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**Raising middle class Black children: parenting priorities, actions and strategies**

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**Abstract**

The enrolment of middle class children in extra-curricular activities is a recent trend in many affluent countries. It is part of what Annette Lareau refers to as a classed parenting style - 'concerted cultivation' which sees the child as a project with skills and talents to be fostered and developed. Controversially, Lareau argued that class, rather than race, was the most influential factor in determining this particular parenting style. In relation to our research with Black middle class parents, we argue the task for the researcher is attempting to understand how race and class differently interact in particular contexts. We conclude that a focus on Black Caribbean heritage families can further develop the concept of concerted cultivation, and demonstrate the complex ways in which for these families, such a strategy is a tool of social reproduction but also functions as attempted protection against racism in White mainstream society.

**Key words:** Black, middle class, families, 'concerted cultivation'

## **Introduction**

This paper draws on qualitative data from the first dedicated UK study of Black Caribbean middle class families, and their priorities and strategies in relation to the education of their children. Here we focus on the role of extra curricular activities – out of school learning - as part of the process by which Black middle class parents seek to raise and develop their children as both middle class and Black. This subject position remains a liminal one in many ways. The Black Caribbean-heritage middle class in England are a relatively small and emergent group, whose existence is often unacknowledged. The 62 participants in our study frequently criticised media portrayals of Black British people as a homogeneous working class group. Our aim in studying the Black middle classes is to explore the intersections of race and class in their lives and how these shape their understandings of education and their strategies supporting their children's education (for a further discussion and theorising of race/class intersectionality, please see Vincent et al 2012, Rollock et al 2011a). We are also exploring the form and volume of social, cultural, and economic resources on which Black middle class parents can draw whilst navigating their children through school. The education system is one in which many middle class Black children experience lower levels of attainment than their peers from other ethnic backgrounds. Using data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England, Strand argues that 'while social class and its correlates are important predictors of educational attainment, they have limited success in explaining the differences in attainment between White British and the Black Caribbean and Black African groups' (2011 p.216). The parents in our study spoke of their acute concern about the relatively low levels of expectation of their children by their teachers, and we have written about this elsewhere (e.g. Gillborn et al 2012).

Our argument in this paper is that, like a strong commitment to educational success, extra curricular activities are, for the parent respondents, a key mechanism through which they support the development of their middle class Black children. We argue that parental awareness and experience of racial discrimination means that they work particularly hard to try and strengthen

their children against the effects of racial inequality, in both the education system and the labour market. They are, in effect, attempting to arm their children with not only educational qualifications, but also certificates celebrating achievements, in music (particular types of music, such as the playing of orchestral instruments), sport, and performing arts, as well as a whole range of other activities. Participation in extra curricular activities, as we show, also develops in the children a range of personal qualities, tastes, and affinities perceived to be valuable life skills and cultural resources. We develop our argument through four sections. First we introduce the study and its participants. Second we consider the growth in extra curricular activities and what this tells us about the discursive imperatives of 'good' parenting and providing a 'good' childhood. We discuss in particular Lareau's (2002, 2003) description of middle class parenting as 'concerted cultivation'. Then we consider the activities in which the young people in the study were involved and their parents' rationales for organising their involvement. As part of this, we point to the differences amongst the parents in the degree of organised cultivation of their children. Finally, we conclude with some observations on the roles of both class and race in shaping parents' priorities, actions and strategies in relation to their children.

### **The study**

We conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with 62 parents who 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<sup>i</sup>, as well as through extensive use of snow-balling via existing contacts within the professional Black community. We spoke 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 categorisation, we sought parents, in professional or managerial occupations (i.e. NS-SEC 1 and 2) using the Standard Occupational Classification manuals<sup>ii</sup>. These occupational groups reflect a particular segment of the middle classes, sometimes called the 'service class' (see Hanlon 1998 for an overview)<sup>iii</sup>. We also collected information on income, educational qualifications and housing. However, our

understanding of class goes beyond these indicators to encompass class as 'an identity and a lifestyle, and a set of perspectives on the social world...class in this sense is ....an identity based on modes of being and becoming or escape and forms of distinction that are realized and reproduced in specific social locations' (Ball 2003 p.6). We illustrate this perspective below with regard to parental investment in activities for their children.

