Mothers and School Choice: Effects on the Home Front

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Certificate of Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of any requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help I have received in the research and preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

There have been substantial changes in the way that families interact with schooling at the point of school choice. These shifts have been brought about by market orientated educational policy changes, and by altered forms and experiences of 'family'. This study explores this changed dynamic by researching how a group of mothers in one urban setting engaged in school choice over a period of fourteen months.

The research set out to investigate the processes, behaviours and influences that mothers took to the task of choosing secondary schooling for their children. In particular it aimed to explore the personal, familial, cultural and social dimensions of this engagement.

These objectives were pursued using feminist and phenomenological frames because these theoretical approaches allowed for a gendered and contextualised analysis of experience. Data was gathered longitudinally through return interviews with 20 women from one socially and culturally diverse local government area in Sydney, Australia. The analysis of data is informed by perspectives on markets and consumerism from the field of cultural studies. Bourdieu's concepts of 'capital', 'habitus' and 'field' were also used along with the feminist concepts of 'emotional labour' and 'emotional capital' to analyse the way that neoliberal market orientated educational policies impacted on this group of middle Australians.

This research shows that the Australian experience of school choice is an emotionally rich, highly context-specific, complex, gendered and cooperative process that contests the prevailing public rhetoric about the operations of markets and of choice. School choice, while not always welcomed by this group of middle Australians, is an overtly gendered activity mostly overseen and undertaken by mothers in gender-specific ways. For these women school choice was an activity that demanded considerable physical and emotional labouring adding significantly to mothers' work in support of their children's education. Further, the research showed how within this new marketised context, the family became the site for the contestation of taste via the negotiation of differing economic, social, cultural and emotional capitals vis a vis the structural imperatives imposed by the market. It showed that for these women and their families in this location, at this time, the promise of 'choice' was a hollow promise indeed.

1. INTRODUCTION

This Australian study is about the way that families, from a mother's perspective, interact with schools in a market context at the point of choosing a secondary school for their child. It is a qualitative study that interviewed 20 mothers over a period of 14 months of choosing and moving to high school. The data has provided information about the individuality of each experience but it has also thrown up a rich mix of intergenerational, familial, gendered and socially constructed themes that enrich more mainstream understandings about social reproduction through education. This study explores continuities and changes in the relationships between Australian families and their schools in the current marketised context.

This research is located at the point of 'choosing' because 'choice' is the pivotal concept of the neoliberal economic reforms that have been applied to educational policy changes globally and in Australia over recent decades. But unlike many other studies of school choice, my interests go beyond capturing details of who chooses what, and why. Rather my interest is to build a more nuanced understanding of the ways that mothers, as key educational decision makers within families, engage in the marketplace of school choice. This study provides a detailed insight into the gender-specific and context-specific ways that mothers facilitate the family-school relationship in an educational market in a contemporary Australia context.

1.1 Background

This study grew out of a number of professional and personal interests that have dovetailed with public concerns around major shifts in schooling policies, globally and in New South Wales (NSW). As an educator I began my teaching career in schools; primary and secondary, public and private. I then worked as an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher overseas and in the burgeoning private sector in Sydney in the 1980s and subsequently as an adult educator in the union movement and then in the government tertiary sector.

As a parent I reconnected with school education through my children and although I was employed as a university lecturer, continued to do occasional relief teaching in schools. Like many other parents, as my children progressed through primary school, I

found myself drawn into more and more frequent conversations about high schools and secondary school options. These discussions occurred anywhere that parents gathered - playgrounds, school gates, dinner parties, weekend sporting fixtures. I found the conversations fascinating not only because I, too, was a parent thinking about the high school options for my children, but also because it seemed to me that these discussions implicated a much bigger agenda.

My own children started high school in 2001 and 2002. My experience of school choice involved me and my partner in considerable self-examination about our own Catholic schooling, our ideological preferences, our children's secular upbringing and their needs and interests. As I engaged in this process over a two year period I became reasonably well informed about local schooling and increasingly interested in the phenomena that seemed to be of universal concern within my community. My personal interest turned to a professional one as I discovered more about the changing landscape of educational provision globally, in Australia and in NSW.

From the time I first embarked on this study, the public interest in 'school choice' in Australia and New South Wales has grown immeasurably. In 2002 there was limited empirical research into, nor public awareness of, the policy driven changes to the provision of Australian schooling (Wilson, 2004). However, as the Liberal Coalition Howard government policies afforded the private sector increasing access to government funding, schools and their communities have had to respond to new agendas driven by the ideology of 'choice' and the promotion of market-oriented policies.

Over this period, within the public domain, debate about school choice has been taken up by the media, by politicians and local communities. In NSW attention to school choice increased markedly as an offshoot to the 2002 Vinson Inquiry instituted by the NSW Teachers Federation and the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW. In 2001 in Sydney's inner west, community awareness was activated following government policy changes aimed at rationalising local government schooling. Public and private school funding was a central issue in both the NSW State election of 2003 the Federal election of 2004 and subsequently schooling issues feature regularly in the popular media.

1.2 Purpose and scope of the study

This study is premised on the fact that something qualitatively different in school education seems to be underfoot in Australia. My study has tried to understand what is happening today that might be different from the experiences of previous generations. Importantly it is a study that interrogates this experience recognising the substantial and globalised changes to schooling that is now marketised, along with substantially altered experiences of family and family life.

It must be clear from the twin territories of family and schooling alone, that the context of this study is a multifaceted and dynamic one. The complexity of social life affords both intrigue and peril for the social scientist and this study is no exception. From the inception of this endeavour it has been an on-going challenge to give justice to this complexity, to construct a disciplined focus that at certain times foregrounds some aspects while leaving others obscured, and at other times explores broader sweeps of commonalities or focuses on particular differences. Therefore it is as important to declare what is, and what is not within the ambit of this thesis.

While this is not a policy study as such, the lives lived by the participants at the time of the study are inextricably bound to federal and state educational policy practices. The women in this study show an acute awareness of the influence of government decisions on their family-school relations. The impact of government policy is explicitly location and time-specific, directly affecting the choices and experiences of these families. This awareness is also relative over time in that the participants constantly compare intergenerational experiences of schooling – their own, their partners', their parents' and their children's. These intergenerational changes and influences enrich the analysis of contemporary policies that support markets.

Family life is inextricably intertwined with schooling. In contemporary industrialised societies Patricia Allatt (1993) says that the "early part of life's course is dominated by the twin domains of home and school" (p. 144). School affects the everyday life of families with children by determining daily and annual schedules and by setting major milestones in the lifecycle of the family. Everyday family routines such as school

attendance, homework and school related social activities shape family life, family talk and attitudes, and even community networks.

This study intervenes in this school-family relationship at the point of choosing and moving to high school. This milestone throws up for re-examination the whole gamut of familial experiences of schooling as well as projected and future-orientated familial and schooling concerns. In the current policy climate, this primary-secondary transition encompasses relatively new factors of choice in a marketised system which position parents-as-consumers and schools-as-commodities thus altering the context and nature of family-school relations.

This marketised school education system is the principal external context of the present study. For these families the school market is the ever-pervading manifestation of recent government policy changes. The mothers in this study, already skilled as the primary shoppers within their families, in the main regard 'school shopping' as an extension of their current duties.

Because I am interested to find out how families are positioned and operate in this market context my investigation is undertaken by exploring the experiences and perceptions of mothers as they engage, on behalf of their families, in the education market. I have chosen mothers to articulate this family-market-school relationship because,

> It is women (as mothers, teachers, principals, and caregivers) who bear the responsibility and ultimately the burden of [school] 'choice' or 'lack of choice', whether it be transporting children to 'good' schools outside the neighborhood, contributing most of their salaries in paid work to pay education fees, or doing the unpaid voluntary labor in schools as pseudo-teachers/caregivers or as school governors/counselors in self managing schools.
>
> (Blackmore, 2000c, p. 470)

The centrality of mothers to family life and to the family-school relationship is well-established if not always widely acknowledged (Allatt, 1993; David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, & Standing, 1997). Some literature has long recognised the role of mothers in education in general (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982; David, 1980; David, Edwards, Hughes, & Ribbens, 1993), and some commentators have made claims

about the centrality of mothers to choice-making in educational markets (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, & Standing, 1997; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Vincent, Ball, & Pietikainen, 2004).

Such studies that have shown that irrespective of ethnicity, race or class, it is principally mothers who make schooling decisions (David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995), and, who facilitate and maintain the commitment to schooling in terms of managing the personal and domestic impacts, the school interactions, transportation and homework obligations (Ball & Vincent, 2001; Blackmore, 2000c; David, 2001; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994). And yet, it would appear that in research and theorising about the effects of education reform, the impact on families and gender continued to be largely overlooked and certainly understudied (Blackmore, 2000b; David, 2001).

It is worth pointing out that although mothers are the focus of this study, such a focus in no way implies that men and/ fathers are less important to families and their relations with schools. The women in this study refer to partners and fathers as significant players in the family's choice of schools and many of those males take on non-traditional roles in family-school relations. However, even in those families, for these women, the majority of the 'school labouring'; the associated physical and emotional work of school choice and the everyday maintenance of the family-school interface remains primarily a woman's responsibility.

The participants in this study are a particular group that can most reasonably be described as middle class, or, after Michael Pusey (2003) these women are drawn from and represent 'middle Australia' in that they are neither rich nor poor. Further this group is characterised by high degrees of mobility and workforce participation, and they are tertiary educated. Nearly half the participants were born outside Australia and more than a quarter spoke a language other than English and/ were married to non native speakers of English.

A further limitation is the inherent contradiction of any study that attempts to track a *process* over a period of some months and then report on that at a point in time some years later. Time and change doesn't stop while research is being undertaken. During this project restructuring of public schooling continued, at the same time the nation-

wide movement from public schooling towards the private sector accelerated and, of course, the lives of the women and the families in this study also continued to change. A challenge for this study was to accommodate and interpret the meanings of these changing components for the research outcomes.

Finally in my attempt to delineate the boundaries of the present study it is important to acknowledge that this study moves constantly between a focus on the individual and the group. I draw on the stories and voices of individual participants to illustrate commonalities but also at other times I highlight unique experiences for their own sakes and/or to enrich our appreciation of the field of possibilities that can be illustrated by the "usefulness of exceptions" (Ball, 2003, p.3). I seek to represent both individual actions and subjectivities without loosing sight of the broader socially constructed patterns of behaviour.

Such parameters determine the limits of what can be taken from this kind of small scale in-depth quantitative study. I am also aware of the limitations of a this small qualitative study to claim 'findings' or to say much beyond itself and particularly of the dangers of claiming to speak of 'women's experiences' as if they were universal and undifferentiated by things such as race and class.

1.3 The research problem and the research questions

As already illustrated, in Australia currently there is limited information about how women, in particular mothers, engage in school markets. My research aims to redress this paucity. As a study of mothers-as-consumers located in a contemporary secondary school marketplace, this study is concerned with everyday experiences of school choice from a mother's perspective.

Thus, the central questions asked of this study are -

1. How do mothers engage in the educational marketplace of secondary school choice? And in particular,

    1.2 How do they come to make choices about schools (processes, behaviours, attitudes, thinking, and influences)?

2. What are the personal, familial, cultural and social dimensions of this engagement?

As these questions indicate, I am more concerned to understand mothers' experiences of choice making, than simply discovering what choices these women make. I am interested in seeing how 'choice' is played out for these individuals **as** participants in networks of social, cultural and familial groups.

In order to address these central concerns I have employed a feminist and phenomenological approach thus foregrounding gender and experience within a particular socially and politically defined context.

This study is a specific and local one, however its context is multi-layered incorporating at one level my own presence within the target community, but also bounded and defined by global, national and familial contexts. These are taken up in the next section.

1.4 Contextualising the study

My study is a small-scale, focussed examination of the local manifestations of a phenomenon that is occurring around the world. This research recognises neoliberalism as the dominant global discourse driving economic reforms over recent decades. In particular there is a recognition of the rise of markets within the rapid expansion of commodity production and associated consumer culture (Featherstone, 2000; Lury, 1996). Within this framework, schools and parents are positioned as consumers and schools as commodities, and women, especially mothers, have a special role to play (Ball, 2003; Blackmore, 2000c; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Lury, 1996; Reay, 1995). Thus markets change the purpose of education from a social endeavour to a means for personal benefit via individual 'choice'. Schools viewed in this way parallel other kinds of consumer goods that saturate our world and are promoted through marketing and advertising designed to generate "dreams, desires and aesthetic pleasures" (Kenway, Bigum, Fitzclarence, Collier, & Tregenza, 2000, p. 1960).

This research is located at the intersection of a number of theoretical frames pertinent to school choice. Critiques of neoliberal policy developments are foundational to my orientation. Research and theorising from sociological and feminist work including many cultural studies scholars, is incorporated since these fields offer valuable tools for

analysing the everyday interactions of mothers operating in a market-orientated school system. Hence this thesis is eclectic in its employment of diverse, but nevertheless valuable and pertinent approaches to understanding the interface of school marketisation policies and the families that are "called up" by and "into policy" as choosers and consumers of education (Ball, 2003).

Policy changes that mean families are being called upon to engage in an educational marketplace in the selection (and maintenance) of schooling for their children is increasingly an international phenomenon. The following section offers a brief overview of the global nature of this trend that impacts on the local experiences of the families in my study. The major aspects of this brief contextualising overview are global shifts in the provision of school education, Australian experience and an introduction to the changing form and nature of families. In this chapter, sections 1.4.2 and 1.4.3 merely introduce key ideas and developments since Chapters 2 and 3 progress these themes with a comprehensive review of the relevant literature.

1.4.1 The global context

An important contextualising framework to my research is the recognition that school choice in a marketised educational environment arises from changes in education policy that are global. These changes to policy are but one component of a swathe of reforms driven by a neoliberal doctrine which gained popularity with governments from the 1970s onwards. While a thorough investigation of the globalised nature of educational change is outside the scope of this study, it is important to recognise the nature and scope of globalisation as a framing to the present study since an understanding of global patterns and consistencies is a useful platform from which to undertake an exploration of the local.

There seems to be little dispute that "economic globalisation discourses … frame educational policies all over the world" (Brantlinger, 2003, p. 17). The range of commonalities across nation states is generally described as including educational policies around marketisation, managerialism, accountability, school self-management, user-pays principles. Such policies have reshaped education to become an arm of national economic policy so that economic needs are the principle drivers of educational change. Structural adjustments include reduced public expenditure on education (and

health and welfare), the shifting of responsibility to the 'third sector' (families, community bodies and charities) and restructuring of public service organization and responsibilities for greater centralisation and regulation of financing, curriculum and qualification systems (Blackmore, 2000a). Anglophone nation states have shifted to post-welfare states with significant equity and gender effects (Blackmore, 2000b; Gewirtz, 1998). And yet it is neither correct nor useful to see globalisation as a heterogeneous movement.

Dominant readings of globalisation within contemporary neoliberal politics present globalisation as an irresistible force (Angus, 2004; Lingard, 2000), however a study like mine questions / troubles such a proposition since the context and the experiences of the women in my research are both idiosyncratic and particular to the local setting while simultaneously echoing global realities. Like Lingard (2000) my study acknowledges that local, national and global structures exist alongside each other in "mutually constitutive" relationships and that the local manifestations of global policies are historically, politically and culturally context-specific. In regard to educational policy changes in recent times there are nation and local examples of difference at the government and community levels. For example, some states (Germany, Japan) have not reduced educational spending nor deregulated public education (Blackmore, 2000c). Feminist literature, in particular, has reported on activism in local sites and networking across levels especially via non-government organizations in order to challenge and resist globalising effects (Pettman, 1998).

1.4.2 The Australian context

As with other Anglophone nations, Australian governments moved away from post-war welfarist orientations and begun to embrace neoliberal policy agendas from the 1970s. Two governments have overseen the acceleration of these neoliberal educational policy changes in ways that reflect their domestic political differences and yet that simultaneously mirror global movements: the social democratic Labor Party government of Bob Hawke and Paul Keating (1983 –1996) and the conservative, Howard Liberal/National Party coalition (1996 – present).

Australia has always had a diversified system of education. The majority of the population is educated in the government sector but a significant proportion of Australians attend non-government schools: either Catholic or independent. Funding to the non-government sector and the proportions of enrolment in these sectors is changing. In 1970, 78% of students went to government schools, 18% to the Catholic sector and 4% to the independent schools. In 2004, 68% of school enrolments were in the government sector, 20% were in the Catholic system and 12% of enrolments were in the independent sector (Independent Schools Council of Australia and Australian Independent Schools, 2005).

The Federal system in Australia is such that while the national government has the major revenue raising capacity, the states have constitutional responsibility for schools. Since the 1970s all Australian federal governments have sought greater national-wide integration in education and training, but with different emphasis and varied implementation (Lingard, 2000, p.85).

1.4.3 The family context

Another aspect of globalised change that constitutes an important context to my study is the significant transformation to the so-called 'traditional family'. In industrial nation-states these transformations include a reconfiguration of the 'nuclear family' unit, an increase in single parent and 'combined' families, an increase in the age of first time parents and an increase in two working parent families. The influences of global restructuring have entered the domestic sphere affecting the way families and lives are managed in response to shifting work patterns, the increased need for childcare and changing responsibilities (David, 2004; Pusey, 2003).

In Australia, like elsewhere, the average number of hours spent at work have increased along with a continued increase in women's participation in the labour force, so that 72% of women aged between 35 and 45 are now employed outside the home (Hayes, Neilsen-Hewett, & Warton, 2002). At the same time unemployment has increased since the 1960s; in 1999, 18.3 per cent of children under the age of 15 were living in a household where no parent was employed (Sanson & Lewis, 2001). Australian families are also more mobile than ever before; on average one in five families move residence each year further aggravating childcare, schooling and family support options (Sanson

& Lewis, 2001). There has also been a dramatic change to the internal form of families; there is greater diversity of family structures, children's dependency on parents has increased with longer years of education and training, and the ageing population means there are more older adults needing care (Goward, 2005). Children in families typically now have fewer siblings, "a better-educated mother with an increased care role and reduced options for dividing the labour" (Hayes, Neilsen-Hewett, & Warton, 2002, p. 95) and an increasing likelihood of limited, or no experience of a father (Hayes, Neilsen-Hewett, & Warton, 2002; Walter, 2000).

Australian families, already under increasing pressure are faced with a flux of neoliberal policy changes which have resulted in the market being ever more intrusive in family life (Blackmore, 2000b; Pusey, 2003). Research suggests the effects on different sections of Australian society differs, however for all but the richest, Australian families feel anxious about maintaining their current standard of living (Pusey, 2003). Within this context it seems women, and mothers in particular, are especially pressured by competing demands of housework, paid employment, caring and family responsibilities, and the increasing expectations to participate in the education of their children (David, 1993; McLaren & Dyck, 2004; D. Richardson, 1993).

1.5 Methodological orientations

There is a powerful but not always acknowledged confluence of gender, education and markets. My work aims to explore the educational marketplace with a gendered face. That is, I am concerned about how we can re-conceptualise the workings of the educational marketplace from a gendered and familial perspective. Therefore my research approach is heavily influenced by feminist theorising and research. My study proceeds from a belief that research can help us understand and interpret our complex, dynamic and contradictory social context. So, in contrast to a market-orientated neoliberal view of society', mine is interpretive and critical.

As a qualitative and longitudinal study, my research is narrowly focussed on documenting the experiences of a small group of women. Only mothers who had children in Year 6 (the final year of primary schooling in NSW) in 2002 were interviewed. The twenty participants were self-selecting and came from one local government area in the inner west of Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. This site

was selected because of its easy access to a wide range of secondary schools and because of its rich social, cultural and economic diversity.

In line with much feminist research I chose to collect data via interviews, in this case using return interviews over a period of 14 months so that I might capture changes over time. This longitudinal approach was also beneficial for the establishment of rapport and reflexivity both of which are valued in feminist research (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2003). I hoped too that a longitudinal study would enable the development of trust thus increasing the likelihood of gathering data about less often researched aspects such as the emotional dimension of school choice.

Feminist researchers widely acknowledge the challenges (and rewards) of researching ones own group (David, 2004; Finch, 1999; Oakley, 1981). Being a local resident and mother of high school children afforded me some degree of entrée to the community I was studying. For example this helped in the recruitment of participants, in the formulation of interview questions and my ability to interrogate the data from the perspective of local knowledge. My knowledge of local schooling also meant, that from time to time I was able to answer queries raised by the participants. On the other hand, I recognised the importance of reflexivity for the purposes of maintaining the integrity of the research project. Reflexivity required me to give full recognition to the roles / power / influence I might hold vis a vis the participants and the research endeavour. For example I aimed to retain a certain mindfulness about the interrelatedness of the lives of the participants and to be vigilant about honouring trust, and to acknowledge and respect differences. I also tried to find or make space for those voices less often heard through recruitment strategies and in presenting the data. Some of the conundrums inherent in this methodological approach are explored in Chapter 4.

Working within these parameters I attempted to let the data drive the research and the theorising. Hence I first tracked and recorded the women's own stories about school shopping. From this data I tabulated a common pattern of practice that, unbeknown to me at the time, closely aligned with recognised patterns of consumer behaviour (Hawkins, Neal, Quester, & Best, 1997). As I recorded these steps and then undertook further reading and deeper analysis this grew to incorporate key analytical tools as represented in Figure 1.1 below. In addition, this Process of School Shopping offered a

framework for the textual presentation of data into discrete chapters and also operated as a framing for the analysis for these different components within the process.

Figure 1.1 below documents the steps in the process of school shopping as articulated by the women in this study and also shows where and how this thesis presents and interrogates the data. This representation is used throughout the thesis to frame the discussion at hand.

Textual location	**Steps in the process of school shopping**	**Step descriptor**	**Theoretical influences and framing**
Chapter 5	**STEP 1** INFORMATION GATHERING	Finding out about secondary schools	Cultural studies framing of consumer culture
Chapter 6	**STEP 2** EVALUATING OPTIONS	Determining which of those might be available to them (eg logistically, financially) by comparing their needs and capabilities against availability	Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital
	STEP 3 DETERMINING PREFERENCES	Choosing between viable options to pursue	
Chapter 7	**STEP 4** INVESTIGATING PROCEDURES	Finding out how to go about opting into those choices (eg by collecting and correctly filling in the right forms, by having the right address)	Feminist perspectives including the concepts of 'emotional labour', and 'emotional capital'
	STEP 5 TAKING ACTION	Implementing individual/collective, short/long term strategies to secure preferences (eg arranging coaching applications/deposits)	
Chapter 8	**STEP 6** CHOOSING OR BEING CHOSEN?	Acting on a response from the targeted school(s) (ie accepting or rejecting an offer)	Sociological and feminist critiques of 'choice'

Figure 1.1 The Process of School Shopping

1.6 Significance of the study

This study is significant for two broad reasons; firstly because it builds on our developing understandings of the everyday familial impacts of the marketisation of school education, and for the contribution it makes to theoretical understandings of this phenomenon. In both regards there is currently scant research in the contemporary Australian context of suburban life in an Australian city.

Broadly speaking this study aims to contribute to knowledge about how Australian families and schools interact at the point of choosing and moving to a secondary school in the context of a marketised school system with changed family dimensions. The study seeks to unfold some of the experiences of families at this point because of the centrality of 'choice' within policies affecting all aspects of family life. In a speech at the Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, the then Minister for Family and Community Services, the Hon Senator Kay Patterson, articulated the view of the Australian Federal government towards 'choice'

> As the Prime Minister has said, choice is the golden thread that flows through many of our policies. Choice about whether to stay at home and care for the children or return to work; choice about childcare; choice about schooling, and choice about healthcare.
>
> (Patterson, 2005)

'Choice' underpins the rhetoric of the neoliberal market-orientated economic agenda in whichever country it is applied and to whichever portfolio. Because this study is located at the point of choosing, it offers the potential to problematise the rhetoric of choice vis a vis some real-life, situated experiences of choice. Therefore according to the extent to which the study illuminates our understandings of families engaging in school choice, the study offers insights for stakeholders across the spectrum of education; policy makers, schools and teachers, and of course the women and families who are drawn into the market willingly or otherwise.

1.6.1 Significance for stakeholders

This study has the potential to offer useful insights to a number of stakeholders. To date, in Australia there is limited information on the domestic impacts of contemporary educational policies that implement the marketisation of school education. I am unaware of any empirically based studies of Australian families in relationship with

their schools at the point of choice in the contemporary market context. An in-depth description of the 'lived' experiences of these women and their families in a process of school choice would fill a gap in current understandings of the education market in Australia. A contribution to this knowledge may help inform policy makers, politicians and schools themselves so as to allow them to better understand and enrich their relationships with the families they aim to attract to their schools. I hope too, that my research may help reignite an interest in what Ball (2003) refers to as the "old themes and concerns from within the sociology of education … the multifaceted relationships between families, public institutions and educational inequalities" (p.1).

1.6.2 Significance for theory building

This study draws on a range of theoretical and empirical literature that forms the basis for this investigation and offers potential for further theory-building. Albeit in fluctuating cycles, social scientists, sociologists and feminists have long been interested in the connections between families and schooling and especially in theorising about social reproduction via education. This study builds on that tradition and interrogates new dynamics associated with neoliberal educational policies in an Australian context.

As illustrated in Figure 1.1 this study is informed by a range of theoretical approaches from the field of cultural studies, from the Bourdieu's work, especially that on social reproduction, and from feminist and sociological perspectives.

Perspectives from cultural studies are employed to analyse the behaviours of the mothers-as-consumers in an educational market place where schools, positioned as enterprises engage in meaning making practices such as marketing and advertising. By adopting such an orientation this study addresses "the considerable ambivalence in local take-ups of discourses of consumerism in education" and responds in some way to Dehli's challenge that "…these ambivalences ought to be explored historically and empirically" (Dehli, 1996 p. 76).

In addition, this study also draws on the work of Bourdieu and key feminist researchers in school choice, to enrich the analysis of the social and gendered aspects of social reproduction via marketised schooling. In particular this thesis uses Bourdieu's

conceptual tools of 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital' to interpret the behaviours of these women as they engage in the secondary school market. In addition, after Reay (2000) and others, the role of emotions is explored through an extension of Bourdieu's ideas of capital to include 'emotional capital' and also via the concept of 'emotional labour' as developed by Hochschild (1983) and usefully employed by Blackmore (2004) and others. By drawing from and building on these theoretical interests and overlaying them with a feminist perspective, this study offers opportunities for further research and theorising.

1.7 Outline of the thesis

It is important to note from the outset that this thesis both is, and is not, a traditional PhD text. This thesis reports on the conduct and findings of empirical research within a context of existing literature on families and school marketisation and in that sense subscribes to 'normalised' expectations of a doctoral text. However, this text also differs from normative standards associated with the traditional science-based thesis. Most particularly there is no clear and sustained separation of literature, analysis and findings. The review of literature in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 errs more toward critique than mere description. Additionally each of the four data chapters begins with a review of pertinent theoretical and conceptual literature in order to set up the particularities of analysis of the 'findings' for that chapter.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the neoliberal frame that has driven the current market-orientated policy changes in education. The chapter refers to British research but is primarily Australia focussed. The review explores the philosophical as well as practical aspects of neoliberalism with a special focus on 'choice' and the social and educational effects of the market. The second aspect of Chapter 2 is a focus on the experience of school marketisation in Australia, and especially the experience in NSW.

Chapter 3 continues to provide a context for this study by documenting the changing form and character of Australian families and family life. It reviews changing ideas of the family, marriage and parenting plus the changing relations of family, work and caring. The second half of the chapter explores the relationship of families to schooling and education within a marketised context.

As already stated, Chapter 2 and 3 is not the only location for the review of literature in this thesis. Literature is extensively reviewed in the process of data analysis in each of the four data chapters according to the scaffolding detailed in Figure 1.1.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological influences and orientations that have guided this project, gives details of the study design and implementation, and presents initial demographic information about the participants in the study. The chapter explains how I came to reject a purely phenomenological approach in favour of a feminist orientation and the resultant implications for my role and for the design and implementation of the research. I explain the rationale for making this a longitudinal study, for decisions about the location and recruitment of participants, the use of interviews for data gathering, ethical considerations and how I analysed, interpreted and wrote about the data.

Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 are the data chapters and are introduced prior to Chapter 5. The structure of the four data chapters is based on this Process of School Shopping which works as a scaffold for the presentation and analysis of data in these chapters.

Chapter 5 examines how the women positioned as consumers went about gathering and responding to information about schools. Critiques of consumer society and consumer behaviour inform the data analysis especially in regard to their interactions with advertising and marketing practices employed by these marketised schools.

Chapter 6 continues to look at the consumer behaviour of these mothers as they engage in evaluating and determining their preferences for schools, but here the focus is more about interpreting the actions of individuals as members of groups positioned in a structured social context of family, class and ethnicity. This chapter employs the Bourdieuian concepts of capital, field and habitus to help explore these broader social dimensions of consumer behaviour.

Chapter 7 analyses the data to explore how mothers investigate procedures and then take action to pursue their school preferences. Feminist perspectives including the concepts of ‘emotional capital’ and ‘emotional labour’ are employed for the analysis of this data since they build on Bourdieuian theorising and offer valuable mechanisms to

interpret the emotional dimensions that dominate Steps 4 and 5 of the Process of School Shopping.

Chapter 8 is concerned with the idea of choice and how, in the final stages of the process of school choice this neoliberal concept is realised in the lives of these women. The stories of these women played out here are analysed against feminist critiques of neoliberal markets and contemporary theorising about 'choice'.

Chapter 9 reviews the major themes arising from this research project in order to propose new understandings about the engagement of Australian women positioned as consumers, in the task of choosing schools for their children in a marketised environment. The chapter concludes that although these mothers, their children and families, have varied responses to the current agenda of educational choice, their participation is a significant factor/driver in the evolving landscape of market-driven school choice. The study also proposes that market forces have contributed to a significant change in primary-secondary transition experiences for both children and their families. The chapter concludes by pointing to implications for educators and policy makers arising from the findings presented.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the context for, and an outline of the nature and direction of my study.

It began by describing how I came to be interested in the issue of secondary school choice by detailing relevant aspects my personal and professional experiences. Chapter 1 also provided a brief introduction to fields of educational inquiry into 'school choice' both globally and in Australia. This chapter clarifies my orientation to the study of educational policy change in Australia and NSW by identifying my key interests, methodological and theoretical orientations and by contextualising the study.

As a feminist inquiry concerned with the experiences of mothers and families in a contemporary educational market this chapter highlights the potential of this study to add to our understanding of the school choice debate in Australia through the particular and understudied experiences of mothers engaged in the secondary school marketplace.

2. MARKETS AND SCHOOLS

2.1 Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis situated educational marketisation as a global phenomenon pointing to how governments around the world have embraced markets as a central mechanism for the provision of school education. In order to contextualise the study, it also pointed out how the form and character of the 'family' has changed globally. Through a review of the literature, Chapters 2 and 3 take up these two aspects; (1) changing provisions of schooling and, (2) changing notions of the family respectively. The purpose of these two chapters, is to document existing understandings of school marketisation and social changes to Australian family life through a focus on empirical research. Later chapters build on this empirical knowledge by revisiting the literature and by applying specific theoretical frameworks to the analysis of the data collected in this study.

This chapter begins with an overview of the ideological and economic foundations of the neoliberal approach that underpins market-orientated education reforms. The central issue of 'choice' is briefly reviewed here but returned to more comprehensively in Chapter 8. Chapter 2 refers extensively to the British experience of school marketisation because of the historical and cultural heritage Australia and Britain share. And, as policy developments in Australian education continue to "bear a certain resemblance to those in that country [Britian]" (Kenway, Bigum, & Fitzclarence, 1995 p. 23) Australia has much to learn from the richly documented and theorised British experiences of school marketisation.

The second half of this chapter, Section 2.5 has an explicit focus on the experiences of school marketisation in Australia and New South Wales.

2.2 The changing face of school education

Commentators on the marketisation of school education point to a total re-jigging of the system over recent decades. There is a sizeable body of literature documenting these reforms in education in Britain, the USA, Canada and New Zealand. Although a relatively late starter, the Australian education system has not escaped this global shift.

There now seems to be a fairly universal agreement that the education systems of the English speaking countries have moved into market driven forms (Blackmore, 2000a).

Within sociological studies of educational marketisation a key concern has been to research and theorise the implementation and effects of market orientated policies on school education. Studies have been concerned to understand the broader social effects of these policy changes, and also to explore the effects on schools themselves, their curriculum, management structures and so on.

Most of the sociological literature on school choice, and the policy changes that have had influence in Australia have origins in the British experience. But there have also been important studies in New Zealand where neoliberal policies were pursued with vigour (Lauder et al., 1999; Waslander & Thrupp, 1995) and in Canada (Dehli, 1996; A. Taylor & Woollard, 2003). School choice has been a concern within the sociology of the USA, however this study only engages minimally with that body of work since the American system and experience is so different from the Australian.

Almost all the literature has addressed the issues of how choice is played out in particular locations, and for particular groups. In Britain, David (for example 1993; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994), Reay (1995, 1998b) and Vincent (Vincent, Ball, & Pietikainen, 2004) amongst others, are notable for their work that foregrounds gendered and feminist issues. Other studies have explored other social dimensions such as class (Ball, 2003; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995), ethnicity (Bagley, 1996) (Bagley, 1996; Denessen, Driessena, & Sleegers, 2005), or those with special needs (Bagley & Woods, 1998; Vincent, Evans, Lunt, & Young, 1995). As this review highlights, in Australia there has been comparatively relatively little empirical research into the effects of school marketisation.

2.2.1 New directions in the provision of schooling: Neoliberalism and economic imperatives

As a starting point for understanding the contemporary educational landscape, this section explores the origins, key concepts and assumptions of the current neoliberal market orientated educational reforms associated with what is know in Australia as ‘economic rationalism’.

Most of the terminology now commonly associated with the market originated in the pre-Keynesian economics of Adam Smith (see *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations,* 1776) who advocated minimal government intervention thus allowing the 'invisible hand' of the market to determine the creation and distribution of a country's wealth. After World War II, governments embraced an economic model often referred to as 'welfarist economics' that favoured government intervention and mediation of the 'free market' for the benefit of the whole society. However from the 1970s these post war welfarist persuasions begun to be replaced by economic policies that promoted once again, the dominance of the market as the primary mechanism for the regulation and operation of local and international economies.

In response to changing global economic circumstances, cultural diversity and the emergence of new information technologies, Western governments around the world have embraced neoliberalism. Neoliberalism encompasses ideological, political and economic dimensions in restatement of classical economics reasserting the principles of freedom, market individualism and small government (O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999). In Britain it was firstly commonly associated with Thatcherism and subsequently the Blair Labour government has continued to privilege the market, albeit as a mechanism for social change (Ball, 2003).

Governments have used mainstream economics to advance neoliberal policies that privilege economic decisions above others:

> Our own economic rationalist prescription proceeds from the extreme assumption that economies, markets, money and prices can always, at least in principle, deliver better outcomes than states, governments, and the law. And, further that the market provides the only practical means for setting values on anything
>
> (Pusey, 2003, p.9)

Neoliberal policy changes have been 'sold' to the public via a rhetoric that advocates individual freedoms, particularly the right to choose without governmental constraints (O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999). Within this frame, understandings of democracy and citizenship shift from a concern for the general good of society, to a focus on the freedom of the individual (Reid, 2002). The market form "carries with it a political

vision that articulates a very individualistic conception of democracy and citizenship" (Ball, 2003, p. 38).

Neoliberal ideology holds that capitalist wealth is created through the operations of the free market and that state interference and welfarist policies result in less wealth and less freedom (Bilton et al., 1996). The basic assumptions of current market-based economics are those espoused by classical economic theories regarding the operations of demand and supply in a free and open market. A 'market' in this sense is understood to mean a mechanism for bringing together buyers and sellers, rather than necessarily a physical place. A market consists of buyers (consumers) and sellers (entrepreneurs) who come together freely to buy and sell goods. According to classical economic theory, the 'invisible hand' of the market will bring about the most efficient supply of commodities demanded by consumers able to choose between competing products in an open market.

Implicit in this is the assumption that consumers are well-informed and rational decision makers who will automatically favour 'good' products over 'bad', until finally the inferior products will improve or be removed from the market altogether (Strober, 2003). The role of government in this scenario is to advocate for the primacy of individual freedoms, rather than for social concerns. In this sense, mainstream economics is based on "an ahistorical concept of individual rationality" and on assumptions of "cultural uniformity" (Gardiner, 1997) whereby the consumer operates entirely objectively unencumbered by cultural, social, religious familial or gendered influences.

2.2.2 Neoliberal markets in education

In Australia, it seems now to be widely recognised that policy development is dominated by neoliberal economics that frames "educational issues, policies and practices today across the schooling and university sectors" (Luke, 1997, p. 3).

In theory, in an educational market, the parents (the consumers) choose between competing products (schools) that offer their packaged goods (education). In this way education becomes a commodity supplied at a price to the market. In practice, there is no one single market in the school sector, rather there are many 'quasi markets' so

named because markets in education are typically neither singular nor 'true' in that education suffers from high levels of government interference, diverse intrusions of market components, and competition is located across multiple and unequal sites (Whitty, 1997). The form and nature of these quasi markets is an evolving aspect of the new market identity of education in Australia. For example, the market is fractured into private and government schooling, into comprehensive and selective types as well as other divisions along religious and secular lines or by gender and so on. In addition, Australia, like many other countries, is witnessing a growth in various forms of informal educational markets including 'shadow education' (Lynch & Moran, 2006) markets where private cramming colleges operate competitively for the preparation of students for mainstream selective and scholarship examinations.

Kenway et al. (2000) identify and theorise the infiltration of a plethora of markets into schools, especially via information communication technology. They argue that the triad of education/markets/information technology affects the product, workings and consumption of education in profound ways. Pedagogies, curricula, classrooms, teachers and schools themselves are implicated in the blurring of old boundaries whereby schools, homes and businesses conflate with education and/as entertainment.

Another more recent concern of the literature on school marketisation is the exploration of contemporary consumer experiences of markets. Theorising from the field of cultural studies offers ways to explore how consumers make choices within a contemporary cultural context, particularly where commodities have value beyond their simple utilitarian function. In different social and cultural contexts the meanings associated with goods are frequently and purposefully exploited by the market through marketing and advertising, to attract and win over buyers. All goods have social dimensions: the physical representation (signifer) and the social meanings (signs) attached to them (the signified). "Advertising could be said to work by fitting a signifer to a signified, both cooperating with and intervening in the semiotic process" (Turner, 2003, p. 15).

In Australia a few authors, notably Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen (2001) and Colin Symes (1998) have usefully employed theoretical frames from cultural studies to the analysis of market and consumer behaviours in the secondary school marketplace.

Semiotics has been used to illustrate the importance of image to competing schools especially in studies of school uniform (Meadmore & Symes, 1997) and in school advertising (Mills, 2004). With colleagues, Kenway (see Kenway, 1999; Kenway, Bigum, Fitzclarence, Collier, & Tregenza, 2000; Kenway & Bullen, 2001) has undertaken a valuable analyses of the growing confluence of education and culture, and of the impact of technological change and consumer culture within a marketised school system. Such studies draw on themes from cultural studies and the works of researchers and theorists such as Baudrillard, (1998), Bourdieu (1984), de Certeau (1984), Featherstone (2000) and Lury (1996) in order to analyse how choice is activated in a market.

Section 2.3 looks at the work concerned with the effects of marketisation on schools and education itself and Section 2.4 reviews the literature on broader societal effects.

2.3 Market effects: Competition, curriculum and school management

The neoliberal rationale for market orientated schooling is that competition brings greater efficiencies to the whole sector. Competition both contributes to and is an effect of market orientated policies. This section explores the literature that shows how competition between schools for students has affected the behaviour of schools themselves, influencing their curriculum and teaching practices as well as altering their budgetary arrangements and management practices.

The logic of the markets is that competition between schools will result in improvements for all 'surviving' schools while those that cannot compete successfully will close. This depends on parents making choices that favour the better product, and also, operates only when schools have spare capacity. In the market context, competition occurs within, between and across the various public and private sectors. In a consumerist society, goods are more than simply material possessions; they mediate relationships and take on meanings beyond their physical sense. Marginson (1996) proposes that market-driven policy changes in Australia have exacerbated the blurring of distinctions between the government and private sectors by created two kinds of schooling; exclusive schools, and, others. Over the last decade, policy changes have maintained if not further entrenched, the exclusivity of certain school types (ie private and 'selective' schools) thus making them more similar. On the other hand, the

predominantly government schools, that are “freely accessible to parental choice, and thus condemned to inferiority in their social standing and educational resources” (Marginson, 1996, p. 125) have continued to suffer materially and in status over this period (Preston, 2004).

