

Middle Class Fractions, Childcare and the 'relational' and 'normative' aspects of class practices.

Stephen J Ball, Carol Vincent, Sophie Kemp and Soile Pietikainen

Institute of Education, University of London
School of Educational Foundations and Policy Studies

Abstract

The emphasis in class research remains on the structural aspects of class, class processes are neglected. This paper focuses upon some relational and normative aspects of class through an examination of social divisions produced and constructed within middle class families' choices of childcare. Working with data from two contrasting settings in London (Battersea and Stoke Newington) three issues are addressed in the paper; the extent to which childcare arrangements both substantively and structurally position children differently within long term educational careers; the ways in which the use of choice in a market system of child care and education, works to produce patterns of social closure that quietly discriminate via the collectivist criterion of class and racial membership; and the ways in which child care choices also point-up and perpetuate subtle distinctions and tensions of values and lifestyle within the middle class, between class factions. Concepts drawn from the work of Bourdieu are deployed throughout.

This paper draws from an ESRC-funded study of middle-class, or more precisely, service class (Goldthorpe 1995) families in London, choosing childcare¹. Through the lens of childcare arrangements, and the planning of children's educational careers, we engage with some of the recent developments in class theory and class research (Crompton 1998) (Savage 2000), (Butler and Robson 2002), see also Vincent, Ball and Kemp 2004). More substantively the focus on pre-school care enables us to begin to demonstrate the ways in which middle-class educational strategies are constructed from a very early age, but also to show how these strategies vary within the middle-class not only by household but by the habitus within which the household is spatially located. Here then we address both the differentiation of class fractional values and life-styles within our middle-class samples, and the ways in which these differentiations are enacted to produce

¹ Our focus on the service class and their relation to the working class perpetuates the more general neglect in sociology of the 'intermediate' middle class.

and reproduce boundaries within the middle-class and between this class and class 'others'. That is to say, following Bourdieu our analysis is relational, the class and class fractional identities and distinctions we describe involve a sense of belonging to a group and a sense of differentiation from others (cf. Savage 2000 p. 115). These metropolitan families are very much social individuals embedded in social networks which are, in the Battersea sample in particular, relatively tightly bounded and over-written by particular cultural makers of class – cars, clothes, leisure and bodily hexis.

Thus, in considering the coherence of the fractions we identify, we attend to both 'the relational aspects of class ... the extent to which a class can be identified through its more or less exclusive patterns of informal social interaction' (Lockwood 1995 p. 6) and the normative aspects of class, those shared values and beliefs which demarcate class groups. Lockwood suggests that both aspects are currently neglected in class research and are 'an open field of investigation' (p. 6). As we shall see the two are thoroughly intertwined within the class practices explored here.

A focus on the organisation and choices of child care also allows us to address 'class processes', the ways in 'which groups attain, establish and retain their positions within the social order' (Crompton 1998 p. 166) and thus the processes of social closure which shape the class structure. In particular we explore three issues. First, the extent to which childcare arrangements both substantively and structurally 'position' children differently towards and within long term educational careers and in relation to potential 'success roles' in education. Second, the ways in which 'the use of ostensibly individualist criteria', that is, the use of choice in a market system of child care and education, works 'to produce a pattern of social closure that quietly discriminates via the collectivist criterion of class or racial membership' (Parkin 1979 p. 65). Here, apart from its other immediate mundane and practical functions, child care can be both a preparation for future educational experiences and a social mechanism for separation off and marking out of class groups. We hope to demonstrate that closure does not simply take place within a structure of static positions, it is also a dynamic process which

constitutes that structure. Third, we address some aspects of what Parkin (1979) calls 'double closure', that closure which takes place within as well as between classes. Child care choices also point-up and perpetuate subtle distinctions and tensions of values and lifestyle within the middle class, between class factions. Each of these issues contributes to the identification of some of the 'mechanisms that connect the essential elements of class position to the characteristics and actions that are associated with class' (Payne 1996 p. 340).

The service class exists in a nexus of contradictions of identity, values and social relationships. It is a class betwixt and between, an 'intermediate zone' within which 'the indeterminacy and the fuzziness of the relationship between practices and positions are the greatest' (Bourdieu 1987 p. 12). We want to hold on to and explore both the distinctions and the fuzziness that characterises the middle class 'to capture this essential ambiguity ... rather than dispose of it' (Wacquant 1991 p. 57). Writing about the class in this way, trying to be clear and subtle at the same time, is not easy.

We would note in passing that in contrast to the respondents described by Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2001 p. 875) the individuals represented here were neither ambivalent nor defensive about their class identity and certainly did not see themselves 'outside' of class, as Savage et al reported. Nor indeed did they regard themselves as 'ordinary', although, in the nuances of fractioning which we outline below, there were some respondents who positioned themselves over and against the 'unordinary' lifestyles which they saw as defining 'others' in the middle class. Overall, these parents seem to have little problem in seeing themselves as middle class and as sharing a set of class traits with other families 'like them' - as we shall see. As one mother straightforwardly puts it, her child's nursery is full of "children like our children, so children of middle class parents who can afford to spend nearly nine hundred pounds a month sending their kids to childcare". We offer examples below.

Bourdieu (1987 p. 6) argues that 'The homogenising effect of homogenous conditionings is at the basis of those dispositions which favour the development of relationships, formal or informal (like homogamy), which tend to increase this very homogeneity'. There are certainly plenty of indications in our data of the ways in which childcare and educational settings are sought and used by particular middle class fractions to maintain and ensure social homogamy. However, as Bourdieu (1987 p. 13) goes on to argue 'In the reality of the social world, there are no more clear-cut boundaries, no more absolute breaks, than there are in the physical world'. Social boundaries, he suggests, can be thought of as 'imaginary planes' or a more appropriate image 'would be that of a flame whose edges are in constant movement, oscillating around a line or surface' (p. 13). This metaphor is certainly apposite as a way of thinking about the distinctions we outline below.