As is common in research on 'parents', most of our respondents are mothers. However, we are alert to the stereotype of Black men as absent fathers, and so, wishing to explore the situation in greater depth, we have 13 research participants who are fathers. Interviews were carried out in London and elsewhere in England, and we returned to 15 of our respondents in order to conduct follow-up interviews. These second interviews allowed us to ask additional questions on themes which arose from our initial analysis, but which 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). This paper draws on material from both original interviews and follow ups. Interviewees were given the opportunity to express a preference for an interviewer of the same ethnic background; 14 (23%) explicitly stated that they preferred to be seen by Nicola Rollck (the team member of Black Caribbean heritage). All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and then coded across the team as themes emerged and were refined using the constant comparative method.

### The activities

From a total of 62 families, we have information on activities from 58. In only two families out of that 58, were children engaged in very minimal extra curricular activities (youth group at church, and the occasional swimming respectively). For the rest, their activities (past and present) were numerous and can be categorized into: sport; performing arts (dance, drama and singing mainly); instrument lessons; Black-led organizations; supplementary school / tutoring; and Other (including youth groups such as Brownies/Cubs, army cadets etc.). Sport was the most popular category of extra curricular activity in

the study, followed by musical instrument lessons. Both boys and girls were involved in activities, with a preference amongst boys for sporting activities, whilst those involved in performing arts were nearly all girls. Seven families were involved with Black-led mentoring organisations such as Junior Windsor Fellowship, Black Boys Can or 100 Black Men.

### **The rise and rise of extra curricular activities**

A trend towards children's participation in extra curricular events is evident in the proliferation, over the last twenty years, of art, music, sporting, drama and other events available to them – for a price. A recent summer 2011 edition of *Families North* (a North London free-sheet for parents, with variations across the UK) ran adverts for 24 different activities including 'French singing for mums, dads and babies'.

These activities are but one aspect of a particular style of parenting, part of an intensive focus upon children that seeks to carefully and comprehensively mould and develop them into a particular kind of social and educational subject. The term 'parenting' is somewhat misleading as it is mothers who are generally positioned as retaining the ultimate responsibility for child-rearing in popular discourses and moral understandings (see Vincent 2010 for more discussion). Indeed, this type of comprehensive approach to childrearing has been described by Hays (1996) as 'intensive mothering', a term she uses to define current normative understanding of 'good mothering' in affluent western countries. This is an approach that is child-focused, with the mother (rather than the father) having the responsibility to care both intensively and extensively, for all aspects of the child's physical, moral, social, emotional and intellectual development. Even if mothers do not, will not, or cannot mother in such a way, intensive mothering expectations (IME, Johnston & Swanson, 2006) become pervasive, 'shaping both engagement *and* resistance' with its demands (Miller 2005 p.85). One of the ways, we suggest, in which IME are realised is through an acceptance by parents that they are responsible for the child's development. Thus they have to think, plan and be purposeful in relation to that task – what Arendell (2001 p.169) calls 'intentional parenting'. Access to various organised developmental activities is a key feature of this

parenting approach. 'In this particular historical period – late twentieth century and early twenty first – a child not only has particular physical, emotional and moral claims on the mother but also educational and enrichment ones' (Arendell 2001 p.168). The home becomes a site of pedagogy, and also, through trips to the theatre, art galleries or concerts, 'exposure' to high status cultural activities. In terms of the 'educational claims' that Arendell notes, one growing trend is the focus of parts of the out-of-school learning market on the school curriculum, the growing 'scholarisation of childhood' (Alexander et al, 2009, cited in Ball 2010 p.158). A recent 2011 Sutton Trust report documents the growing use of tutors especially amongst BME families. The specific mention of race is interesting here, as most of the previous research does not mention race in relation in parenting; the assumed, but unspoken, norm being a White middle class mother (see below for further discussion).

