

**TSHEPISO MATENTJIE**

**2014219006**

**The educational motivations and strategies of black middle-class parents in  
predominantly white schools in post-apartheid South Africa**

**26 September 2017**

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## **THESIS TITLE**

**The educational motivations and strategies of black middle-class parents in predominantly white schools in post-apartheid South Africa**

## **KEYWORDS**

Parental agency, Critical Race Theory, black middle-class, educational strategies, educational motivations, clinical interviewing, racial trauma, race-based stress

## Acknowledgements

To the parents who agreed to participate in the study, thank you for your bravery and willingness to trust me with your stories. Without you this study would not have been possible. Through your eyes I see my role as a black parent differently.

A special thank you to the staff at the Roodepoort Museum and Strubensvalley Community Library for their willingness to point me in the right direction and share information.

To Carmen Langa, for giving me that push when I let my own fears hold me ransom.

To my family, for believing in me, for keeping the dream alive even when I grew tired. For giving up their comforts just so that I can live my dream. I am forever indebted to you for your unwavering support and love.

To Gloria, you may be gone but you will never be forgotten.

To Prof Joel Samoff and Rudy Buys for their insights and critical input, I am truly grateful.

To Lerato Maviya, my student assistant, your brilliant, razor sharp mind and keen ear makes you one in a million, it was a true privilege to pick your brain and feed off your energy. Living proof that God's timing is always perfect.

Professor Jonathan Jansen, your faith in me is overwhelming. Thank you for the second chance, for pushing me and challenging me to soar. I will forever be grateful for your presence in my life. You remain a giant whose shoulders I am privileged to stand on, and whose toes I dare to step on.

Finally, to Sugar, Mo and Timz, you make it all worth it, you keep me grounded. I have it all, with you by my side.

Tshepiso Matentjie  
South Africa, September 2017

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> The setting of the study	<b>6</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b> Background and context of the study	<b>13</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b> The literature review	<b>25</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b> Theoretical framework	<b>38</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b> Research design and methods	<b>46</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b> The social identities and educational aspirations of black middle-class parents in the new South Africa	<b>61</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b> The educational strategies used by black middle-class parents to advance the interests of their children in white schools	<b>77</b>
<b>Chapter 8</b> How race, class, ethnicity and gender intersect to activate personal agency	<b>101</b>
<b>Chapter 9</b> Synthesis and Conclusion	<b>128</b>
<b>Bibliography/References</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b> Interview Schedule	<b>150</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b> Consent Form	<b>152</b>

## **Abstract**

This research explores how black middle-class parents in white-dominant schools utilise their agency in pursuit of quality education for their children in the post-apartheid era. Specifically, the study interrogates the ways in which these black parents handle critical racial incidents that affect their children in post-apartheid schools. It therefore also examines the extent to which racial integration has succeeded in white-dominant schools where black parents constitute a racial minority.

Drawing on clinical interviews with 19 black parents, the research focuses on Parental Agency to explore the psychological processes involved in parental decision-making and the intersections of race, class and ethnicity in making those decisions. Furthermore, the research offers a straddling of disciplines seldom undertaken in other studies on black middle-class parents. The personal interests and motives of each parent are explored, as well as how their actions are consistent with or contradictory to those of other parents. Finally, this study examines how parental decision positions them in their ability and effectiveness in advocating for their children when critical racial incidents, which affect their children, occur within these schools.

The findings indicate that complex patterns of inclusion/exclusion are not simply a result of school actions on black parents and their children; it is also a consequence of the active decisions made, or not made, by parents within white-dominant schools.

## CHAPTER 1

### The setting of the study

#### Introduction

This study investigates how, why and with what consequences black middle-class parents respond to racial problems in the schools their children attend. Focusing on predominantly white schools, the study explores why the parents placed their children in these schools in the first place, it examines the strategies that they use to engage with white school officials when racial incidents occur, and it considers the consequences of parental actions or inactions.

In this chapter, I place my research on the experiences of black middle-class families and their children's education against the backdrop of the city of Roodepoort, its history and evolution over time from a small plot on the western ridge of the Witwatersrand to an Afrikaner municipality to a small town and, as it is today, an established city in Johannesburg. This section of the study explains how black middle-class parents came to be situated in the Roodepoort area. The chapter also provides a rationale for choosing this city as the setting of my study, and further explains how the economic developments in post-1994 South Africa resulted in the emergence of a growing and visible black middle class. Finally, this section of the thesis explains how black middle-class parents, who are part of a racial majority in South Africa, came to be a minority in predominantly white schools in Roodepoort.

#### The setting of the study

My study is located in the city of Roodepoort, which is situated on the West Rand, west of the major city of Johannesburg in the Gauteng Province of South Africa. The area was chosen because in recent years it has seen a major inflow of so-called "black diamonds"<sup>1</sup> into the various residential estates that were built in areas previously designated as farms, mainly owned by White Afrikaans-speaking people.

Today Roodepoort represents a catchment area where black middle-class parents take up residence within the vicinity of the 'good' and still predominantly white public schools in order to qualify for admission in line with the zoning policy used by the public schools for learner acceptance. There has also been a proliferation of private schools in the area where parents, who can afford the fees, choose these schools to enroll their children from as early as grade 000 at the age of four.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Wikipedia.org (accessed on 10 February 2017), the term 'black diamonds' was first coined by TNS Research Surveys (Pty) Ltd and the UCT Unilever Institute to refer to members of South Africa's fast-growing, affluent and influential black community.

The West Rand, and Roodepoort in particular, was also selected for this study because of the recent increase in media reports regarding allegations of racism and racial conflict at Roodepoort Primary and Roodepoort High School. It is therefore of interest how changing patterns of residential occupation by race and class impacts on schools as the emerging black middle-class penetrate these former white-only areas of the West Rand. It begs the question whether the issues at these schools are specific and isolated to the area or whether other black parents in Roodepoort, who place their children in other white schools, share the same experiences.

### **A brief history of the Roodepoort Area**

The name Roodepoort means red valley or 'red pass' in Afrikaans, referring to the red soil found in the area due to the presence of a mineral called iron pyrites<sup>2</sup>. Geographically, Roodepoort is situated immediately to the west of Johannesburg on the Witwatersrand and is bound by Krugersdorp on the west, Soweto on the south, and on the north-east by Randburg. To the north of Roodepoort are hills generally referred to as the "Witwatersrand", which continue for some 15 km from Johannesburg into Krugersdorp. The primary settlers to the area were Boer farmers, hence its Afrikaans name. The Government of the South African Republic granted the farm Roodepoort to D. G. Grobler in 1854. In August 1864, J. G. Steyn was given the farm Vogelstruisfontein and in October 1866 the farm Paardekraal was granted to J. C. Greyling<sup>3</sup>. According to Snell (1976)<sup>4</sup>, on September 18, 1884, Fred Struben struck gold at Wilgerspruit, in an area that he named the Confidence Reef, which was a large rocky outcrop in the centre of Roodepoort. The following year, in 1885, a mining camp was established on the farm Roodepoort and another year later, in 1886, the farms Roodepoort, Vogelstruisfontein and Klein Paardekraal were proclaimed public diggings.

The journey to establish Roodepoort as a municipality, and later a city, was heralded by numerous infrastructural developments that took place in the area, including the extension of the railway line from Boksburg to Johannesburg to Krugersdorp, with stations at Maraisburg, Florida and Roodepoort in 1890. The first form of government in the area was The Goldfields Diggers Committee which was formed in 1886 to represent the interests of the farmers. Dr Hans Sauer was elected as the representative for the area Roodepoort-Maraisburg<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See 'The Story of Roodepoort' sourced from the Roodepoort Museum Archives; publication date unknown

<sup>3</sup> See 'Roodepoort City/Stad: Birth and Growth of a city' prepared by the Roodepoort Museum; publication date unknown

<sup>4</sup> An article published by the Institute of Municipal Engineering of Southern Africa (IMIESA) in November 1976 titled "Roodepoort – Gateway to the Golden West"

<sup>5</sup> See 'The story of Roodepoort' sourced from the Roodepoort Museum Archives, publication date unknown

The establishment of Roodepoort's schools followed in the footsteps of the discovery of gold. Four years after gold was struck in Wilgespruit, in 1888, the first Dutch school was established in Hull Street, Florida in a small wood and iron building. In January 1894, Cassein "Cassie" Klaasen Hamman of Hamberg started the first permanent school in the area known as 'De Morgenster'. Forty pupils attended the school. In July 1895, the school relocated to Van Wyk Street in Roodepoort and was renamed 'Roodepoort Dorp School'. By July 1896, 67 pupils attended the school. In 1901, the Government purchased land specifically for building a school in Rex Street, Roodepoort. The school relocated and was renamed 'Roodepoort Government School'. In 1911, the name of the school changed to 'Roodepoort Primary School – Roodepoort Lagere School'. In 1913, a new school building was erected and in 1918, the school changed its name to Roodepoort Town School. The school continued to expand and eventually Roodepoort Town School 'outgrew' its premises. In 1971, Roodepoort Town School changed its name to Horizon View Primary School and relocated to its current premises.

After the Boer War in 1899, mines were closed and a Health Board was appointed by the British Military Government in 1902 for the Roodepoort-Maraisburg area. The four townships of Roodepoort, Florida, Hamberg and Maraisburg amalgamated into the Urban District Board of Roodepoort/Maraisburg in 1903. It was this amalgamation of the four townships that became the nucleus of the future town of Roodepoort-Maraisburg.

The first election of the District Board members took place in 1904 and the status of the Roodepoort-Maraisburg Urban District Board was revised to that of a Municipality on 26 August 1904. This made the Municipality eligible to appoint its first Mayor and Town Clerk. In 1904, the Municipality's first street lighting scheme was introduced with the installation of paraffin standard lamps, and from 1910, electric lights began to replace candles and paraffin lamps in houses.

By 1907, the Roodepoort-Maraisburg Municipality's water supply system made it possible to have running water in the houses. Prior to this, furrows and wells provided water. Other developments in the Municipality include the Florida Hall, built in 1911, the Maraisburg Hall in 1928, and the Roodepoort Town Hall in 1936. The Florida Choral Society was inaugurated in 1924 with the purpose of discovering, training and developing local talent. A public library was opened in 1920. The first cinema was erected in Van Wyk Street, Roodepoort, in 1917 and others followed shortly thereafter.

The developments in Roodepoort were not happening in isolation; in fact, the country at large was also changing. According to the SA History website, when the Native (Black) Urban Areas Act No. 21 of 1923



was passed; this piece of legislation made each local authority responsible for the blacks in its area. As such, the Act enabled municipalities like Roodepoort to regulate influx control and remove 'surplus' people, referring to those who were not employed in the area to designated areas. At the time, the country was divided into prescribed (urban) and non-prescribed areas, and movement between the two areas was strictly controlled. The law imposed restrictions on the employment of Africans in urban areas, and required white locals to remove black Africans from areas designated for whites, to specified places on the urban peripheries.

It was reported that in 1910 the White population in the Roodepoort-Maraisburg area was 4000; by 1932 it had doubled to 8000, and in 1946 it had risen to 23000; at the time of the publication, the population was said to be totalling 62000<sup>6</sup>. Over the same period the non-White population, including non-permanent mine labourers, increased from 17000 in 1932 to 49000 in 1946 and 51000. At that time, Roodepoort was considered to be the fourth largest municipality in the Transvaal and the ninth largest in South Africa. By then, Roodepoort was said to have "plentiful supply of labour... with minimal wages payable" as prescribed by the Government..." (see Roodepoort City/Stad: publication date unknown) and that the Town Council had built thousands of sub-economic houses and provided other amenities in the Bantu township of Dobsonville. At the time of the publication, there were 4000 houses in Dobsonville. Two other hostels had been completed to provide accommodation for 2200 unattached Bantu men. It was further reported that education in the Roodepoort district was catered for by five high schools, 15 primary schools, and a commercial high school for whites up to standard eight, and six primary schools for Bantu children. A high school for Indians and a primary school for Coloureds were also established. It was also stated that "As a result of good housing conditions and the provision of schools and recreational facilities, labour relations at Roodepoort are harmonious" (see Roodepoort City/Stad: publication date unknown).

In October 1963, the Roodepoort-Maraisburg Municipality was officially changed to Roodepoort to mark the 60th anniversary of the founding of the municipality. Apparently the previous name was found to be cumbersome and outdated, and Roodepoort was more acceptable<sup>7</sup>. According to Chipkin (2012:31), the West Rand benefitted significantly from the great apartheid boom of the 1960s. With black people forcibly removed to the townships on the outskirts of the West Rand, the city embarked on a campaign to recruit German and Dutch immigrants. In its 50th Jubilee Brochure, emphasis was placed on modest homes for middle and upper artisan classes. A vibrant church life offered a choice between two Dutch Reformed

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<sup>6</sup> See Roodepoort City/Stad, sourced from the Roodepoort Museum Archives; publication date unknown.

<sup>7</sup> See the newspaper article published in 'West Rand Times' on Friday October 11 1963 titled "Sixty Years of Bustling Growth", which chronicles Roodepoort's growth into a 'busy, bustling town founded on the precious metal'.

Churches, the Nederduitse Hervormde Kerk and the Nederduits Hervormde or Gereformeerde Kerk<sup>8</sup>. Parents were further given a choice between English or Afrikaans schools, depending on their home language. The majority of Roodepoort citizens were Afrikaans-speaking and, according to Chipkin (2012: 31), this is how the city sought to reinforce its racial identity. These developments also enabled Roodepoort to position itself strategically to becoming a city; it was duly granted city status in 1977.

### **Roodepoort after 1994**

One of the key impacts of democracy in South Africa was found in changes to the racial, political and economic landscape of cities such as Roodepoort. Since the days of the Whites-only referendum in 1992, Roodepoort began to change into a multi-racial city with an emerging black middle class. In that referendum, white voters were asked to give their verdict on the following question: "Do you support the continuation of the reform process which the State President began on 2 February 1990 and which is aimed at a new constitution through negotiation?". When the results were announced on 17 March 1992, as part of the Transvaal, a slim majority of Roodepoort residents had voted in favour of the reforms. According to the statistics, as reported in THE INDICATOR SA (1992:17), 52.3% of Roodepoort voters voted 'Yes'. A more detailed breakdown of the Roodepoort city results, as reported on the Radio Free South Africa website (sourced on 16 September 2016), indicates that a total of 237 882 votes were valid. Of these, 124 737 had voted 'Yes', which constituted 52.44% of the valid votes, and 113 145 voted 'No' against the reforms, which constituted 47,56% of the valid votes.

The city of Roodepoort was later incorporated into the larger Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality in 1995, following the post-1994 re-organisation of local government. According to Chipkin (2012:33), it was this re-organisation that sought to redress the structure and legacy of the 'Apartheid City'. As part of the process, municipal boundaries were re-organised in order to unify the tax base, which resulted in integrating former townships and white areas into a single municipal entity. For Roodepoort, this model was complicated by the fact that the townships historically associated with the city, Dobsonville and Kagiso, were relatively small and adjacent to Soweto. From a planning perspective, they fitted seamlessly into the greater township of Soweto. Furthermore, the capital expenditure that would be required to improve, equalise and urbanise the infrastructure in Soweto would be massive. As a result, the revenue generated from Roodepoort's tax-base was apportioned to the new Johannesburg Metropolitan Chamber (Chipkin 2012:34).

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<sup>8</sup> See 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee Brochure for the City of Roodepoort, published in 1954.

The advent of post-apartheid South Africa opened up numerous opportunities for blacks in politics, business and education. Against the backdrop of global economic growth, there was a burgeoning of the black middle class in South Africa. The increase in the size of the black middle class was however not only limited to South Africa; the black middle-class also grew on the rest of the continent. According to Ncube (2015:1), strong economic growth helped to reduce poverty in Africa and to increase the size of the middle class. Lufumpa, Mubila and Aissa (2015:11) used data from the African Development Bank (AfDB) Data Portal and other international sources to identify the characteristics of the African middle class. They define the middle class according to income or consumption, using per capita daily consumption of \$2 to \$20 in 2005 purchasing power parity (PPP) US dollars.

These authors (2015:11) make a distinction between three subcategories. The 'floating class' has per capita consumption levels of \$2 to \$4 per day; while the 'lower middle class' has per capita consumption levels of \$4 to \$10 per day. They further mention that this group lives above the subsistence level and is able to save and consume non-essential goods. The third group is the 'upper middle class', with per capita consumption levels of \$10 to \$20 per day (Lufumpa et al., 2015:10).

The 'floating class' is the largest and constitutes 63% of Africa's middle class; they remain barely out of the poor category and are in a vulnerable position. With earnings between \$2 and \$4 a day, they are constantly at risk of dropping back into the poor category in the event of any unexpected shocks, such as the loss of income and fuel or food price hikes (ibid.).

Kunene, Munila and Akinkugbe (2015:131) acknowledge that with the increasing size and purchasing power of the African middle class, across different African countries, they use their financial means to seek an alternative form of education which they believe will enhance their children's life chances. As a result, they seek private school education with the expectation that their children will receive a higher-quality education and secure good jobs on completion of their studies.

In 1991, when the South African government abolished segregation in state-run schools, African, Coloured and Indian children were accepted into white schools in larger and larger numbers. The economic growth patterns of the time saw middle-class black parents enrol their children in more expensive white public and private schools (see Nkomo, McKinney and Chisholm, 2004). This facilitated the move into cities like Roodepoort by black middle-class parents.

Another factor that contributed to the mobility of black middle-class parents into cities like Roodepoort has to do with how the black middle class were enabled to purchase property in areas previously reserved for whites. According to Chipkin (2012:18), after 1986 with the passing of the Sectional Title Act, more of

the black middle class could purchase property within the city of Roodepoort. The Act provided for the “division of buildings into sections and common property and for the acquisition of separate ownership of sections coupled with joint ownership in common property” (Act 95 of 1986 Sectional Titles Act). Between 1988 and 2011 in the Gauteng Province alone, and chiefly in Johannesburg and Pretoria, 32 774 sectional title housing schemes were registered. Sectional title living offered a way of exercising private ownership of a property, while sharing the costs of maintenance and of communal infrastructure.

This short overview of the origins of Roodepoort, its growth and the changes made possible during the transition from apartheid helps explain the racial and class character of present-day Roodepoort. The transition from apartheid created the social and class resources that would enable the black middle class to penetrate previously white communities and schools. It effectively removed the legal and bureaucratic obstacles that prevented the *desegregation* of white neighbourhoods and public institutions. However, what these changes could not predict, were the psycho-social and cultural obstacles to *integration* within white-dominant schools, and that is what this study will investigate.

## CHAPTER 2

### Background and context of the study

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provided an analysis of how black middle-class families came to settle in Roodepoort. By outlining the historical, economic and political evolution of the city, which happened in tandem with the changes in South Africa at large, the previous chapter provides a rationale for selecting Roodepoort as the setting for my study and the emergent black middle class as its subject. The opening chapter also hinted at the challenges of racial integration in the country at large, as well as how black middle-class parents, who are part of a racial majority in South Africa, came to be a minority in predominantly white schools in Roodepoort specifically. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the study; its aim, literary context and overall significance for research, policy and practice.

#### Study goals and the state of research

This study is about race, agency and education, focusing specifically on black middle-class parents and the strategies that they use to advance the interests of their children in predominantly white South African schools in the post-apartheid era. First, it explores the assumptions and expectations that underpin the parents' choices of schools; then the strategies that they deploy in order to advocate for their children when critical racial incidents occur within the schools; and finally, the intersection of race, class and ethnicity takes the foreground as a means to understand the resources that they draw upon in developing strategies to advocate for their children.

In South Africa, there is a formidable body of research on the problems of racial integration in white schools after apartheid (see Naidoo, 1996; Vally and Dalamba, 1999; Jansen, 1998; Pillay, 2004; Carrim and Soudien, 1999; Goduka, 1998; Sekete, Shilubane and Moila, 2001; Meier, 2005); school admission policies and how they served to facilitate or stifle racial integration (Beckmann and Karvelas, 2006); the role of principal leadership in facilitating integration (Phatlane 2007); and the role of teachers in the process of racial integration (Dornbrack, 2007; Meier and Hartell, 2009). Others studied patterns and trends with respect to integration (see Soudien, Carrim and Sayed, 2004; Chisholm and Sujee, 2006) and the role of parents in the governance of integrating schools (Mcube, 2009).

Nkomo, McKinney and Chisholm (2004:7) argue that the first ten years after democracy, research on race and education focused on the relationship between decentralisation and desegregation; conflict and contradiction in identity formation; and finally the continuing reproduction and manifestation of race and

racism despite integration. Jansen (2004:1) described this period as a move by the democratically-elected government to achieve what he calls '*toenadering*', which he defines as the "coming together of black and white citizens for the purposes of reconciliation". In general though, much of the post-1994 educational research focused on the politics and problems of the integration project within the school system after apartheid.

Yet, despite this burgeoning literature on racial integration, there is a dearth of South African literature on the ways in which black middle-class parents exercised their agency within predominantly white schools as these institutions opened up to black students. The literature suggests that the choice of predominantly white schools over predominantly black schools is part of the strategies used by black middle-class parents to activate their class resources to access better education for their children (see Sefara, 2002; Mobokodi and Msila, 2004; Kumalo, 1998). Little is known about the role of parents, and in particular black middle-class parents, and how they used their sense of agency in supporting, challenging, criticising, avoiding and/or undermining these schools as they embarked on the process of change and how it affected their children as racial minorities in white majority schools.

There is, however, a small but influential literature on the agential roles of black middle-class parents in white schools in countries where blacks are demographic minorities (see Chapman and Bhopal, 2013; Vincent, Rollock, Ball and Gillborn, 2012; Cousins and Mickelson, 2011; Irwin and Elley, 2011; Harris and Khanna, 2010; Bodovski, 2010). However, research from other countries on the educational strategies of middle-class parents focuses on the issues largely from a sociological perspective, rather than from a psychosocial perspective. As a result, while the individual differences in the parenting values (see Irwin and Elley, 2011), strategies (Vincent et al., 2012) and voices (see Vincent and Martin 2002) among middle-class black parents are acknowledged, the differences are in fact not explained beyond their broader social meanings. Little insight is given into what creates the variation in the levels of personal agency used to advocate for their children when critical racial incidents occur in predominantly white schools, even when black parents have the material and cultural capital to effect the outcome they seek in the interests of their children (see Gillborn, Rollock, Vincent and Ball, 2012). There is however acknowledgement that black people do not form a homogenous group in terms of cultural and ethnic differences (Harris and Khanna, 2010); therefore, how do the multiple forms of social identity also influence how Parental Agency (PA) is exercised? A country like South Africa with all its diversity provides an ideal setting to study how multi-faceted forms of social identity influence how PA is exercised in white-dominant schools.

## **Media images of parental activism**

A general review of South African media clippings on the responses of black parents to racial problems in their children's schools suggests actions that sometimes appear as passive or disinterested on the one hand, or reactionary rather than proactive, on the other hand.

Following allegations of racial segregation at Curro Foundation School in Roodeplaar, East of Pretoria, in January 2015, one parent is reported as saying that "...he had trusted the school to do the right thing and protect black pupils when some white parents had demanded separate classrooms". The father added, "We made a mistake as parents not to research the school thoroughly before enrolling our children... (News24, 02/02/2015). His response suggested an air of resignation, rather than activism.

On the other hand, some media reports showed disgruntled parents actively protesting against specific school practices and policies. In Roodepoort, in particular, two incidents were reported in the media in 2015 and 2017 involving black parents' protests against racial incidents affecting their children in largely white schools. Roodepoort Primary School, located in Davidsonville, was reported to have been shut down with the pupils unable to attend school for two weeks after parents demanded the principal's resignation following allegations of racial abuse towards black children (*EWN Reporter*, 19/02/2015).

The second incident was reported two years later at Roodepoort High School where parents registered complaints with the Gauteng Department of Education that teachers at the school allegedly called their children monkeys, devils and "assholes" (*News24*, 10/02/2017). Other news stories on parental activism are captured as follows: "Parents call for closure of Roodepoort Primary" (*News24*, 19/02/2015); "Parents close primary school" (*Grocott's Mail*, 31/07/2014); and "Parents, pupils claim racism at Roodepoort school" (*News24*, 10/02/2017). All these headlines amplify public awareness when parents organise and collectively raise their grievances with regards to the education of their children.

Black parents often take to the media to raise issues of concern, as indicated in the case at a Curro School in Roodeplaar near Pretoria. This case began with reports in January 2015 that there was racial segregation at Curro Foundation School in Roodeplaar after it was alleged that classes were divided along racial lines (*News24*, 29/01/2015). A group of about 30 parents of pupils at the school are reported to have signed a petition demanding to know why some classes are made up entirely of black pupils and others have only white pupils (*News24*, 29/01/2015). The following month in February 2015 reports under the headline "White flight led to school segregation" (*City Press* and *News24*, 02/02/2015) suggested that white parents were leaving the Curro School in Roodeplaar because the school was enrolling too

many black children. In June of the same year a video went viral sparking outrage on social media showing children getting off a bus, then being split, with white children going one way and black children going another way at a Curro School (*News24*, 19/06/2015). The parents at Roodepoort Primary School, Roodepoort High School and Curro Foundation School in Roodeplaar respectively embarked on joint acts of protest. However, often this collaboration is visible only when active acts of protest draw media attention.

Other strategies involve black parents individually raising grievances through the formal, and sometimes political, channels using the Department of Education. The case in 2011 of the Rivonia Primary School comes to mind where the matter of not admitting a black student was finally decided by the courts in December 2012. According to the *Mail & Guardian* of 3 October 2013, the decision by the Constitutional Court stated that cooperation is compulsory in disputes between School Governing Bodies and national or provincial government.

The media reports of parental activism and protest action reveal strategies employed by parents amidst renewed demands that parents should increase their involvement in the education of their children (see Motala and Luxomo, 2014) rather than simply “cede their responsibility towards their children once they are dropped off at the school gates” (*The Times*, 31/01/ 2012). In January 2012, the Minister of Basic Education, Ms Angie Motshekga, announced the new guidelines in the selection of school governing bodies (SGB), which also placed greater emphasis on expanding the role of the parents in the SGBs. Parental strategies suggested cover a wide spectrum; from getting involved in the running of the school through SGBs, to more learner-centred approaches, such as helping and supervising homework.

While these media reports reveal a range of strategies by black middle-class parents in response to racial problems at the white schools where their children are enrolled, these anecdotes from the media do not constitute empirical evidence for research purposes. This raises the question, what other strategies are parents employing in their pursuit of equitable and quality education for their children? Furthermore, this research problematises the assumption that in pursuit of quality education, parents’ motivation for enrolling their children in historically-white schools in post-apartheid South Africa would necessitate a hands-on, pro-active engagement with the school, rather than a “laissez faire” approach based on blind trust, as expressed by the parent at the Curro School in Roodeplaar.



## **Research problem**

The main research question this study pursues is, "What strategies do black middle-class parents use in response to critical racial incidents that involve their children when they engage with white school officials?". Given the history of race, inequality and apartheid in South Africa, why would black parents assume that a well-resourced, English-based medium, historically white school would prioritise the educational needs and aspirations of its black learners in the same way as it does their white counterparts? By virtue of their educational level, social class, cultural and historical awareness and memory of the struggle for equality, and with their lived experience in a racist South Africa pre-1994, can we assume that they are better equipped to exercise their agency? Therefore, what resources derived from their social identity in terms of race, class and ethnicity do they draw upon in order to advocate for their children?

## **Theoretical framework**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) serves as the overarching framework that guides this study. Emerging originally from law, CRT extends into other research fields, including psychology (Crenshaw, 2011:1256), as a theoretical tool that challenges disciplinary conventions that ignore the racial power inherent in scientific theory, method and professional practice (Adams and Salter, 2011:1360-1361). CRT is also described as a theoretical tool to interrogate the ways in which people of colour continue to experience present-day instantiations and historical legacies of racial oppression (Chapman and Bhopal, 2013:567). It is not simply the application of whitewashed critical theory to a subset of phenomena with obvious connections to race relations, but instead CRT scholars view the entirety of social science phenomena from an analytic lens that recognises racial power (Salter and Adams, 2013:782). This means that CRT challenges scholars to reveal how supposedly 'colour-blind' analyses of apparently race-irrelevant topics also bear the mark of racialised subjectivity (Adams and Salter, 2011:1361). It calls for identity consciousness, critical reflexivity and a deliberate awareness of racial positioning on the part of the researcher, thus contradicting conventional academic wisdom which advocates for the cultivation of colour-blind neutrality as a means to ensure maximum objectivity (Adams and Salter, 2011:1355).

In psychology, in particular, Adams and Salter (2011) argue that Critical Race Psychology must critically consider methodology, identity consciousness and the application of a race-conscious lens to the field of psychology as a whole in order to counteract colour-blind conceptions of the discipline. Salter and Adams (2013:781) further explain the following salient features of CRT relevant to my study:

- it approaches racism as a systemic force embedded in everyday society (rather than a problem of individual bias);

- it serves to illuminate how ideologies of neoliberal individualism (e.g. merit, choice) often reflect and reproduce racial domination;
- it aims to identify interest convergence as the typical source of broad-based support for reparative action;
- it emphasises possessive investment in privileged identities and identity-infused realities that reproduce racial domination; and
- it proposes practices of counter-storytelling to reveal and contest identity-infused bases of everyday society.

In this study, I aim to further this line of thinking by examining how black middle-class parents understand themselves as actors or agents in the educational lives of their children. I want to understand which identities matter to them in adopting particular forms of action in response to the needs of their children when critical racial incidents occur. That is, how do they draw on the cultural, racial and class resources to advocate for their children when engaging with white school officials. In this way, I draw on CRT and parental agency as my theoretical framework. CRT also privileges agency, for instance, other scholars (see Vincent, 2001 and Auerbach, 2002) undertook similar studies with the goal of exploring how PA finds expression in the way minoritised parents employ certain interventions and strategies to advocate for their children who face racial barriers in educational settings. Defining PA as the actions and responses undertaken by the parents in response to their concerns (Vincent, 2001:349), PA was expressed through silence, conversations, direct protest and anger, bypassing the school altogether and finally, by exiting the school.

Auerbach (2002) explored the ideational components of agency by studying the parental counter-stories that comment on the barriers faced by Latino parents within the education system. In her study, Auerbach found that the parents' narratives counter stereotypes of uninvolved Latino parents who delegate academic matters to the school (2002:1385). Auerbach (2002:1384) found that these counter-stories illustrate that Latino PA may be exercised through insightful critique of the educational system, as well as through participation in educational activities. Auerbach's findings (2002) resonate with the four components to human agency mentioned by Bandura (2006:164) of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness.

In this study, I draw on PA and CRT to understand the personal interests and motives of parents and how their actions are consistent with or contradictory to those interests and motives of other parents, and

how in the end this positions them regarding their ability and effectiveness in advocating for their children when engaging with white school officials. As a middle class, heterogeneous, group of black parents, the intersectionality of class, race and ethnicity is foregrounded to help understand the resources they draw upon in developing strategies to advocate for their children. As a result, my research questions are:

### **Research Questions**

1. What assumptions and expectations underpin the choices and engagement of black middle-class parents within predominantly white schools?
2. What educational strategies do black middle-class parents employ in their advocacy for their children when engaging with predominantly white schools?
3. How does the intersection of race, ethnicity and social class impact black middle-class parents' sense of personal agency?

### **Research Approach**

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:315) define qualitative research as inquiry that describes and analyses people's individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions. The researcher interprets phenomena in terms of the meanings that people assign to them. In line with CRT, it is important to understand how their motivation and strategies are informed, impacted and structured by race, ethnicity and social class in their interaction with white school officials. A qualitative design allows for the in-depth exploration of their unique experiences, how they navigate their interactions with white school officials, and how they activate their racial, class and ethnic resources to advocate for their children. As such, the type of research questions that I seek to answer in this study goes beyond "Who?" "What?" and "How many?", but rather they focus on the "How?" and "Why", which, according to Yin (1984:29), the former type of questions are best explored through survey research while the latter are best explored through case study, historical and exploratory research. I am therefore interested in understanding the context in which this specific group of parents develops and uses educational strategies to advocate for their children, particularly when they engage with white school officials and, in turn, how this hinders or helps their advocacy role as parents.

### **Data Collection**

I used clinical interviews to explore 'what it is like' to be a black, middle-class parent in post-apartheid South Africa, and what a factor, such as class position, means for educating your child in a white school. From a psychological perspective, clinical interviews are used by psychologists to extract data intended to gain insight into the respondents' thinking, feelings and behaviour (see diSessa, 2007). The chief

purpose of clinical interviewing is to ascertain the nature and extent of an individual's knowledge about a particular domain by identifying relevant conceptions he/she holds and the perceived relationships among those conceptions (Posner and Gertzog, 1982). The clinical interview is marked by its flexibility in adapting to the individual respondent in an attempt to follow their thinking. In psycho-educational research, clinical interviews have been used to understand children's thinking and problem-solving strategies when learning mathematics (see Arias, Schorr and Warner, 2010). Other scholars have also used clinical interviews to help teachers gain insight into how children think about mathematics as a goal of improving their teaching practices (see Ginsburg, Jacobs and Lopez, 1998; Schorr and Lesh, 2003).

### **Sampling the schools and the parents**

My sampling was informed by the type of school the child attended and whether the school was located in the Roodepoort area. The South African Schools Act recognises two forms of schools, public and independent. Following the quintile system strategy used by the Department of Education to operationalise the National School Funding Norms and Standards, as amended in 2006 (DoE, 1997), the public schools that were targeted were all from quintile 5. Quintile 5 schools comprise former white schools (generally referred to as Model C) who admit black learners; however, they mostly service wealthy communities and admit white learners from within the neighbourhood as well as those from outside the neighbourhood who are bussed in. This means that parents who reside or work in the Roodepoort area, but were educating their children in predominantly white schools outside of Roodepoort, were excluded from the study. I also excluded parents whose children attend former white schools, which now are predominantly black in terms of the learner and staff composition. I also excluded parents whose children attend independent Early Childhood Learning Centres that are not attached to established schools with an established curriculum.

The inclusion of public and private schools in the sample is informed by the findings in the literature that these schools differ in terms of funding - public schools are funded by the state, whereas all schools that are not funded by the state are grouped under independent schools (Hofmeyer and Lee, 2002:79). The schools also differ according to the curriculum. Public schools and independent schools offer the national core curriculum; however, well-resourced independent schools offer a "widely-enriched curriculum", and others such as the Montessori and Waldorf schools offer a different curriculum (Hofmeyer and Lee, 2002:79). The opportunity to interview parents from each type of school offered a unique opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis of the level of influence these parents enjoy and whether their advocacy efforts are equally fruitful on either side of the fence when compared to each other, as well as when compared to their white counterparts.

### **Sampling the research participants**

The parents in my study were drawn from public and private schools in the Roodepoort area; in total, 19 parents were interviewed. I interviewed 12 mothers, five fathers and one couple. All the parents were married, apart from two who were single mothers. Of the schools involved, one was a private remedial school and the rest were mainstream schools.

CRT places at its core of investigation the intersectionality of race, class and ethnicity; it delineates the specific type of participants who should be the focus of this study. As a result, middle-class parents who self-identify as black South African, mixed race or bi-racial, Coloured and black African, as well as inter-racial couples were included as respondents in this study. CRT also privileges agency, it recognises that people, and in this case parents, are not simply 'acted upon' by the system, but that they actively influence, resist, remonstrate and withdraw at various points in their endeavour to represent their cause.

The parents involved in this study had children attending predominantly white schools, which are public or private, in the Roodepoort area. The parents were to be identified through snowball sampling, until a point of saturation was reached. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:104), in snowball sampling, researchers identify a small number of individuals who have the characteristics in which they are interested. The first group of parents who were invited to participate in the study were identified through referrals from the three parents who were used in the pilot study, as well as referrals from parents known personally by the researcher. These people were then used as informants to identify or put the researchers in touch with others who qualified for inclusion and these, in turn, identified yet others. Participation in the study by the individual parents was voluntary.

### **Data Analysis**

A tape recorder was used to record the interviews with consent from the interviewees. Each interview was transcribed using a standard transcription machine. The data was analysed on three levels. Miles and Huberman refer to a start list (1994:58), which is typically drawn from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas and key variables that the researcher brings to the study. In this study, this entailed using the themes generated from the literature on parent educational strategies, parent agency, as well as the research questions. These were used to develop the first level of codes. Where the data showed additional themes not initially identified, these were then also included as part of the first level codes. The second level of analysis included combing themes that were related to form a domain analysis (Cohen et al., 2000:148). The third level involved making connections between the domains and establishing relationships between them, particularly with the goal of forming a semantic

network indicating the parents' thought, behavioural and affective processes, and how these were influenced by the intersection of race, ethnicity and class, as well as how these evolved over time. At this stage, inferences were made in order to test the conceptual analysis of PA, and the intersectionality of race, ethnicity and class.

### **Validity**

When conducting qualitative research, it is deemed imperative that the researcher ensures that the accounts found in a study are credible, dependable and confirmable. The first validity check involved piloting the interview schedule with three black parents whose children were enrolled in predominantly white schools. The parents included in the pilot study did not form part of the actual study; however, the feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the interview schedule that was later used in the actual study.

In the main study, I used respondent validation where each parent was provided with an account of the findings. The goal was to seek corroboration or otherwise of the account of the findings (Bryman, 2001:272). I also used auditing, which refers to the researcher leaving and keeping a trail of evidence collected throughout the research process. Finally, I used peer debriefing to ensure credibility. This entailed making presentations to other PhD students in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of the Free State. At these meetings, comments regarding my progress with the research, the type of data that I had collected, as well as preliminary conclusions from the data were made, and the necessary changes were incorporated. All copies of the feedback and the documents generated throughout the research process, including copies of the interview transcripts, were reviewed and discussed with senior researchers for purposes of further validation. All of these strategies were utilised to ensure that I had acted in good faith and had not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway my conduct or the findings derived from the research.