The grounding of our discussion of intra-class fractions is within small differences and nuances rather than significant rifts, and we must eventually ask questions about the overall significance of these small divisions. Where should primary emphasis be given, to the nuanced differences within the service class or to the systematic commonalities across it? How important in terms of normative and relational differences are these nuances? In some respects it might be argued that class fraction analysis is not class analysis at all in as much that the primacy and independence of the economic bases of class are subverted by the focus upon divisions and differences of social significance based on status and values, and non-economic assets. On the other hand, a distinction of the economic from the social is itself difficult to maintain: 'the "economic" can only be understood as ... a set of embedded social assumptions, obligations and claims' (Bottero 1998 p. 482).

The problem of categorisation especially in relation to class fractions remains as an on-going concern in our work, we are using and troubling our categories at the same time. We are also acutely aware that 'it is not possible to construct a single measure which could successfully capture all the elements going to make up social class - or even structured social inequality' (Crompton 1998 p. 114). Thus, space/locality, parental background and educational

history are employed here alongside occupational criteria to add some nuance and depth to the minimalism of work based divisions² (see full data in Appendix 1). Even so our respondents do not belong to categories in straightforward and uncomplicated ways and it is often difficult to read these individuals as though their experiences were transparent concomitants of the social category they are allocated to. The ontological status of the middle class is not 'ready-made in reality' (Wacquant 1991 p. 57).

As a further dimension to the nuances, depth and complexity of our analysis it is the family rather than individual class actors that is our focus. However, we do not simply take it that 'the family acts as an homogenous unit in the class structure' (Leuifsrud, and Woodward 1987p. 313), although there is no space here to develop the problems and issues that arise from intra-familial differences (see below). Within the 'black box of intra-household negotiations' (Devine 1998 p. 36) the child care arrangements with which we deal here are sometimes the outcome of ongoing tensions and fragile compromises and within these arrangements 'gender relations are everywhere' (Pollert 1996 p. 645).

The Respondents

As noted above the paper draws on data from an ESRC funded research project³. Some of those data are presented, not to illustrate findings or conclusions as such but rather to animate a discussion around the issues of class divisions and class processes and the mobilisation of social resources in the reproduction of advantage (Devine 1998 p. 32). In doing this we hope to

² The service class is localised and globalised simultaneously, especially so within London as a 'world city', they are doubly located, in a local space and a metropolitan one. The former is to the fore in family lives, the latter in their work lives (see Robson and Butler 2001).

³ The research (Nov 2001-April 2004) explores how middle-class parents choose childcare for their young children in two London settings. The project as a whole addresses a set of issues embedded in the operation of 'lived' pre-school, child care markets. The study is a qualitative one, which will when completed involve some 114 semi-structured interviews with parents and providers as well as others closely involved in local child care provision. It builds upon a pilot study (see Vincent and Ball 2001). The sample was elicited in a variety of ways; by advertising in local magazines and NCT news letters; putting up posters in local shops, libraries and child care facilities; by attending child care events and facilities and approaching parents or carers directly; and by word of mouth - 'snowballing'.

demonstrate the potential of up-close, qualitative work of this kind to contribute to core debates in class analysis and class theory. Clearly the claims that we can make based on our particular sample are very limited but as Crompton (1998 p. 122) argues case studies of this kind ‘facilitate theoretical/logical thinking and thus causal explanations’.

Table One - approx here -

Table 1 Parents’ sector of employment

	Battersea		Stoke Newington	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Public sector	7	2	11	3
Private sector	18	23	12	19
Voluntary sector	1	1	4 * and one with no previous career	4

The paper is based on an interim sample of 54 mothers, 26 from Battersea and 28 from Stoke Newington (including one single mother). The localities are described in more detail below. The women are mostly white (except one, although a further two are in mixed race relationships), mostly heterosexual (except one) and mostly in partnerships (except one). They are extremely well educated, nearly all having first degrees and ten having or studying for doctorates. As may be seen from Table 1 the mothers in both locations are more likely than their partners to be employed in the public sector. A high proportion of the men and women in Battersea are employed in the financial sector. One of Butler and Robson’s (2001 p. 2161) respondents commented that “the Northcote Road [in Battersea] is like a branch of the City now”. In Stoke Newington a high proportion are employed in the arts, media, law and higher education (see Appendix for details). Another way of capturing some of the differences between the two localities might have been in terms of the professional/managerial distinction used by (Savage, Barlow et al. 1992) and (Crompton 2001). While this may certainly underpin some of the values

differences we identify it is not on its own sufficient as a way of representing the specific combinations of social, cultural and economic factors which make Stoke Newington and Battersea inhabitable in different ways by middle class families. For example, the distinction does not encompass the variety of self-employed or casually employed media workers in Stoke Newington. And as Savage (2000) has pointed out the validity of the distinction is being weakened by changes in the organisation and culture of professional work (See Vincent, Ball and Kemp 2004). Taken as a whole the sample of families is relatively affluent and hold forms and volumes of cultural and social capital that allow them to be fairly skilled users of childcare markets. Furthermore, in most cases, they are firmly embedded in local networks of other similarly advantaged families, with whom they share information and recommendations. The average length of time that the families have lived in the areas is 6.5 years in Battersea and 6.8 years in Stoke Newington; 9 Battersea families have lived in the area for less than 5 years as against 11 of the Stoke Newington families.

The Localities

Our sample is drawn from two areas of 'gentrified' London with the intention of identifying different occupational groups and local cultural and lifestyle factors and different infrastructures of care. In these respects we were influenced by the work of Tim Butler and colleagues, who have conducted studies of the development of middle class communities in London. Butler and Robson (2001 p. 2160) argue that gentrification is 'localised' and involves 'differing relations to forms of capital' enacted by different fractions of the middle class. As a result distinctive areas have been created, with particular 'styles' or characteristics. Place is then, both a dependent variable, local 'cultures' develop from class choices, and attract 'like-minded' others, but these choices are in part also driven by material concerns and necessities, such as house prices and the reputations of local schools. In these terms we selected two areas of London for study, Battersea and Stoke Newington, both of which have featured in Butler's work. Both areas have established middle class

populations but are also close to, and in the case of Stoke Newington interspersed with, much poorer working class housing estates and neighbourhoods. Stoke Newington is an area that has been in long term, gradual gentrification, whereas Battersea has experienced more recent, quickly established social class change. Battersea, or more precisely an area referred to as 'between the commons', is also known locally as 'nappy valley' because of the large number of families with small children. It is described by Butler and Robson (2001 p. 2153) as 'an area whose "suitability" and "habitability" have been assiduously contrived, primarily through manipulation of markets (in education, housing and leisure)'.

