

Foster Care, Diversity, Difference and Belonging

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NOVELLA



NARRATIVES OF VARIED EVERYDAY
LIVES AND LINKED APPROACHES

8th International Foster Care Research Conference | Siegen 17-18th of September 2015

DEVELOPMENT

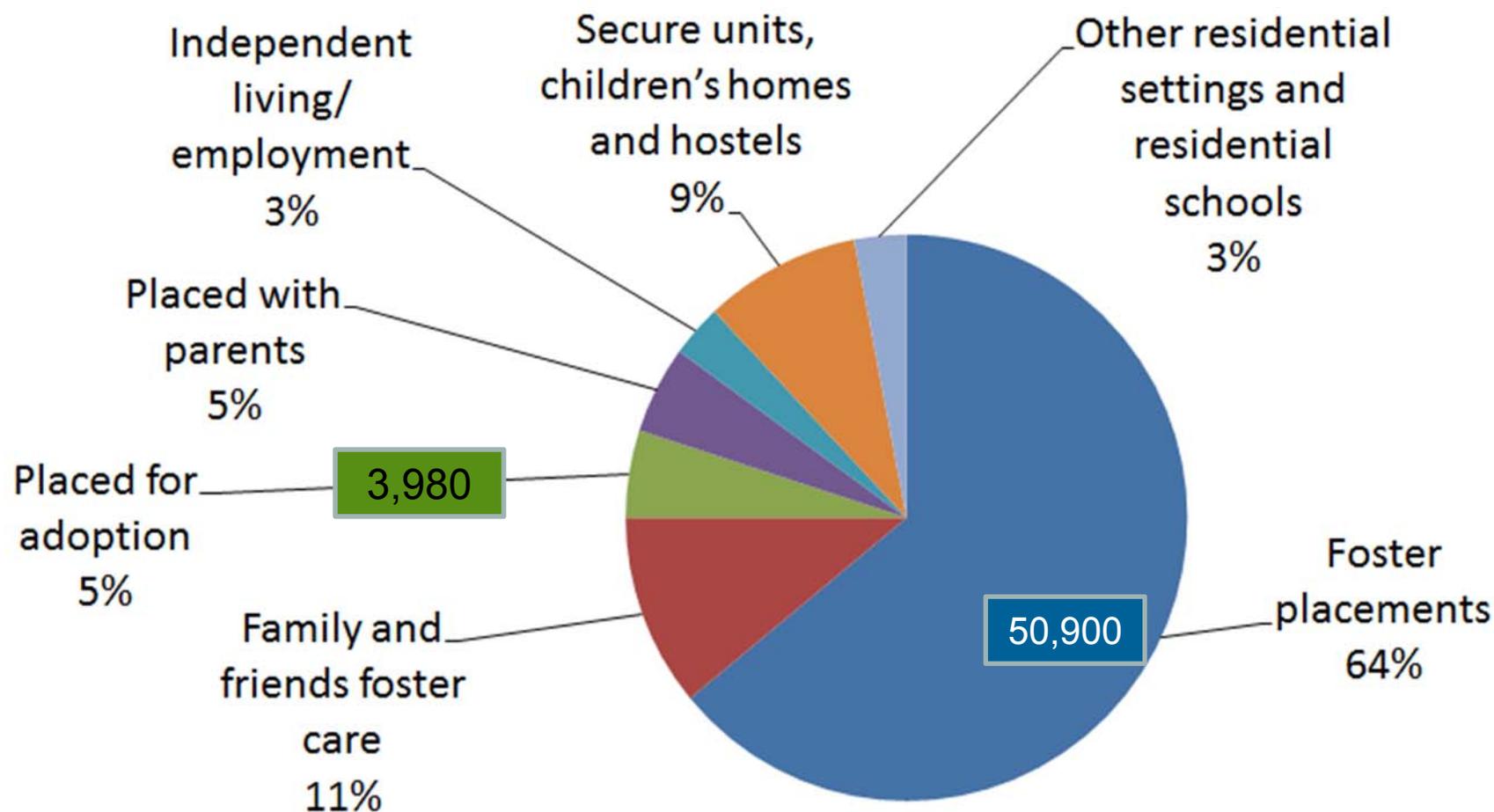
Foster Care is infused by development.

