary response is still a desire to meet or to be put in touch with others in mixed race partnerships or with other mixed race people. Although there are many dissimilarities in ethnic make up, class, occupation and sexuality, there is none the less an apparent desire to identify and be in touch with others associated with mixedness. This may be a very loose underpinning for a community, but it is certainly a source of affinity and belonging.

However we may believe ethnic groups take form, the persistent social definition 'racialized as mixed' does appear to create a certain commonality of experience to be addressed and, increasingly, performed. Before there is any rush to policy, some of the profound questions around the shaping of mixed race experience must be unravelled. In this area of social life there is definitely a 'more research needed' sign over the door. A first question must surely be why some people come to be racialized as mixed whilst others are considered to be pure. ■

# Biographical Information on Contributors

**Dr. Suki Ali** is a Lecturer of Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her main theoretical interests focus upon feminist cultural studies, postcolonial theory, psychoanalysis, research methodologies, visual culture, and theories of identity and embodiment. Her work centralizes the interplay between gender, sexualities, 'race' and class. Whilst continuing to work within these areas her current research explores processes of racialization with specific regard to 'racial science' and technologies, kinship and postcoloniality.

**Linda Bellos** is the Director of Diversity Solutions Consultancy Ltd, a specialist equality and diversity company she formed in February 2002. Since the early eighties, Linda has worked with a range of public authorities and the private sector advising on change management and policy formulation. Linda is a regular guest contributor to radio and television programmes, and as an author, has contributed to a number of anthologies including *IC3*, *the Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain*.

**Dr. Rob Berkeley** is Deputy Director of the Runnymede Trust. A sociologist, he has led Runnymede's follow-up work to the Parekh Report, with particular emphasis on community cohesion, effective regulation of public services, and involving young people in debates on the future of multi-ethnic Britain. Rob is now responsible for Runnymede's strategic policy research programme.

**Dr. Chamion Caballero** is a research fellow at London South Bank University and is currently working with Rosalind Edwards on a project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation looking at the experiences of parents from different racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds. She has a longstanding research interest in issues around mixed identities, particularly around the theorization of mixedness, and was one of the authors of the DfES report 'Understanding the Educational Needs of Mixed Heritage Children', published in 2004.

**Savita de Sousa** is a Policy, Research and Development Consultant, Black Minority Ethnic Issues Project, BAAF. She has a national remit and responsibility for policy and development issues relating to Private Fostering and Black Minority Ethnic children, who are unable to live with their birth families. Previously she has worked for local authorities and the voluntary sector. She has worked as a Social worker, Staff Development Officer and Manager. She has experience of working in social services, corporate services and multi-disciplinary teams.

**Sharron Hall** is from Moss Side, Manchester. Her mother is English and her father from Barbados. She founded Intermix, the first group in the UK for mixed-race individuals and families to come from a mixed-race perspective, in 1999 and is currently editor of [Intermix.org.uk](http://Intermix.org.uk). She has challenged the negative assumptions surrounding the mixed-race experience by highlighting the positive aspects and drawing attention to misrepresentation and marginalization.

**Professor Mark Johnson** directs the Mary Seacole Research Centre, De Montfort University, Leicester. He has been researching 'race and ethnic relations' for nearly 30 years, and learned the value of diverse heritage from living in South London, the Solomon Islands, Nigeria and Liverpool. He now lives near Coventry.

**Dr. Jill Olumide** is a Lecturer at the School of Health Science at Swansea University. Her research interests are in mixed race and children as participants in their health affairs. She is the author of *Raiding the Gene Pool: the Social Construction of Mixed Race* and other writings on the topic of mixed race

**Dr. Charlie Owen** is a researcher in the Thomas Coram Research Unit, part of the Institute of Education, University of London. He specializes in the statistical analysis of official statistics, such as the census. He has a chapter in Toyin Okitikipi's book *Working With Children of Mixed Parentage*.

**John Simmonds** is Director of Policy, Research and Development at the British Association for Adoption and Fostering. He is a social worker and until his appointment at BAAF was the Programme Coordinator for social work programmes at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has been involved in consultancy and training to social workers and social work organizations throughout his career. He has published many articles and chapters in books and was the co-editor of *Direct Work with Children* published by BAAF/Batsford. He is the adoptive father of two children.

**Jessica Mai Sims** is a research and policy analyst at the Runnymede Trust working on the Community Studies programme. Prior work in the series has included research on the Vietnamese community, and race relations and multiculturalism on university campuses, with a forthcoming paper focusing on the Thai community. She has a longstanding research interest in issues around ethnicity, racism, and multiculturalism.

**Dr. Miri Song** is a Reader in Sociology at the University of Kent at Canterbury. Her research interests include ethnic identity, 'race' and 'mixed race', racisms, immigrant adaptation and the 'second generation'. Her books include *Choosing Ethnic Identity* (Polity 2003), *Rethinking 'Mixed Race'* (coedited with David Parker) (Pluto 2001), and *Helping Out: Children's Labor in Ethnic Businesses* (Temple University Press 1999).

**Professor Leon Tikly** is Director of a DfID funded Research Programme Consortium (RPC) on Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries (EdQual). He is also currently directing an evaluation of the UK government's Aiming High: Raising African Caribbean Achievement project; is involved in a state of the art literature review on globalization and education with colleagues in the GSoE; and on a project looking at leadership and the management of change in rural and township schools in South Africa.

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**The Runnymede Trust**  
7 Plough Yard  
London EC2A 3LP  
T: 020 7377 9222  
F: 020 7377 6622  
E: [info@runnymedetrust.org](mailto:info@runnymedetrust.org)  
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Jessica Mai Sims is a research and policy analyst at the Runnymede Trust working on the Community Studies programme which explores small, less visible minority ethnic communities. Her prior work in the series has included research on the Vietnamese community, and race relations and multiculturalism on university campuses, with a forthcoming paper focusing on the Thai community. She has a longstanding research interest in issues around ethnicity, racism, and multiculturalism.



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