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Chasing the Dream: How Black Middle Class Parents Make Educational Decisions For
Their Children

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Chasing the Dream: How Black Middle Class Parents Make Educational Decisions for
Their Children

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An abstract of
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Abstract

Chasing the Dream: How Black Middle Class Parents Make Educational Decisions for
Their Children

By Adria Welcher

The black middle class in many ways occupy an in-between position. Economically, they are employed in solidly middle class occupations, yet they lack the intergenerational transmission of wealth that secures white middle class status. Socially and professionally, they must navigate their racial identity in the white world within which they often work and sometimes live. Black middle class families face additional dilemmas as they both understand the importance of a strong educational foundation, but are also aware of various obstacles their children are likely to confront in school. So while black middle-class families are strategic in advocating for their children in the same ways as other middle-class families, they operate within potentially quite different constraints. Parents, regardless of race, draw on a range of information about school quality when making educational decisions for their children. Yet, Black parents must often pay attention to a whole set of additional factors when considering their children's futures.

My dissertation explores the dilemmas middle class black families face when making decisions about their children's education. Through in depth interviews with 59 black middle class parents, a total of 76 respondents, across metropolitan Atlanta, I show that black middle class parents are aware of the constraints that their racial position presents while utilizing many of the resources granted by their class position. A close examination of the processes black middle class parents use when determining how to best educate their children reveals specific strategies used by various members of the black middle class.

Racial socialization, school choice, and class reproduction all motivate black middle class parents' educational decisions for their children. Black middle class parents desire to reproduce their class status for their children so they incorporate linked fate, racial uplift, and politics of respectability ideologies to explain why and how they distance themselves from lower and working class blacks in their residential choices or other social interactions. They look for schools with strong academic reputations and high levels of parental involvement. Finally, these parents use assimilationist, racial barriers, and self-development racial socialization strategies to teach their children about being black.

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Other black middle class parents in the struggle – I guess all that I can see is we'll keep chasing until we figure out where we should best stand and rest… The things we do for our kids!

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Chapter One: Introduction

"Are there Good Blacks There?"

The Wilson family, a black family, and the Scotts, a white family, both had sons on a traveling baseball team. The children of the two families had been on the same team for three years. The Scott family had recently filed for bankruptcy and needed to downsize to a smaller home. The Scott children had attended private school for the duration of their academic careers but now would be enrolled in public schools. As the Scott family evaluated test scores and rankings of the public schools in their district, they observed that the Wilsons lived in an area zoned for the best schools in the district. Since the Scotts considered themselves to be friends with the Wilson family, Mr. Scott approached Mr. Wilson to ask about their experience at the school. Mr. Scott began with broad questions about teachers and school conditions. Mr. Wilson happily obliged responding based upon his own experiences and those of his children at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Eventually, the conversation changed. Mr. Scott, inquiring about the racial composition of the school, asked, "Are there good black people there?" He queried whether the black students at the school wore their pants sagging or used profanity. Mr. Wilson responded as he had to the other questions but later shared the conversation with his wife. Mrs. Wilson was enraged! The Scotts were people they considered close friends. After all, the Wilsons had been aware of all of the Scotts' financial struggles and had even loaned them money during the ordeal. Mr. Wilson responded to his wife stating, "I felt Mr. Scott was really sincere." The Wilsons never addressed their concerns with the Scott family; rather, they understood that their friendship with this family was based upon their status as "good blacks".

The Wilsons agonized over the treatment their children would receive from whites who may not be friends of the family. The painful reality of their "friends" reminding them of their low status as black seemed to uproot their middle class status. Countless questions ran through their heads. What was a good black anyway? What would it mean if their son wore sagging pants? What would happen to his 'good black' classification? Would he be treated differently? Would they lose their 'good black' classification? What would happen to their friendship with the Scotts? What would happen with their relationships and interactions with other whites? How were they to manage being both black and middle class? Did their race matter more than their character? What sort of interactions had their children had with 'their friends', classmates, or teachers? Were their children considered 'good blacks' at their schools? Had they made the right decisions putting them into these predominantly white, yet high performing academic settings? Would this interaction impact the ways they would talk to their children about being black?

Most peculiar to the Wilson family was how they ended up being asked about 'good black' people. They had done all of the 'right' things and possessed all of the middle class markers. They were a two parent middle class family. Mr. Wilson trained in a prestigious engineering program and was an employed engineer with a major corporation. Mrs. Wilson stayed at home with the children. When purchasing their home, they conducted research and moved into a predominantly white neighborhood to ensure their children had the best possible education. They participated in racially integrated activities for their children and were involved in the schools. They considered themselves friends with a number of white families. In spite of their efforts to solidify

their class status, they may still be subjected to the stereotypes associated with black masses. Although the Scotts treated them as exceptions to their understanding of blacks were, the Wilsons were reminded that their favorable reception was contingent on their performance of class. They worried that if their children did not behave 'appropriately' they would be discriminated against. Their class status, indicated by their financial prosperity, educational attainment, and middle class values, had not been able to override their blackness. Implied in the commentary of Mr. Scott was that stereotypical black or urban behaviors were characteristic of blacks and that the Wilson family represented the exception, not an uncommon experience for middle class blacks (Feagin and Sikes 1994, Perry 2011). These questions led the Wilsons to many long conversations about the choices they had made. Had they made the right decisions for them and their children?

Throughout the United States, members of the black middle class negotiate their intersecting class and race statuses in many different social situations (Andersen and Collins 1995; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Hochschild 1995; Feagin 1991; Lacy 2007). For example, Feagin and Sikes (1994) chronicle the rampant and widespread discriminatory encounters experienced by the black middle class. "Middle class strategies for coping with discrimination range from careful assessment to withdrawal, resigned acceptance, verbal confrontation, or physical confrontation" (Feagin, 1991, p. 103). In fact, members of the Black middle class often experience forms of discrimination distinct from their poor or working class peers as their status leads them to interact more in predominantly white spaces and as racial stereotypes lead to regular questions or challenges to their status (Feagin 1991; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Lacy 2007; Landry 1987).

The experience of the Wilsons with their white baseball team 'friends' highlights the precarious location occupied by middle class black parents. On the one hand, they understand that their children should be able to navigate in a white world; yet, they must balance their connection to the black world. As was demonstrated by the Wilson's being asked about 'good blacks' attending their son's school, whites often see members of the black middle class as an exception to the larger black masses. Unfortunately, for members of the black middle class, these larger black stereotypes inevitably shape their interactions with whites and white institutions. Mr. and Mrs. Wilson had exerted great efforts to ensure their children attended predominantly white schools where they could take advantage of the academic resources and the social integration. Being asked about good blacks at the schools they'd put forth so much effort to ensure their children attended forced the Wilsons to re-evaluate their conversations about race with their children, the hope for their children's future middle class placement, and whether or not attending the predominantly white school was the correct choice. Black middle class parents weigh the role of racial socialization, class reproduction, and school choice as they make decisions for their children's schooling. The overarching impact of racial socialization is a concern not had by white middle class parents so these black parents are confronted with a unique set of decisions when it comes to their children's schooling.

Racial Socialization

The Scotts had racialized the Wilsons in a way that is not unique for many middle class blacks. Middle class blacks must navigate a world in which their racial status can lead others to underestimate or question their class status. Unlike their white middle class counterparts, "playing by the rules" does not guarantee the same sort of returns (Lareau

and Horvat 1999). Black middle class families do not receive the same treatment when interacting with majority institutions. Many members of the black middle class, specifically lower and middle –middle class blacks encounter discrimination when interacting with predominantly white institutions and must prepare their children for such interactions.

As was the case with the Wilsons, although middle class blacks display middle class characteristics and markers, their blackness usually relegates them to a lesser treatment – one markedly different from their white middle class peers. Discrimination experienced by blacks of lower and working class status is also experienced by some middle class blacks. In some cases, middle class blacks with particularly high incomes and a lot of interaction with middle to upper class whites do not experience discrimination in the same way that their solidly middle class or lower middle class black counterparts do (Lacy 2007). Here, it is important to highlight the variation within the black middle class when discussing treatment by whites. Blue-chip blacks are often able to avoid many of the stereotypes attached to lower and working class blacks (Lacy 2007). These upper middle class blacks are often able to separate themselves from non-middle class blacks through residential choice and working in predominantly white places of employment. For these other middle class blacks, though, even in instances where the middle class status is apparent, many blacks who are middle class experience discrimination based on race (Feagin 1991; Feagin et al. 2001; Laureau and Horvat 1999; Roscigno et al. 2012; Shapiro 2004). Members of the black middle class must carefully negotiate their race and class position as they determine how to minimize potential discrimination while maximizing their opportunities and experiences.

Class Reproduction

For decades scholarship has focused on which blacks form the middle class (Frazier 1957, Landry 1987), the experiences of blacks in the middle class (Haynes 2001, Pattillo-McCoy 1999), and how black adults navigate their own middle class terrain (Lacy 2007). However, very little work has focused on how middle class black adults work to secure middle class status for their children (Lacy 2007, Lareau 2003, Lareau and Horvat 1999). Little known about the processes by which these parents participate or efforts they exert to ensure that their children have at least the same financial security and class mobility that they are experiencing. As parents, they have experienced living in the black middle class and realize the importance of their children living a middle class lifestyle. They are aware that they cannot escape the stigma associated with their racial identity but rest comfortably in the lifestyle that their class status affords them. That is, knowing what they know about how the world works for black people, particularly black middle class people, how do black middle class parents attempt to ensure that their children experience a middle class lifestyle?

I decided to focus on the institution of education to further explore this question. For many of these black middle class parents, the choices made for their children's education are just as important as setting aside trust funds and investments in their children's names. Education is particularly important since making decisions about education is something these parents have control over, unlike setting aside substantial savings for their children's economic futures. Many black middle class parents are middle class in terms of their incomes and lifestyles but not by wealth terms. Often middle class black parents are unable to set aside money for their children's future

college attendance or a trust fund for when their child turns 18. For these parents, the educational decisions are especially important as they may determine their children's future educational opportunity and job prospects. These black middle class parents exert great effort into deciding where to educate their children.

School Choice

Across classes, blacks and whites strongly ascribe to the mantra, "Education is the great equalizer" (Johnson 2006; Mann 1848; Mickelson 1990,). According to this philosophy, education places everyone on a level playing field – a field determined by what one knows as opposed to what one looks like. My own grandmother admonished me to get as much education as I could because "they can't take that away from you". It was clear in her advice that she subscribed to the idea that one's education was something that could not be discounted or disputed. The 'they' to whom she referred was the larger white social structure. In her experience, she had been denied opportunities because of her race and her lack of education. Acquiring an education would eliminate disqualification on the basis of lack of knowledge. For so long in the black community, the opportunity to earn an education was denied to blacks, whether legally or in practice. The chance to earn an education would eliminate non-consideration for jobs and opportunities. Once an individual earned an education, race would be the sole reason for not being hired for a job or afforded a particular opportunity for advancement and discrimination based on race was now illegal in the United States. Blacks, with an education, were now able to compete for socially respectable, decent paying middle class jobs and to stand on racial discrimination if all things, including education, were equal. In some cases, for blacks, a quality education allows for opportunities that they may not

receive simply because of being black (Moss and Tilly 1996). Ultimately for many blacks, the hope is that education will ameliorate the effects of blackness, allowing for opportunities to live a middle class, mainstream American lifestyle. Given this strong emphasis placed on education and the hope that is ingrained in earning an education, how do black middle class parents decide how to best educate their child?

My dissertation was birthed out of many conversations with friends having similar experiences to the Wilson family. A number of my friends decided to enroll their children in predominantly white environments to take advantage of the superior education and better quality resources. Unfortunately, many of those middle class black parents expressed frustration with ensuring their children received fair and just treatment in schools and activities. They were upset with the way their children had been treated in predominantly black environments, where being smart was disdained by other blacks, and in predominantly white environments, where their intelligence was often undermined by their race. Many of my friends experienced being called white as they attempted to succeed in school and their children were hearing many of the same taunts from their black classmates in predominantly black environments. In majority white settings, parents complained of their children excelling academically but not being invited into gifted programs, events, or honor societies without their parents having to advocate on their behalf. There was confusion about which choices were the correct ones for their children and what impact the choices they had made would have on their children.

I set out to answer the question, "How do black middle class parents make schooling decisions for their children?" The resulting project, however, revealed the process by which black middle class parents made decisions about how to educate their

children. This education was much broader than simply choosing a school; it was an education about life – about how to be black and middle class in the second decade of the twenty first century. Yes, deciding which school their child(ren) should attend was a part of our conversation but there was much more to be learned. Parents discussed the importance of socializing their children, to be both black and middle class. In addition, they shared their own experiences in educational settings, as both students and now parents. The question that was answered, then, was, "How do black middle class parents rear their children to be black and middle class?"

To be black and middle class, despite the growing number of individuals who fall into this category and the decades of scholarship concerning this group, is a paradox. Using DuBois's (1903) conception of double consciousness, being black and middle class is a contradiction. The intersection of these two identities provides a unique space that members of the black middle class occupy, an "outsider within" status (Collins 1986, Lacy 2007). This struggle of being both black and middle class is captured as DuBois eloquently states the desire "to merge his double self into a better and truer self." (p. 9) Fanon (1952) uses the term dual consciousness to describe the difficulty upwardly mobile blacks experience in colonial contexts when attempting to adopt white behavior as normative in a society that continues to exclude them based on black being non-normative. This same struggle is consistent with middle class blacks creating spaces in contemporary, predominantly black spaces. My dissertation details a few of the strategies that black middle class parents use to prepare their children to be both black and middle class in American society. Black middle class parents exist in this paradoxical space and must equip their children to live in a world where their class

positions do not necessarily mean that they will be treated based on their class status instead of their racial identity and that their racial identities are recognized and valued (Feagin and Sikes 1994).

This project was very personal for me. I am a member of the black middle class. I'm second generation, college-educated. I attended highly ranked, prestigious schools for my primary, secondary, and postsecondary education. I belong to a black Greek letter sorority. I am a member of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., which is a black middle class mother's organization. I belong to the Junior League. My husband and I belong and are active in the Parent Teacher Organizations at our children's schools and in our neighborhood Homeowner's Association. We are members of our neighborhood YMCA and participate in local politics. We own two homes and have retirement accounts. We have portfolios and savings accounts. I consider myself solidly middle class. I have engaged in countless conversations about educating my children with other similarly situated members of the black middle class. I have wrestled with which activities in which to enroll my children. I have struggled over the racial composition of the schools my children attend and the idea of driving past a number of schools in my neighborhood to enroll my children in schools that are perceived to be better but on the other [white] side of town. I have debated about raising our children in predominantly black neighborhoods. This struggle is not unique to me. These sorts of conversations were recounted time and time again by similarly situated black middle class parents. It is not enough for us to figure out how to navigate a world where we are not expected to be black and middle class; we must prepare our children to survive in this world and ideally do better than we have done. As my project demonstrates, this is no easy task.

Outline of Dissertation

The next chapter addresses the literature on the black middle class, parenting, and school choice. In this chapter, I highlight the consensus scholars have reached concerning who comprises the black middle class. Although there is a dearth of scholarship about the lifestyle of black middle class parents, scholars have addressed how black middle class parents socialize their children (Lacy and Harris 2008). In addition to descriptive work about the black middle class and how that class of individuals developed, scholars have chronicled the educational and social experiences of black middle class adults. This chapter briefly summarizes the work on school choice, wealth inequality, and racial identity as an introduction to understanding the experience of black middle class parents.

In the third chapter, I describe in detail the methodology used to gather my data. I center myself in the data and the sample to understand how my own positionality impacts both how I receive and interpret data. Further, I describe the Atlanta metropolitan area where my respondents reside. Atlanta is a particularly interesting case study because there are many educational options as well as a substantial black middle class. Further, there are three historically black colleges and universities that attract a number of affluent blacks to the Atlanta area. I highlight some characteristics of the families in the studies as well as a few of the neighborhoods wherein they reside. In addition, I describe some of the schooling choices available to parents in this vast metropolitan area.

In the fourth chapter, I undertake the question raised by Holme (2002) to determine whether the ways in which black middle class parents choose schools is similar to the ways that white middle class parents make those decisions. As black middle class

parents strive to situate themselves comfortably in a society that does not fully recognize the existence of their race-class group, do they pattern their school selection strategies in similar ways to other middle class parents, especially white middle class parents? Does class work for black middle class parents in the same way as race works for white middle class parents when determining which schools they desire their children to attend? Lacy (2007) encourages an expansion of the work begun by Annette Lareau in her 2003 book, Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life, explaining, "because Lareau did not set out to investigate attitudes about racial identity or racial socialization (she was interested instead in the transmission and reproduction of class), it would be useful to explore whether a different sample of middle-class blacks shows patterns of class socialization that are racially coded." (Lacy 2007, p.8). My interviews reveal that parents socialize their children to be middle class, often to the detriment of their racial identity development.

The fifth chapter focuses on the actual practices parents employ in choosing schools for their children. Black middle class parents put an extreme amount of work into making academic decisions for their children. Throughout my conversations with black middle class parents, there were countless accounts of their intricate involvement with the institution of schools and its representatives – teachers, administrators, and parental organizations (both formal and informal). In choosing schools, institutions instrumental in the reproduction of class (Bourdieu 1977, Bowles and Gintis 1976, Kahlenberg 2003, Swartz 1997), where do black middle class parents stand? How do they navigate the benefits of being middle class with the stigma of being black? I describe the specific strategies employed by these black middle class parents to choose schools that

will most effectively educate their children. Further, I link those strategies to recent literature addressing the roles assumed by black parents as they interact with schools and the black-white wealth gap (Horvat, McNamara, Weininger, and Lareau 2003; Johnson 2006; Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Shapiro 2004).

Chapter Six describes a new form of racial socialization and identity development black middle class parents utilize with their children. These parents do not seem to fall into the racial socialization categories described previously in the literature (McAdoo 2001, Peters 1985). Rather, they approach a more nuanced form of preparing their children to be successful in postmodern society. This socialization is rooted in black middle class parents desiring their children to interact across racial and ethnic lines; however, they do not desire cross-class interactions. The example of Obama is highlighted as a successful middle class black man – only referencing his nontraditional, non-middle class upbringing as an example of global experiences. Obama is used as a guide and a standard for many of the parents in my study and their experiences with him as the president has shaped how many of them discuss race and class with their children.

The last chapter summarizes the contributions of this dissertation as well as addressing the imitations of my research design and my findings. Areas for future research are highlighted, placing particular interest on the experience of the middle class black children in diverse academic settings.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Why Black Middle Class Parents?

After WWII there was a massive expansion in the black middle class in the United States (Landry 1987; Pattillo-McCoy 1999b). By 1995, nearly seven million African Americans were employed in middle class occupations (Pattillo-McCoy 1999). The black middle class has just in recent years started to receive significant scholarly attention to assess how they are doing relative both to their white middle-class and to their lower income black peers (Charles 2003; Lacy 2004; Lareau 2003; Massey and Fischer 1999). Although members of the black middle class are doing well compared to blacks who are in the working and lower class, research shows, in fact, that the black middle class faces a number of challenges relative to their white counterparts. They are more likely to live in residentially segregated neighborhoods, are more likely to come into contact with drugs and crime, and have substantially less wealth, and as a result, have far fewer resources than their white middle class peers (Charles 2003; Massey and Fischer 1999; Oliver and Shapiro 1995; Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Shapiro 2004). Individuals in the black middle class are simultaneously highly advantaged and highly disadvantaged.

The black middle class in many ways occupy an in-between position. Economically, they are employed in solidly middle class occupations, yet they lack the intergenerational transmission of wealth that secures white middle class status, particularly in times of financial trouble or hardships (Oliver and Shapiro 1997, Shapiro 2004, Conley 1999). They have achieved social mobility but are often still burdened with significant responsibilities for extended family (Oliver and Shapiro 1997, Shapiro 2004).

Socially and professionally, they must navigate their racial identity in the white world within which they often work and sometimes live (Andersen and Collins 1995; Lacy 2004). Similarly, when making educational choices for their children, black middle class families face additional dilemmas as they generally both understand the importance of a strong educational foundation, but are also aware of various obstacles their children are likely to confront in school (Lewis 2003, Kozol 2005, Lucas 1999, Lacy 2007). For example, many "good" schools, considered to have the strongest academic program, are predominantly white and middle class and do not necessarily function as "good" schools for black children who face racialized tracking or other forms of subtle or explicit discrimination (Condron 2007, Lacy 2007, Delpit 1997, Ferguson 1998, Frankenburg and Lee 2002, Hallinan 1994, Gamoran 1992; Lewis 2003, Lucas 1999, Oakes and Guiton 1995, Yancey and Saporito 1995). Even in some of the nation's best schools where black students are shown to do well academically, research shows they pay many social and psychological costs (Higginbotham 2001, Willie 2003).

So while black middle-class families are strategic in advocating for their children in the same ways as other middle-class families (Lareau 2003, Lacy 2007), they operate within potentially quite different constraints. Parents, regardless of race, draw on a range of information about school quality when making educational decisions for their children (Johnson 2006, Lacy 2004, Holme 2002; Saporito and Lareau 1999). Yet, Black parents must often pay attention to a whole set of additional factors when considering their children's futures. Attewell, Lavin, Domina, and Levy (2007) demonstrate that many African American children have greater rates of downward mobility than their white counterparts. In light of these concerns, ultimately, then, how do black middle class

parents navigate the challenge of maximizing their children's educational experiences while minimizing the impact of racial discrimination?

Being Black and Middle Class

Parameters and Status of the Black Middle Class

After the Civil Rights Movement, in the context of the post-WWII economic expansion in the United States, the black middle class grew substantially. According to Pattillo-McCoy (1999),

> The period from 1945 to the early 1970s was extraordinary in terms of opening opportunities for African Americans. Predominantly white educational institutions were admitting black students in large numbers, businesses were recruiting at black colleges, and unions yielded to the pressure of their formerly excluded black coworkers (p. 18).

With the growth of the black middle class (Charles 2003, Massey and Fischer 1999), scholars began to take note of this group.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the growth of the middle class waned, especially for black men, because of the economic situation of the United States (Landry 1987) but rebounded somewhat in the 1990s (Wilson 1995). While substantial, the Black middle class is collectively distinct from the white middle class as its members are more often employed in lower middle class occupations like clerical and sales positions than members of the white middle class who are often employed in higher status middle class occupations (Pattillo-McCoy 1999b). In fact, as research on the black middle class expanded, studies began to focus on not just the parameters and experiences of a monolithic "black middle class" but on important diversity within the group. Lacy (2007) suggests that there are three groups of middle class blacks:

Socioeconomic indicators, lifestyle decisions, and the varied spatial patterns of middle-class blacks suggest that there are good reasons to divide the black middle class into distinct groups – those individuals earning less than $50,000, … lower-middle-class; those individuals earning more than $50,000 but less than $100,000, who…constitute the core black middle class; and those individuals earning more than $100,000, …the elite black middle class (p. 41).

These varying class statuses directly impact how members of the black middle class live. The social and economic experiences of the core and elite black middle class vary greatly from those of the lower middle class. The core and elite black middle class have resources at their disposal that may shield them from the everyday discrimination, limited residential options, and lack of wealth accumulation in ways that the lower middle class do not (Lacy 2007). Those same resources may also place members of the core and elite black middle class more susceptible to particular forms of discrimination than their lower class peers (Forman 2003).

With the growth of the black middle class, the spatial distance between black poor and black middle class individuals has increased. It is important to note that the black middle class is no longer a monolithic group (Cohen 1999, Dawson 1994, Lacy 2007). It is widely accepted that part of the black middle class blacks live in core and periphery areas (Jargowsky and Bane 1991, Morenoff and Sampson 1997, Pattillo-McCoy 1999) that place them in varying levels of proximity to other classes of blacks. Many blacks who live in solidly middle class communities, whether black or white areas, have been able to buffer themselves and families from many of the ills that plague the lower middle class. Although part of the black middle class remains connected to the larger, poorer black population socially and politically, Pattillo-McCoy (1999) suggests "African Americans, like other groups, have always tried to translate upward class mobility into geographic mobility" (p. 23). Many members of the black middle class have "out-

migrated" into the suburbs from the inner city (Wilson 1987). This out-migration has in part been driven by the search for better schools (Johnson 2006; Lacy 2007; Warren and Warren Tyagi 2003; Wilson 1987; Wilson and Tettey-Fio 2006).

Residential Patterns

Despite the growth of the black middle class and their increased mobility, national data show that Black racial residential segregation has persisted over time at all income levels, (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Charles 2003; Crowder, South and Chavez 2006; Krysan and Farley 2002; Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Krysan 1997) and is not forecasted to change in the near future (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996, Krysan and Farley 2002). Many middle class blacks live in less affluent, predominantly black neighborhoods (Pattillo-McCoy 1999) and less affluent integrated neighborhoods with more black families and lower SES white families (Quillian 2002). While recent research shows that some middle class blacks who are able (given their resources and local demographics) choose to live in affluent, predominantly black neighborhoods or in affluent, integrated mostly white neighborhoods (Lacy 2004), many middle class black neighborhoods are bordered by lower class neighborhoods, typically plagued with drugs and crime (Pattillo-McCoy 1999). As a result, residents of middle class black neighborhoods are more likely to come into contact with drugs and crime than their white middle class peers.

The Black middle class's unique residential patterns are important for a number of reasons, not least of which is that the persistence of this racial residential segregation leads to the schools attended by these children having vastly different racial and socioeconomic compositions than their white middle class peers (Kahlenberg 2003, Saporito and Sohoni 2006). Black middle class students generally attend predominantly

minority schools with higher levels of poverty and fewer resources than the schools that white middle class students attend (Lamont and Lareau 1988; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell 1999). Bankston and Caldas (1996) find negative effects of school minority concentration on levels of achievement. As the percentage of minority students in a school increases, academic achievement for all racial and ethnic groups decreases. Although their study examines school segregation, it should be noted that since schools are usually drawn from their residential catchment area that schools look very much like the neighborhoods within which they exist (Frankenberg and Lee 2002; Jaynes and Williams 1989; Roscigno 2000). Further, studies demonstrate that there is no group of people more segregated from whites in the suburbs than African Americans (Ascher and Branch-Smith 2005; Logan 2001). In communities where middle class blacks reside with whites, their white neighbors are much less affluent than they are and the resources in their communities are not comparable to their white middle class counterparts (Alba, Logan, and Stults 2000).

Wealth Patterns

Closely linked to homeownership is the notion that true middle class status is not only determined by one's level of education, amount of income, or type of occupation, but also one's net wealth. Oliver and Shapiro (1997) suggest that individuals are securely in the middle class when they are able to buffer themselves in times of financial hardship. For example, when a family member loses a job or experiences some other sort of economic difficulty, individuals in the middle class should be able to buffer themselves with savings, assets, inheritances, and other indicators of wealth. Middle class status is dependent upon "wealth and income . . . [that] together create a solid economic

foundation that simultaneously safeguards a secure standard of living and enhances future life chances" (Oliver and Shapiro 1997:94). For many members of the black middle class, financial standing is much more precarious and tenuous than members of the white middle class.

