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A friend waiting for the decision on her son's application to high school explained to Bridget how this was a particularly stressful time. At the same time, she hoped it was also the end of her major responsibility for his education. She'd decided on his primary school and now his high school, but the rest, she hoped, would be down to him. Navigating a path through the schooling system for one's child is perhaps inevitably an emotional process. For the child it can be an anxious time, representing a big step: going to a much larger school; moving from being in the oldest class in the school to the youngest; often having to travel further and without parents. For a parent, it can bring up their own experiences – for good or ill – of schooling, the successes and failures of other children in the family, and often involves discussions not only with the child's other parent but also with wider members of families and friends. These conversations can be difficult in themselves. Sharon, quoted in Chapter 3, explained how she had started to stay in her car to pick up her children from primary school, rather than get out and be drawn into conversations about schools with other parents. Discussions about school choice can be fraught because they are in some senses deeply political – concerned with questions of equity and opportunity – and are also often shaped by economic wealth (the ability to live in the 'right' area, to buy in tutoring or to buy a private education). They are also deeply personal. Parents may fear that a wrong step at this stage in a child's education may have lasting ramifications on their future life. It may set the parameters of the opportunities the child has in the future and it may also play a significant role in determining how they grow up, how happy they are at school and in the future and what character they develop. At the same time, education policy over the last thirty to forty years has also constructed parents as consumers who choose

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the schools their children will attend. As we have seen in this book, this injunction to choose ramps up the anxiety, particularly for those parents who feel their choices are too limited – or that they have to make a choice where all of the available options are undesirable. In this creation of the choosing parent, we are faced with the neurotic citizen that Isin (2004) suggests is created by a neo-liberal model of the operation of the market and the ideal of the rational consumer. The perfectly choosing parent becomes impossible to perform effectively for the majority, and thus anxiety and worry are a normalised part of the display of parenthood for all but a few. To be a good parent is to worry. Whilst it is often assumed that worrying about education is a middle-class, particularly metropolitan London-based activity, this book traces the ways in which anxiety and concerns are displayed across a much wider range of classed, gendered and racialised positions. Thus many parents worry. At the same time, how they worry and what they worry about may be very different and shaped by a range of social relations and positions, including race, class, gender and religion. What they worry about can also reveal the ways in which class and race are experienced and understood in the everyday. Because, as we have seen, a major issue they worry about is the mix of pupils their children will encounter in school and what implications this will have for their learning, development and socialisation.

This book has sought to explore the accounts of parents going through the process of choosing secondary schools for their children whilst paying particular attention to how these accounts are raced, classed and gendered. We have argued that the moment when a parent is considering secondary schooling is a productive time to consider how they talk about or use discourses that are raced, classed and gendered. This is because of the relational and social nature of schooling which places children in a community and hub of relations which can raise questions about race, ethnic and religious difference, class and gender. Thinking about potential schools not only involves considering the standards of teaching and the subjects and facilities on offer but also frequently includes the assessment of the other children (and their parents) in the schools. The other children in school are critical both as potential friends of your child who are likely to play an important role in both the happiness and sense of belonging of your child but also be a major influence on them. The other children could be friends or bullies, affirming, disruptive or transformative. In

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Bourdieuian terms, the other children in the school will be an important part (alongside the school itself) of the way in which education endows social and cultural capital. From this education, children will learn ways of being and cultural tastes, and potentially be embedded in social networks which can be critical to social mobility or the maintenance of classed distinctions. We have argued that these processes are raced as much as they are classed and are also shaped by gender.

