

The Educational Strategies of the Black Middle Classes

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This chapter draws on data collected as part of a 2-year-funded project into the “educational strategies of the Black middle classes.”¹ The project explores and analyses the educational perspectives, strategies, and experiences of Black-Caribbean-heritage, middle-class families. The demands of being a parent from a minority ethnic group and having to navigate a White-dominated education system have not received a great deal of attention in the UK (although see, for exceptions, Archer 2010; Crozier and Davies 2007; Reynolds 2005). Thus, our research seeks to address a set of complex and relatively neglected questions embedded in the intricate relations between race, social class, and education. Through the study as a whole, we also intend to contribute to the understanding of the intersections of race and class and deconstruct those generalizations used in the media and in research that tend to position Black British people as a homogeneous working class group.

Our data is drawn from 77 qualitative semi-structured interviews with 62 parents who self-define as of Black Caribbean heritage. Aware of the increasing number of Black Caribbeans who have a partner outside of their ethnic group,² families were included in which one or both of the parents self-define as Black Caribbean. Participants were recruited through a range of sources that included announcements on family and education websites, Black professional networks and social groups,

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²Nearly half (48%) of Black Caribbean men in Britain have a partner from a different ethnic group; the highest interethnic relationship rate with the exception of those of mixed heritage backgrounds. The figure for Black Caribbean women is 34% (Platt 2009).

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as well as through extensive use of snowballing via existing contacts within the professional Black community. Participants were selected following completion of a brief filter questionnaire that asked about their ethnic group identification, the age of their children, and their occupation. We were interested in speaking with those parents with at least one child between 8 and 18 years—age groups that encompass key transition points in their school careers. With regard to class categorization, we sought parents sometimes referred to as the “service class” (Goldthorpe 1995), those in professional or managerial occupations, that is, the top two categories of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classifications (NS-SEC) on its 8-point scale commonly used to indicate class location in UK social science. As is common in research on “parents,” most of our respondents are mothers. However, sensitive to debates about the role of Black men as fathers (see, e.g., Reynolds 2009), 13 of our interviews are with fathers. Interviews were carried out in London and elsewhere in England, and we returned to 15 of our 62 respondents in order to conduct follow-up interviews (giving us 77 interviews in total). These second interviews allowed us to ask additional questions on themes that arose from our analysis of the initial interviews, but were not part of our original research schedule (e.g., we asked whether and in what ways respondents talked with their children about racism), or to revisit original themes in more depth (e.g., the complex relationship between race and class in the formation of identity). We analysed the data in two main ways: (a) NVivo software was used for data management and search purposes. These searches were used to bring together theme and topic data that were then subject to detailed hand coding. (b) Hand coding was employed as a means to identify and examine key themes and issues. This was begun early in the research process and involved all members of the research team, which provided a basis for coding reliability. We built up a portfolio of themes and issues that was subject to continuing review and revision. Careful comparisons were undertaken within the data, and a fine-grained examination of particular themes such as strategies in relation to interactions with teachers, perceptions about social class, and talking with children about race and racism was conducted.

Race or Class?

In considering the respective roles and relationships of race and class in the constitution of identity as a Black middle-class parent and the consequent shaping of educational strategies, the writings on intersectionality are helpful. In a seminal paper, Crenshaw (1993) has emphasized that identities are not reducible to just one dimension; that a theoretical focus on, say, class can simplify and reduce; and through reduction, miss and misrepresent the experiences of, for example, Black working class women and the interrelated roles of race and gender in their lives. Indeed, race and class are themselves multidimensional categories. Therefore, an intersectional perspective is needed. Brar and Phoenix (2004, p. 76) define

intersectionality as “signifying the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation—economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential—intersect in historically specific contexts.”

