

# **Living in the city: School friendships, diversity and the middle classes**

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## **Abstract**

Much of the literature on the urban middle classes describes processes of both affiliation (often to the localities) and disaffiliation (often from some of the non middle-class residents). In this paper, we consider this situation from a different position, drawing on research exploring whether and how children and adults living in diverse localities develop friendships with those different to themselves in terms of social class and ethnicity. This paper focuses on the interviews with the ethnically diverse, but predominantly white British, middle-class parent participants, considering their attitudes towards social and cultural difference. We emphasize the importance of highlighting inequalities that arise from social class and its intersection with ethnicity in analyses of complex urban populations. The paper's contribution is, first, to examine processes of clustering amongst the white British middle-class parents, particularly in relation to social class. Second we contrast this process, and its moments of reflection and unease, with the more deliberate and purposeful efforts of one middle-class, Bangladeshi-origin mother who engages in active labour to facilitate relationships across social and ethnic difference.

## **Living in the city: school friendships, diversity and the middle classes**

London, in common with other European and North American cities, is experiencing a changing and increasingly complex demography. These changes come in two main forms. One is migration, and the arrival 'of people from more varied national, ethnic, linguistic and religious backgrounds' (Meissner & Vertovec 2015 p.542), creating conditions of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007). The other is gentrification, as middle-class families increasingly (re)-settle inner urban areas. In the case of London, the two processes have created areas of intense proximity where middle-class gentrifiers live close to both recent migrant populations and locally established working-class populations, and their children attend the same primary schools. This paper reports from data collected for a UK research council funded study (ESRC award: ES/K002384/1), that considers the extent to which children and adults living in such areas, make, maintain or avoid friendships across social and ethnic difference. Our particular focus here is the attitudes and perceptions of the 25 middle-class participants in our research, concerning the diversity of their localities, and their interaction with classed and ethnic 'others' at their children's school. We start by discussing literature on urban middle-class populations, and the research design and setting. We then provide examples of the enactment of class strategies and their intersection with ethnicity, as we explore parents' attitudes towards diversity. We contrast the building of in-group networks by the white middle-class parents (from Britain and the Global North) with the active labour of one

minority ethnic, middle class mother who works to facilitate relationships across difference. Additionally, we note that the attitudes of the white middle-class respondents in perceiving their clustering as a common pattern of behavior, parallel a tendency noted within the super-diversity literature to position ethnic group interaction as horizontal or 'flat' diversity, without an adequate focus on issues of power, resources, and inequality (Vertovec et al 2015).

### **The middle classes, diversity and the city**

This paper draws on and contributes to literature on how parents negotiate ethnic and social class diversity in terms of schooling and in their localities, and the emotions that arise as a result. We discuss here three themes within the literature.

The first is that much of this literature on negotiating diversity, especially in relation to locality and schools, focuses on middle-class behavior and practices. This can clearly be seen in research on urban gentrification processes (e.g. Rankin & MacLean 2015), although Paton (2014) provides an exception. The concept of 'gentrification' is itself a contested one, but can be broadly defined as the transitioning of space 'for progressively more affluent users' (Hackworth 2002: 1, cited in Jackson & Butler 2014 p. 3). Lees et al (2008 p.xv) argue that gentrification should be understood as an act of power, a commodification of space, which displaces and marginalizes the urban poor. Even if people are not physically displaced, changes to local shops and

leisure sites can engender feelings of loss and exclusion (Shaw and Hagemans, 2015).

Researchers have analysed the way in which place contributes to classed identity practices, often using Bourdieu's work. For example, Savage et al (2005) have argued that the middle classes are able to choose a residential location, prioritizing the achievement of a 'fit' between habitus and place, which normally includes the presence of other 'people like us', a process the authors term 'elective belonging'.

The tendency of middle-class groups to disaffiliate from some aspects of their surroundings has also been noted; Watt speaks of 'selective belonging' where residents choose which aspects of their locality to identify with, and which to disassociate themselves from (Watt 2009). Pinkster, in her study of Dutch middle-class residents living in disadvantaged areas, speaks simply of 'non-belonging', where residents do not wish to develop 'meaningful ties' (2014 p.16) with the area. Education can be a key arena for disaffiliation. In relation to their London-based respondents, Jackson and Butler note (2014 p.14) 'As so often with the middle classes their fears and sense of identity were lived through their children' (also Bacque et al 2014 p.1227). Middle-class residents may avoid local state schooling options, seeing them as containing disreputable classed and ethnic 'others' (see e.g. Vowden 2012).

This reference to schooling introduces the second literature to which the paper contributes: how parents negotiate diversity in schooling. Work here falls mainly into two areas. The first comprises studies on school choice (e.g.

