Introduction

Mixed People and ‘Mixing’ in Today’s Britain

‘My guess is, yes, it will dilute further and in the fullness of time, you know, me, my dad/mum, you know, that’ll just become a little bit of family history and gradually that will, you know, sort of come down to a little dot somewhere and if somebody is really interested sort of look back a hundred years they’ll say, “Oh yes, there was a sort of Indian in our family at some point”.’

Drew (South Asian/White, 47)

Drew, who had an Indian father and English mother, and who grew up in mostly White towns in England, reflected upon whether and how his Indian ancestry will be transmitted down the generations. As a ‘mixed race’ person, with a White British partner, and whose children looked entirely White, he believed such ‘dilution’ to be just a matter of time. While there is no one typical narrative about the meanings and significance of minority ancestries for the multiracial individuals in this study, this book explores the varying ways in which they thought about their status and experiences as mixed people, and the ways in which they identified and raised their children. An investigation into the experiences of multiracial people and their families is highly topical, as mixed people and unions are increasingly common in many parts of Britain – as well as other
highly diverse societies such as the USA. This is evident in the now frequent coverage of mixed people and relationships in a variety of news media:

‘Mixed-race relationships are now so common that some ethnic groups – starting with African Caribbean – will virtually disappear, the research states. Young people are six times more likely to be mixed-race as adults. Experts believe the findings, which come just days after Prince Harry was rebuked for calling a fellow cadet “Paki”, and Prince Charles admitted to referring to an Asian friend as “Sooty”, mean that future generations “will not see race in the way we see it”.’  

This excerpt from the Observer newspaper (a respected mainstream paper), which refers to a study commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), is striking in a number of respects. But one particular assertion is especially notable: the idea that specific ethnic groups, such as African Caribbean, may ‘disappear’.

Given the historical denigration of African origin people in many societies around the world, and the continuing racial tensions which surround Black-White relations in the USA in particular, such a notion may be difficult to imagine, but in Britain, the very significant growth in interracial unions is destabilizing traditional understandings of ethnic and racial categories, which are premised upon the popular and longstanding belief that people can be straightforwardly assigned to monoracial (that is, ‘single race’) categories, such as Black, Asian, or White. At the same time, as the above quote suggests, the blurring and possible demise of ethnic categories (such as African Caribbean) sits alongside the still not uncommon usage of offensive racial shibboleths and stereotypes.
Despite (or because) of the growing commonality of mixed people and unions, societal concerns about the ‘place’ of multiracial people, and ambivalence about ethnic and racial ‘mixing’ in Britain, are not unknown. It is notable that in the opening ceremony of the 2012 summer Olympics held in London, a short film (by the film director Danny Boyle) depicted the typical British family as a mixed one – one with a White mother, Black father, and two mixed daughters. One conservative media outlet, The Daily Mail, which is one of the most popular tabloid newspaper in Britain, famously scorned this diverse representation of Britain, calling such a depiction of a mixed family ‘absurdly unrealistic’ and ‘politically correct’:

"This was supposed to be a representation of modern life in England but it is likely to be a challenge for the organisers to find an educated white middle-aged mother and black father living together with a happy family in such a set-up."

In response to a storm of criticism, the Daily Mail removed this piece from its website. In fact, such a depiction of family life is entirely resonant for such families in London, and many other British cities and towns.

Analysts have argued that a polarized discourse has emerged in Britain, in which ‘... images of racial, ethnic and faith diversity are posed in opposition to societal unity and solidarity, with assertions that these differences create a crisis of cohesive national social trust’ (as is suggested in the Daily Mail piece above). At the same time, such depictions exist alongside arguments ‘that such sweeping portrayals of segregation and conflict ignore the reality of ongoing local interactions between a mix of minority and majority racial, ethnic and religious cultures, where multi-culture is ordinary....’. So if forms of mixing are increasingly ordinary, how important are ethnic and racial backgrounds to multiracial people and their families?