Through conducting semi-structured interviews with parents in three different areas of Manchester who were in the process of applying to secondary schools, the book has considered the ways in which race and class talk is explicitly or implicitly present in their narratives about school choice. This gives us insight not just to the racialisation and classed nature of school choice and parenting, but also how people narrate their belonging to areas and other sources of community, such as schools. It also opens a window on to some of the ways in which people regard classed and raced others in relation to themselves. The political and ethical nature of school choice is suggested by the book *How Not to Be a Hypocrite: School Choice for the Morally Perplexed* (Swift 2003) which is explicitly addressed to middle-class readers (also implicitly assumed to be white) who believe in equality of opportunities and the importance of good education for all, but do not want to send their children to the local school because they regard the education offered by those schools as in some ways undesirable (or or because they score low in 'local status hierarchies' Greany and Higham 2018). There has been considerable sociological research on the question of school choice, particularly focused on the same (white middle-class) group hailed by Swift in *How Not to Be a Hypocrite*. However, *All in the mix* examines the experiences of a wider range of social and ethnic or religious groups. Thus we can see the ways in which people from different class and economic positions, from different racialised positions and with different legal status in Britain, respond to questions around school choice. In the book, we have considered the choice-talk of *both* white and ethnic-minority parents across a range of class positions. There is a risk that only speaking to white middle-class parents gives a sense of exceptionality to their experience. It can create school choice and the strategies and emotions which surround it as a singularly white middle-class experience. However, as we have seen, anxieties around choosing schools and concerns about the classed and racialised make-up of the school body are shared by parents from varied class and racialised positions.

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Worrying about your child's schooling is something shared, although expressed in different ways and with different targets of anxiety and responses to them, by parents who are both working-class and middle-class. It is also shared by both working-class and middle-class ethnic minorities, although with an additional set of concerns which are shaped by fears of their children experiencing racism from schools that are too white. White working-class parents also worry that, in some schools, their children may not fit in because of class and economic differences.

Thus we have seen how almost all the parents in the study responded to the state injunction to choose their children's schools with a sense of concern and responsibility about making the right choice. As discussed in Chapter 3, for many – but not all – parents, the process of schooling was also gendered and largely mother-led. Mothers often spent more time in and around school and were better able to access informal networks of information. However, it was clear from the interviews with fathers that the experience of stress and anxiety over school choice was also often experienced by men as well as women. Thus worrying about schooling choice is fairly ubiquitous, even whilst it is shaped by differences of class, race and gender. All parents are also making choices in a context of a reduction in the number of secondary schools (presenting therefore less choice in one sense) and a shifting terrain of different kinds of schools, with the introduction of academies and free schools, the continuation of various forms of selective state schooling. Parental choice is powerful in shaping schools: Greany and Higham (2018: 52) found that schools are increasingly competing for students and engage in a range of strategies to appeal to parents and to move up the local status hierarchies. They also found that, in the context of the policy of academisation, these processes also impacted on inequalities in state schooling, with the increased clustering of FSM-eligible children in schools which were marked less well by Ofsted (Greany and Higham 2018: 58). Whilst parental choice, among other processes, has a negative social impact, at the same time it can also be difficult for individuals. The responsibility to choose almost universally produced expressions of anxieties from parents. Those who were least likely to express worries about the process of choosing schools were characterised not by their class, location or ethnic heritage but by having an 'old hand' status, having already navigated the question of high school choice with older children. Having gone through the process with an older

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child also often provides the security of an assured place through the preference given to siblings by most state schools (with the exception of selective grammar schools).

It is important to remember that school choice is an inherently local affair as choices are shaped by the realistic prospects of getting admission to and managing the logistics of travelling to specific schools. In order to capture the located nature of school choice, the study was conducted in three distinct although relatively nearby areas. This enables us to consider the accounts of parents in the context of the *places* in which the decisions are made and where the ethnic make-up of both the relevant primary and secondary schools and the wider areas is known. Thus parents' accounts can be understood in the context of the very local dynamics in which they are operating. Drawing on this localised approach, we have shown how choices are shaped by narratives which circulate in different areas about schools and about the politics of schooling which include distinct approaches to the idea of what makes a 'good mix' and what are the risks and opportunities presented by social mixing. This located study also enables us to see the relationship between an area's reputation and local schools – which indicates the ways in which schools can become a marker of an area and vice versa. This was reflected in the ways in which the parents themselves also narrated their own position, particularly in ways which they were classed. So we found that respondents often described themselves as being typical of a particular area. In Chorlton, some liberal middle classes felt that they characterised Chorlton, whilst in Cheadle Hulme, several respondents saw themselves as being a middling kind of person, as Cheadle Hulme was a middling kind of quiet area. Thus our understanding of accounts around school choice are enriched when we know about the places about which people are talking and how they view themselves in relation to those places. This understanding is critical to shaping some of the dynamics of discourses around class and racialised or ethnic difference.