Children develop in foster care
and those who have been in foster care continue their development
afterwards if we assume that development is a lifelong process.
Foster care itself continues to develop in a changing world.

Development without developmentalism (c.f. Erica Burman, 2004)

- Foster care central to global developments
- Development of foster care practices requires consideration of background issues.

Children looked after by placement type in England



Children looked after in England, including adoption, 31 March 2013. Source: DfE statistics
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption>

The political recursiveness of issues associated with 'matching' in the UK

Children
Act
(1989)

Labour
government
guidance on
adoption
1998

Adoption
and
Children
Act 2002

Adoption
Statutory
Guidance
2011

Conservative
Government
2012

The political recursiveness of issues associated with 'matching' in the UK

Children
Act
(1989)

Labour
government
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adoption 1998

Adoption
and
Children
Act 2002

The Children
and Families
Act 2014

- consider 'fostering for adoption' where adoption is an option;
- Pathways to permanence;
- role of ethnicity in matching;
- new duties regarding provision of adoption support;
- post adoption contact
- Adoption is one of the Government's top priorities... DfE, 2013

An overemphasis on matching for mixed ethnicity children for many children, for whom there will never be an exact match, having torn, problematic identities. These negative labels are dangers for the way these children will see themselves. This ethnic identity and identity construction is intended to inspire further debate that will go beyond any simplistic notions of 'same-race' vs. 'transracial' adoption arguments. (Marsha Wood, 2009: 438, *Child and Family Social Work*)

Global changes make diversity and difference central to foster care agenda

Steve Vertovec (2007) 'super diversity'

- **Global migration makes ethnicised plurality more common than not.**
- **Differences between groups also on the basis of intersecting categories: legal statuses, age, gender, religion, sexuality and where they live.**
- **Rapidly changing societies.**
- **Mixed relationships increasingly common.**
- **Historicized national differences in categories that are recognised.**

Cultural diversity is about the plurality of different cultural groups in society.

Diversity is frequently paired with 'management' (Sara Ahmed, 2010)

Global changes place racialisation and ethnicisation on foster care agenda

Black and minority ethnic foster carers and adopters urgently needed in Bristol

[Share](#)

Release date: Mon, 03/02/2014

Media release

3 February 2014

Black and minority ethnic foster carers and adopters urgently needed in Bristol

More people from black and minority ethnic and mixed heritage backgrounds who would like to become foster carers and adopters are urged to contact Bristol City Council, which is holding a recruitment event next Wednesday (5th Feb).

More than a quarter of children waiting to be fostered or adopted in the UK are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. As of December 2013 166 children in care are of black or minority ethnic background. However not enough prospective foster carers or adopters are coming forward to care for these children. As a result these children tend to wait longer for families.

The council believes it is important to provide a child with a loving and caring environment where their culture and heritage is respected and promoted.

Shaliyah aged 8 says she likes that her foster carer looks like her, "It makes me less different and I like that she can do my hair properly".

Brenda Massey, the council's Assistant Mayor for Children and Young People says: "Bristol is a diverse city with a diverse population of children in care. As with all children who are fostered it is vital that we place them with carers who best suit their needs. We are

Media enquiries

For follow up media enquiries on this press release please call the Press Office on **0117 922 2650**.



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Equalities Impact Assessment Private Fostering Services July 2006

7. Findings

- a) ...what are the main results of the assessment?
- b) Which groups or individuals are most affected
- c) How does this effect their access to the service?

All the privately fostered children had received an assessment of their needs which included language, ethnicity, age, gender, culture, disability and any special needs. There were particular challenges for the BME privately fostered children accessing services due to language barriers, differences in education abroad and accessing special educational provision for their needs.

