



City Research Online

City St George's, University of London

Citation: Wilson, D. & Nkansa-Dwamena, O. (2026). Black mothers raising mixed race children in the UK. *Psychotherapy & Politics International*, 24(1), pp. 1-21. doi: 10.24135/ppi.v24i1.13

This is the published version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version. To cite this item please consult the publisher's version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/38235/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v24i1.13>

Copyright and Reuse: Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, unless otherwise indicated, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way. For full details of reuse please refer to [City Research Online policy](#).

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

Black mothers raising mixed race children in the UK

Dayna Wilson*  and Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena 

Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, City St George's University of London, UK

ABSTRACT

Research shows that the role of parental figures in mixed race identity formation is crucial. Yet, the current literature focuses predominantly on the experiences and roles of White mothers, with limited research on the experiences of Black mothers. Drawing on data from an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study, this article explores the experiences of nine Black mothers raising mixed race children in the UK. Findings revealed two overarching challenges. The first related to the mother–child dyad. Participants described feeling distinct from their mixed race children, identified the difficulties in aiding mixed race identity development, and referred to concerns about how society would perceive them. Other reported narratives stemmed from experiences within wider society. Participants encountered microaggressions, spoke of the negative assumptions that they had faced, and often experienced questioning of their legitimacy as mothers. These findings highlight the emotional impact of disrupted mirroring between Black mothers and their mixed race children, where physical and cultural differences may interfere with mutual recognition and connection between mother and child. In sum, this study underscores the need to place Black mothers' voices at the heart of research investigating the experience of raising mixed race children.

KEYWORDS: Black mothers; mixed race children; challenges; mother–child dyad; UK

INTRODUCTION

Utilising interview data from nine Black women (Wilson, 2020), this article explores and describes the complex and nuanced experiences of raising mixed race children in the UK. Within this article, 'mixed race' refers to individuals who identify as having both Black and

*Contact details: drdaynawilson@gmail.com

White heritage. The term 'mixed race' is used to align with UK usage, but it is recognised that terminology such as 'biracial' and 'multiracial' can also be used.

Mixed race individuals have been a steadily growing demographic in the UK. Statistics from the 2021 England and Wales census (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2022) show that approximately 10.4 percent of households contain individuals from multiple ethnic groups. Parents and families play a crucial role in identity development, sense of belonging, and wellbeing of children raised in these households (Austin, 2018; Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Hughes et al., 2006). While existing studies have documented identity development, familial experiences, and racial literacy in mixed race families, they mostly reflect the perspectives of White family members (Caballero et al., 2008; Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Twine, 2004). This focus overlooks the subjective experiences of mixed race individuals and Black parents. Furthermore, when focusing on the unique role of mothers, who are often core caregivers within these experiences (UK Government, 2019), the literature had tended to prioritise the experiences of White mothers. This is perhaps reflective of a pattern within the literature which often neglects the experience and role of Black women and Black motherhood within the context of parenting. This neglect is reflective of wider systems of racial and gender inequalities which exist for Black women in the UK.

Black women in mixed race families may be navigating several processes and experiences, including interracial relationship journeys and inequities in several strands of their lives. These experiences may also be encountered in parallel by their children, resulting in the navigation of a duality that may influence parenting practices and, by extension, children's identity development processes. This article aimed to address the absence of these important narratives within the literature and to contribute to understanding the diverse experiences of parenthood in mixed race families.

Existing studies on mixed race families demonstrate the important systemic factors which contribute to the development of mixed race identity (Bauer, 2010; Caballero et al., 2008; Joseph-Salisbury, 2018; Song, 2017). Research examining the parenting of mixed race individuals in the UK demonstrates the importance of parents teaching mixed race individuals about their heritage culture, tradition, and the realities of racism through various means (Hosany, 2016; Mooney, 2014; Rocha, 2010). An example of such insights was found in Song's (2017) study on mixed race parenting, which identified that there were defining practices in the upbringing of mixed race individuals by both omission and commission, both of which had long-lasting impact on identity formation. This included ethnic and cultural transmission, and fostering a sense of racial awareness and pride. Her findings suggest that parents held concerns about ethnic and cultural loss, and attempted to mitigate this. She also noted that there appeared to be very small gender differences in approaches to parenting, with mothers adopting a more active role as they tended to be the main caregivers of young children.

Caballero et al.'s (2010) study explored similar themes, wherein they distributed questionnaires across the UK to parents through schools and conducted in-depth interviews with 35 parent couples regarding their experiences of raising mixed race children. Questionnaire responses showed that parents felt it was most important for them to teach their mixed race children about family history and cultural traditions, so that their children knew their heritage (Caballero et al., 2010). Participants also expressed their belief that both parents were influential in aiding mixed race children in cultivating a sense of self (Caballero et al., 2010). During interviews, parents also spoke of trying to aid their mixed race children with issues of belonging as well as coping with societal reactions to their mixed race child's difference. A limitation of this study was that there was only a 12 percent response rate to questionnaires across schools, which suggested that findings from the data could only be tentatively drawn (Caballero et al., 2010).

Research has also found that racial literacy for mixed race individuals was informed by parental stance and experience. For instance, Morley (2011) found that parents of mixed race people who had experienced racism were described as better able to support their mixed race children, which was said to aid identity development and promote resilience. Conversely, in Pang's (2018) Scottish-based study, White parents of mixed race individuals taught them very little about their ethnic minority heritage; these parents mainly racially socialised mixed race children as White Scottish and raised them to believe that being White was preferable, which had its own bearing on identity development.

