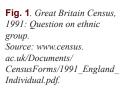# 'Mixed race', 'mixed origins' or what?

Generic terminology for the multiple racial/ethnic group population

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Fig. 1. *Great Britain Census, 1991: Question on ethnic group.*
Source: www.census. ac.uk/Documents/ CensusForms/1991_England_ Individual.pdf.

For the first time in the 2000/01 national census round, census agencies in a number of Western countries offered options for people who, by virtue of their parentage or more distant ancestry, wished to declare a 'mixed' identity in questions on race and ethnic group.

In 1991 the Great Britain Census had only provided free-text options for this population (Fig. 1). The England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland censuses of 2001 all offered options for the 'Mixed' group. England and Wales (Fig. 3; see Anon. 2005) captured this population – a total of 661,034 persons – in the four cultural background categories 'White and Black Caribbean' (35.9%), 'White and Black African' (11.9%), 'White and Asian' (28.6%), and a free-text 'Any other Mixed background' (23.6%); Scotland and Northern Ireland both offered an open-response option. The 'Mixed' group in England and Wales accounted for 1.3% of the total population or 14.6% of that in groups other than 'White'.

The count of the 'mixed race' population and its profiling, its rapid growth rate over the last half dozen years or so, and the analysis of monitoring data (which accrued when census categorization was quickly adopted across government departments) have all given rise to a substantial research interest in this group. This has included how 'mixed race' is conceptualized, and the terminology used to describe the group.

Generic terms

While a broad range of generic terms has been proposed and debated for the 'mixed race' population (including 'mixed race', 'mixed parentage', 'mixed heritage', 'dual heritage', 'biracial', and 'mixed origins'), no consensus on what constitutes appropriate terminology in various policy contexts has emerged. This situation appears to have arisen in no small part because in many cases no link has been made between the underlying conceptual base for identifying this population and the way it is summarily described in terminology. Here the distinction made by Jenkins (1996) between processes of group identification (how group members identify themselves) and social categorization (definition by observers) is important: Jenkins proposes a model of the *internal-external dialectic of identification* whereby the two processes feed back upon each other and are mutually implicated. Clearly, terminology that is unfamiliar to or poorly understood by the members of a collectivity that it purports to describe will be of questionable validity and utility, especially if such terminology is used in data collection.

'Mixed race', the most widely used term, colloquially and in scholarship, has been contested on the grounds that it focuses on 'race', a discredited concept that carries much historical baggage, is increasingly being displaced by 'ethnicity', and some would argue is best confined in usage to discourses on racism. This dissatisfaction has led to the search for an alternative. Advocacy of the term 'mixed origins' dates from 1994, when the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland unanimously carried the resolution, proposed by anthropologist/sociologist Michael Banton, that: 'The Council […] expresses concern at the increased use in Britain of the expression "mixed race" since this implies that there are pure races. The Council believes that the expression "mixed origin", though not ideal, would be preferable' (Anon. 1994). Banton has reaffirmed his position, in ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY (Banton 1999) – calling for 'the cleaning up of the language [...] despatching such objectionable expressions

6 **What is this person's race?** *Mark* ☒ *one or more races* *to indicate what this person considers himself/herself to be.*

☐ White
☐ Black, African Am., or Negro
☐ American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.* ↙

[write-in boxes]

[write-in boxes]

☐ Asian Indian
☐ Chinese
☐ Filipino
☐ Japanese
☐ Korean
☐ Vietnamese
☐ Other Asian — *Print race.* ↙

☐ Native Hawaiian
☐ Guamanian or Chamorro
☐ Samoan
☐ Other Pacific Islander — *Print race.* ↗

[write-in boxes]

[write-in boxes]

☐ Some other race — *Print race.* ↙

[write-in boxes]

[write-in boxes]

England/Wales

8 **What is your ethnic group?**

♦ Choose ONE section from A to E, then ✓ the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background.

