

**AN ACADEMIC AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR COLLABORATION
TO FACILITATE RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT FOR
'MIXED' COUPLES AND FAMILIES: PROJECT REPORT**

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Collaborative Relationship Support for 'Mixed' Families



University of Southampton London South Bank University OnePlusOne People In Harmony Mix Together Intermix

AN ACADEMIC AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR COLLABORATION TO FACILITATE RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT FOR 'MIXED' COUPLES AND FAMILIES

1 INTRODUCTION

This working paper reports on a collaboration between academics and the voluntary sector that aimed to develop online relationship resources and training modules for the benefit of 'mixed' couples and their children, health and social welfare practitioners and support groups: 'The Facilitating Relationship Support for 'Mixed' Couples and Families: A Collaborative Approach and Evaluation' project. 'Mixed' here refers to couple relationships where each member is from a different racial or ethnic background (See Box 1 on terminology).

Academics who had conducted research on 'mixed' couples and families, under the Families & Social Capital Research Group's programme of research at London South Bank University, joined forces with researchers and information providers from OnePlusOne, a national voluntary organisation that aims to enhance understanding of how family relationships contribute to the well being of adults and children. Together they led on the project and collaborated with representatives from three key agencies that support 'mixed' people, relationship and families: People in Harmony, Intermix, and Mix Together.

The project comprised three activities:

- One was the transformation of independent academic research findings into useful online resources for 'mixed' couples who wanted to work on their relationship (via OnePlusOne's theCoupleConnection.net, an interactive online relationship support service), and for training professionals who work with 'mixed' couples and their families (via OnePlusOne's e-learning training for practitioners on relationship issues).
- Linked to this, a second activity evaluating the social effects and impact of this collaborative knowledge-transfer initiative was built into the project.
- The third activity was the identification of an agenda for future practice-relevant research.

The project was funded under the ESRC's Follow-On Funding scheme, which supports knowledge exchange and impact generating activities that follow-on from specific pieces of academic research.¹

¹ ESRC Grant Reference: RES-189-25-0115

Box 1: Terminology

The language used to speak about people from 'mixed' backgrounds and to record them in surveys is subject to much heated and contested ideological and political debate (e.g. Ali 2003, Aspinall 2003, Barn & Harman 2005, Caballero 2005; Ifekwunigwe 1999; Tikly et al. 2004; Wright et al., 2003). For this project, the terms 'mixed' and 'mixing' are used for a number of reasons:

1. They encompass the range of racial, ethnic and faith differences among the individuals, couples and parents in the studies from which the project was developed.
2. The terms have the advantage that the specificities of the type of mixing referred to have to be made clear when discussing these individuals and their families, rather than capturing them under one encompassing categorical qualifier.
3. 'Mixed', while reflecting official census terminology, is in common usage among the 'mixed' couples and individuals in this study, as well as in others (e.g. Barrett *et al.*, 2006; Aspinall et al. 2008; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002).
4. 'Mixing' allowed us to signal the dynamic and relational processes in which the people involved in the original studies and those who took part in the videos for the project were actively involved.

While we recognise the potential intellectual and universalising drawbacks of 'Mixed' to identify individuals, for this project we were concerned with couple relationships and with using terms that are accessible to lay people in everyday use (see Caballero et al. 2008: vi).

For this report we have used 'Mixed' with capital M to denote the Census category applicable to individuals who identify themselves or are identified as falling within this population group. This use is distinct from 'mixed' without the capital, which we use to refer to couple relationships between people who come from different racial and ethnic backgrounds,, which is not an official category.

2 CONTEXT

'Mixed' couple relationships among people from different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds have been one of the consequences of centuries of migration. 'Mixed' couples and their families are part of a growing number of family types that have become more prominent in the modern world. Analyses of the 2001 UK Census (data from the 2011 census has not yet been released) indicate that the population who identify as 'Mixed' is the third largest and one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in Britain (Salt and Rees 2006). Around half of these individuals are under the age of 16, and of this group, just over half have married or cohabiting parents. This challenges stereotypes that relationships across 'race' and ethnic groups are mostly short-term and problematic.

The notion of 'culture clash', as an underlying pathology of 'mixed' racial relationships, is frequently used to explain any difficulties or transience experienced by the couples (Reddy 1994, p.10). This 'clash' framework is a strong thread in the literature on 'mixed' relationships and family counselling or therapy – a literature concerned mainly with Black male and White female couples, emanating from the United States (e.g. Oriti et al. 1996; Thomas et al. 2003; Wehrly 2003). Knowledge that focuses primarily on 'mixed' couples' own understandings of the nature of any relationship problems they face is very thin on the

ground, particularly in the British context and in relation to different forms of mixing. Yet whether couples in 'mixed' relationships regard any relational problems as stemming from cultural difference or from personal incompatibility is likely to impact on how they seek to resolve any difficulties, and whether, or from what type of sources they seek support.

The issue of whether any difficulties in relationships for couples from different racial and ethnic backgrounds and implications for their families are attributed to cultural or personal clashes is relevant for this project. It is significant not only in the context of the dominant source and thrust of knowledge in the 'mixed' family field generally, but also in relation to recent in-depth material and findings from research carried out under the Families & Social Capital Research Group in the British context. Additionally, agencies and frontline practitioners working with 'Mixed' people and families want to develop their knowledge and skills in this area, so as to offer relevant resources to those in need of support and guidance.

Understanding the relationship experiences and meeting the relationship support needs of the parents of 'Mixed' children and young people can help to promote family wellbeing. Indeed, the quality and satisfaction of couple relationship more generally has a strong bearing on parenting quality, with poor quality relationships associated with poor parenting and, in contrast, high relationship satisfaction associated with high levels of family wellbeing (Buehler & Gerard 2002; Carlson & McLanahan 2006). The stability of couple relationships and relationship breakdown thus is recognised as a key area of policy concern, notably as this affects children involved. Current government policy regards strong and stable families of all kinds as the bedrock of a strong and stable society. The Coalition government have therefore committed to placing funding for relationship support on a secure, long-term footing and to ensure that couples are given greater encouragement to use relationship support (HM Government, 2010).

Under these circumstances it is important that frontline practitioners have access to knowledge that will increase their skills and ability to identify and respond to various relationship issues. In this respect, OnePlusOne's 'Brief Encounters®' face-to-face training programme to help practitioners recognise and respond to parents' relationship difficulties has been evaluated as having positive impacts on professional practice and couple relationships (Simons et al. 2001; 2003). However, evidence also points to practitioners' uncertainty about how to deal with 'mixed' couples and families. Feedback from parenting and parent support training shows that 75% of practitioners would like more information on 'mixed' relationships, and generally practitioners supporting parents identify training 'gaps' in relation to culture and ethnicity (Kellet & Apps 2009).

Empirical research conducted within the Families & Social Capital Research Group, under its previous ESRC programme on families and social capital, in part sought to fill this gap in knowledge by focusing on 'mixed' couples' own understandings of the supposed 'clash' or any problems they face in their relationship. In-depth data from projects on:

- African-Caribbean and Italian transnational families living in Britain (Goulbourne et al. 2010) identified how couples can face disjuncture in expectations between them, their families and wider communities.
- A study on parenting 'Mixed' children (Caballero et al. 2008) indicated that there could be complex shifts in how each member of a 'mixed' couple understood any difficulties between them, as rooted in cultural difference or personal attributes and viewpoint.

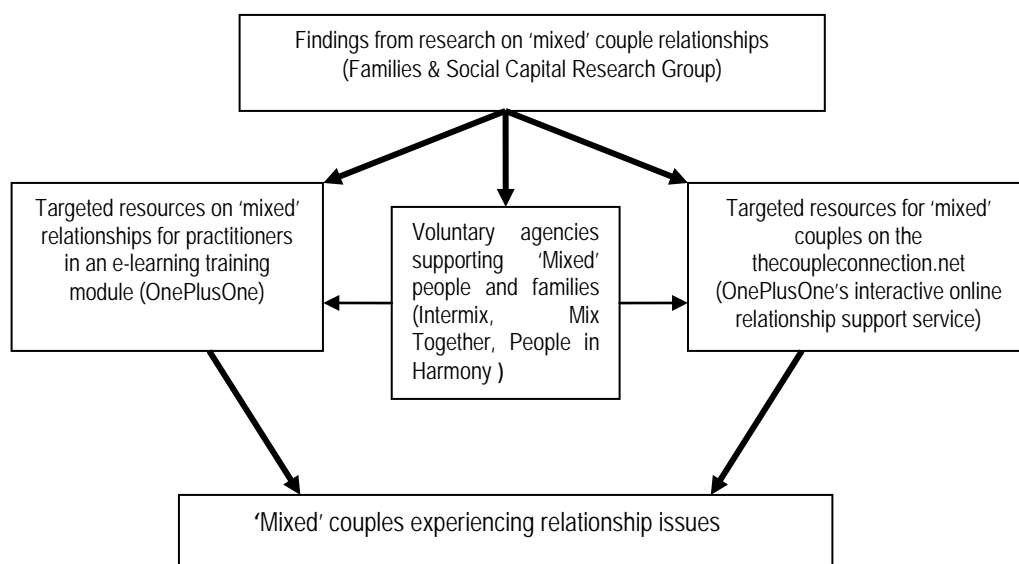
(See Appendix 2 for summary of findings from the three linked research studies.)

On the basis of this evidence, the research programme leader (Edwards) and OnePlusOne's Head of Research (Coleman) forged an academic-voluntary sector partnership and gained funding to provide, and exchange knowledge about, relationship support for 'mixed' couples.

3 AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The 'Facilitating relationship support for "mixed" couples and families' project aimed to bring together voluntary sector organisations that are differentially focused on relationship difficulties (either primarily, as a feature of personal relationship, or of their racial/cultural mixedness), alongside academic research expertise, to facilitate relationship support for 'mixed' couples. The primary objectives were to exchange and build on the available expertise, and to develop online useful resources for 'mixed' couples experiencing relationship difficulties and for organisations and frontline practitioners seeking to support them. This process is illustrated in Figure 1. The project also aimed to evaluate the impact of these resources.

Figure 1: Model of Knowledge Transfer



Another objective was to explore augmentation, clarification of ambiguity and filling of knowledge gaps in the 'mixed' families field, in order to shape an agenda for further research that would be of interest to the academic and voluntary sector participants in the project (See Appendix 7). To this end, as outlined in the Introduction, the project had three main foci:

1. Knowledge transfer: turning existing research on 'mixed' couples and families into online material suitable and accessible for non-academic audiences.
2. Evaluating impact: assessing the social effects (including reach and usefulness) of the above knowledge transfer.
3. Knowledge generation: identifying an agenda for further research and conducting initial exploratory work that will be shaped by relevance to practice, between representatives of all the agencies involved.

4 COLLABORATION DETAILS

The collaboration aimed to build on the in-depth data and findings about 'mixed' couple relationships from research studies already carried out under the Families & Social Capital Research Group at London South Bank University. Collaboration involved academic and voluntary sector project leaders, academic and voluntary sector project workers, and academic voluntary agency consultants.

Project leaders:

- Professor Rosalind Edwards, University of Southampton (previously London South Bank University)
- Dr. Lester Coleman, OnePlusOne

Rosalind and Lester secured ESRC funding to work together to turn the research about 'mixed' couple relationships into useful online resources for 'mixed' couples who want to work on their relationships, and for frontline practitioners supporting 'mixed' couples and families. Throughout the project, their roles primarily were concerned with convening and leading meetings, participating in face-to-face and email discussions and providing feedback and comments on the resources.

Project workers:

- Dr. Elaine Bauer, Families & Social Capital Research Group in the Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research at London South Bank University
- Dr. Catherine Houlston, OnePlusOne

Elaine and Catherine reviewed the findings from the three research projects and identified the issues facing 'mixed' couples and the key messages for practitioners who aim to support them. They worked alongside the academic consultants and the representatives from the voluntary sector agencies to develop written material and videos for the online resources.

Academic consultants:

- Dr. Chamion Caballero, London South Bank University
- Dr. Tracey Reynolds, London South Bank University
- Dr. Elisabetta Zontini, University of Nottingham

Chamion, Tracey and Elisabetta carried out the original research that the project aimed to turn into online support resources. They each carried out a research study that looked in different ways at couple relationships where partners are from a different background: 'mixed' parent couples across different ethnic, racial and faith backgrounds, couples of African/Caribbean origins, and couples of Italian origin, respectively (see Appendix 2 for overview of research findings from which the resources were developed).