### **The significance of the study**

Much of the South African research on parent participation and involvement in South African schools focuses on parents from low-income communities (see Motala and Luxomo, 2014; Singh, Mbokodi and Msila, 2004). No research has focused on black middle-class parents as a cohort. Also, the available research focuses on parental participation and involvement in the school, without exploring the unique strategies that they employ in order to advocate for their children as racial minorities in white schools. As a racial group, black is not a homogenous group, and South Africa's history of apartheid and segregated education where blacks are a majority offers a new perspective to study the intersectionality of race,

ethnicity and class. Finally, the exploration of agency involves a new angle of using psychological processes in understanding the intersection of race, class and ethnicity. In this regard, my study straddles disciplines; it adds a dimension not previously utilised by other studies. The chance to interview parents from a public and a private school offers a unique opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis of the level of influence these parents enjoy and whether their advocacy efforts are equally fruitful on either side of the fence when compared to each other, as well as when compared to their white counterparts.

### **Limitations of the study**

The perspectives of the school or the school officials are not included in this study; as a result, a balanced view of all the stakeholders in the school is not offered. However, this is in keeping with CRT. CRT in education serves as a means to contradict common sense, majoritarian tales that position the behaviours of people of colour in deficit terms and deficient when held up to the high-reaching bar of middle-class white norms and values. Therefore, this study does not seek to offer a balanced view; instead, it aims to expose the taken-for-granted ways of thinking and behaving regarding the educational strategies and motivation of black middle-class parents. By focusing on public and private schools only, my study does not seek to be generalisable to other context. Other studies may expand on my study to include a larger number of schools in the sample. Moreover, other studies may wish to include other types of data sources apart from parent interviews, they could include field notes taken from observations recorded during school meetings between parents and teachers, they could also include official communication documents between parents and teachers.

### **Thesis structure**

**Chapter 1** provided a preface to my study. It provides the setting for my study in terms of where it is located geographically, historically, as well as politically.

**Chapter 2** provides an overview of the study. It indicates where my study is located in the body of knowledge and the rationale behind the research.

**Chapter 3** reviews literature on the educational strategies of black middle-class parents in predominantly white schools across the world. The US and the UK are reviewed, ending with the South African case. The chapter provides an analytical framework for understanding the educational strategies of black middle-class parents.

**Chapter 4** offers a more detailed discussion of the conceptual frameworks of CRT and personal agency.

**Chapter 5** discusses the research design and the methods employed in the study, as well as how my methods evolved as the study progressed.

**Chapter 6** presents the results on black middle-class parents, how they self-identify, their motivation and expectations for choosing to place their children in predominantly white schools.

**Chapter 7** presents the results on the educational strategies employed by black middle-class parents in their advocacy for their children when engaging with predominantly white schools.

**Chapter 8** presents the results on how the intersection of race, ethnicity, social class and gender impact black middle-class parents' sense of personal agency.

**Chapter 9** presents the synthesis and conclusion of my research, as well as implications for further research.

**The Bibliography/References** provide a list of all the information sources consulted in this study.



## CHAPTER 3

### Literature review

#### Introduction

Following the background and context of the study given in the previous chapter, in this chapter I draw first on international and then on South African research to determine what we know about the educational strategies used by black middle-class parents to advocate for the interests of their children in white-dominant schools.

I discuss how the intersection of race, class and culture shapes the strategies employed by these parents when advocating for their children in white schools. The argument put forward by scholars within this body of research is largely from a sociological perspective. In this chapter I further this argument and traverse disciplines; the exploration of agency provides a new angle of using psychological processes in understanding the intersection of race, class and ethnicity.

#### Research on the educational strategies of black middle-class parents

Research on how black parents advocate for their children when engaging with white school officials emanates from a growing dissatisfaction with earlier theories and research on parental involvement in education (see Field-Smith, 2005; Cooper, 2009). Early research on parental involvement in education draws on the work of Epstein (2001) who described cooperative strategies that include activities such as participating in child-rearing workshops, assisting children with homework, reviewing and responding to report cards and teacher requests, and serving on school site councils. These seem to be preferable when compared to more critical strategies that might question the methods and intentions of the teachers and school officials. Cooper (2009:380) argues that the activities or practices that denote parental involvement are in fact dictated by schools without taking into consideration the different needs of individual families and children; as a result there is limited power-sharing in the parent-school partnership with such cooperative strategies. Furthermore, she argues that traditional school-based models of parental involvement rarely account for the many ways that parents from low-income, working class and people of colour participate in their children's education and display educational care. Cooper (2009:381) asserts that these traditional models instead privilege white, middle-class behaviour norms. It negates the complexity of parents' lives, demands, schedules, goals, values and their relationships with their children (ibid.). As a result, when parents do not fulfil the deferential parental involvement roles that educators prefer, they are often judged as uncaring (ibid.).

This point echoes an earlier argument by Field-Smith (2005:130) that the discourse of (traditional) parental involvement in the US tends to favour the views of white middle-class families, whereas views regarding African American parental involvement tend to be negative. Field-Smith (ibid.) suggests that the strategies used by black parents often are viewed as uncooperative and not in keeping with traditional strategies that are typically employed by white parents. Offering a historical analysis of parental involvement drawing from interviews with 19 African American parents from five different schools, Field-Smith found that there is a continuation in the legacy of collective advocacy, shared with parents in the pre-segregation era, wherein the post-segregation parents band together and support each other (ibid.).

However, Field-Smith (2005:134) noted that the post-segregation era parents also differed in their individual beliefs and practices; for instance, the married couples in her study reported that they divided the responsibilities of involvement at home and at school between themselves, a luxury that single parents do not have. She (ibid.) also found that African American post-segregation parents responded to teachers' requests to be involved more often when the teacher specified the type of involvement required. Field-Smith (2005:135) went on to caution that educators must consider the cultural perspective from which they define parental involvement; they must also remain attentive to alternative, less visible ways that parents are and can become involved in their children's schooling.

Lareau (2008:117), on the other hand, minimises the role of race while emphasising the importance of class, as illustrated by this quote:

I suggest that black *and* white middle-class families draw on a similar set of generic class resources. In their interactions with institutions, there are three important ways that social class appears to matter: first, middle-class parents presume that they are entitled to have the institution accommodate to their child's individualized needs. Second, middle-class parents feel comfortable voicing their concerns with people in positions of authority. Third, middle-class parents across race appear to be willing and able to climb the hierarchy of authority to pursue their interests

As a result there is also dissatisfaction among scholars, such as Cooper (2009; 2007) and Field-Smith (2005), with the notion that the experiences and resources of parents are *similar based on class*, that the conceptions of parental involvement are *legitimate* rather than a social construction, and that they are not *differentiated by race* (Cooper, 2007:492). Below follows a review of studies that have problematised the

traditional conceptions of parental involvement, as well as the educational practices and strategies deployed by parents from middle-class ethnic minority groups.

Cooper (2007) conducted in-depth interviews with 14 African American mothers to study their school choices and educational advocacy roles. Her study indicated that race, class and gender factors influence the mothers' school choice-making, as well as their value of education. Cooper (2009:389) found that the mothers in her study cared in ways that educators did not necessarily expect, but in ways that they lived. The study further revealed examples of communal care called 'other-mothering' where the mothers could rely on the advocacy of others to stay involved and assist each other. The mothers also referred to justice-seeking efforts where they worked to 'fight' for their children and sacrificed what they could so that their children could succeed (*ibid.*).

Archer (2010) studied the educational practices of minority ethnic middle-class families in the UK. Using semi-structured interviews with 36 parents, pupils and young professionals who formed a heterogeneous group from different ethnic groups, including black Africans, black Caribbean, Muslim Pakistani, Indian Sikhs, Chinese, Arabic, Turkish Cypriots and one white respondent. Her study found that while the parents exhibited and mobilised their generic class resources to advocate for their children's education, their race curtailed key aspects of that class advantage and consequently, minority ethnic families needed to work disproportionately harder to achieve success (Archer, 2010:466). The parents in her study stated that they were subjected to racial inequalities that could qualify the extent of their class advantage. Archer argued that the interconnection of race, class and gender created a social context that differently inflected not only the nature and distribution of capitals between and within families, but also the conditions under which families operated within the educational field and, in turn, how they deployed similar resources and strategies (*ibid.*).

Focussing specifically on black Caribbean parents, Rollock et al. (2015) found that the perception of risk for black middle-class parents was heightened by their awareness of, and often their own experiences of racism and low teacher expectations when they were children. As a result, the parents developed numerous strategies to manage the risk faced by their children and they drew on their particular resources of social, cultural and economic capital to do so (Rollock et al., 2015:98).

Cousins and Mickelson (2011) investigated the characteristics of involvement among African American parents in the US. Their findings suggest that the parents developed "savvy and sophisticated judgment

about education in a way that anticipates barriers, overcomes barriers, or refuses to yield to them” (Cousins and Mickelson, 2011:7).

Irwin and Elley (2011) surveyed parents with children involved in organised activities at schools. Their study found that within the same social class, there are varying perceptions and experiences that parents have in their interaction with schools, resulting in different orientations towards their children’s education. Irwin and Elley argue that anxiety about facilitating a good future for their children is a *particular* rather than a *general* account of middle-class parenting (2011:492). Also, that there are specific contexts in which diverse values and motivations are embedded (Irwin and Elley, 2011:493). However, their study did not focus specifically on black middle-class parents, it also included white parents. It also did not provide specific strategies that parents employed in their engagement with the education of their children.

A study by Cousins and Mickelson (2011) focused on African American parents who participated in a two-year university-community collaborative project designed to empower the parents to become more involved in their adolescent children’s mathematics and science course selection and placements. Using a small sample of 14 parents, interviews with the parents indicated that they saw the need to be actively involved. They tried to be involved although they faced barriers; the barriers occurred in terms of their own resources, such as the time available to assist their children, support from a spouse or partner, and in terms of school relations. The results also revealed that the parents anticipated barriers, but nonetheless responded creatively to them (Cousins and Mickelson, 2011:12). The strategies that the parents implemented to make a success of the educational careers of their children included giving the children pep talks, tutoring them, and visiting the school to engage with the teachers and school officials. The findings are however limited in their generalisability due to the small sample size, and the parents in this study were drawn more from working to lower middle-class parents (Cousins and Mickelson, 2011:4-5). According to the researchers, the study suggested similarities in the characteristics of parent involvement among middle-class African American parents and their sample, as well as middle-class white parents and their sample, in terms of high levels of motivation, assertiveness in relations with schools, and in terms of being proactive and assertive in their children’s school activities at home (Cousins and Mickelson, 2011:12).

In the UK, Rollock et al. (2011) investigated how middle-class blacks negotiate survival in a society marked by race and class discrimination. They argue that the early formative experiences of racism and the class transition from working class to middle class facilitated the development of a complex set of capital upon which middle-class blacks are able to draw from in order to signal their class identity to

whites, therefore minimising the probability of racial discrimination. Although this study did not focus on the educational context, it revealed a sense of personal agency among middle-class blacks to challenge and redefine themselves and communicate their self-worth and value, rather than remaining passive and playing the victim.

Another study by Vincent et al. (2012) went further and identified five themes in the strategies employed by black middle-class parents. They identified strategies that indicated a determination to obtain the best, strategies that were circumspect, indicating hyper-vigilance; those that were confrontational and more reactive and were focused on giving the child a 'fighting chance'; and finally, those that were more proactive but generalised to the child's wellbeing rather than the educational ideals or the school itself.

Chapman and Bhopal's study (2013) challenged the common sense notion of painting parents of colour as inattentive and non-participatory. Using data drawn from two empirical studies conducted in the US and the UK, they focused on the role of mothers as advocates in their children's education. They found that black mothers pushed their children to use education as a vehicle for empowerment, they accessed outside networks, and advocated at the school level to support their children (Chapman and Bhopal, 2013:570). Their study also revealed that the mothers' daily actions were primarily defined by their gendered roles as mothers; however, their desires for their children were shaped by their classed and raced experiences (ibid.). This study by Chapman and Bhopal helped to highlight the distinction between how the mothers advocated for their children. For instance, the mothers in the study did their utmost to ensure that their children worked hard, met deadlines, revised for their examinations, handed in their homework on time, helped them with their homework, and orchestrated other learning opportunities for them to strengthen their readiness for tertiary education (Chapman and Bhopal, 2013:572-573).

I describe these strategies as child-directed strategies, as they are geared at empowering the child to navigate school successfully. The mothers in their studies also used strategies, such as battling the schools' attitude and behaviour towards their children, attending parent-teacher conferences and school meetings, advocating for their children to be placed in certain classes and receive special education services, as well as making appointments with the school to see teachers if there were issues with their children's work (Chapman and Bhopal, 2013:576).

I describe these strategies as adult-directed strategies as they are geared at intervening on behalf of the child by engaging with the school officials, whether it is with the teacher, administration, principal or governing body. Instead of focusing on the parallels in the characteristics of parent involvement between

black and white middle-class parents, such as the one drawn by Cousins and Mickelson (2011), the Chapman and Bhopal study (2013) highlights the fact that for people of colour, their strategies in engaging with school officials are not always received positively or viewed as constructive or cooperative. Instead, the mothers were demonised and viewed as hostile and difficult because they challenged the status quo.

Allen (2013) studied the approaches to schooling of black middle-class males. Focusing on six black middle-class males and their parents, Allen's study highlights the ways in which black middle-class male youth balance the academic expectations of their parents with the cultural expectations of their peers through tactical acts of resistance and accommodation.

Using a qualitative study of 16 black fathers with differing parenting arrangements, Reynolds, Howard and Jones (2015) focused specifically on the role of black fathers and the strategies that they employ when engaging with school officials. Although their sample and therefore their generalisability is limited, their study challenges deficit views of black fathers, as well as highlights the gendered ways in which schools are constituted, and that schools operate as female-dominated spaces that may serve to exclude fathers (Reynolds, Howard and Jones, 2015:102).

Below I extract some themes from the existing literature on the educational strategies of black middle-class parents in predominantly white schools across the world.

### **They Pull Rank**

Rank in this case refers to the parents drawing attention to their relative position of significance when compared to others. This might be other parents, other black parents, or in comparison to the staff at the school. Rollock et al. (2015:98-100) refer to strategies used by black middle-class parents to gain recognition, but also to defend themselves and their children against misrecognition and misrepresentation. These authors also mention the sense of "double consciousness" of black fathers. (Rollock et al., 2015:96-97). As a result, black parents constantly have to pull rank in order to clarify their identity as actively involved parents, rather than passive parents. They have to clarify their level of education, and economic, political or professional status, as well as dress and act in ways that communicate that status. This happens in an endeavour to 'be taken seriously' in their attempts to advocate for their children in ways that white middle-class parents do not necessarily need to.

***(a) Rank communicated through active involvement in their children's education***

Different studies highlight the fact that as a racial group there is an expectation by white school officials that black parents are passive and not actively involved in the education of their children. As a result, the black middle-class parents who took an active role, reported a sense of surprise, shock, apprehension and discomfort from the school officials (Reynold, Howard and Jones, 2015:100); others reported hostility, feelings of being unwelcome, as well as being viewed as threatening by the school officials (Chapman and Bhopal, 2013:576), However, their active involvement in their children's education inadvertently set them apart from other parents and thus gave them recognition. As noted by Vincent et al., the strategies employed when engaging with school officials included defending themselves and their children against misrecognition by deploying resources to position themselves as assertive but reasonable advocates for their children (2012b:266). Other parents reported monitoring the school and their children to ensure that the teachers were aware of the particular needs of their children (Vincent et al., 2012:348). Cousins and Mickelson (2011:7) also offered parents' accounts of how they let the school 'know' of their active involvement in their children's education. They made themselves available to the (school) system so that they knew that they were involved, they also visited the school or contacted teachers via email, and engaged in discussions with school administrators and teachers (Cousin and Mickelson, 2011:8).

***(b) Rank communicated through their education, economic, political or professional status***

In Reynold et al.'s study of black fathers, they found that according to these fathers, professional status was often determined within the first couple of seconds based on appearances, and then decisions about the subsequent treatment they would receive would then ensue (2015:98). Also that as teachers became more aware of the father's levels of education and perceived social status, they seemed to be a little more at ease with their presence, and race seemed to become less of a factor (Reynold et al., 2015:101). Vincent et al. (2012b:267) offered similar accounts where black middle-class parents had to state what job they did and their credentials in order to be taken seriously.

***(c) Rank communicated through their dress code***

The fathers in Reynold et al.'s study (2015:99) indicated that they wore attire that communicated their professional stature as their appearance affected the treatment they would receive from the school officials. One father reported that he made a point of wearing "work attire, you know, shirt and tie, so that they can understand who they are dealing with" (Reynold et al., 2015:99). The parents in Vincent et al.'s study spoke of the importance they placed on being smartly dressed in public settings for themselves

and their children (2012b:270). One mother in their study reported the importance of ironing her children's clothes and polishing their shoes in order to make sure that they did not present as scruffy, thus preventing others from making judgements about her (2012b:269). A parent in Allen's study mentioned how as a child he would "sanitise himself" by shrinking his afro when engaging with school officials so that he was not perceived as a threat (2013:209).

#### ***(d) Rank communicated through their behaviour and communication styles***

Vincent et al. (2012b:271) reported on parents using language and styles of communication that would improve their chances of being heard by school officials; these included avoiding explicitly mentioning race or racism, gently and carefully raising their concerns to avoid getting shut down by school officials. Rollock et al. (2011:1087) refer to black middle-class parents using their accent, composure and politeness along with persistence and knowledge as strategies that enabled them to take their complaints to the highest channels and obtain the outcome they sought. The parents report employing 'code switching' in order to avoid 'sounding black', which denotes a certain lack of education, when engaging with white school officials (ibid.). In another study by Vincent et al. the parents reported playing things down not to appear to 'know it all' in order to humble themselves, while at the same time showing that they knew what they were talking about when dealing with teachers (2012:348).

#### **They teach their children navigational skills**

The parents teach their children navigational skills in four main ways; by supplementing the school curriculum, developing a strong work ethic, reinforcing their racial and cultural identity to break limiting racial stereotypes and finally, by using their personal histories to justify their parenting strategies.

(a) ***giving their children academic support*** through extra tutoring, helping with and monitoring homework, helping the children learn study skills and prepare for examinations. The mothers in Chapman and Bhopal's study ensured that the children met academic deadlines for the submission of work, checked their homework, helped them review their work in preparation for exams, and accessed additional programmes offered in the community or at colleges to supplement their children's education and reading to enter tertiary studies (2013:572-573). Other studies reported similar findings amongst the parents who were determined to get the best for their children (see Cousins and Mickelson 2011:9; Vincent et al., 2012:345). These parents involved their children in extracurricular activities to enrich their learning experience and enable them to excel (see Vincent et al., 2012:346). The parents in Cousins and



Mickelson's study reported using strategies such as monitoring and checking their homework and their grades, employing tutors where necessary, or helping their children themselves (2011:9).

(b) ***empowering the children with a work ethic that ensures that they stay ahead of their white counterparts***

The mothers in Chapman and Bhopal's study (2013) spoke about how their own identity of being black was a reflection on having to "prove yourself" and having to do well despite this. Such ideas also manifested in how the women instilled ideas of educational success in their own children (Chapman and Bhopal, 2013:574). The mothers taught their children to understand that as people of colour they would need to work twice as hard as their white counterparts to achieve the same level of success.

(c) ***reinforcing their children's racial and cultural identity to break the limiting racial stereotypes*** through socialisation practices. Chapman and Bhopal discuss how the mothers in their study

taught their children how to "fit in" so that they did not stand out in the wrong way that might perpetuate the racial stereotypes held about black boys (2013:579). These included teaching their children how to speak well, how to dress, and getting extra tutoring and extra classes to "stay ahead" or keep up. The findings indicate that the parents imparted their understanding of the prevalence of racism to their children in order to protect and guide them in school (Chapman and Bhopal, 2013:580). The parents in Vincent et al.'s study (2012b) armed their children with a "good script" of having a good attitude in terms of being enthusiastic, able and relatively complaint, and having high ambitions and aspirations. The good script was intended to position the child favourably and protect them from uninformed and unknowing teacher prejudice (Vincent et al., 2012b:270). The parents in Allen's study (2013:203) referred to being able to "walk in and out of worlds" meaning that they had learnt and in turn taught their sons how to move between cultures by adopting and performing certain behaviours and attitudes in one cultural context while performing a different set behaviours and attitudes in another. The strategy of "border crossing" (Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba, 1991 in Allen, 2013:209) or "cultural straddling" (Carter, 2005 in Allen, 2013:209) taught the children ways of transitioning between white and black worlds, and the parents saw it as a necessary skill of resilience that their children needed to master (Allen, 2013:209).

(d) ***They used their own personal histories to justify their parenting strategies and practices to their children.*** Cousins and Mickelson's parent responses also revealed how they used their own

experiences, their successes, limitations and struggles, as a context for their beliefs. They also used their experiences as road maps to guide their children (Cousin and Mickelson, 2011:8). Some of the mothers in Chapman and Bhopal's study (2013) returned to school to improve their own education. The

respondents spoke about the importance of education in relation to their own upbringing and the effect this had on how they brought up their own children (2013:579). Rollock et al. (2011:1084) also referred to the childhood experiences of black middle-class parents when encountering racism and prejudice, and how in response they developed strategies to negotiate a less fraught minoritised existence.

The literature focuses on the issues largely from a sociological perspective, rather than from a psychosocial perspective. As a result, while the individual differences in the parenting values (see Irwin and Elley, 2011), strategies (Vincent et al., 2011) and voices (see Vincent and Martin, 2002) within the middle-class black parents can be acknowledged, the differences are in fact not explained. This is because such an explanation would have to investigate the personal interests and motives of each parent and how their actions are consistent or contradictory to those interests and motives of other parents, and how in the end this positions them in their ability and effectiveness in activating their social capital.

Furthermore, while the parents' sense of agency is acknowledged and their ability to activate their social capital to challenge racism and the limitations placed upon them as black middle-class parents or their children, little insight is given on what creates the variation in the levels of parental agency used to activate their social capital. That is, what is it in the parents' use of strategies that allows them to achieve greater cooperation in their engagement with the school, or encounter barriers; how have they used their prior experience and their shared experiences with other black middle-class parents to refine and reposition their initial strategies; or have they projected their internalised sense of powerlessness to how they engage with and what they expect from the school and therefore their children? Therefore, despite their material and cultural capital, why do some black middle-class parents continue to have their high expectations and support for education thwarted by racist stereotyping and exclusion (see Gillborn et al., 2012b).

Finally, there is very little discussion within this corpus on whether the type of strategies employed by the parents differ amongst black parents for couples who both identify as black, inter-racial couples and mixed race parents. Harris and Khanna's (2010) study illustrates that there is not a singular, monolithic group of black people; in fact, the group is heterogeneous and distinguishable from each other based on class, ethnicity and race. Furthermore, the researchers found that while there is greater tolerance for the black community's racial diversity, there is less tolerance for its class diversity. A country like South Africa, with its so-called Rainbow Nation, carries within it different shades of black, which include South African-born blacks, inter-racial couples where one parent self-identifies as black married to a white partner,

those who self-identify as Coloured, as well as blacks from other African countries who have made South Africa their home.

In South Africa, Lemmer and Van Wyk (2004) focused on the role of the family in providing the social capital needed by schools to optimise learners' school achievements. Using questionnaires and in-depth interviews with parents and educators, the researchers found that educators did not involve parents in any meaningful way in the education of their children. Emphasis was placed on involving parents to support learning at home, although there was uncertainty on how parents could be involved in academic work. The researchers ascertained that although the role of parents was acknowledged, both educators and parents did not know how to achieve this.

Ngidi and Qwabe (2006) explored the role of parents as partners in creating a culture of teaching and learning, together with teachers and principals. Msila (2005) examined the impact of social capital on the school's general success. Focusing on former white schools, Soudien (2010) found that there was an asymmetry in the contact that took place between black and white, which produced practices of cultural assimilation in which black people were required to give up their own aesthetics and cultural practices in favour of those of the dominant middle-class and white community. In his concluding remarks, Soudien (2010:364) noted, "It is important to recognize the unavoidably complex ways in which race and class are being articulated [and] the significant framing device for this re-articulation is the intergenerational relationship and the capacity of older people to mediate the complexity of the new South Africa for young people".

Overall, there is no research on the strategies deployed by black middle-class parents, in particular, who find themselves in the paradoxical situation of being racial minorities in schools established in a black majority country. Beyond what is reported in the media, in the classrooms and offices of white school officials where tensions are not documented and published for public consumption, the questions that arise are, "In private engagements with school officials, what other strategies are parents employing in their pursuit of quality education for their children?" and "How do they exercise their agency?". Given the history of race, inequality and apartheid in South Africa, why would black parents assume that a well-resourced, English-based medium, historically-white school would prioritise the educational needs and aspirations of its black learners in the same way as it does their white counterparts? By virtue of their educational level, social class, cultural and historical awareness and memory of the struggle for equality, and their lived experience in a racist South Africa pre-1994 should their status not predispose them to be more hands-on and proactive in the strategies that they employ?

Southall (2016) echoes the sentiments that the black middle class need to be the focus of research from a social science perspective. Recounting the history of its emergence before democracy in South Africa, he distinguishes between the two approaches of consumption and production that have characterised how the black middle class has been studied in South Africa. He argues that this has created a bias in how they have been studied, and in turn has left important gaps in our understanding. Other scholars, such as Ncube (2015), as well as Kunene, Mubila and Akinkugbe (2015), also focused on the spending habits of the black middle class. Chipkin (2012) studied how changing legislation in the housing sector triggered the mobility of the black middle class into cities like Roodepoort as their purchasing power improved and the barriers to property ownership were relaxed. However, from the educational context, their agential role in schools in terms of how they advocate for their children remained unexplored in South Africa. Where the agential role of parents was explored, it focused on parental involvement within the black community from the perspective of parents in the working and lower classes, who largely educate their children in predominantly black schools (see Motala and Luxomo, 2014; Singh, Mbokodi and Msila, 2004).

### **Key lessons and gaps in the literature**

Within the international literature the agential roles of black middle-class parents in white schools has been the focus of research (see Chapman and Bhopal, 2013; Vincent et al., 2012; Cousins and Mickelson, 2011; Irwin and Elley, 2011; Harris and Khanna, 2010; Bodovski, 2010). However, the limitation with these studies is that they originated in countries where blacks are demographic minorities, In South Africa, they are only minorities within the schools; paradoxically, they constitute a majority within the country.

Research from other countries approached this subject from a sociological perspective (see Irwin and Elley, 2011; Vincent et al., 2012; Vincent and Martin, 2002), making it hard to explain the differences in how PA is activated or not activated and why certain strategies are chosen over others. This highlighted a gap in the literature, necessitating a need to go beyond the social meanings of PA and strategy use. It required an analysis that included psychological factors such as the parents' motivation and interests. My study sought to explore how the social identities of parents in terms of their race, class and ethnicity positions them in their ability and effectiveness to activate their agency within white schools. I wanted to gain insight into what creates the variation in the levels of personal agency used to advocate for their children when critical racial incidents occur.

Also within the international literature there is very little discussion on whether the type of strategies employed by parents differ among and across the population of black middle-class parents; for example, for couples who both identify as black, inter-racial couples and mixed race parents (see Harris and Khanna, 2010). South Africa with its racial, class and cultural diversity offered the opportunity to see how such diverse parents within the black middle-class community exercise their agency within white dominant schools.

In the South African context, I sought to set my study apart from other studies that focused on parental involvement within the black community as they approached the problem from the perspective of parents in the working and lower classes, who largely educate their children in predominantly black schools (see Motala and Luxomo, 2014; Singh et al., 2004). Instead, I focused specifically on black middle-class parents because they are in the unique position of being a racial minority in schools, while in South Africa they constitute a racial majority.

Also, in the South African context, black middle-class parents have not been the primary focus of much research; instead, studies have grouped them as part of the burgeoning middle class, analysing their spending habits (see Ncube, 2015; Kunene et al., 2015), their emergence (see Southall, 2016), and their ownership of property in historically white dominant neighbourhoods (Chipkin, 2012). However, from the educational context, their agential role in schools in terms of how they advocated for their children remained unexplored in South Africa.

Finally, my study afforded me the opportunity to interview parents from public and private schools. This offered a unique opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis of the level of influence these parents enjoyed and whether their advocacy efforts were equally fruitful on either side of the fence when compared to each other, as well as when compared to their white counterparts.

Therefore, in choosing black middle-class parents as the respondents, as well as focusing on how being black and middle class shapes their thinking, feelings and choices, my study places race and class at its centre of inquiry, rather than simply using them as demographic variables. The South African context affords me the opportunity to study the parent's strategies in a context that is unique to that offered by studies nationally and internationally, as indicated above. The exploration of agency provides a new angle to use psychological processes in understanding the intersection of race, class and ethnicity. In this regard, my study straddles disciplines, adding a dimension not previously adopted by other studies.

## CHAPTER 4

### Theoretical framework

#### Introduction

This study on race, agency and education finds powerful resonances in what has been called Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Crenshaw, 2011; Allen, 2012; Chapman and Bhopal, 2013). Such a framework not only informs and justifies the design of the study and enables a coherent, relevant and meaningful interpretation of the data on black middle-class parents and the strategies they use to advance the interests of their children in predominantly white South African schools. I will also draw on Parental Agency (PA) (Vincent, 2001) within this framework to refer to specific strategies parents use to advocate for their children within the critical frame adopted for this study.

#### Critical Race Theory

CRT is a theoretical tool that interrogates the ways in which people of colour continue to experience present-day instantiations and historical legacies of racial oppression (Chapman and Bhopal, 2013:567). Although Allen (2012:137) discusses CRT from an American perspective, the five foundational tenets of CRT that he discussed are applicable to all societies:

- CRT places race and its intersection with other identities at the centre of its analysis;
- It challenges dominant ideologies with the goal of highlighting how they privilege dominant groups and maintain the status quo of racial inequalities;
- It uses storytelling and counter-narrative to give precedence to the lived experiences of minoritised groups and to highlight the vagaries of racism in everyday life;
- It is committed to social justice with the goal of eliminating injustices; and
- Because CRT places race and its intersection with other identities such as culture, gender and ethnicity, at the centre of its analysis, as an analytic framework it is applicable within and across disciplines as identities and race are central to understanding human experiences and interactions.

Allen (2012:173) further argues that CRT in education serves as a means to contradict common sense and majoritarian tales that pose the behaviours of people of colour in deficit terms and deficient when held up to the high reaching bar of middle-class white norms and values. Hence, I move away from the concept of *parental involvement*, which privileges conformity and subjugation by black parents using

collaborative strategies rather than critical strategies that challenge and resist the methods and intentions of white school officials when dealing with black parents and learners (see Field-Smith, 2005:130). As noted by Cooper (2009:380), the activities and practices that denote *parental involvement* have limited power-sharing in the parent-school partnership; they do not account for the myriad ways in which for example people of colour participate in their children's education and display educational care.

In this study I explore how the social identities of parents in terms of their race, class and ethnicity position them in their ability and effectiveness in activating their agency within white schools. I want to gain insight into what creates the variation in the levels of personal agency parents use to advocate for their children when critical racial incidents occur. In doing this, I hope to address the gap in the literature created by approaching this subject from a sociological perspective (see Irwin and Elley, 2011; Vincent et al., 2012; Vincent and Martin, 2002), making it hard to explain the differences in how PA is activated or not activated and why certain strategies are chosen over others. In this way my study will go beyond the social meanings of PA and strategy use, and bring in psychological perspectives on parental motivations, choices and strategies. This explains my rationale for marrying CRT and Critical Psychology in my analytical framework.

Drawing synergies between CRT and Critical Psychology, Salter and Adams (2013:782) posit that "the elements that define critical psychology" include the following:

- a systematic examination of how some varieties of psychological action and experience are privileged;
- insights on how all varieties of psychology are sociocultural and historical constructions;
- articulations of the ways in which psychological culture operates beyond the boundaries of academic and professional practice; and
- exploration of the way everyday "ordinary psychology" structures academic and professional work and its basis for resistance to contemporary disciplinary practices.

These authors further argue that critical psychology initiatives are cognisant of the ways in which mainstream psychology operates within particular cultural paradigms and elaborates theoretical positions that provide avenues for social change (Salter and Adams, 2013:782). In line with this thinking, but expanding further on the argument, DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2014) question why race as a socio-historical construct has not traditionally been investigated in educational psychology research. They argue that generally, in empirical research, constructs like race are included in the research process for

descriptive/demographic purposes (i.e., to simply describe participants in the Methods section but without using race in any further analysis); for explanatory purposes (i.e., when race is used to explain variance in outcome variables such as academic performance in mathematics); and/or for comparative purposes (i.e., when the information is used to make comparisons among various groups) (2014:247). DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2014:244) propose that as a means of expanding educational psychology's use of race as a sociohistorical construct, they introduce the concepts of race-focused and race-reimagined constructs.

DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2014) make a distinction between research in educational psychology that focuses on race-focused constructs versus studies that focus on race-imagined constructs. Both types of studies place race at the centre of research; however, race-focused constructs are grounded in race-based and cultural theories. Utilising a race-focused approach involves placing racial constructs at the centre of analysis, making it the focus of the research rather than simply playing a cursory or non-existent role (DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2014:248). On the other hand, race-imagined constructs view a traditional construct, which is not necessarily derived from a racial theory, from a socio-culturally relevant lens. This includes employing a race-influenced theoretical framework to explicate a non-racial construct, using participants from a specific racial group. They argue that, in doing so, all aspects of the research study are influenced by race-influenced research and theories, including the theoretical framework, research methods and research interpretations (ibid.).

In this study, I endeavour to explain the differences in how PA is activated, in a context where race and racism are systematically embedded within a post-apartheid South Africa and the microcosm of white dominated schools. I employ a race-influenced theoretical framework, in this case CRT, to explicate a non-racial construct, in this case PA, using participants from a specific racial group, in this case black middle-class parents. As a result, all aspects of my study are influenced by race-influenced research and theories, including the theoretical framework, research methods and research interpretations (DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz, 2014:248). Below I elaborate on personal agency as a concept first and then focus specifically on PA as the second component informing my theoretical framework.

## **Parental Agency**

PA is socio-culturally mediated (Ahearn, 2001:112). Martin (2004:135) defines agency as "the capability of individual human beings to make choices and act on these choices in ways that make a difference in their lives". According to Bandura (2006:164), to be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning



and life circumstances. This view recognises people as co-constructors of their own reality. In this study, I aim to further this line of thinking by studying the educational strategies of black middle-class parents by exploring their sense of personal agency, demonstrated in the strategies that they employ when advocating for their children in white-dominant schools.

Here I draw parallels with the work of Vincent (2001) and Auerbach (2002) who studied PA within minoritised groups to explore how these parents employ certain interventions and strategies to advocate for their children who face racial barriers in educational settings. Vincent (2001), together with her colleagues (see Martin, Ranson and Vincent, 2000), studied 76 parents in two secondary schools in the UK who were part of a larger research project comprising of six schools, aimed at exploring the formation and expression of parental voices in the school context. Defining PA as the actions and responses undertaken by the parents in response to their concerns (Vincent, 2001:349), they found the following ways in which PA was expressed. The parents used silence, which constituted inaction, waiting and seeing; they used conversation, which involved engaging in debate and dialogue with the school officials; they also used storming, expressed as direct protest and/or anger; by-pass involved the parents making their own arrangements which by-pass the school, such as employing tutors; and finally exiting, which meant moving the child from the school (Vincent, 2001:363).

Vincent (2001) explains that parental interventions do not occur in a vacuum, but are set within a personal work-related and domestic context. Furthermore, the willingness and ability to intervene in the workings of the school may also be shaped by particular sets of circumstances, such as bullying or a child's special needs, which can produce intense periods of interaction (Vincent, 2001:349). As a result, in the context of my study, it is important to understand the circumstances under which PA is activated. Thus, to explore the critical racial incidents that occur in predominantly white schools that trigger or call for the black middle-class parent to choose certain strategies over others in order to advocate for their child.

In Auerbach's study (2002:1385), the stories told by the Latino parents revealed types of PA that countered stereotypes of uninvolved Latino parents who delegated academic matters to the school. Auerbach (2002:1384) found that these counter-stories illustrated that Latino PA may also be exercised through insightful critique of the educational system, as well as through participation in educational activities. Another finding of Auerbach (2002:1385) was that counter-stories are part of a repertoire of "invisible strategies" of educational support employed by Latino parents, which had never before been documented. Auerbach (2002:1384) advised that it is instructive to peruse parental discourse for all signs of the visible and not so visible ways that they support their children's schooling, as parents themselves

do not typically draw attention to these. According to her, the very act of foregrounding parents' stories at school, with their implications of proactive protagonists, may reinforce awareness of the role of PA in students' careers (2002:1385).

Schnee and Bose (2012:91) studied the roles that parents and caregivers are given and/or choose to enact to support their children's mathematics learning, particularly in relation to their children's homework. Using data culled from interviews with parents of elementary-age children from three different urban school districts in the north-eastern US, they examined the variety and complexity of parental beliefs and perceptions that motivate the exercising of agency, as well as their actions themselves (Schnee and Bose, 2012:96). The authors define PA as "intentional goal-directed behaviour". They focused on how and why agency is expressed and what contributes to that expression (ibid.). Their findings suggest that even when parents seem to be "passive" or "inactive" in a way that is typically expected of parents to become involved in their children's education, the parents' null actions also constitute agency. Some use null actions as a strategy to build self-reliance in the child (Schnee and Bose, 2012:101), while other used null actions as a response to impediments to PA (Schnee and Bose, 2012:104). They posit that certain impediments, such as limited English language ability and the cultural expectations of school, pose significant barriers to PA for immigrant parents.

The significance of this research to my focus on parents' motivation and educational strategies is that it highlights the fact that PA should not be limited to explicit actions. The studies by Auerbach (2002), as well as Schnee and Bose (2012), illustrate that even where there seems to be "inaction" or "passivity", there is agency. Therefore, it is important to explore why parents adopt null actions and what goals the null actions enable them to achieve in their efforts to deal with critical racial incidents at their children's schools. This is where the need to explore parents' motivations, choices and intentions becomes necessary, pushing for a confluence of the sociological and psychological perspectives.