A **White**
☐ British   ☐ Irish
☐ Any other White background, *please write in*

[write-in boxes]

[write-in boxes]

B **Mixed**
☐ White and Black Caribbean
☐ White and Black African
☐ White and Asian
☐ Any other Mixed background, *please write in*

[write-in boxes]

[write-in boxes]

C **Asian or Asian British**
☐ Indian   ☐ Pakistani
☐ Bangladeshi
☐ Any other Asian background, *please write in*

[write-in boxes]

[write-in boxes]

D **Black or Black British**
☐ Caribbean   ☐ African
☐ Any other Black background, *please write in*

[write-in boxes]

[write-in boxes]

E **Chinese or other ethnic group**
☐ Chinese
☐ Any other, *please write in*

[write-in boxes]

[write-in boxes]

Fig. 2 (above). *USA Census 2000: Question on race. Source: http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/pdf/d02p.pdf*

Fig. 3. *England and Wales Census, 2001: Question on ethnic group. Source: https://www.census.ac.uk/Documents/CensusForms/2001_England_Household.pdf*

as "mixed race"' – and more recently (Banton 2007). As a member of the Judicial Studies Board's Ethnic Minorities Advisory Committee in the early 1990s, he had also tried (unsuccessfully) to persuade the Committee that it should recommend that the use of 'mixed race' be discontinued (Banton 2005). However, the current Adult Court Bench book does caution that 'the term mixed race may be considered slightly pejorative to the extent that it focuses upon the racial identity of the parents as opposed to other factors such as culture or ethnicity' (Judicial Studies Board 2005).

A strong rationale for the use of 'mixed origin' is its partial alignment with the popular companion term 'ethnic origin' and the use of 'origin' in the law. The Race Relations Acts of 1965, 1968 and 1976 all used the term 'race or ethnic or national origins' and this (or similar) wording has been recapitulated in subsequent statutes, including the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 ('nationality or ethnic or national origins'). It was, no doubt, adopted to be consistent with the wording of the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which defined discrimination in terms of any distinction, exclusion or preference based on 'race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin'. Given the extent to which this nomenclature has become embedded in UK and international statutes, the argument from the viewpoint of legal usage is a powerful one.

However, this terminology has gained little momentum in other areas. One difficulty is the term's face validity, as it lacks reference to ethnicity and race. Anthropologist Jayne Ifekwunigwe describes the term as 'implicitly ambiguous' and one 'which could describe any individual with a diverse background – i.e. English and Scottish – and not solely individuals who stem from a mixture of so-called different races' (Ifekwunigwe 1997: 128). Its conflation of 'mixed race' and multiethnicity may not be regarded as significant if one holds the view that 'race' is unsustainable conceptually. However, this difference was one that concerned the US Census Bureau in its development of terminology for the 'two or more races population' in the lead-up to the 2000 US census (Fig. 2), and continues to be the subject of wide debate among anthropologists and sociologists.

Ifekwunigwe has attempted to find a candidate generic term to replace this proliferation of unsatisfactory terms by initially arguing for the use of the gender-specific 'métis'/'métisse' to describe people with parents from different ethnic groups. However, she extends the terms to include attributes like 'oscillation, contradiction, paradox, hybridity, creolization, mestizaje, "blending and mixing", polyglot, heteroglossia, transnationalities, multiple reference points, multiculturalism, so-called multiraciality, "belonging nowhere and everywhere", and endogenous and exogenous roots' (Ifekwunigwe 1997: 131), leaving McGowan (1997: 47) to wonder 'as her usage broadens (unhelpfully) […] what analytical work it does which other terms do not, and how it can be so many things at once'. Indeed, post-modern writers use the term to capture just this essence of complexity and hybridity (Zuss 1997).

There is the additional drawback that 'métis' is a term that *specifically* describes persons of mixed North American aboriginal and White ancestry and is so used in Canadian legislation and the Canadian census: for example, in its data collection Statistics Canada cautions respondents of other mixes, who use the term in the generic French sense, not to select 'métis'. One could also argue that the commandeering of the term to denote mixed race/ethnicity in the UK is elitist, as its origins are external to this context and are located in practices in the former French colonies in Africa, particularly Senegal. In Britain the term has no currency as a self-descriptor. Indeed, Ifekwunigwe has revised her original proposal for this term, now arguing that 'métis(se)' is problematic and that 'mixed race' 'is a term that is part and parcel of the English vernacular' (Ifekwunigwe 2004: xxi).