The aforementioned studies shed light on the nuances and challenges that parents of mixed race individuals faced. Arguably although these studies implied the significance of parental involvement in mixed race people's identity development, the data appeared to be skewed towards particular demographics. The cited themes pertaining to experiences of racism, prejudice, relational challenges, and lack of support within their communities (for example, see Harman, 2013; McKenzie, 2013) reflect experiences of family systems, parental dyads, or White mothers, with an acute absence of Black mothers, whose experiences are multilayered. Black women may also encounter difficulties and challenges associated with racism and misogyny, which shapes their experience of motherhood, and inevitably makes their experiences different (Reynolds, 2005), and by proxy, also has an impact on how mixed race individuals experience this parenting.

Black motherhood and raising mixed race children

The experiences of Black mothers raising mixed race children are more widely captured in non-empirical forms, including blogs and articles, and provide interesting insight and views into the nuanced journeys, challenges, and systemic factors reflective of their unique experiences. Even so, UK-based articles were sparse, and therefore, a combination of UK and US-based narratives are utilised to provide insight.

Numerous first-person narratives showed that Black women parenting mixed race children experienced microaggressions that may give rise to feelings of awkwardness, embarrassment, judgment, and/or offense (Anthony, 2019; Faye, 2018; Shabazz, 2019; Thomson, 2019). Lived experiences also speak to the difficulties navigating the development of their children's mixed race identities (Anthony, 2019; Faye, 2018; Thomson, 2019) and the evolution of their own racial identity as a result of confronting this within the parenting roles.

Empirical research regarding the experiences of Black women raising mixed race children is limited; however, two studies are particularly significant. One such study was that of Kilson and Ladd (2009) who interviewed Black mothers in the USA and found that Black mothers placed importance on supporting their mixed race children to develop a positive racial identity. Despite their efforts, these mothers encountered challenges, such as racism, negative stereotyping, and 'White blindness', defined as 'the inability of Whites to perceive the relationship between a darker mother and her lighter child' (Kilson & Ladd, 2009, p. 39).

More recently, Reyna (2022) undertook a study which analysed 13 American blogs written by mothers raising multiracial children, and within this sample was five Black mothers of mixed race children. The findings showed that participants often expressed feelings of isolation as Black mothers raising mixed race children and spoke of the unique challenges that they encountered whilst raising mixed race children. This included racism and an anticipation of the discrimination their children might face. In response, many mothers described engaging in safety socialisation to prepare their children. While concerns were raised for both sons and daughters, greater emphasis was placed on the physical safety of these women's sons.

Wilson's (2020) research also provides an integral understanding of Black mothers' unique profiles and the impact of this on their experiences of raising mixed race children in the UK. Wilson (2020) found that participants expressed an awareness of their own Black female identity as well as feelings of pride and strength within this identity, which shaped the way in which they chose to raise their mixed race children. For some participants, this meant that they would assertively challenge those who would question their legitimacy as a mother, for others it meant preparing their children to live in a society that they perceived as racist, and for some it meant aiding their children to negotiate their mixed race identity and feel pride in their Black heritage. This study showed that Black women's unique profile could not be separated from their experience of raising their mixed race children.

A further dimension that emerges from the abovementioned narratives is the concept of 'mirroring': this is a term coined by Winnicott (1971) which refers to the process in which a child develops their sense of self by seeing their emotions and experiences reflected back to them by their caregiver, thus fostering recognition and emotional security. For Black mothers raising mixed race children, the act of seeing oneself reflected in one's child (physically, culturally, and emotionally) can be complicated by visible racial difference and reinforced by

societal perceptions of legitimacy. Where mothers' internalised understandings of their own racial identity differ from the way their children are racialised, the process of mutual recognition can become disrupted (Winnicott, 1971). This disruption can create emotional dissonance for both mother and child, affecting how they understand their identity, sense of belonging, and maternal connection (Rollock, 2018).

The abovementioned first-person narratives, empirical studies, and the concept of mirroring provide some understanding of Black women's idiographic experiences of raising mixed race children. The varied narratives are necessary, as historically, social science's understanding of Black mothers has been arguably simplistic and stereotypical and as a result, Rodriguez (2016) states that the academic literature is void in its understanding of Black mothers. Challenging this one-dimensional narrative also requires adoption of an intersectional lens to capture the layered nature of Black mothers' experiences. According to Collins (2000), overlapping systems of oppressions combine to shape the injustices that Black women experience daily. This infers that the various overlapping identities that Black women hold rely on each other to be truly meaningful (Lott, 2010) and therefore must be considered to truly grasp the experiences of Black mothers.

The lack of research conducted on Black mothers significantly contrasts with research carried out with other parental figures in the mixed race literature landscape (Campion & Joseph-Salisbury, 2022). Given the increasing presence of mixed race families, the complexity of their experiences, implications for mixed race identity development, and importance of Black women's unique voices and challenges, it is worrying that only a few studies relating to Black mothers of mixed race children exist. As such, this article aims to enrich the limited body of literature by illuminating the idiographic, lived experiences of Black mothers who play an essential role in the identity development and experiences of mixed race individuals in the UK.

METHODOLOGY

This article is drawn from Wilson's (2020) larger IPA study that explored the lived experiences of Black mothers raising mixed race children in the UK. This research utilised a qualitative design method through the lens of Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000). This approach allowed for a rich, idiographic understanding of Black mothers' lived experiences, which are grounded in the perspective that Black women are 'unique agents of knowledge' (Dotson, 2015, p. 2350). Intersectionality was also vital and offered a framework to explore how race, gender, and motherhood intersect in the context of raising Black–White mixed race children.