These studies highlight the four components to human agency mentioned by Bandura (2006:164) of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. Intentionality refers to the intentions which include action plans and strategies for realising them; forethought refers to setting goals and anticipating the likely outcomes of prospective actions to guide and motivate their efforts; self-reactiveness refers to the parents' ability to construct appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution; and self-reflectiveness refers to the parent's metacognitive capability to reflect upon oneself and the adequacy of one's thoughts and actions. Covert (2014:174) makes the point that agency is closely linked to intent, and that even with intent, there is no guarantee that an individual will

achieve the said outcomes from all interactions. Her model focuses on the individual's knowledge and skill, their internal outcome and how this influences their interaction in order to achieve the external outcome, and ultimately how this leads to a change in attitudes (Covert, 2014:165). In her study on Intercultural Competency, Covert (2014) studied how students use agency to develop intercultural competence while studying abroad for a period of a semester. Her findings suggest that personal agency played an important role in participants' development of intercultural competence; and that intercultural competence occurred when participants made intentional and purposeful changes in their communication and behaviour to fit the cultural norms of the host culture, which inadvertently enabled them to achieve their goals (Covert, 2014:163).

Covert's (2014) study pays only cursory attention to the importance of the context under which agency is activated. By contrast, the studies by Vincent (2001) and Auerbach (2002), which are centred on CRT as their analytical framework, are most cognisant of the context under which agency is activated. In my study, the racial dynamics emanating from the history of apartheid in South Africa, of black middle-class parents being a racial minority at a predominantly white school while at the same time being a racial majority in the country, necessitates the juxtaposition of agency against the context of race and racism. It is important to explore how the black parents' sense of purpose, choice, action and intent is shaped by their context. Therefore, how does their race and memory of apartheid influence the strategies used and how they do self-regulate by altering their choices and reflect upon the adequacy of their thoughts and actions. In my study I focus on critical situations, where black middle-class parents needed to engage with white school officials as a result of some crisis or situation affecting their child.

My focus on parents raises similar, but not identical, questions to those raised by Jansen (2009) in his book "Knowledge in the Blood" (2009) where he chronicled how knowledge is transmitted from one generation to the next amongst white students. Jansen defines "knowledge in the blood" as knowledge embedded in the emotional, psychic, spiritual, social, economic, political and psychological lives of a community (2009:171). It is knowledge passed from one generation to the next through socialisation. My particular focus on the parents is triggered by an awareness heightened by my own personal experiences as a black middle-class parent educating my children in predominantly white schools. It is also shaped by my professional work as an educational psychologist who works primarily with parents from this demographic in my private practice. What I have learnt personally and professionally about parents is that where their children are concerned, everything is personal and emotional! Notions of professionalism, conflict resolution, emotional intelligence and Christian values that encourage turning the other cheek are

put on hold when parents deem their child to be in harm's way. In that critical moment, how personal agency finds expression is really unpredictable.

This is eloquently articulated in Jansen's chapter "Meet the Parents" (2009:233) where he narrates numerous encounters that he had with parents, be it at community meetings or the University of Pretoria's Welcoming Address to first-year students. What Jansen captures in this chapter is how personal, vulnerable and emotional parents felt and engaged with him, as they entrusted him with the education of their children. While some of the encounters he narrates turned unexpectedly hostile, most of the encounters enabled parents to lower their defences, look beyond racial prejudice and trust "the black dean" (Jansen, 2009:248). He asks, "How is it possible that white Afrikaner parents can change so quickly, at one moment being advocates and supporters of Apartheid and then suddenly becoming these pragmatic citizens of a new social order? How can belief systems, so strongly entrenched over decades, be traded so easily in the opportunism of the market?" (Jansen, 2009:248).

Turning the mirror on the same question, where the authority is now white and the parents black, I ask, "What was the black parents' motivation for choosing to place their child in a predominantly white school, entrusting them to white teachers and officials?". Given the history of race, inequality and apartheid in South Africa, why would black parents assume that a well-resourced, English-based medium, predominantly white school would prioritise the educational needs and aspirations of its black learners in the same way as it does their white counterparts? By virtue of their educational level, social class, cultural and historical awareness and memory of the struggle for equality and their lived experience in a racist South Africa pre-1994, should their status not predispose them to be more vigilant, and therefore hands-on and proactive in the strategies that they employ?

Jansen (2009:254) argues that a pedagogy of post-conflict societies must account for these complexities and engage both concealed and confessional knowledges in ways that enable an authentic encounter not only with the past but with the actors within it. My questions problematise the extent to which the 'knowledge in the blood' of black parents activate their sense of agency. Giroux (1983:108) argued that human agency helps us to understand more thoroughly the complex ways in which people mediate and respond to the interface between their own lived experience and structures of domination and constraints. The exploration of agency, through studying the parents' behavioural, emotional and cognitive processes, which facilitate the activation of agency, casts a new angle and adds a new dimension not previously undertaken, of using psychological processes in understanding the intersection of race, class and ethnicity. The theoretical framework drawing on CRT will both frame the study and be critically

interrogated as a consequence of the study. That is, what can CRT contribute to but also learn from (e.g. new concepts relevant to CRT) this study into how black middle-class parents act in response to dilemmas regarding race and education in white-dominant schools. I will therefore use the theories of CRT and PA to interpret the findings from this study, as well as test the core claims and assumptions of these theories. If merited, I will also reflect on their limitations in aiding our understanding of how parents' identities, strategies and actions prevail when advocating for their children in predominantly white schools.

## CHAPTER 5

### Research design and methods

#### Introduction

The goal of my study is to investigate the strategies used by black middle-class parents to advance and advocate for their children in schools where they are a racial minority, while being a racial majority in post-apartheid South Africa. I wish to understand how these parents handle critical racial incidents that affect their children when they engage with white school officials.

The nature of questions that I am asking in this study seek to understand the thoughts and feelings that underpin the parents' behaviour, choices and expectations. The study offers a "close-up reality" (Cohen et al., 2011:290) and "thick description" (Geertz, 1973 in Cohen et al., 2011:290) of the parents' lived experiences of, thoughts about, and feelings for a situation. I was more interested in the parents' perspectives and personal experiences as individuals and as black people. I was hoping to capture their unique and common stories in a way that explained how, as parents, they were affected by racism as well as how, in turn, they affected the racial dynamics within predominantly white schools when racial incidents affected their children. A qualitative research approach enabled me to do what DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz called for in studying race-imaged constructs (2014:248). Through clinical interviews, I explore the behavioural, emotional and cognitive processes used by black middle-class parents as they endeavour to advocate for their children. The exploration of agency offers a new perspective by using psychological processes in understanding the intersection of race, class and ethnicity in the educational decision-making of parents. This adds a dimension not previously included in other studies. In turn, my study seeks to straddle the socio-cultural and psychological domains.

To demarcate their experiences from that of other black parents, I focused specifically on black middle-class parents because they are in the unique position of being a racial minority in schools, while in South Africa they constitute a racial majority. I sought to set my study apart from others conducted within South Africa that focused on parental involvement within the black community from the perspective of parents in the working and lower classes who largely educate their children in predominantly black schools (see Motala and Luxomo, 2014; Singh et al., 2004).

In the South African context, the black middle-class parents has not been the primary focus of much research. Instead, studies have grouped them as part of the burgeoning middle class, analysing their spending habits (see Ncube, 2015; Kunene et al., 2015), and how the political landscape in South Africa

has led to the emergence of the black middle class (see Southall, 2016). Chipkin (2012) focused on how changing legislation in the housing sector triggered the mobility of the black middle class into cities like Roodepoort as their purchasing power improved and the barriers to property ownership were relaxed. However, from the educational context, their agential role in schools in terms of how they advocate for their children remains unexplored in South Africa.

Within the international literature numerous scholars studied the agential roles of black middle-class parents in white schools (see Chapman and Bhopal, 2013; Vincent et al., 2012; Cousins and Mickelson, 2011; Irwin and Elley, 2011; Harris and Khanna, 2010; Bodovski 2010). However, the limitation with these studies is that they originate in countries where blacks are demographic minorities, while in South Africa blacks are racial minorities within the sampled schools, even while they constitute a majority within the country.

A qualitative research design allowed for the in-depth exploration of the parents' unique experiences as actors or agents. It also allowed an exploration of how the parents managed their interactions with white school officials and how they drew on or activated their racial, class and cultural resources to advocate for their children inside predominantly white schools. In line with CRT, my study is based on the premise that black middle-class parents are not simply "acted upon" by the system, but that they actively influence, resist, remonstrate and withdraw at various points in their endeavour to represent their cause.

### **About the parents**

The parents were identified through snowball sampling (see Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:104), beginning with the first three parents who are personally known to me, whom I invited to participate in the pilot study. I also approached other people that I go to gym with, who, like myself, enjoy the privilege of having gym membership, and have the flexibility in their time and work commitments to attend gym every morning. I, like the respondents in my study, reside and work in the Roodepoort area. I am Pedi, married to a Motswana man. I, too, educate my children in schools that are predominantly white. Others are colleagues in the health care profession, who work in private practice, like myself, servicing a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-national clientele within the Roodepoort area. The remainder of my respondents were sourced from church groups, referred by either my student assistant, or friends. These people were then used as informants to identify or put me in touch with others who qualify for inclusion and these, in turn, identified yet others.

As a result, my class interests and ambitions overlap with those of the respondents in my study. This created a level of camaraderie and shared experiences about the challenges of racism and how it affects

us as parents and our children within white-dominant schools in the Roodepoort area. This enabled me to break the ice, build trust and dive easily into the interview questions. It also enabled the parents to open up to me at a deep and personal level to the extent where many of them exposed their vulnerabilities to me. They could reference incidents that were familiar to me, which they did not need to explain or create a context for. I was the interviewer, as well as a part of them, rather than an outsider. As a result of my race, my professional position within the community as the Educational Psychologist, my gender and marital status, my ethnicity, my class interests and ambitions, I did not purport to be neutral or objective. I was definitely not the “positionless researcher who pursues objective truth without the biasing effects of racial or other identity baggage” (Salter and Adam, 2013:783).

In total I interviewed 19 parents with children attending both public and private schools in the Roodepoort area. Some of the parents I interviewed at my office, at their request, for privacy reasons, at a time that was convenient for them, while others I interviewed at their place of work or in their homes. All the parents were informed that their participation was voluntary, and they all signed consent forms that explained the purpose of my study. A copy of the consent form is attached under Appendix 2. A tape recorder was used to record all the interviews. Below follows a detailed description of each parent:

Lesedi is a married mother of two children. Her children attend the same Model C primary school that my children attended when they were still in primary school. She is a Motswana, married to a Xhosa man; both are employed full-time. Lesedi holds a Master’s degree and works in the marketing industry for a multi-national company. Both her parents are highly educated and her father, in particular, worked in the education sector as a Director-General in the North West. I interviewed Lesedi at my office after hours. She is one of the parents who reported that due to the economic crisis, she is not comfortable describing herself as middle class.

Pearl and Yoliswa are two parents whom I interviewed separately. I profile them together because their children attend the same school. Incidentally, their children attend the same school as my daughter, although both their children are in the primary school while my daughter is in the high school. One of the parents I interviewed in the pilot referred me to Pearl; I invited Yoliswa in person at the gym that we both attend. They were both interviewed at my office, but separately. Pearl is a married mother with two children, she is South Sotho while her husband is Xhosa. She holds a National Certificate in Public Relations and is currently training as a life coach; she is also self-employed doing events management. Our interview was based on her experiences with her youngest daughter who is 11 years old in grade 6 at a private school. Pearl also drew upon her experiences with her eldest daughter, when she was in high school. She is currently at university.



Yoliswa is part-time self-employed, supplying and delivering goods to a parastatal. Yoliswa is also a stay-at-home mother. She is married with one child, and is originally from the Transkei, and is Xhosa. I would later learn that being brought up in the rural Transkei shielded Yoliswa from the wrath of apartheid in a way that challenged my own assumptions that as black South Africans we have a shared memory of apartheid. Yoliswa is also the only parent in my study who felt that as black people “we destroy” and that our schools are inferior compared to white schools.

Barbara, Thando and Dr Molly are three parents whose children attend the same Cambridge school, albeit in different grades. Barbara was referred to me by one of the parents who I interviewed in the pilot study. They live in the same residential estate. Yoliswa referred me to Thando; while I invited Dr Molly in person as she works in the same building as I do. I interviewed all three parents in my office, although separately.

Barbara is a married mother of three children. She and her husband are both accountants and are both employed full-time. Barbara is Xhosa, while her husband is Zulu. All Barbara’s children attend the Cambridge school. Incidentally, Barbara attended the same university as me, although she started there a year after I had graduated. She grew up in the Eastern Cape and like Yoliswa she had no early experiences of racism. When she later moved to KwaZulu-Natal, this changed significantly. Barbara is the parent who would later described herself and other black parents at the school as “takers” because they merely take what they get from white school officials because of fear of rocking the boat.

Thando is a married father with four children; three boys and one girl. All the children attended private schools, the eldest is currently in college, while the second eldest is in high school in KwaZulu-Natal. The youngest two are at the Cambridge school in grades 8 and R, respectively. Thando was able to draw a comparative analysis between the KwaZulu-Natal private school and the Cambridge school. It is important to mention that prior to choosing the Cambridge school, one of his sons attended the same public school that Lesedi’s children currently attend. So he also drew a comparison between the Model C school, the KwaZulu-Natal school, as well as the Cambridge school. He reported that the school in KwaZulu-Natal embraced and celebrated the racial and cultural diversity amongst its learners to a larger extent than the Cambridge school. As a result, during the interview, he drew on his experiences with his two children who attend the Cambridge school.

Both Thando and his wife are acclaimed actors. He holds a degree in Dramatic Arts and is currently studying towards his Master’s degree in Business Administration. Thando is Sotho but self-identifies as African both in his ethnic group and race. His wife is Zulu, however, she was brought up overseas and knows very little Zulu. Thando’s father was a radical Pan African Congress (PAC) member; most of his

views and the strategies he uses to engage with white school officials reflects his Pan Africanist views and informs his activism.

Dr Molly is a medical practitioner in private practice. She is a single parent to her only daughter. She is Pedi and originally comes from Limpopo Province. Dr Molly attended an all-girls Catholic boarding school. She is new to the West Rand, which also reflects in her interactions with the parents from her children's school. As a single parent, this also affects her ability to become involved with the school.

I was referred to Motshidisi by a colleague who is also a health-care professional, who is friends with her. I interviewed Motshidisi at my office over two sessions due to her time commitments. Motshidisi is a housewife and she holds an honours degree. They have adopted her husband's younger sister, who is 15 years old and are bringing her up as their own child. They have another child, who is five years old. Motshidisi described herself as "a petit bourgeoisie". Both children attend different private schools. Motshidisi and her husband are both South Sotho.

An old friend from university referred me to Mxolisi; we all attended the same university and he holds a post-graduate degree. I interviewed Mxolisi at his place of work. Mxolisi and his wife are a mixed race couple. His wife is Afrikaans, while he is Xhosa. The couple have three children, and the two eldest children attend the same school as Motshidisi's 15 year old. Mxolisi's wife is a stay-at-home mother who gave up her job in order to take care of the children. She also runs a transport business where she transports learners to different schools in the Roodepoort area.

One of the parents in the pilot study referred me to Sandy. They are in the same prayer group. I interviewed her in my office; she is married with one child. She is Xhosa, and has a National Diploma in Quantity Surveying. Sandy explained that she is partly self-employed and a full-time stay-at-home mother. Her child attends a private remedial school in the area.

Maud and Kate both work at a private school. Maud is a senior administrator, while Kate is the finance manager. Maud and Kate are colleagues to one of the parents I interviewed in the pilot study. Kate and Maud both work at a sister school to the one their children attend. However, where they are employed, is a low-fees school targeting low to middle-income black learners from a nearby township. They both do not receive any subsidy from the parent company. I interviewed Maud at her home on a Sunday, while I interviewed Kate at work on a Saturday. Maud is married with three children, two of whom attend the said private school. Maud is Tswana while her husband is Xhosa and she holds a Diploma in Marketing. Maud also does catering to supplement her income. Kate is a single mother who also runs a catering company to supplement her income. Kate is Ndebele; and holds a college Diploma. Kate attended a multi-racial

school in the Roodepoort area. She referenced many of her childhood experiences of her mother advocating for her against her school and the white school officials

A colleague referred me to Dr Danny, who is a medical practitioner in private practice. He is married with two children; the eldest attends a Montessori private school. He is Tsonga, while his wife is Cape Malay; Dr Danny is Christian, while his wife is Muslim. Most of Dr Danny's experiences of racial incidents were in reference to his work as his children are in the early childhood development phase. His private practice is in the Roodepoort area and his patients are multi-racial and multi-cultural.

Thato is a Motswana woman married to a Mosotho man; they have two children and only the eldest is in a private school. She holds a degree and works at a bank in risk management. She was raised by a single mother, who is a retired teacher, who continues to be her support system, helping her granddaughter with homework. I interviewed Thato at her place of work; she was referred to me by one of the parents in the pilot study

Kedibone is a dentist, although she no longer practices as one. I met her through another colleague who is also a health-care professional, and we attend the same gym. She is mixed race, her parents are black and Coloured; however, she was brought up as Pedi in the Limpopo Province. She is married with two children who both attend a Model C school. Kedibone is self-employed and holds a Master's degree. Kedibone referenced her experiences as a light-skinned black, Mopedi woman; she shared personal stories of how this included and excluded her from different racial groups, depending on the circumstances.

Cheryl M and Solly M are a mixed race couple who I interviewed together at their place of residence. They were referred to me by the same colleague who referred me to Kedibone, and we also go to the same gym. Cheryl M, the wife, self-identifies as Coloured, while the husband, Solly M, identifies as black and Tswana. The couple have three children; however, only the eldest two are in the type of schools I was targeting for my study. The eldest attends a different Cambridge school from the one attended by the children of the other three respondents. The middle child attends the same Model C primary school as Lesedi's children. Like Kedibone, the couple draw upon their race and knowledge of Afrikaans as a strategy to gain access when engaging with white school officials.

Reggie and Lorry have children attending the same private school. I was referred to Reggie by my student assistant, while Lorry was referred by one of the parents I interviewed in the pilot study. I interviewed Lorry at her home on a Sunday afternoon, while Reggie was interviewed at my office. Lorry holds a BTech in Supply Chain Management and Purchasing, she also holds a Diploma in Paralegal Law Studies. She

works for a parastatal. Lorry is a married Motswana woman with three children. The two older children attend the same school.

Reggie and his wife consider themselves to be a mixed race couple, he is Coloured while his wife is a black foreign national. He holds a post-graduate qualification, and he works within the education sector as a consultant. Reggie brought a perspective about xenophobia and how it impacts parental interactions with the school, as well as other parents. He reported that as a couple he engages more with the school and white school officials because, apart from his professional training and work in education, his wife as a black foreign national often encountered exclusion and segregation.

Modisha is a married, Motswana father of four. Two of his children attend a Model C school. He is a lawyer by profession and is self-employed. The same friend from university who referred me to Mxolisi, also referred me to Modisha. I interviewed Modisha at my office. He is one of the parents who vehemently rejected the label of middle class because of its negative social connotations, as well as the fact that he is learned and has to work hard and sacrifice many things in order to maintain his standard of living. Modisha did however admit that relative to other family members and peers, he is middle class.

## **Research Methods and Instruments**

An interview schedule with semi-structured questions (see Appendix 1) was prepared beforehand (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006:204). Initially, the duration of the interviews was expected to be approximately one hour each, however, as the discussions unfolded, some of the interviews lasted up to 90 minutes, while the interview with Motshidisi was conducted over two sessions due to time constraints. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Below I discuss the process that I followed in adapting the interview schedule following the pilot study. I also discuss the process I followed in conducting the interviews in order to explore in depth how parents think, feel and behave when critical racial incidents occur at their children's schools. The interview schedule was based on the themes I derived from the literature on the educational strategies of black middle-class parents. Initially I did not have a biographical page where I would capture the identifying details of my respondents. The conversation felt arduous and cold, the insert below is a snippet of the interview with one of the parents during the pilot study:

- T: Please tell me about yourself and I'm in particular, tell me your racial group, your ethnic group, your socio-economic status, your educational qualification, employment status and your marital status  
S: Ok, I'm black. My ethnic group ya neh is a... I grow up in Mapulane baSwati kind of area.  
T: So are you Swati or Pedi?  
S: Pulana not Pedi, cause Pulana is a language that's spoken.  
T: Yah, but that's the language, what is your ethnic group?  
S: I don't know it.  
T: But you are black South African?  
S: Yes.

T: Female?  
 S: Yes.  
 T: Mapulane?  
 S: Yes. My educational qualification is matric.  
 T: Is it really matric?  
 S: Yes it is matric.  
 T: Don't you have another diploma?  
 S: I'm doing my diploma, I have a certificate.  
 T: Yah, certificate in what?  
 S: Child Development.  
 T: Then you can't say that your highest standard is matric  
 S: Oh!, early child development.  
 T: Ok  
 S: yah, I am currently employed  
 T: yah, employed as what?  
 S: As an educator at blackx.  
 T: So what grade do you teach?  
 S: I teach grade three.  
 T: So you are...?  
 S: Yes, the class teacher for grade three.  
 T: There you go, so you are a teacher. The certificate that you have, what is it called? PGCE?  
 S: Yah.

This exchange is representative of the other two pilot interviews. The inclusion of a biographical page enabled me to capture the identifying information about the parent and his/her background. The biographical page did not hinder any conversations; instead the questions on race and class triggered even deeper questions about identity. They actually served as a catalyst to kick off the interview; this is where I learnt that the black parents in my study took issue with being labelled as middle class. I also learnt why they took exception to the label, which inadvertently revealed the type of sacrifices they have made in order to afford the school fees for their children's education. My example of the biographical page enabled me to do more than just capture the parents' form of social identity; it also enabled both the parent and myself to challenge the taken-for-granted constructs that we use to identify ourselves in society. In South Africa, this is valuable indeed, given our history of apartheid. Social labels intended to reinforce the separation of people and families based on superficial characteristics were immediately challenged and rejected by some of the parents in my study.

Developed by Jean Piaget to study children's thinking, the Swiss psychologist used clinical interviews as a flexible method of questioning intended to gain insight into children's thoughts, to capture the child's fundamental activities, and to establish the child's cognitive competence (Ginsburg, 1981:4). During the clinical interview, the researcher is able to adapt questions in order to follow the thinking of the respondent. Applying it to research, diSessa (2007:525) explains that clinical interviewing involves the interviewer proposing usually problematic situations or issues for the respondent to think about. The respondent is encouraged to engage these as best they can. The issue could be a problem to solve, something to explain, or merely something to think about. In the study I focused on critical racial incidents to explore how the parents handled problem situations, as well as to learn about the strategies that they

used to advocate for their children. Using the clinical interview was helpful for me because many of the parents in my study were not always aware of the strategies that they employed, because in fact racial incidents differ; some are subtle and covert, while others may be overt and confrontational. I soon realised that the simple question of asking parents to focus on critical racial incidents was often misunderstood and so the parents would erroneously reply that they had not had any. Here is an example of such an instance during my interview with Maud:

T: Tell me about the encounters you've had with the teachers particularly when you've had to step in for your child with the school officials?

M: You know what I haven't had much of a problem to be honest. They have been really forthcoming. They tell me when there is a problem even before he does. The only time I heard gore [that] he was being mistreated or something I didn't understand I went to the teachers and it's because they had not given him the mark he deserved. I went to question that mark. Even when I did, I did not find any hesitation or whatever. We just spoke about and looked at the exams and went through scripts and it was fixed. I did not have any bad attitude or anything. I think for me black school has an open door policy. If there is anything we are unhappy about they always encourage us to bring it to the open and discuss it.

However, as I probed further, Maud was able to recollect another incident that did not necessarily involve a teacher; however, it was a critical racial incident that affected her child. The following insert illustrates:

T: If you look at the way you guys, you as a mom as a black woman what are the things that get into your mind when you have to meet with the school officials? Whatever it is that has to do with your child.

M: Maybe because of the background I come from. Like I said black school has not given me any problems. The problem in lies within me. My background probably makes me feel inferior a little bit. Whereby I think are they going to listen to me? Do I have to think fast on my toes? Maybe I go in there guns blazing or with a shield?

T: Do you though?

M: At times, it depends what it is about.

T: Give me an example.

M: fees.

T: Tell me about that?

M: The fees problem. I think the white people when it comes to us black people when it comes to fees they treat us a bit different. They are harsher and they find themselves saying things that they might not necessarily say to their white counterparts. The lady in finance said to me why don't you not take out your child and take her to the Meridian which is a sister school and as we know the Meridian is a township. Maybe he will also fit in there. I just felt really would you ask that to a white parent?

As illustrated above, I was able to gather more relevant information about the problem because I rephrased the question differently and directed it to what goes on in her mind when she engages with white school officials. As a result, this enabled her to critically reflect on how her own perceptions and feelings of inferiority led her to react in certain ways. During the clinical interview, the respondent is encouraged to talk aloud while thinking; they are also encouraged to use whatever materials at hand to explore the issue or explain their thinking (diSessa, 2007:525). The overarching goal of a clinical interview is to allow the respondent to expose their "natural" ways of thinking about the situation at hand (ibid.).

As noted by diSessa (2007:526), clinical interviews are often opportunistic in exploiting situations that emerge in order to refine the views of the subjects' thinking. I exploited the conversation about the fees and the financial official to fully explore Maud's way of thinking and how this informs the strategies that she uses to advocate for her child and herself as a black parent.

T: And what did she say?

M: No no she then said. She was very apologetic; I was just thinking it would be easier on you. You can always take them to Fourways High or Rand Park. Gore [so] as you know there is always a waiting lists but yyy [referring to the low-paying fees where Maud works] is a new school and there is always space. It's not a once off experience.

T: I am interested in those experiences... What was your experience with the finance lady?

M: You know what, like I said, when I go in there I go with that mindset that I need to speak my mind and say whatever it may be. If we are going to make an arrangement we make an arrangement but I'm just not going to accept anything negative from her. So I go in with that mindset. I don't know if it's right or wrong.

T: What triggered it?

M: Like I said that comment.

This is typical of questioning in a clinical interview. DiSessa (2007:526) explains that questions might involve a situation that should invoke similar responses, or critically different ones, depending on what the interviewer believes the subject is attending to. For instance, the interviewer may have encountered a surprising response in another interview and, consequently, prepared a question off-line that disambiguates opposing hypotheses in case she/he encounters a similar response from the same or another subject. An assumption is that the respondents' ways of thinking are delicate and complex, and skill is necessary to surface them in a mutually intelligible way. The interviewer explores different ways of framing problematic situations. She may introduce problem variations, sometimes supply alternative interpretations to which the respondent may respond, and seek to uncover depth of commitment or ambivalence (diSessa, 2007:526). This insert of my conversation with Lesedi illustrates:

T: When you are in the school meetings, official meetings with other parents as a black parent you are in the minority you as a couple or you as an individual. How does that play out and how does that make you feel?

L: Eish, I don't know, I've never actually thought about it. For me, it hasn't been a thing of concern, I won't lie, I'm happy to see that there are predominantly white people in the school. It's good as le rona we are in those schools it's good. We can afford what they can afford to give our kids good education. So for me it doesn't even bother me. Yah.

T: If the white kids fled, or the white people fled the school would you stay?

L: Haha why obo tsa po tso eo [why do you ask that question]? Why are they fleeing from the school?

T: Would you stay?

L: What is the problem the question is, if they leave the types of teachers that they have there because I believe they a good number of teachers, I'm talking about the grades that my kids are in. If they can still maintain the same quality that deliver on, I don't see a reason for leaving. I was listening talking about a school and saying there are so many black people and there is only one percent white. There are ninety-five percent black people and I said yah le rona we can afford. I mean the person that's taking their child to that school is a huge, ke motho

o dulang [it's someone who lives in a] suburb, who drives a nice car; who goes to Pipaccinos; a reke ko [and they shop at] JFK so problem keng [so what's the problem]? No, ee yona [yes] I have a problem with why should I take out my child because the school is predominantly black people. For me it's another me who wants what's good for my child. Yah, so would I'll keep my child if se le [it is] good is low class chances some people will. Wa understand nna [you understand me] I see those black people like another me and that's it!

T: Provided that the education is proper?

L: Yah yah, it has to be.

Changes of interpretation are critical events worthy of particular attention. These and other strategies help triangulate the nature of any particular conceptualisation an individual might exhibit, the range of conceptualisations respondents have available, and something of the dynamics of conceptualisations. This includes the context under which certain conceptualisations are applied, how they develop, how much confidence and facility the respondents exhibit, and how ideas may shift in the process of problem solving (diSessa, 2007:527). Consider this insert from my conversation with Barbara:

T: How come when things didn't get resolved you took your husband? What was the reason of taking your husband with you to the meeting?

B: Because I suppose you want them to know. First of all, when she had a chat with the parents of the child. So, I didn't want her to think so I brought my husband. I'm just alone, so let's also go the two of us.

T: Reinforcement?

B: Exactly, this child also has a father.

T: But why was that important for you to communicate that this child has a father? Who cares?

B: Because then you tend to think they don't take you seriously. White people tend to walk around and think black men make children whom they don't even look after. Because they know these are the perceptions, it comes out. They think that black men just make you pregnant and they leave you there. Even if you're married to them, they just leave you and they don't have interest in the kids. But they do. Honestly, I can never get over it. Where I worked once when I was pregnant with my son the guy said to me, "Oooh wow, you are pregnant congratulations! Where is your husband?". "I live with him!". "Oh no", he said, "Is your husband away?" Why would you assume, "because my maid lives here and her husband is in Eastern Cape"? Really? So you think that I'm like your maid. You know it's those type of mentalities that I live here. You live with your kids, piss off!

T: Do you use him as reinforcement quite often without thinking of it?

B: Yes, I do.

In the insert above, I actually challenge Barbara's reasons for bringing her husband along to certain meetings with the school; this after she had agreed as a couple that she should take the primary role of overseeing the children's learning. By asking why in certain instances she handles matters alone and why in this instance she brought her husband along, I could expose the gendered strategies that parents use to advocate for their children. I could also highlight how flexibly the parents morph from one strategy into another, revealing how discerning and strategically PA is exercised.



## Data analysis

I used the summaries independently compiled by myself and my student assistant to determine the themes that were emerging from the data. Miles and Huberman (1994:58) refer to this as a start list, which is typically drawn from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas and key variables that the researcher brings to the study. As a start, we used the themes derived from the literature review to help us look for specific narratives that indicated the parents' aspirations and their social identity. Here we were able to identify the parents' aspiration revealed in their reasons for choosing certain schools over others, thus indicating the emphasis on Christian values, standards and quality education, convenience, and discipline and learning support. These themes were not neat categories that separated one parent from another; instead, the aspirations that the parents have for their children are complex and dynamic. The social identities indicated race, ethnicity, nationality and social class.

With regards to the educational strategies that parents use in order to advocate for their children in response to critical racial incidents focused on the themes of what the parents actually do, what they draw on in order to engage with the school official. For instance, this might be whether the parent uses cooperative strategies, whether they use child-directed strategies or adult-directed strategies. I also explored whether the parent uses strategies employed by their parents as is, with changes, or not at all. Here I relied heavily on the themes I generated from the literature review; however, as I interviewed more parents, other themes emerged that I had not anticipated, such as how parents draw from their memory of engaging with white people during the apartheid era. It was then that I learnt that where parents were raised and situated in South Africa during the apartheid era created very different experiences of apartheid, and that as black people we do not have a shared memory of racial prejudice.

The literature of PA evolved from the different explanations that parents gave about why they make certain choices over others and how they rationalise those choices. I found some literature that spoke to how some parents activated their agency, such as on null actions. However, I learnt about the sacrifices that the parents had made in order to afford school fees, I learnt more about the opportunity costs of choosing those schools. At this stage, inferences were made in order to test the conceptual analysis of PA, and the intersectionality of race, ethnicity and class. I was able to form a semantic network indicating the parents' thought, behavioural and affective processes, and how these are influenced by the intersection of race, ethnicity and class, as well as how these evolved over time.

## **Trustworthiness**

When conducting qualitative research, it is imperative that the researcher ensures that participant narratives are credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable in order to ensure trustworthiness (Bryman, 2001:272). Credibility is ensured by establishing that the research process is carried out according to good practice and that it stands up to scrutiny by schools in the discipline who will confirm that the researcher has correctly understood the phenomena under study (ibid.).

The first step I used to ensure trustworthiness was to pilot the interview schedule with three black parents who have children enrolled in predominantly white schools. The parents included in the pilot study did not form part of the actual study; however, the feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the interview schedule that was used in the actual study. I also used respondent validation where during informal discussions I gave some of the parents who showed interest an account of the findings. The goal was to seek corroboration or otherwise of the account of the findings (Bryman, 2001:272).

I collected the actual recordings of the interviews and the different draft copies of the thesis as it developed, including copies of all the comments from my supervisor. I also kept the actual notes taken during the interviews with each of the parents, as well as my reflections after each interview. The trail of evidence also includes the notes from my student assistant, where she recorded her reflections after transcribing each interview. This enabled my data to be audited in order to strengthen the credibility and dependability of the data collected throughout the research process.

In order to ensure the credibility of the instrument and the findings derived from the study, I presented the initial interview schedule, hard copies of the transcribed interviews, as well as the themes synthesising the findings from the pilot study to my supervisor for review. After rigorous discussion, changes were made to the interview schedule and refined to the state it was in for the main study. During the interviews with the 19 respondents, I made notes during each interview as well as afterwards, recording my reflections of the interview. I also recorded summaries about the key findings from each interview and how the findings linked with emerging themes from other interviews. My student assistant, who assisted with transcribing the data, also summarised the main points and themes emanating from each interview, and we would hold discussions in order to compare notes to see whether we arrived at the same conclusions. I also presented my research and preliminary findings as part of a panel at an international conference where an independent and established researcher was a respondent. Prior to the conference, my supervisor and a fellow PhD student also made inputs to my paper. The feedback received from them was incorporated into the conference presentation, as well as the final thesis. All of these strategies were

used to ensure that I acted in good faith and did not overtly allow personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research or the findings derived from it. All their inputs were solicited as part of peer reviews to strengthen the confirmability and transferability (see Guba and Lincoln, 1994 in Bryman, 2001:272-273) of the study. The thick descriptions derived from the interview data, as well as our field notes, provided in-depth accounts of the parents in my study, making it possible for other interested researchers to determine possible transferability of the findings to other areas. The auditing and peer reviews made it possible for me to demonstrate that as a researcher I acted in good faith and did not overtly allow personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and the findings derived from it.

### **Authenticity**

In order to ensure authenticity, Bryman (2001:274) suggests five criteria: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity. Fairness refers to the whether the research fairly represents different viewpoints among the members of the research setting, which in this case is the white-dominant schools. In my study I limited my focus to black middle-class parents only. I intentionally excluded other respondents such as white parents and white school officials. To achieve fairness in terms of reflecting the different viewpoints within these schools, then I would have had to included white parents and white school officials. However, I aligned my study with CRT, which uses storytelling and counter-narrative to give precedence to the lived experiences of minoritised groups and to highlight the vagaries of racism in everyday life (Allen, 2012:173). White parents and white school officials, although they constitute a minority in South Africa, constitute a majority in the schools where the setting of my study is located. More importantly, they do not suffer racial injustice and subjugation to the extent of black people in general and black middle-class parents in particular. Hence, I was not interested in capturing their lived experiences or using them to benchmark or compare what their experiences were relative to those of black middle-class parents.

Ontological authenticity refers to whether the research helps members to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu; while educative authenticity refers to whether the research helps members to better appreciate the perspectives of other members of their social setting. Catalytic authenticity refers to whether the research acted as an impetus to members to engage in action to change their circumstances. Tactical authenticity refers to whether the research has empowered members to take the steps necessary for engaging in action (Bryman, 2001:274). CRT is committed to social justice with the goal of eliminating injustices (Allen, 2012:173). My study firstly serves to highlight the racial injustices occurring within white-dominant schools; hence, I chose to focus on black middle class as a minority group. I used clinical

interviews because they enabled me to not just record the experiences of racial injustice occurring in these schools. By merely asking questions about racial injustices, clinical interviews also enabled me to help the parents critically reflect on their own practices and how these in turn perpetuate and reinforce acts of injustice whether through their inaction or through direct action. I hope to publish the results of my findings in journals in order to share the lessons gained from my research with other interest groups. However, I cannot guarantee that this will lead to systemic policy changes within government, independent and private schools, or that white school officials will review their own school policies to incorporate the insights gained from my study. I sought to reflect the viewpoints of the black middle-class parents in my study as accurately as possible in order to ensure authenticity, and I can only hope that once published the other interest groups will appreciate the perspectives of these parents. I also recognise that my study could have included black parents who are foreign nationals, particularly because what I learnt from Reggie and Thando brought an angle not properly articulated by South African-born blacks. I hope studies that follow would include black middle-class parents who are foreign nationals in order to record their experiences and stories. Given the scourge of xenophobic attacks in South Africa, it is imperative that their stories are also told. Perhaps this will help eradicate this form of racial injustice, beginning in the microcosm of schools.

## CHAPTER 6

### **The social identities and educational aspirations of black middle-class parents in the new South Africa**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to report on the identities and aspirations that underpin the choices (motivations) and actions (strategies) of black middle-class parents educating their children in predominantly white schools. The parents in this study reveal intimate details about whom they are and how race, class and ethnicity interact to shape their emotions, thoughts and behaviours towards predominantly white schools and the white school authorities under whom their children learn.

As I began interviewing the parents, they questioned and challenged my decisions regarding my choice of respondents. They raised questions about why I was including only middle-class parents, what I meant by middle class, and some of them even challenged being identified as middle class. There were also differences in how parents understood their class status, based on whether they were single or married, Christians, stay-at-home moms, in between business projects, and by how they were affected by the economic crisis. In this context I am therefore examining common sense notions of “middle class” status among black parents in this study.

