

## **Cross-cutting social circle configurations in the lives of the sons and daughters of mixed parentage<sup>1</sup>**

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*Abstract:* This article examines the data from research on the integration of the new generations in Italy, focusing on the children of mixed parentage. Analysis of a sample of 17,225 pre-adolescents (aged 11 to 14), of whom 13,301 were Italians, 2,921 foreigners and 1,003 children of mixed couples, shows that, although these last have in many cases features which put them midway between Italians and foreigners, in some respects they also differ markedly from both the other groups. The particular position assumed by children of mixed parentage in the social space is commented on by resuming Simmel's thought on social circles and their possible intersections (cross-cutting social circles). The data analysis reveals a greater cross-cultural propensity among the new generations than among previous ones: Italian pre-adolescents growing up in a multi-ethnic society are more open to, and willing to accept, the challenge of cultural diversity than are their parents. Amongst all the pre-adolescents interviewed, the children of mixed couples were those most disposed to form intercultural relations.

*Key-words:* Cross-cutting social circles, Gender, Mixed parentage, Social capital, Social space

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## **Introduction**

Children of mixed parentage are emblematic of cross-culturalism. Beyond choices, interests and personal abilities, they not only embody the encounter among linguistic, cultural and ethnic differences, but they also experience the ambivalent perception of them in society. Studies on mixed families are not particularly numerous (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2008) and the interest of scholars, when they have dealt with this issue, has concentrated mainly on the dynamics of the couple, rather than its offspring.

In this regard a discussion of particular interest is that by Blau and Schwartz (1984) who propose a macrosocial theory of inter-group relations by drawing on Simmel's theory of social circles and their possible combinations (cross-cutting social circles). Blau and Schwartz's study prompts interesting considerations, such as, for example, that social inequality is frequently associated with mixed marriages and that multiple intersections among social circles are associated with increased social mobility and inter-group relations (multiple intersection tends to increase social mobility as well as intergroup relations) (Blau, Schwartz, 1994: 98).

Also in what follows it is considered appropriate to adopt Simmel's theory on social circles, a theory suited to the study of the children of mixed parentage, which is conducted here through an analysis of social capital.

Simmel explains that the fact that a person belongs to a variety of social circles entails an enormous number of individualising combinations. Within this multiplicity of circles, and therefore of belongings, "individuality is defined, in both its natural aspiration and in becoming historical, by the relationship between cohesion and competition that is decisive for it" (Simmel, 1998: 365-6). Established on the basis of the specific configuration of circles, therefore, are relationships of competition and cohesion which vary widely and are reflected in processes of individualization. This is universally true. However, on adapting this idea to children of mixed parentage, it is possible to show the dynamics of competition and cohesion to which they are subject in their individualization, which is made more complex by the fact that they are determined from birth by a particular intersection of social circles which may

be connoted by meanings, sense-orientations and even strongly divergent claims.

Simmel says that at birth all individuals occupy an accidental position that places them within an associative circle – the family – which comprises a number of different individualities. For children of mixed parentage, their accidental position is determined within an association of representation complex from a cultural point of view because the individualities that make up their families belong, by definition, to different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

“In mixed families, children grow up seeing differences and learning about two cultures even if these are filtered through inevitable compromises. The parents in such children’s eyes represent two different ways of life, although, living in Italy, the foreign one is perforce more indistinct” (Balsamo, 1994: 110)

The children of mixed couples exhibit a peculiar social characteristic that may be experienced as a set of value-added resources or as a constraint difficult to evade. In reality, there presumably occurs an alternation, an interconnection, a simultaneous presence of resources and constraints, which combine in variable patterns. The dominance of one over the other is largely influenced by attitudes in the surrounding social environment (Tizard, Phoenix, 2002).

Ethnographic research in the London district of Southall, for example, reveals a tendency among new generations to perceive *metisage* as something that creates an attractive distinctiveness, something ‘cool’. Young people appreciate lifestyles marked by a cultural syncretism expressed in music, food and clothes, in the places and persons frequented. On the English youth scene, black style and everything hybridized with it is particularly appreciated. This does not mean that there is less racism; simply that it shifts to becoming a device that works to the detriment of other groups such as Asians (Back, 1996; Baumann, 1996).

In contrast to London, which is currently characterized by recognized cosmopolitanism, the Italian urban environment shows little inclination to recognize multiple identities and, more in general, less capacity for the social inclusion of young people with ethnic markers or hyphenated identities. Empirical research carried out in Rome (Braccini, 2000) and Milan (Andall,

2002) has brought to light dynamics of the stigmatization and marginalization of new generations of Afro-Italians, who are not socially recognised as such because they have an identitarian plurality which at present is not recognised and socially accepted. These new cross-cultural generations therefore prefer to turn elsewhere for their futures. They seek a social environment in which the half-caste may live in an area where social circles intersect among individuals with diversified cultural backgrounds. Only in a social space that makes this possible can the children of mixed couples balance the life-trends due to multiple belongings.

In regard to the effects of participation in several social circles, Simmel explains that the personality of the individual may have problems when it lies amid a variety of circles that do not intersect properly, and where the overlapping of social circles with different contents may be the cause of “an oscillation of life-tendencies”. This dynamic is experienced by all those who, precisely because of the social intersections that they experience, simultaneously exhibit a certain dualism and a stabilizing action.

“The fact that multiplicity of social affiliations gives rise to external and internal conflicts which threaten the individual with a psychological dualism, even a breakdown, is not proof against its stabilising action, which strengthens personal unity” (Simmel, 1998: 356).

Simmel’s typical concern with the ambivalence of phenomena is also expressed in this quotation, in which, alongside the possibility of mental breakdown there emerges that of the resolution of inner conflict. Whether the stabilising force or the dualism prevails depends greatly on the person’s affiliations in the surrounding social environment.

Like all other couples, also mixed ones form households which comprise and express a set of differences.<sup>3</sup> However, their distinguishing feature is that

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<sup>3</sup> One commonly talks about mixed couples in the case of a marriage or union between persons from different countries, or with different cultures, languages or skin colours. In the English-speaking world the most widespread term is ‘intermarriage’, which is declined according to the difference that one wants to highlight. Binational intermarriage is used in the judicial

these differences assume particular importance in the eyes of the surrounding society (Comito, Ghiringhelli, 2005). To speak of a mixed couple it is not enough for a difference to exist; this difference must be perceived, recognized and considered as significant. Above all, it must evoke a reaction in the surrounding social environment.

In European culture, the concept of mixed marriage, *metisage* in French, first appeared in the sixteenth century, when, following colonisation of the Americas, the children of whites and Indios were called *mestizos*, a term with mostly negative connotations. Over the centuries, the concept underwent various changes in meaning and value, until it also acquired positive connotations. Today it is markedly ambivalent (Gomasasca, 2008). According to the historical context and social environment, it assumes a positive sense with a predominant attitude of mixophilia; as opposed to mixophobia, or the fear of mixing with those different from oneself (Bauman, 2007).