In terms of wealth, white families have about 10 times as much wealth as similarly situated black families (Conley 1999; Oliver and Shapiro 1997). In addition, blacks "still tend to be the last hired, the first fired and laid off, and disproportionately relegated to seasonal and part-time employment" (Oliver and Shapiro, 1997, p. 117). Post-recession reports indicate blacks, particularly black men, have been adversely impacted by the economic shift in the US economy. Actually, the disparity between blacks and other ethnic groups rates of unemployment has increased since the recession (Kuehn 2013; Nichols and Simms 2012). Although many black and white families have similar amounts of human capital, there seems to be "a racial wealth tax at work" as displayed by the substantial wealth gap between blacks and whites (Oliver and Shapiro, 1997, p. 135). The wealth differences in addition to the continued discrimination in the labor market contribute to the continued disparity in the black-white middle class experience (Oliver and Shapiro 1997). Black household wealth is often calculated based on multiple wage earners and blacks have less inheritance and savings (Ascher and Branch-Smith 2005; Conley 1999; Shapiro 2004,). Further, Johnson (2006) notes "wealth gives parents the capacity to provide stable homeownership, safer neighborhood environments, better educational experiences, and more expansive opportunities to their children" (8). Thus wealth plays a particularly important role in determining both middle class status and the range of educational options available for black families.

Although many members of the black middle class have achieved educational success by earning baccalaureate, graduate, and professional degrees, there are still income gaps in the amounts that they are paid when compared to their white middle class peers (Landry 1987). Further, the segmented black middle class has quite different lived experiences. The lower black middle class does not have access to the same resources and networks as members of the core and elite black middle class. These disparities result in the black middle class being neither in the same position as other blacks or middle class whites. Although Lareau (2003) has suggested that white and middle class families are more alike than dissimilar, given the many differences between white and black middle class families, it is reasonable to assume that both the schooling experiences of black middle class children and families and the ways by which black middle class parents determine which schools their children will attend would be quite different between the two groups. Further, the experiences of middle class blacks could potentially be quite different from the schooling experiences and choices of their black lower and working class counterparts.

Race and Schooling Experiences

Schools are as highly segregated, if not more so, than the neighborhoods from which their attendance lines are drawn (Benson and Borman 2010; Frankenberg and Lee 2002; Orfield and Ashkinaze 1991; Saporito and Sohoni 2006,). Many of the problems faced by urban, minority schools are also experienced by middle class blacks. Issues of unequal funding that plague inner city, predominantly minority schools also plague many of the schools that have high black middle class enrollments (Kozol 2005). These kinds of resource gaps are consequential. For instance, Condron and Roscigno (2003) find that

unequal funding in districts not only impacts the resources available to schools but also the quality of the teaching occurring in the schools. Both resource and teacher quality disparities have direct impact on academic achievement. Again, schools with high minority enrollments report lower overall academic achievement than schools with lower minority enrollment (Bankston and Caldas 1996). Ascher and Branch-Smith (1991), in their study of two middle class black communities, list three primary reasons for poor academic performance of black middle class public, suburban schools: lower property values and a lower tax base than in surrounding White suburban districts offer less funding for public education; school governance conflicts afflicting many school districts are often magnified in academically struggling Black suburbs, distracting from teaching and learning, and teachers, administrators, and the community label students as ''urban'' or ''inner city,'' with the implied expectations of "urban dysfunctions" and lower goals for student success (p. 1962). These studies suggest that the very schools that black middle class students attend function in such a way that educational attainment will be hindered.

In addition to concerns about the types of schools that black middle class children attend, there are a number of within school processes of which parents must be aware. Research shows a number of different ways black students face discrimination in school. Studies addressing tracking have revealed that students from lower socioeconomic background and racial and ethnic minority groups are more likely to be tracked into lower classes across all levels of primary and secondary education (Condron 2007; Gamoran 1992; Hallinan 1994; Lacy 2007; Lucas 1999; Oakes and Guiton 1995). Studies have also demonstrated that variation exists in the type of instruction given within groups

(Ainsworth and Roscigno 2005; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Kozol 2005;Oakes 1985; Pallas, Entwisle, Alexander, and Stluka 1994). Teacher bias has been documented to have real consequences for students' treatment in the classroom and access to advantaged positions (Delpit 1988; Ferguson 2003; Grant 1984; Lewis 2003; Rist 1970). Even in instances where middle class black students are doing "all of the right things" – doing well academically and behaving according to dominant standards –prevailing stereotypes of black students shape their interactions with teachers and administrators. As a result of this reification of race, black students displaying all of the appropriate middle class cultural signals may not benefit from their class backgrounds because of their racial status.

Another important within school process is the role of teacher expectations in the classroom. Grant (1984) noted the roles that teachers assign students in classrooms and how those roles are similar to those assumed in adult life. Young black girls, for example, are considered to fulfill the helper role in the classroom and are expected to help the teacher manage the classroom whereas young white girls are often considered the smartest students in the classroom and expected to academically excel. Noguera and Wing (2006) note that these "sorting practices… treat race as an unofficial proxy for academic ability" (p. 5). Other scholars have noted that as a result of tracking, black students are often placed in classrooms with mediocre teachers with low expectations of their students (Lucas 1999; Noguera and Wing 2006; Oakes and Guiton 1995; Perry, Steele, and Hilliard 2004).

Some scholars argue that schools often function as "white institutions" (Lewis 2003; Lin 2000; Mickelson 2003; Walters 2001). For example, while all students bring

cultural resources into the school from their homes and neighborhoods only certain cultural resources are rewarded and considered appropriate for school (Lewis 2003).   In some cases, black children face potentially lower returns to achievement for black students when they invest in cultural trips and educational resources than for their white counterparts (Roscigno and Ainsworth Darnell 1999). Research suggests that there are micropolitical processes occurring on the part of the teacher and within the school that affect returns to cultural capital for black students (Lewis 2003; Lareau and Horvat 1999; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell 1999).   Although black students may have similar amounts and types of dominant cultural capital (Carter 2005) as their white counterparts, individuals who should reward that capital, i.e. teachers and administrators, may perceive its activation differently and subsequently reward that activation differently, resulting in lower returns for black students (Lareau and Horvat 1999, McNeal 1999).   These dynamics are echoed in relationships between schools and parents. For example, Lareau and Horvat (1999) show that a black parent and white parent engaging in the same type of action (e.g. going to the school to inquire about a subject) were perceived very differently – the black parent's actions as negative and disruptive as compared to the white parent's legitimate involvement.

Yet another area of concern for black middle class parents is the variation in their children's schooling experiences based on the gender of the child. Noguera (2003) and Ferguson (2000) highlight the negative experiences of black males in school. While in school, "black males are more likely than any other group to be suspended and expelled from school… more likely to be classified as mentally retarded or suffering from a learning disability, more likely to be placed in special education, and more likely to be

absent from advanced-placement and honors courses" (p. 432). These adverse outcomes in schooling for young black males are not moderated by class. Jencks and Phillips (1998) find that middle class blacks lag behind their white middle class male peers academically. Although young black girls are not as often considered deviant, they are often considered invisible (Fordham 1993). Girls who excel academically must conform to appropriate behavioral standards in higher grade levels. In lower grade levels, black girls are often considered, as mentioned earlier, "helpers, enforcers, and go-betweeners" (Grant 1984). The gender identity of black children in schools is another area of schooling experiences with which black middle class parents must contend.

Research on Black students' experiences in schools raises a number of dilemmas for black parents generally and Black middle class parents in particular. Many black students attend highly segregated and under-resourced schools. Black children attending the same schools and sitting in the same classrooms with white students are often treated differently than their white counterparts, regardless of class status. Black male students are far more likely to be disciplined and placed into a lower academic or special education tracks than their white male or female peers. Contending with the implications of race inside of the classroom is an enduring battle for black middle class parents.

Choosing Schools

In many instances, a child attends the school in their residential catchment area (Saporito and Sohoni 2006). As a result of black racial residential segregation, black middle class families' residential options are often limited by housing market discrimination (Feagin and Sikes 1994), residential preferences (Farley 1996) or the black-white wealth gap (Shapiro 2004). Although there are many factors that determine

where individuals reside, for black middle class families, that choice often does not come down to how much home they are able to afford. Here, class status, as indicated by income and wealth, suggests that black middle class families can purchase homes in areas wherein they should have access to great schools and amenities. They can afford to reside in solidly middle class areas. However, in many instances, black middle class families do not find themselves in neighborhoods with their white middle class counterparts. In many cases, middle class families make residential decisions based on schools. Often, these decisions result in white and black middle class families living in very different neighborhoods. Although white families say they prefer to live in racially integrated neighborhoods, they overwhelmingly make decisions leading to racially segregated neighborhoods and schools (Farley, Fielding, and Krysan 1997; Holme 2002; Johnson 2006). Frequently, black middle class families do not reside in the neighborhoods zoned for the 'best' schools. Ultimately in cases where black families are dissatisfied with their zoned neighborhood school, black middle class families are forced to employ school choice options such as charter schools, magnet schools, or private schooling for their children (Bifulco, Ladd, and Ross 2009; Carnoy et al 2005; Haynes, Phillips, and Goldring 2010; Henig 1996; Smrekar 2009; Wells et al 1999).

During the process of choosing non-neighborhood public school options, the wealth gap plays a pivotal role. One of the real consequences of the wealth gap is that blacks are unable to provide the same sorts of opportunities for their children as are whites. Johnson (2006) claims that "regardless of how much they [families without wealth to transfer] may want to choose the best for their children, regardless of how badly they wish they could give them advantageous opportunities, [families without wealth to

transfer] are not as easily able to act on these choices" (159). By and large, examples of inherited wealth being used for down payment on a home or private school tuition was a luxury that white middle class parents often take for granted (Hardaway and McLoyd 2009; Johnson 2006; Shapiro 2004). Shapiro (2004) finds that 1 in 10 white students attend private schools compared to 1 in 25 black students, which is directly related to the net worth of black and white families. These wealth differences restrict the options that many black middle class families have for schooling for their children.

Black middle class parents must also navigate the delicate balance between class and race status. Many blacks engage in strategic assimilation (Lacy 2004). Strategic assimilation is a theory developed by Lacy to explain the effort on the part of black middle class parents to "want their children to fit in and succeed among whites while maintaining a strong connection to the black community, the community that will always accept them" (Lacy 2007, p. 157). For black middle class parents, then, they are forced to decide whether their children should attend predominantly black schools with subpar facilities, resources, and academic performance while exposing their children to white interactions in other capacities or opt for their children to attend predominantly white well-resourced, high achieving institutions and manage the social activities of their children to ensure their black involvement. Striking this balance in selecting a school can be quite difficult. Parents often work in predominantly white environments, and, as a result, understand the importance of interracial interaction as part of the key to success (Feagin and Sikes 1994). However, given their experiences with those white environments, both past and present, may be guarded in deciding what type and frequency of interaction is best for their children.

Focusing specifically on parenting styles, Lareau (2002) has argued that class status plays a more important role in child rearing practices (such as choosing a school) than does race status.   The process of 'concerted cultivation' is a middle class phenomenon wherein parents actively involve their children in activities and situations to prepare them for middle class adult interactions. Working class families, she argues, subscribe to natural growth, allowing their children to "be children" and learn through playing outside and other childlike activities. Thus, Lareau's work suggests that black middle class families engage in very similar processes as white families in actively seeking out optimal educational settings for their children. Similarly, Diamond and Gomez (2004) find that school choice decisions are class based as evidenced by the differences in childrearing practices between working and middle class black parents. They find that middle class parents customized their children's educational experiences by utilizing their resources, exercising their entitlement to query agents of the schools, and in some instances, living near better elementary schools than their working class counterparts who often sent their children without question to the schools to which they were assigned.

Not surprisingly, there is a lot of evidence that black middle class parents are invested in and careful about how they educate their children (Cooper 2007). It is important to these parents that their children are in productive academic environments (Lacy 2007; Lareau 2002). In so much as they can, these parents are aware of the types of schools that their children attend and the processes occurring within the schools that might impact their children. Although black middle class parents are armed with the value of schooling and the knowledge of what happens inside and outside of the

classroom, there is much evidence that they make these decisions with different resources and within different constraints than their white middle class peers and their segmented black peers. Living in residentially segregated neighborhoods and having less amounts of wealth from which to draw impedes the decision making process of certain black middle class parents in ways that do not exist for white middle class parents. Further, finding middle class schools invested in fair treatment of black students is a challenge for black middle class parents and non-existent for white middle class parents. White middle class parents do not have to be concerned with their children enduring dominant stereotypes based on their racial classification. Further, schools teach, reinforce, and reward dominant middle class values and practices. Lewis (2003) suggests that schools are race making institutions. In addition to teaching dominant class standards, schools teach and reinforce dominant views of race. Students are consistently reminded of their race and class status as they interact with the institution of education. As has been argued, schools are white middle class institutions and students identifying as white and middle class will succeed in that setting (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Lewis 2003, Lin 2000; Mickelson 2003; Walters 2001t).

Racial Socialization

As summarized by Peters (1985: 57), "Although they may hope for a better world of future full of fairness and racial equality, Black parents understand that they face an extraordinary challenge: to raise children who will be able to survive in a racist-oriented society." While not all Black parents use the same strategies to address this challenge, research over the last several decades shows that most do think strategically about how to address it (Lesane-Brown 2006; Morris & Monroe 2009; Thornton et al. 1990)**.** Thornton

et al. (1990) define racial socialization as "specific messages designed to communicate racial status around personal and group identity, intergroup relationships, and societal stigma" (Smalls 2009:204). There are a number of strategies commonly used by black parents to prepare their children for success in a society where race matters (McAdoo 2001; Peters 1985).

How parents racially socialize children has consequences for schooling outcomes. Racial socialization has been used primarily to understand how African American parents prepare their children for a world wherein race matters. Broadly, racial socialization explores how parents make decisions about "exposure to cultural practices and objects, efforts to instill pride in and knowledge about African Americans, discussions about discrimination and how to cope with it, and strategies for succeeding in mainstream society" (Hughes et al. 2006). One of the consequences for racial socialization concerns how children process these various messages with regard to various social institutions, specifically the institution of education. Scholars suggest that "black parents may orient their children in particular ways toward racial barriers that have consequences for their motivation, academic performance, and mobility" (Bowman and Howard 1985:136). The messages communicated to black children by their parents can have direct impact on student academic performance as well as parental interaction with school stakeholders (Bowman and Howard 1985, Caughy et al. 2002).

Black parents employ differing orientations to prepare their children for success in a racially conscious world. Although, not all black parents intentionally use race socialization as a strategy of proactively orienting their children to cope with racial barriers and inequalities (Bowman and Howard 1985), silence is a type of strategy

(Caughy et al. 2011)[1]. The majority of black parents do employ some sort of strategy to prepare their children for being black in America (Sanders Thompson 1994). According to Sanders Thompson (1994), there are four commonly used race-related socialization themes: ethnic pride, promotion of mistrust, racial barriers, and egalitarianism (and silence).

Ethnic Pride: Many black parents engage in transmitting messages of ethnic pride to their children encouraging them to be proud of their blackness and to remain committed to black causes.   This strategy is often referred to as cultural socialization because parents, either consciously or implicitly, engage in "teaching children about their racial or ethnic heritage, promoting cultural customs and traditions, and promoting children's cultural, racial, and ethnic pride" (Thompson 2010:11).

Promotion of Mistrust: Other black parents engage in teaching their children to be wary of interracial interactions. Parents admonish their children to mistrust other racial groups and do not offer advice or strategies for managing discrimination.

Racial Barriers: Another strategy employed by black parents to prepare their children for being black in a world where race matters is that of racial barriers whereby they ensure their children are aware of the disadvantaged position of blacks in US society. In addition to informing their children about potential bias, parents prepare them to cope with discrimination.

Egalitarian (and Silence): The last strategy employed by black parents is that of egalitarian ideology suggesting that all individuals are equal regardless of race. Parents focus on individual qualities of people and emphasize strategies allowing for success in

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[1] Silence is considered a strategy of racial socialization by some scholars. Other scholars argue that silence is a type of egalitarianism (Hughes et al. 2006).

mainstream society. Parents specifically highlight hard work, virtue, self-acceptance, and equality (Marshall 1995; Thornton et al. 1990). Silence about race communicates values about and perspectives on race to children, indicating that race is a non-issue.

It is incumbent upon black middle class parents to decide whether teaching their children about how race works in the United States is a priority at all. Realizing that schools may not impart any positive concept of their children's racial selves may be a consideration when choosing schools for some black parents. In addition, the strategies that they employ or attempt to teach their children may prove relevant when deciding to which type of school to send their children.

Parents' racial socialization strategies are related to their racial identity. The perspective that parents have of their own racial identity is an important factor in the messages about race they transmit to their children (Brown and Brown 2006; Sellers et al. 1998). Parents have different perspectives of their racial position in society, perhaps based on their own experiences or messages communicated to them by their parents or other socializing agents. During the 20th Century, the idea that blacks were all connected to one another and that "the haves" would reach back to pull up "the have nots" was prevalent in much thought about within race interactions. DuBois (1903) posited the idea of "The Talented Tenth" as just that – the educated blacks would teach the uneducated blacks and the black race would achieve success as it had never before known. Here, at the turn of the 21st Century, the concept of "each one, teach one" – the linked fate of blacks – is more complex than it was when there were fewer opportunities available to blacks. Dawson (1994) posits that there is a tension between African Americans having a unique identity and their shared group identity. Blacks, in the past, have often used the

success of the group as a whole as a proxy for their own potential for success. However, as Blacks have become increasingly diversified by class, their interests have shifted (Cohen 1999; Dawson 2001; Shelby 2005; Tate 2010). Within American politics, Dawson (1994) suggests that as other interests become more salient, e.g. economic interests, the concept of individual fates being linked to the fate of the larger group decreases and blacks begin to make decisions based on a wider range of factors, resulting in more choices for blacks.

Extending this argument to the process of choosing schools for their children, members of the black middle class may not necessarily perceive their fates as connected to the fate of the larger black community in ways that were once the case. The educational decisions that they make for their children may have much less to do with the idea of a linked fate and responsibility to the larger black community than with some other concerns, such as interracial interactions or academic achievement. Many choices that black middle class parents make may not actually be in the best interest of the black community; rather, in the best interest for themselves and their families, e.g. residential choices. Their decisions are not related to the greater good for blacks; instead, what In this regard, black middle class parents may function more like white parents than black parents of different class position.

Filling in the Gaps

Scholars have defined who comprises the black middle class and have distinguished them from the white middle class and black working and poor classes. There are studies describing the residential patterns of where members of the black middle class live and exploring the decision making processes that factor into

determining where black middle class families reside. Scholarship on the wealth gap has shown significant differences in resources between black and white middle class families – resource differences that shape educational options for black families. Scholars of education have provided many illustrations of differential treatment of black students inside of the classrooms. Black students are often treated based on stereotypes of black students not being able to excel academically, having negative dispositions, and as disciplinary concerns. These factors affect how teachers view and treat black students – and, how black students view the educational enterprise more broadly. Further, the actions of black parents are perceived along racial stereotypes and interpreted very differently than those of white parents. Black middle class parents must battle with the reification of race in the classroom of their child and in the larger school building on behalf of their child.

Black parents are aware that their children will have to confront their racial position at some point in their lives. In an effort to ensure the maintenance of their children's class status, parents are strategic about how they engage their children in conversations about race. These strategies vary for parents and result in children often having very different racial orientations than their parents or grandparents. In addition, parents themselves have their own racial identity that determines how they perceive race and their place in society, individually and relative to other blacks (Sellers et al 1998, Dawson 1994).

Scholars are increasingly focusing much attention on the idea of class reproduction among black middle class families. Since black middle class families are similar to white middle class families in a number of important ways, it is logical to

conclude that they too would want to reproduce their class status for their children. The strategies employed by middle class black parents may be similar to white middle class families in many ways but there are also major differences as black families are still subjected to race-based constraints, whether current, i.e. teacher bias towards a black child in a classroom, or historic, i.e., wealth inequalities across generations. Those constraints prevent middle class blacks from fully experiencing a middle class lifestyle and requires that they prepare their children to be successful while navigating this duality of race and class. One way that we can begin to determine how black middle class families attempt to reproduce middle class status in their children is to understand the role that they perceive education having in their children's development. If education is still perceived as 'the great equalizer' (Downey, von Hippel, and Broh 2004), the key to success in mainstream America, then its role is particularly important for black middle class children who have the markers of class status as well as the stigma of race. How do middle class parents balance their race and class status, which in many ways occupy contradictory positions? To better understand the process by which black middle class parents make sense of the current schooling structure and of what considerations are most important for their children are key in better understanding the experiences of middle class blacks.

Focus of Dissertation

My goal in this dissertation is to begin to uncover the processes middle class black parents employ when making educational decisions for their children. It examines this process on three levels. Firstly, I endeavor to determine if black middle class parents utilize class markers as a way of determining school choice in a similar manner to that of

white middle class parents using race. In so doing, it is important to include all groups comprising the black middle class. Uncovering some of the differences within members of the black middle class will highlight variation within the black middle class as well as across black and white middle class parents. Do middle class black parents use class in determining school quality in a way similar to white middle class parents? How do they evaluate class status? Secondly, I explore the role of wealth in determining school choice for black middle class parents. Although we know that wealth is unequal between white and black middle class families, we do not know exactly how wealth, or the lack thereof, may inhibit black parents from placing their children in the school of their choice. Would black middle class parents make different decisions for their children if they had greater resources? What accommodations have they made for their lack of wealth? Thirdly, I emphasize the strategies these parents utilize in their own understanding of race and how they communicate messages about race to their middle class children. Are these messages similar to the ways these parents discuss class? Is there a particular way black middle class parents talk with black middle class children about their race status or their class status?

Class or Race?

Much of what we know regarding school decision making processes lies in the understanding of what middle class parents do when deciding on schools for their children. However, most of this information is based on white middle class parental experiences (Chubb and Moe 1990, Cookson 1994, Holme 2002, Horvat,Weininger, and Lareau 2003, Johnson 2006). Overwhelmingly, scholars agree that the school choice process is a universal experience - parents consider school quality and its correlates

above all other factors (Chubb and Moe 1990). However, Saporito and Lareau (1999) suggest that there are key distinctions between the processes employed by black and white parents when choosing schools for their children, albeit with similar goals in mind.

White parents often seek to avoid schools with high percentages of black students and then, after ensuring that a school is less than 90% black, consider other factors when making school choice decisions for their children (Saporito and Lareau 1999, Holme 2002, Johnson 2006). Holme (2002) illustrates that many white middle class families often do not even visit schools for which their neighborhood is zoned, rather rely on the reports of similarly situated whites currently living in the neighborhood. White middle class parents hope to avoid high numbers of black students, regardless of class background (Saporito and Lareau 1999). For many white middle class families the racial composition of the schools in their neighborhood determines where they eventually purchase a home. Black parents, on the other hand, consider a number of factors including safety, academic quality, and college preparation (Saporito and Lareau 1999). In addition, black families consistently expressed concern for the poverty rate of the school as a primary consideration in making school decisions (Henig 1996). Further, black families desire racially diverse neighborhoods and schools for their children (Shapiro 2004). Class seems to matter for black families similarly to the way that race matters for white families when making school decisions.

The Role of Wealth

Annette Lareau (2002) suggests that black middle class and white middle class parents engage in very similar child rearing practices. However, black and white middle class children are raised in very different settings. The black middle class is not a

monolithic group. Rather there are three distinct groups within the black middle class: lower middle class blacks, the core middle class, and the elite middle class (Lacy 2007). Black families comprising the lower middle class are much more likely to live near poorer neighborhoods and have less access to resources that could translate into real opportunities for their children. Members of the core and elite black middle class have differing experiences from their lower middle class black peers as well as their white middle class peers. Core and elite black middle class parents are concerned with the academic quality of the education received by their children, while considering other factors (Lacy 2007).

Race Matters

Further, black middle class parents must weigh the role of race alongside that of class. Class markers are important to teach their children but parents must also utilize strategies for navigating a social system that is racially biased. Parents employ various racial socialization strategies for their children in an effort to prepare them for dealing with race as adults. Within the black middle class, there are diverse approaches to navigating racial identity and intraracial interactions. Not only are these approaches necessary for members of the middle class but parents would seemingly be strategic in preparing their children for their future roles as members of the black middle class. Lacy (2007) presents a theory of strategic assimilation for members of the black middle class[2]. She suggests that members of the black middle class are strategic in negotiating their race and class status as it pertains to whites and lower class blacks. Lacy (2007) illustrates

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[2] Lacy focuses on the upper black middle class (core and elite middle class), those making $50,000 or more annually and working in predominantly white environments.

how strategic assimilation operates in choosing a home and for social interactions among

the black middle class.

Chapter Three

Methodology

I conducted in-depth interviews with 76 middle class[3] black parents of students in Pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade living in the metropolitan Atlanta, Georgia area during the 2010-2011 academic year. Using a snowball sample, I interviewed parents from 59 middle class black families. I used multiple starting points: individual acquaintances with whom I had conversed about school decision making, alumni associations of the colleges and universities that I attended, and respondents from various organizational affiliations, primarily the black Greek community and other civic organizations. Recruitment occurred by email, telephone, and face to face. I had a total of 76 individual respondents, comprising the 59 family units.

Insert Table 1 Here.

There were only two criteria for respondent's participation. The first was that one member of the parental unit must be African American. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggested that immigrant students had different motivations to achieve academic success. Further the response of immigrant parents to many of the racially discriminatory experiences of black middle class families are quite different from those of native born blacks (Waters 1999). The response of dominant institutions to immigrant blacks is different from the response received by native born blacks. As a result, the experiences of both immigrant black parents, in their home country and in the United States, and their children are distinct from the educational and life experiences of black Americans. In this study, I am focusing on the African American experience and as a result, excluded

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[3] The operationalization of middle class is specified later in this section.

non-African Americans from the study; for each family represented, at least one parent had to identify as African American[4].

The second criteria for inclusion concerned the labeling of respondents as middle class. There is much debate as to how to classify individuals as middle class. Lacy (2007) spends a great deal of time in her book, Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class, describing the differences among how sociologists define the black middle class. For the purposes of this study, it was important to look for and discern patterns among the various strategies used by black middle class parents when making educational decisions for their children. Some sociologists argue that wealth is the most important factor in determining class status (Johnson 2006; Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Shapiro 2004). Yet, there is debate about the role of income in determining class status (Haynes 2001; Feagin nd Sikes 1994; Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Shapiro 2004). Others argue that lifestyle is a more important aspect of class (Bourdieu 1977, Lacy 2007). Another area wherein there is some disagreement concerns educational attainment as it relates to determining middle class status (Lacy 2007). Some sociologists argue that some college is sufficient for middle class status while others contend a degree is required. Given the educational experience for many middle class blacks in the metropolitan area, the requirement for inclusion was that at least one parent had to have an undergraduate degree. This criterion was selected in an effort to include as many members of the black middle class as possible. This allows for two scholarly goals: to distinguish among the black middle class and to speak of the same group of people as other scholars. Ultimately, I am able to compare my results within the black

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[4] In two cases, respondents did not identify as African American but as second generation immigrant and were included in the study.

middle class sample that I have collected and to compare the findings of other scholars about the same black middle class.

The segregated south has a rich and complicated history (Morris and Monroe 2009). Overarching patterns of racial segregation are apparent in most metropolitan areas. For the purposes of this study, I used two areas of variation when selecting respondents. The first area was neighborhood composition. Logically, I was interested in uncovering what sort of decisions people made about where to live. Since there are many different types of neighborhoods wherein a family can choose to reside and middle class families are better financially equipped to have choice as to residential options, I was curious to find out why families chose to live in their particular neighborhoods. Did individuals choose their neighborhoods based on a desire to have a diverse residential experience or to have a racially homogenous neighborhood for comfort? These were the types of questions for which I hoped to find answers.

