'LEST WE FORGET' – THE CHILDREN THEY LEFT BEHIND

The life experience of adults born to black GIs and British women during the Second World War

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work in the School of Social Work, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne
Declaration of Authorship

I declare that this thesis comprises only my original work except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other materials used. This thesis does not exceed 35,800 words in length, exclusive of bibliographies, footnotes and appendices.

Signature ........................................ Date 13.3.2000
Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the eleven men and women who entrusted me with their stories and without whom this study would not have been possible. In particular I thank them for their willingness to share their lived experience so openly and so honestly with a 'fellow traveller'. The process of researching and documenting their narratives and reflecting on the many parallels with my own story was both a joyous and painful one. This thesis, the end product, I hope honours their journey and ensures that their voices have been and will be 'heard'.

I would like to acknowledge the unstinting and unwavering support and encouragement I have received, over the past five years, from my academic supervisor Dr Lynda Campbell, of the School of Social Work, University of Melbourne. The dual role of researcher as member of the researched cohort adds another dimension to the supervisory role and I thank her most sincerely for supporting and guiding me in my efforts to use my personal experience as a mixed-race war babe, in a way that enhanced and enriched the research outcomes rather than detracted from them.

My grateful thanks to my employer, the Department of Human Services who have supported this research in many ways, but most importantly through the provision of the study leave necessary in order for me to travel overseas and undertake the research interviews. To my Manager, Helen Brain and colleague Cathy Burnett, my thanks for believing in the importance of what I was doing and its relevance for the children for whom we provide a service.

Finally, my thanks to my families. To my husband Brian and my two beautiful daughters who have lived with the highs and lows of my ten-year search for my GI father and encouraged me to persist when I was ready to give up. To my British family of origin who love me for who I am and my 'new' African American family whose total acceptance, openness and affection have more than compensated for the fact that I will never meet my father.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my beloved mother, Myrtle Agnes Stella Regan (1919-1958) who taught me to believe in myself and loved me unconditionally.
Abstract

An estimated 22,000 children were born in England during the Second World War as a result of relationships between British women and American GIs. Of these children, around 1,200–1,700 were born to African American servicemen. These figures are estimates only; the actual number of births will never be known.

The research study is based on personal interviews with eleven members of this cohort. The interviews explore their life experience and examines their sense of identity as extramarital children, of mixed-race parentage, who had no contact with and usually little information about their GI fathers. Of the eleven mothers, over half were married with at least one other child at the time of the birth. Nine participants/respondents were raised by their mother or her extended family. Two were institutionalised. At the time of the interviews all of the respondents were either searching for, or had found, their black GI fathers.

This is a qualitative study which aims to bear witness to the lived experience of this cohort and to analyse the meaning individuals gave to their experience. Data collection involved personal interviews with the eleven participants. The data was then subject to a thematic analysis and the major themes and issues identified. Content analysis was undertaken using a constructivist approach.

The interviews are presented as elicited narrative relayed through an interpretive summary. Consistency was maintained by using common questions organised within a loose interview framework. The findings were organised around the major conceptual issues and themes that emerged from the case summaries. Common themes, including resilience, racial identity, self esteem and stress were identified.

The researcher has professional qualifications as a social worker and clinical family therapist. She has ten years experience in the field of adoption, including the transracial placement of Aboriginal and overseas children in Australian families. She is also a
member of the researched cohort. Issues arising when the researcher is also a member of the researched cohort are discussed in the methodology.

The experience of this cohort suggests that despite the disadvantages of their birth, they fared better than expected. The majority demonstrated high levels of resilience, successfully developing a sense of identity that incorporated both the black and white aspects of their racial heritage. However, for some this success was only achieved at considerable personal cost, with several participants reporting relatively high levels of stress and/or stress related symptoms, such as anxiety, mental illness and heart disease.
Some Wartime Quotations

'It is difficult to go anywhere in London without having the feeling that Britain is now Occupied Territory. The general consensus of opinion seems to be that the only American soldiers with decent manners are the Negroes.' George Orwell, Tribune, 3rd December 1943.

'Have you heard about the new utility knickers? One Yank and they're off!'


'I don’t mind the Yanks, but I don’t care much for those white fellows they’ve brought with them.'


Sign, reportedly displayed outside a small English village during World War Two, to encourage American troops to drive more slowly:

'PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY, THE CHILD YOU KNOCK DOWN COULD BE YOURS.'

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1. **Introduction**

The following study provides an account of the lived experience of the adult children of wartime relationships between British women and African American servicemen during the Second World War.\(^1\) It is a qualitative study that seeks to explore the meaning of that experience and in particular how the research participants see themselves – as black, white or mixed-race.

The exploration of these issues took place in the context of a personal interview with each of eleven respondents, which explored the meaning they gave to their life experience as children of black GI\(^2\) fathers raised with no contact, until they reached middle-age, with their birth fathers or their African American heritage. A particular focus of the interviews was the extent to which this experience impacted on their sense of self-identity as children of mixed British and African American parentage.

As all of the participants were searching for, or had found their birth fathers\(^3\) the significance of their search, in terms of its impact on their sense of personal identity, was also explored.

The experience of this cohort can only be clearly understood in the historical context of the Second World War and in particular the impact of the decision by America to send black troops to England. An overview of the major social and historical issues impacting on the life experience of this cohort follows.

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\(^1\) The term ‘African American’ will be used interchangeably with ‘black’ and ‘black American’ to describe this cohort.

\(^2\) ‘GI’ was the term used to describe members of the American Army. The term derived from the words ‘General Issue,’ which referred to the uniform provided to all US Army personnel.

\(^3\) The term ‘birth father’ is used interchangeably with ‘GI father’ to describe the male biological parent of participants.
1.1 Historical Context

Between 1942 and 1945 over one million United States (US) troops were based in England as part of the build up to the invasion of Europe in June, 1944 (Winfield 1992, p. 2). Approximately 130,000 of these were African Americans (Gardiner 1992, p. 158). An unintended, although not unexpected, consequence of this benign occupation was the birth of an estimated 22,000 children as a result of wartime relationships between British women and American GIs. Approximately 1,200–1,700 of these births were to British women and African American servicemen (Gardiner 1992).

The decision by the US Government to send black troops to England was met with some consternation by the British Government. Anthony Eden, Foreign Secretary in 1942, actively tried to reverse the decision but without success (Smith 1986, p. 188). His fears were twofold and reflected concerns held by the Government as a whole:

1. The difficulty in managing the racial segregation policies that the Americans would bring to Britain.

2. The potential for sexual relations to develop between British women and black American servicemen.

1.1.1 Segregation

Although African Americans had fought in a segregated army in France in World War 1, the numbers allowed to enlist in the army between the wars was limited and the US Army Air Corp refused entry to blacks altogether (Smith 1986, p. 21). In 1937 changes in Army policy resulted in a decision that the services would aim for a target quota of ten percent black troops, reflecting their approximate proportion in the American population. In 1940 President Roosevelt reiterated this commitment, however, complete desegregation of the armed forces, one of the changes most sought after by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), did not occur.
The army that arrived in England in 1942 was therefore segregated, and there was pressure from the US government for this policy to be enforced in Britain. After much deliberation the British War Cabinet decided against this. Their decision was based to some extent on a belief, later confirmed, that the majority of the British people particularly the working class would be reluctant to conform to such a policy. Besides, there were a significant number of black colonial troops and civilians in Britain contributing to the war effort, who would understandably feel angry and offended by any attempt to introduce segregation.

This concern was reiterated by the Lord Chancellor, Sir John Simon. In a memorandum to the War Cabinet marked ‘Secret’ and dated 9th October, 1942, he argued against a proposal that segregation be introduced in Service Clubs, and other public venues in Britain, pointing out that:

The British Empire is on the whole a coloured Empire and it is hardly necessary to emphasise what the reactions might be in the Empire if we took a wrong course on the subject.4

Whilst the British were unwilling to accept segregation, for many GIs particularly those from the Southern States, the notion that blacks should be treated as equals, including having access to white women, was anathema and opposed to everything they had been raised to believe about the relative position of the two races in American society. From an American perspective the attitude of the British was a problem, as the Allied Commander, General Eisenhower pointed out in a letter to General Serls in Washington, dated 10th September 1942:

... here we have a very thickly populated country that is devoid of racial consciousness. They know nothing at all about the conventions and habits of polite society that have been developed

in the US in order to preserve a segregation in social activity without making the matter one of official or public notice. To most English people, including the village girls – even those of perfectly fine character – the Negro soldier is just another man, rather fascinating because he is unique in their experience, a jolly good fellow with money to spend. (Reynolds 1995, p. 218)

1.1.2 Tensions Between Black and White Americans

It is difficult to appreciate, in the post civil rights and equal opportunity era of the 1990s, the extent of the racial hatred directed by many white American servicemen towards blacks in the 1940s. Segregation policies in the US whilst abhorrent, minimised contact, and therefore the potential for violence, between black and white troops.

The following recollections of the acting out of these racial tensions, were documented by Gardiner (1992) and were based on the personal wartime experience of British men and women. A Birmingham [England] man recalled:

I have personally seen the American troops kick, and I mean, kick, coloured troops off the pavements, and when asked why, reply, ‘stinking black pigs’ or ‘black trash’ or ‘uppity niggers’ (Gardiner 1992, p. 154).

A woman, who as a teenage girl during the war ran errands on a US military base, described seeing white troops shouting, screaming and yelling abuse at a lone black soldier walking on the other side of a fence.

I was about fourteen at the time and I could not understand why the sight of a black man walking along the road could arouse so much hatred and abuse. I still can’t (Gardiner 1992, p. 154).
White troops felt so strongly about the issue of contact between black GIs and British girls that they were prepared to 'punish' the girls concerned. A fifteen-year-old girl recalled that:

If you danced with the coloured Americans you were blacklisted by the white ones. They kept a list at the camp of these girls and passed it on to the new troops coming in (Longmate 1975, p. 133).

The reasons for the behaviour of some white troops is explained to some extent by an additional comment in the letter quoted previously on page 3 of this study from General Eisenhower to General Serls:

Our own white soldiers, seeing a girl walk down the street with a negro, frequently see themselves as a protector of the weaker sex and believe it necessary to intervene even to the extent of using force to let her know what she is doing (Reynolds 1995, p. 218).

Negative attitudes towards black GIs were not held by all white Americans. Mrs. Anne Chalmers who was a young woman during the war, recollected that white troops from the Northern States:

... may not have jumped from their chairs and cheered when they found white girls being taken out by black boys, [but] they decided that it was none of their business and they didn’t interfere.  

Despite the decision not to enforce segregation a form of defacto separation was introduced by proprietors of hotels, clubs and dance halls frequented by American

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5 Letter from Mrs. Anne Chalmers of Bristol, England. Imperial War Museum Collection, IWM 90/10/1.
troops, largely to prevent outbreaks of violence. Local councils also introduced an informal system, which allowed white and black troops to come into town on alternate nights, thus lessening the likelihood of clashes occurring.

1.1.3 Sex between Black and White

Whilst there was a general acceptance of the presence of black GIs in Britain there were some who found this policy difficult to accept. Maurice Petherick, a Conservative Party MP, and colleague of Anthony Eden, wrote to the Foreign Secretary in 1943 complaining bitterly about the arrival of black troops in his constituency and their impact upon local women. He wanted Eden to use his influence with the Americans to have the decision reversed:

... as in other parts of England women of the lowest order are consorting with the blackamoors. There is very strong feeling about this ... Surely we are in a strong enough position to stand up to the USA ... and tell them we will not have any more black troops here and ask them to send those we have to North Africa, where poor devils they would be much more happy and warm.

(Smith 1986, p. 190).

What was rarely understood by those who felt most threatened by the potential for sexual relationships between black servicemen and white women was that the black troops in fact much preferred dating women of their own race and culture. As one young black soldier wrote in response to criticism of black GIs in the British media for responding to the overtures of young white girls:

Please do not for a minute harbour the hallucination that we have no race pride ... It hasn’t occurred to you that no-one will ever be able to fill the void that the absence of negro girls has created . . . We too are a very reserved race (Smith p. 202).
1.1.4 ‘Brown babies’

By the end of 1942 the first births of mixed-race children were reported. However, these births were far outweighed by births to white GI fathers. Figures for the number of children born to American GIs between 1942 and 1946 were estimated at 22,000 (Gardiner 1992, p. 158).

Concerns expressed about the births often reflected the myths and stereotypes, prevalent at the time, regarding biracial or mixed-race children. Writing long after the war, General Weaver, who had been in charge of a large number of black troops, expressed the view held by many that:

It is a biological and historical fact that racial mongrelization results in the progeny acquiring the bad habits of both sides with very few of the good attributes of either (Weaver 1958, p. 365).

 Mothers of black war babes did not participate in this study although several participants commented about their mothers’ experiences. Hundreds of British women became war brides, travelling to the US after the war to live with their GI husbands. This was not an option for those women who wished to marry their black GI sweethearts. In 1945 interracial marriage was still illegal in about twenty States in America and journalist Ormus Davenport stated in 1947 that not one GI bride returning to the US under the government scheme ‘is the wife of a negro’ (Smith 1987, p. 206).

Those women who gave birth to mixed-race children but were unable or unwilling to maintain them, placed them in the care of their local welfare authority or a religious organisation. Their position was an extremely difficult one. Despite the general feeling of goodwill toward black GIs, very few white parents would support their daughter marrying a black American, even if this had been possible. The situation had not changed twenty years later, when research into white community attitudes regarding interracial marriage found 91 per cent of people disapproved (Hill 1965).
When the war ended there was continued debate about possible solutions to the 'brown baby' problem. The popular American magazine 'Newsweek' (1947) labelled the children 'Brown Tiny Tims' and described their birth as presenting an 'insoluble problem to the British'. One suggested solution seriously considered and promoted heavily by black community leaders in America, was the possibility of the children being shipped to the US and placed for adoption with black families. There was strong opposition to this from conservative quarters in the US. In a debate on the issue in the House one American Senator declared he was:

... unalterably opposed to bringing to this country a lot of illegitimate half-breed Negro children from England ... they are the ... offspring of the scum of the British Isles (Smith 1987, p. 211)

The proposal in fact did not go ahead. Many children were raised by their birth mother or a member of her extended family. Others were placed in institutions, with some eventually being found adoptive homes in Britain. In March 1946, Harold Moody of the League of Colored Peoples expressed his concerns regarding the children’s future.

When what public opinion regards as the taint of illegitimacy is added to the disadvantage of mixed-race, the chances of the child having a fair opportunity for development and service are much reduced (Smith 1987, p. 205).

Almost nothing is known about the long-term outcomes for this group of vulnerable children. Anecdotal evidence indicated that they had fared relatively well, given the disadvantages of their birth. This study seeks to go some way toward filling this gap in our knowledge and understanding of this unique cohort, by enabling eleven mixed-race war babes to tell their stories.
1.2 Links to Contemporary Welfare Issues

Whilst the circumstances of this cohort is in many ways unique there are linkages between the situation of mixed-race war babes and current child welfare issues, in particular, the transracial placement of children into foster care and adoptive families.

1.2.1 Transracial Child Placement

Children of mixed white and African-Caribbean descent make up a significant proportion of those placed in the care of local authorities each year in the United Kingdom (UK). There is considerable debate about the placement needs of these children with many commentators arguing that 'same race' policies restricting their placement into black families should be lifted and the children placed transracially, that is, into white families.

Transracial placement also takes place in the context of intercountry adoption as it is known. This is a relatively recent adoption phenomenon confined largely to western countries. It grew out of the marked decrease in the availability of healthy infants for adoption in most developed countries in the last thirty years of this century. Transracial adoption and/or foster care can be defined as the placement of a child into an alternative family who do not share the child's racial or cultural heritage. Whilst not generally advocated within the child welfare field, transracial adoption occurs both intra-country and inter-country. The former occurs when a child from a minority community is placed with a family outside that community. The latter occurs when a child from an overseas (usually) third world country is placed with a family from a (usually) first world or developed country, who do not share her racial or cultural background.

In Victoria 60 children were placed intercountry in 1997–1998. This figure compares with 27 locally born infant placements.
1.2.2 Rights of Access to Birth Information

The rights of adult adoptees to identifying information regarding their origins on reaching adulthood is now recognised by most western countries. In Victoria adopted persons (and other identified relatives) over the age of 18 years, have absolute right to their birth records, conditional only upon attending an interview with the Department of Human Services or an accredited agency (Adoption Myth and Reality 1996). In 1997 to 1998, 4,324 persons lodged applications for information regarding an adoption attesting to the need for connection to their origins.6

Up until 1990 there were no formal avenues available for war babes seeking their GI fathers. This meant searches could take many years as the United States, Defence Department refused to provide information about GIs who fathered children in Britain, citing privacy laws. In December 1988 'War Babes,' a British based support organisation for children of American GIs, filed a complaint against the US National Archives and Records Administration and the US Defence Department for violations of the Freedom of Information Act. The researcher was one of the complainants. The case was settled in favour of 'War Babes' in 1990.7

1.3 Aims of the Research

The aim of the research is to 'give voice' to this group of men and women who are part of the living history of the Second World War. The focus of the study is the validation

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7 This judgement means that the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St Louis must now follow specified search procedures to look for records on receiving a request for information from a W.W.II, war babe. They must disclose the city, state and date of any addresses contained in the record of the GI being sought. The NPRC will also forward a letter by certified mail to a GI father, on behalf of a war babe, 'return receipt requested', ie. It will only be delivered if the father signs for it.
of their life experience, which has been consistently written out of the historical records of this period, by documenting their stories in their own words.

An underlying assumption regarding this research is that adults born as result of relationships between black GIs and British women would have been faced with a number of challenges throughout their lifecourse. It is hypothesised that these challenges would include:

a) Development of a positive self-identity as a child of mixed, black and white parentage.

b) Management of the stress experienced by individuals who belong to a stigmatised and/or marginalised minority group in the community.

c) Management of the tensions associated with their ex-nuptial status within the family.
2. Research Design and Methodology

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 provides a description of the logic of the approach and its theoretical underpinnings. It includes a description of the research design, together with an overview of the participants in the study and an outline of the data collection and analysis process. Issues associated with the researcher also being a member of the researched cohort are explored, prior to a discussion of ethical considerations and the validity and generalisability of the results.

2.2 Logic of the Approach

This is a qualitative study which aims to bear witness to the lived experience of adult children of black GI fathers and the meaning participants gave to this experience. The research falls within the 'new paradigm' of the post empirical period which differentiates itself from earlier positivistic research traditions by its criticism of the emphasis placed by positivists on the objective nature of the role of the researcher. There are two major streams of thought within this tradition; the interpretive (hermeneutic) and the critical. Neilsen (1990), points out that researchers within the interpretive tradition:

... are concerned with the importance of meaning in social interaction and argue that limiting research to observable human action misses the most important part of the story. To explain and understand any human social behaviour, they argue, we need to know the meaning attached to it by the participants themselves (p. 7).

Critical theory rejects the notion that there can be 'objective' knowledge or a disinterested perspective on a particular issue and places specific value on the presence of shared values and experiences between the researcher and the researched (Schwandt, 1990; Neilson, 1990; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).
Of particular relevance in the context of this study is the ethnological strand of the
constructivist approach which emphasises its concern with

...understanding as nearly as possible some aspect of human
experience as it is lived, felt or undergone by the participants in
that experience (Schwandt 1990, p. 266).

The critical and interpretive approaches are consistent with a study which aims 'to give
voice to', and, 'make visible', those whose story to date has been interpreted by white,
historians, writers and documentary film makers. It is also consistent with the
researcher sharing the same 'location' both socially and historically as members of the
researched cohort. Thus the researcher is placed in a good position to develop
interpretations of the data which are more likely to accurately reflect the respondents’
perceptions of their lived experience and to be critical of the dominant discourse in
relation to race and sexuality.

2.3 The participants

Contact with and access to the participants has been complicated by the fact that they are
resident in England. The researcher travelled to England for two months to complete the
interviews and has maintained intermittent, and necessarily limited contact, through
letters, telephone calls, and where possible, the internet. The inability for easy on-going
access to the participants in the study has added to the complexity of conducting the
research.

In order to locate potential participants an informal telephone approach followed by a
formal request, was made to the coordinators of the two major support groups (both of
whom were known to the researcher) for British war babes wishing to make contact with
their GI fathers (Appendix 5,6, &7). Both agreed to support the research and to contact
those of their members who fitted the criteria for the study, that is, they were adult
children of wartime relationships between black American servicemen and British women.
Table 1: Participant Information

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<td>1 Joe M</td>
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<td>Institution</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jane F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mother/Step-father</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Arthur M</td>
<td>Married, divorced after birth</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Roy M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Mother/step-father</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Rosa F</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Henry M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Mother/Grand-mother</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Stories 7-11 located in Appendix 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>Marital status of mother</th>
<th>Raised by:</th>
<th>Found father at time of interview</th>
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<tr>
<td>7 Christine F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Don M</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Mother/Step-father</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Joy F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Grandparents/maternal aunt</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Cora F</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mother/Step-father</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Graham M</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twelve adult children born of relationships between African American servicemen and British women during the Second World War volunteered to take part in the study (see Table 1). One participant withdrew after he became ill whilst waiting for heart surgery.

Individual interviews were undertaken with 11 war babes, 6 male and 5 female. Seven of these, 5 males and 2 females, were raised by their birth mothers as single and/or divorced parents, or by both their birth mothers and their British husbands. Two females were raised by their maternal grandparents and 1 female and 1 male were placed in institutions (see Table 1). Ten participants had no contact with their black-American fathers as children or young adults and received little or no information about them. One female participant had access to letters from her father in adolescence. None of the
participants received educational input about their African American racial heritage or its implications for themselves or potential marriage partners.

An important characteristic of this cohort is that they are not a 'client' group. That is, they were not selected on the basis of the fact that they were experiencing social, emotional or psychological problems for which they had sought professional help. The participants were volunteers from the membership register of voluntary support organisations in Britain, for people seeking support in searching for their GI fathers. All participants therefore, were actively seeking and/or had found their birth father.

As the estimated number of black war babes in the UK is 1,200 – 1,700 and only eleven participants were interviewed, they cannot be considered to be a representative group. However, this study is not directed primarily at obtaining generalisable results but to provide an opportunity for the stories of this group to be documented and their voices heard both for their intrinsic worth and as a window on the themes of interest.

2.4 Data Collection

Collection of data involved the researcher travelling to the UK for two months to conduct interviews with eleven participants and consult with the coordinators of the two major tracing organisations in Britain.

Because of the limited amount of time available and the fact that the respondents were dispersed all over England, only one interview was held with each participant. Interviews lasted between 2 and 4 hours and with one exception, were held in the participant's own home. The interviewer used a loosely constructed interview schedule as a framework (Appendix 3) and with the consent of the participants the interviews were recorded. Two interviews were disrupted by problems with the recorder. In these instances hand written notes were taken. The audiotapes provided the basis for the interview summaries.

It was agreed at the commencement of each interview that a copy of the interview summary would be fed back to respondents (by mail) for further refinement and
discussion. This was done after confirmation by telephone of their current address. One participant, who had indicated in the interview that she intended to move to the US on a semi-permanent basis to live with her father, was unable to be contacted at her previous address.

2.5 Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

Content analysis was undertaken using a constructivist approach. This approach reflects the hermeneutic interpretation of the social sciences that there is no objective truth or reality. We do not relate to the world as such but through the interpretations of our perception and of our experience in the world. The goal of the researcher throughout the data analysis is not to search for 'the answer' to a problem or issue but to search for meaning. The product of the inquiry therefore is not a technical report '... but a narrative text, or case report (Schwandt 1990, p. 266).

2.5.1 Analysis

The interviews are presented in summary form to the reader, using the common questions as an organising framework. The summary represents a dialogue which occurred between the researcher and the participant. It is therefore an elicited story relayed through an interpretive summary. Consistency was maintained by using common ideas and a loose interview framework. Each tape was transcribed by hand over a period of six months. The interviews were more fluid than the write up would suggest. Initial organisation and reduction of the data occurred throughout the write-up process on the basis of some analysis as the researcher wrote.

Data which was discarded from the transcripts included repetitive or less coherent quotations related to the major themes and anecdotal or procedural information about the participants' search for their birth father. Information which could potentially identify the participant was also discarded.

A thematic analysis occurred throughout the transcription and write up phase. Issues, which began to emerge as common to participants for example racial identity, were
tagged during transcription and later given a specific heading in the summary. This process was further refined as the write up progressed, with additional themes emerging or being amalgamated with previous ones under a revised heading. The summaries presented in this thesis are therefore the product of this reduction and thematic analysis.

2.5.2 The place of the literature review

A search for helpful concepts in the literature was undertaken to assist in a broader understanding of the narratives presented by participants. Prior to undertaking the fieldwork, the researcher had researched the historical literature and searched for literature on this particular population. Such literature was sparse. In keeping with the commitment to 'hear' the stories as told and principles of grounded theory the researcher did not at the outset develop a strong theoretical framework to take to the interviews. She did, however, enter with an explicit developmental/ecological/historical perspective derived from personal experience and professional education and experience. When analysing the narratives she turned to the literature for assistance in interpreting the emerging themes. This led to reading in areas including:

1. Race and Identity – Identity formation in minority children has been a source of debate in most countries that have significant minority populations, for example the US and UK. A more recent focus has been the additional issues for those who are biracial, that is, have one black and one white parent. This literature will be discussed in Chapter 3.

2. Stigma – The concept of stigma was most eloquently described by Goffman (1963). Stigma as it relates specifically to race has been explored by Carroll (1998), Breakwell (1993) and others.

3. Adoption – Many of the concepts prevalent in adoption literature and practice are applicable to the experience of this group. For example, the importance of a child being told ('telling') about their background from an early age and the right to identifying information about biological parents in adulthood, are key concepts in adoption practice.
4. Resilience – The concept of the development of resilience in children whose birth circumstances are less than optimal has grown out of the child protection literature (Haggerty et al. 1996). It is a concept that lends itself to the current study, as there was considerable concern, after the war ended, as to the future well being of children fathered by African American servicemen.