Parent-respondents in our study recognised the organised, interventionist approach to child-rearing described above, frequently pointing out that it differed – largely due to lack of money and opportunities - from the way that their parents raised them (see also Nelson 2010). This recent interventionist approach to child rearing can be understood as part of a neo-liberal subjectivity, in which the individual is encouraged to take responsibility for his/her biography (and for those of dependent children in this case). Parents, and especially mothers, are encouraged to plan and manage their children's learning, to equip them with social and cultural resources, to seek out exclusivity and advantage (see Ball 2010). As Bourdieu argues, the talents children hone at a young age become naturalized as they grow older, and the 'modes of acquisition of culture' (1984, p.66) – the assumption that the activity is worthwhile, the money to pay for musical instrument lessons, the space in which to practice and the encouragement to continue for example - become obscured. Malorie's daughter, at 17, is an example here, of a 'naturally' multi-talented child.

[Daughter's] an all rounder, she's done a lot of things. I've made sure she's experienced lots of things that I have never had a chance to experience. She's travelled a lot... she plays the clarinet, she plays the

guitar, she does horse riding...She was one of a group of young people who were sponsored ..... to go on a peace building mission [abroad].  
(Malorie, LA education manager).

We do not wish to deny Malorie's daughter her considerable abilities, but simply to point to her mother's effort, energy and expense in creating the conditions in which her daughter's talents are acquired and developed. Clearly the resources that underpinned such conditions are not available to all. The cultivation of one's child depends on considerable financial, cultural and social resources, which are spread unevenly across the population, by class and race. This is a phenomenon that has been studied in detail by Annette Lareau (2002, 2003), to whose work we now turn.

### **Concerted cultivation**

Lareau's well-known ethnographic study of childrearing practices amongst parents of different social classes and ethnicity concludes that class is a key influence, shaping the 'cultural logics of childrearing' (2002, p.772), and informing the 'rhythms of family life'. Her classes consist of three broad groupings, based on occupation: middle class, working class and poor (receiving public assistance). It is important to recognise that there are contextual differences between the USA and the UK, for example the Black middle class in the US is much larger and more established than is the case in the UK. However, the theory of concerted cultivation offers us a useful starting point to consider how class 'works' through particular parenting practices.

Lareau identifies the 'cultural logic of middle class parents' as emphasising the 'concerted cultivation' of their children. 'They enrol their children in numerous age-specific, organised activities that dominate family life and create enormous labour, particularly for mothers. The parents view these activities as transmitting life skills to children,' (2002, p.748). Lareau argues that the childrearing strategies of the working class and poor parents in her study emphasise by contrast, the 'accomplishment of natural growth'. 'These parents believe that as long as they provide love, food and safety, their children will grow and thrive. They do not focus on developing their children's

special talents' (2002 p.748-9, see Chin & Phillips 2004 for a differing view). Lareau is at pains to argue that interacting with children in this fashion should not be seen as negative as it gives the children opportunities for unsupervised, unstructured play. Concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth are, Lareau & Weinberger (2008, p.120) note, drawing on Bourdieu, 'deep seated, relatively stable childrearing dispositions'. Lareau argues that in most cases in her study, the organisation of activities falls heavily on the mother, rather than the father, which we also found to be the case (also Vincent & Ball 2007).

Lareau's findings would seem to support Bourdieu's comment on the importance of studying the family environment, including the material context, as a way to understand children's differing school experiences. 'Academic capital is in fact the guaranteed product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and cultural transmission by the school (the efficiency of which depends on the amount of cultural capital directly inherited from the family)' (Bourdieu 2004, p. 23). It is worth noting that this well known quotation from Bourdieu, focusing on differentiation by class, does not recognize differentiation by race. The notion of 'inheritance' suggests a one-way process within the bounds of the family, acknowledging the way in which the wider social system is deeply classed but ignoring the way it is also patterned by race, and that decisions about the value of particular cultural manifestations operate to the detriment of some minoritized groups (Yosso 2005, Rollock 2007). As noted above, much of the current research on parenting does not centre race; Lareau's study, for instance, having been originally conceived as a study of class with an all-white respondent group (Lareau 2008). In this paper, we aim to develop the concept of concerted cultivation by exploring the experiences of Black middle class families, and explicitly developing an intersectional analysis holding race and class in tension. Studies of parenting amongst Black families are relatively few in number, and those that do exist are commonly American in origin and focus on low-income families (e.g. Sampson 2007), although the work of Lacy (2007) and Montgomery (2006) are exceptions. Particularly relevant to our work is Montgomery's citing of Hill (1999) and Lacy's (2004) work to illustrate