Residential choices could inform the types of schools parents chose for their schools. In some instances, living in a racially segregated area indicates that children are zoned for residentially segregated schools. These parents may consciously decide to live in racially segregated areas and have their children attend racially segregated schools based on their own racial identity development or how they choose to racially socialize their children. The possibility could also exist that parents choosing to live in racially segregated areas intentionally choose to send their children to integrated schools. In the same way, parents choosing to live in integrated or predominantly white areas children will be zoned to attend predominantly white or integrated schools. These parents may make different choices about how to racially socialize their children. For example, they

may intentionally choose predominantly black extra-curricular activities for their children as a part of their racial socialization strategy.

Respondents were divided into three categories based on the racial composition of their neighborhood. An integrated neighborhood is described as a neighborhood wherein the residents are 20 to 60% black. A predominantly black neighborhood is greater than 60% black and a predominantly white neighborhood is less than 20% black. These percentages were chosen to ensure that neighborhoods described as predominantly white were predominantly white in light of the racial residential segregation literature suggesting that once a neighborhood is greater than 30% black that whites begin to leave (Clark 1991). During the interviews, parents were asked to describe their neighborhood and how they ended up in that particular neighborhood. They were also asked for their home address and 2000 Census tract data was used to determine the racial composition of their neighborhoods.

The other area of variation concerned racial contact preferences of the parents with whom I interviewed. I was interested in the social distance desired by parents who had been in the metropolitan area for different amounts of time. The variation was based on which families had resided in the metropolitan area for more than ten years. Those families new to the metropolitan area, living here for less than ten years, may have different preferences for interracial interactions than do their longtime (longer than ten year) resident counterparts. In the metropolitan area wherein I conducted interviews, a black family could live in a neighborhood, attend schools, worship in church, volunteer in service organizations, and shop in grocery and retail stores and not see a person of another racial background. As a result, it is possible that individuals who have lived in

the South for quite some time had grown accustomed to a lifestyle with little interracial interaction. I hypothesized that the longer a family resided in this segregated Southern metropolitan area, the more likely they were to subscribe to the idea of interracial interaction as an unnecessary requirement to effectively rear their children. Ultimately, then, I ended up with six cells wherein to place respondents.

Insert Table 2 Here.

Interviews were conducted using an open-ended interview guide (See Appendix A). The majority of interviews took place face to face – in the homes of respondents, at restaurants, and the place of employment of respondents. A few of the interviews were conducted via phone. All of the interviews, with the exception of two, were voice recorded. Those audio files were transcribed. Notes were taken during the two interviews that were not audio recorded. Interviews were conducted from March of 2010 until March of 2011. Transcribed data was analyzed using MAXQDA software package.

The Setting

Metropolitan Atlanta proves to be an ideal area for this type of study. Atlanta has a thriving black middle class and many educational options. In addition, Atlanta has a number of different neighborhood compositions. There are many predominantly black middle class neighborhoods and areas. Black professionals can live in communities with other black professionals with beautiful homes and landscaping. Since there are a number of educational opportunities in the metropolitan Atlanta area, many blacks are educated creating an educated black population. Further, there are integrated areas as well as predominantly white areas where black families reside. Since Atlanta has been dubbed as 'the Black Mecca', many blacks from all over the world choose to live in this

area allowing for a lot of variability in a study of this nature. Respondents came from ten metropolitan counties with the majority of them from Fulton, DeKalb, Gwinnett, Cobb, and Rockdale Counties. Each of these counties is unique in their racial composition and schooling options. Another interesting characteristic about metropolitan Atlanta is that residential areas have been experiencing a great deal of change and each of the counties. There has been a gret amount of out migration from Atlanta proper into the suburbs.

Fulton County

According to the 2000 Census, Fulton County was 48.11% white and 44.57% black. Fulton County houses the actual city of Atlanta. Using the 2007 American Fact Finder, African Americans have a median income of $37,040 in Fulton County. Those who reported earnings had a mean of $53,031. Of the blacks who reported being employed, 30.3% were in management, professional, and related occupations while 30.8% were employed in sales and office occupations. 25.6% of the black population of Fulton County 25 and over had earned at least a Bachelor's degree. The median home value for blacks in Fulton County was $162,700.

Fulton County has had a few interesting demographic shifts. The Asian population increased by 107.75% between 2000 and 2010. Individuals identifying with two or more races increased by 71.09% and individuals identifying as some other race increased by 45.49%. The total population as of 2010 was 920,581 people. One of the respondents who resides in this county paid $370,000 for a 2,954 square foot home on .64 acres in his predominantly black neighborhood.

Further, Fulton County has an interesting schooling system. There are two school systems within the county. Atlanta Public Schools and Fulton County Schools are two

different districts. Atlanta Public Schools serve the schools that are closer to the actual city of Atlanta. Fulton County Public Schools are those schools situated on the north side of the county serving a majority white population. Both school systems offer some school choice options, particularly through charter schools or special interest (e.g., performing arts) programs.

Dekalb County

According to the 2000 Census, Dekalb County was 49.1% white and 45.2% black. Dekalb County has a part of the city of Atlanta but the majority of the county sits east of the city. Using the 2007 American Fact Finder, African American families have a median income of $44,698 in Dekalb County. Those who reported earnings had a mean of $55,284. Of the blacks who reported being employed, 33.5% were in management, professional, and related occupations while 30.7% were employed in sales and office occupations. 25.2% of the black population of Dekalb County 25 and over had earned at least a Bachelor's degree. The median home value for blacks in Dekalb County was $159,400.

Dekalb County is recognized as the second wealthiest county for middle class blacks, second only to Prince Georges County in Maryland. Dekalb County also has some pretty diverse areas. At one high school in the county over 100 languages and/or dialects are spoken. There were no major demographic shifts with the exception that the Asian population increased by about 32.59% as well as individuals who reported two or more races, which increased by 32.9%. The total population of Dekalb County was 691,893 as reported by the 2010 Census. One of my respondents paid $181,000 for their

2,254 square foot home with 3 bedrooms and 2.5 bathrooms in a predominantly black neighborhood.

Dekalb County has an interesting school system. Dekalb has a number of school choice options – high achiever magnet programs, special interest programs, and a number of charter schools. School choice options start as early as kindergarten. Dekalb County has experienced extreme white flight over the last twenty years. Schools and neighborhoods that were once white are now predominantly black and the schools have followed the same pattern. The southern and central parts of the county are the predominantly black areas.

Gwinnett County

According to the 2000 Census, Gwinnett County was 72.71% white and 13.29% black. Gwinnett County sits northeast of Atlanta. Using the 2007 American Fact Finder, African Americans have a median income of $53,127 in Gwinnett County. Those who reported earnings had a mean of $62,410. Of the blacks who reported being employed, 36% were in management, professional, and related occupations while 36.1% were employed in sales and office occupations. 34% of the black population of Gwinnett County 25 and over had earned at least a Bachelor's degree. The median home value for blacks in Gwinnett County was $197,100.

Gwinnett County is the largest county in the metropolitan area. It boasts a population of 805,321 people. Every ethnic group increased by over 80%. Blacks and individuals claiming two or more increased by the most, 143.11% and 177.45% respectively. Whites grew also but only by a mere 0.39%. One respondent in this county

paid $252,500 for their 2645 square foot home in a predominantly white neighborhood zoned for award winning schools.

Gwinnett County schools are bound by residential neighborhoods. There are a number of private schools, many of whom espouse Christian values, in the county and one charter high school specializing in math and science. Gwinnett County is considered one of the most diverse counties in the state. The schools reflect high numbers of blacks, Asians, and Latinos who are recent additions to the demographics of the county. The southern side of the county is predominantly black while the eastern side has large numbers of Asian students.

Cobb County

According to the 2000 Census, Cobb County was 72.4% white and 18.8% black. Fulton County houses the actual city of Atlanta. Using the 2007 American Fact Finder, African Americans have a median income of $46,854 in Cobb County. Those who reported earnings had a mean of $55,077. Of the blacks who reported being employed, 33.6% were in management, professional, and related occupations while 30.3% were employed in sales and office occupations. 32.1% of the black population of Cobb County 25 and over had earned at least a Bachelor's degree. The median home value for blacks in Fulton County was $182,500.

Cobb County experienced tremendous growth over the past decade. Whites were the only group whose population percentage decreased. Blacks increased by 50.37% while Asians increased by 64.94%. The other two largest groups experiencing growth were those identifying as some other race (67.05%) and individuals claiming two or more

races (64.10%). Cobb County's total population according to the 2010 Census was 688, 078. One of my respondents lived in a 2977 square foot home on a full basement. This respondent paid $243,000 for the home in a predominantly white neighborhood.

Cobb County School District has a number of choice options and charter schools from which parents can choose. Certain parts of the county are known for having particularly high achieving students. Those same schools are also known for having a large predominantly white population. The eastern part of the county is known for not being as racially diverse as the southern part of the county. It was in Cobb County where residents attempted to pass legislation making day work, often performed by Latinos, illegal.

Rockdale County

According to the 2000 Census, Rockdale County was 75.74% white and 18.22% black. Using the 2007 American Fact Finder, African Americans have a median income of $53,068 in Fulton County. Those who reported earnings had a mean of $63,175. Of the blacks who reported being employed, 36.2% were in management, professional, and related occupations while 26.1% were employed in sales and office occupations. 25.7% of the black population of Rockdale County 25 and over had earned at least a Bachelor's degree. The median home value for blacks in Rockdale County was $193,100.

The 2000 Census reports that Rockdale County was 18.22% black but by 2010 the Census reports Rockdale County as 46.42% black. This is an increase of 209.76% in the black population. The entire population of the county grew by 21.54%. The total population of Rockdale as of the 2000 Census was 70,111. Rockdale County experienced

an interesting population shift in the past ten years. One of the respondents from this county paid $375,000 for their 3721 square foot home. Although their neighborhood is predominantly black, neighboring subdivisions are predominantly white.

Rockdale County has a traditional schooling system where most students attend their neighborhood schools. There are a few private school options and one academic magnet high schools. Where parents choose to live in this county directly correlates to w here their children will attend school. Similarly to Dekalb County, Rockdale has seen a tremendous amount of white flight as the numbers of blacks in the county have grown substantially.

My Perspective

It is necessary for me to acknowledge my own struggle with educational decisions as a member of the black middle class. I live in a predominantly black neighborhood. This neighborhood has changed from predominantly white to predominantly black over the course of the last twenty years. Over the past few years, I have seen a number of middle class stores leave my area: specifically Target, Cici's Pizza, Staples, and T.J. Maxx. These stores have all relocated to areas that have a larger white population than my area. It is difficult to see these sorts of resources continue to leave my community and not follow them. Rather than relocate, my children attend schools not in our residential area. I drive across town – about two hour round trip – to take advantage of a private school education for one of my children and a one hour round trip – to take advantage of a magnet school choice option – for another of my children. That is three

hours of commute time to ensure that my children are receiving the best education possible.

For me, the best education involves diverse groups of friends. My children should develop a strong understanding of the world and cultures that are different form their own. It is particularly difficult to do that in a school where everyone is black. I do acknowledge the importance of ethnic diversity so there are a lot of black immigrants at my neighborhood school but there is very little racial diversity. I have exercised great pains to ensure that my children have integrated sporting activities and other racially diverse extra-curricular opportunities. My own experiences with this schooling process allowed me to relate to the parents I interviewed in a very unique way. I was able to hear parents' frustrations and concerns about the decisions they were making or had made for their children. This unique perspective was proved quite useful as I was gathering data. In addition to the shared experience, I was familiar with the school systems, both public and private, across the metropolitan area because I had spent so much time combing through magazines and websites to determine which schools were the best for my children. Conversations with respondents often became shared strategy sessions about what had or had not worked with our children and frequently we knew others who had encountered similar experiences.

I am uniquely situated to have an intimate understanding of the process of choosing schools for black middle class families. In my situation, we are comfortable in our predominantly black neighborhood, shopping at our predominantly black stores and participating in our predominantly black social life. However, we are particularly dissatisfied with our poorly resourced areas. We drive at least twenty minutes to shop at

a health foods specialty store, i.e. Trader Joe's or Whole Foods. We drive at least fifteen minutes to reach restaurants that do not specialize in fried wings, pizza, or fast food style burgers and fries.   We are similarly dissatisfied with our predominantly black, underperforming neighborhood schools. Our children attend the neighborhood elementary school only through third grade and then we begin taking advantage of the school choice options in our county. This process involves researching the different programs, visiting the different schools, and applying through a lottery. In order to be considered for the lottery, we have to gather at least three different verifying documents. The process begins the January before our children will begin school in that fall. We begin this process again after the children finish elementary school only this time we explore the private school options. Private schools can cost up to $25,000 per year so we have to make decisions about each child every year.   Perhaps we could solve our schooling and lack of resource frustrations by relocating to a more integrated area or a predominantly white area but we are concerned that (1) we will not be able to afford the size home that we have grown accustomed to having in our predominantly black, lower valued property and (2) the neighborhood will become less well-resourced and the school quality will decline once black families like ours begin to move there. The experiences of black middle class families in the metropolitan Atlanta area present a number of challenges as well as a number of solutions. In this dissertation, I learned how other families addressed these issues, all the while, considering my own choices, past, present, and future.

Chapter Four:

Residential Preferences

Middle class blacks exist in a world where to be middle class is inherently associated with being white and being black is inherently associated with being lower or working class (Feagin and Sikes 1994, Gregory 1998, Pattillo-McCoy 1999b, Haynes 2001, Lacy 2007). It is difficult for middle class blacks to develop a material reality allowing for both their class and race statuses to coexist. This chapter highlights reasons that middle class black parents choose to live in predominantly white, predominantly black, or integrated environments. Members of the black middle class use linked fate, racial uplift, and the politics of respectability ideologies to explain their residential preferences. In order to take advantage of their middle class lifestyles, members of the black middle class must negotiate the nature of their relationship with other, non-middle class blacks as well as middle class whites. I found that middle class blacks are intentional in their interaction with others and navigate those relationships with care. The middle class black parents in this study are usually unable to develop the types of relationships with other blacks reflective of their race pride because of the costs their middle class status will endure. For example, if middle class blacks choose to live in predominantly black environments, they pay a cost that impacts their long term ability to accrue wealth and maintain middle class amenities and schools (Brown 2012). Much of this navigation of relationship occurs in the choice of residential neighborhood. In their efforts to ensure a middle class experience for their children, the black middle class parents in the current study utilize specific strategies to: 1) protect their children from the

influence of lower and working class blacks, 2) ensure they had access to middle class resources, and 3) protect themselves from the stereotypes attached to the larger black community. Middle class blacks vary in their attempts to separate themselves from the black masses is an effort to eliminate discrimination from the white majority who may not be able to distinguish the middle class markers among various black individuals (Drake and Cayton 1945, Frazier 1957). Feagin (1991) chronicles various ways that middle class blacks consistently experience discrimination in public places, regardless of their class status.

Insert Figure 1 here.

This chapter explores the use of linked fate, racial uplift, and the politics of respectability as guiding ideologies for variation in the separation of middle class blacks from other blacks. Some parents utilized these ideologies as reasons that they moved or planned to move from a particular area. There were strong feelings about the images of success that their children saw regularly, both within and external to the black middle class, and how those images would have impact on their children's perception of acceptable dress and presentation. After a brief discussion of the development of black class identity, I argue that these three ideologies: linked fate, racial uplift, and the politics of respectability can be used to explain residential choice among black middle class parents. Parents choosing to live in predominantly black neighborhoods espouse racial uplift ideologies most often and parents in predominantly white neighborhoods utilize the politics of respectability framework, although these two ideologies are not mutually exclusive. All three sets of parents, including those choosing integrated residential areas, emphasize the effects of linked fate on their experiences.

History of Black Class Identity

The lived experiences of blacks in the United States has been splintered along class lines for centuries. In the early 1900's, slavery had been abolished and blacks were trying to figure out how to construct an identity separate from that of a slave. W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, prolific leaders in the community, had clear ideas as to how this should take place and the two did not agree with one another. Both men wanted to ensure a livelihood for blacks. During this time, a few short decades after emancipation, DuBois advocated providing higher education to equip blacks to do the type of work that had historically been allotted for whites. In so doing, blacks would earn money, purchase property, and gain the respect of whites. Education would assist with the American dreams described, advertised, and made accessible to many whites. Thus, education was a recognizable and acceptable normative accomplishment to everyone, whites and blacks alike. Washington, on the other hand, strongly supported blacks mastering the career fields wherein they would be able to find work, more specifically manual labor. Dubois, an advocate of education, contrasted Washington, a skills-man, worker, and avid capitalist. These two did not come to an agreement on the pursuit of black prosperity and success; rather, some blacks pursued higher education in the hopes that they would earn the respect of whites and that they would be integrated into the mainstream of America. Others developed their craft to ensure that they would be able to feed their families and always have employment, an entirely different, separate, but necessary type of success.

During the Jim Crow Era, many Africans Americans straddled both work and educational identities. Disenfranchisement because of race occurred across any class

divisions that may have existed among blacks. All blacks were treated poorly across classes. Neighborhoods were not racially integrated nor were schools. Blacks were experiencing discrimination in the economic and political spheres. As a result, blacks experienced an actual linked fate, not a sense of linked fate. It could be argued that there was a singular black experience. Frazier (1957) supports the idea that blacks of all class positions experienced discrimination and isolation from the experience of whites. Everyone was fighting for civil rights – the very unalienable rights that were afforded to every American. Once the Civil Rights Movement ended, blacks began to separate again. Although some saw the movement as a success because of the legislative victories and promise of future change, it was quite clear that blacks were no longer on the same page with one another politically by the early 1980's (Landry 1987). Blacks earned mainstream political positions and jobs. Further, many jobs had moved from the inner cities to the suburbs and blacks were able to move away from the poorer, less educated blacks that they'd formerly been forced to neighbor (Wilson 1987). As a result, many blacks began to see themselves as members of mainstream America, rather than disenfranchised members forced to live in substandard communities with substandard public facilities. This mainstream perspective of some blacks splintered the community – this time the lines were more about the haves and the have not's. Blacks who felt they had achieved mainstream status began to disassociate themselves from blacks aligning themselves with a more marginalized identity. The black middle class parents in this study clearly represent this identity shift.

Modern Black Middle Class Perspectives

A school administrator, divorced father of two, notes his observations of parents who request transfers from their zoned school to other schools in the district, "the challenges, the criticisms I've heard have come from the 'middle class' parents in terms of how challenging it is to have the working class parents mixed in with their kids." The parents of whom he speaks live in predominantly black areas yet desire to place their children in racially integrated environments, hopeful that the racial integration would also be reflected with class integration. Yet, the parents in this study intimate the importance of economic diversity – yet, not necessarily in their children's classrooms. Middle class parents value the idea of economic diversity in that they desire their children to appreciate what their parents have worked for so that they do not squander or take it for granted. Likewise, these parents do not want their children to be confused about what their class status means and that to be middle class is distinctly different from the working class crowd. This administrator mentions that parents complain about their children attending schools with working class parents. Some black middle class parents are not interested in living with or attending school with poor or working class blacks and communicate those messages to school agents to ensure their children remain in class homogeneous environments. The parents in the present study highlight their varying reasons for choosing whether their residential location mirrors their desires to have economically integrated schooling experiences for their children. To further illustrate the point, parents regularly reminded their children that others had less than they did. Given this strategy of helping their children to understand where they were positioned in the economic scale, it would seem that parents would strive to keep their children in economically diverse settings. This would keep the children humble as well as

demonstrate how fortunate they were to be living in their financial situation, by seeing the financial situations of others less fortunate.

The choices that black middle class parents, as is the case with parents of any race, make regarding their children's education are based on what they feel is in the best interest of their child. Choices for residential location vary. In some instances, living in an economically diverse area or encouraging cross class interactions with other blacks works, in the minds of some middle class blacks, against the goals middle class black parents who aspire for their children to live a middle class lifestyle. As parents set out to make various lifestyle choices that will impact their children's education, they discussed relationships with the larger black community, residential choices, and school composition as factors to consider when making schooling choices for their children. Ultimately, the black middle class parents in this study are very clear in needing to separate their middle class children from the black masses, lower and working class blacks, in order to achieve their desired goals for their children. In some cases, that separation occurs in the school setting whereas in others, it occurs in residential choice.

The Tradeoff: Predominantly White Neighborhoods

The first generation middle class parents in this study had an interesting experience when they decided to purchase their first home. Their parents had working class professions and in some case were actually poor. Most of these first generation middle class black parents chose to purchase their first homes in predominantly black neighborhoods. One mother of two, who'd recently moved from a predominantly black neighborhood into a predominantly white neighborhood, recalls her experience in choosing their first home, **"**So we didn't know to research schools. The realtor kind of

helped us find a house because that was our goal at the time, a house. … it just turned out that [our zoned school] turned out to be a good school and from there as we got older and were around some of our older counterparts, we kind of learned that we need to do research…" This family's first home purchase was in a predominantly black neighborhood where they were able to afford a beautiful home yet they were not aware of the quality of the neighborhood schools. Another couple, two educators, who were looking into purchasing their third home in a predominantly white, highly successful school district acknowledges, "It won't be big and fabulous in [that system]. To get in that school system, we can't afford to be fabulous. We'll see. You know, that's the tradeoff. We have this house here that is lovely, but this house will be at least twice what we paid for it in [this ideal county where we want to live], and especially in the area we're looking at. We will downgrade on the house, but you downgrade on the house to get the education. It's a tradeoff. I think we are both willing to make that tradeoff." This mother acknowledges that she and her husband may have to compromise some of their middle class status, as represented by home size, to have the ideal middle class schooling experience for their children.

Repeatedly, the lack of wealth possessed by black middle class parents was an obstruction in their ability to choose their preferred schools. Johnson (2006) documents the role of intergenerational transmission of wealth as it directly impacts which schools children attend. In many white families, assets are passed from generation to generation. As a result, white families usually start their lives financially ahead of their black middle class counterparts (Oliver and Shapiro 1997; Shapiro 2004). For example, a white middle class couple may receive a down payment on a home as a wedding gift. This

substantial financial gift makes a major difference in how other financial resources can be allocated. In addition, homeownership is one of the primary ways to build wealth. Black middle class families often use a substantial amount of money for a down payment on a home. Often, the amount that is available for a down payment determines in which sort of neighborhood the black family is able to afford to live. Although the families in my study did not specifically mention home down payments, they did reference the desire to be in different neighborhoods but felt constrained by the costs. Wealthier neighborhoods often have better resources and better schools (Darling-Hammond 2004; Gosa and Alexander 2007; U.S. Department of Education 2011). Middle class black families are often constrained by their lack of financial resources when making residential, and thus school, choices.

In addition to constraints on home ownership choices, black middle class families are constrained in terms of other financial decisions related to schooling. Not having to pay a down payment on a home, allows financial resources to be used in other ways, for example to pay for tuition at private school or to provide for additional tutoring. The parents in this study see this decision making process of choosing how to best use their money as a form of sacrifice. One father of two speaks to the expense correlated with enrolling both of his children in a private school:

> It was a consideration, but it was a sacrifice that my wife and I wanted to make - we knew we were going to have to make regardless. Looking at if they came here for lower school – so first through fifth grade, we're talking about fifteen thousand dollars a year before you can get the uniform, band instruments, per child. So we're looking at upwards in a couple of years of forty thousand dollars without financial aid.

This father states that he and his wife were prepared to sacrifice some aspects of their middle class lifestyle, perhaps the cars that they drove or the amenities in their home, for their children to have a premiere education. A mother of three states it this way when asked if her primary concern when it comes to a private school education for her children was financial constraints, "It depends upon how you define constraints? It's a decision. Could I technically send him to private school? Yes. Could I send him to private school and go on vacation and send them all three to private school and [travel outside of the country to visit their father's family] every other year and redo my kitchen? No." She recognizes the sacrifice that she would have to make to educate all three of her children and that it is not impossible to do. However, it is difficult to pay for them to all attend private school and still live a middle class lifestyle. If the children go to private school, the amenities in the home and their cultural awareness would have to suffer. In other words, there are just not enough financial resources to maintain multiple sets of desires for their children. She decides to send them to the predominantly white public school and provide cultural opportunities for them.

In one instance in the study, a family decided to move from their predominantly black middle class area to a predominantly white middle class neighborhood for their children's schooling. After they'd made this decision, they ran into one of their son's former teachers at a convention. The teacher acknowledged the sacrifice they'd made for the sake of their children and mentioned that she wished more parents would make a similar sacrifice:

> Dad: So, we went to a BETA Club Convention and actually saw his fifth grade teacher and he talked with them and let them know he had made straight "A's" his whole career there and told him

everything he was doing and actually his teacher started crying because they said it was a shame that we had to move from that part of town to see him excel.

Adria: She cried there in the convention?

Mom: She cried in the convention.

Adria: Wow.

Mom: Because she said she saw who he was and she hated that he had to compromise himself to fit in and so evidently this was a better for him.

Adria: Wow, that's powerful. That gave me chills. She cried in the middle of the convention.

Mom: Yeah. When she saw him and when he told her everything he was doing and just how he was excelling; she saw how happy he was and she said she wished that more black parents could sacrifice like she saw us sacrifice, make the sacrifice to move him out of that environment; those were her exact words.

In this instance, the teacher is touched because she realized how great of a sacrifice these parents made – uprooting their entire lives for the education of their children. They moved away from their friends, extended families, and church so that their children could have a better academic experience. The sacrifice of the parents' quality of life for the sake of the children's education is a tradeoff.   Parents have In order for black middle class parents to enjoy a middle class lifestyle and send their children to schools with great academic reputations, parents must sacrifice their own middle class lifestyles, the quality of the home, the extracurricular activities or travel for the children, or any other host of traditionally middle class behaviors.

Politics of Respectability

Parents in predominantly white neighborhoods shared the idea that their children should conduct themselves in a particular way, representing a particular set of values, the politics of respectability (Higginbotham 1994). For blacks in America, displaying appropriate social behaviors and morality was integral to ensuring that they were able to overcome past discrimination. For these blacks, aligning their morals, behaviors, and mannerisms with dominant standards, rather than succumbing to the prevalent stereotypes about blacks, they hoped to dispel those stereotypes. Blacks, then, must subscribe to dominant values in a way that is beyond the subscription that whites have to those values. The parents in this study clearly understand the role of respectability and impart those notions to their children.

A number of parents drew distinctions between how they were rearing their children and how their children's peers were being reared. One mother of three recounts when discussing teaching black identity to her children that waThis mother lives in a predominantly white neighborhood and her children attend a predominantly white school. The decorum of her children is particularly important as she perceives their behavior as a representation of their middle class standing. It is integral that she communicate to her children that they do not have the same liberties regarding behavior as their white peers. An action that a white child does may be permissible. However, if a black child were to engage in the same action, the consequences would be very different, and in some cases, detrimental. Another mother of two, living in an integrated area states,

> He could just be at the mall, just because he's the guy at the mall. They're looking for a black guy, and he's the only black guy at the mall. Oh, no. I just kind of worry about that kind of stuff. I just go back to my younger brothers because they were really cute, but then they got really huge. They're tall. They're both way over six feet, and they dress kind of hip-hoppish or whatever, and I would see the way that people would react

> when they'd just enter a room. I know them. They're my little brothers. They're as sweet as pie. They're just huge black guys. Who knows what they're going to do? Our son's not going to be a huge black guy, so they may not have the same reaction.

For this mother, her son's behavior was extremely important. She'd seen the way that her brothers had been treated in predominantly white environments, simply because they'd been tall black men. She realizes the role of discrimination and stresses how important it is for him to dress and act in accordance with dominant social standards.

