Title

Using RAISEonline as a research tool to analyse the link between attainment, social class and ethnicity

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This paper reflects an emerging concern in the research literature that the achievement of pupils from a White British background might have started to fall behind that of some ethnic groups within the whole school population and that this is more likely to be in evidence among White British pupils from deprived backgrounds.

Previous analysis of performance at all Key Stages carried out within one Local Authority over three years suggests that the performance of pupils by ethnic group is complex and differences in performance within and between ethnic groups are rarely consistent either within one year, or year on year. However, one group where performance has been increasingly identified as low is pupils from a deprived White British background, whose performance is beginning to fall behind that of deprived pupils in other ethnic groups.

RAISEonline is an interactive performance analysis tool designed jointly by the Department for Children, Schools and families (DCSF) and Ofsted. It aims to enable schools to analyse performance data in greater depth as part of the self-evaluation process, provide a common set of analyses for schools, Local Authorities, inspectors and School Improvement Partners, and to provide better support for teaching and learning. It uses techniques such as contextual value added (CVA) analysis, which adjusts performance to take account of an individual’s prior attainment, their contextual profile, including gender, ethnicity and special needs status and the contextual profile of their school.

The detailed pupil level data from RAISEonline can be exported from the system and the performance of particular groups of pupils can be analysed by comparing their actual performance with their expected performance and this can be matched to other data on the pupils which expands the variables that can be used in the analysis. The difference between actual and expected performance provides a residual for each pupil and the sum of a group of pupils’ residuals can provide an overall CVA score for that group. Negative scores will suggest underperformance and positive scores will suggest good performance, that is, pupils in that group have made good progress, given their prior attainment and their contextual profile.

This information can then be used to identify schools that have been successful in securing good outcomes for the groups of children under consideration, in this case pupils from a deprived White British background. The next stage in the research process was to interview a sample of these pupils and some of the teachers who taught them in Key Stage 4. The interviews were carried out with
individual pupils using a semi-structured questionnaire. The interviews with teachers were carried out using a more structured questionnaire.

The data from these interviews was then collated and analysed to find out what strategies the schools had employed to secure good outcomes for these pupils at the end of Key Stage 4.

The research suggests that there are several strategies that schools have successfully employed to improve outcomes for pupils from a deprived White British background. In the local context it is important that these strategies are disseminated widely to schools, as all schools in the local authority area have not been equally successful at achieving the best possible outcomes for these pupils.

The findings can help schools to consider what strategies they might employ to redress some of the external factors that might have impeded pupils from a deprived White British background from making progress that is in line with local or national expectations.

The findings can also help local authorities in their development of school improvement strategies to meet the needs of groups of pupils at risk of underperformance, while making best use of RAISEonline as a tool to support research. The findings will be shared with other local authorities, who are encountering similar issues.

Key words

Deprived White British pupils, working class, social class, ethnicity, performance, achievement, Local Authority

Introduction and background

Greenwich Local Education Authority is in London and was set up in 1990, following the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) in April of that year. The Education Department that was created in 1990 became the Children’s Service in April 2006, following the merger of the Education and Children’s Social Services Departments. This paper builds on previous research by Hayes et al, which analysed the performance of White British working class boys and found that:

“...in the context of Greenwich local authority, the performance of White British working class boys is low and that it is a cause for concern. On average, this group starts behind other pupils at the start of primary schooling and by the end of compulsory age schooling are even more likely to be further behind.”

Greenwich is a culturally diverse borough and the profile of its pupil population in maintained schools is around 50% white and 50% from minority ethnic backgrounds. An emerging pattern in recent years, 2004 to 2008, has been that pupils from many of the ethnic groups are starting to outperform their white peers, in terms of performance in the national curriculum tests from Key Stage 1 to 4 and that social class is re-emerging as an explanatory factor in this trend. Although
there are performance gaps by social class among pupils from all of the main ethnic groups in Greenwich schools, the biggest gap is in the White British group. However, debate on the impact of social class on educational performance has been limited in the last two decades as Gazeley L. & Dunne M. said in 2005:

“Despite the prominent inclusion agenda in education, social class remains largely invisible as a determinant of educational achievement.”