However paradoxically, market competition also promotes variation within sectors. The proliferation of quasi-markets within the secondary school arena is particularly vibrant where the combination of reduced government funding and increased promotion of market economies has forced schools to compete against each other to attract government funding, sponsorship, and consumers. In order to be successful in the eyes of governments, parents and children, schools and education have had to become successful business enterprises (Angus, 2004; Ball, 1993; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1998; Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000; Marginson, 1997b). There are increasing examples of schools employing sophisticated and sometimes expensive marketing tools such as advertising and promotion campaigns, market consultants, and the use of the media to promote and position themselves (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Mills, 2004). In this way schools and education have become commodified (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1998) and in response, parents and children have been positioned as consumers.

Schools within an educational market aim to attract students by promoting themselves in the marketplace - and the image of school that is most attractive to the market is a conservative traditional one. The conserving influence of the marketplace on schools extends to management and structure, clientele, curriculum and pedagogy (Blackmore, 1999; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995), and schools work hard to present a marketable image to the market. The research of Kenway and Fitzclarence (1998) shows that whole school communities participate in promoting the school image. And further, that irrespective of the social context of the school, there appears to be a common acceptance of the value of this conservative image for marketing purposes. School managers, teachers, children and parents recognise the favoured image as a traditional one of well-presented students, teachers and grounds, of high academic achievement and of strict discipline. Kenway and Fitzclarence show how consumer-savvy students recognise the way the market positions them and their schools in relation to the ‘better’ schools, ie the private or ‘privileged’ state schools. In order to compete, schools then aim to emulate the so-called better schools who, in turn then need to differentiate

themselves further, thus resulting in a "never ending cycle of consumer desire" (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1998, p. 54) and a domino effect of institutional competition (Marginson, 1997b).

Thus, markets force schools to engage in contradictory, expensive and never-ending struggles to promote themselves both as different or special in order to attract the eye of the consumer- while simultaneously presenting themselves as traditional, conservative and academically successful enterprises.

> So while the market promises diversity in school provision, the market has normalising effects, as the dominant image of a good school is one of students who are well-dressed, well-behaved and high academic achievers in a pleasant, well-resourced and technologically sophisticated environment. Schools now win or lose students on the basis of their reputation and image (Blackmore, 1999, p. 154)

Mills (2004) shows how two country schools angled to market themselves as better educators of girls than each other and better than their state school competitors. Thus schools may aim to be more traditional but also 'special' in some way. Walker and Crump identify a trend to reinterpret the 1950s versions of 'specialist' schools such as single sex and selective and music, sport or technology high schools (1996). Thompson (1998) states that in England, New Zealand and in Australia, working class public schools seem to be embracing specialist tags such as 'sports' or 'technology' high schools in an attempt to avoid becoming "a marginalised fragment of the former public system" (p. 45).

Another effect of marketisation with implications for the schools, their families and students, is that marketisation has been shown to have a conserving influence on the curriculum and educational approaches (Kenway, 1995b; Thomson, 1998; Whitty, 1997). When schools compete against each other for funding and or students it seems marketing strategies and school policies that favour the more academically able dominate (Conway, 1997; Marginson, 1997b; Teese & Polesel, 2003; West & Pennell, 2000; Woods, Bagley, & Glatter, 1998). Connell (1998) points to the institutionalisation of the competitive academic curriculum which cements advantage to the privileged (see also Teese & Polesel, 2003). He argues that the narrowing of the curriculum and the 'back to basics' push is by necessity married to marketisation. The privileged with the right cultural capital, always have and will continue to (be able to)

select schools where the curriculum is likely to lead to further privileged tertiary education and or professional options (Teese, 2000). On the other hand schools aiming to attract locals with different kinds of cultural capital and greater concerns about employability are more likely to offer vocationally orientated curricula, thus further dividing the rich and poor schools.

The marketisation of school education has lead to a redirection of focus within schools themselves away from the business of education and learning towards the business of financial management and entrepreneurship (Blackmore, 1999; Kenway, 1995b; Lingard, 2000). Educational restructuring in most countries has involved a movement towards school-based management (Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000), entailing a shift in ideas about 'leadership' and specifically to the role of principalship (Angus, 2004). Blackmore (2000b) argues that this shift has had negative democracatic and social justice impacts as these concepts are neither cost-effective nor valued by the market. Blackmore's work showed that many female principals felt "disillusionment and despair" as market values supplanted all others (Blackmore, 1999 p. 155) A number of studies have traced the impact on teachers (Burrow & Martin, 1998; Connell, 1998; Marginson, 1997b; Reid, 1998) where low morale, high stress rates and disillusionment have been attributed at least in part to market reforms in management and accompanying funding reductions (Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000). The implications of these changes are not gender neutral as women dominate the teaching force, and further their leadership styles often do not match market requirements (Blackmore, 2000b).

The combination of reduced government funding to public schooling along with a shift to the market approach generally has lead all schools to seek financial support from a variety of sources. Studies show that the allocation of resources to schools and school performance has become polarised (Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). Schools are increasingly dependant on corporate and community support (Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1998; Marginson, 1996; McInerney, 2003) with immediate and gendered impacts for families. Parents are recruited for their voluntary work in classrooms, on management boards and fund-raising committees and to pay school contributions (Morrow, Blackburn, & Gill, 1998). They are also increasingly asked to contribute financially. The NSW Parents and Citizens Federation claimed that parents would "pour a record $35 million into public education" in 2003 alone (cited in Wood, 2003, p. 30). Morrow

et al. refer to a report from the Senate Committee Investigation into Private Funding of Public Schools that states that parents, teachers and principals now believe that locally raised funds are necessary to deliver the essentials (not the extras) of education (*Not a Level Playing Field*, 1997, cited in Morrow et al., 1998). In this context families are increasingly called upon to supplement school funding arrangements.

Section 2.4 reviews findings from the literature about the social dimensions arising from policy shifts to school marketisation. It begins with a brief discussion on 'class' since it is clear that educational markets effect different groups in society differently and moreover the social position or 'class' overlays other disadvantage (such as special needs or membership of ethnic minorities). Much of the British sociological critique of school marketisation foregrounds class effects as a primary concern for the analysis of unequal outcomes of school markets because "class divisions have historically been, and currently remain, more polarized in England than other countries" and further "in many Western societies, class remains a strong predictor of academic success" (Reay, 2001, p. 334).

2.4 Market effects: Social dimensions

Even when accommodating the different research approaches and challenges of comparing across communities and nations, most commentators agree that there are serious negative social effects arising from school marketisation policies (Ball, 2003). Lucey and Reay claim the research shows that school marketisation has "intensified and deepened social divisions" (2002a, p. 325). Gillborn and Mirza (2000) claim the research shows that inequality in educational attainment between the highest and the lowest classes in Britain has grown since the late 1980s (p. 18).

In reviewing the market-orientated educational policies of the Blair Labour government, Martin Thrupp and Sally Tomlinson (2005) echo concerns about effects across social groups, especially for the already disadvantaged. They highlight how both the ideology and the mechanics of neoliberal market policies effect social norms and disrupt opportunities for social justice.

> As policy discourses have become individuated, notions of equity, redistribution and the common good, usually associated with social justice, have been conspicuously absent. The licence given to people to pursue personal and

> familial profit has been at odds with talk of cohesive communities.
> (Thrupp & Tomlinson, 2005, p. 551)

An interest in how education perpetuates or disrupts social structures has rightly been an on-going feature of sociological concerns. In the 1970s and 1980s in Australia 'class' was a central concern of the seminal study into the relationships between Australian families and their schools (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982). In the 1990s Anderson's study (1992, cited in Marginson, 1997) documented long standing links between certain schools and social privilege in Australia. With few exceptions (Caldwell, 1999; Gorard, 2000) sociological literature has indicated markets in education have had negative social effects for the already disadvantaged (read 'working class') in favour of the middle class.

Within the literature on school choice there sometimes appears to be two approaches to interpreting the relationship between market orientated education and the middle class. In one camp the portrayal of the middle class is often pejorative, whereby middle class parents are presented as selfish, self-seeking 'successful strategists' of the education market and whose competitive behaviour is at the expense of the working class (Power, 2001). Brantlinger (2003) may be accused of such an approach. Others, perhaps well represented by Stephen Ball, hold the position that middle class families are troubled by the market orientated approach that they embrace, and that they feel forced to adopt risk management strategies through school choice.

> …post-welfare education policies offer a social and political context, and produce social fields or social spaces, in which the middle class feel both at home and at risk, comfortable but uncertain. (Ball, 2000, p. 167).

It is also important however, to acknowledge that there remains considerable debate about "class" as a phenomenon, let alone as a reliable or useful descriptor. Occurring in tandem with the uptake of neoliberal economic policies, most countries have recorded significant structural changes affecting social class.

In Australia there remains a significant lack of consistency in the determination of classes and the application of class nomenclature. Connell et al. (1982) and Connell and Irving (1992) use the terms 'ruling-class' and 'working-class' where others may refer to sections of the middle classes. Pusey (2003) has adopted the term "middle

Australia" to refer to "the broad urban middle class, and indeed just about all of us who live between the rich and the poor" (p. 3).

There is some evidence that old views of 'class', education and social reproduction are being unsettled by the contemporary, global changes in educational policy and by gendered and familial changes (Yates, 2002). The case of many immigrant families also raises questions about traditional applications of the term (Francis & Archer, 2005). Despite the shortcomings associated with 'class' the term continues to be used widely in a way that suggests the ongoing value of distinguishing between social groups in a manner that reflects something about economic and social status, lifestyle, and relations to production as well as consumption. And irrespective of how 'class' is used as the descriptor of social difference, evaluating the effect of market orientated policies on social groups has been a central theme of much school choice research.

By way of contrast, research into the effects on smaller, particular social groupings; for example, local communities, culturally distinct groups, education for girls and for boys, those with special needs, and different kinds of families, has been relatively understudied compared to the work on 'class effects' of school marketisation.

Some British studies have documented the disruptions to formerly geographically defined communities (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995) resulting in the loss of connections between schools and their communities (Ball, 1993). Studies have tended to show that schools and school systems can become residualised in a market system as schools compete unequally for students and funding (Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). In an open competitive market, all schools seek to maximise their numbers of high achieving students and minimise their troublemakers with the overall negative effect of polarising the good, well resourced schools from the poor, under-funded ones (Ball, 2003; Noden, 2000).

Thus school communities change as student demographics alter and vice versa. The effect for those who can afford to follow the money is good: on the other hand the outcome is bad for those and their communities who lack sufficient resources. Either way, schools in such a competitive environment are unlikely to foster diversity – the competition for status and funding requires them to favour obedient, academically

talented students and disfavour those with special needs, immigrants and the less academically able (Whitty & Power, 2000)

A number of studies have clearly shown that as a direct consequence of competition, some schools have dismantled or de-emphasised their provisions for those with special needs (Bagley, Woods, & Glatter, 2001; Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995). By contrast other schools have been shown to make special provision for the academically more able (Lucey & Reay, 2002a).

While there has long been an interest in the academic achievements of different genders and ethnic groups there are few studies into the experiences of ethnic minorities in marketised systems (Bagley, 1996; Francis & Archer, 2005; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Green & Vryonides, 2005). Such studies have shown the unequal effects of markets for different cultural groups, however there is a clear need for further location- and group-specific studies since experiences vary across ethnic groups and countries.

Tomlinson (1997) says that migrant and minority group parents have consistently demonstrated their aspirations for good education (see also Francis & Archer, 2005) in order for their children to become equal citizens with equal rights and life changes, and yet she argues that school marketisation has had negative effects for these children. Gillborn and Mirza's study of the educational attainment of students over the period of British school maketisation indicate clear patterns of difference along class, race and gender lines (2000) with African-Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi students doing the worse.

But not all ethnic groups are fairing poorly. Although Francis and Archer's study of British-Chinese students (2005) does not aim to problematise the relationship between their academic success and 'choice', this study, like Archer's on Muslim boys (2003) contributes to a richer understanding of minority experiences within the frame of markets. Both studies attribute attitude as a factor for school success. Francis and Archer propose that British-Chinese families are more likely to succeed academically not through school choice, but rather due to the 'right cultural currency', (that is, their exceedingly high valuing of education) and to teachers' attitudes. On the other hand, there is much to suggest that when parents from certain backgrounds make group-

specific choices, greater ethnic and racial stratification is likely to occur (Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1996). A Dutch study of group-specific reasons for school choice found this to be operationalised mainly by religious and ethnic groups (Denessen, Driessena, & Sleegers, 2005). There is evidence of a similar phenomenon occurring in Australia where the fastest growing component of the school sector is low cost the religious denominational schools (Doherty, 2005). In summing up the findings of marketisation studies globally Ball (2003) proposes that in "multi-racial settings … there may well be an increase in racial segregation" as a result of the operations of choice in a competitive market (p. 37).

Much research around the English speaking world indicates significant shifts in educational attainment by gender in school systems. The growing gap between girls' and boys' educational achievement has been played out in most marketised systems. Various explanations for the relative improvement in girls' results over boys', include altered assessment, teaching and curriculum regimes (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000). Despite some subject and level variations, the gap between girls' and boys' achievement is growing, nevertheless Gillborn and Mirza show that "the gender gap is considerably smaller than the inequalities of attainment associated with ethnic and social class background" (p. 23). However few studies combine race, class and gender. The Gillborn and Mirza work indicates that overall the gender gap is evident in each ethnic group regardless of social class.

While the gender and achievement issues are important and interesting, there is little to suggest these trends are an outcome of marketisation in the way that other inequalities (race and class) have been shown to be connected. Nevertheless the public awareness of girls' and boys' school achievement is an aspect of school choice for parents (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, & Standing, 1997; Jackson & Bisset, 2005; Kenway, 1990) and for schools in marketing themselves (McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Mills, 2004).

The case that competition mitigates against minority groups is well established (Ball, 2003; Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Whitty & Power, 2000). When the child with special needs, the non native speaker or the less academically capable child also belongs to a family with limited economic and social resources, their disadvantage is multiplied. Unlike the better off middle class families, these families are less able to take up the

promise of 'choice' by paying for private schools, moving to areas with 'better' schools or by supplementing school education with private coaching. In Australia, many commentators (for example, Connell, 1998; Kenway & Epstein, 1996; Marginson, 1996; Preston, 2004) echo these concerns about the marginalisation of already less privileged groups via school markets.

Having critiqued the way markets in education are promoted, discussed the implications for 'class' and social equity more broadly, the next section now explores these understandings through a focus on the Australian context, and specifically speaks about the bulk of the population –identified by Michael Pusey (2003) as 'middle Australia'.

2.5 Educational marketisation in Australia and NSW

The history of school education in Australia is characterised by a diverse and changing mix of government and non-government provision with evolving changes in State and Federal government responsibilities. Even after Federation in 1901 schooling was principally a state concern and the administration of the school system remains largely so. However over time, the Federal government has taken on a greater role through funding arrangements for educational provision and for special priorities such as basic skills testing and literacy programs.

Until relatively recently there has been a shortage of Australian literature on school choice – both in terms of empirical research and of a theoretical and conceptualising nature (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2004). In 2004 the Independent Schools Council of Australia listed only seven quantitative studies into school choice undertaken by; government (DEST), newspapers (SMH/the Age), and independent researchers (Seeney Research, Gibsons Consulting, Saulwick and Associates) for the federal government, for the Catholic Diocese of Toowoomba and for the Independent Schools Councils of Victoria and Queensland (Wilson, 2004). Only two quantitative studies were identified: (Aitchison, 2002; McCarthy, 2004). Perhaps this relative shortage in research can be explained in part because the experiences of marketisation have varied between states and because market orientated policies have a relatively short and less aggressive history compared to the experience in the UK or New Zealand.

Markets in Australian school education have always and have long been used by the wealthy to secure advance through to the professions and/ privilege. In Australia before WWII secondary schooling was a minor component of the education system: "a small device sitting on top of a mass primary system" (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982 p. 15). As elsewhere after the War secondary schooling expanded rapidly, but the system remained divided and differentiated, especially between government and non-government schooling [1]. In 1945 the number of secondary students was 181,000, it was 771,000 in 1965 and 1.1 million in 1975 (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982). Support for secondary education was strong across social classes, amongst new immigrants and with both the Liberal and Labor parties who embraced universal education as part of the liberal approach of the welfarism of the times. In 1982, Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett documented a healthy market for the 'ruling class'. The difference now is that educational markets are becoming mainstream.

A enduring feature of Australian schooling is the existence of a Catholic sector. By 1880 the Catholics had already established their own schooling system catering primarily for the working class Catholic population. At different times the sector has been embraced or ignored by governments. By the mid twentieth century the Federal government instituted the first version of state-aid to non-government schools (Campbell, 2005). The 1962 decision by the Menzies Liberal government to offer state-aid to Catholic schools (Marginson, 1996) started a tend popular with Australian governments ever since (Campbell, 2005).

Catholic schools participated in the post war expansion of secondary schooling fuelled by the baby boom and a migration program that included a considerable proportion of Catholics. This led to acute overcrowding in Catholic schools. Broadly speaking however, the middle classes supported government schooling, especially in NSW where

[1] The terminology used to describe government and non-government schools varies. In Britain independent non-government schools describe themselves as 'public schools' Similarly in some parts of Australia, there are some (usually the older) independent non-government schools that call themselves 'public schools'. However, confusingly, this term is also used in some states (eg NSW) as a descriptor for government primary schools. In this thesis, where possible, I use the term 'government' school to describe schools that are funded primarily by government, even though such schools may gather additional funding from parent contributions and/corporations. I use the term 'non-government' schools to include independent 'private' schools, Catholic systemic schools and other independent religious and non-religious schools, even though almost all of these schools receive government funding.

the government selective high school system offered a special education for the talented and/ hard working middle class - which was mainly Protestant (Campbell, 2005).

At the same time that the baby boomers increased their participation and retention rates, the Australian government's expenditure on education fell (Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000). Through a confluence of political expediency (Catholic voters, whose children frequented the largely overcrowded and unfunded Catholic schools, made up a significant proportion of the electoral base of the Labor party), a desire for greater systematisation of education, and a need to respond to the growing costs of universal secondary education, the Whitlam Labor government instituted mechanisms to centralise school funding and to give greater control to the Federal government (Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000).

From the mid 1970s federal and state governments initiated policies that variously supported equity-orientated initiatives and greater school based freedoms (for self management) as well as reforms that increased centralised controls. National equity-focussed policies on girls and indigenous education were initiated (eg the *National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools*, the *National and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy*) and nation-wide curriculum policies were introduced (eg *National Curriculum Statements and Profiles*) as education became increasingly controlled from, and accountable to, the central government.

State-initiated restructuring reforms of the 1980s and 1990s included policies favouring devolution, for example *Better schools* (1987) in Western Australia, *Towards the 90s* (1987) in the Northern Territory, *Focus on Schools* (1990) in Queensland, *Schools Renewal* (1989) in NSW, and *Schools of the Future* (1993) in Victoria (Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). During this time also structural changes impacted significantly on the tertiary sector with an expansion of student places and the parallel increase in charges to students who had previously enjoyed free university education (Lingard, 2000; Marginson, 1997a).

By the mid 1990s successive educational policy changes had significantly altered the landscape of Australian schooling compared to the previous 100 years. Framed by "an even stronger commitment to social disinvestment" (Lingard, 2000, p. 86), the Howard

Liberal Coalition government consolidated the basic direction of the Labor Party changes to education, incorporating a downgrading of equity concerns and a more antagonistic approach to the union movement (Lingard, 2000; Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000) and ever greater centralisation. Under the Liberal Coalition government the marketplace discourse promoted the individual consumer's right to 'choice' over notions of social obligation or 'public good'. Alan Reid (2002) proposes that this process can be best understood as a global shift in thinking that situated education as a 'positional good' chosen and consumed by individuals for personal, not societal benefit. This idea of education as a positional good is explored further in Chapter 8 in the context of choice.

In contrast to many developing Asian countries and other western democracies, Australia has continued to reduce its proportional expenditure on education. In 2000 Australia's expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP was below 4.5%; well below the average for OECD countries at the time and contrasts to the 6.4% of GDP expended on education in 1974-75 (Lingard, Mills, & Hayes, 2000, p. 101). Further, Australia ranked 21st out of 24 OECD countries in terms of overall education expenditure, and third in terms of expenditure on private education (Blackmore, 2000b).

2.5.1 The contemporary landscape

The structure of Australian society has changed markedly over the last 25 years with increasing numbers of families worse off financially as a consequence of economic restructuring (Fincher & Nieuwenhuysen, 1998; Mackay, 1999; Pusey, 2003; Raskall, 1996). Alongside the massive structural changes in the provision of education, the economic dependence of most Australians on secondary education has also grown.

Campbell and Sherington (2004) claim a local response to marketisation policies in NSW has been to 'rescue' government schools through the re-introduction of the principle of selection. In the post war period, the Wyndham scheme first adopted in NSW, became the Australian model for the comprehensive system. At the time of its institution, it was promoted as socially integrative, offering one coeducational site for the education of all classes through a broad curriculum. Although popularly embraced for decades, the comprehensive system has been critiqued by Teese and Polesel (2003)

who show that the assessment regime and curriculum militated against any significant alteration to social differentiation.

Teese and Polesel (2003) argue that throughout the post war expansion of secondary education, competitive individual achievement was promoted, but simultaneously undermined by "strategies of collective academic security which institutionalise success and failure" along socio-economic lines (p. 11). The form of schooling may have changed with the introduction of the comprehensive high but the dominant position of the competitive academic curriculum remained unchanged (Connell, 1998).

The Australian government has changed the way it provides school education so that almost all Australian non-government schools now receive federal funding to some degree or another. This "paradigmatic change in the nature of public education" (Reid, 2002, p. 571) has undermined the distinction between public and private, and created an unequal system with residualising effects for schools clustered in working class areas (Connell, 2003). Increased governmental support to the non-government sector, has resulted in an expansion of the non-government sector – both Catholic and independent. The Catholic sector now accounts for 70 per cent of private schools (Doherty & Thompson, 2004). Catholic education in Australia is of two kinds: the largest section, the 'systemic system' charges low fees and caters for families of low and middle income earners. These schools are part of a centralised system of Catholic Education that oversees and regulates such things as curriculum and fees. The remaining Catholic schools have more in common with the elite 'private' or independent schools who have always catered for the ruling class (Connell, 2003).

Over the last 10 years in particular, Australia has witnessed an unabated flight of students and resources, from government schools to the private sector. In Sydney there has been a particularly strong growth in religious schools, notably Anglican and Christian schools. The change in funding arrangements favouring the private sector has lead to changing school demographics. Between 1993 and 2003, government secondary school enrolments grew by 1.2% while non-government secondary school enrolments grew by 22.3% (Burke, 2004). In 1990 government school enrolments made up 72% of total enrolments, Catholic enrolments were 20% and independent schools were 8%, by

2004 that had changed to 68%, 20% and 12% respectively (Independent Schools Council of Australia and AIS, 2005).

In NSW the number of independent primary and secondary schools has almost doubled in the past 13 years. For example, independent schools numbered 262 in 1993 and in 2005 there were 432 registered independent schools with most growth being in schools with less than 250 students (O'Hagan, 2006, 9 February). Most of the growth has been in Christian schools, non-religious independent schools, Anglican and Muslim institutions (Grimshaw, 2002). Nevertheless, most students are still educated in government schools (67%) with 22% enrolled in the Catholic sector and 11% in the private sector (O'Hagan, 2006, 9 February).

The table below reproduced from research conducted by Preston (2004) indicates how the different school sectors cater for Australia's indigenous population, its poor and its rich. These figures clearly show that school education is strongly divided along economic lines: overall it is the government sector that caters for the poor while the rich are segregated off into the private sector.

Table 1. Proportion of students in Government, Catholic, other nongovernment and all primary and secondary schools with very low family incomes, high family incomes, and who are Indigenous, Australia, 2001

	Government	Catholic	Other nongovt	All schools
Very low family income (less than $400/week)				
Primary	13%	7%	7%	12%
Secondary	11%	6%	6%	9%
High family income (more than $1,500/week)				
Primary	20%	31%	41%	24%
Secondary	23%	39%	52%	31%
Indigenous students				
Primary	4.6%	1.7%	1.5%	3.8%
Secondary	3.8%	1.1%	0.9%	2.5%

Source: Preston 2003 (original source: ABS 2001 Census custom tables)

Table 1 indicates that

- compared with both Catholic and other nongovernment schools, government schools have almost twice the proportion of students with very low family incomes (below the level of income of two parent families on benefits)
- the proportion of students with high family incomes in Catholic primary and secondary schools is more than 50 per cent higher than the proportion in government schools
- the proportion of students with high family incomes in other nongovernment primary and secondary schools is more than twice as high as the proportion in government schools
- compared with both Catholic and other nongovernment schools, government schools have around three times the proportion of Indigenous students.

(Preston, 2004)

School attendance is characterised by social division but also, once at school, experiences differ markedly. It is still the children of manual workers who do least well at school, are most likely to leave school early, will find it more difficult to get full employment, and in addition, face a curriculum that further mitigates against their success (Teese & Polesel, 2003). As a group, it is the children of the more affluent who have done better from schooling, and in this regard, marketisation has had little effect.

On the other hand there is much to suggest significant shifts are taking place for the bulk of the population; those in the middle and lower sections of society. Campbell and Sherington (2004) argue that the adoption of the comprehensive system failed to affect the continuation of the existing single-sex and academically selective secondary schools that educated many of NSW's political and social elite. As it seems the comprehensive system is currently under attack from market policies, it will be interesting to see how new resultant formulations and systems compare in terms of such equity concerns.

With the implementation of market oriented school policies, schooling in Sydney is a vivid illustration of how "policies of choice encourage differentiation" (Reid, 2002, p. 575). As the demographics of Sydney's older suburbs have changed from a mix of working class and migrant communities to the aspirational more moneyed professional families, class loyalties and practices are strained and are changing. Policy changes supported by a rhetoric of individualised rather than social rights have forced both schools and families to participate in the competition market (Pusey, 2003; Reid, 2002). Whatever the shortcomings of the comprehensive system, this new system has far fewer protections for those less able to compete.

2.5.2 Middle Australia and market-orientated schooling

As we have seen Australian schooling has always been divided along social lines with the rich and the Catholics choosing schooling outside the government sector. It is clear however that contemporary market-orientated policies seem aimed at wooing the middle class away from government schooling. As observed in one newspaper, this adoption of policies of choice now appears to be accepted by both major political parties "… it is obvious the Labor Party has finally realised that aspirational voters want choice in education…" (Donnelly, 2006).

This rhetoric of choice and the increased availability of government funding for non-government schools has made more schools more affordable to groups not traditionally consumers of private education. The work of Australian social researchers such as Pusey (1996, 1998, 2003), Mackay (1997, 1999, 2005) Zappala, Green and Parker (2000) offer suggestions for the popularity of non-government schooling amongst middle Australians.

While Pusey (or for that matter Mackay and others) are not without their critics (see for example, Andrew Norton from the Centre for Independent Studies, 2003) the work of these researchers points to the increased economic instability and resultant anxieties of middle and lower income groups.

Pusey (1996) claims that from 1945 to 1965 Australia had the most equal distribution of income in the world but that currently the gap between the top and bottom deciles of

household income is “the most unequal after the USA and Britain” (Pusey, 2003). This change in income pattern from the so-called ‘picket fence to staircase’ may go some way to explaining why the middle class is now being described as ‘anxious’ (Thrupp, 2001), ‘fearful’ (Ball & Vincent, 2001), or ‘aspirational’.

Perhaps the greatest social change brought about by the neoliberal policies has been the ‘hollowing out’ of the middle of Australian society: “we are simultaneously creating a rapidly-growing rich class and a rapidly-growing poor class” (Mackay, 1999, p. 112). The rich are getting richer and the poor, poorer (Harding, Lloyd, & Greenwell, 2005; Mackay, 2005; Zappala, Green, & Parker, 2000). “There has been a substantial upward redistribution of income from the bottom 70% of income earners to the top 10%” and the bottom 20% have seen, at best, no improvement in their economic situation due to rapidly tightening social security provisions” (Pusey, 2003, p. 6-7).

Of particular interest to the present study are the views of Pusey’s middle Australia about education. For the more affluent half of his participants; the professional, managerial and technical workers, a university education is the norm. For those in manual, semi-skilled and lower service jobs, the lack of tertiary education is a barrier that marks and reinforces their relative disadvantage. Pusey says the respondents were “keenly, and often resentfully, aware of the impact that education has on their life chances” (2003, p. 55). Those in the manual and low service jobs, already on low incomes, were nearly twice as likely to have been made redundant in recent years as members of the more affluent middle.

While both groups are critical of economic reforms, there is no doubt that those in the lower socio-economic group are living closer to the edge and have far fewer options in the job market. Although Pusey’s study did not explicitly pursue questions about schooling and choice, it would be safe to extrapolate from what is reported above, that these participants consider that education can have a significant impact on their children’s life chances. It is unclear just how this view might translate into school choice making, however, clearly their choices would be limited by their relative lack of spatial mobility and financial resources. Pusey reports that some “feel committed to putting their kids through a (generally modest-ranking) private school” because “reform has eroded the public schools” (2003, p. 98).

The argument about whether or not some groups are better or worse off under the neoliberal education reforms is important however limited by the capacity to isolate the significance of education from other aspects of economic reform. And further, attempts to compare past and current can suffer from a false notion of some glorious pre-market time. It does seem however, that compared to the era of welfarist social democratic thinking, today's policy agenda has largely abandoned attempts to use education to achieve greater social equality (T. Edwards, 2002). Like other countries, Australia's adoption of market-orientated education policies has altered notions of equality away from egalitarian objectives in favour of individual choice where consumers are encouraged to seek personal and familial advantage. Clearly in such a context those individuals with the social and economic capital to seize the opportunity will be greatly advantaged. This is a theme that is returned to particularly Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to give an account of the major studies and dominant thinking on school marketisation, particularly as it has been relevant to the Australian context. This review of the literature has not been complete – the field is too broad, rather it has been guided and bounded by an interest in the implications for families and their relations with their schools. This orientation has been coloured by a concern to identify the spaces where gender fails to be acknowledged in order to provide a frame for the family-oriented discussions that follow.

This review of the literature continues in Chapter 3 where the focus is more closely on familial and gendered matters. The aim of Chapter 3 is to turn the attention from the educational market to the domestic front – the source of the customers for the markets. By purposefully attending to families, and especially to the role of mothers in families, Chapter 3 foregrounds this often neglected aspect of school marketisation.

3. FAMILIES AND MARKETS

3.1 Introduction

The last chapter was the first of two reviews of the literature relevant to the current study. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on school marketisation. In doing so it drew heavily from the British research and theorising around the origins and effects of markets in the provision of school education in that country. It also reviewed the literature on school marketisation in Australia with a special focus on the experience in New South Wales.

This chapter, Chapter 3, reviews the literature on families in the context of school markets in order again to provide a rich context for the analysis and discussion of findings in the current study. Like Chapter 2, this chapter is influenced by research and theorising from Britain but to a lesser degree since there is significant literature on family life in post-welfare, post-war Australia.

Chapter 3 brings into focus the familial and gendered dimensions of Australia's changing social life particularly over the period of neoliberal reform. The chapter highlights the connections between neoliberal economic changes and changing social and familial circumstances that are the context for reviewing the ways that contemporary Australian families and their schools interact. The review of the literature looks at families and how they interface with schooling in the education market, in particular the final section explores the gendered dimensions of this engagement. It is in the reviewing of this aspect of the literature that it becomes clear that there is a paucity of research and theorising into the everyday gendered and familial effects of the marketisation of school education in an Australian context.

3.2 Families and markets

Over the last 25 – 30 years, families and family life in the industrialised world have changed markedly. In Australia, typically families are smaller and there is greater diversity of structure whereby one-parent families, combined families and families with unmarried and remarried and same sex parents are more prevalent (Goward, 2005). Globalisation has helped create greater diversity within partnerships and families along

linguistic, cultural and religious lines. Economic restructuring has required that families be more mobile, moving to where the jobs are, often resulting in reduced availability of local and free family supports such as child care and aged care. More families now also rely on two incomes and/ increased levels of debt to maintain adequate, or even minimum standards of living.

In every way families have become more reliant on markets for their everyday economic needs and increasingly for goods and services that were previously separate from economic markets. Waring says that families have been at the receiving end of an extraordinary expansion in the colonising power of economics (1999). In economic terms the impact has been profound and unequal. During the years of neoliberal economic restructuring two income families have managed the best, while single-income, two parent families with children have fared the worst (Pusey, 2003). The rate of poverty in Australia grew especially rapidly over the second half of the 1990s, and by 2000 one in eight Australians lived in income poverty, with a rate higher for children than adults (Harding, Lloyd, & Greenwell, 2005). Over the period male incomes in general have declined, and in 2000 the poverty rate for men was slightly higher than for women due largely to higher rates of unemployment amongst men (Harding, Lloyd, & Greenwell, 2005). As a consequence, families have become more dependent on a second income to compensate for the real fall in household income. Over this period women entered the workforce in greater numbers and have remained there for longer periods of time.

The changes to family structure, plus the prevalence of the dual income family with reduced household income has contributed to changes in patterns and attitudes around "parenting" with an even greater reliance on market-mediated support from outside the family. In Australia there appears to be fairly widespread recognition that families are struggling in the current economic climate (Harding, Lloyd, & Greenwell, 2005; Mackay, 2005; Pusey, 2003; Weeks & Quinn, 2000b) although there are differing views about why this is so and how this should be addressed. Although families have changed dramatically since the post war period, research and theorising into families has tended to be fractured and often reactive to top-down policy changes. Much Australian research into families emanates from the Australian Institute of Family Studies, which like other centres for family studies is overtly concerned with the interface between

families and government policy. The focus of most current research into families has been to collect evidence of the nature and extent of family changes and of their economic condition, especially vis a vis policies around work and family life, childcare and family support.

While more recently there have been a number of important studies into factors that effect educational performance such as socio-economic status, family effects and school effects (such as Williams et al., 1991; Mukherjee, 1995; Ainley et al., 1995, cited in Zappala & Considine, 2001), historically there has been less interest by social researchers into the everyday relationships between families and schooling. The landmark study by Connell et al (1982) remains unrivalled in its detailed exploration into the experiences of Australian families and their relationship with schooling. There is a lack of information about how families and schools relate to each other in the current context of changed families and contemporary market driven educational changes. We know even less about the gendered effects of these educational changes on families in regard to every day roles and responsibilities, and particularly what this means for mothers and mothering in the Australian context.

This thesis has already made clear how post-war industrialised economies have shifted from welfarist to market approaches. Section 3.3 has two broad concerns; to explore traditional and contemporary understandings of 'the family' particularly as structural changes have impacted on family structures and family life in Australia, and to examine the implications for mothers in this context. Section 3.4 aims to explore the resultant implications for the relationships between families and schools. Section 3.5 turns the spotlight more explicitly to the gendered aspects of familial engagement in the school marketplace highlighting in particular, the gaps in our knowledge about the role of Australian mothers in school choice making and their role in the family-school relationship.

3.3 Australian families: Changing times

After WW II, Australia, like other industrialised post-war economies, experienced a marriage boom along with a return, for most women, to full-time mothering and home duties. The 'traditional family' of this time was the basis of Australian welfarism and was constructed around the idea of a male as bread-winner with a female partner as a

dependent carer. This post war view of the family permeated every aspect of social, legal and political life; social policy was thus gendered, girls and boys were schooled differently, wages and occupations were fixed according to gender, and so too were the roles and responsibilities of individuals within the family.

However, from the 1970s, this 1950s ideal of the '**traditional family**' was already being seriously eroded. Conventional understandings of the family began to be publicly contested (Edgar, 2000), especially by second wave feminist writers (Bryson, 2000). By the 1980s 'the family' had become "thoroughly politicised" through policy and public debate around such things as family welfare, single parenting and divorce, family planning, and the "medicalisation" of families through family therapy and other interventionalist practices (Edgar, 2000). By the 1990s the traditional family had been largely replaced by an essentially gender-neutral model, in policy terms at least (Bryson, 2000). Policy changes and media practices have also impacted on the separation of 'private' and 'public' spheres of familial experience. Changing views and practices around sex and gender along with the influence of feminism have altered families and family relations. Nevertheless, despite these considerable changes, many views about the gendered nature of families remain based on ideas of 'natural' rather than socially constructed notions of gender (Bryson, 2000; Connell, 2002).

Nevertheless, the 'traditional family' with one income earner and one dependent housewife and mother, still retains a powerful hold on the public imagination. The fact that the man as the family bread winner was embedded in the Australian wage-fixing system has had profound and long term effects (Probert, 1989). The families at the lower end of Pusey's middle Australia were more likely to aspire to this view (Pusey, 2003) and it "continues to shape men's identities and dominate the structure of their lives, often at the expense of family relationships" (Goward, 2005, p.6). Certainly the current conservative Howard Liberal government still promotes the traditional family as an ideal (Bryson, 2000).

For the majority of Australians in the 21st century, their real life experience of 'family' is markedly different to that of earlier generations. A particular feature of the changing landscape in Australia is the **diversity** of the experience of family and family life. One measure of this is the rich cultural, religious and linguistic diversity of the Australian

population. Australia is now "second only to Israel in the numbers and range of migrant population" (Pettman, 1992, cited in Weeks & Quinn, 2000a, p.10). Besides immigrating couples, the diversity of families is also a reflection of patterns of intermarriage between culturally diverse groups and of the growing practice of overseas adoption by Australian families (Weeks & Quinn, 2000a). And yet despite the cultural ideals shared by many non-Anglo Saxon and indigenous Australians of an extended family household, economic imperatives mitigate against many achieving this ideal. The modern Australian family remains essentially neo-local and conjugal (Bittman & Pixley, 2000).

3.3.1 Marriage and parenting: Structural changes

Patterns of **marriage** have changed in other ways too; Australians marry later, there is less remarriage and the number of single (never married) households is growing and likely to continue to grow (Weeks & Quinn, 2000a). The trend towards older age marriage continues with both the medium age at marriage and for first marriage rising again in 2004, and this is reflected in rising proportions of older parents (ABS, 2004). Divorce is more common with about 16% of children likely to experience divorcing parents before they reach sixteen years of age (Edgar, 2000) and in 2004 30% of remarriages had children under 16 years of age (ABS, 2004).

There has also been a growth in single parent families, ex-nuptial births increased from 9.3% in 1971 to 25.7% in 1994 (Edgar, 2000), although, unlike the British and American experiences, Australia has seen a drop in the rate of single teenage pregnancies (Probert & Macdonald, 1998). In 1992 one-parent families made up 17% of all families with dependent children and that figure rose to 21% in 1997 where it has remained steady (ABS, 2003). Many of these changes are both gendered and classed – it is predominantly the higher income earners who delay parenthood, while low income earners, especially young women, remain more committed to the traditional views of motherhood (Probert & Macdonald, 1998) and the traditional family (Pusey, 2003). Nevertheless, in Australia, most families are couple families (84% in 2003) (ABS, 2003) and most children spend their whole childhood in two-parent families (80 % in 1998) (Pusey, 2003).

Relationships between family members have also changed significantly in tandem with changes to family size, shape, membership and form. Alongside structural changes to the family, attitudes around children and **parenting** have also shifted. "The place of children and the meaning of parenthood are becoming more and more problematic" (Edgar, 2000, p. 28). An ongoing trend in the first world, is for first time parents to be older and to have fewer children, and, compared to previous centuries fewer children die in childhood. Over the same time our view of children, 'childhood' and 'adolescence' have changed as children have become the focus of family life (Bittman & Pixley, 2000). Increasing numbers of children experience different forms of parenting over their childhood as changing formations of marriage and non-marriage affect the membership of the family. Many children now experience parenting from adults who may, or may not live in the same home; from their biological and/step-parents, and/ from one parent only.

The **life cycle** of the family has altered with delayed parenting as parents remain in the workforce for longer before starting a family. The reduced numerical size of households plus falling birth rates and increasing longevity have resulted in significant cultural shifts. As more young people delay their entry into the workforce until after further education, more young adults remain economically dependent on their parents and stay at home longer. This phenomenon of the 'revolving door' (Goward, 2005) stands in contrast to family life patterns of a generation ago whereby young adults left the family home to start their own at much earlier age. For example in 1976, 41% of people in their twenties had started their own family whereas that was only true for 20% in 2001 (ABS, 2005).

Compared to previous generations, the altered contemporary life cycle of families and the increase in working parents has brought many and profound effects. The delayed commencement of parenting and the reduced number of children has altered parenting and caring roles. Parents of newborns are now likely to be older and they are also more likely to be caring for aged parents concurrent with caring for their own children. Simultaneously for the current generation of (working) parents there is a greater and growing reliance on grandparents for childcare and a greater expectation for fathers to be involved in child care as well as housework. For many families these different and

evolving circumstances can add to the stress of competing needs and anxieties within family life.

3.3.2 Working for the family: Paid and unpaid

The impact of the market has meant that the lives of all family members have been altered along with the breakdown of the traditional 'male provider model'.

