'Your Past Makes You Who You Are': Retrospective Parenting and Relational Resilience Among Black Caribbean British Young People

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Abstract

In this article, we explore how Black Caribbean parents prepare their children for the challenges ahead–including anticipated discrimination–in order to boost their opportunities in education and work and eventually their social mobility. Drawing upon family case studies with Black Caribbean families in London, this article focuses on what we have defined as *retrospective parenting* to mean the use of narratives about the past as resources for parenting. *Retrospective parenting* draws on the struggles of a cumulative past and aims to transmit a sense of *relational resilience*, drawing simultaneously on individual, family, and community histories. We found that retrospective parenting had restorative purposes, with parents not only aiming to make up for their missed opportunities but also being preventive and progressive, conveying aims with forward-looking implications for the future of their children.

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Introduction

It is widely recognised that parenting has an influence on children's educational attainment, future employment opportunities, and ultimately on intergenerational mobility or reproduction (Bourdieu, 2003; Duncan et al., 2010; Lareau, 2011). Previous research has closely examined parenting practices as the day-to-day activities (Lareau, 2011; Morgan, 2011; Vincent et al., 2013) by which parents seek to support their children's development. In particular, parents' interest and involvement in their children's education have received great attention in this context (Irwin and Elley, 2011). In this article, we shift the focus from day-to-day activities to the role of specific *narratives* employed by Black Caribbean parents to protect their children and support their future opportunities. We found that parents mobilised different types of narratives from not only their personal, but also their family and community's past, in order to arm their children with the motivation and persistence to face future life challenges, including discrimination. These narratives have converged towards what we have defined as *retrospective parenting*, its deployment in the families, and its relevance in passing on a sense of resilience and supporting high aspirations and achievements.

In our analysis, we focus on how parenting is used to attempt to enhance the life chances of the next generation. Previous research has revealed a trend towards raised educational and occupational aspirations (Strand, 2008) and upward social mobility among ethnic minority groups, including Black Caribbeans in Britain (CoDE, 2014; Platt, 2005a, 2005b). Due to changing education and labour market opportunities since the 1970s (i.e. the decline in manual jobs and increase in non-manual and professional occupations), there have been significant changes in national occupational structures. Although Black Caribbeans, like other ethnic minority groups, are increasingly accessing professional and managerial positions, their relative chances of moving into these higher occupational categories compared to other ethnic groups–particularly the white British–remain low (CoDE, 2014; Platt, 2006). Moreover, the educational attainment of Black Caribbean pupils is still significantly below (by 10 percentage points) the national average (57% achieving 5+ A-Cs at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)),[1] and their employment prospects are also still challenging: the Black Caribbean unemployment rate is at 12% compared to a white unemployment rate of 5% (Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2011). These statistics suggest that as with other ethnic minority groups, Black Caribbeans remain exposed to persistent disadvantages in both education and the labour market. Hence, their case is particularly compelling to gain a better understanding of how parents attempt to protect their children from these negative trends.

The article begins with a discussion of different aspects of parenting, focusing on cultural-specific parenting practices and how they link with resilience and the intergenerational transmission of aspirations and attainment. It, then, presents our methodological approach and, finally, the concept of *retrospective parenting*, describing its main characteristics and its link with the idea of *relational resilience*.

Parenting and resilience

In our approach, we define parenting as the process of intergenerational transmission, by which parents aim to pass on values and beliefs to the next generation while relying on the range of resources (e.g. cultural, social, or economic) available to them (Franceschelli,

2016: 14). The idea of parenting as a process encompasses multiple definitions, which cover different aspects such as parenting styles (Baumrind, 1991), practices (Morgan, 2011), and resources (Edwards and Gillies, 2005). Here, we focus on the role of parenting as particularly exemplified by the narratives used by parents to promote better opportunities for their children in view of possible future barriers. Hence, we explore how these narratives relate to ethnic and racial socialisation while accounting for the class contexts of the families.

Previous research has highlighted the multiple ways in which the process of parenting affects children's development and outcomes, such as through the transmission of social and emotional competencies, self-confidence, mental health, educational achievement, and ultimately future employment and life chances (Bornstein and Bradley, 2014; O'Connor and Scott, 2007). For example, Morgan's (2011) idea of 'family practice' highlights the 'active doing' and 'everyday' aspects of parenting. He argues that through 'practice', social actors 'are reproducing the sets of relationships (structures, collectivities) within which these activities are carried out and from which they derive their meaning' (Morgan, 2011: 1). As Becher (2008) explains in her study on South Asian Muslim families, 'family practices' help to understand how people 'do' family. In this sense, the focus is on family not as a 'thing' but as a set of actions, conceptualising parenting as the body of processes and activities behind intergenerational transmission (Brannen, 2003).