In the following chapters of this thesis this literature is presented. The literature review follows rather than precedes this method chapter since it is in effect a product of, rather than solely a precursor to, the data collection. This literature is then used to organise the presentation of the narratives and was revisited after the narratives to assist in drawing conclusions from them. If then the reader finds a striking thematic consistency between the literature review, the findings and the discussion, it is not because the researcher set out to consciously construct interviews to prove a case already determined. Rather, it is because the literature review, fieldwork findings and discussion, constitute one research product for which the interviews were the foundation stone.

2.6 Role of the Researcher

The researcher is the adult child of a black GI and white British woman. She has extensive social work practice and program experience in adoption, including the placement of Aboriginal and intercountry children in white Australian adoptive families. The researcher's combined personal and professional experience places her in a good position to explore the issues involved in this study with a high level of 'theoretical sensitivity'. Strauss and Corbin (1990) use this term to describe the additional sensitisation to the research material that is provided when the researcher has a professional and/or personal experience in a particular area (p. 43).

The role of the researcher as a member of the researched group needs some consideration. The positivist tradition emphasised the role of the worker as an objective observer. Only in this way, it was argued, could bias be avoided. This argument has been increasingly called into question (Fellerman, 1989).
The new paradigm researchers, including the interpretist and critical researchers, have argued that shared values and experience between the subjects and the researcher actually enriches the research process and should be valued. It legitimises their shared experience and openly acknowledges the interest of the researcher, encouraging the disclosure of subjugated material. O'Neill, (1991, p. 26) in a study on adoption disruption found her role as adoptive parent was more important in terms of her interaction with participants than her role as social worker.

Fine, (1994) mounts a passionate argument, using examples from within her own family, on the tendency for qualitative research to reproduce a 'colonising discourse' of the 'other,' whilst deluding themselves into believing that they have actually given voice to the oppressed. The challenge for the researcher is to relay the story without in the process reconstructing a new reality, one that re-authors both the speaker and the listener. The writer, as a member of the researched 'other,' cannot assume that membership of the group under investigation will, in itself, be sufficient to prevent this from occurring. Strategies used to prevent this include self-reflection and individual and peer group supervision.

2.7  Validity

The validation and verification of qualitative data, in evaluative studies, is explored by Patton (1990) who outlines a number of strategies qualitative researchers can use to increasing the integrity of their data. These include searching for 'rival explanations', for the linkages and patterns that have emerged from the analysis and looking for 'the exceptions that prove the rule' i.e. examples that do not fit patterns emerging from the data (pp. 57-58). The first safeguard was having the participants read and comment on the interview summaries, but as the author was extremely limited in terms of access to the study group after the initial interviews additional 'rival explanations' were sought from other sources.
These included:

1. A family therapy peer support group of which the researcher has been a member for ten years and which includes social workers and psychologists providing family therapy services in a range of private and public settings.

2. Social workers employed by the Victorian Government, Department of Human Services, to provide intercountry adoption services to Australian families wishing to adopt a child from overseas countries.

Both groups were consulted on an on-going basis on the themes and issues arising from the data. Discussion with Group 1 focused on the broader developmental issues regarding the life experience of the participants and with Group 2 on the racial themes and issues raised by the data. It is nevertheless a limitation of the design that neither these groups nor academic supervision included a member of the researched population, thus leaving the researcher as the sole voice for the group in these forums.

2.8 Ethical Issues

The major ethical issue anticipated was the possibility that the research might open up areas of personal distress for the participants. Prior to the interviews the researcher contacted a British organisation with experience in providing counselling and support to black members of the British community who agreed to respond to requests for support from participants in the study (see Appendix 12). The Post Adoption Centre, implements an on-going support group for black and mixed-race young adults who were adopted or fostered into white homes as children and has developed a level of understanding and skill around transracial placement issues.

In addition the researcher is a mature age social worker with nineteen years casework and program development experience. She has clinical status as a family therapist and as a critical incidence stress debriefer. The researcher was confident that personal issues that may arise for participants in the context of the research interviews could be handled appropriately. In fact it was clear that the majority of participants enjoyed the interview.
process and the opportunity to share their experiences with someone whom they clearly identified as 'one of us'. For some participants it was their first opportunity to speak to another black war babe. The possibility of follow up counselling was discussed with only one participant who indicated that he was already receiving counselling.

Prior to leaving the UK and with the consent of respondents, the researcher circulated a mailing list, and encouraged the group to maintain contact with each other. In a follow up contact 12 months after the interviews, the well being of the majority of participants was confirmed. Unfortunately one participant had died suddenly of severe heart problems and another had moved without providing a forwarding address.

2.8.1 Assistance with Searches

Targeting potential participants through the UK based support organisations 'TRACE', and 'War Babes', resulted in a number of those who contacted the researcher also requesting assistance with the search for their GI fathers. These participants were referred directly to appropriate search contacts in the US. It was emphasised that this assistance was not contingent on participating in the study.

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8 Trans-Atlantic Children's Enterprise (TRACE) was established by Pamela Winfield in the 1980s to meet the needs of adults born to American Servicemen and British women during World War 2, to find their fathers. Pamela was a GI bride.
9 ‘War Babes’ was established by Shirley McGlade on the same basis as ‘TRACE’. Shirley is also a war babe. Both organisations operate on a purely voluntary basis.
3. Review of the Literature

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine research and other literature that might illuminate the experience of adults born as the result of sexual relationships between black GIs and British women. As the existing literature on this topic is limited the focus will be on literature from a variety of sources related to the themes and issues identified in Chapter 1 as central to this study. The sequence in which these are discussed is based on logical flow rather than priority.

Themes and issues identified earlier include:

1. Sexual relationships between black men and white women.

2. Race and illegitimacy as stigma.

3. Identity formation in children of black and mixed-race parentage.

4. Stress, resilience and coping.

Available literature specific to the research topic is limited and there are no empirical studies known to the researcher. This review will therefore examine the two major strands of the literature which will inform this study, the empirical – which will examine previous research in related areas, and the historical – what has already been written from a historical perspective.

There are two major autobiographical contributions, McGlade (1992) documented the story of her fourteen year search for her white GI father in ‘Daddy Where Are You?’ Winfield (1992) wrote ‘Bye Bye Baby - The Story of the Children the GIs Left Behind,’ about her experience as co-ordinator of TRACE. The book includes the stories of some of the many people whom she has assisted to find their fathers.
Two major historical texts have been written about the GI presence in Britain. Smith (1987) a British historian focuses specifically on the impact of Black GIs on wartime Britain including a brief story of four mixed-race war babes. Reynolds (1995) wrote a detailed history of the impact of the American presence in Britain during World War 2. These texts have been heavily drawn on, in the absence of a broader literature base.

3.1.1 Sexual relationships between black men and white women.

As soon as the first black Americans arrived in England in May 1942, concern was being expressed about the possibility of sexual relationships developing between black GIs and British women (Smith 1987; Gardiner 1990; Reynolds 1995). Fears about miscegenation, the term used to describe sexual relationships between black and white men and women, have been part of the complex power relationship that has developed between black and white males since the first black slaves arrived in the British West Indies and the southern states of America in the early eighteen hundreds.

Given the prominence that this aspect of race relations receives in general it has been surprisingly difficult for the researcher to find contemporary resources on the subject. One explanation for this suggests itself in a remarkably frank book on sexuality between black and white Americans (Day 1972). Day points out that there is long history of denial by whites, of something she argues blacks have always known: that sexual fear and hatred is at the basis of white support for the racial caste system. Further, that those writers who are brave enough to try to raise this as an issue often find themselves quickly and angrily targeted by the white community (pp. 1-2).

This proposition is supported by Jordan (1974) who examined the historical origins of racism in America. He found that myths and stereotypes regarding the sexuality of blacks were included in some of the earliest accounts of indigenous people brought out of West Africa and quotes from a 1596 publication of Jean Bodin:

... in Ethiopia ... the race of men is very keen and lustful

(Jordan 1974, p. 19)
These beliefs together with a growing anxiety about the perceived sexual aggression of the black male, were reinforced by what Jordan described as an ‘anatomical peculiarity’ of black men:

By the final quarter of the eighteenth century the idea that the negro’s penis was larger than the white man’s had become something of a commonplace in European scientific circles (Jordan p 1974, p. 82).

It was a belief that was to cost black men dearly, as together with the concept of the black male as sexually aggressive, it formed the basis for the introduction of castration as a punishment in the slave owning colonies of America. This decision shocked officials in England who described it as:

... inhumane and contrary to all Christian Laws... a punishment never inflicted by any law in [in any] of H.M. Dominions (Jordan 1974, p. 82).

Castration was reserved for Negroes, and occasionally Indians, who had committed ‘crimes’ such as running away or striking a white man. Later, when it had been removed from the statutes of most colonies, it was maintained in Virginia, specifically, and only, for the crime of rape or attempted rape of a white woman (Jordan 1974, p. 82).

A hundred years later it seems little had changed. The concerns raised about the arrival of black troops in England were unashamedly based on anxiety about sexual relationships occurring between black GIs and British women and the possibility of births of mixed-race children or ‘brown babies’, such a possibility being described by one disgruntled conservative MP as ‘a bad thing for any country’ (Smith 1987, p. 189).

**Racial Intermarriage**

American policy discourages US troops marrying whilst on active duty overseas. In 1942 Eisenhower issued orders that neither officers or men could marry without giving
three months notice and then only with the permission of their commanding officer. Any violation of these orders would result in a court martial (Reynolds 1995, p. 210). With regard to interracial marriages Smith (1987) found that it was not possible to determine the number of marriages that took place during the war years. In 1945 when the American Department of State tried to obtain figures from the appropriate consular authorities 'no reply was forthcoming from Britain' (p. 206).

However, it seems unlikely that many such marriages occurred and Ormus Davenport, an American journalist, commented after the war ended that 'not one' of the war brides leaving England at the time was married to an African American. Even if an interracial marriage had been approved in England, laws prohibiting racial intermarriage were still in place in about twenty states in America in the 1940s making it impossible for white wives to join their black husbands in the US (Smith 1986, 206). The US Supreme Court did not remove the last remaining laws forbidding racial intermarriage until 1967 (Billingsley 1968, p. 65). Only one determined young English woman named Margaret Goosey is recorded as actually travelling to Virginia to marry her black GI sweetheart Thomas Johnson. The story did not end happily ever after. Margaret was jailed and later deported and her husband-to-be was sent to the State Industrial Farm (Smith 1987, p. 206).

Relationships with white women held intrinsic dangers for black GIs. If the women subsequently denied that the relationship was consensual, the GI was vulnerable to a charge of rape. US law prevailed for American servicemen based in Britain and the penalty for rape under US law was death. Between 1942 and 1945, 18 GIs were hanged under US Law in Shepton Mallet prison in Somerset, England. Six were hanged for
rape. All of them were black. As the war progressed concern began to be expressed about the impartiality of American justice, where black troops were concerned.\(^{10}\)

With the introduction of migration from the West Indies the incidence of racial intermarriage increased in England in the years following the Second World War. However, views regarding such marriages remained largely unchanged. In a British survey, Hill (1965); found that ninety-one per cent of people disapproved of interracial marriage.

3.1.2 Race and illegitimacy as stigma

**Race**

Irving Goffman writing in 1963, used the word stigma ‘...to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting’ (p. 13) and argued that:

> By definition of course we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances (p. 15).

Goffman described race as a ‘tribal stigma,’ similar to the stigma attached to nationality and religion. A stigmatised individual possesses a negative trait that intrudes itself upon ‘normals’ making them turn away from her or exclude her from everyday social intercourse, ignoring any positive attributes she may possess (p. 15).

\(^{10}\) On 2nd June, 1944 the British ‘Daily Mirror’ responding to ‘a large number of letters’ pleaded for clemency on behalf of Leroy Henry, a black GI sentenced to death for the rape of a white woman in Bath. The evidence, they claimed, suggested that under British law ‘reasonable doubt’ could have been established in the case. Leroy was later acquitted on the grounds of ‘insufficient evidence’ after the direct intervention of General Eisenhower (Smith 1987, pp. 185-186).
Goffman’s comments were made over thirty years ago. Much work has since been done by racial minority groups to encourage members to see their heritage as a source of pride. Despite the progress made, for example, through the ‘black pride’ and civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, racial discrimination continues to be a feature of everyday life for many racial minority group members (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1966; Brown, 1990; Carroll, 1998).

**Illegitimacy**

Reynolds (1995) discusses figures from the British Registrar General’s *Statistical Review, 1940–1945*, which examined birth records during the war years. Over 64,000 illegitimate births were recorded in England in 1945, rising steadily from about 26,500 in 1939. A closer examination of the figures indicates that the percentage of children conceived outside marriage, in fact declined after 1940. The actual decline was in the number of premarital conceptions legitimised by marriage before the birth of the child. The reason for this, according to the Registrar General, was the rapid conscription and subsequent embarkation overseas, of large numbers of young men:

> ... many children were thus inadvertently transferred from the legitimate to the illegitimate class by the imposition of war obstacles to the timely marriage of their parents (Reynolds 1995, p. 274).

The researcher was unable to locate literature relating specifically to the experience of women who gave birth to mixed-race children during the Second World War and this cohort was not included in the current study. However, some idea of the stigma experienced by those British women who had children to black GIs, can be gauged from the following letter to ‘The Times’ on March 11th, 1946, quoted in Smith (1987):
I am shunned by the whole village ... The inspector from the National Society for the prevention of Cruelty to Children has told my friend to keep her children away from my house ... as didn’t she know that I had two illegitimate coloured children? Is there anywhere I can go where my children will not get pushed around? (p. 210)

Current British literature indicates that there are still issues for lone white mothers of mixed-race children as well as for white mothers in interracial marriages in Britain (Alibhai-Brown & Montague 1992; Banks 1995) The latter author, examining the placement needs of children of black mixed parentage in care, argues that the parenting experience of white mothers of black children is quite different to that of white mothers of white children:

It can be, for many, a deeply threatening and socially isolating experience for which they have no developed defences (p. 19).

His comments are borne out by this poignant comment from a British woman with an Afro-Caribbean partner:

It is terrible to say this, because I’m talking about my own children but because I am white, if I’m on my own, I can walk anywhere, I feel free, nobody bothers. But when I have my children with me, I am a prisoner to how people feel about me and the children. I can feel their looks and prejudices even when the children can’t (Alibhai-Brown and Montague 1992, p. 222).

The Registrar General’s Statistical Review 1940–1945, showed that petitions for divorce also rose from 8,357 in 1941 to 25,789 in 1945. Sixty percent of petitions were filed by husbands and two thirds cited adultery as the reason for the application. This compares with 40 percent citing adultery in 1949-1954 (Reynolds 1995, pp. 273-275).
In a study which examined the experience of interracial couples, some mothers expressed a desire for their children to become high achievers as a form of protection against prejudice:

I’m determined that they should have a good education and I want them to be better than other children because I think the better they are the more they’ll be accepted...And I’m obsessed about them being well dressed...about looking nice...I want to beat them, I want to beat their prejudices by making my children the best (Alibhai-Brown and Montague 1992, p. 219).

The concept of stigma is closely linked to that of identity. Breakwell (1986) uses the term ‘threatened identity’ to describe the concept of stigma and emphasises the importance of historical perspective and social context when examining ways that individuals cope with stigmatising behaviours such as racism.

### 3.1.3 Identity Formation

One of the assumptions of this study is that because of their relative isolation in the community and the secrecy concerning their birth, participants would experience a level of conflict or confusion regarding their racial identity. This assumption is based on:

- **a)** Accepted theories of identity formation in children.
- **b)** Current literature regarding identity formation in black and mixed-race children.
- **c)** The personal experience of the researcher.

Erikson (1963) described the establishment of identity as a major developmental task for all adolescents and defined identity as an interactional process:

... taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be
the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them ... (p. 22-23).

Breakwell (1986) described the development of self-identity as a complex social and psychological process involving an on-going, dynamic interaction between the individual and her environment. It therefore cannot be understood outside its social, cultural and historical context (p. 9).

Erikson’s notion of identity as an interactional process echoes the work of Goffman (1963) who highlighted the extent to which our perception about our social identity is dependent on how we perceive that others see us. Identity then, is a broad construct based, to some extent, on the assumption that there is a congruence between the individual’s inner sense of self identity and the perception of significant others.

Dixon & Sands (1983) examined the link between threats to identity, for example job loss, and the onset of personal crisis:

A sense of identity provides a person with wholeness, continuity and purpose. When an event is seen as a threat to identity, a person is vulnerable to the experience of crisis (p. 223).

Identity formation then involves a complex, on-going, transactional process between the individual and her social environment. An examination of the literature regarding the additional challenges in relation to identity formation in children who are members of racial minority groups follows.

In discussing the issue of racial identification, Erikson (1963) speculates that minority and oppressed individuals may be prone to develop a negative identification as a result of accepting negative self images projected on to them by the larger society.
Three Theoretical Perspectives

Identity formation is a complex on-going process which presents additional complexities for black children and children of mixed-race. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) synthesised the literature related to the process of identity formation in minority youth in America.

Three major theoretical perspectives were identified:

1. the developmental perspective;
2. the lifespan perspective; and
3. the ecological perspective.

Each provides a framework for examining the unique experiences of minority group members regarding the development of racial or ethnic identity. Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) suggest that the complexities involved in identity formation may increase as a factor of:

a) an individual's colour;

b) physical features;

c) language differences;

d) distinctive behaviour and

e) long standing social stereotypes. (p. 290)

1 Developmental Perspective

Erikson (1963) describes a series of five psychosocial stages, each needing to be successfully negotiated, if the child is to develop a positive, integrated sense of self. They include the development of personal identity, the establishment of a sense of
independence or autonomy, the ability to relate to peers of the same and the opposite sex and the ability to make a commitment to a chosen career. The developmental consequences of racism are that the potential for the minority child of achieving successful outcomes in each of these developmental stages may be compromised by prejudice, discrimination or other forms of oppression (Spencer, Markstrom-Adams 1990).

Breakwell (1986) identified a variety of threats to a person’s sense of identity including ethnic marginality or membership of a cohort that is not easily categorised as belonging to a specific racial or ethnic grouping. This concept is particularly relevant to the present study, as several participants (including the author) although seen as ‘different’ were not immediately recognisable as of black or mixed-race. This often led to queries (threats) regarding one’s origins from curious strangers, the most common was being asked, ‘Where do you come from?’

Breakwell (1986) also describes some of the adaptations individuals use to cope with the anxiety generated by the experience of threat. For example, where an individual is of mixed-race or not identifiably black, they may elect to ‘pass’ as white. 12 An interesting example of this is found in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, when the ‘Club scene’ became popular in major American cities. Owners of the more exclusive venues employed ‘spotters’, to identify black persons trying to enter the premises by passing as white. Ironically the spotters themselves were black, employed because they were more likely to be able to detect the strategies used for ‘passing’ by those of their own race. 13

12 With regard to countries where segregation policies applied in the past, for example South Africa and North America, the term ‘passing’ was used to describe a situation where an individual attempted to gain access to white social groups by masking or hiding the fact that they were black.

13 When the author migrated to Australia in 1974 she had her hair straightened a few days beforehand in her anxiety to ensure she ‘passed’ as white on entering the country.
2 Lifespan Perspective

Spencer and Markstom-Adams (1990) describe the lifespan perspective as providing an evaluative framework for examining the ‘effect of historical, socio-cultural, psychological and biological factors’ on outcomes for minority youth. Elder (1979) developed the term ‘family life course’ to describe a similar process-oriented perspective on the family which emphasises the importance of viewing the family and the individuals within it, in their social and historical context.

He points out that there is a:

... need for greater sensitivity to transactions between historical change and the family unit ... (p. 279).

This concept is particularly relevant to both black war babes. The single most influential factor on the early childhood years of war babes was the historical circumstances surrounding their birth. They would not have been born if Japan had not bombed Pearl Harbor, bringing America into the war and if America had not committed itself to send 130,000 black servicemen to England as part of its policy of equal opportunity for African Americans in the military. These historical factors created a unique ‘transaction between historical change and the family unit’ which led to the birth of an estimated 1,000 mixed-race children whose families would be forever changed by this event.

3 Ecological perspective

An ecological perspective provides the third framework within which to explore the impact of the major systems within which individuals live their lives. The birth of an illegitimate, mixed-race child in Britain in the 1940s precipitated a crisis for both the women concerned and their families. An ecological perspective assists in understanding both the adaptive mechanisms that the families utilised at the time of the birth but also the on-going adaptive strategies used by the participants throughout their lives in order
to maintain a state of equilibrium or balance between themselves and the predominantly white world in which they lived.

Spencer and Markstrom-Adams (1990) identify two major system levels or ecologies which impact on minority children and their families:

1. The macro-system level – including the broader community from which most of the attitudes, ideologies and beliefs held in the community about race and difference emanate. These include stereotypes about blacks and other racial minorities which then permeate the other levels of the ecosystem within which the child and her family must operate.

2. Micro-system level – includes, for example, the peer group, family and school. These have an important role to play in developing the unique socialisation strategies required to enable minority children to develop a positive self identity. These are particularly important within environments that promote anxiety and conflict through the perpetuation of stereotyped attitudes and values regarding black individuals and their families (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990 p. 293).

The complexities surrounding identity formation are increased when an individual is biracial or of mixed-race, that is, has one black and one white parent.

*Identity and children of mixed-race.*

The extensive literature regarding issues for biracial persons emanates predominantly from North America, which has a large biracial population (Gibbs 1987; Brown, P. 1990; Bowles, 1993; Brown, U. 1995). There is also a growing body of literature on this topic emerging from England, as black migrant families from British Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean, India and Africa intermarry with the predominantly white British population (Wilson, 1984; Tizard and Phoenix, 1993; Richards, 1995).
Whilst there is a range of opinion about the life experience of persons of mixed-race parentage, one thing that researchers agree upon is that it can pose problems in terms of self-identity. A comparative analysis of the American and British literature suggests that the dilemma for biracial individuals in the American context is exacerbated by the historical legacy of slavery and racial segregation.

Brown, P. (1990), an author who is himself of mixed-race, is eloquent in describing the dual social and psychological consciousness which makes up the daily living experience of Americans of mixed black and white ancestry:

This ‘dual reality’ constitutes the essence of the social and psychological dilemma confronting biracial persons. Moreover this social paradox creates a lifelong social purgatory in which biracial persons are forced to reside (p. 320).

The American tradition is that people of mixed-race, historically and by law, have been classified as black. The consequences for biracial individuals are, according to Brown, P. (1995) far reaching, as the denial of one half of the self (the white half) creates internal conflict and undermines the development of a healthy self identity:

With whiteness idealized and blackness frequently associated with negative stereotypes, discrimination and oppression, the negation of the white part of their identity becomes even more difficult for them (p. 125).

The challenge therefore, for the American of mixed-race is to gradually incorporate into an existing black identity, aspects of their white heritage. The vulnerability of this group in adolescence, when identity issues come to the fore, is highlighted in a survey of fifty American social welfare agencies undertaken by Gibbs (1987) who found that sixty percent of the agencies reported that youths of mixed-race were over-represented among their adolescent client group (p. 266).
The British experience differs from the American in that whilst there has been significant conflict between the black and white population more recently, it has not been exacerbated by a long history of institutionalised racism within the British Isles.\textsuperscript{14} Mixed-race individuals born in Britain in the 1940s, prior to the onset of immigration from black Commonwealth countries, are therefore more likely than their American counterparts to have been raised in a predominantly white environment, with limited contact with a black community. An outcome of this experience is that they may be less likely to have a conscious knowledge of being different to others and will see the white external world as a reflection of themselves.

The issues raised by Britons of mixed-race are therefore different and pose what some would see as greater challenges. The individual needs to incorporate into an identity which is oriented primarily toward their white (and possibly preferred) racial heritage, a black identity, which as Brown, U. (1995) pointed out was 'frequently associated with negative stereotypes, discrimination and oppression' (p. 125).

Richards (1995), an African Caribbean author, raised some of these issues in a small British study involving interviews with six men and six women who identified as biracial. The ethnic origin of the respondents was predominantly Anglo-African/Caribbean. Although several respondents lived with one or more mixed-race parents the majority lived with one or two white parents and all were raised in a predominantly white area. The demographics were therefore similar to the war babes in the current study.

Richards found that most of his respondents had 'little or no knowledge of their Black cultural heritage':

\textsuperscript{14} The author acknowledges that the practice of British colonisation was inherently racist and one of the major reasons why many predominantly black Commonwealth countries are unable to offer their people sustainable economic security.
Where individuals categorized themselves as Black, the label carried a sense of emptiness, with individuals unable to convey a lifestyle attached to the concept of being Black (p. 67).

He found that the process of integrating his black heritage was constrained for one participant by the fact he had been raised in a predominantly white environment and had little contact with black people:

I am probably a bit scared about being around Black people. The times that I have been around Black people I have not liked it. I have not been able to relate to them (p. 67).

Richards described the integration of a black identity into what had been a predominantly white sense of self as a non-linear process which occurred throughout the life course of the individual:

... they exhibit multiple identities which emphasise different aspects of their racial duality at different times in their lives (p. 71).

Richards found that his participants’ first experience of being different often occurred when they attended school for the first time and were called names. For the first time they felt vulnerable, as up until then they had not seen themselves as different from other white children. It was also a time when they found themselves wishing they were white. By early adolescence they had developed defences to protect themselves from racism, but although they had begun to identify with the black aspect of themselves, it was an identity which Richards argued lacked substance:

Most individuals saw their cultural perspective as white and had only a vague understanding of, and perception of Black culture (p. 67).
Later, as they moved into the competitive social and economic environment of early adulthood they came into personal contact with racism and discrimination and their identification with their black heritage took on a more politicised aspect. It was during this stage that participants were more likely to identify themselves as ‘black’ (Richards p. 69). Richards argued that by integrating both aspects of their racial heritage into a new unity or oneness’, mixed-race individuals are no longer required to deny one aspect of themselves and can therefore develop a specific ‘mixed-race’ identity.

