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**Title:** Race and neoliberal citizenship in the construction of good (attachment) parents: Parenting Culture Studies and beyond

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**Abstract:**

In this paper, we offer one example of what attending to race can bring to sociological analyses of parenting. We draw on literature from two fields, Parenting Culture Studies and Black Feminist scholarship, to bring their insights to bear on a project that examines black mothers' engagements with attachment parenting. In addressing an analytical lacuna in the work on Parenting Culture Studies, we argue that efforts to both embody and produce good citizens are gendered, classed and *raced*. This is revealed by examining notions of good parenting from the perspective of black parents. As such, in this paper, we show the value of applying an intersectional framework to analyses of contemporary parenting and neoliberal subjectification, in elucidating the mechanisms by which ideals of both parenting and neoliberal citizenship are perpetuated.

**Keywords:** attachment parenting, black feminism, intersectionality, neoliberalism, parenting culture studies

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**Introduction**

Scholarship within the field of Parenting Culture Studies (see for example, Arendell, 2000; Lee et al., 2023; Harman, Cappellini & Webster, 2021) has been concerned with an 'intensification' of the duties of childrearing over the last 40 years (Hays, 1996). This focus on the minutiae of everyday family life reflects a turn in sociological interest generally – and Family Studies more specifically – away from institutions like the 'The Family' towards relationships, intimacies and personal life (May & Nordqvist, 2019, Edwards & Gillies, 2012). As such, whilst scholarship has aptly demonstrated increasingly diverse family forms, it is the *content* of those family relations that has generally preoccupied social scientists (and indeed policy makers) in accounts of how parenting practices are contextualised by wider social structures. As Gillies (2011) notes, the apparently relaxed approach to family form and the 'diversification of families' has coexisted with a 'greater anxiety about the quality and management of relationships and family practices' (para 9.1)

Such a focus demonstrates the heightened responsibilities and significance assigned to parents especially as it is realised through neoliberal rationality, where the goal of

economic growth reinscribes values of self-discipline and responsibility as markers of good citizenship (Ayo, 2012; Brown, 2015; Erel, 2011; Power, 2005). These notions of good citizenship are inseparable from good parenting, both in how parents demonstrate good citizenship through their childrearing practices and in the production of good citizens that this good parenting is intended to facilitate. To this end, sociologists have aptly demonstrated how gender and class constitute ideal citizenship and parenting (see Fox, 2006; Gillies, 2005; Lee, 2008; Romagnoli & Wall, 2012 for examples), highlighting the concentration on maternal behaviour (Ennis, 2014; Hays, 1996) and the use of middle-class parenting behaviours to define the norms of good parenting (Hoffman, 2010; Jensen, 2018; Lareau, 2011).

However, there has been less attention paid to how race informs the negotiation of these ideals. In our examination of the intersection between race and parenting, we draw on a project that examines engagements with attachment parenting, explicitly centring black mothers' experiences of and with this increasingly popular parenting philosophy (Hamilton, 2020). Coined by William and Martha Sears, a paediatrician and nurse married couple from the Midwestern United States, attachment parenting identifies seven 'tools' to achieve secure attachment including (exclusive and extended) breastfeeding, babywearing, bed-sharing and other childrearing behaviours that prioritise close proximity between mother and child. Despite now being a global 'movement', there is limited scholarship on attachment parenting (exceptions include Carter, 2017; Faircloth, 2013) and even fewer examine the philosophy's racial and neoliberal politics.

Though often ridiculed as freakish or extreme, attachment parenting is an apt example of intensive parenting, the dominant 'cultural script' that defines good parenting as that which is child-centric, expert-guided and requires a great deal of physical, emotional and financial resources. Expanding on the popularity of attachment theory (which inspired the name 'attachment parenting') underpinning claims about the benefits intensive parenting provides for children, attachment parenting is distinct in its focus on specific *practices* that its advocates suggest can guarantee the kind of bonding and attachment defined as good childrearing. More than bonding, the Sears and other attachment parenting advocates describe the philosophy as capable of righting society's social ills and producing "kind, affectionate, empathic, well disciplined, bright and successful" future adults (Sears & Sears, 2001, p. ix). It is precisely this promise of attachment parenting, to produce good citizens, and its potential limitations for parents of colour, that is the focus of this paper.

Drawing from our analysis of black mothers' engagements with attachment parenting, we argue that efforts to both embody and produce good citizens are gendered, classed *and* raced. This is revealed by examining notions of good parenting from the perspective of black parents who, by virtue of their position in the racial hierarchies of the UK and Canada, highlight the complex intersection of these factors in the construction of ideal neoliberal citizenship. As such, the paper shows the value of applying an intersectional framework to sociological analyses of contemporary parenting and neoliberal subjectification, in elucidating the (often contradictory) mechanisms by which ideals of both parenting and neoliberal citizenship are perpetuated.