Although the presence of mixed couples has been proposed as an indicator with which to measure the degree of integration by the immigrant population (Zincone, 2001: 97), account should be taken of the reactions, for the most part negative, to the couple in the external context. These give rise to tensions and potential conflicts which the couple must confront and, in the best of cases, reconstruct and overcome. If, from one point of view, these families have additional opportunities in cultural and linguistic terms, from another they may succumb to the social rejection of the differences which they embody, so that the resilience of the couple is severely tested, and thus becomes an indicator of intermittent integration that labours to proceed linearly along the *continuum* to which reference is often made.

As regards the perception of mixed unions in Italy, on the one hand, they are viewed as a form of transgression to be marginalized, in that it is believed that someone who marries a foreigner deliberately chooses to place him/herself at the margins of society. On the other hand, the *mixité* of the couple is seen as a unique cultural opportunity which yields mutual enrichment for both partners and embodies the ideal of integration (Gozzoli, Regalia, 2005: 154). In both

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sphere, interfaith marriage in the religious field, and interethnic or interracial marriage in anthropological or sociological disciplines (Gozzoli, Regalia, 2005: 157).

cases there is a naive interpretation of hybridisation based on *a priori* assumptions concerning the moral value of endogamic and exogamic choices. “Exogamy should not necessarily be equated with assimilation, nor should it be prescribed as a recipe for social harmony and cohesion. Similarly, the fear of endogamy as a sign of ghettoisation and lack of integration is not necessarily justified” (Rodriguez-Garcia, 2008: 263).

This contrasts greatly with “the need for a clear position, an unequivocal development of individuality that induces the individual to select certain circles at whose point of intersection he can place himself, and from the merger of which – one circle offering essentially the form of aggregation, the other of competition – he can obtain maximum individual determinacy” (Simmel, 1998: 366). Hence the children of mixed couples, like all others, will attempt to find that intersection between several circles that enables them to achieve the maximum expression of their subjectivity. But this may be complicated by the fact that they find themselves, from the moment of their birth onwards, belonging to social circles where the intersections are in a certain sense “unforeseen”, so that they do not obtain full legitimacy of their social position within the social space. “When the circles are too distant from one another in their sense and the claims that they make on the individual, there is not reached in general, or at least in relation to purposes, any intersection” (Simmel, 1998: 359).

In my opinion the outcome of the process of the construction of subjectivity, starting from social affiliations multiple from the cultural point of view, depends not only on the resources of the individual but also, and especially, on the reactions to these belongings made from the surrounding social environment.

We may therefore consider the attitude of society towards mixed families in order to determine whether, for their children, the constant tension between psychological dualism and its resolution tends more towards conflict or more towards a stabilising action.

In order to grasp the circularity that obtains between the attitudes assumed in the surrounding social environment towards to the children of mixed couples (structural elements) and expressions of identity, expectations, and the results at an individual level, among the many data available the focus here is on those

relative to social capital and which enable observation of phenomena at the meso level (Ambrosini, 2005; Nicola, 2006; Scidà, 1999: 26). The following analysis, in fact, is based on the belief that this category can be used to grasp more immediately the set of relations that arise between people and the social environment in which they live.

Coleman (2005) defined social capital as a component of the social structure used collectively by individuals to achieve private goals. In other words, social capital is a good which is simultaneously both public and private. In this regard the school, as a place which often, even if unintentionally, produces social capital, is a privileged area of observation.

In our case, by means of the concept of social capital it is possible to grasp the set of relations existing between the person and the surrounding social environment articulated through relations internal to the family (presence or absence of parents), to the extended family (IDNF) and the peer group (ISOC), thereby determining, again by social capital, the propensity to integrate (IPINT).

### **Mixed couples in Italy**

In Italy the presence of mixed couples has expanded as a consequence of the immigration into the country since the early 1990s. Over the course of the past twenty years, the phenomenon has constantly increased, with a downturn on the occasion of entry into the European Union by Romania and Bulgaria. It is currently going through a phase of normalisation.

The available official data<sup>4</sup> show that mixed marriages in Italy are growing and have a certain magnitude. During 2007, more than 23,000 marriages took place between Italian citizens and foreigners, equal to 9.4% of the total: that is, 7 weddings out of 100 as the national average, rising to 9.5 out of 100 in the North. The most frequent type of mixed marriage is one in which the groom is Italian and the bride foreign. Most unions between Italian men and foreign women take place with women from Eastern and Central Europe, mostly Romanian, Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, Moldovan and Albanian, followed by marriages with women from Central and South America, mostly Brazilian, Ecuadorian, Peruvian and Cuban. Italian women who marry foreigners choose men mainly from North Africa (34.1%) with Moroccan and Tunisian nationality (ISTAT, 2008: 260). Following legislation introduced by the “security package”, which required possession of a stay permit on publication of the banns, 2009 saw a reduction in mixed weddings and those between foreigners.

Age is the characteristic that most distinguishes the spouses of mixed marriages from the others. In particular, there is a greater difference between the average age of men (over 41) and that of women (33) in cases where the groom is Italian. When instead the bride is Italian, it is the woman who is slightly older (aged 33 on average) than the husband (aged 32 on average).

Secondly, there is a high incidence of second or third marriages. In cases where both spouses are Italian, only 10% have already been married. In cases of mixed marriage, the percentage doubles (19%), reaching 38% in cases of couples with an Italian groom and a foreign bride.

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<sup>4</sup> At national level (ISTAT, 2008) the information on mixed couples and their children is derived from the data on marriages, divorces and births. Unfortunately, the most up-to-date and detailed domestic source on the foreign juvenile population, the statistical dossier *Alumni con cittadinanza non italiana* published every year by the Ministry of Education, does not take account of this particular group. Within a classification comprising Italian pupils and other pupils without Italian citizenship, the children of mixed couples are not surveyed, on the grounds that – according to the Italian law on citizenship which is predicated *ius sanguinis* – those with one Italian parent fall into the Italian group, while those with foreign parents of different nationalities belong to the group of foreigners.

In addition, mixed marriages are prone to instability and dissolution. That is to say, they are more likely to break down than traditional ones: the percentage of divorces among mixed couples is around double that among Italian couples. Mixed couples separate earlier than others do: the average duration of conjugal cohabitation before separation is 9 years, compared to 14 among Italian couples. Also in the case of divorces, the average duration of marriages before divorce is 13 years, compared with 17 years for Italian marriages. Finally, another distinctive feature of mixed couples is the higher incidence of contentious proceedings during separation than among couples formed of spouses with the same nationality (Eurispes, 2007).

At a regional level, the data of the Lombardy *Regional Observatory of Integration* (Blangiardo, 2009) record persistent homogamy among couples. Mixed couples (married or otherwise) in Lombardy account for 14% of all unions. In line with national figures, it is mainly Italian men who have foreign partners (19.6%, compared with 8.7% of Italian women). The characteristics most associated with this type of union are the frequent presence of childless partnerships, high cultural capital, earlier immigration, and better jobs of the partners with respect to the rest of the immigrant population. To be noted is that foreigners in partnerships with Italians have been longer in Italy and are more often in skilled occupations: for example, social work and translation for women; information technology for men (Terzera, 2009: 128-131).

The national-level information available on mixed families does not go beyond that reported concerning the characteristics of couples. With regard to their children, there is an extremely small amount of data, and they state only the number of births in Italy from mixed couples, which in 2007 amounted to 23,000, of which one in three was out of wedlock (ISTAT, 2008: 262).