Ball 2003, Reay et al 2011, Boterman 2013, Benson, Bridge & Wilson 2015). Particularly germane to our argument here is the findings from these studies that identify middle-class parents as evaluating their child's potential peers when making their choice. Mix may be acceptable but it has to be a 'good' mix (Bryne 2006), meaning a sizeable proportion of other middle-class children. Even the 'counter-intuitive' middle-class choosers in Reay et al's study (2011) who eschew strong exam results in favour of social diversity, differentiate their own child from those around them. Reay and her colleagues point to the relatively limited mixing across class amongst the pupils. Children's interactions are the focus of the second area of research on education and diversity. In the UK at least, this research has been largely on teenagers, contrasting with the young children in our study. Hollingworth and colleagues found that mixing between differently socially-situated young people was largely limited to the school site, 'a space of relative equality where children's backgrounds.... were not immediately visible' (Hollingworth & Williams 2010 p. 54). Also researching in a secondary school, Kulz (2014) argues that class and race structures students' social relationships, although some were able to cross group boundaries, a point to which we return.

Across both these literatures, it is important to insist on two points. First, the heterogeneity of the middle classes, and indeed the variations within the metropolitan-based middle classes. For example, different middle-class fractions live in different London localities, characterised by different lifestyles, predominance of different occupations, and some differences in attitudes towards diversity and the social value of education (see e.g. Vincent & Ball

2006). For some class fractions within the metropolitan middle classes, engagement through neighbourhood relations and through schools, does take place with 'others', although in particular ways, and confined within particular boundaries (Reay et al 2011, Jackson & Butler 2014, August 2014). Second, research such as Reay et al (2011) and Rollock et al (2015) also emphasise the intersection of class and race as vital for understanding people's sense of self, their attitudes towards diversity, and the ways in which class advantage can be 'crucially inflected by race and racism' (Rollock et al 2015 p.3). We build on this work here by responding to Reay et al's (2011) call for more empirical studies of how whiteness is lived and experienced by particular class fractions. We show how, *within* the middle classes, the majority ethnic group tends to homophily (despite intentions otherwise) and produces strong social networks which accrue cultural and social advantage. Rollock et al (2015) argue that the minoritised middle-classes do not escape the inequalities of race, and we illustrate this with reference to our later case study of Fareeda, a minority ethnic mother, who has to assert, and reassert, her identity as a 'good' Muslim. However, we also argue that Fareeda's minoritised identity shapes her intentions (and her practices) to bridge difference in her social relationships, a determination absent in most of the white middle-class parents.

The third literature is on the emotions engendered by mixing and diversity. This has been experiential, and varied in its focus but includes the ambivalent nature of social interaction in moments of encounter and propinquity, as diverse populations share space and social goods (Back 1996; Gilroy 2006;

Amin 2012; Wessendorf 2014; Neal et al 2015); the generation of place-based attachment through everyday social practices (e.g. Blokland & Nast 2014, Hall 2015; Bennett et al 2016), and the commitment to living in diverse neighbourhoods shared by an urban-based class fraction of the middle classes (Jackson 2014).

Our paper therefore builds on and contributes to these literatures by exploring the 'competition for social resources' (Koutrolikou 2012) in our data. We emphasise both the convivial tensions of diversity which can involve positive interaction *and* conflict (Gilroy 2006) - what Back (1996) calls 'the metropolitan paradox' - and 'the relationship between multicultural, dis/comfort and the production of middle class space and subjectivities' (Jackson 2014 p.58). Additionally we note the ways in which whiteness and middle classness continue to operate as privileged identities, (Hollingworth & Williams 2010 p. 49) in contexts of intense diversity. While we do not engage with the conviviality literature *per se* (as we have done that elsewhere, see e.g Vincent et al 2016, Neal et al 2016) this paper is a further exploration of how people live together – conviviality - of how they use, or sometimes do not, 'creative and intuitive capacity' (Gilroy 2006 p.6) to overcome differences and resolve tensions. Our argument here is that the white middle-classes, despite their stated intentions and appreciation of their diverse localities, tend to experience difference by drifting towards forms of 'cocooning' which limit the degree of active 'living together'. In our data, we find a contradictory approach to difference, one that is saturated by emotion. Taking up Burkitt's (2012) and Ahmed's call, (2014) to focus on what emotions do, we illustrate the effect of this ambivalence on processes of making and avoiding relationships across



difference, as well as in the reflexive work (Archer 2003; Burkitt 2012) that some participants tentatively engaged in to make sense of their own and others' social practices.

### **The Localities**

The research focused on three classes of children at three different London primary schools – which we call Leewood, Junction and Fernhill. Here we briefly describe the three localities which were experiencing different degrees of gentrification (see Neal et al 2016 for fuller description). In all three areas there is both public sector and owner-occupied housing, and the development of spaces of comfort for middle-class residents, is visible.