The article begins with a brief introduction to the two fields of scholarship we wish to bring into conversation for our analysis of attachment parenting: parenting culture studies and black feminist scholarship, particularly intersectionality. We focus on the concept of 'parental determinism' as a defining feature of contemporary parenting culture, especially as it aligns with a neoliberal responsibilisation of individuals and a denial of the ongoing impacts of white supremacist and patriarchal social structures. We then describe the study on which we base our analysis. Examining the intersection between attachment parenting, parental determinism and neoliberal investment narratives, we develop an argument that attends to how race informs experiences *and* policing of parenting. The article concludes with a discussion highlighting what is missed when examinations of contemporary parenting elide race and the neoliberal context in which ideals of good parenting and citizenship are made.

### **What intersectionality brings to Parenting Culture Studies**

Parenting has long been considered of great importance when it comes to the transmission of social norms and values, the continuation of kinship, family and household, and for reproducing local and national communities (Barlow & Chapin, 2010). Recent sociological work has also situated 'parenting' as critical for understanding contemporary changes in society – particularly in Euro-American contexts but also further afield (Faircloth, 2013). Indeed 'Parenting Culture Studies' as a body of work emerges from the observation that something has changed in the way both being a parent and raising children is conceptualised, particularly in the last 40 years (Lee et al., 2014, 2023; Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2011).

Drawing attention to broader socio-cultural processes within those societies that have cast contemporary childrearing as a highly important yet problematic sphere of social life, Parenting Culture Studies starts from the premise that raising children has become a more complex and more individualised task, culturally, than it used to be in the past. Early childhood experiences are now commonly considered formative, in line with the popularisation of (developmental) infant psychology. The idea that early infant experience has irreversible and life-long implications is now considered common sense. As scholars have argued, however, this has had with profound implications for how the parenting role is understood, with many pointing to how this 'parental determinism' makes the task of raising children 'impossibly burdensome' (Furedi, 2002, p. 45).

Recognizing the gendered dimension to these changes, much work in the US and the UK has drawn on the concept of 'intensive mothering' (Hays, 1996) in understanding the experiences of contemporary working women to describe an idealized, child-centred, expert-guided interaction with their children which leaves them feeling 'torn' between the worlds of work and home (Hays, 1996: x, see also Lee et al., 2023). Similarly, many scholars have pointed out that to be able to enact these ideals of intensive one-to-one time with children a considerable amount of resources are required, meaning that this ideal is inherently a middle class one (Fox, 2006).

While Parenting Culture Studies has drawn important attention to these particularly gendered and classed dimensions of contemporary ideas about good parenting, it

has neglected race. For example, in Jensen's (2018) important work on the disciplining of poor and working-class families, processes of racialisation are left out of the analysis (Reynolds, 2016) resulting in an examination of public spending and austerity politics that does not pay due attention to how narratives of entitlement and citizenship are *simultaneously* gendered, classed and raced. If these narratives are examined intersectionally, that "ethnic minority women" are disproportionately burdened by cuts to public spending is not only an expected consequence of the racialisation of poverty in Britain but also aligns with a broader narrative that positions Britons of colour as not quite belonging to and therefore not quite entitled to the state-provided benefits of citizenship (Gilroy, 1987; Hampshire, 2005). Such an analysis would draw on neoliberal framings of class hierarchy in distinguishing between deserving and undeserving citizens, critical race analyses of the position occupied by populations of colour in the UK *and* feminist critiques of the ways that mothers are particularly identified as responsible for producing poorly behaved children.

To effect such an analysis, in this paper, we turn to intersectionality. Though 'intersectionality' was coined by legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, an approach that recognises oppressions as mutually constitutive is present in the long history of black feminist activism (Brah & Phoenix, 2004; Hamilton, 2020; Nash, 2019). One of the key principles of black feminist theory is the recognition of the "structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power [that] reappear across quite different forms of oppression" (Collins, 2000, p. 21). In recognition of this intersection and a departure from the binary thinking that defines Western social theory, Collins calls on us to attend to the unique experiences (and opportunities) created by the entanglement of multiple oppressions.