### **The research data**

Before the data are discussed, there follows a brief description of the methodology used to construct and distribute the sample. The survey was conducted during the 2005/06 school year in Lombardy – a region in Northern Italy with more than 9 million inhabitants, of which 1 million are immigrants, a

quarter of the total immigrant population currently in the country. A structured questionnaire was administered in 52 secondary schools with a proportion of non-Italian pupils exceeding 10%. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the schools according to their geographical distribution. A total of 17,225 pre-adolescents aged 11 to 14 were interviewed. Of these, 13,301 were Italian, 2,929 foreign, and 1,003 were the children of mixed couples.<sup>5</sup> The sample was divided between Italians and foreigners according to declared nationality. The children of mixed couples were extrapolated from these two groups on the basis of their parents' birthplaces.

The group of children of mixed couples therefore comprised those who, besides their citizenship, which might be Italian or otherwise, had one Italian parent and one parent of another nationality. Because the majority of citizenships are granted by the Italian state in the case of marriage, with the consequence that the majority of members of a mixed married couple are two Italian citizens, one of whom of foreign origin, it was not possible to take account of citizenship. Of the 1,003 children of mixed couples interviewed, 854 had one Italian and one foreign parent, and the remaining 179 had two parents of different foreign nationalities.

From the point of view of geographical distribution, mixed families are distributed in Lombardy in direct proportion to the immigrant presence, and there are no significant differences between urban and non-urban areas.

### **The indices used**

To conduct the analysis, five indices were constructed which included succinct information on socio-economic wellbeing, self-esteem, family network density, and social capital. An integration index was then built which grouped some of these indicators. By virtue of the similarity of some parts of the questionnaire, where possible, the construction of the indices took account of the findings of *Una scuola in comune* (Giovannini, Queirolo, 2002):

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<sup>5</sup> For more extensive analysis of the data see the publication of the research results (Gilardoni, 2008).

- IBS Index of socio-economic well-being
- IAU Index of self-esteem
- IDNF Index of family network density
- ISOC Index of sociality
- IPINT Index of propensity to integrate

As regards the weighting of the indicators in construction of the indices, the numbers 1 to 10 were used, while the missing cases were classified with zero. With respect to the weights assigned to each variable, to ensure greater homogeneity, it was decided to again use the scale of 1 to 10, then counting them out of ½.

### **The main nationalities**

The sample comprised high percentages of foreign partners of European origin, with a clear predominance of spouses from Switzerland, France and Germany: 34.3% of Italian men and 42.9% of the Italian women formed mixed families in which both parents were European citizens. Consequently, by virtue of relative geographical proximity and freedom of movement within the European Union, these were families at an advantage as regards the easier maintenance of transnational relations and which enjoyed greater social acceptance.

With regard to unions with citizens from outside Europe, in line with the national data,<sup>6</sup> Italian men were mostly married to women from South American (Brazil, Peru, Colombia) and Eastern Europe (Romania). The Italian women were mostly married to North African men mainly from Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco. In contrast to the greater frequency of Italian fathers (532 cases), there was a greater variety in the places of origin of the mothers (87 countries of birth), while among couples in which the mother was Italian (292 cases), this variety was lower (57 countries of birth).

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<sup>6</sup> When comparing these data with the national data, it should be noted that the data from our survey refer to mixed couples with pre-adolescent children, while the national data refer to mixed couples married in 2007.

Then added to the group of mixed couples were 179 children of mixed couples with parents of different foreign nationalities. Because particularly high in these cases were the percentages of parents without useful information on nationality, and also respondents living with a parent and an adult not a parent, it was decided not to specify the nationalities of the parents.

*Table 1. Place of birth of the foreign partner<sup>7</sup>*

<i>Place of birth of the foreign partner</i>	<i>Italian father and foreign mother</i>		<i>Place of birth of the foreign partner</i>	<i>Foreign father and Italian mother</i>	
	<i>v.a.</i>	<i>%</i>		<i>v.a.</i>	<i>%</i>
Switzerland	69	13.3	Switzerland	54	18.9
France	43	8.3	France	26	9.1
Germany	42	8.1	Germany	21	7.3
Brazil	25	4.8	Tunisia	17	5.9
Great Britain	24	4.6	Argentina	16	5.6
Romania	24	4.6	Great Britain	15	5.2
Colombia	15	2.9	Egypt	12	4.2
Spain	14	2.7	Morocco	11	3.8
Peru	14	2.7	Libya	8	2.8
Russia	14	2.7	Belgium	7	2.4
Morocco	13	2.5	Albania	6	2.1
The Philippines	12	2.3	Brazil	6	2.1
Valid percentages in a total of 532 cases			Valid percentages in a total of 292 cases		

With regard to the citizenship declared by the children, this was Italian for almost all children of mixed couples if the mother was Italian (93.0%). If the mother was foreign it was Italian in 86.5% of cases, and if both parents were foreigners in only 46.9%.

The figure on citizenship has particular value in that it is one of the structural elements which have a significant effect on the formation of the

<sup>7</sup> Because of the way in which the sample was distributed, belonging to the category of children of mixed couples were those subjects who, aside from citizenship (either Italian or non-Italian), had an Italian parent and a parent of other origin. In this case account was not taken of citizenship, because the majority of citizenships are granted by the Italian state in the case of marriage, so that the majority of mixed couples, if married, consist of two Italian citizens, one of whom is of foreign origin. To obviate this problem, the subsample of the children of mixed couples was constructed on the basis of the places of birth of the parents.

sense of belonging, not only by virtue of its symbolic value, but more specifically because of the access to civil rights afforded to these children once they become adults, and primarily the right of residence and the right to vote.

In this regard it should be borne in mind that, with the entry into force of the “security package”, the lapse of time before the spouse of an Italian citizen can obtain citizenship has lengthened. According to the new regulations, the period of time which must elapse after marriage before citizenship can be obtained has been extended by six months to two years. On the one hand, therefore, marital unions are more carefully selected; on the other, the legal integration of migrants married to an Italian has been delayed. Owing to the greater difficulties of integration due to irregular status, it is believed that measures of this kind may have harmful consequences, in that the slowing of the integration of one of the two spouses implies greater family difficulties. These measures highlight the growing idea of exclusive citizenship, which does not help bridge the gap between the real country and its legal representation produced by the relationship arising from the persistence of a law typical of an emigration country, when Italy has now become mostly a country of immigration (Zanfrini, 2007).

### **The family structure**

As highlighted in the literature (Portes, Rumbaut, 2001), the structure of the family is one of the main factors determining, partly but importantly, the lives of children and their integration. Hence, taking the family as the starting-point of the social trajectories of the pre-adolescents interviewed, consideration was made of the three forms of capital – economic, cultural and social – which according to Bourdieu (2001) contribute to determining those trajectories.

### **Economic capital**

It emerges from the data that mixed families have a level of socio-economic wellbeing close to that declared by Italian families and well above that of

foreign families. Mixed families, in fact, declare a high level of socio-economic wellbeing (24.1%) which is very close to that of Italians (28.8%), while there is a significant difference with respect to foreign families, which declare high socio-economic wellbeing in only 7.9% of cases.