In the central area of "between the commons", the Victorian houses are extremely well maintained and often 'extended'. House prices have risen exponentially in the area over the last 10 years. Thus, residents are strong in economic capital, which can be seen in the type of shops and restaurants that flourish on the main thoroughfares and the proliferation of private schools. When asked what attracted them to the area the respondents in our study who lived in Battersea mentioned the presence of many other families with young children, the array of child-friendly activities that has developed to cater for families and the 'good', mostly private schools.

In Stoke Newington our respondents also mentioned the presence of other families with children as factors that attracted them to the area, as well as the local, well-equipped park, the cafes and shops but also, and importantly for this paper, the vibrancy arising from the mix of ethnic cultures. There are other differences between the two areas. Houses are smaller and prices are cheaper in Stoke Newington although rising fast⁴. The area has a more distinctive communal identity than Battersea. Parents often used the word 'community' when talking about the 'feel' of the area. This is perhaps what Butler refers to as a 'village in the mind' (Butler & Robson 2002).

⁴ As a crude indicator, in 2002 the average terraced house price in Wandsworth was 365k, in Hackney 280k, with the London average being 244k.

The data are presented below separately by area. This enables us to point up differences of various sorts between the areas and point to ‘an urban middle class which is fractured along socio-spatial lines’ (Butler 2002 p. 22), although we should re-iterate that the commonalities are pervasive (Vincent, Ball and Kemp 2003).

Stoke Newington

“there are whole swathes of the middle class who work in the media around here” (Madeleine)

“I wouldn’t want to live anywhere else in London ... mostly because Stoke Newington is the closest I am going to get to San Francisco in England” (Madison)

“... a bit of an artisty type of feel and it’s very ethnically diverse, so that’s what probably attracted me” (Caroline)

In what follows a complex set of themes are interwoven, characterised by tensions of similarity and difference and integration and separation *within* the middle class *and in relation to* working class ‘others’. Two quotations from Stoke Newington residents Madeleine and Judy will introduce these themes. Madeleine is talking here about moving her child from a private to a Local Authority run nursery. This is a move between two very different social worlds - class worlds. It is also a move out of privilege and advantage, and as she explains this provokes a sense of guilt (see Ball 2003a, Chapter 6 on middle class guilt). Madeleine was one of only four parents in our sample (all of them in Stoke Newington) to seriously consider state provided childcare.

We’re the wrong kind of demographics for [private nursery], which is very much into full-time caring, quite a lot of City [workers], quite a lot of minor media celebrities ... which is why she’s coming out of there ... I think we’re gonna have to because it’s just too expensive for us ... it’s like paying half our mortgage every month for three days [a week] At this moment what I’m going to do is take her away

from there and take her to a state nursery with [adult child] ratios of 1 to 13⁵. I'm just kind of riddled with guilt about it at the moment because I don't know if she's ready and I don't know if I can do that to her ... In the [state] nursery there are about 6 or 7 other white kids. There's 60 kids and I'd say at least half of them English is their second language and that's very different from obviously paying through the nose ... where she is now is not necessarily white but they're middle class. They're professional parents (...) [But] This is why we live in London , I think to have this other experience, the shock and the kind of extremity of it...

There are a number of pertinent issues embedded in this extract. Primarily Madeleine points us to the fault line that exists between private and state provision, in this setting, both in terms of the nature of provision and the demographics of access. The class boundaries here are sharp and relate directly to the ability to pay. Madeleine also indicates something of the complex interplay of class and race and the ways in which one or other may be to the fore in different contexts. Also here we see the contradictions, for some of our respondents of being *in* but not *of* London; the frissons of spatial proximity and social and cultural distance; the shocks of extremity, of stark differences between classes, as against the celebration of multi-culturalism. But Madeleine's account also points to 'softer' divisions within her class, the way that she differentiates herself, by income and identity from middle class 'others' - those of the 'City' and 'minor media celebrities'. She is a translator and has a commission to write a screenplay, her husband is a theatre director and playwright. All of this seems to suggest that she sees herself as neither one thing nor the other. Not working class but not entirely a part of the middle class. She experiences some discomfort in each of the class spaces represented by the two nurseries.

Judy describes a move in the opposite direction, from a relatively cheap and socially diverse community play group to an expensive and exclusive private

⁵ The private nursery would have adult child ratios of 1-8 or lower.

nursery, which offered the longer hours of care which she needed, and the costs of which were borne by her 'in-laws'.

The only problem with [private nursery] is that it's not inclusive, it's one of those places that if you're on a high income, so the only people who use it are City lawyers... the peer group is pretty much white and pretty much moneyed ... and when they found out my [older] daughter's at the local comprehensive they all freak out, the peer group are all going on to the private sector ... [younger daughter's] peer group at [community play group] are all going on the local [state] school. I am very community minded and my choices would be around the community and things that are inclusive. And this [private nursery] is one kind of blip.

Again there are several significant issues evident here. There is a sense again of Judy's child moving across a boundary of values and income. Judy is 'giving up' on her values commitment to inclusivity and her child is experiencing an exclusive class and ethnic setting as a result. The values and income differences are pointed up further by the reactions to her elder daughter's schooling. To the other parents Judy's choice of state schooling is alien and dangerous, it is outside of the moral boundaries of good parenting, as far as they are concerned. Judy's awareness of this, of her differences from them, is what we want to emphasise here but there are also ever-present ambivalences, she goes on to say about the move that "actually it's worked out really well".

There is a tension and duality embedded in the social and moral lives of some members of the middle class - like Madeleine and Judy, a tension between sociality and values commitments, an orientation towards a collective social good, as against individualism and the press of social reproduction. Such tension, as Nagel (1991) puts it, is between the personal and impersonal standpoints (see Ball 2003a pp. 111-118). Again we will return to this.