Turning to the considerable scholarship on multiracial people in the US, a recent national survey of 1,555 multiracial Americans aged 18 and older (of various ‘mixes’) by the Pew
Research Centre found: ‘For multiracial adults, as for the general public, race is not the most important element of their personal identity. Some 26% of multiracial adults say their racial background is “essential” to their identity (as do 28% of all adults).’\(^5\) In fact, this study found that both multiracial adults and the general public are much more likely to identify gender and religion as central to their sense of selves. In other words, we cannot presume the automatic salience of ‘race’ in the lives of multiracial people – a finding also found for multiracial young people in the British context.\(^6\)

This book explores these different currents of social continuity and change in contemporary British society through a study of multiracial (or ‘mixed race’ / ‘mixed’) people and their children. In doing so, we take the study of multiracial people a further generation down.

As Britain and many other multiethnic societies becomes ever more diverse, societal awareness and discourses about ethnic and racial difference (and the taxonomies which accompany such discourses, both official and colloquial) are ever-present, whether in the media or in numerous instances of ‘real life’. Beliefs about the embodiment of race and racial difference are still with us, even though there is – especially among educated middle class circles -- now relatively widespread awareness of the socially constructed nature of race. In fact, there is ample evidence that many people in the wider society still subscribe to the fixity and seemingly enduring nature of race and racial differences.

For instance, In October 2013, a seven year old girl with blonde hair and blue eyes was removed from her home in Dublin, despite her Roma parents’ insistence that they were her parents. After a DNA test proved that she was indeed this couple’s child, the Irish police and health services were forced into an embarrassing U-turn.\(^7\) The removal of this child, along with that of a two year old boy from another Roma family, was justified by concerns that these
children did not resemble their darker Roma parents, or siblings. In another recent case, in the US, a White woman named Jennifer Cramblett became pregnant through artificial insemination, but the sperm bank mistakenly provided sperm from a Black donor, instead of the white donor, whom she and her partner had selected. As a result, Cramblett was shocked to give birth to a mixed race daughter. Cramblett professes to loving her daughter, but argued that she was wholly unprepared to raise a part Black, mixed race child, as she had ‘limited cultural competency’ with African Americans. Such thinking, based upon established conventions around the importance of parents who not only resemble their offspring, but who can demonstrate ethnic and racial awareness in the raising of ethnic minority children, is still widespread. Debates about the importance (or not) of ethnic and racial backgrounds imbue various contemporary policy debates, such as in the case of trans-racial adoption. Under the Conservative government, the Children and Families Act 2014 was passed, which essentially removes the previous requirement for issues of ‘ethnicity’ (race, religion, language and culture) to be taken into account in adoption decisions.

As these examples illustrate, having members of one’s family who are not deemed to be of the same ‘race’, phenotypically, is in itself suspect and an affront to the natural order of things. It is as if the presence of a blonde child within a Roma family setting immediately invokes a sense of disorder, of things out of place, as famously theorized by the anthropologist Mary Douglas. Among the myriad issues and concerns that can arise for parents of any children, it is undeniable that in many public settings, parents and children who are regarded as being visibly of different ‘races’ can often engender stares, suspicion (as the cases above illustrate) and in some cases, even hostility.
While there are also studies which show that people can subscribe to notions of dormant racial traits, which can unexpectedly appear in later generations (e.g. ‘throwback’) to explain such physical incongruities between parents and their children,\textsuperscript{12} such beliefs do not disrupt the normative expectation that parents and children should resemble each other racially. In fact, such notions of ‘throwback’ can be spoken of fearfully, revealing the still extant fears surrounding ‘miscegenation’ for many. Despite the fact that decades of research have pointed to the complex intertwining of genetic and environmental factors in explaining many social outcomes, some analysts have warned that there has been a worrying resurgence in attention given to the biological status of race and racial inheritance in mainstream social science.\textsuperscript{13}