the careful strategies adopted by American Black middle class parents concerned with both preparing their children for success in a white dominated society, and also with maintaining their links to Black communities, cultures and histories. Hill describes this as a process of 'dual socialization', whilst Lacy uses the term 'strategic assimilation' and Montgomery 'selective distancing'. Montgomery (2006) describes how Black middle class parents in Los Angeles chose to live in majority Black urban areas, but also minimised the perceived educational and social threats to their children of mixing with poor and working class Black children, by educating them in distant, more affluent areas. Enrolment in activities was also a key strategy for Montgomery's respondents. Similarly, for parents in our study, a large majority (56 out of the 58 we have information for), were, to varying degrees, concertedly cultivating their children. Cassandra has three daughters: 19, 10 and 9 years

Shall I list them all? Saxophone, piano, flute, violin, choirs. Now the children are doing tennis...The little ones are doing Kumon [*English and maths classes provided by a commercial company*] [...] All of them went through ballet and tap, modern [dance]...My youngest is very vocal 'we need some time to relax mummy' (Cassandra, Director of own company).

Jackie looks back at her 18 yr old daughter's activities:

She went to Saturday school<sup>iv</sup> for a bit.. Three hours on a Saturday, maths, english and science. ...She went to a journalist project, she did that after school from her primary right the way up through secondary...She belonged to a gospel choir, she did Brownies, ice skating, musical production, tap, gymnastics....Some of them were just for a season. If she didn't like it or wasn't getting anything out of it, we would change (Jackie, social worker).

The involvement in multiple activities detailed here, and the shifts in the children's activity portfolios over time is common-place, as their interests

waxed and waned. We do not wish to overlook the children's enjoyment of their various activities, although there was some resistance too. Generally the younger children were involved in more activities than teenagers, who typically claimed a bigger say in the use of their out-of-school time (see also Chin & Phillips 2004 on children's voices).

Despite concerns about the disruption of a 'normal' childhood through 'overscheduling' (Nelson 2010 p.78, Furedi 2001), in general, activities are discursively positioned as a 'good' thing. They are widely viewed, as a key part of a 'good' childhood (Arendell 2001). Studies in the US and to a lesser extent the UK, suggest that involvement in organised activities bestow advantages on children in terms of access to selective and private schools (Vincent & Ball 2007, Peterson 2011), access to HE and to the labour market (Marsh & Kleitman 2002, Hardaway and McLloyd 2009, Brooks 2009 Stevenson & Clegg 2011). In an earlier paper, Vincent & Ball (2007) argued that such activities do indeed accrue cultural capital, as parents seek to make their children into 'cultural omnivores' (Petersen & Kern 1996), or 'Renaissance children' with a range of competencies in musical, art, sporting, and intellectual arenas. As noted above, access to such activities are not open to all. They cost money to attend, may require special equipment and/or transportation, and always require parental time and attention. Thus, there has been some concern to bring experience of these activities to children who do not routinely have access to them<sup>v</sup> (e.g. DCSF 2009). Schools running an extended day, are one of the few sources of such activities available outside the private sector (See for example Parkwood Academy<sup>vi</sup>, in Sheffield <http://www.parkwoodacademy.org.uk/about-the-academy/curriculum/extra-curricular-opportunities>)

Further evidence of the popularity of extra-curricula activities in the public eye is that, in August 2011 following serious public disturbances, Prince Charles suggested that more extra-curricular activities could be a solution to the problem of disaffection amongst young people (Bates, The Guardian, August 17 2011 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/17/charles-camilla-tottenham-stick-together?INTCMP=SRCH>). In fact, activities are now

