Not just class: towards an understanding of the whiteness of middle class schooling choice

Byrne, Bridget

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There is increased attention to questions of class in studies of education, particularly among those who adopt a Bourdieuian perspective. This paper explores the burgeoning literature on school choice and class (in particular middle 'classness') to argue that there are serious analytical and sociological costs to a singular focus on class without due attention to race. Examining interview material, it will show instances where the racialised nature of schooling choice has been ignored or overlooked. It argues that viewing the literature through the lens of race and class is imperative for an understanding of the complexities of class and white middle classness in particular.

Race; class; education; schooling choice; whiteness; Bourdieu

1. Introduction[i]

… Interestingly, one of my (laughs), one of my friends who is my friend now, she was saying to er, something, issue of colour or whatever obviously does come up. And she was saying, she said oh, I don't mean to be awful, but she said um, I'd much rather my children played with your children than the children (laughing) from the estate. And I thought, you know, there's so much, it's not only a colour

thing, it's a class thing, it's, you know, there's just so much there, isn't it? And it's amazing how many barriers everyone, not just white people, you know, just everyone generally with each other, whether it's somebody of a different colour, or of a different class kind of barriers they put up, and how difficult it is to surmount those that you don't happen to fit in with. But that, to me was very interesting.

(Cline et al., 2002: 67)

'it's very difficult to separate class and race a lot of the time, but I suppose they do go hand in hand just through necessity, and that's the way things work out [...] And that's what really worries me about this school, and I think it's sad because what happens is that I think a lot of people see this, and they don't send their children there after ... reception, or nursery, and the children get moved and the mix never ever gets any stronger. The mix doesn't become more like a mix, as it were. You know. And it's really sad'

(Byrne, 2006: 126)

These two quotes, the first from a working class Sikh man talking about sending his children to a school where the large majority of the pupils are white, and the second from a middle class white woman talking about why she is reluctant to send her children to the nearest school demonstrate how the respondents in qualitative research are aware of the complexities and intertwining nature of class and race. This paper will explore the burgeoning literature on school choice and interrogate

the extent to which it has addressed the intersecting nature of both constructions of

and experiences of race and class. This article seeks to tease out this relationship and

particularly to ask why the growing literature on the reproduction of middle class

privilege has, at least until very recently, largely failed to analyse the racialised

nature of its subject. Furthermore, this paper will ask if a Bourdieuian analysis,

whilst aiding the resurgence of class as a social category, inhibits the analysis of the

inter-relation between race and class. I will first explore the literature on school

choice and show how it often ignores questions of race in its focus on class and

middle-class practices in particular. I will draw out the implications of Bourdieu's

work for an analysis of racialised as well as classed practices and finally examine

research which explores questions of race more successfully.

2. School choice

There has been an explosion of literature on school choice since the market reforms

of 1980s (which continue to be rolled out). The 1980 Education Act included the

requirement for local education authorities (LEAs) to meet parental preference (the

notion of parental choice had been established under section 76 of the 1944

Education Act but had only been implemented on an ad hoc basis) (Croft, 2004:

929). Commitment to parental preference was strengthened in legislation in 1988

and 1989, with the introduction of the principal of funding following the pupil

introduced in 1988. While politicians and policy makers claim that parents have

been empowered through their new constructions as consumers of educational

options for their children, this has been questioned in academic literature and public

discussion. The notion of choice and the extent to which this choice is real has been

interrogated , particularly given the centralization of the control of the curriculum

which limits one significant aspect of what parents are choosing between (Gabriel,

1994). The education market is a complicated terrain. The limits of supply (schools

cannot easily 'spring up' to meet a demand) means that schools do not operate in a

pure market. The cost of some schools being winners in the market for students and

funding means that others will be losers. Yet many children still have to attend those

'losing' schools. There are only so many places that popular schools can offer for

students and for many the notion of choice becomes a fiction in those areas where all

the possible choices are unpopular or undesirable. In addition, the operation of

different rules of access suggests that the system can be very difficult to negotiate.

LEAs have relative freedom to formulate their own mechanisms of prioritising

pupils (within certain bounds established by the 2003 Code of Practice on School

Admissions (Croft, 2004: 930)). Distance to school remains an important factor in

admissions for most schools. There are also various types of (wholly or partially)

selective schools – including grammar schools; religious schools and other voluntary

aided schools; Academies; Technical Colleges and specialist schools. In addition,

there is a complicated system of appeals which parents also have to negotiate (Croft,

2004).