When the figures on mixed families are disaggregated according to whether the mother, the father, or both parents are foreign a result emerges which warrants careful consideration.

On observing the low level of socio-economic wellbeing, one notes a significant discrepancy between families with Italian mothers (19.9%) and those with Italian fathers (25.2%) (Table 3). In contrast to the national data on income-earners divided by gender (Istat, 2005), which show that in Italy, job type remaining equal, women receive much lower incomes than men, the socio-economic wellbeing of mixed families is greater in the couples in which the mother is Italian.

One explanation for this may be the fact that, as seen, higher percentages (42.9%) of Italian mothers are married to European citizens, or also the fact that Italian fathers often marry foreign women in a second marriage, and they probably contribute to maintenance of the previous family.

Families in which, instead, both parents are foreign are those with the lowest economic capital (32.4%). This finding is important because, as confirmed by other research (Giovannini, Queirolo, 2001; Queirolo Palmas, 2002; Schizzerotto, 2006) and also by previous interpretation of the data (Gilardoni, 2008), the socio-economic wellbeing of families is significantly associated with better educational performance.

*Table 2. Index of economic and social wellbeing IBS<sup>8</sup> (percentage values of the entire sample divided among Italians, foreigners and children of mixed couples)*

<i>Socioeconomic wellbeing</i>	<i>Italian</i>	<i>Foreigners</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples</i>	<i>Total</i>
Low	18.9	52.9	26.1	25.1
Medium-low	24.8	24.3	28.1	24.9
Medium-high	27.5	14.9	21.6	25.0
High	28.8	7.9	24.1	25.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	13,293	2,903	1,003	17,199

<sup>8</sup> *Index of socio-economic wellbeing IBS.* The questionnaire contained various indicators relative to economic conditions of the families to which the children belonged. To be pointed out that this was not an index measuring the wealth of the family, but rather its wellbeing. The index of economic wellbeing was constructed by combining the following variables recoded as follows: the occupation, where stated, of both parents. If one of the two reference adults was absent, this condition was assigned a score of 1; the place where the family lived (Q. D6: Where do you live? In a rented house = 2, in a house we own = 10, in a house that is not ours, but without paying rent = 1, in a public structure, religious or private = 1); this variable weighted ½; the self-perceived socio-economic status of the family (Q13: How do you consider your family today? Very rich = 10, sufficiently rich = 6, neither rich nor poor = 4, quite poor = 2, very poor = 1); some objects owned (Q's G7-16: Does the family in which you live have the following items? dishwasher, microwave oven, digital camera, video, personal computer, washing machine, scooter, or moped, car, bicycle, at least 50 books excluding school books. Yes = 10, No = 1); the duration of holidays in the previous summer (Q. G27: How long you were away during the holidays last summer? Always stayed at home = 1, 1-2 weeks = 4, 3-4 weeks = 7, more than a month = 10). They have been counted out of ½. It was considered that this variable applied more to Italians, for whom economic prosperity can be best assessed from the length of summer holidays spent somewhere other than at home. For foreigners, the holidays do not correspond to tourism as commonly understood, but a return to the country of origin. In this case, the duration of the holiday is certainly longer, also given the travel costs involved. It was considered, however, that applying in this case was the fact that having someone that can accommodate you is a greater wellbeing index with respect to those who do not have this opportunity.

Table 3. Index of economic and social wellbeing - IBS (percentage of the sub-sample of the children of mixed couples, divided among children of mixed couples with Italian fathers, Italian mothers and couples where both parents are foreign but of different nationalities)

Socioeconomic wellbeing	Children of mixed couples with an Italian father	Children of mixed couples with an Italian mother	Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreign	Total children of mixed couples
Low	25.2	19.9	32.4	26.1
Medium-low	24.1	29.5	27.4	28.1
Medium-high	25.0	24.3	24.0	21.6
High	25.8	26.4	16.2	24.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total of valid cases	532	292	179	1,003

### Cultural capital

The possession of greater or less cultural capital by the parents is a factor able to affect the social trajectories of the children and, in particular, their educational success in terms of greater overall investment in education (Bourdieu, 2001). Also as regards immigrant families in Italy, it has been noted that parents with medium or high educational qualifications tend to set more value on investing in the educations of their children (Ambrosini, 2004; Besozzi, 2005c; Santagati, 2007).

Mixed families exhibit the highest level of cultural capital.<sup>9</sup> Table 4 shows that amongst subjects attending school the longest, the highest percentages are among the fathers of mixed couples (23.2%), while Italians and foreigners record the lowest values and are quite similar. The same applies to mothers. Women in mixed marriages are those with the highest qualifications on average (22.1%) (Table 5).

<sup>9</sup> Cultural capital was measured on the basis of the age up to which the parents went to school. To be noted in regard to this variable is that there was a rather high percentage of non-responses and don't knows. For this reason, contrary to what has been done so far, the two tables that follow give the absolute percentages and not the valid ones.

Table 4. School age of the father or the cohabiting adult man (percentage values relative to the entire sample)

<i>School age</i>	<i>Italians</i>	<i>Foreigners</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples</i>	<i>Total</i>
Before 15	28.3	20.7	25.2	26.8
Between 15 and 19	25.2	20.8	23.1	24.3
20 or over	19.1	18.3	23.2	19.2
Don't know or no reply	27.5	40.1	28.4	29.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	13,301	2,921	1,003	17,225

Table 5. School age of the father or cohabiting adult man living in the family (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of mixed couples with an Italian father, an Italian mother and where both parents are foreigners but of different nationalities)

<i>School age</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with Italian fathers</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with Italian mothers</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed couples</i>
Before 15	26.5	22.1	28.6	25.2
Between 15 and 19	25.1	26.0	14.0	23.1
20 or over	24.6	24.6	10.5	23.2
Don't know or no reply	23.8	27.3	46.8	28.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	529	289	171	1.003

Italians account for the highest percentage of subjects attending school for less time (28.3%). This finding can be explained in light of the fact that areas with high scholastic, and therefore residential, concentrations of foreigners are those inhabited by poorer and lower-educated Italians. On the other hand, it is well-known that, in general, immigrants are more highly qualified (Blangiardo, 2009).

*Table 6. School age of mother or the cohabiting adult woman (percentage values relative to the entire sample)*

<i>School age</i>	<i>Italians</i>	<i>Foreigners</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples</i>	<i>Total</i>
Before 15	26.2	24,2	20.8	25.6
Between 15 and 19	28.9	25.1	30.1	28.3
20 or over	20.5	17.5	22.1	20.1
Don't know or no reply	24.4	33.2	26.9	26.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	13,301	2,921	1,003	17,225

*Table 7. School age of the mother or cohabiting adult woman (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of mixed couples with an Italian father, an Italian mother and where both parents are foreigners but of different nationalities)*

<i>School age</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with Italian fathers</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with Italian mothers</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed couples</i>
Before 15	19.2	25.3	23.0	20.8
Between 15 and 19	32.7	28.0	27.6	30.1
20 or over	22.7	23.2	20.1	22.1
Don't know or no reply	26.5	23.5	29.3	26.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	529	289	174	1,003

Moreover, the high cultural capital of mixed families relates to the fact these unions can be viewed as intellectual marriages formed to learn about other cultures, or for cultural reasons, especially by women who believe that by

marrying a man of a different culture they have greater chances of emancipation from a subordinate female role<sup>10</sup>.