understood to be such a 'good' thing, that their absence in children's lives becomes a mark of unplanned and insufficiently committed parenting. In his study of family intervention in Chicago ('train[ing] poor non-white parents to do the things done in the homes of academically successful poor non-white students', 2007 p. xix), Sampson (2007 p.85) condemns a grandmother who fails to take up the suggestion that her granddaughter be enrolled in dance classes. His analysis does not discuss why someone, caring for young children in a situation of poverty, might not have the time, energy, capacity or inclination to prioritise dance classes and seek them out. The tone of Sampson's discussion suggests that extra curricular activities as a visible form of 'good' parenting have acquired a moral dimension. They appear to be viewed as evidence of both providing a 'good' childhood and being 'good' parents. They are a feature of Kusserow's (2004) 'soft individualism', a child-rearing approach she suggests is dominant amongst affluent middle class Manhattan families. She describes how parents and early years teachers emphasised the gentle 'cultivation' of young children, their uniqueness, their skills and abilities. In our research, parents' rationales for their children's involvement with activities had a slightly harder edge. The respondents had older children, and they were keen to instil a work ethic in them (Reynolds also argues that Caribbean heritage women have a 'cultural legacy as workers' (2005 p.99) which might also inform these mothers' determination that their children would not 'sit idle'). Patricia's teenage sons engage in several regular sporting activities and when one of them decides to give up football, Patricia is clear he must find a replacement activity.

I said 'if you're not doing that [football] you can either Hoover, wash the plates...straighten up. But you're not doing nothing'. Because I don't want him on the street corner. I don't want him to think of that as a way to fill his time...So that's what I am saying to him, you drop that, you still have a choice. What else is next? It's not drop, finish, I've got spare time. You don't have spare time. 'Cos when that time pass, it's gone.'  
(Patricia, Local Authority officer)

Good Lord yes [daughter does activities]. She's not sitting idle, she would love to sit idle in front of the TV all day (Regina, teacher)

Similarly one of the parent-respondents argued that it was a fundamental part of 'good' parenting to enrol your child in extra curricular activities, and be there to support them in these, even at considerable inconvenience to the adult:

Get involved in your school, give your child extra tuition, get them involved in extra-curricular activity. I don't care what the activity is, but take it seriously and be there for them. It takes a lot of time and effort. [We] do not want to get up at 8 o'clock to take [the children to rugby]. You are running from one pitch to another, watching [them], and then getting back home at one o'clock. It's not how we want to spend our Sunday mornings but, you know what, it has to be done. That's how you raise successful children, you give them opportunity and hopefully they will take the opportunity..... (Michael, self employed)

It is apparent, therefore, that the majority of our respondents engaged in cultivating portfolios of activities and that many saw this as an essential part of 'good' parenting. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that this approach was simply a reflection of their class status.

### **Colouring Concerted Cultivation**

Lareau's analysis is primarily structured around class. She argued controversially that affluent black and white middle class parents in her study had the same strategies of concerted cultivation, and that in determining parental childrearing styles, practices and priorities, social class is more important than race. We have argued elsewhere that to argue whether race *or* class is most influential is not as analytically productive as considering the ways in which race, and class (and gender) intersect in particular contexts at particular times (Vincent et al 2011).

Anxiety among some (but not all, Irwin & Elley 2011) White middle class parents about their children's life chances has been well documented (e.g. Ball 2003, 2010, Reay 2008, Vincent & Ball 2007). However, Black middle class parents' awareness and experience of racism give them, we suggest, a radically different basis for engagement with education, in its broadest sense, to White middle class parents (see also Vincent et al 2012). As Ann Phoenix has noted (personal communication) parents' acute awareness of how difference can be transmuted into racialised discrimination, informs the degree of labour, focus, and strength of will that they bring to the cultivation of their children. Although many of the respondents' children were experiencing or had experienced generally positive school careers, our data also contains accounts of the children or their parents when children, being positioned as marginal, less capable or deserving than their White peers (see for instance, Gillborn et al 2012). Concerted cultivation is a potential defence against such treatment. Following through this argument, we conclude that concerted cultivation is both a classed and racialised parenting strategy.

Concerted cultivation does draw on plentiful supplies of classed resources, to give social advantage to children and young people. Activities are one site of cumulative advantage for already advantaged children; one place where middle class families do 'class work', in search of social advantage and reproduction, a phenomenon heightened for some by insecurity occasioned by congested educational and labour markets. The acquisition of skills and talents is an attempt to win positional advantage, although there is, of course, no guarantee that such actions will lead to class reproduction (Irwin 2009 p.1136). However, from our study, we have identified three types of class advantage heralded by proficiency in particular activities. The first is one we have already discussed, the creation of a talented or multi-talented individual.