Overwhelmingly, parents responded that they did not desire to interact regularly with children of lower economic classes. This is often the case when black middle class parents reside in predominantly black areas. That type of exposure to blacks of other class statuses presents a problem for the parents choosing to live in predominantly white areas. One mother of two noted that she wouldn't want her daughter to attend "a school for a year or longer where there are kids that are living below the level we live in but I would like for her to see everything is not easy." Other parents clearly said that they felt it would be too difficult to maintain a certain standard in a school with a lot of economic diversity.

A mother of three when asked if when she spoke of diversity in her children's schooling if she was referring to racial or economic diversity responds this way,

> Racially diverse. That's interesting that you say that. For me, so maybe it's selfish, but I'm less concerned about it being socioeconomically diverse. I'm not opposed to it, so I don't want to be like, the hoity-toity school, we can't let anybody, love this, you can't come, no but, it's hard, because it's different challenges. I don't know, I kind of feel like, I'm open, but when we get to school, it's got to be, it's almost like that assimilation thing, be who you are, but some of that stuff got to be left alone. I don't know. That might sound contradictory, but I guess it's how I feel. It's a certain standard is expected, and we need to get to this standard, and it's kind of like with the whole sort of uniform thing, you can have all kind of creativity and all that stuff, but I have a reason for

wanting you to wear a uniform, and when we come to school, the hair won't be, you know, and the earrings won't be down to here, and we not going to be all tattered up. We going to come, we're going to wear this, and we're going to wear -- so I think you have to have some lines that you draw, or else we could, you could just be all open for everything everywhere. So, for those reasons, then, yeah, I'm open to diversity. I want some diversity, but again, I try to keep a certain decorum and certain standards. So, come up to the standards, great, I don't care if you don't have no many. You can have a dollar to your name, but when you come here, you're going to wear your uniform and act in a certain way and everybody is welcome.

In other words, the children from less affluent backgrounds would detract from their children's experience by bringing in different influences, specifically different styles of dress and standards of behavior. This mother suggests that children from lower and working class backgrounds are less likely to follow school rules such as wearing uniforms. In her experience, the school's decision for their students to wear uniforms has a specific purpose and helps to elevate the standard of dress and decorum at the school. If students of lower and working economic backgrounds cannot adhere to the uniform standard, this mother does not want them attending her daughter's school. A single mother of one son, in a predominantly white area, when discussing why she may change the school he attends for the next academic year recounts a story from the most recent awards day at her son's school.

> Mom: I don't want him necessarily in a school where the students are taught to come in and not care. At the awards ceremony a few weeks ago, the parents received envelopes saying your child is receiving a surprise award on such and such a date, please join us. And I understand if you can't and you're working and that sort of thing, but if you knew your daughter was winning an award in front of the class or the school that day, you don't send her to school in booty shorts and ashy legs.

Adria: A parent had that on at the awards?

>Mom: No, the daughter did. You know, and they probably were just too short – she had outgrown them, but make sure your child lotions her legs before you know she's going up for that award today. Handle that. So these are things I've noticed. Some of the boys have more of the – I'm starting to see a little bit more of the hip-hop flare, and I don't want that. I don't want [my son] around that. Choose whatever you want to listen to as you get older, but you don't have to become what you see on TV.

As this mom highlights, parents want their children to see their class status reflected all around them. In this case, the mother expected that a certain standard of self-presentation is indicative of middle class status. Parents should ensure that they and their children present themselves according to a particular standard. In this particular instance, having ashy legs (legs wherein the skin dryness is noticeable because it is on dark skin) is an affront to black respectability. Wearing clothes that are too small, in this case, 'booty shorts' allows for assumptions to be drawn about one's economic status (perhaps they were unable to afford clothes that fit) or one's moral values (perhaps the child is flaunting her physical assets in her attire). Middle class black parents have expectations as to how teachers should dress and behave. Those same expectations apply to parents of their children's classmates, because they, as parents, would present themselves in a particular way. It is important to black middle class parents that their children see examples of success and are not clouded with images that may resemble those with different levels of success.

The parents in this study highlighted the differences between their values and those values of the black masses. These parents strongly desired their children to not confuse the values that they were instilling in their children with the values seemingly possessed by the black masses. For these parents, they feel as though lower economic classes have and represent a different set of morals and values that they do not want to

expose their children to during their formative years. Parents want their children to see examples of adults who have more similarities to their values and practices with the hopes that the children will maintain those values and practices in their lives, and as adults.

A single mother of one son, an executive director of a museum, raised in a family where her mother was involved in a number of elite black organizations, describes it this way,

> Well, the old guard are the generations and generations that have been here ... A lot of people think that [this area] is black and that's just the social class. But you actually have distinct classes within African American society. A lot of the old guard stay in [a certain part of town]. The new money are the people who don't have lineage [here]. Chances are they did not go to one of the [black colleges here] and if they did, they did not go to [the most prestigious ones]. They're treated differently. And the old guard does not always respect that…I'm not sure if it's as a result or because of the behaviors of the new group. But they are very different. They don't have the same morals and values of the old guard. Sometimes that's good, sometimes that's bad… New money has the flashy car and the flashy house and end up going bankrupt and end up being on the music videos and having the professional photographer to take all these types of pictures. Supposedly superficial because they're not used to having…

Here, this mother expresses that there is a different set of values between the two groups of middle class blacks. This distinction is important because it emphasizes that certain members of the black middle class feel as if there is a cultural difference between them and other black middle class individuals, who may be more in line with the black masses. Earlier a mother expressed frustration with her son attending school where there were markers of lower or working class individuals. This mother is adding that within the black middle class, there are more desirable members with whom to associate.

Many parents expressed that the definition of being black and middle class had changed over time. Income does not equate with class (as represented by behaviors) in the minds of many of the parents interviewed. For them, it was important to interact and remain with blacks who displayed similar class behaviors, not necessarily those who had similar incomes. The mother who spoke of the old guard and new money made this exact distinction. She described the new money individuals as having the money that should allow them to enter into the same social circles as the old guard but because of their morals and values, such as conspicuous consumption and embracing of the hip hop culture, their class status is actually perceived as different (and less than) that of their old money peers. Another single mother, who is a teacher, is contemplating moving farther out from the city:

> Probably with this school year, I've started to see more people that have the appearance of what I don't necessarily want [my son] going to school with…Okay, I'm starting to see a few more what I would consider more urbanesque or people that probably have moved from Downtown [sic] type things or more in town coming out into the suburbs, and that's fine but they come into the school with – I've seen a couple with almost like house shoes or the -- I mean I'm sure to the normal ear it sounds awful, but that's just what I am or who I am. My thing is if we take pride in our community and who we are and who we are rearing our children up to be, we will not allow ourselves to leave the house in certain ways or show up to our children's school in certain ways because we want them to be proud to say oh yes, that's my mama, that's my dad, but we also want to set an example for them as how adults are supposed to come in and out of the house.

This mother expressed a harsh assessment of the parents of her son's classmates who may not dress the way that she expects parents to dress when they are out in public. She perceives this difference in appropriate dress as a value difference, particularly in the type of messages that parents are communicating to their children. For her, this perceived difference in values is enough for her to consider moving into a new neighborhood and

new school district – even though she was already in a predominantly white neighborhood.

However, the distinction between poor and working class blacks and middle class blacks may not be a difference in values at all. One stay at home mother of five in a predominantly white neighborhood had an experience where she needed to run to her son's school to pay money for a field trip. She and her husband, an engineer, recounted the situation when asked if race played an important role in their interactions with others:

> Mom: Okay, [our son] needed some money to be turned in and we were at home and I had done my hair because we were going somewhere and it was a few rollers, it was like five because I had braided it, I was natural and so it was not that many rollers. I looked at the clock and I had to jump up and run to the school before the school closed. The school was closed [when I arrived and] there were nothing but staff people. Two secretaries in the office and two teachers came in after me who happened to be black and looked at me…. But I mean I wasn't thinking about my hair. I mean I didn't think about it. I had to get the money there before they closed.
>
> **Adria: Did you have it wrapped up with a scarf on it or something?**
>
> Dad: No. The big orange rollers. I'm serious.
>
> Mom: That was my one and only time doing that, but I had to. I wasn't thinking. I wasn't thinking and then I felt bad and I posted it on Facebook and then I got like twenty-five comments on how could I have done that and let the whole black race down.
>
> **Adria: But nobody said anything to you? The teachers look at you.**
>
> Mom: The teacher looked at me and said, "No you didn't."
>
> **Adria: She said that?**
>
> Mom: Yeah.
>
> Dad: The black teacher, yeah.

Mom: The black teacher, she was like, "Girl, I know you didn't." I'm like, "Yeah." I tried to explain.

Adria: Nobody else said anything though?

Mom: Funny thing is the white staff secretary was like "Oh", when I came in she was like, "Are you getting ready to go somewhere?" She was like, it wasn't like "Eew, you came up here with the rollers." It was like, "You're getting your hair done because y'all are getting ready to go out" because I think it was a Friday. It was a Friday and so I was like talking to her like that and then when the black teachers came in it was like 'How dare you?" I'm never going to be able to live this down.

Adria: And you feel that for example, even though the white staff members they would look at it and say oh you must be about to go somewhere that it was a representative of the stereotypical kind of urban black woman, house shoes, hair in rollers?

Mom: By the blacks. It was like we were putting that stereotype on us. Honestly, if you had seen her face she was like "Oh, you're getting ready to go somewhere?" Because I've seen some of their daughters come up there or a lady come up there with hair rollers in her hair and they're asking her what are you getting ready to do and she says oh, I have a pageant or oh, I'm getting ready to go deal with a pageant. That one lady I saw it was a pageant. So, it was for her it was oh, you're getting ready for something. With us it was like perpetuating this awful stereotype of a black woman with hair rollers and house shoes. When I got home and thought about it I was like well she didn't seem like it was a big deal, well why did we act like that? And even when I wrote it on Facebook I was saying that the staff person didn't have a problem with it, they were like oh, she talked about you when she got in the car. I was like, it was genuine. It really looked like she was genuinely thinking I was preparing to go somewhere because she knew that I was trying to bring this money in for the field trip because it was too late so it was like, but the teacher was like, oh no you didn't.

Adria: And you have a relationship with all of them, so they all knew who you were?

Mom: Yeah. I did it. I put it on myself, but I mean I will never do it again because of the response. Honestly, I didn't think

>about it. I was just trying to - (To her husband) You were the
>one that was like hurry up and get that money up to the school
>and I just jumped. I didn't think.

Although the earlier mother who mentioned parents coming to the school in house shoes and was planning to relocate as a result of those types of parents saw this sort of presentation as an egregious representation of parenting, this mother of five was attempting to ensure that her son was able to participate in a school field trip. A black mother showing up to a school with hair rollers in her hair is exactly the type of image to which the mothers were referring when they mentioned moving to a different school. However, this mother did not show up to the school in what she thought was appropriate attire for an outing to the school; rather, it was appropriate for a lazy Friday afternoon when an emergency presented itself and she had to deliver something to the school. Her experience led her to believe that blacks had a harsher standard for themselves than whites. She earnestly believed that the black teacher responded to her in the way that she did because the hair rollers in her hair were representative of some urban stereotypes of black women. Her appearance was not respectable, especially as she was interacting with whites. As she stated, she will never make that mistake again because of the reaction that she received from the black teachers and the higher standard that she often imposes upon herself to not uphold any stereotypes in the predominantly white area wherein they live and their children attend school. She did not indicate that she would prefer for blacks to treat her in the way that the white staff members treated her, as if there was nothing at all peculiar about a mother showing up to her child's school with hair rollers in her hair. She did suggest that she had not met her own standards of respectability by going to the school with the rollers in her hair and confirming stereotypes about poor blacks but that

this incident was not reflective of her as a person – she even expressed frustration with her husband for bringing that particular example into the interview.

Linked Fate with Other Blacks

The concept of linked fate (Dawson 1994, Gay and Tate 1998, Jaynes and Williams 1989) suggests that blacks perceive a sense of community as a result of a shared political, economic, and social position. As a result, they generally believe that occurrences happening to one individual or a small group of blacks have an impact on the larger black community. For example, the outcome of the OJ Simpson trial was understood as meaning for the larger black community, not just OJ and the Goldman and Brown families. The arrest and trial of OJ operated as though the entire community had been accused of wrongdoing. Similarly, his acquittal was shared by many in the black community as a unified victory over the system (Watts 2005). The incident that was experienced by an individual was actually experienced collectively as was the shared idea of mutual responsibility. Linked fate, then, suggests that what happens to any black person is felt by the black masses, whether good or bad. Dawson (1994) posited this concept in an effort to explain how despite occupying different class positions, blacks often displayed political solidarity along racial lanes. Linked fate suggests that racial identity for some supersedes class identity, primarily because regardless of class identity, race has always prevailed as a primary identity.

More recently, political scientists suggest that the black community no longer shares one unique identity (Cohen 1999; Dawson 2001; Shelby 2005; Tate 2010). Since the Civil Rights era, there has been increasing diversity in the political views and activities of blacks. Although the majority of blacks still support liberal politics favoring

policies that support the poor and other Democratic principles, cross-cutting issues (Cohen 1999) reveal divisive outcomes. Cross-cutting issues are those that affect only a particular segment of the population. In these cases, the unity that once existed in the black community dissolves. One of the explanations for these various political outcomes is that blacks are more aligned with their class interests than race interests than they were in the past. Now, as blacks make political decisions they are made based upon their best interests, considering both race and class concerns. The change over time has been that "interests" are now understood to be individual rather than collective.

Chasing the Dream and Burning Bridges

Many of the parents residing in predominantly white and integrated neighborhoods were intentional in their desire to leave (or not move into) predominantly black neighborhoods where they would more than likely be exposed to individuals from the lower class (Pattillo-McCoy 1999). In some cases, parents also recognized that the blacker their area became, the more likely whites were to leave and their resources would leave with them (Logan and Alba 1993). Black parents are frustrated with this recurring dynamic. This father of two who'd recently moved into in a predominantly white neighborhood, presents an idea that seems to capture the sentiment of many similarly situated parents explains what he calls 'chasing the dream' this way:

> You're trying to move to what you perceive to be a better area but only after you do, you realize that the resources and elements that were once there started to move out because you are there, because you are tipping the scales of comfort [sic] being that they expect their area to be 95% affluent or perceivably affluent, meaning that people drive a certain type of car, people do certain things to their yard, or 95% white… So they get up and they leave because too many of us are moving up there … these areas that were once white all of a sudden became upper middle class black areas, the resources packed up and left because of the fact that the

people who were there left and they took their resources to another part, therefore, they stopped supporting the public areas, the parks and schools. So when too, too many white people leave, they leave behind dilapidated resources for the upper middle class that moved in there. So, those people get up and move after them again so you're just chasing them. And one of my friends said that he don't mind chasing the dream just as long as he can burn the bridge after him. Once he crosses the bridge and gets there, then you burn the bridge so that not too many other people, other black people move in.

This father explains the difficulty for middle class black families as they attempt to live in racially integrated neighborhoods in an effort to maximize their opportunities and access to resources. This constant 'chasing' of the dream of true middle class living illustrates the shared experience that middle class blacks have with lower and working class blacks. His summary captures the frustration often experienced by black middle class parents and how they rationalize their alienation from the black working class. For this father, as was the case with a number of other families not residing in predominantly black neighborhoods, the area wherein he chose to reside with his family experienced a number of changes, particularly in resources and amenities, once other black families moved in.

Another respondent, a divorced father of three who moved from his predominantly black neighborhood into an integrated area, when asked if he would make other residential choices now than when he initially purchased his home recalls,

Dad: I probably would have forgone living in a black neighborhood and moved to a more mixed neighborhood.

Adria: Why?

Dad: Because what I've come to learn, what I've come to understand is that economics drives. I think one of the things that most African Americans, or many people, most African Americans tend to negate or forget – There's no money coming into the city and state and county,

services are degraded or lost. If you can go into a neighborhood that has been sustained by not only businesses but income driven households, you're not going to lose as much. With a two family that's working or one family that's working with substantial income, and more times than none that's true across the board. So I think a mixed neighborhood would have been better. I still would have had an opportunity to be around my own but my son could grow up with some Asians and white folks and be able to cope, you know, like I did when I grew up. So I think that would have been a change, a welcome one as well.

This father highlights the loss of public services and businesses that black neighborhoods do not have. He believes had he lived in an integrated area when he first moved to the metro area that he would have been able to teach critical socialization skills to his children and he would have had access to amenities and resources like white middle class families. The reality of middle class blacks making less money and being more likely to live next to poor and working class blacks is reflected in the lack of financial resources funneling through the local government, resulting in poorer public facilities.

Black middle class families living in predominantly black areas expressed similar sentiments. The father of two who designed his predominantly black residential area stressed the importance of this separation. One strategy for separating the poor and working class from the middle class is to eliminate access by public transportation to where the black middle class live. He says:

We've got no railroad track, that's one natural divider. It's a boundary. You can't get that riff-raff across that, and then you've got the [other] County line and then you've got the [land barrier]. One of the things y'all don't understand is we don't allow the bus to come up [this main thoroughfare]. That bus can only go to [those other areas], and as long as I'm here, that bus is never gonna come up [this main thoroughfare] because that's the beginning of the end.

He refers to the incorporation of poor and working class blacks as the beginning of the end, indicating that once those other blacks have access to areas that have been selected

and designed to serve the black middle class that the quality of the area – the middle class markers – begin to disappear and the area will ultimately become poor and working class. Further, he refers to these other classes of blacks as riff-raff. This reference points to the social ills that black middle class individuals often experience when living in close proximity to poor and working class blacks. It is quite clear in his recounting of the planning of the area that the developers were aware of the difficulty for the black middle class to separate themselves from the social problems that typically accompany lower and working class blacks. This linked fate has real consequences for black middle class families. Brown (2012) observes that residential racial segregation occurs not because of class differences but the simple number of blacks in a neighborhood. Whites do not want to neighbor blacks so when blacks purchase homes they will not receive the returns that white homeowners receive. Here is an example of another black middle class family's experience with chasing the ever elusive American Dream.

This idea of chasing the dream and burning bridges extends strategic assimilation theory as posited by Karyn Lacy (2004). Lacy suggests that middle class blacks engage in a type of assimilation wherein they are strategic about living and working in a white world while maintaining social ties in a black world. She speaks of elite black organizations, such as fraternities, sororities, and Jack and Jill of America, Inc. This connection to black social groups is partly in an effort to develop racial identity in their children and to serve as a buffer from discrimination from their white world interactions. Many of these organizations focus on service to the larger black community.

Many parents in this study, across residential neighborhood racial composition, felt strongly about their children participating in some sort of service to those who they

considered less fortunate. One mother of four in an integrated neighborhood states, "So, we talk about, like we have kids that are the same age that we sponsor in World Mission, that are the same age as our kids. They each have a kid. Dad and I have kids, and we talk about why it's important for us to give. But, not so much about being middle class but just, again, good stewardship, and if you have a lot you need to give a lot. That's it." A divorced father of three when asked how he talks to his children about their class status recounts that he wants them "to know how fortunate they are and then also the importance of making a difference and contributing, you know, making a difference where you contribute something to society like giving back." However, service to the less fortunate does not equate to racial uplift ideology.

Racial Uplift in Residential Choice

In planning for schooling options and the ensuing interactions that their children will have with neighbors and classmates living in the residential area, some parents, in this study those from solidly middle class backgrounds or not first time homeowners, exert great effort in researching the area wherein they live or are planning to purchase a home. Frazier (1957) documented the desire on the part of the 'black bourgeoisie' to separate themselves from the black masses. He details the great effort exerted by members of the black upper class to remain distinct from the black masses, particularly in their development of "society". Similarly, DuBois (1903) highlights the separation between the black masses and the black intelligentsia, or at least those who have achieved higher education. DuBois places the onus on these more educated blacks, the talented tenth, to uplift the masses from the ills of criminality and other social vices that plague the larger community. Franklin and DuBois agree that there is a metaphysical separation

between the black upper (middle) class and the black masses. Frazier notes that the black

upper class desires to be separate and devises any number of strategies to ensure that they

remain separate from the masses. DuBois, on the other hand, in his acknowledgement of

the separation, admonishes those with privilege to help lift the others to their level – to

save them, ultimately from themselves (Wilson 1987).

One father of two, in his late forties who lives in a predominantly black

neighborhood, was a part of the design team when the area wherein he resides was built.

Here, he articulates his hope for his children regarding their interaction with the black

community:

> And I want at some point for them to read something like this and hear
> something like this so that they don't take for granted what their families
> have done for them, because as you look at other cultures they let their
> kids, you know, get your degrees but have a little fun but you've got to
> come back and do your part for the family now. This is where many of
> my nieces and nephews will tell you that I drill that in their heads all the
> time. It's time for you to give back to your family. That means to go get
> that degree because when you get a degree, you see other places in the
> world that you would have never seen. You may come back home but you
> have something bigger to bring to your community, to your children and
> families, and you can talk to them about the world that they could possibly
> experience out there. If you don't ever leave it in your mind, you will
> never leave it and you'll handicap them because they want a taste of that
> world; one of your children is going to want it and you've got to be ready
> to give them something, to equip them and prepare them to deal with.

This father expresses the importance of racial uplift. For him, uplift was allowing the

children of the middle class to go to college and 'see the world' to gather information and

ideas to pass back to their families and neighbors. Their experiences while they are away

from home give them the tools that are necessary to bridge the gap between the lower and

working blacks and the rest of the white world. Having the tools necessary to speak to

the larger white world allows for the other blacks to potentially escape their plight in

society. The important piece for him was the expectation for those who were privileged to go off to school and travel the world to return to their family and home community.

The idea of racial uplift is a much debated among black intellectuals (Gaines 1996). On the one hand, there are definitions of racial uplift that include interracial cooperation. Many black intellectuals have supported the idea of all races working together to eliminate discrimination for everyone. Franklin, and others like him, framed the familial dysfunction of the black family as a response to widespread racial discrimination. His perspective of racial uplift was to eliminate those sources of discrimination so that the black masses, in addition to the black upper class, would be able to escape the dysfunctional characteristics that lead to poverty and crime. Yet, there is an understanding of racial uplift that supports the DuBoisian concept that it is the responsibility of the haves (within the race) to help the have not's. This latter understanding is somewhat problematic in that it perpetuates the concept of blacks having inherent faults and weaknesses that need help and direction. The middle class parents in this study have mixed feelings about their role in racial uplift. The ambivalence surrounding the concept of racial uplift, particularly as it relates to race-class interactions, emerged when parents spoke of living in predominantly middle class black neighborhoods and their interactions with their neighbors. One engineering executive, father of two, says:

> If people with money and resources across racial lines, would be willing to live with people who do not have money and resources, then the water would meet its level. But, you know, that's kind of what we thought would happen - we would be a presence and there would be other people like us who would be a presence in a community where there would be lots of economic diversity and, you know, you would help raise the waterline. But instead what happened is our house was broken into two times and we said, you know… it's only so many punches I can absorb.

> But that's the real truth of things is that if we really lived in economic and racially diverse communities, then we wouldn't have pockets where everything bad piled up and where everything good was piled up, and then all that pile moved together somewhere else and then that pile of good stuff kept moving, leaving piles of bad stuff.

At one point, this gentleman assumed that he and his family would have a positive impact on an economically diverse community, where his family was one of the more affluent families in his predominantly black, middle class neighborhood. Unfortunately, he and his wife felt that their presence did not help improve the overall status of the community, rather placed the family in harm's way, as their home was burglarized multiple times. The family has since moved to a less economically, and racially, diverse area in an effort to ensure their safety and security and to take advantage of a better school system.

Other parents in these predominantly black neighborhoods felt strongly that those blacks who moved away from the black masses were the ones making the wrong choices. This group of parents was quite direct when speaking about the social obligation of those parents who had 'arrived' reaching back and helping those who had not yet been so fortunate. An educator, mother of three in a predominantly black neighborhood, subscribes to the idea of lifting up the race and says,

> I think it's kind of, for me, the experience of having that experience is that I leverage that experience to help other black people… You know, and I think that's your role, that's what God has called you to do and that's the purpose for you being there. We are placed in that experience and that's what I'm talking about that the Booker T.'s and the Talented come together. It's not for us just to go out and do, it's for you to leverage your experience so that somebody else can get somewhere… Do you get used? Yes. You know, do you get betrayed? Yes. Do you get discriminated? Yes. Um, you know, um, now black folks, we're doing it to each other... You know, we've moved out of the neighborhoods. You know, [our] County School System is horrible, why?... Most of the people that have all the money that live in [our] County, their kids go to private schools… I mean you have to be concerned about it... I think we have to be advocate, each other's advocates and even though there's no national civil rights

> movement but we've been educated, we've been afforded opportunities, it is our responsibilities, because we are here on the sweat, blood and tears of the people that came before us… It is our responsibility to be an advocate for those who don't. We have to allow access, if you have access, you've got to allow access and that's something that we don't do enough of.

This mother clearly articulates the concept of social justice as the obligation of those who have attained some level of success. She suggests that black middle class individuals allow access to those who are not similarly situated. This idea of allowing access is a type of racial uplift. She is supportive of the concepts of giving time, energy, and resources to those who have not had the same opportunities as she has had. She was one of the older parents in the study, a few months shy of celebrating her 50 birthday. She represents a generational effect as her cohort of parents would have been children at the height of the civil rights movement and black activism. The father earlier who spoke of having his children leave and bring their knowledge and experiences back to their family is also a member of that older group of parents. As a result, this cohort of parents, those who still may be classified as part of the baby boomers, may have a different connection to the larger masses than younger, Generation X parents.

Black middle class parents are confronted with a number of decisions about where to live and how to guide their children's social interactions. Residential decisions are constrained both by finances, the phenomenon of white flight, and interactions with other blacks. Schooling and social choices are shaped by these parents' desire to both protect their children from various forms of discrimination and expose them to models that they deem appropriate for their aspirations. This delicate balancing game can prove challenging and frustrating to parents. Unfortunately, there is no one answer as to how to resolve these issues. Instead some parents choose to live in predominantly white areas

and hope their black friends do not become their neighbors. Others are clear in wanting to remain connected to the larger black community while ensuring that they clearly communicate their expectations to their children. Still some parents select the sort of interactions to which they are willing to expose their children while others are still struggling to find that balance for themselves.

Chapter Five:

School Choice Strategies

In addition to preparing their children to be middle class, black middle class parents engage in particular processes to actually decide on which schools are best for educating their black middle class children. Again, the middle class experience for blacks is quite different from the middle class experience of whites. Black middle class parents must navigate their class and race positioning, as the experience of being black complicates the experience of being middle class. As part of this navigation, parents endeavor to maintain their children's racial identities while acknowledging that the school's racial composition may directly bear upon which strategies are required to adequately prepare their children for their racial assignment in society. Black middle class parents must also weigh the role that class identity should have for their children. As mentioned earlier, these parents employ strategic assimilation to ensure their children's exposure to the larger white world is balanced in their exposure, or lack thereof, to the economically diverse black world. Overwhelmingly, black middle class parents want their children to have a solidly middle class identity. The race-based and class-based identity development as it is passed from parent to child are both external to much of what happens inside of the school building. The remaining question then becomes, what happens inside of the school building for these black middle class children and their black middle class parents. In this chapter, I argue that black middle class parents decide on schools for their children based on three criteria. They 1) prioritize the most important characteristics for their children's schooling and 2) utilize their social networks to gather information.