Two other Stoke Newington mothers expressed some dislike of the image projected by private nurseries that they had visited. Ann expressed a fairly strong sense of distancing herself from the class values of private nursery schools and tried and failed to find a state nursery place for her child. Nurseries in nearby Islington were “really expensive and not really the kind of, it’s a bit presumptuous of me, not the kind of care I particularly wanted somehow”. She went on, hesitantly, to describe this both as an aversion to something as a “business rather than educational” and as “an inverted snobby thing. Because, well they’re very expensive [and] too precious somehow, it’s probably my hang-up...” but admitted seeing one such setting and being ‘impressed by it’. Again values and advantage, aversion and responsibility, are juxtaposed. And Elsa also found herself responding negatively to an expensive private nursery; as “a bit too twee, and they had french lessons and things ... very nice but not particularly for us”. In these and the earlier examples the mothers are expressing again a clear sense of being out of place in certain kinds of middle class settings, that are ‘not us’, a sense of discomfort among others ostensibly of their class.

As noted four mothers in our Stoke Newington sample did consider or apply for places in state, council-run nurseries, and Hannah did get a ‘marketed’ place in such a nursery⁶ and saw this as a positive thing for her children, the nursery in question being “quite ethnically and you know, social class-wise quite mixed”. Mix comes about from the presence of both ‘people like us’ and ‘others’. But when mix and its constituents is addressed there is often a hesitancy of tone in describing these, in naming ‘others’. “You get people like us, who are paying market fees and then, obviously, there’s a lot of assisted places as well”. Hannah wanted her child to be somewhere “where, you know, it was, sort of, you know different kind of colours and, you know accents and all the rest of it”. But she explained later that “there’s mixed and mixed”. She did not want her children exposed at an early age to aggressive behaviour; although “not everybody who comes from, you know, a disadvantaged background is abusive ... doesn’t have any kind of respect for the community

⁶ Parents pay fees for a marketed place in a state nursery, although these fees are generally lower than those of a private nursery. Completely free state provision is only available on the basis on social need.

they live in, I mean, quite the opposite". In other words, there are limits to the value of and tolerance of social mix. Caroline also looked at some state nurseries "which were mainly African, African Caribbean ... there were no white children in some of them, and then in others there were a few ... so I thought whether I wanted his name down in a nursery where the majority culture was not his". Nonetheless, the private 'alternative' nursery she chose eventually "is very ethnically diverse" and "you couldn't wish for a better place ... in the sense the cultural mix makes it a vibrant place". But this ethnic mix is also "middle class, middle class professional, only because of the cost". In contrast, and exceptionally, Elsa was happy for her daughter to attend two community nurseries with a majority of African-Caribbean children. One was, "quite friendly, very, very mixed, sort of ethnically mixed. In fact it was more afro-caribbean than white... all of the staff were afro-caribbean". Note the "very very"! There is mixed, very mixed and very, very mixed. In the other nursery, her daughter "was the only white child in that class. Which was nice really. You know, it's just probably if she hadn't been to nursery, she wouldn't have had that". The last comments suggests the clear positivity of such 'mixing' which was commonly expressed by the Stoke Newington respondents but was certainly the exception in Battersea. Emily, also in Stoke Newington, and herself part of a dual-heritage relationship, with dual-heritage children, explained "what was driving us was having a nice mix of children, I felt that was so important, I didn't want him to be somewhere where socially it was all exactly the same children and racially as well, like most of the more expensive nurseries did tend to be predominantly white, I really noticed that...". Even so the nursery chosen is "predominantly middle class, middle class working families ... but there's quite a few mixed race and black children". The degree to which families interact, taking their liaison beyond the confines of the children's relationships in such 'mixed' nurseries is an open question. Butler and Robson's (2001 p. 2157) notion of 'tectonic' social relations as '(s)ocial groups or "plates" which overlap or run parallel to one another without much in the way of integrated experience' might be apposite here.

It is not simply choice at work here. New Labour's National Childcare Strategy which encourages a mix of private, subsidised and free places,

embeds and reproduces class divisions, even where parents wanted to make choices differently: “We were actually turned down at Fernbank ... which is the state-run one, it’s much cheaper, but obviously you have to be extremely poor to get into it ... unless you’re willing to go private, you’re not going to get a nursery place” (Jessica). The structure and economy of childcare is very directly related to social class divisions - within and between classes. In Stoke Newington then a nuanced awareness of inter and intra-class divisions seemed well established. Let us now consider Battersea.

Battersea

“moved from childless area” to “Buggy Jams” (Margot)

“perfect for children - its not called Nappy Valley for nothing” (Lynn)

“both people we shared [our nannies] with were accountants, they’re all accountants round here” (Linda)

“Both of us are very committed to state education which is very unusual in this area” (Linda).

In Battersea the themes of mix and difference are played out again, but somewhat differently. The awareness of an ‘us’ and ‘them’, within the middle class, was again evident from some of the respondents. In some ways, given the demography of the area, this was even more forcefully expressed. Some of the mothers were clear that they did not want their children exposed to settings in which social values they were uncomfortable with were predominant. There are distinct ‘circuits’ (Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz 1995) of care and education in play here which are distinguished relationally (in terms of mix) and normatively (in terms of values) within the middle class. Again, mix here is a very relative term but in comparison to Stoke Newington there is a strong class and ethnic insularity in this locality. Very few of the Battersea respondents talked about mix or gave it a positive value. In this respect for the Battersea ‘dissenters’, those who did value social diversity, mix is much more subtle, and not a matter of crossing stark boundaries of class or ethnicity. In order to pursue the theme of intra-class differences most of the examples below are taken from those Battersea parents who found themselves ‘out of

affinity' or in disharmony with the local habitus and the self evidencies of 'good' parenting.