The locality around Leewood School is an area of established gentrification, a process reaching back 20-25 years, and with shops and services to reflect this. By contrast, Ross Road, where Junction School is located, is home to a significantly poorer and more multi-ethnic population as reflected in the shops, passers-by and places of worship. However, the Victorian housing stock is attracting middle-class families, and this is an area of emergent gentrification. Our third school, Fernhill, is in an area where there are existing pockets of well-established gentrification, coupled with a current regeneration project, reflecting overall partial gentrification. In the two areas of increasing gentrification, surrounding Fernhill and Junction, the speed with which shops and services are emerging, to provision the middle classes, is striking. Across the two areas, we witnessed the arrival over a three year period (2013-2016)

of several boutique cafes, restaurants, delicatessens, a vintage shop, an art gallery, and a whole-food shop.

Jackson & Benson (2014) argue that middle class residents have a complicated relationship with signs of 'otherness' in their locality, incorporating both processes of affiliation and disaffiliation (also Vincent et al 2016). We can see this mixture in our research, particularly in relation to Ross Road, the least gentrified of the three areas. The middle-class participants felt a sense of belonging to their locality, and are attracted by its 'buzz' and bustle. They referenced, in particular, the main thoroughfare, a mixture of independent shops, restaurants, cafes, mostly owned by minority ethnic groups. However some chose to spend leisure time in near-by Manning, a process of socio-spatial boundary-making. Manning is also an area of independent shops, restaurants and cafes, but is an affluent, whiter, middle-class area. The local was incorporated as exotic; the minority ethnic restaurants of Ross Road, gave the area, one mother said, 'a kind of character' but she appreciated the signs that the area was 'improving', 'the nicer cafes and kind of profile of people, and there feels more of a sense of unity actually' (Gemma, white British middle class, Junction School). This speaks to other attitudes expressed by middle-class respondents who both appreciated the diversity of the area they lived in, but simultaneously saw it as a backdrop to their more immediate focus on 'the community', defined, as Clive suggests, as consisting of others like themselves.

I just think [Manning] would be too homogenous for me. I really like the diversity of the community that we live in...We have got a very strong website and lots of stuff going on. There are a couple of [recreational spaces] and they feature as a really major part of the community. You know these communities are primarily driven by the middle-class community, but they aren't – they are not, they don't exclude other members of the community [...] People move here because of the community. There wasn't really a community, it has formed in the last ten years (Clive, white middle-class father, Junction School)

Clive swings here between a broad, inclusive definition of 'community' - an appreciation of the diversity of the local Ross Road population, and referencing the two well-used recreational spaces, to a more bounded notion of the middle classes as the only people who can form a 'community', here referring to virtual and face-to-face social networks. The social networks of other groups remain invisible, until the interviewer asks specifically about 'other' communities locally, and Clive responds: 'I'm thinking I have been quite sort of blinkered in my community – that is a fair point, there are other communities which I am not privy to, and I think they are probably based around community centres, or mosques or churches. And that is a very legitimate form of community'.

As other researchers have noted, 'coping with' diversity can become a form of cultural capital, or what Reay et al (2011) have called 'multicultural capital'. Similarly Bacque et al (2014, p.1222) in their study of a Parisian suburb, noted

that it was a point of pride for middle-class incomers to live in an area noted for being diverse and poor. Jackson & Butler argue that instead of a model of 'social tectonics' (class groups living in parallel with each other without contact or much acknowledgement), 'the presence of 'others', in some localities, is 'central to the active formation of middle-class identities, of place and of self' (Jackson & Butler 2014 p.13). This provides a way of affirming a liberal, cosmopolitan middle-class identity, one that enjoys living in a diverse environment that is contrasted with the 'blank' sameness of more homogeneous middle-class localities. It is these complex processes of engagement with, and isolation from 'others' that we want to consider further in relation to our own data, including, for the minority ethnic middle-class parents, the ways in which a minoritized ethnic identity can act to reposition class identity.

## **Methods**

The three schools all had mixed class and ethnic populations and were chosen using school inspection reports, local knowledge, and ONS (Office for National Statistics) data. Our total data-base is 114 interviews with Year 4 (8/9 year olds) children, their parents, and teachers across Leewood, Junction and Fernhill, as well as children's drawings of their friends, and our observations in and around the schools. In this particular paper, we focus on the middle-class parent respondents across the three schools, that is 25 parents, 17 of whom are white British or from Western Europe/America/Australia, and eight respondent parents who are either Black Caribbean origin (1), Black African (3), South Asian origin (2), or mixed heritage (2). In common with much

research interviewing parents, a majority of these respondents (20/25) were mothers<sup>i</sup>. We classified the parents as middle class if they or their partner worked in professional or managerial jobs covering the NS-SEC classes 1 (1.1 and 1.2) and 2. We also collected parents' educational qualifications that in most, but not all, cases reflected their later positions in the workplace (see appendix 1 for details of the sample).