In Bourdieu's terms, 'practice' is another way human action embodies the social structure (Bourdieu, 1990). In this context, the work of the American sociologist Annette Lareau (2002, 2011) is particularly relevant. Lareau introduces the effects of class in the deployment of parenting practices, suggesting a split in how middle-class and working-class parents bring up their children. For Lareau, the middle-class approach–of concerted cultivation–is aimed at cultivating children's talents in order to develop life skills through a rigid organisation of their leisure time. In comparison, working-class parents lack the resources to invest so heavily in their children's leisure time and employ, instead, a 'natural growth' approach, focusing mostly on primary needs. Recent research (Irwin and Elley, 2011) has challenged this neat class division in parenting identified by Lareau. Based on a survey of parents in the UK and semi-structured interviews, Irwin and Elley argue that Lareau had overstated the internal homogeneity of classes, and they highlighted the diversity of parenting experiences within both middle-class and working-class families. Race and ethnicity have played an important role, as seen when exploring possible sources of variation in parenting practices within the same social class. Lareau's (2002) analysis–whose initial focus was on both class and race–came to the conclusion that class outweighs race:

> Thus my data indicate that on the childrearing dynamics studied here, compared with social class, race was less important in children's daily lives. (p. 773)

By contrast, a study by Rollock et al. (2014) on the educational choices of Black middle classes in Britain has come to different conclusions about the role of race in parenting:

> For almost all parents, race remains present irrespective of class status. (Rollock et al., 2014: 18)

Like Lareau, Rollock et al. (2014) found that middle-class parenting in Black British families revolved around the practice of concerted cultivation, which, nonetheless, in their case existed in a racialised context (Gillborn, 2006). The differences in the findings between the American ethnography and the recent British study may also be related to their different focus. Lareau was concerned with examining everyday practices and how parents set out tight schedules or not in order to organise their children's spare-time activities; Rollock et al., instead, looked more closely at parents supporting education, which involved exploring families' interactions with institutional settings where racism is more likely to take place.

A more evident focus on the role of race and ethnicity in parenting comes from theories of 'ethnic and racial socialization' (ERS; Hughes and Johnson, 2001; Hughes et al., 2006; Iqbal, 2014). ERS is particularly relevant for our study because of growing evidence that it can be a potential protective developmental process preparing children to develop a positive racial self-concept, helping them cope with racism and discrimination (Rodriguez et al., 2008). In the specific context of African American families, racial socialisation has been found to be a 'primary vehicle of cultural transmission' which draws on 'a tradition of resistance to oppression' and which is embedded in conversations aimed to communicate to children 'how to survive with dignity and pride in a racist world.' (Stevenson et al., 2001 in Rodriguez et al., 2008: 2). ERS brings together a number of parenting approaches aimed at transmitting 'information, perspectives and values relating to race and ethnicity to their children' (Iqbal, 2014: 216). Hughes and Johnson (2001: 981) describe different aspects of ERS: the frequency of parents' messages about discrimination (Preparation for bias); parental emphasis on ethnic pride, heritage, and diversity (Cultural socialisation/pluralism); and parents passing on to children a sense of caution and warnings about intergroup relations (promotion of mistrust). Research shows that these different aspects of ERS influence children's outcomes in a number of ways: they affect future attitudes, they have implications for socio-emotional development (Iqbal, 2014), and they can shape educational outcomes by promoting higher self-esteem, even though these patterns are not always consistent (Harris-Britt et al., 2007; Hughes and Johnson, 2001). One typology of ERS–'preparation for bias'–about readying children to the possibility of experiencing racism (Iqbal, 2014) is particularly relevant to our case, as discussed later in this article. However, while ERS is mainly concerned with the intergenerational transmission of perspectives about race, in this article, we focus on wider parenting issues, aimed at supporting children's future opportunities and educational achievement.

As ERS anticipates, parenting is crucial in supporting children to build up certain levels of 'resilience' (Hill et al., 2007) and to support the capacity to attain positive outcomes even in the face of adversity (Schoon, 2006). Resilience, in this context, is understood not as an individual trait but rather as a situated feature resulting from how individuals interact with their context and relate to their significant others. For instance, we can consider how parenting may help to develop 'intrinsic resilient capacities' to cope with adversities 'such as poverty, ill health, bereavement or community violence' (Hill et al., 2007: 11). In this article, we draw on the idea of *relational resilience* established by Ketokivi and Meskus (2015), who, based on a study of biographical disruption, reflect more generally on the nature of human agency. They conclude that individual responses to highly uncontrollable life challenges become signifiers of the relational foundations of agency, with the self becoming increasingly reliant on intimate bonds. Our research also

suggests a relational foundation of the resilience that parents aimed to pass on to their children, which was embedded in a past that encompassed the individual level.