Juliet draws firm lines between herself and other middle class parents who are not like her, have different values and higher incomes. She plans to send her child to a state school, as a private school is not a setting she feels comfortable about - either in respect of its particularity or its exclusivity. However, not any state school will do. For her, as for many Stoke Newington parents 'mix' is good, but some 'mixes' are intolerable. For Juliet, both those schools which are too working class and those which are too middle class, or at least the 'wrong kind' of middle class, are unacceptable. Juliet is thinking of nursery schooling, in part at least, in relation to where her daughter will go to primary school and whether she can get her into Goldwater, a state primary school, which is highly regarded and where,

there's lots of well-heeled middle class parents but there's also a council estate on the doorstep so there's a kind of mixture which is nice. It's not all people driving 4-Wheel Drives like the school across the road [a private school] where you see the kind of procession of armoured cars to collect these children. It's a fantastic school, they are interviewing children at three ... [daughter'd] probably do really well but I don't like the whole deal really, plus you have to cough up a large amount of money not just for the school but for the uniform

Sally also pointed to some subtle differences between her child and what she described as the "very well dressed class" that attend her daughter's nursery. She "got an idea of who she [her daughter] was going to school with" from attending children's birthday parties; "she's going to school with quite a few, sort of, million pound house type children". Nonetheless, Sally also sees a value in social mixing, and is, unusually amongst Battersea parents, keen to find a "more racially mixed" primary school for her daughter, "that would be one of the main criteria". Despite her view that the parents of other children in

her daughter's current nursery are "lovely people" she is not entirely comfortable with the social exclusivity of her current nursery, and while she is "quite OK about sending [child] to private school", her husband is not. "He hates the whole public schoolboy thing" and "we don't want her to grow up with a bunch of snobs ... like [nearby private school], which is walking distance, and the grounds are lovely, and the teachers are nice, and the classes are small, but they, you know, they're a bunch of little snots basically". Once more there is a rejection of middle class 'others', the middle class who are 'not us', the carriers of values into which these parents do not want their child socialised. Also once more however, there is a second tension between normative differences and structural advantage. Because, "then again, if we got into Goldwater [the local state school], she'd be thrown into a class of thirty kids ... so I don't know, we are tending toward private at the moment". Here, a school that is very acceptable to one mother, Juliet, is regarded with considerable suspicion by another, Sally, despite their ostensible sharing of the same class position.

In the case of parents like Sally we could say that private education is preferred both for and despite its effects of social closure, which is not always the case in our sample. It is a structural and rational choice, a way of ensuring particular kinds of opportunities which are not available to others, and is 'intelligible' (Goldthorpe 2000 p. 165) in this way, 'in relation to the class position they hold'. This is an example of what Jordan and colleagues (1994) refer to as 'putting the family first', that is the overriding responsibility felt by middle class parents to try and achieve for their children competitive social advantage, despite a possible cost to their personal principles. And, as in the other instances, economic assets underpin the possibilities of these opportunities. However, these are not simply rational or utilitarian choices, the importance of 'class values, norms, "forms of consciousness"' (Goldthorpe 1996) p. 487) cannot be 'avoided' as Goldthorpe wants to do. As Hatcher (1998) p. 17) demonstrates (using a range of educational choice research evidence), and as indicated throughout our data, 'agents do not simply weigh courses of action in terms of their efficacy in achieving a desired goal, they evaluate the desired goals themselves in relation to a framework of values

that is not reducible to personal utility'. In some families, principles over-ride the logic of utility and interest maximisation (see also Ball 2003b).

The interplay of calculative rationality and values is evident in Phillipa's choices, she, like Sally, although again intending to send her children to private school, contrasts herself and her family with the sorts of middle class parents to be found in some of the private schools she has visited. They are "sort of very City men and sort of flowery women, and we didn't feel comfortable with that either for the children or for ourselves". Again differences in values are alluded to. This is made clearer in Phillipa's preferred private school Park Gate, which she describes as "sort of laid back and apparently more liberal and not quite so traditional sort of style", as opposed to those where "you can get incredibly traditional minds and where there's a massive focus on looking right, shaking hands, wearing the right clothes". Park Gate is viewed as "a much more broad-based school" and it has, "for example quite a few Black or Asian people in it which you often won't see in other private schools" and "it's got some sort of special needs type children", whereas "some of the other schools we started to call Christian master race schools". Again a *degree* of 'mix' is valued but again 'mix' is relative. There are a variety of boundaries and distinctions embedded here, drawn in different places by different families. Phillipa and her partner "wanted a good education for our children but we didn't want to be kind of excluding our children from the vast proportion of society". She is "more confident I feel that my values and Park Gate's values are fairly similar". Here then instrumental and expressive choice coincide, a happy solution where exclusivity and (limited) mix are achieved in one move.

Alice, like others, is clear that the social mix of her child's private nursery is "pretty limited.....middle class". Again she does not see herself as the same in all respects as other parents, as part of this mix "every one, except me I think, drives these wretched 4-Wheel Drive things which I hate, but that's the one trouble, for this area's all very homogeneous really, so, I mean I don't think there's any coloured children here". Again we see minor differences within what is "homogenous" and major divisions between this class setting and

other classes and ethnicities 'elsewhere'. Alice wanted the locally, preferred middle class state primary school [Goldwater] for her son: "I'm very keen that he should go state ... I think it's a really good start rather than imagining that the whole world exists of Volvos and 4-Wheel Drives". Again, by allusion, Alice points to and wants to avoid for her child the possibility of a life-world view constructed within and limited to a particular sort of and different middle class social environment from her own - divisions are drawn on both sides.

Goldwater Primary has an interesting role in these accounts and some attention to this school points up further complexity and subtlety in middle class tactics and strategies of social reproduction and further complications in relation to the notion of social mix. Like the example of Park Gate private school, Goldwater offers a happy solution for many parents to personal and familial dilemmas. It offers a degree of social mix, but not too much. It is within the state sector, while at the same time offering a good likelihood of high levels of achievement in a setting in which others 'like me' are in a majority. For many of the parents we interviewed in this area of Battersea, it was Goldwater or nothing as far as state sector schooling was concerned. It is "perceived to be the only good primary school in the area". Effectively Goldwater has been 'captured' and colonised by the local middle class. As such it is a focus of classed social networks and social interaction, especially among mothers, many of whom are involved in the school, in representative or supportive roles. Butler and Robson's (2001 p. 2150) comments about the primary school in Telegraph Hill would apply equally as well to Goldwater in that 'the school has been nurtured by middle class parents and it is the focal point of social interaction and friendship networks', although for the families whose children attend Goldwater these networks are often already well established through participation in National Childbirth Trust groups, the attached nursery and various local playgroups and local commercial children's activities. These integrated 'circuits' of care are a foundation for and focus of class interactions and normativities. The other point about these networks that Butler and Robson omit to mention is that they are gendered, the relationships are forged and maintained almost exclusively by mothers. In this respect class formation is very much women's work. The invisible work of mothers, as

'status maintainers' (Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari and Guskin 1996 p. 589) is crucial to the knitting together and activation of different forms of family capital.