Furthermore, so entrenched are our notions of racial difference, and our ability to differentiate people in relation to racial taxonomies, that when individuals violate these natural ‘truths’ and claim membership in a group to which they were not born, in terms of ethnic and racial parentage, this can cause uproar. While the policing of such racial chicanery has historically been in relation to fears about non-White people ‘passing’ as White, in June 2015, the case of Rachel Dolezal, a White woman in the US who presented herself as a Black person with Black ancestry, engendered an outpouring of anger and outrage by many commentators. Dolezal was ‘outed’ by her parents, who revealed that she had wholly White ancestry. The ensuing controversy resulted in widespread debates about whether race is primarily a physical and immutable birthright or something which can be cultural and adopted.\textsuperscript{14} Dolezal’s case also sparked fascinating discussions about whether her claim to feel African American was analogous to Caitlyn Jenner’s claim that she was really a woman trapped in man’s body.\textsuperscript{15}

Who Comprises the Multiracial Population?
The growth of mixed people and families makes such debates about our understandings of ethnic and racial difference, and ethnic options, even more pressing, since multiracial people, by definition, transcend monoracial (‘single race’) categorization. Increasingly, multiracial people are identifying in a variety of ways, and the formal recognition of multiracial people (since 2001) is illustrated by the England and Wales decennial census in which ‘Mixed’ is an option in response to the question: ‘What is your ethnic group’? How people answer this question is a matter of choice, and how parents identify themselves and their children on official forms (and in everyday life) may not always correspond with their (or their children’s) actual ethnic or racial parentage.

Interestingly, while there is no one official definition of ‘Mixed’ in Britain, a definition of ‘inter-ethnic’ marriages is offered by the Office for National Statistics: ‘Inter-ethnic’ marriages are defined as marriages between people from different aggregate ethnic groups, where the ethnic group categories are: White, Mixed, Asian [meaning South Asian], Black, Chinese, Other ethnic group.’ Thus, one can deduce that the term 'Mixed' is meant to refer to individuals comprising specific combinations that (usually) include White and one of the broad ‘aggregate ethnic groups’ such as 'Black' or 'Asian'. But a more recent ONS paper on ‘inter-ethnic unions’ (drawing on the 2011 Census) conceptualizes such unions quite differently, suggesting the changeable and contested ways in which official bodies conceive of ‘mixing’ or mixture.

In this book, I use the terms ‘multiracial’, ‘mixed race’, and ‘mixed’ interchangeably to refer to individuals who have parents who are considered to be of disparate racial ancestries (as understood in terms of folk beliefs about the essential nature of ‘race’ and racial differences), and who are visibly different from each other according to dominant social norms (e.g. Black/White, or East Asian/White). In the British context, ‘Black’ can refer to either people of Black
Caribbean or Black African origin, ‘South Asian’ refers to people with ancestry from the Indian subcontinent, while ‘East Asian’ refers to people with ancestry from either East or Southeast Asia.

The growing attention to ‘mixture’ and ‘mixing’ is also reflected in a burgeoning set of studies about multiracial children and people in Britain, most typically focusing upon how such individuals racially identify. However, no studies in Britain (or in the US) have looked specifically at multiracial people as parents, and their relationships with their own children – that is, there has been no study of how multiracial people think about the next generation down, their 2nd generation mixed children. And as these 2nd generation mixed individuals grow up, partner, and have children themselves, we are facing a fascinating yet unknown societal landscape.

As such, this book breaks new ground by taking the now sizeable body of literature on multiracial people one step further – another generation down, as many multiracial (or ‘mixed race’) people in Britain and the US are no longer children or young people, but are now parents. As most official classification systems and policies (e.g. equal opportunity or anti-discrimination) are premised upon monoracial categories, the existence of multiracial people, and their children, poses serious questions about the validity of such frameworks.

Demographically and socially, we must face the reality of ‘multigeneration’ multiracial people and families, and this book is one of the first to explore this increasingly common phenomena.

In the context of the rapid growth of interracial unions and mixed people, individuals may not always know very much about their minority ancestries, or the specific locus of ‘mixture’ in generational terms. Related to this, there is significant societal interest in finding
one’s ancestral roots, as evidenced by the proliferation of websites and software to populate one’s family tree, and television series such as the BBC’s ‘Who do you think you are?’, or the US series ‘Finding Your Roots’ by Henry Louis Gates. In the case of African Americans (and some Britons of Caribbean backgrounds), whose ancestors were enslaved in the trans-Atlantic passage, reclaiming a lost African heritage can be of tremendous emotional and political significance. Alondra Nelson found that African Americans have engaged in genetic DNA testing to locate the African region from where their slave ancestors originated. These varied ways in which people wish to excavate their ancestral pasts may also be indicative of a need for what Anthony Giddens refers to as ‘ontological security’, in light of the often fast-paced and changeable worlds we inhabit. And despite the increasingly diverse types of family and routes to parenthood, societal discourses and norms about the legitimacy and racial ‘purity’ of ancestral descent may especially bear upon multiracial people and their families.