Thus Chris Taylor argues that 'there now exists a mosaic of different educational markets, where the two key components of the reforms, choice and diversity, are unevenly distributed' (Taylor, 2001: 368). Archer and Francis (2007: 74) argue that policy documents around school choice are 'covertly raced and classed discourses' which will perpetuate inequality by privileging the interests of white, middle class parents. A literature has risen to explore how wealth and class practices are key components in negotiating this uneven distribution. This has led to a concern for the ways in which class has interacted with this policy of choice. As Bev Skeggs argues: 'choice is a particularly middle-class way of operating in the world' (2004: 139). Class has increased significance for education where choice amplifies the importance of parental action. The middle classes have particularly come under focus with concerns that they are 'working the system' – or in Bourdieuian terms, demonstrating a 'sense de jeu'.

3. Bourdieu, class and education

The question of class has been the subject of contentious debates within sociology. At the heart of this debate lie two seemingly contradictory trends. The first is that class matters. Socio-economic background has a key and enduring influence in educational outcomes; income distribution; health prospects and participation (see ((Office for National Statistics), 2005). Yet many argue that class no longer matters when the majority see themselves as either having no class or being middle class.

One route out of this impasse is Bourdieuian understandings of class which do not

require the identification of cohesive or self-identifying groups or class formations.

This approach has been particularly influential in the study of education, partly due

to Bourdieu's own interest in education. Bourdieu asserts the need to understand the

workings of the social field beyond economics, particularly in the realm of the

cultural. For Bourdieu, class is about ways of being, tastes and lifestyles. Education

can be important in ensuring the transmission and acquiring of qualifications, but

also class codes and cultural capital. 'The 'eye' is a product of history reproduced in

education' (Bourdieu, 1994, p5-6). Whilst this 'culturalist' approach to class has

been very productive in aiding the analysis of the reproduction of class inequalities

in education, this paper will argue that there is frequently a failure to attend to

questions of race in this approach.

For Bourdieu : (Bourdieu, 1991), a class is a set of people in a similar

position in the 'field' who have shared dispositions and interests which make them

act in particular ways (but not necessarily in a co-ordinated way, and not as a group).

Class positions are maintained through the exclusionary practice of distinctions and

the accumulation and transmission of economic, social and cultural capitals from

one generation to the next. Education plays a key role in this as it is not merely about

acquiring qualifications. Indeed, there may be constant pressure to acquire more as

qualifications can be easily devalued if more people are given access to higher levels

of education (Bourdieu, 1994:133). As much as qualification acquisition, education

is about the acquisition of taste and the right dispositions which play a critical role in

creating distinction (Bourdieu, 1994). This makes schools very important in the

struggle to maintain position. It is here that Bourdieu's work has been very useful

for those who seek to study the operation of class within the educational system.

School, and the composition of school in-take is an area of key concern in the

'genteel battles' (or perhaps not so genteel battles) the middle class are engaged in to

assert and maintain their positions (Savage et al., 1992: 100). Much of the learning

which the middle classes most care about is to be done from fellow pupils as much

as teachers. There is a desire to find a school filled with enough 'people like us' who

will teach children 'how to be'.[ii]

In the context of debates around class, the middle classes in particular have been

brought more into focus. Regarding education, Power, et al., argued that 'issues of

class cannot be properly illuminated without giving middle-class educational

experience the attention it has largely lacked' (Power et al., 2003: 3). While Power

et al., focus on the struggle middle classes engage in to achieve the educational

outcomes they want, others have focused more on the exclusionary effects of that

process and have used frameworks provided by Bourdieu's work. Stephen Ball

writes that 'Education as a field of distinctions and identities is crucial in high

modern society in changing and reproducing the borderlines of class and distributing

unevenly and unequally forms of social and cultural capital'(Ball, 2003: 8). He

argues that education policy is 'aimed at satisfying the concerns and anxieties of the

ever anxious middle classes. The market rules of exclusion offer possibilities for

strategic action which many middle-class families are very willing and very able to

take up' (Ball, 2003: 27).