Data management and analysis was through a combination of hand-coding and qualitative data analysis software (NVivo). Whilst our initial theoretical categories drew from existing literature on class, diversity, social mix and friendships, our code book was derived from team discussions focusing on an initial sample of transcripts (LeCompte et al 1993). The codes were refined and challenged through further engagement with and scrutiny of data. To maximize our 'empirical attentiveness' (Back and Puwar 2012) to the reflexive and emotional content of participants' narratives, we draw on these, at times, as extended, individual accounts. Thus here we examine the distinctive practices of one minority mother – Fareeda - in detail. While this limits our ability to make any wider claims, it does allow us an in-depth exploration of attitudes towards diversity.

### **Homophily, social networks, and middle class fractions**

In general, our data suggested homophily was a common denominator shaping adult friendship networks across *all* the social class and ethnic groups with whom we spoke, and class homophily was particularly noticeable (see also Vincent et al 2015). Yet homophily has different effects depending on one's social positioning. As Bottero comments, it is common to 'engage in

homophily (to a greater or lesser degree), but [people do so] from different positions of power, honour and social resources. The key issue is how differential association is bound up with economic, cultural and social disadvantage' (2007, p.824) in an everyday process of class reproduction, influenced by ethnic identity. However, as Bottero notes in relation to Bourdieu's work, homophilous networks are often assumed and 'the substance of social interaction' overlooked (2009, p.403). Thus, we explore here whether the super-diverse nature of the three localities had the potential to act as a 'disruption' to the common-sense of homophily, and could 'spark reflexivity' (Bottero 2009 p.409) amongst the middle-class residents in our study.

We understand these middle-class families as a particular class fraction within the broader middle classes, drawing on earlier work (Vincent & Ball 2006). The characteristics of this class fraction include a tendency towards occupations in the voluntary and public sectors (at least 1 parent in 15 of the 25 families have occupations in public or voluntary sectors), although with some significant asset variation (particularly around house ownership, with 20/25 being owner-occupiers) and a principled commitment to state, and preferably local, schooling. This group has made a positive choice of their local, diverse schools, yet we draw attention here to the practices of the white middle classes that act, in effect, to manage diversity. We analyse here the formation of social networks with other middle-class parents, drawing on Bourdieu's notions of capitals, which entwines social capital with cultural and economic capitals<sup>ii</sup>, thereby emphasizing the structural inequalities which

allow particular social groups to develop valuable forms of social capital and (re)produce social advantage (Li et al 2008). We are not suggesting that building networks of similar others was necessarily a conscious and articulated strategy of exclusiveness, but rather indicates, in the Bourdieusian sense (Weis et al 2014), action determined by one's habitus<sup>iii</sup>, what appears as the obvious, feasible thing to do, without much explicit reflection; the outcome being a conservative approach to social relationships which led to similar others being perceived as 'natural' friends and allies (Bottero 2009).

One form of school-focused social networking was participation in the parent-teacher association (PTAs) committees and the governing bodies. We argue that middle-class parents in all three schools attempted to exercise their social and cultural capital, in and of a form and volume that is valuable in the field of schooling, and allowed them certain advantages. The PTAs organized the majority of the schools' social events; this gave members a role in school decision-making, and closer relationships with staff, leading to greater knowledge of school activities. Both PTA committees and governing bodies in all three schools, were dominated by middle-class, mainly – but not solely - white parents. This is not a new finding (also Posey-Maddox 2014), but we show that this applies even in highly diverse contexts such as these three schools. Additionally, we also suggest that membership of the PTA committee/governing body acted as a sign of confident 'belonging' to the school world.

All the participating PTA members commented that it was difficult to get other parents involved in the committees – there was broader parental involvement,

but it tended to be episodic, such as providing food for particular events - but that they tried to be as encouraging as possible. However, other respondents noted exclusionary practices (e.g. holding PTA meetings in pubs, arranging expensive fundraising auctions), and suggested the PTA committees appeared as a 'closed' group. For example, Patricia, at Fernhill did not identify with the PTA organisers despite her shared class – but not ethnic – identity.

[It is] run by a particular type of parent. It is mainly headed by – I'm sorry – but it is like the white middle class...and they sort of like, you know they have their own way that they want things to be done etc etc. [...] A lot of them are friends outside schools, so that they can organize things between those friends (Patricia, Black Caribbean origin, middle class).

In an illustration of the instability of power relations at the intersection of class-ethnicity, Patricia's perception of exclusiveness was felt despite her middle-class location. Lorna (white British intermediate class) similarly understood the core of Junction School's PTA as a 'clique'. Noting that PTA members lived in the more affluent roads around the school, she commented 'They know each other [...] I honestly don't know [how]. Perhaps they have an inbuilt radar.' This last was said lightly, but is a striking indicator of how, despite a shared ethnic category, Lorna perceived the group as one of mutual middle-class identification, and thus as not somewhere she could or would belong.