As we have seen, the different areas of the study had distinctive demographic characteristics which varied in terms of class composition, ethnic, religious and national make-up. The sample of parents we interviewed largely reflected that of the schools in terms of their ethnic and class mix (acknowledging, as we did, that FSM are a poor measure of class but the only one available in the context of schools). Looking at the accounts of the parents in the context of the areas

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where respondents were living revealed that the parents in the different areas also had come to live in the sample areas through different routes and across different temporalities. Cheadle Hulme was the area with the largest proportion of white British residents with more working-class and lower-middle-class respondents. It also had a larger number of parents who reported that they had moved into the area (from relatively local areas) specifically to be nearer more desirable schools. Here we see that it is not exclusively the professional middle classes who exercise choice through moving into areas which have what they regard as better schools. Furthermore, from the accounts of parents from Cheadle Hulme, the class composition of the schools they are anxious to avoid is also critical. In many cases, parents in Cheadle Hulme had been born in or relatively near Cheadle Hulme, had often moved out as young adults and then returned once they had had children. This return was shaped sometimes by a desire to be nearer family, but also to move to 'quiet' Cheadle Hulme and away from areas which they characterised as 'rough'. In narratives of undesirable areas, problem schools were particularly identified by the behaviour of the parents as they dropped their children off and picked them up from school. Concerns around language, behaviour and dress indicated concerns around classed notions of respectability (Skeggs 1997). In the case of parents in Cheadle Hulme, the 'rougher' areas they had lived in were often areas of higher levels of economic deprivation with largely white residents. However, for some, discussing the dangers of rough areas summoned up racialised images of the inner city with gangs and a more diverse ethnic mix. As we shall see, Cheadle Hulme, the whitest area in the study, was also the area where the question of ethnic and racialised difference was viewed with most concern and as a potential source of threat.

In Chorlton, also largely white but with more established middle-class parents, the idea of moving to an area with a view to the schools was much less present than in Cheadle Hulme and there were fewer anxieties expressed about ideas of respectability (although these were also present). Rather, Chorlton was seen as a natural destination for a particular kind of liberal middle-class graduate and as an area defined by lifestyle and consumption opportunities, particularly bars and restaurants. The respondents had often moved to Chorlton as young adults post-university. They then stayed once they had children and thus could fully espouse the idea of going to a local school as they felt confident (enough) that there would be sufficient people 'like us' in

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the schools whilst, at the same time, embracing some ideas of multicultural and class difference. Their choices had, to a certain extent, already been made before they had had children. Finally the much more ethnically mixed and more economically precarious parents in Whalley Range were less able to produce a coherent narrative of choosing the area as a place to live. It was an area where they had ended up, often as a result of migration and, for some, as part of a flight from other areas of Manchester where they had experienced racism. Nonetheless, they also had a sense of affective belonging to the area, characterising it as a friendly area where they felt safe and which served their religious needs as it had both mosques and Asian, halal food shops.