Selection of and attendance at school involves a series of dispositions and

practices which draw on different classed capitals. Economic resources come into

play. This occurs at the mundane level of ability to visit schools that are further and

also to contemplate sending a child to a more distant school. But economic resources

may work at the extreme level of moving house in order to fall into the catchment

area of a 'better' school. Cultural and social resources are important in giving

parents the ability to access and assess the 'hot' and 'cold' information on schools –

from appraising OFSTED reports to using networks to evaluate schools. There is

evidence that different classes tend to use different sources for this. Diane Reay

(Reay, 1999) argues that middle class parents are much more confident in dealing

with the education system in general. This is likely to translate into confidence in

negotiating the possibilities of choice. The middle classes may make more vigorous

and successful use of the appeals system and researchers have found that middle

class parents are quick to argue that their child is specifically gifted and/or needs

special assistance and treatment which may assist their position in the appeal process

(Ball, 2003: 37: 62, Devine, 2004: 222). In the transition from primary to secondary

schools, they may also be better at enlisting teachers and other support, including

private tuition where entry to grammar schools is based on test results.

Stephen Ball argues: 'It is within the complex 'tapestry of practices' … in the interlinking of the domestic sphere with public institutions that the work of social reproduction, closure and exclusion gets done. In the interaction between families and institutions, in struggles over scarce resources and valued trajectories, structural and cultural divisions are re-enacted … For these families class continues to be a critical mediation of being, of who they are.' (Ball, 2003: 76). Reproduction of class is particularly significant in the examination of what parents look for in schools. The literature argues that middle class parents want a sufficient number of other middle class parents, 'people like us': 'The search for a place of safety is a search for others like us, informed and reinforced by the decisions and advice given by those others like us, whom we trust. A community of aspirations is being sought, people who see and value the future in the same way' (Ball, 2003: 64). But while this literature makes much of the desire for sufficient 'people like us' to give a sense of safety and community, it largely fails to explore how this might be a *racialised* as much as a classed desire. Thus it ignores the extent to which class and race have always been constructed together (see McClintock 1995). The following section will examine this literature in more detail and show how the whiteness of the respondents is often left unexamined.

4. Whiteness, class and school choice

Helen (Charles) asked in 1993 'I have often wondered whether white people *know* that they are white' ((charles), 1993: 99)? It is often the case that the power of whiteness works in such a way as to make white peoples' racialised position and experiences unmarked or unnoticed. As Richard Dyer argues: 'because we are seen as white, we characteristically see ourselves and believe ourselves seen as unmarked, unspecific, universal' (Dyer, 1997: 45). However, in the case of education and schooling choice, and particularly in the case of parents considering schools for their children in urban relatively multicultural areas, I would argue that white people *are* often aware of their whiteness and the racialised nature of their choices.

This is based not only on my own research (Byrne, 2006) but also on the material presented in much of the literature which this paper examines. However, what seems more curious, and is more damaging for the understanding of the impact of the construction of parents as consumers, is that many of those interviewing and analyzing the responses do not appear to *know* that (or perhaps if) their respondents are white. For instance it is quite common within this literature on the middle classes and schooling choice for qualitative research to be written up almost entirely without reference to the ethnicity of the respondents (see for example (Ball and Vincent, 2007, Butler and Robson, 2003, Devine, 2004, Oria et al., 2007, Power et al., 2003). Where all respondents are white, it appears to be not considered worthy of comment or even statement. This suggests that whiteness, or perhaps more particularly white

middleclassness, is being constructed as a norm from which others deviate (see

(Dyer, 1997, Frankenberg, 1997).

The article 'Urban education, the middle classes and their dilemmas of

school choice' by Oria et al. (2007) draws on interviews with 28

'professional/managerial/ middle class families' living in Hackney (Oria et al., 2007:

92). At no point are we told the ethnicity of the respondents. The same is true of an

article about circuits of education and gentrification by Butler and Robson, based on

fieldwork in five sites in London, including Lewisham, Brixton and Wandsworth.

We know, for instance that one of the parents is talking about their mixed race child,

but we are not told the ethnicity of the interviewee (this situation also crops up in

(Ball and Vincent, 2007). In other cases, where both white and non-white parents

have been interviewed, we are sometimes told when the respondent is black or

Asian, but whiteness is left unmarked (see for example (Power et al., 2003).

Interestingly, the respondents themselves often appear to sensitive to issues of race.

In almost all articles about schooling choice, questions of race appear in the

interviews even when the researcher appears blind to their presence or significance.

For instance, in the article by Oria et al. discussed above, Emily appreciates a

particular Specialist Art school because it has 'a wide variety of children in terms of

ability and their background … race as well' (Oria et al., 2007: 95). Similarly

Gemma contrasted the school her children went to with an imaginary 'very white

middle class school' where they would not have the same experience of being

'exposed to children from different ethnic backgrounds or social backgrounds or different values' (Oria et al., 2007: 99-100).