Voluntary agency consultants:

- Ashley Chisholm, MixTogether
- Sharron Hall, Intermix
- Val Hoskins, People in Harmony

As representatives from key voluntary sector agencies in the 'mixed race' support field, Ashley, Sharron and Val run charity organisations that offer information and support for 'Mixed' ('Mixed' race/ethnicity/faith) individuals, and promote a positive experience of mixing and mixedness in Britain. They contributed to the project by discussing and raising issues commonly experienced by 'mixed' couples, providing feedback on the development of resource ideas and the resources themselves, as well as linking to and promoting the final resources.

Box 2: Remits of organisations involved in the project

Families & Social Capital Research Group, Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research, London South Bank University (www.lsbu.ac.uk/families) is committed to high quality research that focuses on the dynamics of family change and social resource processes, and on policy and practice that influence change in our society.

OnePlusOne (www.oneplusone.org.uk) is a UK charity that strengthens relationships by creating resources that help families and frontline workers tackle relationship issues early. OnePlusOne helps couples and parents through a range of web-services, whilst providing online learning to equip frontline workers with the skills to offer timely relationship support in a face to face setting. They use research evidence to inform the development of policies and services that encourage early support for family relationships.

Intermix (www.intermix.org.uk) is a non-profit organisation that offers information, support and the chance to build a community around and within the 'mixed-race' experience. *Intermix* was established in 1999 with a grant from the Family Learning Millennium Awards by Sharron Hall, who wanted to address the negative assumptions based around 'Mixed-race' individuals and their families. Their website has a forum that offers peer-to-peer discussions with 'Mixed-race' individuals, and published papers on 'mixed-race' experiences may also be found there.

Mix Together (www.mixtogether.org) is a charity organisation that supports 'mixed' couples ('Mixed' race/ religion/ caste) who face opposition from family or community to their relationship. *Mix Together* was established in 2004, and the organisation welcomes all age group, from young people who are just dating to established families. Their website has a forum that offers peer-to-peer support to individuals in 'mixed' relationships and some helpful information that they can read.

People in Harmony (www.pih.org.uk) is a 'mixed race' charity that promotes the positive experience of interracial life in Britain today and provides advice, support and information for 'mixed race' families, couples and individuals. *People in Harmony* was established in 1972 as an organisation where 'Mixed' race people and 'mixed' couples can come together and talk with others who have an understanding and an awareness of 'Mixed' race. *People in Harmony* produces a wide range of educational resources around the issue of 'Mixed' race, as well as organizing regular conferences and workshops on this issue.

5 PROCESS

A crucial basis of the collaborative approach used for this project was the dialogue between the different parties involved. The process was participative and flexible to allow interaction between the agendas of the agencies involved and developments of the resources. This meant that while the parameters and aims of the project were outlined in the initial proposal, the specific approach, the format of resources and their final delivery changed in accordance with feedback from those directly involved in this project as well as other OnePlusOne staff (including those involved with practice development and content of the online services), and to fit with OnePlusOne's other projects' commitments. This flexible approach meant that the resources could be best developed to meet the needs of different audiences and to achieve greater overall reach to 'mixed' couples and practitioners.

The specific process and stages of the project are detailed in this report, structured around the three main aims of the project:

- 1 Knowledge Transfer: Exchanging knowledge and facilitating support
- 2 Evaluating Impact: Assessing the social impact of the project
- 3 Knowledge Generation: Identifying an agenda for further research (Appendix 7)

In order to carry out the objectives of the project, a series of three face-to-face collaboration meetings were held between: the project leaders, the project workers, the academic consultants, the consultants from the voluntary organisations in the 'mixed' racial/cultural field, and OnePlusOne's Training and Support teams. These meetings occurred at the beginning (October 2010), middle (March 2011) and end of the project (September 2011). Email consultations occurred in the interim. Additional meetings were held between the project leaders, the project workers, and members of OnePlusOne's Training and Support teams to review the outcomes and action points from the collaboration meetings and to monitor progress on the project. Further details of these meetings are outlined in the sections below.

6 EXCHANGING KNOWLEDGE AND FACILITATING SUPPORT

The aim of this phase of the project was to transfer the findings from previously funded ESRC studies about 'mixed' couple relationships, into two types of useful resources. Firstly, resources for 'mixed' couples themselves who want to work on their relationships; to provide relevant, targeted resources for their specific needs, rather than relying on general universal resources that 'mixed' couples might not regard as relevant. Secondly, to provide training resources to alert frontline practitioners to the particular issues that might be faced by 'mixed' couples, rather than those based on stereotypical assumptions.

Consequently, a major aspect in the process of exchanging knowledge and facilitating support was the collaborative effort of translating the academic research findings about 'mixed' couples and family relationships (see Appendix 2) into useful online resources that aimed to:

- challenge stereotypes about 'mixed' couples and their families and normalise their experiences,
- raise awareness and explore some of the issues that 'mixed' couples and families may face, and,
- provide signposts to organisations that can provide further support where required.

6.1 Identifying key issues and messages from the research findings

The initial task in the process of exchanging knowledge and facilitating support involved the project workers identifying key issues and messages for 'mixed' couples and for practitioners supporting them, based on the findings from the three ESRC studies about 'mixed' couple relationships (see Appendix 2). These messages formed the basis for the content which was developed into online resources. The project workers drew up a list of issues that they had identified from the Families & Social Capital Research Group studies and circulated these to the academic and voluntary sector consultants for their feedback and further suggestions at the first collaborative meeting. Box 3 illustrates the main themes from the three studies that were circulated for consultation (see section 6.3.1 of this paper for the final list of agreed messages that informed the online resources).

Box 3: Main Issues

Experience of disapproval, lack of acceptance and rejection

- People in 'mixed' couple relationships may experience disapproval or even rejection from those in their social network (such as, family members, friends, neighbours and work colleagues).
- Some people in the wider community may present further problems by not acknowledging or accepting people in 'mixed' families as a family unit, because they sometimes look different.
- The disapproval of 'mixed' couple relationship by some may be based on their views of what is 'normal' or 'natural' and 'acceptable' for relationship and family formation.
- Views of what is normal/natural and acceptable are likely to be influenced by culture, ethnicity, religion, etc. Some family members may see the formation of 'mixed' couple relationships as a rejection of these values.
- For some groups, the issue of forced marriage cuts across people's choice of forming/continuing a 'mixed' couple relationship.
- Even if adults in 'mixed' couple relationship do not experience, or are unaware of any disapproval, their children may sometimes experience teasing or bullying because they are from a 'mixed' family.
- 'Mixed' families could benefit from policies and practices that focus on tackling negative assumptions, discrimination and prejudice.

Managing expectations: the involvement of grandparents, rejection and reconciliation

- The influence of extended family expectations and pressures on 'mixed' couple relationships may be heightened during key transitions and relationship developments, such as marriage and when becoming parents.
- Pressures from extended family (including grandparents) sometimes come from expectations regarding roles and family obligations.
- Communication and negotiation is important in maintaining good extended family relationships.

Developing a sense of identity and belonging for children in 'mixed' families

- Parents in 'mixed' families use different approaches to create a sense of belonging and identity for their children.
- Approaches used may not always work and may sometimes create conflict between parents.
- It is important to understand children's choices in coming to terms with their own sense of belonging and identity(ies).

- Passing down language and culture to children is an important component of many 'mixed' families' experiences.
- Tensions may arise between 'mixed' couples with regard to raising children.
- Communication and negotiation is important in achieving a shared endeavour in bringing up children.

External support and understanding

- Those in 'mixed' families may experience pressures from social services over the care of children.
- Those in 'mixed' families may experience challenges from professionals who do not understand the issues they face.
- There are no universal messages about what sorts of support parents will find useful.
- It is important that family support, health, education and social services do not make assumptions about 'mixed' families. Families who seem to share a form of mixing can differ from each other.

Managing and understanding conflict in 'mixed' couple relationships

- Tensions and conflict between 'mixed' couples may be due to expectations based on cultural differences.
- It is important to understanding whether tensions in 'mixed' relationships are rooted in cultural differences, or whether they arise from differences in personality and individual expectations (including gender and class issues).
- Open communication and negotiation is helpful in solving disputes/tensions between couples
- It is also important to understand the impact of where 'mixed' couples live on their experiences of feeling usual or unusual.

6.2 Online platforms for resources

Before work began on developing the above key issues and messages into resources for 'mixed' couples and practitioners, the project leaders and workers confirmed which online platforms would be used to host these resources. This included OnePlusOne's online relationship support service for couples, theCoupleConnection.net and the e-learning training offered to practitioners who work directly with families.

6.2.1 theCoupleConnection.net

theCoupleConnection.net is an interactive relationship support service which offers information to couples and encourages users to take a self-help approach to managing relationship difficulties and improving their relationship. The service was launched in August 2008 and over the following three and a half years, more than 804,260 people have accessed the site, with an average of 25,000 new users joining each month².

Currently (early 2012), the service is funded by the Department for Education. It is freely available to anyone with internet access who is looking for relationship information or support, but key target groups

² Figures from end of January 2012

include providing information to disadvantaged and vulnerable parents, such as those undergoing life transitions (for example new parenthood), coping with difficult circumstances, and those who are unwilling or unable to access mainstream services.

The service has adopted an approach based on assisting parents and couples to increase their understanding of relationships as well as helping themselves to improve their relationship. It uses the helping process model of support, including elements which allow users to explore a relationship issue through information and to develop greater understanding about that issue, before making plans and changes and then reviewing these changes (Braun et al. 2006).

The service is organised into three levels of engagement which support involvement at different levels of intensity. Level one on the site is where people can access information through a range of video and text-based resources and relationship insights which are grounded in research evidence and professional expertise. Level two offers users a place where they can discuss concerns by posting and replying to comments on a forum. Support is provided through the online community and the forum is moderated by trained relationship counsellors. The highest level of service involvement allows users to work at their relationship issues through exercises and 'personal' and 'couple spaces' focused on specified goals.

The resources developed through the 'mixed' family project followed a similar format to the range and type of resources already offered on the CoupleConnection.net for other relationship topics and issues. However, the specific content was driven by existing literature in this area and by what 'mixed' couples had to say themselves. For consistency with other resources on the site, the newly developed resources used a similar format and tone, with non-academic and accessible language.

6.2.2 E-learning courses for practitioners

Resources developed for a range of frontline practitioners who work with 'mixed' couples and families were incorporated into an e-learning module, 'Working with different types of family'.

This module was developed as part of a range of online training on relationship issues, specifically for practitioners who work closely with families (such as Health Visitors, Family Support Workers, Outreach Workers etc). Other existing modules include:

1. Understanding couple relationships: An introduction
2. Brief encounters: A framework for early intervention
3. Relationships under pressure
4. Dealing with conflict in relationships

The content of these online modules are grounded in research evidence on couple and family relationships. They build on the earlier success of OnePlusOne's face-to-face Brief Encounters® training (Simons, Reynolds & Morison, 2001). Existing online modules have been rated highly and OnePlusOne won an e-learning award in 2010 for excellence in the production of learning content in the not for profit sector.

Content on 'mixed' families for the 'Working with different types of family' module was developed to supplement other material written outside of this project and which focuses on different aspects of family life including:

- Step families
- Same sex parents
- Young parents
- Single parent families

Each family type has sections that focus on: a) the experiences of living in a variety of family types, and b) the principles that inform and enhance work with these families/parents. It is noted at the beginning of this module that there may be some overlap between different families types (for example a family may represent different racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds, as well as being step). It is also acknowledged that this module does not deal with all possible family forms but address some which practitioners may encounter.

6.3 Developing online resources

The following section covers the process of developing the online resources and outlines the main meetings held and issues raised (subsection 6.3.1), the process of producing the online resources and what the final products were (subsection 6.3.2) and finally, when these resources were launched (subsection 6.3.3).

6.3.1 Collaborative and development meetings

The collaborative aspect of this project was a key component for the successful transfer of knowledge into usable resources. From the outset, academics and voluntary sector agencies currently working on the issues involving 'mixed' families were involved. Academic and voluntary agency consultants (see section 4) were asked during and following the first collaboration meeting to feedback on the identified key issues and messages from the research, as well as providing ideas about the planned resources and to comment and advise on these as they were developed.