### **Social capital**

Contrary to the case of economic and cultural capital, the social capital of mixed families is significantly lower than that of Italians. The social capital of pre-adolescents and their families was analysed in terms of the presence or absence of parents, an index of density of the family network (IDNF), and an index of sociality (ISOC), which refers to the frequency of relations established in the peer group.

With regard to the family structure, in line with the national data (ISTAT, 2008), our research shows a lower stability of mixed families. However, compared with the national data on the relationship between marriages and divorces, the situation is decidedly more reassuring. Indeed, although for each family the birth of a child is a crucial event often not free from tensions – in particular for mixed families, which face a series of problems regarding decisions be taken about religion, language and, more generally, the cultural models to transmit to the offspring – overall the mixed couples surveyed exhibit good resilience.

In the great majority of cases, the families of the pre-adolescents interviewed, whether Italian, foreigners, or the children of mixed couples – appear to be united and stable because they are characterized by the presence of both parents. The least stable families are without doubt the mixed ones, in which the absence of one of the two parents, usually the father, is more frequent. When the father is absent, pre-adolescents live mostly with the grandfather or with an uncle, while the children of mixed couples, besides

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<sup>10</sup> The typology of marriages constructed on the reasons for entering into them, produced by Tognetti Bordogna was resumed in the second report of the *Secondo Rapporto della Commissione per le politiche di integrazione degli immigrati* (Zincone, 2002) and Ambrosini (2005: 160).

recording a larger proportion of absent fathers, live with a non-relative to a greater extent than do the other two groups.

When observing the density of the family network (IDNF), it should be borne in mind that immigrant families are dislocated from their original families. This feature is halved in the case of mixed families. There is consequently an asymmetry between relations with the Italian parent's family of origin and that of the foreign parent.

The distribution in quartiles of the index of density of the family network (IDNF) shows that mixed families occupy a substantially middle position, although they exhibit scant relations to quite a high extent (38.7%) and very frequent relations to a low one (11.7%).

It was not possible with the data available to determine whether this was due to a more marked spirit of independence of these families or to forms of isolation. However, on the basis of the findings in the literature, the latter hypothesis is more likely. Research shows that "the responses of families to mixed couples are characterised by a more accentuated form of explicit contrariness, or at least of strong concern. The intensity of the reaction of opposition seems especially accentuated when there are differences between the spouses to which the families of origin attribute particular importance. For example, a marriage between an Arab and an Italian woman may be viewed badly by the groom's family on religious grounds and by the bride's family for reasons of reputation and social status" (Gozzoli, Regalia, 2005: 187).

Often, the choice of a partner from outside the reference group is perceived by kin and friends as a betrayal and is therefore not fully accepted (Eurispes, Telefono Azzurro, 2007). Excerpts from interviews conducted some years ago evidence the difficulty of Italian families in accepting a mixed marriage, especially when the *mixité* involves racial aspects:

"I told my mother on the phone that I was going to marry an African. She cried for three days and told everybody about her misfortune" (Balsamo, 1994: 54).

“They didn’t approve of my choice. They didn’t like him. They didn’t even know him, or even ask if I was happy with him. They rejected him out of hand” (Balsamo, 1994: 54).

Table 8. Index of the family network density – IDNF<sup>11</sup> (percentage values relative to the division in quartiles of the entire sample)

Density of the family network	Italians	Foreigners	Children of mixed couples	Total
Low	17.7	55.5	38.7	25.3
Medium-low	23.2	33.4	24.4	25.0
Medium-high	38.2	6.2	25.2	32.0
High	20.9	4.9	11.7	17.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	13,297	2,918	1,002	17,217

<sup>11</sup> *Index of family network density IDNF*. This index measured the density of the kinship network of the interviewees’ families and was constructed by combining the following variables suitably recoded: presence or absence of the mother (Q. B1: Who is the most important adult woman living with you? My mother = 10, my grandmother or my aunt = 5, another relative = 5, another person who is not my relative = 1); the presence or absence of a father (Q. C1: who is the most important male person living with you? My father = 10, my grandfather or my uncle = 5, another relative = 5, another person who is not my relative = 1); degree of closeness to grandparents (Q. D9: How far away is the grandfather or the grandmother who lives closest to your home? Unfortunately, none of my grandparents are alive = 1, lives with us = 10, lives very close to us = 10, less than 1 km away = 9, less than 10 kms away = 8, more than 10 kms away, but in Lombardy = 6, in another region = 4, in another country = 2); degree of proximity to uncles and aunts (Q. D10: How far away is the uncle or aunt who lives closest to your home? Unfortunately I have no living uncles or aunts = 1, lives with us = 10, lives very close to us = 10, less than 1 km away = 9, less than 10 kms away = 8, more than 10 kms away, but in Lombardy = 6, in another region = 4, in another country = 2); help requested by the family in case of need (Q. D11: If they need something, who do the adults who live with you usually ask? My grandparents = 10, my uncles or aunts = 10, some other relative = 10, persons who are not relatives = 1, they never ask anybody for help = 1).

“His mother was very worried when she didn’t know me. To her mind it would have been better if her son had married a girl from Eritrea, possibly from his ethnic group. She was not very happy when she learned that her son had married an Italian girl” (Balsamo, 1994: 54).

“I delayed telling my parents that I was pregnant because I was afraid of how they would react. Even now, my parents don’t want us to go and visit them all together, or at least they want us to go only at night, because at night you can’t see colours. At the beginning I went alone with the children and he stayed at home. Then I stopped going as well” (Balsamo, 1994: 54).

Closer inspection of the mixed families, disaggregating the figures according to the provenance of the parents, shows that mixed families in which both the parents are foreign are those with the lowest density of the family network. This is indubitably due to a greater probability of the absence of grandparents or uncles in the country of immigration. These families record an IDNF (62.9%) three times lower than that of mixed families with at least one Italian parent. To be noted in regard to the latter is that if the mother is Italian, the IDNF increases. Thus confirmed is a certain tendency of the man’s family to exercise negative control on mixed unions in which the foreigner is the woman.

Research conducted in the Mediterranean area has shown, besides the fact that mixed marriages are disliked in the social environment, that opposition is mostly raised against women, with stigmatisation of the daughter-in-law by the mother-in-law. In the Arab world, mixed couples formed of a foreign man and an Italian women encounter prejudices concerning the behaviour of Italian women, who are considered to be too free, and often equated with prostitutes. Likewise, in mixed marriages between Italian men and foreign women, it is often the mothers of the husbands who accuse the daughters-in-law of being in Italy as prostitutes (Balsamo, 2003).