The relational and normative distinctions of class are thoroughly inter-woven here. For some families their view of class relations and the responsibilities of advantage and social reproduction lead to choices which produce absolute relational separations -exclusivity and closure - some kinds of settings are sought and other avoided. For others such responsibilities are off-set against a commitment to the importance of diverse social relations, a balance between the personal and impersonal standpoints (Nagel 1991) which rests on class ambivalences and produces much fuzzier separations.

Discussion: class fractions and class localities

Childcare may not, at first sight, seem to be a key arena of class reproduction but we suggest that that is exactly what it is. Childcare opportunities and choices are strongly stratified and very closely tied to family assets. There are sharp and distinct class boundaries established and maintained within the socially segmented childcare market. The combination of cost and choice ensures that classes and class fractions are separated off from one another in different and well-bounded 'circuits of care' which are more or less tightly related to 'circuits of [primary] schooling' - state or private. Social and normative expectations and social patterns of attraction and rejection work to produce very different childcare cultures and environments. Nonetheless, throughout our analysis and discussion we are trying to hold onto and convey the significance of both the divisions between and within classes. The relative rigidity of these divisions produce variations in the degree of social mix to which children are exposed. Childcare 'options' range from home-based childcare involving nannies and the more exclusive private day nurseries, both giving rise to defended, carefully crafted social relations and social networks, through a variety of less expensive and less socially exclusive nursery schools settings, some of which are inflected with 'integrationist' and

'alternative' values. In this middle ground there are also childminders⁷ and a limited number of community nurseries with 'mix' policies based on combinations of free and funded places. And at the other extreme of class exclusivity there is the state nursery sector, primarily only available to families with acute social needs. Childcare choices made by middle class families, in combination with Government policies of provision both generate and maintain class divisions and work to reproduce differential educational opportunities. These choices have implications for both educational identities and as 'ability' markers, and are linked to access to, and preparation for different, and differently privileged long-term educational trajectories.

However, both the patterns of childcare choice and the values related to social mix differed between the localities in this study reflecting both the local geographies of childcare and the differently prevailing values of child rearing and sociality in each locality. Some of these differences are indicated in Table 2 which shows the childcare choices of the two respondent groups. It is possible to suggest, albeit tentatively at the moment, that these different middle-class factions are engaged in distinct forms of local social relations (see table 2). These forms can be characterised in a number of ways, capturing their different aspects, by drawing upon a variety of sociological vocabularies.

Table 2 - Forms of local social relations

Stoke Newington	Battersea
symbolic mutuality	instrumentalism
vertical social capital	horizontal social capital
impersonal values	personal values
community	individualism - market-based
inclusivist	exclusivist
relaxed boundaries	common ideology -strong boundaries

⁷ In Stoke Newington the use of childminders was not uncommon, in Battersea it was unusual. The differences in use relate to cost, availability, and values. The relationships between middle class mothers and working class child minders involve another, interesting kind of boundary-crossing which we do not have the space to examine here (Mooney et al 2001).

Inclusivist,community values were more embedded and more widespread in Stoke Newington and *exclusivist,individualist* values more embedded and widespread in Battersea but there were some *inclusivist* parents in the Battersea sample and a few *exclusivists* in Stoke Newington. In Stoke Newington exclusivity was more evident as children neared secondary school age. In Stoke Newington social boundaries were more relaxed (Bernstein 1996) and more references were made to impersonal values (Nagel 1991) and the public goods. In Battersea social boundaries were relatively closed and personal values predominated. The social relations each in case may thus constitute different forms of social capital, vertical in Stoke Newington and horizontal in Battersea. In both localities values differences were related to perceptions of class fractional differences and to childcare choices and thus to patterns of social interaction. However, like most other binaries these divisions obscure as much as they reveal. (The analysis here which stresses differences between the localities can be compared with (Vincent, Ball et al. 2004) which stresses a set of commonalities).

Table 3 - approx here -

Table 3 - Choices of Child Care

	Battersea	Stoke Newington
Nannies	8 (1 f-t live-in)	2*
Nanny Share	1	6*
Private nursery	11	8
State school nursery	1	
Childminder	3	4
Au Pair	1	2
Private school nursery		1
State nurseries		4
Community nursery		3
Co-op nursery		3

**Most of the Stoke Newington nannies were unqualified and inexperienced, and part-time, and employed through personal recommendations, or small*

ads. Most of the Battersea nannies were qualified and employed through agencies.

NB: Some of the families had more than one child under 5. Hence the total shown here for types of care chosen adds up to more than 54.

There are three, or at least three interpretive possibilities in relation to this account.

1. This demonstrates the ways in which class is mediated by space. That different localities attract and reproduce different class lifestyles and cultures, based upon the use of differently available forms and volumes of capitals.
2. The differences across the localities indicate the importance of more general structural, relational and normativities divisions - fractions - within the middle class.
3. These are minor perturbations around basic class commonalities within the middle class and what is most significant here is the stark divisions between the middle and working classes which are only occasionally breached.

We suggest that we have here, in small scale, a prima facie case for the existence of relational and normative differences and differentiations within the middle class - generated by things that repel and attract, separations and boundaries. These separations are by no means absolute but there is a seeking out of spaces of differentiation - in nurseries, and schools and through other childcare arrangements, by some families. While, in contrast, others look for particular, but 'tolerable' kinds of social mix. In most cases here 'social mix' is what might be termed 'designer mix', diversity, vibrancy, and safety, based on a 'commonality within difference', shared values around childrearing across ethnic or cultural variations but mainly within the limits of social class. Negotiating differences in values is after all demanding, and not something that many adults do, most of us preferring to mix socially with 'people like us'.