> Before the separation of workplace from home life that emerged with the industrial revolution, children had been an economic benefit to families (Caldwell, 1982; Fukuyama, 1999; Gilding, 1991). Now, parenthood is a major cause of financial disadvantage. (Craig, 2002b)

Housework, or the management and maintenance of domestic tasks has historically been considered the domain of women and mothers in particular. After the Second World War, women were encouraged to return to domestic duties in order to fulfil their new, post-war obligations to society. In the 1950s the idea of the 'housewife' as productive citizen was advocated by government and through the popular press in service of the welfarist ideology of the time. Johnson and Lloyd's (2004) interesting commentary on the Australian housewife shows how at that time, women themselves organised collective action around issues central to women's domestic lives. Women-centred and directed collective organisations such as the Australian Housewives Association (AHA), or the Communist, Union of Australian Women (UAW) lobbied around issues calling for improvements to the working conditions of 'housewives' such as improved housing, childcare, and support for nursing mothers, as well as wages for mothers and equal pay in the workforce (Johnson & Lloyd, 2004).

The concerns of these housewives were anchored in the everyday domestic realities of home and family life management. Their housewifely roles were ascribed entirely on the basis of gender, and although there were some class effects these were not as entrenched as occurred in some other countries. For example, Australia's post war middle class never employed servants to the extent that occurred in England (Johnson & Lloyd, 2004).

Housework and childcare were important issues for the feminist movements of the 1970s. Ann Oakley's pioneering study of housework (1974) had a major impact on sociological interest in the role of women vis a vis domestic duties (Baxter, 1998;

Gardiner, 1997). Nevertheless as women moved into the labour force, the focus of organised women's movements shifted from supporting women's work in the home to advocating for equal wages outside the home (Game & Pringle, 1984; Johnson & Lloyd, 2004).

Over these decades technology improved housing and labour saving devices so the physically demanding 'burden of housework' was relieved, but not removed. In fact Robert's (1995) account of British working class women between 1940 – 1970 indicates increasing amounts of household tasks over the period. In Australia the ABS's 1992 pilot time use survey showed women spent about 22 hours per week on domestic activities compared to men's 12 hours (Baxter, 1998) . Waring (1999) also reports on time-studies which show no diminishing of the time that women spend on household tasks. So, social, familial and technological changes may have altered the form of housework - but certainly not its gendered nature. Contemporary research consistently points to women carrying the major load of domestic work irrespective of their participation in the paid labour force (Bittman & Pixley, 2000; Craig, 2002b; , 2005; Pusey, 2003; Vincent, Ball, & Pietikainen, 2004; Waring, 1999).

Changing economic factors have combined with Australia's declining fertility rate and aging population to further aggravate the unequal gendered burden of **care** within families. It is largely women, who do the caring in our society – in both the paid and unpaid workforce. As the median age for mothers in Australia has now moved to 30.5 years (ABS, 2005) there is a strong and growing likelihood of caring overlaps – the so-called 'sandwich problem' of older women caring for children and elderly parents combined with paid labour force participation and unpaid domestic work (Goward, 2005; Pusey, 2003). Women are the primary carers of children, the elderly and those with disabilities. Mostly this work is voluntary, much of it in addition to paid employment: 59 percent of unpaid carers are also employed in the workforce (Goward, 2005). Women are nearly three times as likely as men to provide primary care to someone with a disability or who is older; for example, 88.5 percent of elderly people are cared for by their daughters (Goward, 2005)

The primary form of care provided by families is the care of children by mothers. Bittman and Pixley (2000) estimate that mothers of infant children (0 -1 years) spend

about 90 hours per week on childcare and related activities. Even when men indicate a willingness to participate in childrearing activities they mostly only do so in terms of 'assisting' (Bulbeck, 2004 cited in Goward, 2005). "Bringing up children remains, for the overwhelming majority, the work of women, whether mothers or other women carers" (Vincent, Ball, & Pietikainen, 2004, p. 14).

Typically as families have become more isolated from their communities and from traditional forms of familial support, they have had to become more dependent on the market. Increasing numbers of households now turn to the market to outsource housework such as cleaning, cooking, ironing and childcare. In Britain, the domestic services industry is worth $4 billion a year and in Australia, cleaning firms are growing at a rate of 20% each year (Khoo, 2005). British research shows the classed nature of housework. In Walkerdine and Lucey's (1989) study, middle class women elevated housework by making it a site for teaching their children, while working class women regarded housework as a mother's job which they prioritise over playing with their children. In the study of middle class women by Vincent, Ball and Pietikainen (2004) more than a decade later, these professional women chose to stay at home to be with their children and facilitated this focus by outsourcing 'housework' to the market.

Parenting is now commonly mediated through markets; by entering the labour force, by paying for housework, child-care, before and after school care, school holiday care – and increasingly schooling. It seems, despite the not inconsiderable social changes around the role and status of women generally, the nature of parenting has changed more for mothers than for fathers. Studies continue to show that fathers play a secondary role in child care across social class and ethnicity, and unlike mothers "few young men see becoming a father as inhibiting their access to education or work" (Probert & Macdonald, 1998). Men's care is not only quantitatively different it is qualitatively different (Craig, 2002b; Vincent, Ball, & Pietikainen, 2004; West, Noden, Edge, & David, 1998). There are also differences in the way parenting and care work is played out amongst different groups and in relation to the market.

British studies into mothering and paid work have been influential in building a picture of mothers' attitudes around **combining parenting and paid work**. Some studies indicate that care work (both paid and unpaid) parenting and child care is rationalised

differently (Vincent, Ball, & Pietikainen, 2004; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). The middle class women in Vincent et al.'s study (2004) didn't hesitate to engage the market for childcare, although their rationales for doing so involved articulating choices ranging from investing in full-time mothering to full-time labour force participation. Pusey's study reports high levels of anxiety and guilt by middle class women about the negative effects of participating in the paid labour force on the family, especially on the children. These women felt pressured by the desire to fulfil both traditional views of motherhood and mothering, plus pursue fulfilling working lives where for most, the "equal gender contract had not yet fully emerged" (Pusey, 1996, p.100).

Families are both pressured and trapped into entering the labour force and working more rather than less (Goward, 2005; Pusey, 2003). Within one generation the proportion of young women entering the **workforce** has increased from 41 to 71 percent (1970 – 1996) (Pusey, 2003). In 2004 the labour force participation for women was 56.1 % and 71.5 % for men and unlike men, patterns of workforce participation for women is strongly linked to the ages and childcare needs of their children (Goward, 2005).

Australians are working "longer hours, with greater intensity and for many with greater job insecurity" (Goward, 2005, p. 4) and with negative impacts especially for women caught in the 'work/life' collision' (Pocock & Clarke, 2004) and resulting in stress-related illnesses (Wooden, 2002). Lyn Craig's analysis of time use studies (2002a; , 2002b) show clearly the division of labour between mothers and fathers, and tellingly, of the personal sacrifices made by mothers to engineer time with their children. Working women bear significant costs to their own well-being rather than allow their children or their employers to be deprived of time spent with them (Craig, 2005).

The average hours worked has increased in recent years with particular relevance for the parenting years; men in full time employment work an average of 45 hours, for females it is 41 hours (Goward, 2005). Pusey proposes that families have been significantly negatively affected through a confluence of declining male earnings, a reduced working life span (via later entry into and earlier retirement from full-time employment), increased casualisation and insecurity of work, increased household indebtness and privatisation and government withdrawal of measures supporting families (2003).

For Australian families the progressive undermining of the family's economic security along with the entry of women into the market has resulted in women undertaking greater loads of unpaid family labour (providing family based welfare and a safety net for hard times). Women are further disadvantaged with respect to retirement incomes, educational payments, access to higher-income jobs and home ownership (Pusey, 2003). Markets have been implicit in the creation of this situation and also offer themselves as the solution, thus families have become ever more reliant on the market for the everyday interactions (Pusey, 2003; Waring, 1999; Weeks & Quinn, 2000b).

For parents, but especially for women, decision making about paid work and child care involved considerable personal adjustments aimed at accommodating the tensions and fragilities of multiple demands of changing constructions of mothering in a market context. Such tensions are keenly played out for mothers at the interface of mothering and the education of their children, as schooling and parenting changes thus affecting the relationships between schools and families.

3.4 The family-school relationship

For over a hundred years schooling has been a fundamental aspect of Australian family life. The relationship between families and schools is now a universal and central experience for most of the world's citizens. The relationship is symbiotic, dynamic and complex. In its simplest equation, schools need families to provide pupils, and families need schools to educate their children so they are able to compete for jobs in the modern, globalised workforce. This relationship has evolved in tandem with changes in Australia's social fabric, with and through the interference of government, and most significantly in accordance with the needs of an evolving economy. In order to understand the family-school relationship this section briefly reviews the historical circumstances of family's connections to schooling in Australia. It then moves to explore how contemporary families are positioned in the contemporary educational market and the implications of this for the relationship between the two.

Prior to the industrial revolution children were regarded as an economic unit within the family or tribe and as such even relatively young children worked (Bittman & Pixley, 2000). This flow of wealth into the family via the children continued, although somewhat abated by child protection laws of the 19th century, through to the 1900s

when the wealth flow became reversed from parents to their children. From the 1880s as the Education Acts imposed compulsory schooling throughout Australia, and parents were forced to send their children to school.

Initially parents were reluctant to have their children leave the home for non-income generating activities because children were a crucial component of the household labour force. At a time when women had an average of six children each (in the mid 1890s), older children were needed at home to help with domestic duties and childcare (Bittman & Pixley, 2000). But even still, it was not until 1910 when the birth rate had begun to decline that the majority of parents actively supported their children going to school (Bittman & Pixley, 2000). It took some time, particularly within working class families, for a child's identity to move from 'worker' to both 'worker' and 'student' until finally compulsory mass education contributed to the incompatibility of the child 'student' and 'worker' identities (Bilton et al., 1996). For those who attended school prior to the 1900s, most only stayed long enough to achieve basic literacy and numeracy, girls then left school to help with home duties, work in domestic service or get married. Secondary education, available through private schools, was generally only for the upper and middle classes (Campbell, 2005) and seen exclusively as a passage way to university and the professions (Connell, 1998; Reid, 2002).

In pre-WWII Australia, education was unashamedly gender-biased and class confirming. In the early post war period, secondary education remained relatively unimportant in the lives of most families as illustrated by the sharp decline in school enrolments at the statutory leaving age (Teese & Polesel, 2003). Even in the 1940s only a minority of primary school students went on to government high schools. Those who did attend post-primary education went to institutions such as 'domestic science' schools for girls, to 'central' and 'intermediate' schools in rural areas, or to a variety of technical and vocational training colleges for boys (Campbell & Sherington, 2004). Relatively few jobs required educational certification, and university was rarely considered by the vast majority of families. While private schools were regarded as the prerogative of the wealthy, in Australia the growth of the Catholic education sector and the existence in some states of an elite government 'selective' system unsettled the public/private binary.

In Britain, David (1993) proposed that within a discourse of equality of opportunity, secondary education was offered free to all, so that financial or social status was supposed not to be a barrier to advancement via meritocracy. In Australia the introduction of the comprehensive secondary school held out the offer of being socially integrative and co-educational (Campbell & Sherington, 2004). However Teese and Polesel (2003) argue that in effect, comprehensive schooling along with a segregated system of academically selective high schools preserved a class and gender-biased academic curriculum (eg NSW). As noted earlier, from the 1970s, a range of policy initiatives aimed at addressing persistent inequalities in achievement for certain social groups and gendered academic outcomes, were pursued via public education. "Public schools were spoken about as having important public purposes" in contrast to private schools who were regarded as serving discrete social, religious, or cultural groups (Reid, 2002, p. 574).

The boom economic conditions of the 1950s and 1960s altered the family-school relationship significantly and marked the beginning of a now permanent relationship between school and familial economic well being. Secondary schooling became crucial for channelling family aspirations and for access to the labour market (Teese & Polesel, 2003). From this time onwards schooling has become increasingly co-dependent on economic factors and the generalised economic requirement for pre-employment qualifications. Teese and Polesel show how, across all professions, there has been a progressive upgrading of certificated entry requirements.

> Over the last fifty years the economic dependence of the Australian population on secondary education has grown to such an extent that today, for most families, there is no refuge from the demands of academic success and no asylum for academic failure. At the end of the Second World War, every tenth child completed a school program leading to university. Today nearly eight out of ten do so.
>
> (Teese & Polesel, 2003)

From the post war period onwards, the economy came to play a significant role in mediating family-school relationships. In the 1950s and 1960s greater income security enabled parents to send their children to school for longer periods of time at the same time that the economy demanded more skilled workers. Conversely a downturn in the demand for higher levels of schooling matched the economic downturn of the 1970s (Teese & Polesel, 2003). The boom of the 1980s again saw a peak in young people

reaching the final year of schooling, apprenticeships for early school leavers were also permanently reduced and record numbers of students entered university (Teese & Polesel, 2003).

Such economic fluctuations entail ramifications for schools and families. Prior to the 20th century, families were shown to actively undermine efforts for compulsory schooling as particularly mothers bore the brunt of such policy mandates. Throughout the 20th century again families had to adapt to economic needs-based education policy changes. For recent generations of families, especially for those on lower income levels more vulnerable to changes in the labour force requirements, the relationship with schooling has at times been fraught. Schools have been variously positioned as holding pens for frustrated adolescents with few options outside of school, or as training yards in the mad spiral of credentialising. In either case families (and schools) are constrained by market forces from offering meaningful alternatives to their children.

The continuing importance of exams and credentials has put enormous pressures on individual children to succeed, but also on parents who are increasingly positioned to drive their children to compete for never ending qualifications in order for them to be able to compete for jobs (Pusey, 2003). This aspect of marketisation which permeates the entire education system directly impacts on the internal relationships and individual roles and identities within families, as well as on the family's external relationships with schools and the booming supplementary schooling industry (for example private coaching and exam preparation colleges, and extracurricular educational activities such as gifted and talented programs, music, drama and sporting clinics).

Ball and Vincent (2001) say that the behaviours and practices of the middle classes are derived from fear about securing social and economic reproduction, and that in their research parents frequently spoke of their concerns arising from increased competition and risk in education and the labour market. Pusey's work in Australia suggests it is not only the middle class, but also the more vulnerable on lower income levels, the 'working class' of middle Australia, that share these worries (2003). Particularly for families on lower incomes, disenchantment with school combines with poor motivation and failure (Polesel, 2002) with further ramifications for increased likelihood of delinquency (Putins, 1999, and Winters, 1997 cited in Polesel, 2002).

Irrespective of social standing, people rightly believe that ability is not enough to ensure the academic success of their children - and it appears this is gendered. Savage and Egerton (1977, cited in Ball & Vincent, 2001) found that the maintenance of class privileges for daughters was much more dependent on their ability scores than was the case for sons. In contrast, it seems boys were less dependent on academic scores as they had access to greater financial, social and cultural capital resources than did the girls.

Teese and Polesel's research (2003) showed that amongst other things, aspiration works in with ability to affect destinations of year 12 students. Again, gender and class are key aspects. Girls likely to leave school early do so only about half as often as boys, although in the locations of highest dropouts (metropolitan sites of low SES, semi-rural areas, and country regions) the rates are equal (Teese & Polesel, 2003, p. 134). In 1999 King estimated that 65% of female early leavers fail to return to any kind of education within the first few years of leaving (cited in Te Riele, 2003). Teese and Polesel (2003) reported on a 2001 Victorian study, where across the range of SES quintiles, boys were less likely than girls to apply for and accept offers of places at university. They reported that each fall in SES is mirrored in a fall in university entrance. At the lowest SES quintile only about 50% of girls and 46% of boys who reach the end of high school entered into any tertiary education in the following year (p. 181). Teese and Polesel also note the impact of 'family history or cultural tradition' on school success and aspirations for further study. Interestingly, they showed that in the lowest quintile, the relationship between SES and tertiary aspiration reverses for both genders. They suggest the high proportion of NESB and immigrant families such as the Chinese and Vietnamese who place a special value on education, could explain this turn around.

It seems that families feel pressured to accommodate this competitive drive for more and 'better' education of their children. The poorest however are often unable to support their children through the extra unproductive and often unhappy years at school, let alone through university and/ TAFE. For those who can afford it, parents and families are increasingly prepared to sustain greater levels of opportunity cost[2] in favour

[2] Economists refer to the 'opportunity cost' as the (economic) cost of what is foregone when making a choice between competing needs or wants. For example the opportunity cost for a family that chose to spend money on their child's private coaching may be to forgo buying a new car.

of spending on their child's education. Short term sacrifices are made because education is seen as an investment in the future of the particular child and also for the benefit of the whole family. Thus, the 21st century child is increasingly privatised as investment in it has grown (Bittman & Pixley, 2000) and parents have been made responsible for investing in their children's education in order to ensure they have the skills required by the economy (McLaren & Dyck, 2004). Many families are driven by the fear that a failure to invest in this way could result in long-term economic dependence of their children as well as significant, emotional and personal costs for all members of the family.

There are additional implications for families in terms of interpersonal roles and relationships. Bittman and Pixley point out how with the expanding time spent at school and in education, children remain quarantined off from adulthood. Education has become important "in demarcating 'childhood' more sharply" (2000, p. 37) thus unsettling parenting patterns, family life cycles and especially resulting in greater dependence for parents on employment. These changes have particular gendered implications for women and mothers who make the major contribution to the care of children and the maintenance of familial educational endeavours. Mothers contribute to the family economy through ever increasing levels of labour force participation, as well as via unpaid domestic labour, including that associated with schooling.

3.5 The gendered face of marketplace engagement

In the pre war period, the terms 'parents' and 'family' were explicitly defined along traditional gendered terms. In the welfarist post war period, the connection between the state and the family was strengthened at the same time that education policy advocated partnerships between parents and schools for the promotion of equal opportunity for the benefit of society as a whole (David, 1993). Within this discourse as we have seen, mothers were given a special role as educators, (David, 1993; Johnson & Lloyd, 2004; D. Richardson, 1993; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989) and working class families were regarded as in particular need of attention to help them fulfil this role. A broad range of strategies was undertaken to 'educate' these disadvantaged families especially by targeting mothers. Interestingly in education, the rhetoric of the times employed the term 'parent' even though the public and policy rhetoric clearly distinguished family members and their roles along gender lines (David, 1993).

In previous centuries mothers' concerns were for survival of their children, themselves, and the family. The childrearing manuals of the 1920 and 1930s provided authoritarian advice to mothers. By the 1940s "the rights and responsibilities of mothers were increasingly being defined in terms of what the child needed of them" (D. Richardson, 1993, p.40). By WWII "what benefited the child was not necessarily in the mother's best interests" (Weiss, 1978, p. 34 cited in D. Richardson, 1993).

Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) argue that the postwar rhetoric that positioned women as productive citizens located in their homes, served as an oppressive ideology particularly for working class women. Mothers were charged with the task of 'educating' their children and, she argues, the middle class women, via their roles as teachers and nurses and social workers, were inveigled to regulate the efforts of these working class women (see also Johnson & Lloyd, 2004). From the 1950s it was the mother that became "responsible for the child's intellectual growth" (D. Richardson, 1993 p. 42). Mothers generally did not presume to interfere with schooling as such, and parents were largely "kept at a distance from schools and the process of schooling" (Vincent & Tomlinson, 2001, p. 2041).

The task of educating the children was mostly limited to pre-school child-rearing practices and to ensuring children did their homework. Schools were regarded as the site for learning, and families especially mothers, were positioned outside this sphere and expected merely to support the efforts of the school-based professionals. In the 1970s and 1980s under the influence of child psychology there was a new emphasis: mothers "should recognise the need for expert advice and guidance" (D. Richardson, 1993 p. 54).

The policy interest and public discourse around families and schools shifted in the 1970s from 'equality of opportunity' to 'school effectiveness' with assertions of the necessity of parental involvement for the achievement of educational success (David, 2001). In the 1970s and 1980s there was an increased desire by schools to involve parents to help them support children in school learning. In Australia there were numerous studies and programs aimed at exploring and exploiting the home-school relationship for the purposes of developing children's literacy (Cairney, 2000). Much

of this work assumed parental deficit, and that mother's learning was subordinate to, and instrumental in their child's learning. Hutchinson (2001) proposes that in practice such family literacy programs were likely to reinforce "gendered discourses of literacy work within families" such that they could be viewed as programs of domestication. That is:

> … they confine participants to a sphere where labour is voluntary, autonomy is minimal and rewards are, for the most part, located in the altruistic domain of good mothering. (Hutchison, 2001, p. 49)

With the move to market-orientated schooling, instead of a socially purposeful partnership between families and their schools, families were encouraged to adopt a 'user pays' mentality and view schools as 'products'. Schools were also re-positioned to market themselves to attract 'desirable' parent consumers over less desirable or troublesome ones, thus essentially changing the dynamic between families and schools. At the same time, public and policy discourse advocated partnerships between schools and families.

Neoliberal policy changes have put families and especially 'parents' at the centre in two regards – at the point of choosing the 'right' school and as school 'partners' for the ongoing maintenance of the family-school relationship. In both cases there are unnamed gendered implications and a breach between the public and policy rhetoric and the everyday practice experienced by families. This section now explores these two aspects.

3.5.1 Parents' and schools: Keeping Mum invisible

As already noted, in the contemporary discourse of markets 'parents' are routinely nominated as the decision-making units within families for school choice and engagement. While schools themselves frequently employ gender as a differentiating marketing tool, for example in the promotion of single sex schools, the market rhetoric de-genders the parent as consumer and as school partner. The genderless individuals supposedly make choices and then participate in school communities independent of their context as mothers or fathers, and members of diverse and complex familial units with varying access to social and economic capital. Ball (2003) argues that choice cannot be "subsumed within a view of social action dominated entirely by rational

calculation" (p. 23). Behaviour is modified by a range of factors including agency and autonomy, and fluctuating individual constraints and resources.

For some time now, commentators and researchers have been interested in problematising the terminology of 'parent'. With the work of researchers like Diane Reay (1995), David, West and Ribbens (1994) and Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995) there was a growing recognition of the role of women and mothers in particular within education markets. However all too frequently the gender-neutral term 'parent' is still promoted thus 'disappearing' inequalities in parental relationships and privileging male participation where it is not warranted. Further this 'genderless' parenting "operates discursively to deny women's work" (Reay, 1995, p.338). Despite the continuing widespread use of the term 'parent' there seems little dispute now that in the day-to-day interactions of families and schools, it is primarily the mothers who undertake the main responsibility and the majority of the associated work (David, 1993; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Reay, 1998b). Increasingly the literature now recognises that women are the key school choice decision makers.

Coinciding with studies showing that fathers spend considerably less time on childcare than do mothers (Bittman & Pixley, 2000; Craig, 2002b) there has been a burgeoning of public interest in paternal involvement in child rearing (see for example Biddulph, 1988, 1994). While such texts indicate a welcome move toward greater equalisation of domestic and familial responsibilities, significant alterations to domestic divisions of labour are yet to be noted. In fact, Craig (2002a) argues that popular texts and discourses advocating paternal involvement do not aim to dismantle the primary role of mothers either as child carers or domestic labourers, but merely to supplement mother's roles. As children age, child care increasingly extends beyond the home to include a swathe of obligations associated with schools, sporting and other care-related activities.

Feminist critiques of market-orientated education reform have argued that calls for parental participation in the market have in fact reinforced gendered parenthood (David, 2001; David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, & Standing, 1997; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Reay, 1998b). Over the period of neoliberal economic reform, parents have been called upon to become involved in their child's education. The rhetoric associated with neoliberal reform presumes traditional forms of the family with two heterosexual

parents positioned to take on many of the welfare and community services abrogated by the government (Weeks, 2000). The policy push to have greater parental involvement in schooling is curiously blind to changed family structures and new economic and time constraints of dual income families.

In the contemporary educational market, the role for parents as 'educators' has expanded markedly and mothers in particular have become "responsible for the family's daily investment in children's schooling" (McLaren & Dyck, 2004, p. 8) whereby the 'good mothering' has become synonymous with good teaching (Hutchison, 2001). Besides the educative role that mothers and fathers play independent of institutionally based curricula, mothers in particular are involved in supporting and supplementing formal education through their own labour and increasingly via the market. For example, in the early childhood years parents are now expected to prepare their children prior to their entry into kindergarten and pre-school particularly with basic literacy skills (Hutchison, 2001). Parents, positioned as school 'partners' are also expected to support their child's school-based learning through the primary and secondary years by helping in the school and via home reading, homework and extra curricula activities.

Confirming earlier research, the British study by West, Noden, Edge and David (1998) into parental involvement in their child's education across 19 primary schools , found that "mothers generally assume overriding responsibility for their children's education" (p. 461). This study revealed the extent of involvement by mothers and showed that mothers contributed directly to their child's school-based learning by volunteering their labour in and outside the classroom in a myriad of ways. It also showed differing patterns of interactions between the parents of children in public and in private schools. Direct assistance with learning in the classroom (ie reading with children) was more common amongst mothers of children in public schools. There was also a marked difference between the public and private schools, in the amount of homework and the consequent patterns of home school work assistance given by parents. In regard to homework "mothers were involved in most activities in the vast majority of cases, except for mathematics when the fathers were involved somewhat more often" (West, Noden, Edge, & David, 1998, p.9).

Home-based educational activities were also shown to be mostly facilitated by mothers rather than fathers. More than half the sample reported the use of commercially produced textbooks to assist children with a range of school-related skills such as English and mathematics, however this was more common in families where the children attended government schools. Over a third of the group reported having employed a tutor for their child, and although there was no significant difference between the public and private schools in this regard, there was a strong relationship between mother's educational level and the use of a tutor.

The research by West et al. (1998) highlights the key role of mothers in maintaining the relationship between the school and the family through their volunteering roles in primary school classroom, but also as the conduit for communications between the school and family in regard to the child's performance. Of the 101 participating parents in their study, 92 mothers reported attending parent teacher interviews while 65 fathers accompanied the mother to the event. Communications are also facilitated through informal discussions, again mostly involving mothers.

In summarising the patterns of differing parental and gendered engagement in school relations West et al.(1998) nominated the mother's own educational level as a more likely predictor of involvement than social class. There is no doubt also that policies impact differently on different groups as David argues (2001), most often delivering a greater burden for single mothers and working class women.

3.6 Conclusions

This is the second of two chapters reviewing the literature.

Chapter 3 has been concerned with the changing nature of Australian families. In order to highlight contemporary understandings of the family this account has incorporated some historical references especially to post war Australia and the ever-pervading notion of the 'traditional family'. The review has detailed structural changes and their impact on family life and parenting and particularly as that interfaces with markets and with schooling. Attention has also been paid to the role of mothers in families and especially their role in regard to the education of their children and the resultant relations between families and schools.

By canvassing the literature on markets and school education in Chapter 2 and on markets and families in this chapter, I have aimed to provide a detailed context for the present study and its focus on mothers and families in a specific Australian educational market. Chapter 4 now outlines the methodological perspectives that underpin this study as well as detailing key aspects of the methods employed.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Chapters 2 and 3 reviewed the literature on contemporary and specific market-orientated schooling and about contemporary families. These two fields are the primary contexts for the present study. This chapter outlines the methodological framing for the research project.

Bogdan and Biklen claim that most qualitative researchers "reflect some sort of phenomenological perspective" (2003, p. 22). Early on in my doctoral research, I recognised this along with a connection to critical paradigms, to be true of my research orientation. These views were reviewed and sharpened through personal, and research-related experiences over the period of this project. Thus, as suggested by McIntyre (1998), my methodology evolved and developed in tandem with theorising about the research problem and in the practice of researching.

For example, as I interviewed women in my study and witnessed how they could report a different view of the world from each other and even differing over time, I felt more convinced than ever, that reality was not a fixed 'knowable' and pre-determined thing, but rather something that is contextual and subjective. When these women spoke about their dilemmas for their families and children over school choice, I saw their ability to resist expected patterns of behaviour and yet operate intrinsically as socially-situated and gendered individuals. During the course of this research I noticed that my own thinking about school choice changed as I heard different views and witnessed the struggles of each of these women as they laboured for the best for their children.

As my life as mother and worker expanded to include my role as researcher within my local community, my thinking and reading included reflections on myself as researcher and writer with a feminist orientation. I realised that as a woman, I was similarly positioned to those I interviewed, but that as a researcher, our relationship, although respectful, was not equal. I recognised that in order to try to understand, interpret and represent the meanings of those in my study, I had to operate reflexively.

This chapter offers an overview of the theoretical perspectives that shaped my research approach; its concerns, design and execution. In section 4.2, I explain how and why my research is phenomenological and feminist in orientation. Building on this explanation, section 4.3 details how my participants were recruited, the research setting, my approach to data analysis as well as thoughts about presentation and ethics. Section 4.4 presents a detailed description of the demographics of the participants since along with the specifics of the setting, the demographics of the participants set the foundations upon which the data is analysed in the following four chapters.

4.2 Research Approach

In the early stages of this project, when I thought about the kind of research I wished to conduct, I quickly recognised that I was less interested in which schools people chose, than how they came to make those decisions. Thus my interest in experience rather than measurable outcomes, drew me to qualitative, interpretive research. I was sympathetic to the view that this interpretivist perspective regarded knowledge as socially constructed and was aware that such an understanding of knowledge could account for the different meanings given by different people to the same phenomenon. This view also helps explain different meanings over time and across cultures.

My research interest was to explore the experiences of those engaged in the process of choosing schools for their children. The phenomenologists' concern with the subjective and 'everyday experiences' resonated with my interest in the often-overlooked details of the daily lives of these mothers as they engaged in the educational marketplace. Husserl's interest in consciousness, that is, in people's ability to describe the phenomena they were experiencing rather than the experience itself (Lawler, 1998), directed me to favour the collection of data through direct interview rather than say, through observation.

I felt that a phenomenological perspective fostered an approach that enhanced my capacity as a researcher to interpret meaning by laying aside existing preconceptions in order to "…learn to see what stands before our eyes" (Husserl, 1931, p. 43). This perspective required me to seek to understand the particular and subjective meaning of actions, rather than to impose my perception or interpretation onto my participants. In this sense I recognised that I would need to engage in a kind of dialogue with my

participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) in order to establish as fully as possible their meanings.

My study is premised on the belief that humans are able to make choices and act as independent agents, however, I also acknowledge the powerful nature of structural forces such as capitalism, globalism and patriarchy to affect such actions. In this way I am sympathetic to the views of feminists and critical theorists who hold that reality is more than purely a subjective experience pertaining to a given individual, reality is more than just "what people see it to be" (Sarantakos, 2000, p. 36).

Given the criticism of Husserlian phenomenology in particular, that it can be reductive and fundamentally descriptive, I considered a **feminist perspective** could begin to address these concerns since it incorporates a critical stance. Mary Maynard (1994) points to the connection between feminist methodology and phenomenology. A feminist phenomenological approach would foreground women's descriptions and accounts of their experiences recognising they have already produced understandings of their own, while also providing tools for analysing the role of external structures and forces. A purely phenomenological approach would fail to adequately problematise the tensions between subjectivities and experiences and social power relations interacting with such aspects as gender, race and class.

Feminism is a social movement and a disciplinary knowledge with its own evolving normative and regulatory tendencies (Blackmore, 1999) incorporating a multiplicity of views. There is a large body of literature exploring the evolution of feminism and its debates and its diversity, nevertheless it is possible to speak of 'a feminist orientation' and of 'feminist methodologies' in research (David, 2004; De Vault, 1996; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2003). De Vault suggests that feminist methodologists "are united through various efforts to include women's lives and concerns in society, to minimise the harms of research, and to support changes that will improve women's status" (1996, p. 29). While there is no one 'feminist methodology' or 'feminist method', notions of feminist research typically have women and gender at the centre of their concerns and employ methods that show appropriate sensitivity about power relations between the researcher and the researched. In this study I have sought to find

ways of doing this through a focus on mothers and by adopting a reflexive approach to the design, implementation and analysis of the study as is now elaborated upon.

Acker (1994) shows that the relative exclusion of gender from the concerns of British educational sociologists was largely unchallenged until the late 1980s. The situation was more complex in Australia where there was an uneven but evolving interest in feminist and gender intersections with education policy (Blackmore, 1999; Kenway, 1995a).

I wanted to interrogate experiences of market participation through an explicit focus on women. Close analysis of choice-making in educational markets (particularly, but not exclusively, by feminist researchers) showed that, irrespective of race or class, the choice-makers are more accurately described as mothers, rather than in the gender-neutral term 'parents' (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, & Standing, 1997; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Vincent, Ball, & Pietikainen, 2004). But despite such important contributions, studies in school education into "how the gendered implications of the market are changing state/market/home relations" (Blackmore, 2000c, p.470) remain at the margins of inquiry. My explicit intention to 'give voice' to mothers, against a market discourse that prefers to mask context, gender and 'irrational thought', stands in line with feminist concerns. A feminist research perspective allowed me to make women the focus of my inquiry by "bringing the margin to the centre, rendering the trivial as important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, [and] understanding women as subjects in their own right" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 248).

By adopting a feminist research approach I hoped to address the imbalance of interrogations into 'parental choice' by 'making visible' the role and experience of mothers, because doing so would provide a more representative account of the phenomenon overall, but also because, as feminist research has shown, it is a task worthy of itself.

As a feminist researcher, my approach recognised the importance of *process* both in the conduct of the research and in its focus because of a recognition that behaviour and subjectivities are developed, sustained and reproduced, or resisted over time. A number of feminist studies of school choice have highlighted the multilayered social process of

making choices about schools (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay, & Standing, 1997; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Kenway & Bullen, 2001). Fox and Murry (2000) point to feminist research such as Cowan & Cowan, (1990); Cohen, (1987); and Ribbens (1994), which problematise the myriad processes involved in parenting as a process that occurs over time.

In addition Fox and Murry (2000) also advocate that a feminist approach includes

> A conscious articulation of values, awareness of and attendance to the sensibilities of research participants, attention to the ethics of research … and the grounding of research questions and insights in human experience (p. 1162)

This perspective is **reflexive** in that it demands a recognition on the part of the researcher of their intimate involvement in the research process; both affecting and being affected by their involvement. Feminist researchers have been characterised as engaging in extensive reflection about what they do (Acker, 1994; David, 2004). Reflexivity generally means "attempting to make explicit the power relations and the exercise of power in the research process" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2003, p. 118). Reflexivity is valued by feminists because it demands openness and accountability about the role, the power and the perspective of the researcher, as well as a mindfulness about the impact and influences on the participants and the knowledge that is produced.

Reflexivity stands in contrast to the objectivity claimed by some researchers and suggests alternative notions of reliability and validity in research. This study adopts the view that a well documented, well considered and open account of the researcher's biases and approach is a key strategy for establishing credibility.

Opportunities for reflexivity are numerous for feminist researchers. In speaking of the attendant difficulties of being in and of families while studying them, David says "we are in effect studying the context that we live within, that constitutes us as we constitute it" (David, 2004, p. 92). This requires the researcher to be reflexive – that is to be "vigilant to this conundrum" and reflect upon "our research and practices, our positionings and our personal perspectives as we study and research them" (p. 92).

I was aware that feminists urged researchers to abandon hierarchical relations with their participants (Acker, 1994) but on the other hand I acknowledge that gender itself is not sufficient to gain easy rapport in an interview situation (De Vault, 1996). While I recognise the idea of shared experience particular to women as expressed by Dorothy Smith's "standpoint of women" (Smith, 1987), or Donna Haraway's (1988) notion of "situated knowledge" and that perhaps my gender gave me entrée to this, this perspective needs to be handled with caution.

The researcher needs to be acutely aware of the limitations and complexities of presuming 'sameness' so as to avoid obscuring the multiplicity of truths arising for different women from their different positionings. While I tried to keep this awareness, both in recruiting and in conducting interviews, I also hoped to capitalise on my 'insider' experiences as mother and parent. For example I actively employed my 'insider' knowledge as a local mother in recruitment by placing flyers in places I knew mothers frequented; popular cafes, doctor's surgeries, hairdressers, neighbourhood centres and around school communities. Further my ability to engage in a sharing of tales and experiences about local primary schools, teachers, and community events as well as my knowledge of local high schools and transportation options helped build rapport.

On the other hand there were times in interviews when, as recommended by Rosalind Edwards (1990), I openly acknowledged differences of views with my interviewees. Although the longitudinal nature of the study provided opportunities to revisit, compare and clarify issues, I acknowledge that like Acker (2001), there is no way of knowing if the interviewee suppressed or modified her comments for the purposes of the interview or for, or because of, me. Similarly there were times where I withheld information. For example towards the end of the period of data collection my eldest child was very unhappy at school and I too was experiencing considerable disquiet about some of aspects of her schooling. I was also aware that some mothers were just commencing their child at this school. I thought deeply about the potential for a conflict of interest and the possible impact of sharing my experience. I also reflected on how my engagement in this research might have affected the way that I thought about my own children's schooling. In dealing with this situation I tried to balance the obligation I felt to be open and honest and the fact that my own thinking was evolving and inconclusive

against considerations for the women involved. Thus, at this time, I was circumspect about sharing my uneasiness about this school.

So far, in this section I have tried to show how my research has taken up and responded to common concerns of feminist researchers, however in addition I have also been influenced by the ideas of poststructuralism. As the label 'feminism' gives prominence to the commonalities of this social movement, the influences of post modernism and especially poststructuralism have worked to unsettle views of 'sameness' and stability.

Feminists see that multiple, shifting and gendered 'subjectivities' stand in contrast to the stable, humanist concept of 'self' which is unrelated to social relations such as race, class, age and so on (Acker, 1994). This feminist poststructuralist perspective warns researchers against falsely presenting universalised pictures of women's lives, proposing that experience always "arises in language and discourse" that is socially situated (De Vault, 1996). Davies (1992) illustrates how the construction of subjectivity is intertwined with language,

> When I talk about the experience of being "a woman", I refer to the experience of being assigned to the category female, of being discursively, interactively, and structurally *positioned* as such, and of taking up as one's own those discourses through which one is constituted as female. [italics in original] (p. 54)

According to a poststructuralist view, language or 'discourse' is not merely a descriptor of pre-existing reality, rather "meanings are produced in and by discourses" (McLeod, 2000). When poststructuralist research foregrounds the constitutive force of discourse and discourse practices it inevitably canvasses ideas about knowledge and power that, for feminists, is gendered. For the purposes of the present study these poststructuralist perspectives that recognise that language shapes meaning, are fundamental to my aim of researching the experiences as heard through interviews. The primary source of data in my study is that which is discursively constructed by the women participants themselves as they talk about their experiences of school choice. On the other hand, I do not believe that meaning is wholly constructed by discourse alone: "embodiment, violence, institutionalised dominance, material resources, for example, produce experiences that are more than discourse …" (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2003, p. 126)

Multiple and contradictory discourses impact on an individual's understanding of themselves and their place in society, producing, simultaneously, the possibility for oppression and resistance. This perspective offers my study a framework to analyse the gendered experiences and concerns of my participants and their views about schools and schooling for their sons and daughters. It also gave me a framework from which to reflect on oppositional and contradictory responses to the dominant market discourses that aimed to position these women as self-interested consumers. A feminist poststructuralist perspective could suggest ways to "search for meaning in a world of contradictory information" (Lather, 1991, p. 124). It also allowed me to position my work with the growing interest of poststructural feminists to interrogate public policy debates with a focus on the public / private dichotomy; "being a mother can mean different ways of knowing about and experiencing the world as compared to more official understandings" (David, Edwards, Hughes, & Ribbens, 1993, p. 26).

Miriam David says that feminist theories and projects have become "associated with new … ways of understanding and researching women's lives" especially personal and family lives vis a vis the public arena (2002, p. 3). By adopting an approach to research that builds on a phenomenological tradition and incorporates aspects of poststructuralist feminist understandings and methodologies I hope my research can make a contribution to our understandings of the details and complexities of the interface between women's private lives and the playing out of public policy.

In summary, since the present study required a methodology that fore-grounded the everyday experiences of women situated within their family and interfacing with government policy, I have built on a phenomenological approach drawing from a range of methodologies embraced by feminist theoreticians and researchers. This hybridised framework allowed me to seek participants, collect and analyse data in a way that honours their everyday familial and socially contextualised lives as well as illuminate their 'public' lives as they intersect with policy.

4.3 Study design and implementation

Section 4.3 shows how this study into mothers' experiences of school choice was conducted by documenting the design and implementation of the research. It provides details about the site of the study, how participants were recruited and how data was

generated through interviews and from other sources. It also includes information about the ethical issues associated with the study as well as a discussion about the analysis, interpretation and presentation of the data.

While this information is presented in a linear form it should be acknowledged that the process of design and implementation were in fact neither linear nor chronological. Data generation, analysis and interpretation occurred in an iterative process that involved constant movement backwards and forwards between the data and the broader research endeavour.

4.3.1 The site of the study

The research site was chosen because of the large range of secondary school options assessable from this locale, because the area is economically, socially and culturally diverse and, because despite its dynamic and changing population, it retains a sense of community. This study is located within one Local Government Area (LGA) which is made up of a small group of suburbs in Sydney's inner west, NSW, Australia[3]. Participants were recruited from within approximately a five kilometre radius in what is commonly referred to as 'the Inner West'.