School Characteristics

Academic Reputation

According to the parents in my study the primary concern for them about what makes a good school is its academic reputation. The academic reputation of schools was determined by test scores and other published information to which parents had access. Parents did not rely on word of mouth reputation to suffice. One stay at home mother of four notes, "it had to be a good school to begin with. I wouldn't even look at it if the test scores weren't up." Parents were consistent in acknowledging the importance that their children received the best education (that they could afford). The best education was the one wherein their children were able to receive the best academic program. Test scores and adequate preparation for the next level of schooling emerged as the most important considerations for these parents as they determined the best academic program.

Parents also expressed the necessity for their children to be academically prepared to compete in an increasingly global society. One of the primary criteria parents considered in their school search process centered on the school's academic reputation. A mother of four, when asked what makes a good school, responded this way: "Academics. Have a focus on academics. Well rounded academics, not just your benchmark…every five minutes. But well-rounded academics. Creative academics. I think that has done a wonder with our children."

To determine which schools had academic programs aligned with how parents defined a strong academic program, parents utilized school rankings. Many of the rankings found online, such as greatschools.org and the state's Department of Education, listed schools based on their standardized test scores. These rankings typically list

schools by county and the percentage of students that met or exceeded the standard as assessed on the standardized test. Often, they also provide information about the economic diversity of a school, by listing how many students are on free lunch and information about the racial diversity of the school listing which racial or ethnic groups performed on the standardized measure[5]. One mother of two, whose children attend public school in a suburban district of the metropolitan area expresses how important it is to find specific information about how the academic environment would work for her children when asked if she visited the schools prior to purchasing a home in her district,

> I didn't but my mother-in-law is very into reading papers and she's very into telling me, you know, [this county's] schools are doing very well in their SAT scores. And you know, that's fine, and then I would just say, well, how are the black kids doing? And they don't necessarily break down those demographics by subgroups so well how was each demographics doing, how are the boys doing versus the girls? That type of thing. You know, she was looking at the whole picture, which it's true, [Our] County has done well as far as SAT scores. I mean, I'm talking about throughout the State, which is good, but I want to know a breakdown because I'm in the system so I know, okay, SAT scores don't necessarily mean that because is everybody doing well or is it only certain ones doing well? Are we treating the black students fairly, are we treating the black males fairly versus the black females?

Although these various rankings are useful in that parents are able to assess which schools have students who can demonstrate their mastery of basic skills; it was frustrating to many parents that these test scores were so important to their child's education. Many of them expressed frustration with the amount of teaching time given to test taking rather than teaching the appropriate grade level material for mastery. Although this is a common way of ranking schools, black parents expressed frustration that they were unable to find out how schools were performing based on students real learning. One

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[5] In addition to race and ethnic students' performance, many of these rankings list the performance of special needs and English as Second Language students. These last two types of students were not mentioned as overarching criteria for parents unless they had a special needs child.

father of two living in a predominantly black neighborhood where his son attends a predominantly black school expressed,

> My son, for instance, he's a first grader. He's a hard worker pretty much and great kid. He's in a gifted program at his school, but for the past month, it's all been about testing. I've looked at his homework folder, and it's gone from all of this exploration of science and what not to how to answer multiple choice test questions and what not, and my fear is – with my wife – our fear is that our kids are going to be behind. We won't be able to compete and think globally and think collaboratively for college – prepare for college.

This father understands that standardized testing is part of the way schools are required to function but believes it is a disservice to his son's education. He goes on to suggest that he and his wife are now considering private schooling options to ensure their son's preparation for college. Another couple, when asked what they did not like about their first grade son's school, responded:

> Other than the fact that I feel as though overall the education system is gearing towards teaching kids how to test versus teaching them what they really need in life, I can't really think of anything. I just…I'm a little concerned. Like I know the testing is important, but the testing is taking up so much time. They aren't necessarily picking up life skills and for some kids they'll pick that up at home through things that they do with their parents, but not all kids have those opportunities so what about them? And sometimes the things that happen at home need to be reinforced in the public and vice versa, so I think that somehow it needs to be revamped to include both aspects of life not just this is what you do because you have to pass this test to keep funding in our school.

This sentiment, shared by the mother, was later reiterated by the father. These parents acknowledged that the testing was required for all schools but critiqued the development of skills that their son would not receive as a result of the testing mandate. They disliked the overall structure of the school system requiring students to be tested so that their school could receive funding based on the testing scores. A few parents who'd opted to

have their children in private school mentioned that one advantage to having their children in private school was they do not test as much as is required in the public schools. Although testing was an unfortunate quality of public school education, parents were able to use information collected to make decisions about the academic rigor of their children's potential schools.

Public, Private, or School Choice

Many of the parents with whom I spoke articulated with ease the best schools in their district, the school choice options available to their children, how to take advantage of district transfers, and with whom to speak when they have a concern about schooling choices. The focus of this study was to uncover how black middle class parents made educational decisions for their children. I expected to find explicit class and race composition responses or a particular type of question that was regularly asked of school staff. Rather, I found that parents overwhelmingly had clear ideas as to where their children should be enrolled and utilized various aspects of their middle class positioning to place their children in those environments. One mother of three, living in an integrated area, whose three children all attend an exclusive private school, remarks, "I'm sure you've heard a lot of people just talk about either you have to move to a certain area to get a good public school, or if you don't, then you try and have to find other resources or try and send them to private schools." Finding other resources for black middle class parents includes the search for private schools, in cases where they are affordable, but it also includes understanding how to navigate the public school choice options offered in many districts.

Parents choosing to enroll their children in private school feel as though they must provide the best educational opportunities for their children. The academic preparation offered at these schools is far beyond anything their children could achieve in a public school district. To give their children that academic edge makes the expensive tuition worth it. The mother earlier who referred to moving or finding other resources had tried a charter school and a number of private school options for her three children. This past academic year was the first year that all of her children attended the same school. When I asked that mom if she was satisfied with leaving her children there until they graduated high school, she responded in this way:

Adria: Will all three of your children remain [there] until the twelfth grade?

Mom: It has yet to be determined.

Adria: What might change that? What would make a difference? Because, I know that would be ideal.

Mom: Yeah, it would be ideal. If my husband had a different job, and we moved to another area where they had good schools. Financially, every year, we write that check, and we're just like, this is ridiculous. This is ridiculous, and so, if we got to the point where we just said, this is just too ridiculous, we just can't do this anymore and then looked at other options for them as well, too.

Adria: Okay, but you wouldn't try the charter school thing?

Mom: No, we're done with that. No more charter schools. No more charter schools. I mean, we've talked, for example, in our area, there's an International Baccalaureate program at [one of the high schools], so we've talked about exploring that more for [our oldest] in terms of high school. So, we're going to look into that more and see.

Adria: Okay. So, you're not opposed to public schools, it just needs to have the academic rigor?

Mom: That's right. I mean, I think there's a lot to be said for going to public school. I really do, but in our particular area, unless you're in that

particular program, I don't think that it's rigorous enough to really prepare them.

As was the case with this mom, parents did not live in the catchment area where they felt the best schools for their children were located. Although she was in a predominantly white area, she did not feel that the academic rigor of the neighborhood schools was satisfactory. There were special choice programs in the area that she may consider for at least one of her children but beyond that particular program, her children would not enroll in any other public school option or charter school. Her experience with charter schools was that the one in which her children were enrolled was underfunded and disorganized. The academic rigor of her children's education was something wherein she was unwilling to bend.

Another mother, a former school teacher in an integrated neighborhood, decided on private school for her son because she felt that the public school system was mis-educating our children. She elaborates:

Adria: Now earlier you talked about mis-education of our children. Can you tell me what you mean by that?

Mom: Yeah, the school system has lost its focus. I don't think the school system really focuses on children anymore and the needs of our children. From what I've seen it's data driven. When I first graduated from college with a major in accounting I went to work for a bank. For a while I was a supervisor at that bank and what we did was meet every week and talked about numbers. We talked about data. We had to keep the numbers under control. I feel like corporate…and I left corporate America because I didn't like corporate America but now I feel like corporate America has come into the schools because now what we focus on is numbers. How many kids passed the benchmark? How many kids passed the [state standardized exam]? What are we going to do to help these kids pass but the initiatives they put in place don't really help the kids learn. They help the kids pass the next test. But then the next test will come and the same

kids have failed the next test because they haven't learned anything. It's just frustrating. It's a frustrating cycle.

Adria: Wow. Do you see that changing any?

Mom: It's going to take some kind of radical change. I wish I knew what that was. I think if people went back…you know when I took my certification classes one of the things I remembered was that we had to learn child psychology and child development and what is developmentally appropriate for children. The schools talk about differentiated education but they don't really teach children on an individual level because you might have three kids in first grade. One child is reading on a first grade level. One child is still reading at maybe a kindergarten level. The other child is reading at a third grade level, and everybody is being taught the same thing. Because they are going to be tested on the same thing.

Adria: Which is the first grade level.

Mom: Which is on the first grade level. And so you have this child who is still reading on a kindergarten level because his birthday might be…he might be the youngest kid in the classroom and might be developmentally…developmentally he's still a kindergartener but he's punished and he's made to feel bad because he's not on the first grade level yet. Well, he's really not supposed to be. I just don't think that schools are focusing on the individual child and what their needs are. It seems like it always comes back to the test which is sad.

Adria: Yeah, it's heartbreaking.

Mom: I really wish we could do away with the testing. But I don't see that happening any time soon. I think that would help a lot.

Again, the issue of testing causes concern for parents. In this case, the mother was sufficiently frustrated that she decided to leave the teaching profession and enroll one of her children in private school. The ability for private schools to focus on the individual needs of the child rather than applying a universal standard to all children was particularly important to this mother. In addition, her child had been bullied in the public school. She felt strongly that if the public school system had done a better job of focusing on her particular child and the needs and experiences of that child that she

would have been able to keep the children in a public school and she would have still been teaching.

For many of the parents residing in predominantly black neighborhoods, private school was not an option and they did not accept the subpar schools that are often found in predominantly black residential areas (Hanushek and Rivkin 2009). These parents chose to reside in one area and have their children attend school in a different area of the same district. Taking advantage of school choice options was an easy decision for these parents. Repeatedly, parents referenced as one of the primary advantages of living in a metropolitan area the ability to choose among the many educational options. They stated that because they had cars and were able to transport their children wherever they may have needed to go that there were many viable schooling options. One father of three, a private school administrator residing in a predominantly black neighborhood, states when referring to the home that he and his wife purchased when they first moved back to this area, "We got a steal. In any case, it was one of those situations that – the one thing at the time we didn't think about as a true priority were the schools in the area. Knowing the elementary and middle school – I grew up in the area – we realized that we had access to other schools, we just had to drive our kids to school in that way. We love the neighborhood, hate the schools."

One couple, parents of four children residing in a predominantly black neighborhood, disagreed in that the father was concerned that the "kids would never see somebody that's not Afro-American… or … that doesn't have a darker skin or complexion, Jamaican or somebody like that" while the mother was clear in stating, "I didn't see that as much as a problem… I don't know that I was entirely uncomfortable

with that but … it would be a good thing at some point for them to learn to deal with people who aren't like them although I think they would've probably been doing that anyway – dealing with people who weren't like them." Interestingly, some parents felt that exposure to a diverse world was inevitable for their children and the racial diversity of their schooling was not as relevant as other aspects of their schooling, such as safety and committed teachers. These parents opted to live wherever they were comfortable, often in predominantly black environments, and ensure that their children had the best experience in that environment. The best academic environment for many of these parents involved their children participating in gifted programs or a school choice option offered by their county, particularly in cases where cost or distance was a deterrent to enrolling their children in a private school.

Parents carried a heavy burden having to bus or drive their children across town for school. Financial resources are used to pay for gas and car maintenance. Also, time resources are used during the commuting time from the home of the parent to the school of the child. In addition, schools that are not close to the home of the parents make it more difficult for parents to be as involved in their children's schools as they would if the schools were in their neighborhoods. Parental involvement is often compromised as a result of the distance from the school to the home. A divorced father of two who is a high ranking administrator in a public school system observes,

> When I look at a majority of the parents that want administrative transfers, they live in [in one part of the district] and they want their kids to go to [sic] schools [on the other side of the district]. So we still have that impression that, you know, white is right and if it's all white, it's all good…When you look at the end products sometimes you may, you know, and you weigh it, that might play out due to parental involvement in the [desirable] schools, due to the financial commitment that they put in as the parents in the [desirable] schools. You know you have a [sic] PTA with

> $30,000 and they're coffers and then you have [their neighborhood] PTA with nothing, you know. You have a [desirable] school where the parents are walking and roaming in there all day, helping and volunteering and participating and the teachers don't have to do anything, they just send the email out to the classroom mom that sends an email out to everybody else…And then in the [neighborhood] school, you know, we're fighting for folks to participate. Now again, social science, social science, there's a whole bunch of dynamics that relate to why.

Here this administrator points to a distinction between parental involvement and the ability of the school to be effective. He acknowledges that parents have made the necessary arrangements to get their kids into a more desirable school in the district but suggests that they may not have done the necessary research to determine why this school is higher performing than their neighborhood school. He suggests that some black middle class parents would prefer for their kids to be in a predominantly white school while they do not live in a predominantly white area. Further, he suggests that these parents would prefer their children to be with white children rather than working class blacks. The problem, he indicates, is that the white schools are successful because of the parental involvement and PTA commitment to additional funding. He stops just shy of saying if these parents invested this much in their neighborhood schools that they might experience similar results. Later in his interview, he acknowledged that his children did not attend the neighborhood school and he had them in a better performing school, close to his job. He still had the ability to be involved but felt that he needed to have his children attend the neighborhood schools in an effort to make his neighborhood school better. A single mother of one son who lives in a predominantly white neighborhood notes,

> But I really believe that the communities are really only as strong as the schools are. Unfortunately, in our communities you have a lot of poor performing schools, and it's almost the opposite because you have all

these well to do folks and their schools are horrible. And I would say it's because the parents aren't involved because we still have control over them in elementary school. How can you have a poor performing elementary school in a neighborhood where you've got all these middle class Black people? How can you have that? It sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it?

There seems to be some sort of disconnect between the salaries of any given group of black middle class parents and their underperforming schools. This mother who formerly lived in an affluent black middle class area with poor schools observes that it is illogical that parents can have so many resources but choose to send them out of their community. Both this administrator and mother are pointing to the idea that black middle class parents do not employ the same methods for maintaining a school as white middle class parents. White middle class parents are present in their local schools, raising monies where necessary and advocating on behalf of their children. Black middle class parents advocate for their children to attend another school where the attributes that make a school good already exist. Although this academic administrator's observation that black parents still believe that white is right and desire their children to be in a white academic environment, I contend that black middle class parents research academic outcomes and realize that white schools are better resourced (Pattillo-McCoy 1999; Darling-Hammond 2004; Gosa and Alexander 2007) and they desire racial diversity. The desire for racial diversity and the understanding that better resources leads to better educational opportunities is what pushes black middle class families to abandon their neighborhood schools in search of a different schooling environment.

Many parents chose to relocate to a neighborhood where their children could attend the neighborhood schools. One mother of two who moved her son from a

reasonably good district to a better one asked an administrator at the new school why this public school seemed to have so many more offerings for their children from a different set of books for home and school to offering soy milk at lunch,

> She said, well after you're done allocating the money from the State, the school has to come up with their own, the rest of the funding, they have to foot the bill. That's where PTA comes in. Well on our black side of town, you have a lot of single parents, parents that are working two and three and four jobs, they don't have the funds nor the extra time to help fundraise to help build the money up. A lot of them aren't really into education's not on the top tier so they really don't care about trying to help the school, they don't go to the PTA meetings, they don't even join PTA at all, no teacher parent interaction, the support is just not there. So you don't get that extra money and then your school is struggling. However, in the higher income areas, you have a lot more stay-at-home moms, they spend half the day at the school, volunteering free time, they sit here and they'll drive the kids around to do the PTAs, they take them to work and put it on the break room desk so everyone can come and order something. You have all this tremendous support in that area because they have the means to provide. So granted, you have two different, the State says, this is what you need to teach and if you don't have enough money, you have to buy the basic book that this book, that's going to say what the State needs out of this book. If you have the extra money, well then you could find the book that's going to meet State's the standards and even go higher than that and buy a higher quality set of books. … Which is really sad to say because it seems like it's more of we're already set up to fail? So you don't want to turn your back but at the same time as a parent, you want your child to be able, you know, to have the best education and unfortunately the best education is in the area that has, it's a little higher socioeconomic status because of all those reasons.

Although this recollection is based on hearsay from an administrator to a parent, the parents in this study perceive a difference between the funding at predominantly black schools and that at predominantly white schools. The role of parental involvement is particularly important for black middle class parents because they realize that in addition to human capital, the financial capital that parental involvement can bring into a school could have substantial impact on their children's academic experiences.

Although relocation eliminated the lack of parental involvement[6], it did not entirely eliminate black middle class parents' lack of access to resources. Parents felt that living in a metropolitan area afforded them the same flexibility with extracurricular activities and social events. As a result, black parents who lived in a predominantly white areas were able to get their children to predominantly black areas for social activities, if they so desired. Similarly, black parents who lived in predominantly black areas were able to transport their children to schools on the other side of the county at their discretion. In some cases, as illustrated by this divorced mother of one son, academic preparation was more important than racial diversity because she knew that she could create diverse experiences for her son:

> **Adria: Okay, so now [that area] has great schools, but they also have a reputation for being not very diverse. Is that a concern for you at all?**
>
> Mom: I think that I would be more concerned about him not getting the education that he needs more so, or the level of education that he needs more so than that. I really think [my son] is able to assimilate in most situations, and most conditions. So we made a point, even when he was at [his last private school], and I think there were two other black boys in his class, and maybe one black girl, we never ask questions. Oh, I was playing with Charlie Li. Well, we know who Charlie Li is. We never did that. Even when he developed a crush on [a female classmate], and I did ask what she looked like, and she was blonde –
>
> **Adria: That helps narrow it right on down**.
>
> Mom: Okay. All righty then. Let's get you to the park to play basketball. I mean, there's other ways to balance it out; I want you to have exposure to everything. So I wouldn't be so concerned about that because - and I talk with other parents that have their children in schools where not very diverse, and maybe even more Caucasians, and they do things like that - well, they play baseball at [at all black park in the city], … My colleague, who's from [the city], coaches at [that park] because that's how he came up, and he was just like, "You know I'm telling you, [your son] going to

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[6] Presumably because of the closer proximity between school and home

have some real rough friends. He's gonna have his first friend from the project."

Again, parents who decided to enroll their children in predominantly white schools or in schools where there was little economic diversity discovered other ways to provide that exposure.

Economic and Racial Diversity

A primary concern for parents, as discussed in the previous chapter, was the economic diversity of the schools wherein their children attended. It was the sentiment of parents that "I'm not super-worried about economic diversity to be honest as long as people have a diversity of experience and mindset", as represented by this mother of three in a predominantly white affluent neighborhood. Economic diversity was important in so much as parents did not want their children "to be poorest kids there or the richest kids there" but parents did not seem to rate it as important as racial diversity for the classroom. In some instances, parents did not want economic diversity because their children may be exposed to values or ideas from which their parents were trying to protect them. In this way, class for black middle class parents operates similarly to race for white middle class parents when making school choice decisions (Holme 2002). According to Holme, white middle class parents determine the racial composition of a school as part of the information that they will use to determine if they would be comfortable sending their child there. Rather than using race as a determinant to exclude a school, black middle class parents use class as a primary factor. While they research the academic ratings of the school, they are also considering the percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Again, black middle class parents are selective in how

their children interact with children from lower and working class, both in school and outside of school. As mentioned in the next chapter, the racial diversity of schools was an important consideration. This desire proved to be a constraint for many parents because of how segregated schools are in the metropolitan area. One mother of two whose son attends private school recalls,

> That's what I mean by [this area] though. I find that it's either one or the other here. It's really hard to find a school that has a very diverse set of people and racially not just in that sense. You either go all black, all white or something because looking for….because you find that the elementary school in [the public school system] is not—even [in the neighboring] area are so predominantly white or predominantly black. It's never like 50/50 or even 65/35; it's always 90-something and a speckle of one or the other.

Unlike white middle class parents (Holme 2002), black middle class parents desire various amounts of racial and ethnic diversity in the classroom.

Some of the parents residing in predominantly black neighborhoods whose children attended predominantly black schools were fine with that non-diverse academic experience, at least for the formative years of their children's education. The parents of two, when asked how they felt about their daughter's school being 97-99% black respond this way,

> Mom: Fine with that, I love it. I grew up in an environment where the schools systems were white. You know, for her to feel pride in her culture and learn about her own culture and see people in charge in her culture, there are no limits and boundaries for her because the rest of the world she is going to get because she won't have a choice, because if she tries to move up, you know, her numbers are gonna get smaller with her trying to go and get a master's or Ph.D. or want to go here and do all that. Her world gets smaller. She will grow and branch out as she becomes more involved in her extracurricular activities because at some point she'll be competing on that level. I put her in a camp after [the school year] was over, an all sports camp at [a local college], primarily white. But she went in and adapted. I was waiting for her to come home one day and say, mama, now that girl is white. She didn't say anything for the first couple of days but then she started telling me names and she said, mama, she's

white. I said, okay, but she's a nice girl. So I was trying to balance it like these are still people so that she wouldn't feel, you know, our kids are fascinated by difference and they want to know that, and what I wanted [her] to see was it's all the same, just a little bit different texture, style, whatever, but still her own and to be proud of it. So her extracurricular activities, her world has been primarily African American.

Adria: And you're okay with that as well?

Dad: Well, the reality of it is every major city is going to be urbanized. So for the first time in the history of America more people live in urban communities than in rural communities … so the counties and cities are going to be more urbanized. [Many of the counties in the metro area] have the majority of blacks on their commission. So you can't be afraid of it. Unless you're gonna move up north, you're gonna be hanging with black people. If you're gonna live from New York down the Eastern Seaboard over to Dallas or Houston, you're gonna be hanging with black people. You're not gonna be in an environment – unless you're gonna be in Minnesota, you know, you're gonna be seeing us. I'm fine with it.

These parents felt that to keep their daughter in a predominantly black environment would be best for her preparation for the future. As the father describes, the urbanization taking place across the country means that his daughter will more than likely interact with blacks on some level and needs to be comfortable in that environment. He does acknowledge that she will have to deal with whites as her education advances but for now, the all black environment is ideal.

A mother of one, employed at an elite private school, expressed her desire to live in an area that is not "all or the other". She did not want to live in an area that was either all white or all black. The sentiment that blacks want to live in racially diverse neighborhoods has been confirmed by years of sociological research on racial residential segregation (Bobo and Zubrinsky 1996; Charles 2003; Farley 1996; Sigelman and Welch 1991). As an extension of more recent work on racial residential segregation suggesting that even in racially diverse communities, blacks are still the least desirable neighbors,

the parents interviewed strongly desired to create a racially diverse living experience for their children. Often they were unable to achieve this type of diversity in their neighborhoods so they sought out diverse interactions in their children's schooling environments. For them, diversity has taken on more than the dichotomy of black and white. It is clear that these parents put great thought into the amount of diverse racial experiences that their children receive. One father of two stressed that being around predominantly African Americans was not the real world or the real America. Strategically, he and his wife planned to move their children into a more racially diverse school after they'd completed elementary school to ensure that their educational experience was well rounded.

This strategy was expressed by a number of parents. A mother of two children expressed the financial burden of having her children attend an all-black school, suggesting that more racially integrated schooling would save parents money, "because when you put your kid in an all-black school then you got to take them to other activities, where they get to become indoctrinated with other cultures." In both of these instances, parents are strategic in their thinking about how to best prepare their children for a diverse world. As a result of these parents being aware of the persistent racism resulting in predominantly black neighborhoods, they are preparing themselves to pay for more racially diverse schooling or racially diverse activities. This trend was recurrent throughout the respondents interviewed. There were some parents who acknowledged driving as far as forty-five minutes from their homes to ensure that that it was imperative for her child to have a racially diverse dance class or participate on a racially diverse athletic team.The residential racial segregation patterns that have existed for decades

continue to plague middle class blacks, regardless of their class positions (Farley 1996; Farley, Fielding and Krysan 1997). In this instance, a family of four with parents who are an educator and corporate executive, desire to limit the number of blacks that move into an area with them because they realize that the resources and amenities will follow the white people who leave when 'too many' blacks move into a residential area. He perceives that the process of moving to a better area (usually a majority white area) results in middle class blacks having to continuously relocate in an effort to keep up with the resources. This is the 'chasing' part of the dream. The American Dream is elusive in that it follows the white families who flee an area when black families enter. He expands this chasing concept further to the burning of bridges intimating that once he 'moves on up to the Eastside', he hopes that other blacks, whether or not they are similarly situated, do not move with him. He spoke about not wanting public transportation or apartments in his area because he is trying to keep the whites around. It is important to note that he does not want the whites around to befriend them or develop interracial relationships but to maintain good schools and nice amenities in close proximity to his home.

Some parents were clear about diversity being more than the dichotomy of black and white students in a classroom while others seemed content to have their students in a predominantly non-black school, even if that school was predominantly white. One stay at home mother describes her ideal composition this way, "I like for the classroom to be diverse. I don't like it to be too much of any one thing. If I could say it was 25, 25, 25, 25, love it. You know, or whatever it is. I like for there to be some of everybody. It keeps good discussions." Parents wanted their children to be prepared to operate in a diverse,

global society so it is necessary for their children to have a diverse educational experience.

Social Networks

Once the decision was made to have children or to move once children were of school age, black middle class parents availed themselves of all of the information about their schooling options and decided on the best fit for their child. Utilizing internet websites and print magazines to gather academic and demographic information about schools as well as the utilization of social capital in the form of relying on the experiences of their peers whose children were already attending schools, black middle class parents thoroughly explored schooling options. If they were able to move to the area wherein they felt the best schools were their neighborhood schools, they did. If they were not, they exercised school choice or private school options, depending upon the district. In many cases, parents would have children of different grade levels attending different schools in different parts of the metropolitan area, acknowledging that what is best for one child is not necessarily best for their other children.

Similar to white parents, black middle class parents rely on the suggestions of others who are similarly situated regarding information about schools (Holme 2002). Social capital was particularly important for parents who were new to the area. Parents spent much time discussing schooling options with other similarly situated parents, friends with children already in the school system, teachers, principals, and other administrators. Social networks were particularly important to those families who were new to the metropolitan area. They were choosing neighborhoods and schools yet did not

have the benefit of familiarity with the area and the schools. One mother of three, a teacher in a school district prior to purchasing a home in that school district notes during her search process, "I actually…I had a little insight because I knew people who were already working in the school system so they told me which schools to look at, which neighborhoods to consider and we did do that." Here this mother utilized her social capital from her employment relationships. Her coworkers were able to provide information about schools and neighborhoods based on their time in the area and their experience with parents and students in the area as well.

Another mother of three, when she first moved to the metro area acknowledged that she was only able to gather a limited amount of information because she was new to the area. "But being newcomers to a place you're really sort of, what's good on paper? What do our colleagues do? What do our friends do? So you're sort of operating on those bases a little bit more than you would in different kind of circumstances." In this case, the mother recognizes that she does not have many friends in her new area. However, she is able to speak with those in close proximity to determine what choices they've made for their children. She relies on the referrals of her coworkers and friends.