This has also been acknowledged in a Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (now Department for Children, Schools and Families – DCSF) research paper which suggests that within dialogues about diversity; white ethnicity and social class is often rendered invisible. It is as if discussion about social class and the link between class and education has been suppressed for most of the last two decades. However, there has been a recent emergence of work exploring this area and there is an agreement within the research literature that social class is often related to educational achievement and, in turn, social mobility and opportunities for employment. Some of these aspects are considered in the following review of the literature.

Review of the literature

Although it has been suggested that social class is often rendered invisible in many educational dialogues, a recent statement from the DfES in 2006 clearly acknowledges that there is a long-standing association between social class and educational achievement:

“There is a strong, direct and long-standing association between social class and successful achievement in education. DfES figures for many years (1997–2003) show that pupils from advantaged backgrounds (management, professional) were more than three times as likely to obtain 5+ GCSE A* – C grades than their peers at the other end of the social spectrum (unskilled manual). Indeed, although children from both social groups have improved, in percentage terms, in obtaining 5+ GCSE A* – C grades, the gap between them is getting larger every year.”

This statement from the DfES could hardly be any clearer about the association between social class and educational achievement, but there are still gaps in the research evidence, particularly when the analysis by social class is broken down by gender and ethnic group. Plummer in 2000 stated that: “the intersection of white working class and gender is gravely under-researched, and raises many unanswered questions.” However, more recent work by Cassen and Kingdon, for the Joseph Rowntree Trust in 2007, has begun to address this gap and they found that:

“White British students on average – boys and girls – are more likely than other ethnic groups to persist in low achievement [although] boys outnumber girls as low achievers by three to two. Nearly half of all low achievers are white British males.”

Earlier research by Reay and Ball in 1997 picked up on the ambivalence among the working class when considering their reluctance to invest in education:
“Working class decision-making in education is infused by ambivalence, fear and a reluctance to invest too much in an area where failure is still a common working class experience.”

Cassen picked up on the notion that for disadvantaged children the issues of low performance were likely to be in evidence before they enter primary school and that there was a need to address the problems associated with this before they became entrenched. Cassen’s recent work has brought the link between deprivation and low performance at school back up the agenda. The work of Strand also replicates some of the Greenwich findings of Hayes et al and of Cassen. In Strand’s work on: ‘Race, sex, class and educational attainment at age 16: The case of white working class pupils’ he found that:

“White British working class pupils (both boys and girls) [and Black Caribbean boys] were the lowest performing groups at age 16. While pupils from most minority ethnic groups made good progress during secondary school, White British working class pupils showed a marked decline in attainment in the last two years of secondary school.”

In addition to analysing pupils’ academic outcomes in the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England (LSYPE), Strand’s work also linked the outcome data to detailed contextual data on the experiences, attitudes and aspirations of both the 15,000 young people and their parents.

This paper explores ways of using a robust analysis tool, RAISEonline, to identify young people who have managed to succeed in secondary school against the odds and to investigate what it was that enabled them to succeed, through a qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews with a small sample of the 2008 Greenwich GCSE cohort.

Methodology

The main research had two strands, one to use RAISEonline to identify students from deprived backgrounds who had performed above expectation at GCSE in 2008 and then to carry out interviews with a sample group of those students.

RAISEonline is a web based interactive performance analysis tool, which was developed jointly by the DCSF and Ofsted. It enables schools to analyse performance data in greater depth as part of the self-evaluation process. It provides a common set of analyses for schools, Local Authorities, inspectors and School Improvement Partners. It uses techniques such as contextual value added (CVA) analysis, which adjusts performance to take account of an individual’s prior attainment, their contextual profile, including gender, ethnicity and special needs status and the contextual profile of their school.