The notion of conceptualising ‘mixed-race’ as an authentic identity on a par with ‘black’ and ‘white’ is gaining credence in both the British and American literature (Wilson, 1987). As the trend toward racial intermarriage increases, more biracial offspring are querying the legitimacy of having to choose to identify with the racial heritage of only one of their parents.

Whilst this seems like a laudable objective, for mixed-race war babes it was this aspect of identity formation which posed the greatest challenge. Having been raised by white mothers in the predominantly white British environment of the 1940s and 1950s they inevitably identified strongly with their white cultural heritage. In order to integrate the black aspects of themselves they needed to relate positively to the little they knew about their fathers and African American culture. This was a difficult task when the input they had received throughout their lives was largely negative. The issues faced by biracial persons (as opposed to black [monoracial] persons) regarding identity formation are therefore complex and likely to require higher level adaptive skills on the part of the individuals concerned to manage the often daily threats to identity posed by stigma and racism in the community.

3.1.4 Stress, resilience and coping

There was considerable pessimism when the war ended regarding long term outcomes for mixed-race war babes. How would they and their mothers’ cope with the daunting obstacles facing them? Researchers interested in human functioning have been re-orienting their focus away from pathology toward an examination of the factors
underlying competency and healthy development (Nettles and Pleck 1995). The latter have been referred to as resilience factors. Resilience is a concept that is gaining increased recognition as of fundamental importance to child placement practice. Gilligan (1997) provides the following definition:

Resilience refers to qualities which cushion a vulnerable child from the worst effects of adversity in whatever form it takes and which may help a child or young person to cope, survive and even thrive in the face of great hurt and disadvantage.

These cushioning factors have also been described by Rutter (1987) as ‘protective factors’ and he identified them as central to an understanding of the differential impact of stress, on children and adults, as they mediate the negative impact of risk factors (p. 157). Gilligan (1997) examines the implications of resilience literature for children who come into the care of the State usually after experiencing some form of trauma. He proposes ‘three building blocks of resilience’, which he labels as ‘core influences’ in the ability of children in care to maintain healthy developmental outcomes – a sense of a secure base, a sense of self esteem and a sense of self efficacy (p. 15).

In an essay which examined the application of protective factors and resilience on black adolescents, Nettles and Pleck (1995) argued that the majority of research in this area has found that blacks have similar levels of self-esteem to whites across all age levels (p. 163) and highlighted the importance of recognising the diversity within the population of black youth. Garmezy (1987) warned researchers to beware of the potential for politicisation of the concept of resilience. He pointed out that the evidence that many children and adults with traumatic backgrounds can establish successful lives:

... can be used by political advocates of an ideological viewpoint that holds the resilience of some to be proof of its possession by all: That anyone can emulate such achievements if only they try harder (p. 171).
The concept of resilience provides a useful framework within which to examine long-term outcomes for the participants in this study.

3.2 Conclusion

These bodies of literature have provided a conceptual framework for organising the interview data. This framework will be revised in the final chapter, though the case summaries, which follow, will contain echoes of these themes:

a) How did the mothers and families of these young people deal with the effects of this major social upheaval?

b) What were the social and cultural conditions in which their offspring grew up? How stigmatising was race in this context?

c) How did the developing war babes find a sense of identity and at what cost?
4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the participants 'speak' of their life experience. In keeping with the chosen methodology, this experience is analysed by the researcher only to the extent of organising the interviews and reducing the data in the light of the key emerging themes. Further analysis is held over to the final discussion chapter. The stories stand as eleven unique perspectives on a shared phenomenon. It was partly for this reason that the decision was taken to present each story as a whole rather than to disaggregate the stories and compare participants theme by theme.

The researcher has included in this chapter the six stories that raise most obviously the themes and issues that emerged as a result of the thematic analysis. The five remaining stories are located in Appendix 2, p. 131. This is not meant to imply that these stories are less important. Constraints related to the size of the thesis required that this be done. Table 2, p. 88, provides a summary of the life experience of each of the eleven participants.

All names used for participants are pseudonyms which they were invited to choose themselves. Family and friends are identified by the initial of their first name only. Defined quotes from the participants are identified as such. The researcher was asked questions by participants about her own experience throughout the interviews. These were answered frankly and fully. At the end of any input by the researcher, she emphasised that each mixed-race war babe would have a unique personal perspective on their experience. In the next chapters, this interplay of researcher and researched will be illustrated.
4.2 Case studies

4.2.1 Participant 1

Joseph (Joe)

Family Background

Joe’s mother was single and living with her parents when he was born. His GI father was still in England and was aware of the birth. His maternal grandparents went to the US Army base where he was stationed and identified him to the Base Commander. He indicated that he would like to keep the child. It was made clear that if he attempted to maintain the relationship with Joe’s mother he would be charged with rape. Joe’s parents saw each other secretly once, before he was posted back to the US.

His maternal grandparents arranged an institutional placement for Joe through their church. His mother was not informed where he had been placed and they did not meet again until he was 30 years old. She told him then that it was the fact that he was of mixed-race that persuaded her parents that he could not be raised within the family.

Institutional Care

Joe was raised until the age of 15 years within the British boys’ home system of the 1940s and 1950s. He described institutional life as brutal and he experienced institutionalised abuse including physical and sexual abuse from an early age. Up to 33 boys aged from 4 years to 15 years of age were housed in what he described as ‘a cold stern place.’ In order to survive the boys took care of each other, the older ones looking out for the younger. Rules were strict and maintained by fear and physical violence. The consequences for real or perceived misbehaviour were swift:

The ‘Master’ would hit you with whatever he had in his hand.
Joe felt the impact of his institutional background early on, when he was, "kicked out", at the age of 15 years for refusing to leave grammar school to take a job in a factory. He was totally unprepared for independent living and there was no after-care available.

I had no idea about money – I had no idea about anything.

He soon discovered that his male dominated, emotionally and socially deprived, institutional upbringing had also ill-equipped him for negotiating relationships in the real world. By the time he was 17 years old he had started stealing cars and spent three months in prison on remand. He commented with a rueful grin that ‘It was easy after the home.’ Then he had the good luck to meet a girl he liked and decided that he wanted more out of life.

Joe organised annual reunions for other men who had been raised in the home. Like him many had found it hard to survive in a world of which they had little or no experience.

When we have our reunions some fall off for a couple of years, or five years and we don’t see them again and then they resurface again – they’ve been in prison.

Education

Joe was the only boy in the institution to pass his 11–plus examination and gain entry to grammar school. Matron who made much of his success and he remembered being held up to the community ‘as a prize on show’ and as an example of the success of the Boy’s Home system. He enjoyed school but found there was an expectation that he would leave school at 15 years and accept a job in a factory. He refused, as he knew that it was important that he finish his education.
This was an important issue for Joe who saw his above average intelligence as a counterbalance to his racial background and institutional upbringing, something that could become his greatest asset in reversing some of the damaging effects of his upbringing. He attended night school over the next twenty years eventually obtaining university entrance.

I wanted to prove to myself, I wanted to prove to the Home that I didn’t need them.

Joe went on to become a high achiever in adulthood using the anger he held against the establishment and his above average literacy and language skills to become prominent in the trade union movement. He became a champion of the oppressed.

I’ve always been a rebel. I identified strongly with the homeless and the disenfranchised. ... I was not afraid to close a factory.

Later he moved into local government, achieving above average success and gaining respect from the community for his ability.

Racial Issues

It was clear that the focus of Joe’s energy in childhood and adolescence was survival and whilst he was aware of his racial difference and had experienced racial prejudice, it was not an issue for him. He pointed out that although there were several mixed-race children at the boy’s home, it was not an issue there either:

All the kids were equally badly treated.

\[15\]

‘11-plus’ refers to the examination sat by all 11 year old students in the British education system at that time. The aim was to stream ‘brighter’ students, with the potential to go on to tertiary education, into the grammar school system at an early age.
The colour issue was never mentioned. Being brought up in a predominantly white society, they take your colour off you, they take your colour out of you. You see things through white eyes.

Joe didn’t think he identified as black. He was proud of being English and didn’t want to be put on a pedestal as a high achieving black person. He had read a lot about African-American issues, particularly the civil rights issues of the 1960s and Ghandi was one of his heroes. However, the minimal opportunities for contact with others of a similar background made social contact with other blacks, when it occurred, an uncomfortable experience for him. Joe met a ‘coloured girl’ for the first time when he was 18 years of age and described it as ‘quite a shock’.

I found it difficult going out with this coloured girl, she was sort of the first coloured person I’d seen and yet I’d been brought up with mixed-race children.

Joe had experienced racism on a number of occasions including in employment:

Yes, I’ve had problems. I used to design computer programs for [company] and I know that I’ve been better qualified to do certain jobs than other people. It has been on the grounds of race I’m sure, but its proving it ... [if you complain] people turn around and say you’ve got a chip on your shoulder. So you’ve got to be defensive about the whole situation.

In the overall scheme if things Joe did not believe that race had been a big issue in his life and felt that it should be put in perspective:

Race can be a distraction ... I don’t look at the negative, I look at the positive angle ... I will not join a black organisation [simply] because I’m black. You either accept me for what I am or if you can’t accept me for what I am – tough luck!
Joe saw his educational achievements as a child setting him apart from other children, just as in adulthood he was set apart by his colour. He described this sense of marginality that is, being part of but not part of the group, as a recurring theme throughout his life. Together with his deprived background this had led to relatively high levels of cumulative stress.

**Stress**

Joe experienced a 'psychological breakdown' after his first marriage ended and identified himself as vulnerable when under stress. At the time of the interview he was receiving counselling after another life crisis precipitated by the breakdown of a second long-term relationship. In view of this the discussion around this aspect of his life was limited by the researcher. It appeared that the cumulative effects of early deprivation, confusion and anxiety related to his marginalised status and the physical and emotional toll associated with the need to push himself to the limit to 'prove' himself, had contributed to his vulnerability to stress related illness.

**Marriage and Family**

Joe acknowledged the impact his background had on his ability to establish and maintain relationships.

I had no role model as a child for a long-term relationship.

He had worked hard to make up for what he felt he lacked in this area by, reading, talking to others and constantly striving to improve his relationship skills through maintaining an openness to feedback about himself and to new ideas.

Joe had a short-term relationship at the age of 22 years, which had lasted six months. He had a child from this relationship but he did not see her after the relationship ended, until she contacted him when she was 23 years old. Later he married and had two other children. This relationship ended in divorce about ten years ago. When his eldest daughter contacted him as an adult requesting information about his background, Joe
initiated his first search for information about himself. He contacted the organisation that had placed him and discovered that his father had been a black GI.

‘Telling’

Joe received very little information about his background as he grew up. He recognised that he was black and therefore different to most of the other children in the boys’ home but did not know what that meant in terms of his racial identity. On first contact as an adult with the organisation responsible for his welfare as a child, he obtained identifying information regarding his mother but felt he ‘wasn’t emotionally ready’ to contact her.

Some years later Joe visited his mother with the support of one of her sisters. It was an, ‘emotionally charged’ meeting but he was disappointed at his apparent lack of feelings toward her:

There was no bond. It could have been the next door neighbour.

They did not meet for another twenty years. Joe has worked hard to establish a relationship with his birth family, he has eight other siblings, and is now ‘quite close’ to his mother. When he decided to trace his GI father, his mother was very supportive. He discovered then that she still loved his father:

What’s strongly coming through is that she is still in love with my father and when she eventually married she told her husband that her first love was my father. She desperately wants to see him.

Joe was angry with the Children’s Society, the organisation that had placed him, regarding the condition of his childhood records. There were ‘chunks’ of information missing, including letters. There was a letter from Chicago written by his father’s sister saying she would like to adopt him but no indication of how she knew where he was. There were also a number of inaccuracies in terms of recorded information.
At the time of the interview Joe was still searching for his biological father and had made some headway. He had sent a letter to the man whom he believed was his father and was hoping for a reply.

In a follow up telephone contact 18 months after the interview, the researcher was informed by his son that Joe had died a few months earlier after undergoing emergency heart surgery. He had received no response from the letter to his father. Six months later Joe’s son received a call from the United States. It was an American woman calling to say that her father had died the previous night. She had been going through his personal effects and found the letter from Joe. The caller was Joe’s sister.

4.2.2 Participant 2

Jane

Family Background

Jane’s mother was married with a 2-year-old daughter when she met Jane’s GI father. Her British husband was serving overseas. They separated for a short period when he became aware of the birth but were reunited. Jane’s step-father adopted her when she was 7 years old and they have always had a close relationship. Jane located her birth father in 1991 and is planning to move to America to live with him on a semi-permanent basis, in the next few months. Jane is married and has 3 children. Her mother died in 1994.

Jane described herself as ‘very close’ to her mother and adoptive father and as having enjoyed the total acceptance and support of the latter. When she met her GI father she learned her adoptive father had written to him soon after the war saying that he accepted full responsibility for maintaining her. When her birth father received the letter he decided he would ‘bow out’ of her life.

Jane described her mother as ‘very protective’ of her.
She was just a worrier over me-she really was. I never ever thought she’d let me get married. I think she thought I would be with her forever. We’ve always been so close.

This closeness seems to have been related to a form of early childhood attachment anxiety:

I followed mum every where, right up until I was twelve. If she went to the bathroom I’d go upstairs and sit on the top of the stairs until she came out, just to make sure she did come out. I followed her all over the place. I used to hold the back of her dress. She used to say ‘Jane, you’re pulling my dress off!’ I just had to make sure she wasn’t going anywhere.

Her maternal grandparents had been divided in terms of their acceptance of her. Her grandfather, who died soon after she was born, did not approve of her mother’s decision to keep her but her grand mother had always been ‘great’. Jane had been a favourite with both her mother and maternal grandmother, but did not have a good relationship with her older sister.

Racial Issues

Jane had experienced considerable difficulty as a child and young adult in accepting her ‘difference’ from others and identifying positively with her African American racial heritage. ‘The one that always bothered me was my colour’. Jane was so concerned about the darkness of her skin that she wore the lightest make-up she could find and tried to protect her skin from becoming darker.

I always wore clothes with the sleeves down here and the neck up here [gesturing to her wrist and neck] so that I wouldn’t get brown.
Her anxiety about skin colour extended to her children:

I wouldn’t let the kids play in the sun.

This ambivalence about her colour and her relationship to the black community was shared by her mother. Jane thought that her mother, although she had a relationship with a black GI, still held prejudiced views about black people:

In the late 40’s my grandmother married a black man, which mum didn’t like. I think she was a little bit colour prejudice, me mum. It seems funny.

I think over the years ... she put it to the back of her mind, that I’m brown, or, that mum had anything to do with a black guy.

Matters came to a head regarding Jane’s non-acceptance of her colour, when a friend confronted her one day about the fact that despite the hot weather she was wearing a warm jumper to cover her arms. For perhaps the first time she was able to talk with someone else about her anxiety regarding her skin colour and felt that this was a turning point in being able to feel more comfortable with her appearance.

Jane thought her general sense of unease about her racial background persisted until she was about 24 years old when she found she could acknowledge to others, without discomfort, that her father was black.

Actually meeting her father, however, reactivated much of her early ambivalence about her racial identity.

Search for GI father

Jane first thought about finding her father on her wedding day, when she found herself wishing that he could be there. In her late twenties, she spoke to her mother and
adoptive father, for the first time, about her need to search for her GI father and they were both supportive. Jane wasn’t sure what had prompted her desire to search:

The first time I tried to find my dad it was just something in me, something in me I thought I had to do. I wanted to see who it was I got certain traits off ...

Mother had difficulty in recalling identifying information about her father other than his name and that he came from Mississippi. Her adoptive father contacted the US government but without success. Years later Jane saw an article about the British self-help organisation ‘War Babes’ who provided support and advice throughout her search until she found her birth father in 1991.

Finding her father was a major event in Jane’s life and she spent much of the interview talking about the impact this had on her. Her father had visited England six times and Jane had travelled to the US three times in order to spend time together. In addition, he normally telephoned her at least twice a week. Their relationship had become so close that she and her husband planned to move to the US to live on a semi-permanent basis.

However, their relationship had not started off well, and the first two years were punctuated by conflict and misunderstanding. The issues Jane described as problematic focused to some extent on the realities of the situation and were issues reported by others in similar circumstances. Some were specific to race and culture and the unique situation which arises when war babes and their black GI fathers are reunited.

The reality for most war babes meeting their fathers for the first time is that they are a fifty-year-old son or daughter meeting a seventy to eighty-year-old father. Whilst they have often been searching for many years and have had a lot of time to work through their feelings about the meeting their father may have had only a few months to adapt to the idea. The meeting often takes place in a less than ideal setting – a crowded airport lounge, for example. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that expectations, on both sides, are unlikely to be met.
Jane spoke to her father over the phone on several occasions before making plans to go to the US to meet him. Even at this early stage she began to have doubts about her ability to relate to him. Her perception was that he was ‘very chauvinistic’ and she had always enjoyed a relaxed and equal relationship with her husband.

After a few months I knew I really didn’t like him. He was the type of man I’d always despised. Not only that, he was always saying hurtful things and making me cry and I thought, ‘I don’t like this man.’

Although Jane had tried to prepare herself, she was shocked by her father’s appearance when she first met him and thought:

Who are you? You’re not my dad; you’re too black! I’d always been told he was brown. I thought you can’t possibly be my dad!

A major issue early in their relationship had been her father’s insistence on telling her what she should do, including what she should wear. Eventually she felt the need to say something to him about this:

I said, ‘Look I don’t stand my husband telling me what to do and I’m damn well not going to stand you ... I’ve survived for 45 years without your help. I can do the rest of my life without your help.

Gradually things improved as her father came to terms with the fact she was not a child, she was fifty years old and that her expectations of equality with both her husband and himself were appropriate. Like some other GI fathers he seemed to be trying to make up for the years of lost parenting and caring, by behaving in an over-protective way toward her, which she still finds difficult to accept:
... he smothers me, he breaths for me if he could, you know.
He's a little bit ... 'put you coat on, put your scarf on, put this on, put that on'. [It's] Sometimes overpowering, you know? ... I've only got to say 'I've got a cold' and he'll be on the phone every day! ‘Would you like me to come over and look after you like,’ - and I've only got a cold! It's nice in a way, I wasn't spoilt as a child, but sometimes it's hard to take.

It had not been an easy experience and there were times when she thought of giving up altogether and accepting that she could never like this man, even if he was her father. After this difficult start, their relationship is now very close.

**Education**

Jane had really enjoyed school and said she did not experience prejudice from either children or staff. She left school at 15 years to assist the family economically. Jane thought that she and her father were similar in terms of their academic prowess. Dad's family included doctors, lawyers and other professionals but he had not completed his schooling and neither had she. ‘Me and dad are a one-off, everybody else is clever and we're not.’

**Stress**

Jane commented that she had a long history (fifteen years) of depressive illness and was now in receipt of an invalid pension. She was unsure of the etiology of her illness and did not make a link between this and her life experience. This was not explored further in the context of the interview.

**Marriage and Family**

Jane had known her husband P*** since they were children. His mother had raised the issue of children and asked him, 'Have you thought about what colour your children will be?' P*** had never given it a thought but Jane decided to visit the local doctor.
Like Christine's general practitioner her doctor admitted he did not know a lot about the genetic implications of her background, but emphasised the importance of telling her children 'there is black in the family, in case a black child is born later.'

There are three adult children of the marriage two boys aged 30 and 32 years and a girl of 28 years. All three are married although both boys are now divorced. The children are recognisably different in terms of skin colour and one of the boys had experienced some difficulty in accepting his background. He had met his maternal grandfather when he visited England and had eventually invited him to his wedding. Jane thought that this relationship had enabled him to come to terms more with his own background.

Her husband has been totally supportive of her relationship with her father even though he'd found the early conflictual period difficult to cope with. He will accompany her to America to be near her father.

4.2.3 Participant 3

Arthur

Background

Arthur's mother was married with three children the youngest of whom was 7 years old, when she met Arthur’s GI father. Her husband was serving overseas. The relationship lasted for 2 years. The period that his father was in England. Arthur’s mother and her husband separated on his return to England and later divorced. His mother raised Arthur and the other three children alone.

Family Relationships

Arthur described his childhood very positively 'I had a good life.' His mother was a good woman who had been very strict but very fair, and had, 'brought us up good.' She had worked all her life in a shoe factory and had given her children good values. Arthur
saw himself as being ‘very lucky’ compared to some of the other black war babes whom he had met.

I had a good life. My family were pretty good. My brothers and my mother’s brothers and sisters took to me. I never had a problem with any of these.

Arthur still has a close relationship with his eldest brother and they are ‘very good mates.’ His relationship to his mother was particularly close:

She was very protective of me, very. If I had a problem at school she was first up there and she stood her ground ... She was very, very, protective of me.

Arthur’s wife had pointed out to him that family photographs of him as a child showed him as always beautifully dressed, far better than his siblings and even his mother. He described his sense of being ‘special’ to his mother and acknowledged that relative to his siblings he had been ‘spoilt.’

When you really look at the photographs, I never had hand-me-downs or second-hands...

When I sit back and analyse these things I realise that she really did spend a lot of time and money on me.

His mother’s childhood protectiveness was carried on into adulthood where at times it could become a problem. He had once complained to her about a fellow worker who had told the boss he was late for work. A few days later he found that his mother had met the worker concerned and ‘had words’ with her.

That was my mum (laughing). No one could have a go at her boy!
Arthur commented that he had missed not having a father as a child. He felt the loss most at school functions, such as sports days, when other boys’ fathers were in attendance.

You feel a lot then ... you miss that. When you get older, I think you realise just how much you miss that.

This sense of loss became more noticeable as the possibility of finding his father alive increased.

‘Telling’

Arthur’s mother had never formally told him about his father but he grew to understand that he was a black GI who had died in the war. ‘It was just something I sort of grew up with…’

As a child he was aware that there were three other boys in the neighbourhood with similar backgrounds to himself. The boys had become close friends although, as if by tacit agreement, they had not discussed their backgrounds. These friendships had lasted into adulthood.

Arthur, unlike most war babes, had some childhood memorabilia of his father. He had found a small pair of bootees at home and was told that his father had sent them to him. He also had a letter his father had written to his mother. The importance of items like this to children who had no tangible evidence that their fathers ever existed was amply demonstrated in the interview as this middle-aged, very successful business man, spoke about the meaning of this pair of bootees to him:

He wouldn’t have sent these bootees over if he hadn’t have got some thought or um ... This is how I’m looking at it, anyway. He must have thought something, to have at least sent me these little bootees.
Arthur's mother told him that his father had died. His father had written and sent money in the first few years after the war and Arthur assumed that when this stopped, his mother thought he must have died. It wasn't until his mother became ill later in life, and he talked to her about the possibility of trying to find his father, that she gave him the first indication that she thought his father might still be alive.

**Education**

Arthur had experienced some racism at school but described it as 'silliness.'

You got called 'blacky' and things like that, you know. That lasted a couple of years.

Like most boys of his age and background the traditional way of dealing with this was to fight, but he began to practice early the strategies he developed later in life, to control his anger and/or hurt and blend in with the group.

Sometimes they [the other kids] could get me going and sometimes they couldn't.

At 15 years of age Arthur left school and joined the Merchant Navy. It was tough and many boys dropped out but Arthur rose to the challenge and ended up enjoying the life. Again he described himself as 'lucky' he had not experienced a lot of racism and ended up making friends from all over England. On being discharged from the Navy, he started work in the printing industry where he has worked for most of his life. His reputation as 'one of the best book binders in the business' is a source of great pride to him.

**Racial Issues**

Arthur did not identify strongly with his black racial heritage and saw this as in some ways advantageous as it had enabled him to enjoy a high level of acceptance among his English friends.
I've never considered myself black to be quite honest ... No, I'm getting it wrong. People don't treat me as black.

In his experience Arthur had found that whites were more accepting of those who did not insist on being seen or treated differently to anybody else. He cited examples of, 'coloureds', he had known who insisted on acknowledgment of their 'difference.'

I know I've seen it for myself. They think 'I'm different' you know, 'I'm being treated differently.' People start to think 'Oh Christ! They're back again' and that causes racial problems.

Arthur had a clear strategy for managing racial prejudice, which worked well for him. He discovered early on that it was important to blend in with the group, even if that meant occasionally having to listen to racist jokes about black people. His maxim was that as a general rule people didn't mean to be rude or racist and if you ignored these comments as much as possible, people were more accepting of you.

You've got to sort of fit in and forget about anything else, you know. Whether your black, red, green or whatever you are, you've just got to forget it and just try and mould in and fit.

I never take umbrage, never take offence – no point. You are what you are and that's how I've lived my life. I think it helps, you know. I think people accept you more - more readily.

This ability to blend in was shared by another member of the group of three black war babes he had grown up with. S*** had been very successful in his career in the British Army. He had joined as a boy soldier and had just retired at the age of 50 years as a full Major.

I was proud to the ears of that. He was a good mate and that took an awful lot of doing ... that is a really big feat in the army.
He was told officially he would not get any further - so there is sort-of a wall somewhere. Whether we like it or not there is always a wall somewhere, with somebody saying ‘you’ve gone far enough’.

Arthur was clearly delighted with, and shared in, his friend’s success, which he saw as a success for all blacks. “It gives me great pleasure to tell people that.”

A third member of the group had fared less well.

He had a chip on his shoulder - always had - and he couldn’t get it off him. Smashing guy, he just got this thing, you know, that everybody was against him ... He always thought that people owed him a living.

His friend eventually committed suicide. Although his death was not recorded as such - ‘We all knew he did.’

In relation to the inevitable question, “Where do you come from?” Arthur’s approach was to be as open as he could in terms of the information he had.

Well, when people asked me I just say, ‘Well I was born in England, my father was American, black American.’ I never hid the fact that um, where I came from .... I’m a black GI’s son ... I don’t consider it anything to be ashamed of.

This ability to become one of the group had advantages and disadvantages. It meant that your friends often forgot that you were black putting you in the position of having to decide how to respond, or not respond, to racist remarks made in one’s presence by one’s own friends. Arthur related an anecdote about a group of mates discussing a racial issue:
... saying something detrimental about a certain, um, say an
Indian or Pakistani, ... which is still colour, and they’ll say, ‘What
do you reckon, Arthur, what do you think?’ They just look at me
and they just carry on talking ... They’re blind aren’t they?... They
do not see what I am - that’s how I look at it.”