What emerged from the study is that being middle class, for some of the parents, carries with it values that can be construed as “un-African”. This shaped how they made sense of their responses to white school officials. I also learnt that racial and class self-identification was not always salient. There were occasions where for some of the parents their identification as black took precedence over and informed how they engaged with white school officials; whereas in other instances race was not a factor. In the same manner, there were instances where being middle class took precedence over race, and informed how they engaged with white school officials; in some other instances, social status was not a factor at all. Furthermore, using race for purposes of self-identification was less pronounced among inter-racial couples; in such cases, cultural identity or ethnicity became more salient. So how do these parents understand themselves and, consequentially, their educational goals for their children within a changing South Africa?

## What Do You Mean Middle Class?

*“Bitso lebe ke seromo”*

This Setswana idiom when translated means “*Give a child a bad name and you curse them for life*”. I begin with this idiom because the value of a name, what you choose to identify yourself and those related to you, has power and meaning... for life! This stern warning serves to articulate the cautionary discomfort that the parents in my study revealed when asked whether they considered themselves middle class or not.

The decision to self-identify as middle class was uncomfortable for many of the parents in my study. They either disagreed with the label, or would agree to it only because when compared to their upbringing or the current financial status of their siblings, parents or peers, they seemed to be faring better-off financially. The economic crisis was another factor that made parents uncomfortable with the label because of the awareness that the material comforts that they enjoyed were not guaranteed, and that they came with many sacrifices. The other reason for the discomfort was because middle-class values are sometimes viewed as being contrary to African values.

Sandy describes her husband as middle class and, because she is a stay-at-home mom, she refuses to identify herself as middle class:

Me, no and then both of us as a couple, yes ... Because I've said I am not where I want to be. I am a stay-at-home mom to start with. So that by itself is like I am not bringing in any income and that has a huge part of defining middle class. Like the income ratio and so on, my part no.

For Sandy, there is a sense of disempowerment that she feels because she is unemployed. Furthermore, her consciousness of being middle class is tied to her own sense of agency or lack of it, to be able to have financial independence. Sandy's story provides a counter-narrative to the notion that one can marry upwards, or that marriage provides mobility into the middle class. Her story highlights how her position as an unemployed married mother is one of personal affliction and vulnerability. It is the dynamics of her marriage that amplify her sense of “not being middle class”:

(Laughs) I guess it's some of the things that have happened in my life as well. I look at my life and I am nowhere where I need to be. So you know career-wise especially I am trying to rebuild my life. My marriage last year took a big knock, like a big knock, last year. That affected me as well because of the things my husband was saying. So yah, I guess that has spilled over to... at school

For other parents, the rejection of the label was more about what being middle class represents in mainstream society. Dr Molly, a general practitioner in private practice, explains why she is uncomfortable with being categorised in any specific class:

I really don't mind. Not that I have thought much about it, about the label itself. I wouldn't consider myself middle class or lower class. I just feel like I work hard and I want the best for my child and whatever that I can afford I will take her there, to whatever school I can afford. Like right now I am looking for a boarding school and I am not really looking at the price tag I am mostly looking at..., I want a Catholic girls' school, preferably, because I also went to a Catholic school.

Another parent, Lesedi, explained that her reason for not regarding herself as middle class was because of the current economic crisis:

Because I take it from the fact that with this economic crisis, I don't afford the things I used to be able to afford five years ago. So automatically I do not consider myself middle class. Everything is getting expensive, we're not getting..., pays are not going up... if anything, two percent is not enough, if anything we're not being paid a lot.

Lesedi also explained the sacrifices that they have had to make as a result of the economic crisis; hence, her discomfort of being labelled as middle class:

We don't go out as much as we used to. That's a given. I don't spend so much money on clothes like I used to. I would, I mean the kids are not around, I'd probably be at Clearwater Mall. If I could, not because I need it, I would like to have it. So I cut back on unnecessary spending, which is when I don't see a need. I think I'm also growing up. So other things are not as important as they used to be two years ago, a year ago.

The fleeting acknowledgement made by Lesedi that she is "growing up", while it suggests that her spending habits are maturing, is actually muted by the fact that this maturity is really in response to pressures caused by the economic crisis. It acknowledges how vulnerable her financial position is. The rest of the parents whom I interviewed echoed Lesedi's points, each revealing the personal sacrifices they were making to keep their children at predominantly white schools. Their stories offer an alternative perspective that depicts "middle-class-ness" as being more than just about income, consumption and status; instead, the parents raised questions about values, middle-class values to be precise.

Barbara had an additional reason for her discomfort with being labelled middle class:

Because as soon as people think they are higher class or middle class they start to behave in a weird way. They start to treat other people in a bad way; mostly that's what I have experienced. It's this thing that as soon as someone's life starts to improve and they feel good about themselves, then they start looking down at the other people. I just have this thing about classism; it just doesn't work.

Barbara alludes to what in Sepedi is called "*goikgogomosa*", The English equivalent words that come closest to capturing the vernacular meaning is "pompous" and "ostentatious". The public images depicted

in the media of the black middle class carry negative connotations that suggest opulence and greed, with lavish lifestyles characterised by designer clothes, flashy jewellery, flashy imported cars, cigars, and eating sushi off naked women's bodies at some nightclub, etc. It is this "conspicuous consumption" (Southall, 2016:172) that Barbara seeks to distance herself from by rejecting the label. It makes sense for a hardworking mother like Barbara to set herself and her family apart from this negative public image. Which explains why, in the interview with a perfect stranger, Barbara and the other respondents went into detail about the personal and financial sacrifices they had to go through in order to afford the school fees for their children. Some may find this humiliating or mistakenly assume that the appropriate response should be pity. For these parents, however, it asserts their will, determination and drive to do what is best for their children; thus, the appropriate response is to show them respect. It follows then that, with pride, Barbara goes to great length to explain how the economic crisis affected them and the sacrifices they made as a couple in order to keep their children at their chosen school:

So my husband and I we worked and served our articles. We had our careers, he used to work for [a government department] and I worked at an accounting firm where I did my articles. I stayed on. I went to start a business and he left [the government department] to start a business. We did well, and we made money. But there was a time we weren't making money. At that time we did everything we did to keep our kids at that same level. We had many options. One we let go of our house, sold our house and moved into another place and we decided we don't want to do that. Or we could have changed schools. We did think about it but 'yho' the thought of it broke our hearts. We could see what the kids were becoming... there's a lot of things that they know that I didn't know at that age. It's impressive because it puts you one step ahead. So we made those types of sacrifices. Let's keep our kids in a good school; that's the best thing we can give them. We're not going to give them PS4 [Play Station 4] and whatever, but we are not going to give them everything. To fight and pay in a way; as everyone says education is the best gift you can give to your children. We don't want to leave them stranded [so that] one day when we are gone they don't have a good future. So I mean we sacrificed a lot - car, holidays, nice lavish... we did what we could do. When we did that they would come out. We also did not want to take them out of the school which would be the easiest thing. It's a monthly thing; you just take them out to a cheaper school. It's a monthly thing; it saves you money. They have never been to a public school. My little one who is seven started at XXX[name of school] from when she was three. My son started when he was four. We didn't want to disrupt that environment. We also know people, I mean we would chat to some people at XXX[name of school] who I became kind of friends with and I think they were also going through the same thing or a similar thing. With her job and her husband was no longer working and she said to me they thought of the same thing. But they had friends who also did that. They took their kids out of the private school because they were struggling financially. They took them out and put them in a public school and her kids were distraught and a year into school they were just not coping. So we didn't want to make those emotional drastic decisions that are going to affect the kids. We sacrificed ourselves and the qualities of their lives. Just so we could get out of our financial dip.

Barbara asserts her social identity as a mature, responsible adult who focuses on delayed gratification, self-restraint and a view of investing in education to achieve sustainable success that positively benefits



the next generation. It is a view that goes against the dominant perception of defining the black middle class based solely on conspicuous consumption.

Another parent, Mxolisi, articulates this point succinctly. He shows ambivalence towards the label middle class because for him their financial status is more a reflection of their discipline and sacrifices so that they can afford the quality of life they choose:

Yah, I think that's a general definition. I don't think we can ever run away from that... Nah, I think it reflects our economic status. It's a fact. I don't think that's something one can argue against... So I think my wife will tell you the latest sacrifice she will have to do is working for herself so that she can also be around. Pick up the kids at school; obviously take them to all these extramural activities. I think that's a sacrifice she will say she has had to make. From my side I think it's trying to live within my means so I can afford to take them to school. Afford to take them to a holiday overseas. That's just by having the financial discipline to stay with what you can afford. There are the more expensive schools that we could have taken our kids to. There is another school down the road, but we can't afford to take them there.

It is this tenacity, as well as the ability to self-regulate and delay gratification that Mxolisi and his wife strive to inculcate in their children from an early age. Furthermore, they acquired this strategy from their parents as young children:

Yes, we teach them a lot about financial discipline because I had that when I was growing up so getting that into them. So we make decisions, they make decisions or we force them to make decisions around what they do with their pocket money. We get them involved around decisions about where to go on holiday, which one is cheaper, which one is expensive, the timing of the holiday. So yah, they are getting to learn financial discipline at an early age.

The general perception that the black middle class become rich through tenders and political connections is also challenged by Modisha, who like Mxolisi emphasises the value of hard work as a means for a black person to move upward in status. Modisha mentions the historical impact of colonialism and apartheid as factors that subjugated black people to the lower class as the basis for his downright rejection of the label, stating that it's impossible for a "darkie" [a black person] to be middle class:

No, that is impossible! If I look at all my problems in life I'm probably very poor. In my own definition, but others will see it differently... Yah, because I'm broke. (laughs) I'm running around. No, but look I understand why I would be classified as middle class. I think more the educational part, the career and assets which I can't turn into money now.

The subjugation has its legacy in the limited opportunities and racial barriers that black people continue to struggle against despite their education. Modisha's comment (above) highlights the fact that access to being middle class can be determined from one's level of education or financial status; however, for a black person in South Africa formal educational achievements do not necessarily automatically enable you to move upward into the middle class financially. Modisha's comment suggests that, for him, nothing

has changed 22 years after democracy and, as a result, he rejects the label of being classified as middle class because at this point in time, it is his financial situation, in as far as it limits him access to the class resources that his educational level “should have” enabled him to attain.

There seems to be a perception from Dr Molly, Lesedi, Barbara and Modisha that being middle class implies not working hard for the money you make, not having to struggle. It seems that being middle class is the antithesis of hard work, that the awareness or consciousness of being middle class will be fully realised when one does not have to work so hard for your money. Pearl is another example of a parent who was taken aback when asked if she was middle class; on the other hand, given her lifestyle, Pearl concedes that she is middle class given the material comforts she enjoys:

I didn't expect that. I think so. Wena [You] what do you see?.....If I don't see myself as middle class, where would I classify myself?... I think so, the life that we have as well. We're enjoying it.....We travel and do your international trips with kids so we try and do it every two years, and yah..... And the kids are very happy. All of us enjoy the life. I remember when we would talk about recessions and stuff will hit everyone, but rona [we] have the house and we try and manage things. We are there, what we did is downgrade, and not being shy about it. Then we're fine, we don't get a pinch of anything and we still have the lifestyle that we like.

For Pearl, the lived experience of international trips as well as the ability to maintain their comfortable lifestyle, concretises the awareness and reality of the family being middle class. In addition, having to “downgrade” does not diminish her class consciousness. Her statement of “not being shy” about downgrading epitomises the values question, suggesting that although one enjoys the material comforts afforded by the financial status of “middle-class-ness”, one’s sense of identity and importance is not defined, constructed or confined by being middle class. The parents appeared to suggest that they were willing and able to fluidly “morph” from one level to the next; that the loss of material comforts did not necessarily result in a crisis of identity, shame, loss of dignity, or a disequilibrium in one’s sense of self. Instead, it was this ability to transition and adapt to the changing economic and financial realities that heralded the parents’ sense of resilience.

Kate, on the other hand, chose to self-identify as working class, stating the following:

I would like to think I'm working class, unless I don't understand the term. I'm at an eight to four job. I get a monthly salary. I am employed permanently. So that's why I would define myself as working class. That's why I said, unless I don't understand.

Kate works in administration at a sister institution that is a low-fee school targeted at predominantly black children in one of the newly formed townships in the Roodepoort area. However, she chooses to educate

her child at the more expensive school that targets the quintile 5<sup>9</sup> income group. The reason for her being uncomfortable with the label of middle class was because of the sacrifices she had to make as a single parent in order to afford the school her child attends:

I had to think of another way of generating income because on my monthly salary alone there was no way I could afford it. I had to look for a second income and that meant I had to sacrifice my time. I see her less because now on Saturdays I have to cook; I cook at all hours in the night. Then in the morning I have to cook to make sure there is food during the day. During the week I run catering events on request. I don't see her as I want to. I don't spend much time with her, as I want to. I have to send her either to my mom and ask someone to look after her.

For Kate, the fact that the school develops and stimulates her child holistically in ways she could not conceive in the beginning justifies the sacrifices she is making in order to have her child attend the quintile 5 school. This, despite the fact that where she works would have been more affordable for her and she would have qualified for a discount:

Well, I'm working under the XXX group [company that owns the schools] at yyy [name of school]. I felt like she would be in an environment better than where I am at and because I am so particular. It would have ruined my relationship with the staff because I am that person, I would go and I would look and ask you questions. I think I would nag the teachers. So since we are under the XXX group I decided to take her *ko (to)* BLACK. Another reason is that we don't have grade 000; *bona (they)* they have it and I wanted her to have a foundation. She has not uttered a word of English. I decided to teach her our African languages. I decided to take her there so she can build up on her English. I want her to understand the basics *tisa (of)* English the proper way; not to say that they don't teach here. It's on a different level. From what I've seen in the past eight months she's been there, I'm just amazed. I am so happy; she has improved so much she can speak the language fluently. Their way of teaching develops a child everywhere. Things like tearing paper; I didn't know it was important for her to learn how to tear paper. It develops their 'what what'. I am learning so much through her; things that I didn't get a foundation, I just went to primary, then high school, and then college. I wanted it for her.

Lorry consents to being identified as middle class based on the material possessions she can afford to give her children:

For the fact that I am able to enjoy the school fees that I'm paying for my kids, that alone is a privilege on its own. The fact that I am able to drive a car where I am able to pay an instalment of R7000 a month, that is a privilege on its own. For the fact that I have never run short of food in the house; I don't have to live from hand to mouth. I can still have at least R5000 by the time I get to month end, by pay day; that also is a privilege. I am able save at least two thousand rand per month.

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<sup>9</sup> Quintile 5 schools comprise of former white, generally referred to as Model C schools who admit black learners but mostly service wealthy communities, according to the National School Funding Norms and Standards (DoE, 1997).

However, Lorry acknowledges that they are also experiencing financial strain:

Yes, there has been such a huge difference! My husband is self-employed so it has taken me from being that person who was very comfortable to a person who has to count every rand and cent. And make sure that I am holding the fort, especially in the house because I have to provide everything....

Despite financial difficulties, Lorry and her husband have strived to keep their children at the same schools:

Mmmmm no, like nothing has changed because I pay the school fees... No, they [the children] don't even know we are going through that. Because I make sure the kids' school fees comes first. I make sure that it is paid, then everything else follows.

Lorry makes the point that being middle class as a black person does not mean they enjoy the same opportunities as their white counterparts. She explains:

To tell you the truth I look at it in a way that I see my husband's company is struggling at this time, something will come through. Something comes back, and takes them to where they were. It can be very frustrating because you have their expectations raised. You are anticipating on income coming through and when all that is not happening. You start thinking of why we are in this situation as black people. Why is it easy for white people to penetrate in this kind of business, because the type of business he is in not many black people is tapping in that space? So it's, you have that attitude where you wish everything is black-dominated and not white-dominated, and change the dynamics. The overall dynamics in terms of our day-to-day lives, in terms of our environment. There are times I wish I had money and buy those white people out.

The legacy of apartheid has intensified the impact of the economic crisis for Lorry:

You realize that we might have the power as black people but we do not control the capital; that's the sad part. The school is not well kept, but we are paying school fees. These people are taking this money and living well. You are paying for every little thing that gets used in this school and at the same time you are paying school fees. There aren't any black children in that school, its white children. Those are the things that make you angry. When you are going through difficult financial challenges. That's exactly how I feel. There are times when I feel like how I wish I could take my kids out of that school, but where would I put them? There is nowhere else. I look around - all the schools are owned by white people. What am I doing as a black parent? Do I aspire to have a school that is better, functional than the school that my child attends or other schools? That is one question I always ask myself...

In the insert above one can sense Lorry's frustration that despite the fact that the school is white-owned, that black learners are in the minority, and that as parents they pay fees higher than in the public schools, the school's infrastructure is not properly maintained. She reflects a sense of powerlessness that as a black person she does not control the capital, and thus her ability to challenge how the school is run is limited. Furthermore, she reflects that despite her financial resources as a black middle-class parent, she is not able to "vote with her feet" and move her children to a different school. Lorry feels trapped as a black person. She explains further below:

I have actually challenged my sister-in-law, actually two of my sisters-in-law. I have said why don't we buy something and shares in the school and go open another school. The same school for the black kids and we will have it functioning. Mainly because it's being run by black people. To tell you the truth, what is so special about the white system? Except the fact that there is influence, it's not the good education they impacting on our kids, but the influence. It's all about the money; it tells you a lot about us as black people. Money has influenced how we make decisions. There are so many good teachers out there, black principals. They find themselves in those situations where the school is located in a small rural village where there are no resources. Not that you're not good at what you do, but you do not have enough resources to help these kids to move forward. Then you become not good enough. It boils down to money at the end of the day. It's painful because as black people if we are not realising it. You look at our social status now as black people; those that have money where do they invest? When was the last time you heard one of our so-called millionaires investing in the schools? Just adopting one or two schools and say I am going to put my money here and I would like to see this school producing a 100 percent pass rate. None. My father-in-law had two Master's, he had a PhD. My father-in-law in the eighties he secured scholarships in Soweto. My father-in-law he secured scholarships not for his kids, but for children in Soweto. He got plus-minus 20 of them. They all have either Master's or they have got PhDs. All of them are back in the country, but what are they doing? Are they giving back? None of them has ever come forward, even at church. We go to church in Soweto. None of them has ever come forward and say I would like to support at least one child in this church. It says a lot about us as black people in terms of how we think. Right now like I was saying my sister-in-law is going overseas.

The reference to other black people who have become successful, but are not ploughing back or helping others less-privileged than themselves, seems to be another negative characteristic of being middle class. There seems to be a perception that middle class teaches values that go against African values like valuing a sense of community, respect for others less-privileged than yourself, humility and ubuntu: Barbara explains:

I have a child whose 12 years old, who's a girl. She goes to a private school; she went to a school that was private and very new and which is why I said we didn't want to experiment. It was like two years old and she was a part of it and we pulled her out immediately. So she is basically used to this private school. She's growing up in this private school, she's growing up in an environment of people who are either middle class or upper class. That teaches them a snobbish type of behaviour. Kids that go to private schools, there is things that they would not want to do. There are places where they would not want to go. I'm not saying I want to go to every place, but what I am saying is there are places where they wouldn't set their foot. For example, we used to go to a [charismatic New Age] church and my daughter didn't like it. Because the classes are too full, Mommy, because in a private school you get 15 learners in a class. They are used to environments that are ... Because they are exclusive and they are treated as exclusive children that then passes on to the other areas of their lives.

Pearl also echoes the points about being middle class and how they insist on emphasising that their children embody African values and not think that they are better than other people:

I think I'm not saying that my kids are living two different lives. Like when they're at school they accommodate a certain lifestyle and when they're at home they accommodate our lifestyle. It's been the same and I think we never change. The most

important thing I teach them is when we visit people they mustn't put themselves very high, you go along. You visiting, they're eating pap and cabbage, you go along; it's food we're eating. You know normally people hear Tshepiso is coming and they stress, [nna] I tell them don't stress. Those things, we do them at home. I am so lucky that my daughter is that type of person who is giving and loving. You know us black people when we see someone dressed up funny, you say this person. She doesn't like that she says, 'Mama, why don't you say it nicely?'. When you say someone is looking dirty she doesn't like it. So she's more nicer because she doesn't like the negative and you cannot comment something bad on someone.

Like Pearl and Barbara, the parents in my study emphasised the need to balance being middle class without having to forego their African values and culture. Their sense of identity remained intact for as long as their values kept them grounded in the reality that money and status were not guaranteed. The parents acknowledged that they were able to enjoy the material benefits of being middle class in the new South Africa; however, this did not in any way imply that they were superior or better than other black people. The respondents in my study reflected this sense of vulnerability. This seemed to strengthen their religious conviction, which somehow compensated for the vulnerability created by their class position. For the respondents in my study, religion trumped class and status in terms of defining who they were, choosing one school over another in order to educate their children, and the strategies they chose to use to advocate for their children when engaging with white school officials.

### **As fellow Christians...**

One of the key and distinctive claims identified among black parents was that of being Christian and choosing to educate their children in schools with a Christian ethos. For some the label of being identified as Christian was more salient than being labelled middle class. Due to their Christian values, they expected equal treatment and a level of engagement similar for all parents, regardless of race. As a result, their religious beliefs informed the strategy used to engage with the schools. As Lorry explains:

The main reason was for me what stood out the most was that it is a Christian school; that was the first thing. The second thing was based on the interaction I had with a few parents that have taken their kids to that school was that their foundation level is quite good. What I have also noticed by putting my kids there, I realised that they were attending to them individually and they were able to also highlight whatever challenges that your kids might be going through and assist you as a parent to also work towards making sure the kids are achieving whatever goals that you and the kids are willing to achieve or are intending to achieve. So it was for me, that's what stood out about the school. And then also in terms of the school, the number of kids that go to the school, you know your child gets that attention that most of the kids will not get, especially when there is a huge number of kids attending the similar school, you find that one classroom is having 40 kids. It becomes a bit of a challenge where most of the time the kids they get lost within the system or they get lost within the classroom because the teacher cannot attend to the child as an individual - that was one of the things and reasons why. And also it was mainly the affordability, if I have to put it like that. .

Her Christian ethos influenced how Lorry expected herself and her children to be treated at the school by the officials. It also informed how she treated the school officials:

Ummm, there was a time my brother-in-law passed away, so that's my husband's elder brother. So I had to go to Limpopo to help with the funeral arrangements with the children. So the kids were left here with the helper and my husband's niece; she's 25 years old. What will happen is every day when they come from school she would assist them with homework and make sure that when they go to school they are looking good, and all that. Uuum, so I had asked her to write a letter to them to release them from school early so that they can be able to attend their uncle's funeral. Then the vice-principal did not take kindly to the fact that we wanted the kids to be released early on a Friday. Then she did not address that with my niece, but rather started venting on the kids. You know the way she said it, is that she said this and this. I told her [the niece] that I will address it with her [the teacher] and indeed I went to the school and I spoke to her [the teacher]. I thanked her for her time and I went to the office; it was not the first time. When the schools opened early this year in January they are expected to bring stationery to school, except for grade 4 going up. They are not supposed to bring stationery because they can bring whatever they consider is responsible, so they don't have to bring everything. So my daughter did not bring her stationery box to school; she left it at home. So I told her she can take what she needs for this term. She [the teacher] just shouted at her, "Do you think you are special? Why didn't you bring your entire box with you?". This is going too far. Then my daughter explained to her, "My mom and I agreed because we know that the grade 4's are not supposed to bring the entire box. You should have told me that we should bring the box then my mother would have brought it". I said to her [the teacher] I let that one slide and I thought it was a mistake. I see your way of communicating with the kids, it's not desirable, and this is not how you're going to communicate with my child. You're not supposed to communicate like that with my child, you should communicate with me, or the parents, and not in front of the child. Kids can be mean to each other and they will be laughing at her and then what's going to happen to her? Her confidence level is going to go down. Everything else will be affected; she will also feel like you hate her, because it was not for the first time. She was being defensive about it and I said to her you know what, as an adult you guys are advocating Christian values and I am expecting that to be the point, whereby you're guiding our kids according to the Christian values and impacting our kids as you expect the parent to. I am expecting you to do the same and that's why I took my kids to a Christian school, not because I want them to be hard on my kids, and being disrespectful. This is disrespectful because it's a child; their morale will be so down. When you say stuff like this to a child their morale will be so down. What I am teaching the child as a parent at home is according to how the Christians are supposed to be living and when she gets to school you are doing all that. It defeats the very purpose; I also don't know how you as an adult can talk to a child like that. A principal for that matter; I mean she's a principal. We ended up speaking to the principal.

Pearl also explains the fact that she chose the current school for her child because of its Christian ethos:

Yah, Model C. So I was happy with how he would lead the school, the discipline and all that. I was sure that he would bring it here. Religion as well, they practice [Christianity] very well as well. I mean they are Christians; I am very comfortable.

Mxolisi also indicates that they chose a school that was Christian as a way to inculcate a healthy self-esteem in their children that is not based on race, but rather Christian values:

I think being a Christian school and both of us being brought up in a Christian environment. We felt that will basically assist in making sure they grow up in a similar upbringing... I think in hindsight we send them to a Christian school. One of the things that we are hoping for when we send them to an environment like that is that they will get that everyone is treated the same way. Everyone is equal before God, so when they start inculcating those principles they start; it helps with other people and their self-esteem. So it's not just about them having this kind of self-esteem about them, but also realizing that look other people are just as important as well. So how they relate to the world because once they come out of school that's exactly what they are going to experience in their social life once they are at work. They are going to work with people from different backgrounds.

Dr Molly recalls that her own parents believed that Christian values were more salient than race and, as a result, her parents focused more on child-directed strategies rather than school-directed strategies:

There wasn't much interaction mainly because they were nuns. My parents are, I was raised, very Catholic. So there is already that barrier that it is a nun and Catholic, you are now having this thing that she cannot be racist and she cannot be prejudicial because she is Christian or a Catholic nun. So they already come to her with a level of respect, they have put her on a pedestal, that she can never do something wrong. So I know that every time I would come home and say the food is horrible, they did this to us, they treat us badly, my parents would have this, you can't complain because you are there to be educated, you're not there for the food, you're not there for the bad treatment so just shut up and go to school. Our parents never complained, where I am thinking now if my child was going to a boarding school, convent school with nuns and there was that type of treatment. I would probably write a long letter of complaint and everything, but my parents, our parents had that mentality that you are there for schooling, nothing else. Why are you complaining about food? Why are you complaining about bad treatment? You are not allowed to go out or whatever, you are not there for that.

The reference to religion by these parents is not in terms of "coping with the precariousness of their financial position", as suggested by Southall (2016). Perhaps, this is because the subject under discussion has to do with education, the education of their children. The comments from the parents highlight the fact that religion, more specifically, Christianity, preaches messages of equality irrespective of race and social class, which resonates with their hopes for what schools are supposed to do. In addition, Christianity imparts a sense of agency that the choices you make based on faith can help change your destiny, surpassing the limitations imposed by your present circumstances. The emphasis on Christianity was only made by those parents who considered religion as more salient in their choice of a school. For all the parents, including the Christian parents, the choice of a predominantly white school was largely due to the quality of education and the learning experiences they offered the children. This raises the question about the aspirations of the parents for choosing white schools over black schools.

In the previous section, I discussed how black middle-class parents identify themselves, contesting the label of middle class in order to explain their motivation for choosing to educate their children in predominantly white schools. The results indicate a tension between enjoying the benefits of being middle class and having to do this in ways that do not solicit reprisal and rejection from their family and peers.



The tension is also evident in choosing behaviours and practices that are consistent with their African identity, that are embedded in their African culture; which are more significant and carry more value for black people as compared to the behaviour and practices of being middle-class that are fleeting and circumstantial, as these can change in response to economic and political pressures. In the next section, I present the results on the aspirations of the black middle-class parents, thus explaining their motivation for choosing predominantly white schools.

### **Are White Schools Better?**

The motivation to choose predominantly white school ranges from the quality and standard of education, the teacher-pupil ratio, enabling the child to receive individualised attention, the commitment of the teachers to teaching and learning, as well as the perception of white schools as committed to instilling order, discipline and academic excellence. As to whether white schools are better or not, the parents in my study were divided in this regard. For Dr Molly, the reason for choosing the Cambridge school was primarily due to convenience; however, she also wanted to offer her child something much better than her parents gave her:

Ehm, I've always had this thing, I guess it has to be personal. Or rather, the one thing that drives me is that I've always had to ehm, what's the English word, outmatch what my parents have offered me. That if my parents took me to a boarding school with Catholic Belgium nuns I have to eh eh be a step ahead. So, my dream has always had to be that I want my child to be able to, if she has the dream of going to an international university, which is something I didn't get to do. Which is one of the reasons I chose the Cambridge curriculum, because I want her to have the opportunity, the choice to have wherever that she wants to go.

The discipline, order and commitment of the staff attracted Lorry to the school:

I think it's mainly the... it's order that's the main thing and then you look at how serious they take, you know, the education of the kids. Uuum, the commitment, the dedication that you find in the school. Because first day of the school when they open schools, first day they bring homework home. And you know what you look at the type of work they bring home, it's something that your child might have not been exposed to but for the fact they are also challenging you as a parent, they are also challenging your child to start to apply and challenge your mind. That stood out for me and I look at some of my cousins kids who live in Soweto; they can spend a week you know after school when school is open without homework. Without getting studying notes, that also makes you as a parent to make comparisons between the school from the township and that one from the suburb. And, not that we disregard our black teachers and their education, but the fact remains that the reality of the matter is that do we take ourselves seriously as black people when it comes to education? We don't.

Lorry goes on to explain that the commitment of white teachers is different to that of black teachers:

You look at the calibre of teachers; I have a lot of teachers in my family. You listen to the stories that you know that they tell all the time. Sometimes you find that the principal

will just disappear for like a week without the school even knowing exactly where he is or she is. And no one, nobody accounts for his or her disappearance or himself does not even account for his disappearance. Those are the kinds of things you ask yourself, "Do we have our hearts and minds in the right place when it comes to the education of a black child in our country?". And those are the kinds of things that will also discourage you as a parent to take your kids to the very black school. Which is sad; we wouldn't want to actually take our kids to white schools if our education level was at that higher level as white schools. It's the reality that we are faced with as black parents; we're forced to take our kids to predominately white schools.

Lorry also recognises the impact of the school on the character of the child, particularly in terms of preparing her children to compete equally with their counterparts in the world:

You know what, their confidence level is actually, it actually has improved a lot. I have these kids who are very shy, they don't normally express themselves. By just taking them to that school where they are able to express themselves and show their ability and strength has also actually given me that privilege of saying had I taken them to a public school they wouldn't have been able to, because in our culture as a child you are never heard. You can only express yourself around your peers, but when it comes to your peers, but when it comes to your teachers, the adults you are always supposed to keep quiet and know exactly when to speak. They are very fluent now, very outspoken and they are performing very well even at school because of the kind of education that has been impacted on them, especially when it comes to participation with sport. They are not playing only what is expected as a black sport, like a netball or soccer, and that's it. So they are playing other you know sport activities and we are able to diverse in that regard. And, that also makes it a privilege to say my child can play cricket and you understand cricket better. And he has shown a better strength on cricket than soccer itself. So those are the things.

For Kate, the quality of education in the white schools enables her children to compete equally with other racial groups, and communicate confidently in English. The fact that they relate and engage with different racial groups empowers her children to develop the social and cultural competence to fit into any environment:

My beliefs. (laughs) Shoo, I've never really looked at that. I think being a black person we've always had this mentality that if you send your child to a white school they will turn out this way... Like, in terms of their social skills. In terms of fitting in the market, in terms of fitting in anywhere. They can engage different people easily when they go to a white school. Their confidence, they don't have problems with confidence. I'm not saying that kids that go black schools have those problems, but I've always said that if you send your kids to a school that has different races they can identify with everyone else, not just at school. It helps them everywhere because I see her now even at church, she is not as scared as before. She very too herself, but now I can see, she is coming out now, she becoming confident. She is becoming her. She is becoming a woman, because she is a diva now. She has all these diva tendencies. Like okay, I've always believed with your confidence in terms of speaking. When you know that you can say a word and sometimes you hear people say words and they don't know what it means and they just say it. I think he meant that, you say something and you understand what you are saying. It allows you to have a presence, you are not scared, you will get there and I am confident. I know what I am talking about. Educationally, black schools and white schools are the same, but in terms of building you up and making you ready for the fact that we take them from school and bring them here [work]. I know of a person; he is so

intelligent and he is an A student but because he has never uttered a word ya English he struggles. Now people think he is dumb, but he is so intelligent. When he speaks, he doesn't understand the different tones. He doesn't understand the way he constructs his sentences, but you can hear what he is saying. But because he has never been taught that being polite, that if I take something from Setswana and translate it into English it won't sound the same. Then you learn that, I feel.

However, while other parents recognise the benefits of choosing predominantly white schools, they do not necessarily believe that it is the racial demographics of the teachers that make them better. For instance, Lesedi makes the argument that black people with equal resources, given the opportunity, can also offer quality education:

White people flee to *Hoërskool*. Nna [me] I know even within my own circle of friends some of them will start saying let's just take, even the private school people will take their kids out of the private schools because now they are starting to check everyone is black and there is two percent white people and maybe Indians. What is wrong with that? Nna [me] what I am saying is maintain the quality of education, 'cause for me that's what's important. I've got no problem, the person that brought their child here is a me as well, who is also seeking for a good education. Why can't I work with her and her as well, make sure that we maintain the reputation of the school and support the school? You know stuff like that, we need that, not in a bad way. But who the hell are white people. We can't be dependent on them! Because what does that say about me? I'm saying to my kids that black schools are not good? But wena [you] if you see there's predominantly white people, that's where you must go?. Bull! Absolute bull. Nna [me] I want my kids, they should know, just because a person is white they don't have authority!

Yoliswa, on the other hand, was one of the parents who stated that white schools are better. However, a closer interrogation of her statement revealed that, like the other parents in my study, it is what happens in black schools, in terms of lack of discipline on the part of the learners and the teachers regarding the commitment to teaching and learning, that made her utter such a statement:

Eh yah, with our schools there are a lot of problems in terms of not attending schools and not going to school. Toyi-toying, there's no seriousness about it, so I thought let me take her to a school where I know everything will be done in order, I won't be stressing about any other thing.... Because whites do better things than us... Eh, because we do things differently from them. Sometimes I feel we [black people] literally destroy what we've got.... We don't stick; we tend not to nurture what we've got as black people.

So what are the opportunity costs for having a quality education for your child? What is the price worth paying to have a good education for your child, and to what great lengths were the parents willing to go in order to have their children attend predominantly white schools? I hope to answer these questions in the following chapter.

## **Synthesis and Conclusion**

In this chapter, I sought to report on the identities and aspirations that underpin the choices of black middle-class parents who educate their children in predominantly white schools. The results indicated

that not all the parents in my study ascribed to the label of “middle class”. While from a consumption and lifestyle perspective, they recognised that they, in comparison to significant others, were able to afford a better standard of living, hence their ability to educate their children at predominantly white schools, not all of them agreed to being labelled middle class. The reasons given included the negative public images of conspicuous consumption, and the perception that upward mobility into the middle class was achieved through untoward means such as political connections, tenders and corruption, rather than through hard work, intellect and sacrifice. As a result, the parents in my study went to great lengths to share the intimate details of the challenges and sacrifices they have to make in order to maintain their way of life. The second reason stemmed from a deeper awareness of the precariousness of being middle class in light of political, economic, as well as domestic and global pressures. The awareness that their way of life was not guaranteed resulted in the parents being strategic and discerning in how they conducted their lives, some even teaching their children to be more prudent and financially disciplined. The third reason was that the current perceptions of “middle-class-ness” seemed to carry values that were perceived as “un-African” suggesting pomposity, opulence and selfishness, resulting in behaviours that alienated family members and the majority of black people who had “not yet made it” out of the grips of poverty and unemployment.

Secondly, the results indicated that the parents in my study had high ambitions for their children, which motivated their choice of predominantly white schools. The motivation for their choice of school was not driven by race, as in white is better than black, but rather it was driven by an awareness that white schools were better resourced, better managed, and better disciplined than black schools. While one dissenting parent declared that whites are better than blacks because “blacks destroy”, it is also a critique of what happens in black schools when compared to white schools, rather than the superiority of one race over another. The parents in my study overwhelmingly agreed that with better capacity, resources and leadership, blacks are just as capable of running successful schools.

The salience of race was minimised amongst the parents whose choice of school was driven by religious beliefs, rather than those whose school choice was purely educational. For these parents, they believed that Christianity and thus the common belief in God would facilitate equality and minimise racial prejudice and discrimination from the school officials.

In the next chapter I will discuss how factors around black middle-class parents’ social identity influence *what* they do in terms of the educational strategies they employ in order to advocate for their children when engaging with white school officials.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Educational strategies used by black middle-class parents to advance the interests of their children in white schools**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I discussed *who* the parents in this study are and how they understand themselves as actors or agents in the educational lives of their children. In other words, which identities matter to them in taking up particular forms of action in response to the needs and concerns of their children inside predominantly white schools. This chapter goes further and captures *what* the parents actually do (or refrain from doing) as actors in their children's schools. In the next chapter I delve more deeply into *why* they choose certain strategies over others, and under what circumstances these strategic decisions are made.

#### **They invoke and project their personal status**

The parents in my study invoke their personal status in order to be heard. However, unlike existing research on status utilisation, what my research found is that for these parents their use of personal status is actually influenced by the public image of how the black middle class is perceived in South Africa. There is a need among these parents to emphasise the fact that their class resources were attained through hard work and educational achievement, rather than from tenders and government intervention. There is also a pressing need by the parents to set themselves apart from the public image of conspicuous consumption associated with the black middle class. As Barbara put it:

It makes you feel like you always have to prove a point to them ukuthi [that] 'you know what? You are not talking to a fool; you are talking to someone who is highly educated'. I think sometimes they have this perception that; and I've also just experienced it, where you find that black people have money and they're just going to throw their kids in these schools. That's it, but I know with us, it's very different. We do not have too much money but we sacrificed to have our kids there and we know why we want them there. I think white people kind of view you like you are just one of those black parents who've made money. I don't know how, through tenders; I don't know what they think about us but I think they don't have a very high opinion of us. They would look at us say, you might have the money, but you probably don't have the intellect.