The detailed student level data from RAISEonline can be exported from the system and the performance of particular groups of students can be analysed by comparing their actual performance with their expected performance. The difference between actual and expected performance provides a residual for each student and the sum of a group of students’ residuals can provide an overall CVA
score for that group. Negative scores will suggest underperformance and positive scores will suggest good performance, that is, students in that group have made good progress, given their prior attainment and their contextual profile.

This information was downloaded from RAISEonline for secondary schools in Greenwich on the 2008 GCSE cohort. This enabled the identification of schools that were successful in securing good outcomes for the groups of children under consideration, in this case, students from a deprived White British background. The data was exported into SPSS and a sample of individual students who met the criteria of having performed above expectation and who were from a deprived White British background was identified, by looking at White British students who were eligible for free school meals. The data in RAISEonline provides an estimate of each student’s Total GCSE Capped Point Score and their actual score on the same indicator. The Total GCSE Capped Score is based on the student’s best eight GCSE grades. The allocation of points to GCSE grades is illustrated in a table at Appendix 1 and a worked example is provided for information.

The next stage in the research process was to interview this sample of students and some of the teachers who taught them in Key Stage 4. The interviews were carried out with individual students using a semi-structured questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire is at Appendix 2 of this paper.

The interviews were carried out by local authority school advisers and research and statistics staff. They took place in school with agreement of the students’ form teachers and lasted, on average, half an hour. The interviews were all recorded on tape and transcribed. In this stage of the research, a total of 15 in-depth interviews were carried out during the 2008/09 school year. All of the interviews were carried out in the school in which the students were studying in Year 12, i.e. the first year of their Post 16 studies. There is a short endnote which comments on some of the methodological issues associated with the interviewing process.¹

The desired objective from the interviews was to find out what factors had contributed to the students achieving a higher level of performance at GCSE than their RAISEonline estimate. Then if there were factors which emerged as particularly significant the next stage of the research will be to distil these into existing or new school improvement strategies aimed at raising the attainment of students from a deprived White British background.

Findings

The first theme to emerge from the interviews was an element of ambition and competitiveness. For several of the students being ambitious for their own success was important for them in achieving that success. One female student said that:

“I guess that I am a competitive person. If I see someone who is higher than me, I’ll want to get to their level so I compete with them to get myself higher.”

It would seem that for some students an element of competition is a spur to achieving success and related to this is the concept of resilience. For many young
people taking GCSEs, developing personal resilience and the ability to find solutions to problems is very important. This was demonstrated by one female student who said:

“It depends on you as a person. Always stay positive. If you have a bad situation or you get a barrier or something that is getting in your way, you just turn it into a positive and you think how you can get past that.”

For many students an ability to stay positive through challenging times, both personal and educational, is imperative. One male student made the following observation about himself:

“I don’t like to be doubted. People were doubting me. I sat down and worked out that I wanted to prove to everyone that I am better than they think.”

This theme of resilience in school age children is one that has been developed in the work of Challen et al in their interim report for the DCSF on the Evaluation of the UK Resilience Programme, a programme, originally developed in Pennsylvania, aimed at building resilience in children in the early years of secondary schooling. Within their initial quantitative work in the UK, they found a significant positive impact on pupils’ depression and anxiety symptom scores for those schools where the intervention and control groups were well matched. An impact of the programme on pupils’ depression and anxiety scores is indicated – as well as heterogeneity of impact by pupil characteristics. In particular, the preliminary results suggest that more disadvantaged or lower attaining pupils gain more from the workshops. This could have implications for Greenwich where the focus of the research is on White pupils from deprived backgrounds, whereby some Greenwich pupils might benefit from such an intervention.