Arthur felt strongly that it was important to give his peers the benefit of the doubt in
situations like this:

People say things and they don’t think a lot, um, they don’t really
mean it in the spiteful vindictive way it sounds. If you’re
prepared to take it that way then you get a lot of upset.

I’ve had people say, ‘I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it to come out that
way.’

Arthur presented as confident in terms of his sense of self and his approach to managing
racial issues. His ability to adapt had gained him great acceptance which he clearly
enjoyed. His strong identification with the white community was to some extent at the
expense of his identification with the black aspects of himself but this was a ‘trade off’
he was clearly very comfortable with.

**Marriage and Family**

Just as he believed he had been lucky in other aspects of his life Arthur believed he had
been lucky in his choice of wife. M*** and he had a good relationship and he clearly
saw her as linked to both his general and business success.

He had experienced some anxiety as a young man when he had first started going out to
dances and meeting girls. He was conscious of his racial difference and the implications
of this when it came to dating and choosing a marriage partner.
You’d go to a dance and you’d meet girls and you’d know there’d be only one in fifty girls who you knew you could take home. Whereas your mates would possibly have a wider range of choice. You had the feeling that they (girls) loved talking to you but you don’t pass in that area. So I think that, you know, at times your choice is very limited in that respect, or your brain told you it was. Whether that was something that was self-inflicted or not I don’t know.

The next big hurdle after having met M***, was arranging to meet her parents. This was where M*** took what he described as a lead role and ‘stage managed’ the whole thing.

When I first went with M***, now I’d been going with her for, I don’t know, a few months, and she took me to meet her sister and her husband before she dared to take me to meet her mum and dad. To get her sister’s opinion of me I mean.

She got her sister to tell her mum that she was going with me - to break the ice as such and the words her mum said was, ‘There’s good and bad in everybody. I’ll make up my mind when I meet him.’

When Arthur eventually met his future in-laws they took to him immediately and he described his relationship with them as:

Brilliant! I couldn’t wish for anybody nicer.

He knew of other black war babes who had not been so lucky. D***, the member of the group who had taken his own life, had been given a hard time by the parents of his future wife’.
His wife's father didn't want to know him. He had three years of purgatory when he wanted to marry their daughter and he went through a lot of hassle and trouble.

Regarding his children – two adult girls, Arthur thought that neither of them gave the issue of colour, "a second thought". It was an issue he worried about though.

In fact with both the lads that they went out with I said, 'I hope you realise one child could suddenly turn out coloured.'

Stress

Arthur didn't believe he had experienced more or less stress than the average person but spoke about the strong sense of wishing to excel at what he did which seemed to have underlined his success in business and in life.

I've always worked to try to be the best I can at what I do. I've always felt that I've got to learn that job and be better at it than anyone else.

What it's about is I've got to do everything better than the next person.

This drive was undoubtedly the basis of Arthur's success in business and whilst he had never analysed it, it seemed to be based on a need to prove himself.

I don't know really, whether its trying to prove to yourself that you can, or that you are as good ... It's just at the back of your mind where you feel you've got to prove that you are as good, or are better.
Search for Father

Arthur had actually wanted to begin his search for his father as a young man but decided he would wait:

Well I always said I will some day, but I never wanted to cause a problem in his family. I mean he’s gone home to America and its just a case of OK, that was a war time fling. I’ve gone home, got a family and children and got a good life here. I didn’t want to upset that life under any circumstances, you know. Couldn’t have been anything worse than all of a sudden there’s a letter or a phone call from a boy in England ... Can you imagine his wife ... his family ... That was the last thing I wanted, so I always said I’d leave it until as late as possible.

The differing gender issues for male war babes in relation to searching for a GI father became evident as Arthur talked about his heightened awareness, after he married and had children of his own, of the potential impact on the GIs concerned.

Yes, I would have loved to have done it then [as a young man] but I thought, no, you know, I won’t. I don’t want to cause any problems... I was feeling a little bit frightened as years went on ... I realised then what happened when men got married so I wouldn’t want to cause a problem. Yes, that’s why, you know, I left it so long.

At the time of the interview his wife had encouraged him to search for his GI father and he was hopeful of finding him.

In a follow up telephone contact 12 months later Arthur had found his father and had just come back from America elated after meeting him and his family. The trip was very successful and there is every indication the relationship will continue.
4.2.4 Participant 4

Roy

Background

Roy’s mother was single and living with her parents and a sister when she became pregnant to Roy’s GI father for the first time. The child, a little girl, died soon after birth and was buried in the local churchyard. Roy still visits her grave occasionally. His father was one of only a few black officers in the US Army. He wrote letters and sent gifts to Roy and his mother for up to two years after he returned to the US. The relationship lasted three years and was very special to his mother, who described Roy’s father as ‘the love of her life.’

Roy’s mother married shortly after the war but divorced within a few years. They lived with his maternal grandparents until his mother married for the second time when he was 10 years old. There was one child from the first marriage and three from the second.

‘Telling’

Roy never knew a time when he wasn’t aware of his background and recalls that in the early years his mother kept a photograph of his father. She had always believed that she would eventually go to America to join him as a war bride. Roy thought that his mother had come under pressure from her own mother and the family doctor not to go. ‘I believe they conspired to split the relationship’.

Roy had a close relationship with his mother whom he described as ‘fiercely protective’ of him and treating him in a way that made him feel that he was very special to her. One of his earliest memories was of visiting a new boy in the neighbourhood and being told by the boy’s father to ‘get your black face out of here’. He had gone home in tears and told his mother what had happened:
Well, inside ten minutes she was down there, knocked on the door and as he opened it she got him by the scruff of the neck and pulled him off the door step … and I’m witnessing all this, you know [laughing], … and I think she would have knocked his head off. I’m sure she would…!

Like Arthur, Roy sometimes became embarrassed by his mother’s fierce loyalty toward him and speculated that the intensity of her feelings toward him was, to some extent, a reflection of the love she had felt for his father.

As I say, I was a little embarrassed by it…a young man doesn’t want his mother chasing after him fighting his battles, but yes, she did think I was somehow special, because she’s never ever, even now, has she forgotten her relationship with [father’s name] and how she felt about him – still does feel about him, even though it was fifty years ago … and because of the way she felt about him, she transferred that on to me.

As far as she’s concerned, those three years he spent here, she spent with him. He was the love of her life and no one can stand between her and him! No matter who you are, or what you say; [father’s name] was the best thing that ever happened to her. She’ll hear nothing said against him.

Roy had few recollections of his first step-father, as he was too young, but he had a poor relationship with his mother’s second husband and thought that it probably had to do with his black American background.

I think it did, from my point of view, because I felt rightly or wrongly that it was because of my colour and background that he didn’t like me...
When he married and had a family of his own, like Arthur, Roy thought more deeply about the issues faced by the husbands of women who had children to black GIs.

I don’t think that white men want to be reminded all the time that their wife has slept with a black man ... Having that pushed in your face all the time can’t be easy.

Despite his mother treating him as a favourite, his relationship with his three younger siblings has always been good.

I realise that they’ve always looked up to me in some way, you know ... My two sisters ... all their life, even now, they come to me if there’s anything going wrong or they want any information. They’re on the phone or they call around ... its almost as if they put me on some kind of pedestal, you know.

He thought that his relationship with his siblings was part of a set of broader skills that he had in terms of his ability to relate to people and linked this ability with his life experience as a child of mixed-race.

I’ve always been good with people. I’m able to get on with people; I’m also able to relate to other people’s feelings. I think because I know how things can hurt. I’m very careful about what I say and how I treat people. If I do say something that upsets somebody I feel terrible about it.

Racial Issues

Roy had missed not having a relationship with a father, particularly as a child, and thought this had contributed to his sense of having to stick up for himself because his father was not there to do it for him. He had experienced prejudice both as a child and as an adult and had decided early on how he would deal with it. He felt that in terms of
racism, it wasn't the number of times that incidents occurred which was the issue, but the impact they had when they did occur.

It happened now and then but because it is such a big thing to you it sticks more and I think the biggest effect it had on me was to make me, uh, defend myself aggressively.

If I could talk my way out of things I would do but I was never one to back off from physical confrontation.

One day an older boy in the neighbourhood told the other boys that blacks didn't feel pain in the same way as whites and pinched Roy's arm hard to demonstrate the point.

I was only twelve and he was sixteen and I thought 'I'm not having this' so I just turned on him and hit him as hard as I could and as I did it I knew what was going to happen. He knocked me all over the place.

I think that really summed up my attitude in life. I always had a go ... at anything that I found a challenge and I think it was to compensate for what I saw as a loss - not having my own father there, not knowing much about him.

Roy had given considerable thought to racial issues. He had struggled to make sense of his own experience and to resolve his own sense of racial identity as a child of mixed parentage.

I found out a long time ago there's no such thing in the English language as being half white, when anybody refers to you, you're half black.
He was aware of seeing his racial background as a handicap and likened it to a form of disability. In particular he was aware of feeling inferior to whites and fought against this.

It became a bit of an issue in my own mind because I suppose it, in a way, it tended to make you feel a little inferior. So I had to overcome this inferiority complex because I refused to be inferior but deep down there was a feeling – because of the comments that had been made year in year out, that maybe you were a little bit.

I always describe myself as being black now. I didn’t early on perhaps, when I was younger I mean. I was just a kid, I didn’t really understand it so much but as I got into my teens and you become more aware of yourself and the interaction with other people ...

Like other black war babies he had little contact with black people as a child and reported feelings of discomfort when first meeting them.

I don’t really know when the transition was that I felt more comfortable with thinking of myself as black. I know early on when I was a kid, when I got to know one or two people who were black or of Afro descent I felt a little uncomfortable with them. I didn’t like being in their company ... um ... I suppose you could say it reminded myself of what I was.

When Roy was seventeen he had the experience of being identified as black by a West Indian man who suggested to him he should have nothing to do with the white community and that he would be ‘better off mixing with his own people’.
I thought, I don’t like that attitude at all and I thought about it and I thought about it and he’d sort of said, ‘your own people’ you see ... and it was the first time I’d ever identified with it.

That’s when I first thought, ‘Well yeah. They are my people!’ Suddenly for some reason I didn’t feel uncomfortable about it any more.

This had been a turning point for Roy.

It was suddenly as if I just knew that things were different for me and you know, were better in a way, because when you’re unable to identify a problem you don’t deal with it very well do you?

... suddenly I’d woken up one day and realised that there was no problem in being black. It’s just what I am, and if I’m going to be what I am, well get on with it and do it!

This new found sense of identity meant he had to change his usual non-committal response to the inevitable question ‘Where do you come from?’ from curious strangers:

Well from then on I’d say ‘No, my father was a Negro, you know, I’m half black’.

Marriage and Family

Despite this sense of greater confidence and comfortableness about his colour there was still anxiety in relation to the impact of race on his marriage and his children. This seemed to be based on an awareness of his own painful experiences as a child and a desire to protect his children from experiencing this:

I always thought I didn’t want them to be really black, you know.
I thought, what if it throws back a couple of generations, you
know, and they’re born really black. I could see what kind of a, you know, life they’d have to put up with ... 

... I knew they’d have to put up with a bit of stick if they were [black] because, you know, we live in a white environment here in [name of town]. I knew there’d be a certain amount of things they’d have to overcome.

I think you like to protect your children from the same type of things you had to go through.

His wife K** had argued that it was not an issue for her but Roy was not reassured.

... I think that’s because she couldn’t realise, and why should she indeed, exactly how I was viewing it. Because if you haven’t experienced racialism against you, you can’t really explain to somebody, can you, what it means exactly.

As it happened both his daughters were relatively light skinned and had never indicated to him that they had experienced prejudice in the community.

Prior to the marriage Roy felt apprehensive, as he knew from previous experience that his potential mother-in-law held strong views on race. When they first started dating she had commented to her daughter that, ‘No decent white boy would want you now!’

An additional issue was that K** was pregnant and under 21 years of age, so they needed her mother’s written consent to marry. As with previous issues in his life Roy decided the best approach was to accept the challenge head on. He visited her alone and explained he would not budge from his determination to marry her daughter.

Well, inside a fortnight she’d signed the papers everything was all right and there’s never been a cross word between us since - We
get on like that [holding up his right hand with the index and second fingers entwined]. When she realised I was ‘normal’ she was happier.

Stress

Roy discussed the issue of self esteem and self worth and his sense, which was shared by two other male war babes, Joe and Arthur, of having to continually strive to do things better than anybody else:

I’ve never felt sort of worthy of having been successful at certain things. I think that’s why I’ve always had to try just that little bit harder.

Roy saw this sense of constantly needing to prove himself, as a dominant theme in his life.

I’ll still be battling on my deathbed.

The ‘battle’ had already taken its toll. Roy experienced anxiety and depression when his first child died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. It was a devastating experience and he found that several years later he was still feeling depressed and drinking heavily.

An old friend who had done some boxing with him when he was younger, persuaded him to take it up again. Roy found the physical exercise helped and now uses it as a strategy for managing his occasional periods of anxiety and depression.

Search for father

At the time of the interview Roy had found that his GI father had died in 1982. He had been searching for other family members but had reached a ‘dead end’ and decided not to pursue the matter further. During his search he became aware that he was probably his father’s only child.
4.2.5 Participant 5

Rosalind (Rosa)

Background

Rosa's mother was single, thirty-five years old and living with a friend on the south coast of England when Rosa was born in 1945. Soon after the birth she moved to London and married a year later. When she later had access to her childhood records, Rosa found that the marriage, which did not last, was bigamous. In 1948 her mother established a second long-term relationship which produced two children, both girls. After the arrival of the girls, Rosa was placed informally with a friend of her mother's until she was six years old, when her mother formally relinquished her into the care of a Catholic child welfare organisation. She remained with this organisation until she was fifteen years old.

At the time of the interview Rosa was searching for her black GI father but experiencing difficulties. Her mother did not support her search and up until her death in 1989 had actively tried to undermine it by providing Rosa with false or misleading information about her father.

Family Relationships

Rosa did not have positive memories of the few years she spent with her family before being placed in care, or of her post adolescent years when she re-contacted her mother. She felt her mother had always seen her as being outside the family and made no attempt to hide her preference for her two younger sisters. The decision that she would be placed in care seemed to confirm this.

Rosa felt angry and frustrated by her mother’s behaviour toward her, particularly regarding her unwillingness to provide information which would assist her search for her birth father. This unwillingness extended to providing false or misleading information which added years to the search. Rosa was open about her anger and
hostility toward her mother whose behaviour she found unforgivable. Her mother was thirty-five years when Rosa was born and she felt she had behaved irresponsibly given her maturity, ‘If she was young I could understand it.’ Her mother’s decision to place her in care was a source of pain to her:

Oh, I can remember the day I went in there ... She never even took me in there, somebody else took me. I remember holding somebody's hand and I remember holding a toy in the other hand ... but I can remember these great big gates because I was only little ....

Rosa’s feelings made it difficult to refer to her mother as ‘mum’.

Well, I say ‘mum’ but it was more their [her sisters] mum. I don’t count her as my mum. A very cold women she was, a very cold woman.

Rosa’s mother had not visited her whilst she was in care and had rarely mentioned her father. Rosa did have a good relationship with her step-father who at one stage, when she was around 12 years of age, tried to persuade her mother to allow Rosa to return home. This arrangement did not work out, however, and she returned to residential care. When she later obtained her childhood records, Rosa discovered that he had opposed her mother’s plan to place her in care.

**Institutional Care**

Rosa described her experience of residential life as relatively positive. She had developed a network of friends and had good relationships with many of the nuns who had cared for her. However, like Joe, the only other war babe in the study who was institutionalised, she was frustrated, as an adult, with the poor state of her childhood records and general lack of documentation about important events in her life.
The agency appeared not to have made even the most cursory checks to ensure that her mother provided correct information to them when she was placed in care. For example her mother used different surnames on documents and gave differing information regarding the identity of Rosa’s father. On one document he was wrongly described as a French-Canadian who had died in action in 1942. Rosa used this information to search for her birth father, subsequently wasting many months searching for the wrong person.

Rosa’s records showed that she had been considered for adoption when she was about twelve years old by two single sisters with whom she spent Christmas and school holidays. The application was rejected on the recommendation of the assessing social worker. She queried the motivation of the sisters to adopt a black child describing their affection for Rosa as ‘sickly sentimentality’ and argued that the placement should not go ahead on racial grounds.

Rosa was hurt and angry that she had missed out on an opportunity for family placement:

I said to [husband] ‘That’s all wrong.’ You know what I mean?
They shouldn’t be like that with children ... It did upset me because I thought, well, of all people to do that, when if people are willing to take these children on ...

The sisters had been upset by the decision and subsequently Rosa lost touch with them.

I lost my aunts through that...I never heard from them again.

Rosa described herself as a ‘rebel’ who was often in trouble with the nuns who ran the girls’ home. At times like this she would want to write ‘home’ to complain but would then remember there was no point. There was no one there who would ‘stand up’ for her. It was at times like these that she felt her status as a fatherless child most keenly:
... I thought that’s it I’m not staying here - I’m going and I thought I’ll write home and then I thought, it’s a waste of time and that’s always when I’d wish my dad was home because if my dad knew what I was going through there he wouldn’t let me stay here.

... I never ever thought that my dad had abandoned me.

Racial Identity

Like Joe, who had also been raised in residential care, her racial identity had not been a big issue for Rosa. She had not known of her African American heritage until she reached adulthood and this seemed to have protected her from the stress, associated with awareness, experienced by those participants who had known of their background from an early age. Rosa could not remember experiencing prejudice as a child but had experienced racist taunts from neighbours and others since moving to her current home. Although as a child she was aware of having dark skin and curly hair she was unaware of the meaning of these physical characteristics, nor could she remember when she first began to think about racial issues in relation to herself:

I don’t know. I don’t. I can’t remember even thinking about it. I just was as I was ...

As reported by other respondents Rosa was surprised and sometimes shocked when she was identified by other black Britons as a member of that racial group. A black neighbour who was having difficulty with her relationship to other families in the area once visited her to discuss the issue and solicit support.

... She came over to me one time ... and she said ‘How do you get on with people?’ ... I couldn’t believe what she was saying, you know! So she said ‘About your colour’ so I said ‘What about my
colour? I never ever took any notice of it. I’ve always been able to get jobs and it’s never sort of come into anything.

On another occasion a neighbour, who came to the door to complain about her son, used the term ‘your breed’ when referring to Rosa. She had thought ‘I sound like a Red Indian!’ Another neighbour had asked the question often directed at migrants, but particularly rankling to mixed-race war babes who were born in Britain ‘Why don’t you go back where you came from?’ and she had thought ‘Well where’s that?’ However, Rosa was pragmatic about her neighbours’ behaviour and, like Arthur, was prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt:

I said, ‘I’ll get you into trouble for saying that to me.’ But then I thought, you could say they were like that with people from London and that, you know.

Despite her generally pragmatic approach, Rosa was prepared to fight for her right to be treated equally. She had once appeared at the local Magistrates Court after causing minor damage to a car, after the driver had racially abused her.

Marriage and Family

There were few supports available to cope with the transition from the sheltered life of the institution and later hostel to ‘normal’ life and Rosa experienced difficulty in managing the change. She received little support from her mother. She married her first husband at the age of 21 years, commenting that he was really the only person she knew. He had recognised and exploited her desire for a home and family of her own, after many years in care:

He worked out I was vulnerable and he used that.
Her husband had also had difficulty in coping with her racial difference and asked her to
tell people, if asked, that she was Italian. She became more aware of his racially
prejudiced views when expecting their first child.

My husband said if he [the child] is black or coloured it was
nothing to do with him and you can imagine how pleased I was
when [the baby] turned out to be white skinned and fair. Because
I didn’t know what would happen, because he used to say ‘jungle
bunnies’ about coloured people and all of this you see.

There were two children of the marriage, a boy now 25 years and a girl 23 years. Her
daughter has inherited Rosa’s dark skin. Both of the children experienced difficulties as
they grew up and as adults have not achieved the sort of stability in their personal lives
that Rosa hoped for. Rosa divorced her first husband when her children were still young
and her second marriage has been more successful. Her husband has encouraged and
supported her throughout the search for her birth father.

Stress

Rosa saw herself as ‘a fighter’, a necessary prerequisite for anyone who wished to
survive British institutional life in the 1950s.

I didn’t like them nuns and I was never anybody’s favourite ...
I’ve been bullied and everything else. I just rebelled. But it was
never going to bring me down.

Rosa felt that she had always been sustained throughout her life by the friendships she
made. Although seen as tough by her friends she acknowledged a sense of her own
vulnerability.

People sort of say ‘Hell you’re tough’ and all that but I know I’m
not, not really, deep down. I do worry over things ... I nearly did
come near to having a nervous breakdown when I didn’t have any money [after the divorce].

One of the greatest sources of stress for Rosa had been her relationship with her mother, which had been undermined by what she saw as her mother’s rejection of her. This had been exacerbated by her steadfast refusal to assist Rosa’s search by providing the information she needed about her birth father.

**Search for Birth Father**

Rosa had been searching for her birth father for many years but had been hampered by the lack of support from her mother, who died in 1989 without giving her the information she needed to be able to find her father. Rosa expressed much of the same frustration as Christine [Participant 7] in terms of her mother’s tendency to provide deliberately inaccurate or false information thereby undermining and extending the search.

Like Joe, Rosa had received no information regarding her background whilst growing up in care and did not know that her father was a black American until she became an adult and found identifying information about her father. She made contact with a woman, who had known her mother at the time she was born, and had met her GI father. The women told her that her father was not a French Canadian but a black American. She also told her that her father had visited her frequently as a child and had ‘given her everything’.

In a follow up contact with Rosa 12 months after the interview she had located her GI father’s family. Her father had died, but had told the family about her. He had always hoped that one day she would find him. Rosa travelled to America with her husband in 1997 to meet her new family of 3 brothers, 2 sisters, 3 nephews and 3 nieces. Her father’s wife, who is still living, insists on calling her ‘daughter’ and with financial support from Rosa’s American siblings, plans to visit her in England in the near future.
4.2.6  Participant 6

Henry

Background

Henry’s mother was married, but separated, when he was born. She had a six-year-old daughter who lived with her husband after the separation. Henry and his mother lived with his maternal grandmother, who helped support them for over twenty years. His mother divorced in 1953 and did not re-marry until Henry was thirty years old. Henry lived with his mother until she remarried. He himself has never married, although he has had several long-term relationships. Henry found his GI father in 1995 and has visited him in America. The meeting had been an emotional one for Henry who had believed, at one stage, that he would never find his father.

Family Relationships

Henry developed a close relationship with his mother and grandmother. His grandmother was very supportive; she had known Henry’s birth father and liked him. Henry was still living with his mother when she re-married and he had found it difficult to relate to his step-father:

Even when my mother did marry, my step-father didn’t accept me and we’ve had quite an unpleasant relationship for twenty odd years. He’s changed, funnily enough, since I found my father – it’s opened his eyes.

Henry was aware that his mother had been subject to abuse because the father of her child was a black GI. ‘She was spat at, one time’. She never told her second husband that Henry’s father was a black GI. His research regarding his GI father had been educative and he discovered that two blacks GIs were murdered during the war in his hometown, for having relationships with white women.
Like other men in the study Henry had felt the absence of a positive father figure. He thought that had his father been around when he was a child, he would have been able to counteract the negative input he received regarding his racial background and help him to develop a positive sense of himself as a person of both black and white racial heritage.

One very good friend of mine, I always remember, once he said to me, ‘Just have faith in yourself.’ That’s good, because if my father wasn’t around to say it. I mean if he’d been around, if I’d known who my father was he’d have told me that.

Racial Identity

Henry had thought a great deal about racial identity and had done some research and reading around the subject. He had identified a change in his own attitudes and thinking, about his racial identity, over time.

Initially I saw myself as white, ‘cos, I grew up in a white family, most of my school chums were white. Girlfriends have always been white, I don’t know if that’s a yardstick or not ... So, as a younger man I always saw myself as white and deep down I felt I probably was walking around as a white man in a black man’s skin.

Identity confusion was inevitable, as his social group had consisted entirely of young, white men and women, who over time simply accepted him as one of the crowd, often ‘forgetting’ his colour when they were together as a group. Whilst this was gratifying on the one hand, it also meant that they occasionally made comments that were racist, not realising until afterwards, if at all, that they had been offensive to Henry.

I know what the average white person ... thinks when they look at me because I’ve been there when it’s been said. You can be out
with a group of white friends and they will see a black person outside the window, but because they’ve grown up with me and known me all my life they don’t see me as black. This is what’s so crazy about the whole thing. [They’ll say] ‘**** wog,’ whatever, you know and I’m sat there thinking, ‘I could be the one outside the window’, but this group don’t see me as that and so the colour has vanished - they don’t see it!

Unlike Arthur (Participant 3) who had been able to laugh off or ignore these occasions, Henry found this behaviour difficult to cope with. An additional issue was that having been raised to believe he was white, he had absorbed the cultural norms and beliefs around race and difference held by many British people in the 1950s and 1960s. This made it doubly difficult to identify positively as a black person later in life.

Henry raised a number of racial issues he’d struggled to come to terms with over the years and it became clear as he spoke, that the issue of his racial identity had dominated much of his thinking. Where did he fit in? Was he black or white, or should he identify with both races?

As a young man for a long time I was desperate to be accepted by one group or another. I wanted to be accepted as a white guy only because I identified as white.

The way that his identity was reliant on the perception of others made it hard for Henry (and other participants) to feel in control of the development of their own sense of self.

I’ve never pretended to be 100 per cent white and I’ve never pretended to be 100 per cent black. I am what I am, I’m half-and-half and I’m quite happy with that. The problem is with everyone else’s perception of me - that’s the problem.
Having distinct physical characteristics, for example, dark skin and 'frizzy' hair, set you apart from other members of the community and could become a handicap, as Henry found when he decided to change careers several years earlier. He found it a lot more difficult than he had anticipated to find employment and felt that in some cases at least, his physical appearance rather than his skills or ability had been the deciding factor.