The ways in which the parents talked about school choice also reflected some of these personal narratives of geographical mobility, as well as their concerns about education and the classed and raced composition of the local schools. What they largely shared was a narrative of school choice being difficult and somewhat unsatisfactory with too few 'real' available choices. What made a choice 'real' depended on a range of factors, including location (in terms of how possible it was to get their children there), affordability (related to private schooling and the tuition costs often entailed by trying to access selective grammar schooling) and the existence of schools which raised too many fears about racial, class and religious difference. Many of the discussions about selective education focused on ethical issues concerning equity. In the context of non-religious private schools, it was only the parents in Cheadle Hulme who considered them seriously. For these parents, the cost of private schooling was prohibitive, but they also had worries about putting their children in environments where they would have a too severe 'fish-out-of-water' experience and where they might face exclusion on the basis of being different and not rich or middle-class enough. Some of the Muslim parents in Whalley Range and Chorlton did have experience of sending their children to Islamic private schools, although those we spoke to had largely sent older children to Islamic schools and were not considering it for their current year 6 child. Some of these parents had a slightly different account of the question of 'fish-out-of-water' where they, on reflection, considered that it was good that their own children would get used to being in a non-Muslim context and also that it was important for mainstream schools to have their children in them because they would then foster an understanding of Islam in other

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children. Here we saw how some ethnic-minority parents are very conscious of what they *bring* to the mix, as much as what they get out of it. This tended not to be considered by white parents in the study. In general, as we saw also in Chapter 5, the ethnic-minority parents did suggest that the embracing of multiculturalism was important for all children. However, this came with the proviso that there should be *enough* difference to ensure that their children would not face the kind of racism that was risked in an overwhelmingly white context.

The framing given to accounts by the parents' own experiences of schooling was perhaps most evident in the discussions around grammar schooling. As we discussed in Chapter 3, state selective education, in the form of grammar schooling, was available because of the presence of grammar schooling in neighbouring boroughs. For those parents who had experienced the Eleven-plus in their own childhoods and had either passed or failed this critical test, their success or failure and the subsequent effect it had on their schooling was a strong part of their narratives. This was also a topic on which overtly political or ethical questions were most often raised, where some suggested that education with a whole community, rather than a selected educationally elite section, was part of a rich educational experience. Some parents however had wanted their children to apply for grammar schools and paid for at least a year of tutoring, whilst others had done this with their older children (although not the current year 6 child). None of the children in the sample had been successful in getting into grammar school, however, so the responses were dominated by accounts of children's disappointment (the levels of which the parents sometimes said they were surprised by) and also knocks on their children's levels of confidence. These accounts demonstrate some of the risks of selective education for those who are not successful in getting into grammar schools. Chapter 4 considered directly the nature of some of the emotions around schooling which are related to the social and relational nature of education. In the interviews with parents, they were more likely to talk about their children's happiness and security than about straightforward academic achievement. These are things that schools also sought to reassure parents about in ordered open evenings, with school slogans stressing concern for the children's happiness and the presentation of strict uniform rules. It was in this nexus between happiness and security that we argued that choosing schools for their children often produced in parents fearful emotions that were centred on ideas of the 'wrong' kind of children



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in a way which was racialised and classed. In the context of worrying about children's comfort and the security of a new school environment, class was particularly present in parents' accounts, even if it was rarely directly mentioned. The wrong kind of children (coming from the wrong kind of families) were indicated in references to being exposed to 'crazy children' or those with an 'aggressive lifestyle' or 'aggressive personality', or perhaps who were involved in gangs. As mentioned above, parents often observed schools at the end of the day and were put off particularly if they saw unruly behaviour by parents, or if the appearance of the children was particularly classed and gendered in ways which signalled notions of a repudiated working class. This again circulated around parents' notions of respectability and the risks of their children being influenced by those who appeared to have no regard for respectability or who were seen as an underclass. We argued that this was one explanation for the focus on school uniforms as a marker for a good school. This was in contrast to some primary school contexts where a policy of no uniform was taken as a positive sign of a liberal approach suggesting a more expressive educational culture (Bernstein 1971).