To facilitate the development of the resources, the project team met on several occasions with members of OnePlusOne's Training and Support teams to follow up on issues raised by consultants and to ensure that the resources were also suitable for the existing online platforms on which they were to be hosted (theCoupleConnection.net and e-learning for practitioners). Specific issues and actions relating to the first collaborative meeting and subsequent development meetings are outlined below. In addition to these meetings the project workers met regularly (every one or two weeks) to review work on the resources and consider any issues arising or amendments needed. The project leaders were provided with updates and consulted regarding particular issues and decisions relating to the development of resources.

First collaborative meeting (October 18, 2010): Objectives and issues of note

The first meeting was attended by all the key participants on the project, and we were joined by OnePlusOne's Training and Support teams.

The objectives of this meeting were:

- to introduce participants and learn about their organisations and their interests in the project;
- to review the project's main objectives and the timetable as proposed in the ESRC application;

- to review the research findings about 'mixed' couples from which the project developed and discuss the main issues and key messages arising from them and any additional issues that collaborators might be aware of;
- to demonstrate the online platforms to be used to host the resources (e-learning courses for practitioners and theCoupleConnection.net);
- to clarify participants' roles and tasks on the project.

At this first meeting we created a project logo for use in correspondence and presentations (see p. 4 of this working paper). Following the meeting, a web-based file-hosting service, Dropbox, was set up with all collaborators enrolled, as a method for storing and sharing material from the project (meeting notes etc.).

The list of main issues and key messages based on the earlier research findings (see Box 3) was amended slightly based on feedback and additional issues that were raised in the meeting. The agreed key issues to cover in the resources were summarised as follows:

1. Experience of disapproval, lack of acceptance and rejection – from family members, friends, neighbours and work colleagues.
2. Managing expectations: the involvement of grandparents, rejection and reconciliation – managing extended family expectations and maintaining relationships through communication and negotiation.
3. Developing a sense of identity and belonging for children in 'mixed' families – parents used different approaches to create identity and belonging in for their children.
4. External support and understanding – 'mixed' families may experience pressures from social services over care of children and challenges from professionals who do not understand the issues they face.
5. Managing and understanding conflict in 'mixed' couple relationships – understanding whether tensions in 'mixed' relationships are rooted in cultural differences or if they arise from differences in personality and individual expectations.

As part of the collaboration, the list was then recirculated to the collaborators for their feedback, comments and final agreement. Jointly establishing the relevant messages from the evidence-base was an essential step in the knowledge-exchange and ensured that the project team and relevant OnePlusOne Training and Support staff (who were not directly funded by the project) were fully committed to the process. These agreed key issues formed the framework for the development of all the resources for 'mixed' couples and practitioners.

Meetings with OnePlusOne's Training and Support teams

After the amended issues and messages were reviewed by all, the project workers met with OnePlusOne's Training and Support teams to discuss ways to develop the content into useful resources for 'mixed' couples and for practitioners who work with them.

We explored appropriate formats for the development of the research material into useful online resources which would fit in with the existing style of the host platforms (theCoupleConnection.net and e-learning for practitioners). Considerations for developing the resources were also discussed – such as the appropriate branding or labeling for these 'mixed' family resources, as well as the time and cost involved in developing the resources – and ideas for the next steps.

Some of the issues raised during these meetings were:

- **The need to tie in with the existing format and tone of the other resources already available on the online platforms.**

The OnePlusOne Training and Support team suggested that we develop similar content to other modules on the sites for the e-Learning and theCoupleConnection.net modules. This involved writing succinct material for 'mixed' couples themselves and practitioners, using clear non-academic language to convey key messages from the earlier research.

E-learning - resource for practitioners

For the e-learning module, it was suggested that the project workers write a two to three page contribution for a 'working with diversity' module, which would highlight key messages for practitioners who may come into contact with 'mixed' couples and their families and be unaware of the specific issues these families may face. For example, a key issue identified from the earlier research is that: 'It is important that parenting and family support services do not make assumptions about, and essentialise, "mixed" families, mixing and mixedness'.

theCoupleConnection.net - resources for 'mixed' couples and families

For thecoupleconneciton.net the Resource team suggested that the project workers wrote five articles (see section 6.3.2) which would highlight the issues facing 'mixed' couples and their families. These would primarily involve the material from the earlier ESRC research findings but would also go beyond to include some statistics and wider knowledge about 'mixing' and 'mixed' families.

- **The target audience for the resources and the focus of the information used in the resources**

A contextual resource in the form of a 'Did you know this about "mixed" families' written article was developed. This article contained general and statistical information about 'mixed' relationships. It was intended to bring awareness to the growing number of 'mixed' couples and their families. It also highlighted some of the positive outcomes for 'Mixed' people, while also challenging negative perceptions about them.

- **The labeling of the resources**

What to call the resources once we created them was a point of discussion; how to achieve the appropriate branding for the e-learning and theCoupleConnection.net modules. The main challenge was in finding the balance between normalising 'mixed' couples and families while also addressing ways of helping them with their particular issues. In other words, it was important to label the articles in a way that would not single out people in 'mixed' relationships and families.

- **Timing and cost of the project**

Concerns about timing and cost of the project were also raised. The issue here was the extent and kind of resources that could be developed to fit within OnePlusOne's existing formats and time lines for delivery, given the timetable and budget boundaries of the project.

A three-pronged approach for developing the online resources was proposed:

- Use existing evidence to show that 'mixed' couple relationships are commonly found in the UK and that many of the issues faced by these couples are similar to those experienced in all (or many) relationships.
- Cite research about the key issues that could have a negative impact on 'mixed' couple relationships and provide information that addresses these issues, but in such a way that the discussion could also be relevant for any relationship (such as extended family involvement and bringing up children).
- Signpost and raise awareness of organisations that provide specific support for 'mixed' couples and families.

Essentially this approach is about providing information that 'normalises' 'mixed' families (in other words, it treats them as ordinary, rather than as strange and unusual), then deals with specific issues and case studies. To this end we used cases from the research conducted by the academic consultants to supplement the key messages (see Appendix 3).

Drafts of the content for the e-learning module were circulated to the collaborative team for their feedback. The project workers then amended the articles to incorporate the collaborators' comments, and re-circulated them for further discussion at the second meeting.

Second collaborative meeting (March 29, 2011): Objectives and main issues

The second collaboration meeting took place halfway through the project, and we were joined by members of OnePlusOne's Training and Support teams. At this meeting we:

- Reviewed the key issues and draft resources.
- Demonstrated how the resources would be developed for the online platforms.
- Discussed issues regarding terminology and content presentation. For example: issues around the appropriate label or title for the e-learning module for practitioners, the concept of 'mixed' and how best to represent 'mixed' families with regards to race, faith and ethnicity, and the possible use of videos to complement the written articles and texts.
- Discussed methods for evaluating the social impact of the resources at the end of the project.
- Explored ideas for further research on 'mixed' couples and families (see section 8 'Identifying an agenda for further research').

A key outcome from this meeting was a consensus that video resources should be developed alongside the written resources. Collaborators agreed this was a powerful medium by which to get across messages about 'mixed' families and an opportunity to hear from 'mixed' couples directly. It was also felt that videos would reduce the volume of text and possibly engage more people, some of whom might not be inclined to read written articles but would be able to gain knowledge, understanding and support from the experiences addressed in the videos. Indeed, the existing video material on theCoupleConnection.net was very popular.

Following this second collaboration meeting, the project team worked out a timetable for the tasks to be undertaken in the remainder of the project: primarily to continue to develop the material into written resources and to supplement this with videos to help highlight the key issues for 'mixed' families.

Third collaborative meeting (September 7, 2011): Issues of note

By the third and final collaboration meeting the resources for 'mixed' couples and their families had been reviewed by all participants on the project, revised to take account of feedback and then been made public through theCoupleConnection.net (OnePlusOne's online support service for couples and families). The e-learning resources had also been reviewed and amended, but were waiting to be launched as part of a larger roll-out to practitioners through the 'Working with different families' module (see below).

At this final meeting the project leaders updated the collaborators on the progress of the project; the project workers demonstrated the resources for theCoupleConnection.net, and discussed the strengths and challenges that the project had faced and the lessons learnt. The gaps in the literature on 'mixed' couples were also discussed and a topic identified as an agenda for further research. We also discussed avenues for dissemination of the process, insights and outputs of the project.

6.3.2 Producing the online resources

The written content of the articles for theCoupleConnection.net and the e-learning module, as well as the content for the video interviews (used on both online platforms), were structured around the agreed key issues and in accordance with the current format and style of the other material on the online platforms.

In developing the online resources from a research-into-practice perspective, the following considerations were stressed by all collaborators on the project:

- The need to develop the resources sensitively without taking an interfering or prescriptive approach. The focus was on highlighting the issues, allowing people to help themselves, and signposting specialist support if they wanted to follow this up.
- The need to identify common issues, while conveying an awareness that experiences within 'mixed' families vary for individuals. This consideration was relevant especially for practitioners, in making them aware of diversity when dealing with 'mixed' couples, and of the need to be sensitive to the particular issues that might arise for individual couples and families.
- The need to think about who these resources are directed at. Some aspects could be directed to people in 'mixed' relationships themselves, while other aspects may be useful for the extended family and wider community, practitioners and those who work with families. A further consideration was how this information is best conveyed.
- The need to keep in mind the main objectives of different resources: to inform, to normalise, to support, to signpost, etc.

An outline of the process by which the online resources were developed is provided in Box 4 below.

Box 4: Summary of the online resource development process

1. The main issues from the three research projects on 'mixed' families were identified. The key messages to convey to 'mixed' couples themselves, practitioners and the general public were highlighted.
2. Case studies to illustrate the key messages were developed from research material.
3. Feedback was sought from collaborators on the key issues and case studies.
4. The format of online resources on theCoupleConnection.net and the e-learning modules was scoped.
5. Material about 'Mixed' people, couples and families was reviewed to contextualise the findings from the research projects.
6. Draft written content was developed based on messages from the research that was consistent with the format of resources on OnePlusOne's online platforms.
7. Feedback was collected from collaborators on the draft resources.
8. The written resources were amended.
9. Video resources were developed (the process is described below).
10. Videos were incorporated into the written content.
11. A final edit of resources taking into account further comments from consultants.
12. The resources were launched.
13. Collection of social impact data was initiated (see 'Evaluation the social impact of this project' section below).

Written articles for theCoupleConnection.net

Five articles were written as resources for 'mixed' couples and uploaded to theCoupleConnection.net:

I. *An introduction to 'mixed' families:* Defines what is meant by 'mixed' and highlights the main issues which were identified through the research and at the collaboration meetings. The article can be accessed at: <http://thecoupleconnection.net/articles/an-introduction-to-mixed-couples-and-their-families>.

II. *Did you know this about 'mixed' families?:* Presents wider figures and statistics which help to challenge some preconceptions and inform people about 'mixed' families. This article can be accessed at: <http://thecoupleconnection.net/articles/did-you-know-this-about-mixed-families>.

III. *What other couples say about being in a 'mixed' relationships:* Incorporates the case study examples provided by the original investigators from the three linked research studies to illustrate some of the main issues raised. This article can be accessed at: <http://thecoupleconnection.net/articles/case-studies-on-mixed-families>.

Two focused articles on different issues commonly faced by 'mixed' couples:

IV. *Dealing with disapproval and rejection from others:* Addresses possible prejudice from the wider community as well as within families. This article can be accessed at: <http://thecoupleconnection.net/articles/dealing-with-disapproval-and-rejection-from-others>.

V. *Developing a sense of identity and belonging for children in 'mixed' families:* Addresses some of the ways parents in 'mixed' families understand difference and negotiate identity and belonging for their children. This article can be accessed at: <http://thecoupleconnection.net/articles/creating-identity-and-a-sense-of-belonging-for-mixed-couples-and-their-families>.

These brief articles also contain links to video interviews with 'mixed' couples (see below), as well as relevant information on general relationship issues already contained on theCoupleConnection.net. Additionally, the two focus articles refer readers to online activities to help those who wish to work on improving their relationship. These general activities relate strongly to the issues raised in the focused articles (including 'Our family customs'; 'Journey to shared goals'; and 'Finding a happy compromise'). Thus 'mixed' couples have the opportunity to understand the issues that they may be experiencing as ones that all couples may face, and to make changes and build on their relationship, if they want to.