Through these normative and relational patterns and their attendant processes of social advantage we can see ways in which class fractional differences are instantiated in everyday life aspects of social reproduction and

are also embedded in and reproduced within social institutions. They rest upon and are revealed within the power of allusions, asides, avoidances and aversion - the work of loose-fitting but practical classifications, senses 'of place' and of 'being out of place'. There is a dual element then to these small acts of closure. On the one hand, there is recognition of others 'like us', a 'class-attributive judgement' (Bourdieu 1986 p. 473). On the other, is a sense of alienation, of difference, from 'others' not 'like us' - 'aliens among their own species' (Charlesworth 2000 p. 9). In other words, a sense of social structure - 'a structure of affinity and aversion' (Bourdieu 1987 p. 7) of 'forces of attraction and repulsion that reproduce the structure' (Charlesworth 2000 p. 8). The existence of nuanced but serious differences in values based views of and attitudes toward social mix are also related to lifestyle differences, consumption decisions and class performativities [cars, clothes, housing etc.]. These differences in lifestyle are obliquely glimpsed in these data and for the families they underpin 'reasonably genteel battles to assert their own identities, social positions and worth' (Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding 1992 p. 100).

The other side of this is a much more distinct seal between the middle class as a whole and the working class. Strategies of closure are evident. While the divisions and classifications which demarcate fractions within classes are articulated in subtle terms those which demarcate boundaries between classes are stark. In one particular form what is evident here are what Wacquant (1991 p. 52) refers to as the 'self production of class collectivities' achieved 'through struggles which simultaneously involve relationships between and within classes and determine the actual demarcation of new frontiers'. In a sense what we are glimpsing here is the extent to which the middle class, as a 'theoretical class' is also a 'real class' and its fractions are 'real' fractions (Bourdieu 1987). That is to say, as well as socio-economic categories, 'a class on paper', they appear as categories which agents use in relation to the social world and 'their place in it' (p.8). The distinctions 'on paper' have a basis in practice. These service class families are aware of themselves as sharing certain dispositions, and are aware of the variation of

these dispositions among themselves, and thus distinguish themselves from others within and outside of their social space.

What we suggest here, following Butler and Robson (2001) are two different but not necessarily distinct, localised, middle class habituses, which are rooted in different combinations of capital and forms of social relationships. Battersea is more homogeneous, more 'self-contained' as Butler and Robson put it. They goes as far as to suggest that there is a 'one-dimensional and rather stifling atmosphere of conformity' (p. 2153) and a 'very strong sense of "people like us" gathering together' (p. 2153). This commonality, and the concomitant sense of safety and convenience of schools and services, is important to many of the inhabitants. Social capital rests almost exclusively on horizontal social relations. Mutuality is interpersonal and primarily instrumental. In contrast, in Stoke Newington, diversity is a positive value, and social, particularly ethnic mixing, is actively sought by many parents as part of the experience of growing up for their child - a different kind of social capital. This is a sort of symbolic mutuality. Alongside this, in stark comparison to Battersea, there are various ways, in relation to childcare, in which 'active mutuality' is valued e.g. cooperative, community and 'alternative' nurseries (Vincent, Ball and Kemp 2004). Only in Stoke Newington do we find our respondents considering sending their children to council nurseries, or attending and participating in the running of community nurseries, or organising and running cooperative nurseries. There is more evidence here of 'vertical' social capital. Stoke Newington parents are also much more likely to consider and use child minders. In contrast, in Battersea qualified nannies are widely used and there are a growing number of Nanny Agencies in the locality. In Stoke Newington, parents who did employ nannies, relied on unqualified, often young, foreign women. Indeed the 'grey economy' in childcare was much more in evidence in Stoke Newington. Nor where there any local secular private schools available to the Stoke Newington parents. In these respects we can again reinforce Butler and Robson's (2001 p. 2159) comments that 'the common good in Battersea is established through market-based commonalities of interest based on households acting atomistically'.

In general terms, as Bernstein predicted, agents of symbolic control (Bernstein 1990 pp138-140), the new middle class (as in Stoke Newington), with 'no necessarily shared ideology' (p. 135) appear more comfortable with 'relaxed' boundaries and relative social mix or are at least more willing to postpone the necessities of exclusivity. By contrast the traditional middle class, agents of control in the field of production (or finance, as in Battersea), who are 'likely to share common interests and common ideology' (p. 135), are more concerned to establish firm boundaries and relative social exclusivity from the earliest stages of their children's care and education (see also van Zanten 2002).

What we have sought to do here is to establish a plausible case and a set of possibilities for further research which seeks to ground class in the practical principles of division and the actual systems of aversion and affinity which structure the social relations of particular social spaces - social structures in the head. That is to move beyond the 'theoreticist illusion' (Bourdieu 1987 p.7) of 'class on paper' to take seriously how class 'gets done'. Childcare is a critically pertinent focus for such an endeavour. In several respects it is the heartland of the formation of classed subjects⁸.

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Appendix 1

Biographical Data

Person	No of children	Age and gender of children	Mother's working hours	Mother's current or last employment	Father's current employment	Mother's education	Father's education
Madison	3	Boy 7 Girl 5 Girl 2	Part-time	Probation officer	Project manager, housing association	Masters or similar	First degree
Michael	2	Boy 3 Girl 1	Home	Paediatrician	TV producer	Masters or similar, Oxbridge	Masters or similar, Oxbridge
Emily	1	Boy 3	Part-time	Independent writer and lecturer	Programme director, civil service	PhD or several masters, Oxbridge, new university	Masters or similar, Oxbridge
Poppy	3	Boy 5 Girl 3 Boy 1	Home	Engineer, civil service	Civil engineer	First degree, Oxbridge	First degree, Oxbridge
Julia	2	Boy 7 Girl 3	Home	Administrator	Financial director	No professional qualification	First degree
Robert	1	Girl 2	Full-time	Reader	Travel agency manager	PhD or several masters, Oxbridge	First degree
Christine	2	Boy 2 Boy 0	Full-time	Accountant, City bank	Asset management, City bank	First degree	First degree
Madira	1	Boy 2	Home	Asset management/PR/marketing, City	Stock broker, corporate business	Masters or similar	Masters or similar
Anna	2	Girl 2 Girl 2 (twins)	Part-time	Lawyer, civil service	Solicitor in private practice	PhD or several masters	Masters or similar
Rebecca	1	Boy 2	Part-time	Editor, free lance	Financial advisor/analyst, corporate business	First degree	First degree
Lucy	2	Boy 1 Boy 0	Full-time	Head of department, local authority management	Own investment company, chartered surveyor	First degree	First degree
Oliver	1	Girl 3	Home	Editorial director	CEO in PR company	Masters or similar	First degree
Logan	3	Boy 3 Girl 1 Girl 0	Full-time	Lawyer, City bank	Own business in asset management	Masters or similar	Masters or similar, Oxbridge
Lucy	2	Boy 1 Girl 0	Home	Equities director, City bank	Managing director, City bank	First degree	No professional qualification
Julia	1	Boy 7	Part-time	Teacher, primary school	Independent writer	Masters or similar	First degree