A Look across the Atlantic

As an American who grew up in the US, but who has lived in England since 1991, I find that many American studies view race relations and the significance of race and racisms (not surprisingly) through an American lens; but there isn’t always a recognition that an American framework doesn’t apply universally. In fact, some scholars do not seem to want to hear about how people in different societies may think differently about race. The research (upon which this proposed book is based) grew out of my interest and engagement with quantitative US studies, some of which assumed that parents’ racial categorizations of their multiracial children told the whole story – that their ‘tick boxes’ told us all we needed to know about how interracial couples thought about ethnic and racial identification, and how they were raising their children. I find
these assumptions to be problematic. Given the high rate of interracial partnering in Britain, Britain provides a wonderful comparative test case.

Studies of race and ethnic minority groups find it difficult to situate multiracial people in a racially stratified society which is usually understood in relation to the hierarchical positionings of monoracial groups. The question of how to assess the children of multiracial people (2nd generation multiracials), who are often several generations removed from a minority ancestor(s), requires even more debate and investigation. As I argue in this book, no clear conventions apply when we look a further generation down. Is there a generational ‘tipping point’ at which one’s minority ancestry ceases to be meaningful for multiracial individuals and their children – especially for multiracial people with predominantly White ancestors? Can such tipping points be reversed by new patterns of mixing which don’t always involve White people and/or forms of ethnic and racial revivals?

The status and experiences of multiracial people need to be investigated, but given the heterogeneity of such a population, what we know is still largely speculative. Thus, this book investigates these key questions:

1. How do multiracial people (as opposed to those in interracial unions) racially identify their children, and on what bases do multiracial people make such choices?
2. How do multiracial people raise their children? Is there a clear correspondence between how they racially identify their children, with how they raise them?
3. Is a mixed race identity, or a specific minority heritage, something that mixed race parents wish to transmit to their children?
4. How may the specific ‘race mixture’ and racial experiences of the mixed race parent and the racial background(s) of his/her spouse influence the identification and socialization of
their children?

5. Do multiracial people think that their children are/will be subject to forms of racial prejudice and discrimination?

6. What is in store for multiracial people and their children? Is there a generational tipping point at which one’s mixedness and/or minority ancestry becomes inconsequential?

Why is this study of multiracial people and their children of social importance? These multiracial individuals are raising the next generation, and as such, they provide a valuable glimpse into how ethnic and racial identification and difference may or may not matter for the coming generation. Furthermore, as the status of multiracial people in a racially stratified society such as Britain is yet unclear, the experiences and practices of these parents will illuminate this pressing question. It is also important to investigate the contemporary approaches and practices adopted by these parents, as their experiences of parenthood are likely to differ considerably from those of multiracial people of an earlier generation (such as the experiences of their own parents), when mixed relationships and families were both less common and less socially acceptable.

The Study

Investigating the views, experiences, and practices of multiracial people as parents is clearly no small task, and required not only a great deal of data about each participant’s life history, but also that of his or her family’s. To complement and extend existing studies employing census data, a qualitative approach allows us to ask a different set of questions about the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of various processes. An in-depth qualitative investigation also allows us to open up, and disaggregate ‘the family’ – not just down the generations, but enables participants to reflect on their experiences, choices and practices, in comparison to those of their own parents, as well as
the variable experiences of their children. Not only are ‘multiracial’ (or ‘mixed’) people highly varied, as part of the British population, but, as discussed throughout this book, it is clear that we cannot extrapolate much reliable information on the basis of census ‘tick boxes’ specifying ethnic and racial identification. How multiracial people of various backgrounds think about their mixed ancestries, live their lives, and raise their children, cannot be properly understood without attending to their detailed life histories and accounts of themselves.