In addition, there are those 'politically correct' terms that encompass the word 'heritage', such as 'dual', 'mixed' and 'multiple heritage'. These are relatively recent arrivals whose wider usage has been catalysed by officialdom. They have been adopted by some government departments, especially the Department for Children, Schools

and Families, as a strategy to avoid the use of the contested term 'mixed race' (Table 1). For example, Tikly et al. state that:

we use the term 'mixed heritage' rather than the more commonly used term 'mixed race' to refer to those pupils and people who identify themselves, or are identified, as having a distinct sense of a dual or mixed, rather than 'mono heritage' […]The decision to use 'mixed heritage' instead of 'mixed race' was adopted in order to ensure consistency of terminology on DfES literature. However, it was apparent in interviews that the majority of pupil and parent respondents used 'mixed race', whilst some were content to use 'half caste'. For most pupils and parents, 'mixed heritage' was not a term that they were familiar with and were less comfortable with its initial use in the interview. (2004: 17)

The lack of currency of these terms amongst 'mixed race' people, and the view of some that they are outsider's or imposed terms, weaken their candidacy. They also suffer the same drawback as 'mixed origins', in that *heritage* is non-specific with respect to the implied referent of inherited characteristics. While Ifekwunigwe (1997: 128) sees some merit in 'dual heritage' as it 'pinpoints the convergence of different cultures and ethnicities' and 'the fact that it is de-racialized also broadens its potential relevance', the term could, again, equally describe people who are mixes of different White groups. Moreover, as with 'mixed parentage', a term popularized in the 1990s as another alternative to 'mixed race', 'dual heritage' limits a person's mixed background to just two groups (indeed, implying 'mixed parentage').

The census agencies in the UK have side-stepped this controversy over terminology by eschewing all these terms. ONS in England and Wales used 'Mixed' to label the four cultural background options in the 2001 census (a usage that spawned the term 'mixedness' [Runnymede Trust 2007]) and have recommended 'Mixed/multiple ethnic groups' for the 2011 Census (ONS 2008); GRO(S) in Scotland has also changed the open-response category heading from 'Mixed' to 'Mixed or multiple ethnic groups' on the grounds that some regard 'Mixed' as offensive while others were unfamiliar with the term 'Multiple' or confused by it (GRO(S) & Scottish Government 2008). Other official bodies offer different guidance. The British Sociological Association (BSA) uses familiar arguments to claim that 'mixed race' 'is a misleading term since it implies that a "pure race" exists':

It should be recognised that the idea of race mixture or being 'mixed race' is informed by a racial discourse that privileges the notion of essential races. Some social scientists aim to establish a new vocabulary other than the highly contentious notion of 'race'. (BSA 2005)

This mixing of 'races' – or the mixing of cultures defined by racial difference – to which 'mixed race' alludes, explains the BSA's use of quotation marks, alternatives put forward being 'mixed parentage', 'dual

Anon. 1994. RAI News. *Anthropology Today* 10(2): 26.

Anon. 2005. Policy and race. *Anthropology Today* 21(4): back cover caption.

Azoulay, K.G. 2003. Rethinking 'mixed race' (review). *Research in African Literatures* 34(2): 233-235.

Banton, M. 1999. Reporting on race. *Anthropology Today* 15(3): 1-3.

— 2005. Historical and contemporary modes of racialization. In: Murji, K. and Solomos, J. (eds) *Racialization: Studies in theory and practice,* pp. 51-68. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

— 2007. Comment on Smith, L. 'Start talking: Laura Smith asks why Britain's growing mixed race population is still ignored'. *Catalyst* 2007 (15 May). http://83.137.212.42/siteArchive/catalystmagazine/Default.aspx.LocID-0hgnew0ui.RefLocID-0hg01b00100o.Lang-EN.htm; accessed 1 October 2008.