In this article, we deploy intersectionality to better attend to the structures that govern the experience of parenting and specifically address the intersection of racism, sexism and classism in the construction and promotion of ideal parenting behaviours and good citizenship. An intersectional framework requires situating parents' childrearing choices in the wider social context, particularly identifying different domains of power at the personal, community and institutional levels (Collins, 2000; Dill & Zambrana, 2009) and their influence as parents navigate popular and influential parenting philosophies. An intersectional analysis also offers a corrective to scholarship on neoliberal citizenship and subjectivity, drawing attention to how neoliberal rationality covertly deploys racism and sexism and co-opts anti-racist and feminist efforts to resist these oppressions (Duggan, 2003; Dunn, 2016; Kapoor, 2013). Here, we use intersectionality to argue that contemporary parenting culture cannot be examined without attending to the ways that the exclusion of citizens of colour as incapable of meeting the remit of good parenting is inseparable from their exclusion from normative, neoliberal notions of good citizenship.

### **Parental determinism and its intersection with race and neoliberalism**

One of the defining features of contemporary parenting is the idea of parental determinism; the belief that "parental action, in most areas of everyday life, [has] a determining impact on a child's future happiness, healthiness and success" (Lee 2014, p. 2). Parenting's deterministic power is inevitably rendered as a responsibility; the duty of every individual parent is to ensure the health and well-being of their child

not only for that child's sake but as a wider societal obligation – arguably an ever more acute one in the context of fertility decline. Moreover, meeting such an obligation is evidenced not only in the future *potential* of a child but through the present *work* the intensification of parenting demands; keeping abreast of the latest advances in child development, assessing the myriad sources of parental expertise and choosing and acting appropriately (Hays, 1996; Murphy, 2003).

Parental determinism is promoted and made possible through neoliberalisation, which has involved “a specific and consequential organization of the social, the subject, and the state” (Brown, 2006, p. 693, Hamilton, 2020). Through it, the parent is remade as a neoliberal subject who, through adherence to state- and market-sanctioned expertise, is produced as either capable or *incapable* of raising economically productive citizens and remaining economically productive themselves.

Much of neoliberal logic rests on its focus on the individual. As it promotes choice, responsibility and self-sufficiency as ideal markers of good citizenship (Rose, 1999; Brown, 2015), it is the individual that is centered in its ability to either act accordingly or require disciplining. In this idealised scenario, the individual is stripped of its attachment to other forms of subjectivity and is presented as gender-, class- and race-neutral. In neoliberal parlance, each individual's capacity for economic prosperity is unfettered by racism, sexism or economic inequities, each presented as past obstacles now overcome (Hamilton, 2020).

As parents, individual citizens are expected to both maintain their economic productivity, taking advantage of policy instruments such as paid parental leave (Christopher, 2015) or subsidised childcare, and engage in the intensive work necessary to prepare their children for the same future. While these twin responsibilities can sometimes result in contradictions (Hays, 1996; Tyler, 2011), much contemporary parenting advice attempts to balance these two goals. For example, breastfeeding promotion focuses on both the nutritional superiority of breast milk and its capacity to save the state money by reducing healthcare costs (Renfrew et al., 2012) and producing optimally developed future citizens (Boseley, 2015).

While this focus on individual, parental responsibility is presented as neutral, scholars of neoliberalism have pointed to the ways that this and other features of neoliberal rationality marshal racism to achieve its goals (Duggan, 2003; Wacquant, 2012). For example, justifications for reductions in state spending often point to ‘exploitative’ welfare claims by African American populations in the US (Kandaswamy, 2008) or threats of migrant ‘health tourism’ in the UK (Jamieson, 2017). In both scenarios, racialised Others are constructed as not only responsible for public spending reductions but as requiring policing to ensure that they do not exploit the system and reproduce ‘failing’ citizens (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010; Wacquant, 2012) who will do the same.

## **Rationale and research framing**

As co-authors and long-term collaborators working on parenting, we explain a little about the genesis of this article and our analysis here. Faircloth was one of the first authors to examine attachment parenting in the UK context, as well as a major

contributor to the field of Parenting Culture Studies (Faircloth, 2013; Lee et al., 2104, 2023; Ballif, 2023; Harman, Cappellini & Webster, 2021) which has worked to developed various concepts, including parental determinism and 'identity work', as vehicles to help understand contemporary trends in family life. However, she had long acknowledged intersectional lacunae not only in her own work, but across the field more widely. Hamilton's entry into this field was inspired by this gap and sought to highlight the explicitly (but thus far unacknowledged) racial politics that animate attachment parenting and its absorption into mainstream parenting advice. These twin concerns (around attachment parenting specifically and an absence of attention to race more generally) provided the rationale for bringing our work into dialogue.