It does get in the way, that's another thing, being perceived of as 'different', it gets in the bloody way of your progress! You go for a job interview and its there right away.

The issue of hair and hair management was discussed by several participants, either in the context of the interview or in informal discussion afterwards. The focus of these discussions was that although participants tended to vary in terms of skin colour from very dark to very light skinned, they had all inherited to a greater or lesser extent, their fathers' distinctive, tightly curled, 'afro' hair. Henry graphically described his perception of the role this secondary racial characteristic had played, in defining how he was perceived by others:

It seems to have a big, big influence over how we are perceived. I'm convinced of this. Sometimes when I walk into a place and immediately walk into a wall of animosity it's because I've got curly kinky hair!

I used to think if only I could find a decent barber or a hairdresser who would straighten my hair for me. I could pass myself off, not as white, but not to have all this embarrassment where you'd go to a party and within about twenty minutes of talking they'd say 'I hope you don't mind my asking' and I'd think, 'Here we go', "Where do you come from?" ... I used to think THIS BLOODY HAIR - IT'S A TRAITOR TO ME!
Henry referred to the fact that many black Americans straightened their hair and black men in Britain had started shaving their heads. He saw the latter fashion as yet another way that blacks were bowing to the pressure to minimise those aspects of themselves that identified them as black.

Some of them are shaving themselves bald. You must have noticed that.... but again it’s a concession. It’s a concession to the whites. It annoys me. It’s a case of, I’m ashamed of the fact, I’m ashamed of the way nature has made me.

It’s a crazy thing but it always comes back to the thing on top of your head – your hair.

**Marriage and Family**

Henry is not married but has experienced a number of long-term relationships. His decision not to marry was to some extent related to his background:

I wouldn’t put it just down to colour. I’ve always been very wary of marriage because of various things. My mother’s experience of marriage was really bad and she influenced me in my early days ... she was holding on to me as well. I was her only son and I was living at home. I reminded her of dad. Every time she saw me she could see dad. It was the only thing she had to hang on to, I suppose. But yes, part of it has very definitely been that I’ve never felt sure of myself on the colour side. But it’s much more complex than that. There was also the issue of about having lived as the only son for a long time in a house with two women [mother and grandmother].

He felt that his background had ‘definitely’ affected his ability to establish relationships:
There was one girlfriend I’d got ... and she suddenly dropped me one day without any warning at all. I couldn’t understand why - I was devastated! I got back together with her about a year later and I said ‘Why did you drop me last time?’... and apparently her mother had been lecturing to her for weeks, ‘Can’t you get yourself a decent white guy?’ and so forth and in the end it soured the girl so much against me that she chucked me in and that was very, very bad for my confidence.

Henry had not experienced being a parent but had thought about the implications of parenting for him. Unlike other participants he had worried, not that his children, would be too dark skinned but that they might be too light:

I have a horror that I might have children, that when they got to eighteen or nineteen, would turn on me and look down on me because of peer pressure from their own kids at school, because any child I produce would be paler still.

**Search for Father**

Henry was one of only two participants who had found their GI fathers prior to the research interview. He had hoped that in meeting his father he would gain a greater sense of self-esteem and confidence regarding his racial identity and he was not disappointed:

The best thing that could have happened to me was finding my dad. That’s why I really wanted to do it.

Henry’s father enjoyed a middle-class lifestyle and had provided a good education for his two American children. This was very important to Henry and he smiled as he described his first meeting with his American family:
I was so pleased and proud of the fact that when I did find dad, he’s got a chest full of medals and he’s in uniform and he’s a war veteran of several wars. He was in the Korean War and got decorated in that. I’ve noticed the white society can relate to that.

Henry kept his father’s photograph prominently displayed in his home and acknowledged with a wry grin that he was finally enjoying, at the age of fifty years, the sort of pride in his father’s achievements that most boys enjoyed when they were ten years old.

Yes, my father is black out there and they are successful people. They’re not the one’s all of you like to say we are. They’ve all worked. They’ve all gone to University. They’ve all made it.

Henry’s pride was edged with anxiety as he raised the issue facing many war babes who find their father is still living. His father is seventy-four years of age and could well die within a few years. His life and family ties are in America. The possibility of father and child spending time together is limited and yet the desire to do so after so many years of searching, is strong.

Finding his father had meant a great deal to Henry, not just in terms of his self-identity.

Well, everything my mother told me about my dad was right. ... He’s a very, very nice human being. He’s a Christian ... He actually is a genuine practicing Christian. He treats his fellow man with respect. He’s done a lot for his local community. He’s launched his family on very, very good careers. He’s done the thing that’s so difficult in America at the time that he did it in – he’s got black kids into jobs...

There had also been an increased sense of comfortableness for Henry about his own background, as he experienced the acceptance and warmth of his black family.
Obviously, when I was flying out to the States I knew that dad, and his family, were black ... Even knowing all that, I kept talking to myself ... saying you mustn’t appear surprised at all these black faces. Then I started meeting neighbours ... and the church congregation; etc. and they were all black and just for a little while I began to feel a little bit like a fish out of water. But after a few days I totally adjusted ... It was completely normal to see myself as part of the black community with my father and the family.

Stress

Henry had experienced stress-related symptoms in the past and was unwell at the time of the interview. He had recently been ill and feared a heart attack. He was informed by his doctor that he should consider it a ‘warning’. He was looking at his life style and diet and pointed out that he was aware he had always driven himself ‘too hard’:

I know that I work too hard. In fact, recently, I’ve made myself, made myself, slow down... At fifty you have to start watching things a little bit more.

The period of unemployment had been particularly hard to cope with and at one time he thought he would ‘really go off my head.’ These ‘normal’ periods of stress which most people had to cope with during their life course were exacerbated by the need to cope with, ‘Being black as well, on top of all that.’

Henry articulated an issue not raised specifically by other male participants but which they had alluded to – the additional stresses he faced as a mixed-race male in a predominantly white society. Henry spoke of the need to be alert to the potential for racially based violence or abuse to occur when he was out in the community:
The black part of me is aware of it all the time. If I go out somewhere in the evening I know it's there all the time. If you go to a bar, or something, I think, 'Is there anyone who might pick on me or try to have a fight because he sees me as black and he's got a chip on his shoulder about that?' Which means to a certain extent that it does affect you socially. Being able to be one hundred percent relaxed I find is difficult. I think most people of any colour have that—a sixth sense that there might be an incident while they're out.

A follow up call found that Henry had been seriously ill with pneumonia in the months following the interview and later that year had been persuaded by his black American family to join them for Christmas. Whilst there, his sister had arranged for him to meet one of her single girl friends. They fell in love and married soon after.

4.3 Participant Summaries

A summary of the life experience of the six participants whose stories appear in this Chapter and the seven whose stories appear in Appendix 2, p. 131, can be found in Table 2 below. As explained earlier, documentation of the narratives of participants 7 to 11, has been placed in the appendices because of constraints related to the size of the thesis.
Table 2  Summary of Participants’ Experience

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
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<th>Relationship with Step-father</th>
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<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>Single mother living with parents who arranged for Joe to be institutionalised. Did not meet mother until he was 25 years old. Institutional life described as brutal and uncaring.</td>
<td>Not applicable. Raised in institutional care.</td>
<td>Not informed of background as a child. Became aware when he obtained his welfare records. As an adult</td>
<td>Does not identify himself as ‘black’ although he experienced racism as an adult. Sympathetic to black issues and aspirations but wanted to be identified as a successful man, rather than as a successful black man.</td>
<td>Still searching at time of interview. Had written a letter to the man he believed was his father but received no reply. Joe died in 1997. Six months later Joe’s son received a call from America. It was Joe’s American sister calling to say her father had died the night before and she had found Joe’s letter when going through his effects. He had not replied.</td>
<td>Experienced a stress related breakdown after the ending of a long term relationship. Died after emergency heart surgery aged 52 years.</td>
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<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>Mother married with 2 year old daughter. Parents separated briefly but reunited. Step-father accepted responsibility for raising Jane and adopted her. Father is still living, mother died in 1994.</td>
<td>Jane and adoptive father always enjoyed a close relationship. Jane concerned no to hurt his feelings when she began her search for her GI father.</td>
<td>Told by her mother at an early age that her father was a black GI. Mother assisted her in her search for her GI father.</td>
<td>Very ambivalent as a child and a young woman about her colour. Covered herself in summer to ensure her skin did not tan and made her children play out of the sun.</td>
<td>Jane found her GI father in 1991. Relationship difficult for first 2 years. Father very over-protective felt smothered by him. Have since become very close. Jane planned to leave England and live in the US for an extended period of time to be near her father. Her husband has agreed to go with her.</td>
<td>Experienced a long term depressive illness for most of her adult life.</td>
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<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>Mother married with 3 children. Divorced husband after war. Mother raised 4 children alone. “Very Strong’ lady who was very protective of Arthur.</td>
<td>Occasionally saw step father who was pleasant to him and who still lived in the neighbourhood. No formal relationship.</td>
<td>“Always knew’ that his father was black American. Father sent a pair of boots when he was a baby. Mother willing to talk about GI father if asked.</td>
<td>Does not identify strongly as black. “I’ve never considered myself as black...” Felt it was more important to “fit in” with the white community in which he was raised.</td>
<td>Still searching for father at time of interview. Found him shortly after has been to the US to visit him twice. Keen to spend an extended period with him in the US.</td>
<td>Aware of putting himself under pressure to be ‘the best’ at whatever he did. Managed the stress of this very well.</td>
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<td>Joe</td>
<td>Single mother living with parents who arranged for Joe to be institutionalised. Did not meet mother until he was 25 years old. Institutional life described as brutal and uncaring.</td>
<td>Not applicable. Raised in institutional care.</td>
<td>Not informed of background as a child. Became aware when he obtained his welfare records. As an adult</td>
<td>Does not identify himself as ‘black’ although he experienced racism as an adult. Sympathetic to black issues and aspirations but wanted to be identified as a successful man, rather than as a successful black man.</td>
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<td>Experienced a stress related breakdown after the ending of a long term relationship. Died after emergency heart surgery aged 52 years.</td>
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<td>Jane</td>
<td>Mother married with 2 year old daughter. Parents separated briefly but reunited. Step-father accepted responsibility for raising Jane and adopted her. Father is still living, mother died in 1994.</td>
<td>Jane and adoptive father always enjoyed a close relationship. Jane concerned no to hurt his feelings when she began her search for her GI father.</td>
<td>Told by her mother at an early age that her father was a black GI. Mother assisted her in her search for her GI father.</td>
<td>Very ambivalent as a child and a young woman about her colour. Covered herself in summer to ensure her skin did not tan and made her children play out of the sun.</td>
<td>Jane found her GI father in 1991. Relationship difficult for first 2 years. Father very over-protective felt smothered by him. Have since become very close. Jane planned to leave England and live in the US for an extended period of time to be near her father. Her husband has agreed to go with her.</td>
<td>Experienced a long term depressive illness for most of her adult life.</td>
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<td>Arthur</td>
<td>Mother married with 3 children. Divorced husband after war. Mother raised 4 children alone. “Very Strong’ lady who was very protective of Arthur.</td>
<td>Occasionally saw step father who was pleasant to him and who still lived in the neighbourhood. No formal relationship.</td>
<td>“Always knew’ that his father was black American. Father sent a pair of boots when he was a baby. Mother willing to talk about GI father if asked.</td>
<td>Does not identify strongly as black. “I’ve never considered myself as black...” Felt it was more important to “fit in” with the white community in which he was raised.</td>
<td>Still searching for father at time of interview. Found him shortly after has been to the US to visit him twice. Keen to spend an extended period with him in the US.</td>
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<td>Participant 4 Roy</td>
<td>Mother single and living with parents when Roy was born. Had 2 children by Roe's GI father, one of whom died soon after birth. Later married twice and had 4 children.</td>
<td>Did not know first husband very well. Poor relationship with his mother's second husband. 'I felt rightly or wrongly it was because of my colour and background that he didn't like me.'</td>
<td>&quot;Always knew' about his background as mother had kept photographs of his GI father. Mother described him as 'the love of her life.'</td>
<td>Ambivalent about his background as a child and often got into fights over racist taunts. As he grew older felt more comfortable 'thinking of myself as black.'</td>
<td>Found GI father but he had died in 1982. Had tried to locate family members but unable to progress this contact. Was unsure about whether he would pursue it. Had become aware he was probably his father's only child.</td>
<td>Had experienced a stress breakdown after the 'cot death ' of his first child. Felt depressed and was drinking heavily. Returned to boxing as a way of coping and found it worked well for occasional bouts of anxiety and depression.</td>
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<td>Participant 5 Rosa</td>
<td>Mother single and living with a friend when Rosa born. Rosa fostered to another friend until 6 years of age when she was institutionalised. Remained in care until 15 years. Ongoing poor relationship with mother until she died in 1989.</td>
<td>Raised in institutional care. Had an intermittent relationship with her mother's husband (bigamous marriage) who showed her some small kindnesses.</td>
<td>Although aware she looked different to other children in care, Rosa was unaware of her racial heritage until she obtained her records as an adult. Mother lied consistently regarding information given to the welfare organisation and to Rosa.</td>
<td>Unaware of the racial basis for her physical difference until adulthood. Identifies strongly with the white community. Like Joe, felt anxious/embarrassed when identified by other blacks as 'one of them.'</td>
<td>Still searching at time of interview. Hampered by inability to confirm which information provided by mother was true. Post interview found father had died but located his wife and family who have welcomed her as a daughter.</td>
<td>Acknowledged her own vulnerability when stressed although her friends thought she was 'tough'. Experienced severe stress following separation form her first husband. 'I nearly did come near to having a nervous breakdown...'</td>
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<td>Participant 6 Henry</td>
<td>Mother married with a young daughter. On his return from the war, husband left taking daughter with him. Henry raised by mother and maternal grandmother. Mother did not remarry until Henry was 30 years old.</td>
<td>Mother did not remarry until Henry was 30 years. Partly because she was concerned her husband might not accept him. Henry did not get on particularly well with his step-father. '...we've had quite an unpleasant relationship for 20 odd years.'</td>
<td>Always knew that he was 'different' but unsure as to the basis of this until he grew older.</td>
<td>Henry was very conscious of being caught between two identities. 'Initially I saw myself as white, 'cos I grew up in a white family.' Later he developed a sense of being '...half and half and I'm happy with that.'</td>
<td>Henry found his GI father prior to the interview and had visited him in the US. Had felt this had been a turning point in terms of his development of a positive identity as a person of mixed black and white racial heritage.</td>
<td>Had experienced intermittent stress related symptoms including chest pains and digestive disorders. Felt that 'normal', day to day stresses were heightened by the additional stresses associated with being black.</td>
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<td>Participant 7 Christine</td>
<td>Mother single, living with parents . Raised by maternal grandparents until mother married when she was 5 years old. Still searching for GI father at time of interview.</td>
<td>Described a strained relationship with step-father. Felt 'nothing was right' about her childhood in terms of family relationships.</td>
<td>Received differing information at different stages in her life. Mother refused to give identifying information about GI father.</td>
<td>Racial background not fully confirmed until adulthood. Anxious/ guilty about her children experiencing prejudice 'because of me.'</td>
<td>Searched for many years without success. Mother unsupportive. Found father after interview and has visited him in the US twice.</td>
<td>Felt she had managed stress well in her life.</td>
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<td>Participant 8 Don</td>
<td>Mother single, 21 years and living with her parents when Don born. GI father aware of the birth and wrote to mother for several years after returning to America. Mother later lived with her older sister. Married when Don was 8 years old.</td>
<td>Step-father angry when GI father wrote soon after mother's marriage. He threw away photographs and 'dog tags' belonging to GI father. However he developed a good relationship with Don. Died when Don was 17 years old.</td>
<td>First aware aged 6/7 years old after name calling from other children. Mother told him his father was American. Did not raise the issue again until he was in his 40s. 'I was embarrassed for me mum'.</td>
<td>Does not identify strongly as black. Ambivalent towards his black American family and blacks in general. 'I think they are strange'.</td>
<td>Mother supportive of search for birth father and provided him with identifying information. Father had died in 1987. Located his father's wife and other family members but some resistance/suspicion regarding his motives in contacting them.</td>
<td>Did not feel he had experienced stress in relation to his background.</td>
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<td>Participant 9 Joy</td>
<td>Mother married with 3 children. Husband unwilling for her to remain in the family. Raised by maternal-grandmother and later maternal-aunt. Discouraged from forming relationship with mother.</td>
<td>Step-father angry about her mother's relationship with GI father. Excluded Joy from family functions. Was reported to have been physically violent to mother.</td>
<td>Aware from an early age that her father was an American. Told aged 11 years that she had been adopted by grand parents. Given letters and photos of father aged 11 years. Asked if she would like to live in America with father in teens. Said 'No' afraid of hurting aunt.</td>
<td>Experienced little racism as a child. Enjoyed being seen as 'different' and somehow 'special'. Identified as white partly to enhance a sense of belonging within her white family.</td>
<td>Found that father had died prior to interview. Searching for family members of GI father with help of 'War Babes'. Not told mother of search. Afraid to put her under 'pressure' given her age.</td>
<td>No stress related symptoms reported.</td>
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<td>Participant 10 Cora</td>
<td>Mother married with 3 year old daughter when Cora was born. Step-father angry and commenced divorce proceedings but relented. Agreed Cora could remain in the family and registered her birth in his name. Mother died aged 54.</td>
<td>Step-father angry about Cora and the marriage experienced high levels of on-going conflict. However, he grew to love her and later appeared to favour her above her siblings. The relationship is not good but Cora maintains it, as she feels 'very grateful' to him.</td>
<td>First aware aged 7 years, after father raised the issue in the context of argument with her mother. Mother explained circumstances to her. Her GI father had written regularly to her mother after the war.</td>
<td>Identifies strongly with her African American background. Reacted angrily to racism as a child. 'I've always been very sensitive about that.'</td>
<td>Waited until 1994 to commence her search as she did not want to hurt her step-father's feelings. 'I'm still grateful to him'. Unable to make any headway despite her best efforts. It has become 'an obsession'. 'Before I die I just want to know.'</td>
<td>Felt stressed by childhood experience of racism. Felt that while she did not regret her birth circumstances life would have been 'easier' if she had been white.</td>
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<td>Participant 11</td>
<td>Mother married with 6 adult children when he was born. Could not remember much about step-father. Raised by mother and maternal grandmother.</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>'Brushed off by mother when he asked questions about his appearance. Mother died without providing any information about his father. Graham angry, 'I feel cheated'. Discovered background after obtaining birth certificate when he joined the army.</td>
<td>Identifies strongly with his black heritage and developed keen interest in black military history. Experienced 'a lot of abuse' about his colour in the army.</td>
<td>Began searching shortly after mother's death. And found father within a few months. Has visited him in the US and whilst enjoyable his father was 80 years old and could not remember much about the war. Graham angry with his mother 'I felt cheated'. 'It was '10 years too late.'</td>
<td>Acknowledged her own vulnerability when stressed although her friends thought she was 'tough'. Experienced severe stress following separation form her first husband. 'I nearly did come near to having a nervous breakdown...'</td>
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</table>
5. Summary and Discussion of Findings

The findings will be summarised and then discussed in the context of identified themes and issues which emerged from the narratives. Those stories that speak loudest, in terms of particular themes, will be used to illustrate points in the discussion. It is important to emphasise at this stage that the narrative texts in Chapter 4 are the findings. The findings indicated that the narratives of the eleven participants in the study had many points of similarity in terms of their perceptions of their experience. This was despite the fact that apart from Don and Roy, who met as adults, the participants had never met each other and the majority had never met another mixed-race war babe.

A core theme to emerge was the individual struggle of participants to develop a sense of identity which accurately reflected not only their perception of themselves but also the perceptions of significant others. Parallel to this core theme were sub-themes which emerged from the narratives, around grief and loss and stress and resilience.

Discussion of the findings will take place within an interpretive framework within which the researcher will endeavour to maintain ‘theoretical sensitivity’ as outlined in the methodology (p. 13). Theoretical sensitivity ‘is the ability to recognise what is important in the data and give it meaning’ and comes from the researcher being well grounded in the literature and from professional and personal experience regarding the specific topic (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 46).

A result of the reflexivity of the research process is that the discussion, the literature, the narratives of the respondents and the researcher’s/my story are woven closely together. In order to make this explicit I have written a reflexive commentary based on my personal experience at the end of each discussion on a particular theme. This may make it appear as though I am telling a personal story and using the literature and other narratives to support this. I ask the reader to consider that my story is as much a product of the research process as the stories told by the respondents.
The reason for adding my personal reflections in the final chapter is to demonstrate to the reader how I interacted with the stories I was given and the extent to which my story is intertwined with the respondent’s stories. Fine (1994) emphasised the importance for the researcher who is attempting to ‘give voice’ to her respondents, of ensuring she does not re-author their stories so that they in fact become hers (p. 70). I am not seeking to objectify the respondents or to reconstruct or ‘colonise’ their experience by over-theorising, but trying as an ‘insider’ to assist those ‘outside’ to understand the meaning of these stories, how they interact together and how they might inform the reader’s understanding of other similar situations, which bear some resemblance, but which can never be quite the same.

This research study has echoed the literature to a large extent. However, as anticipated in the conclusion to the literature review (p. 40) the conceptual framework for the discussion of the findings needs to be revised in the light of additional themes emerging from the narratives. Three additional themes emerged which extend and illuminate the interpretive framework for the discussion, but are not addressed in any depth in the current literature. The first relates to grief and loss in relation to spoiled identity, the second to race related stress and the third to the impact on identity formation of the search for the absent black parent. These have been incorporated into the original list of themes and issues identified in Chapter 2.

5.1 Themes and Issues:

1. Sex between black and white

2. Race and illegitimacy as stigma.


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Narayan (1998) and others, use the term ‘insider’ to describe members of an oppressed group and ‘outsider’ to describe non-members (p. 317). A person may move from an insider to outsider role, depending on their status relative to a particular form of oppressive social
4. Stress, resilience and coping.


5.1.1 Sex between black and white

For the purposes of the literature review, the issue regarding sexual relationships between black men and white women was examined specifically in the historical context of attitudes towards relationships between British women and black GIs during the Second World War. This discussion will look at specific issues raised by respondents about their own experience of relationships and their decision to marry where applicable.

There has been some movement in community attitudes in Britain towards greater acceptance of interracial marriage since the war however, Hill (1965) found that 91 per cent of the Britons he surveyed, disapproved of interracial marriage.

Ten of the respondents had married at least once and all had married white partners. This is not an unusual finding given that they had been raised in a predominantly white environment and had, initially at least, identified as white. Three had divorced with one re-marrying. Two male respondents, Arthur and Roy, felt anxious about the response of their partner’s parents to their decision to marry. Both found their anxiety unfounded and reported on-going good relationships with their in-laws. One female participant (Cora) also reported feeling anxious about possible rejection by her husbands family, whilst another (Joy) found she was accepted immediately her prospective father-in-law discovered she came from the same area as himself. ‘You’re one of us Chuck! … you’re one of us!’(p. 146).

Henry, who had lived with his divorced mother until she re-married when he was thirty years old, was the only respondent not to marry prior to the interviews although he had...
had several long-term relationships. His reasons for remaining single were based partly on his awareness of his mother’s unhappy marriage experience but were also related to his fears that his children might have lighter skin than himself and the implications of this:

I have a horror that I might have children, that when they got to eighteen of nineteen, would turn on me and look down on me because of peer pressure from their own kids at school, because any child I produce would be paler still (p. 84)

The more surprising finding was that two female participants, Christine (see Appendix 2) and Rosa, found that their husbands, despite their decision to marry someone of mixed-race, held prejudiced views regarding people of colour. Both men used these views to hurt and humiliate their partners, particularly during periods of domestic conflict. Both marriages ended in divorce.

Four of the five female participants raised issues about pregnancy and the uncertainty associated with the appearance of their children. Several sought medical advice and were generally told that the possibility of having a black child was remote.

Generally speaking respondents reported a high level of acceptance by in-laws and extended family despite their initial anxiety.

Researcher’s Reflective Commentary

I did not experience prejudice from the families of either of my white partners or from my partners themselves, although I was aware of feeling anxious about the potential for this. I experienced considerable anxiety regarding the birth of my first child; I was 23 years old and still ambivalent about my racial background. I was concerned about my ability (and my husbands) to accept a child who was recognisably ‘different’. My first child was phenotypically white; my second inherited my dark skin but not my African American hair. Both girls have enjoyed a high level of acceptance in the community.
5.1.2 Race and Illegitimacy as Stigma.

The majority of participants reported examples of situations or events where their illegitimate status and/or racial difference and dark skin colour, singled them out in their predominantly white communities as possessing attributes which Goffman (1963) described as 'deeply discrediting.' Participants described strategies they had developed to enable them to manage social situations where their stigmatised status became an issue.

Goffman (1963) argues that stigma management is a 'general feature of society', occurring wherever identity norms are established (p. 155). The 'norm' for skin colour in England in the 1940s and 1950s was whiteness and it was their deviation from this norm, which set mixed-race war babes apart. Because of their unique birth circumstances their illegitimacy and racial difference were inextricably linked in the minds of others. The stigma of racial difference led to racism although the realisation that they were in fact not 'the same' as other children was often not apparent to participants until they attended school for the first time and became subject to name calling, for example, 'blacky' and 'nigger'. The gradual realisation of their deviance from the norm was a shock for some participants. Graham for example, described his first experiences of name-calling at school as hurtful and confusing.