Aspirations

In the article, we initially explored how the transmission of a sense of resilience became a means by which parents encouraged their children's aspirations. The vast amount of literature on the aspirations of ethnic minority groups mostly considers two interrelated issues: the development of aspirations and their outcomes, particularly in education. Research has established that ethnic minority groups' high educational and professional aspirations originate from their migrant past (Franceschelli, 2016; Strand, 2008; Wilson et al., 2006), which acts as an incentive to pursue upward occupational mobility through education, particularly for the next generation. As Mirza (2009: 13) highlights, 'it's often the case that people migrate searching for a better life […] for themselves and for their children'. Strand's (2008) analysis of longitudinal data found that pupils' educational aspirations, parents' educational aspirations for their children, and pupils' academic self-concept each have a great impact on the attainment of education in 16-year-olds. Generally, the association between high educational and occupational aspirations and later attainment is well established, even after controlling for social background and academic ability (Reynolds and Johnson, 2011; Schoon and Parsons, 2002; Sewell and Hauser, 1975), and research has identified that young people's aspirations, goals, and life plans are a potential protective factor, enabling positive adaptation in the face of adversity (Clausen, 1995; Schoon, 2006). Although the benefits of aspirations as a driving force in themselves are widely recognised (e.g. Strand, 2008; Wilson et al., 2006), their effects on the actual life chances of people are debated (Reay, 2013). First, the length of residence in the host country–and therefore the migrant generation–is associated with declining aspirations (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009) and feelings of 'blocked opportunities' (Kao and Tienda, 1998), which may also reduce the faith in aspirations. Second, ideas of 'attainment status' suggest that educational and occupational aspirations vary by social class, so achievements in education–and later, employment outcomes–are bound to structural factors (Kao and Tienda, 1998; Reay, 2013), ethnic penalty (Modood and Khattab, 2016), and are undermined by institutional racism (Gillborn, 2006). In their research about middle-class Black Caribbean parents, Rollock et al. (2014) suggest that regardless of their higher socio-economic status, the positive effects of their high aspirations were reduced by racial discrimination with negative effects on educational achievement and the schooling experiences of their children. Ultimately, the link between aspirations, educational attainment, and employment outcomes is a contested one, with aspirations acting as possible–rather than tangible–predictors of future life outcomes (Franceschelli, 2016). In this article, we therefore also explore the intergenerational transmission of aspirations, and particularly, on how Black Caribbean parents have nurtured aspirations by referring to their histories.

Approaches, methods, and reflexivity

To explore the interlinkages, continuity, and change in the views and experiences of parents and children in the same family group, we adopted an approach, which is both

intergenerational and narrative (Franceschelli, 2013). By 'narrative', we mean respondents' accounts of their past or present experiences and how they made sense and came to terms with these experiences (Phoenix and Brannen, 2014; Riessman, 2008). In this sense, narratives are not just descriptions of sequences of events but rather processes of creating meaning, in relation to specific social contexts and normative grounds (Ewick and Silbey, 2003; Phoenix and Brannen, 2014). With 'intergenerational', we indicate our focus on *what* (the content of transmission) and *how* (the means of transmission) has been passed from parents to children. Our attention to 'intergenerational' also suggests that our research design and analysis draw on the interplay between the accounts of both parents and teenage children within the same family group. During the interviews, parents and children were asked a number of similar questions about their experiences of growing up, their own family, their education, and their aspirations. They were also asked questions about each other: what were the parents' priorities and aspirations for their children and what were the children's most important messages learnt from their parents? In the analysis, we initially explored themes for all fathers, all mothers, all teenagers, and all parents, but we then focused more closely on comparing themes across generations in each family group, and so developed family case studies.

The present research draws on eight in-depth family case studies with Black Caribbean families, including 24 single participants (five girls, five boys, eight mothers, five fathers, and one grandmother, who volunteered to take part when she found out about the research). Two parents were from mixed Black Caribbean and white backgrounds, and two families were from mixed ethnic Black African and African Caribbean backgrounds. In each family, we spoke to each parent and child separately. Parents were a mix of first- and second-generation immigrants (five were second-generation), while all the teenage children (13–19 years old) were born in the UK. The sample includes three lone parent families where only the mother and the young person were interviewed–in these cases, the father could not be reached or refused to participate. The sampling rationale was purposive, and most of the recruitment was done via snowballing.