The study site includes some of Sydney's earliest suburbs. Like the inner suburbs of many large cities, the area was originally populated by working class families with a smaller proportion of wealthy landholders. After the War many of these families moved away to the 'new suburbs' and were replaced by post war migrants, mainly Europeans and mostly Italians. Between 1954 and 1961 the area was "both a reception centre and a transit camp for Italian migrants as the numbers of Italians grew dramatically" (Solling & Reynolds, 1997, p. 226). Much of this area was occupied by workers and trades people until the 1970s when blue collar workers began to be replaced by professionals and white collar workers. In recent decades there has been a new influx of moneyed, upwardly mobile families and singles who have been able to afford the increasingly expensive real estate close to the city. The area is well serviced by public

[3] Since the time this study was conducted some boundaries of the LGA have changed.

transport and has ready accessibility to a range of both public and private schools (Solling & Reynolds, 1997).

The large post war influx of migrants into the area is still a defining characteristic of significant parts of the neighbourhood. However, while the LGA retains some of the traditional population groupings its character is undergoing rapid change. There are pockets of great wealth and of significant hardship. In some parts of the LGA, real estate prices are amongst the highest in Australia while the same neighbourhood accommodates people on welfare benefits living in public housing. The most recent Census of 2001 recorded 7,478 out of 54, 593 people had a weekly individual income of $1,500 or more while 5,840 earned less than $160.00 per week of which 2,582 had a negative or no income (ABS, 2001a).

Reflecting the diversity in the area, the 2001 Census recorded the dominant religious groupings as Christianity (54%) with Catholic (26.6%) the biggest part. The next biggest non-Christian group was recorded as 'no religion' (23.7%) followed by Buddhism at 2%. In this local government area, 77.5% of the population uses English as the main language at home. The biggest non-English language group is Italian (3.4%) and many of these are second and third generation Italian speakers, then Chinese (1.8%), with at least 32 other main languages spoken in the area. In 2001, 64% of residents were born in Australia with the biggest grouping of foreign countries of origin being the United Kingdom 7.6%, New Zealand 3.7% and Italy 2.2% (ABS, 2001b).

Of key importance to the current study is that this area is particularly well serviced by a range of affordable and efficient public transport options. Travellers to the city can access numerous bus routes, trains, ferries and light rail, from there the city provides easy access to the northern and eastern suburbs. Busses and trains also run regularly from the Inner West to the west. Furthermore, the government provides free public transport to all school children travelling to and from school. This relatively unique transport-rich environment means that, in market terms, these consumers had real access to a broad range of choices which amply suited the purposes of my study to investigate school choice in a market context.

4.3.2 Recruitment

The primary method of recruitment of interviewees was through the distribution of a flyer about my research (see Appendix A). Initially schools and key community sites were targeted, but subsequently word-of-mouth became an important means of recruitment.

In order to reach parents of Year 6 children I contacted eight local government primary schools and three local Catholic primary schools. In addition two other government primary schools found out about the project by word of mouth and my flyers were circulated in these schools. In the government sector five Principals offered to put a notice in the school newsletter and two agreed I could advertise for interested participants directly via their Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) associations[4]. I handed out flyers outside the school gates of another two primary schools. In one case (a Catholic primary school) I was invited to meet the Principal to explain my research project, and subsequently she and another Catholic primary school Principal offered to hand out my flyer directly to Year 6 children. One of the first mothers I interviewed turned out to be a high school teacher in the Catholic system and she offered to distribute flyers at a forthcoming Open Day for prospective new students.

In addition to targeting schools themselves, I distributed flyers around the community wherever I though mothers of Year 6 students might gather. I left flyers in two municipal libraries, four cafes, on the local shopping centre notice board at three neighbourhood centres, in two hairdressers, at three doctors' surgeries, two OSHC centres, and a neighbourhood study skills college.

An important part of the recruitment occurred through word of mouth. A Director of one of the local neighbourhood centres put me in contact with a mother she thought might be interested, and this woman then recruited a further three other mothers. Another woman recommended five others from two different schools. In all, twelve of the 20 participants were recruited through this snowballing technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Other participants reported that they heard of the study via leaflets at

[4] OSHC which stands for 'Out of School Hours Care' is the NSW acronym for the care available to school children before and after school through an association independent of the school itself.

school (2), via a leaflet at the doctor's surgery (1), via the school newsletter (2), via OSHC (1), and two participants said they found out about the study by chance.

I had originally intended (and advertised) to interview only those mothers who were choosing high school for the first time, that is, for the first of their children to go to high school. This was based on the fact that the literature regarded the decision made for the first child "is often the pathfinder for all subsequent children" (Woods, Bagley, & Glatter, 1998, p. 118). However, after I began circulating my flyer and talking to mothers about my intended research I was surprised at the negative response to my decision to exclude second/ third time choosers. I was approached by women who wanted to participate but were not choosing for the first time. I was convinced by them that secondary schooling had changed/was changing so much that their views would enrich my study. Hence I reconsidered my approach and broadened the catchment to include non first-time choosers.

Another important characteristic of my recruitment was self-selection. There are two aspects to this decision; firstly I was attracted to the idea that self-selection militated against the possibility of coercion. On the other hand I was aware that this recruitment decision would mean certain types of people; the more confident and articulate, would be more likely to respond. I was cognisant of feminist criticisms that research more often captured the views of dominant social groups such as white, middle class educated women leaving the voices of the more marginalised minority groups unheard (Casey, 2003; Collins, 1986). In order to balance these conflicting probabilities I purposefully tried to recruit from school neighbourhoods with relatively higher proportions of indigenous, low income and NESB families. For example I intensified my efforts in two areas with high proportions of housing trust residents. Tables 4.1 and 4.3 give some indication of the diversity of the group.

4.3.3 Data generation

In this study, data was generated over a period of 14 months primarily through a series of return interviews. Supplementary data was obtained from simple, time-study semester-based timetables and from other relevant sources such as school advertising, government documentation and media reports during and subsequent to the period of data generation.

Interviews

Interviewing has been widely used within the social sciences as a popular means for the gathering of in-depth qualitative information (Baker, 2004; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Hart, 2005; Kvale, 1996). As a research method, interviewing has been described, categorised and theorised extensively (Kvale, 1996; Sarantakos, 2000). Most practitioners recognise that interview types range from the highly structured through to un-structured forms with the former including pre-set questions and procedures, while un-structured interviews typically have a limited number of pre-determined questions and procedural instructions (Sarantakos, 2000). Semi-structured interviews have elements of both depending on the particular aims and style of the research project.

For the purposes of this study I favoured **semi-structured interviews** because I sought the relative freedom to respond to unexpected directions or issues, to probe and to digress, while nevertheless retaining a common core of predetermined and ordered questions for each set of interviews. I also preferred individual rather than group interviews because they offered the potential for the establishment of rapport and for the gathering of individual experiences rich with subjective perspective and personal information.

The target group for interviewing was mothers who had children in the last year of primary school (Year 6) in 2002 and who were choosing secondary school for their child to commence in 2003.

Longitudinal studies, that is, those gathering data from the same group on more than one occasion, are valued for their capacity to provide data on social change, however the practical and financial difficulties associated with longitudinal studies restrict their use (Payne & Payne, 2004; Sarantakos, 2000). Longitudinal research allows for the collection of sequences of action and the examination of patterns of behaviour and change over time (Payne & Payne, 2004; Sarantakos, 2000).

I aimed to interview each participant on three occasions in order to capture how their experiences of, and thinking about school choice may change. I brought to this endeavour a hunch born of my own experiences as a parent choosing high schools, that

choice was not only problematic of itself, but in addition, a family's 'choice' was routinely 'interrupted' by changing contextual factors such as systemic, familial or work-related matters. For example when my own family was considering high schools during 2001 an unexpected threat to my employment affected our choice making. Hence for us, choice was indeed a dynamic and context-specific phenomenon.

A limited longitudinal study suited my desire to test out this hunch. Further, Dorothy Smith's contention that "the social is always being brought into being in the concerting of people's local activities. It is never already there" (1997, p. 395) reinforced the value of studying the same group of people over a period of time. I chose return and semi-structured interviews because I considered they had the potential to capture the shifting and sometimes contradictory experiences that are tied to "local particularities of everyday/everynight worlds" (Smith, 1997, p. 393).

Initially I decided to recruit 20 participants for interviewing because it is recognised that the attrition rate is higher in longitudinal studies (Payne & Payne, 2004). In fact however, surprisingly few women dropped out. Twenty participated in the first round of interviews. Nineteen participated in the second interview and two of those women contacted me again to update me on events prior to the last round of interviews. By the third round of interviews in 2003, three mothers had dropped out because of domestic pressures involving their own health and/ increased caring responsibilities and a fourth person had moved interstate.

At the time of the telephone discussion when mothers contacted me in response to my advertising, I explained the study, particularly the form and nature of the interview process in order to accurately inform them of what they were committing themselves to. Again, at the commencement of the first interview I recapped on these details as well as discussing issues of privacy and the rights of the participants. The consent form was discussed and signed at the first interview. Participants were offered a copy for their own records.

I offered my participants choices of meeting times and places. Most interviewees preferred that I come to their own homes at times that accommodated their work, schooling and childcare arrangements. Three mothers elected to meet at a local coffee

shop after school drop-offs and three women preferred to come to my place. I always supplied refreshments and cakes, and/ offered to pay the café bills because I wanted the interviews to be as relaxed and enjoyable as possible. This was also my way of showing an appreciation of the commitment they were making.

In setting up the interviews I aimed to avoid Ann Oakley's (1981) criticism of standardised, hierarchical interviewing practices that fail to allow for intensive dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. Thus I favoured open-ended questions and aimed to establish rapport with the interviewee. I hoped to achieve this by making the process as transparent as possible: by allowing interviewees maximum choice in regard to time and location of interviews; by commencing interviews with informal 'chat', and by making the interview sessions as non-threatening and convivial as possible.

The establishment of rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee is widely commented upon as essential for qualitative, in-depth interviewing and has been especially identified by feminist researchers as key to collaborative, non-hierarchical researcher-participant relationships (Finch, 1999; Oakley, 1981). As I have already noted, while I recognised the value of, and strove to establish rapport, I was not naively holding to the romanticised notion that a 'friendly atmosphere' necessarily nor automatically produced rich, open conversation. I was also mildly unsettled by the thought that aiming too purposefully to 'establish rapport' may be seen as artificial.

In practice however, like Janet Finch (1999), allowing for some initial unease, I found the women overwhelmingly enthusiastic to talk as reflected in the following comment:

> *It's an area I am interested in and nobody else in my life has bothered to ask me about all of these things that have occupied me for the last 15 years. And I've never bothered to reflect on it, and it's been very interesting. Important that you were local? Oh yes,- and that you are part of my network without me even knowing! If you'd been male I probably would have responded, however the sessions would have been very short! Yes, it would have been different.*
> (Rosemary 3)

I do think the fact that I had much in common with the people I was interviewing (gender, mothering, membership of the local community, family and schooling) made a difference to the practice of interviewing and to the kinds of data that emerged. Other

researchers have also commented on this phenomenon (Acker, 2001; Lather, 1988; Oakley, 1981). Much of the data that did emerge would not have been elicited from a structured interview, or from an 'unbiased' 'objective' interviewer, or perhaps from a male. For example, when I did mention to one mother my changing perspective on the school my daughter attended, this opened up the conversation since in a way my revelation served to 'legitimise' the emotional dimensions of uncertainty, self-doubt and anxiety.

On the other hand, I don't wish to overestimate the importance of identification as suggested by some advocates of woman-to-woman interviewing, nor do I wish to overlook the political and ethical dimensions of researching one's own social group (see Section 4.3.4 where these issues are taken up again).

Each interview was guided by a schedule of questions clustered around themes and containing sub-questions and/prompts which were used as required. The first session typically lasted an hour and a half but few interviews were completed inside an hour. These interview schedules are included in Appendices B, C and D.

Except for those whom I met in cafes I sought permission from each interviewee to record the interview using an audio tape recorder. Only two people declined. Nevertheless I took handwritten notes at each interview as a memory aid in case of poor or problematic recording, to note questions or comments for later, and of course as the primary record in the absence of a tape recording.

Most of the **first interviews** were conducted in Term One of 2002, from February to April. After talking about the Code of Ethics and the research itself, I asked the participants to complete a page of demographic information (see Appendix E). This interview had two parts: the first being focussed around the experiences these women had had of education – as children themselves and also more recently as mothers of children at school. The second part of the interview was concerned to elicit details of their engagement in school choice thus far. The questions aimed to capture both the overt, rational aspects of their experiences, as well as their hopes and fears regarding school choice. Hence the inclusion of such questions as: *When you think about choosing a high school for … how do you feel?* and, *Are you looking forward to …..*

starting school? As evidenced in the interview schedules, this attention to the emotional dimension of school choice was maintained throughout all the interviews.

The **second round of interviews** was conducted from August through to November, 2002. By the time I conducted these interviews I had already transcribed the tapes from the first interview and had begun to find common themes and identify issues I wished to follow up. The first interview revealed that these women were incredibly busy people. I realised that I wanted to find a more systematic way to record how much of their time was spent supporting their child's education. I decided that a simple timetable schedule of activity could be useful to capture this activity, for making comparisons over time and for generating discussion. So at the commencement of the second and subsequent interview I asked each mother to complete a 'typical week' Semester time diary (see Appendix F).

From initial analyses of Interview One transcripts it also became clear that I lacked sufficient demographic information about the participants' partners to have a sense of the family unit as a whole. Since so much conversation had included reference to their own and their husband's experiences of education, I purposefully collected these additional demographic details at the commencement of Interview Two (see Appendix C). This kind of data helped me situate the experiences of the women as wives and partners of others whose own biographies and social backgrounds, experiences and aspirations were influential. This expanded context became important, for example when data was analysed in terms of Bourdieuian concepts, particularly of social capital and habitus (see Chapter 6).

In these interviews mothers were given the opportunity to share any new thinking about their school choices and to talk about the nature and impact of their involvement in school choice so far. By the time of the second interview some families had reached a resolution about which school their child would attend – these were parents who had received a letter of offer from either private or public schools. Many others however, were still waiting for their desired outcome – these were mainly parents of children who were on waiting lists for selective school places, private schools; both scholarship and non-scholarship places, and places in public schools that were outside the catchment area. This second round of interviews by contrast was far more emotionally charged, as

earlier hopes and desires brushed up against the uncertainties and changing realities being confronted by these women.

The **final round of interviews** took place in Term One 2003, from mid March to mid April[5]. At the commencement of this interview mothers were asked to complete a new 'typical week' timetable. As in the previous interview this activity engendered lots of talk about familial divisions of labour and about the work involved in supporting their child's schooling.

The focus of the last interview was to find out where the child had commenced high school, to explore how the family had adapted to the demands associated with the new school, and to measure expectations against first impressions. By this stage the women in the study were adapting to changed circumstances arising from the move to high school. These interviews were the shortest since already for most, time had moved on and they were grateful to have finished with school choice.

Supplementary data generation

Although over 60 hours of interviews generated the vast bulk of data for this study other sources of data were also used. For example, I recorded notes, sometimes called 'field notes' (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998), after each interview about things that I thought might have made an impact on the interview itself or that might contribute to my better understanding of an interviewee. For example I noted the presence of children or spouses during the interviews and the impressions I gathered about social status, taste and/ wealth of the family. These notes became part of the data collection and were used in analysis in conjunction with the interview transcripts.

Reference has already been made to the timetable schedule which allowed for a documentation and subsequent comparison of mothers' work supporting their child's education and in pursuing school choice. This 'typical week' activity schedule was completed for the first, and then the second half of 2002, and again at the third interview in 2003. In addition to getting a sense of mothers' everyday routines in support of

[5] One mother contracted cancer after our first interview. In April 2003 she contacted me and asked to have the second and third interview then.

schooling, these timetables showed how differently time was spent during the period of school choice making.

As a local resident I was also a recipient of three community newspapers that regularly ran stories on local schools. Similarly, as a member of the community I received information from government and non-government sources about the on-going restructuring of public schooling and the public inquiry into schooling in NSW. Over the period of this study, schooling was also targeted as a key election issue by all parties and as such most media over the period ran stories about schools and schooling.

Conducting research into schooling on the wave of these public discussions afforded me additional sources of data. Sometimes these issues and associated discourses were alluded to in my interviews with mothers, for example, one prompt that accompanied a question about school choice was *Have you read/heard about these schools through the media at all?* (Interview 1, Question 7). In a few cases they became part of my analysis, but in general the value of supplementary data was in providing valuable background for the construction of interview questions, for discussion with the interviewees, and for contextualising the analysis of transcripts.

The interviews combined with these other supplementary sources of data allowed me to attend to the fine details of an individual's experience and to set that within a context of broader, more 'public' concerns around school choice. That is, in designing this study I hoped as a researcher to enable "opportunities to think self-critically about the attributions [being made] about the meaning of the texts in relation to the larger education issues which are the context of study" (Yates, 2003, p. 226).

4.3.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations featured highly in this research project since as already outlined, feminist research typically emphasises reflexivity, incorporates degrees of reciprocity, and additionally, in this case I was a member of the local community in which the study took place.

In keeping with formal requirements my project commenced only after receiving official ethics clearance from the University of Technology, Sydney. This clearance

was based on a submission of an application that outlined the nature of the research and the measures I took to ensure that the participants were recruited without duress and their participation was voluntary and would not expose them to harm. As already stated, from the outset I explained to the participants the nature and purpose of the research, and the scope and nature of their involvement and their rights.

Another aspect of my endeavours to treat my participants with **respect** was that in negotiating meeting arrangements I pointed out that meeting in public places and where other children or family members gathered, might inhibit free conversation. By the same token, I had to respect the right of those participants who chose to meet in public, with their husbands nearby, or who preferred not to be recorded. In writing my thesis I tried to report with honesty. There were occasions, even though participants had signed the consent form, where I declined to report on things that I recognised as being too private, or that may cause embarrassment. In re-telling the stories of the women I tried "Taking the words … themselves as the best descriptions available" (Oakley, 1980, p. 96).

As a researcher I aimed to protect the **anonymity** of the participants. In order to protect the identity of participants I gave considerable thought to how they might be referred to. It was easy to reject the option of replacing names with codes and/numbers since this dehumanising process would stand in contrast to the feminist perspective embraced by this study. I also rejected the option of giving my participants labels indicating marital or occupational status since I did not wish to foreground that aspect of their identity. I wished to refer to the participants by a first name in keeping with more informal nature of the relationship that evolved between the interviewees and myself over the course of the research project.

After trialling a number of variations I turned to horticultural designations for inspiration. Research shows a rich cross-cultural history of the use of botanical names for humans and most cultures show a predilection for naming females after flowers (Mann, 1995). In my study I sought to substitute each participant's name with a botanical reference that reflected something the vibrancy of the individual personality and their cultural identity. In presenting these pseudonyms (see Appendix G) I had to be mindful of balancing my desire to capture something of the person/personality

through the choice of name, while at the same time protecting their identity. Consequently these descriptors are cryptic.

Protecting the identity of the participants was further complicated because my study was sited in my own community. Given the nature of women's networking and community orientation, many of the participants had lives that intersected. Because of the longitudinal nature of this study I became privy to information about the participants from multiple and intersecting sources, which was incumbent on me to keep private. On more than one occasion, I heard stories that I realised implicated people I knew and/ were in my study. I had to take care not to divulge information about other participants, their relationships, their marriages, friends and communities, or about sources of information that might implicate them. Because my interviews often took on the nature of dialogue or conversation I found myself having an unexpected role as the 'keeper of secrets'. As a feminist researcher I was mindful of the public /private divide and not to betray trust (Finch, 1999).

As the person conducting this research, I was aware of issues of **power** in the researcher-researched relationship (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001) and the potential for me to unintentionally influence those participating in my study. Feminist research has been especially concerned about the potential to exploit women in research (David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Lather, 1988). This consideration was one I took seriously, since I became aware that some women wanted to participate in the study because they believed that I knew a lot about local schools. For these women participating in this research gave them an opportunity to include me in their network of gathering information. As a parent of two high school children I recognised that from the perspective of some participants I had 'insider' information, and hence when asked, and when appropriate, I answered their questions as honestly as possible.

Following Oakley (1981) and others (David, 2004; Finch, 1999) I thought it incumbent on me to reciprocate a sharing of experiences. I felt that I should frankly answer their questions, but took care to be as factual and unbiased as I could. Similarly I aimed to be equally open and receptive to differing views. Initially I took care not to divulge where my own children went to school, lest this may affect how the participants viewed me, or what they were prepared to reveal to me. However, at the same time I was aware that

for a sense of mutual trust to develop I too, needed to share some personal information. Furthermore because my research was conducted within my own community, it was futile to imagine I could keep such information private.

As a feminist researcher I was concerned that I might take more from my participants than I could give back to them and attempted always to be grateful for their participation. A couple of women said they would be interested in reading anything I'd written about the research. This posed a moral dilemma for me as I constructed the text mindful of the possibility of a different audience. In particular I wondered how these women would respond to the academic discourse in which our discussions were presented.

Like other feminist researchers (see De Vault, 1996) I was concerned about the potential for misrepresentation of my participants and took pains to double check my interpretations of what had been said. The interview transcriptions contain many examples of me checking for meaning by paraphrasing or asking for clarification, however there are also some instances where I remained uncertain of the exact meaning of a statement or the implication of sentences that were unfinished. Because I returned to interview my participants more than once I was able to re-check uncertainties. One example of this arose when I thought about how I might write about the same-sex couple. I knew that I wished to explicitly present this feature in my research since I wanted to avoid representing 'mothers' or 'families' as unitary and unproblematised phenomena, and yet I did not wish to position either of these women as the 'other' by contrasting their sexual preference against the 'norm'. I resolved this dilemma by discussing it with the women in the second round of interviews and coming to an agreed position that this aspect of their lives would be presented where relevant.

4.3.5 Analysing and interpreting the data

The analysis and interpretation of data is an integral aspect of 'the invention of the study' (Kemmis, 1980). In the present study, analysis and interpretation was guided by the epistemological and methodological frames outlined above and also importantly in concert with the aims of the research project and thereby broader social concerns. Thus analysis and especially interpretation, arose from "ongoing and multiple acts of design, comparison, dialogue, reflexive critique and interpretation" (Yates, 2003, p. 224).

This section illustrates how this iterative and cyclical process played out in the current study; it also demonstrates how I aimed for a transparent process that could be judged as thorough, consistent and appropriate. It concludes by attending to issues of presentation, particularly as raised by a feminist and interpretive approach.

There are numerous texts describing data analysis however most commentators agree that qualitative data analysis is a process that involves collating, managing and interpreting data (Kvale, 1996; O'Leary, 2004; Sarantakos, 2000). It is a process that begins even before, as well as outside the research project itself and one that proceeds through to the creation of a final text. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) describe it as "the art of interpretation": a creative and interpretive process by which the researcher manipulates data into a "research text" which is re-created into "a working interpretive document that contains the writer's initial attempts to make sense out of what he or she has learned" and, finally, the process end as this text is (re)constructed for an audience (p. 29-30).

The **collating** of data, or 'data reduction' as it is called by Miles and Huberman (1994), is a function of the research design since aspects such as research questions, site selection and recruitment decisions involve 'anticipatory data reduction'. That is, even prior to the commencement of interviewing, collating information began with the construction of the schedule of questions which were broadly grouped around themes. Each interview was transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after the interview and each set of interviews was transcribed before the subsequent round commenced. Hard and electronic copies of the transcripts were made and filed under the pseudonym of the interviewee and the order of interview. Although the process of transcribing is essentially a mechanical one, this close revisitation of the interviews and its typing up, served to familiarise me with the fine details of the data. In this way the process of analysis and interpretation was embedded and ongoing. This moving from and between texts was accompanied by reflexive thinking, an early searching for meaning by seeking out connections, contradictions and patterns in the data. In the course of transferring the audio recordings into text and for collating these reflections, I began to consider options for managing the large amounts of material.

The appropriate **management** of data is crucial for analysis in qualitative research, "The researcher typically needs to see a reduced set of data as a basis for thinking about its meanings" (Huberman & Miles, 1998, p. 180). As part of the process of transcribing I had kept notes on themes, ideas and patterns that were emerging from the data. Originally I used traditional paper-based methods such as underlining, highlighting, making notes, and 'cut and paste' to identify and track aspects in the texts that appeared worthy of note. I was influenced in this regard by the ideas of Miles and Huberman (1994) who encourage researchers to keep an open mind in the early stages of analysis and to try a range of methods including summarising, text coding, pattern coding, memoing and the construction of vignettes. Initially I used data from the first round of interviews to trial these methods but as the volume of transcriptions grew, I became interested in exploring the potential offered by computer-assisted qualitative data analysis.

I was attracted to the idea that computer software might simplify the management of the data itself, as well as aid coding and thereby **analysis and interpretation**. A number of advantages have been ascribed to the appropriate use of computer software programs such as NVivo. For example, it is argued that they can save time and resources, offer greater accuracy and flexibility in analysis and retrieval (especially of larger quantities of data), and improved display, manipulation, reproduction and sharing of text (Bazeley & Richards, 2000; Kelle, 2004; Richards & Richards, 1998; Sarantakos, 2000).

I transported all the transcripts and the demographic data into NVivo. Using NVivo to code I read every transcript line-by-line as I worked first to ascribe 'free nodes' to pieces of text and then to rework the data again to create coding hierarchies of 'tree nodes' with subcategories of 'children' and their 'siblings'. Freed from "burdensome mechanical tasks" of traditional coding techniques I spent many hours 'playing' with the data (Kelle, 2004, p. 283), categorising, comparing, merging and tracking links within and between transcripts. Using NVivo I was also able to store notes and comments by creating hyperlinks within the transcripts themselves and also between texts. I also stored demographic details of the participants into NVivo.

NVivo allowed me to undertake detailed comparisons of differences, similarities and relationships between texts. This was useful for comparing the responses of

interviewees to the same questions, or for following how one person may have altered their responses over time. For example, I was able to search the three or four transcripts of a particular mother for text segments that I had coded as 'Emotions' and pull these together into one new text that traced the emotional changes across time.

Being easily able to make quick and detailed comparisons was effective for the testing out of hunches that could help develop empirically based theory construction (Kelle, 2004). In this case for example, having coded for 'Emotions' I then sought to find links and relationships between that and experiences that might be occurring simultaneously. By comparing 'Emotions' against codes such as 'partner' 'target child' 'selective school entry' I found that "through the comparative analysis of textual passages both abstract theoretical concepts and also everyday coding categories can progressively be given empirical content" (Kelle, 2004, p. 280). NVivo allowed me to isolate pieces of text and to compare both within and across the transcripts for one person and for the whole group. In this case, this comparative coding allowed me to easily locate and interrogate the relevant data which at a later stage I juxtaposed against the literature on emotional labour and emotional capital that formed the basis for data analysis in Chapter 7.

The use of NVivo offered many advantages to this study. NVivo helped me to develop an intimacy with my data as I spent many months entering data, coding it and then setting up cross-referenced comparisons. NVivo was useful for providing quick countable empirical details against which I could check hunches and begin to problematise instances. In particular NVivo enabled me to locate common patterns of behaviour namely the way that these women engaged in a process I called the Process of School Shopping.

At other times this facility proved an invaluable safe guard against false impressions. For example, after three consecutive interviews where women had related stories of personal anguish experienced as school children, I had a strong feeling that this could be common to the group. I used NVivo to search the data methodically and was able to determine that although this experience was powerful and important to particular individuals, it was not generalisable across the group.

However I also found that NVivo had limitations for my particular study. Ultimately, for the purposes of the present study I found myself returning to individual hard copy transcripts since that way I could bring a hermeneutic, contextualised interpretation to individuated actions, thoughts or events. Like Holloway and Jefferson (2000) I found that the more I subdivided categories "the more these risked fragmentation, thus threatening the whole that gave them their meaning" (p. 108). The process of interpreting what's going on in the data can be aided, but also limited, by the fragmentation that can occur when coding becomes a preoccupation so easily facilitated by the use of computer-assisted data analysis (Agar, 1991 cited in Kelle, 2004).

In this study I used a range of traditional and computer-assisted tools for the collation and management of data to aid in a hermeneutic interpretation of components so that:

> In interpreting them, we engage in implicit dialogue and comparison with the specific different subjects in our study, with the study as a whole, and with research and theorising outside the study, and in doing so, we engage in a process of inscription: we name them, and thereby locate them in broader patterns of theorisation. (Yates, 2003, p. 230)

As suggested by Ramazanoglu and Holland (2003) in this study, analysis and interpretation have permeated the entire research endeavour through an evolving and creative process that developed in interaction with the generation of data over a period of time.

4.3.6 Presenting the data

Prior to and during the process of analysis and interpretation I was mindful of decisions that had to be made about what would be included or excluded, how I might ensure my text was 'vital' (L. Richardson, 1998) and how I might present my interpretations of the data and myself as author. I was aware that "no permanent telling of a story can be given" (Denzin, 1998, p. 330) and that my interpretation and its rendition must invariably reflect my own biases, brought about by my white, middle class background, my gender and, perhaps also, by too many years in academia!

As my research is positioned within a poststructuralist feminist frame, I have aimed to adopt an interpretive style that enacts a situated, gendered and multivoiced, reflexive and transparent representation of the data. Following the advice of Ramazanoglu and

Holland that "since there is no general feminist methodological strategy on interpretation, you will need to decide how to put reflexivity into practice" (2003, p.160). I aimed in the practice and in the writing of this research to be transparently self-critical and reflexive and to distinguish between reporting the voices of others and my own commentary.

This study draws on the transcripts collected from all 20 interviewees; however the experiences of some women feature more prominently than do others. There are pragmatic reasons for this as with all research, since only a small proportion of the hundreds of pages of data can be included in the final text (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Nevertheless this thesis is embedded with the tales of these women's experiences and with quotes from their conversations and musings, sometimes chosen because they are representational of many voices and concerns, and sometimes because of their poignancy in illustrating a particular or unique perspective.

The next section of this chapter provides selected demographic details of the women who make up the study allowing me thereafter to name and locate those whose voices I reproduce in direct speech presented in italics. On other occasions in this thesis I divert from direct speech altogether and use vignettes (presented in shaded boxes) to tell the story of an individual's experience. The data also represents a picture of the participants as a whole since this research aims to understand individual experience against a backdrop that positions the individual socially and culturally within their families, in communities that exist in a market-driven environment.

A final note about presentation refers to the structure of this thesis with its four data chapters each of which takes a different theoretical orientation for framing the analysis. This framing of the data analysis was first noted in the Introduction and is further explained in the interlude preceding Chapter 5.

This structure arose as a component of the reflexive process whereby I attempted to let the data drive the theorising. Having coded and analysed each women's experience of school choice I searched for commonalities and found that in general all the women worked through a series of six steps in a process from information gathering to a school

choice outcome. From this I formulated a six step process of school shopping as noted in Chapter One.

In thinking about how best to analyse these various steps I sought out relevant theoretical and empirical literature to find the 'best fit'. Hence, as evidenced in Chapter 5 I found perspectives on consumer society as offered by cultural studies to be valuable for analysing these women's experiences of their initial interactions with the market.

When I sought to understand how the women responded to the available school options I found Bourdieu's theories useful especially in their capacity to account for the tensions between structure and individual agency as played out via choice in this particular social context.

When I wanted to analyse Steps 4 – 5 of The Process of School Shopping, I sought a framework that would allow me to give proper recognition to the affective and emotional aspects of these women's experiences of investigating and responding to school options. Feminist theorising about emotional labour and emotional capital proved to be particularly pertinent for these purposes.

For the analysis of the final step where school choice outcomes were arrived at, again feminist thinking provided the most useful framing for analysis since that theoretical perspective allowed for a comprehensive exploration of experience from a gendered perspective that acknowledged women in dynamic interaction with and within their families.

4.4 Understanding the participants

The purpose of the next section is to provide information about the participants who make up this study. It is important to get a picture of the whole group because at times I generalise about them as a group, but equally it important to develop an understanding of the individuals that make up the group. The following three tables provide a snapshot of the group and the individuals that constitute it.

As a qualitative study my concern is not with the counting or itemising of features per se, rather here I hope these tables provide the reader with the means to 'eyeball'

(Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) key features against which they might read my analyses and interpretations. These demographics are drawn upon throughout the rest of the thesis for conceptualisation, for illustration and for theorising. The demographic features presented below are not of themselves significant, but rather form a launching pad from which individual and collective tales may be read within wider familial, social and policy contexts.

4.4.1 The women

Table 4.1 displays key features for the individuals in the study, namely their ages, cultural, and schooling backgrounds as well as religious affiliations.

Table 4. 1 Selected Individual Characteristics

Name	Age	Place of origin	Own schooling	Cultural background	Religion
Angelica	30 - 39	New Zealand	o/s Govt	Anglo-Saxon (AS)	Anglican childhood
Camellia	40 - 49	Singapore	o/s Catholic	Chinese	Catholic
Clover	40 - 49	Sydney	Catholic	AS	Catholic childhood, now atheist
Daisy	30 - 39	Canberra	Govt	AS	-
Daphne	50 - 59	UK	o/s Govt & Cath scholarship	AS	Catholic childhood
Hazel	30 - 39	Sydney	Catholic	AS	Catholic
Heather	40 - 49	UK	Govt	Scottish	Ex - Catholic
Holly	40 - 49	Sydney	Govt, selective	AS	-
Iris	40 - 49	Brisbane	Anglican girls boarding & govt	AS	Anglican schooling
Ivy	40 - 49	UK	Many, mostly private Aust & UK	AS	Anglican schooling
Jade	40 - 49	Brisbane	Govt	AS	Atheist
Jasmine	40 - 49	Argen-tina	Govt Argentina & Aust	Scottish, Russian, Spanish	Catholic upbringing
Lily	40 - 49	Sydney	Govt, selective	AS	-

May	40 - 49	Country NSW	Anglican Boarding school	AS	Catholic
Peony	40 - 49	China	Govt,	Chinese	Buddhist
Poppy	40 - 49	Thailand	o/s Private & govt selective	Thai	Muslim upbringing
Primrose	30 - 39	UK	o/s Govt	AS	Anglican
Rosa	40 - 49	Sydney	Govt	AS	-
Rosemary	50 – 59	Sydney	Catholic	AS	Catholic education
Veronica	30 - 39	Brisbane	Catholic	AS	Catholic education

As a group, these women are older mothers: two are over 50 and most are in their late 40s. This demographic illustrates the changing nature of family life as first reported on in Chapter 3.

The participants were also asked to nominate their 'cultural background' and this elicited a rich personal and ancestral heritage in keeping with the character of the LGA. Of the 20 participating mothers, just under half (9 out of 20) were born overseas in Britain (4), Asia (3), New Zealand (1), and South America (1). Eleven nominated themselves as Australian born of Anglo-Saxon heritage, and only 5 of these were born in Sydney.

Another feature of the group is the high proportion with connections to Catholicism either through heritage or marriage (predominately into Italian families). Nine women either identified themselves as Catholic or as having a Catholic heritage via schooling or upbringing. In addition, five (including amongst that number some non-Catholics) had Catholic partners. Interestingly two mothers worked in Catholic schools. The second largest religious grouping was those with a connection to Anglicanism, again either as believers (1) or via school (3). Other religions represented in the group include Baptist (1), Buddhism (1), Muslim (1) and unstated/ atheist/ no religion (6). These religious connections played themselves out in different ways in school choice as taken up especially in Chapters 6 and 7.

4.4.2 The women and their families

Table 4.2 builds on Table 4.1 by adding details about the working lives of the parents and about their children. A reading of Table 4.1 and 4.2 together provides a better developed picture of these mothers in the context of their families.

Table 4.2 Selected Familial Characteristics

Name	Partnership status	Paid work (mother)	Paid work (father)	Familial income security	No. of child-ren	Target child: gender, order *
Angelica	Partnered (P)	p/t freelance Writer/educator	f/t, Middle manager	Very secure	3	F, 1st
Camellia	P	f/t Personal Assit	Self employed, (trade)	Fairly secure	1	M, 1st
Clover	P	p/t Lawyer	f/t Lawyer	Very secure	1	M, 1st
Daisy	P	casual Teacher	f/t Scientist	Fairly secure	2	M, 1st
Daphne	P	f/t Teacher	f/t Nurse	Very secure	2	M, 2nd
Hazel	P	p/t Librarian	f/t, Sub editor	Fairly secure	3	F, 1st
Heather	P	Casual Midwife	Self employed (trade)	Very secure	2	F, 1st
Holly	P	p/t Dental Tech.	f/t Scientist	Very secure	1	M, 1st
Iris	P	f/t Scientist	p/t Technician	Very secure	1	M, 1st
Ivy	P	p/t Teacher	Casual Legal work	Very insecure	1**	M, 1st
Jade	P	Casual Teacher	f/t Lecturer	Very secure	2	F, 2nd
Jasmine	P	f/t Pub servant	f/t Accountant	-	2	F, 1st
Lily	Separated (S)	p/t Customer officer	-	Very insecure	2	F, 1st
May	P	p/t Casual Mothercraft nurse	f/t Scientific officer	Fairly secure	2	F, 2nd
Peony	P	Casual Shop assist	f/t Teacher (TAFE)	Very secure	1	F, 1st
Poppy	P	sessional Health educator	f/t lecturer	Very secure	2	F, 1st
Primrose	P	Casual	f/t	Pretty	3	M, 1st

		RN	HR manager	dependable		
Rosa	P	p/t RN	f/t Self employed small business	Pretty dependable	2	F, 1st
Rosemary	P	p/t Teacher	f/t Teacher (secondary)	Pretty dependable	2	F, 2nd
Veronica	P	p/t Speech therapist	f/t Manager,	Very secure	2	M, 1st

* Indicates if this is the first, second, third etc child to attend secondary school
** Only one dependent child, there is another independent child from husband's first marriage

The table above shows the range of occupations within the group. Most of the women nominated occupations that require tertiary education, and almost all are characterised by the propensity for part time and casual employment with school-friendly hours. Nurses and teachers are well represented. Not surprisingly the occupations of the partners indicate higher level responsibility commensurate with an uninterrupted career path. Of note is the number of unskilled jobs represented amongst the partners.

All but one of the women in this study were in stable relationships with two adults supporting the child(ren) and contributing financially to their education. There is one single mother and one lesbian couple in the group. Just over half of the participants are parents with two child families, although three mothers had three child families and six participants had only one fully dependent child. There is a fairly even distribution of gender amongst the Year 6 children; 11 girls and 9 boys.

Not surprisingly given the ages of these women, most families were at a more mature stage-of-life whereby relationships are well-established, children are older and careers and familial income streams are better established. However this relative stability was not universal: Lily and Ivy reported their familial income as "very insecure", a feature which impacts significantly in the playing out of school choice. Families with younger children, children with special needs, and the possibility of more children approached school choice with greater uncertainty.

Interestingly the five youngest women in the study had the largest families. In the main most of these families operated along traditional lines. However again this was not

universal. When asked about marital status 19 of the 20 reported being in stable relationships, however of those only 12 reported being "married" the others nominated de facto relationships or one family noted the partners lived separately.

4.4.3 The women, their families and their socio-economic contexts

When read against the first two tables, Table 4.3 introduces a range of factors that contribute to our understanding of the socio economic status (SES) of these families.

Table 4.3 Selected SES Characteristics

Name	Partner-ship status	Income pa (mother's)	Income pa (combined)	Educational background (mother's)	Educational background (partner's)
Angelica	Partnered (P)	Under 19,000	100-139,000	Training Certs	Govt sch'g, Degree
Camellia	P	50 – 69,000	100-139,000	High school	Govt sch'g, Training Cert
Clover	P	40 – 49,000	Over 180,000	Degree	Anglican boys sch'g, Degree
Daisy	P	20 – 39,000	80 – 99,000	Degree (as mature aged std)	Govt sch'g, Degree
Daphne	P	50 – 69,000	100-139,000	2 x degrees 1 x Masters, & Certs	Govt sch'g, Degree (as mature aged std)
Hazel	P	20 – 39,000	100-139,000	Degree, studying Masters	Cath sch'g, Incomplete tertiary study
Heather	P	50,000	50 – 79,000	BSc, RN Cert Midwifery	Cath sch'g, to Yr 10
Holly	P	40,000	140 – 179,000	Diploma	Anglican & govt, PhD
Iris	P	Over $100,000	140 – 179,000	PhD	Govt selectv, Diploma
Ivy	P	40 – 49,000	80 – 99,000	Masters	Cath sch'g, Degree, 2 x Diploma
Jade	P	20 – 39,000	100 – 139,000	Degree	Govt comp, PhD
Jasmine	P	50 – 69,000	140 – 179,000	Degree	Unknown
Lily	S	20 – 39,000	Unknown	Year 12	Govt selectv, Unknown
May	P	Under 19,000	50 – 79,000	Diploma	Cath Sch'g, Masters

Peony	P	Under 19,000	80 – 99,000	Unclear	Govt sch'g, Degree
Poppy	P	Under 19,000	100-139,000	Masters	Govt comp PhD
Primrose	P	Under 19, 000	80 – 99,000	RN Cert	Cath sch'g, Incomplete tertiary study
Rosa	P	20 – 39,000	50 – 79,000	RN and other Certs	Cath. Sch'g, Masters
Rosemary	P	Under 19,000	50 – 69,000	Masters	Govt sch'g Degree
Veronica	P	20 – 39,000	100-139,000	Masters, doing PhD	Govt, Year 12

Even though the income levels of the mothers were relatively low compared to their partners, it was clear that for many their earnings made an important contribution to the disposable family income. Six of the mothers reported their income to be under $19,000 pa. The relatively low incomes recorded by the mothers can be explained partly by the casual nature of their participation (only 4 women work fulltime) also the women generally have lower status, lower earning jobs than their partners. All but one of the households had two sources of income available for spending on the child(ren). Only one household had a relatively high (over $180,000 pa) income and only three had low (up to $80,000 pa) income streams, the majority were neither 'rich' nor 'poor' but rather, after Pusey (2003), they could be described as Middle Australia.