'If I was precious, why did she send me away?' Precious Williams, *The Telegraph*

An elderly, white woman in Midhurst, West Sussex, answered my mother's advert. My mother called her "the Nanny". She had two grown-up children of her own, but liked the idea of having a black baby girl, and mother paid her about £9 a week to take me in. My foster mother said that she took me, not for the money, but "because you were lovely to look at. Good enough to eat."...At the time, it was not uncommon for African parents to farm their children out to white foster families - usually reluctantly, while finishing medical school or law school - for three or four years, but it was all done outside the jurisdiction of the social services. Theoretically, absolutely anybody could take in an African child. Growing up in Midhurst, I knew I was different. I was the only black child at my school. My mother never came to parents' evenings, and none of my teachers and few of my friends ever saw her. One day, on the school playground, a girl shook her head sadly and said: "Even your own mother doesn't love you." I was eight when she announced that she was taking me back, permanently, and was going to send me "home" to Nigeria. I cried every day for weeks.

Identities at the heart of issues of transracial fostering/adoption

- **Transracially fostered/adopted children can feel difference as painful.**
- **Divides and racialises the developmental process.**
 - Marked by experiences of racism.
- **Some adoptive parents also refuse to acknowledge difference.**
- **Some try hard to make their children comfortable with difference.**
- **Fits with issues from academic literature (e.g. *Adoption and Fostering*, December 2012).**
- **Complicated by relationships with birth parents.**
- **Few black and Asian foster carers (Wainwright and Ridley, 2012)**

Talk covers

1. Debates on transracial fostering & adoption
2. Theorising identities
3. Belonging and the Politics of belonging
4. Children's intersectional identities indicating that racialisation matters.





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Debates on transracial fostering & adoption

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Education secretary Michael Gove believes that race issues are holding up the adoption process.

Racial and cultural differences can have a profound impact on ethnic-minority [children](#) adopted by white parents, according to new research that challenges the government's plans on [adoption](#) reform. A study by the [British Association for Adoption and Fostering](#) (BAAF) examined the experiences of 72 Chinese orphans who arrived from Hong Kong in the 1960s and were adopted by mainly white British parent. The findings, the first study into the long-term impact of interracial adoption in Britain, raise questions over the government's proposals to make it easier for prospective parents to adopt children from different racial or cultural backgrounds.

Researchers questioned the former orphans on their experiences from childhood through to middle age, reporting that common experiences included "varying levels of racism, prejudice and feelings of belonging and difference within their adoptive families and wider communities".

Some of the women, the three-year BAAF study found, "felt alienated, struggled with conflicts of dual/multiple identities and had experienced race-based mistreatment". Childhood and adolescence were particularly traumatic for some, with 54% saying they "felt uncomfortable" following comments about how they looked different from their adoptive family, while three-quarters admitted thinking that they wanted to look less Chinese.

For a minority, it added, "race-based bullying" and discrimination "had a substantial negative impact on their wellbeing". Throughout, the issue of ethnicity was cited by many of the former orphans as a potentially fraught issue whose impact was often linked to their

Transracial adoption is frequently polarised (Barn & Kirton, 2012)

Pro

Love and security are central to children's needs

'Colour blindness'

Success of transracial adoption (Lee, 2003)

Shortage of black adopters

Better option than care, Selwyn (2010)

What constitutes a 'good enough' match?

(Racialised) Identities are complex and intersectional.

Anti (ABSWAP; BAAF)

Produces 'identity confusion'.

Racism is difficult to deal with and has long-term deleterious consequences (Perlita Harris; Lee, 2003).

