



**Embracing Complexity:
Identity in Research, Policy,
and Lived Experience**

Youth Insight Forum

2 July 2024

Introduction from Carol

On behalf of Coram, I am pleased to welcome you to the inaugural Youth Insight Forum.

Championing youth voices is one of Coram's core priorities, reflected in the important work of individuals and programmes across our group. Young people are not just the future, but a vital force shaping the present. The Coram Institute for Children, the only think tank centred on the lives and experiences of young people, will elevate youth voice and research by championing Youth Insight in research.

This event – the first in a series of planned forums - is a testament to the potential unleashed when young people are given the resources and platform to drive and develop research and discourse. The research at its heart was produced by exceptional young researchers who have built on their lived experience, organisational exploration of identity, and research expertise to produce insight that is fresh and rigorous, and sets new pathways for how we consider identity.

As enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, identity is a fundamental and inalienable right and our consideration cannot be confined to academic discourse alone. We must delve deeper - capturing the personal, collective, and political dimensions of identity and how it shapes our experiences. Through understanding themselves and navigating our dynamic world, young people utilize identity as the lens through which they engage, build communities, and ultimately, create change.

Embracing complex identities therefore does not begin or end with this research. We recognise this forum may be part of your own exploration on a personal or organizational level and it aims to create a space for all to participate actively, contribute insights to thought-provoking discussions so we can all build upon them to amplify the authority of young voices in shaping our society for the next generation.

Sincerely,

Dr Carol Homden CBE
CEO of Coram

Event running order

1.30-2pm

Coffee and registration

2-2.10pm

Welcome and introduction from Dr Carol Homden CBE

2.10-2.40pm

Responses to the papers from Professor Susan Golombok, Hardeep Matharu and Dr Tam Cane.

The concept of Complex Identity emerged in the work of Zoe Lambert and Anthony Lynch with In-Between Lines as an exploration of the experience of those with multiple identities in a single social category. Through Youth Insight, they have produced two research papers exploring the formation, experience, and implications of complexity in identity. In this session, key voices from various disciplines will reflect on the ideas explored in this research and respond through their expertise and disciplinary lenses.

2.40-3.40pm

Complex Identity Workshop by Zoe Lambert and Anthony Lynch

The workshops will delve into the world of complex identities and what it means for the young people who have them. Zoe's will focus more on the development of adolescents as they encounter increasingly global and digital sources of community, whereas Anthony's will explore the production of lived experience research and how it can reframe policy issues for researchers and organisations. Both will invite participants to consider how lived experience and academic research can mutually inform each other, feeding into policy decisions that benefit young people in marginalised communities.

3.40-4.10pm

Refreshments

4.10-4.40pm

Q&A with Ruth Van Reken: Complex Identity in Context

Complex Identity emerged from a rich body of scholarship on multiplicity, intersectionality, and subjectivity in the experience of identity. This includes Ruth Van Reken's theorisation of Third Culture Kids (TCKs) and Cross Culture Kids (CCKs), which Zoe and Anthony have built upon to consider new intersections across various borders. Discussing both the UK and the dynamic global context in which it is integrated, this discussion considers the past, present, and future of scholarship on identity and multiplicity.

4.40-5.25pm

Identity in Practice (panel) with Irene Levine and Hannah Lawrence

What are the implications of complex identities for organisations, researchers, policymakers and others working within the children's sector? This panel brings together experts from various fields to consider how identity is mobilised and embedded in the work of organisations, and how this may develop in the future.

5.25-5.50pm

Lived Experience and Complex Identity with Philip Sinden

Moving away from theory, this discussion focuses on the lived experience of identity, the search for community, and the importance of creative expression in this endeavour.

5.50-6pm

Conclusions

6.00pm

Refreshments and networking

Complex Identity: An Intersectional Framework for Youth Organisations and Researchers in the UK | Anthony Lynch

This intersectional research paper highlights the lived experience of individuals with multiple identities in a single social category. Traditional conceptions of identity have an understanding of one identity per social category e.g.: British → Nationality, which does not address the need of several marginalised groups. Situated in the UK equality and peer research context, the paper explores academic and grassroots accounts in transracial care experience, mixed-heritage, Third Culture Kid, and border communities. Introducing the Complex Identity framework, it relates these experiences to encourage political networks and connections across differences. Neither exhaustive nor authoritative, it aims to 'speak nearby' these communities, creating space for others to detail their lived experience.

The motivation behind the research is the increasingly globalised world that young people inhabit. The UK is the most ethnically diverse it has ever been, and with residential segregation between demographics decreasing, young people are living in a fusion of cultures, foods, traditions, music, families, languages, and friends. These factors are producing a consciousness of identity complexity for these groups that organisations and researchers need to account for in their work. The paper gives several recommendations for researchers and organisations to raise awareness of complex identities, as well as to increase representation and funding for grassroots groups. By accurately conceptualising the needs of marginalised young people, the hope is that support for identity can reflect the complex reality of 21st century Britain.

Beyond Labels: Understanding the Complex Identities of Youth in the UK | Zoe Lambert

This report examines the social and psychological development of complex identities in adolescents within the United Kingdom, aimed at informing people in positions of authority. By integrating Erikson's identity development theory from "Childhood and Society" (1993) with additional theories related to the complex identity experience, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the unique challenges faced by these adolescents. The findings reveal that adolescents with complex identities must navigate several distinct processes to achieve the optimal outcome described in Erikson's theory. These processes add to the typical developmental tasks that adolescents face as they transition to adulthood.