Written material for the practitioner e-learning

The issues identified from the original research were used to provide key messages to help practitioners work with and better support 'mixed' families as part of the 'Working with different types of family' online training module.

Several pages of material were developed which formed a section on working with 'mixed' families. As noted in section 6.2.2 of this report, other parts of the module dealt with different family types. The learning pages were designed to be interactive, encouraging practitioners to reflect on their own experiences in working with families. The case studies and videos (see below) were also used to illustrate 'mixed' couples' experiences for practitioners alongside the key messages.

A resource centre page for this module includes more details about particular issues, lists references and sources for further information, and provides links to organisations which support 'mixed' families. A brief outline of this collaborative project is included in the resource centre as well.

Videos with 'mixed' couples

As noted earlier, there was a strong consensus among all the project collaborators that the written resources should be supplemented by videos that illustrated the issues faced by 'mixed' couples. Consequently, we advertised for and identified four 'mixed' couples who were willing to be interviewed for the video resources for this project.

Identifying objectives and themes and constructing an interview guide

The content of the videos and what to convey, was an important issue. Three ideas were identified as to how the key issues could be developed into video material. Based on collaborators' feedback and thinking about cost and other resource limitations, there was a strong preference for involving actual 'mixed' couples rather than using actors to illustrate the key messages and case studies.

Further debate concerned ways of generating the video content. For example, should it be scripted or just ask people to talk? The exploratory idea was favoured and an interview guide was developed (see Appendix 5). The interview guide enabled couples to talk about a range of themes related to the key issues in the online resources: 1) normalising 'mixed' couples and family relationships, 2) showing how couples cope with possible disapproval and rejection from others (family, friends and wider community), 3) showing how couples understand and deal with cultural and individual differences in their relationship and 4) how they create identity and belonging for themselves and for their children.

Recruitment

The project collaborators agreed to help advertise for and identify people in 'mixed' relationships and families who might be interested in talking about their experience of being in a 'mixed' couple relationship for the video resources. An advert along with additional information about the project was posted on all participating organisations' websites (see Appendix 4). The advert included a request for feedback on the online resources at a later date. The available budget from the project meant that no cash payments or time could be offered, but travel costs were reimbursed and refreshments provided. We initially aimed to recruit eight to 10 couples to reflect a range of mixing. Four 'mixed', heterosexual couples and two women in 'mixed' relationships expressed an interest in taking part in the videos, but in the end it was the four couples who took part.

A summary of the characteristics of video participants is provided in Table 1 below: three of the four couples had a child or children together, and two couples were from London, one from Northampton and one from Nottingham. As illustrative cases, the couples covered a range of ages and ethnic and racial mixing.

Table 1: Characteristics of Videos Participants (participants' identities were all self-ascribed)

| Couples | Age | Residence | Years together | Children | Recruitment Source |
|--|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Czech-Jewish white woman / Ghanaian black man | F = 29 M = 42 | London | 5 | Daughter (18 months) | People in Harmony |
| Chinese (Singapore-Malay) woman / English man | F = 30+ M = 30+ | London | 4½ | None | People in Harmony |
| Asian-Sikh woman / White British man | F = 52 M = 56 | Northampton | 35 | Daughter (25) Son (20) | Mix Together |
| Indian Punjabi woman / English white British man | F = 50+ M = 50+ | Nottingham | 36 | Daughter (19) Son (22) | Mix Together |

Producing the videos

To facilitate high quality production of the video material, an external producer and technical staff (video recordist and sound engineer) were hired. The location of the video shoot was important; it needed to offer various areas to use as different backdrops for the interviews with each couples. The location chosen was the Young Foundation Building in Bethnal Green, which is located close to rail links.

Time and cost considerations meant that the video interviews were filmed over one weekend. Each couple was given a time slot that accommodated introductions and settling in, conducting interviews and retakes as necessary, with enough time in between the slots for the video team and project workers to arrange the equipment and next background location.

Before filming, couples were informed of the process and what to expect. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix 6). Efforts were made to relax participants so that they felt comfortable talking on camera. One of the project workers interviewed each couple using the interview guide. Couples were encouraged to refer to the question wording within their response to enable the interviewer's voice to be removed during the editing process. Couples were also encouraged to interact with one another rather than sticking to a rigid question--response format. Each couples' interview generated an average of 90 minutes of video content, which subsequently was edited down to 4-5 minute clips.

Editing

Editing of the interviews was conducted by the Information and Media Officer at OnePlusOne, with input and feedback from the two project workers.

The editing process involved cutting out the interviewer and any transition sections between takes. Within each interview the key issues raised were identified and the clearest section which conveyed this issue or message was included. The sections from different couples were then placed together under particular themes, based on the content discussed. These theme clips were then cut down and the presentation order of clips was edited to ensure a smooth transition and flow throughout the videos.

Final Videos

Four 4-5 minute video clips were developed depicting 'mixed' couples talking about their experiences. After the final editing was completed, the videos were embedded digitally within the online written materials and sent to the consultants for their feedback before the resources were made public.

The video resources cover:

- 'Being in a 'mixed' couple'. Accessible at:
<http://thecoupleconnection.net/videos/mixed-families-being-in-a-mixed-relationship>
- 'Identity and belonging'. Accessible at:
<http://thecoupleconnection.net/videos/mixed-families-identity-and-belonging>
- 'Family reaction'. Accessible at:
<http://thecoupleconnection.net/videos/mixed-families-family-reactions>
- 'Community reaction'. Accessible at:
<http://thecoupleconnection.net/videos/mixed-families-community-reactions>

The videos added an important dimension to the written resources, and some of the discussions and issues that emerged from them fed into the agenda for future knowledge generation about 'mixed' families (see section 8 below).

Initially the videos were hosted on YouTube, linked directly from theCoupleConnection.net and the e-learning module. However, during the final project collaboration meeting a major problem was identified by one of the voluntary organisation consultants. Using YouTube as a host meant that we did not have control of the tags for related content added by external viewers. Some of these tags to related content were racist. Immediate action was taken to remove the videos from YouTube, and arrangements were made to host the videos on Vimeo with direct viewing on theCoupleConnection.net. This change of host involved further technical development.

6.3.3 Launching the final resources

The written and video resources for 'mixed' couples and their families were launched on theCoupleConnection.net initially in July 2011. As part of a separate grant activity, however, OnePlusOne's online services subsequently were redeveloped to improve overall usability, functionality and navigation. This meant that theCoupleConnection.net and its content was re-launched in October 2011. The re-launch included the 'mixed' couples and families resources. The new links were sent out to all collaborators as well as other organisations and academics with an interest in this area. The videos can be accessed through theCoupleConnection.net home page, where they are listed under the 'filter by category - 'mixed' families' section.

The launch of the 'mixed' couples' e-learning module for practitioners was delayed to coincide with the development of material for the other sections (such as same sex parents, single parents etc). All the sections were integrated into a single module for practitioners working with different types of family. The 'Dealing with different family types' module will be launched Spring 2012. It will be available initially to approximately 500 Parenting Fund Learners who are piloting the e-learning modules before being rolled out more widely. These individuals work directly in supporting parents. Practitioners received the introductory relationship modules provided by OnePlusOne, such as the 'Understanding Couple Relationships' and 'Brief Encounters®' training, and then progress on to the 'Dealing with different family types' module as a more targeted resource which builds on some of the concepts and issues identified in earlier modules.

7 EVALUATING THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

The 'Facilitating relationships support for 'mixed' couples and families' project aimed to benefit and have a social impact on three main constituencies:

1. People in 'mixed' couple relationships, their children and families, with provision of new online resources through theCoupleConnection.net, providing insights with the intention of improving the quality of their personal relationships and family life.
2. Practitioners supporting people in 'mixed' couple relationships, their children and families, with the provision of new training resources through OnePlusOne's e-learning for practitioners course, aimed at improving the support that they deliver to 'mixed' couples and families.
3. Voluntary sector consultants involved in the immediate knowledge exchange, transfer and generation process, with the exchange of knowledge and expertise impacting beneficially on their organisational agendas.

Hence, the resources were evaluated at the end of the project by the couples involved in making the resources; the users of the resources (couples and practitioners); and the academics and the representatives from the 'Mixed' race organisation who collaborated on the project.

7.1 Couples involved in making the video resources

As we involved some 'mixed' couples themselves in the development of the resources, we were interested in hearing how they felt about their participation in the project; as well as their thoughts on the resources available on theCoupleConnection.net to 'mixed' couples. The couples involved in the making of the videos provided feedback via:

- 1) telephone interviews reflecting on their participation in the production of the videos; and

- 2) through feeding back on the resources after viewing them online, via an online anonymous questionnaire.

In assessing their participation in the videos we asked couples the following questions:

- How has sharing your experiences as a 'mixed' couple made you feel?
- How do you feel your contribution will help other 'mixed' couples and families?
- Do you think that there have been any changes with regards to attitudes towards 'mixed' relationships and families over the years?

All participants answered the first two questions in a similar spirit. On sharing their experiences as 'mixed' couples, they said that they felt 'good' to be involved in a project aiming to support other 'mixed' couples and families. Similarly, they hoped that their contribution would bring awareness to people who might be contemplating forming 'mixed' relationships. The following quotes convey such sentiments:

We've really enjoyed it. It was a real good experience, and we are happy be in a position where we might be able to be supportive to other 'Mixed' race people [and couples] in 'mixed' race relationships. So it was a real pleasure for us to be involved in that (Czech-Jewish, white woman married to Ghanaian, black man).

I suppose the most I can hope for it that it might help people to feel less isolated, and that what they feel isn't unique to them, and that there are people who have experienced this, and organisations that care to listen (White British male married to Indian Punjabi female).

Regarding their perception of attitudes to 'mixed' relationships over the years, on the whole these video participants indicated that they had indeed noticed changes. Responses varied, however, depending on generation, where couples live and their ethnic background. The younger couples' responses were based on assumptions about the history of race relations in the UK as opposed to what they judged from their own experiences:

I think that in our parents' generation it was probably more difficult for 'mixed' race relationships to happen. And then you know, generally in our generation there are still issues, but I suppose it's probably more accepted by the family (Chinese female with English partner).

For the older participants, their responses were based on their own experiences and their observations over time:

I think that there have been [changes]... That said, I think there is still some big hurdles for some families, and I think that therefore some of the same issues [we faced] will be faced by some young people... but I think it has moved, it certainly has moved over the years. But you know, there is still a need to provide support for people in that situation (White British male married to Asian female).

At the time of recruiting participants for the videos, some people declined to participate but agreed to help us to evaluate the resources. After viewing them online, some e-mailed comments, along with suggestions for developing additional resources. For example:

I did watch the video clips and read some of the responses. It helps a lot knowing that there are more people out there like me. I think that the videos and comments of couples are accurate on the stresses we face, although perhaps not very specific on cultural differences. For example, I am with a Muslim man who lives in Egypt. The relationship is long-distance and our families don't see eye-to-eye at all. I think perhaps some advice on these problems that are perhaps more difficult to couples and more specific experience would help. Have you considered setting up a questions and answers forum for advice from people that have made it as a 'Mixed' race couple? All in all I believe what you have done is an excellent job. Well done! (Susie, white British female with Egyptian-Muslim partner)

7.2 Users of the resources

'Users' here refer to those who have accessed the online resources. The section covers users of theCoupleConnection.net who accessed the written articles and video content developed for 'mixed' couples themselves; as well as providing information on how the impact of the 'mixed' family content for practitioners will be captured through the online training course.