However, for Barbara, status utilisation also serves to indicate that by virtue of her professional qualifications and education, she is in fact knowledgeable about education in general even if she may not

be an educator by profession, and more importantly, that she is actively involved in her child's learning and development as well.

Yes. Last year, in grade two, I found that he had a teacher who was just not understanding. She just didn't understand the type of child he is and obviously I think that when people don't understand the way you are they tend to look at the negative side of things. So obviously she would say she finds him... he doesn't pay attention, this is the type of child he is. And then I would say, "You haven't come to that point to understand the personality of the child". My view is that if you are a teacher you must get to know everyone here and treat them in the way that they are and you can't want to box them. This is the way that he is, he wears glasses. There was a time he was sitting at the back and he couldn't see; maybe he didn't take it seriously, that if he sits at the back that he won't see. He moved to the front. He is one of those kids that minds his own business. He stays in his lane and does his own thing. Obviously, a boy, there's naughtiness that comes with that. But I think that they prejudge your kids.

Barbara's comment, "If you are a teacher you must get to know everyone and treat them in the way that they are..." reveals her awareness about learner-centred teaching; where teaching is adapted to fit the child's personality, learning needs and learning style. Her reference to the teacher having to recognise that "he wears glasses" that "if he sits at the back he won't see" and that since "he moved to the front he is one of those kids who minds his own business" indicates Barbara's awareness about the conditions that optimise learning for her child. Barbara, in spite of being an accountant, makes practical recommendations to the teacher about how to create an environment that is conducive to enabling her son to learn optimally so that he can reach his maximum level of independent learning. These are all strategies that, by virtue of being educated herself, she is able to communicate with conviction to the teacher. Evoking personal status for Barbara is also about challenging the stereotype that teachers know children better than their parents because the children spend so much time at school. Barbara explains that she uses assertiveness, a strategy she has acquired in her training as an accountant, to engage with the teachers, particularly to challenge the perception that teachers know her child much better than she does:

Mostly though it's assertiveness. You have to be assertive when you deal with in particular white people. Especially when you are in the role of being a receiver. When I did my articles the one thing that I learnt and they would always drive it in you, you need to be assertive because you are going to go to a client and ask for this and they don't give it to you. They give you a run around and you need to put your foot down. So I found that it helps to say this is what I want for my child and I don't think you are right when you say he's like that. This is how I know him to be and then they will take your opinion. Obviously they know our kids sometimes a little bit more than we do. Our kids spend a lot of time with them sometimes. You say how your child is, you need to stand up for your child. If you are going to agree to what they say your child is, you might be letting your child down. Because obviously when someone is judging your child in the wrong manner you also need to be like they might have done that, but I think this is why they did. They are not a bad person; this is how they are.

Kedibone also uses assertiveness to advocate for her child. Her advocacy efforts were triggered by ill-treatment of her child and other black children. Because Kedibone persistently raised her concerns with the principal and teachers, she was then put on a committee of the school:

After school the school had an after-care service. The lady who was running it was a white person. I would pick up when they would give them food. She would give the white kids first and one day when I asked that, is it just my eyes? All the white kids are in the front and all the black kids are at the back. "Oooh no, we just call them and they come". It's amazing that for some odd reason all the white kids are in front and the black kids are at the back. Even the way she would talk to them. She would talk on a loudspeaker with black kids and talk normal with white kids. When I asked her, she said they take time to understand. I said to her that's wrong; it doesn't mean the louder you talk the better the child will understand. I went to the school principal and I said it's either they get rid of this woman or address her. Because of the way she addresses my child and my child complains and I've seen it. Initially they said don't see it as a race thing. I said I am seeing it as a race thing because if you are talking with my child using a loudspeaker and any other child who is black, yet when you speak to white kids and their peers, you talk to them; clearly something is wrong. Luckily, it looks like a number of parents were complaining about her. Then they got someone privately to run the aftercare. Another incident was in class, where you know when you have school concerts. The white kids would be given the main characters if it's your coral verse. The black ones would participate if it's a dance thing. Those that need more intellect would be white, *bo majiva jiva* [the ones who dance] would be black. When I asked the teacher: "Why is it like this?"; "We ask them which ones they would want to do and we group them according to that". So I asked my daughter: "Did you get to choose where you were going to be?"; "No, the teacher came with the list and so and so you would be in that group". I went to the principal and said: "The kids didn't get the opportunity to choose, you chose for them, and you are saying black kids are good in this and white kids are good with the intellect". They will try and convince you. "No, no, this will have to change. We have seen the rehearsal and the concert is next week but I would highly appreciate it that next year if there is a concert this doesn't happen". I guess the school figured that I am too into it. They put me in whatever committee. You would even hear in the school committee the comments that they would pass and thingy. Probably they would forget that I was there. When they would talk of kids that are unruly it would be black kids. I would say: "Hold on, are you saying to me the white kids are not unruly?" With time they changed, and as more black kids came.

Kedibone used her personal status to challenge the subtle ways in which race and white children were privileged and treated better than black children. By bringing the school management's attention to the manner in which the after-care teacher chose to speak normally to white kids, yet used a loudspeaker when addressing the black learners, and how roles were allocated for the school concert according to race, she highlighted the pervasiveness of racism within the school. Kedibone exposed the white teachers' everyday, taken-for-granted practices, utterances and ways of engaging with black children. For Kedibone, the teacher was actively perpetuating the unequal treatment of white and black children, despite claiming that "It's not a race thing". She exposed how racial micro-aggressions<sup>i</sup> were articulated and performed within the school. This raises the question whether her appointment to the committee was actually in acknowledgement of her critical but valuable inputs to the school, or whether it was in fact to

silence her through co-optation. Nonetheless, Kedibone was able to use her personal status to raise her concerns to the extent that her capabilities were recognised, leading to her appointment to the committee.

The parents in my study used their personal status to find “out-of-the-box” ways of engaging with the school, outside of the traditional ways typically planned out by the school. For instance, Lesedi works in marketing and sales; she explains how she donates pet food to the school as her way of setting herself apart from other black parents:

For foundation phase they have a drive where they are looking after animal shelters. So because I'm in that space, I give. There are products that we can give at work, so I give them... I must be known that I am present; I am present in this school. I am there. We are there, they must know I exist.

Lesedi uses her work resources to benefit the school, thus engaging with the school differently to how traditionally black parents would be perceived.

Dr Molly admits that being a single parent, who is self-employed, she does not have as much time as white parents to attend most of the functions at her child's school. Spending time with her black friends whose children are at the same school helps Dr Molly to not feel isolated, and helps her to “fit in”:

... my number one reason is because I haven't had time as a single parent. Ehm, the other reason is that most of the black parents I know and hang around, they are also not involved because there's not a lot of us and a lot of the ones that are part of those committees are white and most of them have the time... So the reason I am saying I'm always trying to fit in is because every time there is a concert or a mother's day concert I find myself there and I know these clichés. So I hang around my black friends, and yah.

The issue of using their personal status to achieve collective advocacy underlines the impact of being racial minorities in a predominantly white school. However, it also highlights the values of ubuntu that underpin cooperation and a sense of community crucial to African society. Kedibone explains how she came to advocate for another child, whose mother is a domestic worker, who receives financial aid from the school to educate her child at the predominantly white school:

The child, the mother is a domestic worker, they stay there in Zandspruit and the mother tried to talk to the teacher and the teacher didn't have time. The reason was they were given homework and they were told to go on the Internet. Initially I didn't think much of it when my daughter came with it. You don't think that much because there's Internet in the house, do whatever. When two days later my daughter's friend missed school and I asked why. “I couldn't do the project that we were supposed to because I couldn't go on the Internet and I tried but mom didn't have money to go to the Internet café and she wasn't happy because what about people with no Internet”. No, but she should have told her. “No, she went to Miss whoever to try and explain it and that lady didn't have time. Even the way she was speaking to my mom was more like please don't waste my time. It's a school prerequisite what-what”. I told her give me your mom's number and



when I spoke to her you could hear that she wasn't happy. Even the way she was looking at her, she is looking at her like a nobody. If you can't keep up with it because it's a school prerequisite maybe you should consider taking your child to Zandspruit. Are there no schools in Zandspruit? Things like that which I felt were unnecessary. So I thought let's meet here tomorrow and go to the teacher. When we got to the teacher, she went in first and I could see the teacher's annoyance in her face. When I got in her facial expressions changed. I told her I'm actually with her and you can see the confusion in her face. Quickly I could pick on the confusion on her face. I know how it's going to go, for the fact that when she walked in her facial expressions and how she had spoken to her. I think the conversation she had a day ago, she wasn't happy with it. So now she is trying to say the thing is I was trying to explain to her was this and this. No, but you didn't explain it to me and the thing I was trying to say is that I am a domestic worker. I don't have the money and the child is here on a subsidised something...

The principle of ubuntu "*Motho ke motho ka batho*" is the driving force behind the collective advocacy articulated by Kedibone. In her comment, she is using her personal status to benefit another, less-privileged parent's child. This challenges the public perception of the black middle class as self-centred and self-absorbed. This way of getting involved in education is not typically mentioned or encouraged by teachers during parent-teacher meetings; in fact, such intervention by others could well be considered by the school as interference. However, it is an educational strategy that is essential in establishing the sense of community that black parents in particular, because of their culture and the isolation of being racial minorities in a predominantly white school, would deem as vital.

The reality for South African black middle-class parents is that very few can afford not to work. In fact, for married couples, the precariousness of their class position forces them to draw on two incomes rather than a single income. Such a precarious position challenges them to find creative and alternative ways of generating income, while remaining engaged in their child's education.

Mxolisi's wife, who gave up her full-time employment in order to be more hands-on with the children's education, started a transport business in order to draw an income and still participate in her children's education:

So I think my wife will tell you the latest sacrifice she will have to do is working for herself so that she can also be around. Pick up the kids at school; obviously take them to all these extramural activities. I think that is a sacrifice she will say she has had to make.

..

The decision to start her own small business in order to generate income while having the flexibility to be there for the kids was also shared by the other respondents in my study. What is interesting is whether national statistics actually reflect this reality. How many small businesses started by black middle-class parents were actually initiated with the goal of one parent being more hands-on in their child's education? What is the impact of these business initiatives on the economy?

## **They draw on gendered strategies of response**

Gendered strategies are evoked strategically and differently by mothers and fathers. The parents in my study used a more feminine or womanly approach to make a point when they chose to be more diplomatic in their strategy, rather than be more confrontational, like their husbands. It was almost as if the parents played “good cop-bad cop” with the teachers where the husband was the trump card that was called upon only when the situation spun out of the mother’s control. However, there was also an awareness that the father’s approach could escalate the situation and alienate the teachers; this could result in the victimisation of the child, rather than resolving the situation amicably. Lorry makes this point well in advancing her own child’s interests:

Being a woman, for starters, I’m always of the opinion that as a woman if you are in leadership, you do not have to necessarily act like a man. You don’t have to change your personality to fit a man. You can always get results in leadership as a woman by just being tactical and strategic in terms of your approach.

As a woman, Lorry appears to make a conscious decision not to be like her husband in the strategies she employs:

Ummm, because me and my husband are very competitive that is one thing about us. We do debate a lot of things. We are very robust about certain things that are happening around us. Especially politics, we talk about politics a lot and talk about the economy, things that are happening around us. He can be very chauvinistic and I show that woman aspect. He wants to be at the top so I allow him to think that he is up there. Whereas strategically, I am doing things.

It is common practice during lobola negotiations, where the wives’ family is paid a dowry by the groom’s family, that the elders will sternly warn the wife that “Monna ke hlogo ya lelapa”, a Sepedi idiom which means “the man is the head of the family”. This is emphasised, especially, where the wife is educated, as educated women are often viewed as controlling, challenging and difficult as wives. What Lorry alludes to here exposes the cultural ways in which wives are viewed as subservient to the husband, and that if you are going to challenge your husband, you better do it in subtle ways, away from the public eye. Lorry uses her personal status to subtly challenge not only her husband and his way of doing things, but also her culture. Behind the scenes she uses the strategy of “You be the head, I’ll be the neck” to activate her power as a woman within the marriage; it is this power that she draws upon in the strategies that she employs when dealing with white school officials:

What will happen is his daughter is his princess. So she will start complaining, “The teacher said this and this”. My husband will say, ‘I am going there now, you know this woman I need to give her a piece of my mind’. I will say, “You don’t do that and how you deal with people like her. Let’s rather assess the situation and see how bad the situation is. Because you go there and you start shouting, what will happen?” At the end

of the day your child will be mistreated. You need to go there knowing that whatever you will say at the end of the day no one will vent at our child. The first time around when she said stuff about the books, he wanted to go, and I said no. Let's let it go; we will see if something else happens. Then when this thing happened with his brother passing, he was so angry and mad. He said, "I am going there now" and I said, "We're not going there now, we are going to make a proper appointment". You could tell he was just... I would really like to understand why you have something against my daughter. I can be very, I may come across as being polite, but what comes out of my mouth leaves something. 'Cause I am that type of person. I learnt that as I was doing some negotiating skills. So you don't necessarily be robust in terms of your negotiation. You can be very polite but very strategic in how you will achieve those goals. So it has always been like that, you work on her psyche. Later on she will realise that was stupid of me to treat such a small child in such a manner. As a person she will reflect on that. She will realise this is not the best manner to deal with that, especially when dealing with a child. It's either you get a positive or negative; when you are dealing with a child not necessarily in a positive because the child is scared of you. Then when you are supposed to be impacting something which is educational, will they receive it? Or will they decide to block their mind and not achieve or receive anything from you. You don't, you don't do that because it's going to be her attitude against your attitude.

There are two Sepedi sayings, "Mmagongwana o swara thipa ka bogaleng", translated it says that "A mother holds the knife at its edge"; and "Mosadi o dula mollo ka marago", translated it says that "A woman sits on top of the burning fire with her bottom". This captures the values behind employing gendered-strategies. It is seen as the woman's role in African culture is to diffuse the situation and think about the long-term implications of one's behaviour and its impact on the child. Sandy makes a similar point when comparing her use of strategy to that of her husband's:

Ummm hmmm, my husband is how I describe him. He is in sales so he has this strong personality and character. So that in itself is the way he, not to say he has an attitude, but he is very black conscious. Yah, that also affects the way he interacts with other people. Based on what happens ko mosebetsing [at work]. "I am not going to let a white person push me around, so to speak". So already o kena [he comes] with that attitude.

According to Sandy, she views her husband as drawing upon his experience of apartheid and his black consciousness to influence how he engages with white colleagues at work, as well as at their child's school. This does not in any way suggest that Sandy has never suffered from prejudice and discrimination in her life, far from it; in fact, during the interview she recounted her experience of vicious racial attacks by white children at her high school. Nonetheless, she chooses to handle her child's teachers with humility:

Like we went for a parents' evening, not the one ya go interactor [to interact] with other parents but to check the school work and how my son is doing ko sekolong [at school]. It's almost like he [the husband] doesn't give them the time of day. And sometimes I come in with my personality and I accommodate people and be nice sometimes. With him, he is not willing to accommodate, so he wants you to do things straight. With me ha ke kopana le di teachers [when I meet with teachers] I try to be nice and make small talk. With him, he is there to see mosebetsi ya ngwana [the child's school work] and let's get on with it.

As Sandy elaborates, it became evident that her choice of being accommodating and gentle is strategic. She does not want to alienate the teacher and she does not want her child to adopt a negative attitude towards her teacher, and so she leads by example. In traditional African culture, all adults are your parents and you treat every adult with respect as though they are your real parents. The Sepedi saying “Kgaka sena mabala, mabala a kgakaneng” means that the true character of a parent is seen in the behaviour of the child:

Like I said, I try to be accommodating. Like you said he is like business, let's get on with it, with business. Yena [the husband] self he is *kinda* like a hard person. So when it comes to white people it's even worse. I remember on Sunday saying that I understand where he is coming from but then now that ha e etla kobaneng [now when it comes to the children] I don't know how to deal with it cause they see it. Example the other time, I know I am going off-track...ne ke rekile [I had bought] my daughter Frozen, it's like an outfit. He [husband] looked at it and then he said, “Wow you look nice, but then the only problem is those two white ladies on your chest”. You know, and for me, oooh my word. Then my son was there, and then he said “Something is wrong with your T-shirt”. Then my son is now going to think that something is wrong with white people. Ko-classeng [in class] I think he is the only black kid!.. So now I am thinking when he [her son] goes back to school otlo tla [he will come] with that thing that there is something wrong with white people. Yah, that's him nowadays. I think maybe with the racism issues going on.

There is a responsibility carried by the mothers in my study that how they choose to engage with other people, particularly white school officials, is a reflection of their character, that they are actually leading by example. So even as they use gendered strategies, they are discerning in choosing which strategy to use, when and where, resulting in a myriad of choices manifesting in multiple ways of advocating for their children. Also, when to act themselves or give over to their husbands or act in tandem.

### **They restrict themselves to child-directed strategies**

Strategic choice is informed by the intentions and likely outcomes of strategy use; in fact, this is how agency is activated, a matter I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. In this section I wanted to tell the story of the parents in my study who seemed to be passive or do nothing with regards to their children's school and the teachers. Instead, the parents chose to employ child-directed strategies (see Chapman and Bhopal, 2013). What sets these parents apart from those in the previous section is that the motivation behind being passive with regards to the white school officials is driven by numerous factors. They include regard for the status quo of white schools as black schools are deemed to be inferior; parents' personal characteristics of being non-confrontational; the parents' Christian values; and the parents' lack of knowledge regarding educational practices. These parents admitted that they do not engage with the school at all, instead they choose to focus on the child and help the child thrive. They provided numerous examples of enrolling their children in various programmes to receive extra tuition in mathematics and English, helping with homework, attending parent-teacher meetings to learn about the

child's progress, and communicating with the teacher via the school diary. However, the focus of my study is on the educational strategies employed by the parents when engaging with white school officials, and their motivation behind the choice and use of strategies. I want to mention upfront that strategy use was adapted depending on the child, the context, the school, and the matter at hand. These parents in this section of the results chose to work on the character of their children, rather than change or challenge the system. I call this child-directed strategies.

Mxolisi had concerns about the racial demographics of the teaching staff and the impact it was likely to have on his children. It was obvious in the interview that Mxolisi had deep concerns about this matter as he believed that the lack of black teachers sent the wrong message to his children about their future aspirations as teachers:

So my kids have integrated very well at the school. I think if one looks at the percentages of non-white children, I would say it's quite balanced. I think where one would get disappointed is in the staff complement, the teachers themselves. The school has not improved on that. It's not an issue that I have taken up because at this stage I haven't felt it has impacted my kids in any way in terms of their academics. But I think just from a role model point of view if they can also see that a black can also be a teacher at their school. Maybe one of them could say, "Look one day I also want to be a teacher because you also get black teachers". I think the school can improve there.

However, despite the valid concerns of Mxolisi and the impact he projects this could have on his children's self-esteem, he chooses not to challenge the system or raise his concerns with the school. Instead, he allows his children to have "sleepovers" and socialise with other racial groups. Mxolisi explains the philosophy behind his decision to use child-directed strategies, rather than engage the school directly regarding his concerns:

So that's a very interesting question because one of the things I try to instil with my kids is never to see themselves as either black or white, but to see themselves first of all as a human being. Racial issues I try not to bring them if I feel they are not going to build their character and as such at school they have never felt like they are in the minority or stuff like that from other kids. That's reflected in the friendships they keep at school. Where they go for sleepovers. The people they invite for sleepovers. All my kids, I want them to believe that they can be better than anyone or that they are just as good as anyone else, so that they don't have an inferiority complex. When that sets in their mind that can have a negative impact on how they feel about themselves and their self-esteem

The Sepedi idiom "Sepa la mpsa le obja le sale meetse" translated states that "A dog's poo is moulded while it is still wet" explains Mxolisi's strategy use here. He chooses to mould the character of his children and the children that they associate with while they are still young, rather than "teach an old dog new tricks". However, this strategy stands in contrast to the actions of more activist parents who would argue that racism and racial oppression requires challenge and change at every level where it finds expression,

in the home, school, church, work, community and society at large. By working on his children, Mxolisi finds a less confrontational manner to build their positive self-esteem. In the process, more activist parents would argue, he leaves white hegemonic practices intact and misses the opportunity to challenge racial subjugation as practiced in the school.

Mxolisi, Yoliswa and Sandy choose child-directed strategies to intervene, instead of engaging with the school or the teacher directly. What sets Mxolisi apart from Yoliswa and Sandy is that he recognises racial inequalities and how these impact his children, and he chooses to address these by cultivating an environment that fosters racial equality at home. Yoliswa and Sandy, on the other hand, acknowledge racial inequality but they feel powerless to do anything at all. Their response is to wear “oogklappe” or blinkers in order to avoid tackling any issues regarding race; they choose to focus on the academic aspects of their child’s learning and ignore anything that might derail their child’s academic success. Their approach towards the school is characterised by docility and positive regard, and acceptance of the status quo.

Yoliswa, as mentioned previously, holds the view that “...whites do better things than us... because we do things differently from them. Sometimes I feel we literally destroy what we’ve got”. This explains Yoliswa’s reason for placing her child in this school:

I know that my child can be stretched as far as her brain can take. But in my Model C school I don’t see that. I can actually compare with the other kids in my estate. The kids who go to Model C’s and to my child, they are not really on the same par..... Have you ever heard of a school that is burnt down like your private school? No, who burns down schools? Us black people. Do you see white people burning down buildings; no, they don’t. Instead of us black people maintaining what we have, we destroy. If you remember when Hillbrow was Jo’burg, Hillbrow when whites were there, it used to be a proper thing. It’s something I don’t think you want to go there because you are worried that you going to be stabbed, raped, killed, and yah.

Yoliswa’s comparison is not just about the quality of education between township schools and her daughter’s school. In her estimation, the private school education of her daughter is better than her own public education at a former white (Model C) school:

Yes, the standard of the education. Another thing is I never went to a private school; I went to a Model C school. I see I was disadvantaged when I’m comparing to my child’s schooling nowadays. There are so many things, like the standard, now she’s in grade 4. The things that they are studying now I studied probably in grade 6.

Yoliswa goes on to articulate a sense of powerlessness that renders her petrified. The fact that she is not a teacher, it is her first child, and the standard of education that her child receives is far above what she

was exposed to as a child makes her feel incapable of asking questions, raising any objections or voicing an opinion. It is almost as though the school is a giant on a pedestal, while she is a mere mortal:

I do go if there is something that I don't understand. I am not the type of person who, it's as if I am bugging them. But if there is a problem I will go and ask. Most of the time I don't ask, I wait for the report and if I see there is improvement on the report I keep quiet. If there is no improvement I go ask. Is she struggling and all that? Otherwise I would expect the teacher to contact me if there is a problem with my child because I was never a teacher before....Remember I am not a teacher, I don't know these things. This is my first child; I am always eager to listen and get ideas. Such that she is on two programmes out of the school...I would say now that we are in the intermediate phase of her schooling, this is the time I am able to see how she is going to be progressing because the first term there were awards that I didn't even know about. So in terms of academics, with extramurals she's getting certificates and the first grade one, two and three she did get some academic awards. But now it's another level. I'm still learning how it's going to be done. There's that dilemma of not understanding why are they having those top ten students across the board; how it's done and all that. When it comes to swimming 'cause she's good at swimming I just feel like they not putting her where she is supposed. Because I am not saying anything because I want my child to be good at sport and that's it. Such things like I say I can't be asking, what if they give me something as proof and I can't say anything. Because I haven't been exposed. Saying I'm learning according as we go. I don't think it's worrying me being a female who's married and middle-aged. I don't know what they are doing behind that they are not exposing to black people. Remember what these white people would do is give money to the school, things that we don't do and do extra things that we don't do. Because we've just taken our kids for education, but with them they want to have a relationship so that their kids can actually have a relationship so that their kids can get these awards and being prefects and all that. Those things don't bother me because I know they are done, but what can I do.

The regard for her daughter's school stems from her perception that blacks destroy and that black schools are inferior to white schools:

Eh yah, with our schools there are a lot of problems in terms of not attending schools and not going to school. Toy-toying there's no seriousness about it, so I thought let me take her to a school where I know everything will be done in order, I won't be stressing about any other thing.

The high regard for her daughter's private education also finds expression in how she engages with the teacher, as well as how she handles strife with family and friends:

I am always a positive person and am not like that. I don't get to interact with the other mothers and know if they are going through the same problems as me. I just take the teachers advice and I am out of that office.....I am just like that; I don't like discussing things that are not about me. I feel like if it's not about my child it's not about me. Me and my husband and that's it. I don't want any influential decisions from outside. I am always like that, no friends, nothing, because I am a very positive person....It's not really a strategy, it's the way I am. Because even if there is a family quarrel or crisis I am always the one who's a peacemaker. If I am fighting with you Tshepiso then I see that you are rising up and we are both rising up. I'm the one who's going to calm down first so that this can be stopped. If there is a family crisis I am always the one whose trying to say guys let's talk about this!

Yoliswa consciously makes the point of avoiding race in how she interprets issues:

I don't know. I don't know and I don't want to say things that. I think that's a way, that's the way he is. Sometimes I do feel like he is a little bit because of race. But I don't want to put that in my head otherwise it's going to affect me...The way I am going to look at them now. Instead of me focusing on my child. I don't want to look at them that way like these people are racial and all that. I don't want to look at that, I just want my child to do her best and push her... Like I said. I feel even if I can, it's not in me; I don't want to be involved. Because even if I get involved I know there's nothing that can be done because of my race. Like you said, it's a predominantly white school...Yes, you know I will tell one thing. Parents cried about Zulu and Afrikaans; they asked if our black kids can do Zulu and their white kids do Afrikaans. What they did, I think they cut Zulu and the kids did Afrikaans; something like that? It's something that was raised by white people, then it was done. They just removed Zulu because they said their kids can't assist their kids, I think grade five or whatever. But there is something like that. It's their school; we are putting our kids there, so what can we do? You have to follow suit. We can fight a bit just for them to be aware that this is what we want, but they won't do anything about it. Except if you take your child out.

Yoliswa feels powerless to change the way things are at the school; she is aware that she is in a racial minority and that she has isolated herself as a protective mechanism for her child and herself. She is aware that she voluntarily enrolled her child at the school and because she is impressed with how the school is run and she is not knowledgeable about education, there is little that she can do to advocate for her child against racial inequality. Yoliswa has a myriad of reasons why she avoids addressing issues regarding racial inequality, and why she wears blinkers to focus solely on her child's education. Her statement, "It's their school; we are putting our kids there so what can we do", captures her sense of powerlessness. Her class consciousness does not translate into feeling equal to the white parents and white teachers, even to her fellow black parents.

Sandy is another parent who echoed Yoliswa's sentiments. She justifies her being subdued as a character trait; Sandy also admits that feeling inferior to the white parents because of her limited education:

Ummm, like maybe I'm a reserved person, a shy person and that's another thing. Like, you would see that they do talk nicely and so many things, so to speak. The conversation le bona just flows. They would come and check up on you two minutes, then leave, and go back to the white parents. Ke reng [what can I say], like I'm saying .. the confidence goes with it...When you speak to them Ke reng [what can I say] umm okay, rewind (laughs). Some of the parents I've met are lawyers or in high-profile positions and I think that's where the confidence comes from as well. The confidence e ke bolela kateng. Nna I wouldn't say it's arrogance, but ke [it's] confidence. The way they carry themselves, so the other parents would carry themselves in that way as well.

Sandy admits, "I've lost my confidence". She elaborates:



(Laughs) I guess it's some of the things that have happened in my life as well. I look at my life and I am nowhere where I need to be. So you know career-wise especially I am trying to rebuild my life. My marriage last year took a big knock, like a big knock last year. That affected me as well because of the things my husband was saying. So yah, I guess that has spilled over to... at school.

The Sepedi saying “Sehlare sa moshi ke go o katoga” translated means “The best way to deal with smoke is to avoid it”. This captures the strategy employed by these parents. The choice of child-directed strategies focuses on parents who do not overtly engage with the school, but instead works on the child. By focusing on helping the child to achieve academically, the parents avoid addressing uncomfortable issues about racial integration and inequality; they avoid changing or challenging the system to highlight the taken-for-granted ways in which their black children are subjugated as racial minorities in the schools. The parents in this section might be middle class, according to their financial position; however, their class consciousness and awareness of class resources does not translate into where they feel empowered to activate the change they require within the school. Instead, they limit their strategy and influence within the home with their children.

### **They take their authority and inspiration from knowledge handed down**

“Rutang bana ditaola le se ye natso badimong”, a Sepedi idiom promotes intergenerational knowledge transfer. It says that adults should impart their wisdom to the children before they perish. The role of grandparents and their influence on their children's development is central to many African communities and culture. The importance of drawing upon intergenerational knowledge and strategies was also evident among the parents in my study. The strategies that they employed were influenced by what their parents did, their assessment of whether those strategies were effective or not, as well as how they were impacted by those strategies as children. Where they experienced the impact as positive, the parents in my study adopted those strategies. Where they deemed the impact as negative, even if retrospectively, they recognised the strategies benefitted them as children, then they rejected or changed the strategies.

Lesedi explains how she was influenced by her parents to advocate for her children:

My mother is an educator and my father was; although my mother used to work my father was like the breadwinner. In terms of salary scale my father earned more. So my father worked, but she was the lecturer by nature. So when it came to school my mother would always be the first one to ensure that in terms of school if I'm lacking in math there must be extramural activities, I mean extra math; there must be extra science. So I've seen how my mother nurtured my education to date, and to where I am today I know that my mother's encouragement, my mother's dreams, my mother wanting me to achieve more than her. My mother she studied up until Honours level and her dream was always “You know what, Lesedi, if you can I want you to push beyond that you understand”. So I've always had that dream and drive and for me with my kids now. I am also studying now, and I am studying because I don't want my kids to stop where I

stopped. Ideally, I want them to go far; I want them to push themselves. For me it comes from my mother, I come from a family ya education. So there's not even after matric you take a year off, or what-what.

Lesedi goes on to explain how her father stood up for her when she was in school:

So my father had a very high position in education at that stage. So if I had, if I felt maybe like you as my teacher I wasn't getting enough from you with another child. A white child o mofa [you give them] attention of which nna [I am] not getting because of language, because English is my second language and I'm lacking with whatever the subject and you're not coming up with or forth. I would call my dad and tell him this is the problem that I have..., and the teacher is not doing this and what I find is that all the white people, Coloured were also important, Indians, all those people are getting the attention because English ke [is] second language you don't get or understand the content or what is being delivered in class. Nna [my] father was very pro-education, my father would attend straight to the principal. He would go straight to the principal. The matter will be attended to. Let me tell you the next day, all of that would change. My father was, he's always been for equality for all. Nna, I've always told myself come hell or high waters my child will not take the back seat and they would not be number two. Where I am involved, and where I can influence a situation and I'm not going to go and ask for my kids to pass or be done a favour. No ways, they will earn that 80 percent. But I will push for that 80 percent. My daughter studies, she's in standard two, grade four, hey... I think my father; I don't think he really had a strategy. My father was just, this is what's wrong; he was just – it was either black or white. We are not happy with this, this is what will happen and we will document it.

The use of intergenerational strategies is not without critical assessment. The level of agency also involved the parents being self-critical about the strategies used by their parents. They did not simply repeat what their parents did. The parents in my study were more discerning about which strategies from their parents they would adopt, with an awareness of how it impacted them as children. Lesedi articulates this further:

Ya, no. No, principal straight. I mean half the time I would see him in that office, I'm like "Oooh my gosh, I am going to be in trouble with the teachers". You worry, you know how it is at school. Now, I am not going to be the popular one in class, or the teacher is going to treat me differently and because now my father is attacking the principal, the principal is going to attack this teacher... So for me I don't consider myself... my father was aggressive. I am not aggressive.

As a result of her awareness of how her father's actions impacted her negatively, Lesedi chose a more diplomatic approach in order to minimise the impact on her own children:

I want to find out, what the problem is, if there is a problem. Or if I've identified the problem I would like to explain the problem to the next person and understand how you can help me help you so we can help the child. At the end of the day to make your life, your job that much easier so that my child can get out of the situation that they are in. ... Let me see, let me see. What happened, it was my son's reading, I found out that he was lacking behind, I found out the teacher was not, I was not being informed. Although I could see gore ne go na li digaps [there were learning gaps]. I don't know how to teach grade 1, I don't know the level or the methods of teaching. But I went back to her and I said, "You can see that the child has got a problem and ke batla ompolelle gore [I want

you to tell me] how can I better help him to grasp the concepts of these things". What can you do to help me as part of, "*No, but you know the curriculum you need to do this and this*". I'm like, "I'm not asking you to go over and above as a teacher", and maybe I was aggressive. "I don't want you to go over and above. I just want you to give me the material if available. Or tell me, where on the Internet I can access or tell me where on D6 communicator I can access the material so I can assist my child". Because I won't sleep at night. For me it's wicked to find out that my child is on par or one step ahead. So nna that's how, and since then the relationship is actually good, very good. I even provide them with a free product.

Kate, on the other hand, acknowledges how her mother took her side as a child, which at the time served to protect her from her teachers. However, she chose to engage with her child's teacher differently so as to not repeat the mistakes made by her mother:

My mom was a very difficult one and I used to play on that as a kid. If I get home and do something wrong I must just tell her my side of the story so she can buy it. By the time she gets to school, she's on my side. I know I have got her because I've told her. She was a no-nonsense taking parent. If I got called in a lot I was very intelligent but I was that child, my work is done, but I would get my A's and B's. I would pull a crowd and take them completely the opposite direction knowing very well I am passing. I was always in trouble. They didn't have anything to stand on because when they looked at my academics I was way up there. That also worked with my mom as well. She would be like, "My child she got an A for this and a B for this; what are you trying to say. Look at all those kids, they are all failing". I think she didn't know me and that side of me existed. Because I played it so well, I made sure I do my homework and she sees it. She sees that I'm studying, so that when they call her and they say she was with the group of kids that bunked school. She would be like, "But how does she get an A if she bunked?" If she was called to the office, she would go. I went to a multi-racial school in Krugersdorp. It wasn't a private school, it was a government school.

Kate acknowledges that it was her mother's experience of racism that made her use confrontational strategies when engaging with white school officials:

So yah, back then it was predominately white children. You didn't get accepted easily. She was there and she tried to protect me and she would say, "Should you feel like they're not treating you fairly because they are predominately white, you should tell me. I want to be there to protect you". She saw that here this is what it is. I think grade eight and nine I had to do Afrikaans home language because the English classes were full. So she wanted to make sure *gore* that now you're doing Afrikaans home language and you're not even Afrikaans, I want to know that they are being fair to you in terms of marks. But I think if you understand what you are doing it doesn't matter whether you are doing Afrikaans first language or English home language; you will just pass.

Kate acknowledges that her mother's hypervigilance regarding racism created a blind spot for her. This was compounded by her sterling academic performance. As a result, Kate's mother was oblivious to her truant behaviour and consequently became more confrontational with the teachers:

She had to do that a lot; like I said I was a troublemaker. I was at a point where they had said that now they don't want me at the school. You still haven't proved how an A student can be a troublemaker. You know I played her well. I would get home and cry my eyeballs out. I did a debate thing and now they don't want to listen to me because I

am that troublemaker and teachers have that... She [mother] fought for me a lot. I do regret it now, now that I have my own child I think maybe I shouldn't have done that because it put a strain on her. "My child, they are always being unfair to her", and part of it was not true.

Kate admits that she manipulated her mother. In retrospect she concedes that this had a negative impact on her mother, as well as herself. Consequently, she chooses to engage very differently with her own daughter's teachers. Out of her own experience, Kate has learnt to distinguish between negative treatment from the teachers because of racism, and one that was a consequence of bad behaviour on her part:

I don't want to lie and say that were [racism]. I think it was just from a troublemaker, a problem child. Nna, I perceive that it's because I'm black now they say this and this, not putting it into account that you are a troublemaker. You bunk classes, make noise in class, backchat teachers. So I don't think it was a racial issue. Maybe it was, but I had already created that perception that this is how I am. I had always thought that not a lot of teachers like me. So I struggled a lot with that I had to prove myself. I grew up in grade eleven and I had to realise that now you need to grow up. Some things are not going to work for you. You get rejected and you can see that if I was that type of person I would not get rejected. But because I backchat teachers, now I am being treated. The day you decide to grow up so much, so they are still holding on to when you were in grade eight. That caused a lot of rejection, a lot, and I had to. It was something that was in me. I had been rejected by my teachers so much that I felt that I had to work through that growing up. I had to tell myself, "You not that person and not everyone is going to reject you". Even if I wasn't rejected for a job interview but because of my qualification it took me back to my high school years. Because I felt like, "But you were always rejected, this is not something new. Who do you think you are? Ka na [by the way], you were rejected in high school". So I had to grow through that and remember that this person doesn't know that or anything about you. They don't go back to your teachers and say give me a reference about this person, so yah.

Earlier I made reference to Lorry using gendered strategies. She chooses to be strategic, and therefore less confrontational than her husband. She draws upon her experiences of racism at work to engage more strategically, but assertively, with the teachers:

Ummm, I guess because as a person I'm exposed, a black person that's exposed. I've seen it in the working environment and I've said to myself I will never allow anyone, be it white or black, to treat me differently because of my status. I would actually fight for myself. I am not going to allow anybody to treat my kids like... That has always been a thing that I've had. I'm not going to allow anybody to!