Brubaker, R., Loveman, M. and Stamatov, P. 2004. Ethnicity as cognition. *Theory and Society* 33: 31-64.

Table 1: *Terms used on government websites*

Term	Dept of Health	Dept of Children, Schools & Families	Home Office	Dept of Communities & Local Govt
Mixed parentage	1	9	13	6
Mixed race	1	22	28	67
Mixed origins	0	5	1	2
Dual heritage	0	29	5	6
Mixed heritage	0	49	3	16

Note: Searches undertaken on main government department websites, accessed 1 October 2008:
www.dh.gov.uk/;
www.dcsf.gov.uk/; www.homeoffice.gov.uk/;
www.communities.gov.uk/; terms entered as 'exact phrase'.

Fig. 4. *The home page of the Multiple Heritage Project, founded by Bradley Lincoln in 2006 to make a positive contribution to the ongoing 'mixed race' discussion, uses the terms 'mixed race', 'multiple heritage' and 'mix-d'. Source: http://www.multipleheritage.co.uk/*

Table 2: *Respondents' preferences for general terms for mixed race*

General term	General population survey (n=76)	Student survey (n=326)
I do not identify as mixed race	1	15
I identify as mixed race and prefer the terms…		
Mixed parentage	10	42
Mixed race	32	176
Dual heritage	5	38
Mixed heritage	11	58
Multiracial	2	32
Biracial[2]	-	13
Multiethnic[2]	-	23
Mixed origins	4	51
Some other term[1]	4	16
No preference	4	60
I never think about it	3	62

Source: (i) General population survey, 2005/6: see Aspinall, P.J. et al. 2006 *Mixed race in Britain: A survey of the preferences of mixed race people for terminology and classifications. Interim report.* Canterbury: CHSS. www.pih.org.uk/features/mixedraceinbritain_report2.html; (ii) Students in higher/further education survey, 2006/7: Aspinall, P.J., Song, M. and Hashem, F. 2008. *ESRC final report: Ethnic options of 'mixed race' people in Britain.* Canterbury: CHSS. *Notes:* 1. These included: 'half caste' (n=3), 'brown' (n=2), 'my name'/'me' (n=2), 'human being'/'human race' (n=2), 'mulatto', 'multiethnic', 'background', 'dual nationality', 'mixed', 'yellow', 'black mixed race', and 'quarter caste'. 2. Not included in general population survey.

British Sociological Association (BSA) 2005. 'Equality and diversity: Language and the BSA – ethnicity and race'. www.britsoc.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/4E70B7F7-58A1-43AB-A414…/534/EqualityandDiversity_LanguageandtheBSA_RaceMar05.doc; accessed 1 October 2008.

General Register Office for Scotland (GRO(S)) and the Scottish Parliament 2008. *Scotland's new official ethnicity classification.* Edinburgh: GRO(S).

Ifekwunigwe, J.O. 1997. Diaspora's daughters, Africa's orphans? On lineage, authenticity, and 'mixed race' identity. In: Mirza, H.S. *Black British feminism: A reader*, pp. 127-152. London: Routledge.

— 2004. *'Mixed race' studies: A reader.* London/New York: Routledge.

Jenkins, R. 1996. *Social identity.* London/New York: Routledge.

Table 3*: Terms respondents found offensive or would not like to see on official forms*

Term	General population survey	Student survey
'Half-caste'	7	60
'Biracial'	0	19
'Coloured'	0	11
'Half breed'/'half bred'	2	10
'Dual heritage'	8	9
'Multiracial'	3	7
'Multiethnic'	0	7
'Mixed parentage'	2	7
'Mixed race'	0	6
'Mixed heritage'	3	4
'Mongrel'	0	5
'Mixed origins'	5	3

Source: See Table 2.