Couples

Data on the use of the 'mixed' couple resources were gathered from two sources:

- 1) High level data on reach and use of the resources from Google Analytics
- 2) Responses to an online anonymous survey

Data from Google Analytics

As part of the on-going monitoring and evaluation of the online services provided to the public, OnePlusOne subscribes to Google Analytics, which tracks the overall use of the services as well as providing detail on particular aspects and areas of the site. This information is used to outline the reach of the 'mixed' families resources in terms of page views for each of the articles and videos, average time looking at these resources and the percentage of users exiting from this page. Table 2 presents this data in two stages:

Stage 1: From initial launch until just before the final collaboration meeting (25/07/2011-31/08/2011);

Stage 2: From the time all 'mixed' families resources were re-instated on theCoupleConnection.net after the re-launch of the service until the end of January (01/11/2011-31/01/2012).³

This information is important in terms of determining approximately how many people have viewed the resources, which appear to be the most popular resources from the 'mixed' families range, as well as giving an indication of users' level of engagement with the resources. The findings suggest that the most read articles are the Introduction and the two focus articles (Dealing with disapproval and rejection, and Creating a sense of identity). The exit rate is lowest for the Introduction article and the 'What other couples say' page, perhaps indicating that visitors to the site are using the internal links to other pages in the 'mixed' families series rather than leaving the site as soon as they have read one article. The exit rate is highest for the 'Further support for "mixed" couples' article, suggesting that the information may successfully be linking users to 'mixed' family organisations for more targeted support where required.

³ Data is not available from between September and October 2011 whilst thecoupleconnection.net was being developed although all written articles were available to view during this time.

Table 2: Google Analytic Data on the Use of the 'Mixed' Families Resources

| Article title | Page views | Average time on site ⁴ | Exit rate from the site ⁵ |
|---|------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Stage 1: Data from 25/07/11-31/08/11 | | | |
| An Introduction to 'Mixed' Couples and their Families | 149 | 51 sec | 10% |
| Did you Know this About 'Mixed' Couples | 67 | 36 sec | 16% |
| Case Studies on 'Mixed' Couples (What other couples say) | 61 | 42 sec | 6% |
| Dealing with Disapproval and Rejection from Others | 73 | 51 sec | 11% |
| Creating Identity and a Sense of Belonging for 'Mixed' Couples and their Families | 73 | 56 sec | 15% |
| Further Support for 'Mixed' Couples and their Families | 73 | 39 sec | 27% |
| Stage 2: Data from 01/11/11-31/1/12 | | | |
| An Introduction to 'Mixed' Couples and their Families | 248 | 41 sec | 4% |
| Did you Know this About 'Mixed' Couples | 99 | 40 sec | 17% |
| Case Studies on 'Mixed' Couples (What other couples say) | 95 | 58 sec | 13% |
| Dealing with Disapproval and Rejection from Others | 181 | 51 sec | 23% |
| Creating Identity and a Sense of Belonging for 'Mixed' Couples and their Families | 114 | 35 sec | 20% |
| Further Support for 'Mixed' Couples and their Families | 79 | 44 sec | 32% |

Available data detailing the number of times that the video resources were viewed indicate that when these initially were launched on YouTube, there was a total of 530 views across all four videos for the first period (from 25/07/11 to 31/08/11). Once the videos were re-launched on Vimeo and could only be accessed via theCoupleConnection.net, Vimeo statistics reveal that there were a total of 113 plays during the second period (01/11/11-31/1/12). However, the videos were actually accessed (loaded) 589 times during this period; perhaps indicating that some people may have had technical difficulties in playing the videos or decided not to watch them once they had loaded. These figures do raise the crucial dilemma of weighing up potentially greater reach by using a widely used online tool such as YouTube with the problems this presents in terms of lack of control over the other (sometimes undesirable) material it can be associated with because of the topic of 'mixed' race noted earlier. Given our focus on supporting 'mixed' couples and their families, we felt that greater control and avoiding negative associated material was the more important issue here. Further promoting and directing 'mixed' couples to these video resources is an ongoing process.

Online survey

The original aims of the resources were to:

- challenge stereotypes about 'mixed' couples and their families and normalise their experiences,
- raise awareness and explore some of the issues that 'mixed' couples and families may face, and,
- provide signposts to organisations that can provide further support where required.

⁴ This is an overall 'average' time for each page, so includes those who bounce on and off the site as well as those who spend significantly longer.

⁵ The Exit Rate shows the percentage of users who leave the site after landing on this particular page.

To assess what people in 'mixed' couple relationships think about the online resources we have developed an anonymous online survey. In tune with the social impact remit, the purpose of this ongoing survey is to capture:

- What resources people have seen in the 'mixed' couples and families series on theCoupleConnection.net.
- How useful they find these resources in general (response options include; 'very useful', 'useful', 'not useful' and 'not at all useful' and respondents were asked to give a reason for their rating).
- A couple of open ended questions are posed to ask whether respondents think there are any other issues for 'mixed' couples that could be covered in the resources, and whether they have any further comments about the resources they have viewed.
- Some additional questions are asked to establish respondents' demographics (age, gender), whether they are from 'Mixed' backgrounds (asking for the ethnicity and religion of their mother and father, if known), and if they are currently in a 'mixed' couple relationship (where they and their partner are from different racial, religious or ethnic backgrounds).
- For those who are in a 'mixed' relationship, respondents are asked to indicate their own and their partner's ethnic and religious backgrounds, how long they have been together and whether they have children together.

These respondents are also asked about their perceived impact of the resources on their couple relationship by indicating to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statements:

- a) The resources cover issues that me and my partner have encountered.
- b) The resources help me to understand the situation better.
- c) I now feel more able to make changes to my relationship (response options include: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree').

Finally, all respondents are asked whether they work with 'mixed' couples and their families and if anyone in their family is in a 'mixed' couple relationship. We felt that although the resources are aimed at 'mixed' couples and their families, they also highlight key issues and experiences for people who work with these families and for people in 'mixed' extended families, so we were interested in hearing their views.

The survey was initiated in August 2011, but was removed in September to accommodate the re-launch of theCoupleConnection.net service and the migration of the videos from YouTube directly to the site (see Section 6.3.2). The survey was reinstated in November and can be accessed directly through theCoupleConnection.net and via the following link:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/mixedcouples_feedback

To raise awareness about the resources and to encourage feedback via this survey, e-mails were sent to contacts (both academic and voluntary organisations) interested in the 'mixed' families field with links to both the resources and survey.

Since the online survey has been available, as of 13.3.12, 29 people had responded to the online survey. The majority of respondents were female (92%) and their ages ranged from 17-56. Eleven respondents stated that their own parents were from different ethnic groups, so they were 'Mixed' themselves. Most respondents (87%) were in a 'mixed' relationship, where their partner is from a different race, religious or ethnic background to themselves. The length of these couple relationships varied from less than a year to over 20 years (with most being in a relationship between 2-5 years or longer). Just over a third of these

couples had children together (36%). Only two respondents stated that they worked with 'mixed' couples and their families.

Almost all respondents had read at least one of the written articles. The most commonly read article was the 'Introduction to "mixed" couples' (read by 52% of respondents) followed by the 'Did you know this about "mixed" couples', and 'Dealing with disapproval and rejection from others' which was read by approximately half of respondents (48%). The remaining articles were read by approximately a third of respondents.

The most commonly viewed video was the 'Being in a "mixed" relationship' (48%). The other videos were viewed by just under half (37%). The open ended comments and the variation in what resources respondents had viewed indicated the importance of presenting the resources (both written and video formats). Whilst some respondents only read the articles, others stated they only watched the videos because they wanted to hear directly from other 'mixed' couples.

The vast majority of the respondents found the resources helpful, rating them as either 'useful' (67%) or 'very useful' (27%). Reasons they gave for the usefulness of the resources included that they dealt with taboo subjects and helped normalise their own experiences:

"Sometimes, I feel like an outsider, particularly about family rejection. It's a taboo subject. I don't feel these are issues I can discuss with others who have 'normal' families. There is some comfort in hearing about other experiences and seeing the longevity of 'mixed' relationships, despite the adversity they have faced."

"I am really pleased to see the subject of 'mixed' relationships being discussed openly, I think this is a good start to a subject which is still a taboo sometimes for 'mixed' couples themselves because it focuses attention on them and their children if they have them...but also I think it allows those contemplating settling in a 'mixed' relationship to have a look into a window on what experiences there are out there in these unions."

Respondents also suggested that the issues raised represented those they had experienced themselves and that the resources allowed them to hear from others in a similar position:

"I found the material to be most enlightening and found that many of the case studies expressed similar opinions and embraced their relationships in much the same way that I and my husband do. I do not feel that my relationship or the cultural or racial differences that we have make our relationship any harder or easier and it is somewhat strangely comforting to realise that this is possibly the norm for others. What is most important is the love you share and helping each other to grow as in all good relationships."

"It's always good to know that you're not alone and there are people out there who understand what you're going through and have similar experiences. People that you can call on for support or advice."

The videos were judged to reflect reality. When respondents in 'mixed' relationships were asked about the impact of the resources, all those who answered agreed (either 'agreed' 70% or 'strongly agreed' 30%) that the resources covered issues that they and their partner had encountered. Half of these respondents also

suggested that the resources helped them to understand their situation better (56%). However, no-one felt that the resources meant that they now felt more able to make changes to their relationship. It is important to remember that those who view the resources may not want to or feel the need to change their relationship. In fact, many respondents were in long term (and in some cases very long lasting) relationships, which may represent those which are more enduring and successful. As was the case with some of the couples in the videos, some couples who access the resources may have experienced issues such as rejection and disapproval some time ago and managed to come through it together. This representation may help to create a positive image of 'mixed' relationships. As some survey respondents identified, this sharing of experiences can be helpful to other 'mixed' couples who may now be experiencing the same issues. Reciprocal links to the resources have been established on the voluntary sector consultants' organisation websites and they have agreed to keep them there to encourage ongoing engagement.

Overall then, responses to the survey questions and open ended comments suggest that respondents found the resources helpful, that the issues raised were relevant to them and that in some cases helped them to gain a better understanding of these issues. The survey and Google analytic data indicate that the original aims of the resources in normalising experiences, raising awareness and providing signposting for 'mixed' couples and their families have been met.

Practitioners

At the time of writing this report, the e-learning module is due to be released shortly. We will record the number of practitioners accessing this course, as well as details such as job role etc. We have also built in some brief online evaluation questions at the beginning and end of the module to assess practitioners understanding of the issues that affect 'mixed' families, their confidence in dealing with such families and their awareness of where to signpost for more targeted support.

7.3 Consultants

We asked the academic and 'mixed' families organisation consultants who worked with us on this project what they felt they had brought to the project and what they had gained from the collaboration.

In the main, the consultants from the 'mixed' families organisations felt that the key thing they fed into the collaboration was their expertise and years of experience working in the 'mixed' field:

I think one of the key issues was to provide a resource for 'mixed' couples that would help them identify elements that were helpful to them without alienating them. I think many of my suggestions helped bring this about. Working in collaboration with the other attendees helped refine this process and strengthen the effectiveness of the resources.

In terms of what they gained from the collaboration, the voluntary sector consultants highlighted:

- 1) the benefits of collaboration on a project which involved people with different areas of expertise; and
- 2) the reciprocal links created between their organisation and OnePlusOne.

The academic consultants whose research forms the basis of the project, felt that they had helped to raise awareness of other forms of mixing beyond black and white, such as 'Mixed' ethnicity, 'Mixed' faith and the combination of these. Another key contribution was awareness of the importance and politics of

terminology for 'Mixed' people, couples and families, and how crucial this is in developing resources for 'mixed' couples and families.

The academic consultants primarily were interested in the benefits that could be gained from translating research findings into practical outputs which then become available to a wider audience, and how establishing productive relationships with user groups can enable this process.

Both academic and voluntary sector consultants expressed a wish for a further collaboration on the development of a joint research agenda.

8 IDENTIFYING AN AGENDA FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

An aim of the 'Facilitating Relationship Support for "Mixed" Couples and Families' project was to identify and explore a research agenda that would fill gaps and ambiguities in existing knowledge about 'mixed' couples and families, and be of interest to all the participants (academics and voluntary sector agencies). The intention was to undertake exploratory work investigating the possibilities for further research and the development of supportive resources.