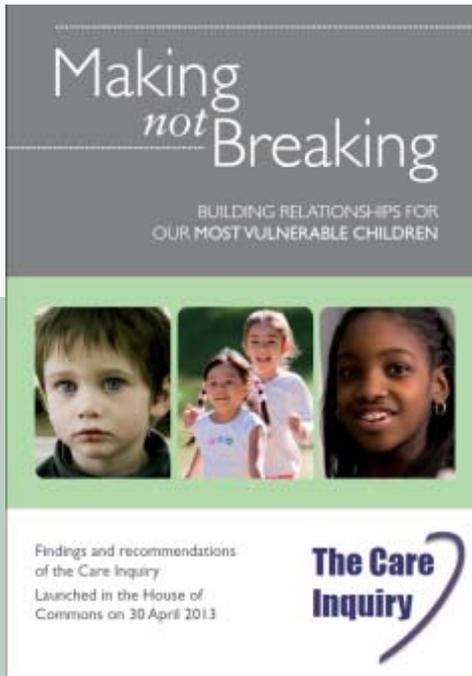
Constitutes the stealing of children.

black children unable to relate to other black people and to deal with rejections from white society.



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**‘The current research literature on psychological outcome, racial/ethnic identity development, and cultural socialization suggests that transracial adoptees—both domestic and international—are psychologically well adjusted, exhibit variability in their racial/ethnic identity development, and along with their parents, engage in a variety of cultural socialization strategies to overcome the transracial adoption paradox. More theory and research, however, are necessary to unravel the specific factors that affect cultural socialization, racial/ethnic identity development, and psychological adjustment, as well as to inform practitioners on how to facilitate the developmental challenges that transracial adoptees and families will encounter in life.’
(Lee, 2003: 725, ‘The transracial paradox’)**



Identity: ethnicity



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The variable experiences of black and minority ethnic children in the looked after system indicate a critical need to develop social work understandings of identities and their intersection with ethnicity – including mixed ethnicity without being trapped into indecision, lack of timeliness and an adult, rather than child, focus. (Boddy 2013: 2)

Racialisation, identities and transracial adoption

- **Dynamic patterns in the construction of identities in family placement --categorical oppositions of black and white are no longer useful (Caballero, et al, 2012)**
- **Persistent and disproportionate focus on transracial adoption as the solution to family placement problems is unlikely to reduce the numbers of minoritised ethnic group children in public care (Barn & Kirton, 2012; McRoy & Griffin, 2012).**
- **Attempts to achieve 'perfect ethnic matching' are oversimplistic (Wainwright & Ridley, 2012).**
- **Transracial adoptees continue to face racism (Rushton et al., 2012).**

- **Adoptive (and birth) parents often do not know/understand racism their children experience**
- **Many transracial adopters struggle to expose their children to the cultures from which they ‘come’ and to sanitise their birth stories (Richards, 2012).**
- **Attempts to make children familiar with ‘their’ cultures also position children as outsiders to the nation and family (Lind, 2012).**
- **Racialisation continues to be central to child upbringing in transracial adoption.**



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Theorising identities

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Why identities matter



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- **Guides individual actions. The ways in which we identify with other people affects what we do (Hopkins and Reicher, 2002).**
- **Central to children's understanding of themselves as separate from others and so knowledge of other perspectives, minds and empathy**
 - **-Precursor 7-9 months (Baron-Cohen); Meltzoff- 2-3 years**
 - **-deictic shift**
 - **-ability to keep secrets**
- **Consumption = developmentally salient.**
- **Affects children's feelings of belonging to families and social groups and participation.**
- **Relational**
- **Affects practices and legislation for children.**

Identities interlinked with Social Action

‘Collective identities are important: they shape our sense of who we are, our position in relation to others, and how we can and should act/.../Group memberships can provide a crucial supportive context in which oppressive identity constructions may be explored. Such explorations will not always result in identifications and practices that all would construe as progressive’ (Hopkins et al., 2006: 52&56)

Identities, the future and identity projects

- Identity is often thought about as about the past or the present. What is our tradition, who are we?
- But identity is about the future as much as the past. (Stuart Hall)
- ‘Identity is always a project...a definition of what should count for us and who we think we should be and those who seek to mobilise us, and those who seek to influence who we are will always be entrepreneurs of identity’—e.g. politicians, activists, academics (Reicher, 2005; Wetherell, 2010).
- Can try to limit our identities, to freeze them to make sure that the privileges that exist don’t change or we can consider alternative arrangements (Reicher, 2005).
- Definition counterposed to one that suggests that constructed ‘roots’ are essential to healthy identities (c.f. debates on sperm donors; tracing birth parents & ancestors).