The Participants

Of the 62 multiracial participants in this study, 37 were women and 25 men, and most were aged between 25 and 50, though a small number of participants were in their 50s (and the eldest, 62). The age of children in these households varied from a few months old to those in their late 20s. Depending on the age of our participants, most of our parents either had children of primary school age and/or younger, or had children in both primary and secondary schools. Of the 62 participants, all of whom had had children in heterosexual unions, 14 were not partnered at the time of the study, with most of these being separated or divorced from their former partners.

The study participants had to meet the following criteria: First, they had to have one White and one non-White parent, such as an East Asian mother and a White father. Most commonly, the White parents were White British, but this sample also included those with a White parent of other European backgrounds, such as French. Given the debates about whether some multiracial people would wish to claim a White identity for their children, if given the opportunity to do so, I wanted the participants to have a White parent. Participants could also have one White parent and one multiracial parent. Second, participants had to be a parent. Rather than choosing participants who identified as mixed, only individuals who reported minority (or
multiracial) and White *ancestries* (regardless of how they identified themselves) were included in this study.

While there are no established conventions for who can be said to be multiracial in Britain, as such, in this study we focused upon individuals with the following mixed backgrounds: 32 Black/White, 19 South Asian/White, 11 East Asian/White, as these are the most common mixed ancestries in Britain. On the online surveys, participants varied in terms of how detailed they were about reporting their ethnic and racial ancestries, so that while some may have specified that they were ‘Black Jamaican and English’, others used the shorthand of ‘Black/White’. For the purposes of facilitating comparisons, I distilled the open-ended responses about mixed ancestries into the three broad types of mixed ancestries above.

Had time and resources been unlimited, I would have liked to include mixed participants who were ‘minority mix’, and who had no (known) White parentage. However, in addition to the fact that such mixed people are still relatively rare in Britain, I wanted to focus upon how multiracial status and experience were affected by generational change, especially for those who had a White parent. I specifically excluded participants who were the children of inter-ethnic unions (such as between a White British and White German), as I wanted participants who had grown up with parents who were regarded as being of two visibly distinct ‘races’, according to prevailing social norms.

While most (54 of 62) participants were ‘first generation’ mixed, with one White and one non-White minority parent, 7 participants were ‘second generation’ mixed (meaning they had at least one parent who was multiracial themselves); in fact, a few participants were not entirely sure about whether one of their own parents was mixed or not (I only counted those who were certain that one of their parents was mixed as 2nd generation mixed). The majority of participants
(46 of 62) had White British (38) or White other (8 non-British) partners with whom they had children. By comparison, 9 participants had partners with a (monoracial) minority background (3 British and 6 non-British), and 7 had multiracial partners (4 British and 3 non-British). Those partners who had grown up in another country, and not attended school in Britain, were categorized as ethnically non-British. A small number of participants had had children with more than one partner; in those cases, I recorded only the backgrounds of the first partner with whom they had had children.

Several important limitations arose in relation to the small sample in this study. Had I been able to obtain a larger and more representative sample, I could have explored the gender dimensions of multiracial experiences more fully, given that the female participants in this study were usually the primary caregivers for those with young children, and there is evidence that racial identification among ‘biracial’ people is gendered, with women more likely than men to identify as multiracial.26

Furthermore, given the potentially significant influence that class and affluence can have on how minority people racially identify themselves, the predominantly middle class profile of the participants is likely to have provided a partial picture of how mixed people thought about and experienced their roles as parents, and their day to day lives more generally. The majority of participants were middle class, meaning that they had either a first degree in higher education and/or professional forms of employment (such as university lecturer, financial consultant), while 10 of the 62 participants had not been university educated, and had relatively low-skilled and/or clerical, or skilled but manual, forms of employment, such as a school ‘dinner lady’ (cafeteria worker, or call centre worker). The middle class participants also typically had one or
more parents who were (or had been) themselves relatively highly educated and/or in professional occupations.