An initial general review of the literature (see Appendix 7 for the more in-depth literature review) on 'mixed' couples and families was undertaken by the project workers during the first half of the project. Some of the discussions and issues that emerged from the videos also fed into the agenda for future knowledge generation about 'mixed' families. The following areas emerged as significant gaps:

- The literature continues to focus primarily on couples in black-white relationships and their families. Mixing is not just about black and white, therefore more work is needed on diverse racial as well as ethnic and faith mixing.
- The bulk of the literature tends to focus on cultural differences as a common issue affecting 'mixed' couple relationship, which means that it is unclear how far issues arise from differences in gender, class or religion.
- Although there is some discussion in the literature on the impact of extended families of origin on the 'mixed' couple, research on the impact of 'mixed' relationships on couples' families of origin and in-laws is lacking. More work in this area could bring further understanding to the issues couples face in their relationships.
- More work is needed looking at 'mixed' couples' intergenerational relationships over the life course.
- Given the experience of rejection and disapproval for some 'mixed' families, there is need for more research on how mothers and fathers in 'mixed' families develop strategies to provide their children with resilience and wellbeing.
- Accounts of 'Mixed' people themselves about how they develop resilience and a sense of wellbeing are severely lacking.
- Although the literature on families more generally highlights the need for clinicians to adapt and broaden their clinical assessment and treatment approaches to meet the needs of diverse cultural orientations, very little attention has been paid to clinical work with 'mixed' families.
- Finally, a key gap which this project illuminated is the need to develop resources not just for 'mixed' couples, but also for their extended families.

From the gaps identified above, three potential topics were proposed and discussed among project collaborators:

1. The impact of ongoing extended family conflict on 'mixed' couples and on the well-being of 'Mixed' children, which would address some of the strategies that parents may use to protect their children from extended family conflict.
2. Facilitating relationship support for separated couples co-parenting 'Mixed' children, which would explore some of the challenges in co-parenting 'Mixed' racial, ethnic and religious children.
3. The impact of transracial adoption and fostering on couple and family relationships, which would address some of the challenges 'mixed' couples may face in adopting and fostering transracial children and also the strategies they use to instill a sense of belonging and identity in the children.

After discussion during the second and third collaboration meetings (see section 6.3.1), the first topic emerged as of most interest to project collaborators, based on what they felt was most lacking in research on 'mixed' families, and how the topic fit with their own and/or their organisations' focus and interests. The project workers subsequently refined the topic to explicitly address how mothers and fathers (rather than ungendered parents) seek to pass on resilience and well-being to their children, given that their approaches may be gendered and additionally may depend upon whether they are from two biological parents, step and lone parent families. The topic was also revised to highlight that conflict and other issues within an extended family can be short term with longer consequences, or changeable in other ways, and that extended family conflict is not the only issue for 'mixed' couples. To this end, the topic for a research agenda became: 'The impact of extended family conflict and social disapproval on 'mixed' families and the strategies mothers and fathers use to encourage resilience and wellbeing for their children'. A more in-depth review of the relevant literature to address this topic was undertaken by one of the project workers and can be found in Appendix 7.

How we could extend knowledge

This proposed research aims to move beyond the problem-focused approach to analysing 'mixed' couples and families towards a more grounded framework to understanding family practices within the wider family and social structure, and from 'mixed' couples' and 'Mixed' people's own perspectives. It aims to explore the influence of gender, social class and religion as well as ethnicity in 'mixed' families. Specifically, it aims to explore the strategies that mothers and fathers in 'mixed' families use to provide their children with resilience from family and public disapproval and to encourage wellbeing. By taking an intergenerational and life-course approach, it would allow us to look at the experiences of mothers and fathers in two biological parent families, step and lone parent families, and the issues involved from the parents', children, grandparents and other extended family members' lifespan perspectives. Hence, it could help to unearth some of the external social constraints that contribute to the difficulties these couples face in their relationships and in their families. Finally, from our academic and voluntary sector knowledge exchange collaboration for this project, we have become aware of how evidence-based research can be usefully turned into practical resources. Thus, following a similar framework, from this project we could develop the findings into practical resources that might be useful for 'mixed' couples and their families and for practitioners working with them.

9 CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNT

There were considerable benefits to using a collaborative approach in this project, including the contribution which the various expertises that different people and organisations brought to both the knowledge transfer and knowledge generation aspects of the project. The project team and other collaborators felt that we had learnt a lot from our involvement on the project itself and from each other. Some aspects which contributed to the success of this collaboration include:

- the prior commitment of all participants involved, despite their initial priorities and agendas;
- building dialogue and flexibility into the process;
- cooperation between academics and voluntary sectors. The project team was able to adapt a clear research-into-practice approach because key members understood the nature of academic research as well as the needs of OnePlusOne in delivering accessible, user-friendly resources.

The collaboration did, however, face a number of challenges. The first of these was that participants did not always share the same perspective on the issues at hand. An example was the issue of terminology, with the term 'mixed' in particular needing to be defined in the context of this project. 'Mixed' is a strongly disputed term, and there were on-going and often lengthy debates regarding the language to be used. Moreover, questions of how to refer to 'mixed' racial, ethnic and faith families also had significance for OnePlusOne Resource teams, and addressing them helped to reduce their anxiety in dealing with the concept. Discussions around the appropriate use of the term engaged all participating members, and eventually we all acknowledged and agreed that the priority was to refer to 'mixed' families in a way that was accessible to lay people and in everyday use.

A second challenge had to do with the depth of detail to cover in order to develop resources that would reach a diverse set of 'mixed' couples. The findings from the three linked research studies on which this project is based did not involve extensive statistical analyses. We met this challenge by including some general and statistical information about 'mixed' families in a contextual resource article titled 'Did you know this about "mixed" families'.

A third and wider challenge was translating the messages to both professionals and the public in a user-friendly, accessible and engaging manner. An extended academic style of writing was not appropriate for the online resources; the language had to be succinct and easily understood by the target audience. Related to this was the issue of how to label the resources. The challenge was in finding the balance between normalising 'mixed' couples and families while also addressing their particular issues.

A fourth challenge, when working across sectors and involving several different groups and organisations, was reaching the project's objectives on time. Flexibility was essential in order to respect everyone's current and often shifting work priorities and agendas. This involved a difficult balancing act, in demonstrating such respect while maintaining recognition of the project schedule and the project leaders' responsibility to deliver the project within the agreed timeframe and resources. An example of how this challenge was overcome was by agreeing from the outset (at the first collaborators meeting) to set deadline responses to consultations by email, where a non-response was understood by all to stand for agreement.

Finally, and very importantly, we identified a problem in the initial hosting of the videos on YouTube. At the final collaboration meeting we became aware that using YouTube as a host to reach a potentially greater audience also meant that we lacked control of the tags for related content by external users that could be

racist, thus defeating the aims of the resources. We addressed this challenge by removing the videos from YouTube and rehosting them with direct viewing on the coupleconnection.net. This involved a period of suspension of access, however, and ultimately limiting audience reach to theCoupleConnection.net users only.

Despite these challenges, we were able to deliver the resources within the project's timeframe. The project has also generated additional social impact through dissemination and the various activities carried out by the project leaders and project workers to date (see Appendix 1). Most telling, feedback so far on the www.thecoupleconnection.net resources for 'mixed' couples suggest that these resources are largely considered to be useful, relevant to issues that 'mixed' couples and their families have encountered, and helpful in understanding their situation better.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Dissemination

Conference and Seminar Presentations

- "Collaborative Relationship Support for 'Mixed' Families: An academic and voluntary sector collaborative", at CRFR 10th Anniversary National Conference "Influencing Society: The role of social research", University of Edinburgh, 30 November 2011 – paper delivered to an international and national audience of academics, practitioners from voluntary sector agencies and government analysts.
- "Collaborative Relationship Support for 'Mixed' Families: An academic and voluntary sector collaborative", at Families and Social Capital Research Group, Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research Seminar, London South Bank University, 5 December 2011 – paper delivered to a national audience of academics and practitioners.
- "Facilitating Relationship Support for 'Mixed' Families: An academic and voluntary sector collaborative", at BSA Conference "Intersecting Family Lives, Locales and Labours", London South Bank University, 3rd February 2012 – paper delivered to an international and national audience of academics.
- "Facilitating Relationship Support for 'Mixed' Families: An academic and voluntary sector collaborative", forthcoming at "Exploring the Use of Visual Media in the Communication of Research Findings" Conference, Cardiff University, 12 July 2012.

Publications

- "An Academic and Voluntary Sector Collaboration to Facilitate Relationships Support for 'Mixed' Couples and Families". Paper forthcoming in *Families, Relationships and Societies Journal*
- "An Academic and Voluntary Sector Collaboration to Facilitate Relationship Support for 'Mixed' Couples and Families: Project Report". Forthcoming in the Families and Social Capital Research Group Working Paper Series (Weeks Centre for Social and Policy Research at London South Bank University www.lsbu.ac.uk/families)

Impacts

- The project has been reviewed in *The Runnymede Bulletin*, Autumn 2011/ Issue 367 www.runnymedetrust.org with a link to theCoupleConnection.net where all the resources can be accessed.
- The project has been highlighted as an example of the activities that have been funded through the ESRC's Knowledge Exchange schemes. See [RES-189-25-0115](https://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/15388/follow-on-funding-scheme.aspx) under 'Impacts and Findings' page of the Follow on Funding Scheme <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/15388/follow-on-funding-scheme.aspx>. In addition, the ESRC is planning a press release relating to the project for International Day of Families (15 May 2012).

Appendix 2: OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS ON 'MIXED' PARTNERING AND PARENTING FROM THREE LINKED PROJECTS

1. Partnering across different ethnic or racial backgrounds – people of African-Caribbean origin

- An important consequence of individualised, fluid and 'loose' Caribbean family and household patterns is a high likelihood of engaging in black/white mixed-race partnerships, but there are also within-race mixed partnerships (such as Black British/Caribbean or Caribbean/West African), as well as Caribbean/South Asian unions.
- Caribbean-origin and West African-origin mixed partnerships can see tensions in raising children, between the parents and their extended kin, in terms of passing on culture and language issues.
- Caribbean-origin and South Asian-origin, and also Indo-Caribbean-origin, mixed partnerships are often seen as crossing a racial taboo, especially for the South Asian or Indo-Caribbean extended family, where black Caribbeans are positioned lower in the racial social hierarchy.
- Caribbean-origin people who partner out and bring up mixed children can feel that they better appreciate the difference and have access to wider social resources.

2. Partnering across different ethnic or racial backgrounds – people of Italian origin

- The longevity of preferences and expectations for partnering within the Italian ethnic origin group down the generations, on the basis of cultural and practical understandings of the close relationships that should be maintained between the couple, their parents and the extended family generally.
- Women of Italian origin partnering out often have to manage pressure coming both from their partner and their own parents, and can experience the guilt of not living up to their family's expectations. This is in contrast to what they often see as a lack of interference from their in-laws, which they can view positively (self-sufficiency) or negatively (detached coldness).
- Men of Italian origin partnering out seems more acceptable, but their non-Italian origin partners are often subject to negative perceptions amongst the man's family, seen as having a lack of concern for family.
- Expectations of emotional and physical contact do not diminish with increased geographical distance, such as (grand)parents moving back to Italy after retirement. The frequency and length of visiting can become a contested issue.
- Younger children in large families of Italian origin can experience less pressure about within-ethnic group partnering than the older children.
- In bringing up children, normally taken for granted issues about language and religion often have to be negotiated. Italian-origin parents can see the potential of richer cultural backgrounds associated with being mixed as more easily achieved in Britain than in Italy.

Parenting across different ethnic or racial backgrounds

- Mixed-parent couples in Britain are often in sustained relationships, and a high proportion are middle class.
- Typical approaches that couples use to instil a sense of belonging in their children are:
 - *Individual*: children's sense of belonging is not seen as rooted in their mixed background.
 - *Mix*: children's mixed background is understood as a factual part of their identity; all aspects are emphasised.
 - *Single*: one aspect of children's mixed background is stressed.Particular approaches were not associated with particular racial or faith combinations.

- Couples whose approach differed in giving their children a sense of belonging are not necessarily in conflict. For some, divergent approaches are complementary. Others see difficulties between them as humanistic, political or personality choices.
- Supportive or constraining resources and relationships for parents' ability to create a sense of belonging include neighbourhoods, schools, travel, languages, grandparents and children themselves. What is supportive for some can be a drawback for others, depending on context.
- Mixed-parent couples can be more concerned with other issues, such as children's safety and health, unity over discipline and financial security.

Appendix 3: Cases from the research

Case studies from these research projects are available on [thecoupleconnect.net](http://thecoupleconnection.net) at <http://thecoupleconnection.net/relationship-advice/categories/mixed-families>.