Study design and sampling

Purposive sampling was used to recruit a homogenous sample of 10 Black mothers (including one pilot participant) raising Black–White mixed race children aged eight or older. Inclusion criteria included: self-identifying as Black, aged over 18, living in the UK, with at least one mixed race (biological or adopted) child whose father is White. Participants also had to declare that they were not experiencing significant mental health difficulties and were available for face-to-face interviews.

Recruitment was conducted via flyers in the community (e.g., Caribbean takeaways, beauty salons), social media (Instagram, Twitter), and via word of mouth. Prospective participants received an information sheet, followed by a screening call after 24 hours. All who enquired took part in the study.

A sample of nine was selected in line with IPA's idiographic focus as guidance suggested recruitment of six to ten participants (Smith et al., 2009), as this allowed for in-depth exploration of under-researched experiences.

Data collection and analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over an eight-month period. Interviews lasted between one and two hours, were audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The interviews were analysed using IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

Transcripts were read multiple times and coding led to the development of superordinate and subthemes, which were refined iteratively to produce final themes. Analysis generated four superordinate themes. The two themes relevant to the focus of this paper are presented.

Researcher reflexivity

Both the researcher and the research supervisor of the researcher identified as Black women. It should be considered that this may have had an impact on the research and given rise to possible bias, particularly within the analysis. However, both the researcher and research supervisor worked hard to limit the impact of bias by engaging in ongoing reflection throughout the entire research process.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from City St George's University of London. All participants provided informed consent, were aware of the study's aims, and were assured of confidentiality via pseudonyms. Data was securely stored, and participants could withdraw at any point prior to thesis submission. All interview settings were private, distress protocols were followed, and participants were debriefed afterward.

FINDINGS

Participants provided rich and varied accounts of their experiences raising mixed race children in the UK. The analysis highlights how participants' identities as Black women and mothers shaped their parenting experiences. The superordinate themes explored in this paper are:

- Challenging experiences concerning the Black mother–mixed race child dyad
- Challenging biases

These themes illuminate the experiences of Black mothers raising mixed race children within the UK context and bring to light the challenges that they experience. The first theme focuses on the dynamics within the Black mother–mixed race child relationship, and delves into challenges of feeling distinct from their mixed race children, difficulties negotiating mixed race identity development, and concerns that these mothers encounter regarding their mixed race children. The second theme explores the biases these mothers face, such as microaggressions, societal assumptions, and questioning of their legitimacy as mothers. Together, these themes highlight the challenges that the Black mothers within this research faced whilst raising their mixed race children and shed light on their journeys of challenge but also resilience and adaptation.

CHALLENGING EXPERIENCES CONCERNING THE BLACK MOTHER–MIXED RACE CHILD DYAD

This theme explores challenges within the Black mother–mixed race child relationship. These include feelings of physical and cultural distinctness, navigating mixed race identity formation, and concerns about societal perceptions.

Distinctness

All participants described experiences of feeling distinct from their mixed race children in some way. Factors such as skin tone, hair texture, and food preferences contributed to this sense of difference and were described as emotionally impactful for these mothers. This sense of distinctness was interpreted through Winnicott's (1971) idea of mirroring, which captures how mothers and children look for reflections of themselves in one another (be it physically, culturally, or emotionally). When this mutual recognition is absent, both identity formation and attachment can be disrupted (Winnicott, 1971). For many participants, this challenge was intensified by the Black mothers' internalised racial identities and the visible contrast between their Blackness and their children's lighter appearance. This suggested that mirroring could be unsettled not only by physical difference but also by personal and social ideas about racial belonging (Rollock, 2018; Twine, 2010). These moments of dissonance may have left mothers struggling to see aspects of themselves reflected in their children,

complicating their maternal identity and sense of legitimacy as Black mothers raising mixed race children.

Sharon reflected: 'That baby don't look like it's mine. Straight, straight hair, obviously very light, if I wasn't awake, I would've sworn they switched that baby!' This reaction exemplifies the initial shock and feeling of disconnection that Sharon experienced due to her child's appearance, which is very different from her own.

Hair texture also emerged as a noteworthy challenge. Two-thirds of participants discussed feeling unfamiliar with their children's hair. Angel said, 'I just remember praying every day hoping that his hair would get a little bit afroey... that it would look like mine...' Angel's comment suggested a deep longing for physical resemblance and cultural familiarity, possibly to strengthen her sense of connection and ownership of her child.

Cultural differences also arose in everyday practices such as food. Debbie shared: 'If my son hears jollof rice he is like "oh can I have chips instead?" ... some of those days I will take the bowl and I will put it in front of him and I will say, "sit down, you're eating it!"' This highlights an internal struggle between Debbie wanting her child to embrace her cultural heritage while recognising his exposure to other cultural influences. This tension was echoed by other participants and highlighted the challenges that arose when navigating shared and differing cultural identities within the family.

White mothers of mixed race children may experience similar tensions. However, for Black mothers, feeling distinct from their children often caused frustration, confusion, and a longing for similarity. These complex emotions highlight the impact of racialised difference on maternal identity and wellbeing.