Terms with a count of ≤ 2 in the combined surveys included: 'African black and white', 'all except dual heritage', 'any including the word half/semi, like half-caste', 'ape', 'blackie', 'black/white', 'china man', 'chink', 'chinky', 'cooley', 'dual', 'faggot', 'half and half', 'hapa', 'hybrid', 'cross breed', 'Iranians categorized in the same options as Arabs', 'light-skinned', 'mixed other', 'mixed breed', 'mix up', 'monkey', 'monkey hanger', 'mulatto', 'mutt', 'nigger', 'other', 'octoroon', 'race', 'racism', 'red skin', and 'slant eyes'.

heritage' or 'metis(se)'. The organization leans towards Ifekwunige's view, suggesting that these emerging identities, often described in terms of hybridity, borderlands, shifting boundaries and multiplicity, produce new cultural forms and practices that cannot satisfactorily be defined by race and/or ethnicity. However, the BSA does not endorse 'mixed-cultural', pointing to the criticism that the term assumes that 'all cultures are equal and overlooks relations of power and domination that rank cultures differentially'. It is these relations of power that persuade Azoulay that we need to retain 'mixed race' as a term distinct from 'multiethnic':

> Within the United States, 'mixed race' has gained currency as a loaded but culturally comprehensible term referencing individuals where one parent is white and the other is of color. Some […] challenge this approach and claim recognition for 'mixed-race' identities that were never legally proscribed. It is a strategic but frivolous petition as the explicit legacy of Anglo-European slavery and colonialism, which gave birth to the ominous idea of race in the first place, facilitated the abhorrent notions of *miscegenation, hybridity,* and *mixed race*. Efforts to expand the discourse of 'mixed race' to include any combination that abridges diverse ethnic/national origin – e.g., Chinese-Chicano, Southeast Indian and Iranian – seem rather disingenuous given the mating history of humankind. Scholarship on the impact of contemporary demographic changes and their impact on mixed identities per se must not confuse the historical particularity of *mixed race*. Again – more, not less, clarity and precision is needed and the appealing notion of *third-ness*, a separate space defined for mixedness, still confuses the challenges of racial ambiguity with panethnic mixing between minority communities. (Azoulay 2003: 234)

In an attempt to throw some light on this plethora of putative generic terms (Fig. 4), two surveys among self-

BRITISH PATHÉ/ITN SOURCE

Fig. 5. *In official correspondence in the 1960s the Home Office talked of 'half-caste children' and 'mixed families' (National Archives, HO 344/41). Contemporary images point to ordinary lives, as in this British Pathé Ltd. still: 'A mixed race couple with their children on the steps of their home, in Brixton'.*

Judicial Studies Board 2005. *Adult Court Bench Book.* London: Judicial Studies Board.

McGowan, K. 1997. *97: The year's work in critical and cultural theory.* Vol. 7. Oxford: Blackwell for the English Association.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2003. *How do you define ethnicity?* London: ONS.

— 2008. *Development of the ethnicity, language and religion questions for the 2011 census.* Paper AAG(08)02. London: ONS.

identifying 'mixed race' people (a convenience sample of the general population and a structured sample of 18-25 year-olds in higher/further education institutions) were undertaken to obtain systematic data on preferences for terminology. Respondents were asked which of a list of *general terms for mixed race* they preferred and were invited to select all that applied.

The most popular general term of choice amongst respondents in these studies was 'mixed race' (Table 2), just over half the respondents in the student survey selecting this. Other terms that attracted much less support amongst students were 'mixed heritage' (18%), 'mixed origins' (16%), and 'mixed parentage' (13%). Indeed, terms indicating only two groups, 'mixed parentage', 'dual heritage' (12%), and 'biracial' (4%) were among the least popular for students, as was 'multiethnic' (7%). Finally, students reporting 'no preference' or 'never thought about it' each comprised a fifth of the sample.

When asked if there were terms (including any of those listed) that they found offensive, around only a third of respondents in the two surveys said that there were: a dozen different terms were identified (Table 3).

The most frequently mentioned offensive term was 'half-caste', others including 'biracial', 'dual heritage', 'coloured', and 'half breed/bred'. Less than 2% of the full student sample (n=326) objected to (each of) 'mixed race', 'mixed heritage' and 'mixed origins'.