A further example of the failure to analyse the racialised narratives produced by respondents is provided by Tim Butler writing about gentrification processes in Hackney which also focuses on schooling choices. Again, his respondents are explicit in describing the ways in which race and class are brought together in their concerns around schooling: 'we are coming to the conclusion that our kids would probably not be comfortable in a school where there are an enormous number of black children or really rough white kids which there are around here' (Butler, 1997: 144). This language is almost dismissed in the analysis '[w]ords like "rough" which were used by Harriet would never normally be used in any other context, the references to "black dominated" […] all suggest a measure of desperation' (Butler, 1997: 147).

One could argue that the lack of an analysis of race is particularly curious in the context of London where there are high levels of racialised inequality and where local areas (such as Hackney) are frequently understood through racialised discourses. As Paul Gilroy argues: 'Where once it was the mean streets of the decaying inner city which hosted the most fearsome encounter between white Britons and their most improbably and intimidating other - black youth - now it is the classrooms and staffrooms of the nation's inner-city schools which frame the same conflict and provide the most potent terms with which to make sense of racial

difference'(Gilroy, 1993: p26). In order to be attentive to the intersections between

race and class which contribute to making up someone 'like me', it is important to

be alive to the coded way in which people talk about race. So, for example the 'inner

city' or 'urban' needs to be read through a racialised imaginary. 'Urban' 'gang'

'inner-city' and 'sink school' can often be understood as shifting codes for race.

Stephen Ball writes about how, for middle class parents who negotiate the state

system, their choices are part of a 'geography of fear and uncertainties, of dangerous

places and people' yet he does not seem willing to analyse the ways in which the

respondents whiteness as much as their middle classness plays into this (Ball, 2003:

37).

        The easy slippage between 'urban' and race for example is sometimes made

explicit in interviews, such as the account Mrs Kerr gives in Stephen Ball's research

'certainly in an urban area I think you're going to get, certainly around here it would

be completely different cultures as well, and languages spoken, so it was that kind of

thing really that makes you think. I think if we were in the country I wouldn't bat an

eyelid about sending them to the local school (Ball, 2003: 66). Thus Mrs Kerr is

spelling out for us the terrain on which she is operating and the ways in which she is

seeking to reproduce white middle-classness for her children. This is a racialised

space, yet this important factor is left un-remarked by Ball. Similarly, Ball notes the

invisibility of the working classes in response to a respondent who remarks about

her nearest school that 'nobody' goes there' (Ball, 2003: 37: 62). But this may also

be a 'silent antagonism' of race as much as class. We have no way of telling from

his account. Again in discussions of the desirable 'mix' that the parents are seeking,

Ball focuses exclusively on social class, whilst his respondents explicitly talk about

both class and ethnicity. In the following excerpt, Mrs Mankell ossilates between

talking about ethnicity and class. For her, the two are inextricable:

'these kind of London suburbs are quite unique … and … they are moneyed … I

hate these terms … jargon, isn't it … they're moneyed areas … people have

good standard of lives … whatever middle class means … doesn't actually mean

they're all middle-class … but it has a nice balance, I suppose, of children from

caring homes. It doesn't have a great ethnic mix. But it certainly has a balance of

… it has a balance between children from less caring and more caring homes … I

wouldn't say it was predominantly middle-class really … it hasn't got a very

good ethnic mix, like a few Asian children, only a couple … well that's true of

the borough, this is not a borough with a high proportion of Asian or West Indian

families particularly, but what we do have is a vast mixture from all over the

shop'

Yet the analysis is only focused on the question of the classed mix. There is

no probing of what the juxtaposition of 'caring' families and 'ethnic mix' might

mean for understanding white middle classness (Ball, 2003: 37: 63). I would argue

that the result of these omissions is a poorer understanding of what the interviewees

mean when they talk about 'mix'. The term suggests more than a concern about

class but also the negotiation of racialised geographies and identities that

characterise middle classness particularly in urban (and perhaps especially in

London) contexts. Often in the study of whiteness, a reading 'against the grain' of

what respondents are saying needs to be undertaken. However, in these studies, the

respondents themselves are worrying about the extent to which they could/should be

characterised as 'pushy middle class white parent[s]', but the analysis fails to

address this (Ball, 2003: 37: p58). They also make clear the sometimes strong

emotional responses they have to the 'wrong' sort of school which is not white

enough. A school which Ball describes as having a 'high proportion of ethnic

minority students' is described by a parent as 'a no no school' and another parent

declares: 'I wouldn't send her to Saint's whatever happened, I would probably chain

myself to the railings of Borough House (Ball, 2003: 105).