Mixed race identity formation

Eight of nine participants reflected on their attempts to support their children's mixed race identity and seven of nine consciously exposed their children to both Black and White cultures. However, several also believed their children would be racialised as Black by society and therefore placed emphasis on Black racial socialisation. Jenny explained: 'If you've got any tinge of Black in you then you're Black... So, I've got to try and make them understand that look, you are a mixture of mummy and daddy but actually, society will see you as Black'.

This belief shaped how mothers prepared their children for navigating a racially biased society. Jenny's approach aligns with well-researched racial socialisation strategies, such as preparation-for-bias and cultural pride (Carter & Flewellen, 2022; Csizmadia et al., 2014; Hughes et al., 2006; McHale et al., 2006). Twine (2004) describes this process as 'racial literacy' which is defined as the skills needed to identify and respond to racialised assumptions.

Conversely, some participants encouraged their children to embrace both aspects of their heritage. It could be that these participants' own sense of Black pride motivated the emphasis on Black identity, or that dual identity was seen as a more inclusive path.

Two participants expressed self-doubt about their ability to support their children's mixed race identity, partly because they themselves did not share the same identity. Lisa asked: 'How do I show them who they should be? Because I don't know what it's like to be mixed race.' Her uncertainty reveals the emotional complexity of parenting across racial boundaries.

Lisa also described intentionally surrounding her children with Black role models. However, she remained unsure whether this was enough or even appropriate: 'Am I doing them a disservice by just showing them a whole bunch of Black people and it's not up to me to show them anything? I mean, we live in a White society, they've got plenty of White role model vomit, if they wanna look up to them, I mean, even saying that just really makes me angry!' The intensity of Lisa's words suggested that she felt the heaviness of protecting her children from societal racial bias. Lisa's use of the word 'vomit' illustrates that she was angry as well as disgusted and frustrated with the racial norms of the UK—the society in which she raised her children.

For many participants, racial socialisation was informed by their own upbringing. Thus, their efforts to support their children mirrored the strategies used by their own Black mothers, reflecting an intergenerational impact in navigating race.

As a result of these mother–child differences, participants were often more aware that their mixed race children might be racialised differently than themselves. This awareness appeared to create uncertainty about how best to support their children and sometimes left mothers feeling unable to fully understand their children's mixed race experiences.

Concerns

Five participants expressed ongoing concerns for their children's safety and wellbeing. These concerns were often linked to how their children would be perceived, particularly as they grew older. For these mothers, socialising their children to be prepared for bias was a necessary protective strategy (Hughes et al., 2006; Turner, 2020).

Cara explained: 'The police and prospective job interviews. It's when you have these strangers who have your life in their hands, how do you come across? So yes... it's about preparing them within their racial identity.' Her concern stemmed from the recognition that society may not view her son neutrally.

Lisa echoed this as her son approached adolescence: 'Now that my eldest is nearly 15, I get worried about... how everybody else is going to see him, to see this young Black guy... well, Black appearing guy'. Lisa's statement highlights her anxiety about the impact of racial stereotypes on her son's future and safety.

Debbie also worried about how her son might feel if she had children with a Black partner: 'I am worried about the fact that my son is mixed... if I dated a Black guy... how does my son feel? ...And if I decide to have other children with this Black person and they are a different colour then he will be the only person that is of a different colour in the family'.

The aforementioned concerns highlight how deeply intertwined racial identity, family dynamics, and public perception are in the lives of Black mothers raising mixed race children. The experience often involved navigating uncertainty, feelings of difference, and a strong sense of protectiveness. Participants described an ongoing emotional negotiation shaped by the contrast between their own racial identities and how their children might be seen and treated by society. These internal and external challenges highlighted the unique challenges of the Black mother–mixed race child relationship. The following theme builds on this by examining how external biases and assumptions further shaped these women's maternal experiences.

CHALLENGING BIASES

This theme captures participants' experiences of microaggressions, bias, assumptions, and prejudice across multiple contexts, which collectively called into question their legitimacy and status as mothers.

Microaggressions

Seven participants described encountering subtle but hurtful microaggressions from strangers, community members, and even family. These microaggressions, though not overtly racist, were experienced as psychologically damaging.

Lisa explained: 'It's not racism in the sense of KKK, you know spray painting epithets on your lawn, it's that drip drip microaggressions stuff that absolutely drives me crazy.' Her use of 'drip drip' conveys the cumulative nature of these experiences, highlighting how seemingly small but persistent acts of harm gradually eroded her wellbeing over time.

Angel recalled: 'It's just constant staring and they always look straight at him and then they look at me and it's like, they've got a look of disgust.' This quote shows how these interactions triggered feelings of being judged as well as discomfort.

Debbie experienced microaggressions from her own mother, who referred to her mixed race grandson as 'pepperless' due to his inability to tolerate spicy food. She added: 'She says, "oh it's because he's White"'. These comments suggest that her child's mixed race identity placed him outside the cultural norms of the family, contributing to feelings of exclusion.

These accounts are in alignment with literature which states that microaggressions can cause feelings of powerlessness (Davis, 2018) and can negatively impact psychological functioning (Donovan et al., 2012) and the physical health of Black women (Taylor et al., 2007), thus giving rise to challenges that directly stem from the experience of raising mixed race children as Black mothers.

Societal assumptions

Seven participants spoke about the judgments they felt society made about them as Black women who had children with White men. These experiences shaped their sense of belonging within both their Black communities and wider society.