A separate study by Nota et al in Italy found that students who can self-regulate cognitive, motivational, and behavioural aspects of their academic functioning are more effective as learners. They studied relations between the self-regulation strategies used by a group of Italian students during the final years of high school and their subsequent academic achievement and resilience in pursuing higher education. They found that the cognitive self-regulation strategy of organizing and transforming proved to be a significant predictor of the students’ course grades in Italian, mathematics, and technical subjects in high school and in their subsequent average course grades and examinations passed at university.

One of the female students demonstrated her capacity for this type of self-regulation when she said the following:

“I never liked asking for help but I had to encourage myself to ask for help. Since I got older I calm myself down and encourage myself to go and ask for help.”

As well as building personal resilience, some students emphasised the importance of having a supportive family in helping them to achieve success at GCSE. From the interviews there were two models of family support which came through, one which was largely academic support and the other which was mostly emotional
support. Some of the students got academic support from family members and one female student specifically observed:

"My family helped me with my coursework when I couldn’t understand the questions and I liked it when my brother helped me to do it."

Several interviewees reported similar support from family members, including one female student whose parents were not always able to help:

"My parents tried to help me even if they didn’t know they’d still try to help me."

There is a perception that family support is an important factor influencing young students’ potential to succeed but the family support is not always academic in nature. Sometimes the support is more emotional in nature as one female student observed:

"You need family support as well because if you needed help you’ve got to be able to go to someone for assurance and to let you know that you can do it."

This concept of emotional support takes one towards the more general perception that family aspiration for the children to succeed academically may be lower in deprived White British households and possibly in some of these households, emotional support acts as a substitute for academic support. In the context of this research this is a broad generalisation, but there is a view that young people in deprived White British households experience lower levels of aspiration for their academic success compared to many of the young people growing up in Black and minority ethnic households. (See previous work by Hayes et al and by Strand and Winston). In 2008 Strand and Winston concluded that:

"…differences [in aspiration] between ethnic groups were marked. Black African, Asian Other and Pakistani groups had significantly higher educational aspirations than the White British group, who had the lowest aspirations. The results suggest the high aspirations of Black African; Asian Other and Pakistani pupils are mediated through strong academic self-concept, positive peer support, a commitment to schooling and high educational aspirations in the home."

What the successful students in this research, from a deprived White background, have managed to do is to build, through their own resilience, a strong academic self-concept and have positive peer support. For several of the students who were interviewed, they quoted their friendship groups at school as being an important determinant of their academic success. One male student made a point of changing his friends because he felt that they were holding him back academically:

"I changed my group of friends after Year 9 as I realised that they were not good for me. I could just feel that I was failing…now my old friends are not doing anything in life and I am at college."

A female student said that she also changed her group of friends:
“I got in with a different social group and then they were more like heads down sort of people…we’d revise together before exams.”

There is possibly a strong link between the resilience these students have shown and their capacity and strength of purpose to actually change their friendship groups while still only being 15 or 16 years old.

Another female student did not so much change her friendship group but realised that she needed to make some sort of break from them, so that she could get on with her studies, enabling her to perform better than expected:

“My teachers were really happy with me. They thought I’d do a bit worse. I was a bit of a girly girl, talking with my friends. But in the last nine months, that’s when I put my head down. I didn’t sit near my friends. I just got my head down and that’s how I did a bit better than expected.”

Finding solutions to problems was considered to be important and students needed to access a number of strategies to self-support. A common theme was that of finding support for learning, including added clarity, good exemplars of work and self motivation, through working with friendship groups. Where these were successful, the network continued outside of the classroom into an incentive to engage with intervention and revision classes both within the school and at each others’ houses.

Another type of support that the students referred to was support within school from teachers being encouraging in the classroom through to teachers providing additional support beyond the classroom and outside the normal school day. One male student observed how he received support from school with problems that he was having outside of school and how that support continued when he returned to school:

“They made extra time with me because they understood the situation [family problems]. They gave me time off and then brought me back in and got me up to date [with my studies].”