By elaborating on what Lorry observed her grandmother doing when advocating for her, she learnt to be assertive and courageous:

Yes. My upbringing, I was raised by my grandmother. My grandmother like... Yes, I've had bullying in my childhood. I remember when I was doing grade two, this other boy he was way older than all of us. He used to take my lunchbox and he will eat it. He would then throw me with... with breadcrumbs... Screaming at him and I would actually complain to the teacher. My grandmother was that type of a person; she wouldn't waste time. Immediately after you come home crying she would go straight to the school and

tell the principal. I would like to see you disciplining this boy in front of me. I am not leaving the school until I see him being disciplined. Even the teachers; there was this teacher; I had a very long hair. So anyway, I had very long hair when I was doing standard one. This teacher was very temperamental. You know those people they have mood swings, today they are in high spirits, the following day they are something else. Whether that is prompted by the problems at home, I don't know. I was very young but understand how she behaved. One day she just took a pair of scissors and started cutting my hair. Then cut my friends hair. "You're not supposed to have such long hair wara wara [etcetera]". We were like; we've had this hair since we started school. No one has complained about our hair. I mean my grandmother makes sure that my hair is neat and whatever. So she cut it while it was plaited, how you like it! I actually left the school before (school was out)... Yes, and then went home. My grandparents were very influential. My grandfather was a retired teacher and even the school was named after him. The school that I attended, the primary school that I attended, when I got home I found my grandparents, and they said let's go. That teacher was actually expelled. All the parents came and said, you know what. They united against that teacher and said what will happen next if her temper can do this? If it can drive her to do this, what more can she do? She's teaching the standard one's, grade three's. At the time, we did not understand her attitude. Then she was expelled from the school. I think even the Department of Education at the time, they were very strict. So they did not even want her, she had to leave the profession.

However, unlike her grandmother, Lorry has learnt to be more strategic as a woman. "You can always get results in leadership as a woman by just being tactical and strategic in terms of your approach". Her earlier comments revealed that she tends to study the situation first and think about the long-term implications of her behaviour and its impact on her child. Similar to Lorry, Kedibone recalls how both her parents advocated for her as a child:

I think advocate for me in the sense that I would, I think the race thing has always been there. My complexion will at times work at my disadvantage or advantage. Being in a school that is predominately black. There's this light-skinned person, there's this thing that teachers would want to give you either preferential treatment or they would want to pin you down and say, "Don't think you are lighter than everyone else, we will give special treatment". So it came in both ways, where I would be penalised when I say I cannot stay long in the sun because of my complexion. The lighter you are, the vision, because it affects their eyesight. Even fair-skinned people, you can't stay in the sun because of it. When you try and explain that to the teacher they say or think, "You are special because of your complexion". They would make you do long chores in the sun just to see how you react. You would try and say to them, "It's not because I want to be special". The more they would do that I would tell my mom its making my stay very uncomfortable. I don't want to go there anymore. She would have to go to school and say, "Look, I understand all the kids have to do this, but I don't appreciate the treatment you giving my child". You know ,the teachers will say, "Sometimes we feel like she wants to be treated special". "What has she done that has made you to think that she wants to be treated differently?" She is basically saying this is my condition. This is what happens when I'm in the sun for so long. Then it will go back to normal and there would be instances I would get away with things that I shouldn't be. Every time I would tell my mom, "Guess what? Everyone did this", and my mom will be quick to say, "They are giving you preferential treatment because of this". Somehow it's going to come back and bite you. She would still go and tell the principal, "I understand that we have favourites, but it's not going to work well in the long run for her. It will work at her disadvantage. She will think that what happens in life and it is going to harm her". Like I said, I think I was lucky to have parents that were

involved in my schooling.... I have always been that type of person that does not take a back seat. I will pick up and I guess it was how we were raised up. You shouldn't fear or have a mind that you are victimised. When we were growing up it was that thing that a white person can never be wrong. I would say that my father was one very outspoken person and mother as well. I think the advantage as well was the language thing.

The content of the issues that Kedibone's parents raised on her behalf, as well as the manner in which they raised their grievances to the school, mirrors how Kedibone currently engages with the teachers at her children's schools. Earlier I made reference to how she uses stealth, and how she used her personal status to advocate for another less-privileged child, as well as how she used her personal status to challenge the subtle ways in which race and white children are privileged and treated better than black children. Her response indicates that "Pinyana ge ere ping, e kwele Ping e kgolo", a Sepedi idiom that would completely lose its meaning if I dared to translate it. However, its English equivalent would be "The apple does not fall very far from the tree".

Another parent who draws on intergenerational knowledge is Mxolisi. He explains that his parents' career made it difficult for them to be actively involved in his schooling:

So both our parents were sales people. My wife's father was an insurance salesperson; my mother and father were furniture sales people. Were we poor? No, we were not poor. Did we get the best education we could get? At the time. I would say yes they could afford to take us to school; they could afford to clothe us. We're definitely not poor; whether we were middle class or not? I'm not quite sure about that... There was never an engagement with the school. Basically my mom would say, "I don't have to engage with the school. I don't have the time to engage with the school because I have to go to work". So being a salesperson paid on commission, she needed to be at work all the time. So no interaction whatsoever.

Mxolisi's parents did not overtly engage with the school on his behalf. They saw to it that his school fees were paid and he had a roof over his head, period. Which to a certain extent, he is also doing. However, he feels that in comparison to his parents, he is more actively involved with his children's education; albeit, he also adopts child-directed strategies rather than teacher-directed ones:

No definitely not. So I engage with the school I would say way more than my parents did. I look at their books, so your tutorial material, or what you call tutorial material at varsity. Whatever the teachers put together, so I will comment if I find spelling mistakes in the book, if it doesn't make sense, or if I feel like my child is not getting the support he needs I communicate with the school and the school is open to that. The school has a diary, so if the school wants to communicate, we communicate with the diary. And the teacher responds with the diary.

The transmission of knowledge from one generation to another, and in particular, the educational strategies from parent to child is very important in the broader scheme of achieving racial equality within the education sector in South Africa. In order for the next generation to have access to quality education, in a truly free and fair society, it is imperative that strategies that help change the system at the school

level, as the microcosm of society, are studied more carefully and replicated widely. This will hopefully give impetus to the drive to accelerate change toward racial equality for all status levels.

### **They recall experiences from memory as the basis for action**

Among black South Africans, there seems to be an assumption of a shared memory of apartheid. Through the interviews with the parents in my study I learnt that people's experience of apartheid was situational. For parents who grew up in the Bantustans (so-called homelands), such as Bophuthatswana, Transkei and Northern Transvaal, their experience of racism and therefore apartheid as children is radically different to those who grew up in the old (white) Transvaal. Therefore, although the parents in my study grew up during the apartheid era, their stories carry rival narratives of segregation and racial oppression; in other words, their experiences differ because where they grew up in the Bantustans, they engaged very differently with other racial groups. I wanted to document their experiences and explore these experiences based on where they were geographically located when they grew up; if the experience was traumatic and how that experience shapes the way they engage with white school officials as adults.

My initial expectation that they would be suspicious and hyper-vigilant towards white school officials was to be challenged irrevocably by their responses. As I conversed with them, I realised that my own experiences and memory of apartheid South Africa, and therefore how I engage with white school officials as a parent, was not necessarily shared by all black people. For example, Lesedi recounts an experience of racism with a learner from another school and how the white teacher who helped her, shaped how she now chooses to engage with white school officials:

I've with other schools, I think I was doing Standard Six [grade 8]. I can't even remember which year it was, we went to, eeh it was traumatising, I won't forget it. We went to inter eeh; you know when the schools meet together and it's athletics. It was with Afrikaans schools. What a mess. We were from the stadium to the school. At [her high school in Potchefstroom] everything is in a single file and formal. These white guys come driving past. Obviously it's a mix of us, but as black people we were walking there towards the back. "You bloody kaffirs", it was just traumatising. "How dare we walk around the street and we think we are so free". That I didn't understand. So we get to the school and at that stage our teacher was like, "We mustn't take those comments to heart. It is one of those people that will always have something to say". For me I didn't understand why just a year ago we were declared free people and there is still people that see you and call the K-word. That I didn't understand, so my teacher gets there and she didn't even have an answer for me. All she said to me was you will find people like that, that are not ok. Unfortunately there are people like that and there's nothing you can do about it. So from that point onwards I knew that no one will tell me or will say a K-word to me or you do not belong or you shall not. There is absolutely no way.

Lorry draws on her experience of boarding school in the then Bophuthatswana:

No, I actually went to a black school. I am a boarding school product. I went to boarding school. I started boarding school when I was doing standard five. I lived in boarding school, the independence in Bophuthatswana in Mafikeng... So the independence I got it from there. Also the no-nonsense, I got it from boarding school. I am that kind of person; either this or nothing

Kedibone, with her memory of how she was treated as a light-skinned black person in the then Northern Transvaal, currently Limpopo Province, is much more cautious and vigilant when dealing with white school officials:

My attitude has and it still is putting an eye and watching them. At the back of my mind is that because my child is black they may never give my child the necessary attention needed. Mainly because of her skin colour. If I'm there they may not, if I'm not there they may. So I don't put my guard down. Maybe I'm abnormal; I think it's a trust issue. It comes from what used to happen before. If they were able to do it before, I shouldn't think it's hunky dory. We are all lovey-dovey. I think it's in all humans; there will always be that thing where you are not sure whether to leave your child because you not sure whether or not they would give my child food. Or they would say your mom is not here and give the other child. So there is always that. You've got your guard on.

What is interesting is that Lorry, Kedibone, Mxolisi and Yoliswa all grew up in Bantustans, where racism was not as rife as in the Transvaal. Kedibone, in particular, her memory and experience of racism is from fellow black learners. She suffered from discrimination from black teachers and learners who were also Pedi, belonging to her cultural group. Her experience reads like that of black people who suffered racial inequality under apartheid perpetrated by white people, simply because of her light skin colour. Kedibone's experience is in stark contrast to that of Lorry, Mxolisi and Yoliswa, who were "protected" to a certain extent from the harsh treatment under apartheid. Mxolisi grew up in the Transkei Bantustan in the Eastern Cape:

So I think growing up in the Eastern Cape, obviously predominately Xhosa ethnic group. Very little exposure to other racial groups up until high school. When I say little exposure as in interacting with other racial groups on a day-to-day basis. Obviously you would interact with white people when you are in town, going to a shop to buy clothes and also where my mother worked, there were white people you would interact with them when you go see your parents. Really interaction with other racial groups was at high school and varsity. At varsity it took a different complexion because it was other ethnic groups as well Sotho-speaking, Zulu-speaking. So I think that then gave me the exposure to other racial groups, which is important and I want my kids to have. How that influenced the way I relate with the school, for example? I think for me it's about competence rather than the colour of your skin. If the school has a white teacher that is not competent, I will speak against that. If the school has a black teacher that is not competent, I will speak about that. That is what I want my kids to view on other human beings. It should be, "Is this person delivering on what they promised or in terms of what is expected of them?" That should be the criteria of judging other people, rather than the colour of their skin.

Even though in his formative years, Mxolisi was not exposed to other racial groups, as he grew up he interacted with people from different racial groups. The experience of growing up in the Transkei shielded



him from the trauma and oppression characteristic of the treatment that black people were exposed to by whites during the apartheid era:

There's a couple of things that happen as you grow up. My mother being a salesperson, she had to sell furniture to all racial groups. Okay, why? Because that paid her salary and put food on the table. She was very open when it came to dealing with other racial groups because that meant a lot to her. She also got us involved, so for example my mother will sell a TV to a Coloured lady in a Coloured township, there's a place. She would say, "My kids will bring the TV". You needed people to set up these things and you would go to these places where there were different racial groups. I think in that way I became comfortable with interacting with just about anybody. I think even at work, I think the teachers going to university and interacting with people of a mixed race, playing soccer with people of a mixed race. Different ethnic groups, starting to speak Sotho, I think that has helped me cope with interacting with people from other racial groups.

As a result of his upbringing, as well as being in a mixed-race relationship, Mxolisi uses child-directed strategies to deconstruct the narrow definitions of self-identity along racial lines in his children:

So I think our kids find themselves in a different cultural context. Culturally if you were to ask my kids, "what's your culture?", they will probably say, "I'm Xhosa because my dad is Xhosa but I also speak Afrikaans because my mom speaks Afrikaans". For them that would be defining their culture because both the parents are important to them. But if we talk of cultural or traditional things that have to be done my kids will go to the Eastern Cape if there is a function. But are they getting the same exposure as I did growing up? Definitely not, because of where we live. Are they getting white culture? I'm not sure if the school is a white culture, it's a melting pot amongst the kids and I think the kids are going to create their own culture. Unless the parents are deliberate that you have to understand what daddy went through, but if it's not deliberate they will come up with their own culture, their own worldview, which I'm open to.

Like Mxolisi, Yoliswa grew up in the Transkei. Her experience of racism mirrors that of Mxolisi, further shedding light on why she remains uncomfortable with raising issues around race and racism, even to this day:

You know what with me, I was born in Transkei. We didn't have this sort of exposure to apartheid because we were under Matanzima. Matanzima was actually doing everything for us. Hence, people from the other provinces, not provinces, but like PE and all that would go to the Transkei to go study. People from Jo'burg would go to the Transkei to go study. Because there were no riots there. We were never treated by the Boer in that way because I would say I didn't know in terms of schooling. Hence, people from other provinces would go to the Transkei. So everything was done for us, I would say.

The story of South Africa's oppression under apartheid is often told from the perspective of freedom fighters, struggle stalwarts, political parties, riots and protest action. However, the parents in my study have cast another angle, that the experience of race and racism was situational – it depends on where

you grew up. Lesedi's story is very similar to my own; however, there are other parents in my study that tell a very different story that is just as compelling. Depending on where you lived and where you were educated during apartheid, your consciousness about race, class and ethnicity is different. One could experience discrimination and rejection within your own racial group and ethnic group, rather than from white people; another person could experience acceptance and acknowledgement from other racial groups, while yet another could experience harsh treatment, discrimination and rejection from white people. In turn, the educational strategies employed by these parents when engaging with white school officials are not as straightforward or predictable as one would expect.

### **They deploy cultural resources and advantage to position themselves for action**

Being black in South Africa is not straightforward. In fact, the experiences of parents and the strategies that they use are influenced by their skin colour, ethnic group, nationality, and whether they are an inter-racial couple. Kedibone self-identifies as black, she is originally from Limpopo, and her ethnic group is Pedi, her mother tongue is Sepedi, and she is also fluent in English and Afrikaans. However, her skin is very light, which leads a lot of people to mistake her as Coloured. For Kedibone, her light skin colour affects how others experience and engage with her:

Very interesting. Not even at school, even out, whether you go to a shop. The treatment they give another person you think they wouldn't give it to me mainly because of my skin colour. You know I would test that and it would be exactly that. You know if you're dark skinned and you ask something "Sorry", "Sorry", and they look the other way. What? You know, but if I come before I can say what I want, they actually come to me and say, "Can I help you". As much as the race thing, it's out there... Even amongst black people. Even amongst my friends, there is still that notion that the more fluent you are in English, the more you do what white people are doing, the more up your class. You know even the way we talk. When I reprimand my kids I reprimand them in Pedi and they know I'm being serious 'cause I say to them English is not my first language and so they know. But if I reprimand them in English, they will say whatever. They will run away with it. I will get surprised when my friends say their kids don't know Sotho. That even confuses me.

In her recollection of the incident with the mother who works as a domestic worker, Kedibone acknowledges the fact that her light skin gave her leverage. She could advocate for the mother, because the teacher could not decide, based on her skin colour, whether she was black or Coloured:

I think so because she can't be white, but maybe she's Coloured. So it's like I'm somewhere. She's probably thinking that I must be tactful and not offend you.

As a result, Kedibone uses her multi-lingual competency as a strategy to cross racial and ethnic lines. In particular, her proficiency in English and Afrikaans serves as a strategy to engage with white people more effectively as an equal:

Language, as in I'm fluent in your English or Afrikaans. So the schools will either hold their meetings in Afrikaans or English. They would sort of cut you off. If there is a number of black people you are sort of cut off. So if you don't know the language you don't get that part that they didn't want you to hear. You would even see with your colleagues they would not even tell you. What did they say? They would just assume whatever. Who are you? You know it's like there is this fear from out there that says a white person is going upper hand. So if you are black, you're not supposed to say anything that's going to question a white person's stature. That worked in my advantage because I don't see them as that. For me whether you are black or white if you are wrong, you are wrong. The advantage was being able to speak to them in their language. If someone argues to me in Sotho, if I respond in Sotho, they would be able to understand me more unlike if I respond in English. Information gets lost; if you are an Afrikaans person and I argue in your language, we will both get the message. The language thing was an advantage.

A mixed race couple, the wife Cheryl M self-identifies as Coloured, while the husband, Solly M, identifies as black. Like Kedibone, they draw upon their race and knowledge of Afrikaans as a strategy to gain access when engaging with white school officials. Cheryl M recounts how she uses Afrikaans to build a relationship with her daughter's teachers:

No, I think our kids are too scared to step out of line. I think what counted in our favour at the Cambridge school and because I'm Afrikaans. The minute they see they converse in their own language and I found that he will just sit and I will have a big conversation. I mean if I go to the school the teachers come and they hug. Merits like our relationship has grown; my daughter has grown. But we have got a type of relationship. When you leave I know what business you have, the degree you have and the kids you have. We have that type of relationship. I feel that has counted, especially at the current school; in the primary school we haven't really interacted like that. Our kids get good marks so they have never had to call us on anything. There has never been an issue where they called us and said look we have a problem maybe she's lacking in something. My daughter has always had white teachers. I think one of the teachers were really black, and maybe that's why we've never experienced it.

Her ability to use Afrikaans enables Cheryl M to break the ice as well as any barriers between herself and the teacher, to the extent that the teacher ended up confiding in her. She herself is baffled by how simply speaking the same language as the teacher could enable her to access the teacher at such a deep, personal and vulnerable level:

I think I first observe them to hear maybe what language I observe them in. When they start that then I start asking them questions. The one lady I think in Jan they had an open camp and we had to fetch them. I remember my kids walked out to my daughter, the one teacher's roof fell in and she was in a state. I asked her, "What happened?" We just started talking. She [the teacher] started hugging me and crying. I don't know how to do it when I see them talking a different language that I know I just switch over to make you more comfortable. I guess also knowing it will make you more comfortable.

The reference to learning Afrikaans by black children remains a bone of contention amongst black parents. However, like Cheryl M and Kedibone have illustrated, speaking Afrikaans enables one to break cultural and racial barriers; it enables one to gain access to a racial and cultural group who still holds the

bulk of the economy, wealth and land in South Africa. It raises the question, how far, as a country, are we capable of removing racial and economic barriers if we continue to refuse to learn each other's languages?

The stories of the parents who deploy cultural advantage and resources are prevalent amongst the mixed-race or Coloured parents. It highlights an issue that has been captured in the media about being "yellow boned", a derogatory term used to refer to black people who are light in complexion. Their complexion makes it hard for people to place them into a racial category, especially when that person does not come outright and label themselves as Coloured. Their story is important because there is a growing trend among celebrities who are also black middle class to use skin lighteners in order to be "yellow boned". However, exploration of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this study.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented the findings on the educational strategies employed by the parents in my study. The results indicate that they use a myriad of strategies that include both child-directed and institution-directed strategies. Some of the child-directed strategies are actually a visor, hiding the fact that the parents feel ill-equipped to challenge racial inequalities. The findings corroborate those from other scholars with regards to using personal status to assert themselves; however, what sets the parents in my study apart is that as the black middle class in South Africa, they are constantly fighting the stereotype of being labelled as "black diamonds". Here class is a double-edged sword that empowers, but also limits.

The parents in my study also draw upon intergenerational knowledge; depending on their impact, they use strategies learnt from their parents. They also draw upon gendered strategies to set themselves apart from their spouses, as well as model a good example for their children. However, there are cultural nuances that underlie the gendered ways in which strategies are deployed. Where the mothers recognise that their strategy is more effective, they do this without outshining the father. They work subtly, without undermining the father. In the next chapter, I explore how the intersection of race, class, ethnicity and gender activate personal agency and influence the choice of strategy use.

## CHAPTER 8

### How race, class, ethnicity and gender intersect to activate personal agency

#### Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the reasons why and the circumstances under which black middle-class parents choose one strategy over another when negotiating race-related concerns about their children with white school authorities. I present the findings on how the race-related concerns trigger strategies that activate the black middle-class parents' agency, and how these strategies, in turn, are shaped by the parents' race, class, ethnicity and gender. Social and educational research in South Africa has not yet attended to the strategies deployed by black middle-class parents who particularly find themselves in the paradoxical situation of being racial minorities in schools established and operating in a black majority country. Moreover, the international research on the educational strategies of black middle-class parents approached the subject from sociological vantage points without much attention to psychological perspectives on what motivates their strategy use and under what circumstances these parents might choose one strategy over another.

South African media reports suggest that black parents often take to public platforms in order to air their grievances with the school. However, my research finds that much more is happening in terms of parent activism or non-activism at the school and classroom levels in relation to their children's interests. This raises questions about *why* and *when* the activism or non-activism is deployed by black middle-class parents in the schools their children attend.

The relevant research questions are many: how are black parents using their class resources to raise and address their grievances pertaining to their children's education? What are those grievances, and what are the critical incidents to which the parents respond? In private engagements with the school, how are these grievances handled? Are they reactionary or proactive, and how does race, class and ethnicity influence the way these grievances are handled by the parents? Do the black middle-class parents fight the battles alone, or do they wait for the situation to blow up and gather public sympathy through the news reports; do they use the formal school structures to raise their concerns, or do they rely on galvanising support from other parents as a collective to address inequality and racial oppression like during the apartheid era? Or, has the attainment of the class resources and the hassle of maintaining the middle-class privileges lulled them into a state of blind trust towards the white school officials because predominantly white schools are run so much better than black schools? Or, has the project of navigating

the precariousness of being middle-class created such as a distraction that the parents are not aware or engaged, and the spirit of activism has ended with the new South Africa? How do their educational level, social class, cultural and historical awareness and memory of the struggle for equality, as well as their lived experience in a racist South Africa pre-1994, influence their agency? Should their middle-class status not predispose black middle-class parents to be more hands-on and proactive in the strategies that they employ, now that they can afford to give quality education to their children?

Until now, the factors that activate personal agency in the parents have not been explored in South African research, making it difficult to gain insight into the personal interests and motives of each parent and how their actions are consistent or contradictory to those interests and motives. In the previous chapter, I presented the findings on *what* the parents *do* to advocate for their children. In this chapter, I focus more closely on what activates parents' sense of agency, and in turn how that agency is expressed. The findings in this chapter help explain *why* and *under what circumstances* parents choose one strategy over others.

### **They make sacrifices with respect to language and cultural identity**

In choosing the schools, the parents chose to give up their language. Dr Molly describes the sacrifice of having her daughter not know her mother tongue, Sepedi. She also explains how she uses the school holidays to help her daughter, with the assistance of the grandmother, to stimulate her proficiency in Sepedi:

Mmm, I think the biggest sacrifice has been our "vernac". My daughter has always spoken pure Pedi, from her childhood; even when she went to crèche she used to speak Sepedi properly until she went to the Cambridge school. Even now I make sure that it's either I have a helper who speaks Sepedi or which speaks Sesotho, but now, for some reason she's regressed and she speaks Sepedi with an accent. It's such a sore point for me, but I always try. I have very supportive parents; I always try every time when she has a school break; she won't spend two days with me, the following day she's out in Polokwane. And my mother, because she's a teacher, she will make sure that she plays with the kids around the table and she speaks Sepedi and she always tells them you can never speak English with these kids, so at least she gets that. So I know like for example now, she's going to have two weeks of speaking Sepedi and she'll come back and speak about whatever... I am very cultural and I have...I love my background so whenever I am with my grandparents I always want to know, who are we?, where are we from? And I just feel that it's just not right for my black child not to know my language or for my black child not to be able to read Sepedi.

Dr Molly however clarifies that the sacrifice was because of access to quality education and convenience, rather than any belief that white schools are inherently better:

But that's what I was saying, the problem is the convenience for me; if I could place her at a school in Soweto, I don't know Soweto well, I don't know where I could place her or take her. The convenience of the Cambridge school just being across my previous house was even much better. So it was more a convenience to me, hence I was saying sacrifice. This will work better for me with my circumstances. The one thing that I have to give up is that she won't know Sepedi and for me to be able to meet her halfway or to meet that need is for me to take her to my parents where she will know. Where she will speak Sepedi.

Thando also placed his two children in the same Cambridge school as Dr Molly and Barbara. His eldest son moved to the school after attending the Model C school in the area; in fact, it is the same school Lesedi's kids attend. His reasoning for choosing the Cambridge school did not go down well with his wife because in choosing a quality education, they sacrificed the fact that their children would learn the vernacular:

You know we had an argument with the mother on why I placed him there. Actually the first one, before he used to go the Model C school. Then the mother felt uncomfortable and the reason why I wanted him there was because I want him to be placed in a place where he can be able to interact with everyone. In the Model C school you have the Coloured kids, the black kids and they were also teaching language [meaning African language]. I was very interested in them learning a home language. Obviously, the attention they were getting there in terms of their marks, it was a little bit poor. So I got defeated when the mother said no, we have to take them to a private school. When we went to a private school there was no [African] language. They were improving in other subjects, educational subjects like your maths and other stuff. But in terms of language, then they became fluent in speaking English and they can't speak their mother tongue, let alone their father tongue. So we then had to choose: it was a choice of mother tongue or formal education, and we had to settle for that

Barbara explains the dilemma of having children who are eloquent in English at the cost of their home language:

We are bringing them up as Zulu, but I speak Xhosa. I speak Zulu with them mostly but I'll also speak Xhosa. Unfortunately, we have fallen in that trap where we have kids who cannot speak an African language. So we have been thinking about it that let's get someone to tutor them Zulu and let them speak Zulu because their dad is Zulu. Get someone to tutor them Zulu. The school is not doing anything, to be honest. I mean they have had in pre-primary... they would have a list of Zulu words. They did, but a little bit. You know the name of the months, like January, so this is how you say it in Zulu and Tswana, but it's not too much. They would at choir music; they would sing a few Tswana songs and a few Zulu songs. There is no subjects that are Zulu.

Barbara's explains their lack of action in pressing the school to teach African languages through the curriculum:

I think we lazy about that. We take other cultures, what they give us, we just take it. Let me tell you, Tshepiso, we don't want to go and say "Why don't they have Zulu here?" because what if they start targeting your child because wena you are too...

In the process, parents sacrifice their cultural identity. Barbara explains:

Mmm [yes], an example will be they just went to visit their family now in Durban and they were there for a week. My daughter says it was a waste of a holiday, because first of all, they cannot speak Zulu. They can understand, and for them it's like the first point of you know. My daughter says you don't even know what it's like to go to a place and you're the only children that can't speak Zulu. Maybe that makes them feel kinda out when they are there. At my husband's family they don't have a car. The gran doesn't have a car. It's something like, we were in Durban, but we couldn't even go to the beach because they don't even have a car. You see what I mean? Then it's different when they go to my parents because they each have a car. They will drive them to Ports, which is just an hour away from eMthatha where I come from. So it's very already... Already they are like, I think it's better for us to go to Mthatha than Durban. Guys, it's your family. The fact that they don't have a car doesn't make them any less than other people... After the holiday they were like the only thing they enjoyed, which we provided, was that they came by plane. Other than that the holiday sucked because they stayed in the township and [could not] go anywhere.

Despite choosing the Cambridge school because of the quality of the education, the low teacher:learner ratio, as well as the proximity to their home, Thando understands its limitation with regards to language policy. The limitation however also extends to teaching African culture:

The problem that we have with the Cambridge school is that they do a Cambridge learning system. My question is: why are they instilling the Cambridge system into the lives of our kids? More than anything else, when it comes to African languages, they did not prioritise. They will only look at European-based languages and they will even instil Afrikaans to make it part of the curriculum and they try and introduce something they call IsiZulu. It's something that you learn in passing. It's not given the same attention that the Afrikaans is given. So those are the problems that we are having there. Then obviously you start to see that the African child is not a priority in schools like this. The African teachings are not a priority and African culture is not a priority. African expressions mostly are not a priority. I will give you an example, when they do their concerts, the concerts are based on European concepts. So the kids have to learn how to do ballet and whatever; you wonder would it be different if they had to do Indlapho and mogobelo?... Indlapho is a Zulu dance, mogobelo is a Sotho traditional dance. Those things are not a priority for them and then you wonder why are we having such schools in Africa if they are not interested in an African way of doing things. So then you see it takes us back to where we were sitting in terms of our colonies. Cambridge comes directly from our colonisers, our masters and those who took land from us before. If you look even to the teachers within these schools, the Cambridge school, you would hardly find a black teacher there. You would hardly find a teacher of colour in those schools. You will find an Indian, but you won't find that. So the consciousness of what they are building within our kids, it doesn't cater for an African child, and that is my biggest problem! The question that then comes to my mind is what are they trying to pursue by doing what they are doing? What do they want our kids to be?

Lesedi also experienced a similar dilemma regarding the school's choice to have Afrikaans as a second language, instead of IsiZulu or Setswana

I would say for me, something that will make me, you know they talk about mother tongue at that school. Or is maybe all the schools generally and they refer to mother tongue as English, that I didn't get. Initially when they said we're introducing mother tongue I was under the impression that because Jo'burg is predominately Zulu they would probably say they would teach Zulu. I had a problem with the fact that IsiZulu is not coming to



play, but we still maintain Afrikaans, that's something I had a problem with and asked. I don't know how to address it because it doesn't pertain to a school. It's bigger than the school, I would like to think. I have a problem with that to the point that my kids come from school and they say, "Mommy, I am battling with Afrikaans. I passed it but I didn't do well". I'm like, "You know what? Just pass it; you're not going to use it. Don't worry". I say that, "Make sure your English is brilliant; Afrikaans it will die".

Lorry also gives a moving account of how having her children learn Afrikaans is really difficult for her:

Afrikaans, yes it's that because for me, knowing the history of our country. It's a sore pain for my kids to speak Afrikaans and I know they are battling with Afrikaans. You have to put in ten times more effort into preparing them for any test or assessment because the attitude is there too. I mean our kids, they are exposed and they know the history too and they know where we are with our white counterparts. We are very explicit in telling them who they are. It's very painful for me to tell the truth. Whenever we have parent meetings we raise that and say can't we introduce another vernacular than Afrikaans because we've got a multi-racial school and we can actually have another language like IsiZulu, Sepedi or another language. We will look at the ratio in terms, and of the kids, and look at how many kids are predominately Sepedi-speaking or are Zulu-speaking and it's something that is a battle that we are willing to fight for as long as our kids are in that school.

Another parent, Pearl, faced a similar challenge when she noticed that the school choir sings African songs without incorporating dance moves:

Yah, with the other parents - white parents. It was easy, we were sitting I remember. I was even sitting, commenting, saying that, "Kana [by the way] what were they singing?" And that song needed movement. Even the white parents would say. "This teacher! Why aren't the kids swinging I mean you can hear the beat it requires them to move". The white moms! Nna [me] I don't know, I thought they would think that she's black. But I'd say to my child "Your teacher should allow you to move. So you have songs with beats, why are you standing still?"... I never thought of telling the teacher.

Kate explains that how being multi-lingual creates a dilemma for her in inculcating a coherent cultural identity for her daughter, which makes her proud to be black, without feeling she should identify with being white just because she attends a white school:

That's a very interesting question. I think I am yet to find out. I am also at that point where I am trying to find out how do I ensure that she fits into our black community. How do I make sure that when she goes there because she goes to a private school, she doesn't feel like she's better than her peers. Especially from home where I come from. How do I make sure? I have seen her with other kids and have seen that she is starting to have a funk. Now how do I ensure that she does think you can't speak English so. It's something to be honest I'm still yet to figure it out. I make sure at home we speak our language full time. I don't try and get her confused. We are very confused at home. We speak Ndebele, Tswana and Sotho. We speak in all languages. I speak to my mom's sister in Tswana and I speak to my mom in Ndebele. That alone tells you there is a bit of confusion. Whatever language I want her to know... speak it. You must be able to speak to your grandmother in Pretoria. You must be able to relate to her. She mustn't think my grandchild is coming, I must find someone to interpret. I want her to know that you are a black woman and you need to carry yourself as a black woman. You don't need to try and fit in with the white.

Once again the fear of being politically incorrect and offending white teachers comes to the fore with Pearl:

I will ask my daughter, but sometimes I mean for singing, you know black people. We always like singing and every song has movement. Bona, they're white, shem [shame]. I remember even the principal he would say "Moms, the next song, if you want to move, to dance". What's wrong with the song? It's a song that everyone knows *ke lebetse* [I forgot it]. I mean you could see even the principal was moving. Sometimes you don't want to offend people (laughs). Maybe I must go listen, Monday is choir. I will go listen and try do that I must find a better way of talking to her.

Thando does not share the need to be politically accommodating; his goal is to instil within his daughter a self-love that makes her African identity salient, even with a school curriculum that does not reinforce or reflect who she is as a black child:

The younger one she's a likable one; all the kids play with her and so forth. But then there is something that I taught her, to refrain from using white dolls to play, so that she can have a strong identity and love herself in terms of the images she sees and so forth and so on. I think she raised it with the other kids that I don't play with white Barbie and created a bit of a tension there. That caused us to have to go there and I had to go there and explain it to the teacher. That no, the reason why is she is not being racist. Well, the interpretation that you get is that. If you are pro-African you are always going to be labelled as racist. Then I asked her to repeat what she was saying to her friend. "I told my friends that I don't play with white Barbies and I play with black Barbies because black Barbies look like me and I love myself". Then I asked them, "Is that racist; no, it's not racist, it's just that the other kids"... I don't care about the other kids! What my child is saying is the truth and I don't care about the other kids! I want her to grow up with that in her heart. So there is nothing wrong; even you at school, when you want them to play don't play with them like that. So that she understands she has to love herself now until she grows up. She must love her body, love hair, and love her skin colour; so that self-hate does not become a part of her...

For Modisha, the need to avoid coming across as xenophobic among Africans from other countries was more pressing. As a result, he gave up the fight to introduce vernacular at the school despite the school agreeing to his request:

Personally, and again, I have also had discussions with a couple. One of the things I've wanted to do is choose a black language. The school then says we can give you a room and you can run with that project, but I felt that I'm not teacher. I've got children in the school, black kids should be taught a local language. Whether it's their mother tongue or not becomes an issue; as you know Gauteng is mixed and you can't escape. Did a bit of research; West Cape is predominately Xhosa, but now when you look at the numbers the debate around which language. Foreign nationals, especially from the Zimbabwean side, some of them are from the Ndebele side, they will add on to the number wanting Zulu to be the language of choice. For me it's a bit, you know why are foreign national dictating the language in the country. So I mean, it's not a discussion I have taken beyond conversations with a couple of people. I don't want to argue issues against xenophobia, so I just live it.... Yah, and the response was simple the school will not hire a teacher to teach a black language, but will make resources available in the classroom. For me that meant getting a person, paying a person, even though yah and I thought I've got my own career which has nothing to do with teaching. It's not an area

I wanted to fight, the solution for me really was, my mother is a retired Tswana teacher; when they are home she will teach Setswana.

In sacrificing their culture, language and ethnicity, PA manifests as the accommodation of white practices and cultures because of a vested commitment to changing the legacy of poverty, unemployment and apartheid through their children's education. In addition, the sacrifices are made with the goal of enabling the children of black middle-class parents to traverse two worlds, that of the white middle-class communities where the children are educated, which would enable them to fit into the world as global citizens, as well as the black community from which they originate. Parent agency based on sacrifice is borne out of a selfless regard on the part of the parents aimed at reducing barriers to entry that black children could face if they do not fit into the white culture because they are different. On the other hand, the parents themselves avoid coming across as radical or militant because they also need to be seen to fit in and seem politically correct. However, not all of the parents make these sacrifices quietly or submissively.

### **They redirect energies**

I found that all the parents in my study took personal responsibility to help their child at home in order for them to succeed academically<sup>ii</sup>. Some of the parents conceded that they do not engage with the school at all; instead, they chose to focus on the child and help the child thrive. It seems from the perspective of the school these parents might appear uninvolved or disengaged. However, the results from my study indicate that at the home front, or behind the scenes, they are actually very actively involved. Mxolisi illustrates this point:

Yes, of course both kids went to a math enrichment programme when they were four and the reason why I sent them to it was obviously from previous experience from people that went to school with me. They only discovered in Standard 9 (Grade 11) that now they are struggling with maths and that they need extra classes. So my belief is that maths is like a language; the earlier you learn the language the more proficient you become. So we had to choose between sending them for, what do they call these classes after school? Aftercare. And I said it was actually cheaper for them to go to the math enrichment programme than to go to aftercare, and I sent them at the programme. So they went to it as a hobby, which is now paying off!

It is important to mention that Mxolisi has three children; the two eldest daughters attend a private school, one is in Grade 4, while the other is in Grade R. He enrolled both children in the enrichment programmes not because they have a learning difficulty or are underperforming in school. Instead, he enrolled them to give them extra stimulation and strengthen their foundational knowledge in mathematics, as well as to prevent any difficulties that might arise in subsequent grades. He reported that the eldest daughter began

attending the mathematics enrichment programme from the age of four to ensure that she has a solid foundation in mathematics and English by the time she begins “big school”, namely grade R.

Like other parents, Mxolisi provides numerous examples of enrolling his children in various programmes to receive extra tuition in mathematics and English, and enrolling them in dance, swimming, golf and modelling classes. In addition, together with his wife, they help their grade 4 daughter with homework, they attend parent-teacher meetings to learn about her progress, and they communicate with the teacher via the school diary. The following comments from Motshidisi illustrates:

Normally the school would say that our daughter needs to do extra lessons with another teacher at the school. Lessons on maths after class, but we have gone further on to look for external providers that provide extra lessons on the respective subjects. That's the intervention we have done. At home as well, and partly that's the reason we decided that I should stay at home. When I was employed it was obviously a challenge; you would come home at seven and try and go through a math exercise with her. She is already tired, all she wants to do is go to bed. Whereas, if you home from about four to five, you have ample time to go through whatever exercises she will need to do. We realised that it didn't help for you to come home at about 8 pm and try get her to concentrate on some exercise.