The same holds if one looks at the percentages of requests for help by mixed couples. Also this variable reveals a greater isolation of mixed families in which both parents are foreign, which in case of need turn only to the grandparents in 23.0% of cases. Although these families ask for help to a lesser

extent (27.9%), they nevertheless rely more frequently on other relatives (15.2%) or non-relatives (12.7%)

*Table 9. Index of the family network – IDNF (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of the children of mixed families, subdivided among the children of mixed families with an Italian father, Italian mother and with both parents foreign but of different nationalities)*

<i>Density of the family network</i>	<i>Children of mixed families with an Italian father</i>	<i>Children of mixed families with an Italian mother</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed families</i>
Low	23.5	15.1	62.9	38.7
Medium-low	24.4	26.7	18.5	24.4
Medium-high	27.8	30.8	12.9	25.2
High	24.2	27.4	5.6	11.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	532	292	178	1,002

Also with regard to meetings, reunions and parties with people from the country or region of the parents, mixed families exhibit a greater propensity to isolation. Among those who never attend this type of meeting, the first place is occupied by the children of mixed couples (28.2%), which again confirms a greater degree of isolation with respect to Italians (20.2%),<sup>12</sup> and also to foreigners (18.8%), who are those that to a greater extent go often (19.4%) or very often (11.6%) to meetings of this type (Table 11). The children of mixed couples report slightly higher participation if the foreigner is the mother.

Hence, whilst having an Italian mother facilitates relationships with the Italian relatives, having a foreign mother is associated with more frequent relations with the community of origin. Aside from the fact that the mother is Italian or foreign and the type of social capital developed and maintained through her, the data highlight the role performed by the mother in the

<sup>12</sup> The percentage of Italians who answered this question is an evident signal of the persistence of domestic migration. At a school in Limbiate, a municipality in the Milanese hinterland, it was found, for instance, that in a class with over 20 Italian students, none of them had been born in Lombardy.

production of family social capital, also with respect to that which the children are able to activate.

Table 10. Persons to whom the parents turn at times of need (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of the children of mixed families, subdivided among the children of mixed families with an Italian father, Italian mother and with both parents foreign but of different nationalities)

<i>Persons the parents turn to in times of need</i>	<i>Children of mixed families with an Italian father</i>	<i>Children of mixed families with an Italian mother</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed families</i>
Grandparents	32.8	34.8	23.0	31.8
Uncles and aunts	19.3	21.6	20.6	20.2
Another relative	10.7	9.8	15.2	11.2
An unrelated person	10.5	8.7	12.7	10.3
No request for help	26.7	24.0	27.9	26.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	524	287	165	972

Table 11. Frequency of participation in reunions, meetings or parties with people from the country or region of origin of the parents (percentage values relative to the entire sample)

<i>Frequency of reunions, parties and meetings</i>	<i>Italians</i>	<i>Foreigners</i>	<i>Children of mixed families</i>	<i>Total</i>
We are from here	24.7	4.0	10.5	20.4
Never	20.2	18.8	28.2	20.4
Sometimes	37.2	46.2	39.9	38.8
Often	12.4	19.4	14.0	13.7
Very often	5.6	11.6	7.4	6.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	13,045	2,800	985	16,830

With regard to families in which both parents are foreign, once again to be noted is their greater isolation (32.6% never go to meetings, reunions or parties), but also greater attachment to the community of origin, if present. It is

in fact precisely these families which very often (11.4%) participate in the type of meetings considered. Finally, it is curious to note that 8.0% of pre-adolescents with both foreign parents declare that “we are from here”.

*Table 12. Frequency of participation in reunions, meetings or parties with people from the country or region of origin of the parents (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of the children of mixed families, subdivided among the children of mixed families with an Italian father, Italian mother and with both parents foreign but of different nationalities)*

<i>Frequency of reunions, parties and meetings</i>	<i>Children of mixed families with an Italian father</i>	<i>Children of mixed families with an Italian mother</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed families</i>
We are from here	9.3	14.0	8.0	10.5
Never	29.0	24.2	32.6	28.2
Sometimes	38.9	42.8	38.3	39.9
Often	15.6	13.7	9.7	14.0
Very often	7.2	5.3	11.4	7.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	525	285	175	985

To sum up, it can be stated that the mixed families considered are endowed with an amount of economic capital which is closer to that of Italian families than of foreign families. This applies above all to families with an Italian mother. Instead, a large percentage of mixed families in which both parents are foreign possess low social capital (32.4%), although this percentage is lower than among foreign families (52.9%). Cultural capital also appears to be substantial, especially among mixed families with at least one Italian parent.

With regard to social capital at family level there is a substantial unity also among mixed families (presence of both parents), except for those with two foreign parents, which more frequently report the absence of one of the two parents. Besides high family unity, however, mixed families are rather isolated if one considers active relationships with relatives, friends and neighbours (IDNF). The social circles seem discrepant, and this appears to be linked with a social environment that, through non-acceptance, is unable culturally to “accept” social relations in which the foreigner is suddenly close by. There is

consequently little willingness to establish relationships based on intercultural exchange.

### **Social capital in the peer group**

We now turn to the social capital that pre-adolescents develop in the peer group. On growing up, everyone experiences transition from the social circle of the family of origin to new circles of contact which intersect in different ways with the previous ones. Equality of age is a feature that establishes equality within a new social circle. Whilst in family social circles the children occupy a lower position than their adult relatives, in the social circle composed of their peers, they are able to experience the position of *par inter pares*.

Paraphrasing Simmel, “those who, outside the circles in which they were above or below, find themselves simultaneously inserted in a circle in which they are equal, acquire in this way an individualising synthesis; the structure of the circles in which one participates enriches and determines in a distinctive way the sense of life as a social being. [...] The portion of social space defined by peer groups is particularly significant in youth, a period in which one is generally more indifferent to one’s individuality compared with what happens at a mature age” (364).

Observing the sociality which develops among these children is therefore essential for understanding the reality of a particularly important social circle: the peer group. As will be seen from Table 13, the group with the lowest index of sociality is the group of foreigners. Like Italians, the children of mixed couples declare that they place considerable importance on their friends in class, that they spend little time watching television, and that they play team sports during their out-of-school time.

The propensity to establish relations within the peer group is greater among subjects with Italian mothers.

Table 13. Index of sociality – ISOC<sup>13</sup> (percentage values relative to the subdivision into quartiles of the entire sample)

<i>Index of sociality</i>	<i>Italians</i>	<i>Foreigners</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples</i>	<i>Total</i>
Low	25.5	42.1	29.4	28.5
Medium-low	24.4	26.1	24.1	24.7
Medium-high	23.2	17.8	22.3	22.2
High	26.9	13.9	24.3	24.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	13,277	2,864	1,002	17,143

<sup>13</sup> *Index of sociality ISOC.* This measured the density of the relations that the respondents maintained with peers at and outside school in relation to the importance they attach to classmates, to the fact that they frequent or not Italian and foreign friends and with what frequency, the number of hours per day devoted to watching television, the frequency with which they play team sports and the time involved. The importance attributed to classmates (Q. E13: Are the friends that you have in class important? Not very = 1, Quite important = 5, Very important = 10); hours spent watching TV (Q. G1: How many hours do you usually spend watching TV each day? I never watch TV = 10, up to 1 hour = 7; 1 to 2 hours = 5; 2 to 3 hours = 3, more than 3 hours = 1); team sports activities (Q. G6: Do you play in a sports team? yes = 10, no = 5); time devoted to team sports (Q. G4: In a week, how many hours do you spend playing team sports? None = 1, up to 2 hours = 3, from 2 to 3 hours = 5, from 3 to 5 hours = 7, from 5 or more hours = 10). To construct this index, the information regarding the number of hours that respondents stated that they spent playing computer games or with play stations was not taken into account. In contrast to television, whose negative role in relation to social capital was highlighted by Putnam (2004), these are play instruments very often used in the company of friends. It was decided to omit the degree of friendship with Italians (Q. E5: Do you have any Italian friends? yes = 10, no = 1) and the prevalence of Italian friends or foreigners (Q. E7: Do you have more foreign or Italian friends? More Italian = 10, more foreigners = 1, more or less the same number of Italian and foreign friends = 8), because the inclusion of these two indicators would have required creating separate indices for Italians and foreigners.