As authors we have different disciplinary backgrounds (Hamilton in Sociology and Gender Studies and Faircloth in Anthropology) as well as areas of expertise (intersectionality and parenting culture studies respectively) which we have found productive in our conversations across our bodies of work. Other differences and similarities have also proved generative: we both began our studies of attachment parenting before becoming parents ourselves, facilitating a unique evolution of insider/outsider status (Shinozaki, 2012) during data collection, data analysis and our more recent collaborative work. As a black woman growing up in South Africa, Hamilton was drawn into this field by lived experience of the contradictory stereotypes of pathologized black motherhood and the romanticisation of African motherhood often promoted in attachment parenting material. As an anthropologist Faircloth was similarly concerned by the fetishisation of 'primitives' and 'primates' by the largely white, middle-class women that she worked with. At the same time she recognised that participants shared their accounts partly *because* of a shared (gendered, raced and classed) background – and with the hope that any outputs would serve as further advocacy material for attachment parenting. This 'kinship' therefore posed its own ethical challenges (see Faircloth, 2013 for more on this).

In this paper, we come together to examine what role childrearing philosophies play in parental determinism and neoliberal responsibilisation, drawing on data collected during one of Hamilton's projects. This focused exclusively on black mothers' engagements with attachment parenting (Hamilton, 2020) with analysis framed by and in conversation with some of Faircloth's conceptual work previously.

Beginning from an interest in the contradiction between the celebrated image of instinctively capable African attachment mothers celebrated by the likes of the Sears (Hamilton, 2021) and the pathologisation of black mothers in the West (Collins, 2000; Reynolds, 2016), Hamilton's project recruited black mothers with young children (aged 5 or under) and some familiarity with attachment parenting to participate in in-depth interviews about their parenting practices. Hamilton interviewed nineteen black mothers, ten of whom lived in the UK and the remaining nine residents of Canada at the time of the research. Analyses of these two countries together offers unique opportunities to attend to the similarities (comparably sized black populations; waves of sometimes exploitative migration from the Caribbean and Africa; both liberal welfare regimes) and differences (Canada's more explicitly 'welcoming' approach to immigrants versus the long-standing hostility faced by British colonial subjects turned 'immigrants') in their racial politics. Both countries have embraced the intensification of parenting and its alignment with an individualised and responsibilised citizenry (see Romagnoli & Wall, 2012 in Canada and Jensen, 2018 in the UK).

Conducted between 2015 and 2016, the sample of women interviewed disproportionately identified themselves as ‘middle-class’<sup>1</sup> (14 out of 19 women) and reported experiences with children ranging in age from newborn to 12 years old:

Pseudonym	Age	Education	Marital status	Age of youngest child
Interviewed in the UK				
Angela	35	Undergraduate	Married	2 years old
Barbara	38	Postgraduate	Married	12 months old
Claudia	40	Postgraduate	Living with partner	20 months old
Demita	26	Undergraduate	Single	3 years old
Eleanor	33	College	Married	4 years old
Florynce	29	Undergraduate	Married	6 months old
Gloria	34	Undergraduate	Married	8 months old
Harriet	34	Undergraduate	Married	1 month old
Ida	41	Undergraduate	Married	8 months old
Jayaben	44	Postgraduate	Married	3 years old
Interviewed in Canada				
Kimberlé	24	Current undergraduate student	Single	3 years old
Lorde	33	Undergraduate	Married	2 years old
Margaret	28	Undergraduate	Married	16 months old
Notisha	34	Undergraduate	Married	12 months old
Olive	28	College	Living with partner	2 months old
Patricia	41	High school	Living with partner	3 years old
Rebecca	38	Postgraduate	Married	13 months old
Stella	37	Undergraduate	Single	4 years old
Tracey	31	Undergraduate	Married	5 months old

*Table 1: Demographic details*

Interviews captured the wide range of perspectives that attachment parenting can inspire, including rejection, ambivalence and wholesale embrace. Though many of these mothers preferred another name for their parenting style, we draw on a classification based on practice of the main ‘three Bs’ of attachment parenting: (extended) breastfeeding, babywearing and bedsharing to distinguish ‘attachment parents’. According to this logic, in Hamilton’s study, ten out of the nineteen mothers were ‘attachment parents’ and we focus on these parents, particularly those who drew on a language of ‘investment’ so appropriate to the work of raising children in a neoliberal context.

Our analysis, conducted collaboratively through discussion and co-writing highlights two themes; first, the overlap between attachment parenting and neoliberal investment, and the particularly raced meaning attached to this intersection for black

<sup>1</sup> Participants were asked to complete a demographic information form during the interview. In response to the request to describe their class identity, many participants expressed uncertainty about the differences between, for example, working-class and middle-class identities. Nevertheless, most identified themselves as at least middle-class. Participants were not asked to state their sexual orientation.



parents and second, how class shapes black mothers' vision of the futures they are preparing their children for, futures framed by the values of attachment parenting and neoliberalism.