We can see that the respondents are clear that the ethnic mix of schools is

something that is important to them when considering the available choices. But

why should their whiteness matter to us? Stephen Ball argues that middle-classness,

like other class identifications, has to be sought in the subtleties of the everyday, in

the uncertainties of status, in fine distinctions as well as gross ones (Ball, 2003:

176). It is here that I would argue that race becomes very important if we are to truly

understand the nature of and practices of the middle classness being researched.

Because it is not simply middle classness that is the subject of analysis, but *white*

middle classness in particular. This particularity needs to be understood, and at times

decoded if we are to fully trace the nuances of educational and reproductive choices

being made. We have to know what is being reproduced. This involves being more

attentive to what Bourdieu calls a 'network of oppositions' in what makes someone

not 'people like us'. These oppositions are not just based on class distinctions but are

intermixed with racialised distinctions in sometimes complex ways (as the opening

quotes to this paper show). The more explicitly racialised nature of US society and

the history of segregation and place of schools as a prime battlefield in struggles

around segregation makes the importance of race more obvious for British and US-

based researchers (see for example (Devine, 2004). Laureau and McNamara Horvat

argue that the race specific nature of given fields, particularly education, needs to be

explored. In a study of parents' interactions with teachers and school institutions in

the US, they argue that '[a]lthough the terminology is somewhat awkward, we see

being white as a cultural resource that white parents unwittingly draw on in their

school negotiations in this speaking. Technically speaking, in this field, being white

becomes a type of cultural capital' (Lareau and McNamara Horvat, 1999: 42). So, in

considering the US case, for example Stephen Ball acknowledges that 'in multi-

racial settings, race is a further compounding factor in the choice process and there

may well be racial segregation as a result' (Ball, 2003: 37). However, he does not

translate this awareness to the British context where race talk and practice is perhaps

more coded and made less explicit.[iii]

The question remains, how far can Bourdieu be held responsible for these

omissions. Or, put another way, what conceptual framework is required to put race

and class together with more success, particularly in an analysis of privilege?

Bourdieu does allow for other forms of distinction to be operating in the field, such

as gender and race. [iv] However, there is a potential rigidity in his construction of

both the field and habitus which makes this understanding difficult to operationalise.

As Terry Lovell argues, Bourdieu's sociology is in danger of positioning sex/gender,

sexuality and even 'race' as secondary to that of social class' (Lovell, 2000). One

problem is that it is difficult to operationalise notions like field and habitus on

multiple axes (although this should be possible). The complexities may be

overwhelming. Toril Moi argues that gender, like class, needs to be understood as

part of a field because of its relational and shifting nature. Thus gender is for Moi,

understood not as an autonomous system but as a 'particularly combinatory social

category, one that infiltrates and influences every other category' (Moi, cited in

(Skeggs, 2004b) p6) The same must also, I would argue, be said for race, but this is

rarely accomplished. [v] As Terry Lovell argues: 'While class penetrates right through

his [Bourdieu's] diagrammatic representation of the social field, like the lettering in

Brighton rock, gender is largely invisible, as is race' (Lovell, 2000: 36). [vi] Lois

McNay argues that there is a tendency within Bourdieu's work to reduce symbolic

relations to pre-given social relations (McNay, 2004). This tends to give social

identities a fixity which obscures their complexity and instability. If we are to

understand the multiple interrelations between race, class and gender, then it is

possible that Bourdieu's construction of the habitus does not offer sufficiently

flexible analysis to reach the complex psychosocial processes behind identification.

Archer and Francis for example in their exploration of minority ethnic achievement

in schools argue for a multi-layered theoretical framework. As well as using

Bourdieu's work, they also draw on post-structuralist theorisations of identification

offered by Stuart Hall and Judith Butler respectively: 'Within this approach, social identities, divisions and inequalities (of race/ethnicity, social class, gender and sexuality) are understood as being brought into being through social life - through talk, actions, policies, practices and so on'. (Archer and Francis, 2007) p25-6). This discursive, performative approach relies on a more diffuse notion of power and the performance and embodiment of identities than is perhaps usually associated with Bourdieu. Archer and Francis argue that 'theories of social class have been primarily formulated with reference to White communities, and hence care must be taken when extending these notions to minority ethnic communities' (Archer and Francis, 2007) p34). Thus the next section will briefly explore research on race and education to see to what extent that offers a model for examining white middle classness.