The mixed race respondents gave a range of reasons why they found these terms offensive or inappropriate. In

the general population survey, dislike of 'dual heritage' focused on its limitation to two groups, for example: 'Many of us are more than dual!'. Also, terms like 'dual heritage' and 'mixed origins' were seen as attempts to disregard race. Others regarded 'mixed origins' and 'mixed heritage' unfavourably as they 'do not accurately represent "Mixed Race" as they are too general' and 'sound negative'. 'Half-caste' was regarded as pejorative by several respondents, on the ground of only partial recognition and historical connotations (Fig. 5):

> *'"half-caste" is terrible! Makes you sound as though you're "half a person"'; 'They* [terms including words like half and semi] *suggest I am less than whole and have historical meanings and usage which demean us'; 'I am not "dual"/two of/ half of even though PC social workers "adopt" this term'; 'It was formerly used in a prejudiced/ignorant way'; 'Because it* [and also mulatto and dual heritage] *would indicate two races of genetic origin'; 'sounds derogatory'; 'Because it portrays the notion that I am only half a person'.*

'Half breed', too, was regarded as 'very negative' or with 'negative connotations, linked to racist ideology and slavery' (as was 'half-caste'). 'Mulatto' and 'octoroon' were judged to have 'slavery connotations and inaccuracies'. Although 'multiracial' was disliked by three respondents (thought to be 'very open to interpretation, anyone could tick it'; '"I'm multiracial" sounds like a place, not a person!'; and 'It sounds very inconclusive, multi rather than mixed'), another mixed race person expressed a preference for this term ('I like "multiracial", as used in USA

Family origins of pregnant woman:

☐ UK White

☐ N. European White

☐ Southern or other European White

☐ Other Non-European

☐ African or African Caribbean

☐ South Asian

☐ South East Asian

Mixed race categories (for pregnant women only):

☐ White and African or African Caribbean

☐ White and Asian

☐ Asian and African or African Caribbean

Fig. 6. *In 2008 the National Health Service Foetal Anomaly Screening Programme issued a national form for Down's syndrome screening. Ten categories are provided to record the 'family origins' of the pregnant woman, including three 'mixed race' categories. This approach incorporates the concepts of 'origins' and 'race'.*

Runnymede Trust 2007: 'Mixedness and mixing'. http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects/mixed-heritage/mixedness-conference-lsbu.html; accessed 1 October 2008.

Tikly, L. et al. 2004. *Understanding the educational needs of mixed heritage pupils. Research report RR549.* London: Department for Education and Skills.

US Office of Management and Budget 2007. *Federal register* 7 September 1997, Part II; pp. 36873-36946.

Williams, D.R. and Jackson, J.S. 2000. Race/ethnicity and the 2000 census: Recommendations for African American and other Black populations in the United States. *American Journal of Public Health* 90: 1728-1730.

Zuss, M. 1997. Contesting representations: Life-writings and subjectivity in postmodern and feminist autobiography. *Theory and Psychology* 7(5): 653-673.

debate, much better than "mixed race"'). One respondent felt that none of 'half caste', 'mixed heritage', 'dual heritage' and 'mixed parentage' meant 'mixed race'. Any terms encompassing race were felt to be inappropriate by another respondent: 'I think of having "origins", but I have always felt that the only "race" is the human race and as a result do not believe there are "different" types of human beings'.

In the student survey, similar objections were voiced. With respect to 'half-caste' respondents stated:

'Degrading and unnecessary'; 'Half-caste has negative historical origins'; 'Makes you sound incomplete'; 'Because it dates back to the slave trade and what caste you belong to'; 'I don't see different races as castes (as in levers of class). We are all equal'; 'It is indicating or suggesting that you are only half one race or that you're not a full person as you're not fully one race'; 'It has connotations that a person is not "whole" [...] they are half made'; 'I presume it stems from the Hindu caste system and I don't like the implication of social inferiority or the principle of dividing any population into groups/castes – stratified into special roles'.