In addition to supportive teachers within and beyond the classroom, several students observed how important the revision classes and the weekend classes were in helping them to achieve academic success. One male student put it thus:

“For English we had an extra half hour lesson at the start of school from 8 till 8.30. Close to the exams we were revising exam techniques and there were also half terms when they let you come in, get coursework done and revise.”

There were other factors which the students raised in the interviews which had a less positive impact on their GCSE performance. Some students were not impressed by the quality of careers advice that they were getting. One student described their experience of careers advice as follows:

“We had the careers lady come down but to be honest I don’t know how to get to my sort of career. They could improve on the careers section, like more detailed talks; they [only] gave you a general one.”
Some of the feedback from the interviews on the careers service was positive but one student even suggested that they were actually answering the careers adviser’s questions for them:

“They need to get more information on it because when I would say surveyor, they’d be like, ‘oh what, do you need maths for that?’ But they would be asking me, like they weren’t too sure.”

Some students were able to express their ability to see the bigger picture, that is, beyond the boundaries of school and where they live and also the bigger picture in terms of where the right qualifications might take them if they achieve them. One female student expressed this very clearly when she commented on the possibilities that the subject art might open up to her:

“Everything can lead to anything. Like art, people think it’s drawing and painting but art is so much, it can lead to surveying, architecture, everything. Everything’s got such open doors and I guess I’ve always looked at it like that.”

For some students finding a vision of oneself within the wider community was considered to be very important and this can be linked to raised aspirations and increasing personal resilience and maturation. Opportunities to explore a different slice of life via trips, including social and educational trips and visits to universities and colleges were all deemed to be of benefit.

**Conclusion**

The earlier quantitative research by Hayes et al demonstrated that pupils from a deprived White British background were increasingly at risk of under-performing in Greenwich schools. Through the qualitative research being reported in this paper, there is emerging evidence that students from this background can overcome this trend and achieve higher levels of performance than their estimates, either estimates by their teachers or by RAISEonline. RAISEonline has provided reliable and robust data from a national system which has supported the selection of a sample of students that enabled a more qualitative research project to be carried out.

What is emerging from the qualitative research is that the successful students from a deprived White British background have developed a range of approaches and strategies to help them succeed. These include a degree of ambition for their success and a level of resilience that they have developed for themselves, often leading to a capacity for self regulation, especially when it comes to organising their own learning. Other factors that emerged included family support, in some cases academic support and in others emotional support. Sometimes the emotional support may have acted as an alternative to parental aspiration for their child’s education, although this hypothesis needs further research. Students’ friendship groups at school were also important and in several cases students demonstrated their resilience by changing their friendship group to ensure that they focussed their efforts on studying for their GCSEs. Support within school was also very important for some students both from individual teachers and through the additional study programmes that schools laid on as the examinations approached.
The next stage of this research is to interview more students from this background who have been successful at out-performing their estimates at GCSE in 2009 and then to find ways of collating and disseminating the findings and the lessons learned to Greenwich schools. Based on the research so far one of the most important factors to emerge from the qualitative work has been resilience and how the local authority and its schools can help young people build resilience is possibly one of the main challenges for the future.
Bibliography


Hayes, S. (2001). *Pupils who achieved Level 4 at Key Stage 2 and also at Key Stage 3.* Internal Hammersmith & Fulham LA paper.


Notes

This paper is currently in draft format and is being presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Manchester, from 2 – 5 September 2009. This paper is confidential and should only be used with the express permission of the authors, (contact details below).

The work on this research project has been on-going since 2007 and will continue through to 2010 as school improvement strategies are developed in response to the emerging issues from the research.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1

GCSE Points Table

Table 1 shows the GCSE points that each GCSE grade attracts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Total Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>A*</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

Worked Example of Total GCSE Capped Point Score:

Table 2 shows an example of the calculation required for Total GCSE Capped Point Score. The capped score is based on the student’s performance in their best eight GCSEs. In this example the two ‘D’ grades are not included in the total.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GCSEs in Capped 8</th>
<th>GCSE Grade Achieved</th>
<th>GCSE Points Achieved</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>A*</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>C</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Capped Points</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

In another example, a student achieving 8 ‘C’ grades at GCSE would have a total capped point score of 320 (i.e. 8 x 40 = 320)
Appendix 2

White Working Class Achievement Depth Interviews

Topic Guide

NB this should be used as a guide for ideas – follow up on anything interesting that the interviewee says.