*Table 14. Index of sociality - ISOC (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of the children of mixed families, subdivided among the children of mixed families with an Italian father, Italian mother and with both parents foreign but of different nationalities)*

<i>Index of sociality</i>	<i>Children of mixed families with an Italian father</i>	<i>Children of mixed families with an Italian mother</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed families</i>
Low	27.3	27.5	39.1	29.4
Medium-low	25.2	24.1	20.7	24.1
Medium-high	22.7	21.3	19.0	22.3
High	24.8	27.1	21.2	24.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	532	292	179	1.002

Inspection of the frequency distribution of having more Italian friends or more foreign friends reveals a greater propensity for the children of mixed couples to divide their friendships impartially. The children of mixed couples in which both parents are foreign exhibit a low level of sociality (39.1%), close to that of the children of foreigners (42.1%).

Also in this case, the mother's cultural origins play a significant role: subjects with Italian mothers tend more towards friendships with Italians (84.1%), while those with foreign mothers have more Italian friends to a lesser extent (76.0%) and show more intercultural propensities by declaring that they have Italian and foreign friends in equal measure (19.5%), in percentages higher than the children of mixed couples with Italian mothers (12.5%).

Also evident as regards social capital among peers, therefore, is the significant importance of the mother. As already seen in the case of family social capital, which is greater if the mother is Italian, also in the peer group such capital increases if the mother is Italian. However, the greatest propensity to inter-culturalism, which is shown by having an equal number of Italian and foreign friends, occurs among pre-adolescent children of mixed couples in which both parents are foreign when the mother is foreign.

*Table 15. Prevalence of Italian or foreign friends (percentage values relative to the entire sample sub-divided by variable type)*

<i>Friendships with Italians and foreigners</i>	<i>Italians</i>	<i>Foreigners</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples</i>	<i>Total</i>
More with Italians	90.9	43.0	75.8	82.2
More with foreigners	0.9	24.5	6.4	5.1
The same	8.1	32.4	17.9	12.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	13,196	2,823	265	16,939

*Table 16. Prevalence of Italian or foreign friends (percentage values relative to the entire sample sub-divided by variable type)*

<i>Friendships with Italians and foreigners</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with an Italian father</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with an Italian mother</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed couples</i>
More with Italians	76.0	84.1	61.0	75.8
More with foreigners	4.5	3.5	16.9	6.4
The same	19.5	12.5	22.1	17.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	529	289	172	265

Having an Italian or foreign mother is associated with other characteristics of children which are now briefly described. The first concerns the self-perception of feeling Italian or otherwise. Although the majority of the children of mixed couples declare that they feel themselves Italian (77.1%), this is particularly the case of those with Italian mothers (87.6%). In fact, more numerous among those with Italian fathers are those who declare that they do not feel themselves Italian (7.7% compared with 5.9%), and this proportion

doubles for those who are undecided (13.6% compared to 6.6%). The indecision is particularly marked among the pre-adolescents with two foreign parents (22.3%), who are also those declaring less than the other children of mixed couples that they feel Italian (54.9%) (Table 17).

*Table 17. Self-perception with respect to feeling Italian (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of the children of mixed couples, subdivided among the children of mixed couples with an Italian father, Italian mother and with both parents foreign but of different nationalities)*

<i>Do you feel Italian?</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with an Italian father</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with an Italian mother</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed couples</i>
Yes	78.7	87.6	54.9	77.1
No	7.7	5.9	22.9	9.8
Don't know	13.6	6.6	22.3	13.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	531	290	175	996

*Table 18. Levels of personal satisfaction (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of the children of mixed couples, subdivided among the children of mixed couples with an Italian father, Italian mother and with both parents foreign but of different nationalities)*

<i>Agreement in respect to feeling satisfied</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with an Italian father</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with an Italian mother</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed couples</i>
Very	36.6	38.0	38.0	37.2
Quite	51.3	52.6	47.4	51.0
Not very	9.1	6.3	9.9	8.4
Not at all	3.0	3.1	4.7	3.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	528	287	171	986

Table 19. Index of self-esteem - IAU<sup>14</sup> (percentage values relative to the sub-division in quartiles of the entire sample by variable type)

Level of self-esteem	Italians	Foreigners	Children of mixed couples	Total
Low	24.0	30.6	23.9	25.1
Medium-low	26.3	27.2	30.0	26.7
Medium-high	24.5	22.0	22.1	24.0
High	25.1	20.2	24.0	24.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	13,278	2,863	1,000	17,141

Valid percentages. Total answers 17,141, missing 84

<sup>14</sup> *Index of self-esteem IAU*. This measured the degree of self-esteem, and therefore of wellbeing, of the interviewees. It was constructed by combining the following variables concerning education and work expectations in relation to the sense of adequacy with variables that directly affect the wellbeing of children in terms of self satisfaction and self-assessment of abilities: the sense of adequacy in respect to work expectations (Q. E4: How much chance do you really have of doing this job? None = 1, very few = 1, few = 1, sufficient = 5, many = 10); personal satisfaction (Q. F1: I am satisfied with myself. Fully agree = 10, quite agree = 7, do not really agree = 4, do not agree (D = 1); sense of adequacy (Q. F2: I can do everything that people of my age do. = Fully agree 10, quite agree = 7, do not really agree = 4, do not agree = 1); sense of inadequacy (Q. F12: At times I do not seem able to do anything. Fully agree = 1, quite agree = 4, do not agree very much = 7, do not agree (= 10); Future prospects in terms of education and employment: school prospects after lower-secondary school (Q. E1: Which upper-secondary school do you think you will attend? None = 1, technical or vocational school = 5, *Liceo* = 10, don't know = 0); prospects of continuing education after upper-secondary school (Q. E2: Do you think you will go to university? yes = 10, no = 1, don't know = 0).

*Table 20. Index of self-esteem - IAU (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of the children of mixed couples, subdivided among the children of mixed couples with an Italian father, Italian mother and with both parents foreign but of different nationalities)*

<i>Level of self esteem</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with an Italian father</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples with an Italian mother</i>	<i>Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners</i>	<i>Total children of mixed couples</i>
Low	22.7	25.5	32.6	25.3
Medium-low	29.7	29.7	23.6	28.6
Medium-high	22.6	22.1	20.8	22.1
High	25.0	22.8	23.0	24.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	532	290	178	1000

Also as regards the degree of self satisfaction – which is one of the prime indicators of wellbeing – there is greater satisfaction among those with Italian mothers, and a more marked lack of satisfaction among pre-adolescents with two foreign parents. Although the latter express the same degree of self-satisfaction (38.0%) as do those with Italian mothers, they also express a higher percentage of lack of satisfaction (4.7%).