5. Race and education

Race has been an important component in research on education ever since comparatively larger numbers of racialised minority groups entered the education system in Britain as a result of post-war immigration. Initially, this research focused on essentially conservative issues around how schools might be a site of easing the tensions understood to result from mass immigration of racialised others, or to promote assimilation (Rattansi, 1992). Initially, the focus was on large quantitative studies but there has increasingly been more qualitative and ethnographic work. This shift also marked a general move from cultural deficit models to focus on the

process of schooling and was sometimes accompanied by action based research.

Thus there has been more attention given to what is going on in schools and in

particular an examination of the interactions and learning of children. A major

concern has been how schools might be the site of racism (for example in the

curriculum, through bullying, through lowered expectations by teachers of black and

ethnic minority children) [vii] – and how might they be sites of education around

multiculturalism and anti-racism[viii]. Education has also been critical in the backlash

against anti-racist initiatives. Paul Gilroy points out how classrooms, regarded as the

depositaries of national culture, have become a major battleground: 'the school has

become the principal element in the ideology with which the English New Right

have sought to attack anti-racism' (Gilroy, 1993: 26).

There has also been considerable research on the apparently enduring nature

of underachievement and how this should be understood (Gillborn, 2006). Recently,

research has become more attuned to the complexities of understanding minority

ethnic experience in British schools. In particular, there is more awareness of the

need to differentiate between different ethnic groups and how trajectories of arrival,

settlement and placement in the system have very different outcomes.[ix] There has

also been some interesting work on questions of race, ethnicity and gender. This

includes work on racialised masculinities and the ways in which gender and

sexuality interact with race in producing different learning cultures and opportunities

(see (Archer, 2003, Mac an Ghaill, 1996) .

There has been some limited qualitative and quantitative work on the specific

question of school choice and race. Irene Bruegel argues that there is a lack of fit

between the current Labour Government's rhetoric on social capital and community

cohesion and its continuing education reforms: 'the drive for competition between

pupils and between schools, sits poorly with the collaboration required to build

social capital across diversity'(Bruegel, 2006: 3). Bruegel contends that parental

choice systems of school allocation can fuel racism, partly because different groups

see the process as weighted against them in obscure ways and partly because it

enables parents to act upon their prejudices, to the potential disadvantage of their

children. She tracks how in the transition from primary to secondary school the

friendships most likely to be ruptured by the move were those that crossed ethnic

boundaries (Bruegel, 2006: 3: 9). Quantitative research does suggest that racialised

choices *are* being played out in schooling. In a study on schools in England,

Johnston et al find that: '[b]oth whites and non-whites are more concentrated into

schools with their co-ethnics than predicted by a random allocation model'

(Johnston et al., 2004: 246). Thus they find evidence of higher levels of segregation

in schools than in residence. In areas that are more ethnically mixed they found more

concentration of both whites and non-whites (this was particularly the case with

Asian populations) (Burgess et al., 2005)

Nonetheless, asDebbie Weekes-Bernard (Weekes-Bernard, 2007) points out,

the literature of school choice has often failed to look at ethnicity. In a study of

Black and minority ethnic parents, she argues that the notion of choice is largely

rhetorical. Parents are not actually able to choose the schools they would most want, rather they are expressing merely a preference. Muslim parents in particular had strong desires for Muslim faith schools which are largely not available in the state system. Some parents were actively choosing schools where there was a large presence or majority of black and Asian students – to avoid racism and bullying[x], while others were avoiding those very schools: 'A small minority of aspirant Black and Asian parents actively avoid schools that are Black/Asian majority, engaging, where affordable, in high rates of residential and educational flight despite their own awareness of the risks associated with educating their children in predominantly White schools' (Weekes-Bernard, 2007: 41). This results in a complex negotiation of class and race for those parents: '[You are] trying to get your child to stay away from certain types of children. Now these certain types, some of these are Black. So you find yourself in this really weird situation where you are staying Black and true to yourself, but you are staying away because you are trying to get your child out of a Black environment and into a White environment that you know they are going to struggle in anyway. But you know they are going to have a better education… as parents [we] battle with our ethnicity [but] we put our children in a battle as well' (Weekes-Bernard, 2007: 41).