Theorisation of identities



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- Continuously debated in public policy and in theory.**
- ‘the place(s) or location(s) where social categories and social relations, symbolic representations and hierarchies of privilege and disadvantage come together and are lived out as forms of subjectivity and community’ (Wetherell and Mohanty, 2010).**
- Identities are a resource, projects, decentred & multiple.**
- Intersectional.**
- Contradictions between convivial, solidaristic everyday relations and racism.**

Difference is part of everyday practices

- **Other side of identity**
- **An understanding of who we are and who we are *not*.**
- **Kroger (1993) 'the balance between self and other'.**
- **Affects, and is affected by our social interactions and social positioning.**

Gender, racialisation, class, sexuality, embodiment

- **So diversity is part of identity.**

Theoretical perspective on identities

- **Multiple & decentred.**
- **Potentially fluid so changes historically and geographically.**
- **Constructed through experience.**
- **Linguistically coded into narratives.**
- **Uses culturally available resources—practical accomplishment.**
- **Part of identity projects**
- **Interactional resource.**
- **Performative.**
- **Saturated with power relations**



Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; 1994, 2011)

- **(Everyday) theory for recognising simultaneous positioning in social categories—e.g. gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity.**
- **Non-additive & non-essentialist (Crenshaw, 1989).**
- **Helps to account for the processes by which identities are flexible, shifting, not determinist, multiply located and continually recombined.**
- **At the heart of processes of subjectification.**

Framing Intersectionality (Lutz et al., 2011)

Racialisation (Frantz Fanon)

- **'Race' changes over time and is different in different situations.**
- **It is made socially significant, rather than being natural or fixed.**
- **Involves exclusions and inclusions.**
- **Socially constructed process.**

Belonging & The Politics of Belonging (Nira Yuval-Davis, 2011)

‘People can ‘belong’ in many different ways and to many different objects of attachments. These can vary from a particular person to the whole humanity, in a concrete or abstract way, by self or other identification, in a stable, contested or transient way. Even in its most stable ‘primordial’ forms, however, belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity...’

Three interrelated levels:

- 1) Social locations;**
- 2) People’s identifications and emotional attachments to various collectivities and groupings;**
- 3) Relates to ethical and political value systems people use to judge their own and others’ belonging/s.**

Belonging is a central issue for fostered and adopted children

- **Visible ethnic difference is difficult for many (Precious example; Sarah Richards, 2012).**
- **Parental and state efforts to maintain a 'roots' notion of culture highlights difference in ways that can feel exclusionary (Lind, 2012).**
- **Occurs 'naturally' in 'mixed'-parentage families and visibly ethnically different families (Caballero et al., 2008; Holmes, 1995; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002).**
- **Sometimes difficult for fostered unaccompanied asylum seekers (Connolly, 2014).**
- **Source of stigma for some fostered children (Madigan, 2013)**

Gillian Schofield 'family practices' (David Morgan)

'Narratives are seen as stories which people tell to themselves and to others about their own family relationships, which enable them to be understood and situated as part of an accepted repertoire of what 'family' means. '

Finch, J. (2007) 'Displaying families' *Sociology* 41 (2) pp. 65-81

- **The core message of 'display' is 'these are my family relationships and they work' (Finch 2007)**
- **Foster families (and other 'chosen' families) seek legitimacy, often through 'displaying' that they are 'the same' as cultural ideals of family.**

Cards, rituals, celebrations, weddings, funerals – and their relationships

Children's intersectional experiences in 'mixed' 'birth' families

Importance of biographical narratives (Reimer and Schafer, 2015)

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Identification with white brothers

‘...So I, one of the strongest parts of my identity I would say is, I feel I’ve been socialised in a predominantly white working class background, so I identify strongly with white working class lads from that background. However when I’m outside ‘Newborough’, people think I’m, because I’m mixed race and I looked mixed race. People don’t naturally associate me as connected with the white working class side of my cultural identity which to me is stronger than my mixed race identity...‘...what I did do at some point was internalise external opinions of my identity.,. Never been black enough to be black or white enough to be white and whenever an issue or discussion would happen around mixed identity, people would ...dismiss it.