Lastly, there is little doubt that regional variations in how people think about and experience their multiracial backgrounds remain significant, and while I was able to distinguish between those in urban versus more suburban settings, most of the participants in this study were drawn from the Southeast of England. Most of the 62 participants resided in the Greater London area and cities and towns in the Southeast, but a small proportion lived in cities and towns in the Midlands and the North. Exceptionally, we also included 2 participants who lived in Wales, and Scotland, respectively. Participants’ residential locations and their children’s schools varied considerably in terms of their ethnic and racial diversity. While participants living in London and other large cities tended to live in ethnically diverse areas (usually with relatively diverse schools), those residing in small towns and cities outside of London and other large metropolitan areas reported predominantly White neighbourhoods and schools for their children.

Data Collection and Analysis

Not surprisingly, in a small, qualitative study of this kind, achieving a representative sample of multiracial people in Britain was not possible. Through schools, websites, and snowball sampling, we recruited 62 mixed race parents who each completed an online survey, followed by an in-depth interview. After obtaining permission with gatekeepers, such as head teachers, brief letters describing the nature and aims of the project were disseminated by schools directly - either via hard copy to all parents, or via email attachments sent out by the school. Advertisements were also placed on some websites aimed at mixed individuals and families in Britain, such as *Intermix* (www.intermix.org.uk) and *People in Harmony* (www.pih.org.uk).
Overall, 19 participants were recruited through schools, 22 through websites, and 21 through snowballing. We did not discern any notable differences in the participants or data, based upon the mode of recruitment – though those who were recruited via websites aimed at multiracial people and families could have had a greater awareness and investment in their status as mixed people.

There were two stages to data collection. Data collection (both online surveys and in-depth interviews) was carried out between July 2012 and December 2013. First, the online surveys elicited mostly factual background information about participants’ histories, including their place of birth, where they attended primary and secondary schools, and the ethnic backgrounds of their parents, among many other variables. For instance, participants were asked to respond to the following question: ‘How would you describe your “mixed” background? (Please be as specific as possible, and describe both your mother’s and father’s ancestries. If one or both of your parents is “mixed” themselves, please specify their ancestries).’ The online survey used open-response fields, so that participants could use their own terms and language to describe themselves and their families.

These surveys were followed by the in-depth semi-structured interviews, which gathered detailed information about participants’ family and individual histories, and their thoughts and experiences as multiracial individuals and as parents. They were also probed about the descriptions of their mixed backgrounds in their online surveys. These interviews were crucial in providing a sense of the participants’ views and experiences, but also a sense of their day to day lives with their children and wider social networks. Most interviews were conducted in the participants’ homes, though about 1/3 were conducted in the participants’ offices and/or public spaces such as cafes and restaurants. These interviews ranged between 1.5 to 3 hours long. While
most of the participants were very forthcoming and open about discussing their life experiences, and those of their children, in a handful of interviews, not all of the data collection was complete; a few cases of missing data resulted when participants who had limited time had to terminate the interviews before all the topics had been covered; in a few of those cases, we were unable to secure a follow-up interview to complete the data collection. All the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, then transcribed verbatim (as soon as possible after the interviews took place). In a few cases, face to face interviews were not possible, and so SKYPE, and in one case, telephone, conversations were employed. Pseudonyms were used for all participants, and personal details were changed in some cases to ensure anonymity. While not initially planned, early on in the research, we asked participants for permission to take a photograph of them, or to send us a photograph of their choice. With a few exceptions, the participants agreed to this request, and their photographs were helpful in completing a portrayal of each participant.

While SPSS was used to identify some overall patterns found in the online survey, the analysis of the interview data was wholly qualitative. As researchers, we engage in an interpretation of the interview transcripts.27 A thematic analysis of the interviews started with jotting down notes about particular themes or points that had been especially prominent in the interview. Notes, too, about the emotional tenor of the interviews were recorded, as it was not uncommon for participants to articulate a range of often strong emotions, as they reflected upon their lives, and those of their children. Observations were scribbled along the margins of transcripts, but this process was also followed by listening to the digital recordings themselves several times. Through both listening and the recording of themes, we then created codes to reflect key themes.28 An effort was made to compare the thoughts and experiences of participants
of different ethnic and racial ancestries, as well as a range of participants living in both diverse, urban areas, compared with largely White, more suburban locations. Our coding approach generally approximates what Strauss and Corbin refer to as ‘open coding’:\(^{29}\): ‘the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data’. We generated a set of codes, with their definitions, to cover the full range of themes, practices and ideas in the interview transcripts.