Intersectionality emphasizes fluidity and the importance of different locales, situations, spaces, times, different dispositions, and subjectivities for understanding particular interactions and identities. This fluidity is both a strength and a weakness. Intersectionality has been criticized for being too incomplete, too general a theory—what Davis has called “inherently hazy and mystifyingly open ended” (Davis 2008, p. 69)—to offer any analytical depth. The term itself, suggestive of intersecting sections, can present a misleadingly reified and essentialist view of, say, being female or being Black. Mindful of this ambiguity, Phoenix and Pattynama (2006, p. 187) refer to intersectionality as “a handy catchall phrase that aims to make visible the multiple positionings that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it.” However, despite Phoenix and Pattynama’s implicit warning of the dangers of superficial approaches to intersectionality, the reminder of the need for an analysis that holds multiple positionings in tension is valuable in itself.

Youdell (2011) cites Judith Butler’s (1997) description of the “cross-cutting modalities of life” when introducing her own concept of a “constellation of discourses and the identity categories they constitute” that can help

tease out the nuanced processes of subjectivization. The notion of constellation has been useful to me because it asks how classificatory systems (e.g., gender or race) and their categories (boy/girl, White/Black) come to be meaningful to other classifications and categories within particular constellations. (Youdell 2011, pp. 43–44)

In relation to our study, respondents understand the positioning of their Black, middle-classed, and gendered identities differently; they vary in how they understand the interaction of race and class in their lives, and they appreciate that their identities “play out” differently in interactions with particular schools and teachers (see, also, Rollock et al. 2011a).

With reference to our particular “constellation” of class and race in constituting Black middle-class parenting strategies, one recent and well-known piece of research into childrearing styles by Annette Lareau (2003) suggests that “the largest differences in the organization of children’s daily lives—including familial networks and styles of interaction with institutional representatives—are across the lines of class, not race” (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau 2003, p. 341). We understand how Lareau, working with Black and White families differentiated by class, reached her conclusions. However, we suggest, in relation to our study, which focused entirely on middle-class Black parents, that the appropriate question is not whether class *or* race is more or less influential in the organization of children’s lives. Taking an approach influenced by intersectionality allows us to explore the differences and commonalities of Black parents’ experiences and to consider how race, class, and/or gender interact in particular situations and interactions. Thus, for different parents at different points in time and in different interactions, race, class, and/or

gender can come to the fore.³ This is what Horvat (2003, p. 1), citing Collins (1991), refers to as the “both/and nature of race and class.”⁴

Indeed, in other writing, we explore the differences between the parents in their priorities and actions, exploring this via the notion of “family habitus” (Vincent et al. 2012). In response to the limitations of what can be said in one chapter, we use the space here to focus on the clear areas of similarity and commonality between the parent respondents in terms of the educational challenges they identified and the strategies they developed in order to overcome them.

Challenges and Strategies

The parents with whom we spoke identified a number of challenges they had to address during the school career of their children. These challenges include: low expectations on the part of teachers, racism and institutional racism, and stereotypes of Black parents as being uninterested in and lacking in knowledge about education, along with teen resistance and the peer group effect. We shall now discuss each in more detail. Space allows only illustrative quotes, but these are representative of the views of other parents not cited here. In addition, we give references to other writing in which the issues noted are discussed in more detail.

Low Teacher Expectations

Previous research on the experience of Black-Caribbean-heritage students has highlighted their disproportionate representation in exclusions from school and in low-ranked teaching groups (see, e.g., Gillborn 2008; Gillborn and Youdell 2000; John 2006; Richardson 2007; Rollock 2007). Students’ social class background is not the only factor here. Indeed, Black middle-class students appear to attain fewer GCSE qualifications during compulsory schooling than their White middle-class counterparts. The UK Youth Cohort Study of 2007, for example, shows that 72.7% of White children whose parents have occupations in the top two NS-SEC categories gained

³Gender is extremely important in this project. For example, we shall be writing about the differential positioning of Black boys and girls by both their teachers and parents. However, in this chapter, the focus is on the interaction of class and race. Additionally, as already noted, the majority of our respondents were women. The way in which the apparently neutral “parent” and “parenting” come to mean, in practice, “mother” and “mothering” has been discussed elsewhere (Vincent 2010).