Most of these mothers have fairly high levels of education with two currently studying higher degrees, and all but one had participated in some post-schooling education which was largely career-orientated. By comparison, amongst the partners in this study there are four who had no formal post school qualifications, however three of those four had risen to managerial positions.

Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 show nominated income groups, occupations and work status for the women and their partners at the time of the first interview. At the time of the first interview most women worked in part time or casual positions (16) not necessarily within their field of occupation, but rather determined by the capacity of the job to 'fit around' the needs of the family. There was no one who did not work at all. However over the period of the study there were considerable changes for the women especially, after, or close to, the resolution of secondary school choice. No one reduced their hours

of work, however some increased and or supplemented their previous arrangements by taking on additional work in order to contribute to the family income, particularly in the light of increasing costs of secondary schooling (Primrose and May). Others took on extra jobs because they regarded the needs of their older children to have changed, enabling them greater freedom away from domestic duties (Jade, Clover, Daisy, Holly, May, Peony, Poppy). For these women, the relatively good and stable family income meant they could alter their relationship to the paid workforce, viewing work more as an opportunity for financial or personal reward rather than merely something to suit the family.

Notwithstanding my reservations about making claims arising from the demographic details of this group it would be safe to state that in the main, this group of consumers is fairly well educated and has a reasonably comfortable and secure lifestyle. In many ways they represent 'Middle Australia'. Certainly in terms of the rhetoric of the market they are ideal consumers – well informed, with access to a variety of schools and with reasonable financial capacity. In traditional Keynesian economic terms they are model consumers.

4.5 Conclusion

The intention of this chapter is to make public the methodological orientations that underpin this study. I have aimed to do this through a process that has required me to reflexively consider the evolution of my thinking about the purpose and nature of this research and my role in it. Thus this chapter has documented the theoretical and methodological influences that have affected the shape of this research endeavour and the resultant design, implementation and presentation of the project.

Of all the influences on this qualitative study, the ideas of feminism most strongly characterise and permeate the study. This study reflects the concerns of feminism to understand the everyday lives of women and speaks to the emerging literature about how women in families negotiate their lives in the interface with contemporary contexts of markets and schooling. In doing so it aims to undertake the research guided by feminist concerns particularly about power and reflexivity being mindful that:

> Feminists in particular, have to be wary of universalising discourses about female ways of doing, seeing and leading, for the essentialising tendencies that tend to represent white middle class Western women's experiences …. (Blackmore, 2000b, p. 32)

Feminist perspectives also made me mindful of the way that I would present data, analysis and interpretation. In this chapter I have tabulated a range of characteristics that might help illuminate the lives of individuals as well as say something about the group as a whole. From this data I make observations and comparisons between the individuals, their families and their social contexts; the claims or generalisations that I make I do so as transparently as possible. The information presented in this chapter works as one means against which my interpretations and further analyses can be measured. The analysis and interpretations presented in subsequent chapters continue to explore this tension between what is observed within and about this study and what can be claimed beyond it.

INTERLUDE

Introduction to data chapters

In this thesis four chapters analyse and discuss the themes arising from data gathered in interviews and supplemented by field notes, activity schedules and media sources juxtaposed against relevant literature. The aim of these four chapters is to construct a picture of the everyday gendered experiences of the participants as they engage in school choice and additionally to find ways of interpreting those experiences against the literature about families and their schools at the point of 'choice' in a market context. In this endeavour I have been emboldened by Dorothy Smith's (1999)call for sociologists to start with the everyday/every night experiences of women in order to determine how our worlds are put together and shaped by powers and forces beyond the obvious.

A central challenge for the following four chapters has been to find a way of disentangling the complexity of these women's experiences in order to analyse what might be going on, and, to present their experiences in a way that is comprehensible, and yet doesn't deny the interrelatedness of multiple and changing positioning, events, feelings and actions. Therefore while the following sections are necessarily static and linear, they should be read with a kind of suspended disbelief since any one section of these chapters is at that time only a representation of the whole. I have tried to move beyond the static by peppering my text with anecdote, narrative and quotation from the interview transcripts to 'enliven' the text, to mirror something of the vibrancy and shifting sand of these women's lives and, as much as possible, to foreground their voices.

Early readings of the interview data revealed the recurrence of shopping analogies which prompted further analysis. Ultimately the patterns arising from this analysis lead me to adopt 'shopping' as the macro organisational structure for the textual presentation of data in this thesis. The following four data chapters are sequential in that they follow the process of 'school shopping' as articulated by the women in this study. Additionally, each of the chapters explicitly takes up a theoretical orientation for the analysis of data. As explained in Chapter 4, the theoretical frame employed in each case has been chosen because it best facilitates a close-up analysis of issues articulated most strongly in that part of the data, and also, is best able to facilitate a feminist and phenomenological approach to the data. This framing is illustrated below.

The Process of School Shopping

Textual location	Steps in the process of school shopping	Step descriptor	Theoretical influences and framing
Chapter 5	**STEP 1** INFORMATION GATHERING	Finding out about secondary schools	Cultural studies framing of consumer culture
Chapter 6	**STEP 2** EVALUATING OPTIONS	Determining which of those schools might be possible (eg logistically, financially) by comparing their needs and capabilities against availability	Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital'
	STEP 3 DETERMINING PREFERENCES	Choosing between viable options to pursue	
Chapter 7	**STEP 4** INVESTIGATING PROCEDURES	Finding out how to go about opting into those choices (eg by collecting and correctly filling in the right forms, by having the right address)	Feminist perspectives including the concepts of 'emotional labour', and 'emotional capital'
	STEP 5 TAKING ACTION	Implementing individual/collective, short/long term strategies to secure preferences (eg arranging coaching applications/deposits)	
Chapter 8	**STEP 6** CHOOSING OR BEING CHOSEN?	Acting on a response from the targeted school(s) (ie accepting or rejecting an offer)	Sociological and feminist critiques of 'choice'

Chapter 5 draws from cultural studies to analyse how mothers find out about and respond to schools in a marketised context. Chapter 6 uses Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital' to help interpret how these women evaluate school options and determine preferences. Chapter 7 incorporates feminist perspectives specifically the concepts of 'emotional labour' and 'emotional capital' to analyse how mothers went about investigating procedures and taking action to secure their preferences. Chapter 8 builds on these theoretical frames, especially on feminist critiques of 'choice' to analyse how choice is played out for these women in this localised Australian study.

5. MOTHERS AS EDUCATIONAL SHOPPERS: A MARKETER'S DREAM?

5.1 Introduction and theoretical framing

In Chapter 2 and 3, I wrote about the way the marketisation of school education driven by an economic agenda, has been promoted in public and policy discourses around markets and how it is taken up in the media and has trickled down into everyday use by ordinary people positioned as 'consumers'. In particular I highlighted the positioning of families and schools in this contemporary context. Chapter 4 details the research approach that underpins my orientation and the rationale for my collection and use of data.

As the first of four data chapters, Chapter 5 responds to the primary theme thrown up by the data itself – that is the task of 'school shopping' as articulated and performed by the mothers-as-consumers in their local market of schools-as-commodities. Section 5.1 explains the theoretical orientations that I bring to my data analysis. Section 5.2 offers a brief 'situationer' on the local market that is the site of this investigation. Section 5.3 establishes the framing I use to examine the actual everyday activities of mothers' investigations into the secondary school market. It begins with a key observation about the use of the shopping metaphor by the women in the study and uses aspects of cultural theory to examine its applicability to the school market place. Through an examination of the data, a staged pattern of consumer behaviour is exacted which is used as a scaffolding for the structure and exploration of themes pursued herein. Section 5.4 provides a detailed account of the activities of these mothers-as-consumers as they find out about their local secondary schools market.

Chapter 5 draws on cultural studies to help theorise and analyse the behaviour of these women as they begin exploring their local secondary schooling market. Originally I became interested in cultural studies because of an unease with the often automatic application of older reproduction theories of schooling to contemporary contexts. My data seemed to be throwing up different challenges for sociological thinking about the connections between schools and markets and the everyday practices and concerns of the women in my study. For me the appeal of the approach loosely identified as

'cultural studies' is that it allows a reinterpretation of commonalities between people positioned as consumers albeit unequally, in a society that seems to be increasingly constructed around consumption. As Ritzer says, more people spend time in supermarkets than in factories, and yet so much sociological interest remains embedded in old concerns around production-based analyses of social order (2001).

It is important however, to acknowledge that 'cultural studies' is not a clearly defined singular discipline; rather it is a contested interdisciplinary field incorporating sociology, social theory, semiotics, literary theory, linguistics, economics, media studies and cultural anthropology. Winter (2004) describes cultural studies as an "interdisciplinary project … which uses qualitative methods to subject cultural forms, practices and processes of contemporary societies to critical investigation and analysis" (p. 118).

The diversity of cultural studies is due in some part to the differing British and American origins as well as to its commitment to location-specific contexts (Winter, 2004). However, an interest in everyday contemporary experiences of culture (in the broadest sense of the word) within a social and political context remains at the heart of cultural studies.

The application of cultural studies to education is still relatively new and yet it offers exciting possibilities for a fresh analysis or consumer behaviour in this very particular context. Specifically here I have been influenced by the work in Australian school semiotics - (for example, Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Meadmore & Symes, 1997; Symes, 1998) and more general theorising about consumer culture especially regarding the role of women as consumers and of advertising and marketing (for example de Certeau, 1984; Johnson & Lloyd, 2004; Kline, 1993; Lury, 1996). From the full and eclectic range of concerns of cultural studies, I have taken from critiques of consumer culture, particularly of women and children in markets, those ideas that I believe have direct applicability to this local study. This chapter uses cultural studies extensively as a tool for analysis however, it is worth reiterating that this study as a whole, is not one sited wholly in the field of cultural studies.

Cultural studies sits at the interface of markets, consumption, marketing and popular culture and therefore it offers possibilities for the exploration of 'choice' in postmodern times. Importantly for this study, it draws on a range of perspectives to understand how consumption has moved from early classical interpretations of shopping as rational behaviour for utilitarian purposes, to a blend of material and symbolic purposes (Kline, 1993) in this 'consumer society' (Baudrillard, 1998). This approach allows the naming and interrogation of not only the material and substantive marketing practices such as advertising, but also the 'symbolic' marketing located in school uniforms, school practices and students themselves. These orientations of cultural studies do not exclude a recognition of social difference, but rather help interpret different behaviours which attest to the importance of social structures, a theme which is the focus of Chapter 6 in particular.

5.2 The local market: Secondary schooling in Sydney's inner west

The following overview of the secondary schools market in Sydney's inner west, builds on the mapping and theorising laid out in Chapter 2 in order to highlight aspects pertinent to the time and location of this study, and the analysis of the data.

While almost all Australian schools receive federal funds, the amount and more recent acceleration of funding support to the non-government sector is the most significant recent differentiating characteristic of the Australian school education system.

Since the election of the Carr Labor government in 1995, NSW has consolidated earlier market-orientated policies favouring increasing differentiation and selectivity of government schooling. While the majority of government school students still attend comprehensive schools, the system is characterised by increasing diversification with more selective and specialist schools, greater variety of forms such as multi-campus, senior high schools and collegiate colleges (Campbell & Sherington, 2004). Further there are increasingly inter-sectoral curriculum arrangements such as for the provision of subjects to school students by universities, TAFE, and other private providers (Symes, 1999).

Recent changes to the government sector of NSW schooling show how complex the school sector has become, and gives an indication of the difficulties for those entering

this market for the first time. In NSW in 2001 there were 19 academic selective high schools and four agricultural high schools (Campbell & Sherington, 2004). There were also a limited number of specialist schools in sports, technology and performing arts. By 2005, besides the 4 agricultural highs, there were 17 fully selective high schools, 12 high schools with selective classes and a senior high with selective classes into Years 11 and 12 (Department of Education and Training, 2005). Further illustrating this complexity, the 2005 NSW Department of Education and Training website lists under 'Types of schools' the following options; 'general' and selective high schools, technical, sports creative and performing arts high schools, senior high schools and colleges, collegiates, language schools and schools for specific purposes (http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/schoolfind/types). And further, at the time these participants were engaged in choosing schools, two 'comprehensive' high schools in the target area had newly established 'gifted and talented classes' available by academic selection.

For the families living in the inner west of Sydney the complexity of the secondary school market was additionally aggravated by the announcement of major restructuring of local government schooling. Under the State government's 2001 *Building the Future* proposals, all the local comprehensive secondary schools were under review. Strong community reaction had the effect of reversing some proposals such as the closing of one school and the creation of a single sex school for boys. Ultimately, Sydney Secondary College was created with feeder schools offering Years 7 – 10, and a separate Year 11 and 12 campus. This move further undermined comprehensive school options for the local community since schools in the transport-rich inner west were already significantly residualised through demographic changes and competition from major selective high schools (Campbell & Sherington, 2004) not to mention the competition from many non-government schools.

While the uncertainty around the future plans for government schools of the inner west had largely subsided in the first months of my study, the lasting effects may well have contributed additional anxiety and suspicion surrounding government intentions and how new arrangements would be played out locally.

It is worthwhile recalling the fact, noted in Chapter 2, that because of the history of the inner west as a working class area, it is relatively well serviced by Catholic and government schools. In the 1980s and early 1990s many of these were under threat from falling enrolments. The changing demographics of recent years have resulted in rapidly expanding enrolments for all primary schools and this growth has recently begun to translate into a demand for secondary school places. For example, a local selective performing arts high school that struggled as a comprehensive high to fill places fifteen years ago, today struggles with an over supply of local interest. Similarly there has been an increased demand for local Catholic systemic schools. However, while most families send their children to local government primary schools, this practice is far from automatic with the transition to high schools where the attrition rate from government primary to secondary schools is above 40% (Rhiannon, 2004).

This sketch of the secondary school market in the inner west of Sydney clearly illustrates how differentiated and how volatile the market is, and sets the context for a discussion of how the women in my study went about choosing a high school for their child. In short, this context shows how these families were faced with what could be called a very post-modern experience of the market – where old certainties are rapidly evaporating, and old sources of information and values are changing. This later stage of post-modernity, described by Giddens (1990, 1991) as 'high modernity' is one where the traditional agencies of socialisation (eg church, school) are declining compared to the rising influences of the media and popular culture. This is a world where ordinary people understandably say they feel 'overwhelmed'. It is also a time of unprecedented faith in markets (Kline, 1993) as the mechanism that mediates familial interactions with society, from childrearing and child care to higher education (Pusey, 2003).

5.3 Mothers as educational shoppers

From the earliest interviews I conducted in April 2002 I began to notice how the women spoke about school choice using the metaphor of shopping.

> *I am the sort of person who has to shop around for everything. You know, if I wanted a new stove I'd have to go around and look at them all.* Rosa (1)

> *I checked out X School – just looking, just shopping.* Holly (1)

> *We feel like we might have settled on something now …we've had an intense week of shopping around.* Clover (1)

Although not all interviewees articulated this shopping metaphor so explicitly, almost all the women used language replete with shopping parallels. The women indicated how they approached the task of choosing a school in much the same way that any consumer may have described their search for the "right" product; "value for money", "affordability", "finding out what's available".

So why should it be that shopping metaphors dominated the discussion of school choice? The stories and the way they are expressed by these women clearly support the claim that markets have infected the everyday language and interactions of citizens (Waring, 1999). While 'shopping' is hardly a new idea (particularly for women), I would argue that this easy application of the shopping metaphor to schooling is new in the Australian context.

In the traditional family of the male breadwinner, the female used the male's earnings to shop for the whole family. Johnson and Lloyd (2004) show how skills of economising and wise shopping were highly regarded by post-war policy makers, the media and by women themselves. Even though the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s contested women's responsibilities around domestic labour, being a good shopper has long been a central concern of motherhood, and an important part of a mother's work (Oakley, 1982). Post-Fordist economic organization and the process of 'suburbanisation' amongst other things, have meant shopping has assumed an ever greater part of housework, now taking up a full day a week compared to two hours in the 1920s (Lury, 1996).

A number of commentators (Dowling, 1993; Game & Pringle, 1984; Johnson & Lloyd, 2004; Lury, 1996) have explained the special role ascribed to mothers in the emerging popular press of the mid 20th Century. Johnson and Lloyd point out how women resisted and subverted such public representations of their roles, and Kenway and Bullen (2001) illustrate the pervasiveness of the seductive 'foot soldiers of the market': advertising and marketing. Both accounts seek to understand the influence of

advertising culture on behaviour and the special role ascribed to women (Johnson & Lloyd, 2004) and children (Kenway & Bullen, 2001). Such accounts show how, during this time, the boundaries between advertising and marketing, the media and popular culture became increasingly blurred.

On the home front, the twentieth century saw an apparently unstoppable preference for purchased consumer items over home-made goods and services (Lury, 1996). Because so many goods need to be purchased households are forced to spend increasing amounts of time shopping; that is, "we must constantly respond to and interpret masses of information" (Kline, 1993). Between 1961 and 1984, British time studies showed that while the overall time spent on routine domestic duties declined, the time spent on shopping and childcare increased. Explanations can be found in changed housing patterns and the concentration of food retailing in large, more distant supermarket complexes (Gardiner, 1997). In addition, the supermarket increased the complexity of the shopping task, because, shoppers

> … must deal with the superfluity of products and information about them, and with the essentially antagonistic marketing techniques designed to disrupt their routines and induce them to buy new products. In this context the screening and sorting that shoppers do is a specific kind of skilled practice.
>
> (De Vault, 1991, p. 70)

In mapping the rising importance of the child to consumption, Kenway and Bullen (2001) explain how the mass production of Fordism in turn required mass consumption, and how mothers were inveigled to the cause of expanding consumption. Lury (1996) points out that women as shoppers are central to the family as an economic system. In a post-Fordist economy it is women who make up the majority of consumers in that they routinely purchase most goods. But in addition, as shoppers for the family, she argues, they also act as producers, stating that shopping "may be seen as an instance of consumption in relation to the cycle of commodity production (that is, production of goods for exchange on the market), but also as a moment of production in relation to household or domestic production (for exchange in the family)" (p. 123). Hence shopping has a dual economic function in which mothers as shoppers, are central.

In addition to buying for the home for immediate consumption, mothers were further targeted to purchase for better child-rearing (Kline, 1993) especially as behaviourist

models of psychology were replaced by developmentalism (for example Piaget's developmental theories).

> Advertising now exhorted parents – mothers – to buy products promising to ensure their child's maximum development. Good mothering came to be equated with good shopping and good shopping was understood as rational.
>
> Kenway and Bullen, 2001

In this way, women consumers bought products for their children's consumption and also acted as investors in future consumers thus consuming (and producing) beyond the immediate basic requirements of the family. Thus women, as housewives in service of the family, are the bearers of consumer culture.

This thesis has already reviewed how, despite many changes to family life, traditional divisions of labour remain largely entrenched in Australian households (Bittman & Pixley, 2000; Craig, 2002b, 2005). Australian studies show mothers overwhelmingly do most of the work associated with caring for children as well as most of the housework (Goward, 2005). In 1996 Lurey said that women implement 80% or more of consumption decisions. While it is likely that men are taking on greater responsibility for household shopping, as with childcare, it is probable that in most families women still do the bulk of this work. It is small wonder then, that mothers take the major responsibility for this familial task and given the invasive nature of markets into family life generally, it is not surprising that in this study mothers seamlessly apply everyday notions of shopping to school choice. Womens' work is still clearly situated at the centre of the family economy and shopping for schools is an extension of existing roles (David, West, & Ribbens, 1994).

On the other side of this equation, schools too now have assumed the symbols and behaviours associated with the shopping metaphor. Contemporary neoliberal policy changes have meant all schools must compete for students in the marketplace, irrespective of their expertise or financial standing. All schools now need to model themselves as competing firms (Kenway, 1995b; Marginson, 1997b) and therefore **marketing and advertising** have become essential practices in schools (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Symes, 1998) positioned as a modern enterprises.

In competitive markets, businesses allocate a considerable amount of money and energy to marketing in order to win a greater share of the market from their competitors. Marketing involves more than just advertising, it includes a range of competitive and promotional activities, aimed at identifying consumer expectations, formulating plans and strategies to fulfil these expectations and delivering products to satisfy these wants (Dixon, Mann, & O'Mahony, 2002). Marketers aim for a good 'marketing mix' of product, image, price and promotion (www.marketingtoday.com).

One way that schools seek to create an advantage over their competitors is through product **differentiation**, that is by promoting the uniqueness of a school, for example by promoting its special relationship with technology or its unique teaching approach or subject choice. Reid (2002) claims that "invariably this differentiation is organised around socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion and race." (p.575).

The burgeoning growth of different types of senior schooling (selective, specialist, collegiate, multi-campus and so on) can be seen as another example of product differentiation further contributes to the growing **segmentation** of school markets. As schools scramble to make their product noticed, they are trapped in a bind: increasingly policy imperatives (eg around curriculum and reporting) are forcing greater conformity and uniformity in Australian schooling, and yet as competing enterprises, schools need to find ways to attract customers by setting themselves apart from the crowd. As more schools join the competition, the pace accelerates and the need for product identification intensifies.

In the competition for market share there has been a blossoming of 'entrepreneurial culture' (Symes, 1998) in the school sector. Many schools now employ marketing expertise (Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Norrie, 2006, January 2) to manage a range of practices such as school promotional materials and websites; participation in 'schools expos'; direct advertising and the placement of more subtle 'stories' in local newspapers; open days, fetes and information evenings. The main marketing task for schools is the making, or remaking, of a favourable **'school image**'. In its marketing endeavours the school aims to present an image of itself that it believes will attract not just more students, but students of a kind that will further advantage their school's image and in a self-fulfilling way therefore continue the cycle of benefit to the school

(Norrie, 2006, January 2). Such markets are voracious; increasing the type of student at one school leaves another worse off with further negative spin offs for image and consequently popularity, thus potentially invoking a negative downward spiral.

In the world of schooling, image and 'reputation' are created by the full range of semiotic practices, that is, via the presentation of language, signs and symbols especially through language and behaviours that work together in a complex and dynamic mix to create an image. Besides entrepreneurially engineered 'marketing', school image is constructed by powerful signs such as uniforms, academic success and behaviour - especially by students. School image work is more complex and difficult to manage than straight forward advertising because it involves compliance from the whole school community: administrators, teachers, parents and most importantly students. Kenway and Bullen (2001) identify three common assumptions about what gives a school a good name: "strict teachers, good students and tidy grounds" (p. 135). Image and reputation are fragile concepts that any one person or event can quickly dismantle with long term effects. Schools know well the potential impact of negative publicity and they work hard to conceal 'failure' and advance 'success' (Kenway & Bullen, 2001).

Marketers employ many devices to 'sell' the school but all depend on creating and sustaining the 'right' (ie what sells) image. An important device for creating the image is the **packaging,** and it is the packaging, more often than what it contains, that attracts and sells (Kenway & Bullen, 2001). In this way schools as commodities can themselves become a form of cultural expression by the consumer since the buyer is purchasing the image, the 'dream-scape' as Zukin calls it (1991, cited in Lury, 1996). It is this fantasy or facade that appeals to their sense of style or their dreams, for example of success, prestige or the good life. Through packaging, promotion and advertising, goods are said to be "fitted with masks" designed to appeal to human wants and emotions as much as to needs, thus enabling them to assume cultural associations and illusions (Lury, 1996). The commodity itself takes on the symbol codes that carry social meaning. Packaging appeals to different people depending on a complex mix of social, gendered and financial factors as explored throughout these data chapters.

While economic rationalists argue that consumers operate rationally in choice making, the mechanisms of commodity production themselves now rely increasingly on the irrational. Advertising aims to influence, and when the product is essentially the same (like petrol, cigarettes or high schools) more elaborate ruses must be employed. Kenway and Bullen (2001) call on cultural analysis to explain contemporary marketing and especially advertising techniques which work beyond the rational and on the psyche. Such techniques inscribe goods with a 'narrative capacity' (after Williams, 1980) to tell fictional tales that imply the story's promise will be fulfilled for the consumer on purchase of the goods. Thus advertising makes a direct connection "to the readers' fantasies about themselves, and their future" (Kenway & Bullen, 2001 p. 129) shifting attention to "the plane of the possible" (Kline, 1993 p. 331). Successful marketing and advertising connects aspirations and fantasies that provoke a positive response with a point of identity for the consumer. Thus school shoppers (mothers) are invited to buy into the dreams and fantasies they hold for their children through the promise of buying into a 'good school'.

In response to the marketisation agenda, schools are forced to operate as enterprises selling a product and as such they use market strategies to attract 'shoppers' and win over 'buyers'. For their part, families too, are pulled into this matrix. Policies, the popular press, and the persistent barrage of advertising normalise the idea of schools as commodities and force families to respond as consumers.

5.4 School choice as shopping

The literature reports on mothers becoming the family's 'labourers of school choice' as well as 'the experts' on school choice (Reay & Ball, 1998). On the one hand, this role affords to these women, the advantage of being able to selectively impart information to other family members including partners; on the other hand, it brings considerable demands on time, emotions and sometimes finances for these mothers.

> *My husband was fairly disengaged in the process and he's left the decision making to me – that's part of the thing; I've made the decision and therefore I have to wear whatever the outcome is.*
>
> Hazel (2)

For example Hazel wants and gets, total responsibility for doing the shopping and for making the choice of secondary school. However this power comes at a cost – clearly

all the work associated with choosing the school is hers and so is the responsibility for how that decision resolves itself. Hazel also undertakes to earn the money required to send their child to the school of her choice.

In searching of the 'right' secondary school for their child, these mothers engaged in a process that was often convoluted, but that can nevertheless be represented by the common experience involving the following steps or strategies as represented in Figure 5.1 below. Step 1: Information gathering is the focus of this chapter.

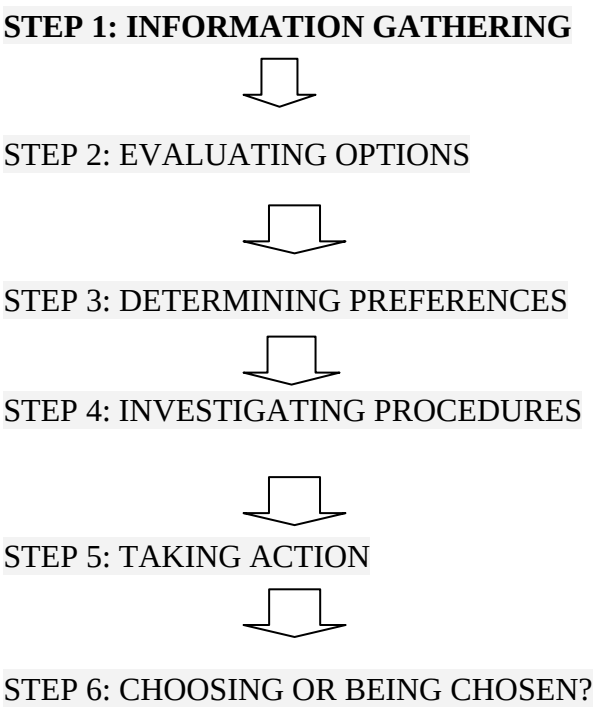


Figure 5.1 Steps in the Process of School Shopping

Although the task of school choice is presented above as a linear process, it is more complex, dynamic and cyclical. For example, having reached any point in the process new information (such as schools themselves changing) or other variables (such as changes to the family's economic circumstances) may cause a re-think and a re-engagement with the process. The process also involves powerful variables around the dynamics of social capital, familial and gendered relationships. Further, depending on the outcome of any one component, the whole process may need to be repeated. The gap between step one and six can be significant; most of the women in my study said they'd been looking at secondary school options for years.

Section 5.5 now examines the experiences of these women as they began the process of school shopping by gathering information about their options.

5.5 Information Gathering: Step One

> *I feel really green. I'm trying to find out really quick. … I'm trying real hard. Going to all the schools to hear their marketing blurb, which I know they've got to do - but I couldn't believe it.*
>
> Holly (1)

It was not uncommon for the participants in this study to report feeling ill informed about the school system in NSW, let alone in their immediate neighbourhood. For example, although Clover was brought up in the 'new' outer western suburbs during the rapid population expansion of the 1960s and 1970s, she has spent a considerable proportion of her adult life in the inner west. She attended mostly Catholic but also government schools, and has been actively involved in her child's primary education, and yet even she reported a lack of knowledge about the schooling options before her.

> *I'd like to have been more informed about high schools … It's so different from our day. I didn't even understand 'design technology', - I mean I didn't even know what the subjects were. … I feel ignorant about high school, … I wanted to know about high school, like … what's curriculum, what are the subjects?*
> Clover (1)

The following section details the various sources of information that were canvassed and something of the value attributed to the different sources; but one thing that stands out clearly is that any one piece of information was corroborated by other means. The most trusted sources of information were information from social networks and visits to the school, but even these were considered inadequate without further interrogation and supplementary information.

5.5.1 The Sales-pitch: School publicity, prospectuses, websites

> *School publications are not very useful really, compared to finding out for yourself.* Camellia (1)

In his study of school prospectuses Colin Symes (1998) concludes that the prospectus, (like other features of school semiotics) "is not an inconsequential element of the emerging political economy of education" and goes on to say that "it would be

interesting to determine the degree to which prospectuses actually influence consumer choice and market share in education" (p. 143).

This section is concerned with the responses to, and use of school-generated media by the women and their families as reported by these mothers. It also includes an analysis of the some of the text-based school advertising circulating around the time of the study.

As the women in this study searched out information about prospective schools they all reported using official school-generated materials for the collection of factual details such as subject availability, facilities, extracurricular opportunities and costs. For many, these promotional brochures and prospectuses were a starting point in their decision making process. Having established basic facts such as costs and subject availability mothers included or rejected schools for further investigation. Clearly then, early access to such materials can influence future outcomes, and, conversely without such knowledge some schools may never be investigated as an option.

For Veronica school publications provided confirmation of rumours brought home by her Year 6 son about the use of computers in a particular secondary school. This school aimed to differentiate itself from other boys' schools by offering an entry-by-selection stream that integrated computer technology into everyday teaching and learning in the classroom and at home. Like other mothers, Veronica did not rely on any one source of information, her child's say-so was corroborated by school materials directed at parents, but even then, she used this information as a basis for yet further investigation. Another mother, trying to find out about sporting opportunities for her son, said *We've got the official line, but I'd like to get the real story on this* (Ivy, 1). These women clearly recognised that the packaging was not necessarily the same as the product and both knew they had to search deeper for answers.

In general, at the time of this study, school generated publicity varied from modest, principally text-based handouts of loose pages about school subjects, school rules and newsletters, to highly sophisticated, multi paged, coloured prospectuses showing happy children, busy, well-resourced classrooms and impressive school grounds. Mostly the government schools distributed the former, and the latter came from non-government independent schools, while the publicity from systemic Catholic schools fell some

where in between. The differences between the publications of the government and non-government schools, however, went beyond differing budgetary allocations.

At the time of this study, non-government schools were at a distinct disadvantage given the not insubstantial restructuring proposals of 2001. However, they also appeared to have a much less sophisticated understanding of the importance of image-making in consumerist market-orientated contexts. Even the well-funded publicity from the NSW Department of Education and Training concerning the proposed *Building the Future* restructure seemed out of step with the slick promotional materials of the private sector. The widely distributed government pamphlet featured a few small photographs and drawings of buildings devoid of open space and school children – images unlikely to connect to the dreams or fantasies of either parents or their children. In stark contrast, the promotional materials of the nongovernment schools employed the common device of close up pictures of happy faced, well groomed children enjoying learning (Symes, 1998).

By and large, publications of the local government schools presented more information and less gloss, but they also presented a different 'aesthetic' which, reflecting a social differentiation, was recognised by these women. Angelica says:

> *I'm not a person that has to buy from David Jones if I can get the same from Target for half the price. I don't need the DJ's label*[6] *or the Gucci label and that's how I see private schools – they are labels.* (2)

Amongst those who had collected the prospectuses of non-government schools there was a degree of disapproval about the glossy, expensive formats, and the claims and offers contained within. But nevertheless, once viewed, this packaging affected the realm of possibilities perceived by the women for their children. In a sense every mother's dream of beautiful, happy, successful children schooled in well-resourced classrooms with well-kept gardens and sporting facilities had already been 'sold'. For those who didn't reject this 'dream scape' outright, every other option was doomed to be second rate. It could be argued that the 'rhetoric of appearance' (Symes, 1998) that

[6] "DJ's" is a colloquial reference to the department store David Jones, which is popularly regarded as the shopping preference of the wealthy. Its international equivalents would be Selfridges in London or Sax Fifth Avenue in New York. Target, another local store, would be akin to Marks and Spencers in Britain or Walmart in the United States of America.

seeks out the 'irrational' (Kenway & Bullen, 2001) and infuses most aspects of contemporary consumerism, has now also infected the market for secondary schooling.

Other than for the provision of verifiable facts, school-generated artefacts were generally considered to be part of the school's marketing strategy and regarded with scepticism. On the other hand, one participant did note that such documents offered a wider insight: *I'm cynical about brochures … but you do get an idea of what the schools are pushing* (Jade,1).

Surprisingly, only five families reported using the internet as a source of information about schools, and, they reported their experience as not particularly rewarding. The internet was used extensively by one mother to research proposed building changes to one of the local schools. It is likely however, given the extraordinary and rapidly growing popularity of the internet since 2002, and as both schools and families become even more adept with electronic media, the internet will take on a far greater importance alongside other forms of school publicity.

The experiences of the women in this study indicate a widespread collection and use of school-generated materials for the gathering of information in order to select for further investigation. From the consumers' point of view then, it seems such materials play an important initial, but perhaps relatively minor, part in the overall task of choosing a school. And yet such school advertising and publicity is highly rated by school marketers. For the more exclusive private schools who set the bar, the purpose of school-generated publicity is more about packaging and promoting an image that 'hooks in' potential buyers, than with immediate sales. By comparison, government schools with smaller budgets and fewer (if any) marketing strategies, were shown to be more likely to produce materials appealing to the rational, through the provision of facts for immediate consumption, rather than for building dreams.

5.5.2 (Un)Popular gossip - The media

Although the media was not commonly identified by these participants as a particularly important influence in their school choice making, its presence was clearly pervasive. When questioned further, many mothers reported noting advertisements about school events such as open days and schools expos, many said they enjoyed reading about local

schools in the suburban press, and others referred to the commentary in the popular media about broader issues such as the drift from public schooling and the rising popularity of coaching colleges and selective schooling.

> *People are becoming more competitive generally perhaps and maybe there's a bit of over-anxiety attaching too much importance on it [educational success]. For example, in the media so many people sitting for the [selective schools'] test and so few places, and a lot of people are putting their kids through that process when it may not be appropriate, just to see how they'd go …*
> *I think the whole consumer sovereignty stuff; "We've got to give people what they want" - I think a whole lot is driven by that view. Everybody thinks "I want my child to be in selective". They are catering to consumer driven stuff – it's not about education. All this publicity about coaching colleges – it was big this year, that attitude about selective … And I think they've misread that. For example, 15,000 people sat the selective test – does that mean we need 15,000 selective places?*
> *I wonder how much it's just all about consumerism, is it just about people who are being overly ambitious for their children?*
>
> Clover (2)

Although most women reported an interest in reading about education and schooling in particular, mothers clearly and strongly discounted the value of mainstream media accounts of schools recognising that schools and others used the media for their own purposes, *I don't like the media in Australia; it mixes things up* (Poppy, 1). However negative reports about schools can leave lasting impressions. A few mothers commented on the sensational media reports of 2000 about a local school. One family that was considering the school, said those *media reports …gave us a lot of anxiety* (Ivy, 1). While such negative press did cause considerable short term anxiety, it did not ultimately affect this family's decision, but clearly in the local community, memories of the events were still strong.

The interview data revealed another surprising element about the media and school choice. A mother originally from the Peoples Republic of China, spoke about the importance of the (local and overseas) Chinese press as a source of information about the relative academic successes of secondary schools in NSW. She said that amongst many of her friends here and in China, these reports on Australian schools, especially their comparative academic ranking scales, were very influential indeed. By contrast few other mothers volunteered that they took note of Australian press reports comparing schools' academic achievements.

It seems then, that for the women in this study, the official media was primarily used as a site for accessing details from advertisements about school events and open days. Beyond that these women placed little store by the media – they preferred their own sources of information. It must be noted, however, that at the time of data collection there was no particular coverage of local schools in the popular media. There was though, a continual but generalised public discourse in the press about the declining popularity of government schools, and from early 2002, occasional reports of The Vinson Inquiry into public education [7] The participants did report an interest in reading about local schools in their suburban papers. Like the research by Mills (2004) into the role of a local newspaper covering a schools debate, the reference by these participants to media coverage of a two-year old incident, shows the pervasive nature of the media even amongst those with little regard for it.

5.5.3 Trade fairs - Schools Expos, The Good Schools Guide

In 2002 Sydney had experienced only four "Independent Schools Expos". These show case exhibitions were held at Sydney University, arguably one of the most prestigious universities in Australia, and were styled along the lines of the International Education Exhibitions now stock fair in the global education markets. Only private schools are represented in such forums. In 2005 the popularity of this event had grown; over 40 independent schools participated and more than 3,000 families visited over the two days (www.schoolsexpo.com.au).

Only three families from this study attended the Schools Expo. The Expos was regarded as useful for providing easy access to a wide range of independent school options and for these time-poor mothers that was regarded as a bonus. Through this forum two families found out about schools they were otherwise unfamiliar with.
However, it is likely that many, if not most, schools had already filled their target enrolments for the following year and their participation in the Expo was part of a broader marketing exercise to target parents of much younger children. Such trade fairs

[7] Beginning in 2001, the NSW Teachers Federation and the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations of NSW commissioned and funded an independent and wide-ranging review of public education commonly known as the Vinson Inquiry.

and the accompanying hype help create a climate of desire and exclusivity that benefits the whole market for independent schooling.

When participants were asked how they found out about the schools only one person reported using the Good Schools Guide. Angelica's used the Guide as a reference against which she could check out schools as she heard about them on the grapevine or in the media.

5.5.4 Pacing the aisles - School site visits and telephone inquiries

It was not uncommon for mothers to **telephone** schools with a particular request or query and these experiences made important impressions on the mothers and contributed strongly to their impression of the school. It seemed that more often than not, over-supplied schools assumed a hostile approach to dealing with the public. One parent reported a school's response when she admitted her son wasn't baptised; … *it was disgusting … it was so patronising. She said "Well I'm sure there are plenty of other lovely schools, but this school is for Catholic families, practising Catholic families" I thought you hypocritical shit because I know lots of people who get their kids baptised just to get in … I'm not used to being told to bugger off!* (Ivy, 2).

Quite a few families in the study were hoping to be accepted into selective or out of area government schools, and in some cases were on waiting lists for months. One government school in particular was singled out for its preparedness to answer queries about a child's chances or progress on the list.

> *I think [particular government school] has a good system – they give you a number and are happy to tell you your statistics compared to other years. With [selective high school] there is a wall of silence and you have no indication whether you should give up or keep hoping.* Jade (2.2)

Other mothers had more negative responses from the over-supplied selective school:

> *… the interaction was not very helpful, the receptionist was really derisive, she said "You'd be better off going to another school" – I just didn't get it … she was so unhelpful.*
>
> Angelica (1)

Being uncertain about the options before her, Heather rang the school to ask to speak to the principal, and was told the principal wouldn't see her "*under any circumstances*".

> *I was rather taken aback by that – it made a bad impression. Also, later, the office lady was … rude. While we were waiting to hear back from them, I rang to ask how we might have fared and she asked me if there was anything special about my child!* Heather (2)

In NSW there are sharp differences between the school **open days** as offered by government and non-government schools. The government schools in this study had a tradition of 'Information Evenings' for parents in contrast to the weekend 'Open Days' normally offered by the independent and Catholic schools. It was also common for the government high schools in the area to make direct approaches to feeder primary schools to invite Year Six students to various school daytime activities, as well as to invite parents to information evenings. Many mothers commented positively about such transition programs and took account of their children's responses to the schools they visited.