Motshidisi's daughter is in high school; she is 15 years old and in grade 9. Motshidisi and Mxolisi demonstrate how agency is directed at enabling the child to succeed academically “behind the scenes”. Most of their work is directed towards the child and is being done away from the school, beyond the school gates. However, unlike Mxolisi, Motshidisi enrolled her daughter in the enrichment programmes because she was struggling academically. For Motshidisi, she has dedicated time to supervise and manage her daughter's scholastic career. She has become what in middle-class circles is considered a “soccer mom”. She has put aside her career to help her daughter perform optimally at school. As a result, questions about how she engages with the school are also about scholastic performance:

It's difficult to compare because primary I went to a government school and later on went to a Model C school. Engagements there, it was teacher-to-parent engagement and engagement now is parent-to-teacher. You're asking different questions I don't see because engagement for us is all about focus; it's about helping my daughter, concern for a student that is struggling, the coming to a point of how do we then help the student. Because it's a private school what you find is that, and hence I was saying you look at their performance as well. These schools are listed on the JSE and if they don't perform well and their academics are not high it impacts on their credibility. It impacts on their institution as a whole, so obviously they don't want that kind of thing. They always want to present that we have a 100 percent pass rate thing. We have had a 100 percent pass rate in grade eight, we've had a 100 percent pass rate in grade nine, because for them it's literally a build up towards grade 12. By the time our kids get to grade 12 they are already prepared for grade 12. Now, when you have your strugglers it means that they are putting down where the school wants to get to. Those engagements you will not find if your child is not struggling. Their focus and their engagement is that your child must just get through the grade because if your child does not get through the grade it impacts

on their overall strategy and what it is that they want to achieve. That is really for you to have the perception that the school is a well-performing school.

What Motshidisi captures in her comment above is that she employs child-directed strategies to ensure that her child keeps up with the cognitive demands of her subjects. However, for Motshidisi, she is also aware that the need for her daughter to keep her grades up is also linked with maintaining the high academic standards of the school. She does not want her child to be seen as a weakling who lowers the school's reputation as a high-performing school. Parents like Mxolisi and Motshidisi understood advocacy and educational strategies primarily from an academic perspective, and that their role is to provide academic support within the home environment.

Barbara, on the other hand, did not take kindly to the teacher referring her child to a mathematics enrichment programme. For her, this implied that she was incapable as a mother to help her child, as if black people do not know mathematics, or are not in a position to help the child at home due to work commitments. She experienced the teacher's feedback about her child needing extra support as criticism; and she experienced the criticism racially:

Yah, there was this one teacher my daughter had. She was in grade 4, so she had problems with maths. I don't know what was going on there. "Oooh okay, can you come and help us? You know she doesn't understand. This and that, you know she's not grasping the concepts". I sit there, then I say "Okay, the last time she had problem. I sat down with her for 20 minutes. I explained it to her and she caught on in ten minutes". Because I am an accountant, maths is like second nature to me. So it's those types of things. It feels like when they are going to call you and say your child has problems, you can't do anything about it. You must send her somewhere. But I'm an accountant, I was very good at maths, it's not something I struggle with. Often with the white parents, if your child has a problem, send them and they think you can't help at home. They will start telling you, you can take them there and take them there without exploring the option of getting help at home first. Now I take my kids to a math enrichment programme, but it's because I don't have the time to help them. I can't commit to help them every time, but I am more than capable of doing it by myself.

Barbara has three children attending the Cambridge school; her daughter is in grade 6, her middle son in grade 3, while the youngest is in grade 1. Barbara emphasises the point that she uses enrichment programmes due to work commitments and time limitations, but that she is quite capable of helping her children with mathematics herself. She is registering the fact that she felt undermined by the teachers, that as a black parent, she was incapable of dealing with the problem herself. Barbara is also indicating that the teachers do not go the extra mile to help black children, like they do for white children. Instead, black parents are referred to outside providers rather than receive support from within the school. The results indicate that strategy choice is informed by the intentions and expected outcomes of the strategy use. In the rest of the chapter, I elaborate on this further as I discuss the other factors that activated the agency in the parents, particularly when engaging with white school officials where the intersection of

race, gender, class and ethnicity were prevalent. I discuss the reasons why the parents chose certain strategies over others, and how in turn they address the elephant in the room: of being a racial minority in a school, while being a racial majority within the country.

### **They make strategic use of “null actions”**

Null actions (see Schnee and Bose, 2012:101) refer to strategies that seem passive, but in fact involve closely monitoring the situation. No overt action is undertaken by the parents because the situation might not call for direct responses. In my study, null actions indicate that the parents are more discerning, rather than passive, in their tactical responses. They are actively and constantly evaluating the situation to determine if it is necessary to act or not. Furthermore, they are able to adjust their strategy should the situation change or require for them to be more hands-on.

The vignettes that follow from Pearl, Dr Molly and Lesedi were in response to how they engaged with the school when there were challenges or critical incidents involving their children. Like most of the parents in my study, they reported that they have never had challenges with the school because their children were thriving academically. At first glance, it seems that they are passive parents in terms of engaging with the school, for as long as the child is performing well and they are happy at the school, then they do not interact with the teacher. Pearl explains:

Aaag nna (Ugh me], I didn't have a lot challenging; like I said I am very comfortable. My child is happy at school and she is doing well with her grades academically. I didn't have any way I could feel like my daughter is not doing well and then feel like why she got a certain percentage. Let's look at what she wrote because I think the nice thing is they bring their test papers as well, you go through that. Then you will see the mistakes where your child has gone wrong. Then you engage with her. What happened here and I thought you were good here, you are dropping, and sometimes it will happen. I mean she will tell you. Luckily, after she writes the test, how did the test go? "Eeuh, Mommy, I had a challenging thing here and there". What did you do? "I tried to attend to the question last like you always say to me. Try and attend to what you know first and choose that question is making me waste time. Look at other questions, then answer and make sure you answer well. Go back where you were struggling and if you feel like I didn't do well there. Then go back to the other one's that you wrote and make sure that if maybe I lose three, where can I get those three. Sometimes you find that you are not sure, then you find that you did very well". So when the question papers come for us to sign and comment on, that she will bring that and she will look at the question and we go through it. That question you need to study and you need to do this, and lucky, every time when she comes she's been excelling. If maybe she goes down, she gets 68% or at most 65%, and you will find out that is one. She gets your 70-something or 75 percent. So she is mostly on your B's and A's.

Pearl's engagement is mainly with her daughter, tracking her performance, coaching her on how to take tests and manage her time effectively. There is no mention of how she engages with the teacher to obtain the teacher's perspective on how her child is doing, even though that is what I specifically asked her to

comment on. So in terms of educational strategies from the parent-teacher perspective, Pearl looks like she is not doing anything, hence she is using null actions. However, from the child's perspective, she is doing a lot. Pearl instead uses child-directed strategies; however, in terms of educational strategies with the school, she is using null actions.

Dr Molly also explains that she is not doing "anything" with the Cambridge school her daughter attends, because she is thriving. However, she mentions that she was more actively involved in the previous school when she perceived a sense of racial segregation:

Mmm hmm, you know what I really don't have anything to say about my engagement with the school that made me uncomfortable. I am usually a very vocal mom, 'cause I tell you the school that she used to go to prior down the road from the Cambridge school. I had a lot of those encounters where I felt like the black kids would be put in one class and then the white kids would be in one. Just to blend in, they would put one Indian child; so that I was very vocal about. But with the Cambridge school I haven't had any of that.

For Dr Molly, when all is well, she does nothing; however, when things are not going well, she "has encounters". Both Dr Molly and Pearl employ null actions with regards to the school; however, Pearl employs null actions only in as far as the school is concerned. In the privacy of her home, she employs child-directed strategies. Dr Molly, on the other hand, employs null actions with the school, only when all is well. She is actually surveying the situation because when she was "uncomfortable" with the school she confronted them. Lesedi is another parent who initially used null actions; she was "hands-off" when her daughter was thriving academically, but she changed her strategy to be more active with her son's teacher because her son required more support:

You see for me, my daughter has always been comfortable, she's been a go-getter. She takes charge of her life. She's been an athletics champ all her life, she's very proud and delivers good results. My son on the other hand, he's a boy and he is very active, he thinks of outdoor playing; so for me it was very critical that he gets a solid structure because he needed to focus. Because coming from grade R to grade 1 is a very big step, because now there's homework, there's reading, there's a lot of learning. So for me I had to engage with the teachers. And even today I have; every second week I phone the teacher, I make an appointment when I drop the kids off and I go and see them just to see how far we are with my son. Well, and ask what is it I can do, additional work to help him get up to speed. Cause it's very important, otherwise I know he will fall behind. As long as the bell has rung, let me go play, and that's all he thinks about. So I need to pull him back and say this is what we do. And, for this year they noticed that he is good at soccer and we said he is not going to play soccer, he needs to find his feet. He needs to find his way, then next year once settled and he knows the routine, then maybe we can introduce chess, we can introduce extramural activities. But I engage with the teachers with him in particular a lot.

The Sepedi saying, "O sere go nwa metse wa nyela didiba", means one ought not to defecate in a stream you have just drank from, lest you need to drink from it later, captures Lesedi's value of leveraging on

null actions. She explains how she leveraged on her null actions with her daughter's teacher, by requesting that the same teacher teach her son:

So the specific teacher for my son, what I found is she taught my daughter, and I actually asked for her in particular because I could see, very strict, but I could see the results from my daughter. So I was hoping to see the same for my son, I am actually. There are gaps of which between the two of us myself and her do address outside the school together with the aftercare. We identify problem areas; she'll write in the book and then I'll attend to those areas, then I'll give feedback and she'll come to me after a week and say I am happy with this, let's rather focus on this. She's been very open and I think it's because I am a very involved parent.

Lesedi reveals that her use of null actions was because the teacher who taught her daughter challenged her daughter to excel. The reference to the teacher being "very strict" and that "she could see the results from her daughter" explains why she employed null actions with the daughter's teacher. Her comment suggests that she established a working relationship with the teacher, even though she was not as actively involved in the teacher as she would in subsequent years when advocating for her son. Her use of null actions during her daughter's term was strategic. Through the teacher, they empowered her to build a relationship with the school that later enabled her to make requests that benefit her son. Typically, it is unusual for a parent to request a specific teacher to teach their child as children are often allocated teachers and classes without recommendations or requests from the parents. Furthermore, it is uncommon for black parents to make such requests.

Null actions are therefore used to avoid "rocking the boat". In her explanation about why they did not pressure the Cambridge school to include isiZulu as a subject or employ black teachers, Barbara explains:

Exactly then you go there and be like, how come we don't have Zulu? And why don't we have black teachers teaching here? So you are becoming political about the thing. It might just be taken the wrong way

Barbara explains that she makes a conscious effort to avoid altercations and tension:

I think it happens because we don't want to rock the boat from fear that if I do this what's going to happen. I know parents who, when something happens to their child, they get very angry and they would say if this doesn't change there is going to be hell to pay! Their child might struggle a little bit somewhere-somewhere, but you might find another teacher sucking up to them because they know that parent, yho!

Barbara reports that she chooses to avoid "rocking the boat" for fear of what might happen, even though she is aware that there are parents who stand up for their children and get positive outcomes; however, that still does not motivate her to speak out. In essence, Barbara's use of null actions is out of fear and insecurity. At first, the apparent fear and insecurity is confusing; however, it highlights the fact that where



Barbara is not sure about the likely outcome, or she believes that her child is not personally affected by the situation, then she chooses null actions. She chooses null actions even if precedence has been created by other parents who have achieved positive outcomes by being more active. Kedibone, on the other hand, uses stealth as a strategy; at first she uses null actions in order to allow herself to calm down, but also to survey the situation to determine if it is worth any action. Once she establishes that it is worth intervening, then she arrives unannounced to capitalise on the element of surprise:

The first one is not to go the minute I hear of an incident 'cause I know the minute I go there I am just going to mess up everything. Because I will be very angry. Breathe in and breathe out. I normally go there a day later. I've seen instances when my daughter would say this is what is happened at aftercare and I turn the car back and you exchange words and the person doesn't get the message because you are saying a whole lot of things. You are angry and saying words that you even you regret. I normally ask her why you are saying that. So that I don't assume it's something wrong. Why are you telling me this? Mommy remembers we were talking about this and this and you told me this. Or sometimes she thinks it's wrong, this shouldn't have happened. The following morning I will opt to go drop her off at school. One thing I don't do is make an appointment, so they try and run. I've tried it once at primary and then all of a sudden the principal is not available. What I do is I opt to drop her so I can go to the school principal's office. Put the matter on the table and say I'm not comfortable with it. Is it the school norm? Was it a once just off? Is it the culture? Just to hear whether there was a reason and just to sense do they really see that there is anything wrong with what they have done.

Thus far I have discussed the use of null actions as a strategy, particularly in terms of parent-adult or parent-school engagement. Below I focus more specifically on how the perception or reality of harm can lead some parents to avoid engaging with the school or the teacher because of fear of a backlash, while others engage confrontationally with the school after being triggered. PA manifests differently because of the goal the parent hopes to achieve, informed by their personal characteristics, personal histories and memory of apartheid.

### **They avoid conflict**

For some of the parents in my study, the choice of strategy used when engaging with white school officials was highly influenced by what they anticipate to be the outcome of a more direct confrontation with the authorities. If they deemed the outcome likely to yield minimal results, they chose to withdraw or avoid the situation altogether. This was also done, especially when the parent perceived that the outcome might lead to the victimisation of their child, or that the situation was in fact miniscule in the greater scheme of things, particularly if the child was thriving at school. In such instances, the parent was likely to use withdrawal and avoid confrontation. Avoiding conflict differs from using null actions, because null actions seems passive on the outside, while internally, the parents are actively and constantly evaluating the situation to determine if it is necessary to act or not. Conflict avoidance is more passive, and results in

the parents disengaging from the situation. Furthermore, with null actions the parents are able to adjust their strategy should the situation change or require for them to be more hands-on. Whereas will conflict avoidance, even if the situation changes, strategy use is not changed, mainly because the parents deems any action or resistance as futile. Yoliswa's comment below demonstrates that she did not want "to bug" the teacher; instead she keeps quiet and helps her child herself:

I do go if there is something that I don't understand. I am not the type of person who, it's as if I am bugging them. But if there is a problem I will go and ask. Most of the time I don't ask, I wait for the report and if I see there is improvement on the report, I keep quiet. If there is no improvement, I go ask. Is she struggling, and all that? Otherwise I would expect the teacher to contact me if there is a problem with my child because I was never a teacher before.

Yoliswa, like Motshidisi and Mxolisi above, is aware that her child could benefit from additional support and attention from the school. However, unlike the other parents, she does not want to be a burden or bother the teachers. Below, Yoliswa offers another incident involving withdrawal and avoidance:

You know, sometimes going to my daughter's school, the principal will like greet parents around you or just pass one parent, he greets one parent and passes you as if he hasn't seen you and yet they are teaching these kids to greet each and every parent or whatever. So I see those things and I am not bothered he greets or he does not greet; it's his problem... I don't know. I don't know and I don't want to say things that... I think that's a way, that's the way he is. Sometimes I do feel like it's a little bit because of race. But I don't want to put that in my head otherwise it's going to affect me... the way I am going to look at them now, instead of me focusing on my child. I don't want to look at them that way, like these people are racial and all that. I don't want to look at that, I just want my child to do her best and push her.

Yoliswa's statement acknowledges the fact that if she focused on the principal's behaviour towards her, it would affect her in a bad way. She acknowledges that she does not want to aggravate the situation, and she does not want to be distracted from focusing on her only child, who is actually more vulnerable and in need of attention than she is. Reggie reflects the same position as Yoliswa; however, he withdrew after his efforts to raise concerns about the language policy of the school were met with indifference by the principal:

It's an issue in a way that it's subtle and not obvious. It's an issue in a way that I think there's a section of our population that does not know how to transform into the new South Africa. I'll give you a simple example - at the end of the year at the parent meeting I brought up why don't we have a third language. So they do Afrikaans and English and I said why we don't have a third language, which is in the foundation phase. It's policy of the country and it will help our children so much more... and that took everyone by such a shock. It was such a shock to the system of the school. So me and the other black parents who were there were the vocal ones. We were like "But this is not such a difficult thing to implement". The leadership of the school was clearly white Afrikaans. It was clearly on a front and they actually deflated it. There has been no coming back or follow-ups. We heard through the grapevine that it is going to start in 2017, but there has been no engagement. Similarly in that same meeting we said we need to have a

PTA, a Parent Teacher Association, so we can engage with you guys [the teachers/school]. This was February period or January period. Yes, to date we have not had a response. So what I saw in that meeting is that maybe it was perceived as aggressive because there was one parent who may have been perceived as pushy.

The concern about being perceived as “pushy” gave Reggie pause to stop and reflect, and to look critically at himself, raising doubts about his manner of approach. The self-doubt crept in despite Reggie’s conviction about the introduction of a third language at the school. When his suggestion was not taken up by the school or the principal, Reggie re-evaluated the situation and decided that his efforts were futile, “this is not a war that we will win”:

His points were valid, but maybe because I am a pushy person as well. Maybe that’s why, and he created this momentum where the other parents were like, but why? What about this? I think for me what has become clearer is that the leadership in the school reflects the mindset in our country of not knowing how to engage with diversity. That for me is what I saw; I then made a deliberate decision not to engage around that issue. Because I thought this is not a war that we will win over time, rather than me challenging the school on these issues. Which is wrong I know; I think for myself I know it is wrong. Because this needs to change and for the complexity of a Christian-based school is that race, religion and class get conflated. So this, it becomes, eeh the school is run by a pastor whose a nice guy and all. But it’s clear that you are living in a particular world that doesn’t apply to the realities of our societies. It’s alarming, but there are some clear blind spots. So the question I asked myself is that do I need to engage these men in this? My kids are happy, they are doing well in school, there’s 15 kids in their class or less. So let me not rock the boat.

His assessment of reality that it will take time, it will require more than him as an individual, as well as a principal who does not have “blind spots” in order to change the language policy of the school, is in fact bargaining<sup>iii</sup>. Reggie also used bargaining when his children, who do not use race to self-identify because they are mixed race, were confronted at the school about their racial identity and were presumed to be Coloured:

Yah, we never identify ourselves as Coloured. In fact, I said there is no Coloured people here, there is people. We’ve had conversations; we can’t run away from them because it’s clear my wife and I are from different backgrounds. In fact, we are from different countries. Our eldest son is adopted, and he is clearly different from our own children. Our children are obviously different from the majority of kids in their school. It’s not something were we can say there is no race, because there is race. You cannot say there is no class, because there is class. I mean we are learning that how do we bring this in a mature way so that we don’t recycle the bad stuff that we learnt as children - where race has connotations about intelligence, power and so forth. For me if the school is, especially if the school claims to be Christian in ethos, is not consciously dealing with this, there is something we need to deal with; it’s something within their power as well. To deal with race, class, identity, but the leadership of the school has to deal with it by themselves... and they clearly haven’t. For me that’s the longer story. So the question I think for me is how you deal with something potentially explosive, potentially creating defensiveness. The fear then is that it gets transferred to my kids in the classroom.

In Reggie's case, the process of his bargaining made him question and re-examine his priorities. This resulted in his withdrawal from pursuing the language and racial identity issues because his children were happy at the school; it was better "not to rock the boat", and because he was afraid that his children would be victimised.

### **They confront authorities**

Sometimes the parents in my study used direct confrontation as a strategy for engaging school authorities. The choice to engage was actually in response to a trigger, a problem, or a critical situation. For some of these parents, they tackled the issue at hand with the parties concerned, without necessarily ensuring that there was systemic change, which was then replicated and institutionalised for the betterment of the entire school, as well as the benefit of all learners. This kind of agency is confrontational, it is often situation-specific. The issue of concern might be major or minor; nonetheless, the changes resulting from the action happen in isolation in that they might cause ripples in the system. However, they do not have the momentum to carry forward and galvanise other parents and parties involved to join the cause. In my study, the confrontation was typically triggered when the parent perceived harm, subjugation, prejudice and discrimination towards themselves or the child or significant others. Reggie's account illustrates:

It was an issue around religion where the school took our kids on camp and they had an altar call or something and I then spoke to the pastor and said this is not right. Our children's spirituality is very personal and an important thing for our family. The school can't take that on and then do something with our kids. Whether you say this is right according to our religion and you believe in that sort of practice, I respect that, but then you must respect me as a father. That my children's spirituality, as well as their well-being is critical to me. So if the school wants to do something of that magnitude, which is causing our kids to be emotionally confused, the school has to engage with me. So that was the only thing and I think that is what informed me 'cause this happened last year. I don't think he spoke to anyone or he is someone who has been spoken to, because the reaction was very defensive, and I thought I've said what I needed to say to you and clearly you're not getting it. It's not to my kids' benefit for me to be arguing with the principal of the school. He was the pastor, now he is the principal, but he is both actually. I think for me that's been the issue. If it is not directly affecting my children's academic outcomes and their social wellbeing 'cause they are very happy in school and that was not always the case. My one son wasn't happy in the other school and we had to take him out. So for me it's kinda of in a very selfish way this bubble I am in. But it's not going to last.

For these parents, they may use null actions at first; however, when triggered, they become confrontational in order to right the wrong that they experience, suspect or perceive. This raises the point that the racism, oppression and subjugation can be perceived, even if the perpetrator did not intend to

cause offence, as in Reggie's case above, or they claim that it is not a race thing. To the victim, the instant that racism is perceived is enough to trigger a confrontation in order to protect themselves because of the cumulative traumatic effects of racism (see Lowe, Okubo and Reilly, 2012:196; Carter, 2007b:150). For instance, Lesedi's comment below illustrates how race and gender intersect as a black educated woman and how she carries herself in order to avoid being oppressed. Her social status based on her education and her professional status is communicated in her demeanour, or as she says, in how she "carries" herself:

I would say definitely where we're at, with in terms of independence as black people, black educated woman, I carry myself very highly. So I wouldn't be oppressed... I think it's my attitude, I'm very upfront. So you will not talk down to me... I have actually never thought about it. Because for me the dress code and car, I have-never. For me I think it's just about the conversation that will come about... And how, where the direction of the conversation goes and what comments you make and how I would respond to those comments. Because I will not hold back if I feel strongly about it, I will put you in your place! Yah, I mean at the end of the day forget my skin colour, I've got values. I am not going to go there and throw myself all over the place - no ways. I carry myself properly and if I have a problem I will address it professionally...

Lesedi's comment suggests that oppression is somehow avoidable and that the power to stop it lies within the person being oppressed; in how they carry themselves when engaging with whites. It indicates a heightened sense of awareness, which in psychology is referred to as hypervigilance. So in order not to be oppressed, one has to put in place defence mechanisms, such as the way they carry themselves, their attitude, their education, etc. to discourage being a target. Here the locus of control is located within the individual "victim". However, inversely, Lesedi's comment also suggests that victims "ask for it", that they let themselves be oppressed, and that the burden to change lies primarily in the victim rather than the oppressor, instead of both of them. It suggests that as a black person, if you do not carry yourself in certain ways, then you put yourself in a compromising position that will attract racial attacks and subjugation. As she elaborates, Lesedi explains how her education and professional status makes her feel empowered to engage equally with white school officials, and be confrontational when the need arises. She admits that her calm demeanour is very dependent on how the conversation goes and how the other party responds. So, even if her professional standing empowers her to challenge white school officials to look beyond her skin colour, and to engage with her as an equal, if she feels undermined she will "put you in your place":

It looks like I conduct myself in a good manner, like I carry myself well. Like you see the way I am sitting with you right now, if I had a problem and you are Mr Van der Kirk and I have a problem with you, I would come into your office, "Mr Van der Kirk, this is the situation and this is what happened. I want to understand what your point of view is and I want to know how we move on with this".

Lesedi is conscious that her demeanour and behaviour communicates her professional and educational status, coming from an awareness of what will facilitate her ability to be heard, and effect the change she is looking for in order to benefit her child. However, this is also balanced by how the school officials respond to her:

I don't see a point of raising my voice. I don't see a point of raising my voice because I'm going to get worked up and Mr Van der Kirk will be sitting there very calmly, unless he turns around and he has got an attitude, then I won't be calm. Definitely, I will give it to him the same way he is giving it to me.

Her calm demeanour suggests that Lesedi gives white school officials the benefit of the doubt; however, she will fight fire with fire should the need arise. The principle of "treat others as you would like to be treated" takes precedence over "turning the other cheek". It actually portrays how fragile race relations are between blacks and whites in South Africa. A similar example of using confrontation was given by Maud, below, regarding how her husband confronted a teacher when he felt undermined:

Again I will say the information is there, they don't hold back anything. They let us know in advance - these are the areas of concern and we need to work together. We always advocate that we work together. We as parents and teacher and my child will make sure we achieve whatever goal he has set out for himself. At one point there was some condescending remark from an English teacher, who felt [that] okay she needed to correct some things that we said; maybe the grammar or whatever. She needed to correct it. Honestly, I would be lying about any other incident... She just felt like, maybe you know. She was having a conversation between her and my husband and from what he told me is he used a wrong word in a sentence. She felt the need to correct him. She then took it as far as saying "Such mistakes, the kids come with those mistakes in class. They repeat those mistakes because they pick it up at home because maybe we don't use the right grammar. Therefore, it had a negative impact on classing [in class] especially in an English subject..." He told her upfront, "It's not my mother tongue and you're not going to take something so small and make it big. Actually I find it very concerning when you say that it's an insult, especially because his son was sitting there. How can you correct me in front of my son?" He didn't take it to someone senior; it ended between them. The lady apologised.

Maud's husband's response is focused on registering his annoyance with the teacher immediately; however, after the teacher's apology, the issue is minimised and thus not taken further through the formal complaints process of the school. The husband activated his agency when confronting the teacher and registering his offence or displeasure, particularly in terms of how being undermined by the teacher in his son's presence would impact his relationship with his son overall. This is really a pertinent issue that encroaches on the parent-child dynamics, which the teacher violated in that instance. However, the use of confrontation dilutes its significance; it actually makes it seem like the father is overreacting or being overly-sensitive, it hides the fact that what he experienced is a form of racial micro-aggression. Kedibone's account of how black children are in subtle ways encouraged to take Maths Literacy, while for white children it is considered the last measure when all else fails, in addition, discussions on drug

abuse seem to be directed at black children rather than white children, provide a case in point in how racial micro-aggressions are articulated within the school:

It was more an issue of some subjects, like your maths and life skills. When I asked my daughter questions, I could pick up that, especially with the life skills. I would pick up that there is still that thing that white teachers believe that the focus is on black kids. When they focus on the white kids it's more like, just know it's out there. 'Cause my daughter would say that, "I can see from the teachers eyes they are more focused on the black kids. When she want to soften it up, drugs are bad, she is looking at the white kids". I said, "How do you know that?" She said, "I can see when she looks my direction. It's like they have grouped themselves. Black kids sit in this group. So when you turn and the lighter area is you are softening the thing". The way she took it is that it's a black problem and you're softening the thing. It's out there; be aware for it. She said, "It's so funny that when you out of school, the ones that are bingeing are the white ones". So when we had like the parent meeting I tried to find out these issues. I would ask the teacher, "How does the school address these matters. How do they relay the message to the school children?" They would just give you a general response, "This is how we should speak to them at home". You know especially if your children are around an environment with a lot of pressure. What I would pick up is when they say things like for example, "You know when they live here, in their transport and they take a tax". I am thinking that there is bias in her mind. Because in her mind she is thinking all the black kids come to school in a transport or taxi. The white ones are the ones that get dropped off. In my head I am thinking is that the black kids would be involved in those activities because the white comes with their parents. I made a note to say, "Don't you think that you are being a little bit biased?". They would try and lighten it. When you've been in situations like that, you do pick it up. Then what I also didn't like it looks like in subjects such as maths the teachers have that mentality that black kids are not going to do well in that subject. Such that they try to woo them more into math literacy; they shouldn't look at maths literacy as a bad thing. My daughter said to me, "Your mommy said this maths literacy is a bad thing". Yah, it's for dom kops [idiots]; it's either there is maths or no maths. For me I don't want her to think there is maths literacy. You're not going to go far with it. The teacher said when they were addressing us with my friends, "Maths literacy is not a bad thing; it was designed for people who are not doing so well in maths". The way she was preaching it; she was punting for it, and stuff. I was even scared about it and I asked her, "Why are you telling me?" She said during break with her white friends, what if they want to do maths literacy. She the white teacher said only if you are really in a bad situation or really doing badly in maths, that's when you should think of maths literacy. That's when she thought of me. Now it was in a group of us and she was punting for it, but when these ones [the white kids] are asking, [the teacher responds], "Don't, do it, only in a dire situation". That's when I thought the battle of the mind is to think that you are black and clearly this maths thing is not built for you. The other groups the message being conveyed is unless you're riding in your 12 percents, then you must do it.

For black children, the value of your parent knowing you better than your teachers takes on a very different meaning with far-reaching implications; for instance, when a black child is accused of misbehaviour, is underperforming, or is discouraged from taking certain subjects because they have been deemed to be too difficult for them, it is imperative that their parents advocate for them. These factors are more limiting for black children, and often the damage may scar them for much longer, beyond their

schooling careers. Maud also used confrontation in a similar way when addressing the finance official at her children's school:

The fees problem. I think the white people, when it comes to us black people, when it comes to fees they treat us a bit different. They are harsher and they find themselves saying things that they might not necessarily say to their white counterparts. The lady in finance said to me, "Why don't you not take out your child and take her to the sister school?", which as we know it is a township school. "Maybe he will also fit in there." I just felt, really, would you ask that to a white parent?.. "No, no", she then said. She was very apologetic; "I was just thinking it would be easier on you. You can always take them to Fourways High or Rand Park. Gore [so that], "as you know, there is always waiting lists, but the sister school is a new school and there is always space". It's not a once-off experience...

What is interesting about the comments made by Maud, her husband, Kedibone, and Lesedi, is that even when they recognise that they are denigrated as black middle-class parents by white school officials, they confront the person concerned directly rather than expand the strategy to include challenging the unofficial, humiliating and prejudicial policies and practices employed by the school. This practice of extracting fees from black parents at the school is not isolated to one school, or urging black children to take Maths Literacy as Maths core is deemed too difficult for them, was highlighted by the other black middle-class parents who I interviewed whose children attend other schools within the Roodepoort area. For instance, Motshidisi and Kedibone, whose children attend different schools, also raised the issue about fees. Motshidisi gives another example of racial micro-aggressions and how they are performed at the school under the guise of ensuring that parents are up-to-date on the payment of their fees:

So this year, I don't know what happened. We tried to pay out, out of the first six months of the year; we try pay all of the fees in the beginning of the year. Then this year I don't know what my husband did. He was travelling, and till this day I don't know what happened. My daughter was taken out of the class because her fees were outstanding. When I asked my husband, my husband got upset and he drove all the way from work to come and deal with this lady because I think the conversation and discussion, they had gotten into an agreement. So he is obviously upset that just two days ago I spoke with you. Because he travels a lot it, could have been I will do the transfer today or I will do the transfer whenever. It was never done so we then got a SMS [text message] to say our daughter's fees are outstanding and she is put on suspension. So then, husband please attend to this. Then Wednesday comes, my daughter phones me to say I've been suspended and I have been pulled out of class because my fees are outstanding. So what needs to happen? You have to come and fetch me. So I go and I fetch her and phone husband, "This is what happened, kanti, what is happening? I thought you had settled this out?" Husband gets a flip and drives all the way. I don't know what happened and I don't get involved with fees. All I want to see is that fees are paid. On my daughter's side it was embarrassing because when you get pulled out of class it means you're owing the fees. Do I agree with that principle? No, because its embarrassing. If as a child you have a low self-esteem it might just impact on you. My daughter says when you get pulled out of class we know you are owing fees and now everybody knows that your parents didn't pay the fees. Questions like, "Why didn't your parents pay the fees? I mean, they should know, why did they bring you here?" 'Cause kids can be nasty. My daughter was very upset, she was very angry and she kept asking, "What happened?"



,"Wait for your father and you can engage him in that regard and ask him what happened. He says that there must have been a misunderstanding". His side of the story was that just Monday he had a discussion with the finance lady and they had got to some form of agreement and he couldn't understand why this act? And why this reactive? And to the point of embarrassing the child? Well, he went to the school. I don't know what the outcome was. I don't even know what the discussion was like. I don't know; he is a typical guy so he wouldn't really get and say no, I told her, rona [we] get into those finer details. He just came back and said, "I sorted that lady out and I think it was wrong what she did, especially when I had just had a conversation with her on Monday." We're still wondering if it happens with everybody, or is it mostly black kids. Then I asked my daughter, "Do you find that white kids go through this?" and she said it is mostly with black kids! But then it could mean that rona [we] don't pay fees as black people. (laughs)

Motshidisi revealed that although her husband was able to "sort the matter out", she does not "know the finer details" of how her husband did this. Motshidisi's use of humour, while it lightens the matter, in actual fact indicates a sense of embarrassment and internalised racism that "we don't pay fees as black people". So even within the same family, there is embarrassment and shame that school fees were not paid when they should have been, despite the class resources and lifestyle they live. Once again, how the school handled the issue, ended up encroaching on the family dynamics within the home. More concerning is the fact that Motshidisi wondered if this happened to other children, or if it was mostly black children. Kedibone offers a different account of how she used confrontation to address the same matter at her child's school. Kedibone confronted the principal directly; however, in the end, she removed her children from the school rather than lobby other parents to break the silence against this problem:

The white kids were being given preference than the black kids. They would offer, yah like, when you do your unannounced visits you can see the white kids are always clean. When black babies are not clean, whether it is with a nappy that's full. When you ask they say, "Ooh no, we were going to change them?" Even when they are at the playground, the white ones would be at the jungle gym and the black kids in the sand pit. You can see the black kids want to swim and they are always told to wait. The issue was more on the treatment they were getting in class. My child will always complain that if she says something wrong in class the teacher will embarrass her. Whereas another white kid says something, she won't embarrass her. The same as when coming to issues of school fees, if I miss a month of payment, I get to be told that my child gets to be embarrassed and she is told that "If your parents cannot afford the fees you mustn't come to this place. This place is not a charity case". There would be white kids whom I would know they are owing and they are not being put to the front. That did not sit well with me and the main reason I took them was that preference was being given to the white kids and black kids were being treated low class. It's like you were brought here and we did you a favour by accepting you. So when I raised the issue with the principal they were very defensive because when I said these are my observations and this is what I get from the child. You could see that they are a bit uncomfortable and even the black teachers, who were assistant teachers, they would pay more attention to the white kids, and when you raise that, they would say, this is what we've been told, because if so and so's mom comes in and doesn't see us paying attention to their child they will take the child out. They were not worried about the black child being taken out. You can see that it was more so thing of aah. So I decided I am going to take them [her children] out.

The stories told by these parents regarding the fees problem reveal a lack of cooperation and communication between the black parents within the same school, as well as within the Roodepoort community at large. It indicates an erosion of the ubuntu values, which encourages building a sense of community and mutual interdependence. It also portrays the shame and vulnerability suffered by these middle-class parents that the precariousness of their financial status, at times, lands them in hot water, such that they cannot timeously meet their financial commitments towards the school. They feel ashamed and embarrassed, and this is compounded by the humiliating way in which the schools handle this matter. In turn, the parents may use confrontation to raise their displeasure; however, they privately gravitate to opposite corners, pulling away from each other into their own silos. Each family suffers in isolation, rather than talk openly about the problem and challenge the humiliating and racist manner in which the schools handle it. As a result, issues such as these are not addressed holistically and effectively, and consequently, the black children suffer.

### **They build networks**

The need to talk and confide in others who have had similar experiences to yourself is powerful and helps black middle-class parents to deal with race-based stress<sup>iv</sup>. Pearl gives an account of how another black parent confided in her when she was frustrated that a netball event was cancelled at the last hour, despite her leaving work early to attend in support of her child:

I think so, I think most of them are doing well. I saw when I had to take my daughter for netball. Sometimes you would go and sometimes they are playing somewhere, you would have to go and watch. I was working at the time; sometimes it would be frustrating for black parents. I would find myself alone on one or two months and most of them, you would find that white people dress very well; ba [they are] smart. You can see that ba [they], it's the executive housewives (laughs). Yes, it would be them supporting a lot. For us it will be like one or two; you find that most of us are working. We at our jobs, we can't take off. I remember one of the incidents, one was off, and then netball was cancelled. It cancelled and we were there and I think it was raining and then it stopped. They just cancelled because they were worried about the rain and the grass being wet and all that. She was complaining saying that these people don't think for us, we are working, I took a day off for this. The next thing this is not happening I cannot afford to take another day off.... Another black mother. Nna [for me] it was painful as well because you know how kids are; they feel so grateful when they see their parents watching them. You see that people cannot afford doing those things. I saw as well I think they do good when mom and dad are there as well. So lucky I have a good support system, even if I cannot make it, my eldest daughter will make it. Or granddad or grandma; they are on pension so my youngest daughter didn't feel frustrated, she was always supported.

For Pearl, being a minority in her child's school has led to feelings of isolation and loneliness. She highlights the fact that because of work commitments, black middle-class parents are not able to attend

sports and extramural activities<sup>v</sup>. Work commitments, as well as being a racial minority, compound the sense of isolation and loneliness for black middle-class parents. When these factors are not taken into consideration by the school, a simple act of cancelling a netball match at the last minute ends up having far-reaching consequences for the black parents. In turn, they create even more stress for black parents who want to show support for their children.

The prevalence of how predominantly white schools in the Roodepoort area handle the matter of arrears or delayed payment in school fees by black middle-class parents portrays the fact that these parents do not fully rely on each other as a support network. It is also evident that these parents are very selective about what they reveal about themselves to other black middle-class parents; as a result there is no open discussion or exposure of these unfair practices. It seems the fact of being racial minorities in the predominantly white schools has widened the spaces in which black middle-class parents can interact honestly and reveal their vulnerabilities to each other with the goal of building a strong support network.