Introduction

- Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview about your GCSE results. My name is XXX and I work for Greenwich Council in the Children’s Service.

- Explain background to the interview i.e. to find out how you felt about your GCSE results and your plans for the future. The interview will take no longer than 30 minutes.

- Explain confidentiality (names will be anonymised when we write up the findings).

- Stress that there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers – just say what they think.

- Permission to tape record (to save having to write everything down) – we will arrange to borrow tape recorders from the schools (if they are available).

Reaction to their GCSE Results

- Thinking back to when you got your GCSE results, how did you feel when you found out what your grades were?
  - Did you feel like you’d done well – Why/Why not?
  - Were you pleased with your grades in some subjects but disappointed with others? Which subjects and why?
  - How did your parents/carers feel about your GCSE grades? What was their reaction?
  - How did other family members feel about your GCSE grades? (e.g. brothers, sisters, grandparents). What was their reaction?
  - How did your teachers feel about your GCSE grades (if they got a chance to give you any feedback)? What was their reaction?

Exceeding expectations

We selected you to be interviewed because you did better in your GCSEs than you were predicted to do, based on your Key Stage 3 results.

- Were you aware that you had done better than expected in your GCSEs?
  - Why do you think that you did better than expected?
- Did anything or anyone make a difference? What? Who?
- Did your parents or other family members encourage you to do well? How?
- Did your school try to help you to do well?
- What did the school do to help you e.g. revision classes, mentoring, extra classes after school/at lunch time/on Saturdays/during the holidays, coursework workshops, rehearsal of exams/completing past papers, SAM Learning, financial incentives or other rewards, laptop loans etc.? How helpful was it – do you feel like it made a difference to you?
- Did your school monitor your performance?
- Did the school discuss your predicted GCSE grades with you?
- Did you get the chance to say what you thought about your predicted grades i.e. whether they were too high or low for you – if so, did they change as a result of what you said?
- Did the school keep your parents/carers informed about your predicted GCSE grades?
- Did the school meet with your parents/carers about your predicted grades?
- How motivated were you to do well in your GCSEs? Why?
- Do you feel like the school had high expectations of you? Why/Why not?
- Were there any teachers who helped you a lot – what did they do to support you?

**Plans for the future**

- How important was it for you to get good grades in your GCSEs?
- Did your grades influence your decision to stay on in education or would you have stayed in education whatever your grades had been? Why?
- What are you studying now? Do you feel like you are doing well?
- What did you think of the careers advice that you were given at school? Was it helpful or not?
- What are your plans for the future?
- Have you got a particular career in mind?

**Summing up**

- Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your time in Year 11 or your GCSEs that we have not covered in the interview?

**Thank respondent**
Methodological issues

It is acknowledged that the size of the sample of students, i.e. 15 students selected for in-depth interviews, is small and one must be careful about drawing any conclusions from such a study. However, the earlier quantitative work has clearly identified that students from a deprived White background have been at significant risk of underperforming in Greenwich schools and what this stage of the research does is to illustrate how some students from such a background achieved success at GCSE, against the odds. The 15 in-depth interviews have thrown up some interesting common themes that help to explain why these students have performed better than they were estimated to. The interviews were carried out by local authority school advisers and research and statistics staff and although the research and statistics staff have bona fide research backgrounds, the bulk of the interviewing was done by the school advisers. One can never be absolutely sure that the interview process is entirely free from research bias; however, this is a minor consideration and any research bias is likely to have been negligible in terms of how the interviewees responded to the questions.

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