The socio-economic backgrounds of the families ranged from the lower middle class (three families) to working class (five families). To categorise the families into social-class groups during the recruitment stage, we, initially, drew on the National Statistics Socio-economic classification SOC2010[2] based on an updated version of the original Goldthorpe schema (Goldthorpe, 2004). In our sample, fathers mostly had semi-skilled jobs, which required some level of qualification (but all below degree level, for example, engineers, a self-employed mechanic and monitoring health and safety equipment for a large organisation). Mothers' employment ranged from temporary administrative positions, receptionist, and child-minder to foster care and part-time book keeping. Three mothers were unemployed, but one of them was studying. Only one mother had a degree; all the other parents had qualifications below the GCSE level or no qualifications.[3] Subsequently, during the interview, we integrated this initial classification of families with notions of economic, cultural, and social capital exemplified by questions about income but also social activities, social relations and cultural tastes in line with more recent debates about social class informed by the theory of Pierre Bourdieu (e.g. Bennett et al., 2009; Franceschelli et al., 2016; Le Roux et al., 2008; Savage et al., 2013). The main part of the interview aimed to generate narratives about experiences within education and was quite unstructured, while the final session explored aspirations and upbringing practices from both parents' and

children's perspectives. The researcher visited each family several times, and interviews with family members were conducted separately and most often on different days. Interviews were recorded with the consent of participants and were fully transcribed, and the researcher took fieldwork notes.

One other characteristic of narratives is that they come to exist and acquire meaning through the interactions between narrators and the audience (Ewick and Silbey, 2003). Phoenix and Brannen (2014) argue that narration and storytelling are co-constructed between the interviewer and interviewee. In our case, we have taken into account the implications of a white European female researcher accessing the studied communities as an outsider: on one hand, there was a sense of difference attached to the researcher being external, while on the other hand, the non-British background of the researcher involved a sense of shared commonalities based on a past–although different–of migration. Finally, evidence of the persistent disadvantage experienced by minority groups and theories about their subordinate positions in society are likely to have influenced our conceptualisation of resilience as an aspect of the relational self that emerges socially (Donati and Archer, 2015), rather than as an individual intrinsic trait.

Retrospective parenting: *your past makes you who you are*

'Retrospective parenting' is a new conceptual category emerging from our analysis, which explains how parents have used narratives about the past as resources for their parenting. With the case of Thomas's family, we introduce the concept of retrospective parenting from an intergenerational perspective. Thomas was a father of two teenagers, Jahil and Jayla. He was in his late 30s, moving from one job to another within the publishing sector, and his wife Rita was working as a receptionist. Thomas's idea that the 'past makes you who you are' reflects the essence of retrospective parenting, setting out the importance of the past for the construction of adult and gender identities, in his case as a man and a provider:

> 'Your past makes who you are' and […] 'right, I know how you grew up'–do you know what I mean? So everything you do is a part of how you was grown, sort of thing, and the things you didn't get, sort of thing. So that for me, it was … I think, I vowed from a very young age: 'when my kids want something, when I have kids and they want something, they're going to get it, I'm going to provide it for them'. Whereas as well as my mum did–and she provided everything for me and all the rest of it–I got to a point where I think I was about 14; I couldn't even ask my mum for anything any more […]

If the emphasis on 'providing' fed into Thomas's ideas of gendered family roles, it was also a way of dealing with his missed opportunities. Retrospective parenting may involve various levels of the past, which goes beyond parental biographies, reaching to wider family histories and the history of the community, including the diaspora and Black history.

Thomas' account about his mother suggests how his familial past was used to make sense of his upbringing first of all and of his parenting thereafter:

> My mum grew up in Jamaica […] My mum's always been busy working, but … the things that I recollect from my mother is that … when my mum and my dad sort of split up, erm … there

was a time in my mum's life where she never had anywhere to live. […] Me and my mum were staying in bed and breakfasts. And for me, my mum's always had a difficult … difficult life in some sort of way. Erm … so I think everything sort of like was a struggle for my mum in some sort of way, so that's why I've kind of learnt that work hard. So, yeah.

He also exemplifies a reoccurring tendency among the parents in the research: the past was not depicted as neutral, but rather, the emphasis was on the difficulties, the challenges, and the struggles that it involved. Jahil, Thomas' 16-year-old son, wanted to study engineering and suggested the importance of having a purpose while negotiating present and future aspirations:

Erm … I think my future affects my present I guess, cos what happens in the … what happens now affects what's going to happen in the future. So if I plan out what's going to happen in the future, I can do what I want to do now to make sure that happens in the future.