### **They participate strategically**

The parents in this group were more thoughtful, discerning and strategic, and they used various activities to channel their experiences of racial trauma and racial micro-aggressions. For these parents, they went further to raise their concerns and make the school officials accountable to change. They were conscious of how one action carried repercussions that impacted all the systems, for example, the self-esteem of the child at a micro-level, to the dynamics of the parent-child interactions within the family, as well as parent-teacher and child-teacher and child-peers within the meso-system, and then the larger scope of the macro-system in terms of what that action says about the school's values vis a vis the parents' values, and finally the chrono-system, the implications of how and where we are moving as a people, a country, or as God-fearing people. According to Lesedi, her husband uses his experience in finance to become involved in the school:

Both, my husband. Both of us, he wants to know about the financials... If there is a ten percent increase for argument's sake, where does the ten percent go? How does it get distributed? How does, what's this guy's name, Mandla, the caretaker, does he get an increase when we pay that ten percent, does he get a portion of that, five percent or two percent, does he get an increase? He [husband] wants to read the financial statement.... There's meetings and then when they present the budget, the income statement and everything. My husband, he has no problem when it comes to money. He will ask: "So we see there's a 12 percent increase for 2016. Where does it go? Does the caretaker fit in that structure? Are we taking care of him? I've noticed, for example, 'cause he walks

the school. I see for example, maybe the pool is falling apart, for argument's sake. Are there any plans to fix the pool? Are there any plans to increase the security?" Of which now they are actually working on it, because apparently there has been dodgy people walking around, chatting to little girls. Which is very concerning; so now they have increased security from that perspective. They have a private security company driving up and down.

Lesedi's husband, although the issue at hand is about the school's fee increase, he does not simply ask about how the school spends their budget. His reference to Mandla, the caretaker, how his salary increase will be affected and whether the school is taking care of him, has wider implications that goes beyond money. He is highlighting the fact that Mandla is an asset, who is also responsible for the well-being of the children, and that as a valuable asset, like the teachers, administrative staff, computers and the swimming pool, and the private security company that patrols the area around the school, Mandla also needs to be taken care of. In essence, Lesedi's husband is advocating for another black person who, because of their status in the school as a mere labourer, would not have been considered when salary increases are negotiated.

With Reggie, he directed his attention to researching issues around the Coloured identity and redefining his racial identity. His frustration about the lack of movement in the school's language policy and racial policy is palpable:

Because you can't go on like that. You can't go on pretending that everything is okay when it's not. For example, the language issue; the fact that our kids are still learning English and Afrikaans and not a black language is that, one, it's out of sync with the country. Two, it's actually a negative thing to all our children. So just because the school can't get around how we are going to get a Zulu teacher or a Sotho teacher, that's not the issue. They must sort it out with us parents and we will figure it out. Because along with that comes a lot of, my wife and I call it, social literacy. Yah, social and cultural literacy, and language is a very critical issue; if I am not interested in your language and you are not interested in mine. I am saying I am not interested in your culture and your identity, your background, and how you view authority. So for me those are issues that a small private school can deal with much quicker than in a public school. One, for the sheer number, you can manage those numbers much easier. A lot quicker than a whole education system. At some point I have to speak up, and it's coming. At some points I've been tempted to say I think we need to talk about this, or I think we need to talk about this. Yah, I think there is a, that, the issue. Now with this issue of identity, I've spent five years on an identity search. I've come to a place I've researched and read books on Coloured identity, whatever, my own background. For me it's been important for me to search, particularly being a minority, Coloured person, middle class. That's a minority within a minority. In the Johannesburg setting with Coloured people being a minority than for example the Western Cape and then the other day my daughter came home and said to me, "Us Coloureds". It freaked me out because we don't speak like that in our house, race is not... not that race is not brought up, but we don't speak like that. We don't glorify race, we don't, yah.

Reggie illustrates that when efforts to redirect focus and energy towards more productive and positive activities, when the bigger picture remains unchanged, builds frustration and stress. It is evident that a pressure point is fast approaching where matters cannot be contained anymore. Thando gives an account

of how he lobbied other parents to challenge the Cambridge curriculum for its failure to reflect the African values, culture and history, as well as the lack of an African language as a school subject:

We gathered together with other black parents, but now in these schools you have the problem of our African brothers who come from the up countries who are also here. Who would not also want to challenge - maybe it's because of the background where they come from and so forth. If they lose interest in what we are trying to push then we become more and more in the minority. We become dismantled parents in the school and that's how they are putting it. It becomes a problem and it doesn't push the cause of what we are trying to do. Some of them they have a strong..., some come from Nigeria and some come from Zimbabwe. The majority is between the English-speaking African countries, they have their children here at the Cambridge school. Obviously when we speak of the African language, I think they might be thinking, and this is my thinking, "But no man, this [Thando] guy is talking Sotho, Zulu, whereas he [the foreign national] is talking about Yoruba", and they lose interest in terms of that. So, it then defeats the purpose of why we are trying to push the African values within the school...

Although Thando's effort to galvanise the black parents in the school ended up in a petition, the momentum was lost, not because of interference or apathy from the school officials. Thando's attempts to lobby other parents ultimately failed because of the ethnic diversity amongst the black parents in the school. The fact that as a racial minority, the black middle-class group of parents include South African nationals from different ethnic groups, as well as parents from other African countries; their diversity made it difficult for them to form a united front. They could not agree on which African language should take precedence over others in order to be added to the curriculum. Here the intersection of race, class and ethnicity served to derail the parents from reaching consensus and maintaining the momentum to achieve the change they sought:

We try mobilise all black parents to sit in one room. So we can at least try to understand where their thinking is in terms of the African values within the school. You try and gauge where the wind is blowing. Then you find out in us bringing this up, even though the majority were positive in saying we need to bring African languages. In terms of following up and the meetings after we end up being three or four. The others come and the others don't come. Then you start to realise that not all of us have the same push in terms of African values; the same spirit or the same fire that can spark this thing and change the status quo in terms of our schooling systems. So it then falls back to let's just write a letter. It was even hard to get people to sign the petition to say me the father of one, two, three I say I support.

## **Synthesis and Conclusion**

I realised as I was going through the transcripts from the interviews with the parents that questions about agency were actually asking the parents the extent to which they traverse systems. This moves from micro-systems, which are more proximal and are characterised by face-to-face or direct interactions with the individual, an example is the parents' beliefs, perceptions, memory of apartheid and their

consciousness of class. to meso-systems, which refer to systems that link with other micro systems. An example would be parent-child interactions, interactions with teachers and white school officials, colleagues, other parents. Exo-systems link micro-systems with one system, which the individual does not directly function in, but has an impact on them. Macro-systems comprise of larger principles that have a cascading effect throughout the interactions of all the other systems; an example would be culture, values, racism, gender. Finally, chrono-systems refer to the dimensions of time as it relates to the individual's environments, which can either be internal or external. The sense of helplessness, frustration and anger is most prevalent when the parents realise they cannot effect the change they seek at the macro-level. In spite of being a racial majority in South Africa, and having the financial status to have their children attend these schools, within the gates of the predominantly white schools in Roodepoort, the black middle-class parents remain powerless.

The parents in my study reported an internal dilemma with regards to reinforcing their children's sense of identity as black, with black values, language and behaviours, with a deep appreciation for their culture and ethnic background, while immersed in a white culture. They reported on the discomfort of having their children learn Afrikaans as an official language at school, rather than an African language. This was an opportunity cost they were willing to pay with the goal of giving the next generation a better life. They also gave accounts of having to teach their children navigational skills to survive "home" in the suburbs of Roodepoort as an equal amongst white children, while keeping the connection to "the other home" where grandparents and extended families live, which may be in the rural areas or the townships.

The results also indicate that the parents use null actions to actively survey the situation, to avoid rocking the boat, and for some, in reverence of the status quo. They are actively and constantly evaluating the situation to determine if it is necessary to act or not, with an awareness of and a deep sense of duty to prevent possible retribution and backlash from the white school officials. Furthermore, they are able to adjust their strategy should the situation change or require for them to be more hands-on.

In this chapter, I have discussed how black middle-class parents exercise their sense of agency by using coping strategies to deal with race-based stress, subjugation and racial micro-aggressions. The discussion highlights why certain strategies are chosen over others and with what goals in mind. The results also reflect that the effectiveness of the strategy use and the potency of PA was often subdued

by the impact of their race, class, gender and ethnic group. As a result, change is situated and confined to the micro- and meso-system; beyond that, being racial minorities in the school muffles their voices, it dilutes their efforts to collaborate and act as a united front. Furthermore, their class resources have also created invisible walls where they operate in silos, being hyper-selective about revealing their vulnerabilities to other black middle-class parents. It is almost as if they are also a racial minority within the country; consequently, a vicious cycle that perpetuates inequality and discrimination prevails within the predominantly white schools. Using child-directed strategies to activate agency within the home environment creates a blind spot for the parents, as it places the burden for change on the child and the family, rather than the school.

## CHAPTER 9

### SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

#### **Introduction**

I began my thesis with the goal of investigating the strategies that black middle-class parents use to advocate for their children when critical racial incidents occur in schools where they are a racial minority. I presented my findings on the parents' social identities and aspirations (Chapter 6), the educational strategies they deployed (Chapter 7), and how they exercise their agency as parents (Chapter 8) while acting on behalf of their children. I did this in response to three key questions: Firstly, who are these black parents who have their children in white schools, and what motivates their choice of schools? Secondly, what resources do these black parents draw on to inform their actions within white schools? And, thirdly, how do black middle-class parents exercise their personal agency within the schools attended by their children?

These questions were largely left unanswered by what is available in the literature within the South African context, as well as within international research on black parents and their children's schools. From the South African research, most of the literature focused on parental participation and involvement drawn primarily from the perspectives of parents from low-income groups. However, very little research was focused on black middle-class parents as a cohort. Where black middle-class parents were the focus of the study, their sense of agency in co-creating or challenging racial hegemony in education was not explored. Instead, focus was placed on how black middle-class parents participate and become involved in the school without exploring the unique strategies that they employ in order to advocate for their children in schools where they are racial minorities. South Africa, with its history of apartheid and segregated education, offered a new perspective to study the intersection of race, ethnicity and class from the perspective of black middle-class parents who find themselves in the paradoxical situation of being racial minorities in schools established in a black majority country. The transition from apartheid created the social and class resources which enabled the black middle class to penetrate previously white residential areas and schools, such as in Roodepoort. The end of apartheid effectively removed the legal and bureaucratic obstacles that prevented the desegregation of white neighbourhoods and public schools. However, what these changes could not predict, were the psycho-social and cultural obstacles to *integration* within white-dominant schools, and that is what this study sought to investigate.



It is the case that research outside South Africa has attended to the views and educational strategies of black middle-class parents (see Chapman and Bhopal, 2013; Vincent et al., 2012; Cousins and Mickelson, 2011; Irwin and Elley, 2011).

In the next section, I will summarise and interpret the main findings through the lens of the conceptual frameworks presented for this study. Such interpretation of the data will aid understanding of the parents' motives and educational strategies when advocating for their children in predominantly white schools.

### **A world apart**

In my reflections, trying to capture the essence of what I had learnt from my study, I was struck by the disparities between where the black middle-class parents are at present and where their social identities and acts of agency locate them relative to others. The "others" I am referring to here include the parents' spouses, their own parents, children, other black parents within the school and neighbourhoods, as well as their extended families who still live in the townships. I realised that their current reality casts them as agents living worlds apart from others in a multitude of ways. A simple web search of the phrase "a world apart" brought up numerous titles of films and television series that tell stories about people who find themselves psychologically living in worlds far removed from others, or environments, they had previously known.

What resonated with me and captured what I had learnt from my study was the 1988 anti-apartheid fictionalised film based on the lives of Ruth First and Joe Slovo, written by their daughter Shawn Slovo. The film is described as a daughter's tribute to her mother, capturing her journey of appreciation for and coming to terms with her mother's activism against racial injustice. The character Molly is a world apart from her white peers who ostracise her due to her parent's political exploits; in addition, her untroubled teenage-hood is shattered when her father, a member of an anti-apartheid political party, is exiled. Her comfortable life in 1963 Johannesburg suburbs is in stark contrast to the millions living in poverty-stricken black townships. Molly is also a world apart from her parents who are activists fighting for a cause for people far removed from her sheltered reality in the comfortable white suburbs in an era where black and white were separate and unequal. The film, like the parents in my study, captures disparities between generations, races and genders.

CRT aims to illuminate how ideologies of neoliberal individualism, such as merit and choice, often reflect and reproduce racial domination. Without a doubt, in this study, the disparities that emerged tell stories of alienation, isolation and dislocation. I learnt that, as the parents in my study moved up in the world in terms of their financial standing, at the same time who they are, their experiences of racial incidents, as well as how they advocate for their children set them apart from others, only deepening their sense of isolation. Black middle-class parents seem to be caught in vicious cycles that reproduce racial domination (Allen, 2012:173). I found disparities along generational, class, racial, nationality and gender lines.

CRT uses storytelling and counter-narrative to give precedence to the lived experiences of minoritised groups and to highlight the vagaries of racism in everyday life (Allen, 2012:173). By focusing specifically on these parents I was able to uncover that within white schools, the black parents in my study did not enjoy the same privileges as their white counterparts despite belonging to the same class. The disparities along racial lines were unsurprising, as they had been documented in other studies. What I found surprising, though, was that this inequality was not just perpetuated by white school officials. The everyday racism and inequality persisted in spite of political advancements in South African society, in general, and policy reforms within the education sector, specifically. The parents in my study were not always aware or fully utilising these resources for the benefit of their children. For instance, policies such as the White Paper 6 on Inclusive Education intended to empower all children to access learning support within the school, such as amanuenses, concessions and accommodation were unknown to some of the parents in my study. The fact that all the parents, except for Lesedi, were not aware that they could request teachers to offer individual support to their children, or like Maud, make requests to receive financial relief from the school bursar, was very surprising.

In a way I learnt that despite their education and class resources, the black middle-class parents were not optimally utilising their class resources like their white counterparts. This raises a point that perhaps there is an under-estimation of what racial integration would require at all levels of education. It is evident that even within middle-class schools and the private education sector there is a gap between policy and practice, and that racial inequalities persist in spite of advancement in equity and redress policies. In addition, it is also evident that the racial inequalities persist because perhaps as black middle-class parents there is a psychological block that creates a dissociation between the reality of being middle class and the class consciousness that would manifest in mobilising the assets and cultural capital acquired in concrete ways.

The world in which black middle-class parents live is in complete contrast to that of their parents and their children; even though some of the parents, like Kate in my study, were educated in predominantly white educational settings, whether at school or university. Under apartheid, migrant labour system set parents worlds apart from their children, by forcing fathers to live far apart from their families and for children to grow up under the care of grandparents and in abject poverty. In post-apartheid South Africa, 23 years later, I learnt that as parents, they are positioned generationally worlds apart from their parents and their children. Yet this disparity is more psychological, rather than physical. For instance, the parents in my study reported an internal dilemma concerning reinforcing their children's sense of identity as black, with black values, language and behaviours, with a deep appreciation for their culture and ethnic background, while immersed in a white culture. They reported on the discomfort of having their children learn Afrikaans as an official language at school, rather than an African language. This was an "opportunity cost" they were willing to pay with the goal of giving the next generation a better life. They also gave accounts of having to teach their children navigational skills to survive "home" in the suburbs of Roodepoort as an equal amongst white kids, while keeping the connection to "the other home" where grandparents and extended families live, which may be in the rural areas or the townships. Another example of generational disparities was indicated in how as children the parents in my study knew not to speak up against teachers as authority figures or against their own parents. However, in their advocacy efforts they employed child-directed strategies that encouraged feedback, debate and conversation with their own children. They were able to concede how their own parents' strategies limited and affected them as children, and they were conscious of how to do and be better than their parents, even employing strategies that their own parents would frown upon. The neoliberal conceptions of quality education, upward social mobility and being global citizens have actually accelerated what apartheid began in displacing people and creating disparities. In post-democratic South Africa, these conceptions have intensified the psychological disconnection and alienation amongst families and generations.

The parents also offered accounts of how they have adapted and become more discerning in how they exercise their agency when compared to their own parents during the apartheid era. Disparities along gender lines were reflected in how women, who perceived their husbands as militant and confrontational as a result of their black consciousness beliefs, tended to censor the husbands and choose more gentle and accommodating strategies when engaging with white school officials. During the apartheid era, such militant and confrontational strategies would have been encouraged, and even applauded. This indicates the effect that time has had on how PA is activated and how the applicability of certain strategies over others has evolved historically.

The wall of silence that exists between black middle-class parents, which compels them to keep their struggles of navigating the white world private, indicates one way that these parents live psychologically apart from others. They do not form a community or rely on each other to remonstrate against the racial injustices that they continue to encounter within their communities in Roodepoort, as well as within the schools where their children are educated. This highlighted the fact the black middle-class parents' sense of class consciousness is very situational and largely influenced by environmental factors, much more so than their white counterparts. The fact that public perceptions of "middle-class-ness" seem to carry values that are perceived as "un-African", suggesting pomposity, opulence and selfishness, result in behaviours that are alienating to family members and the majority of black people who have "not yet made it" out of the grips of poverty and unemployment. For foreign nationals married to South African-born spouses, cultural differences as well as the reality of xenophobia amplifies the sense of isolation for these couples.

### **Parental Agency, like identity, is trigger sensitive**

I learnt that just as the parents' class and racial consciousness was situational, the strategies they employed to activate their agency was also context-dependent. Depending on the situation, the parents could access their inner activist or inner "taker"<sup>vi</sup> and thus react in ways consistent with that inner sense of self, depending on their assessment of whether that strategy was adequate and consistent with their goal or not. In short, complex patterns of inclusion/exclusion are not simply a result of school actions on black parents and their children; it is also a consequence of the active decisions made, or not made, by parents within white-dominant schools.

I learnt that questions about one's children tug at the hearts of all parents in very deep and personal ways; and thus, issues of social identity and personal agency, if they pose a threat to one's child, the parents would choose strategies that in effect held them back; provided that doing so aligns with optimising the child's educational progress and overall adjustment. I realised that while these parents might seem "passive", or come across as "takers", this was only in as far as their little ones were "OK". Once they perceived a threat, the learnt skills of negotiation, professionalism, diplomacy, as well as rational conflict resolution seemed to take a pause. I learnt that personal, and intimate, conversations about one's children made parents very vulnerable, even to the extent of minimising how confrontational or passive they sometimes came across, and that the strategy use/choice, was in fact in response to how close the 'perceived threat' was to one's child. I learnt that children were the "heart of the matter" and that "matters of the heart" were the driving force behind what activated the parents' sense of agency, and determined whether in a specific situation they would become activists or takers. In turn, this influenced

the choice, timing and use of strategy, as well as informed their motivation and rationalisation for activating their social capital along class, racial, ethnic and marital status lines.

When considering the strategies deployed, a few things bothered me. The following puzzled me: Why would these parents not openly raise the corrosive nature of some of the disturbing practices that had racist undertones at a broader level? For example, even in incidents where the parents asked their children if the treatment regarding outstanding fees was directed at all the learners and not only the black children, when they learnt that only black children were treated in this way by school officials, why did these parents not galvanise all the parents to protest against this injustice? Why did none of them take up the matter with the companies listed on the JSE who own these private schools, or the churches under which the Christian schools are managed? There are policies in South Africa on addressing learning barriers within the school environment that insist that schools share the responsibility to provide academic support. Why did the black parents take to outsourcing this responsibility to private providers at an additional cost to them, rather than insisting that the schools provide these services, like they did for white children? I realised that how PA was activated revealed a few issues about patterns of racism in the South African context, as well as how we as black South Africans inadvertently perpetuate racism, issues not properly explained by the theories of CRT and PA. I elaborate more on this below.

### **Parental Agency as directing energy across and within systems**

In my study, I found that how black middle-class parents advocated for their children and the strategies that they employed in their advocacy efforts were directed towards helping the child at home so that they could perform optimally in school. In psychological terms, the parents used the home to employ strategies to help the child reach their maximum level of independent learning. In this case, homes turned into sites of learning, indicating that for these parents and their children, the academic day was not limited from 07:30 to 14:00, Monday to Friday. All the parents in my study helped with homework after school, and/or enrolled their children in enrichment programmes that took place after school, or on Saturdays. As Barbara illustrated, some parents made use of external programmes due to time constraints and work commitments, rather than because they did not personally have the skills, the commitment, or knowledge to assist the child.

Therefore, redirecting energies towards the home front involved helping the children with homework in order to provide academic support and help the children develop a positive self-identity. This was done

as a preventative measure, as was the case of Mxolisi, in order to strengthen the child's foundational knowledge. Other parents used the same strategy for remedial purposes, as in the case of Motshidisi, because the child had learning difficulties and was under-performing. Others used the same strategy to close the gap created by work commitments and time constraints associated with being working parents, as in the case of Barbara.

What could be deduced from these results is that the black parents worked behind the scenes because, in spite of being able to afford the same quality education as their white counterparts, they believed that black children did not receive the same support and attention as their white counterparts from teachers and the school. The parents in my study acknowledged that White teachers were not necessarily as supportive and nurturing towards black children in terms of challenging them and expecting them to excel academically. Furthermore, despite their class resources, black children remained at a disadvantage in terms of readiness and stimulation in their foundational learning, largely because they were not learning in their mother tongue. For all of these children, English is their second, third or fourth language. For instance, as a mixed-race couple Mxolisi is Xhosa, his mother tongue is isiXhosa, his wife is Coloured and her mother tongue is Afrikaans. Their children speak English; however, their primary languages are Xhosa and Afrikaans! Barbara is Xhosa and her mother tongue is isiXhosa, her husband is Zulu and his home language is isiZulu. Their children speak English; however, their home languages are isiZulu and isiXhosa. Motshidisi's daughter is Tswana, her home language is Setswana, and English is her second language. Therefore, in order to level the playing field, the black parents used their class and financial resources, to access better schools as well as invest in extra tuition. How this field is levelled is adapted depending on the child, the context, the school and the matter at hand.

In redirecting the energies, the focus can be internal, as in self-help activated within the home and focused on the child; or it can be outward, and directed at the school officials. The results indicated that some of the parents chose to *only* focus inwards, i.e. they supported their children academically and worked on building their character *rather than* changing or challenging the school authorities or the system. Other parents did *both*, particularly when issues around race, racial inequality, discrimination and prejudice were concerned. Parents like Mxolisi, Barbara and Motshidisi chose to focus inwards and worked within the family structure to motivate their children to be more diligent in their schoolwork and to have a more positive racial identity. However, for Motshidisi her focus was limited to schoolwork, even though she was also aware of the macro-system. Her comment that "... strugglers... are putting down where the school wants

to get to...” and that “... if your child doesn't get through the grade it impacts on their [the schools'] overall strategy...” demonstrates her awareness that as a black child and a black parent you do not want to taint the image of the school as a high-performing school.

Mxolisi and Motshidisi both chose the home as the setting to activate their agency. In so doing, they both opted not to engage the school in terms of how the school can remove whatever barriers may hinder the child's progress, or that the school should go the extra mile to advance the success of their children. The perspective of agency as redirecting energy inward involves working from behind the scenes, in the privacy of the home. In fact, for some of these parents, they admit that the burden to change the system does not sit on their shoulders; they simply shrug it off and choose to ignore it. Strategy choice is strongly informed by the intentions and likely outcomes of strategy use; in fact, this is how agency is activated.

### **Why patterns of racism in schools persist**

I found that there were unintended consequences to parents' remonstrations against social identity and strategy use when engaging with white school officials to address critical incidents involving their children. For instance, the parents in my study invoked their personal status to highlight the pervasiveness of racism within the school; they exposed how racial micro-aggressions were articulated and performed within the school. According to Sue, Capodilupo and Holder (2008 in Rollock, 2011:518), racial micro-aggressions are articulated and performed through seemingly slight but persistent daily re-occurrences that serve to remind persons of colour that they are judged to be different, not trustworthy, less intelligent and inferior as compared to their white counterparts. Distinctive examples are the incidents of racial discrimination shared by my respondents around how teachers coerced black learners into choosing Maths Literacy as opposed to Math core, as well as how the schools dealt with outstanding school fees amongst black learners. The impact on the self-esteem of the learners and how these in turn corroded the parent-child, child-peers, parent-teacher and teacher-child dynamics were acknowledged by the parents. There is a clear delineation between those parents who I described as activists and those that I described as “takers” in how they employed certain strategies over others, as well as the circumstances under which these choices were made. For activists, the parents confronted the school official concerned and even raised the matter with the principal, in order to have the matter dealt with. For the takers, they chose to minimise their intervention within the home front, without necessarily confronting the school. I am reminded of Motshidisi who even felt embarrassed to ask her husband for feedback on how he resolved the situation about the outstanding school fees. She used humour, to make light of the matter,

inadvertently revealing a sense of embarrassment and internalised racism that “we don’t pay fees as black people”.

These things puzzled me about the reasons the parents gave for choosing strategies. I recognise that all the parents in my study, be they takers or activists, avoided addressing these issues at a macro-level where they could lobby, change policy and challenge these unofficial, unwritten, racially denigrating practices. These incidents persist despite the material or class resources that they have acquired because of being middle class. The parents in my study revealed that as black people, despite their social status, South Africa being a democratic country where they are a racial majority, they continue to experience current and historical legacies of concrete incidents of racism, and segregation; they continue to experience present-day instantiations and historical legacies of racial oppression (Chapman and Bhopal, 2013:567). However, what I learnt is that they are not just victims of racial oppression, their patterns of deploying agency betrays them in that they seem to choose strategies that unintentionally perpetuate racial hegemony.

I, as a black girl growing up in the 1980s in the then Transvaal, in the dusty streets of Mamelodi, a township East of Pretoria, it never crossed my mind that there were people my age in South Africa who were spared the terror of having Hippos<sup>2</sup> patrolling their streets or parked at the school gates to block its entrance in the middle of the day. The terror of having your brothers and uncles sleep on the roof during the night in case police raids were conducted around two in the morning to investigate if there were no “comrades” at home and “pass over” like the angel of death passing over the homes of the Israelites. I have vivid memories of machine guns blazing during an athletics gala at HM Pitje Stadium and having to jump, or maybe I was thrown, over a high fence with barbed wire in order to escape police dogs and imprisonment. I remember having to hold the urge to urinate until we got to the taxi rank because there were no toilets in town, never understanding that there were toilets, it’s just that the ones meant for black people were filthy and poorly maintained. I just always assumed that everyone knew the burn of tear gas in their eyes and that we all knew the words to the Mzabalazo<sup>3</sup> songs.

Most of all, I never ever thought that these are memories that could shape how I engage with my daughter’s white teachers when they suggest that her “kroes” hair is untidy, or when they insist that she must not speak Setswana with her peers in class as they do not understand her. I admit that at the time these incidents incited a burning rage inside of me; however, like the parents in my study, I did nothing to confront the school. I limited my intervention to having what my daughter calls “a DMC”, a deep



meaningful conversation. I chose to tell my child to be proud of her hair, and her Tswana heritage. I commanded her that she is forbidden from damaging her hair and scalp by having it relaxed with chemicals just so she could fit into white's people's idea of "neatness". I forbade her not to participate in any protest actions held by young black girls like her from other white schools in Gauteng; I told her nothing must distract her from her academics. My reasoning... "We sacrifice a lot to put you in that school, and the best way to get even as a black child is to get ahead through education", words uttered sternly by my mother to me and by my grandmother to my mother before that. I learnt from my study that as South Africans we do not have a shared memory of apartheid, and, in turn, the educational strategies that we employed when engaging with white school officials were not as straightforward or predictable as one would expect, and that sometimes they reinforced and perpetuated our own subjugation when we chose to do nothing!

Nonetheless, there are blind spots on the part of the parents: The reports by the parents regarding school fees and subject choice revealed a gaping hole – like me, they failed to take the matter further beyond confronting the white school official involved. This minimises the fact that these acts constitute a form of abuse and trauma, which actually requires the deployment of strategies that challenge the system to expose the written and unwritten policies and practices that legitimise them. It renders the schools, especially the private schools, untouchable as they are not under threat of being charged with racism or unfair and discriminatory practices. By not challenging the preference of employing white teachers over black teachers, by failing to insist that white schools reflect black values, culture and languages, and accepting white cultural practices and languages, inadvertently these parents, like me, are implying that white is better. We inadvertently imply that white officials are more competent in running schools than black officials. We maintain the status quo rather than change it, all with the goal of protecting our young ones from "harm". The narrative elucidating on the parents' strategy choice revealed a deeper layer of complexity not properly explained using CRT and PA. It suggests that our historical patterns of dealing with racism may have caused harm to our society to the extent that is psychological, which makes them abstract, intangible and very hard to prove, yet they are as real and impactful as physical harm.

### **The power of reprisals**

While making sense of the circumstances under which certain strategies are chosen over others, I realised that the key point of departure is "the perception of harm", and that what constitutes harm is very personal. In raising the question of "harm", I was delving deeper into the parents' experience of trauma induced by racism and racial discrimination. I learnt that the parents' perception of racial trauma creates

the context as well as the circumstances under which agency is activated, and thus the deployment of strategies. Harm in this sense constitutes reprisal, or an act of retaliation or retribution that may be triggered by the parents as they advocate for their children when engaging with white school officials. The mere threat of retribution levelled against the child is just as powerful as the very act of retribution inflicted, overtly or covertly, directly or indirectly on the child.

The origin or cause of the fear was not only limited to the teachers, white parents and school officials. Fellow black middle-class parents, perfect strangers and even one's own parents and family members could also be the trigger and source of the fear. Hence, the wall of silence and caution exercised at all times regulating when, where and how PA is activated. Carter (2007:14) has written extensively on racism and its impact on mental health. He argues that a major contributing factor to racism and its impact on mental health is a failure to clearly understand the emotional, psychological and, to some extent, the physical effects of racism on its targets. Carter (ibid.) further argues that what is less clear is what specific aspects of racism are related to emotional and psychological harm given a person's unique way of responding and coping with such experiences.

In their study to examine the relationship between racial identity status attitudes, the specific strategies used by Black Americans to cope with racism and mental health outcomes, Forsyth and Carter (2012:130) used an instrument titled the Racism-Related Coping Scale to assess the situational coping behaviours used to deal with and resist racism. The measure has eight scales - bargaining, hypervigilance, social support, confrontation, empowered action, spiritual strategies, racial consciousness and constrained resistance (ibid.). *Bargaining* consists of primarily cognitive strategies focused on efforts to make sense of the experience, to examine one's own responsibility in bringing about the incident, and to change one's behaviour in order to manage other's perceptions. In my study I observed how a parent like Reggie used bargaining to pause and reflect, raising doubts within himself about coming across as "pushy" despite his conviction about the introduction of a third language at the school and the objection to having his children being classified as Coloured. When his suggestions were not taken up by the principal, he relented, deciding that "this is not a war that we will win" and that it is better "not to rock the boat". *Hypervigilant* strategies are characterised by increased caution and sensitivity in interactions with others who are not black, the use of avoidant strategies to evade future racially charged interactions, and cognitive preoccupation with the incident (Forsyth and Carter, 2012:130).

In my study, the parents avoided conflict particularly when they perceived that the outcome of a more direct confrontation with the school authorities might lead to the victimisation of their child, or that the situation was a minor issue that did not threaten the child's academic performance. *Social Support* strategies comprise of a range of behaviours and cognitions intended to seek and provide support to oneself and to others. According to Lowe et al. (2012:193), being able to talk about one's experiences of racism is another way of enabling people of colour to cope with race-based trauma and stress. I found in my study that parents like Kedibone and Pearl tried to support other black parents whose needs and family circumstances were completely disregarded by school officials. They gave accounts of how simple acts/practices by the school officials, which on the outside did not suggest discrimination or bias, actually privileged white parents over black parents. The simple act of school projects requiring computer access after school hours effectively excluded the child whose mother is a domestic worker who did not have a computer at home; or netball matches cancelled at the last minute effectively compromised the working hours of that black mother who left work early to attend her child's match, and could not negotiate another time off work to attend the next netball match. They reported on how stressful these incidents were to the black parents concerned and how the school officials did not consider the impact of their actions on them. I also found that the parents in my study were very selective about what they shared with other black parents in the school. I learnt that how predominantly white schools in the Roodepoort area handled the matter of outstanding school fees betrayed the fact that black middle-class parents are extremely selective about what they shared with other black parents and that they did not fully rely on each other as a support network. It became evident that the lack of support amongst black middle-class parents, as a minority within these schools, compounded their sense of isolation and loneliness.

For instance, I am reminded of Thando, whose child attends the same Cambridge school as Barbara and Dr Molly's children. Thando's account tells of how ethnicity became a barrier when he and other parents tried to mobilise all black parents to challenge the school management to reflect African values, languages and culture. Thando made a poignant point; that because of a different vernacular, as black parents they could not agree on which language should constitute the official African language to be taught at the school. The black parents from the African diaspora, as well as the South African black parents from different cultural groups, including parents who self-identify as Coloured, could not agree and form a united front. The diversity in culture and ethnicity undermined their efforts to band together and support each other towards a common cause. Worse, when some of these parents, like Barbara, Catherine and Pearl, faced financial strife that threatened their livelihood and thus their ability to pay school fees, these parents did not seek emotional support from other black middle-class parents. The

humiliation suffered by Motshidisi and Lorry of having their children paraded in front of the class for having outstanding fees was never shared with other black parents. These incidences created a blanket of silence, shame and isolation for black middle-class parents. When these factors are not taken into consideration by the school, a simple act of cancelling a netball match at the last minute actually ends up having far-reaching consequences on the black parents; in turn they create even more stress for black parents who really want to show support for their children. Fault lies with the school for not being sensitive to the black parents' needs, and in not creating platforms where black parents can raise their grievances and influence how simple taken-for-granted decisions over practice schedules and match time tables impact black parents. On the other hand, fault also lies with the black parents by not highlighting these issues in a way that changes policy at a system level, as well as being able to form an emotional support for each other. *Confrontation* consists of a direct expression of anger and/or legal resources to make those involved accountable for their actions. *Spiritual strategies* include seeking support from religious institutions and figures or in religious books and engaging in self-soothing or empowering spiritual practices, such as meditation, prayer and singing. *Racial Consciousness* includes efforts to connect with or express one's cultural heritage and history and to take action against racism. *Constrained Resistance* strategies include both passive and active efforts to resist racism (Forsyth and Carter, 2012:130).

Reading down the list I recognised that most, if not all, the strategies listed to cope with racism and race-based stress were similar to what was given in the literature, as well as what I found in my study, as educational strategies employed by black middle-class parents when engaging with white school officials. I wondered, if the strategies deployed were actually in response to racial trauma and race-based stress, why call them educational strategies? Are they actually about education or are they about dealing with trauma? Given the South African Constitution, and its stance against racism and discrimination, if we acknowledge that these strategies are about dealing with racial trauma and race-based stress will that in any way compel our society in general and predominantly white schools in particular to abolish these practices or face the full might of the law? Will the acknowledgement of trauma and stress in any way demand a more compassionate approach from the white school officials when dealing with black learners and parents? Are teachers and teacher training institutions reflecting this in their training programmes and should job specifications require these attributes as part of the job requirements for teaching? To what extent do educational psychologists employed by the schools actually expand their repertoire of interventions to include how teachers can minimise triggering racial trauma and race-based stress, and to what extent do parent guidance sessions address the parents' experiences of racial trauma and race-based stress induced by white school officials? I acknowledge that these questions lie beyond the scope

of my study; however, they suggest a need for a closer investigation. Further research employing the strategies suggested by DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2014:248) drawing on Critical Psychology as its theoretical framework can help answer these question. Such an exploration will take further the initiative shown in this study to traverse disciplines between educational psychology and sociology.

CRT and PA fall short of explaining how actions taken by parents to cope with race-based stress and trauma actually influence strategy choice and strategy use when engaging with school officials. Future research could investigate this further. This study stopped short of including the experiences and perspective of parents who are black foreign nationals residing in South Africa who also constitute a demographic minority; other studies could expand on this in future. In addition, the following could also be considered for further research: a comparison of black and white middle-class parents' strategies used in addressing the educational concerns of their children with the school authorities; a larger national study, beyond Roodepoort, on the strategies deployed by black middle-class parents in the context of racial incidents affecting their children; a study of black parents who leave these white-dominant schools, exploring why they leave and where they take their children; finally, further research could focus on the children themselves and how they experience their racial minority status in mainly white schools despite being a majority population in the country as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> This is in reference to the tendency by some black communities to burn property during protest actions and civil unrest. There is a growing and worrying pattern of black communities destroying schools, clinics and other public property with the goal of getting media attention to air their grievances.

<sup>2</sup> These were military vans driven by the police during the apartheid era,

<sup>3</sup> These are struggles songs usually sang during political rallies to celebrate our struggle heroes as well as comfort people to stay strong and continue with the fight for equality.

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<sup>i</sup> See Rollock (2011:518) on racial micro-aggressions.

<sup>ii</sup> The parents in my study did not simply drop off the children at the school gate and drive off to work or gym in their fancy cars as it was alleged in the media that they “cede their responsibility towards their children once they are dropped off at the school gates” (source: The Editor, The Times Newspaper dated 31/01/2012 time 00:21).

<sup>iii</sup> According to Forsyth and Carter (2012:131), bargaining is one of the racism-related coping strategies. It consists of primarily cognitive strategies focused on efforts to make sense of the experience, to examine one’s own responsibility in bringing the incident about, and to change one’s behaviour in order to manage others’ perceptions.

<sup>iv</sup> According to Lowe, Okubo and Reilly (2012:193), being able to talk about one’s experiences of racism is another way of enabling people of colour to cope with race-based trauma and stress.

<sup>v</sup> As noted by Cooper (2009:381), traditional school-based models of parental involvement rarely account for the many ways that parents from low-income, working class and people of colour participate in their children’s education and display educational care. Instead the traditional models privilege white, middle-class behaviour norms and negate the complexity of parent’s lives, demands, schedules, goals, values and their relationships with their children.

<sup>vi</sup> Here I am borrowing from what Babalwa, one of the parents in my study, suggested that black parents are takers, referring to incidents where black parents seem to cooperate without question or dissent to what the school officials demand, even to their own detriment.