**Overview of the Book**

While many studies of multiracial people have been carried out in the US in the last several decades, the study of multiracial people and their families is still relatively nascent in Britain. Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the demographic growth of mixed people in Britain, and will show that, rather than constituting a marginal social group, multiracial people in Britain are quickly becoming relatively common, especially in ethnically diverse metropolitan areas. A review of both North American and British studies will demonstrate that there is a significant gap in the research concerning *mixed race people as parents*, and their relationships with their children. This generational perspective, I argue, is needed to achieve a fuller understanding of what it means to be a multiracial individual and parent today.

Chapter 2 examines how and why multiracial people identify their children in particular ways. Amazingly, we know very little about this key question. Do participants of disparate mixed backgrounds differ in the identifications of their children, and do the ethnic and racial backgrounds of partners influence how they identify their children? Furthermore, how important is the physical appearance of children, the generational locus of mixture, and contact with White and ethnic minority family members in shaping the identification of children? While many US
studies have focused on how parents in interracial unions racially classify their children, these studies have not investigated how such parents think about or explain their choices. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the racial categories chosen by multiracial people – whether ‘mixed’, ‘Black’, ‘White’, ‘Asian’ (or others) – do not speak for themselves and need to be unpacked, as the meanings and motivations underlying the use of such terms is far from straightforward.

In fact, the identification of children on official forms can only tell us so much about how multiracial people actually raise their children – the focus of Chapter 3. As some analysts have pointed out, monoracial parents in interracial relationships are not themselves multiracial, and will not have experienced many of the issues and concerns that can arise for their children. Do multiracial people, as parents, steer their children toward particular upbringings regarding cultural transmission and/or racial awareness? Is there a correspondence between how parents racially identify and raise their children? In this chapter, I examine four ways in which multiracial people bring up their children, and I examine why particular parents are drawn to specific modes of socialization. Furthermore, I discuss the importance of generational change and how participants’ experiences of their own upbringings and childhoods could influence their thinking and parenting practices in relation to their children.

Chapter 4 then turns to a significant concern for many multiracial parents: will their children be subject to forms of racial prejudice and discrimination? How do parents teach their children about the realities of ‘race’, and how do they prepare them to deal with potential forms of discrimination and denigration? Existing studies of mixed people in Britain rarely explicitly address their experiences of racial stigmatization or denigration and even less is known about how they, as parents, regard the racialized experiences of their children. In this chapter, I examine how multiracial participants’ own experiences (or not) of racism may influence
potential concerns about how their own children are treated in the wider society. The interviews with our participants reveal a strong theme of generational change and norms regarding the need and obligation on the part of some parents to discuss racial awareness and coping – though how parents put this into practice could differ in their day-to-day lives.

Not surprisingly, our participants’ accounts of themselves and their children often segued both into the past and the future. In Chapter 5, our participants reflected upon what was in store for their children, as they grew up, and perhaps had children of their own. I investigate what multiracial parents thought about the future regarding the salience of ethnic and racial difference, and what this would portend for their children’s lives. Parents also reflected upon whom their children may partner with, and with what consequences, especially for the potential ‘dilution’ or reinforcement of ethnic minority heritage. For some parents, this was a difficult and emotional conversation to have. Many of the participants spoke about their own family’s role in the evolving make-up of British society – that is, they framed change around racial mixture by talking about themselves and their children as being at the forefront of a contemporary Britain, in which there was a great deal of flux surrounding the meanings and dynamics of racial and ethnic boundaries.

Lastly, in the Conclusion, I consider the key findings of this study – many of which point to the growing normality of mixing and mixedness. This conclusion also considers the extent to which the lives of multiracial people in Britain mirror, or are distinctive from, those of multiracial people in the US, and whether theorizing based upon the US, including dominant understandings about racism and racial hierarchies in the US, are applicable to contemporary Britain.