I think middle class parents provide a variety of opportunities for their children, without any ulterior purpose. You just want them to experience a wide range of activities and opportunities. It is part of creating I suppose the whole person (Robert, academic)

As Robert says, the idea that middle class parents should and do cultivate their children's talents, offering them a range of experiences and opportunities has become a taken-for-granted, assumed part of 'good' parenting. The class advantage fostered through this parenting style is unspoken and unrecognized ('no ulterior motive'). A second advantage is related, the development of particular personal characteristics (persistence, self-direction, resilience, confidence, sociability etc), 'the construction of a "focused" self' (Stefansen & Aarseth 2011) thought to bring advantage when in competition with others in the education and labour markets. As Miles describes here, certificates reward the child's persistence.

We were thinking that after two years of doing [instrument], perhaps the grade system should be coming in [...My wife] wants to make sure that he is still enjoying it, finding it stimulating, getting something out of it [...]  
Things like swimming lessons.... we said 'look you can stop' – he's got to Bronze now – 'when you get to Gold, if you choose to.' (Miles, recruitment manager)

A third and more specific advantage is access to particular schools. Some state schools set aside places for pupils with, say, musical aptitude, and private schools offer bursaries for pupils with particular skill sets. One mother whose son had passed academic and music tests for entry into a selective state school, commented,

We didn't [originally] think you'd need an instrument in order to open doors for a secondary school, but we obviously used it once we realised it could help him get in. We started the drums because he wanted to play (Cynthia, teacher).

However, the pursuit of class advantage is not the whole story. There are two points here, the first is that the parents in our study were not born into the middle classes, but had experienced considerable social mobility. Their own parents had come to the UK in search of enhanced opportunities for their children, and the respondents were concerned to see their own children

securing their positions in the middle classes. Secondly and fundamentally, Black middle class parents also sought to arm their children against racism, to help them resist the often subtle, but insidious positioning of Black children as inferior in a white dominated society (see for example, Gillborn & Youdell 2000, Banks, 2002, Cork 2006, John 2006) and activities have a role to play here. They might, for example, serve to ground the children, strengthen their identities as young Black or mixed race children, their sense of pride and self esteem. Derek lives in a largely White area of the country, and has mixed race children. His daughter plays steel pans, an activity from which she derives enjoyment, but also provides a link with the Caribbean cultural heritage of the steel pans.

It is important for [daughter] to be in touch with her own.. erm identity. OK it is not primarily her identity, but her parents and her grandparents, and you know generations of identity. Erm, there's a lot of mixed, dual heritage families around where the children have no contact with ethnic minorities.

The band offers a space to young people locally to meet others who share their heritage whilst living in a largely white, rural/suburban area. As Derek notes, 'One of the kids actually said, erm, just out of the blue, "I like coming to this group because I get to mix with people my own colour" And she was 14'.

Those parents whose children were involved in Black-led organisations understood these to provide similar benefits around identity and pride. As Brenda says of a 100 Black Men event, the events are to 'make [children] know who they are, feel a bond with themselves and feel comfortable with who they are, and know their history and feel strong about it'. Such organisations can act, as Mirza and Reay note in relation to Black supplementary schools, to 'decentre' whiteness, to displace it as central (also Rollock 2012).

Black supplementary schools provide a 'sacred space of blackness' (Foley 1998) that enables the affirming of selfhood that the white

majority take for granted in their privileged spaces of whiteness in mainstream schools. The black women educators [in supplementary schools] were all engaged in various ways in rewriting blackness as a positive 'normative' social identity (Mirza & Ray 2000 p. 538, also Maylor et al 2010)

This sense of pride in one's background and racial identity was something which all the parents were keen to foster in their children. Several parents, who had no involvement with organisations like 100 Black Men, nevertheless said that through their friendship networks, their children had access to similar social benefits, that is to other middle class Black children, and networks of supportive Black professional adults. Parents were also concerned to differentiate their children from 'stereotypical' versions of (working class) Blackness. In many cases, they discouraged their children from speaking slang, and several spoke of keeping their children away from 'the street', one advantage of activities. Richard has two boys of 10 and 11.