Approaching the sociological analysis of parenting through black mothers' eyes makes clear the ways that the work of preparing an ideal citizen is raced, as well as classed and gendered. In both the UK and Canada, black people are constructed as outside the national imaginary (Gilroy, 1987; Harder, 2010) and thus, unsurprisingly, are seen as incapable of meeting the standards of appropriate parenting, even as they continue to be held responsible for their children's failures or in the Canadian context, have historically been concentrated in poorly paid childcare work (Lawson, 2013). Contemporary parenting ideology constructs black parents as incapable of meeting its standards while one of its central tenets, individual responsibility, is deployed to explain the 'failures' of the black community. Intersectionality, which holds these contradictions in tension in its attendance to race, gender *and* class, makes a crucial contribution to unpicking such an entanglement, laying the foundation for the situated (Collins, 2000) analysis of contemporary parenting we now move to present here.

### ***Classed investments in raising children***

Contemporary childrearing norms and neoliberal rationality both demand that parents *invest* in the development of their children (Hays, 1996). As a childrearing philosophy, attachment parenting is a particularly well-suited tool in this project, drawing on an evolutionary logic that promises 'optimal' development for the human species, ironically often drawing on (raced) imaginaries of primates, 'primitives' or 'women in African villages' (Faircloth, 2013). The philosophy repeatedly invokes parental determinism, suggesting that the choices that parents make have the capacity to not only fundamentally shape their children's lives but also that of society. William and Martha Sears not only guarantee "well-disciplined" adults will be produced through their philosophy, they also draw explicitly on an economic logic to explain the appeal of attachment parenting:

*This style asks a lot of parents, especially in the first three to six months. You give a lot of yourself to your baby – your time, your energy, your commitment. But you get back a lot more in return. Parenting is like investing in an IRA.<sup>2</sup> The more you put into your child in the early years, the greater the later returns. (2001, p. 7)*

The use of this logic and particularly the word 'invest', captures the predominance of the economic lens through which all actions, whether that of the state or of individual citizens, must now be measured in a neoliberal context (mothers in Faircloth's study referred to breastmilk as 'liquid gold'). Indeed, the investment intensive parenting requires is assuredly economic; adherence to its norms is positively correlated with access to financial and other material resources (Fox, 2009; Romagnoli & Wall, 2012) and the anticipated "greater...returns" are similarly reported in economic terms, offering guarantees of high-earning, productive future citizens (Boseley, 2015). The mothers interviewed spoke of investment in their children in just these deterministic terms; Margaret, a mother of one interviewed in Canada, for example,

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<sup>2</sup> A form of retirement savings or pension popular in the United States.

described the benefits of bonding: “the research shows that it’s important to do and that you’ll be investing in your child’s health and wellness and future”. In a more personal example, Harriet invoked the language of investment to counter suggestions that her three-year-old son’s intelligence was due to ‘luck’:

*[P]eople say my son is bright, he **is** bright but then people are like ‘wow, he’s so bright, you’re so lucky’ and it’s like, no, I’ve spent time, we’ve, I’ve invested in him.* (Interviewed in the UK, one son aged 3 years and one daughter aged 1 month)

Noting and building upon the revealing and gendered slippage between “we” and “I” in Harriet’s quote that is so typical of maternal ‘identity work’ (Faircloth, 2013), we suggest that parents’ efforts to develop their children’s ‘health, wellness and future’ are not just gendered in who is framed as particularly responsible for this development. Nor are they just classed in determining what kinds of interventions are said to guarantee this development (and, indeed, what that vision of health, wellness and future entails). Indeed, they are also *raced*, articulating the contradictory efforts of, in particular, black mothers to conform to a model of citizenship from which they are, by definition, excluded (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010; Tyler, 2010, 2013; Wacquant, 2012). We argue that the intersection of these features shapes black mothers’ parenting strategies, influencing their interest in philosophies like attachment parenting and inflecting such interest with an explicit concern with raising their children in a context that is likely to frame them as burdensome. Given her limited career prospects and financial resources, Olive’s investment, for example, was time:

*I’m really struggling by making this choice...I’m sacrificing a lot of things...that I could do if I just put my kids in day care and went to work, I’m giving up those things because being with them is more important to me, like they’re never gonna be the same age again[...]I think it’s worth the sacrifices that I’m making to have this lifestyle. Which is hard like I could be at work, just making money...It’s like maybe one day I’ll do that, maybe once they’re past a certain stage but when they need me the most I’m not gonna go try to do something to sup-, to be with my kids in the end, you know what I mean?* (Interviewed in Canada, two sons aged 3 years and 2 months)

Olive’s “lifestyle” and the time it required are explicitly contrasted with the financial benefits she might reap if she *invested* her time elsewhere, in school or a career. This time investment is of course gendered (Olive named breastfeeding as an example of the intense but fleeting needs of infants and later recalled never having left her sons in their father’s care) but also inextricably intertwined with a desire to parent differently than her first-generation immigrant parents who, for financial reasons, ‘had’ to work and thus could not parent in a way that prioritised their children’s needs and development.

Olive seemed less interested in class reproduction or mobility, in the typical sense, and spoke of supporting her sons’ interests and desires, even if they did not conform to traditional goals of good citizenship such as a university education and a professional career. On the one hand, Olive was able to meet the requirements of good parenting, accepting the ‘twin mythologies’ of infant and parental determinism; she parented intensively and individually, taking on the vast majority of the early

childrearing work on her own because she believed that her choices in the children's early childhood would determine their futures. In this commitment, Olive embodies the good parent.

At the same time, Olive framed her commitment to her children as contrary to what's expected of her not only as a black woman but as a working-class woman. In fact, she described her choice to forego working and "making money" in favour of prioritising her children's optimal development as a "rebellion [against] the standards of society". However, Olive's "rebellion" was limited and in fact, relied on maintaining the stereotype of *other* black parents as neglectful and only interested in their children as consumer items:

*And some people are like, I'm not trying to be stereotypical but I've seen it myself, people that don't mind having more kids just to get more money or get child support from whoever. They see that as a plus like 'oh, I'm gonna get this money' and I don't, I would never, I would never, you know? My kids are more important to me.*

Olive's articulation of herself as a good mother is made possible by the explicit contrast with other, less committed, less 'good' parents. Her assessment of the other parents in the working-class, black neighbourhood in which she lived allows her to distinguish her child-centered investment from the poorly motivated, financially focused actions of others.

For both Harriet and Olive, investment, particularly of time, was a key distinction between good and less good parents. Across their different contexts (Harriet was interviewed in the UK, Olive in Canada), both women contrasted their attachment-inspired parenting with those who would leave their children "in front of the TV all day" (Harriet) or would prioritise "Jordans" or "iPhones" over the spending required for healthy eating (Olive). Echoing the parental (and infant) determinism espoused by the Sears and by broader parenting culture, Harriet defined attachment parenting by "how invested [a parent is] in parenting". By pairing their investment-oriented understandings of attachment parenting with subtly classed derision of 'bad' parents, Olive and Harriet offer a construction of AP well-suited to the current neoliberal moment.

### ***Investing in (black) children***

But does such a construction of AP offer something specific to *black* children? To answer this question, we narrow our focus to the self-identified middle-class mothers in the sample, including Harriet. For these mothers, attachment parenting formed part of a project of what Vincent et al call "dual socialization" or "strategic assimilation", both "preparing their children for success in a white-dominated society" and "maintaining their links to black communities, cultures and histories" (Vincent, Rollock, Ball & Gillborn, 2012, p. 432). Harriet's employment of attachment parenting involved an attempt to balance an effort to distance herself from the "harsh" style of parenting she associated with Caribbean culture, a desire to give her children a "good sense of [their] roots" and the work of raising a "bright" child. Lorde, interviewed in Canada, presents another example. Lorde named herself as "upper middle-class" and a "hands-on" parent, drawing on ideas about what is "natural" and what is practiced by the "majority" of the world outside of the West (naming Africa as

a particular example). Stretching beyond decisions to breastfeed or bed-share, her parenting was also concerned with equipping her children with the best possible opportunities to succeed, such as a focus on education:

*So, for school the main focus for me was education...education and curriculum and diversity. I found that was the hardest thing for me, I never want my son to go to a place where he's the only black face he sees. That's very important for me. I don't want him to be...amongst everyone all black either because that's not the world and that's, that's just not the world. So, I needed education to be number one and then diversity be number two. (Interviewed in Canada, two sons aged 4 years and 2 years and expecting a third child)*

Lorde's investment in a good education is typical of good mothering discourses (Lareau, 2011) but highlights that the work of investment is heightened for the raising of *black* children (Hamilton, 2020). Her collapsing of high-quality education and "diversity" marks a specific approach to understanding how racism functions in the contemporary neoliberal moment, replacing 'racial equality' as a goal in favour of the less politically contentious aim of representation. Or as Notisha puts it, the ability to "understand other races and other cultures":