Black and minority ethnic parents have a sense of the 'risk' of encountering racism. This presents a different response to importance of mix and social and ethnic background of school intake than that of white parents and one which arouses difficult questions of identity: 'I remember I took my son to Northgram primary

school. He was the only little Black boy there – sat at a table with four little White

boys and they had their names on and they're all looking at him like, what are you

doing here? And he looked round at me and said 'it's ok you can go Mummy' and I

wanted to cry – I didn't want to leave him' (Weekes-Bernard, 2007: 41-2). This also

has consequences for children as Diane Reay and Helen Lucey point out in their

study of 'demonised' schools: '[w]hile children, across race and class, could make

identical criticisms of 'bad' schools, such judgements signified very differently, as

for white middle-class children, pupils at such schools are 'a distanced other', while

black and white working-class children they implicate 'people like me' ...There are

painful social and psychological consequences for these minority ethnic working

class children which the white middle class children can avoid, in particular, the

effort of pushing the 'demonized' other out when it is conflated with the self' (Reay

and Lucey, 2003: 130).

     The majority of work which examines questions of race and education

focuses, perhaps understandably, on ethnic minorities. A significant exception to this

is the focus on the white working classes who are becoming a key site of policy and

academic debate (see (Evans, 2006). It could be argued that the white working class,

and particularly white working class boys are subject to similar scrutiny that marked

black and other ethnic minorities in the early years of research – where notions of

cultural deficit and 'refusal' to be educated are still circulating. For example,

Raveaud and van Zanten argue that middle class parents talking about school choice

are reluctant to express views which may be seen as racist, but do not always have

the same reservations around class: 'while it appears unacceptable to attribute

negative educational effects to the presence of minority ethnic children, there is no

such constraint on criticism directed towards other social classes. Pupils from lower

social classes are occasionally presented as 'anti-social', 'nasty', 'the horrible ones'

likely to induce anti-school peer pressure' (Raveaud and van Zanten, 2007: 117). An

alternative formation of this debate argues that white working class boys are feeling

'left out' in the new re-making of British identity and celebrations of diversity – they

have no identity to celebrate. [xi] Whilst these debates mark the whiteness of the

working class, they still leave the white middle classes unmarked and unexamined

(and therefore somehow outside of the operations of both racism and racialisation).

Where whiteness appears to be marginal (in the case of white working class boys) it

can be brought into focus. Where it is a component of privilege, it becomes a 'ghost'

unable to be seen (Goldberg, 1997: 83).

        Diane Reay and Helen Lucey argue that 'Social class, race, social exclusion

and social exclusivity are all intertwined in secondary school choice in the inner city'

(Reay and Lucey, 2004: 37). They also argue that safety concerns are 'frequently

constructed through racialised, territorialized and, for some boys' schools, gendered

lenses'(Reay and Lucey, 2004: 45). Diane Reay and others are currently examining

those white middle classes who 'actively choosing the type of inner city

comprehensives that most white middle classes avoid' (Reay, 2007). This work

shows some of the different ways in which race and class interact. This includes the

idea of a cosmopolitan disposition, where some middle class parents see themselves

as providing their children with the capacity to move around comfortably and

operate successfully in multicultural contexts. This suggests an adaptation to the

global economy. Reay et al also argue that white middle class parents sometimes use

black and ethnic minority children symbolically to mark the distance between

themselves and the white working classes. Thus a parent remarks that a school she

sends her child to is 'very low on the white trash factor'.[xii]

Reay et al. (2004) are examining perhaps an exception in terms of the white

middle classes in that they directly sought out those who are actively choosing

schools that many are avoiding (by manipulating the system or geographical

relocation). This leaves the challenge to engage not only with those more unusual

parents, but the norm of the white middle classes who have specific raced, as well as

classed imaginaries of the desired school fellows for their children. As Anoop Nayak

points out, it is often harder to engage with 'the normalcy of whiteness as ordinary,

monotonous or humdrum' (Nayak, 2003: p140).

6. Conclusion

This paper has shown some of the ways in which the analysis of empirical material

is weakened by a singular focus on class. It has argued that whilst the respondents in

research on middle-class schooling choice appear to frequently flag race as a

relevant issue, this has not always been picked up by researchers. Whilst the use of

Bourdieuian notions of distinction in class habitus have been productive in enabling

an analysis of the class nature of parental action around schooling, there needs to be

more recognition of the intersections between race and class in making up middle

classness in Britain. This requires a more nuanced understanding of the shifting

terrain on which the idea of 'people like us' is constructed, as well as attention to

where the 'middle class' practices and discourses discovered would be better

described those of the white middle classes. Acknowledging the mutually

constitutive nature of social categories also opens up the scope of thinking through

the racialised nature of social reproduction and social capital that are so critical to

education. In addition, considerations of the racialised nature of parental choices

would call for a further critical examination of education reforms which could be

argued to increase both prejudice and concentrate privilege.