na	1	Girl 1	Part-time	Marketing for husbands company	Own consultancy business, 10+ employees	Masters or similar	PhD or several masters
	2	Girl 2 Girl 0	Part-time	Operational research consultant, employed	Political lobbyist, major company	PhD or several masters, new university	PhD or several masters, new university
a	3	Boy 11 Boy 8 Boy 4	Part-time	Charity consultant, self employed	Education consultant, self employed	Masters or similar, Oxbridge	Masters or similar, Oxbridge
n	3	Girl 5 Girl 3 Boy 1	Part-time	Civil servant	Accountant, corporate finance	Masters or similar, Oxbridge	Masters or similar
ryn	3	Boy 8 Boy 5 Girl 3	Part-time	Speech therapist	Managing partner, City law firm	PhD or several masters, Oxbridge	Masters or similar, Oxbridge
n	2	Girl 5 Girl 1	Home	Middle management, US bank	Senior manager, City finance	Masters or similar	Masters or similar
y	2	Girl 3 Girl 1	Home	Chef and cookery writer	Practising management, US bank	Professional diploma	PhD or several masters, Oxbridge
nor	2	Boy 3 Boy 1	Home	Administration and lobbying	Fund manager, investment company	No professional qualification	First degree
rie	2	Girl 4 Boy 2	Part-time	Just finished PhD, previously lecturer	Solicitor, partner in City corporate finance	PhD or several masters, Oxbridge	Masters or similar
ren	2	Girl 4 Girl 0	Part-time	Studying for final exams for architects	Fund manager, City finance	First degree	First degree, Oxbridge
ce	1	Boy 1	Part-time	Senior legal advisor	Chartered surveyor	First degree	First degree

Newington

y	2	Girl 3 Boy 1	Home	Lecturer	Recruitment consultant, City recruitment	First degree	No professional qualification
	2	Girl 3 Girl 2	Part-time	Administrator	Barrister	PhD or several masters	Masters or similar
y	2	Boy 3 Girl 0	Home	Nurse	Actor	Professional diploma	Professional diploma
anna	2	Girl 3 Girl 2	Home	Recruitment consultant	Managing director, own marketing company	Professional diploma	No professional qualification
ie	2	Girl 3 Girl 1	Part-time	Architect, lecturer	Architect, lecturer	Masters or similar, new university	Masters or similar
y	2	Boy 6 Girl 3	Full-time	Teacher	Computer programmer	First degree	First degree
ie	3	Girl 3 Boy 1 Boy 0	Home	No previous career	Chartered accountant	No professional qualification	Professional diploma
n	1	Boy 1	Part-time	Lecturer	Company lawyer	Masters or similar	First degree, Oxbridge
para	1	Boy 2	Full-time	Massage therapist, herbalist	No partner	First degree	Unknown
lelin	2	Girl 2 Girl 0	Home	Translator, screenplay writer	Writer, theatre director	First degree	First degree, Oxbridge
y	2	Boy 7 Girl 0	Full-time	Charity fundraiser	Architect, own business	No professional qualification	First degree, polytechnic
ra	1	Girl 1	Part-time	Radio producer	TV producer	First degree	First degree
	2	Girl 3 Girl 2	Home	Book-keeping for husband's business	Own building business	First degree	First degree

sa	2	Girl 3 Boy 0	Home	Marketing manager	Managing director, own graphics company	First degree	First degree
sica	2	Girl 3 Girl 0	Full-time	Research scientist	Director, NGO	PhD or several masters	First degree
kie	2	Girl 4 Boy 1	Home	Publishing/translating	Economist, civil service	Masters or similar	Masters or similar, Oxbridge
hel	1	Boy 3	Part-time	Administrator, home based work	Employee communications, IT company	First degree	No professional qualification
ison	2	Girl 9 Boy 4	Part-time	Academic, historian	Journalist	PhD or several masters, Oxbridge	PhD or several masters, Oxbridge
na	2	Boy 2 Girl 1	Part-time	Lecturer	IT management, corporate business	PhD or several masters, Oxbridge	Masters or similar, Oxbridge
y	3	Girl 12 Boy 10 Girl 4	Part-time	Lecturer	Criminal lawyer, own practice	PhD or several masters, Oxbridge	First degree, Oxbridge
	2	Boy 10 Boy 7	Part-time	Administration, NGO	Role not clear, NGO	First degree	First degree
ise	1	Girl 3	Part-time	Freelance writer and illustrator	Fund manager, City	First degree	First degree, Oxbridge
	3	Girl 4 Girl 1 Boy 1 (twins)	Home	Administration, local authority	Project Manager, charity	First degree, Oxbridge	First degree, Oxbridge
y	2	Girl 3 Boy 0	Part-time	Architect	Architect	Masters or similar	First degree, Oxbridge
nie	3	Girl 8 Girl 5 Boy 3	Part-time	Drama teacher	Senior academic and medical professional	First degree	PhD or several masters
le	1	Boy 0	Full-time	Head of department, big media company	Own business consultancy	Masters or similar	Masters or similar
essa	1	Girl 0	Part-time	Magazine editor, voluntary sector	Journalist	First degree	First degree
ela	2	Boy 3 Girl 1	Home	Manager, charity	Charity fundraiser	First degree	First degree

Notes to table:

1. Part-time varies from a few hours of free lance work to 0.8 employment
2. Universities attended are 'old universities' unless otherwise stated.
However, we have also indicated where qualification comes from Oxbridge.
3. We have grouped educational qualifications in the following way:
Professional diploma (any post compulsory professional qualification that was gained through courses not classifies as university degrees college, polytechnics or in-house training leading to a recognised qualification), Masters or similar (any post-graduate of duration one year, such as MA, MSc, MBA or teaching qualification), PhD or several

masters (where parent had a PhD or alternatively two or more post-graduate qualifications).