With respect to the index of self-esteem (IAU), the differences among Italians, foreigners and children of mixed couples are not significant. There are numerous foreigners among subjects with low and medium-low levels of self-esteem (57.8%). However, this value does not differ greatly from those for the children of mixed couples (53.9%) and Italians (50.3%).

In contrast to the findings thus far, in this case having a foreign mother enhances self-esteem. But also in the case of this variable, having two foreign parents associates with a greater degree of difficulty: preadolescents with two foreign parents are those reporting the lowest level of self-esteem at higher percentages (32.6%).

Having an Italian mother is also associated with a greater propensity to integrate (IPINT).

Table 21. Index of propensity to integrate - IPINT<sup>15</sup> (percentage values relative to the sub-sample of the children of mixed couples, subdivided among the children of mixed couples with an Italian father, Italian mother and with both parents foreign but of different nationalities)

Level of self esteem	Children of mixed couples with an Italian father	Children of mixed couples with an Italian mother	Children of mixed couples where both parents are foreigners	Total children of mixed couples
Low	23.9	18.5	46.4	26.3
Medium-low	24.4	26.0	18.4	23.8
Medium-high	31.2	27.1	20.1	28.0
High	20.5	28.4	15.1	21.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total valid cases	532	292	179	1003

As reported elsewhere (Gilardoni, 2008), the propensity to integrate is strongly associated with the degree of socio-economic wellbeing for all the

<sup>15</sup> *Index of propensity to integration IPINT*. The index measured the degree of integration, that is, the propensity to assimilate, of foreign pupils on the basis of their self-perception as to whether or not they felt Italian, their knowledge of the Italian language, which, if high, enabled greater communication with the context outside the family, in particular with the peer group, friendship relations and the time the respondents spent with their peers. The index was constructed by considering the following variables, recoded as follows: self-perception with regard to feeling Italian or not (Q. A14: Do you feel Italian? yes = 10, no = 1, don't know = 5); value ¼; index ICI regarding knowledge of Italian value ¼; preferred language (Q.A23: In what language you prefer to speak? Lombardo dialect = 10, another dialect = 10, Italian = 10, another language = 1); index of sociality ISOC; time spent on friendships outside school (Q. E11: How often do you see your Italian friends outside school? Never = 1, sometimes = 3, often = 8, always = 10). Less weight was assigned to the indicators relative to language knowledge to limit the influence of the latter. It was initially intended to build an index measuring the degree of transnationalism in terms of symbolic imagery conveyed through television (Q. G2: Usually, in what language are the television programmes that you watch? Always or almost always in Italian = 1, often in another language = 5, always or almost always in another language = 10), and any returns to the country of origin which implied the construction and maintenance of social capital of a transnational type (Q. G29: Last summer, did you go back to the country or region of origin of your parents? yes = 10, no = 1, my parents are from here = 0). In any event, given the difference between the two dimensions, it was decided to segregate them and to use the variables in the commentary on the data without combining them in the index.

foreign pre-adolescents and children of mixed couples interviewed. As regards the children of mixed couples, to be noted that having an Italian mother significantly enhances the propensity to integrate: 28.4% of the children of mixed couples with Italian mothers showed a high level of such propensity, compared with only 20.5% of the children with foreign mothers (Table 21).

### **Concluding remarks**

Two main considerations can be drawn from the foregoing analysis. The first concerns the mother's central role the transmission of cultural models in processes of identity construction and in orienting the choice of friends. The second concerns the social capital of mixed families, which is low at family level, but high in the peer group.

The analysis has shown the central importance of the mother's role in the transmission of belongingness, as well as the attitudes and behaviours adopted by the pre-adolescents interviewed towards the peer group and, more generally, society. Once again, this highlights the importance of gender relations operating through the particular significance of the female role, in this case maternal, in determining the integration of their children.

To be noted in this regard is that a recent study on the integration indexes of the immigrant population in Italy has shown that women achieve greater levels of integration compared with men (Cesareo, Blangiardo, 2009). This recalls the view of gender in its more specific sense as the person's open and dynamic relational positioning and as a communicative resource (Besozzi, 2003: 10-11).

The findings of the research reported here show that the mother plays a crucial role in the development of social capital. She does whether she is Italian, by orienting the family's relationships more towards the maintenance of ties with her kinship group and those of the children to friendships with Italian schoolmates, or whether she is foreign, by encouraging greater participation in meetings, reunions and parties with her community of origin and a more pronounced propensity of their children to share their friendships equally among Italians and foreigners. It is evident that the mother performs a fundamental role in shaping identity and the meaning of cultural belonging.

This finding, which this study has only touched upon, requires further study. Hence, given the lack of research on the children of mixed couples, suggested for future investigation is an area which has not yet been explored in Italy: the specific nature of the children of mixed couples and the mother's role in fostering and orienting their sociality.

Two interpretations can be advanced concerning the discrepancy found between the low density of the family network of mixed families and the high social capital of the children of mixed couples among their peers. The first focuses mainly on the subject: in response to the isolation from the external environment suffered by families, the children of mixed couples enact compensatory strategies which induce them to develop greater social capital within the peer group in order to overcome the family's isolation. This compensatory explanation is not entirely convincing, not least in view of the fact that disadvantages usually accumulate rather than being off-set (Portes, Rumbaut, 2001).

The second interpretation instead focuses on the influences exerted by the context on the subjects considered. As Portes (2005) puts it, these influences are of "frightening" importance, and they spring from the difference among social spaces at an inter-generational level. The discrepancy between the two forms of social capital may testify to the fact that the pre-adolescents interviewed, who belonged to the cohort born in the mid-1990s, had more familiarity with diversity than their parents, and they endeavoured more than previous cohorts to create a social environment in which it was easier to maintain relations. The gap between the two forms of social capital should therefore be viewed in light of a change in social attitudes towards diversity at an inter-generational level which moves from attitudes among adults mainly oriented to closure and rejection to greater openness and the fuller recognition of others. Thus, an attitude more oriented to the rejection of *mixité* has given way to an attitude more oriented to the full or partial recognition of cultural diversity. The younger generation exhibits a pattern of social circles based on greater cohesion. This is undoubtedly due to the equality of age, which facilitates membership in social circles formed by the peer group, but it is also due to an inter-generational change in Italian society produced by the immigrant presence itself.

The current inter-generational change consisting in the greater willingness of Italians to accept interculturalism suggests that the children of mixed couples will be able to resolve the tension emphasised by Simmel between psychological dualism and its resolution. There is consequently reason to believe that stabilizing action may prevail in the lives of these pre-adolescents, rather than identitarian conflict. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the isolation suffered by mixed families may have harmful repercussions. It is, in fact, advisable to recall Djouder's (2007) finding with regard to French youths with migratory backgrounds, for whom the rejection suffered by the first generation, which caused the alienation of their parents, is a burden on the second generation which restricts their sense of belonging and, in general, their integration.

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