The report also considers the significant roles of globalisation and the internet in shaping complex identities, influencing both the development process and its pace. This complexity indicates that the current infrastructure is not equipped to address the nuances of complex identities, as evidenced by a lack of existing research and unanswered questions in official reports. To prevent policy errors and social division, it is recommended that professional bodies and authorities educate themselves on the phenomenon of complex identities. A lived experience-focused approach and a better understanding of the implications of having a complex identity will help create knowledge in this area.

Currently in development, the Coram Institute for Children will be the only think tank dedicated to the future of children, working with partners and young people to learn from the past, examine current needs and create better chances for the next generation.

Youth Insight will form a constituent part of the Institute, providing a pathway for graduates to produce high-quality research informed by their experience and expertise. Integrated into the resources, structures, and audiences of Coram, each researcher will lead an independent research project which culminates in a published report. A Youth Insight Forum similar to today's event will also be held to disseminate and explore their work to wider audiences. Each placement offers an opportunity for young people to develop existing research skills, build collaboration and leadership, and contribute perspectives that will support the expansion of the Coram Institute for Children.

As an ongoing cycle of researchers, Youth Insight will ensure the Institute stays at the forefront of youth issues, constantly informed by fresh perspectives and lived experience. The driving intention of this programme is to turn youth experience into rigorous insight produced without being framed by the research design and analysis of others. Structured at the heart of the Institute, these insights will be translated into real and tangible impact.

The development of Youth Insight is being led by Anthony Lynch, Zoe Lambert, and Milly Jonas. Please see the Institute website for updates on the Institute's development and future output from Youth Insight.

Find out more about Youth Insight at coram.org.uk/institute



Speaker profiles

Susan Golombok is Professor Emerita of Family Research and former Director of the Centre for Family Research at the University of Cambridge. She has pioneered research on lesbian mother families, gay father families, families with transgender parents, families formed by single parents by choice, and families created by assisted reproductive technologies including in vitro fertilisation (IVF), donor insemination, egg donation and surrogacy. Her research has challenged commonly held assumptions about these families as well as widely held theories of child development and has contributed to policy and legislation on the family both nationally and internationally. Her most recent book is, *We Are Family: What Really Matters for Parents and Children*.

Hardeep Matharu is a journalist and writer, whose work focuses on the forces that shape us: identities, politics, and the media. The London-born daughter of Sikh Punjabi immigrants from British Kenya and India, she is passionate about bringing complexity, nuance, and depth to readers of her work. Hardeep is the Editor of the independent investigative news site and monthly print news magazine *Byline Times*, which covers 'what the papers don't say'. Before starting her career in journalism as an award-winning local news reporter, Hardeep read Law at Cambridge University. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

Dr Tam Cane is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Sussex. She has led research and evaluation projects examining anti-racist practice in social work practice. Tam has developed several models to support adoption practice, including the BRAC2eD model for debiasing the assessment and recruitment processes with racialised and minoritised ethnic prospective adopters. Tam founded and developed AFDiT, a transracial adoption framework, later co-created with people with lived experience of transracial adoption (adoptees, adopters and birth parents), and social workers, piloted and rolled out nationally. Dr Tam Cane is actively leading and co-researching a number of care and adoption projects.

Ruth Van Reken is a second generation Third Culture Kid* (TCK) and mother of three now adult TCKs. She is co-author of *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*, 3rd ed., and author of *Letters Never Sent*, her personal journaling seeking to understand the long-term impact of her cross-cultural childhood. For more than thirty-five years Ruth has travelled extensively speaking about issues related to the impact of global mobility on individuals, families, and societies. She is co-founder and past chairperson of Families in Global Transition. In addition to her two books and many articles, she has written a chapter in other books including *Strangers at Home*, *Unrooted Childhoods*, and *Writing Out of Limbo*. In 2019 she received an Hon. Litt.D from Wheaton College for her life's work. She now lives in Indianapolis, IN with her husband, David,

Philip Sinden is a fashion and portrait photographer who caught the photography bug at 13 when he picked up a camera at a jumble sale. His formative years spent honing his craft eventually paid off when clients including *Wallpaper, Vogue and the Telegraph Magazine came calling. He is known for his relaxed but structured fashion and portrait work bringing the conventions of portraiture into his fashion photography in the studio with natural lighting techniques or on location. The photographer lives with his wife and son in Hackney and has a studio in Bow where he works on personal projects. He has shot short films for Gieves and Hawkes and a series for The Telegraph Luxury in New York, Paris, Venice and London. His work has been featured in Harper's Bazaar, British Vogue, The Telegraph Magazine, The Article Magazine, Wallpaper*, Port Magazine, Town and Country, Esquire, GQ Germany, AnOther and YWYW Magazine. His clients include Paul Smith, Marks & Spencer, Gieves and Hawkes, Richard James, Hogan, Sony, American Express, France Telecom and Hewlett Packard. He was a finalist in the AOP 2020 Open awards. Philip has a print in the Royal Academy collection and has contributed to several books.



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