[The stereotype is that] Black people can only do music and sport, so I have kept them away from that... There will be no hanging round the streets as they get older.. So you move directly from activities to a car, and drive past the people hanging around on the streets (Richard)

Richard's position as a relatively affluent man living in a middle class area allows him use his class resources to protect his boys from 'others', those who are out unsupervised. 'The street' is, of course, a more or less dangerous place depending on where you live and also who you are. For young Black boys, as parents were acutely aware, the urban streets could be very dangerous places.

As we have noted the majority of parents in our study are engaged in the concerted cultivation of their children. However the degree of determination and intensity around that cultivation differed across the parent sample. The reasons for this are partly financial. Although the parents were all in professional / managerial occupations, their income varied. Femi, a public



sector worker, whose young daughter was involved in several different activities, commented on the significant financial outlay that music lessons require:

Most of these children who do music outside of [school] lessons, they live in big houses where they have got a separate room to practice etc. They don't have two parents at work and have to run round to fit everything in already. So I have got to pay £32 a week and I have got to have constant arguments with my child about practising her instrument on top of everything else I have got to manage? I'm sorry, no (Femi, lecturer).

Another important difference concerns parenting styles. In an earlier paper, we mapped individual parental strategies along a continuum, from 'determined for the best' to 'hoping for the best' (Vincent et al 2012). Briefly, parents in the *determined* cluster had the following characteristics: long term planning of educational strategy, intense focus on academic achievement, considerable monitoring and surveillance of both child and school. They also tended to be the more established in the middle class in terms of their occupations, incomes and educational qualifications. For the *hoping for the best* cluster at the other end of the continuum, academic achievement is important, but the family habitus is one which appears to give more space to the child's own voice. The parents are pro-active with regard to education, and the child's achievement and well-being, but less focused on school and schooling. Unsurprisingly when we came to map activities, children of *hoping for the best* parents engage in fewer activities than those in *determined for the best* families. More space was allowed by 'hoping' parents for the exercise of any resistance the children might offer. June is an example here:

[Son] was offered, 'do you want to play an instrument at school? 'Do you want to do french?' 'Do you want to..?' He didn't want to do it. And I think for me, maybe because I was on my own with them, if they don't want to do it, I'm not going to push it because it is just like a lot of trouble' (June, teacher)

Unlike Sampson cited earlier, we would certainly not see this as a mark of insufficient commitment on June's part. Her priority was to respond to her children's different preferences about the use of their spare time (so her daughter chooses to do activities and her son does not).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In this paper we have examined how a sample of Black middle class parents approached the use of extra curricular activities as an aid to the nurturing and supporting of their children through the English educational system. In considering their perceptions and actions we have adopted an intersectional approach that seeks to understand the complex, changing and contextually located nature of the interplay between different factors, especially social class and ethnicity. By drawing attention to the way in which the parenting styles of these Black middle class parents were shaped by their classed and racialised identities, we highlight the futility of attempting to establish some sort of hierarchy of oppression, as if class or race can be identified as the uniformly dominant characteristic in making sense of people's lived experiences.

The data from our research project leads us to differ from Lareau in our conclusions about 'childrearing dispositions' (Lareau and Weinberger 2008), at least as understood through the provision and encouragement of extra curricular activities. Race *does* differentiate priorities, actions and values. Let us extend our arguments: we agree that the provision of extra-curricular activities for children are part of an assumed, taken for granted, aspect of 'good' (middle class) parenting, and that concerted cultivation is a classed practice. Families in the study do use activities to develop their child's talents, in a bid to advantage their child over others in what they perceive to be a highly competitive education and labour market. Many parents sought out high status cultural activities for their children such as music lessons and public speaking, and pressed children to excel in their activities. Perceived gaps in children's learning were filled with individual tutors and extra classes. Many of the strategies enacted by the parents in support of their children's education - including the organisation of a range of extra curricular

experiences – match those documented by other research cited here as practised amongst White middle class parents. However as we have noted elsewhere (Rollock et al 2011b), the respondents in our study did not, in the main, identify as middle class, feeling the term described the White middle classes, and a range of concomitant behaviours and values that they did not wish to share.