⁴We are not suggesting that Lareau is asserting that class is more defining of Black parents’ experiences than race. Elsewhere, her colleague Horvat describes Lareau’s recent work as “illustrat[ing] the layered effect of race and class on children’s experiences” (Horvat 2003, p. 3).

5 or more GCSEs at grades A*–C (5 GCSEs at these grades is seen as a minimum requirement for schools and pupils).⁵ A total of 61.6% of their Black-Caribbean-heritage, middle-class peers reached this threshold—a difference of nearly 10 percentage points. Low teacher expectations have long been documented in the UK and identified as a contributory factor in Black underachievement (see Coard 1971). The parents who participated in our research had had experiences themselves of being placed in lower teaching groups, being entered for lower status exams, and being told by teachers not to have too high an aspiration as regards their career choices:

There was one teacher who was encouraging me to pursue my A levels.... There was one teacher, I remember him doing that, but for the vast majority they talked about me going to work in the hospital as an auxiliary [nurse]. They talked about me going to work in a shop. Not even office based. That was the level of expectation. (Joan, Local education authority manager)

All the parents with whom we spoke understood low teacher expectations to be a potential risk to their children, (see Gillborn et al. 2012 for further details) and spoke of a sense that good behaviour and average attainments by Black children are accepted as sufficient by too many teachers:

There was a test [son] did and I think he got five out of 35 and this was accepted and as I was looking through the exercise book, I thought what is this?... that's just not acceptable and I wanted to know why wasn't I called in, why wasn't I briefed? Why is this just the norm? (Cynthia, teacher)

In the final year the expectations from some of [son's] teachers, you picked up that they said "Well you got a pass, so what more do you want? Where we weren't expecting you to get a pass."... [Eventually] he got a mixture of A stars. As, I think his lowest grade was a B for sociology. (Vanessa, community development officer)

In response, parent respondents in the study show what has been called elsewhere a "managed trust" (Vincent and Martin 2002) of the school. That is, they support their children's school and their children's progress through school, and, in so doing, they engage in a considerable amount of monitoring and surveillance of both the child and the school. White middle-class parents engage in this careful monitoring too (Vincent and Martin 2002), but for the Black parent respondents, their awareness and experience of discrimination adds an acuteness and intensity to their surveillance. They are proactive in building a relationship with the school; they email questions and ask for meetings, drawing the teacher's attention to (and the phrase is a considered one) their concerns:

My partner says very nicely, "I just wanted to draw your attention to..." you know. So you have to kind of do it strategically. (Barbara, child health professional)

At every single stage of my child's education, I make sure that they are not under the radar. This is ridiculous how much I bother their teachers to make sure that they know that there is a child here. (Alice, senior researcher, voluntary sector)

⁵GCSE exams are taken at 16 years of age in a range of subjects. Getting the top four grades A*, A, B, or C is generally regarded as a "good" pass. Schools are judged by how many of their pupils attain at least 5 A*–C grades. This number (now usually including such grades in English and Maths) is seen as a key benchmark in the English educational system. Thanks to Paul Connelly for running this analysis.

[Son has] just started secondary school and I'm seeing some of the same traits in the children that I'm working with who are underachieving... I need to devise a strategy to ensure that this boy achieves....There's a lethargy about homework, peer pressure, I'm seeing a lack of interest in the curriculum, I'm seeing... some stereotyping from perhaps some of the teachers, maybe one or two, and since I've identified that, I've probably been down to school twice now just to check on him... The teachers have been very, very supportive, but also very surprised that I've wanted to see them before parents' evening or before they asked me to. (Anne, Local Authority education adviser)

As the quote from Anne suggests, parents engage in "conversation" with teachers (Vincent and Martin 2002) designed to develop a dialogue of equals. "Conversation" is considered, polite, reasoning in its tone, and drawing on class-based and embodied resources of confidence and knowledge. Cassandra runs her own company; her husband is a senior doctor. She describes a conversation with the head teacher of her daughters' infant school:

We talked about some of the books they used, I did not think they were very multicultural, erm, and I just gently flagged that up, and you know they changed all the books. It was awesome really. This is perhaps another example where class and race can merge.... I did not go in there as you know "we are Black people and you should not have this and that and the other." [Rather] "it is a little bit dated and it would be really good... if the children could have resources that would reflect their experiences." Well [coming from] Black parents who work in business and medicine, whatever, [the head teacher] took it on board. (Cassandra)

The following description from Ella illustrates how "conversation" can operate when actually making a complaint. Her son has a teacher whose behaviour towards him seems, through the child's eyes, inconsistent. Although broadly happy with school, Ella has identified in the past instances in which she thinks her son, a minority pupil in a largely White school, has been unfairly treated. Parents' evening is approaching, and in the interview with us, Ella considers her strategy in detail, what exactly she is going to say in her allocated 10-min slot, her words, her tone. Her aim is

to make sure that she knows we are very gentle parents "we want to work with you,"... To make sure she realizes at the end that I will expect her to be professional and fair with [son] and nothing less will do. But I am going to find out how to do that in a touchy feely, keep her in her safety zone, not too threatening, but under no illusion that we are not to be walked over. Now that's a challenge! (Ella, senior health care professional)

Parents' deployment of their class resources is a strategy we explore further below.

Racism

Parents spoke of how they themselves had frequently faced crude and overt racism during their childhoods from both peers and teachers. Generally, this form of racism was less of a feature in their children's lives. However, we heard of a particularly

distressing case faced by one teenage student at a private school who was the target of crude, overt racism sustained over a period of time:

Name calling... nigger, wog, coon, all this sort of thing, it was a daily occurrence... I said how did the other Black boys manage and he said they just ignored it, just pretend you're White and that way you can deal with it, but... he's always been brought up to be aware of who he is, no apologies for who he is... It got to the stage that he just didn't want to go any more, but he wasn't saying why he didn't want to go... and this went on for a year... and his marks started dropping as well ... When he left in the morning his head was down, he was hunched over. (Felicia, lawyer)

The private school involved was unable or unwilling to tackle the issue of racism and, instead, responded to Felicia's concerns by locating the problem within the child, first suggesting his deteriorating marks were a function of learning difficulties (tests revealed no learning difficulties), and thereafter focusing on the child's apparent self-presentation:

[The letter from the head teacher] talked about how [son] embraced the bling culture. I've never seen my son in any bling! ... If you look at his school reports, there's never been any suggestion of bad behaviour. (Felicia)

The accusation of "bling" (dressing in an extravagant style, and in particular the wearing of ostentatious jewellery, often associated with rappers) indicates another challenge of which parents spoke: the assumption that all Black families are working class and the associations made between working class Blackness and disreputable and disruptive behaviour (and, in this instance, vulgarity). Here, in the mind of this head teacher, class and race prejudices seem to elide, locating all Black boys as working class "other," far from being "people like us." ... The head teacher, as power-holder, can and does change the terms in which the situation can be discussed. Even if the child had "embraced the bling culture," it is not clear how this would explain, let alone justify, the racist abuse. Felicia is forced onto the terrain of the head's arguments, seeking to defend her son from the symbolic violence of stereotyping. The physical violence of the abuse is ignored by the head. Felicia's strategy here, acutely concerned as she is with her son's well-being, is to take him out of this school that has failed to protect him against racism and, furthermore, has stonewalled, denying her complaints apparently without investigation.

The majority of the parent respondents felt that whilst their children were still vulnerable to such crude racism on the streets, manifestations of racism in schools were now more likely to be subtle, embedded in often taken for granted, unaware assumptions and actions; in other words, institutionalized. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry defined institutionalized racism in the UK as:

The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people. (Macpherson 1999, p. 321)

Gillborn (2008, p. 27) cites Carmichael and Hamilton (1967, p. 112) as noting that institutional racism "originates in the established and respected forces in the

society, and thus receives far less public condemnation.” Institutional racism focuses on the consequences of actions rather than the intent. If the consequences are racist, then institutional racism is present regardless of individuals’ intentions. To give one example from our study: A mother with a daughter at a multiethnic school told us of a Gifted and Talented cohort identified by the school:

The school was running a Gifted and Talented programme ... they selected the young people who they saw as gifted and talented to be a part of this programme and started to do things with them, extended their experiences and opportunities and, as I say, I found out about it by default ... so they chose these young people and do you know what? All of them were White. (Malorie, education manager, local authority)

With other parents, Malorie took her concerns to the head teacher who accepted the criticism:

It’s not, the race issue is not something that we sit down and think, right is this racist? But this one, I couldn’t believe it! We started sending emails, and asking for clarification, and the emails were coming back and forth until we got a meeting with the head. Had a very good meeting with the head teacher, eerm, points were clearly taken, because subsequent years things changed.... It was disappointing that they had somehow managed to be this biased, we said “well did you not notice?”

Many parents, like Malorie, challenged the school when they perceived there to be issues of inequality. However, some parents noted that they were reluctant to name race and racism explicitly, because it caused White power-holders to become defensive. Ella explains:

I have never actually been in a situation [in relation to her son’s school] where I have gone out and said you are racist or I think this is an act of racism. It is something I am very reluctant to do because you get (claps her hands) shut down.... I would very much approach that I am going to go and deal with this situation. I am going to try and sort out this situation with you because I think once you mention to people you think they have been racist, they clam up. But what you can say is that this behaviour is a problem ... how can we tackle it and turn it round? (Ella, senior doctor)

Other parental strategies for combating and challenging racism included talking about racial inequality to the children:

My mother’s argument was always, you know, you have to be ten times better or a hundred times better than a White person. I don’t say it in exactly that way, I am not that direct with [daughter], but I do find myself saying to her, “You know life is not going to be easy.” ... [Discussions about race] are usually something that comes out in anecdotes, and to be fair to her, she listens and takes things seriously.... And she will actually ask me if something happens, and she will say to me “Do you think that was racist?” and so we are able to have those kind of conversations. (Lorraine, researcher)

However, exactly what to say was a contested area. Parents commonly described discussing media coverage of Black people for instance (“[Black women in soap operas] are never assertive, we are aggressive,” Jean, FE lecturer). But the degree to which one should be explicit about racism was debated. Richard, for example, asserts that for Black people “of course [race] has been an issue. I don’t care who you are or what you are, race has been an issue.” However, he is also concerned that racism does not become an excuse for his children to use.

“[Attitudes such as] ‘I didn’t do so well because I am Black.’ ‘I didn’t get this because I am Black.’ I would cry for days if that ever happened to my kids you know. And I’[d done] that to them” (Richard, director voluntary sector organization).

In summarizing this section, it is important to note that the parent respondents’ strategies of monitoring and surveillance look very similar to those deployed by White middle-class parents (Reay 1998; Vincent and Martin 2002). However, a closer consideration reveals the key role of race and racism, and how awareness and experience of racism leads the Black middle-class parent respondents to inflect and direct their strategies differently to their White middle-class counterparts.

Stereotypes of Black Parents

Misrepresentation was an issue for parents, not only in relation to teacher assumptions concerning the children as indicated above, but also in relation to parents themselves. Black women felt they were facing caricatured and racist assumptions that they lack knowledge, articulation, and calm. “Sometimes people categorize you, they expect you to be whatever stereotypical kind of screeching, not able to articulate, black female” (Cassandra, Director of training company). Similarly, in the USA, Cooper (2007, p. 492) cites African American mothers in her research as being seen as “irrational, threatening, and combative” in their interactions with schools. Black women were often assumed to be lone mothers. Black men experienced being perceived as a potential physical threat (see, also, Lareau 2003):

And you find it helpful sometimes to use your status, what job you do. And people treat you differently. I don’t necessarily want to say I do x, y, and z, but I found that if you don’t sometimes say that, they treat you in a way, my own experience as a Black woman—oh, you’re a single parent—there is a category they read off as to who you are without really knowing anything about you. (Eleanor, social worker)

Derrick lives in a part of England with few visible minorities:

I believe there is fear. Six foot, Black guy with a baseball cap on ... I do believe that people have a stereotypical fear of what Black people are or what they could be ... That we are violent, we’re arrogant, we’re criminals, erm undereducated, erm generally not nice people to cross... Sometimes if someone at a checkout, if they don’t say hello first, I will say “hello, are you alright?” ... just to put them at ease that I am not going to hold a gun at them and tell them to empty the till. (Derrick, manager, voluntary sector organization)

Parents’ strategies here are suggested in the quotations above. The Black middle classes felt it necessary to have a number of public faces tailored to particular situations (see, for more details, Rollock et al. 2011b). In relation to interactions with schools in particular, parents spoke of drawing on their class resources—plentiful supplies of appropriate economic, social, and cultural capital—as a form of resistance to these stereotypes. They were highly attuned to the image they presented through their dress and their voice (accent and vocabulary in particular); they displayed their knowledge of the education system and spoke with confidence

and assurance within a “conversational” mode (Vincent and Martin 2002) designed to set up, as noted above, a dialogue of equals. The parent respondents are confident to engage with teachers, feel they have an entitlement to do so, and are confident to take any unresolved issues up the hierarchy of authority (Lareau 2003). Further examples reveal other ways in which parents use their economic, social, and cultural capitals to defend their children against the effects of being what one referred to as a “discredited minority” (Rachel, solicitor). Economic capital can offer access to high-status culture through enrichment activities such as music lessons (“[Music] can actually open up a lot of opportunities,” Malorie, LA officer); it can provide opportunities for supporting academic achievement through tutoring. Social capital can provide children with links to other Black professional and successful families (“[We have] a circle of Black friends who are all professional people, they are all highly educated, they are all aware of where they have come from, where they want to go,” Robert, academic). Cultural capital can encompass a wide range of attributes, attitudes, and even possessions (see, for a critique, Kingston 2001). As examples, parents referred to the importance of speaking “properly” and being articulate (Femi tells her daughter, “If you learn to speak properly now, you can choose when you use it and when you want something, you can use it to get what you want”), being polite, but assertive. Often, the deployment of these capitals was effective, as we have shown in several examples. However, Felicia’s experience of the racist abuse of her son shows that Black parents’ capital can be denied, rejected, and ignored. Perhaps because Felicia insisted on naming racism (indeed, she had little choice), the school stonewalled. Felicia is a lawyer, her husband a high-ranking civil servant, but the utilization of their capitals in addressing the threat to their son’s education is simply denied any legitimacy. We have already noted that some parent respondents avoided naming racism, addressing the problem using other terms, or having exhausted “voice” turned to “exit,” and took the child out of school.

Teen Resistance and Peer Group Effect

In some cases, those parent respondents who had teenagers found that their children resisted their parents’ efforts to guide them through schooling. “Oh my children didn’t want me to go anywhere. ‘No please don’t do anything. Leave it.’ ... OK that’s fine with me” (Anthea, Local Authority education manager). Catherine is less sanguine. About her son, whom she considers to be underperforming, she says,

I am held at bay.... Being a parent who comes from a professional background and being Black, I had hopes that I would be able to use that to [son’s] advantage in terms of work experience, in being able to support him with his homework ... provide an environment where he would be able to excel and that’s been resisted so much. So in terms of [son’s] education, I may as well be whatever, not a professional parent. (Catherine, head teacher)

This induces considerable frustration, because she considers her son to be “below the radar” at school. Illustrating the school’s low expectations, she notes “Because

he's [seen by his teachers as] a nice boy and not kicking off, he's almost being allowed to underperform." One of Catherine's strategies here is to seek to control her son's out-of-school activities and insist on his enrolment in a number of musical and sporting activities. Use of extracurricular activities designed to cultivate and develop talents and skills in a concerted manner was common across the sample. This is an approach to parenting that Annette Lareau (2003) has called "concerted cultivation." Lareau argues that Black and White middle-class parents in the USA place equal importance on such activities for creating high-status cultural knowledge, skill in a range of areas, and a number of interpersonal and personal attributes (the ability to work with others, focus, self-discipline, etc.). However, in addition to these reasons, some parents in our sample also used out-of-school activities—such as membership of organizations like Junior Windsor Fellowship, 100 Black Men, or, to a lesser extent, attendance at supplementary schools, to develop their child's sense of self-esteem and pride as a Black young person, to enhance their knowledge of Black histories and cultures, and give them opportunities to be with other aspirational Black students and successful adults.