This need of a sense of purpose also emerged from Thomas and his wife Rita. Thomas and Rita wanted their children to have a clear idea of what to do with their lives. As parents who had children at young age, their narratives reflected a sense of missed opportunities and unfulfilled aspirations and now, approaching 40, they had some regrets about how things had turned out for them. However, they dealt with these feelings differently: while Rita was about to go back into education, Thomas was still unsure about what he really wanted to do in his life and continued to 'float around', as he admitted. Their son Jahil was preparing for his GCSEs and was predicted with a few Bs, despite his dyslexia and being diagnosed with a life-threatening disease only shortly prior to our interview with him. His words suggested how his perceived duty to succeed had been shaped by his parents and particularly his father's sense of a lack of achievement:

I think my mum and dad just want me to be … better than they are, I guess. […] They don't want me to be on the same level or lower than they–on, like, the money that they're making. They want me to make more money than they're making and have a better life than they've had. So, yeah. But they don't have any set path or nothing, they just say 'do what you want to be, it's your option'. My dad hasn't achieved his dreams. My mum, I'm not sure, I've never really asked them, but I know my dad hasn't.

Jahil's reference to his parents' earnings as a marker of family status and achievements also reflected a 'materialistic approach to success', somewhat mirroring his father. This approach was actually a concern for his mother Rita who spoke about Thomas needing control over his shopping habits, as he tended to buy things they did not really need, such as 'big new speakers or a huge flat-screen TV'. This rush to consume happened for a reason, and Rita contextualised this in Thomas' behaviour: as he had had to learn to look after himself at a young age, he then wanted to provide a better and easier life for his family, avoiding the difficulties and constraints he had experienced. Hence, shopping was for him a way to show he could provide for the family. Moreover, having had their first child when they were really young increased the pace of their coming of age, leaving a feeling of needing to catch up with what they had left behind to prioritise their children. Intergenerational analysis sheds light on the implications of the parents' biographies on their children.

Their 19-year-old daughter Jayla had her own view about her parents' past life experiences. She actually sounded judgemental about their general lack of self-focus and purpose, describing them as 'floating around'. Nonetheless, she also showed awareness of why they had had to put their lives on hold:

> Because if they was thinking of themselves, my mum would have gone to college years ago, or my dad would have got a different job years ago and … different things would have happened and … so, yeah. But then I guess they had to think about me and my brother–they had no choice. But now that we're a bit older they're starting to realise actually: 'What about me? What have I done with myself? I'm now at 38–what am I going to do?' (laughs) So yeah, time's ticking on (laughs).

Jayla's awareness that her parents' life opportunities had been shaped by having her when they were still very young, affected her own identity. She reflected on her determinant role, although unchosen, in shaping the history of her family and portrayed herself as a mature and self-reliant young woman who was 'parenting her own parents':

> And I think that if they didn't have children they wouldn't be together right now, they wouldn't … they would have separated. And I think that if I wasn't an option, if I wasn't around, then … things would be a bit more … they would be able to go for their dreams a bit more, they would have been doing what they wanted to do at the time, but that's because they wouldn't be together.

> *So you feel a bit of responsibility of keeping them together?*

> It's not that I feel a responsibility, not at all. I just feel that that's the way it is. And yeah it's just what happened. You have babies, you think, 'OK we can't separate now, we've got to do this, this and this'.

Thomas and Rita's family introduces important themes about retrospective parenting, which were shared by the other families in the study, including the importance of different levels of past for parenting and of past as a 'struggle'. The following section looks at retrospective parenting and explores in more depth its characteristics.

Looking inside retrospective parenting: *restorative, progressive, and preventive practices*

We found that retrospective parenting took three main forms: *restorative* (making up for missed opportunities), *preventive* (preparing for experiences of bias and discrimination), *and progressive* (focusing on the future to avoid 'wrong turns'). Ultimately, these different aspects were not exclusive and tended to converge towards the idea that the use of the past in parenting had implications for children's present and future.

Similarly to Thomas, Kwane, a father and stepfather, spoke about his past–'when he used to have nothing'–with *restorative* purposes. In so doing, he attempted to compensate for his missed opportunities by ensuring that his children would not have to go through the same hardships. Kwane highlighted the importance of past for identity

construction, connecting past with future achievements, and suggested that a positive current identity can only be achieved through knowledge of how individual and collective pasts come together:

> Don't forget who you are and where you came from. I mean you should remember […] 'if you remember where you came from then you know where you're going […] always find out the truth if you know your past'.