There was less evidence of these kinds of transition activities offered by the over-supplied selective government schools. Catholic systemic feeder primary schools also had strong links to selected Catholic secondary schools, and, like the government sector, actively promoted these throughout the primary years. It was relatively rare for schools to hold open days during school time, but where they did, this was very popular. A few parents felt it important enough to made special arrangements to visit schools during normal school hours and most ranked such visits as highly informative.

Another significant opportunity for visiting schools were 'Orientation Days' for students and their parents who had accepted a place offered by the school. These days were held in October or November before the new intake in February. In addition some schools interviewed prospective students prior to offering them a place, and for those mothers this was regarded as a significant source of information. For one mother in particular this interview made a very positive impression …*she [the principal] was very friendly and relaxed and nice to the children and she had a dog in the office. It was very welcoming and relaxed.*… (Lily, 1). The only school in the catchment area that didn't offer a formal opportunity for prospective parents to visit and tour the school was the over-supplied government selective performing arts school.

All the mothers visited schools of interest and there was a common feeling that 'seeing with my own eyes' was one of the most useful of all the information-gathering activities. In most cases, visits to schools followed on from other information-gathering activities such as word of mouth, or from school publicity. Mothers felt site visits were invaluable because, *You get to see the kids, the place … You get a feel for the school and how the people there try to present their school – what they think is important and what they think they are providing.* Jade (1)

Site visits were highly regarded for their own sakes but also in order to make comparisons. The following sample of comments shows how sophisticated these women were as shoppers. They used or engineered contacts with schools to gather information for the purposes of comparing and analysing that data. Comparisons were made between particular schools and across school systems.

We really liked it … we were shown around by prefects. They were smart, put on good manners. Everything was well displayed, the classrooms looked great. They had a music teacher there. It made a good impression on us. Primrose 1

And at open day it seemed that despite more boys than girls - the girls there were really confident and happy. Also music is important, I was comparing music in both schools. Rosemary 2

This is the observation I made – at [government selective high school] you get the Orchestra, at [local high school] you get a Rock and Roll band, I don't know what you make of that. … At the state school they did it well, – they had some speeches and then some small quasi-lessons. It worked well, I was really impressed. The teachers did it well, with enthusiasm, it was real home spun, real nice. With the P& C doing the noodle bar etc it was real nice. Whereas the private school they used the catering staff.
But some of the things they didn't say I thought was very telling. At [government selective high school] the young woman and man both got up and spoke very confidently, extremely confidently, so confidently they almost made you sick. The kid at [local high school] was such a contrast. He got up, said a few things, shuffled his feet, then couldn't think of anything else to say, and started again. I mean it was shocking – I mean, I thought if that is the best public speaker you can put up there?… It's shocking. It doesn't look good. They were all shabby, I mean the way they are wearing the uniforms I mean … You make comparisons.
Holly 1

So we went to the [local government school] information evening which made me run a mile – it was terrible, absolutely shocking – I mean the physical place itself is just terrible enough for me - so old, awful and

small. I just thought; "Oh I hope we don't have to go here". The evening was just so terrible. Veronica 2

What you see at the school makes a big impression. For example, you expect the school will pick the best speaker to talk to the parents, and you expect the child may be nervous but that they will at least have prepared something, and this didn't happen at this school. It made a really bad impression. And what they look like - the girls wear very short, short, very short skirts and the tie is undone, and this is on an open day when you are trying to impress people.
Camellia 1

These comments reflect an appreciation – but not an approval - of what is happening in the marketplace, particularly of how schools have been positioned to use such events as a forum to compete for customers: *At the meeting, one government school accused another of poaching their students. That kind of thing is terrible* (Lily, 1). The mothers recognised that the new market-orientated context required schools to respond differently and, although willing to be understanding, they were nevertheless scathing about those schools that failed to use the occasion to present well.

The stories about contacts with schools illustrated the importance of school image and of 'impression management' in the creation and maintenance of that image (Symes, 1999). Orchestrated events such as school open days are prime forums for showcasing the school to potential 'customers' and many components combine to form an overall image or impression that will attract or repel a potential consumer. Key 'signs' include the physical site itself: in this study represented by numerous comments on space, tidiness, maintenance and aesthetic appeal.

…the things that I thought were completely unimportant that I had prided myself on not being, like snobbery … but when I went to [local government high school] with its broken windows and graffiti and then going to the extremely aesthetically pleasing [private boys school] with beautiful grounds and chapel and facilities – like, it's nice- it's really nice, you know.
Iris (1)

It seems little escaped the critical gaze of the astute shopper. Even months later the women shared observations about facilities, resources, the state of the toilet block, the classroom presentations, and the people *The teachers were really friendly, especially if you are not a Caucasian, you really notice how they treat you.* (Camellia, 3).

As the women spoke about visiting the schools they also revealed an understanding of how, they too, had been positioned in this competitive market. As sophisticated consumers, most were able to recognise the promotional aspects of the exercise *I feel sorry for the schools – it's not about education now, it's about sales pitch* (Clover, 1). Mostly they were uncomfortable about the situation, feeling either manipulated: *I feel really angry because I know what's going on. I know we fall totally into the category they want to send their kids off to private schools* (Ivy, 1) or disgusted: *They are just telling the parents what they think they want to hear* (Lily, 1)

As reported in these visits to schools, key moments in the construction of the school's image revolved around the 'look' of the school but also included the official presentations: the displays of student work, the speeches by the principal, the staff, the P & C and, by the students themselves. Interestingly in this study, few people commented on the content of these speeches but, most noted the presentation style and the appearance of the students that spoke. None of the mothers commented on the grooming or appearance of the adults representing the school, and yet reflections about the children almost **always** included commentary about their appearance, their grooming and uniform.

May's eldest child goes to a government high school two suburbs away rather than the local high school that May rejected because, *Mainly the look of them, the scruffiness, it's really turned me off. That's why the first goes to [government boys' high school] because they are strict on uniform and you've got to learn to be well groomed for when you leave school for jobs and stuff* (1). Such observations were a particularly strong feature of the descriptions given by the non Anglo-Saxon mothers and comments displayed a strong preference for traditional and strict uniform policies.

Mothers were not the only ones to note uniforms and appearance; the children too saw the uniform as an important sign of a 'good school' indicating "a disciplined and regulated body of students" (Meadmore & Symes, 1997, p. 177).

> *My daughter says "I'm glad I'm not going to [government girls' school]" and "They're all bitches" And she sees the uniform so short and the dyed hair…*
> Lily (2)

Citing her son's experience with, and survival of, bullying in an inner London primary school, Veronica described him as 'a street wise kid' who had strong views about the kind of high school he wanted:

> *He's decided **that** is the kind of school he wants to go to- ie where you wear a nice uniform, and where there's quite a lot of strong discipline, … that's the kind of place he really wanted to go.* Veronica (2)

Veronica's son was imagining himself as the uniformed child, safe in a disciplined environment dreaming a 'dream of identity' (Barthes, 1983) that, in its reversion to traditional values, offers security and wholeness in a fragmented and dangerous 'late modern' world (Giddens, 1991).

These children have grown up in a marketised world, as 11 and 12 year olds they have been exposed to gender-specific advertising aimed at exploiting their desire to differentiate themselves. As members of the 'teen generation' 12-14 year olds are targeted with brands associated with age and gender specific icons such as supermodels or pop idols (Kline, 1993). And yet both Veronica and May's children children rejected the option to self-style that is allowed in some schools with more relaxed uniform policies. Irrespective of their differences: one from a low SES, the other middle class, with differing genders and school preferences (government and Catholic systemic), these two children hold re-traditionalised views of school style. By buying out of the 'cool' option these consumers expressed a preference that aligned with their parents' views and a growing trend by schools to use "signifiers of traditionalism" (Ball, 2003; Woods, Bagley, & Glatter, 1998). There is no question for them that school uniform represents a type of school and a type of school student – for them the packaging **is** the product.

This strong confluence of views between these baby boomer parents, or the "Stress Generation", as Hugh Mackay (1997) calls them, and their children, contradicts the view that markets and marketing necessarily segregates. In educational markets it can often collapses generational differences (Ball, 2003; Kenway, 1990) particularly under the influence of class. As shown in Kenway and Bullen's research (2001), students know well the importance of image to the construction of popular understandings of what makes a 'good school'. This age group has high aspirational values, and for these

school children and their parents, consumption connects to a conservative, less risky dream (Kenway, 1999).

School open days are, clearly, promotional activities and yet compared to advertising, they are high-risk ventures because multiple aspects of the product are on display simultaneously and because neither these 'signs' nor the consumers behave in entirely predictable ways. As a marketing activity, successful open days require careful planning and management to ensure the right impression is created through the development of a coordinated set of signs and practices. Open days, and indeed any direct contact between the school and the public becomes a marketing moment and illustrates the movement towards a culture of consumption that is more about appearance than performance.

5.5.5 Getting the low-down – Networking and insider trading

> *Well, it's a very big part of the conversation – actually it's the only conversation! For example you go to parties and you talk to people and gather information …* Camellia (2)

Conversations about schools were a constant in the lives of these women throughout, and often before and beyond, this study. Mothers used social networks for collecting and sharing information across all six steps in the process of school choice. These networks were valued as a constant source of new information as well as a location for swapping stories and for testing out views within a sympathetic milieu. In addition to sharing information, it seemed that talking about the issues helped the women clarify their own views. Most mothers shared stories freely about schools and appreciated hearing others in turn.

In keeping with the findings of Ball (2003), both parents and students privilege informal sources of information gathered from social networks over formal sources. *I did my own follow ups via the network of friends and kids* (Hazel, 1). In another case, Ivy rejected a school even though her son had been successful in the entry test saying, *we'd heard a story that the science staff had girlie pictures up in their room* (2).

Further, this study reveals the extent of this networking with information swapping within and between nuclear and extended families, local communities and even

including overseas networks as far away as China and Thailand. Three main types of information networks were featured in my discussions with mothers; the mothers' network; the children's network and to a lesser extent the networking with others such as extended family members, friends or associates.

The mothers' network

> *It's the networking, the network of mothers, the word of mouth stuff that counts.*
> Daphne (1)

As an initial source of information about schools, mothers drew on local knowledge primarily from other mothers at their primary schools, but also from neighbours, people in their children's sporting and activity clubs and via social activities such as adult and children's parties. Interestingly these networks were initially largely bound to physical location and existing social groupings, be they in Australia or overseas. However in the course of canvassing high school options, these networks radiated out beyond existing geographic, social and religious networks. For example Rosa and Hazel sought out connections on Sydney's North Shore for information about the better-resourced government schools in those more affluent suburbs; Primrose and May turned to close and distant relatives for information about Catholic school options, and Jade tracked down families of high school children formerly at her primary school:

> *I preferred to get the info from people I believed in – the only people I listened to in the end were the people who had kids at the schools themselves – and that was a big influence. The types of people who I knew had my values, the schools they chose and the fact that if they were prepared to send their kids to a school, then that was good.* (Jade, 1)

It seemed most women had 'core' networks that were supplemented either purposely or serendipitously. Most networks were wide, however not everyone had extensive networks, nor ones that opened up options. Social and cultural ties were strong factors variously working to limit or expand information gathering.

For example, Peony's English was not very strong and her social networks in the Anglo-Australian community were limited. As a consequence her main sources of information outside the Chinese community were second hand. Her husband and her

daughter tell her stories from their networks. Her husband works at TAFE[8] and her daughter has friends at both private and public selective schools. So Peony says her information comes from *my husband, and my daughter, but not much from other parents … but I trust my husband the most* (1). On the other hand she has extensive overseas networks:

> *My friends in China they send their children hereto school so I know a lot from them about schools. The Chinese [friends] know a lot, they have ranking of the academic achievements of the schools and of the university entrance scores of the different schools. They are very serious. They rank them from one down. They get their information from overseas media and from Australia too* (1).

Lily was considering a Catholic systemic school and seemed to lack access to any 'insider' information on this option. Similarly Poppy's network excluded the gathering of certain kinds of information *I don't know [about alternatives] because we always around people who send their kids to government schools* (1).

Information of any kind, even if not directly relevant, had currency as exchange value in the trading of information; *The network goes both ways* (Ivy 1). One such story revolved around an inappropriate question about marital status that was asked of a prospective mother and daughter at an Orientation interview at a girls' government high school. *This story went round the mother's network like quick-fire. People were outraged* (Lily 1).

While all stories had exchange value, not all were trusted. There was a strong sense that all information sh/could be collected, but equally, that all information should be closely scrutinised:

> *I listen to all the opinions and it's really interesting, but it all boils down to whether that person speaking is biased or not. You know they don't really look at the full picture because people could talk about experience but it isn't necessarily going to be your child's experience.* Camellia (1).

Stories were collected and stories were vetted, however the most trusted source remained the mothers' network:

[8] TAFE is the acronym for Technical and Further Education, which refers to Australia's system of technical colleges.

I've found out mainly from other mothers because they are more tuned in
Lily (1)

As already alluded to, the mother's information networks performed an additional, allied function to the provision of information, and that was, as a forum to discuss views and even for formulating action as evidenced by the stories of Poppy, Clover and Daphne in Chapter 7.

While these women spoke at length about the social networks that sourced their information about schools, reference to male partners and fathers in these conversations was largely absent. *I do all the networking of course, so I've actually had the main say…* (May 1). Men mostly entered the conversation as significant, well-connected others. Apart from Peony's story, fathers played virtually no role in information gathering; they were more often pulled into the process of analysing the information that was collected and presented to them by their partners.

In stark contrast to the market that revolves around competition, there was no evidence in this study of competitive behaviour between the women, even though there was a clear understanding that in many cases their child was competing directly against other children for a place in a school. In fact the behaviour of these mothers-as-consumers was collusive in that they swapped information and undermined the exclusive practices of the competing schools.

These women displayed a sense of community with other mothers going through the difficult task of school choice, and a preparedness to help each other. For example, Poppy said she joined this study *so I can give something back* (3).

The work of de Certeau (1984) offers a useful perspective for interpreting such collusive market-undermining "practices of everyday life" as exhibited by these mothers. de Certeau proposes that people, in the act of shopping, for example, can employ "tactical ruses" in opposition to the "strategies" of the dominant neoliberal market. de Certeau refers to the "clever tricks of the 'weak' within the order established by the 'strong', an art of putting one over on [sic] the adversary on his own turf" (1984, p. 40). In his terms the "strategies" of neoliberal markets position consumers to operate independently and in competition for limited goods (ie 'good' schools) and to compete

for information about these products. de Certeau suggests consumers sometimes subvert such 'rules' for their own purposes. In this case collecting and sharing information in a network entitles one to also receive the information collected by others, and is therefore mutually beneficial. And further, contrary to the individualistic and self-interested motivations that are supposed to characterise consumer behaviour, these women often operated from a sense of community and social obligation.

In some ways, de Certeau's view empowers the consumer giving them agency over market practices, but it also illustrates the tensions between the power of the market and of the consumer. Certainly the sharing of information is a defining characteristic of the process of shopping for the women in this study. However, this commonality of practice needs to be further interpreted against other intersecting social factors such as ethnicity and SES in the school market context, themes which are the focus of more explicit concern in the following chapters.

The children's network

Information shared amongst children, and between children and adults was an important aspect of local networking. As with the mothers' information networks, children circulated stories about schools rapidly and constantly. Primary school children supplied mothers with gossip and older students already at high school, offered a perspective based on first hand experience. Children learned from and informed each other about schools, and in addition their views and experiences informed mothers. Despite some claims made in early interviews no mothers in this study allowed, or had their child's school preferences override theirs. But nevertheless all mothers valued information from children: their own, and/others'.

> *… the kids are preoccupied with it – it's been talked about at school non-stop. This comparison all the time.* Lily (2)

> *I think you can't help but be influenced by experiences and by your network, the grapevine, and you can get caught up in it - the push to private schooling – and the kids absolutely get caught up in it too. Absolutely – they are the ones bringing home the rumours; "I wouldn't go there!! Etc etc" And it's pervasive, from year 2 or 3 at least. The kids pick up on it so much. And there's all this hearsay …* Daphne (1)

> *The playground talk has been a big influence, especially regarding one school – amongst the kids, its reputation stinks* Veronica (1)

Over time, between the first interviews and those towards the end of the year, there appeared amongst the women, to be a growing recognition of the potential destructiveness of much of the children's talk, and considerable energies went into interpreting, countering and mediating such stories within the home. It was not uncommon by the end of the second round of interviews to hear how the mothers had begun to curtail if not actively discourage 'playground talk' within family conversations about schools. Playground talk was mostly considered unreliable; more rumour and prejudice than informed and useful. And furthermore, mothers expressed concern about how readily children took up these unsubstantiated stories sometimes adding to their child's anxieties.

> *…the kids at school told our son that school "is shit" and he was really demoralised.* Clover (1)

> *I don't think the kids really understand the difference between public and private – you know why X is going to [private school], the status stuff…and their perceptions about the local school ie "only losers go there". I made a conscious effort to stop talking about it. I felt enough was enough. I was sick to death of it all.* Lily (2)

On the other hand mothers often found occasions to quiz children, especially those already at high school, for their views and experiences. These conversations could be very influential *I've never considered [particular Catholic systemic school] because anytime I've spoken to the kids there, they've never seemed happy; they don't like it* (May, 1). *My son's friends who have moved on to high school have so much to tell [about their schools.]* (Veronica, 1).

But there were also examples of how some adults had spoken with children about school choices in ways that were unappreciated. Clover told of how another parent had tried to dissuade her son from a school he favoured *I thought that was really inappropriate. I've found even nice people say inappropriate things. I'm astounded. It's so stressful for the kids* (2). Parents from one primary school complained how teachers there constantly asked after, and commented on their student's applications for high schools.

Clearly talk about high school for some, at some points, became all-consuming moving beyond the relatively benign task of information sharing and into a potentially destructive plane of gossip and rumour encompassing both children and their families. These influences couldn't be further from the rational objective decision making advocated by the neoliberal economic discourses.

The network of 'others'

Contacts beyond the immediate and everyday circles of family and friends were also exploited as information sources. In some cases these people were already known to the mothers and in other cases they arose by chance. But as a group, these women had limited access to connections that were able to offer any especially new or significant information. No one had social connections that could make a difference.

In only one case was this wider network really significant.

> Heather's work as a nurse provides the stable income for their family of two children and two adults. Her husband is tradesman but often unemployed. They live in rental property. The family has rejected the local school because of its poor reputation and gender imbalance, as well as the Catholic system because her husband is a disaffected Catholic and she is strongly anti Catholic. The family is interested in an all-girls' school but as they are out of area they are not confident of securing a position there.
>
> The child's music teacher suggested that Heather's daughter audition for the performing arts high school. This was not an option they had previously considered and Heather was uncertain about the school. Serendipitously through her daughter's involvement in primary school music she met the band master who offered to show her around the school. This one event made a significant difference to the family since the performing arts high school itself had been less than helpful and, until then, they hadn't considered this option.

For Heather this chance meeting opened the door to an option otherwise most likely not pursued.

5.6 Conclusion

This study shows for these women, the universal importance of finding out about possible school options as a first step in the process of school choice. It showed that in NSW the onus is largely on the consumer to find out about schools. Unlike the UK where the state supplements information through the publication of league tables and inspection reports (Ball, 2003) the provision of information about secondary schools in NSW is the province of the market and increasingly of marketers.

Mothers collected information from a variety of sources and over an extended period of time. For most women, there was a strong belief that all information sources ought to be exploited to the maximum so that they could be fully informed of their options. But all information gathered was vetted. "In a sense, all information was considered but none, or almost none was trusted" (Ball, 2003, p. 157) at least not on its own. In the process of finding out about schools these women were drawn into a sea of information and misinformation, a situation that they recognised as inextricably connected to the marketisation of schooling. The task of discerning fact from fiction, image from reality, sales pitch from truth, was demanding and these mothers spent considerable time locked into these tasks. This stage of The Process of School Shopping illustrates how these women tried to balance out objective, rational shopping against the powerful 'dream scapes' formulated by this competitive market. Official information repeatedly failed to impress compared to information obtained from first hand observations and social networks.

Mothers actively engaged "in a process of receiving, seeking and interpreting information about schools" for the benefit of the family (Woods, Bagley, & Glatter, 1998, p. 214). In this study social networks and the family in particular, played important roles as collection points and subsequently as forums for discussion and analysis of findings. In most cases mothers described how they engaged their social networks in order to progress their thinking and decision making.

In carrying out this first step in The Process of School Shopping these mothers proved themselves to be sophisticated shoppers aware of, and yet also able to undermine the

workings of the market. Their use of the information gathered is the focus of the following two chapters.

6. MOTHERS AS EDUCATIONAL SHOPPERS: WEIGHING UP THE OPTIONS

6.1 Introduction

The last chapter, Chapter 5, began the exploration of the analogy of everyday commodity shopping and its applicability to school choice as articulated by the mothers in this study. Mothers' descriptions of their shopping experiences were used to formulate a six step process, and Chapter 5 focussed on Step One: Information gathering. Chapter 5 used ideas from cultural studies to focus on the way that these women operated in response to the barrage of information in this competitive market that was seen so often to be reconstituting 'information' into complex promotional and marketing strategies.

This chapter, Chapter 6, continues to work with the data to explore how these mothers move forward from their initial information-seeking activities about secondary schools, to evaluating and choosing between their options. Thus this chapter is scaffolded around Step 2 and Step 3 of The Process of School Shopping as illustrated again below.

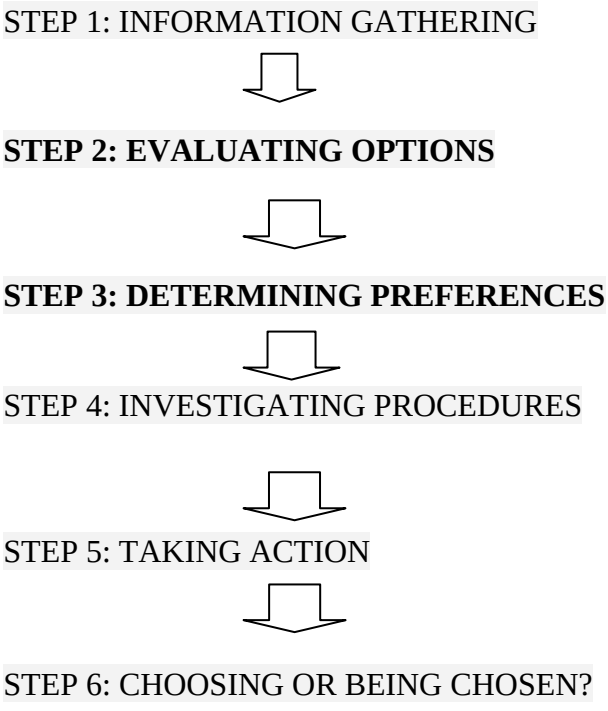


Figure 6.1 Steps in the Process of School Shopping

Chapter 6 begins by exploring the theoretical orientations adopted for the analysis of data in this chapter. It then presents the data by relating contrasting experiences of particular women engaged in evaluating their options and determining their family's school preferences.

6.2 Bourdieu and school shopping

This chapter interacts with theories of social reproduction and schooling, especially those that intersect with thinking about cultural theory, although I am not simply interested in social reproduction through school choice. My interest is to explore how social factors interact with gender, family and ethnicity. That is, this chapter explores how, as these women move towards selecting a secondary school, they behave as consumers using consumption to maintain and strengthen social boundaries while also being used by the market for consumption-generating purposes. By closely studying the stories of these women I saw them at times exercising power and agency, and at other times seemingly rendered powerless. Sometimes these mothers acted as savvy shoppers aware of how the market operates to manipulate sales, while at other times they were at the mercy of the market.

From a close and recursive reading of the interview transcripts it became clear that the data needed to be analysed in a way that would recognise the interplay of structure and individual agency. I also sought a theoretical framework that would accommodate my interest in how gender and family interacted with the affective aspects of school shopping. As a consequence I was drawn to Bourdieu because his work on social reproduction and culture are flexible enough to accommodate these parameters. And further, his central concerns intersect with the ideas on individual and collective consumer behaviour as problematised by cultural studies theorists already explored in the previous chapter.

This chapter calls on the work of Bourdieu, especially his interdependent notions of 'habitus', 'field' and 'capital' to analyse the behaviours of these mothers-as-consumers. Bourdieu's concepts suggest ways to account for the choices that are made favouring one commodity over another via the playing out of taste and style by consumers in a socially stratified or classed system. Chapter 6 looks at taste and style because they,

along with economic capital, are key aspects of choice-making in a neoliberal market context.

In using Bourdieu I am mindful of the increasing appreciation of his work for theorising and research in education as evidenced for example in the special editions on Bourdieu in the Journal of Education Policy (2005) and the British Journal of Sociology of Education (2004). Much of this recent attention rightfully goes beyond Bourdieus's early work on education and social reproduction and interacts with later "more polemic texts" (Lingard, Taylor, & Rawolle, 2005, p. 663). One interesting shift in the recent up take of Bourdieu's work is a greater focus on the concept of 'field' which has been previously neglected in education (Maton, 2005). Further, there appears to be a greater recognition of Bourdieu's contribution beyond theorising, for example there has been an interest in his reflexive methodology and epistemology which encourages the extension and application of his conceptual tools to a range of social contexts from global policy to class-room interactions.

I am also aware, however of the criticisms Bourdieu has attracted. Early criticisms of Bourdieu's work revolved around the obscurity / ambiguity of his writing (Heath, 1982 and Jenkins, 1989 cited in Nash, 1990; Postone, LiPuma, & Calhoun, 1995); the on-going charge of determinism/structuralism (Bohman, 2000; Margolis, 2000; Nash, 1990); the circularity of his notion of habitus (Nash, 1990); and his virtual silence on matters of gender and ethnicity (Miller & Branson, 1987). In part such criticisms are product of the late translation of early Bourdieuian texts (Grenfell, 1998), the slowness of sociologists to take up his newer writings (Robbins, 2004) and the extraordinary volume of work that documents his evolving thinking.

However as more of Bourdieu's work has become available to, and been taken up by the English speaking world, these criticisms have dissipated. Bourdieu's contribution across the social sciences is increasing (Lingard, Taylor, & Rawolle, 2005) and his work is recognised for its versatility and potential for empirical application and further theory building.

Increasingly sociologists in the English speaking world have found value in applying Bourdieu's concepts to particular locations and circumstances (see the Special Edition

of the British Journal of Sociology of Education, 2004). For example, Reay offers one response to criticisms of Bourdieu by suggesting his concept of habitus is of particular use when employed as a method – ie a conceptual tool for empirical research:

> … the difficulties, inconsistencies, risks of determinism, and aspects of circularity inherent in habitus can be viewed as far less problematic if habitus is viewed more fluidly as both method and theory; a way of understanding the world (Reay, 2004, p. 439).

Reay's view offers a way to capitalise on the strengths of Bourdieu's conceptual work and also accommodates the evolutionary nature of his thinking. Further, importantly for this study, it enables a constructive response to the identified shortcomings especially relating to Bourdieu's neglect on gender and the constraints of habitus. As this chapter shows, these shortcomings do not necessarily inhibit the application of his conceptual frames for a contextualised analysis of individual and small-group behaviours.

6.3 The relationship of taste and style to 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital'

Consumer culture is "characterised by increased stylisation" whereby the production, exchange and use of consumer goods is increasingly valued for its symbolic attributes as components of 'lifestyle' (Lury, 1996, p. 80). As contemporary Western society is bombarded by a seemingly ever increasing supply of goods, individuals consume a greater proportion of symbolic over utilitarian goods (Featherstone, 2000). The increasing use of goods as a means to distinguish one's self socially can be seen as one instance of the struggle for social position. As more consumers spend more on symbolic goods seeking ways to display their social status, their behaviour adds to the ever increasing spiral of consumption. In this scenario modes of consumption are increasingly designated by 'taste' and 'style'.

When markets become the mechanism for the allocation of goods in the sphere of education, then schools-as-commodities and parents-as-consumers are positioned similarly. It could be argued that once schooling moves beyond its basic utilitarian function in order to attract a greater share of the market, it too is characterised by greater symbolic or stylised aspects. In this scenario schools-as-commodities have an additional value beyond simply educating children, and that value is symbolic – schools can be used to differentiate oneself and one's family. The choice of schools is actioned by economic capital, but also importantly by issues of style and taste that are social

constructions that both reflect and mark difference. Thus in the context of an ever-changing and ever growing flow of commodities, taste "the discriminatory judgement" (Featherstone, 2000, p.17) takes on new and particular meanings.

Bourdieu (and others such as Veblen, 1899, and Douglas and Isherwood, 1980) points to the ways consumption is used to access, maintain and mark social divisions. For Bourdieu "taste classifies the classifier" (1984), that is, consumption and lifestyle choices are the products of 'discriminatory judgements' which simultaneously also identify and "render classifiable our own particular judgement of taste to others" (Featherstone, 2000, p.17). Taste is both the outcome and the marker of social difference, and further it can be learned so that by acquiring the appropriate 'taste' one may gain entrée to different social groupings.

For Bourdieu taste is learned as 'capital' from one's current and inherited social milieu, particularly from one's family. Taste in cultural goods especially, functions as a marker of social position. In *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste* (1984) Bourdieu maps out how differently class and occupation groups spend on cultural or lifestyle goods. For example visiting museums, concert going or watching football, matches different tastes in lifestyle and consumer goods such as food, drink, hobbies and holidays. These modes of consumption are a means by which social groups can be identified, challenged, reproduced or maintained over time.

For Bourdieu this is a highly classed situation whereby the domination of the upper class determines distinctive notions of 'good' or 'bad' taste. Such classifications are subject to change in a consumer society. For example, if the lower sections of society adopt a certain consumer good then, the upper classes loose interest in it, as it is no longer a signifier of wealth or status. The upper classes have to find other commodities to demarcate and reproduce themselves. As the rate of production of new, desirable goods speeds up and there is a greater "democratisation" of consumer goods, it is more difficult to obtain "positional goods" that mark status for any length of time. As more and more people purchase goods to mark status, positional or competitive consumption is no longer confined to the elite (Hirsch, 1977). The idea of education as a positional good (Hirsch, 1977) has already been canvassed in Chapter 2, but it is clear how such a

spiralling upwards of taste and desire can take effect in a marketised educational system.

According to Bourdieu, people make taken-for-granted consumption choices because of an internalised set of conditions shaped by ones familial and social /class position. This "**habitus**" is a habit, a system of dispositions "which organises the individual's capacity to act" (Lury, 1996, p. 83). Habitus is durable and transportable and can be inherited. The habitus provides a template for action but like any template, this template reflects common patterns of behaviour but does not foreclose on individual agency, nor is it a guarantee of predictable actions. Habitus is a valuable tool for social analysis because it can offer an explanation for how processes of social reproduction can occur with or without conscious planning or strategising (Calhoun, 1995).

Habitus is central to Bourdieu's theory of practice and stands at the intersection between structure and independent action; that is, between the social, and individual agency. An individual's habitus facilitates certain consumer actions and inhibits others. It is:

> A system of lasting and transposable dispositions, which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transformations of schemes permitting the solutions of similarly shaped problems. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 83)

A person's habitus is both "structured and structuring" (Bourdieu, 1984) as it facilitates certain consumer roles and discourages others, and further, these consumer choices in turn effect future actions. That is, habitus is adapting: "Habitus is not the fate some people read into it. Being the product of history it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 133). Habitus is inherited, but people can learn to modify or change their habitus in response to success or failure or desire. Tradition is important but not necessarily pre-determining (Calhoun, 1995).

For Bourdieu, human action is created via the relationship between an individual's thoughts and actions and their objective world or "**field**" as he calls it. Field is "a set of objective, historical relations between position anchored in certain forms of power (or

capital)" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp., 73). A field is a structured system of social relations and its connection to habitus is mutually constituting. For Bourdieu, "knowledge and action have an objective value subjectively perceived in the course of human activity" (Grenfell, James, with Hodkinson, Reay, & Robbins, 1998, p.18) Thus the interaction of habitus and field is pivotal in determining behaviour:

> The relation between habitus and field operates in two ways. On the one side, it is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus, which is the product of the embodiment of immanent necessity of a field (or of hierarchically intersecting sets of fields). …it is a relation of knowledge or cognitive construction: habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world … in which it is worth investing one's practice.
> (Bourdieu, 1989 cited in Grenfell, James, with Hodkinson, Reay, & Robbins, 1998, p. 16)

Bourdieu sees the field as a site of power struggles over status and resources. A field is a context, and as such it can refer to a whole system, such as the education system or a local instance such as a classroom. Each field is semi-autonomous, with its own agents, history, logic and forms of valued capital (Calhoun, LiPuma, & Postone, 1995). In complex societies people are connected by many interrelated fields such as kinship, religion and work between which there may be varying degrees of congruence and transferability of habitus and capital.

A third interrelated concept is Bourdieu's idea of "**capital**" as used by him to describe "the social products of a field or system of relations through which individuals carry out social intercourse" (Grenfell, James, with Hodkinson, Reay, & Robbins, 1998, p.18). The products of these relations are the multiplicity of different forms of capital such as knowledge, taste, ways of thinking and acting (Pinto, 1999). Capital is a form of power which individuals seek to maximise from their relational social position within a given field. "The capital they are able to accumulate defines their social trajectory (that is, their life chances); moreover, it also serves to reproduce class distinctions" (Calhoun, LiPuma, & Postone, 1995, p. 5).

Capital is distributed unequally and differently between and within class groupings, and it is also used differently. Capital potentially has the capacity to bring further rewards to the user: "the kinds of capital, like trumps in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit in a given field" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 230). For Bourdieu

social groups compete for social standing and do so by displaying the 'right' capital in social and economic transactions. For Bourdieu "capital attracts capital" (Grenfell, James, with Hodkinson, Reay, & Robbins, 1998) and so, social demarcation is perpetuated as decisions fuelled by capital and flowing naturally from one's habitus have resonance with others who make and display similar choices. Capital is especially poignant in future orientated decision making as articulated in choices about education, and especially decisions about one's child(ren).

The power of economic capital is relatively straight forward – adequate economic capital opens up possibilities while limited economic capital closes down options. It can be conveyed as wealth from one generation to the next and it is more easily converted into other forms of capital than vice versa (Calhoun, LiPuma, & Postone, 1995). In educational decision making, adequate financial standing allows economic considerations to become less significant, if not irrelevant, to decision making. For the well-off, a child's education can be mediated via the market through pre-school activities, through the selection of any primary and secondary schooling, and complimented through unlimited extracurricular sporting, cultural or leisure activities as well as supported through supplementary educational holiday programs, cramming, tutoring and so on. For those on lower incomes, such educational 'choices' are not available (Ball, 2003).

By contrast, other forms of capital, such as cultural and social capital are less easily categorised and accounted for; not the least being because of the different origins and usages of the terms. In fact Bourdieu's use of these terms has also developed and changed over time (Ball, 2003). Nevertheless many scholars continue to find these concepts useful and applicable to studies of social reproduction and increasingly as a means to understand educational 'choice'.

Cultural capital (inherited from the family and/bought via education) and social capital (linked to networks of relations) combines with economic capital and other forms of capital including 'emotional capital' (as highlighted by feminist writers, for example see Reay, 2000 and taken up in the next chapter) to build both a complex picture of social stratification and a better understanding of how individuals operate within such structures (Trigilia, 2002). Although Bourdieu is sometimes criticised for being too

deterministic (Calhoun, LiPuma, & Postone, 1995; Grenfell, James, with Hodkinson, Reay, & Robbins, 1998) his formula of habitus and capital being played out in a field offers the potential for individual agency. By applying these Bourdieuian concepts to the data, this chapter tests out the tensions between structure and agency in order to understand how is it that people come to "want what they want" (Valerie Walkerdine, 1990). That is, how as consumers, and as mothers, these women interact with the market to strive for certain things and not for others, and to act in certain ways to secure these choices.

In this, I identify two fields: (1) the familial context in which the mothers operate, and, (2) the field of school options available to them as consumers – that is the nature of their direct experience of, and exposure to, the school market. In both fields intergenerational and contemporary experiences are pertinent. The field of the school market includes overlapping experiences of primary school settings and the setting of secondary school options being explored by them as mothers, and includes their own experiences as children also.

Given the specific time and location of this study, for these participants, the field does include a relatively significant number of school options including an array of government and non-government; private and Catholic systemic options. Also at this time 'school choice' is a significant aspect of public rhetoric and as we have seen the focus of much domestic concern. In such a field even those whose habitus and capital might normally turn them away from 'choice' or from particular choices, would be hard pressed **not** to engage in choice. Thus the role and force of an individual's agency is likely to be transmuted or at least mediated by the field in which they exist.

The familial field is the site from which, and for whom, mothers engage in the market as shoppers. As outlined in Chapter 3 the familial field is itself another situation of unequal and contested power relations reflecting the changing social fabric of Australian society undergoing deep social and economic change (Pusey, 2003; Weeks & Quinn, 2000a)

In this study, both the field and the habitus is seen to be particularly gendered. In the field of the family the role of the mother is paramount to the educational endeavours

and aspirations of family members, and in the family-market interface again it is the mostly the mothers who negotiate these interactions. This 'gendered habitus' reflects common domestic divisions of labour which still see women do most of the work associated with children and their education (Reay, 1998a) as well as most of the family's shopping (Craig, 2005). Thus it seems 'natural', or, to use Bourdieu's term, there would be an "ontological complicity" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1995, p. 38) in the perception of these mothers (and their families) that the women undertake primary responsibility for school shopping.

The rest of this chapter now takes up Bourdieu's conceptual frames of capital, field and habitus by applying them to the particular instances of everyday experiences of the women as they move through Steps 2 and 3 of The Process of School Shopping. In this chapter economic, cultural and social capital intertwine as the women respond to the information they have gathered in order to begin to action their decision making.

Section 6.4 looks at how mothers explicated Step 2: Evaluating options. Starting from the Bourdieuian concepts of field and habitus, Section 6.4.1 focuses on one particular example – Lily's story - to explore the complex interactions of these notions as they operate against a backdrop of differing capitals to affect taste and choice. Section 6.5 draws on a number of contrasting stories to illustrate how different forms of capital interact and sometimes compete to inform the actions of these women as they undertook Step 3: Determining preferences.

6.4 Evaluating options: Step Two

The demographics provided in Chapter 4 show that although not all of the women in this study are well placed financially, as a group they can be considered middle class or, following Pusey, (2003) as members of Australia's middle - certainly they are neither very rich nor very poor. Therefore unlike Bourdieu's analysis of the French working class whose decisions are restricted to "the choices of necessity", all have some capacity to consider a range of school options. While economic considerations are paramount for most of these families, their thinking is also affected by a range of other intersecting influences. The consumer practices of these individuals take place within the field or setting that constitute their everyday lives and as we have already seen, this field is in

fact one of considerable actual, as well as discursive, 'choice' and one in which the market is pervasive.

While not everyone was equally comfortable with all school options, some women actively rejected certain options, while in other cases, schools were rejected by default. It is useful to consider the deliberate ruling in or out of school options since this is one measure of how schools are evaluated. In early discussions, the great majority of women purposefully aimed to keep their options as open as possible even though they might have expressed preferences for a particular school or school system. There were some instances however, where particular options were explicitly excluded right from the outset. The objects of these exclusions were; one particular local high school with a bad reputation deemed unpopular by all, a refusal to consider Catholic schools (of any kind) by seven families, an outright rejection of private schools including Catholic non-systemic schools by twelve. At the commencement of the study no one rejected outright government schooling as an option, per se.

For some of the women in this study, school options were ruled in or out seemingly independent of new information. For example, Angelica, Rosemary and Heather rejected the Catholic school option because either they or their partners were dismissive of the Catholic religion and/ Catholic schooling. Both Rosemary and her husband were educated in the Catholic system and work as teachers within it, nevertheless they rejected this option in favour of a government schooling. Rosemary brought this predetermination to the task of school choice and this view didn't shift even when she appeared to be unsuccessful in securing a place in the school of her first choice.

Heather and Angelica had strong, negative views about Catholic schooling and these views can be seen to connect to their particular inherited fields and habitus. In Heather's own family and schooling there was no experience of Catholicism and her partner's experiences of Catholicism were negative. *I won't consider the Catholic option and therefore those people who don't mind have more choice* (Heather, 1). Angelica similarly was dismissive of the Catholic schooling option. Although notes from the interview didn't reveal a particular reason for this view, her anti-Catholic sentiment was sympathetic with her world view: a part of her habitus. *I wouldn't send my children to a Catholic school period - I was raised Anglican. No. I mean Catholicism has a lot to*

answer for in society's break down – I'm convinced of that (Angelica, 2). Angelica's views arose in part from her inherited habitus and were further confirmed by her present familial field.