*[W]here we live right now we like to live, we like living in a place where it's multicultural so it's not, you know, one culture. So, that's another thing that's kind of, where in terms of race playing a role. Like even in the church that we go, we wanted to make sure that it was, you know, that it was multicultural and it wasn't skewed, like an all-black church or, you know, or all-white or whatever but it was a nice good mix 'cause I think it's essential to understand other races and other cultures. Yeah, so I think in that regard that also, yeah, that also plays a part. Even their school, we chose a school that was multicultural, that had a good mix. (Interviewed in Canada, two daughters aged three and one).*

This investment in the importance of a "multicultural" school or neighbourhood is classed, especially when understood as a strategy for ensuring that children are best prepared to maximize their opportunities in "the world" (Hamilton, 2020) as well as able to 'deal with anyone' in their pursuit of a successful future (Vincent and Ball, 2006). The cultural elevation of terms such as diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism, enable individually focused and corporatized responses to problems related to 'race' (Spence, 2011). In such a scenario, rigorous research (typically by an 'intensive' mother) to choose an appropriate and optimal school or neighbourhood is invested with a greater significance than any effort to organise politically to address structural or systemic racism. Such decisions are made against the stereotypes cited by Olive and Harriet above.

Bringing the dual 'investment' in their own identities as much as those of their children together, Notisha and Lorde used attachment parenting to develop forms of mothering that both rested on norms such as parental determinism and the economic productivity expected of all citizens and rejected the framing of black motherhood and citizenship as in need of policing or punishment. As a working-class parent, Olive's time investments, on the other hand, particularly as opposed to consumerist investments of other, implicitly lesser parents, also appear to work to counter stereotypes of blackness. It is her *lack* of interest in money and her

consequent investment in her children that is meant to distinguish her while at the same time rejecting the key suppositions of good citizenship. This chimes with Hays (1996) who makes the observation that motherhood is sacralised in capitalist society precisely *because* it is the one area of social life not governed by remuneration. This is echoed again, in Olive's intention to prepare her sons for a "happiness" not necessarily linked to financial success. These different strategies, both translated through attachment parenting, demonstrate the intertwining of contemporary parenting culture and neoliberal rationality as they each draw on racial tropes in attempts to exclude black mothers. It also demonstrates the intersection of class and race in the production of such tropes and in mothers' navigation of them. Such efforts expand beyond specific parenting philosophies such as attachment parenting to include the very infrastructure that many parents rely on to balance good parenting and economic productivity – despite an awareness that the very infrastructure is precarious in the face of wider geopolitical trends (Rosen and Suissa, 2020).

## Discussion

In a neoliberal context where individual citizens work to discipline and regulate themselves so as to reduce the burden on a shrinking state, parenting responsibilities are heightened. The intertwining of parental responsibility and the self-disciplining ideals of good citizenship is gendered and classed, evident in the identification of *mothers* as especially capable of and responsible for good parenting, and in the articulation of middle-class parenting behaviours as the norms of good parenting (Hoffman, 2010; Lareau, 2011). However, as the interviews from Hamilton's project demonstrate, this entanglement is *also* raced. The argument that parents' choices and behaviours determines the development of their children is enacted not only to encourage parents to produce both themselves and their children as ideal neoliberal subjects but also to explain and justify why some types of parents, particularly parents of colour, are subject to greater levels of intervention and policing. This is true, even for middle-class mothers who appreciate the limited protection their economic resources can afford their children. As detailed elsewhere (Hamilton, forthcoming), the fear of police violence (as reported by Lorde and Notisha) and child welfare intervention (evident in the disproportionate child protection plans and looked after rates among black children in low deprivation areas, see Bywaters et al, 2019) persists regardless of socio-economic status, shaping mothers' parenting styles.

Parental determinism serves as a persuasive explanation of the inequalities that characterise contemporary parenting culture and a neoliberal rationality. The success of children like Harriet's son are attributed to individual hard work and dedication. The persuasive nature of parental determinism as an explanation for both inequality and prosperity is made possible through its alignment with neoliberal rationality. Thus neoliberal subjectivity is constructed alongside with and entangled in racial ideas of ideal citizenship which inevitably inform the experience and disciplining of parenting. In light of the well documented fertility decline in the Global North, these debates become ever more stark when one considers anxieties around population renewal. Coupled with a 'hostile environment' around migration, more explicit in the UK but gaining prominence in the 'managed immigration' context of Canada that has long invoked race to facilitate successful entry (Hamilton, 2020;

Harder, 2010), one has to ask, precisely what sort of child is actually 'priceless' (Zelizer, 1985) or what sort of citizen is considered desirable.