Other newcomers to the metropolitan area rely on information from individuals who are engaged in similar extracurricular activities. This single mother utilized a mom she'd observed in one of her daughter's extracurricular activities to have a conversation about schooling choices. She notes the importance of seeing that her children seemed academically advanced and that she seemed particularly organized. The primary focus for this mother was to maximize the academic experience of her daughter. Another

single mom who ultimately decided to send her child to private school recounts her experience this way,

> Mom: There was a parent in her gymnastics class that was really, really extremely structured, and we just kind of talked about school. Her kids were a little advanced, my daughter was pretty advanced. Her kids were going to be going there last year, and she recommended it so I let my daughter go there for summer school. At first I didn't want her to go there because I thought it was going to be too expensive but somehow I ended up paying more for her other school. This school, the kids there learn a lot more than pretty much any school I've heard of, and because my daughter was already pretty advanced, I took her out of [one school] because it was too slow for her and the [this other school], they raved that they taught way above the grade level. So she went there, she excelled there, and now based on my research, I did a lot of research for schools, that school offered the most out of what I was looking for for her.

> **Adria: How did you go about doing that research?**

> Mom: Most of it was online. I visited a couple of schools. I called. I talked to people.

Another couple new to the metropolitan area highlights the middle class based organizations to which they belonged as a key source of information when decision making for their children. This mother emphasizes the importance of gathering information from like-minded parents.

> Mom: No, just you know, how you end up networking with other parents in the school system. Do you know what I'm saying? You know, like there are a couple of people that we've met over the past…since our kids have been there and you want your kids to not emulate those students obviously, but you want them sort of like Jack and Jill, you want them to hang around kids that are like them. You know that are progressive and they're learning things and you know, they're being challenged in school, so you want to hang around those parents as well to expose your child to parents like that as well. Parents that can be encouraging to your children as well.

Newcomers to the metropolitan area are selective about from whom they gather their information. They gather information from individuals whose children display a

particular set of characteristics or whom they feel they are shared class-based similarities. For example, the earlier newcomer mothers requested information from their coworkers – individuals who are similarly situated.

As these mothers demonstrate, contrary to what scholars have found in research on white families (Holme 2002), black middle class parents do not make decisions solely based on what others recommend. Rather, they investigate the schools themselves. A mother of two, a former educator, explains it this way, "Well, I went online and looked up all of the private schools in my area and probably visited most of them. So I went from school to school. I took a tour of each one. Just you know, compared them. [My husband]'s like, well go ahead and if you like one of them call me and I'll go ahead and come look." Parents in this study spoke to administrators at the schools. They went to visit the schools. Although they were able to gain information from their coworkers, neighbors, or others in their social network, parents were most comfortable with schools wherein they had visited and made their own assessment of the environment and the experience their child(ren) may have if they were to enroll at that school.

A stay at home mom of four recalls the experiences she and her husband had when deciding on purchasing a home. This mother was looking to relocate her children into a school that had more of a familial environment,

> Mom: I called and spoke to the principal and he was very warm and friendly and welcoming. And then we went and toured the school.
>
> **Adria: You and your husband?**
>
> Mom: And then we actually went and looked at some other houses at a different school system, and we ended up and looking and checking that out. I didn't tour those other schools. I just called and asked questions about those other schools. And then we ended up about two months later,

we came back... It was just -- it was the one. We knew it was the one. And
I think we ended up closing on the house three days later.

Parents desired to feel as though the school worked in partnership with them in the schooling process for their children. Many schooling environments have not presented a welcoming atmosphere for black parents, regardless of class status (Lareau and Horvat 1999). One of the characteristics that parents continued to emphasize was liking a school that felt like a family atmosphere. One mother recounts an experience where her child was hospitalized,

> When…. my mom came to help take care of my kids, and while we were away [my son] was playing soccer during their break time. Ran into a 5th grader, hit his head, had a mild concussion. So my mom had to go get him and take him to the hospital and the principal and one of his teachers went with my mother to the hospital. So I mean that's just to show how it really is like a family over there and they hung out with my mother for awhile."

For black middle class parents, across school or neighborhood racial composition, they desire to feel valued and welcomed in their children's school environment. It is important that black parents feel a part of their children's schooling environment. This involvement serves a dual purpose. In addition to the financial and human capital that has been mentioned, more interaction between and among black middle class parents with teachers, parents and administrators at predominantly white and integrated environments, more opportunities to display respectable behavior are presented. One mother whose children attend a school that is changing from predominantly black to predominantly white because of gentrification recalls the process of replacing the principal to communicate better with the white parents who were now involved at the school.

> Mom: Yes, the principal was standing right there when we walked in to register him. She was standing right there and she was very excited to see

us and the principal she's a really nice woman, but I knew when I met her I was like she'll be there, like she's good to take [the school] to the next step like transitioning from sort of an underperforming school to a performing school, but I was like I don't think she's going to be there for the long haul because she—this is terrible, this is going to sound politically incorrect. Everything I say I know sounds politically incorrect, but she was real nice, real cool, but she was more along the lines of the people in the neighborhood, the older residents in the neighborhood, like some of the people might call her a little ghetto.

Adria: Okay.

Mom: And so she was good when she came in and was sort of cleaning up and helping the school get to the next level, but when you start to talking about going and speaking to these upper middle class white parents who were professionals and all of that stuff.

Adria: Right. She wouldn't have made the cut.

Mom: She wasn't the person who was ultimately going to convince them to place their kids there on the large part.

Adria: Got you. And this is the one that's been replaced?

Mom: Yes. So literally a job opening came open at the middle school in the neighborhood and she applied for that job and got it. So then there was a hiring committee to replace her. And my husband was on that committee because he is the head of the local school council at [at our school].

Adria: And that's the same as the PTA?

Mom: No, the local school counsel is like a group of some parents, some teachers, some neighborhood stake holders, so they might not have kids there, but they are like real estate agents, business people, church deacons or whatever. And so it's sort of an outside group that works with the principal to sort of oversee stuff with the school so it's something that the school system created, I think. So as part of that group, he was part of the search committee. And so they ended up picking somebody who was a lot more polished, you know, she—power,… Right, she was like that type of black woman and she used to be assistant principal at [another school] and she came over to [our school]. And she's like us—I mean for lack of a better—that's pretty much what it is.

Adria: And presentation means a lot.

> Mom: Right, and so my husband was like I think she's going to go over a lot better to these parents that she has to make the case to.

Here, this mother has explained the importance of how blacks are presented when interacting with white parents in educational settings. This story captures the role that presentation plays and how it is discussed among members of the black middle class community. The politics of respectability matter when it comes to blacks regardless of their actual role in the school. Parents and administrators alike can utilize their interactions with whites in welcoming school environments to attempt to dispel stereotypes of blacks and remind whites that in some ways, black middle class parents are more like white middle class parents than lower and working class blacks.

Parental Involvement

One of the most important uses of social capital in schools occurs in interactions with other parents (Lin 2000, Horvat et al. 2003). Often for black parents whose children attend a desirable school, there may be resources from other parents that black parents can not access. Parents commented on the cliques existing at the schools, particular attention was given to the stay at home mom clique. A local college professor, mother of one son, notices this:

> Mom: So I make sure I'm there, I volunteer. So it never fails I'll go to someone and someone will say I saw you. I'm like and you are whose mom. Oh, so and so told me about and…
>
> **Adria: Like researching you on the internet**?
>
> Mom: Researching or I'll be talking to someone because there is a clique, there is definitely a clique.
>
> **Adria: The stay at home mom clique?**
>
> Mom: The stay at home clique and so my son is friends with some of the stay at home mom kids and so I think it's just people talking. So every so

often it surprises me because I'll do something and oh someone told me to look and I saw you and I was like oh, that's nice. Don't believe it.

Adria: How does that make you feel?

Mom: A little uncomfortable, but I take it with a grain of salt. It was interesting because that's why I say it's middle to upper class there are moms that are stay at home moms. University of Pennsylvania, well-educated and this was part of their duty to stay at home. So in their activities they are active in the community, they are at the fundraiser and all of that stuff, so it's not that they are just at home they are actually doing everything else.

This mother observes that there is a group of mothers who have a very close relationship at her son's school. Within this clique of moms, information is passed back and forth about the parents in such a way that when this mother interacts with individuals with whom she does not have a relationship, they know exactly who she is. The same is the case with information. Many parents acknowledged that there are things occurring at the school and among the children about which they are completely unaware because they are not a part of that inner circle. This happens in the private schools as well. A mother of three claims,

Mom: I think [another private school] was difficult, because I think that there was really, I think [our old private school] is more difficult than [our current private school] from a social interaction, because most of the mothers at [our old school] don't work, and I think there is a real difference between the working moms versus the non-working moms. So, I was always kind of out of the loop. Because, when they meet at ten o'clock in the morning, I can't be there, and so that was a little, and I didn't feel like the mothers were as welcoming, but at [our current school], I feel that the community is really a lot more welcoming, and they create opportunities for everybody to participate no matter whether you're working or not, and I don't feel they're as kind of aloof as the parents were at [our old school].

Adria: Okay, so when you say welcoming, exactly what do you mean?

Mom: I experience the mothers at [the old school], not all of them, but a lot of them, to be kind of standoffish and just not really inclusive, but like for example, at [the current school], for one of those classes, they had like a mother's lunch thing, and so the moms would get together, and they

would send an email to everybody to participate and RSVP, and so I'm sure other things went on like at [the old school] that I just probably never even knew about, but like they would say, everybody can come, and even though I would always say, I can't make it, they would still always send me the emails. So, that kind of situation is a little bit different.

Even though parents have made various decisions to ensure that their children have access to the best schooling resources, they are often still denied access to information – often that information concerns the inner workings of the school or non-published opportunities.

Similarly to the way that this black middle class mother at a predominantly white school was easily identifiable to the 'stay at home' clique, many other black middle class parents who are able to afford to live in and/or send their children to affluent white schools have high status positions. The administrator dad referenced earlier observes that the four black fathers who drop their children off at the school every morning all have significant positions in their employment: a judge, an executive director of a major non-profit, and two high ranking school district administrators. This ease of recognition is a form of tokenism in that because of the sheer number of white men and women in high profile positions like the type that these fathers possess, they are often not as easily recognized. Although each of these fathers would be able to 'pull rank' because of their positions, many of them do not unless they need to utilize their titles, and the accompanying social capital, to ensure that their children receive certain benefits. The dad did recall two experiences where other parents implied that he was receiving preferential treatment because of his administrative affiliation with the district. Although he does not have these interactions often, he feels it necessary to explain to the teachers and staff at his children's school to treat him only as a father and not to regard his title

with the district. Another father, an administrator at an elite private school and father of three, notes when he and his wife began considering private schooling options for their children that he experienced a form of favoritism,

> Part of it even now as we potentially consider looking at another school, wasn't even discriminated against. I mean we – maybe it was discrimination in a different way because a lot of folks knew me and knew who I was, and they wanted me to be a parent. They were like we see what we can get out of this. So I told my wife, whenever we try to make that next transition – we kind of thought about it this year, and folks here wanted my kids to come here. I told them look, I want you to go on your own because if I step foot in the building, it's going to be different. Like you won't get the real feel. They're going to put on a dog and pony show.

In this case, schools wanted him to send his children to their school. He felt strongly that it was not because of his children rather, because of his role. This disturbed him and he encouraged his wife to go to the other schools by herself so that she could gather a real assessment of the school rather than the 'say all of the right things' experience because they want your husband to become one of their parents.

On the other hand, there are parents who expect their job titles or social networks to achieve certain results for their children. One father of two boys who is a lobbyist for a major union recalls an experience during the process of visiting the school his oldest child would attend that overall he had a positive experience but requested the school to test his child for proper grade placement prior to him beginning the school. The father knew that this exception was within his rights as a result of his familiarity with state school code, however, the process did not move as quickly as he'd expected. He reflects "the one interaction that we did have, you know, it was collegial and it was respectful, however, I think when I handed over my business card that had my organization and my position, I think—I was expecting a follow up call and I have not yet received it. So we

will be following up." His class position, in this case, did not work for him. Another parent, mother of three, went to the county office and had an exchange with the superintendent to get her daughter into a particular school. One single mother in the study was on the board of a museum connected with one high performing school and subsequently determined in which neighborhood she would need to reside to ensure that her son was in that school's district. One mother of four traveled to the school she desired her son to attend. She began attending PTA meetings and being involved in school acitivites – all prior to her son's admittance to the school. One day, as she was at the school, she saw the principal on the school grounds and made her requests known to him. He acknowledged that her son seemed like a good kid and he had seen her around and that resulted in him requesting the transfer on her son's behalf. There are a number of instances where parents intentionally used their class status and social networks to ensure that their children were able to attend a particular school. Parents called in favors to political friends, school principals, county administrators, and anyone else to whom they had access with the hopes of having their child land in their desired schooling environment. Although these parents are not always successful, it is not for lack of trying. Black middle class parents seem to be able to navigate the class landscape in ways that directly benefit their children.

Once parents are in these desired schools, they believe strongly in parental involvement. As noted earlier, there are some instances where parents are unable to physically be at the school because of the distance from their homes to the schools. Overwhelmingly in these cases, parents make donations of resources or supplies to account for the inability to be present. Other parents are clearly committed to

engagement through the PTA. Two administrators at elite private schools recall that parents are able to work across class to have an effective PTA,

> Male: They're all committed to the school. Like I said, their PTA is standing room only – PTA meetings, and even some of the parents who aren't considered middle class – you'd consider them working class – they're very committed to the school as well, so that's what we really enjoy about it. For example, my son is in Cub Scouts which is based there at the school, and I'd say half of the Cub Scouts – some of the parents are working class, but they're dedicated just as much as the other parents who are considered middle class. We're all there together. We're all there for one purpose regardless of our social economic background. We're there for one reason, to make sure our kids get the best education, and we want to support the school.

> Female: I would say the majority of the parents at our school – because we are a new charter, a lot of the private school parents in that area came over, so that's kind of why we're like a private public so to speak. So they're dedicated, but even so, like you said, we have mixed classes there, so I would think that everybody seems to be like minded, wanting the best for their children.

Overwhelmingly, black middle class parents were invested in being involved in their children's schooling. The expressed idea of all parents desiring their children to be successful and have a good education was a prevalent them with every parent in the study who echoed the importance of parental involvement.

For some parents parental involvement was being involved in PTA. Some parents had strong feeling about the PTA/PTSA's fundraising function. One graduate student mother of two observes, "the PTA is very active at both schools by the way. But, they are active in raising money. They are not necessarily actively engaged in the school." For other parents, it was important that they were present during the school day. One mother of two sons, a healthcare professional, recounts her standard introduction to her son's teachers,

And we let every teacher that we know that we interact with at the beginning of the year, we let them know this is how we are. We're high maintenance parents. We really are. We're gonna keep our finger to the pulse and know what's going on in your classroom, and it's not a bad thing if you work with us. It will be a beautiful union if you just work with us, and that's not to say we need to get our way because we have learned as we've progressed through this initial exposure to the academic process with our first child that there are things that we can do to improve our role in the process. So it's not that we're trying to get our way. And I tell my parents this, the parents that I work with professionally, you're the expert when it comes to your child, I'm the expert when it comes to how to strengthen your child's needs, but when it comes to knowing the in's and out's of your child, I don't know your child the way you know your child and I need you as an effective partner on the team for the success of your child. And I say that to my parents and I believe that as a parent. So [my husband] and I are integral parts of our children's success and we can't be closed out and so you can welcome us or we'll push our way in but we're gonna be involved.

These parents feel strongly about being an active participant in their children's learning. One father of three indicates that sometimes he drops by his son's school just to see what he is doing, "sometimes you have to say, I have to go check on my child. Go see what your child is doing. See how your child acts." He, along with many other parents in the study, feel strongly that parental involvement is not optional.

For many of the parents in the study, the onus is not just on them but on the other parents at the school. A successful school is dependent upon parents being involved. One stay at home mother of two says,

A good school is typically one that the parents are very involved in and the parents are very involved in it because they're very focused on their child and their child's well being and they want their child to have a great education. I don't think that you can find a good school where there aren't active parents and that says a lot. It says that the parents support the school because usually in those schools where you have the active parents the parents are putting in money to the school and they could be private or they could be public... So where the active parents are the good schools

> kind of form and so you have an active parent, the child knows that my mom is watching what's going on at school and so they're helping them with their homework and they're doing all those things so all the other things kind of fall in line from that. It's kind of an interesting thing and I don't really know how to name all the other things because the forefront of everything is the parents because the parents are going to demand that there is a good administration at the school. The parents are going to make the good test scores come because they're going to make sure their child does their homework and all those other things and so the children are going to be well spoken and they're going to have other things that they're doing outside of school because their parents are just really involved like that and they're really focused on the well-being of their child.

Contrary to literature that states that black parents are not involved in their children's schooling because of discrimination (Lareau and Horvat 1999), all of the parents in this study were quite clear in their expressing that parental involvement was necessary for a school to function at its best.

Black middle class parents, overall, are very concerned about their children's academic experiences. They desire to prepare their children to be competitive in the future. Based on the knowledge they have about what makes a good school and their own experiences, they strive to ensure their children are in the best place for them. These parents are aware that race and resources matter but hope to overcome those differences through their parental involvement. Overall, parents put forth a lot of work to ensure their children have positive schooling experiences. Initially, the fact finding process as to which school is the best for their children is very time consuming and then depending on the school of choice, financial and time resources are often spent to maintain that schooling option. Black middle class parents desire to have healthy well-adjusted children who are prepared for the futures they will face.

Chapter Six:

Racial Socialization Strategies

Black middle class parents, in addition to navigating their class position, must establish a sense of understanding their race position. In this chapter, I argue that black middle class parents develop a nuanced form of racial socialization[7] for their children. Black parents shoulder the responsibility of buffering information their children receive about race (Murray, Stokes, and Peacock 1999). Information can come from a variety of sources. Schools are the primary socializing agent where racial messages are communicated to children (Lewis 2003). Often, the messages given in schools do not reflect the image of what it means to be black that parents desire their children to attain. When deciding on which schools their children should attend, black parents, in light of their own educational experiences, understand that schools are race-making institutions. Since race is being created and recreated in school interactions (Lewis 2003; Forman 2001), parents respond with their own set of racial socialization messages to ensure that their children understand how race works in ways that are reflective of their parents racial beliefs. In this chapter, I will discuss how black middle class parents who are new to the metropolitan area espouse humanist ideologies and egalitarian socialization strategies while long term middle class black residents living in predominantly white or integrated communities employ the racial socialization strategies of racial barriers and self-promotion to prepare their children for their racial position in US society.

Although the focus of this chapter is racial socialization, many parents acknowledged the election of President Obama as the black middle class experience

finally being recognized and represented on a national stage. One mother of two sons, attending a predominantly white school and living in a predominantly white area, lamented that "the educated African American male didn't get popular until, unfortunately, Obama." She further expressed that there were hundreds of years of black intellect that was considered invalid but in 2008, the black intellectual male went mainstream. In her mind, the portrayal of Obama as new and innovative – the new face of America – was "unfortunate". She was upset that it had taken so long for the black middle class experience to be considered part of the mainstream in America. She had seen and experienced countless Obamas, many in her very own family, and the fact that these generations of successful, educated blacks were being misrepresented as a new trend was disturbing to her. Obama's portrayal as an exception frustrated and angered some of the parents in the study. In their minds, their existence as an educated black middle class had not been recognized or validated until Obama came into the White House. Although contentious among parents, Obama's election was good for their children's socialization in that it made their existence as black middle class individuals a norm and not a novelty.

Understanding Racial Socialization

Although the term racial socialization has been used in a number of different ways to measure a number of different constructs (Lesane-Browne 2006; Bowman and Howard 1985; Caughy et al. 2002; Hughes and Chen 1999). I am using Lesane-Brown's definition of racial socialization: "specific verbal and non-verbal (e.g., modeling of behavior and exposure to different contexts and objects) messages transmitted to younger generations for the development of values, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding the

meaning and significance of race and racial stratification, intergroup and intragroup interactions, and personal and group identity." (2006). Racial socialization concerns the messages and practices that are given to individuals providing information about who they are as black children, how others perceive them as black children, and what it means to be black in a predominantly white society (Boykin and Toms 1985; Bowman and Howard 1985). Although these messages do not have to come exclusively from parents, this chapter will focus on messages that parents transmit to their children about racial socialization in the post-Obama era.

There are a number of ways that parents disseminate racial socialization messages. Racial socialization messages are composed of both the expression, the way that parents transmit the message, and intent, the purpose of their message (Lesane-Brown 2006). Messages are expressed in two ways: verbal and non-verbal messages. Verbal messages are those that are communicated directly to children whereas non-verbal messages can include a multitude of forms: modeling or reinforcing cultural or ethnic behaviors or racially structuring children's environments. The intent of racial socialization messages is either inadvertent or deliberate (Lesane-Browne 2006; Bowman and Howard 1985; Caughy et al. 2002; Hughes and Chen 1999). Parents may use these various types of messages interchangeably and in some cases, these messages are in conflict with one another (Hughes and Chen 1999, Lesane-Brown 2006).

Parents have numerous reasons to employ none of these socialization strategies[8]. Some parents may have had extremely negative experiences with race themselves and are reluctant to discuss it with their children. In other cases, parents strive to raise race

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[8] Although it is important to note that silence is now considered a type of racial socialization, most often linked to egalitarianism (Thompson 2010).

neutral children and teach life skills without focusing on the role of race (Lesane-Brown 2006). Thornton et al (1990) suggest that some parents may have internalized negative images of Blacks, are concerned to discussions about race may make their children angry, or believe that race is no longer a problem. There are traditionally three methods of communicating racial socialization to children: culture messages, minority experience, and mainstream experience. Culture messages highlight black culture while minority experience prepares children for inequalities that may result from their racial affiliation (Bowman and Howard 1985; Marshall 1995; Sanders Thompson 1994; Thornton et al 1990; Lesane-Brown 2006). The approach taken by the majority of black middle class parents is the mainstream experience method. The goal of mainstream experience is to "de-emphasize race but stress life skills and person al qualities, such as ambition and confidence in addition to emphasizing Blacks' co-existence in mainstream society" (Lesane-Brown 2006:409). This idea fits with much of the racial socialization literature suggesting black parents who are educated and live in racially mixed areas are more likely to employ some sort of racial socialization method (Thornton et al 1990).

My findings suggest that despite residential racial composition, overwhelmingly, parents desired to teach their children to succeed in a multiracial, multiethnic environment. None of the parents expressed the expectation that their children would experience an adult lifestyle that would be predominantly black. There was general sentiment that all of the children referenced in the study would need to live in a diverse environment. As our society becomes increasingly global, these parents in our study must determine ways to prepare their children to be successful in navigating this international terrain. In an effort to ensure their children's future success and ability to

live a comfortably middle class lifestyle themselves, the black parents in the present study were clear as to the ways to speak with their children about how to be successful in mainstream society (Frabutt et al. 2002). Racial socialization, then, for these parents focuses on mainstream success for their children.

Using the election, inauguration, and office of President Barack Obama, middle class black parents demonstrate how they employ mainstream experience racial socialization strategies. Parents want to ensure that their children are aware of the racist past experienced by many of their ancestors but focus much of their energy on ensuring that their children are aware of the broad opportunities that are available to them. This type of socialization neglects the ethnic pride and egalitarian race-related socialization strategies, embracing more racial barriers and self-development socialization practices (Bowman and Howard 1985). As has been the case in previous studies (Frabutt, Walker, and MacKinnon-Lewis 2002), parents do not discuss discrimination or experiences of discrimination with their children explicitly, although many thought they would have these conversations with their children as they get older and are able to handle a conversation about racial discrimination.

Teaching Black Identity in a Diverse America

Black parents use different strategies to teach their children about race and how race operates in US society. There are a number of factors that cause variation in which types of parents use which racial socialization strategies. Parents connect the process of child rearing to particular kinds of racialized experiences, often ones that they themselves have experienced (Schneider et al 1998). In a 1985 study, Bowman and Howard found that many black parents did not use any particular racial socialization strategies but those that

did most often instilled ethnic pride in their children. The racial identity of blacks, black parents specifically, is partly based on their racial ideology. Sellers et al (1997) indicate four ideology subscales – nationalist, oppressed minority, assimilationist, and humanist. These ideology subscales match with racial socialization strategies employed by parents. Nationalist parents would likely employ race pride strategies while humanist parents would employ egalitarianism strategies. Similarly, oppressed minority parents would share with their children the racial barriers strategies and assimilationist parents would emphasize self-development.

The majority of parents in this study who live in white or integrated neighborhoods and whose children attend white or integrated schools actually employ assimilationist ideologies. During the interview, parents were asked if they would teach their children to be happy to be black. This question would allow parents to respond out of their own understanding of their position in the racial hierarchy and what the future position of their children may be. In response to the question "Will you teach your children to be happy to be black?", the vast majority of parents, across school types, neighborhood types, and amount of time in the metropolitan area, interviewed responded that they wanted them to be happy to be who they are, noting that blackness was a part of their personhood. One mother of three in a predominantly white neighborhood whose children attend predominantly white schools and are biracial as their father is White clarifies her response to this question when she says,

> I mean yeah, the world is going to perceive you a certain way but for me it
> is more about heritage and it's more about where they've come from and
> where our family has come from and where our family has been through.
> For me, that's what I mean by I want them to understand who they are but
> it's not about being happy to be Black. It's about being happy to be who

they are… Because they are a lot of things and they are standing on the shoulders of a lot of people who have sacrificed a lot and been through a lot and you know they need to understand that and so they will grow up with a specific and an acute awareness of what it means culturally and what their heritage is. Because I also don't want them to forget. I don't want them to be those kind of little Black kids who grow up in the suburbs and think they are White because they are not. I don't mean that in a 'so you better remember you are a Black child'. I want you to be proud of look at what our people have done in this country in a hundred and fifty years. Be proud of that… Understand that there is also responsibility that comes with your privilege and that people died for you to be able to go to this school. So I might turn my nose up at [our neighborhood school] but I tell you that if we go you are going to study because somebody died and marched so that you could go to this public school... So you need to understand that about who you are and who you come from. So from that perspective…I mean…happy to be Black…you know I don't want them to think they are any better than anybody else for being Black and I don't want them to think they are any worse for being Black. It's who they are just like being a man or a woman or whatever. It's just who God made us and I want them to understand how all these things can coexist.

In her response, she indicates that her children's identity is comprised of many aspects, not the least of which is their race. She also emphasizes that her children have a complicated identity and she desires for them to embrace all parts of that identity. The history of their family and the legacy that they have been born into is how she defines their blackness. She, as well as the majority of other parents interviewed, in addition to their racial identity mentioned their children's personalities, spirituality, and interests as other aspects of themselves in which they should take pride. The struggle of black ancestors is important as a source of pride in understanding historical context as a part of what makes you who you are. This distinction is important in that parents are not teaching their children to be proud of their blackness, rather to be proud of who they are and to be aware of the struggles of their black ancestors (Hughes et al. 2006). The awareness is one of understanding how they historically fit into the current structure of

America while acknowledging that there are a lot of attributes possessed that are equally important as their blackness.

It is the hope of these parents that their children embrace their black racial identity as a part of their overall identity. Race should not be a primary identity for these children nor should it frame how the children experience others or how race has been used as a barrier to success. One couple responds to the question if they would teach their children to be happy to be black this way,

> **Female:** I think for me, it's more important to teach them to be happy to be them with the full understanding of who they are, and that's a combination of a lot of things. Their race, their interests, their friends, their gender. So yeah, I think for me, it's more about teaching them to be happy to be them.

> **Male:** I don't know. I don't want to put too much stock in it versus – like she said, she'd be proud to be who you are, and if you're happy to be black and glad you're not something else. Just like creating some type of strata between races is like essentially what you're doing. I just look at it from that standpoint.