Whilst this book has tracked how parents share anxieties around the process of choosing secondary schools for their children, this is not to say that they do not want to have a say in where their children go to school. What parents generally want is *more* choice – a sense that the schools their children attend will not be determined largely by where they live. Parents often felt that this limited them to one – or perhaps two – schools. However, as we have seen, this limited choice was often a result of some potential local schools already having been ruled out of consideration. This process of elimination was often directed by the social and ethnic mix of the schools in question. Here we have an inherent tension in a state education policy focused on parental choice which, through processes of parental selection, produce and reproduce inequalities and elements of social and ethnic segregation. As we have seen, where class (or more specifically questions of working class or underclass) appeared in the accounts, either directly mentioned or implicitly referred to, it was generally seen in a negative light, in ways that were largely shared across the different areas. The repudiated working class were not considered to have anything positive to add to the mix and were almost always characterised in negative terms as a risk to children's education. However, as we saw in Chapter 5, ideas of cultural and

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racial difference *could* be framed more positively through drawing on ideas of multiculturalism as a positive learning environment for children. Here difference was often narrated as a positive, convivial, experience for children which would equip them to live in a more diverse world. However, discourses around cultural, ethnic and racial differences were discernibly different in the different areas, reflecting the ethnic composition of those different places. Parents in Whalley Range and Chorlton were generally positive about the higher levels of ethnic mix in both the area and the primary schools which children were attending. These parents therefore also embraced notions of ethnic mix in high schools – with some differences between them. A small number of parents in Chorlton had in fact avoided the primary schools in Whalley Range and other neighbouring areas for their children as they were considered not mixed enough, with a majority of ethnic-minority pupils. These considerations may also have led parents to avoid some high schools in the area – such as, for example, the girls-only high school which had larger numbers of Muslim pupils, which was more popular among the Whalley Range than the Chorlton parents.

In the whiter Cheadle Hulme in contrast to Whalley Range and Chorlton, although many said they appreciated diversity, some also expressed fearfulness about the risks of ‘too much’ difference, particularly when it came to religious difference and the presence of Muslim children in schools. This was despite the fact that white children were in a much larger majority than in the Chorlton primary and high schools. Some parents in Cheadle Hulme rehearsed popular narratives of the kind of ‘political correctness gone mad’ variety where too much attention was given by schools to racist incidents and respect for other (particularly Muslim) religious sensibilities – although this was denied by the schools (for example, the claim that nativity plays were no longer put on). Thus, in-depth interviews in three different locations revealed that, although all parents expressed some positivity around ideas of multicultural mix, there were significant differences in the feelings behind these broad generalisations. Whilst none expressed strong anti-immigrant or racist attitudes and all were able to agree that the fact of their children having been exposed to difference was a positive element of schooling, for some parents in Cheadle Hulme it was possible to feel an awkwardness and discomfort in using the language of racialised and ethnic difference. There was also a possibility that too much difference (or not enough

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white Christian influence) could be seen as a threat to their children and their education.

We also saw that, in all areas, a different kind of threat was considered by ethnic-minority and migrant parents in the study. Many ethnic-minority parents also considered the impact on their children in contexts which were too white as they feared that their children might experience racism. For these parents, sufficient ethnic and religious mix was regarded as a vital protection against racism, discrimination and the impact of being the 'only black child' or the 'only Muslim child' in the class. Thus, for ethnic-minority parents, a good mix suggested the possibility of avoiding these situations, and some also expressed concerns that their children's education should include positive attitudes about and role models for their children. In this way, this chapter in particular demonstrates the importance of interviewing parents in a known local context. Here we have parents using subtly different discourses around mix and multiculturalism which are better understood when analysed in their specific context. What this reveals more generally is that we have a very undifferentiated language for talking about ethnic and religious diversity. Thus, almost all the parents said that they were living in a fairly mixed area and their children were going to schools which had high levels of cultural diversity, despite the fact that the ethnic mix in their areas and schools varied widely. Schools where the large majority of children come from ethnic minorities are described with the very same language as schools where ethnic minorities form a small majority or where white British are in the large majority. This raises important questions at both research and policy levels for how we approach questions of multiculturalism and social mix. It points to the importance of establishing that we know exactly what is being referred to in discussions of mix, multiculturalism or diversity. It is clear that, when the focus is all on the 'mix', one person's diversity may, literally, look like another's monoculture.