The covert influence of racial ideas and their intersection with seemingly neutral notions of parental determinism are evident in the promotion of philosophies like attachment parenting. The women interviewed here described investing in attachment parenting in different ways that demonstrate the philosophy's capacity to both concede to and resist neoliberal ideas of investment and individual responsibility. For the black attachment mothers, using this philosophy to develop what one participant called a "brilliant black child", could counter the pathologised image of their citizenship and capacity for parenting by drawing on neoliberal ideas to construct their mothering. This was particularly convincing for middle-class mothers such as Lorde and Notisha who could draw on discourses of diversity and multiculturalism to construct their children as ideal middle-class subjects, whose bodies themselves represent the 'diversity' now celebrated by institutions (Ahmed, 2007). These efforts to ensure that their children reach their full potential are both attempts to conform with the dominant cultural script that operates on parental determinism and demands 'bright, successful' and responsible adults as the goal of good parenting and *also* work as an explicit counter to normative neoliberal accounts of good citizenship that attempt to both elide race (good citizens are race-less) and deploy it to delineate those at risk of failure (and thus require intervention, punishment or both) (Lentin & Titley, 2011; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). Attachment parenting produces brilliant *black* children and not only is it *African* in origin, as many participants claimed, through it, black mothers both embody and produce good citizenship, in a way that undermines dominant constructions of good citizenship and black motherhood.

The findings from this research point to the vitality of parental determinism and individual responsibility in contemporary constructions of ideal parenting and citizenship. They also highlight the *racial* implications of these intertwined ideals, attending to the constrained possibilities of individual responsibility when it is promoted by the same state that constructs minoritized populations as outsiders. This provides essential context for some black mothers' commitment to 'investing' in their children through attachment parenting and explains why they might, for example, challenge pathological representations of themselves by adopting the very same language of individual responsibility and parental determinism so characteristic of our contemporary neoliberal context, a trend long observed in the contradictory workings of ideology, (see for example Howe 1990).

The narratives presented in the interviews demonstrate the endurance of individual responsibility especially as it marks the parenting choices of mothers marginalized by their race. The image of poor citizenship that the mothers counter captures how processes of responsibilization that accompany neoliberal rationality are not distributed evenly, with some identified as particularly in need of intervention and assistance to behave appropriately by not properly preparing their children for economic productivity. Their narratives capture the integral role played by racialization in distinguishing between citizens and Others.

## **Conclusion**

In the time since data was collected, major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the resurgence of a global Black Lives Matter movement have provided new opportunities to attend to the persistence and explicitly racialised nature of responsibilising narratives. While popular and academic interest in intersectional frameworks has, too, risen, this has not always translated into analyses that confront the mutually constitutive nature of oppressions (Nash, 2019). Indeed, neoliberalism invites a focus on racism *or* sexism, discouraging analyses that frame these oppressions as part of a matrix of domination (Collins, 2000; Dunn, 2016).

Amidst debates about the value of intersectionality, our aim here has been to wield it in our detailing of the relationship between individual experiences of navigating the demands of good citizenship and good parenting and the overarching structures that make meeting such demands almost impossible. By highlighting the attachment parenting-influenced strategies employed by black mothers and reflecting on how such strategies are inevitably raced as well as gendered and classed, our goal has been to show the (limited) frames of resistance that neoliberalisation offers to black mothers in their efforts to counter the claim that their children are incapable of economic productivity.

Such a conclusion is only possible through the application of an intersectional lens. Bringing intersectionality to the study of parenting enables an expansion of the key contribution made by Parenting Culture Studies, that the everyday, mundane acts of raising children are imbued with social significance not just in what future citizens might contribute but in the disciplining of parent-citizens. Our contribution to this body of work foregrounds the overlooked but central role that race, as it intersects with gender and class, plays in both defining appropriate childrearing practices and policing groups constructed as incapable of meeting the requirements of good parenting and good citizenship. We make explicit some of the conceptual assumptions of contemporary parenting culture, pointing to its reliance on highly individualistic, rather than structural solutions to the 'problem' of social reproduction. Taking our cue from work by black feminist scholars working with the concept of intersectionality, and indeed those working within Parenting Culture Studies, we point to the material social and cultural limitations to the performance of these parenting 'ideals', as well as to the ways that these ideals are *themselves* classed, gendered and raced. We suggest that a more structural perspective is essential here to reframing these issues as ones of macro rather than micro politics.

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