Rebecca reflected: 'The problem is with Black people... they kind of say... "you're a traitor... you're a traitor"... because for them, Black women should not be procreating with a White man, to dilute the Black race.' Her words highlight feelings of guilt and betrayal that may impact her identity as a Black woman.

Angel shared similar sentiments: 'Like you've failed the race basically. Like you have let us all down'. She contrasted this with how White women in interracial relationships are sometimes celebrated for 'embracing' Black culture, whereas Black women are condemned.

Debbie described her family's response: "'Does she think she was too good for Black men?'" That was my mum's initial reaction... My aunty was like, "of all the countries in Africa, she couldn't find anybody"... and then she went and brought home a White man...' These judgments reflect a perceived betrayal to the Black community, which reinforced; seclusion and a sense of shame.

Mother status

Seven participants voiced their experiences of others having questioned their 'mother' status. These participants encountered others who had assumed that they were not the mothers of their mixed race children.

Lisa described a school incident: 'The teacher comes up and she's telling me about Jasmin and I'm like, "Jasmin?" and she's like "oh you're Jasmin's mum, aren't you?" I'm like "no! I'm Nicole's mother"'. Lisa appeared to feel overlooked and disrespected as a result of mismatched racial expectations.

Anna described an interaction with a stranger: 'An Asian woman has said "am I the babysitter?" I said no, "I'm the mother, that's my daughter in there" but I wasn't offended, I just found it quite intriguing'. This interaction highlighted racialised expectations of what a mother should look like.

Gloria recounted: 'This White man stops and really stares at my baby. I wasn't quite sure... what he was thinking but later I thought, oh! Did he think I had stolen this baby or something?'

Though no words were exchanged, the gaze was experienced as judgmental and was a contributory factor to Gloria feeling as though she was under surveillance.

These instances suggest that assumptions about motherhood are profoundly racialised. The failure to identify these Black women as mothers contributed to feelings of being unseen, excluded, and scrutinised.

In summary, bias (whether overt or covert) shaped participants' experience of motherhood. These experiences affected not only how participants were perceived by others, but also how they perceived themselves and their place in society. It could be suggested that societal biases may have further disrupted the process of mirroring (moments in which these Black mothers expected to see themselves reflected in their children but instead were faced with society's distorted perceptions). Consequently, a range of emotions arose in response to these biases, these include feeling misunderstood, overlooked, frustrated, and isolated.

Accounts illuminated the lived experiences and challenges of being Black mothers who are raising mixed race children in the UK. These accounts suggest that raising a mixed race child as a Black woman is a complex journey. One in which participants regularly encountered difficulties and challenges in relation to themselves, their mixed race children, their friends, and families, as well as the wider society. Narratives reflect overarching experiences of adaptation, tolerance, resilience, and coping.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this article was to explore the lived experiences of Black mothers raising mixed race children in the UK. This study contributes to the literature by centring the voices of Black mothers and offering insight into the emotional and relational complexities of raising mixed race children in the UK. Here, the superordinate themes are interpreted in relation to existing literature, and implications are considered with particular attention to racial identity, motherhood, and mental health. Finally, the study's limitations are outlined and recommendations for future research are identified.

Interpretation and implications

The impact of experiencing the mixed race child as distinct from the self

The existing literature does not directly explore the experiences of Black mothers feeling distinct from their mixed race children; thus, findings of the current research are novel. Seven participants experienced their mixed race child as distinct from themselves, mainly because of differences in hair texture and skin complexion. This difference influenced how participants related to their mixed race children. For example, several participants expressed that it took

time to adjust to the idea that their mixed race children looked different from them. This aligns with prior research suggesting that a visible physical difference can complicate familial identification and impact relational dynamics within multiracial families (Sweeney & Gabb, 2016). Adjusting to these differences in appearance can give rise to complex emotions, as parents reconcile their monoracial identity with their child's mixed race identity (Rockquemore & Laszloffy, 2005; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). Furthermore, this dynamic may challenge traditional ideas of family resemblance and belonging, affecting parental bonding and cultural socialisation (Rollins & Hunter, 2013). The concept of mirroring (Winnicott, 1971), can help to explain this: in monoracial dyads, mirroring often reinforces belonging, whereas within interracial dyads (such as those in this study) its absence can contribute to emotional dissonance and challenges within identity negotiation for both mother and child (Phoenix & Song, 2003). For Black mothers raising mixed race children, this lack of mirroring may be particularly complex, as these mothers must navigate their own racial identity while simultaneously mediating how society perceives their children. Additionally, when societal biases question the legitimacy of Black mothers of mixed race children, disruption in mirroring may be reinforced both socially and personally (Campion & Joseph-Salisbury, 2022; Song, 2017). Identity is thus shaped both within the family and by wider racialised societal expectations.

Some participants also reflected on the idea that their mixed race children did not align with the expectations they had—expectations that were often unspoken, vague, or unexamined. While these mothers were unable to clearly articulate what they had anticipated, their responses suggested an unconscious ideal or imagined version of what their child might be like—perhaps in terms of appearance, cultural affinity, or behaviour. The dissonance between imagined and actual experience appeared to generate complex emotions such as surprise or confusion, highlighting the tension between personal identity, cultural transmission, and the unpredictable nature of mixed race identity development. This ambiguity aligns with Miville et al.'s (2005) findings that multiracial individuals often encounter expectations that are placed on their identity. As a result, these individuals may struggle emotionally as they grapple with reconciling their personal identity and societal perceptions. This highlights how raising mixed race children can challenge monoracial parents to reflect on their internalised ideals and standards about identity and family resemblance.