All the schools had made some effort to expand their governing bodies and attract a more diverse group of governors, through targeting particular minority ethnic parents to recruit (see example of Fareeda below). Fernhill had had some success here with the recruitment of a Somali governor (although he only remained a governor for a short period), but the governing body was, as the (white, middle-class) chair noted 'not as diverse as we might be'. She had decided that expending effort on diversifying the governing body was not a good use of time, as, as with the PTAs, there was a sense that radically altering the active membership was impossible.

We want to have representation but maybe we can find representation in other ways, because actually we have got bloody hard work to do, ... I would love to have a really diverse [governing] body working on [school improvement] but actually what I need is *people* working on that first and foremost (Jill, chair of governors and mother, Fernhill School)

The 'people' referenced here is actually exclusionary rather than inclusionary, as it signals a reversion to the dominance of the white middle classes on Fernhill's governing body. Our argument here is that membership of the PTA committees and the governing bodies speaks to a more general middle class strategy around forming strong social networks of 'people like me', those who have 'know-how' around committee work, and a sense of entitlement and confidence in interacting with the school, although we recognise that most of

the school social events attracted attendance from a more ethnically and socially diverse parent population.

While school events (but not their organization) appeared democratic and inclusive, a drift towards social clustering in the playgrounds where families gathered at the beginning and end of the school day, was described by participants across all three schools. Gemma describes the playground at Junction School.

There have been some occasions when you do go into the playground and I think if there is a group of white middle-class parents standing around having a chat, it is hard for someone-else to come into it. In the same sense if you have got a group of people speaking another language, sometimes you are not even sure what language it is, it is harder to integrate. So I think perhaps it cuts both ways, and we all gravitate to someone similar and it is sometimes harder to break out of that than you think, perhaps the kids do a bit (Gemma, white British, middle-class)

Gemma here presents a picture of what Kofman (cited in Humphris 2015) calls 'flat' or horizontal diversity, positioning individuals as equally privileged in social space. Different groups cluster together in 'rooms without walls' – a term Vertovec and colleagues use to describe the way in which people in open outdoor spaces socially cluster as if inside smaller, 'carved out' spaces (Vertovec et al 2015 p. 16). However, this picture of 'flat' diversity is

misleading. Collective spaces are not necessarily ones where 'larger social inequalities' are bracketed (Apetkar 2015 p.118). Whilst we would agree with Gemma that the affective micro-experience of being excluded from a group might feel similar to two individuals, the larger picture of playground relations differs depending on who you are. The social networks are, of course, not equal, some provide more than an enjoyable chat. The playgrounds, where parents meet, are highly stratified – different parents bring different forms and volumes of social, economic and cultural capitals, and some resources are more valuable than others in negotiating parents' relationships with the school as an institution. We can see this in relation to dominance of the PTAs, and governing bodies by the middle classes in all three schools as noted above. In the space of the playgrounds, the white British middle classes are established, they know the routines of the school, understand the expectations of the staff, and are knowledgeable about the curriculum and structure of primary schooling. However, we would not want to suggest that playground relations are completely fixed and stable in terms of the in/exclusionary capitals and feelings they generate. Gemma's description above exposes some of her internal conversation about managing difference and a reflexive process that recognizes both a desire to seek sameness and the alternative to it – her reference to children being able to 'break out'.

We see aspects of other internal conversations about managing difference in two instances where white middle-class families felt marginal to networks of similar others. Their distress at this situation highlights the fundamental importance of such networks for parents, an importance which has a psycho-

social resonance. For reasons of space, we give just one example here. Miranda's daughter at Leewood was experiencing exclusion and bullying by her peer group. This was highly distressing for those involved, and we would not diminish that. Germane to our argument, however, is that Miranda is struggling with, not only the exclusion of her daughter, but specifically, her exclusion by those who would be expected to be her 'natural' peer group.

Maybe nine [girls in the class] I would say are from quite affluent backgrounds. Whose parents share a cultural experience...Children gravitate towards children are who like them, she..she would want to be friends with them, but she's always been peripheral [...] She's less wanting to be with the middle-class girls [now]. She's become quite friendly with a little Bengali girl which..which is lovely and she's the sweetest little girl, but then...so all the other girls are doing sleepovers and meeting at weekends, but I'm really struggling to make a connection [with the Bangladeshi family].

We found operating amongst the white middle-class families across the three schools, a strong sense of the activities that make up a 'good' childhood (see Vincent et al 2015 for more detail), which included prioritizing play-dates, sleepovers, extra-curricular activities. Thus the Bangladeshi family are not a substitute for the white middle-class families, because they order their leisure time differently, only occasionally committing to play-dates. The middle-class Leewood network had just organised a camping weekend, about which Miranda says, 'Like I just don't understand how come that she's the only

one...okay they have excluded the Bengali, the African, the Turkish girls, but you know...of the white middle-class girls...how come she's the only one that hasn't been [invited]?' That the minority ethnic children were not invited either, is recognized, but of little relevance to Miranda's sense that her daughter's exclusion is a transgression against a social order that is meant to be.