'Biracial' was disliked for a range of reasons: 'Has an element of sexual orientation'; 'biracial is too categorical (i.e. just not 2 races)'; 'Makes me think of the term bisexual which I think is wrong'; 'The context itself shows lack of respect for mixed heritage'; 'These (dual heritage, biracial) do not apply to those with more than two racial backgrounds, so may be inaccurate for some people'. Terms such as 'multiracial', 'biracial', 'dual heritage', and 'multiethnic' were thought of as pretentious by some.

Fitting terminology to usage

It is clear from the foregoing evidence that the choice of terminology needs to fit the context in which it is used. Many usages in public policy – especially those that monitor government programmes for the avoidance of disadvantage and discrimination and draw heavily upon data collected from respondents – recognize the mutual implication of category and group.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS), for example, has articulated this perspective, arguing that 'categories should be used [...] that reflect people's own preferred ethnic descriptions of themselves' (ONS 2003). The US Census Bureau, too, has emphasized that the terms used to identify population groups should be familiar and acceptable to the people described 'if the principle of self-identification is to be honored' (US Office of Management and Budget 1997). Similarly, Williams and Jackson (2000) have urged in a public health context that 'efforts should be made to use the most preferred terms for racial popula-

tions [...] and to periodically monitor and update racial categories.'

The argument that terminology should be sensitive to the cognitive system by which people and groups express their identities is a powerful one, with respect to the role of agency, the importance of the collective dimension of identity in our conceptualization of ethnicity, and data quality when terminology is incorporated into data collection instruments.

In other contexts one could argue that such *group* preferences, while relevant, are but one strand of information amongst several that fashion terminology and are, themselves, dynamic and shaped and amenable to change on the basis of logical, needs-based arguments. Indeed, Brubaker et al. (2004) have argued that 'even when census categories are initially remote from prevailing self-understandings, they may be taken up by cultural and political entrepreneurs and eventually reshape lines of identification'.

Journal editorial boards and other official bodies may wish to argue, for example, that as the concept of race is contested and carries many negative historical associations, a case for using terminology other than 'mixed race' is justified on moral or philosophical grounds, even if deemed unsatisfactory by those it describes. Such a position is defensible, though ruptures in usage between group members and categorizers of the kind identified by Tikly et al. may give rise to a need for justification.

The use of 'mixed origins' is likely to have a continuing niche role in some bureaucratic and professional practices of government. 'Origins' has an entrenched position with regard to legal usage, for example. Similarly, the assessment of health risks may require a more stable measure than ethnic identity, which is subject to selective attribution. Both the 1994 Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities and the 1999 and 2004 Health Survey for England use the term 'family origins', as do some NHS antenatal and newborn screening programmes (such as those for sickle cell trait and thalassaemia, although the Foetal Anomaly Screening Programme uses 'mixed race') (Fig. 6).

Conclusions

This analysis shows that the term of choice of most respondents in general population and student samples was 'mixed race'. Based on the criterion of currency amongst the community described by the terms, 'mixed race' is clearly the strongest candidate for those contexts where a conceptual basis of ethnic/racial identity or group allegiance or membership is required. Terms invoking two groups – such as 'mixed parentage', 'dual heritage', and 'biracial' – are preferred by very few and 'mixed origins' and 'mixed heritage' fare little better, although few find them offensive. Others such as 'multi-ethnic' and 'mixed cultural' have not entered the popular lexicon. Yet concern about the disputed meaning of race – and the historical legacy of the term – make the widespread adoption of 'mixed race' unattractive to some sociologists and anthropologists.

There is a clear need for a more encompassing term that captures multiplicity at the ethnic group/cultural background level and 'mixed ethnic groups' and 'multiple ethnic groups' have emerged as candidates in the UK. There probably still remains a need in analytical work for terminology that refers to mixes at the broad pan-ethnic group level that frequently involve 'White' groups: given the currency and acceptability of the term 'mixed race' amongst those it describes and substantive (but not complete) agreement on its meaning amongst data users, it is premature to argue for its replacement by terms such as 'mixed origins' that are not self-descriptors amongst the community in question, although these have a continuing place in other specific contexts. ●