Indeed, the activities in which the children were involved had another aspect, additional to the ‘traditional’ classed array of flute, ballet and tennis lessons. Some activities spoke directly to the children’s identity as Black young people (e.g. events arranged by Black led organisations, activities, like steel pans that have a clear cultural link with the Caribbean, and those which focused on African and Caribbean history, for example). It was a minority of parents who used organised activities for this purpose, the majority choosing to use their social networks and household discussions, to ensure that children are secure in their identity as Black young people, proud of who they are, and knowledgeable about Black history and cultures. Our overarching point, however, is that racial identity, and awareness and experience of racism in society informs all aspects of childrearing. Thus even if activities were not *specifically* chosen to reinforce children’s understanding of and pride in being Black, they were arranged to offer the children the chance to develop skills and abilities, cultural and social resources, in order to strengthen their position as they navigate a racially unequal society. The highly competitive education and labour markets for which White parents equip their children, have another aspect for the Black middle classes: that of possible racial inequality and discrimination.

Lareau’s concept of concerted cultivation, which we have sought to develop in relation to our study is one, very valuable, illustration of the process of transmission of cultural capital. Bourdieu argued that ‘cultural capital is not simply a matter of what is transmitted in families, it is a statement about an unequal system in which ‘what is transmitted’ in middle class families holds a correspondence with ‘what is valued in society’ (Irwin 2009 p.1124).

However, our data both interrupts and supports this statement, as the respondent parents sought out traditional, high status cultural knowledge for their children, but also sought, through their own teachings, and their use of Black- led activities to interrupt and disrupt a monocultural understanding of 'what is valued in society'. They did this both by claiming as their own, traditional high cultural knowledge, and also by ensuring their children were familiar with different, traditionally marginalised forms of knowledge, such as Black African history.

In conclusion, therefore: the majority of the parent respondents were engaged in the concerted cultivation of their children, although the amount of importance given to various activities and the degree to which the children themselves appeared to appreciate or resist the attempts of their parents to organise their out-of-school time did vary. We maintain that concerted cultivation for these parents is not simply a classed strategy of parenting *but also* a racialised strategy of parenting. The activities in which the children are involved are both a mechanism of distinction from the working classes *and* a mechanism for sustaining and equipping Black children to live in a racist society. This is not simply an uncomplicated story of privilege. Indeed, the priorities, actions and strategies of Black middle class parents, focusing, in particular, here, on extracurricular activities, can be understood as an example of what Montgomery (2006 p.445) refers to as the 'contradictions, privileges and struggles of the black middle class'.

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<sup>i</sup> For example: the Family & Parenting Institute e-newsletter; Black solicitors network; 100 Black Men of London e-newsletter.

<sup>ii</sup> Other NS-SEC groups include intermediate workers (e.g clerical and administrative work), own account workers and those in semi-routine and routine occupations. Although the binary of middle and working class is often still used in research on class, this overlooks both fractions within those classes, and also the intermediate grouping.

<sup>iii</sup> The supposed security of tenure of some sections of this group – for example, those who work in local government – is vulnerable to planned funding cuts, (Audit Commission 2011). The public sector trade union, Unison, has recently voiced fears that black local government workers are being hit hardest by cuts.

[http://www.unison.org.uk/asppresspack/pressrelease\\_view.asp?id=2600](http://www.unison.org.uk/asppresspack/pressrelease_view.asp?id=2600)

<sup>iv</sup> Saturday or supplementary schools have a long history within Black and other minority ethnic communities as a community-provided compensatory form of provision in the UK (see eg Mirza & Reay 2000, Maylor et al 2010). In our interviews, parents moved between supplementary schools when the children were younger and individual tutors when they were older and preparing for exams.

<sup>v</sup> The Sutton Trust is currently running a pilot project to offer tutoring to teenagers whose families can not afford to purchase it.

<sup>vi</sup> Academies are relatively new forms of school in the UK – funded directly by government, but exempt from the staffing and curriculum restrictions placed on other forms of state school.