### **Affect and social mixing**

As Miranda's example shows, for parents, emotions saturate the experience of piloting a child through the public space that is a primary school, although these emotions are not necessarily acknowledged, subjugated perhaps by an awareness that, for parents, primary schooling is a common and taken-for-granted experience. Amongst the white middle-class respondents, we discerned a variety of emotions informing their rather exclusive clustering: social awkwardness, fear of embarrassment, and incomprehension at different family priorities (allowing primary school children to have mobile phones is one example from the data that met with bemusement from the white middle-class respondents).

It was in relation to social anxieties about lacking multicultural competency (despite articulating explicit pro-diversity affiliations to the places in which they lived) that it was possible to see the emotional content that shapes participants' reflexive 'internal conversation'. As Burkitt (2012: 470) helpfully reminds us 'Reflexivity occurs when we bring some externally mediated knowledge to bear on the process of self-reflection and interpretation, and also try to take a more distanced view in the monitoring of our actions'.

In an example of this, Elizabeth, whose son has three close friends from different ethnic and social backgrounds explains that her own relationships with the boys' parents are just strong enough to facilitate the children meeting out-of-school (the fact that the boys' multi-ethnic, mixed class group did socialize beyond school made them relatively unusual in our research). She contrasts this with her daughter's friends who are all from white middle-class families, making relationships 'easy'.

Over the years, I have thought about that [relationships with those who are different], because obviously there are lots of different people around here. And it is harder, it is much easier to be friends with people who are similar to you [...] It is not around parenting or values, it is just the links...and making things work. ...Speaking in the playground, that is not a problem, it is just that it doesn't feel like one community, so I have thought about inviting sort of Ollie's friends from his class and their parents all round here and I've never done it because I could just - I can't - I'm not sure how it would be enjoyable for the parents, it would be awkward. Although as I talk to you now I think, oh I must do that, it would be good. But again it would be an effort and because it would be an effort I don't know who would come and who wouldn't (Elizabeth, white British middle-class mother, Junction School)

Elizabeth is considering the sort of social event at her home that she finds commonplace and wondering how her son's friends' parents would react. Would they respond, would they attend and would they enjoy the event?

Every stage seems to her problematic and replete with opportunities for social peril and awkwardness. Yet Elizabeth does not feel entirely comfortable with her passivity. Indeed, many of the white middle-class respondents did take a reflexive approach to their ethnic clustering, and spoke of feelings of hypocrisy or guilt and a desire to have more difference in their personal lives and networks. Olive, for example, expresses anger about the failure of others to develop social intimacies across difference, but then includes herself in this.

When people talk about diversity but then don't have any diversity in their own lives. That annoys me. Like I want to live in [area] because it is so diverse, but I have no friends from any other group, like education or culture or whatever you want to call it, income (Olive, white British middle-class, Leewood).

Another father in the same social network as Elizabeth voices similar thoughts, although he reverts to the position that homophily is natural and inevitable.

I have often talked to [wife] or other friends about, and feeling a certain guilt that here I am living in a diverse cultural environment, I don't have many friends myself from other ethnic backgrounds [...] Say Monique [younger, working class, Black Caribbean mother of child in same class] I do chat to her, but I don't know what it is, up to a certain point, and [my wife] felt the same.... [...] The [dads] I have met...they tend to be more

university educated.. And I do think that is something that just, maybe it is a general thing that happens (Hugh, Junction School)

We have in these two sections above outlined the practices and the emotions informing the networking of the white middle-class parents. We turn now to consider the middle-class respondents from minority ethnic groups.

### **Being minoritized: class and ethnicity**

The actions and values of this group were challenging to analyse as between the eight parents falling into this category, there was a plurality of responses. For some, family and others from their country of origin played a key role in their social networks, although work often provided more diverse social contacts. Relatedly, for some of those, the school was not expected to be a source of friendship. Others were part of largely white middle-class networks. We identified a small number (4) of parents, not all of whom were middle class (as defined by occupation), but all of whom had access to some middle class forms of social and cultural capital, who were particular bridging figures (Putnam 2000) or 'transversal enablers' (Wise 2009). For Wise these are those 'personalities who are engaged in facilitating intercultural exchanges' (2009: 10) and our examples were participants whose reflexive capacities in relations to themselves and the social contexts of diversity were acutely attuned to issues around difference and diversity. They engage in labour and effort to facilitate relationships across difference. We focus on one example of such a figure drawn from the minority ethnic middle-class respondents.