In relation to the management of the stigma attached to their racial difference, gender differences emerged among participants. Males were more likely than females to resort to physical aggression in order to re-establish their status as 'normals' within their peer group. Roy for example tried to avoid physical confrontation in relation to name calling or other racist behaviour, but if it was inevitable, took on all comers, regardless of age or size:

I was only twelve and he was sixteen and I thought, 'I'm not having this' so I just turned on him and hit him as hard as I could and as I did it I knew what was going to happen. He knocked me all over the place (Roy p. 67).
The dilemma faced by those whose status changes for whatever reason from ‘normal,’ in this case white, to stigmatised, that is mixed-race or non-white, can have profound psychological implications. Goffman (1963) argued that:

... it is difficult to understand how individuals who sustain sudden transformation of their life from that of a normal to that of a stigmatised person can survive the change psychologically; yet very often they do (p. 158).

Goffman’s comment is significant in terms of the above average levels of stress reported by some participants, particularly as they moved into adulthood. Other forms of adaptation were reported in the narratives to accommodate to what Breakwell (1993) labelled as ‘spoiled identity.’ Some participants, again predominantly males, compensated for their sense of inferiority, by pushing themselves to excel in everything they did:

What it’s about is, I’ve got to do everything better than the next person (Arthur, p. 62).

I’ve never felt sort of worthy of having been successful at certain things. I think that’s why I’ve always had to try just that little bit harder...I’ll still be battling on my death bed (Roy, p. 71).

Protectiveness of birth mothers
Mothers of mixed-race war babes were in the position of experiencing stigma both first hand, as the parent of an illegitimate child of mixed-race and vicariously, through the prejudice experienced by first, their black partners and later their children. In the circumstances it is a not an unexpected finding that mothers exhibited protective behaviours toward their children, most of whom were very identifiable in the community as both illegitimate and mixed-race. These mothers would also have experienced first hand, the racial intolerance shown toward their GI sweethearts.
Protective strategies included taking a ‘zero tolerance’ approach to racial vilification of their children, an approach which was beautifully illustrated by Roy’s mother. On hearing that a new male neighbour had racially abused her son, Roy’s mother had immediately marched to the neighbours home and as he opened the door ‘...got him by the scruff of the neck and pulled him off the door step...’ (Roy, p. 65).

A second approach was imbuing their children with an enduring sense of their ‘specialness’. In some cases this was achieved simply by ensuring their children always looked well-groomed and well presented, for example, Arthur (p. 55), in others, by telling their children how much they had loved their GI fathers and by implication, the child themselves (Roy, p. 65; Cora, p. 148).

An alternative interpretation of the protective behaviour exhibited by these mothers is that they may have felt anxiety and/or guilt regarding the extent to which their child’s vulnerability was their ‘fault’. If they had not had a sexual relationship with a black GI, their child would not have been born racially different and therefore vulnerable to abuse. Two female participants also expressed their own sense of responsibility and feelings of guilt regarding the hurt their own children experienced as a consequence of racial discrimination. As one participant put it:

‘I shouldn’t have had kids. If it wasn’t for me he wouldn’t have dark skin’ (Cora, p. 151)

The stress associated with their stigmatised role may have adversely affected the long-term health of some birth mothers. Two participants described their mothers as experiencing ‘nervous’ conditions. Cora described her mother as having ‘lived on her nerves’. She died at the age of fifty-four years. Don’s mother was described as developing a ‘nervous disorder’ soon after his birth.

*Researcher’s Reflective Commentary*

My mother was married with a seven-year-old son when I was born in January 1946. I was raised by my mother and white step-father and was not told about my background until after my
mother's death when I was twelve years of age. Any queries I raised as a child about my dark skin colour and obvious physical differences to my siblings who were very fair were brushed aside. Up until being 'told' about my GI father, I had identified as white. Name-calling and being stared at had little impact, as I did not link them with my racial difference. I also had a strong sense of self worth, having been treated like Cora, Arthur and Roy, as 'very special' by my mother. Finding that my experience paralleled that of the participants was very affirming and lessened my own sense of personal isolation as a mixed-race war babe.

5.1.3 Identity Formation and Children of Mixed-race

The data about how respondents identified themselves and their struggle to establish an identity that incorporated both the black and white aspects of their racial heritage and accurately reflected their perception of themselves at that particular point in time, provided some of the most powerful narrative.

Rosa and Joe who had both been institutionalised clearly saw their race as a 'non-issue'. As Joe, described it:

Being brought up in a predominantly white society, they take the colour off you, they take your colour out of you. You see things through white eyes (Joe, p. 45).

Neither had been aware of their African American heritage until adulthood and had identified, up until then, as white. Don, who was not immediately recognisable as ‘different’ also saw race as a ‘non-issue’ and described himself as ‘not black’. Christine had been aware that she looked ‘different’, but was unsure of her racial background at the time of the interview and felt she could not resolve her identity until she had found her father.

Five participants almost fifty per cent of the sample saw themselves as of mixed-race but used differing terminology. Roy and Henry used the terms black, 'half and half', and 'half black' interchangeably as self-descriptors. Cora and Graham described themselves as 'half American' and fifty/fifty, whilst Arthur described himself as 'not
black’, but as a ‘black GI’s son’ suggesting he also saw himself as of mixed-race. Jane, who had been very self-conscious about her colour, described herself as ‘brown’. Joy was the only respondent who described herself as ‘white’.

These findings are similar to a study by Richards (1995), an African Caribbean author, who found that a group of twelve black British adults with one white and one black parent, generally defined themselves as of mixed-race, but that this sense of identity was only arrived at over a period of years.

The themes of identity and belonging were deeply embedded in the stories participants told about their lives, from their descriptions of early childhood, adolescence and then adulthood, to the search for their GI fathers. The findings illustrate the extent to which identity formation is fluid in nature and, as indicated in the literature needs to be seen from a life span or life course perspective (Breakwell 1986; Elder 1979). It is influenced by variables such as the developmental stage of the individual, the changing historical and social context in which they live and the micro and macro ecologies impacting upon them (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams 1990).

The finding that five participants, by middle age, identified themselves as of mixed-race, rather than black, is consistent with recent studies involving mixed-race adolescents in both the US (Brown 1995) and Britain (Banks 1995, Tizard and Phoenix 1995). In an American study of 119 young adults of mixed black and white racial heredity, the former found that the majority of participants ‘increasingly saw themselves as interracial.’ (P. 129). This literature suggests that as the number of mixed-race individuals in the community has increased, both in England and the US, there is an emerging view, from younger members in particular, that rather than be forced to identify as either black or mixed-race they would prefer to claim their mixed-race identity as a viable, legitimate and independent alternative.

Tizard and Phoenix (1995) conducted a British study of 58 adolescents of mixed Afro-Caribbean and white parentage and found that:
'Just over half our sample identified themselves as ‘half-and-half,’ mixed’, or ‘brown’, rather than black (p. 1407).

The young Americans in Brown’s (1995) study had initially identified with their black racial heritage and then reached a stage where they wished to acknowledge their white parentage. The reverse occurred in the case of mixed-race war babes who identified with their white heritage initially and only later with their black origins. This illustrates the impact of cultural and historical factors in identity outcomes. In the US children of mixed black and white parentage are automatically regarded as black on the basis of the ‘one black ancestor rule’. A child born to an interracial couple would therefore be raised as black. A child born in similar circumstances in England would be raised as the parents saw fit, regarding racial identity.

The young people in the Tizard & Phoenix (1995) study had been born in Britain in the 1980s when attitudes toward blacks were more informed and less negative than in 1940s. The majority lived with at least one black parent and attended schools where there were significant numbers of black children. Black mixed-race war babes lived in a totally white environment with white parent/s and/or extended family and with little information and no contact with their black fathers. The majority were understandably, given their birth circumstances, encouraged by their white families to ignore their black heritage and see themselves primarily as white. That almost half of the participants should then go on to identify themselves as ‘mixed-race’ rather than ‘white’ in adulthood raises some interesting issues about the value of racial identity to the individual.

The two participants who were institutionalised saw identity issues as less relevant than those who were raised by their families. This seems to be based on the differing microsystem issues for these two participants. Neither received input regarding their racial background until well into adulthood and although they were aware of being ‘different’

17 The ‘one black ancestor’ rule meant that persons of mixed black and white parentage were assigned the status of the subordinate group. It applies only to African Americans in the US.
to other children they had no understanding of what their colour meant. In these circumstances it would have been difficult to develop a sense of identity as a person of mixed-race.

For these war babes, a psychological shift in terms of their sense of self was required, from a childhood identification with an idealised and dominant white community, as personified by their mothers, to identification with a stigmatised, black minority, personified by their absent fathers. Making this identity shift was a prolonged process influenced by both micro and macro environmental changes in particular changes in community attitudes toward blacks in Britain.

The importance of utilising a life course perspective as advocated by Elder (1979) when examining identity issues, is illustrated by the gradual change in the way war babes viewed their racial background as they moved through the life cycle. From a strong identification with their white heredity in childhood they moved toward questioning where they belonged.

Their adolescent years coincided with the civil rights movements of the 1950s and early 1960s. The 1960s and 1970s heralded in the black consciousness raising movements such as ‘black power.’ At the same time there was an increase in the number of Afro-Caribbean migrants to Britain, bringing with them their own unique sense of black pride and cultural identity. Finally, in the 1980s and 1990s as war babes moved into middle age and felt the need to begin their search for their black GI fathers, came the upsurge of interest in family genealogy as people sought for their biological roots. This on-going interaction between individual war babes, and their micro and macro-ecology led to a gradual adaptation for some toward a closer and more positive identification with their black heredity and a greater sense of comfort about acknowledging their mixed-race status.

**Researcher’s Reflective Commentary**

I was raised to believe I was white until I was 12 years old and this remained my primary identification well into adulthood. On learning of my mixed-race origins I denied this aspect of
myself, only gradually incorporating the notion of being black as ‘OK’. My search for my GI father which commenced in the mid 1980s was symbolic of a decision to accept the black aspects of myself as a positive attribute. However, although I described myself as ‘black’ I was aware that the description lacked substance. I knew little or nothing of black culture and history and had no contact with black people. My decision to become a social worker enabled me to begin to make sense of my experience and working with the Aboriginal community in Melbourne helped me to develop an appreciation of the politics of race. The process of undertaking this research has opened my mind to the possibility of identifying as ‘mixed-race’ as a legitimate choice or option and that I can still identity as black when I choose to indicate solidarity with the ongoing struggle for human rights and equality by African American and black communities around the world.

5.1.4 Grief and Loss

In relation to grief and loss, there are parallels between the experience of the respondents in the current study and that of children who have been adopted. Grief and loss are central to the experience of all parties to the infant adoption triangle. The infertile adoptive parents grieve the loss of the biological child they will never have. The birth parent/s grieve the loss of their biological child and the child – the loss of her birth parents. If she has been adopted from overseas (intercountry adoption) the loss includes her country of origin and cultural ties, along with the possible loss of racially similar peers. Like adoptees of the same generation, many participants were raised with a sense of confusion around their birth status, were separated from at least one of their birth parents and some were denied access to information about their birth fathers.

Whilst information regarding their racial background was accepted at an intellectual level by participants as children, it was only later (usually in adolescence and early adulthood) that they began to fully appreciate the meaning of the information and to reflect on the implications their racial difference had, for themselves and for their future. 18 One of the outcomes of this reflective process was an attempt over time to

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18 It is important to note that in the 1950s childhood ended earlier than it does now. The majority of children from lower socio-economic families finished their schooling and commenced work at fifteen years of age.
integrate their black racial heritage into their sense of self-identity. In order to do this successfully they were required to gradually relinquish their childhood sense of themselves as solely white, precipitating a sense of loss and grief.

Rando (1993) writing in the context of death and dying, describes the processes of mourning as involving a loss of the individual's 'assumptive world:'

In large part the assumptive world determines the individual's needs, emotions, and behaviour, and gives rise to hopes, wishes fantasies and dreams. It is the internal model against which the person constantly matches incoming sensory data in order to orient self, recognize what is happening, and plan behaviour (Rando 1993, p. 51).

This concept is applicable to the experience of participants in the present study. Their assumptive world included beliefs around growing up as a white person in a white world, competing equally for job opportunities, marrying another white person and having white children and grandchildren. Respondents needed to revise their assumptive world over time to accommodate changed expectations, altered relationships and a new identity. Some reported that it was not until they reached adulthood or even middle age that they felt they had successfully incorporated a positive acceptance and acknowledgment of their mixed-race status. For others, for example Joy, this accommodation did not occur and she retained her primary identification as a white individual.

Rando (1993) argues that the greater the revision or reconstruction required the more the individual must contend with secondary losses and, '... must deal with the anxiety, insecurity, vulnerability, and questioned identity such reconstruction inevitably brings' (p. 53).

The view of grief as a time limited and linear process has been challenged by Wilker et al. (1981) and Bruce et al. (1993) in the context of the grief and loss experienced by the
parents of children with an intellectual disability. Bruce et al concluded that grieving was an ongoing process and that mothers experienced grief more intensely than fathers (p. 37). The latter finding is interesting and links with the findings of the current study that female participants were more likely than male, to report feelings of guilt, sadness and a sense of personal responsibility when their children experienced racial prejudice. It appeared that their children’s experience re-activated for them, in a way it did not for male participants, their personal sense of grief in relation to their own past losses.

Because their experience of loss was unique, that is, these children were living an experience lived by few others, their grief went largely unrecognised and unacknowledged by their white family (and to some extent themselves). Doka (1989) describes this form of grieving as ‘disenfranchised’ grief and defines it as:

... the grief that persons experience when they incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported (Doka 1989, p. 4)

Those who were resilient found this grief experience stressful but manageable. Some demonstrated a vulnerability to post traumatic stress disorder. Roy, for example, described a period of severe emotional stress after the death of a child and Rosa feared she would have a ‘breakdown’ after her first marriage ended in divorce. If we view grief and loss as cumulative and ongoing, then it is important to take a life-course perspective when examining the impact of loss on the individual. This model would suggest that vulnerability to stress breakdown or post traumatic stress disorder increases with age.

**Researcher’s Reflective Commentary**

The sense of loss regarding my white identity was exacerbated by the unexpectedness of the information I was given at the age of 12 years regarding my racial background. Rando (1993) points out that the more rapid and fundamental the revision of the affected persons assumptive world ‘the more shocking and problematic the experience is to the mourner’ (p. 53). Integrating into my sense of self a racial identity which I had been raised to believe was inferior to my
preferred white identity took many years and it was not until I reached mid-life that I began to identify with my black heritage and feel more comfortable in identifying myself as black. The reflective process of writing this thesis has enabled a further identity shift to occur. The literature has indicated that persons of 'mixed-race' are increasingly identifying as such and that this is a viable alternative to identifying as 'black'. My previous belief had been that persons of mixed-race had to identify as either white or black. Identifying as black was a politicised decision, confirming one's solidarity with the struggle for freedom and equality for all blacks.

5.1.5 Stress, Resilience and Coping

On the basis of the literature and her personal and professional experience, the researcher had expected to find that some participants would report experiencing stress as a consequence of their birth circumstances and racial difference. Five respondents, almost fifty percent of the sample, reported experiencing conditions such as anxiety, depression or heart disease, which have a stress component.

Considerable work has been done into the relationship between racism and the occurrence of stress in individual African Americans. Utsey & Ponterotto (1996) developed a specific instrument to measure the stress associated with the experience of racism in daily life. They point out the difficulties in measuring everyday occurrences of racism which are often elusive and subtle in nature and the link between race-related stress and the development of depression (p. 491).

Carroll (1998), a black author, maintains that all African Americans 'live in the shadow of whiteness' and as a consequence suffer from mundane extreme environmental stress (MEES). Pierce (1970, 1974) defines this as:

... an environment in which racism and subtle oppression are ubiquitous, constant, continuing and mundane and one in which African Americans must daily suffer the annoying 'micro-aggressions' such environments breed (quoted in Carroll 1998, p. 4)
Carroll (1998) argues that skin colouration is still the primary form of categorisation used in the US and that blackness has been so stigmatised and devalued that every member of the African American community is placed under enormous and on-going pressure. Further, the dominance of anti-African thought and Eurocentric ideas of beauty and ways of being, create unique additional stresses for African Americans (p. 3).

This stress is present in all identifiable African Americans and/or all who identify with being of African descent (Carroll, 1998. p. 3).

Dr Bruce McEwan, neuroendocrinologist at the prestigious Rockefeller University, New York, has also explored the impact of day to day stress on the individual. In an interview with Norman Swann on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s, Radio National program the ‘Health Report,’ he argued that it is the day-to-day stress in peoples’ lives, rather than one-off ‘dramatic life events’ which cause problems as the effects may accumulate over time.19

Carroll (1998) and others have identified the African American family structure as a mediating factor which helps to buffer African Americans from the worst aspects of MEES. These include the type of home environment, educational setting and the parents’ perspective (p. 10). This factor was not available to the participants in the present study. It was not that the British families were unsupportive, but that they were unable to offer the kind of support that comes from a shared history and shared experience.

The findings indicate that race related and other stress, was a factor in the lives of several participants. Their birth circumstances, experience of persistent, mundane, extreme environmental stress, together with their isolation from the kind of familial support available to black children in African American families, increased the potential

19 Dr Bruce McEwan, interviewed by Norman Swann on Radio National Health Report 13.4.98
for the development of race-related stress and vulnerability to post-traumatic stress disorder. It is proposed that race related stress was exacerbated for mixed-race war babes by their illegitimate status and the grief and loss associated with the absence of their GI fathers.

**Researcher's Reflective Commentary**

In order to manage my sense of personal inferiority associated with my awareness of my African American status, I pushed myself in the way described by Arthur, Joe and Roy, to excel in everything I did. I focused on those attributes which I believed would emphasise my Britishness/whiteness, for example high academic achievement. My aim, was for personal recognition and to compensate for what I believed was my ‘spoiled identity’ by proving that I was not lazy or a ‘stupid black’ epithets I had heard applied to black people.

**Stress, Resilience and Coping**

Resilience is a concept that is gaining increased recognition as fundamental to an understanding of coping mechanisms in children exposed to stress and trauma. Resilience models predicate that there are protective or cushioning factors, which act as mediators increasing a child’s resilience to stress. As such they are central to an understanding of the differential impact of stress on individual children and adults.

The majority of respondents indicated high levels of resilience with five of the eleven reporting that they had experienced either one or more periods of stress. In terms of severity, these varied from regular hospitalisation, to seeking professional counselling or support from trusted friends. One participant, Joe, died about eighteen months after the interview after unsuccessful emergency surgery for heart disease. In addition to these five participants, a twelfth participant withdrew prior to the interviews after his condition deteriorated whilst he also waited for heart surgery.

Clearly the eleven respondents demonstrated differential impact to the same stressful event, that is being born both illegitimate and of mixed-race in wartime England. The problem with a study of this nature is that this is a small sample of mature adults reflecting on the past. There is an absence of corroborative developmental data. In terms of trying to apply the concepts from resilience literature it is not possible to know
if what is ‘seen’ – that is ‘coping’ – is a sign of innate resilience, developmental influences or some other factor.

What is known is that resilience is a transactional multifaceted phenomenon involving genetic aspects, environmental aspects, developmental aspects, as well as good luck. Some of the coping mechanisms respondents reported included loving and supportive mothers and/or other caring relatives, job opportunities, accepting marriage partners, living in accepting, stable and often small communities and a successful search for their GI father, particularly where the father was still alive.

**Researcher’s Reflective Commentary**

My experience has been of vulnerability to stress both in childhood and adulthood. Over the years I have developed stress management techniques including meditation, exercise and diet and relaxation which have enabled me to maintain a sense of equilibrium. My training and experience as a social worker considerably enhanced the repertoire of stress management strategies available to me compared to the respondents. It also assisted in ‘normalising’ my experience of stress.

Writing the thesis has been both stressful and liberating as I have sought to strategically manage the emotions and feelings precipitated by the research process and apply the learnings derived from the integration of the participant’s stories, my personal and professional experience, the literature and the methodology.

### 5.1.6 Impact of search for birth father on identity formation

All of the participants who took part in the study were searching for their GI fathers. Some searched for many years. Six had found their fathers at the time of the interviews. Three were still alive when found and three had died. The three respondents whose fathers were still alive had visited them in the United States. One father had also been to England on several occasions to spend time with his daughter.

For some participants it was clear their search for their African American father was linked to their search for a sense of identity as a person of mixed-race.

If I knew my father and his family, even if I’ve got black sisters, my history would be complete, at the moment I don’t know what – how can I put it? What I am basically (Christine, p. 135).
For those that had met their fathers and other members of their family there was an intense and heightened awareness of their identity and a sense of belonging which they felt they had not experienced before. This is illustrated in the following quotations from Graham and Henry, two of the three participants, who had met their fathers prior to the research interviews:

When I got in the house I felt at home—relaxed, as if I'd been there all my life. We [Graham and his father] used to sit on the verandah—they had a rocking chair (Graham, p. 156).

Obviously, when I was flying out to the States I knew that dad, and his family, were black ... But after a few days I totally adjusted ... It was completely normal to see myself as part of the black community with my father and the family (Henry, p. 86).

Jane, the third participant, found that meeting her father confronted her with earlier unresolved anxieties about her identity as a person of both black and white heritage. Her first thoughts on seeing him were:

Who are you? You're not my dad; you're too black! I'd always been told he was brown. I thought, you can't possibly be my dad (Jane, p. 52).

One of the issues which emerged prior to the interviews for Jane, but became an issue for others in the follow up stage, was how to maintain a relationship with a parent who lives several thousand miles away and whose life expectancy, given his age, is limited. Jane chose to move to America to be with her father but this was not an option for everyone. It is a particularly difficult issue for those who spent many years searching for their fathers and who understandably want to make the most of whatever time is left to spend with them.
Those participants who were still searching for their fathers shared the hopes of people in similar situations most notably adoptees, that they would experience a sense of connectedness with their birth parent and completeness or wholeness in terms of their sense of self (Adoption Myth and Reality). For mixed-race war babes an additional dimension was that meeting their birth parent would also provide an opportunity to consolidate their sense of identity as a person of both black and white racial origins.

**Researchers Reflective Commentary**

I searched for my GI father for over ten years discovering in 1995 that he had died in 1981. I was able to locate his wife and family some of whom were still living in the family home in Los Angeles. They were totally welcoming and accepted me warmly and without question. I travelled to Los Angeles to meet them in 1996 soon after I commenced this study. It was an incredibly moving and emotional experience. I came away feeling more ‘authentic’ in terms of my identification as ‘black’. I continue to mourn the fact that I will never know my father and struggle to maintain contact with my American family who are over 12,000 miles away and unlikely ever to be able to visit Australia. Paradoxically, the successful conclusion of my search has brought me closer to my white family with whom, because of migration, I have had little contact over the past 25 years.

**5.2 Implications for Social Work Practice**

This cohort was not a social work client group and the present research was not directed toward illuminating a particular social work problem or issue, however there are implications for social work practice derived from the present study and they are discussed in this chapter. The major applicability of the outcomes of this study is in the area of transracial child placement and more broadly to cross-cultural social work practice. As there are different levels of applicability, implications for black and mixed-race children placed transracially and for children adopted intercountry will be discussed first, followed by a discussion on the broader implications for cross cultural and anti-racist social work practice.
Mixed-race children, adopted, fostered or otherwise cared for, in-country.

The findings relate most closely to those British children of mixed-race parentage who constitute a significant proportion of the children entering the care system (Bebbington and Miles, 1989; Rowe 1989; Banks 1995). One of the options for children in care, if they are unable to return permanently to their family of origin, is adoption in an alternative family.

Placement of black children in white families (transracial adoption) began in the early 1960s in the UK with the establishment of the British Adoption Project, specifically aimed to promote the placement of children from ethnic minorities. By the 1980s concerns were being raised by black professionals about the efficacy of these placements. In particular it was argued that black and mixed-race children in white families would not develop a black identity, considered essential as a cushioning or protective factor against racism.

In 1983 two white researchers Gill and Jackson published the findings from a third follow up study of 53 black and mixed-race children placed transracially in the context of the British Adoption Project. They found that with regard to racial identity the 'large majority of parents had made 'only limited' or 'very limited' attempts to instil a sense of racial pride or even understanding of their racial background in their children:

The children in turn saw themselves as 'white' in all but skin colour and had little knowledge or experience of their counterparts growing up in the black community (Gill & Jackson 1983, p. 192).

Despite these findings, the researchers said that they 'felt confident' in using the word 'success' to describe outcomes for the majority of the children in the project. Their confidence was not shared by the Association of Black Social Workers and Allied Professionals (ABSAP) who issued the following statement:
The practice of transracial placements as an alternative care structure for black children is perpetuating racist ideologies and so poses one of the most dangerous threats to the type of society to which we aspire.

There followed a lengthy period when the concept of ‘same race’ placement and ‘black families for black children’ dominated child placement policy and practice and transracial placements were discouraged. By the late 1980s, however, unease was being expressed about the potential for these policies to result in black and mixed-race children remaining in care for inordinate lengths of time because of the lack of black families and the reluctance of agencies to place transracially (Gilroy 1994; Gaber & Aldridge 1994).

The issue came to a head early in 1990 with a high profile case involving the removal of a 17 month old child of mixed-race from white foster parents who had cared for him since he was a few days old and had applied to adopt him. The child was placed with a black couple (Townsend 1990). The foster family took their case to the High Court, who upheld the agency’s decision, but the media furore which followed led to a decision by the Health Minister, David Mellor, to call a ministerial inquiry into transracial placements.

In 1990 the government announced a review of the Adoption Act 1976 and in 1993 published a White Paper on adoption. The paper was unambiguous in its attitude toward racial issues in adoption:

There is no conclusive research which justifies isolating such questions from other matters needing assessment; or which supports the proposition that children adopted by people of a different ethnic group will necessarily encounter problems of identity or prejudice later in life (Section 4.33).
Similar tensions regarding transracial placement developed in the US. In 1972 the National Association of Black Social Workers issued a position statement in opposition to the transracial placement of African American children by white families, arguing they were harmful to the children concerned (Curtis 1996). This resulted in the introduction of a 'same race' policy and a reduction in the number of transracial placements in the US from 2,574 in 1971 (Bartolet 1991) to 747 in 1994, (Auld 1993).