Identification with white brothers

'I used to explain to my older white brothers that they were er, (.) they were always in a majority. I felt I was in a majority when I was at home, within my family house but when I came out of there I was in a minority and because they were male, they were quite strong, and good looking guys they were never in a minority so they didn't understand that experience. And again I would have my identity brought into question, and get into trouble around that because people called me nigger or paki or all that ridiculous stuff that people do. (.) Yeah and that's how I learnt. (Isaac, UK-born)

Intersectional thinking is an everyday heuristic device (Lutz; Knapp)

- **'Isaac' orients to negotiations of gendered/racialised/classed & familial identifications.**
- **Non-shared environments (Dunn & Plomin, 1982).**
- **Appeals to the unconscious & emotions.**
- **Changed over time.**
- **Geographically and historically located.**
- **Societal issues –outsider definitions, racism and resistance.**

Difference & identities 1

'As soon as I hit the school age, there are things, there are some distinct memories so for example there was an Irish family who lived across further down the road, and a Pakistani family who lived opposite me. And the girls in the Pakistani family were good friends and we used to walk to school together but the Irish family were terrible racists and they had a dog and they use to set their dog on us to chase us up the road after school. And they didn't see any difference between me and the Caribbean family next door to me or the Pakistani family across the road. So I knew that I had things in common with those and yet the dog wouldn't be set on my white cousins when they came or the white friend I had who was further up the road.'

Difference & identities 2



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‘So you know that was probably from about the age of 5 so those sorts of things kind of set you apart from other members of your family or your peers who are white and it’s all about being visibly different. Because I wasn’t like the Pakistani girls, in this Pakistani household which had, which clearly differentiated itself, my household was essentially a white Anglo Saxon household you know. The food we ate, the language we spoke was, there was nothing that kind of set itself out as different, the only thing different thing was essentially the way I looked.’ (Sylvia 35 years old)

Developing identities through disjunctions



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What do you remember about first coming [to the UK]?

Odette Um, feeling very cold and umm going to school and nobody in school realising I was mixed race. *Everyone* thought I was black. And there was one other group (.) one other black family in the whole school and they were three sisters and they were *very very* dark. And people couldn't tell the difference between me and them. And, not that I particularly minded to be dark or anything but I was shocked that people couldn't tell the difference between (.) um me being mixed race and (.) now I'm extremely light skinned um I was probably a bit darker when I came then and and and and then and even in my sister's class she had someone who refused to believe that her mum was white (.) (Moved from Nigeria)

Well-intentioned parents may not notice racialisation

‘Years later, while living in an integrated suburb where I thought I was raising my own children differently, I was horrified one day when my four-year-old son identified a stylishly dressed Black man who was jogging by our house as a “garbage man” ...In those days, virtually all the men who collected the town’s garbage were Black...No wonder my son couldn’t distinguish between a Black corporate executive jogging in his Calvin Klein warm-up suit and a Black man picking up the trash. By the age of two or three, he already had absorbed the racial hierarchy that had been constructed for him in a thousand small ways, and his eyes could not see past the construct—any more than I could so many years earlier.’ (Rothenberg, 2000, *Invisible Privilege*, p. 42)

Diversity, Difference and Belonging

- **Central to fostering and adoption.**
- **Examples show how belonging is centrally linked with how children make sense of the world, understand their positioning in it and in their families.**
- **Adults need to have more psychosocial understanding of children's racialized experiences.**
- **More foster carers from more ethnic groups needed (McDermid et al., 2012)**
- **BUT children in their birth families also have such experiences.**
- **'One size does not fit all' (Nikki Luke et al., Rees Centre).**