Four participants described moments when they had to remind themselves that their mixed race children were still their own, despite visible differences in appearance. These experiences appeared to intensify feelings of difference within the mother–child relationship and at times sparked frustration, confusion, or a longing for perceived similarity. Such emotional responses are in line with findings that multiracial identity ambiguity can affect parents as well as children, potentially influencing maternal wellbeing (Crawford & Alaggia, 2008; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). In particular, pressures arising from identity negotiation have

been linked to increased emotional strain and have a negative impact on psychological comfort within multiracial families (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009).

The impact of microaggressions

Participants' experiences of microaggressions seemed to reinforce their feelings of being distinct from their mixed race children. It is also interesting to note that Black mothers' concerns for their mixed race children appeared to be rooted in their own experiences of microaggressions (that they faced as a result of being Black women). Thus, participants' concerns were often in relation to the difficulties that their mixed race children may encounter as a result of being perceived as Black or because their mixed race children were half Black.

The academic literature suggests that microaggressions have a negative impact on an individual's psychological functioning and can be damaging to the interpersonal relationships of those who experience it (Torino et al., 2018). Davis (2018) argues that often the initial reactions to microaggressions are confusion, worry, and a need to process the encounter as often the subtleness of the microaggressions can leave the recipient feeling unsure of what had occurred. It has also been suggested that the long-term effects of microaggressions may be: anxiety (Davis, 2018); traumatic stress (Nadal, 2018); substance use (Blume et al., 2012); depression and suicidal ideation (Hollingsworth et al., 2017). With regard to Black women, the literature states that microaggressions can increase feelings of powerlessness (Davis, 2018) and can have a harmful effect on the psychological functioning (Donovan et al., 2012) and the physical health of Black women (Taylor et al., 2007). Findings from this research expanded knowledge into the lived experiences of microaggressions for Black women. For the participants, microaggressions were an impactful part of their experience of raising mixed race children and were spoken about with great passion. Participants' experiences of microaggressions appeared to have a profound impact on their lives and the way in which they viewed themselves, others, and the world.

The impact of mixed race identity development

This research supports the existing literature, which states that often mothers engage in challenging discussions with mixed race children regarding race-related issues to equip children in being able to deal with any challenges that they may encounter as a result of being mixed race (Csizmadia et al., 2014). Rockquemore and Laszloffy (2005) argue that parents can aid mixed race identity formation by preparing mixed race children for societal biases that may arise as a result of being mixed race and by educating their children about the various empowering labels that mixed race individuals can use to define themselves (for example, mixed race, biracial, multiracial, etc.).

Research suggests that racial identity is associated with self-esteem, health, and wellbeing (Allen et al., 2013) and therefore, racial identification and categorisation appears to be

essential to the identity development and overall wellbeing of the mixed race person. Thus, it is imperative that applied professionals working with Black mothers raising mixed race children are aware of and can empathise with the challenges that Black mothers may face when attempting to aid their mixed race children to negotiate their mixed race identities. Support spaces reflective of their unique experiences can be co-constructed, hopefully prompting sharing and validation of their journeys.

Limitations

This study offers pivotal insight into the experiences of Black mothers raising mixed race children in the UK, though it has limitations. Most participants lived in urban London, potentially shaping their experiences due to the city's multicultural nature. As Emerson and Yancey (2008) note, interracial families tend to be more accepted in diverse communities, which may have influenced how participants were perceived and how they experienced raising mixed race children as Black women.

Recommendations for future research

There are multiple directions that future research could take to continue to develop insight into the experiences of Black mothers raising mixed race children. Future research could explore different racial mixes within interracial families. It would be interesting to see if there are any commonalities or differences between different racial mixes. The current research specifically focused on Black–White interracial families from the perspective of Black mothers and because of this perhaps there was a limit to the data that arose.

Additionally, this research aimed to focus on the experiences of mothers as opposed to fathers, because women/mothers are often the primary caregivers of their children. The focus then became Black mothers, as there is currently a lack of literature which explores their experiences of raising mixed race children. Future research would do well to investigate the experiences of fathers raising mixed race children as this research is also limited. Research in this area would further illuminate the experiences and challenges of raising a mixed race child as well as interracial family dynamics and the experience of fatherhood.

REFERENCES

- Allen, G., Garriott, P., Reyes, C., & Hsieh, C. (2013). Racial identity, phenotype, and self-esteem among biracial Polynesian/White individuals. *Family Relations*, 62(1), 82–91.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2012.00743.x>