As in the UK, proponents of transracial adoption have argued strongly that black children are not disadvantaged by placement in white families. In 1994 'same-race’ policies were reversed in the US when President Clinton signed into law the Multiethnic Placement Act which prohibited agencies receiving federal funding from considering race as a factor in the placement of a child (Curtis 1996, p. 161).

**Intercountry Adoption**

Intercountry adoption involves movement of a child from a third world country such as India, or Asia into a usually western developed country, for example North America, Australia or Britain. The popularity of intercountry adoption programs and the large numbers of children leaving their country of origin each year to be adopted in the western world has prompted discussion about the impact on the children concerned and the politics of intercountry adoptive placement. In Australia in 1997/98, 245 non-relative children were adopted intercountry making a total of 2,192 non-relative, overseas children adopted in Australia since 1990/91.\(^{20}\) In the US data from the Immigration and Naturalisation Services indicate that 7,088 children were adopted intercountry in 1990.\(^{21}\)

The long-term effects on the psychological health of children trans-located from one culture to another is still largely unknown although studies of younger children suggest

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that the outcomes so far are positive (Triseliotis 1991, p. 51). The outcomes of these studies are generally limited, however, by the relatively young age of the children involved.

Transracial placement of children both in-country and inter-country is an emotive and controversial area of social work practice. It is also politically sensitive. The question which researchers in the field have tried to answer is:

... can an intercountry and transracially placed child have a strong sense of self-esteem and good mental health alongside poor racial and ethnic identification? (Triseliotis 1991, p. 48).

On the basis of his review of the literature, Triseliotis (1991), argued that despite considerable research evidence indicating that children adopted intercountry generally do as well as children adopted in-country 'the evidence points with considerable certainty' to the reality that the adopted person's sense of self worth is damaged when they are identified by others as members of an 'outgroup' (p. 51).

The findings of the current study indicate that participants were often hurt and momentarily bewildered when they were identified by others as not white, particularly in childhood and adolescence. It is not possible given the size of the sample and the unique life circumstances of this cohort, to make a causative link between the cumulative stress associated with repeated experiences of this nature and reports by participants of stress-related illness in adulthood. However it does suggest the need for further research in this area.

Implications of the current study for social work practice in the child placement area follow:

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21 Eastern European Adoption Coalition, Internet Website
<http://eadopt.com/home/heritage/index.html>
Black and mixed-race children in white families are likely to experience additional stress over and above that associated with their adoptive status.

Mixed-race children whose primary identification is white but who are perceived of by others as black or mixed-race, need to develop strategies to manage the cognitive dissonance created by the lack of congruence between their perception of themselves and the perception of others. The dilemma faced by children in this situation is highlighted by Sommerlad (1977), in the context of Aboriginal child placement in Australia. Sommerlad used the concept of ‘reference group’ to describe the group that an individual uses for guidance regarding personal behaviour attitudes and values. And ‘membership group’ for the group that a person belongs to by virtue of race and/or ethnicity, for example Aboriginal, African-Caribbean or Indian. The potential conflict inherent for the child placed transracially is that:

If whites are his reference models, and the membership group is thus different to the reference group, it might be expected that conflict might be augmented, particularly when that reference group also holds a negative image of Aborigines (p. 19).

‘Telling’ a child about her racial background and encouraging the child to develop a positive sense of racial identity, should be seen in placement practice, as equivalent to ‘telling’ a child about her adoptive status.

‘Telling’ a child about their adoptive status at an early age, is an agency expectation of all potential adoptive families. Kirk (1964) coined the terms ‘acknowledgment-of-difference’ and ‘rejection-of-difference’ to conceptualise strategies used by adoptive parents to manage their conflicting obligations, to accept a child as if s/he is ‘their ‘own’ but acknowledge that the child has another set of parents.

He found that children suffered less deprivation in families where parents ‘were able to acknowledge there was a difference between their situation and that of the birth parents’. This concept is equally applicable to racial difference. Parents who adopt
transracially must be able to accept that their child is racially different to themselves and to assist the child to acknowledge this difference in a positive way.

*Training and support, on an on-going basis, should be available to assist white adoptive parents to deal with race-related issues associated with the placement.*

As Banks (1990) pointed out, white parents of mixed-race children have not had the preparation necessary to cope with racism in the community directed at either themselves or their children. Adoption social workers have an important role to play in the training, preparation and support of potential adoptive parents. This could include educative input about the nature of racism, role plays modelling responses to situations where racially biased remarks are made and input from older transracially adopted persons.

**Cultural Sensitivity and Anti-Racist Social Work Practice**

The following discussion links the present study with the broader literature around culturally sensitive and anti-racist social work practices. Whilst the present study is not of this practice literature it lends support to its importance. Cross-cultural social work describes the interaction which occurs when the social worker and the client do not share the same cultural background (Sang 1991). Jackson (1995) describes cross-cultural sensitivity in social work practice as:

... the ability to interweave cultural awareness and an appreciation of the socio-cultural forces that influence people's experiences into all phases of the helping process (p. 51).

Social workers involved in multi-cultural settings need to be aware of the impact of their personal attitudes and views on clients. They cannot assume that their social work training means that they are impartial where race and ethnicity are concerned, as their values and assumptions are usually Eurocentric (Casas 1984).
Clare (1991) experienced first hand the impact of culturally insensitive practice as a social work educator who was involved in addressing the 'colour blind and ethnocentric practice assumptions of social workers in the UK', following the race riots of 1981 (p. 115). He points out that one of the three major areas of change that needed to occur was in the area of child welfare practice, and in particular, the need for practitioners to take the child's 'racial and ethnic identity' into account when making placements (p. 116).

The importance of developing culturally sensitive communication and working relationships across racial and cultural boundaries is emphasised by Narayan (1998). Using the 'insider' 'outsider' model she outlines a number of ways that the cultural insensitivity of outsiders (members of the dominant culture) can unintentionally violate the emotions and therefore the sense of self of 'insiders' (members of the oppressed group). Narayan's observations are particularly relevant to the debate about transracial adoption which has tended to split the academic and professional child welfare community along racial lines. She points out that working across differences, whilst an important goal, involves higher emotional costs for insiders who are vulnerable to the hurt which occurs when their trust in outsiders is unwittingly betrayed:

> Insiders cannot fail to realise that being hurt by the insensitivity of outsiders they endeavour to work with and care about, is often more difficult to deal with emotionally than being hurt by the deliberate malice of outsiders whom they expect no better of (Narayan 1998, p. 319).

This comment is pertinent to the situation of the transracially adopted child who holds 'insider' status within the white family and must learn to manage the hurt occasioned by the 'unintentional violations' of her emotions by loved, white family members. In order to protect insiders from the insensitivity of outsiders Narayan claims 'epistemic privilege' for members of the oppressed minority:
The claim of epistemic privilege amounts to claiming that members of an oppressed group have a more immediate, subtle and critical knowledge about the nature of their oppression than people who are non-members of the oppressed group (pp. 319-320).

The implications of epistemic privilege for the outsider who wishes to challenge the validity of the insider’s point of view, is that they must do so with ‘methodological caution,’ that is, in such a way that it does not appear that they are undermining of, or dismissing altogether, the validity of the insider’s viewpoint (Narayan 1998, p. 321).

The implications of Narayan’s model for social workers working across cultural and racial boundaries is the need to be conscious of the emotional costs of oppression. These were also outlined by Carroll (1998) who used the term mundane extreme environmental stress (MEES) to describe the day-to-day subtle forms of oppression that go largely unnoticed by outsiders but are part of everyday life for the majority of African Americans. For social workers and others, working in the highly emotive area of transracial adoption, there is an even greater need to ensure they acknowledge the epistemic privilege of black professionals, black families and other members of the black or mixed-race community who are in a position to have a view on this issue.

5.3 Conclusion

The eleven participants in this study are ordinary men and women who have led extraordinary lives. Born into a hostile world, they personified, by their very presence in post war England, an aspect of the Second World War that both Britain and America preferred to forget. Those mothers who chose to keep their child and raise her themselves were often shunned and vilified. Despite this some of them, when faced with having to choose between their white husbands and their black child, chose to keep their child.
Their fathers and the other black GIs they served with, returned to the U.S. after the war with different expectations about their future. Whilst based in Britain (and Europe), they had generally been accepted on an equal footing by whites for the first time and had enjoyed the experience. There is little doubt that the civil rights and black power movements of the 1950s and 1960s were based to some extent on the determination of these black veterans to secure a better future for themselves and for their children.

The military has continued to play an important role in the lives of African Americans. In 1948 segregation was eliminated in the armed forces, opening up hitherto unknown opportunities for young blacks, both male and female, to enjoy not only equal opportunity, but access to skills training. Dr John Butler, cited in Billingsley, 1992, estimates that over twenty-five per cent of all middle-class black families in the U.S. 'owe their status directly or indirectly to the military' (p. 195). The appointment of Colin Powell to the role of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of all the U.S. Armed Forces in 1989, marked the culmination of the achievement of power and status for African Americans in the military arena.

For the children who were left behind by black GIs in 1945, however, and their mothers, this was small comfort. Their isolation within the white community was exacerbated by the stigma associated with their situation and their lack of developed defences to deal with this. The decision by those mothers who raised their mixed-race child themselves to 'put it all behind them' and 'get on with their lives' whilst laudable, added to their children's sense of being disconnected from one half of their racial heritage. It also emphasised their isolation within the white community and increased the stress associated with their race and illegitimate status.

Given this isolation, the high level of shared experience reported across the group of participants regarding the key themes and issues, is significant. In particular, their stories featured themes about identity formation, the management of stigma and race related stress, their relationship with their mothers (and where applicable their step-fathers) and their motivation for searching for their black GI fathers.
The most significant finding was that five out of the eleven participants, almost fifty percent, identified with both the black and white aspects of their racial heritage despite the paucity of information regarding their African American background and in some cases the lack of encouragement from their families to pursue this aspect of themselves. Several mothers in fact refused to support their child’s search for their origins, actively withholding information about their GI fathers.

As well as sharing similar experiences with each other, the lived experience of the respondents bears similarities to that of black and mixed-race children, placed transracially through adoption and foster care programs. The implications of this finding are several. There is considerable debate about the long-term effects of transracial placement. To date, this has not been able to be explored because transracial adoption is a relatively recent concept. The respondents in the current study provide a unique trans-generational perspective on the experience of being raised as a child of mixed-race in a white family within a predominantly white environment. More importantly it provides some indication that there may be particular race-related stresses involved for children who identify as white but are perceived of by others as black or mixed-race.

The concept of race-related stress and the cumulative nature of mundane extreme environmental stress (MEES) on children and adults requires further consideration. This could occur in the context of work currently being done to identify protective factors and resilience in black and mixed-race children in care. The current research suggests that a positive sense of self-identity as a person of mixed-race, is a cushioning factor promoting resilience in children and adults.

The role of researcher as researched in the current study has demonstrated the extent to which a degree of ‘theoretical sensitivity’, based on shared experience between researcher and participants, can enable the research process in terms of establishing trust.
The aim of this study was to 'give voice to' a group of men and women who are relatively unknown but who are an important part of the living history of the Second World War. As children they were described as, ‘... the offspring of the scum of the British Isles’ (Smith p. 211), an insult that encapsulated both themselves and their British mothers.

Participants showed remarkable resilience given that they regularly faced problems and issues which their white peers would never experience and could not begin to understand. They did so in isolation from the support of other African Americans or persons of mixed-race. However, some also showed signs of the cumulative personal stress involved, when an individual’s energy is re-directed, towards finding a balance between two worlds that have traditionally been at opposite ends of the continuum we call ‘race’.
6. Bibliography


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Sang, D. 1990, Cross-Cultural Counselling: Some Current Issues, in *Issues of Cross Cultural Practice*, Clare & Jayasuriya (eds), Department of Social Work and Social Administration, the University of Western Australia.


**Manuscript and Archival Sources**

**Britain**

2 Imperial War Museum, Elephant and Castle, London.
CO Colonial Office Papers
WO War Office Papers
Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>An American who identifies herself or is identified by others as of African descent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>black</td>
<td>A term which was used in the 1960s and 1970s to describe an African American. Now used interchangeably with the term African American.</td>
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<tr>
<td>race</td>
<td>A group of persons connected by common descent…family tribe or nation regarded as of common stock (The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary 1997)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ethnicity</td>
<td>A characteristic of shared unique cultural traditions and a heritage that persists across generations (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990, p. 292).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>racism</td>
<td>Discrimination on the basis that perceived cultural superiority is based on genetic superiority (Sang 1990, p. 40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ethnocentrism</td>
<td>Discrimination on the basis of perceived cultural superiority (Sang 1990, p. 40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>racial identity</td>
<td>Implies a consciousness of self within a particular group (Spencer and Markstrom-Adams 1990, p. 292).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed-race parentage</td>
<td>For the purposes of this study, a person who has one white and one black parent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transracial adoption</td>
<td>The adoptive placement of a child with a family who do not share the child’s racial and/or cultural background.</td>
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Appendix 2: Participant’s Stories (continued)

6.1.1 Participant 7

Christine

Background

Christine’s mother was 19 years old, single and living with her parents when she became pregnant to Christine’s black GI father. She was one of five children and did not become aware of the pregnancy until after the father left England. Christine described her mother’s parents as ‘quite horrible’ to her when they discovered the pregnancy, ‘Nevertheless they stood by her when I was born.’

Christine lived with her grandparents whom she called ‘mum’ and ‘dad’, until she was five years old. She called her mother by her first name. When her mother married she went to live with her and her new husband. Christine had a poor relationship with her step-father and her perception of her childhood was that it was generally unhappy and lacking in authenticity, ‘Nothing was right in my life.’ This sense of living within an unsatisfactory family system and its impact on her childhood, was a dominant theme throughout the interview.

The relationship between Christine and her mother, who is still living, is strained and her mother has not been supportive of Christine’s search for her GI father.

‘Telling’

Christine was told ‘many different stories’ about her background and was discouraged from asking questions:

It was actually an issue that got swept under the carpet. When you ever mentioned it, it was something that never happened as well. [It was as if], ‘All that’s in the past now - its gone.’
She was told her father had wanted to marry her mother but had been killed in the war. Later when she felt ready to begin the search for her father and/or other family members, her mother’s ambivalence made it difficult for her to proceed as she could not be sure that the information she had was correct. Christine believed that her mother and other family members could not appreciate the painful feelings she experienced in relation to the need to know who she was. Family members who may have been in a position to assist her in finding her father were equally reluctant to divulge information which had the status of ‘family secrets’.

I think that was the most disappointing thing of it all, is when people make light work of it when you are looking for a father and they can’t understand the importance of it [as if they think]...

‘Why bother after all this time? What’s the point?’

The importance of locating a birth parent, in terms of the emotional and psychological well being of the individual concerned, is often under-estimated by those who have never experienced it.

It goes so deep, I don’t think people are aware how deep it goes when you don’t know one of your parents. I’d be quite happy right now just to have another photograph of him, you know, just to say that was my dad.

Christine reported feeling frustrated by the fact that her mother had provided misleading and/or contradictory information in the past concerning her GI father, which had thwarted her search to find him. At the age of 6 years she had been given a photograph of a black GI and told it was her father and that he had been killed in the war. She had emotionally attached to the photograph and shared it with friends as the only tangible evidence she had of his existence. More recently her mother claimed the GI in the photo was not her father but a friend of his and that her father may not have been killed.
Racial Identity

For Christine her racial background, particularly her colour, was something she had to contend with all her life. She had experienced name-calling including terms like ‘nigger’ and ‘black bastard’ and commented that this was a bigger problem than it might have been because of the lack of support from home.

My colour was a big issue ... I was aware of my colour ... Like I say there were some times I felt like, um, I wish I could peel my skin off!

Her confusion about her racial identity was exacerbated by a sense of loss, in terms of her status as a fatherless child.

... but not having a father at home ... sort of, to stand up for you if you like, um ... That was a big thing in my life.

Symptomatic of the reality that there were very few racially different people in England in the 1940s and 1950s, most war babes reported being regularly stared at and often subject to queries from curious strangers about their appearance. “Where do you come from?”, was a question asked frequently enough for many of them to develop a specific strategy for responding to it.

Christine resented the intrusion implicit in the question, pointing out that it is difficult to have to admit you don’t know who your father is. Her response was to give a limited amount of information and make it clear that she did not intend to give any more.

If I have to mention about my father, then I’ll say he came from America. I don’t mention that he’s black.
Marriage and Family

Christine met her husband when she was 18 years old and they married two years later. Her racial background was initially an issue for her new husband’s family.

Well when [husband] mentioned to his mother and father about me, their first reaction was, ‘Oh, you got a black one then.’

However, there was at least one other inter-racial marriage within the family and Christine described her mother-in-law as accepting of her. Her husband, however, seemed ambivalent about her racial origins and threatened by her understandable wish to identify with other black people. Her experience reflected that of several other mixed-race war babes, in that their marital partners were not always themselves, free of racial prejudice.

The colour issue did arise in my marriage – very much so. He was always under the impression that I was always jumping to the defence of any black person on television or black group ... that I would stick up for them regardless, you know, and I could never get through to him that to my mind there was good and bad in every race, you know, and if I liked someone or admired them it was because of what they did not because they were coloured, so I think he was more racial than I was.

This ambivalence became more pronounced in moments of marital conflict.

That [her colour] was the first thing he bought up when we were in a row ... it was quite hurtful at times.

The issue of children was discussed once they had made a decision that they would marry.
We did go to the doctors to see what chance there would be of having a black child. I think he [her husband] must have been a bit concerned about that.

The doctor’s visit highlighted the difficulty for black war babes in trying to get genetic counselling in the 1950s and early 1960s when many of them were thinking about marriage and children. Christine’s local general practitioner’s reassuring, if somewhat ethnocentric advice, was that they shouldn’t worry as ‘white always came out on top.’

Search for Father

It was hard for Christine to develop a sense of identity with a particular race when she was not even sure that her father was a black GI and that she could in fact claim African American heritage. She described her sense of identity as closely linked to the search for her father and expressed a sense of genealogical bewilderment regarding her current status:

If I knew my father and his family, even if I’ve got black sisters, my history would be complete, at the moment I don’t know what – how can I put it? What I am basically.

This was also an issue for one of her sons who had inherited her dark skin colouring and who had asked where her father had come from:

I was touched. It’s a very sad issue actually, I said, ‘I don’t know. I can only tell by my features. Judging by my features, I think he was African.’

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22 A term used primarily within the adoption community to describe the sense of confusion, experienced by adoptees in particular, regarding their genetic history.
Because of her uncertainty about the information her mother had given her Christine was uncertain as to whether she would ever find her father.

In a follow up contact 18 months after the interview Christine wrote that she had found her father and had visited him twice in America.

6.1.2 Participant 8

Donald (Don)

Background and Family Relationships

Don's mother was 21 years old, single and living with her mother and father when he was born. Soon after the birth she developed a 'nervous disorder. His black GI father was aware of the birth but had to leave England when he was four months old. He left his 'dog tags' and a photograph which his mother kept as mementos.

Don’s mother experienced high levels of tension between her parents and she later left to live with an older sister, M***, who had four sons of her own. She remained there until she married when Don was 8 years old. Soon after the marriage his GI father wrote to her again but her new husband was 'very angry' about the letter and threw it away together with the dog tags and photograph. His step-father died when Don was 17 years old. There was one child of the marriage, a girl. Don has a good relationship with his mother whom he described as 'a lady'. His mother is still living but his aunt M*** died about five years ago.

23 “Dog tags” was the term used to describe the metal identification disc that all US and British serviceman wore. The 'dog tag' was often the only means of identification left if a serviceman was seriously injured or killed in battle. The “dog tags” were important to the men as a momento of their war service. The fact that Don's father gave them to his mother, suggests the relationship was a significant one to him.
Don described his aunt as, ‘a hard case you know’. She was very protective of Don, who frequently got into fights with other children. This sometimes led to the father of the child concerned waiting for him after school.

If my Aunt M*** got word of anything like that, she’d put in an appearance you now, and make the guy look that big [holding up finger and thumb slightly apart]...

She was a great protector you know, me Aunt M***.

‘Telling’

Don first became aware of his background when he was about six or seven years old, after comments were made by other children in the street about his skin colour and hair. He went to his mother who told him that his father was an American. He did not raise the issue with her again until he was fifteen or sixteen years old, when he met another mixed-race war babe. This was the first time he had met anyone who shared his experience.

Similarly to the other men in the study, Don had felt constrained in discussing his background with his mother:

I never discussed it with me mum. Just within the last ten years really. I never mentioned it ... until I reached forty.

... I felt like – embarrassed to bring it up. I didn’t want to embarrass me mum.

Racial Issues

Don reported that he had rarely experienced racial prejudice ‘Colour has never been an issue really’. He thought this could be linked to the fact that although he had a slightly darker skin and curly hair, he was not immediately recognisable as having an African
American background. When problems did arise, like Roy, he decided to take a fairly aggressive approach. This had occasionally got him into serious trouble 'I thought I were going to get prison', when he got into a fight with a local man who had racially abused him 'I put him in hospital'.

Don was aware of the black civil rights movement, but did not identify with it and felt sceptical about current 'black rights' issues in England:

They’re all descended from slaves ... it must put something in their minds, you know, that the world owes them a living.

Don felt that blacks had in fact always enjoyed equal opportunity.

Yes, nobody can stop you reading a book or educating yourself...
the opportunities are there whether you’re black or white.

**Marriage and Family**

Don did not think his racial difference had impacted on his relationship with women.

I never even thought of that where the opposite sex were concerned.

Despite Don’s view that his racial background had not affected his relationships, one of his earliest experiences as an adolescent indicated that whilst he did not see himself as different, girls sometimes did. A young woman had written him a note and not knowing his name had addressed it to ‘the dark guy’. Don was shocked:

It made me blood run cold. I’d never seen that, you know. It’s never been an issue for me.

It were an issue for her ... but not an issue for me, you know.
He couldn’t recall ever discussing the issue of his racial background with his wife, but he did wonder about what his children might look like:

... I thought in my mind I thought, you know, what is a child going to look like, you know, and I was a bit apprehensive about it ...

Don had one adult son who was supportive of his search for his father, although they had not discussed the issue of his background and the impact of this on his son, in any great depth. Don had been surprised and a little dismayed when his son had suggested he would like to call his first child, if it was a boy, after his black GI grandfather:

Well I suppose its my feelings, you know, ‘cos he [his father] let us down.

Well he didn’t leave here until August [1945] so he’d known me for four months, you know. It’s not like he hadn’t seen me, you know. I mean some guys they went back and they’d never seen the child, you know.

Don did not identify strongly with his black heritage and seemed ambivalent in his attitudes toward black people. It was unclear to what extent this was based on his disappointment at the lack of response from his father’s family or on previously held views.

**Search for Father**

As Don became older and realised that if he did not initiate a search for his father soon it would be too late, he approached his mother. She supported his search and was able to give him his father’s full name and wartime address. It took three years to find that his father had died in 1987.
Don had been in touch with his father’s widow, who has remarried, and other family members but it was not a positive experience. Don got the impression that his newly found American family were suspicious of his motives in contacting them and he could not hide his frustration and sense of disappointment about this:

I sent the guy [his father’s brother] a letter and sent him another letter just getting nothing back. I don’t know whether they’ve got their heads in the sand over there or what.

You get the feeling that they think you’re after something and all you’re trying to do is fit the pieces of a jig-saw together.

Don’s contact with his black family seemed to reactivate previously held views about black people in general. In referring to his search experience he commented that:

It might have been exciting until I realised what kind of people they are, you know, the Americans, especially the Afro-Americans, you know – I think they are strange.

Don’s views were based on his awareness that the family came from a particularly poor area of St Louis and his difficulty in understanding why they might not welcome his approach to them.

How could anybody be ‘posh’ coming from there, you know?
How could anybody who lives there, not want to know me, over here?

Most of Don’s contact had been with his father’s widow who seemed to be concerned to minimise his contact with other members of his father’s family:

Apparently her husband’s a preacher or something, you know ... a Latter Day Minister ... a Baptist, whatever they are, you know.
There's that many religions isn't there among the black community ... I think its all a load of hogwash myself.

At one stage she had called him specifically to express concern about his attempts to contact his father's brother. Don explained that in the absence of meeting his father:

I'd like to get in touch with other relatives ... I just want to see what they look like, that's all I suppose ... do they resemble me?

6.1.3 Participant 9

Joy

Background

Joy's mother was married with three children when she met Joy's GI father. Her husband was serving overseas with the Royal Air Force and returned shortly before Joy was born. He was angry about what had happened and unwilling to allow Joy to remain within the family. A decision was made that she would be raised by her maternal grandparents who later adopted her. Her mother lived locally with her step-father and siblings. Joy saw her frequently as a child but was unable to acknowledge her unless they met 'secretly'. She refers to her mother and her husband as 'aunt' and 'uncle'.

Joy was one of the few war babes whose family received correspondence from her GI father when she was a child. She later lost touch with him and by the time she had instituted a formal search for him as an adult, found he had died at the age of sixty-one years. She was very disappointed that she would not now have the chance to meet him. At the time of the interview Joy she was trying to locate other members of her father's family.

Family Relationships

Joy enjoyed being part of a large extended family who had lived in the same neighbourhood and even the same homes since the Second World War. This sense of
community and continuity of relationships was important to her and she valued the
sense of security she gained from it. At the same time, it was clear that the
circumstances of her birth had placed enormous strain on the relationship between her
mother and her step-father. She was six weeks old when the tensions came to a head.
Her mother wanted to keep her, but her husband was angry about the birth and would
not agree. Her maternal grandfather stepped in to resolve the issue. Joy described the
story of his intervention with a smile:

‘Oh, I’ll have her. You two go your own way and I’ll keep the
girl.’ And he got me all wrapped up in a bundle and put me in a
wheelbarrow and bought me back up here. They named me Joy.
I’ve been quite happy really, you know, growing up in the family.
There’s never been a bad word .. I think that’s very good really.

The story about the wheelbarrow journey to her new home had become part of family
tale and Joy felt very much loved by her grandparents who legally adopted her, and
later when they became too old to care for her, by a single aunt.