6.4.1 When the field has changed: Lily's story

Another woman, Lily, was also originally dismissive of Catholic schooling, however, she changed her mind, and in the end sent her child to a local Catholic systemic girls' school. As with Heather and Angelica, Lily's field and habitus incorporated no prior personal or social experience of Catholic schooling. *I'm not a Catholic and this is a bit of an issue. I find it all very* …(1). Lily herself, attended a government selective high school although she says this occurred not because she or her parents actively 'chose' it, but simply because she passed the entry test to this, her local high school. In fact her experience of that school was negative, and it seems she didn't feel she fitted in; *I really think a selective did nothing for my self esteem. If you're not top of the class you're not regarded well. The whole thing made me feel I was more dumb than the reality because in that school that's your point of comparison* (1). In this sense maybe she experienced a disjuncture between her habitus and the selective school system where she was educated. It seems then there was nothing in Lily's own field or habitus as either a child or parent that would predispose her to engage in school choice at all, nor to look favourably at Catholic school options.

Being part of the neighbourhood community, Lily and her children had known about the local government high school for many years and were familiar with its poor reputation and declining popularity especially for female students. She was also very aware of the recent changes to local schooling and prepared to accept that these changes may bring improvements in the future but couldn't see evidence of that occurring in the near future. Consequently she sought out additional information about other less-familiar options. She favoured a government girls' school but had little confidence about being accepted there because they lived out-of-area. Lily needed no additional information to know that private and Catholic non-systemic schools were outside the realm of possibility for them. The Catholic systemic system offered the only alternative in her eyes. So at Step Two: Evaluating options, Lily's field encompassed some exclusions (local government high schools, private schools and Catholic non-systemic schools), included two Catholic systemic schools, and one out-of-area government girls' school.

By mid year, this field was further narrowed to one government school and one Catholic systemic school, and Lily held these options open for most of the rest of the year.

As indicated, until 2002, Lily knew little about Catholic school education: it was outside her own prior and direct field of experience as well as outside her inherited and current social networks, and, without financial assistance, beyond her capacity to pay. Clearly the 'natural' choice for Lily would have been a government school; this habitus would reflect her own childhood experiences as well as her familiarity with government schools as a parent. So how was it that by mid 2002 Lily and her daughter were making favourable evaluations of Catholic systemic school options?

How can we use Bourdieu's concepts to explain how Lily came to act outside expected practice, while the habitus of others such as Angelica and Heather appeared sympathetic to their field, and cultural capital? I'd like to propose that this example of Lily poses a rich mix of interactions within and between overlapping and changing fields and habitus and mediated by differing allocations and types of capital.

Firstly Lily's economic capital was limited. She was a single mother of two who worked part time as a Customer Services Officer. She nominated her annual income as between $20,000 - $39,000. While her children did receive financial assistance from their father, Lily claimed this was an inadequate amount. In our second interview Lily said her husband had agreed to pay the school fees for the Catholic systemic school (approximately $2,000.00 pa) thereby reducing the financial impediment to this choice.

By 2002 many aspects of the field or setting within which Lily operated had changed. Lily felt strongly that government policies had undermined local schools and had forced her to make school choices outside the government system. By her own admission, the changes towards a marketised system of school education were ones that caused her a considerable amount of anger and discomfort. Lily felt that these changes had forced her to act as she'd rather not, (to change her habitus) and to consider options outside of her normal sphere (to embrace new fields). She was acting out of recognition that for her, her old fields no longer existed, and thus she had no choice but alter her natural disposition, her habitus, to accommodate this changed situation.

> *Earlier I said I wouldn't consider the Catholic system but I am seriously considering one now. … like in our generation you just wouldn't consider it at all. Even if I did send her to a Catholic school my mother wouldn't understand. There's at least two Catholic girls' schools I would consider. Her friends might be going there and I want her to go somewhere where at least one of her friends will be.*
>
> *I find it annoying. That money that goes to the Catholics should have gone to the state schools - it makes my blood boil. I believe it was deliberate so you're put in a no win situation because they've run down the government schools so you're forced to consider things you don't really want to. [Government] schools have been run down and so of course parents don't choose them.*
>
> *I think education should be for everyone and should bring the community together, but the government has established two systems - one for the rich and one for the poor. And in the future the community has to pay the consequences.*
>
> Lily (1)

Lily's level of frustration and discomfort was in some small part atoned by the fact that a few other mothers from the primary school network were similarly positioned and were also favouring the local Catholic system option. As she put it, *Plus too I think there are other parents going too, and for practical reasons when you can have someone that can share the driving, someone who can drive your kid to school in an emergency, I think that is easier* (Lily, 2). For Lily, maintaining a place in the mothers' network was not so much a matter of perpetuating her social capital; it was a pragmatic necessity. While Lily could not draw on cultural or social capital to inform her about this future direction, she was comforted to know others from her current social networks were also moving into this new field.

It is useful to consider here the intersection of non-school related fields and social capital on Lily's thinking about schools. Lily works in a government welfare agency and she raised observations from that context into the discussions. *I deal with school kids who drop out of school, and I've seen a lot from [the local high schools]. I work with a girl that went to [one of them] and she's got that really rough element, tattoos, the way she speaks.*…(2). Clearly these observations were unsettling for Lily as she imagined future possibilities (Lury, 1996) for her child. In evaluating possible future outcomes she rejected the models she saw in favour of unknown ones.

One thing to note in Lily's story is the absence of any talk about embracing her new school and its community (both field and social capital) as a step up the social ladder.

Within the gamut of potential motivations for choosing a particular school, Lily doesn't appear to be using school choice as an overt strategy to improve her social position. Rather her choice is an attempt to maintain social position. For her, the provisional value of schooling is such that although she may once have routinely moved her children on to the local government high school, she now felt the need to purchase an education merely to maintain the family's social position. The spiralling upwards of consumer demand for differentiated, and more expensive and branded, commodities means that consumers need to outlay greater financial investments in order not to fall backwards socially. At one level the growth in private school enrolments in Australia can be seen as exemplifying this spiralling of competition for social capital via education. In this context, far from improving one's lot, it could be argued that, complicit with government policy, those at the lower end of Australia's middle, are now spending more of their relatively limited finances to maintain their social position. In this sense as Bourdieu proposes, education is absolutely an investment in the maintenance of cultural capital. But in the case of Lily the direct, immediate impetus for this changed habitus was the changed field in which she found herself.

In speaking about the Catholic school option, Lily does not mention the aesthetic appeal of the school itself, even though the beautiful convent grounds rated comment by most other mothers who had been there. Neither was there any specifically positive talk about the symbolic appeal of the private school uniform worn by these school girls - there was however, a very negative view of the short skirts worn by the local government school girls. Bourdieu might interpret this as a different sense of taste**,** one that contrasts with those who purchase goods for their display value. Rational judgements would hold that neither school uniforms nor attractive school grounds could be taken as a measure of a school's educational qualities, however their symbolic value as markers of particular lifestyles and social position are evident. The aesthetic appeal and style value of this school rated highly for some participants but seemed to be invisible to Lily. For Lily a 'taste' for non-government schooling was antithetical to her class and family practices.

In *Distinction,* Bourdieu pinpoints the petit bourgeois as the providers and consumers of symbolic goods and services. Bourdieu says that typically the new petit bourgeois embraces upper class qualities of style, distinction and refinement by investing in

cultural and educational capital (1984). In the Australian context, such people could be described as the aspirational middle class. Featherstone says of the petit bourgeoisie:

> the new petit bourgeois is a pretender, aspiring to more than he is, who adopts an investment orientation to life; he possesses little economic or cultural capital and therefore must acquire it. …the fascination with identity, presentation and appearance makes the new petit bourgeois a 'natural consumer'. (Featherstone, 2000, p. 90-91)

Lily's story is one of a family, insecure in their social position with limited cultural capital to call upon, making choices not from a position of power, but rather reacting as best they can to the realities of a significantly altered field that means the playing out of old habitus could result in a further loss of cultural capital. The tension between structure and agency is clear. Neither does Lily match Bourdieu's scenario of the petit bourgeois adopting upper class, or even upper middle class tastes for private education as a means to acquire greater economic or cultural capital. Lily's evaluation of the options available to her was not motivated by a taste **for** Catholic or private schooling, as much as a dislike of the local government school options as she saw them. Lily has no particular taste for private schooling, nor is she predisposed to school choice; her actions are reactions rather than 'choice'. She evaluates her options on the basis of available economic capital and in recognition of the demands of a changed field she feels manipulated to move into a new social and market-orientated field.

6.5 Determining Preferences: Step Three

I wish I had the NRMA[9] *man to go over the lot [of schools] and show me all the faults*
Holly (1)

According to The Process of School Shopping first discussed in Chapter 1, and reiterated at the beginning of this chapter, having evaluated the options, these mothers moved to determine a smaller set of preferred schools. In this next section I analyse just how the women in this study narrow down their selection of schools to a favoured few. The analysis in this section continues to work with the Bourdieuian frameworks established above, and foregrounds how the women themselves feel about, interpret and activate 'choice' at this stage.

[9] The National Roads and Motorists Association (NRMA) provides a range of services to members including an assessment and evaluation of vehicles for sale.

Since pursuing school options is time consuming, and can be expensive as well as emotionally taxing, most mothers aimed to ensure at least two or three acceptable alternatives, in order to hedge their bets lest their first or second choice failed to come to fruition. In narrowing the field, the mothers in this study considered much the same group of school factors that have been reported in other studies (Whitty, 1997) namely: cost, proximity, reputation, academic achievement, pastoral care, and the schools' capacities in areas such as music, special needs or sporting opportunities. These more readily quantifiable factors however, weighed relatively lightly in the interviews compared to the amount of talk about family dynamics, intergenerational differences, conflicting and disturbed ideological and/ personal values about schooling and community.

Choice of schooling was often seen as a component of bigger familial aspirations of conflicting choice. Many families weighed up school options within a rhetoric of opportunity cost – comparisons of how money could be otherwise spent were common to the group, however the nature of comparative alternative expenditures differed markedly. Using Bourdieu's frames of capital and habitus, Ritzer says that "consumers who lack economic capital are unlikely to be very discriminating (to be 'choosers') when it comes to the settings of consumption; they will use what they can afford" (2001, p. 68). In this study financial considerations **are** important, but in families, field, habitus and capital don't always operate in tandem. By exploring how these women talk about choice and especially about the opportunity cost of choice, it is possible to see again the activation of complex interplay of taste, social position, economic capacity and aspiration.

6.5.1 When the capitals come out to play

For families with limited economic capital, school choice was more restricted: either to choosing between schools in the government sector, or to choosing between schools from within the government sector and the Catholic systemic system. Heather's work as a nurse provides the primary source of income for her family of two children and two adults, and money is scare. If Heather's child is accepted into either of the government schools she is considering, then the family can move into a bigger house to rent. The family does not have the economic capital to consider independent schools and is not willing to consider Catholic options on principle.

Like Heather, May's family has limited economic capital and school considerations have huge implications for alternate familial spending patterns.

> May and her husband live in a modest un-renovated wooden house. The worn furnishings and broken fittings give an impression that money is not abundant. May says she earns under $19,000 per year and the combined family income is less than $80,000. May's two children had had a happy time at primary school although they struggled academically. From the outset she rejected the local comprehensive high school largely because of its rough reputation and gender imbalance (in favour of boys). Her son was at a boys' high school with a reasonable reputation in a nearby suburb. She had applied for her daughter to go to an out–of-area girls' high school.
>
> At the time of the second interview May had discovered that her daughter was number 35 on the out-of-area waiting list at the girls' high school, and was beginning to actively canvass other options: *We decided to pull out all stops and enrol her at the local systemic girls Catholic college – we didn't do it earlier because we just hoped she'd get into the first choice.* Given that May had been active in the primary school community it was surprising that she had sustained this hope since historically only small numbers of out-of-area applicants got into the school she preferred. Some weeks after our interview May rang me; she was in a quandary because the family had become resigned to the fact that their daughter would be attending the Catholic school (and the daughter now too had become attached to the idea) and then suddenly they had been offered a place at the girls high school that **was** originally their first choice.
>
> May had two main issues to reconcile: the new desire of her daughter to go to the Catholic school, a desire which May had latterly encouraged; and the family's significant financial constraints. May explained the sacrifices the family would have to make to send their daughter to this school (she would have to take on more work, they would have to forgo family holidays, they might have to eat into their savings) – sacrifices they were prepared to make when they thought they had no alternative. However now, at the eleventh hour, they were offered the possibility of very acceptable cheaper public schooling. In addition to May's own dilemma, her son had complained to the family that it "wasn't fair" because he, plus everyone else, would have to pay for this. In the end May decided to reject the Catholic school offer and send her daughter to the government high school.

Heather, May and Lily, the families in this study with the least economic and applicable cultural capital, make careful calculations about the alternative uses of limited resources. By comparison with the better off families, their aspirations are more (but not exclusively) utilitarian, less infused with talk about style and taste, more pragmatic. They have some 'choice,' but it is more constrained.

The values and behaviours of the families at the other end of the economic spectrum make an interesting contrast to the experiences of May, Lily and Heather. I have chosen three family scenarios to illustrate the interplay of economic and cultural capital on how these women go about Step 3: Determining preferences. These families have the economic capacity for wide ranging choice, but draw on differing social and cultural capitals in narrowing down the field of options.

The tale of two lawyers: Challenging expectations

Clover and her partner are both lawyers. Their combined income in 2002 was over $180,000.00 and likely to rise as Clover intended to take on more work when their only child went to high school. Clover was educated in Sydney's rapidly expanding post-war suburbs in a *Catholic working class school* until the final year it was available and then transferred to the local single sex government high school. Typical of that kind of Catholic schooling at the time, classes were overcrowded (Clover reported her brother's class having 90 students), facilities substandard, and the teaching force often under-trained. Of her schooling Clover says: *In my day …there was never a discussion about where to go for high school, there was never a choice (1).* In her neighbourhood the Catholics went Catholic and the others went to the government high school. Clover's partner attended *the best Church of England grammar school* in Queensland, mostly as a day student but also as a boarder. He did not particularly enjoy this experience, claiming that the best teaching was reserved for the brightest students.

Clover states that both she and her partner support public education and therefore she narrowed her choice-making to neighbouring government schools only. In addition she was anti-selective schooling for both ideological and educational reasons. From that basis then, for them, the task of determining viable options (Step 3) was focussed on selecting the best kind of education on offer within the non-selective component of the government sector. Despite their own childhood experiences of different school systems these parents held very similar views about what they wanted for their child. Clover says:

> *… [my partner] just believes objectively you don't get a better standard of education in a private school. So I guess we've come to it from different*

> *experiences, but we both hold these views. We have friends that have really achieved and they didn't go to fancy schools …but we are in no doubt … that going to the right school does give an advantage – we are not naïve.* (1).

Of all the people in this study, Clover and her partner, have the greatest economic, social and cultural capital. Unlike other participants, there was absolutely no talk of opportunity cost in discussions about secondary schooling. Their social circles include successful professional people schooled in both the public and private sector. However they both dismissed the contribution of their own schooling to their success in life. In their view their success is independent of (indeed might be **despite**) their schooling, and this is the habitus they wish to activate for their son. They are however in no doubt about the security of their cultural and economic capital nor of how that enables them to take chances not open to others. In reflecting on their decision to send their child to a neighbouring government school, Clover says:

> *We felt confident – he is a healthy intelligent child and we come from a position of privilege and so we're lucky … we always felt confident that he'd make his own way in the world; wherever he went to school, he'd be successful. We're lucky he [her son] has similar views, we feel very strongly about public education. If he had not wanted the same thing, I don't know, but probably we wouldn't have let him go to a private school. We have some friends who have changed to private schooling against their own ideology* (3).

By way of contrast, the following example shows how another couple of similar economic stranding, but with conflicting parental cultural capital, dealt with school choice. Like Clover, these women have only one child, however unlike Clover their family structure is not traditional. As a lesbian couple they bring additional concerns about the potential impact of their lifestyle for their child in a new school environment.

Resolving differing cultural capital: The story of Iris and Holly

Most of Iris' schooling was privileged. She attended traditional establishment girls' Anglican day and boarding schools until the final two years of schooling when she moved to a government coeducational high school. She has mixed views about her private schooling, variously hating it and yet also recognising its value. *…even though I hated it, I got things out of it…the public school was fabulous, the private school was a real bonding thing…I got friends out of the private school, even though I got tortured there* (2). Iris' partner, Holly, went to a government selective girls' high school. She

enjoyed the experience and compared to her peers felt a bit special since she had passed the entry test and the school had a good reputation.

Iris and Holly express similar aspirations for their only child: *we just want him to be happy*. However their views about the role that schooling can play in this dream are very different. Their combined economic capital is such that they could consider the full range of school options, however these parents bring different and sometimes conflicting cultural and social capital to the activation of that capacity. The interviews with these women provide a rich documentary of how two different world views; two sets of 'taste', were thrashed out and eventually resolved at the juncture of school choice.

Firstly the family's combined annual income was stated as $140, 000 - $179, 000.00 and expected to rise when Holly took on more work after their child began secondary school. Compared to the considerations of other families, their opportunity cost trade-offs were less significant: private schooling would mean delaying house renovations.

Holly's preference was for their son to go to the government sector. She was personally uncomfortable about (and unfamiliar with) the practice of spending so much money on education: *Education wasn't really considered very important in my family; the school groomed you for uni, but that wasn't the case at home. Neither of my parents were uni graduates* (1). Such an emphasis was outside Holly's current and inherited social fields and habitus, and she frequently expressed anxiety about how they would fit in at a private school socially and also in terms of their same-sex parenting situation. In anticipation of her son going to the private sector she says*; I'm a bit nervous about meeting the new mothers – you know getting to know their pecking order, you know. Establishing ourselves as lesbian mothers you know - there's also that (1).*

Even after their son had commenced at the private school and the concerns about their sexual preference seem to have been allayed, she continues to feel uncomfortable;

> *I felt un-golded at the function. There's a lot of money there. I know it's not my scene. Iris is not so fazed by it as I am. I'm not intending to get very involved. I'm sure our boy will find like-minded kids there and probably those parents will be OK.* Holly (3)

Holly initially invested considerable amounts of time and energy gathering information about schools that fitted their respective habituses. After initial cursory inquiries, she did not pursue any Catholic school options. Following visits to the schools, both women rejected the local comprehensive school options. By the time of the second interview, their son was attending coaching and Holly was pinning her hopes on him passing the entry test into the government selective high school. Iris concurred, but pointed out that their son was also sitting for scholarships for private boys' schools, and in addition they had now secured a non-scholarship place for him at one of these. There was no animosity between the women in regard to these preferences, but there was a very different sense of comfort about their preferred options.

Iris had no issue, per se, with spending on a private school education … *it's nice to have nice things if you can afford it – and we can* (1). At our first interview Iris made clear her views on the importance of education*; I'm pretty education orientated. I have a PhD and that's the way I think. I think school is tremendously important* (1), and from her point of view, if it cost money to secure a 'good education' then she had no truck with that. The aesthetics of private schools also suited her: *This is ridiculous I know … but I am a sucker for old buildings …Like – when I went to Sydney uni and walked around, I thought "this is where I want to be" and I did. … I loved being there.* (1).

Further, unlike Holly, Iris could resolve any fears about such schools by bringing an insider's view to private schooling *If you've been in the system, then maybe you can look at it differently because you can stand outside it and sort of be judgemental and question it …(Iris, 2).* Iris had the capacity to recognise the faults as well as the merits of both systems, but her comfort zone was with the private sector. If her son went to a private school she would be operationalising a habitus that spanned three generations, her capacity to relate to the school would be informed by generations of experience, and the decision would match her view about education as a valid consumer and cultural good. A similar scenario could be painted in reverse for Holly. At the time of the interviews neither woman had friends in Sydney with children at private schools.

It is useful to look at the choice making of another relatively well-off family with slightly less economic capital, but where the parents have a more equal social and cultural inheritance and whose adult life and experiences might provide them with a rich cultural and social reservoir of capital to call on.

Activating lifestyle choices: Veronica's story

In many ways Veronica and her partner are models of an upwardly mobile family: they have lived and travelled overseas, they live in a more desirable part of the inner west, the husband holds a senior position in the media and Veronica works part time in welfare while completing her PhD. At the commencement of 2002, the combined family income was stated as $100,000 – $139,000 and expected to rise as Veronica increased her labour force participation in the following year.

The family was not religious and the children were not baptised, and yet their son nominated a Catholic systemic school as his choice of high school, and, happily Veronica and her partner approved. Despite having distanced herself from her own Catholic upbringing, Veronica was able to share the irony of her child's choice with parents, sisters and old school friends: the enduring connections she cherished from her own schooling. In this sense she and Iris similarly share strong childhood connections to social networks arising from their own schooling, albeit schooling of which they are both critical. Like Iris, Veronica's son's school will perpetuate the family's cultural capital and re-establish social capital in keeping with intergenerational experiences and habitus. Unlike Lily, Holly or Clover, neither Iris nor Veronica showed any resentment about the needing to 'choose' a secondary school: doing so matched their familial habitus and field. For them there was no conflicting habitus because the notion of school choice was a continuation of a pre-existing field and fitted naturally into an inherited and an existing habitus associated with their cultural capital and/or religious practice.

Even though Veronica said she'd like to support the government sector, she found it impossible to make positive judgements about any of the local schools, emphasising her dislike of the aesthetic nature: *the physical place itself is just terrible enough for me* (2) and her concerns about bullying as mentioned in Chapter 5. The aesthetic

characteristics of schools were worthy considerations for both Iris and Veronica whose sense of taste was schooled elsewhere. Veronica's husband attended his local government high school, however this seemed to carry little weight in their reckoning. Veronica claimed that in their family, schooling matters were historically defined as her territory and mostly her husband deferred to her views.

Nevertheless it would be inaccurate to paint the choices of either Iris or Veronica as entirely straightforward and certainly not as purposeful strategies for class reproduction. Iris was partnered to someone whose views contested hers, and school choice became a forum for debating different sensibilities about the nature and purpose of school, and the capacity of different sectors to meet those needs. When their son failed to pass the entry test to the government selective school, Iris and Holly had run out of options as they saw it. In the end both Holly and Iris embraced private schooling because they could afford it, their son's needs were being met and he was happy and challenged in a way they believed wasn't available from the other non-selective schools. There is no doubt however that Iris was acutely aware of the additional social and cultural benefits that would flow from this choice.

The decision for Veronica's child to go to the Catholic systemic school, rather than to pursue a private school option was interesting. As already stated Veronica rejected the local government schools despite her ideological support for the sector. Her experience with the primary schooling of her children in Australia had not been entirely satisfactory, exasperated to some extent by the fact that both her children have learning difficulties. As well, for her, the physical look and feel of the available government secondary schools was repugnant. Veronica also rejected the private school option, choosing not to even visit these schools. Her reasoning for this was two-fold; firstly she said the family preferred to use their money for overseas travel, and secondly she made a clear demarcation between people who go to private schools and their own sorts of friends. *I said to our son, "Look at the kids who go to private schools - do you want to be like that?"* (2).

Veronica's aesthetic views about schools, the family's investment in cultural commodities of overseas travel and stylish accommodation would perhaps indicate a sense of 'taste' synonymous with Bourdieu's petit bourgeoisie, the aspirational middle

class. Certainly these commodity expenditures along with her husband's occupation and her own educational attainment would be 'markers' of a more upper middle class lifestyle that might accompany private schooling.

Veronica said that when they first started thinking about secondary schooling they didn't know anyone locally with children at high school. Without a local social network of like-minded people it is not so surprising that Veronica looked favourably on old habits and inherited practices. This return to familiar field by the activation of old habitus was articulated when she spoke about visiting the Catholic school with her son:

> *When we went there it was all so familiar, you know, the picture of the Holy Cross and the chairs and the furniture and the smell. And you think "God, I've been here before!". So there is that sense of familiarity which I'm fine with. It's that sort of ritual and tradition, that… well… it didn't do me any harm*
>
> Veronica, 2

In a Bourdieuian sense, Veronica, as the matriarch, has overseen the perpetuation of social class – but why didn't she take the opportunity to move up socially? Why did she so clearly steer her child to rejection of the private schooling option? Compared to May or Lily, Veronica's circumstances allowed her to contemplate this choice. Veronica herself admitted that if the systemic Catholic boys' school didn't offer the support for their child's learning difficulties then they would have had to "go private". Instead, as Veronica sees it, they can perpetuate the family's social capital by using their economic capital for other purposes, namely via the adoption of alternative lifestyle markers of privilege (Lury, 1996). The pull of her familial and personal social capital to the familiar, was stronger than her desire to move upwards via schooling. And further, like Clover and her partner, as they saw it, the parents' experiences of school had had no particular or special impact on their lives. From their perspective, school had very little to do with their success as adults. Is schooling less important to social status and mobility in Australia than it is in Britain or France?

6.6 Conclusion

Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital hold out possibilities for interpreting the behaviours of individuals in contextualised social circumstances. This chapter attempts to apply Bourdieu's concepts to a contemporary Australian situation and in

doing so throws up new insights and understandings of the dynamic playing out of tensions between individual agency and social structures, and of the processes of social reproduction.

Amongst the group of participants in this study, the first interviews revealed a relatively high degree of optimism about the process of choosing a school. With few exceptions, the women initially embraced the notion of being able to 'choose' a school for their child. On a personal level most of the women were grateful they were given the opportunity to choose, no doubt responding in part to the rhetoric of choice which promotes a sense of power, of being responsible for one's child's welfare.

By mid 2002 these mothers had been actively engaged in the process of school choice for some time - they had collected and evaluated information about schools and had narrowed down their selection to a favoured few. The data reveals that the capacity and methods of selecting schools into, and out of, one's basket of options, was played out quite differently for these women. The process of evaluating options involved activating taste from a range of capitals.

Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus offer a useful way to interpret and explain why someone might act outside their normal disposition. In Australia, for some families especially in some locations, the new market orientated context of secondary schooling has meant the field of education has changed markedly. Australian families too have undergone considerable restructuring around partnership forms, family size and shape, work force participation patterns and caring arrangements. Bourdieu's concepts help us to understand how people can alter their habitus in the face of altering fields within a consumer society that places an emphasis on neoliberal notions of 'choice'.

Particular stories related in the chapter illustrate different aspects of the complexity of interacting individual agency and structure. Lily showed how one mother felt she was being forced to alter her habitus because of her changed family circumstances and because of government policies had altered the field of schooling. Holly also acted against her preferred habitus partly for the same reasons but also because of the influence of her partner's differing habitus and taste. Both Iris and Veronica activated taste for schooling in keeping with their inherited habitus – Iris' experience of school

was significant in shaping her social and professional life, it seemed less important to Veronica's family and her view of their life chances.

The next chapter, Chapter 7, continues this analysis using the scaffolding offered by The Process of School Shopping. Chapter 7 is structured around an investigation of the dynamics of Step 4: Investigating procedures and Step 5: Taking action. It employs feminist lenses to further develop the Bourdieuian concepts already used in this chapter. In particular the ideas of 'emotional capital' and 'emotional labour' are taken up as key tools for analysis.

7. MOTHERS AS EDUCATIONAL SHOPPERS: SELECTING THE GOODS

7.1 Introduction

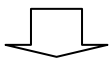
The previous chapter, Chapter 6, continued to work within the structure afforded by The Process of School Shopping for analysing the data about how the women in the study went about Step 2 and Step 3. The analysis of these steps proceeded from a concern to understand how taste and style were linked in the context of individual agency and social structure, and hence the Bourdieuian notions of capital, field and habitus were used as analytical and theoretical tools.

This chapter continues to use The Process of School Shopping as a structure for analysing how the mothers went about further investigations into their preferred schools and how they then proceeded to take action (that is, Steps 4 and 5). Reproduced again below is the figure showing the broad sequence of moves common to these women in this study.

Although this process has been identified as a linear progression of steps in general followed and experienced by all the mothers in this study, for any one individual, the progression from step to step is not necessarily neat and linear and there is an overlapping and sometimes a revision of steps. This is especially true of Steps 4 and 5 since, depending on the school being pursued these steps may be quite distinct or heavily interdependent components of the task. Just as the steps below may not always be clearly individuated this is also true of the attendant emotions that are the focus of this chapter.

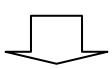
STEP 1: INFORMATION GATHERING

STEP 2: EVALUATING OPTIONS



STEP 3: DETERMINING PREFERENCES

STEP 4: INVESTIGATING PROCEDURES



STEP 5: TAKING ACTION

STEP 6: CHOOSING OR BEING CHOSEN?

Figure 7.1 Steps in the process of school shopping

This chapter, Chapter 7, draws on feminist research and theorising within and beyond the area of school choice to make a point of articulating the emotional aspects of this engagement. I do not wish to imply that it is only here, at this point in the process of school shopping, that emotions come into play. Emotional involvement is a feature of the experience of all of these women at different times and to different degrees throughout the process of school shopping. However in seeking a way to give legitimate space to this under-recognised and under-theorised aspect of school choice, I examined the data to find how I might present some of the more poignant representations of the emotional experiences as related in this study. From this investigation it seemed the best location for the exploration of the emotional dimensions of school choice was offered up in Step 4 and Step 5 because for many these points were the location of significant emotion, both positive and negative. Importantly however, I would like to clarify that by giving more space in this chapter to the negative emotional experiences, I do not wish to deny the positive experiences related by these mothers. These feelings of joy, pride, relief and happiness while enormously uplifting and sustaining, did not take up as much space in the narratives of these women, as did the more personally challenging emotions of anxiety, powerlessness and guilt.

In trying to understand the place, purpose and effects of emotions in the process of school choice I have found the concepts of 'emotional labour' and 'emotional management' to be particularly useful for understanding the familial dimensions, and the role of mothers and mothering in school choice. In addition, I have drawn from and built on the work of feminists who extend Bourdieu's concepts of capital to include 'emotional capital' as a conceptual tool for understanding the role of emotions as part of mothers' work, especially for social reproduction.

7.2 School shopping: Head or heart work?

As already documented in the literature and mirrored in this study, women and mothers in particular are the central agents or the 'labourers of school choice' (Reay & Ball, 1998). As this section explores how mothers go about Steps 4 and 5, we see again the intensity of their involvement and especially of the emotional aspects of this labouring. Section 7.2 outlines the theoretical influences that I draw on in my analysis of the data that relates to Step 4: Investigating procedures and Step 5: Taking action.

Education and schooling has long been seen as the business of women, and of mothers in particular. Women as teachers dominate school systems worldwide and, as already established, on the home front it is the mothers who still do most of the educational work, both informally and that which is associated with schooling (Reay, 1995; West, Noden, Edge, & David, 1998). As noted in Chapter 3, in a variety of ways, but increasingly since World War II, women have been positioned as having primarily responsibility for the education of children as an extension to their childcare role. In the 1950s and 1960s educational psychologists called upon mothers to interact with their children in ways that would "encourage intellectual growth" (D. Richardson, 1993, p. 53). In the 1960s and 1970s advice to mothers centred around their responsibility for producing "cleverer babies" as, for example, facilitated via the purchase and use by mothers of educational toys such as flash cards (D. Richardson, 1993). The 1980s saw the rapid growth of classroom volunteering and the beginnings of the now burgeoning private sector educational services to supplement formal schooling (Lareau, 1989). The trend for the market to infiltrate family life including the provision of education continues if not expands in the twenty first century (West, Noden, Edge, & David, 1998) and by all accounts this seems set to remain predominately the work of mothers.

The relationship between women and education in first world countries has been especially significant in more recent generations. The women's liberation movements in the USA, UK and Australia linked liberation to education for women and especially for housewives. In 1963, Betty Friedan wrote "the key to the trap [of housewifery] is of course, education" and by the 1980s the greatest growth in university enrolments came from women (ABS, 1994) predominantly white middle class women. Certainly this is reflected in the demographics and attitudes of the women in the present study. Further,

as reported by McLaren and Dyck (2004) in their study of immigrant women in Canada, education is regarded by these mothers as pivotal to their daughters' futures and as such, these women selflessly pursue it.

Education and school work in the current neoliberal market orientated context, remains symbolically and pragmatically gender- and mother-specific. As the neoliberal enterprise of 'choice' infects schooling in Australia, the impact on mothers' time and work, let alone emotions, is yet to be fully appreciated.

Feminist researchers have struggled to find ways of theorising the affective and emotional aspects of human experience in a way that gives legitimate space to these subjective aspects while also confronting the Cartesian dualisms of mind/body; reason/passion; culture/nature; male/female. Since the Enlightenment this dualistic thinking has associated men with rationality and women with irrationality thus confining women's knowledge to the feminine, the domestic and maternal, in natural subordination to men (Lloyd, 1984). Feminism has contested this narrow thinking but continues to struggle against mainstream discourses that inadequately reconcile the interplay of the rational and irrational in human experience. This may, in some part, explain why twentieth century western feminists sought education as a means to liberation (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002).

For feminists, the pervasive legacy of this western thinking has challenged them to find ways of legitimising alternative views of mind/body separations without reinforcing old, essentialist views of women and of womanhood. This challenge is to activate different views of epistemology; ones that embrace emotional as well as rational aspects of human experience, and that see such endeavours as legitimate agendas for intellectual and empirical research. The implications here, for this study, have been to find a suitable theoretical frame that allows for a constructive analysis of the place of emotion in the experiences of these women as they engage in school choice which is framed by neoliberal discourses as a rational endeavour.

Although a number of scholars have acknowledged the emotional aspects of school choice, particularly in regard to research into middle class experiences (Ball, 2003; David, 1993; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995), relatively

few have attended to this aspect in any detail (for exceptions see Lucey & Reay, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Reay, 1995). Like Diane Reay, one of the significant characteristics of my research has been "the recurrence of intense emotions, both positive and negative, permeating mothers' accounts of their children's schooling" (Reay, 2000, p. 568). In the present study a similar recurrence of intense emotions permeated mothers' accounts of school choice with the greatest intensity of emotions occurring in the final three steps of The Process of School Shopping.

Lucey and Reay (2002a) describe how, within educational work, anxiety is conceived of as a quantifiable and to some degree, measurable conscious process or state. Within this frame, they propose therefore that:

> … we are understood as evolving a series of psychic mechanisms of defence from earliest infancy, in order to manage and cope with internal aggressive forces as well as external circumstances that give rise to great anxiety. Defensive mechanisms such as denial, projection, introjection and splitting are normal, even necessary processes through which the individual can separate off difficult emotions, knowledge and experiences that are unacceptably anxiety provoking. These mechanisms can be used constructively …to discern some sort of order in the world… (Lucey & Reay, 2002a, p. 324)

This chapter works within such a cognitive framing of emotions in order to construct an account of why mothers may feel as they do, and further, how they manage their own and others' emotions.

7.3 School shopping: Emotional labour and emotional capital

Physical labour equated with 'work' has long been recognised as an economic component of production. 'Labour' constituted as physical and mental effort is calculated as a basic component of national and international productivity accounting. However this narrow understanding of human effort underestimates the considerable importance of emotions that is a legitimate, if not difficult to calculate, component of effort.

The idea of "emotional work" or "emotional labour", conceived of as an extension to other forms of labour (eg physical or mental), is a relatively new concept which was initially applied to workplace environments. For example, Arlie Hochschild (1983) and

subsequently others (Blackmore, 2004; James, 1989; Lynch, 1989; S. Taylor & Tyler, 2000) have used this concept as a way of viewing emotions as 'work'- particularly within the caring professions but also occasionally outside the commercial sphere (Reay, 1995; Young, Dixon-Woods, Findlay, & Heney, 2002).

Through an investigation of training practices in the airline industry, Hochschild's early work, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling,* explored how industry exploited labour's capacity to manage feelings for commercial benefit. In this study she showed how companies harness the capacity of employees (notably women) to manipulate their private emotions so as to present an appropriate image to the public. Following Hochschild, Nicky James defines "emotional labour" as "the work involved in dealing with other people's feelings, a core component of which is the regulation of emotions" (James, 1989, p.15).

For Hochschild, emotions are more than mere biological responses to external stimuli; they are learned within a cultural context such that the naming or 'owning' of a feeling, as well as the method of displaying and the means of recognising it, is socially constructed. Emotions have a "signal function" that is, they "warn us of where we stand vis-à-vis outer or inner events" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 28) and they also communicate to others. Importantly humans are capable of disguising feelings and of pretending to feel things they do not. In other words, emotions have a performativity role (Blackmore, 2004). Hochschild calls this 'pretending' "surface acting …[when]…we deceive others about what we really feel, but we do not deceive ourselves". On the other hand, if one pretends too thoroughly –when one is "deceiving oneself as much as deceiving others" then "… we make feigning easy by making it unnecessary", Hochschild calls this "deep acting" (p.33) and over time, such 'acting' can become second nature or automatic. Within a commercial setting, as distinct from a private setting, surface and deep acting can render one's face and one's feelings an economic resource like any other whose purpose is to make profit.

The employment of emotional labour can affect one's subjectivity. Where there is a sustained difference between real feelings and acted feelings this effect may be negative. Hochschild (1983) refers to the disabling effects of "emotional dissonance"

which is analogous to cognitive dissonance, when there is a sustained disjuncture between a feeling and feigning.

Since the 1980s others have used and developed these notions of emotional labour by applying them to different empirical data sets. Researchers have explored how emotional labour is performed in the airline industry (S. Taylor & Tyler, 2000) in nursing contexts (Young, Dixon-Woods, Findlay, & Heney, 2002) and in school leadership (Blackmore, 2004; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998) for example. A common finding of these studies is that women are regarded by industry as having particular skills vis-à-vis emotional labour. That emotional labour is regarded as:

> 'women's work' in that the majority of those employed to undertake it are women, and it is deemed to draw on abilities which women are supposed to possess by virtue of their sexual difference from some norm of masculinity. (S. Taylor & Tyler, 2000, p. 91)

In many caring professions, emotional labour, variously named as 'sentimental labour', 'labour with a smile' or 'comforting labour', is widely regarded as an essential component of the job (Battistina, 1994). In such cases there may even be limited training and possibly surveillance for levels of worker compliance (Battistina, 1994; Hochschild, 1983). Jill Blackmore's study (2004) of school principals in Victorian public schools shows how the impact of educational reforms favouring choice and competition has increased the need for school principals to manage their own and others' emotions. In particular she argues that this competitive marketised context, values performativity as "the real work" because a school's success or failure is so closely tied to image over substance. In the management of schools, principals must work hard to regulate the strong emotions of the teachers, students and parents in order to preserve the right image, which is one of a calm business-like performance. Her studies reported a high level of emotional dissonance for some principals and teachers within this entrepreneurial frame of a marketised system.

An important study of emotional labour in a non-profit context is that by Young et al. (2002) of mothering of children with chronic illnesses. Amongst other tasks, the authors report on the important work mothers do to manage their own and their children's emotions as part of their caring work. In this context the mothers' emotional work involved a range of activities including acting as 'information brokers' – to filter

unpalatable news from their children; to manage a child's compliance with treatment; to 'guard their biographies' and to proffer explanations for their circumstances. All these tasks required considerable emotional skills often achieved "at high cost to the mothers themselves" (p. 1835).

While I am not aware of any studies that are particularly focussed on mothers' emotional labour within the context of school choice, there is much from the studies already mentioned that has relevance to the present project. Mothers share with paid workers many commonalities around emotional work. For example, like other 'caring professionals', mothers' emotional work involves caring for others and oneself through the daily management of human emotions within a nurturing and complex context-specific environment. This task involves externally and internally driven notions of identity, responsibility and accountability. And further, for mothers, powerful public and private discourses of motherhood and mothering inform the display and management of emotional as well as other forms of labour.

Like women who are being paid by an employer, there are expectations on mothers to be seen to be controlling their own emotions, for example to 'act' calmly in a crisis so as to be able to comfort and/serve and/nurture others. Like nurses, school principals, or flight attendants they are expected to put others' needs before their own, but unlike paid employees they rarely have 'down time' (Hochschild, 1997). Nicky James says that women's emotional labour "involves preparing children for their environment and circumstances, shielding them and defending them … in a variety of ways, by listening, gentle persuasion, by firm direction … and by force" (James, 1989, p. 24).

There is another analogy I believe can be drawn between the principals in Blackmore's (2004) studies and mothers in school choice. Blackmore says that school marketisation discourses of competition and "survival of the fittest" reconfigured the role of the principal so that principals are measured by the public, and, measure themselves as 'successful' when they achieve for their own (school, selves) rather than for the broader community. "They are expected to put their school first, rather than 'caring for others' within wider citizenship responsibilities or a professional commitment to 'the public'" (2004, p. 452). In a competitive, marketised context of school choice where good parenting is seen to be equated with good school choice (Ball, 2003; Kenway & Bullen,

2001; Marginson, 1997b) then mothers too are positioned to put their own (children/family) first, rather than 'caring for others' (in the sense of the wider community). Doing what's right for an individual child versus balancing the needs of oneself, other family members and/the broader community requires considerable levels of emotional labour in the evaluation and execution of choice. This tension is illustrated vividly and often in the data of this chapter in particular.