- Anthony, D. (2019, September 13). *What it means to be a Black mom raising mixed kids in America right now*. Babble. Retrieved September 13, 2019, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20190109072938/https://www.babble.com/parenting/black-mom-parenting-biracial-kids/>
- Austin, S. (2018, December 7). *Who am I? Mixed-race identity and schools: What we need to know*. Croydon Education Partnership. <https://www.croydoneducationpartnership.org/blog/who-am-i-mixed-race-identity-and-schools-what-to-know/>
- Bauer, E. (2010). *The creolisation of London kinship: Mixed African-Caribbean and White British extended families, 1950–2003*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Blume, A., Lovato, L., Thyken, B., & Denny, N. (2012). The relationship of microaggressions with alcohol use and anxiety among ethnic minority college students in a historically White institution. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 18*(1), 45–54. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025457>
- Caballero, C., Edwards, R., & Puthussery, S. (2008). *Parenting 'mixed' children: Difference and belonging in mixed-race and faith families*. University of Southampton Institutional Repository. <http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/id/eprint/190715>
- Caballero, C., Edwards, R., & Puthussery, S. (2010). Parenting children from 'mixed' racial, ethnic and faith backgrounds: Typifications of difference and belonging. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 33*(6), 949–967. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870903318185>
- Campion, M. A., & Joseph-Salisbury, R. (2022). Racial illiteracies and whiteness: Exploring Black mixed-race narrations of race in the family. *Genealogy, 6*(3), Article 58. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy6030058>
- Carter, R. A., & Flewellen, T. T. (2022). Maternal racial socialization during puberty: Perspectives of Black and Black-White biracial daughters. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 32*(3), 842–860. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12724>
- Collins, P. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. Routledge.
- Crawford, S. E., & Alaggia, R. (2008). The best of both worlds?: Family influences on mixed race youth identity development. *Qualitative Social Work, 7*(1), 81–98. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473325007086417>
- Csizmadia, A., Rollins, A., & Kaneakua, J. (2014). Ethnic-racial socialization and its correlates in families of Black-White biracial children. *Family Relations, 63*(2), 259–270. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12062>
- Davis, S. (2018). When sistahs support sistahs: A process of supportive communication about racial microaggressions among Black women. *Communication Monographs, 86*(2), 133–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637751.2018.1548769>
- Donovan, R., Galban, D., Grace, R., Bennett, J., & Felicié, S. (2012). Impact of racial macro- and microaggressions in Black women's lives. *Journal of Black Psychology, 39*(2), 185–196. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798412443259>

- Dotson, K. (2015). Inheriting Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist* epistemology. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38(13), 2322–2328. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1058496>
- Emerson, M., & Yancey, G. (2008). African Americans in interracial congregations: An analysis of demographics, social networks, and social attitudes. *Review of Religious Research*, 49(3), 301–318. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20447500>
- Faye, N. (2018, March 14). *Dealing with everyday racism as a Black mom with a white-passing son*. Mixed Race Studies. <https://mixedracestudies.org/wp/?p=55938>
- Harman, V. (2013). Social capital and the informal support networks of lone White mothers of mixed-parentage children. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(8), 1323–1341. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2012.743626>
- Hollingsworth, D., Cole, A., O'Keefe, V., Tucker, R., Story, C., & Wingate, L. (2017). Experiencing racial microaggressions influences suicide ideation through perceived burdensomeness in African Americans. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 64(1), 104–111. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000177>
- Hosany, Z. (2016). 'Who am I and where do I belong?' An exploratory study of the construction of identities of people from mixed heritage backgrounds in Britain [Doctoral dissertation, University of East London]. UEL Research Repository. <https://doi.org/10.15123/PUB.5854>
- Hughes, D., Rodriguez, J., Smith, E. P., Johnson, D. J., Stevenson, H. C., & Spicer, P. (2006). Parents' ethnic-racial socialization practices: A review of research and directions for future study. *Developmental Psychology*, 42(5), 747–770. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.42.5.747>
- Joseph-Salisbury, R. (2018). Black mixed-race men, perceptions of the family, and the cultivation of 'post-racial' resilience. *Ethnicities*, 18(1), 86–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796817709035>
- Kilson, M., & Ladd, F. (2009). *Is that your child? Mothers talk about rearing biracial children*. Lexington Books.
- Lott, B. (2010). *Multiculturalism and diversity: A social psychological perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- McHale, S. M., Crouter, A. C., Kim, J.-Y., Burton, L. M., Davis, K. D., Dotterer, A. M., & Swanson, D. P. (2006). Mothers' and fathers' racial socialization in African American families: Implications for youth. *Child Development*, 77(5), 1387–1402. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2006.00942.x>
- McKenzie, L. (2013). Narratives from a Nottingham council estate: A story of White working-class mothers with mixed-race children. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36(8), 1342–1358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.776698>
- Miville, M. L., Constantine, M. G., Baysden, M. F., & So-Lloyd, G. (2005). Chameleon changes: An exploration of racial identity themes of multiracial people. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(4), 507–516. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.52.4.507>

- Mooney, A. (2014). *'The elephant in the room?' An exploration into how clients construct and manage the role of being mixed race within therapy* [Doctoral thesis, University of Roehampton]. University of Roehampton Repository.
<https://pure.roehampton.ac.uk/portal/en/studentTheses/the-elephant-in-the-room/>
- Morley, D. (2011). *Mixed experiences: A study of the childhood narratives of mixed race people related to risks to their mental health and capacity for developing resilience* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. City University London.
- Nadal, K. L. (2018). *Microaggressions and traumatic stress: Theory, research, and clinical treatment*. American Psychological Association.
- Office for National Statistics. (2022, November 29). *Ethnic group, England and Wales: Census 2021*. ONS. Retrieved August 21, 2025, from
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021>
- Pang, M. (2018). Negotiating the (non)negotiable: Connecting 'mixed-race' identities to 'mixed-race' families. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 39(4), 414–428.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2018.1486292>
- Pascoe, E. A., & Smart Richman, L. (2009). Perceived discrimination and health: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 135(4), 531–554.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016059>
- Phoenix, A., & Song, M. (2003). Parenting and ethnic identity transmission: A case study of mixed-race families in the UK. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 26(6), 937–957.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987032000132475>
- Reyna, C. V. (2022). 'You're biracial but...': Multiracial socialization discourse among mommy bloggers with Black and non Black multiracial children. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 84(5), 1507–1528. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12866>
- Reynolds, T. (2005). *Caribbean mothers' identity and experience in the U.K.* Tufnell Press.
- Rocha, Z. (2010). Mixed messages, mixed memories, mixed ethnicity: Mnemonic heritage and constructing identity through mixed parentage. *New Zealand Sociology*, 25(1), 75–96.
- Rockquemore, K., & Laszloffy, T. (2005). *Raising biracial children*. AltaMira Press.
- Rodriguez, C. (2016). Mothering while Black: Feminist thought on maternal loss, mourning and agency in the African Diaspora. *Transforming Anthropology*, 24(1), 61–69.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/traa.12059>
- Rollins, J. A., & Hunter, A. G. (2013). Racial socialization in the family: The experiences of biracial children. *Family Relations*, 62(3), 397–409. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12014>
- Rollock, N. (2018). *The lived experience of Black women academics in higher education: Between inclusion and exclusion*. UCL Institute of Education Press.
- Shabazz, S. (2019, June 15). *What mixed-race parents are tired of hearing*. Scary Mommy.
<https://www.scarymommy.com/mixed-race-parents-tired-of-hearing>