Appendix 4: Video participants' recruitment advert

SUPPORTING 'MIXED' COUPLES AND FAMILIES

Are you and your partner from different racial, ethnic or faith backgrounds? Would you be prepared to help other couples in 'mixed' relationships?

OnePlusOne, a voluntary agency concerned with couple and family relationship support, is developing online resources that challenge stereotypes about 'mixed' couples and their families, and raise awareness about the issues that they may face. We are doing this in collaboration with voluntary agencies who support 'Mixed' people and families: Intermix, Mix Together and People in Harmony, as well as university-based family researchers.

You can help us in two ways:

- by taking part in a short video clip, and/or
- providing feedback on online resources aimed at supporting 'mixed' couples.

If you are interested in participating in this project to support other people who are in a similar situation to you, in 'mixed' relationships, please email or telephone us. We are happy to answer any questions or concerns that you might have to help you make up your mind.

If you are interested in getting involved, please contact us by Thursday 19th May.

Many thanks.

Elaine Bauer (London South Bank University): email me at bauere@lsbu.ac.uk, or phone me on 0207 815 5780

Cat Houlston (OnePlusOne): email me at catherinehoulston@oneplusone.org.uk, or phone me on 0207 553 9530

Appendix 5: Interview guide for video participants

FACILITATING RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT FOR 'MIXED' COUPLES AND FAMILIES Interview guide

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROJECT:

I would like to begin by thanking you for agreeing to be part of our study.

Questions aim to address the following themes:

- Normalise 'mixed' couple and family relationships - that is to say that 'mixed' relationships are like any other relationship in many ways.
- Possible disapproval and rejection from others
- Understanding and dealing with both cultural and individual differences within the couple relationship
- Creating identity and sense of belonging for themselves and their children

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions I will ask you. Please feel free to elaborate as much as you wish on the issues that we will be focusing on.

If you feel uncomfortable about any question please know that you are not obliged to answer it, and feel free move on to the next question.

Interview questions

Preliminary

Can you each tell me something about yourselves, for example when you were born? Can you tell me a bit about your family background?

Can you tell me about how first got together?

When you saw the advert what made you want to take part in the project?

Did you speak to your children about coming here today?

What did they think about it?

Normalise 'mixed' couples and family relationships

1. What do you think are the important issues facing couples and families today?
2. How do they affect you?
3. How so you balance work and family life?

Possible disapproval and rejection from others.

1. How did your family feel when you first got together?
2. Did that change over time?
3. Do you see your parents often?
4. What other forms of contact do you have with them?

5. How did your friends feel when you first got together?
6. Any change among your friends over time?
7. What about people in general?

Understanding and dealing with both cultural and individual differences within the couple relationship; and creating identity and sense of belonging.

1. What things do you think you share in bringing up your children?
2. Why do you share in these things
3. What things do you clash over?
4. Why?
5. What made you decide to live and raise your children where you did?
6. When you needed support and advice about bringing up children where did you go?
7. How much of yourselves do you see in your children?
8. How do your children see themselves?
9. Are there differences in the way they see themselves?
10. Thinking of yourselves now, how much of who you are do you feel comes from your different cultural backgrounds?
11. Is religion important to either of you?
12. What do you do for leisure?
13. Can you tell us the secret that's kept you together?
14. If you wanted the larger society to know something about 'mixed' couples and 'mixed' families what would you say?

Many thanks for taking part and we will get in touch with you when the resources go live.

E.B. May 16/11

Appendix 6: Consent form

CONSENT FORM – ‘MIXED’ FAMILY VIDEO SHOOT

I agree to participate in an interview with my partner about our experiences of being in a ‘mixed’ couple relationship.

I agree to the interview being recorded and for it to be edited for a short video clip (approximately 3-5mins) to be placed on OnePlusOne’s various platforms (online training and relationship support services).

I have read the information letter and understand the purpose of the study and how the information will be used.

I understand that I am able to withdraw from the interview at any time (for example if I am uncomfortable with any questions).

OnePlusOne will ensure that all interviews and filmed images are used solely for the purposes they are intended, which is to increase and promote greater understanding of relationships in ‘Mixed’ Families.

OnePlusOne will not include any identifying personal details on our web site or printed publications (such as full name, personal e-mail or postal address, telephone or fax numbers).

If at any time either participant wish the interviews to be removed from the website, 7 days’ notice must be given to OnePlusOne after which the data will be removed.

If you become aware that these interviews being used inappropriately, you should inform OnePlusOne immediately.

Name (please print).....

Signed.....

Date.....

**For more information contact:
Elaine Bauer at London Southbank on 0207 815 5780 or Catherine Houlston at OnePlusOne on 020
7553 9530**

Appendix 7: Literature review

THE IMPACT OF EXTENDED FAMILY CONFLICT AND SOCIAL DISAPPROVAL ON 'MIXED' FAMILIES AND THE STRATEGIES MOTHERS AND FATHERS USE TO ENCOURAGE RESILIENCE AND WELLBEING FOR THEIR CHILDREN: REVIEW OF THE ISSUES

Elaine Bauer, London South Bank University

What we know

'Mixed' relationships and marriages are growing internationally. Statistics in the US and in the UK show a rise in the number of 'mixed' relationships and also in the number of children born to couples in 'mixed' relationships (US Census Bureau 2003; 2007; Morgan 2009; Myrick et al. 2009a; 2009b, Passel et al. 2010; Taylor 2010). Current data from the U. S. show that among newly married couples, one out of seven include spouses of different racial or ethnic backgrounds — a six-fold increase from 1960 (Passel et al. 2010; Taylor 2010). It is estimated that Britain currently has the highest rate of intermarriage and children of 'Mixed' parentage in the Western world, among which the largest mix is black (British-born African Caribbean and African-Caribbean) and white British individuals (Alibhai-Brown, 2001:77; Feng et al. 2009; Model & Fisher 2002; Owen 2007). However, mixing in the UK occurs across many other racial, ethnic and religious groups with some couples displaying multiple combinations of mixing (Abe & Furlong 2005; Alibhai-Brown 2001; Aspinall 2009a 2009b; Bauer 2010; Caballero et al. 2008a; Caballero et al. 2008b; Edwards 2008; Feng et al. 2009; Graham et al. 2007; Morgan et al. 1996; Mutarak & Heath 2010; Platt 2009). Despite this growing phenomenon, studies investigating the wider family dynamics of 'mixed' couples and their children have received very little attention (for exceptions see Bauer 2010; Caballero et al. 2008a; 2008b; Rosenblatt et al. 1995). Additionally, understandings of how these dynamics evolve and change over time, across generations and in different contexts, is very thin on the ground.

We have drawn on some large scale statistical sources (for example Taylor 201a; 2010b; for the U.S; Aspinall 2009a; 2009b; Bradford (2006; Caballero et al. 2008b; Feng et al. 2009; Mutarak & Heath 2010; Owen 2007; Platt 2009 for the U.K.; Model & Fisher 2002 for England and US compared), but most are small scale qualitative studies. There is a lack of mixed method studies in which qualitative indepth interviews are carried out as a subsample of a larger statistical study (see Aspinall 2009a; 2009b; Song 2010 for qualitative and quantitative mixed methods research on ethnic identification among 'Mixed' people in the U.K.).

Some studies have been carried out on 'mixed' couples and children in the UK, and in the main, these findings echo earlier findings from the US (see Porterfield 1978; Rosenblatt et al. 1995) and show that although there are differences, 'mixed' couples also have very similar issues as couples from same race/ethnic/religious backgrounds. For example, as with parents from shared racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds, parents in 'mixed' relationships have concerns regarding their children's safety, parental unity over discipline, health and financial security and see their family lives as 'ordinary' (Bauer 2010; Caballero et al. 2008b). More often, however, the stress on race and culture in the literature on mixing tends to overshadow 'ordinariness' while highlighting difference, even though for many couples, the issue of race is less significant to their relationships than other issues (Okun 1996; Caballero et al. 2008b; Bauer 2010). Additionally, it is often ignored that some couples may also be interracial, interethnic and interfaith all at

once (Caballero et al. 2008b; Graham et al. 2007; Morgan et al. 1995), and by focussing on one aspect (more often race) other aspects of their mixedness are left largely unexplored.

'Mixed' couple relationships studies

The bulk of the literature on 'mixed' relationships and marriages draws largely from the United States, where 'mixed race' unions have been much less prevalent than in the UK (Model & Fisher 2002), and where race relations in general are arguably not representative of those that exist in Britain (Bauer & Thompson 2006; Gilroy 2004; Model & Fisher 2002; Deaux 2006; Peach 1996; Spickard 1992; Vickerman 1999; Waters 1991; Yuval Davis et al. 2005). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, most of these studies are small-scale qualitative studies, and although statistics show that Asians (from the six major Asian countries) marrying whites comprise the largest proportion of intermarriages in the United States (Hwang et al. 1994; Myrick et al. 2009b; Passel et al. 2010; Taylor 2010; Qian & Lichter 2001; US census Bureau 2004), the focus remains largely on Black-white couples – mainly Black men-White women mixes (Okun 1996: 222).

These studies usually attempt to understand a) why couples choose to marry outside their racial boundaries - often framed within racial, structural, and exchange theories- and b) the social and psychological consequences of intermarriage for the couples involved. Hence, the following questions become of particular interest; Does marrying someone from a different ethnic or racial background lead to problems in the marriage? Do these marriages require special attention from mental health practitioners? Do they end in divorce more frequently than other marriages? Or are they culturally richer, blending elements of different cultures that are beneficial for the parties involved? (Waters 1990).

With few exceptions, (cf. Porterfield 1978; Rosenblatt et al. 1995; Spickard 1989; Okun 1996; Orbe 1999; Lewis et al. 1997; Cerroni-Long 1984; Kouri & Lasswell 1993) the bulk of the earlier literature illustrate an assumption of deviance, viewing Black-white relationships/marriages for example, as problematic and pathological (see for example Spaight & Dixon 1984; Gordon 1964; McNamara et al. 1999). These assumptions were founded largely on the basis of stereotypes and negative theorizing about the characteristics and motivations of people likely to become involved in interracial relationships, and the functioning of these relationships as consequences of their different 'racial' and 'cultural' backgrounds (Gordon 1964; Davidson 1992; Davidson & Schneider 1992; Wade 1991; Merton 1941; Qian 1999). The widespread popular belief was that individuals in interracial relationships were attracted by the mysterious and strangeness in others from a different 'race'. However, most of these theories had no sound empirical support and instead, evidence suggests that non-racial factors are less important to interracial couples. Instead, common interests and attitudes, and similarities in education and class are more important (Greenberg & Goldman 2008; Inman et al. 2011; Lewis 1997; Lewis et al. 1997; Porterfield 1978; Wieling 2003; add list from original agenda doc)

Challenges faced by 'mixed' couples

There is much theorizing in the literature about the issues and challenges confronting 'mixed' couples. The popular view is that due to their different cultural (and sometimes religious) backgrounds, individuals in 'mixed' couple relationships may have different attitudes about, and expectations for love and marriage, parenting their 'Mixed' children, modes of emotional expression and communication styles and different coping strategies, and these challenges result in greater marital distress and marital tensions (Bratter & King 2008; Inman & Sandhu 2002; Hsu 2001; Joanides et al 2002; Baltas & Steptoe 2000; Okun 1996).

As is often the case in the literature, studied in isolation, the results can give startling and confusing pictures. In their study comparing intra- and interracial couples across cultures and ethnicities, Troy and his colleagues (2006) found no differences for interracial couples in relationship quality, conflict patterns, relationship efficacy, coping style and attachment. Yet other studies suggest outcomes vary by the couples' economic level and status, their geographical location and their type of mix in terms of race and ethnicity (ibid: 226-227; Inman et al. 2011; Okun 1996; Sandhya 2009). Other authors argue that while 'mixed' relationships may create challenges and vulnerability for the couples involved, they can also provide the opportunity to gain a kind of personal and interpersonal maturity that they would probably never have known otherwise (Okun 1996: 226-227; Akhtar 1995; Karis & Killian 2009).