Fareeda is a mother at Junction School. She is middle class, of Bangladeshi origin (born in UK), and has a range of social networks across ethnicity and class. She named these as her extended family; mothers at her children's Quranic classes; Bengali-speaking parents at school, her university friends (a multi-ethnic group), and her close friendships with two white British mothers at school. She is also a governor at Junction School. Like some of the minority students in Kulz's (2014) study above, Fareeda deliberately crosses borders. She builds 'bridging' social capital; for her, making relationships with diverse others is the way one should live in a diverse urban society. She uses these links to challenge perceptions held by others in her different networks of what it means to be a practicing Muslim woman of Bangladeshi origin. Talking about one of her close white friends at school, she says,

We value each other's friendship because with everything that is going on around the world it can be quite difficult for me as a Muslim to be friends with everyone because they might see me as – this is what – how can I say it, 'this is what *you* are causing', do you see? But I think .. you should get to know the person and the values that I have. Because yes I do practice Islam but I'm not a fanatic, I'm not an extremist.

Fareeda also speaks of being perceived as having considerable independence by some of the more conservative Muslim women in her networks, but notes that she still maintains a respect for tradition (also Hoque 2015).

I know some of the Bengali mums might see me as like ‘oh my God she has got like so much independence’ – but I still abide by my in-laws. I still respect them, but yes, I do have that independence

To return for a moment to our earlier comments on PTAs, Fareeda described the PTA committee at Junction School as ‘definitely white middle-class. And then you have a few odd-bods like me’; the term ‘odd-bod’ neatly suggesting how ‘out of place’ her identity, her embodiment, was in PTA circles. As Valentine notes ‘when individual identities are “done” differently in particular temporal moments, they rub up against and so expose the dominant spatial ordering that defines who is in place/out of place, who belongs and who does not’ (2007 p.19). Like Amrit in Jones’ research, Fareeda lives not a double but a ‘multi-faceted life...the intersections of ...experience, of both exclusion and privilege, of knowledge of different perspectives’ influences her practice (Jones 2014 p. 80). She enables, both through her own willingness to be a minority in particular spaces, and also through her ability to act as a conduit between various parts of her social networks (between the school and Bengali-speaking mothers for example). Thus we can celebrate Fareeda for making social connections, for challenging stereotypes, but whilst doing so, also note that her efforts to maintain relationships across difference can be understood as a response to being an Asian-origin Muslim woman in a climate which is, in many ways, hostile to Muslims, and which results in her sense that she needs to prove that it is possible to be a practising Muslim and not an ‘extremist’. This exemplifies the excessive burden on some to demonstrate a non-vilified identity, despite a degree of social privilege.

Rollock writes, 'skin colour acts as a form of embodied capital that disrupts and lessens the worth of the cultural capital held by the black middle classes' (2014 p.448). We suggest that a similar argument can be made about intersecting minoritized religious and ethnic identities; that activating her social and cultural capitals requires considerable labour from Fareeda, as she seeks to maintain relationships with diverse others.

## **Conclusion**

Our data illustrate the stratified and emotional manifestations of convivial tension. Our argument is that for the white middle-class respondents an openness to and appreciation of diversity were understood as positive values, what Ahmed (2014) refers to as 'an imperative to love difference'. However, these parents also crafted strategies to help them manage diversity, often by building strong school-based social networks amongst similar people. By contrast, Fareeda's example gives a sense of her acute awareness of and her commitment to bridge difference, reflected in the degree of effort and intentionality in her thinking and practices around friendships, which diverges from the general acceptance of the status-quo by the white middle class respondents (albeit problematized at times, a point we discuss further below). Fareeda's example also reflects the way a minoritized ethnic identity can redefine and reformulate class-related attitudes and practices, a point also made in a study of Black Caribbean-origin middle classes, where Rollock et al (2015) argues that understandings of class within the British context are racialised, shaped and informed by white privilege, and a quiet, but, persistent racism.

We can see here a complex range of reactions and emotions amongst the white middle-class respondents, stemming from both an attraction to and an anxiety over difference (also Vincent et al 2016). In many respects, white privilege is largely assumed by white people to be the 'normal' social order (Rollock 2014), so white middle-class clustering was invisible to these respondents. In interviews, they often positioned their clustering as 'natural' – what everyone does – they were one group amongst many. However, in seeing themselves and their clustering as an identical process of gathering-together that could also be seen amongst minority groups in the playgrounds, the white middle-class respondents occasionally recognised, but often overlooked, the realities of their structural advantages. They had high volumes of cultural, social, and economic capital that had value in both their localities and in the field of education, the latter allowing them to play a key role in their children's schools. Their presence changes the local high streets, as expensive cafes and delicatessens sprang up in the three areas to serve affluent populations. Being able to and willing to use these shops, just like being able to and willing to be part of the school PTAs and governing bodies, signals belonging, and indeed reaches beyond belonging, to indicate a privileged position in the competition for social resources, resources offered via the high streets (in the form of desired services) and the schools (in the form of a voice in and recognition by the school).