It was clear that Joy’s birth had caused a major rift in her mother’s marriage:

He [step-father] couldn’t take the way his wife had gone off with
an American ... and I was told he used to beat her up terrible.

Her grandfather’s decision, that she would be raised by the extended family was a
courageous one, but it placed Joy in a difficult position, in a large and closely knit
family who held family gatherings or ‘parties’ as Joy described them, every few months:

Even the parties they used to have I was never invited ... but the
rest of the family was. So me and my aunt used to stay at home...
My aunt used to say ‘If they don’t want you they don’t want me.’
She always used to stick by me in that way. I always felt good,
because I felt if she had gone, who would have been with me?
Joy still saw her mother, but could not openly acknowledge her as such, calling her ‘aunt’ and her step-father ‘uncle’. This placed considerable stress on her at a critical stage in her early childhood development:

I could never get close to her [mother]. Everything had to be in secret.

My uncle like uh, I had to call him my uncle, like he didn’t think much of me. If I wanted to see my mother, if it was at a party, we had to meet in the toilet. The only time I caught hold of her was in the toilet!

The issues around who was responsible for her care, the overt rejection by her step-father and the lack of opportunity to establish an attachment to her mother, who was still part of her extended family network, had lead to some anxiety for Joy about where she belonged, which had stayed with her into adulthood.

In the past year several older family members, including her aunt had died and the sense of loss Joy had experienced had been exacerbated by anxiety about who would ‘take care’ of her.

All the family were really good to me ... When my aunt died, the other aunt took over from where she left off, so even though I’m fifty two, my other aunt takes care of me now ... I feel good about that because when she died (first aunt) I thought, ‘Who am I going to go to?’

‘Telling’

Joy thought she had known from an early age that her father was American:

... I always knew I was American for some reason ... and I always said that my father was in the war.
As she got older Joy was given more information.

I was about eleven when I was told that I was adopted, but it wasn’t from the outside, it was inside the family. My grandfather he, um, he wanted to have me in the family. He didn’t want anybody else to have me. He thought I was gorgeous ...

About this time, Joy was given access to the letters her father had written to her mother, after he returned to the US.

... they just left me in my room to read the letters, to look at the photos and that you know. I can’t even remember what else I said. I think I asked them where he lived and they said he lives in New York and you’ve got relatives in the Pacific.

**Racial Issues**

Joy was not aware of having experienced racial prejudice either as a child or as an adult but could recall occasions during her childhood when her racial difference gave her sense of being ‘special’. Several participants mentioned the phenomenon of being singled out, as a child, for special favours or treats, for example it was not unusual to be given money by complete strangers because they were considered particularly ‘cute’ or attractive.

When I used to go shopping they (shopkeepers) would always give me half-a-crown ... and then there was the bus drivers. When I was about six ... the bus drivers used to stop and give me half a crown to go and get sweets. They thought I was adorable.

At the age of five years she had gone into hospital for a minor operation. Whilst there, a photo was taken of her, which later won a prize.

In terms of identity, Joy was clear that she did not identify as black.
I wouldn’t say that I was black, I’d say that I was white for some reason. I suppose it’s because of being in a white family you see. I don’t put myself on the outside you see ... I feel as though I’m just like one of the others.

Because being brought up with an all white family ... I just put that thing away [being mixed-race] and just classed myself as all white.

Joy’s strong sense of identification with her white family influenced her views on racism in Britain.

There’s no racist here ... I’m not having it [racism] now anyway... I more or less feel as though I can stand up for myself ... and that’s why I can’t understand why there’s so much racist in the world today.”

**Marriage and Family**

Joy had left school at fifteen years and had no difficulty in finding work. She had several jobs often working with one of her aunts, until she married. She has not worked outside the home since then.

Joy had met her husband at her work place. She was twenty-nine years old and he was ten years younger than her. She did not think that the issue of her background was something they had really thought about prior to the wedding.

All it was, was we just wanted to get married. We never thought about one being white and one being coloured ... We just thought we was just going to get married and that was it.
Once it was established she was a local girl there were no difficulties about her background as far as her new in-laws were concerned. On meeting them for the first time the issue of her background came up:

And then his father says ‘Where were you born?’ and I says [name of street]. ‘Your one of us Chuck ... your one of us! ‘Cos that’s where he used to come from.

From that point on Joy’s new in-laws were totally accepting of her and had even joined her husband and herself on their honeymoon. More importantly, from Joy’s point of view, she was always warmly welcomed at family gatherings:

They look at me as if I’m not coloured, white or anything else – I’m just one of the family.

Search for Father

Joy was motivated to search for her father by the thought of trying to put the pieces of her life together.

It’s because you only get one half of the puzzle ... and you want the whole lot.

It will make yourself, more relaxed more easier ... to know that you’ve got another family.

Although Joy had lost touch with her father in early adolescence, she managed to trace him again when she was sixteen. They corresponded for a while and he invited her to travel to America to stay with him and his family. Joy decided against it:

I thought of going and then I saw my aunt’s face. She thought she was losing a daughter.
If I’d gone over there I don’t think I’d have been happy at all. I
would have been homesick.

Somehow over the ensuing years she lost her father’s letters. It was a terrible blow. As
with other participants, anything which provided a tangible link to their father however
remote, took on enormous significance:

That was so important at the time, hanging on to those letters – so
important. I felt as though I’d lost everything, you know. I
thought that everything had gone out the window.

Joy’s search had been simplified by the fact that she knew her father’s full name and
army unit. Even so, it took several years to track him down. She had cried with
excitement when she located her father’s whereabouts and sat down immediately to
write a letter giving him news about her family. Within a few days she found he had
died in 1969. It was a terrible disappointment and she bitterly regretted the earlier loss
of the letters which would have enabled her to find him sooner. Joy had not told her
birth mother about her search as she had not wanted to ‘push her too much’ at this stage
of her life.

24 The usual process of locating American servicemen is that war babes contact National Army
Personnel Records Centre in St Louis with any identifying information they have concerning
their father. NPRC then confirm whether or not they have a record. This information is cross-
referredenced with the U.S. Veterans Affairs Department who confirm whether the man concerned
is still alive. It is not unusual for war babes to hear a few days after the initial ‘good news’ from
NPRC, that their father has died sometimes, as in Joy’s (and the researchers) case, many years
before they even commenced their search.
6.1.4 Participant 10

(Note  Tape-recorder broke down at commencement of interview. Case study is based on notes taken at the time.)

Cora

Background

Cora’s mother was married and had a child of three years when Cora was born. Her GI father was also married. Her step-father was in the British navy and away for long periods during the war. He was angry about the birth and started divorce proceedings threatening to remove the older child from her mother. He later relented, even registered Cora’s birth in his name. Cora thought her step-father had grown to love her, in fact, favouring her over her siblings. The marriage, however was not a happy one and Cora’s mother died at the age of fifty-four years. Her step-father is still living and although she has always felt ‘very grateful’ to him their relationship is not as close as she would like. The search for her GI father has been a frustrating one. At the time of the interview, and after many years of research, Cora was unable to locate him.

Family Relationships

Cora described a family situation, which was marred by on-going marital conflict. Although her step-father had agreed to raise Cora and was obviously fond of her, in times of marital conflict he would ‘throw her up.’

Her mother had been orphaned in adolescence and had always ‘felt unloved and lonely’. She confided to Cora, as other participant’s mothers had done, that the relationship with her GI father had been very special to her. Despite the stress Cora’s birth had placed on the marriage, she believed the wartime relationship had been worthwhile:

I’ve got you, and two beautiful grandchildren. He was the only man I’ve ever loved.
A third child, Cora’s younger brother, was born after the war and Cora described herself as having a close relationship both with him and with her older sister. As with other participants, she was aware that she was ‘special’ to her mother in a way her siblings were not:

I was very close to mum. She felt that much more for me.

The tension between her parents affected her siblings and it was after a family row when her father referred to Cora as ‘that f— bastard’ that her older sister left home. Her mother found the stress of the relationship difficult to manage and ‘lived on her nerves’. She eventually died at the age of fifty-four years. Cora continues to maintain contact with her father who is the only father she has known.

‘Telling’

Cora first discovered that she was not a child of the marriage during one of the frequent arguments between her parents. She was five to six years old when she heard her parents arguing and her step-father referred to the circumstances of her birth. Aware that she had heard, her mother later showed her a photograph and some letters from her birth father and explained about her wartime romance. Cora’s GI father had written to her mother regularly and sent money. Eventually his wife wrote from America explaining that his links with Cora and her mother were ‘tearing him apart’ and asked if she would stop writing. Her mother agreed. Cora pointed out that when her mother first told her about her background she was too young to appreciate the importance of what she heard, ‘I just wanted to go out to play’.

Racial Issues

Cora felt her birth circumstances and racial difference had affected her self-esteem. She lacked confidence in herself and was self-conscious about her appearance. As a child she had experienced name-calling and being stared at in public. She had developed ‘a chip on my shoulder’ and felt it had affected her self confidence:
I've always been very sensitive about that. People say I'm too sensitive really.

She felt her confidence had improved as she got older but her hair was still an issue for her and she blow-waved it each day to ensure it looked as straight as possible.

As a child Cora had resented the curiosity and stares her appearance generated and had reacted aggressively. ‘What's the matter - want a photo'? As an adult her confidence increased. Her family and friends had reassured her about her background and her role in the family ‘You may be another colour but you're just the same as us.' Whilst this was meant to be reassuring the fact was that such comments denied the perception of non-family members and of war babes, themselves, that they were 'different'.

Cora related an anecdote about a recent Christmas party. Her sister-in-law had made a joking comment about:

   Every mother's dread - that your daughter could come home with a black man.

Cora had been offended and commented angrily

   You're talking about people like me!

Her sister in law had been upset, pointing out that she simply didn’t see Cora as 'different'. Cora identified strongly with her African American racial heritage and found it hard to understand that others might choose not to identify as black. Her response to the inevitable question 'Where do you come from?' was 'I'm half American.'

Whilst there had been negatives associated with her background and she thought 'it would have made life easier' if she had been white, on balance Cora felt that she was happy with her situation:
In a way it's nice to be a bit different. In a way I feel quite chuffed.

Marriage and Family

As a young woman Cora had felt constrained in forming relationships by concerns that she might be rejected because of her colour. Her husband was very supportive of her but when they became engaged she felt anxious about possible rejection by his family. She also worried that her fiancé did not appreciate the implications for any children they might have felt the need to warn him:

You do realise don’t you, I might have dark babies?” He’d replied, ‘What does it matter it’s still our baby.’

There are two children, one male and one female, of the marriage both of whom are recognisably different in terms of their skin colour. Both children experienced problems with racism at school and Cora had visited the principal to discuss name-calling. Her son, who is darker, is more conscious of his difference and sensitive about his colour whilst her youngest child, a girl, would often ‘stick up for him’. More recently he had experienced problems when he visited a night club. Cora felt protective where her children were concerned and found herself feeling guilty about the incident:

I shouldn’t have had kids. If it wasn’t for me he wouldn’t have dark skin.

Search for Father

Cora had commenced her search in 1994 but had been thinking about it for some time. Her reason for not starting sooner was that she had not wanted to hurt her step-father’s feelings. ‘I am still grateful to him.’ There was also the sense that she had a good family already with whom she felt secure.
One of Cora’s motivations to find her father was that she felt she was searching on her mother’s behalf as well. ‘She would have been so chuffed.’ She wondered if she had any of her father’s characteristics. Her mother had told her she had inherited her father’s temper and a tendency to jealousy. Even if she found he had died, she would like to find out if there were any family members still living.

Although Cora had left it until quite late to search, once she began it became ‘an obsession.’ She had come up against a number of ‘brick walls’ and although she had her father’s name and rank the Army Personnel Records Center had not been able to find any listing regarding him. This had been very frustrating:

Before I die I just want to know – was he real? Nobody seems to know who he was!

In desperation she had visited a number of clairvoyants one of whom told her, her father was dead:

I won’t feel fulfilled until I get somewhere. I don’t want to die not knowing anything more.

In a follow up telephone call twelve months after the interview, Cora had still not been able to progress her search and was losing the motivation to continue.

6.1.5 Participant 11

(Note Tape-recorder broke down during interview. Case study is based on a combination of hand written notes and audio tape.)

Graham

Background

Graham was born into a complex family situation. He was one of seven children but only had contact with two of his siblings, both of whom were considerably older
(twenty years), than himself and one of whom, has since died. His mother married in 1939 but he did not remember her husband, his step-father. He was raised by his mother and his maternal grandmother. He found his GI father, who is eighty years old, about two years prior to the research interview and travelled to the US to meet him. However, Graham feels it was too late for a meaningful relationship to develop between them.

**Family Relationships**

Graham described his childhood as isolating. His grandmother took care of him whilst his mother worked.

> I've always been a loner... I don't have that many friends, not what you'd call real friends.

As a child he did not have a lot of contact with his older siblings. His sister served in the Women's Royal Air Force and his brother had already left home when Graham was born.

**'Telling'**

Graham's found he was 'brushed off' when he asked his mother questions about his background and he grew up feeling unclear about why he had no father and why he looked different to other children. Like other male war-babes he felt the absence of a father figure in childhood. From the age of five years he was conscious of his difference, in terms of appearance, to other children:

> They used to call me a 'nigger'... but I wasn’t really black.

> I started to wonder myself, ‘Why have I got curly hair?’ You just start to think about these things.
As he grew older he began to feel increasingly angry about his mother's refusal to talk to him about his father. As the years passed he had hoped that at least before she died she would give him his father's name. However, he was disappointed:

Even on her death bed, when she was dying, she still never said anything.

When he eventually found his father he felt it was 'ten years too late'. He had hoped his father would be able to fill in the gaps in his birth history for him, but he was too old to be able to recall events that had occurred fifty years earlier. This had been a bitter realisation for Graham and he could not hide his deep sense of anger and frustration:

I feel that I've been cheated! There are things I will never know.

I really want to know what happened. I want to know about the relationship.

Racial Issues

Graham was aware of his difference at an early age and experienced name calling at school. He had generally not retaliated when this occurred but one day hit a female student who called him a 'black bastard'. Later, the classroom teacher had been supportive saying that she didn't blame him for his behaviour.

As a young adult Graham had joined the British Army and experienced 'a lot of abuse about my colour.' Once he discovered his father was a black American GI he began educating himself about black issues and developed a keen interest in black military history. Graham believed that the contribution of black servicemen to the US military had been down played and wanted to 'put the record straight.' During the 50th anniversary celebrations for the Second World War he worked with Anglia Television to produce a documentary which looked specifically at the role of black GIs and airman, based in Anglia, between 1942 and 1945.
Despite the limited information Graham received about his background he clearly identified with his black heritage, in his formative years. He described himself as ‘an English-American’.

I’d have to say I’m British but also I’m aware of my American connections. I’d have to say I’m fifty-fifty. That’s what I am ... purely fifty-fifty.

**Marriage and Family**

Graham’s sense of isolation impacted on his ability to form relationships with others particularly women. He described himself as ‘very shy’ as a young adult and rather than approach girls he would wait for them to approach him or ask a male friend to act as a go-between. He felt this lack of assertiveness on his part was a feature of his life in general.

I’d tend to stand back and watch rather than approach. It took a long time to get rid of that.

He had missed out on promotion in the work place and in a voluntary organisation he was involved in because of his unwillingness to be assertive about his own worth.

He met his wife late in life and married when he was thirty-eight years old. Given their ages, he and his wife had not felt under so much pressure to take into account the views or attitudes of other relatives about the marriage. His wife had children from a previous relationship and later they had a son of their own who is now an adolescent. Given his lack of a male role model as a child, Graham recognised that being a father was going to be an uphill task. ‘I basically wasn’t used to it’.

**Education**

Graham joined the Boy Scouts whilst at school and enjoyed the sense of stability it gave him. He left school at fifteen years to join the Army Cadets graduating to the Army at
seventeen years of age. Graham served in the British Army until his hearing was
damaged during active service in the middle-east. On return to civilian life he
eventually found work locally

Search for Father

Graham began his search soon after his mother’s death. His older sister who
remembered his father coming to the house during the war to write letters, gave him
some information which she felt she could not pass on to him earlier. Once he had the
identifying information he needed, it was only a matter of months before he was able to
locate his father.

When he visited his father in America, Graham felt immediately at home:

When I got in the house I felt at home—relaxed, as if I’d been
there all my life. We [Graham and his father] used to sit on the
verandah – they had a rocking chair.

Graham wondered if his life might have been different, better in fact, if he had been
raised in America with his father, rather than in England. He made a link between his
racial difference as a child and his acute sense of isolation. He believed things would
have been different if he had lived in the US, in that he would have not felt such a
‘loner.’

Yes—I’m sure of that. I feel cheated. I wouldn’t have known
about England but at least I would have known where I came
from, who I was.

Later, after his return to England, he had time to reflect on this:

Since I’ve been back and I’ve had time to think about it, I
wouldn’t want to live in America. It’s too late. We’ve got on
with our lives. It’s too late for that.
But at the same time, looking back I can see what would have been, what could have been.

If I'd lived in the US ... I would have had similar experiences [i.e. racism], but you'd have been more accepted.

6.2 Summary

A summary of the major themes from the above narratives can be found in Table 2, p. 88
Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

1. Family situation at the time of your birth?
   - Was your mother married or single?
     If she was married:
     - what was her husband's response to the pregnancy/birth?
     - what was the response of other family members?
     - what was the decision regarding your future?

2. Who cared for you as a child?
   - your mother?
   - another family member?
   - adoptive/foster parent?
   - residential care?

3. How were you told the facts about your birth?
   - Who told you and when?
   - How did this impact on you and your relationship to:
     - your mother?
     - other family members?

4. Racial Issues
   a) Identity:
      - How do you see yourself?
      - as an Englishwoman/man?
      - as black Englishwoman/man?
      - as a mixed-race Englishwoman/man?
      How did you arrive at this view of yourself?
   b) Discrimination
      - Have you experienced discrimination?
      - How did you deal with this?
      - Have you children experienced discrimination?
      - How did you/they deal with this?

5. Marriage and Family
   - Did your background affect your choice of a marriage partner?
   - If yes in what ways? How did you deal with this?
   - Are your children recognisably different?
   - How do you/your partner feel about this?

6. Is there anything we have not discussed today that is important to you and to an understanding of how you have lived your life?
Appendix 4: Letter to Tracing Services

Dear

I am a member of “War Babes” and I am currently undertaking research for my master of Social Work Degree at the University of Melbourne in Victoria, Australia. The topic of my thesis is the lived experience of adult children born as a result of wartime relationships between African American GIs and English women during World War II.

I am writing to seek your assistance in locating other members of war Babes in the UK who have a black GI father and would be willing to take part in the research. If I can find sufficient interested persons I plan to travel to the UK in 1996 to undertake individual interviews and then return to Australia to complete the thesis. Copies of the research findings will be made available to all research participants including yourself.

As you know I was also a mixed-race war babe and I am aware of the impact this experience can have on those concerned. My research will focus on the meaning of this experience for participants and how they have integrated this information into their lives. I understand that this is a sensitive and complex issue and I will ensure that those who take part will remain anonymous.

For your convenience I have enclosed the following:

1. Copies of a standard letter to you might like to use when contacting potential participants.

2. 15 self-addressed envelopes and international postage stamp orders for participants to return to me.

3. An International Money order for fifty pounds to cover the costs of photocopying and postage.

I am aware of the limited resources available to the organisation, please do not hesitate to inform me if this amount is insufficient.

I would value your support of this research and will telephone you within one week of you receiving this letter to clarify any aspects of the research of which you are unsure.

Yours sincerely,
Appendix 5: Letter of Support from TRACE
Appendix 6: Letter of Support From ‘War Babes’ (UK)
Appendix 7: Letter to Participants (1)

Dear

I am writing to you to introduce Ms Janet Baker who is currently undertaking a research project focusing on the life experience of adult children born as a result of relationships between black US Servicemen and English women in the Second World War.

Ms Baker is a social worker and family therapist and as a black ‘war babe’ herself, is well placed to research this topic. I have enclosed a letter from her outlining her areas of interest.

I believe your involvement in the project would be very worthwhile and hope that you will be interested in taking part. If so please contact Ms Baker using the self-addressed envelope enclosed, or by making a reverse charges call using the number provided in her letter, to arrange a time and place to meet. Ms Baker intends travelling to England in 1996 to undertake interviews with participants.

I believe this research will provide a valuable opportunity for the voices of children born in war-time situations to be heard and I hope you will consider taking part.

Yours sincerely,
Appendix 8: Letter to Participants (2)

Dear

I am a social worker from Melbourne, Australia currently completing a Master of Social Work Degree at the University of Melbourne. I am also the adult child born of a wartime relationship between a Black American GI and a British women during the Second World War.

My research is on the life experience of mixed-race ‘war babes’ and will focus on the impact of racial ‘difference’. In particular it will look at the following:

1. how was this difference experienced at various stages of the life cycle.
2. How did they make sense of this difference?
3. How did this impact on their understanding of themselves and their relationship with others?

I am writing to you in the hope you will agree to take part in the research and to be interviewed by me. I understand that the matters I would like to discuss with you are sensitive and complex but I believe that your experience will be helpful in gaining a better understanding and acknowledgment of the impact of war on communities and in particular on women and children.

Given my background I see this as a shared undertaking. A copy of my final report will be made available to all participants.

I will travel to England in the first half of 1966 to complete the interviews and I will contact you before then to arrange a time and a venue to meet.

I look forward to hearing from you. Please use the self addressed envelope and international stamp order to write to me. If you would prefer to telephone please make a reverse charges call by dialing ............and give the Australian operator my number which is ..........

Yours sincerely,
Appendix 9: Letter to Participants (3)

Dear

I write regarding the research project that I interviewed you for in May 1996. The project has taken much longer than I had anticipated as my personal circumstances changed on my return to Australia and I was unable to give my thesis priority until this year.

I am pleased to say the project is now nearing completion and as promised at the time of the interviews I have enclosed a record of your interview for you to read and comment on if you wish. The report is a mix of what you said and what I said. I haven’t put everything in but I have put enough of the things that were important to everybody. Have I left out anything that was important to you? Is there anything I have written that you believe is incorrect or that you would like to change about what I have said?

Most people talked about their racial identity. Although experiences were different nearly everybody had struggled with this. Several people talked about the stress that came with their racial identity and a sense of not quite belonging. Some had issues about their relationship with their birth mother. Those who had found their fathers had different experiences, some good and some less so.

I have written below a list of thing I’m thinking about putting into a discussion to follow the stories people told me about their lives.

a) racial identity  
b) stress  
c) relationship with birth mother.

I would like to have some discussion about what makes up racial identity for this group and how issues around race were stressful for some people. I would also like to talk about the relationships people developed with their birth mothers.

I hope that you enjoy the experience of reading your story. If I have not heard from you by .... I will assume that your are happy with what I have written if you would like to talk to me about anything in your story please feel free to contact me (reverse the charges). My new telephone number is ...... You will need to put the Australian codes in front of this number. If you would prefer to write my address is:............

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your participation in this project. I believe that it will provide not only an opportunity for the stories of black war babes to be heard but valuable information about the needs of children raised in families and/or communities who do not share their cultural heritage.

Yours sincerely,
Appendix 10: Consent to Take Part in Research Project

I ........................................................ hereby consent/do not consent (please circle) to take part in the attached project. I have read the description and understand that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time. If I withdraw I understand that I am free to withdraw any tapes or written material that have not already been processed for the research findings.

I consent/do not consent (please circle) to the interview being audio-taped. I understand that these are confidential and will only be used for the purposes of the research, teaching or writing journal articles. I also understand that my name and details of my situation will not be revealed in any identifying way.

Signed:.............................................................(Participant)

Date: ...........................................
Appendix 11: Letter to Post Adoption Resource Centre

Director,
Post Adoption Centre,
5,Torriano Avenue
LONDON NW.5 TRZ
Dear Alan

I am Social Worker and Family Therapist currently living in Melbourne, Australia. I am employed as a Program Adviser by the Victorian State Government, Department of Health and Community Services, in the field of adoption and permanent care. My adoption experience includes, Intercountry Adoption, and the placement of Aboriginal children in white Australian families. My current role is Program Adviser to a program that places children with intellectual and physical disabilities.

I am currently undertaking the final year of a Masters Degree in Social Work at the University of Melbourne. The topic of my thesis is an account of the lived experience of adult children born as the result of wartime relationships between British women and African American servicemen. I have both a professional and personal interest in this area. My father was a black-American serviceman and I was raised in England by my birth mother and her husband. I migrated to Australia in 1974 and have lived here ever since.

I am travelling to England on the 22nd March 1996 for 2-3 months. I plan to interview some ten to fifteen black, "war babes", who have agreed to participate in my project. I will be completing the data collection in England and returning to Australia to undertake a thematic analysis of the interviews. I will be returning to Australia via the United States in June 1996.

The interviews will be relatively unstructured and I do not anticipate that participants will experience distress in relation to the project. They are not members of a client group and are mature men and women functioning adequately in the community who have made a conscious decision to search for their biological fathers. However, as you know, reflecting on past experience in the context of a research project may reactivate unresolved issues, particularly around loss and grief, for some participants.

I would like to ensure that I have a referral source for those participants who feel they would like to follow up issues that may arise for them from their involvement in the project. I contacted the Post Adoption Centre recently by telephone and was informed verbally that P.A.C. would be willing to act as a referral source. I wonder if you could confirm this for me and provide copies of any written information (pamphlets etc) that could be provided to participants, including information about costs.

Thank you for your support.

Yours sincerely
Appendix 12: Response from Post Adoption Resource Centre
22 February 1996

Ms Janet Baker
Program Advisor
IDS Initiative in Adoption and Permanent Care
Protective Services Section
19th Floor
555 Collins Street
Melbourne, Vic 3000
AUSTRALIA

Dear Janet

Thank you for letter. Your project sounds very interesting and I hope you enjoy your visit. We would welcome a chance to meet you when you are over here.

I can confirm that we would offer follow up counselling for any of your interviewees. I have enclosed leaflets about us and ATRAP to whom we have forwarded your letter and a copy of your thesis.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Alan Burnell
Director