Lydia, a 43-year-old mother of a young girl called Aisha, enjoyed exploring London with her daughter as a way to 're-live her past' and fill 'the gaps' in her own life experiences while growing up:

> But these activities I think is … I think I know what it is. Because I didn't have it, I'm doing it. […] I think I have the opportunity … you see, talking about it now, because I didn't do it and I now–I didn't get it myself and I have the opportunity I am maximising that. I didn't go to see London, so Alyssa's my excuse to re-live my childhood.

Although Lydia re-living her past was an inward-looking strategy, it was not an end in itself as it had outer implications, such as providing her daughter with important life experiences.

The idea of a 'migration effect' (Franceschelli, 2016) was an important feature of the *restorative* aspect: parents considered their children's future life chances as a way to make up for what they had missed out in their own lives while growing up because of the difficulties, changes and adaptations they had had to face as first- or second-generation immigrants. The 'migration effect' also has a progressive component, connecting the migrant's past with hopes for the future, informed by strong beliefs in meritocracy. Therefore, parents hoped that hard work would ultimately be rewarded, reflecting a 'belief in agency' and the individuals' responsibility for shaping their own future.

Emphasis on the past did not mean lack of attention to the future, and retrospective parenting also had a strong forward-looking aspect. These *progressive* aspects of retrospective parenting were present in the ways parents encouraged their children to develop self-belief. Keira, a first-generation Black Caribbean mother of three, summarised well this idea:

> I mean … I always say to my children there is nothing that you can't do. If you want to become something, you can if you work hard at it.

Aspirations were central in this forward-looking aspect, and Keira suggested the importance of instilling aspirations from a young age, so that children grow up with a certain mindset and a focus:

> She's 6, you know, and I said to her, 'Oh I want you to become a doctor'. So, erm … from even two, she was telling everyone, 'Oh, I'm going to become a doctor'. […] Erm … and in Year One she (started) telling me, 'I want to be like Miss Smith, I'm going to be a teacher like Miss Smith'. So she came up: 'Oh I'm going to be a teacher like' … 'No, OK so you're going to be a doctor'. […] And finally she said to me, 'Mum, you know what, I'm going to be a teacher in the day and a doctor at night'. (laughs)

Finally, a *preventive approach* in using the past involved emphasis on the idea of struggle that was used to describe families' histories and individual biographies. By referring to past adversities, parents sought to raise their children's awareness about possible bias and to teach them how to overcome it. Preparing children for the experience of bias acted as a preventive mechanism aimed to equip them to deal with the challenges ahead. Some mothers and fathers raised their children's awareness of bias by speaking about it directly, like the parents of Manu, a 14 year-old boy:

> *So, you said, do you speak about racism and stuff like that with your parents?*
>
> Mmm.
>
> *What do they say?*
>
> They say, like, what's it? That you, I, as a black person, have to try harder because some people will be racist. So you can't let them–what's it? You can't let them bring you down […] so you have to try twice as hard as someone else, or something like that.

More often, as part of a preventive approach, parents included prejudice and racial discrimination into their narratives about struggles, which characterised their personal past, and that of the family and the community. But what were these struggles about? Many parents spoke about growing up in poverty or at least struggling financially and, although primary needs were mostly met, there was little left for anything else. There was no blame of their families, and most adult respondents used the words 'hard-working' to describe their own parents, as Patricia, a lone mother suggested:

> Yeah, he just worked in the factories. And they did picking as well. They were both very, very hard-working people. And I think they worked too hard and not enough pleasure. That's what I think they did. My dad worked in the factories at night. He worked nights. And my mum worked during the days. And then we saw my dad in the day, we saw mum at night.

Even those from a more wealthy and educated background back in the Caribbean described their families' struggles–and in most cases, the failures–to maintain their status and social position once in Britain. Afua, a mother of three children, spoke about her father's resignation from his career in the printing sector:

> My dad didn't–it was so racist then–he couldn't get a job at Fleet Street. He tried to get work and that kind of stuff, so he couldn't. […] Oh, he tells us the stories and something—he had to get some permit, he said, when he first came here […] in order to work in the print, a newspaper. But then the newspaper […] wouldn't … it was like he was being tossed […] So he–he's done. He's just had a life of a string of different jobs.

The struggles varied by gender and family role: fathers, similarly to some lone mothers, described giving up personal aspirations to provide financially for the family. The struggles of mothers in the couple families were also about giving up things for themselves, like career and education, but they were perceived differently: rather as required to fulfil their childrearing responsibilities.