In their largely uncritical focus on 'flat' diversity, participants like Gemma or Clive appear to negate any recognition of social hierarchy associated with difference. This evidences some of the concerns in academic accounts

(Hollingsworth and Mansary 2014; Vertovec et al 2015) which caution against over-interpreting the positive outcomes of 'horizontal or flat diversity'. Diverse groups may, as in the school playgrounds discussed here, access and share social space and resources, but we argue that cultural and social hierarchies remain largely intact.

Thus we suggest our data show that routinized experiences of diversity disrupting the common sense of homophily and leading to a different 'lifeworld' (Bottero 2009, p.408) seems a limited phenomenon amongst the white British middle-class participants. However, we do identify some potential in our research. Pulling a new set of theoretical voices into the debates as to how proximate urban difference is managed in quotidian social life, we follow Archer's (2003) identification of reflexivity as the deliberative mode within which individuals situate themselves within social context and Burkitt's (2012: 449) insistence that reflexivity is 'motivated by emotion [...] it is central to the way people..relate to one another'. It is thereby possible to identify unease in the emotional inner worlds of some participants – cited here are Olive's anger, Elizabeth's reflection, Hugh's guilt - over their existing homogeneous networks, unease which may yet lead to an alteration in their social practices in the future. Additionally, Boterman argues that there is 'real meaning in the middle class desire to live in areas that are socially diverse' (2013, p.1132), and use local, diverse schools. The stated enthusiasm of the white middle class respondents for their children to know people of different backgrounds, their own encounters in the playground, tentative social relationships, everyday conversations structured around the children, all these have a *potential* meaning beyond everyday etiquette, as a way of generating new

social relationships across difference.

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**Table 1: Middle class respondents**

Name of interviewee	Mother's occupation	Father's occupation	Mother's highest educational qualification	Father's highest educational qualification	Current housing O/o = owner occupied	Mother's ethnicity	Father's ethnicity
Amy	Curator	banker	Masters	Masters	O/o	White other	White other
Aarthi	HE lecturer	banker	Masters	degree	O/o	Mixed heritage	White British
Clive	HR director	Local government	Not available	degree	O/o	White British	White British
Dawn	Student	Project manager- (own company)	degree	Degree	O/o	White other	White other
Angela	Social worker	Public sector manager	Post grad diploma	PhD	O/o	White British	White British
Jane	Consultant – public sector	Not available	degree	Not available	O/o	White British	White other
Miranda	Specialist nurse	accountant	degree	Vocational qualifications	O/o	White Irish	White British
Stuart	HE lecturer	Own small business	PhD	Post grad qualifications	o/o	White British	White British
Catherine	Currently at home	Banker	degree	Not available	o/o	White British	White British
Elizabeth	Freelance third sector researcher	Third sector	Post grad dip	Masters	o/o	White British	White British
Fareeda	Teacher	consultant doctor	Post grad dip	Post grad qualifications	o/o	British Asian	British Asian
Iman	Nutritionist	Not available	masters	Not available	Not available	Black African	Black African
Rosina	Bank – managerial	Private sector customer service	Masters	GCSE equivalent	Council	Black African	Black African
Kaleb	School meals assistant	Town planner	Not available	Masters	Council	Black African	Black African
Mary	Private sector consultant	Not available	degree	Not available	Private rented	White other	White British
Olivia	Counsellor	Economist	Post grad qualifications	masters	o/o	White British	White British
Mira	Small business owner	Small business owner	Degree	GCSEs	o/o	Mixed heritage	British Asian
Gemma	Marketing consultant	Private sector manager	A levels	degree	o/o	White British	White British
Hugh	Arts based occupation	Arts-based occupation	degree	degree	o/o	White British	White British
Patricia	Teacher	Not available	degree	Not available	o/o	Black Caribbean	Not available
Saija	Currently at home	Public sector manager	degree	degree	Private rented	White other	East Asian
Annette	Hypnotherapist	builder	Vocational qualifications	Not available	o/o	White other	White British
Patrick	not available	youth worker	not available	degree	o/o	not available	White British
Sabina	currently at home	medical doctor	degree	Post grad qualifications	o/o	British Asian	White
Jill	Private sector managerial	Own business	degree	Not available	o/o	White British	Turkish

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The research team (three middle-class women, two white British and one British Asian) had different relationships of symmetry with the parents and the localities. The white middle class respondents could easily 'place' Sarah and Carol. It is also clear from their responses that the South Asian-origin parents (both working and middle class) responded to Humera with assumptions of recognition.

<sup>ii</sup> In brief, economic capital refers to income and assets, social capital to networks, and cultural capital to values-based resources (eg educational qualifications, taste, language skills). Capitals are more or less valuable in struggles for advantage in particular social fields.

<sup>iii</sup> In brief, Bourdieu uses habitus to describe ways of being and doing, dispositions, which are 'right' and 'natural' to the individual concerned, and therefore guide individual actions and choices.