This father articulates the lack of a desire to make it a racial competition. In teaching his son and daughter to be proud of their blackness, he is not desirous of them declaring that they are better than any other race. This is contrary to the ethnic pride strategy of racial socialization. Rather, these parents would rather their children consider their racial identity as a part of their overall identity. This humanist ideology is reflective of many of the parents living in predominantly white or integrated areas. The mother of the three biracial children quoted earlier declares,

> I don't know how you get that balance right where they identify with their racial heritage and they are proud of who they are and they understand …bless liberal White people who say I'm color blind. I don't want to be color blind. God made us different on purpose and it is beautiful. The problem is the reason you say that is because you think it is something to

be ashamed of or something to be scared of or something to be ignored. I think it's beautiful so I want them to be proud of who they are. When people say why does your hair look like that I want them to say because my grandfather was from Ghana, that they never met. I want them to understand that about who they are… I want them to be proud…The only way you can really understand is to not be scared of race. If you are scared of race then you will put your head in the sand… If you embrace it for everything that it means, all the positive and all the negative, all the stereotypes…

Overwhelmingly, these black middle class parents categorically reject the idea of colorblindness from non-blacks. Black middle class parents in this study are quite clear in their understanding that "race matters" while expressing the necessity of their children to have an interracial, global understanding that all of the people in the world matter and are important. A stay at home mother of two, when describing essential elements of a good school says, "I just want my child to know that there's more than just America. There is a world and I'm a part of the world and I'm going to find my place in the world but I'm also going to be very accepting of others in the world." This mother lives in a predominantly black neighborhood while sending her children to predominantly white schools. Her neighborhood is gentrifying and becoming increasingly less black. It is her desire to have a neighborhood composed of a number of races and ethnicities.

Other parents were clear in that they wanted their children to have racially diverse experiences from the beginning of their primary education. The most typical remedy was to move into a predominantly white area. One father of two sons, when explaining why his family moved into a predominantly white area said,

At this point he's had a completely minority experience. You know, all African Americans in his class, all African American classroom professionals, and we don't live in an all-African American world. Even if … there's a large percentage of African Americans, it is absolutely critical that our boys get exposure and that they know how to function in more than just a familiar environment. We do not want our boys to ever

> be comfortable. Under no circumstance do we ever want him to understand or to only be able to relate to one culture.

Of course parents acknowledged other reasons for desiring to live in predominantly white areas, often, amenities such as Starbucks and Target. In many cases, the parents express their desire to live with other black families but are unwilling to accept fewer amenities. One mother of two sons says, "The majority thinks since you live around them and go to their schools, you are choosing them. If I could live in an area with a lot of blacks and have the same amenities and the same schools, I would. It is not a privilege because I can live around you, even if you're there first." Many parents wanted to ensure that their children had access to the same things that other middle class children had, particularly white middle class children without embracing the "white is right" attitude that many blacks nostalgically use to explain the flight from the inner city to the suburbs post desegregation (Wilson 1987).

The desire on the part of black parents to have a diverse schooling experience for their children is comparable to their desire to live in racially integrated neighborhoods. Although racial residential segregation studies indicate that individuals of other races and ethnicities are least likely to want to live in a predominantly black area, the rank ordering of racial and ethnic groups occurring in residential choices does not translate directly to the desires of black middle class parents. The meaning of diversity has taken on a global perspective and parents are most desirous of their children having a diverse experience that will prepare them for a global world. Two fathers in a discussion about their children's schooling experiences shared,

> Dad 1: They may not reside [here] for the rest of their lives. This is an unrealistic place. It is, so they need to learn to coexist with other cultures, and that's mainstream – that's the way to go, even if they decide to go

work for corporate America. That's mainstream, and they have to play the game to succeed. It's as simple as that.

Dad 2: I think more so than when we were in school, it's a global society now.

Dad 1: Right.

Dad 2: I didn't know what I didn't know on the level that when [left here] – I mean folks thought I was Dominican. I was like huh? You know, I knew where the Dominican was, but even when I went to a huge school in the northeast, it was 4% black. … They need to be well versed in different cultures and in different areas. I mean there's some kids that you talk to, and I hate to say this, in some public schools – tell me where Iraq is. When they couldn't tell you culturally what – you know, and different religions. Those are things you need to – part of it is when you get into the environments we're in … I need to be able to relate and have a conversation with you, even if I've never been there. So yeah, you've got fifty million in your pocket, but we can talk because for me to be – not that you're trying to get something out of the relationship but to be able to have that conversation and to be a peer – you have to be able to have the small talk, and without those experiences, I don't think you can.

Dad 1: Right.

These fathers illustrate that global awareness, the way that many black middle class parents viewed diversity, is extremely important in ensuring that their children are able to interact with folks of middle to upper class backgrounds in the future. Although there was conversation about global exposure for the sake of exposure, the vast majority of comments about global awareness were for the purpose of future professional and personal interactions. It is clear that most of these parents are not preparing their children to learn about other cultures for the sake of learning, rather, they are preparing them for success in a world that is becoming increasingly global. A mother of three states it this way,

I don't think that it's healthy for a child to go to school with all of one anything. If you are Caucasian I don't think you should only go to school with Caucasians. If you're Asian, you need diversity because the world is

> diverse and you don't get to choose if the job you get after college is one where you are the minority or the majority. You don't get to choose that so you need to be exposed to all of them to be able to work with all people.

Again, her focus is not on exposure to other cultures for the sake of exposure and a more 'cultured' living experience, rather she is quite focused on potential for future employment. Part of the desire for these parents to have their children in diverse environments is to secure their future middle class status, both in terms of employment and social interactions. One mother who is in a predominantly white neighborhood says,

> It is because when you work as a professional as you know that you have to interact with them and I think for them to grow up in this falsehood that the world looks…like, for instance, okay, I live in a black house, we go to a black church, I go to an all-black school, now I'll go to an all-black college and then bam you're thrown out on the world and you don't know how to interact outside of that. That's going to be a shock to you because they do play by different rules and if you aren't exposed to them some people can adjust and kind of get things together but some don't and it's better that they're prepared for it versus being just thrown out and left to fend for themselves not knowing the outcome. So as a parent I think that's a responsibility.

This mother understands the role of preparing her children for success in a diverse world as part of her responsibility. One of the difficulties in living in an area where there are large numbers of successful, middle class blacks is that it can be difficult to find diverse environments. A mother new to the metropolitan area explains it this way,

> When I first moved here I really wasn't happy with that because one of the reasons we left [our previous northern city] was we thought, well, here we are going to [this metropolitan area] because [my husband] used to live in [this area] and when I was thinking [the metropolitan area], I was thinking of moving back to [my husband's old neighborhood]. So I come here and I'm like whoa. A, they were all white, B, they all went to [to the same state university], and C, they pretty much all went to high school together. So you're like, okay there is absolutely no diversity in this neighborhood. So we stuck out like a sore thumb. And then I met this one woman who was from New York and I was asking her what's the diversity inside these schools because if the neighborhood is like this, my god how does the

school look? And she was like, no, the schools are a lot more diverse, it's okay.

As these parents stressed the importance of their children having diverse interactions, they do not overlook race. These parents see race as part of their children's overall identity. None of the parents in the study emphasized their race as a deficit or a hurdle to overcome. Rather, they see it as a strength and an asset. In addition to the categorical rejection of colorblindness, black middle class parents seem to be extremely put off by the language of diversity. They expressed great frustration with programs and institutions claiming the importance of diversity but only measuring its effectiveness in terms of quantity. One mother of three who lives in a predominantly black neighborhood but drives across the metropolitan area to have her eldest child in a racially integrated charter school, interviewed with her husband, said it this way:

> I think that's kind of the pros, and it's people that look like you. So, that is a pro, but it's also a con in the sense that as the world becomes more global, so the need increases for you to be able to relate, interrelate and interact with a diverse group of people. So, from that standpoint, there is an appeal to, if not live in a more diverse neighborhood, at least send your children to a school setting, educational setting where diversity truly is appreciated, and that it's not just some moniker on a wall or just, this is part of the mission statement, but that's not what they're living. So, it's a balance.

In addition to trying to strike a balance between where they live and where their children attend school, some parents exert great effort and energy ensuring their children are in an environment that does not desire their presence for the sake of tokenism. The definition of diversity is not based on the quantity of different ethnic and racial groups in a classroom. Diversity for these parents is more than simply sitting next to a person of a different racial background (Lewis 2003). Similar to the dialogue occurring during the social experiment of integrated schooling, it is not enough for black and white (or other)

children just to sit next to each other. There must be contact among the varied racial groups resulting in substantial relationships and conversations impacting all parties engaging in the contact. Contact theory, as initially presented by Gordon Allport (1954), supports the desire and expectations of these middle class parents in the racially diverse environments into which they send their children. Although the contact theory posits ways to minimize discriminatory behavior, these parents think that genuine contact among children of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds will result in positive interactions. These interactions will prepare their children for living in an increasingly diverse society. A part of the desire for increased interaction is minimizing discrimination but a greater part is ensuring that their children are positioned to interact with individuals of other ethnic and racial backgrounds.

Humanist Ideology: Wishing There Was No Race

Parents who espouse humanist ideologies desire their children to not focus on race as a primary aspect of their identity but rather to include it as a part of their personhood. In my study, these parents were ones who were new to the metropolitan area. Perhaps those parents who have not lived in the area for an extended period of time have not had exposure to the same sorts of racial experiences as those who have been here for a while. Given the racial composition, segregation, and demographics of this particular metropolitan area, it is likely that parents are exposed to a number of different ways of race being reified the longer they live here. One mother, who lives on a sprawling estate and children attend predominantly white schools that are quickly becoming integrated, recounts an experience of living with the discrimination in the metropolitan area this way:

Mom: So I like to do different kind of things, so when my kids were in second grade I said okay, we've had a good kindergarten year. I loved those teachers. First grade, loved those teachers. Second grade, I'm really loving these teachers. I don't want to just give them a gift card or send them lunch; I want to do something really special for them. So [my husband] said well what do you want to do? I said I think I want to have a teacher's appreciation dinner at the house. He said are you serious? I said yep. I mean I went all out; linen, china.

Adria: For all the teachers at the school?

Mom: For the whole second grade; principal and any other teachers that I really, really liked because [my husband] was the PTA president so he was cool with some of fourth grade and fifth grade teachers, any of those people, I invited them too.

Adria: So they all saw the house?

So as a result, they all RSVP'd, yeah we're coming. So I'll never forget when they came and it was like I could literally, when I'm going to the door, see people doing this [inaudible surprised facial expression]. So as a result, they come and they was like, oh my gosh, your house is beautiful and I said thank you, it's just home for us though come on in, let us pamper you, just being the perfect little hostess and every thing. I mean I had it laid out. [My son's second grade teacher] said I've been teaching for almost thirty years, she said no one has ever done anything this nice for me ever! Not as a parent, not ever! She said and I just want to say thank you. Okay, so we had a couple of teachers because [our other son] Donovan he loved his second grade teacher, but she was very animated and kid friendly, so it didn't surprise me, but I would just say no because they were like hey do you want to see my room, yeah. So I was like wanting to kill my kids because I think as an adult you say no baby or maybe some other time not yeah. So then you see this grown person…..

Adria: So she sees your whole house?

Mom: Yeah. So then the thing of it is we had a good time it appeared that everybody was happy, the whole bit. Boy was that a big mistake. It was such a big mistake because we were cool with the black teachers that were there, so we got all the feedback from what was said when they got back. Well one teacher just outright asked what does [her husband] do because isn't he a rapper or does he sell drugs?

Adria: Okay just to be clear, so this teacher had the gall to ask this to other teachers about y'all and the options were rapper or selling drugs?

> Mom: I was so offended because we had nothing. We have worked very hard. My husband built the first playground we had by himself with wood; hammer, nails together over at the other school.
>
> **Adria: Is he a rapper or does he sell drugs?**
>
> Mom: Yeah, he was in the music industry at one point in time, that was real short lived, but my husband went to college. He has an electrical engineering degree.

Parents who have longer tenure in the metropolitan area have had greater interaction with whites who may have negative reactions to the large numbers of middle class blacks in the area or are having difficulty with the changing demographics of their neighborhoods and schools as they are becoming more and more populated with blacks. This mother recounts an experience where the teachers and administrators that she invited over to her home could not fathom an upper middle class black family having such a beautiful home. Much of the growth of the black middle class in this area, as acknowledged in a previous chapter, is the result of success in the music and entertainment industry. This mother was highly offended by the thought of her husband, a hard working engineer whose joint efforts with her had elevated their lifestyles to an upper middle class, being relegated to only being a rapper or a drug dealer. The longer those families are in the metropolitan area wherein this study occurred, the more likely they are to have these sorts of experiences where race is made plain for them and they are confronted with mainstream stereotypes of successful blacks.

These newcomer parents desire their children to align themselves with the larger human race. Parents subscribing to this ideology attempt to minimize the importance of race rather pointing to individual characteristics such as hard work and integrity. The goal of this ideology is to teach their children to be good people, not simply good black

people. A mother when asked if she would teach her sons to be happy to be black

responds,

> Not necessarily happy. Proud. Not ashamed that they are who they are.
> You are who you are. You make the best of it. If you were purple, you
> have integrity, you do things to help people if you can. These are human
> characteristics or as I see them they're human characteristics. Not a black
> thing, not a white thing, so it's more important for me for them to be not
> necessarily happy but proud..

A number of parents subscribed to the humanist ideology of highlighting individual

strengths and attributes instead of emphasizing racial differences or disparities.

> Mom: Really it's, I'm not trying to be black, I'm trying to be a child of
> God so that is, you know that's a different category. You know, that's not
> a culturally distinct, you know, it's principles that everyone can do when
> practiced. So you know, it doesn't, I think really, you know, talking about
> race, it only has its value to a certain point.
>
> Dad: In the sense that, you know, yeah you need to observe or recognize
> and be aware of you know, there are certain things that affect certain
> races, you know, differently, but once you identify that and do what you
> can do about it, you know, it's still a greater humankind that draws us all
> together and you know, those issues that we have on those levels are
> greater than our individual race issues that we have. … To me, that's my
> personal opinion. So if we can focus on the greater humanity problem,
> change humanitarian problems, then we'll see that race problems, you
> know, don't really matter. I mean, if you black, white, whatever, you
> know, you're still hungry.
>
> Mom: Mm-hmm.
>
> Dad: Either way. So you know, I'm not going to say that it's not
> important, you know, race, of course it is, but it's kind of, we're getting to
> the point now , the boundaries aren't racial anymore.

This couple lived in a predominantly black area and their children attended

predominantly black schools. They both acknowledge the importance of race but do not

want to focus on race too much because they do not feel that race is what separates

people. The father goes on to recognize economic differences as the boundaries that

separate people now. He does recognize that there are structural factors that disproportionately impact certain groups but thinks it only important to recognize those differences and propose solutions. Beyond those proposed solutions, we must focus on the things that unify humankind. A mother of three who resides in an integrated area spoke of teaching her children about black cultural practices this way, "I wish we were in a world where race just truly did not matter. So I don't make it a point. I think everybody should know their history so in doing that you have to bring up race in your culture and your cultural practices but to make it who you are and what you are, I don't think it has to be that strong. I just really, really, really wish that there was no such thing as race." Here, the mother recognizes the importance of everyone knowing their history but would prefer that there be no construct of race. She outrightly rejects a nationalist ideology and would not socialize her children with any sort of race pride. A proponent of the human race, this mother illustrates a humanist racial ideology.

Generally, middle class black parents agree that it is important their children understand the historical experience of blacks in America and develop a sense of purpose tying them to that historical experience. In my study, parents who are making different residential and educational choices choose different ways to transmit racial messages to their children. Parents would describe ways that they'd tried to introduce their children to the larger African American experience. Many of them had shown their children the movie "Roots", which chronicles the slave experience of one family as told by the historian Alex Haley. One mother and father of two in a predominantly white neighborhood express their experience of showing their older child the movie, "But um, so just with certain things, I mean we watch, we've let him watch Roots and stuff like

that and broke it down and explained things…. And stuff like that but I mean if he doesn't see any color, I don't think that's a bad thing. You know, it's just as he gets older, he still needs to know where he came from and who his people are." In spite of their facilitating a discussion about slavery and the experience of enslaved blacks in America, these parents still desire for their son to not see race.

Others mentioned the types of cultural events they would ensure their children attend such as black art exhibits in museums or an Alvin Ailey dance performance. A mother of one who lives in an integrated neighborhood and children attend predominantly white schools when asked if being black played an important role in who she was, observes,

> So, I think that played a part of who I am, definitely. So, I think making my kids aware of their culture is very important. We, for a long time, celebrated Kwanzaa every year but we kind of got out of that. But they know what it is, except for my youngest son; I think I need to start. He's kind of missing out on some things. But definitely, they see in the house my coffee table book, famous Black people, they see books about – even though I have political books on Hilary Clinton, and Bill Clinton, and all of the – but they see Obama, they see other - Louis Gates. They see other Black people who are doing well. They can pick up a book written by Jada Pinkett-Smith. They can pick up a book written by – what's another child's author that they have? Can't think of the name, but they can see, in books, people who look like them, positive stories, and I think that's important… And when we travel, we always – we experience the city that we're in, but we always incorporate the Black history of that city. How did Blacks influence the city? Where's a museum or something that they can see? So, I think it's important. I think just so that they are aware of how far we've come, and know they don't have the struggles that my mom had because I didn't have any. I can't say – you know, I did feel some things growing up, but I didn't have the same struggles as my mom and my grandmother – my grandparents – didn't have those, and they don't have them, they really don't.

Here, this mother acknowledges the significance of her being black has had on her sense of identity. She explains ways that she transmits cultural messages to her children. By having books of successful African Americans on the coffee table, she is communicating

non-verbal messages about race. Her children are able to see President Barack Obama and Harvard scholar, Henry Louis Gates, daily as a reminder of their unlimited potential. When the children travel, she deliberately exposes them to the contributions of blacks so that the children are able to see their connection to the actual fabric of the United States of America. These messages, both verbal and non-verbal, were deliberately transmitted suggesting that black middle class parents value the opportunity to racially socialize their children.

As they discussed how they talk about race with their children, the black middle class parents in my study are intentional and purposeful in the ways they speak with their children about race. Parents who lived in predominantly black or predominantly white neighborhoods had particular ways of racially socializing their children. All of the parents stressed the importance of their children understanding that each child had a myriad of characteristics and qualities; of which race is merely one. However, there is variation in how families communicate that message to their children. The families in white and/or integrated neighborhoods communicated messages using the racial barriers and self-development socialization strategies while those in black neighborhoods employed the race pride technique of racial socialization.

Racial Barriers and Self Development: "That's your soft spot"

In my sample, parents whose children attended predominantly white or integrated school settings had experiences with their children's race playing a role in their daily interactions. Partly as a result of their constant interactions with children of different racial and ethnic identities, and partly as a result of the role that race plays in American

culture, these children are confronted with racial discrimination and race creation on a regular basis. The parents must devise ways to equip their children to deal with these various experiences so that they are able to navigate successfully interracial interactions.

One mother of three, living in a predominantly white area and new to the metropolitan area recalls an event wherein her son had a race making experience:

> Mom: One child has had some experiences, and believe it or not, it has all come from one race. He's got some of the Chinese boys in his class who were saying to him oh, you're skin this, you're black skin this, you're brown skin because they don't even know. You're brown and you can't be in our club. That was tough, and during that period of time, he was saying he wished he could wash it off. He said to me he wished his hair was straight. He has often said he wants to grow it out so that it will be straight, and he can cut it like so and so. He wants to look like them. There's always a blonde child. And I did have a lot of conversations about being happy to be black, about how beautiful his skin was, and how rich his skin is, and how much character is in – you know, who he is and all that. We went through a lot last year with that. We really did. That was stressful for him. He was sad. He was very sad. That's the 9-year-old.

> **Adria: So this was in second grade?**

> Mom: Yes. Well, it started at the end of the second grade year, then we had the summer, and we started up at the beginning of the third grade year. Same kids, same stuff. Not even all in the same class. They ended up in a different class and were torturing him on the playground. He was getting into fights on the playground.

> **Adria: Is he the only black boy?**

> Mom: Yeah.

> **Adria: Was the teacher made aware of it?**

> Mom: Oh yes. One day when the office had no idea what I was marching up and down the halls about, I went to the teacher of those kids who I don't know, and she told me to go to the principal, the vice principal, and I was like yeah, but when you're on the playground, you need to handle this. I think I talked to my son's teacher first, and she was, again, new teacher, not a lot of experience, did not really know what to do with the situation. Loving teacher, good teacher. Didn't know what to do with that

situation. So then I went to the other teacher, and then I did march right back down to the vice principal, and I had a nice talk with him about it. My understanding is it's pretty much ended, but again, it's the same kids. He was not surprised when I said well, I can't give you last names. I don't remember what they were. It's this kid and this kid. He was like Zang and Wang or I think it was. He knew – one of them was not Asian, one of the white kids. He knew exactly who the kids were that were troublemakers, that tortured [my son] – but they just happened to be torturing him about the color of his skin. And that is something that I tell him all the time – if someone says something like that or gets into that, that's a big thing. They're just trying to torture you just because. That's your soft spot. They're going to torture Sally because she's got freckles, so you need to realize this is not – I'm trying to think of the word I tell them all the time about – it's not something to hold us back. Don't let them even know that it hurts your feelings. So those were major conversations. Again, I think mostly, believe it or not, when I just talk about achievement and ability, it's usually in the same conversation with race. You can and you need to.

This mother describes the experience her black son had in an integrated learning environment. There were Asian and white students who excluded him from certain activities, solely because of the color of his skin. He was regularly reminded of his 'difference' from his peers. The mother addressed this difference acknowledging that he could not let them see that he was even the slightest bit disturbed by their comments. Her strategy for coping with this form of discrimination and reification of race was to ensure that he realized that he was capable of achieving in spite of his racial assignment. She refers to his race as a 'soft spot', suggesting that it is his vulnerable area or a barrier that may set him up to experience bias. By equating it to another classmate's freckles, she suggests that his race is something unique to him and children usually pick on whatever is unique or different. She punctuates the story highlighting that parents must talk about race with their children in a way that adequately manage their racial identity, similarly to the ways parents engage in ensuring that their children embrace their achievements or their abilities.

Another mother, whose children attend an integrated school and live in an integrated neighborhood, explains why she feels it is particularly important that she is able to impart the way that her daughter understands race:

> She can grasp what it means to be black today. When I was a child and black, when my mom was a child and black, when grandma was a child and black, that may be a good way to talk about it, and you talk about it from a childhood experience, I think it might make sense. Like the idea of when my grandmother was a black child, and these are the things that she could do or couldn't do. It's better I think to be the one to have those conversations about what it means to be black and how certain people might perceive her because she's black before someone else gets in there. My younger brothers were young. They were probably like seven and nine or something like that, but I was actually at an event with one of them, my youngest one who was seven, and we were trying to get into a basketball game, and the guys, for whatever reason, kept ignoring him or kept not wanting to take his money or just kept pulling him off, and I think it finally clicked for him after really looking at the guy and really looking at the people he was helping and then thinking about himself, that the guy wasn't helping him because of who he was, and it was so sad for him. I just felt awful. It was just I think like nobody had ever really explained that to him. You don't want that discrimination point to be – that day – to be the learning moment. I kind of decided when I saw that happen that well, I need to tell my children about this before. It's a shame you have to educate them about discrimination. I mean that's just something if you have black children you're going to have to talk about. I suppose if you have white children, you may not have to talk about it unless you just want to make sure that they don't discriminate or that they recognize that as wrong, but if you have a black child, it's a conversation that you should have because you don't want somebody else to define that teaching moment for you. I think it'll probably potentially be less of an issue in this community, but you never really know when it's going to come up.

This mother recalls an experience where her own brothers had not been prepared to deal with their racial assignment. She does not want this experience to happen to her own children. She feels strongly that she (and her husband) should be the ones to speak with the children about race. One of the important aspects of racial barriers racial socialization is that children are equipped with strategies for dealing with discrimination. According to his mother, had her brother been equipped to deal with potential bias or

discrimination, he would not have been so devastated once he did not receive service. Rather, he would have been prepared for both the discriminatory experience and how to respond to it.

Enter: President Barack Obama

Inevitably, the very existence of President Barack Obama led to understanding how these parents define diversity and what that means for their children and their class status. Regardless of how these parents thought or felt about Obama's election, there was a necessity to discuss the events with their children. These discussions transpired in many different ways but there seemed to be one unifying thread – it was important to the parents that their children did not miss the significance of this moment in history. The election, inauguration, and subsequent implications of Obama as President of the United States provided the opportunity for parents to be strategic about how they framed the event for their children. Black middle class parents were thoughtful in how they provided opportunities for their children to 'experience' the inauguration. Further, they were intentional in discussing the role that Obama held, not in politics, but in the ways that they and their families were perceived by the larger national populous.

With the election in particular, parents used a number of ways to connect the experience to a larger cultural heritage. They were clear in their verbal message communication about the ways that they celebrated the election and the ways that the election may have future impact on who their children are or how they are perceived. One father related Obama's election to a spiritual experience when reflecting on which lessons were the most important to teach his children: "When you look at President

Obama and everything he was told that he couldn't do and you ask him why was he going to be president and he said because God told him. So what is God telling you? That's what I want to instill in him so before I cloud him with everything else I want him to understand his heritage." This father has expressed the importance of his son understanding "his heritage" as a way to encourage self-development. For this father, his son's heritage includes not just his racial understanding but also embracing his spiritual identity. He refers to barriers in society but does not link them directly to race, rather barriers that may occur in life to anyone, regardless of their race position.

When discussing the inauguration specifically, parents voiced the importance of their children being able to watch, and in some cases, attend the inaugural ceremony. For those who were unable to make the trip, they inquired at the schools their children attended about the school's inaugural plans. In schools that were predominantly white, parents perceived a conscious effort on the part of the school to not show the inauguration. One parent, a mother of two boys in a predominantly white school, remembers a note being sent home that her son's school would not take time out of class to have the inauguration televised in the classroom because of an overwhelming response from other parents who said they did not want their children to watch the ceremony. She decided not to respond but instead assured her children after school that it was special and important. Another parent in a predominantly white school signed all five of her children out of school early as the school was not planning on showing or recognizing the inauguration. Rather, her mother, father, husband, and children all watched the inauguration together. The mother stated how important it was for her children to:

> see her parents sit up there and hold each other and cry as they were watching the first black African American being inaugurated… I think that

did something for them. They were all asking them questions and my parents were able to say this is why this is so important and they were talking to them about growing up during a Civil Rights era and so I knew they weren't going to get that in school.

Both of these examples illustrate the need felt by black middle class parents to impart their own values and ideals in their children rather than depend on an external institution, such as school, to reflect who they desire their children to become. These parents did not rely on their perception of the school 'downplaying' the inauguration to teach their children how they should interpret the experience. Rather, they took it upon themselves to teach their children that this was indeed special and important and when possible involve others in the lesson. In so doing, they incorporated both verbal and non-verbal messages. The conversations ensuing after the inauguration were verbal messages wherein the importance of this moment in history was communicated to the children.