Another aspect of 'struggles' involved wider and shared cultural identities beyond the family. Cynthia, another mother of three young children, grew up in poverty with her mum and older brother. She was now studying to become a teacher and spoke extensively about how she was using 'black history' to teach her children about their identity, legacy, and heritage beyond what they currently learn at school:

> And again, it was, it was … it's American, you know, they're … Britain, it's like they … I don't know, it's like they almost hide British black history, you know. It's like we appeared during the Windrush, but there were no black people before that, you know. So erm … I think it is important for children to know. Because I said to my son, 'What do you know about black history?' He knew there were slaves. I mean, it's like, well … you know there's more to it than that, you know? There is more to it. So I think it's important, I really do, yeah.

Her 15-year-old son Roy showed that the message had been successfully passed on. He spoke about Malcolm X and was reading and watching films about Black history:

> I'm currently studying history for GCSE at school and … I'd like them if they did–what's it?– educate children on black history. I don't think it's really knowledgeable throughout children. […] I don't think children are really knowledgeable about it but … I think my mum's, like, on the case to sorting out how erm … schools can teach that throughout classes.

Roy's words suggest that the history of these communities fed into the struggles that characterised preventive aspects of retrospective parenting.

Together with the narratives about the past, there were more practical aspects of upbringing that intersected with retrospective parenting, and, like Vincent et al. (2013), we also found evidence of parents employing concerted cultivation to bring together progressive and preventive elements. In this context, concerted cultivation provided further scope to equip children with the ability to challenge future difficulties with a positive frame of mind. Similarly to Lareau, organised spare-time activities and intellectual stimuli were also intended to improve the children's skills and abilities in light of their future. However, differently from her, our sample was not as polarised by class, and most of our participants were from lower middle-class and working-class backgrounds; they were neither experiencing the most extreme disadvantage, nor they were from the highest professional status. Within these socio-economic backgrounds, we found that most parents were adopting concerted cultivation, rather than natural growth, as a way to both improve the children's future prospects and train them to tackle difficulties and possible disadvantages. Hence, even parents from lower social economic backgrounds were concerned with filling the spare time of the children with numerous activities: for instance, a girl from one more disadvantaged family was attending piano lessons, one young boy was going to drama classes, and many were involved with swimming and other sports activities. We wondered how working-class and lower middle-class parents could afford to pay for these multiple activities. Parents explained that some of these programmes were part of after-school clubs, financed by local authorities or delivered by the church.

So far, we have presented the concept of retrospective parenting and shown how it was operationalised in the families. The case of Alyssa's family below highlights one

more aspect of retrospective parenting and its link with relational resilience in the context of education.

Alyssa's family: struggles, education, and 'relational resilience'

Intergenerational analysis suggests that the restorative, progressive, and preventive elements of the past converged with parents' attempts to pass on a *sense of resilience* to their children. In our case, resilience–as the capacity to show positive adaptation in face of adversity (Schoon, 2012)–was not simply an individual attribute. Indeed, parents constructed a sense of resilience as a relational feature whose sources and strengths emerged as part of their biographies, and also the wider family and more general issues affecting their communities.

The importance of resilience was evident in the context of education: even those who spoke about their educational successes–like Lydia, who had a degree from a prestigious university–used the language of struggle. Lydia's family was among the wealthiest in the sample: they owned their own house in a residential area of an up-and-coming Inner London borough, she was running a successful child-minding business and her husband was a gas engineer. Lydia and her husband Ross were both born in the UK but Lydia's parents were from Grenada, while Ross was originally from Jamaica. Lydia was a 'straight A' student who graduated in humanities, but her account of the transition from GCSE to upper secondary was still rather dramatic:

> She (headmistress) wanted to see all the girls who were planning to go on to do A levels. Because then it was like, 'Well if you're doing A levels you're bound to be going on to do a degree'. (And she kept on saying,) 'Why would you, people like you, want to go to university? Are you planning to be missionaries?' And that …! […] Yeah. I remember getting up and walking out. I think when she turned back I wasn't in the room.

Lydia's walking away as an act of resilience acquires a symbolic meaning: it was not just her response to institutional racism but also a turning point and the beginning of her journey, which ended with her educational success. It was through this initial experience of racism that she constructed her resilient adult identity. While exploring what brought her to leave the room, Lydia made references to her upbringing. She spoke about how her parents' history converged with that of the wider Caribbean community and how her parents' concerns were shaped by the fear of her lacking independence:

> My mum said, 'Because, being a girl, we wanted you to grow up never to be dependent on anybody, that we wanted you to be independent, and that focus, the idea of you failing in your studies and leaving you vulnerable wasn't an option'.