- Shih, M., & Sanchez, D. T. (2005). Perspectives and research on the positive and negative implications of having multiple racial identities. *Psychological Bulletin*, 131(4), 569–591. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.131.4.569>
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE Publications.
- Song, M. (2017). *Multiracial parents: Mixed families, generational change, and the future of race*. NYU Press.
- Sweeney, K., & Gabb, J. (2016). Navigating ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ within interethnic relationships: Racial difference, boundaries, and intersectionality. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(2), 153–169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2015.1022198>
- Taylor, T., Williams, C., Makambi, K., Mouton, C., Harrell, J., Cozier, Y., & Palmer, J. (2007). Racial discrimination and breast cancer incidence in U.S. Black women: The Black Women’s Health Study. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 166(1), 46–54. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwm056>
- Thomson, A. C. (2019, August 30). *I’m black, therefore my kids are, right?* Today’s Parent. <https://www.todaysparent.com/family/parenting/im-black-therefore-my-kids-are-right/>
- Torino, G., Rivera, D., Capodilupo, C., Nadal, K., & Wing Sue, D. (2018). *Microaggression theory: Influence and implications*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Turner, J. L. (2020). Black mothering in action: The racial class socialization practices of low income Black single mothers. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*, 6(4), 532–548. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332649219899683>
- Twine, F. W. (2004). A white side of Black Britain: The concept of racial literacy. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 27(6), 878–907. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141987042000268512>
- Twine, F. W. (2010). *A white side of Black Britain: Interracial intimacy and racial literacy*. Duke University Press.
- UK Government. (2019, August 29). *Sharing of childcare and well-being outcomes: An empirical analysis*. GOV.UK. Retrieved August 22, 2025, from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childcare-shared-care-and-well-being-outcomes-for-families/sharing-of-childcare-and-well-being-outcomes-an-empirical-analysis>
- Wilson, D. (2020). *An exploration of the experiences of Black women raising biracial children in the UK* [Doctoral thesis, City, University of London]. City Research Online. <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/25680/>
- Winnicott, D. W. (1971). *Playing and reality*. Tavistock Publications.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I (Dayna) would like to thank each and every one of my participants. Without you, this research would not have been possible. Thank you for sharing your experiences—your voices are at the heart of this work.

I am deeply grateful to my research supervisor, Dr Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena. Thank you for believing in me, for pushing me to reach my full potential, and for your unwavering support and guidance throughout this journey.

To my wonderful and selfless mother, my supportive and understanding father, and my protective brother—thank you for your consistent love, strength, and encouragement. I would not have been able to publish this paper without your steadfast support and love. Your love has been a quiet strength throughout this journey.

To my best friend, Jasmin, I am deeply grateful for your friendship. Thank you for walking beside me through seasons of growth, uncertainty, and becoming. Because you believed in me, I was able to believe in myself. I could not have asked for a better sister.

To my darling other half, Hughes—thank you for believing in me, for being my biggest cheerleader, and for proofreading my work alongside me (with tired eyes) at 2 a.m. while the baby slept. You have been my rock through every moment of stress and overwhelm, and I owe you my sanity.

To my baby and little love, Tate—thank you for giving me a reason to be the best version of myself. Everything I do is for you. My Taye-Taye.

Finally, I would like to thank God for continually blessing me, for giving me the strength to complete this research, and for guiding me through the process of publication. I owe You everything and give You all the glory—always.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES



Dr Dayna Wilson is a counselling psychologist and an accredited schema psychotherapist affiliated with City St George's, University of London. Dr Wilson works in the National Health Service and in private practice, with previous positions in higher education settings. She has clinical expertise in emotionally unstable personality disorder. Her scholarly work explores the experiences of Black mothers raising mixed-race children, with particular attention to race, identity, and sociopolitical context.



Dr Ohemaa Nkansa-Dwamena is an associate professor of counselling psychology at City St George's, University of London. She is also a counselling psychologist in private practice, with previous positions in the NHS, higher education settings, and third sector organisations. She is a published author and researcher whose clinical expertise and research interests include multiple identity negotiation, minoritised identities, intersectionality, and issues related to race and mental health, African diasporan mental health, and cross-cultural engagement. Her work focuses on promoting inclusivity, decolonising psychology, and challenging systemic and structural barriers to foster equity.