Parents also utilize Obama to transmit racial socialization messages to their children. The father of a family of six, in a predominantly white neighborhood whose children attend predominantly white public and private schools, speaks about Obama and how he discusses racial barriers with his children,

> Even just like when Obama was – we were of course 100% supporting Obama, why we wanted him to win so bad. We just had a talk and I think I was giving them some kind of analogy about it something like that, trying to get them to understand that even though like slavery time, the blacks trying to strive towards something and I was giving them the analogy of basically somebody putting a weight on a black person. At first it didn't let them take off as fast as when the others would take off, but even when they let them take off they put a big 50 pound weight on them like now you so-called got this equal chance. So I gave them that analogy and I was trying to explain to them why, now that we've got this person that actually has this legitimate chance, you know, why we want him to be the President because for once we feel like he's not being weighted down.

This dad is using the importance of Obama's election to explain how their race has in the past and could potentially in the future could operate as a weight (barrier) attempting to impede their forward progress. He stressed how important it was for Obama to win because his opportunity to become the president of the United States would represent the 'racial' weight being lifted.

They believe parents must equip their children with the skills necessary to navigate the white middle class world while in their black skin.

For these parents, President Obama epitomizes how they endeavor to racially socialize their children. As a black man, Obama has achieved the highest pinnacle of political success. He is able to interact with individuals of all races and backgrounds, exhibiting true global diversity. Obama's worldliness helps shape the ways that black middle class parents view diversity. He has earned degrees from some of the nation's best universities while still maintaining a clear perspective of the historical significance of his experiences. Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech delivered in March of 2008 is indicative of how these parents want their children to understand race. Their children should embrace all of the aspects of their being, not ignoring nor highlighting race. Encouraging their children to look to Obama's middle class upbringing represents, for many of these parents, the circles within which they desire their children to remain as adults. Obama is the epitome of the black middle class – unashamedly black while able to mingle in any environment. Black middle class parents utilize Obama (and his family) as an example to prepare their children for their own current and future positions in the black middle class.

Chapter Seven:

Conclusion

The other thing about the black middle class is we're not believable to ourselves and we're not believable to the majority of the country.

-Father of Two

As this quote suggests, the black middle class is a unique group of people. Although there is great diversity within the black middle class, the majority of blacks in this group are considered an anomaly. A lot of members of the black middle class have experienced discrimination because of race. Many of them are accustomed to experiencing being treated as the exception by whites. Many of them are concerned about preparing their children for life as black middle class adults. The black middle class is situated in a unique position in the United States. On the one hand, they have experienced great success in their educational and occupational achievements. These successes have allowed for them to achieve middle class status. Often, there are great disparities in the amount of wealth between middle class blacks and middle class whites. Yet, black parents still utilize various resources available to them to provide the best middle class experience they can for their families. Unfortunately, the black middle class is unable to escape the stigma associated with being black in this country and are often exposed to discrimination as felt by lower and working class blacks. In this dissertation, I endeavored to find out how these black people, occupying a middle class status that is suited for white people and a black status that is suited for poor and working class people choose where to educate their children. The results are intriguing, to say the least.

This project intended to uncover the strategies employed by black middle class parents when deciding on schools for their children to attend. Black middle class individuals have a unique experience in the United States, in that they in many ways occupy an in-between position. On the one hand, they have many middle class markers. They often own homes, have college degrees, and professional jobs. On the other hand, they are still subjected to the same types of discrimination experienced by lower and working class blacks. I endeavored to find out how black middle class parents understand their positioning and how in turn they equip their children to be black and middle class using their educational decision making process. In this chapter, I will summarize the findings from the research project, address limitations, and suggest future areas for research.

Near the end of one of my interviews, a mother and father engaged in a discussion about experiences of discrimination that their children had endured and how they spoke with their children about those experiences. This was the same mother and father, who'd been classified as good blacks at the introduction of this study. The conversation went this way,

> *Dad: I know this is outside of the question, but in the interaction with the baseball parents. Whenever we go to games or practice and have the twins there, the white parents are just so fascinated by the twins it's almost like they treat them as pets. They're just like I want to take them home with me. It's just the way that they interact with them.*

> *Mom: We want to hold them and squeeze them and hold them tight. As each instance happens, we discuss it, but for the most*

part I think we're, for me, it's bringing up a lot of stuff that's going on that we may have or may be overlooking. We're addressing it as it comes, but then we'll kind of push it. I think I'm probably feeling like are we accepting certain things now as just a standard and not really looking at them for what they are. Because for me, I'm getting a little angry, like every instance I think of then I'm getting a little more angry about it. So I don't know if I'm just saying okay, this is acceptable because you know?

Dad: I think the example I gave, I think that they are intrigued and wanting to learn more like say for instance, they will ask questions about [my wife's] hair. Like she showed up with braids one time. Trying to figure out how we're made up.

Adria: And so you see it as really just curiosity?

Dad: Yeah for the most party curiosity.

Adria: You don't see it that way?

Mom: I see it as curiosity, but the negative things that I discussed. My child being called cookie.

Dad: Oh, well yeah that. I agree 100%.

Mom: Saying ugly stuff about Obama and still we have to see bumper stickers and t-shirts everyday about Obama. Those type things I feel like are covert, racist, racism.

Dad: It always makes you wonder what is discussed at their dinner tables. That's what we always wonder.

When we finished this exchange, the mother burst into tears asking me what the right answer is. She wanted me to tell her how she should educate her child. She was concerned that she had not made the right decisions about where they lived and their extracurricular activities – perhaps had they had made too many tradeoffs. She didn't think she had done enough – had they engaged in the appropriate amount and type of conversations about race. She did not know if the schooling experience of her children was ideal for them to reach their best potential. Recounting the experiences that she and her husband had endured in attempting to find the best educational and social environment for their children was exhausting.

The amount of work that these parents have done to ensure the proper education of their children is overwhelming. I've had parents give me their own dissertation about all of the research that they've done. I've had parents tell me about horrible experiences that they've endured and that their children have endured. The interviews, in many instances were cathartic for my respondents. Black middle class parents exert great amounts of energy and effort to make these decisions. These parents reminded me in their eloquent retellings of their stories that their children are their most important investments.

Chapter Four highlights the strategies and ideologies black middle class parents employ when considering their level of interaction with other blacks. Black parents are intentional in the ways they protect their children from stereotypes associated with poor and working class blacks while reinforcing the values and morals that they have imparted into their children. Their reasons for selecting when to be around other blacks vary by

residential choice. Parents who lived in predominantly white or integrated areas heavily subscribed to the politics of respectability. The working and lower class blacks were the ones perpetuating stereotypes about the moral standing of blacks. These predominantly white and integrated parents choose to separate themselves from the masses in an effort to maintain their respectable standing. In addition, parents realize that as a result of linked fate, the more blacks that are in an area the fewer the resources and amenities in that area. Further, the less racially diverse an area will be as because of racial residential segregation. Whites will move out of an area if there are a substantial number of blacks living there. Parents in predominantly black neighborhoods feel obligated to the larger community as they feel it is their duty to give back to the black community. Ultimately, the concept of the talented tenth is part of the desire on the part of these parents to stay connected to working and lower class blacks.

Chapter Five highlights school characteristics that are important to middle class black parents. Parents were primarily focused with the academic reputation of a school. Parents utilized various online and print resources to determine which schools performed the highest as measured by standardized test scores. Some parents were so disappointed with the performance of their neighborhood schools that they were only concerned with private schooling options for their children. Further, parents were often aware that published test scores are summaries of everyone in the school and they would search for more information about specific populations, particularly black males in the school. Lastly, parents were more concerned about racially diverse schooling environments than economically diverse ones. Also, parental social networks were instrumental as sources of information for where to live and in which schools to enroll children, especially for

newcomer parents.   In addition to the academic reputation, it was important to these parents to feel as though they were truly welcome and a part of the schooling environment.   Many of them used the phrase 'familial' to describe ideal schooling situations.   Parents considered teachers, administrators, and other parents all as a part of the school family to which their children belong and some schools were more familial than others. One point of variation was a result of wealth inequality.   In many cases, black families had both parents working and the white stay at home mothers who were the sources of information at their children's schools excluded them from gaining information.

Chapter Six chronicles how black middle class parents teach their children about race.   Overall, black middle class parents believe it is their role to teach their children about their black identity.   This chapter emphasizes newcomer parents to the metropolitan area are more likely to employ humanist ideologies and egalitarian socialization strategies.   These parents have had less time to learn how race impacts ones interactions in the metropolitan area and, as a result are able to espouse the importance of individual characteristics instead of structural impediments based on race.   In addition, black middle class parents do not subscribe the biracial, white and black racial order; rather, they are interested in preparing their children for multiethnic and multicultural interactions as their children need to be prepared for a global world.   Parents who are raising their children in predominantly white or integrated environments prepare their children for bias using oppressed minority and assimilationist racial ideologies and self-development and egalitarian racial socialization strategies.   Black middle class parents

also use Barack Obama to speak to their children about the role of race in today's America.

Limitations

The sample for this study was a snowball sample based on my own social networks and organizations. As a result, certain areas of town and professions may be overrepresented in the data. For example, a lot of educators are in this sample because a lot of my social networks include teachers. In addition, as I live on the east side of the metropolitan area, I have a substantial number of respondents who live on the east side. In addition, as I am a long time resident of the metropolitan area, it was difficult for me to find newcomers to the area so more tenured residents are overrepresented in this sample.

Another limitation concerned my status as an insider in the black middle class community. Although it allowed access to this particular population, it also served as a hindrance in there may have been some concepts or ideas that I did not develop enough as I understood the shared meaning of that particular phrase or concept. Although I attempted to be particularly mindful to always ask my respondents to explain exactly what they meant if they used a phrase unique to the black middle class subgroup, I may have inadvertently overlooked some such concepts or ideas.

Since my interviews took place over a calendar year, 2010-2011, I had to ask some parents to reflect on the prior academic year. Their recalled memories may not be as accurate as those of someone who is in the midst of the school year. Additionally, the information occurs over two school years. Some parents spoke of experiences from the 2009-2010 academic year while others focused on the 2010-2011 academic year.

Future Directions for Research

My study scratches the surface of what black middle class parents consider when deciding on school choices for their children. This study should be recreated with children on every academic level. I focused on elementary school children but the choices that parents make for their high school children could be very different and dependent upon a completely different sent of factors. Parents in the present study clearly articulated that they intended to make changes later on in their children's academic careers. What are the reasons for those changes? Why are the parents choosing to wait? Those are questions that would be answered in a similar study for secondary school aged children.

This study should also be replicated with other racial/ethnic groups to draw comparisons between and among each group's experiences. Studies have been done on the school choice process of white parents. There are a number of factors that are included in the process that both white and black parents utilize in choosing schools for their children. What factors matter for other racial groups? Are there different processes occurring that would result in differing outcomes? For example, do parents of other racial or ethnic group treat blacks, regardless of class, similarly to the ways middle class blacks treat working and lower class blacks.

Lastly, this study would be strengthened by having a longitudinal design so that parents could be followed over the course of their children's schooling, and into adulthood, to see the result of their decisions and the ultimate impact that those decisions have on their children. Understanding a child's experience in elementary school that may

impact how that child perceives themselves can have direct impact in high school. In addition, we could see how parents' views have changed regarding their strategies in rearing and choosing school for their children. For example, perhaps newcomer parents would be less committed to the humanist ideology after having lived a few years in the metropolitan area.

Table 1.Demographics of Sample

Age	Marital Status	# of Children	Undergraduate Type*	Residential Composition+	Tenure	Interview
30-35	Married	4	HBCU (mom)/PWI (dad)	Black	Long Term	R's Home
30-35	Single	1	HBCU	Integrated	Long Term	R's Home
25-30	Single	2	HBCU	Black	Long Term	R's Church
30-35	Single	1	HBCU	Integrated	Long Term	Restaurant
30-35	Married	2	PWI (mom)/HBCU (dad)	White	Newcomer	Restaurant
30-35	Married	2	HBCU (mom)/PWI (dad)	White	Long Term	R's Home
35-40	Married	2	HBCU	White	Newcomer	Restaurant
35-40	Divorced	2	PWI	Black	Long Term	R's Job
35-40	Married	5	HBCU (mom)/PWI (dad)	White	Long Term	R's Home
45-50	Married	2	PWI	Black	Long Term	R's Home
35-40	Married	3	PWI (mom)/HBCU (dad)	Black	Long Term	R's Home
35-40	Single	2	PWI	Black	Newcomer	R's Job
35-40	Married	4	HBCU (mom)/PWI (dad)	Black	Long Term	R's Home
30-35	Married	2	HBCU (mom)/PWI (dad)	Black	Long Term	Restaurant
35-40	Divorced	3	HBCU	Integrated	Long Term	Restaurant
35-40	Married	3	HBCU	Black	Long Term	R's Job*
35-40	Married	1	PWI	Integrated	Long Term	R's Job*
35-40	Married	2	PWI (mom)/HBCU (dad)	Black	Long Term	R's Job*
30-35	Married	3	HBCU	White	Long Term	R's Home
40-45	Divorced	2	HBCU	Black	Long Term	R's Job
45-50	Divorced	3	PWI	Black	Newcomer	R's Job
50-55	Single	1	PWI	White	Long Term	Restaurant
35-40	Married	3	PWI	Integrated	Long Term	R's Home
30-35	Married	1	HBCU (mom)/PWI (dad)	White	Newcomer	R's Home
40-50	Married	3	PWI	Integrated	Newcomer	Restaurant
40-45	Married	2	HBCU	White	Long Term	R's Job
35-40	Married	2	PWI	Integrated	Long Term	R's Job
40-50	Divorced	1	HBCU	Black	Long Term	Restaurant
35-40	Married	2	PWI	Integrated	Newcomer	R's Home
30-35	Married	2	PWI (mom)/HBCU (dad)	Black	Newcomer	R's Home
35-40	Married	1	PWI	Integrated	Newcomer	R's Job
35-40	Married	2	PWI	White	Newcomer	Phone
40-45	Married	3	HBCU	Integrated	Long Term	R's Home
30-35	Married	3	PWI	Black	Newcomer	R's Home
40-50	Married	4	PWI	White	Long Term	R's Job
45-50	Married	3	PWI (mom)/HBCU (dad)	Integrated	Long Term	R's Job
35-45	Married	3	PWI	White	Newcomer	Restaurant
30-40	Married	3	PWI	White	Newcomer	R's Home
30-35	Married	2	PWI	White	Newcomer	R's Home
30-35	Married	4	PWI	Integrated	Newcomer	R's Home
35-40	Divorced	1	HBCU	Integrated	Long Term	Restaurant
35-40	Married	5	PWI	White	Long Term	R's Home
30-35	Married	2	HBCU	Integrated	Long Term	Restaurant
40-45	Married	3	PWI	White	Long Term	Phone
40-45	Married	2	HBCU	Integrated	Long Term	R's Home
45-50	Married	2	HBCU (mom)/PWI (dad)	Black	Long Term	Restaurant
40-45	Married	4	PWI	White	Long Term	Restaurant

30-35	Single	1	PWI	Black	Newcomer	Restaurant
40-45	Married	3	PWI	Integrated	Newcomer	R's Church
40-45	Divorced	3	HBCU	Integrated	Newcomer	R's Job
35-40	Divorced	3	HBCU	Integrated	Long Term	Phone
35-40	Married	2	HBCU	White	Long Term	R's Home
35-45	Married	2	PWI	Integrated	Long Term	Restaurant
35-40	Married	3	PWI	White	Long Term	Phone
35-40	Married	2	PWI	White	Newcomer	Phone
45-50	Married	4	PWI	Integrated	Newcomer	Restaurant
35-40	Married	4	HBCU	White	Long Term	Phone
40-45	Married	4	HBCU	Black	Long Term	Restaurant
40-45	Single	1	HBCU	Black	Newcomer	Phone

Table 2. Neighborhood Racial Composition by Tenure in Atlanta of Respondents

Neighborhood Composition / Tenure in Metro Area	Predominantly White Neighborhood (Less Than 20% Black)	Racially Integrated Neighborhood (20 to 60% Black)	Predominately Black Neighborhood (More than 60% Black)
In Metro Area Less than 10 Years	8 parental units (11 respondents)	7 parental units (9 respondents)	6 parental units (8 respondents)
In Metro Area 10 Years or Longer	12 parental units (18 respondents)	13 parental units (14 respondents)	13 parental units (16 respondents)

Table 3.Type of School Selected By Respondents

Neighborhood Composition / Tenure in Metro Area	Predominantly White Neighborhood (Less Than 20% Black)	Racially Integrated Neighborhood (20 to 60% Black)	Predominately Black Neighborhood (More than 60% Black)
In Metro Area Less than 10 Years	5 Public 4 Private 1 Public Choice 0 Charter	5 Public 1 Private 1 Public Choice 0 Charter	0 Public 1 Private 3 Public Choice 2 Charter
In Metro Area 10 Years or Longer	10 Public 1 Private 2 Public Choice 1 Charter	7 Public 3 Private 1 Public Choice 2 Charter	2 Public 1 Private 8 Public Choice 2 Charter

- In cases where families made multiple choices for their children's schooling, i.e., where the family has more than one child, each choice is counted as one. Thusly, the sum in each cell may exceed the number of families comprising each cell.
- Public choice includes administrative transfers, schools with special admissions requirements (e.g., certain test scores), and schools with special foci (e.g., science and technology or performing arts)

Figure 1. Illustration of Black Middle Class Placement
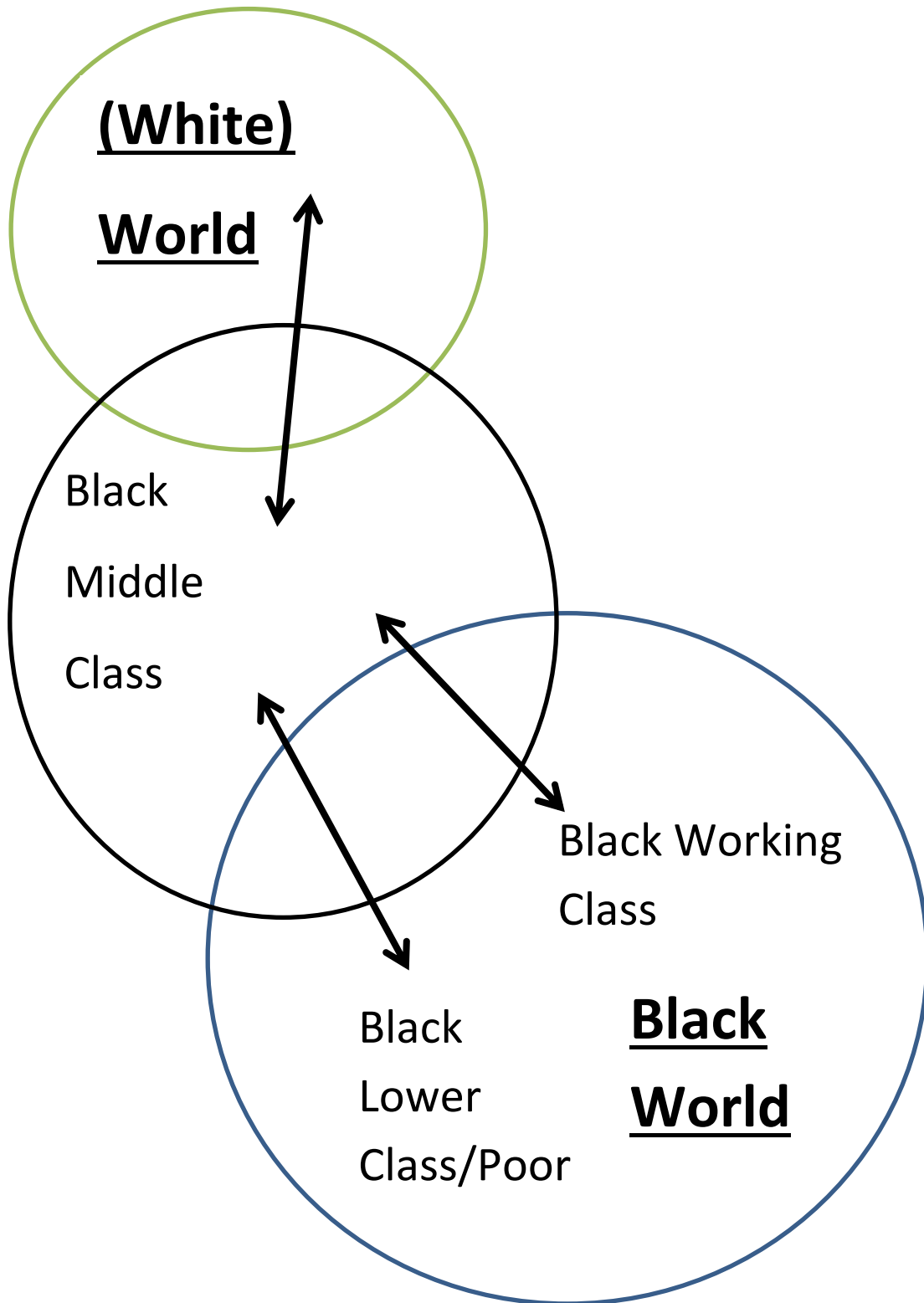
Appendix A. Interview Guide

I'd like to begin by finding out some general information about you and your family.

Background Information

- Where did you grow up? What about your spouse?
    - Is that where you went to elementary and high school?
    - What did your parents do?
- Where did you go to college?
    - Did you graduate from there?
    - Have you had any other schooling? What and where?
- Do you work?
    - If so, what is your job or occupation?
        - Where do you work?
    - How long have you done this job?
        - Been with the same employer?
    - Describe your job responsibilities.
    - About how many hours do you work per week?
        - Which shift?
- How old are you?
    - Are you married?
    - For how long?
- How many children do you have?
- What are their ages?

o Genders?

o First names

Now, let's talk a little bit about living here in the metro area and in this neighborhood.

<u>Metro Area Information</u>

- How long have you lived in the metro area?

  o At this particular address?

- What made your family decide to move here?

- How long have you lived in this neighborhood?

  o What made you decide to move to this neighborhood?

- How would you describe this neighborhood?

- If you were asked to use one of four names for your social class, which would you say you belong in: the lower class, the working class, the middle class, or the upper class?"

  o What about your neighbors? Friends?

- Do most of your friends live in this neighborhood?

  o Your child(ren's) playmates?

- Do your children attend the neighborhood school?

  o If not, where do they attend school?

Now, let's talk more about the school that your children attend.

Educational Decision Making Process

- How long have your children attended this school?

- Describe the school to me.

  o What grades does it enroll?

- How did you hear about that school?

- How did you decide on that school?

  o What were the considerations?

    ▪ Money, distance from home, racial/ethnic composition, special programs

- Think back to when you were choosing this school, describe the interactions that you had with administrators? Teachers? Staff? Other parents?

  o Did you feel discriminated against during the process of choosing the school?

  o Did you feel that your child has had any experiences of discrimination while attending the school?

- What did you like about the school prior to enrolling your child?

  o Racial demographics of the student body? Of the administrators? Teachers?

  o Other parents like at the school?

  o Parent Teacher Organization or Association?

- This past year, about how many times did you visit the school? What would be the reason for your visit(s)?

- Do you have a lot of interaction with the school?

  o Teachers/administrators/other parents, or attending meetings (PTA) or other events?

- - ▪ How would you characterize your interactions with them?
    - ▪ Are there any experiences (either positive or negative) that stick out in your mind? Tell me about them.
    - o Have the teachers been helpful?
- Are you pleased with your child's academic experiences at their current school?
- Are you pleased with your child's social experiences at their current school?
- Will your child remain enrolled until the last grade at the school? Why or why not?
    - o Where would you enroll your child instead of at the current school?
- What do you like about the school?
- What don't you like about the school?
- What is a "good" school?
- Describe the ideal school for your child.
- In the future, would you make any other considerations in light of your and your child's experiences?
- Briefly describe your own educational experiences.

Racial Identity and Socialization

- How do you identify racially?
- Does your race play an important role in who you are or your relationships with others?

How important is it to teach your son or daughter about the cultural practices of your ethnic group?

Do you try teach your son or daughter how to get along in mainstream American culture? Or, how to get along in a culturally diverse society?

Have you had any experiences talking to your child about how to deal with experiences like name-calling or discrimination?"

- Do you talk with your child about his or her racial identity?
  - Why or Why Not?
  - In What Ways?
  - Do you have any examples of a race based conversation that you had with your child?
  - Have you done or told them things to help them know what it is and means to be black?
  - What was the most important thing that you've told them?

Do you think it is important for your children to learn how to

- Happy to be black?
- Interracial interaction important?
- American first and then black?
- Black art, etc.

I'd like to learn a little more about you and your child's interactions and experiences.

Cultural and Social Capital

- Describe your child's closest friends.

- o Do they attend your child's school?

- o Do they leave near you?

- o What is their racial/ethnic identity?

- o How would you describe their social class?

- Are you friends with your child's friends' parents?

- What sorts of activities do you do with your children?

  - o On the weekends?

  - o During the summers?

  - o During holidays?

- What sorts of activities do your children participate in outside of school? Do you talk with your child about being (fill in status from earlier) class?

  - o Why or Why Not?

  - o In What Ways? Do you have any examples of a class based conversation that you had with your child?

Thank you for your time.

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Appendix B. Consent Form

Emory University

Consent to be a Research Subject

Title: How Middle Class Black Families Make Educational Decisions for Their Children

Principal Investigators: Adria Welcher

Sponsor's Name: Emory University Department of Sociology

Introduction and Purpose: You are invited to volunteer in a research study. The purpose of this study is to find out about the experiences of black middle class parents in Atlanta as they make decisions about their children's schooling. I want to know about what influenced the decisions you made about where to send your children to school. The purpose of the study is to find-out how middle class black families in Atlanta are experiencing education for their children. I am asking you to participate because of your experience and knowledge in this area. I plan to interview 60 families. With my study, I hope to provide information for policy-makers on improving the lives of all of Atlanta's children.

Procedures: If you choose to participate in this study, I will interview you for approximately 90 minutes. I will ask you a number of questions about your experiences in Atlanta, primarily what affected your decisions about schools. With your permission I will audiotape the interview to make sure that I record your answers correctly.

Benefits and Risks: The risks to participating in this study are small. There is an unlikely risk that confidentiality would be breached. Also, you might experience some emotional discomfort if you talk about negative experiences in Atlanta.   On the other hand, you may find that discussing negative experiences as well as positive experiences is enjoyable or emotionally beneficial. You will not directly benefit from the study. However, the information you provide will add to our knowledge about how to enhance opportunities for black middle class children and create equal opportunities for all children in Atlanta.

Confidentiality: I will keep facts about you private. Your name will not appear on any of the tapes or transcribed interviews. I will use identification numbers to mark tapes and transcripts. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when I present this study or publish its results. Instead, I will use a pseudonym when referencing portions of your interview. I will have access to the tapes and written transcriptions. Agencies that make rules and policies about how research is done have the right to review research records. Those with the right to look at your study records include Emory University Institutional Review Board, The Office of

Human Research Protections and the Emory Office of Research Compliance. Files and tapes containing information from this study will be kept in a locked file cabinet or on a password-protected computer in a locked room.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Participation in this research is *voluntary*. You have the right to refuse to participate, or refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time at no cost to you. You may skip questions or stop the interview at anytime. If you decide to withdraw, your responses will be destroyed along with the record of your involvement with the study.

Contact Information: If you have any questions regarding the research or your participation in it, either now or at any time in the future, please contact a member of the research team. Your interviewer is Adria Welcher. You may contact me by phone at (404) 401-7123 or by email at awelche@emory.edu. If you have concerns about your rights, you may contact the Emory Institutional Review Board at 1-877-503-9797 or 404-712-0720; irb@emory.edu or write to the office at 1599 Clifton Road, Atlanta GA 30322.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Signature:

_____

Date:

_____

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