Her husband Ross had a difficult relationship with his stepfather and no contact with his biological father. He spoke extensively about the difficulties of growing up, even though he only opened up explicitly in one of the later visits. Ross' manifestation of resilience was a survival strategy and reaction against a challenging social environment where he grew up:

Yeah, because with … with the way I grew up, it could have gone any way, because some … if I wasn't strong enough, I could have been in trouble, because I wasn't getting any love from home, and I can imagine if you're not getting anything you look for it somewhere else, and that's why these kids end up in gangs. So for me, because I was stronger mentally, I didn't end up in any problems, I didn't get in trouble or anything, but my life was that bad that, you know, it could have gone that way.

Ross spoke of the troubles, such as involvement in crime and gangs, that young people in the community, particularly boys, are subjected to when in disadvantaged families and neighbourhoods. His difficult family circumstances and the actual social environment of the community shaped Ross's resilience and meant that he 'stood up against these lifestyles'.

Lydia and Ross's resiliencies informed the accounts about the education and future of their daughter Alyssa. Alyssa was about to turn 14 at the time of the interview, and since the first informal conversation, she had appeared to be concerned about her experience in school. She explained that she was not doing very well and found the school experience challenging:

Well it's just … I think my life would be perfect if it wasn't for my school, really. I think … erm…some … I'm not sure, just it isn't the best.

Her narrative about school was full of terms such as 'detention', 'punishment', 'exclusion', 'exclusion room', 'bullying', 'escalating', and 'misbehaving'. The school was described as being full of 'disciplinary norms' and 'disciplinary procedures'. Half way through the interview, Alyssa explained that she had been excluded for 1 day for bullying another girl. She insisted she had not done that:

There's a thing called DP slips. […] And if someone misbehaves, you write one to go downstairs. […] Like … so then, someone could basically shout at you (laughs) and give you a detention, which will be co-ordinators 90 minutes if you get DP'd […]

In making sense of these events, Alyssa recognised she could be loud, but felt she had unfairly become a target:

I know a girl called Megan. She's white, she's got blue eyes, blonde hair, quite quiet, she's got kind of a baby voice. […] I'm not sure if it's racist, but it's quite stereotypical that obviously the taller, black girl did it.

She believed that racism was behind teachers' stereotyping her as 'loud and disruptive', but in the face of these events, she was staying positive, focusing on the future rather than on the present. Hence, she manifested resilience by imagining her future success, which she perceived as the best 'revenge' against the people who were making it difficult for her at school:

I want to be an assistant of a fashion designer so I could, like, see what they do and how they do it, and how they control a situation. […] When I go into like the fashion industry and I basically

achieve what I want to achieve, I will just want to like wave at all the people {laughs} that got me down and thought that I couldn't do it.

A sense of resilience linked the narratives of Lydia, Ross, and Alyssa. What was common was that their different resiliencies emerged from sources outside their subjective spheres, stemming from family, school, and the wider issues faced by their community.

Conclusion

In this article, we have focused on how Black Caribbean parents have used significant stories from their individual, family, and community past to support the development and transmission of aspirations to their teenage children. The analysis suggests that parenting in these families was *'retrospective'*. This is to say that in an attempt to promote the future life chances of their children, parents made references to their own biographies, their family history, and sometimes to the wider history of African-Caribbean communities. The use of the past was not neutral, but parents employed it for restorative, progressive, and preventive purposes informed by past and present difficulties and struggles. Through the acceptance rather than denial of challenges, they sought to urge their children to sustain effort and fight against the odds imposed by structured opportunities and racialised labour markets. As in Ketokivi and Meskus' (2015) study of biographical disruption, the resilience promoted by our participants was an expression of agency, which has to be understood as relational, sustained through sources beyond the individual, such as their wider social relations and collective histories. Finally, our results highlight a contradictory mixture of hopes for a better future and concern about children experiencing difficulties and barriers. In this context, *relational resilience* served as a further attempt to deal with the sense of fatalism and pre-determination associated with the awareness of structured and racialised opportunities.

Notes

1. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/399005/SFR06_2015_Text.pdf
2. Retrieved from https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/standardoccupationalclassificationsoc/soc2010/soc2010volume3thenationalstatisticssocioeconomicclassificationnssecrebasedonsoc2010
3. General Certificate of Secondary Education—qualification awarded at age 16.

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