Exploration of how white middle class practices around school choice are

producing and reproducing racialised as well as classed inequalities and exclusions

is one route in to the examination of the 'normalcy of whiteness'. The marking of

class as also racialised also helps to open up the exploration of the practices of non-

white middle classes around schooling choice. Are Black, Asian and other ethnic

minorities making similar choices to their white counterparts around schooling or

how and why are they engaging in different practices? How are different ethnic

groups internally differentiated, and how do their choices differ? Do different ethnic

groups (including whites) meet a different reception from schools and teachers? For

example, is the 'pushy' black parent received in a different way from the 'pushy'

white parent?[xiii] If this empirical research agenda were pursued, it would also enable

a more engaged debate with Bourduiean understandings of the social world and

social interaction and how they might enable the analysis of racialised as well as

classed practices.

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Notes

BRIDGET BYRNE is a lecture in the Department of Sociology at the University of

Manchester

ADDRESS: Sociology, University of Manchester, Arthur Lewis Building, Oxford

Road, Manchester M13 9PL. Email bridget.byrne@manchester.ac.uk

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[i] Thanks to Virinder Kalra, Wendy Bottero and the anonymous reviewers for comments.

[ii] In addition, and particularly at primary level, much of the out-of-school social life of the child and mother may be shaped by fellow pupils (see Byrne, 2006).

[iii] Stephen Ball is well aware of the significance of race in other research he is involved in. See BALL, S. J. 1998 ''Race', Space and the Further Education Market Place', *Race, Ethnicity and Education,* vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 171-189, BALL, S. J., REAY, D. & DAVID, M. 2002 "Ethnic Choosing': Minority Ethnic students and higher education choice', *Race, Ethnicity and Education,* vol. 5, no. 4, pp. 333-357..

[iv] For an example of how Bourdieu can be usefully applied to the study of race see HANCOCK, B. H. 2005 'Steppin' out of Whiteness', *Ethnography,* vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 427-461.. See also SMAJE, C. 1997 'Not just a social construct: Theorising race and ethnicity', *Sociology,* vol. 31, no. 2, pp. 307-327.. Both argue for the importance of Bourdieu's approach to bodily practices for understandings of race.

[v] Although see HAGE, G. 1998 *White Nation. Fantasies of White supremacy in a multicultural society*. Melbourne and London: Pluto Press. for a Bourdieuian approach to national identity and belonging.

[vi] An exception to this would be *La Misere du Monde* where Bourdieu addresses race more directly.

[vii] See TROYNA, B. & HATCHER, R. 1992 *Racism in Children's Lives. A study of mainly-white primary schools*. London: Routledge. HEWITT, R. 1986 *White Talk Black Talk: inter-racial friendship and communication amongst adolescents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[viii] See YUVAL-DAVIS, N. 1992 'Fundamentalism, multiculturalism and women in Britain', in DONALD, J. & RATTANSI, A. (eds) *'Race', culture and difference.* London: Sage Publications, RATTANSI, A. 1992 'Changing the subject? Racism, culture and education', in DONALD, J. & RATTANSI, A. (eds) *'Race', Culture and Difference.* London: Sage Publications, BONNETT, A. 2000 *Anti-racism*. London: Routledge..

[ix] See ARCHER, L. & FRANCIS, B. 2007 *Understanding Minority Ethnic Achievement. Race, gender, class and 'success'*. London and New York: Routledge. for an exploration of British Chinese involvement in the education system

[x] See also REAY, D. & LUCEY, H. 2003 'The Limits of 'Choice': Children and Inner city schooling', *Sociology,* vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 121-142..

[xi] See HAYLETT, C. 2000 'Illegitimate subjects? Abject whites, neoliberal modernisation and middle class multiculturalism', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* vol. 19, pp. 351-70, SKEGGS, B. 2004a *Class, Self, Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. on the racialisation of the white working class in Britain.

[xii] See HARTIGAN, J. J. 2005 *Odd Tribes. Toward a cultural analysis of white people*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, HARTIGAN JR., J. 1997 'Unpopular culture: the case of 'white trash'', *Cultural Studies,* vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 316-343. for discussion of 'white trash'.

[xiii] Work by WILLIAMS, K. & MAYLOR, U. 2007 "I do think they think Black children are uneducable': Black middle class parents' accounts of managing their children's education', *The Educated Family? Middle class families and education.* London Metropolitan University. would suggest that this is the case.