Nevertheless, most of the literature on 'mixed' relationships and marriages continues to highlight differences of culture and ethnicity as crucial factors in determining the satisfaction and stability of 'mixed' couple relationships (Bramlett & Mosher 2002; Inman et al. 2011; Feng et al. 2009, Adams 2004; Burrell & Fitzpatrick 1990; Horowitz 1990). It is suggested that marital satisfaction and stability is lower among 'mixed' couples due to differences in language, differences in sexual attitudes, in family ideologies, attitudes to childrearing practices and in communication style (Usita & Poulsen 2003 cited in Troy et al. 2006; Feng et al. 2009).

However, with the focus still primarily on black-white unions, we are left without a wider understanding of marital satisfaction and stability across 'mixed' marriages. Studies looking at a diversity of 'mixed' couples reveal a much more complex picture with factors including the race, ethnicity, class, where couples live and their experience of racism (see Feng et al. 2009; Inman et al. 2011; Zang & Van Hook 2009). In their US study of interracial marriage among Whites, Blacks, Hispanics and Asians, they found that 'mixed' marriages involving Blacks were the least stable followed by those involving Hispanics. On the other hand, 'mixed' marriages involving Asians (from East Asia) were more stable than endogamous White marriages. In addition, they found that Black male-white female unions were least stable of all marriage types, reflecting the persistent racism and distrust directed toward Blacks in the US. Their result suggest that "the racial and ethnic patterns of dissolution in 'mixed' marriages reflect broad racial and ethnic differences which "may in turn be associates with a number of factors including discrimination, but are not specifically associated with interracial marriage itself" (ibid: 105).

In Britain, Feng and his colleagues (2009) found that South Asian men with white partners had a higher rate of separation than for Black and other Asian people in 'Mixed-ethnic' unions. They also found that Black people in wards with the highest concentration of Black people, and Other Asian people in wards with the lowest concentration of Other Asian population had a lower risk of separation and marriage dissolution (Feng et al. 2009: 28).

Other studies show that difficulties for 'mixed' couples *often* stem from external factors such as stereotyping and family and community disapproval (Bauer 2010; Feng et al. 2009; Molina et al. 2004; Okun 1996). Dealing with disapproval, racism and physical and emotional abuse from family as well as people the wider community can also create conflict in the couple relationship (Feng et al. 2009; Inman et al. 2011; Lewis 1994; Karis 2003; Killian 2001; McNamara et al, 1999; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan 1990; Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan 1990).

In Britain, even without the ban on interracial marriages that existed in the US until 1967, 'mixed' relationships and marriages were disapproved of by many people in British society (see Banton, 1955; 1960; Collins 1957; Hill, 1965; Little, 1947; Richmond, 1954). Some qualitative studies showed that public

disapproval and racism did indeed create problems for many 'mixed' couples and their families (Hill 1965; Wilson 1987; Alibhai-Brown 2001; Bauer 2010).

Some of the more recent studies have reported more positive functioning and outcome among 'mixed' couples. Okun (1996) believes that as with any relationship, internal pressures and feelings of stress between 'mixed' couples, particularly during certain transitional times. However, she argues that happy, functional and committed couples and families exist in many diverse forms (ibid., see also Bauer 2010; Caballero 2008; Caballero et al. 2008; Goulbourn et al. 2010; Negy & Snyder 2000). Molina and her colleagues (2004) argue that although some 'mixed' couples may experience conflict, their relationships can be complementary, while creating a richness that would be less likely to be found among couples from similar cultures (Molina et al. 2004; McNamara et al. 1999). In their study on Mexican American and White American 'mixed' couples, Negy & Snyder (2000) reported that interracial Hispanic relationships had a higher level of marital satisfaction than intra-racial Hispanic couples. But Shibasaki and Brennan (1998) compared individuals in intra- and interethnic relationships and found no differences in relationship satisfaction (see also Troy et al. 2006 for similar findings).

What about the children?

Another major area in the literature on mixing concerns the identity of children born to 'mixed' couples. The older literature on children of 'Mixed' racial origins was primarily concerned with trying to understand where they fit into society, with questions revolving around the consequences of crossing distinct racial boundaries (Park 1928; Stonequist 1961 [1937]; Thornton 1996). With the primary focus on children of black-white unions, the assumption was that children born from these unions had inherently problematic identities because neither the black nor the white community would accept these children (Gordon 1964; Benson 1981; Gibbs 1987). The predominant argument – rooted in the historical dogma of the 'one drop rule' in the US, whereby the where children of whites and black slaves were classified as black (Omi & Winant 1994) - was that these children exist on the margins of social and cultural groups, 'and therefore face unique emotional, psychological and social problems' (Gilbert 2005:4) Following this view, 'Mixed' race individuals were encouraged to identify as Black because this was how society defined them (Banks 1996; Henriques 1977; Lander 1977; Maxine 1993; Root 1996; 1992).

In Britain, children born to 'Mixed' race parents were often stigmatised (see Banton, 1955; Hill, 1965; Little, 1947; Richmond, 1954; Wilson 1987). The problem-focussed perspective used to understand 'Mixed' race children's identity endured into the mid 1990s (see Benson 1981; Herring 1995; Hershel 1995) resulting in numerous theories and concerns about their social, educational and psychological needs (Gilbert 2005:4). Herring (1995) for example, claimed that biracial youths have 'special needs and unique circumstances' because they 'have difficulty identifying with their ethnic minority parent, and coming to terms with and developing a healthy sexual identity ((Herring 1995, cited in Gilbert 2005: 4).

More recent works both in the Canada, the US and in the UK – continued on the theme of identity both from the perspectives of the parents and from the children themselves from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds (Bauer 2010; Byrd & Garwick 2004; Hancock 2000; Luke & Luke 1998; 1999; Maxwell 1998; Segal 1997; Root 1996; Caballero et al. 2008; Song??; Tizard & Phoenix 2002;) These recent analyses challenge the problem-focussed perspective of the earlier works and show that multiple factors affect the ways in which 'Mixed' people identify. These include parental upbringing, class and socio-economic status, extended family relationships, the ethnic composition of their neighbourhoods and schools, friendship alliances; language, attitudes to gender relations, social and political contexts and physical characteristics

(colour) of the individual' (Ali 2003; Luke & Luke 1998; Maxwell 1998; Rockquemore & Laskloffy 2005; Song 2010).

Some recent works have also addressed identity from the perspective of 'belonging' (see Gilbert 2005:8; Ifekwunigwe 1999; Storrs 1999; Sudbury 2001) and show that despite the range of identity issues that children born to 'mixed' couples face, on the whole, they nevertheless adapt well, developing a sense of positive wellbeing and many do embrace their 'Mixed' origins (Phinney & Alipuria 1996; Phinney 2000; Hancock 2000; Aspinall 2008; 2009a; 2009b; Bauer 2010; Caballero et al. 2008a; Root 1996; Tizard & Phoenix 2002).

Essentially, what the more recent literature illustrate is that for 'Mixed' people, identity can be a more complex and an often emotive process than simply identifying with their parental ancestry (see Caballero et al. 2008a; 2008b; Caballero in progress; Root 1992; Song 2010; Zack 1996). However, with few exceptions (see for example Ali 2003; Caballero et al. 2008a; 2008b; Goulbourne et al. 2010; Inman et al. 2011; Hancock 2000; Mahtani 2002) most of the work on 'Mixed' individuals continue to focus on black-white mix, leaving the experiences of 'Mixed' people from other groups (including different languages and faiths) largely unexplored.

Parenting 'Mixed' race children: Strategies to combat racism and encourage wellbeing

Some authors have suggested that while some 'Mixed' children may experience different issues and pressures than their parents, if they are raised in a secure and loving family, they are more likely to develop resilience and a strong sense of belonging and wellbeing (Johnson & Warren 1994; Rosenblatt et al. 1995; Root 1996; Okun 1996). There is much in the literature about the parenting of 'Mixed' race/ethnic children (see Crippen and Brew 2007 for an extensive literature review on this issue). The majority of these works illustrate the challenges and the potential conflicts 'mixed' parents may experience in parenting due to their different values and beliefs, and how they negotiate their differences.

There is some work suggesting recommendations to parents to promote wellbeing in their children (Cunico 2009; Byrd & Garwick 2006; Orbe 1999), and some counselling advice in this direction (*American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 2006; Crohn 1998; Harper & McFadden 2003). The main messages that run through these reports include: educating children about 'race' in order to develop a positive sense of identity; providing children with positive and diverse cultural experiences to reflect their heritages; residing in a diverse community in order to minimise sense of feeling different or unacceptable; and to establish support networks where children can gain a sense of belonging. However, there is little about how 'mixed' parents protect their children from prejudice and promote resilience and wellbeing. And more importantly, the voices of parents and their children about how they develop resilience and wellbeing are largely absent.

Within the last fifteen years some work have been done in Britain exploring some of the strategies 'mixed' parents use to shield their children from racism and prejudice (Bauer 2010; Caballero work in progress; Caballero & Edwards 2010; Caballero et al. 2008; Crippen & Brew 2007:108; Romano 2001; Rosenblatt et al. 1995; Twine 1999; 2004;). Twine's (1999; 2004) work on 'white' mothers of 'black' children in Britain has been exploring the acts of 'antiracism' that such mothers engage in to provide a sense of identity and belonging for themselves and their children. Caballero and her colleagues (Caballero et al. 2008; Caballero & Edwards 2010; Caballero work in progress; Edwards & Caballero 2008) look at how parents negotiate identity and belonging for their children, and the resources and support networks they access to foster wellbeing for themselves and their children.

Extended family studies

Research has shown that extended family relations could impact on the stability of couples and the wellbeing of children (Rostosky et al. 2004; Olsen et al. 1989). Few studies have examined the wider family context in which 'mixed' couples negotiate their lives and relationships (for exceptions see Bauer 2010; Caballero et al 2008b; Goulbourne et al 2010). 'Mixed' families, like same- race/ethnicity/faith families, are sites of support and strength as well as conflict and pains. Findings from the three linked researches on 'mixed' families that informed this project (Caballero et al. 2008b; Goulbourne et al. 2010), and from the video content that supplemented the online resources show that couples perception of their extended families' support varied from positively supportive, to non-supportive, or ambivalent in their support. Firsthand in-depth inquiry into the experiences of 'mixed' couples and their wider families might not only ameliorate general public assumptions that are based on stereotypes and prejudices, but may also broaden our knowledge and understanding about how they function and also lead to very significant policy implications.

Taken together, the literature on 'mixed' relationships and families give mixed views in their reporting. While the older material theorised based on assumptions and the myths and fears of people in the general public about these relationships, more recent research have began to investigate more in-depth into these relationships. However, with few exceptions, these studies have not allowed the voices of the individuals in these marriages to be heard directly. Additionally, very little is heard from 'Mixed' race children themselves.

Areas to explore

Base on the primary objective of the proposed research, the exploratory framework aims to investigate the following themes in order to understand more clearly, if and why parents feel the need to protect their children, and how the strategies they use to give their children resilience and wellbeing have evolved and materialised over time:

- What is the nature of conflict and social disapproval for 'mixed' couples and their children? Do these change over time? What are the consequences of these for 'mixed' couples and their children
- Is conflict the only issue for 'mixed' couples in relation to their extended families or part of the issue? Some video participants' accounts of wanting independence from family expectations and traditions, breaking away from mainstream culture and non-conformance to their community traditions takes courage. What impact does this have on the disapproval and possible rejection they may experience from their family and communities?
- To what extent does the degree of support (or lack of support) impact on the stability of the 'mixed' couple and the wellbeing of their children?
- Are there any changes in the nature of extended family (especially grandparents) support over time due to cultural expectations as children grow up (expectations such as particular schools for the child or going to mosques etc.)?
- The gendered nature of race and racism (Rosenblatt et al. 1995) was often highlighted in discussions of family opposition to 'mixed' unions. How has gender impacted upon the degree of support that couples received from their families?
- What role does gender play in the parents' approaches to passing on resilience and wellbeing to their children?

- What role does class play in passing on resilience and wellbeing
- Recent research has shown on the whole multiracial children do not differ from other children in self-esteem, comfort with themselves, or number of psychiatric problems. Also, they tend to be high achievers with a strong sense of self and tolerance of diversity" (American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 2007:2). How do they achieve these qualities given social prejudices towards them?
- How do the strategies parents use to pass on resilience and wellbeing evolve over time? If any changes in approach, when in the life cycle of the child do these take place and why?
- Avenues for collaborative creation of practical resources for 'mixed' families and for practitioners working with them.

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