Parents in the study also feared the negative influences of peers who may come from families who did not share the emphasis they placed on education or did not oversee their children's activities to any great extent. As a result, they carefully considered the social mix when choosing a school. For the majority of respondents, a "good" social mix at school signals an ethnically diverse intake. Some parents prioritized academic attainment, and for those who chose private schools, this generally meant sending their children to schools that were less mixed on ethnic and social dimensions. However, others prioritized a diverse pupil intake, although the preferred diversity was usually one of ethnicity rather than social class (see, for more details, Ball et al. 2011):

So, yeah we chose that school on the basis of the location. The kind of feel of the place as I say, you know, what the tutors were like, and what the other kids seemed like, they had kids guiding us around this school, the kind of look of the place as in the space and layout, all of these things I took into consideration and yeah, very much a mix 'cos some of the other schools we went to ... were quite heavily Asian, and I didn't, you know, I didn't want that but neither did I want it to be heavily White, I wanted it mixed. I wanted my dream [laughs] a melting pot school. (Amanda, Senior Librarian)

Ethnic diversity in pupil intake meant, parents felt, that the likelihood of racism was minimized, and students learnt to develop tolerance and other valuable skills and dispositions for coping with ethnic "others." As far as schooling is concerned, such "good" mixes are far easier to find in London than elsewhere in the UK.

Parents were attuned to their children's friendships but were also aware of the limits of control. Nonetheless, efforts are made to ensure that children choose the "right" friends—those who are like them in terms of values, aspirations, demeanour, speech, and language. White middle-class parents evinced the same concerns but inflected differently in terms of the relations between ethnicity and class (Ball et al. 2004). A few parents were ambivalent about the ethnic mixing of their children, wanting them to have at least some Black friends, and this led to discussions within some families about the importance of a positive Black identity.

Concluding Thoughts

The respondents in our project work to defend their children and themselves from overt racism, stereotyping, and seemingly entrenched low expectations, alongside investing time and energy in the development of their children as successful learners. In order to resist misrepresentations of themselves and their children based on damaging, negative, and stereotypical perceptions of Black working class behaviour and attitudes, parents deployed a range of strategies, and these strategies draw on a range of social, cultural, and economic resources commonly associated with the middle classes. Parents seek to organize their child's educational experiences, and to some extent their social experiences, both in and outside school: inside, in order that their concerns and arguments be heard by school managers; and outside, in order that their children receive a range of experiences designed to develop their resources of cultural and social capital in directions deemed by their parents to be appropriate (see Vincent et al. 2012). We conclude, therefore, that for those Black middle-class parents to whom we spoke, their engagement with the school system, their orientation towards it, lies on radically different ground to that of White middle-class parents, although several of their strategies designed to help navigate their children successfully through schooling appear similar.

Both positive and negative readings are possible here. Through their actions, their strategizing, their labour, there is the potential for parents' "strategies of action" (Moore 2008) to lead to the "remaking of racial meaning in day to day life" (Craig 2002, p. 9, cited in Moore 2008, p. 499), because they present assertive, knowledgeable, and engaged parental identities to counter the dominant White stereotypes of Black parents as lacking in these attributes. However, the degree and extent of the labour required by Black parents in their interactions with schools speaks to the continuing significance of race and racism, despite the advantages of their class position, in shaping their and their children's experiences as they strive to ensure educational success. We conclude that social class resources, carefully deployed, help to mediate racism *to some extent* for the respondent parents and their children. However, our data reveal the extent to which racial inequalities still mark and shape the lives of these families.

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