Another concept that foregrounds emotions, is the idea of 'emotional capital' as an extension of Bourdieu's use of the terms economic, cultural and social capital. Diane Reay (2000) built on Helga Nowotny's initial usage of the term 'emotional capital' as a way of understanding how mothers were involved in their children's education. Following Bourdieu, Nowotny saw emotional capital as a form of social capital located in the private rather than the public domain (1981). Like other kinds of capital, emotional capital can be regarded as a resource able to be passed on through social networks, including via the family. According to Nowotny, women play a special role in this regard since they are more likely to have an abundance of this resource than are men, and because of their special caring roles within families. On the other hand, as Bourdieu claimed, capital is differently distributed and differently valued by different groups, so this may also apply to emotional capital. It may be that women and men bring qualitatively, rather than quantitatively different kinds of emotional capital to situations.

Patricia Allatt (1993) also uses Nowotny's notion of emotional capital factoring it into her description of the intertwining of other capitals in the context of privileged families and private schooling. For Allatt, emotional capital is mostly bounded within affective relationships of family and friendship and "includes emotionally valid assets and skills, love and affection … [involving] the apparently gratuitous expenditure of time, attention, care and concern" (p. 143). She sees emotional capital as encompassing particular notions of happiness and of shared familial endeavours, exemplified in her study in shared valuing of hard work and a valuing of education.

More recently Val Gillies also uses emotional capital in her exploration of working class mothers and school life (2006). Gillies uses the concept of emotional capital as a means for analysing how working class mothers employ different kinds of emotional

resources to the support of their children via a vis school, from those used by middle class mothers. For the working class women and children in her study, school is a source of stress and conflict and mothers therefore invest emotional energies into "keeping their children safe, soothing feelings of failure and low self-worth and challenging injustice" (p. 281). This kind of emotional capital generated in response to institutionally-created stress, bears similarities to the kind of emotional labouring documented by Young et al. (2002) where mothers filter a child's experiences to moderate against debilitating events.

For Nowotny, Allatt, Reay and Gillies the concept of emotional capital is essentially an extension of Bourdieu's use of capitals. It shares many attributes and characteristics with Bourdieu's other capitals, especially symbolic capital, that is, the legitimation that comes from powerful or prestigious economic, cultural and social capitals (Gillies, 2006). In particular, as noted in Chapter 6, Bourdieuian capital is a resource that can be put to use in social contexts; it "serves to theoretically mediate the individual and society" (Calhoun, LiPuma, & Postone, 1995, p. 4). And because it can be accumulated over one's life time and passed on to one's family, it plays a crucial role in social reproduction.

This study has already demonstrated the value of the Bourdieuian concepts of habitus, field and capital to an analysis of the complex interrelated processes of choice. The concept of emotional capital broadens this frame to incorporate the affective aspects of choice and offers the potential to capture the 'irrational' tensions between agency and structure as played out in this context. While Bourdieu never used the term 'emotional capital' he did see the family as the driver of social reproduction and, for the intergenerational movement of capital.

There are, however some difficulties associated with the term 'emotional capital'. For example the connection between a parent imparting emotional capital and a child's automatic acquisition of it is not readily accommodated. Also because of the inherently fluid nature of 'emotions' the concept itself remains "slippery"(Gillies, 2006) . Nevertheless the ability to trace the role of the family in class reproduction is enriched though the use of these notions of emotional capital and emotional labour. The

concepts allow researchers to acknowledge and explore the powerful emotional work that is a crucial part of mothers' work and family life.

Some literature on choice indicates that increased choice is associated with heightened levels of emotional engagement. Certainly theorists of late modernity such as Giddens (1991), propose that the current era is characterised by diversity and unpredictability aggravated by a loosening of traditional ties and a fragmenting of structures and "ontological security". When parents do engage in choosing school on behalf of their children they activate hope for the future (Kenway & Bullen, 2001). For all parents, choosing and getting the school which is 'right for them' is their "main concern" (Lucey & Reay, 2002a) and would therefore involve degrees of anxiety, because unlike other commodities bought on the market, the outcome of the purchase cannot be known for some years – if ever. Further the choice of a school has a "signal value" that can be read both as a proclamation of "good parenting" and of social status within a marketised and individualised consumer society.

Chapter 3 detailed how mothers' work has changed within and outside the domestic sphere, particularly over the last 25 – 30 years. In the context of school choice I propose that mothers' work has altered significantly both quantitatively and qualitatively. In Australia as greater numbers of families reject the government sector in favour of non-government schools, it can be presumed at a minimum, that more families are engaging in some kind of selection process or school choice than was common in previous generations when the majority of children automatically attended their local school.

As neoliberal market orientated economic restructuring has taken hold, and as the traditional family has undergone internal transformations, both continuities and differences have been produced. With the greater participation of women in the workforce, women from all social stratas have increasingly required childcare. At the same time many Australian households are experiencing reduced standards of living, shortages of family time and greatly increased disparities between rich and poor families (Mackay, 2005; Pusey, 2003). Understandably families report feeling under increased pressure (Mackay, 1999) and mothers increasingly carry the burden of their

own increased work and stress loads (Goward, 2005) as well as that of their children and partners (Craig, 2005).

In an educational market place a competitive system depends on, and in turn re-creates inequities. We have already seen how competing schools differentiate and market themselves in order to attract certain kinds of students in a way that deepens existing inequalities (Ball, 2003; Whitty, Power, & Halpin, 1998). This competitive market increasingly aims to woo children and families by selling dreams and peddling educational goods thus adding to the already excessive 'noise' of markets in the everyday lives of families.

As detailed in Chapter 4, Sydney's inner west is a site of great diversification of school types and, further because of the many transport options residents can access an even greater range of schools. Where demand outstrips supply, then schools can institute even more selective strategies to further effect the kinds of students they accept (Teese & Polesel, 2003). Amongst the government options, there is a high concentration of selective schools, schools with special streams for the 'gifted and talented' and single and co-educational schools. Competition for the selective schools is fierce and the system is ruthless in separating winners and losers.

For the mothers who mediate the family's experience of this selective system, the emotional demands can be great, since they are at the crossroads between structural norms that depend on failure, and an individual's experience of it. Selective schools are desirable precisely **because** they fail out poor performing students. And in the case of mothers and schooling, that failed individual may be their child and therefore associated emotions are likely to be particularly poignant. The selective system is a crucible for anxiety, frustration and guilt, and in this study it is the mothers who bear the emotional brunt of participation in this competition. It falls to them to deal with their own feelings of fear and anxiety, guilt and remorse, but also, significantly, they must manage the emotions of the entire household.

7.4 Investigating procedures: Step Four

In the main it is probably true to say that of all the steps, Step 4: Investigating procedures, presents initially as the least demanding of all the steps in The process of School

Shopping. Interestingly it was from a position of reflection after the event, that this step gained prominence especially among those who held regrets.

One case in particular, that of Jade, illustrates the potential fallout from failing to thoroughly investigate procedures for school selection. Although Jade's story is also a potent example of the perils of Step 6: Choosing or being chosen? I analyse Jade's story here within Step 4: Investigating procedures because she says it is her failure to investigate the procedures for school applications that is the cause of much of her emotional anxiety. Jade stands apart from the other mothers in that she didn't visit schools, she collected very little information about alternative schools and didn't thoroughly investigate the 'informal' procedures for school applications.

7.4.1 Managing emotions: When policy impacts at home

In contrast to mothers' experiences with Step 1: Finding out about secondary schools, Step 4: Investigating procedures was a far more difficult and frustrating task. The mothers spoke about how hard it was to get reliable information from either formal or informal sources on details such as how to complete forms, the process for application and submission of details and the best timing and packaging of documents for submission to schools. There was a recognition of the importance of knowing: *I mean, like filling out the selective high school form the right way… Like how do you know how to fill out the form?* and for Catholic schools …*I mean in the section about being a Catholic, how do you fill it out?* (Holly, 1).

Because of the lack of transparency about these things, there was a perception that some were advantaged unfairly by having insider information, or through a favourable report from a primary school principal that might influence the outcome of the selective high school test, or by 'correct' form filling. *We applied for [a particular high school] as our 'local' government school but we didn't get in … some of our friends who live outside the area got in – they must have known the right thing to put on the form, there is obviously something that you need to say on the form to trigger the right response* (Ivy, 2).

Both Jade and Rosemary already had children at selective high schools and knew better than most, the competitive nature of the entry process. And yet these mothers seemed

relatively under prepared for the competitive process and the possibility of their child's failure to secure a place. Rosemary lamented how entry for her son into the performing arts high school years earlier was relatively easy compared to the situation her daughter now faced: *music has blown out – they had 30-40% increase in the number of auditions this year alone…*(2). Neither of these women had originally invested sufficient energies (emotional or otherwise) to update their knowledge of the market or secure acceptable alternatives. In the 4 – 5 months following their children's auditions for the performing arts high school these two women engaged in extensive self-examination and re-evaluation of their performances in the educational market place.

While other parents had actively sought out and acted upon information that propelled them to invest heavily in Step 4 and 5 Jade had done relatively little. For example, Jade found out that other parents had presented their child's achievements in the best light by attaching additional information, substantial curriculum vitaes, portfolios and references to their school applications. She had not, and blamed herself for this oversight, thinking it her fault that other children of equal or lesser capabilities, had progressed ahead of her child. Jade felt she had been complacent because she didn't get, and act upon the right information at the right time.

> *I also feel really slack that I didn't put [school x] on the form – it didn't name those schools, I was so stupid I should have known – I mean I work in a school, but it didn't say them and I didn't put them in. And so lots of other kids put them down and they got in, her peers, so I think she could have got in. So now I'm thinking maybe we should have… so I wasn't well prepared at all, now I feel bad, I didn't do it. … I feel it is my fault. I think forms could say like, put in music or certificates or whatever… so that you'd do it.* Jade (3)

This notion of guilt resonates with other studies of middle class interactions with market oriented schooling (Ball, 2003). The system of applying to a range of schools that essentially compete for the same pool of bright kids means families are competing against each other to secure offers from the maximum number of schools in order to ensure maximum 'choice'. This means the stakes are high and that otherwise relatively unimportant things, such as the right reference, become highly significant. Therefore one child is advantaged over another because their parent knows better than another how to stack the odds in their favour. Where mothers take on the primary role of managing the school shopping they also take on the responsibility for the outcome.

There is no doubt in Jade's mind that she is to blame for her child's current predicament and her guilt is huge.

> *Actually I'm now going through a guilty stage. I'm not guilty about [names a school] because I think she worked really hard for that – she practised an hour a day. And I think she couldn't have done any more and if she doesn't get in then it wasn't through lack of trying. So that's fine. But what I feel guilty about is that I didn't even bother to do one thing about the application [for another school]. I just wrote something small, I just didn't know, if I had even thought to put in her marks for music or a reference from the music teacher. I just didn't think of this – I just thought, you know, I thought you just sent it in. And I now feel really guilty that I didn't give her that chance. … If only I'd done more earlier…* Jade (2)

Many factors contributed to the high anxiety experienced by Jade and others around this time. Firstly, **uncertainty** arose from the timing of the release of offers from schools and for many months families either held on to places in the hope of getting a better offer, or waited patiently for an offer to come to them.

In all, Jade's family waited four months from the time of the audition for the selective arts high school and three months from when offers were sent out, before they received one[10]. In the main, Catholic and independent schools offered places for their secondary school intakes many months before the government sector began to release offers. But it wasn't in regard only to government selective schools that families had to compete for places as we saw in Chapter 5 when May had to reassess her preferences after being offered a place at the popular out-of-area girls high school. Also those considering private school options and who could afford it, were less likely to experience the stresses associated with highly competitive entry criteria.

Secondly, families reported feeling a sense of **powerlessness** and frustration since they were unable to influence or sometimes even find out about the progress of their applications during this time.

> *... the whole process of other kids getting their choice "I've got this, I've got that" and in some cases it feels like "I don't know why that kid got straight into [school x] and my kid didn't" and I don't think it is an academic thing, and I don't think it is because that kid is nicer or what*

[10] In 2004 the NSW Department of Education and Training brought forward the selective high school examination so that results are now available by mid year.

> *ever. I just think that's the way it is, and I know that, but it's actually hard living through it.*
> *It's also the element of chance - no matter what I do, the 30 kids on the list for [school x] they have every right to accept that position, and they might, it's chance. It's no longer a matter of practising your instrument and doing well – it's now chance. I can't do anything about that now.*
> Jade (2)

And thirdly there was a feeling of **guilt** by some mothers who felt they'd let their child down by not being well informed enough about the procedures, about being complacent or about failing to take the 'right' action at the right time.

For the majority of families in this study the sequencing and timing of offers was a significant feature of the year preceding high school. These families had to juggle decisions and hedge bets, stalling for a better offer and living with uncertainty sometimes right up to the start of the new school year.

For some people the desire to avoid the agony of uncertainty was a significant factor in their decision making. When Lily finally received the offer of a place at the girls high school it was far too late: *We had already been to an interview [at the Catholic school] and she said "I can offer you a spot" there and then. This compares to all the phone calling you have to make to find out where you are on the waiting list … you don't really know… it's very frustrating…*(Lily 2).

For those competing for government selective schools their experience was often more acute and their sense of powerlessness significantly greater. Entry into the private sector required a longer lead time and financial commitments to secure offers. There was a greater cost but also a greater sense of certainty. Where children were trying out for scholarships in the private sector, families seemed less stressed; results were definitive and families were not held on waiting lists. The Catholic education system interviewed and offered places much earlier in the year thereby offering certainty enough to lock in some parents before hearing from the government sector. Of course the greatest certainty came for those who opted for their local government high school.

7.4.2 'Acting' calm versus being calm: Jade's story

Over the period of data collection Jade's emotional state altered considerably. In the first interview she was very calm …*this whole process of selecting high schools – I just find it like a dream … we're discussing what's best for our kid …we have a chat but no stress.*…(1). When Jade talks about her child and the preferred school options she does so with confidence. She believes her child is bright enough to have gone to a government academic selective high but for the family's opposition to this kind of schooling: *We decided we didn't want this, so she hasn't even seen a test … we discussed it and we said we were against it.* (1). Unlike others in the study Jade didn't spend time visiting schools because she was confident her daughter would be selected for the government performing arts high school that their first child attended. She also nominated two other choices: an out-of-area government girls' high school with a good music and arts program, and one of the local systemic Catholic girls' schools.

At the time of the second interview at the end of August, Jade presented very differently. They had only been offered their third preference: a place at the Catholic school, and they were on waiting lists for their other two choices. Jade's calm assurance had been replaced by high anxiety. The preferred school had first posted out offers more than a month earlier and despite her daughter's successful audition and her musical and academic achievements, still they had not been offered a place. And, unlike many children they perceived to be of equal or less ability, neither had they been offered a place at the out-of-area government girls' school.

She described the stress arising from their predicament, *I'm anxious. I'm trying not to be, but I am very anxious… I feel stupid that I am so worried and I lay awake at night thinking about it* (Jade 1). Not only is Jade anxious, but she feels **guilty** about being anxious, and she speaks of this by comparing it against her husband's response: *he is being logical and saying not to worry.* Her narrative is peppered with references to her husband's different, rational approach: *My husband says I'm just focussing on this unnecessarily and getting myself into a state because he says I've got nothing else to think about, which is true because generally things are OK* (Jade, 2).

Bourdieu's conceptual frames of capital, habitus and field go some way to identifying what is going on here. Jade and her husband are similar in many ways: they share similar social backgrounds; the same religious views; they both support, and are successful products of the government school system; they are both university educated and they share the same aspirations for their children. From a Bourdieuian perspective they share the same economic, social and cultural capitals, and occupy the same field vis a vis school choice. They would prefer a government local comprehensive coeducational school but find that option unacceptable because of the poor reputation especially amongst parents of girls. Their social networks and aspirations for their children lie in the world of the performing arts. And yet their behaviours differ markedly when emotional aspects are considered; they bring very different responses to their current situation. Perhaps it could be said that their dispositions or habitus differ in this response. Of course we don't know how Jade's husband would have acted if he had been responsible for the school shopping and found himself in this predicament. As Jade relates her story she has taken sole responsibility for school choice and this means her husband has abrogated both the labour of school shopping and the associated emotional labour.

Is Jade's behaviour to be regarded as the archetypical response of the 'irrational female', or can we find alternative understandings that may throw light on her behaviour that she herself names as "uncharacteristic"? In their 2002 study of middle and working class experiences of entry to selective schools in Britain, Lucey and Reay (2002a) report on the prevalence of anxiety amongst middle class children and parents hoping to maintain the family's social status via selective schooling. They reflect that some of the anxieties, particularly about poorer performing government schools are not without basis as some of these schools did suffer from "higher staff turn-over, higher ratios of children excluded from other schools, high numbers of 'transient' children and fewer resources" (p. 328). And further, as Teese and Polesel (2003) point out, the rise in credentialism is another objective contributor to parental anxiety over schooling. Given that Jade has taken full responsibility for school shopping perhaps her appreciation of the inadequacies of the field of school choice may be more thorough and hence her anxiety greater?

The notion of emotional work and especially of emotional management is useful here to help interpret the different responses of these two individuals who otherwise have so much in common. In particular emotional work is useful for capturing the idea of differing amounts and uses of emotional management and of the exchange value of this kind of work within a family at a time of stress.

It is clear that while Jade invested little time or emotion on school shopping initially, for her, Steps 4 and 5 are associated with a great deal of emotional labour. The uncertainty and the sense of powerlessness have affected her deeply. She manages her own emotions by sharing her true feelings. Originally she talked to her husband, but after a while, because he didn't share her anxiety, she talked to her other child *I talk to [eldest daughter] all the time. She is a good comfort to me, but she can't do anything either.* But this frank sharing of emotions was never displayed to the child in question, instead Jade put on a brave face in these interactions. Her primary emotional management strategy was to hide from her child her own anxieties *I go home in my lunch hour to check the mail, to end the agony – and I try not to mention it to my daughter.* Another strategy was to provide a rationale that protected her daughter's self esteem in the face of apparent 'failure'. Jade spoke often about the role of chance and of how she comforted her daughter from the hurtful comparisons of success and failure made by other children in the playground. By talking up the positives of the alternatives she aimed to protect the possible bibliographies of her daughter.

For months Jade had to work 'overtime' to manage her own and her family's emotional responses with the build up of uncertainty and the threat of disappointment. Jade's 'acting' was an exhausting and conscious part of her everyday routine in her familial interactions. She was never able to achieve the 'deep acting' referred to by Hochschild (1983) that could have made interactions easier, more automatic, less stressful: *Emotionally it's taken up every minute … since the day of the auditions- it has overwhelmed me.* Jade's emotional management was successful, but not sustainable since it was clear that there was significant emotional dissonance between the public face of her emotions and the reality of her feelings.

Jade's emotional labour was of two sorts: the personal "agony" she experienced and managed for herself primarily through talking about her true anxieties to selected

audiences; and her more public display of positive encouragement employed for the management of her daughter's anxieties. While the circumstances differ markedly these strategies share similarities with the emotional labour exhibited by mothers of children with cancer (Young, Dixon-Woods, Findlay, & Heney, 2002), especially in the performance of labour for protecting the child's emotional well being. Within the family context, Jade's undertaking of such extensive emotional labouring allowed her husband to remain relatively disengaged from the family's pain. She was doing the worrying for him, and like other studies have shown, her male partner provided limited support for this emotional labour (David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Reay, 1995)

Much has already been documented in the literature and this thesis about the effects of competitive educational markets. This study throws light on another aspect – that of the domestic and emotional effects. In particular it shows the mother at the centre of this dynamic mediating the anxieties of others, rationalising the events and ultimately carrying the burden of responsibility and worry for the whole family. Jade illustrates how this competitive process plays out on the home front showing particularly clearly how the uncertainty and sense of powerlessness combine to create high levels of anxiety, frustration and guilt. Jade feels she has somehow been tricked by the system because of her ignorance of unspecified strategies to control access.

Section 7.5 looks closely at Step 5: Taking action that has been identified as part of The Process of School Shopping. Although closely allied, Step 5: Taking action is about **what is done** rather than finding out what has to be done which is the business of Step 4. Actions include short term tasks such as collecting, completing and returning forms and/deposits on time, as well as the larger, longer-term tasks that may be necessary to ensure the success of one's application. These may include such things as arranging and monitoring coaching for selective entry, acquiring the 'right' references, and/or engineering support from the child and/family members for the preferred school. In short, Step 5 is about taking whatever action is required to secure the best chances of successful application for a given school, and as we have seen in a competitive marketised system, such tasks are likely to be complex, time consuming, expensive and gendered.

7.5 Taking action: Step Five

In this study mothers approached Step 5: Taking action in different ways - they engaged in action that was both collective and/individual and also that was reactive and/ proactive involving long and short term action. Irrespective of what kind of action was taken, again it is the mothers who were the principal managers of the task and its associated emotions.

7.5.1 Taking action collectively: Daphne's story

Like many of the middle class women in overseas studies (Ball, 2003; Brantlinger, 2003; Carol Vincent, 2001), these women were, in the main, actively involved in their child's schools and many of them brought this community orientated perspective to secondary school selection. One such group (including Clover) used their involvement to facilitate the visit of a neighbouring high school principal to the state primary school to speak to parents. This address was well received and was a significant influence on school choice for the parents who attended. In another suburb, contrary to normal neighbourhood practice, a group of mothers (including Daphne) banded together to send their children to the local high school. In another instance Poppy arranged for two years in a row for her primary school P & C to discuss high school options and related procedures. In another instance, Hazel took on the role as informant on secondary school options and became the key resource person within the local Catholic community.

In many ways these activities were a natural and logical extension of the active role already played by these women in their primary school communities. However within the context of a marketised school system, such information sharing runs counter to the neoliberal view of consumer behaviour that is supposed to be self-serving and individualised rather than for the collective good. While it is possible to argue that these women were motivated by self-interest, their actions are in fact characterised by community-mindedness rather than by individuated self-interest. Further, in contrast to Brantlinger's study (2003), these women were not taking collective action that undermined the already residualised and unpopular government high school.

In this section the story of Daphne is used to illustrate a particular approach to collective action to secure school choice, and this approach based more on hope than on a calculation of hard evidence. Daphne placed her faith in collective action with her local community to bring about the kind of schooling she wanted for her child.

Daphne works full time, holds teaching and nursing qualifications and works as a TAFE teacher. In later life, her husband moved from the printing industry to train in nursing. Daphne nominated her income as between $50, 000 – 69, 000 pa and the combined family income as up to $139,000.00 pa. The family lives in a modest house in a suburb that has become extremely gentrified and is home to some of Sydney's most expensive real estate.

For many years the local government comprehensive high school has laboured under a poor reputation and struggled to attract students. In 2001 the state government initiative to restructure schooling in the inner west aimed to enhance this school's attractiveness by incorporating it into the collegiate system.

Daphne speaks of her community's response to these proposals and the collective nature of her own thinking regarding the resultant school choice making.

> *Through my children I've been involved in education here for the last 10 years and there's always been the feeling that the local high school was the last option – it was for the drop outs - not to be considered; rough, academically poor, etc etc.*
>
> *So now with the proposed changes, and especially with the selective element to the local high, I think the academic shift will be upwards. And so we will give it a go. In my group of friends we begun to talk about it as a possibility last year – we attended a lot of meetings to see what it would be like and what it would mean. And there was a feeling we'd give it a try. It's our local high school, the kids can walk together, they're going with their friends… I mean I think people **want** to send their kids to the local high school…*Daphne, 1

Daphne's narrative shows how strongly she feels about her community and the need for it to work together 'to give it a go': *the parents have made a collective decision to go there [local school] and to **say** that's where they're going* (2). Her narrative is filled with hope; she wants this school choice to work for her and her child and also for the

sake of the community. Hence as part of a group action she is prepared to take a chance that she may not have done as an independent agent.

While Daphne's decision to act along with her community was fuelled by hope she was also riddled with doubt and anxiety. At the third interview Daphne's hopes were turning to disappointment and she explained how things had not progressed satisfactorily and how her child was fearful of bullying and wanted to change schools. Daphne was taking his concerns seriously and had already begun privately to investigate alternative schools, however publicly, and especially in front of her son, she spoke positively about the school. Like Jade, she had to 'act' content, despite growing personal reservations that produced emotional dissonance and inner discontent. For Daphne the job of school choice appeared to be far from over and she had to continue this labour intensive emotional management until the situation could be resolved.

Despite a reasonably wide, self-professed commitment to community, this is the only example where community action went so far: more common was the experience of one or two women working to try and bring the community along. For example, both Poppy and Clover shared with Daphne a strong sense of community as a central aspect of their preference for government schooling. However despite their best efforts, there was no united action in their community and families selected a wide range of secondary school options flowing from a common dissatisfaction with the local high school. If anything, in these cases the community action **was** the rejection of the local high school.

7.5.2 Activating family values. Managing disharmony: Poppy's story

The story of Poppy shows how one mother activated familial values in the face of opposition from her daughter and the intensive emotional management that was required to secure a happy outcome.

Like many families, Poppy had been thinking about and investigating secondary school options for years preceding this study. Poppy and her husband are supporters of public education and also were not prepared for their children to travel outside the area for school. Born and educated in Thailand, Poppy had attended a 'good' private primary school until her family's circumstances changed and she had to work hard to gain entry into a government selective high school. Her husband was educated in Britain in the

comprehensive system. Poppy is clearly very concerned about school choice and has done extensive research into all the government options. She has organised discussions on school choice at her local primary school and has attended the public meetings of the Vinson Inquiry[11]. She has investigated schools via the net, through publications and the media, through direct contact and visits to schools, and via her social networks.

Poppy had been an active supporter of public education, however over the time of our interviews her loyalty wavered and she expressed frustration, disappointment and some anger about government schooling. Over the course of three interviews the views Poppy expresses are sometimes contradictory as she appears to try and reconcile her own and her husband's experiences of schooling, their ideological position, her child's desires and her disappointment with the sector.

In the first interview Poppy declares her family's long held view: *ideologically we both support public education, that helps, so we don't have to look at the others.*…Quickly following however, Poppy speaks about how she discovered the inequality within the system …*and I think one of my biggest mistakes was I took her to see [selective school]. I shouldn't have done that. She was really impressed.…she wanted this school the most.*…(1). This visit to the high status, relatively well resourced selective school set the bar that no other government school in her district could come near; from that point on, all other schools were patently second best. In family interactions, and especially with her daughter, Poppy puts aside her own growing unease about public schooling.

An integral part of Poppy's process of school choice is the management of her daughter's feelings. Some British studies (Ball, 2003; Reay & Ball, 1998) indicate that working class families are more likely to leave children to choose their school than are the middle class who sometimes 'guide' the child towards their preference. For Poppy this 'guiding' is an extremely physically and emotionally demanding aspect of school choice and one that holds pitfalls and contradictions as evidenced in the following transcript.

> *The one that I like the most is not selective it is [X] high - a comprehensive and the school I don't like at all is the special school like [the performing arts*

[11] See notes on Vinson Inquiry in Chapter 5.

selective high school]. The eccentricity in the way the school is run and I don't think they are going to encourage the parental involvement and I can see there is going to be a gulf between us as the parent, our child who is growing apart doing her own thing, and the school and the community around it. She went to the audition and she didn't get in. We said if she gets in we will really have to talk to her about how we feel.
She doesn't know what our preferences are because we didn't think it was right to tell her. My husband said it is her decision.
So do you think it is her decision?
Yes I think everything is her decision, that she choose to sit for the selective, that she choose to rank the schools she seen.
We both agreed that we want our kids to go to the co-ed but it is their decision.
So you prefer a co-ed comprehensive high school, but if she gets into a single sex selective what will you do?
Umm yeah because that's her choice, if she gets in she can go.
What if she got into [performing arts high school], would you let her go?
That would be a big issue so I just hope she doesn't.

When asked about the confluence of opinions between herself and her daughter, Poppy explained how she had responded to her daughter's questions about why some families sent their children to the non government sector.

I explained to her that those kids have to do 3 or 4 periods compulsory religion and I say "You don't want that do you" And I explain to her about he private school because they get the idea since kindy how we never send them to private school and it's not because of affordability – we could afford it, but we don't think that would be the best thing. We always stress to them we don't leave everything to the school it's just family environment as well and that is our explanation. We say that some or many parents who send their kids to private schools they just push educating and discipline at those schools and they just pay. We say we want to work with you the kids so there is no need to pay that money so we would rather take you traveling to Disneyland instead. We did that last year instead of the private school and they were happy. I can imagine for some people it is a real sacrifice I guess they pay and just hope for the best. I don't know because we always around people who send their kids to government schools. Poppy (1)

This narrative shows how hard Poppy is working to inveigle her daughter to the parent's point of view. Like Jade, she appears to have taken on major responsibility for the emotional management of school choice making. Over days, months and years Poppy has helped her children to know and accept the family view on school choice employing a range of strategies from gentle persuasion to, ultimately outright insistence. One method also used by Veronica in Chapter 5, is to paint a negative view of the 'other' (ie private schools) in order to construct an image of their family's different perspective. Another strategy employed by both Poppy and others to encourage their children

towards the family view is to 'bribe' them with alternatives. For example, both Poppy and Veronica offer their children overseas trips as inducement to forfeit expensive educational options.

On an emotional level Poppy had been preparing her children to favour public schooling for many years. It seems that only relatively recently had she become more disillusioned with the sector. And only recently had Poppy taken action that would prepare her child for selective school entry, which she argued was primarily to compensate for the inadequacies of the primary school, rather than to cram for the test. Poppy expressed frustration and disappointment about her daughter's academic readiness for high school, let alone for the selective test.

> *Sometimes I think I have been let down by the school, they didn't do maths and homework because they said they didn't have time to mark the homework. We do all right but I feel sorry for the average and bottom ones where their parents have no idea how they help their kids.* (1)

After the results were released Poppy returned to this theme: *I admit, I feel a little bitter. Even the basic things the primary school didn't even teach them basic maths. Nothing to prepare them for the [selective schools] test. … This [primary] school is good, but it is not academic* (2). Poppy had not fully appreciated the need for extensive long term preparation for success in the selective exam system. Unlike Peony, Poppy had an expectation that the primary school would better prepare the children for academic success and therefore the family had not perhaps taken on the same level of responsibility for academic learning.

Like so most of the other mothers, Poppy was acutely aware of the residualising effects on local schools of the selective system. Ideologically she wanted to support the local government school, but found her own ambivalence was mirrored in her daughter's stubborn resistance to the neighbouring high school. By March 2003, Poppy's daughter had finally settled happily into the local high school; a result, no doubt, largely due to the intensive and exhausting emotional labouring undertaken by Poppy. At that point Poppy said she was *glad my partner and I have the same position and we insisted* (3), however the long space between the Step 1 and her daughter's happy first day at school took a heavy toll on Poppy.

> *She didn't want to go [to the local high school]. And all school holidays she whinged and she went on and on. Especially when she spoke to her friends who were going to other schools. So I was really worried. Actually I got depressed … Especially when she got together with her friends, she whinged and wanted to change schools… I was so worried. So worried. I even went to a psychic and did a reading - that helped me…- and it's cheaper than a counsellor!*
>
> Poppy, 3

As a mother, and as a person who cherished her own school days, Poppy was unsettled by the available school options and deeply uncomfortable with her daughter's unhappiness regarding their school choice. In the face of this disappointment and her daughter's defiance, Poppy struggled to manage her own emotions let alone those of her daughter, and she admitted to times of great family disharmony. The emotional burden for Poppy was significant since the core beliefs she shared with her husband about community and schooling were threatened, and family disharmony was at odds with her religious and cultural heritage as well. For a time, her view of herself as a competent mother and manager of the family's emotional well-being was severely threatened.

7.5.3 Activating family values. Managing harmony: Peony's story

Peony's family consists of herself, her Australian born husband and one daughter. Peony's approach to school choice was part of a long-term family strategy that prioritised the schooling of their child, but it was also a decision that set her apart from her peers and was carried out by the family privately and largely independent of external support.

Peony was born in the Peoples Republic of China where her own education was disrupted by the Cultural Revolution. Even though she had learned English at university in China and had lived in Australia for more than a decade, her proficiency with spoken English was limited. Her husband was a TAFE teacher and until recently Peony had been at home full time in order to look after their daughter:

> *She always goes first – before me and my job. I don't care about my work compared to that* (1).

The education of their daughter is a primary focus of this family. Peony's entry to the workforce was scheduled around the needs of their daughter; there is a strong emphasis on homework and study is routinised as an everyday part of family life. Further, an

important aspiration Peony articulates for her daughter is that she be surrounded by other children who share this studious disposition.

> *I actually worry not about the school so much, but I do want a nice environment. … I mean with friends who want to learn, why I want a selective school is those people all concerned to learn. They have that in common. They will be her friends and her friends will influence her.* Peony (1)

Family life for Peony seemed less hectic and more home based than it appeared to be for other mothers in this study. Because Peony didn't drive child centred activities were restricted and close to home. And further, unlike the other mothers in this study and in Reay's study of parental involvement in their children's education, Peony doesn't seem to face the stresses arising from "the difficulties of 'being there' emotionally for children, while simultaneously trying to get on with other aspects of their lives" (Reay, 1995). Even Peony's recently acquired part time job fitted inside school hours and further, Peony seemed relatively isolated from local, religious or school communities nominating her limited English as a reason for this.

On the other hand, an important part of her social networking is the Chinese community albeit mostly based overseas. Having said that, Peony and her husband were anxious to distance themselves from the stereotype of Chinese children driven to cram for selective school entrance by ambitious parents: *After we got into [selective school] we sent a letter to our primary school saying thankyou and that she never had coaching but got in anyway. … there were comments and that's why we wrote this letter pointing out we didn't coach her* (2).

Despite her language handicap Peony took on considerable responsibilities for managing her daughter's education, including her preparation for the selective test:

> *I also get the books, supervise her and spend the time with her doing the work. She wouldn't let me do much. I did make sure she did about one hour every night practising for the test. I did also arrange to take weeks off work to spend time with her to make sure she learning for the test.* Peony (2)

For both the mother and daughter the decision not to undertake formal coaching was, however, a continual source of anxiety. Peony's community of Chinese friends was largely opposed to this view: *I got the contacts they say "you should send her to coaching", the Chinese people they say this. I did have pressure from the Chinese but*

not from the Australians. At different times both of them worried that they may have made the wrong decision. Peony says, *… I was worried that if we didn't do coaching and then missed out, then we would feel really bad…*, and she said of her daughter: *…She was so anxious about that we didn't do coaching that her father booked her into a selective test workshop two days before the test* (2).

Peony's approach to Step 5: Taking action was an undertaking that appeared to be a private matter for the family and a deliberate component of a well-considered long-term plan for their child's academic success largely taken and executed independently of their social networks. Peony's role was pivotal: on an everyday basis she managed her daughter's compliance by carefully establishing attitudes, routines and skills that prioritised learning. Like the migrant women in McLaren and Dyck's study (2004), Peony's view of motherhood was intrinsically tied to these objectives for her child and she embraced her role facilitating this endeavour. When Peony's daughter was successful she could rightly take some of the credit, saying: *Afterwards I asked her "Do you think it was helpful for me to do all that?" and she said "Yes"* (2). When her child was accepted into the selective school she could stop worrying and enjoy her daughter's success: *then we didn't have to worry because she got in …I am feeling very proud of her…also because I think she deserved it.* (2).

There appeared to be no tension between the views of Peony and her husband regarding school choice and the action they should undertake to achieve that goal. While it seems Peony took on many of the home-based activities in support of their goals, her husband was the primary labourer for many of the earlier steps in the process of school shopping. It was he that gathered the information about schools and procedures, and his anti-religious and anti-private schooling views seemed to be accepted without question by Peony. On the other hand, their approach to Step 5: Taking action reflected an ambivalence common in migrant families struggling to find an intermediate space between behaviours and attitudes from the home culture and those of the new country. To a degree it seems their decision to reject formal coaching set Peony apart from her social group for whom formal coaching colleges were the norm, and neither were they prepared to comply with the more laissez-faire approach characteristic of their daughter's Australian peers. Peony's cultural heritage of valuing education (Francis & Archer, 2005) was shared by her husband, and it seemed was taken on by their

daughter. Given the husband's rejection of religious and private schooling options, domestic harmony was achieved around the familial pursuit of a selective education.

In Peony's story it is possible to see how a family with limited economic and social capital activates different capitals to advance school choice. Neither parent had occupations that would forward them the kind of social capital that might facilitate access to educational options that held status and/guaranteed social advancement. Peony's relative isolation from mainstream Australian society restricted her access to conventional understandings of social capital. On the other hand there was powerful emotional capital within this family as manifested through Peony's extensive investment of time and emotional labour that directly facilitates educational attainment. In keeping with Bourdieu's view that one kind of capital can be transformed into another (Bourdieu, 1986), it could be argued that in the absence of high value social and economic capital, the use of emotional capital can be called upon for the creation of high value cultural and ultimately economic capital via success in education.

In this family there was a clear transmission from the parents to the child of the value of education, of personal sacrifice and of hard work in the present for future gains. These values synchronise with characteristics often attributed to immigrants and to the Chinese in particular (Francis & Archer, 2005). Such values are an asset in the pursuit of advancement through education and when seen as cultural capital and activated through emotional capital, are pivotal to social reproduction. But here I am particularly interested in the role of Peony whose capitals may come in significant part from her ethnic inheritance that reportedly embraces attitudes beneficial to educational achievement (Francis & Archer, 2005; Kao & Thompson, 2003). In addition however, Peony's role in this family is to execute these beliefs in the everyday emotional management of her daughter's education overseeing the inculcation of these attitudes in their child.

In keeping with Nowotny's (1981) example, Peony's own education has not advanced her own position as much as it is of assistance in the advancement of her child. Her preparedness to place her own career as secondary to her child's education is a kind of emotional capital that serves her daughter well. The inculcation of these values in their child takes time and devotion and this is the emotional capital that Peony brings to the

task. Further there is some evidence that the Chinese value of filial piety whereby lines of responsibility and obligation are respected, is also advantageous to educational success (Kao & Thompson, 2003).

This story illustrates the complex interplay of capitals and highlights the importance of a gendered emotional management and of emotional capital as it is realised in one Chinese-Australian family at the point of school choice. The suggestions raised here can not be taken as indicative nor of universal applicability, since there are many more complex and un-examined aspects to cultural dimensions raised here. Like Diane Reay (2000), my application of emotional capital as an extension to Bourdieu's use of capital is more "a heuristic device than … an over arching conceptual frame" and like her, I "recognise that it requires further refining both theoretically and empirically" (p. 569). This example is not definitive by any measure, however rather it highlights the need for further investigations into the gendered nature of emotions in social reproduction particularly within the dynamic contexts of non Anglo-Saxon families. What does seem apparent in this example, is that it is not the economic, cultural or social capital that is drawn on for the advancement of this family, rather it is the activation of a gendered and culturally influenced emotional capital that is the key resource for familial advancement through education.

7.6 Conclusion

In keeping with this study's examination of the processes of school shopping as articulated in the six steps, this chapter has looked at how mothers went about investigating the necessary procedures and then how they acted upon those discoveries in order to secure school choice. It has already become evident that the process of school shopping is a labour intensive activity and this chapter shows that it is also emotionally intensive.

In this study emotional aspects intensified as families moved toward closure of the process of school shopping. Emotions became more acute with the build up of uncertainty and anxiety associated with moving toward the resolution of school choice. Often this build up of emotion was intensified by systemic factors arising from competitive marketisation policies so that the otherwise relatively simple task of investigating and then actioning procedures became, for some, the site of extreme

emotion. As the case of Jade shows, Step 4 served as the trigger for strong emotions as she struggled to reconcile her sense of failure and thus experienced anxiety, frustration and guilt.

The stories of Jade and Poppy illustrate how, whether those anxieties originated inside or outside of the family, it fell to mothers to manage not only their own strong emotions, but those of the whole family. Peony demonstrated how cultural and gendered emotional capital impacts over the long term to affect school choice.

These mothers took on the emotional labouring on behalf of the whole family as an unquestioned extension of their other mothering roles and of the task of school shopping. The examples presented in this chapter show how integral this role is, such that it is hard to image the same school choice outcomes without this labour having been invested.

The data has been unequivocal in revealing the emotional dimensions of school choice and again challenging the neoliberal rhetoric of rational decision making in a market context. The work in this chapter goes some way to detailing the nature and scope of these emotions, it also offers useful insights into how and why emotions play such a large role in school choice.

8. MOTHERS, CHOICE AND FAMILY MATTERS

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 7 looked at how mothers went about investigating procedures and taking action to bring them towards the final phase of school choice. Chapter 8 is the last data chapter and it documents and analyses the concluding phase of the six step Process of School Shopping identified in this study and as reproduced in Figure 8.1 below.

This chapter is concerned with the outcome, the closure of this process, and hence incorporates a closer re-examination of 'choice' since the final step in the school shopping process involves the resolution of choice in whatever form it takes, with or without the active involvement and/compliance of the family. It is at this point of closure that the effects of school marketisation are acutely felt within families and thereby in their relations with schooling.

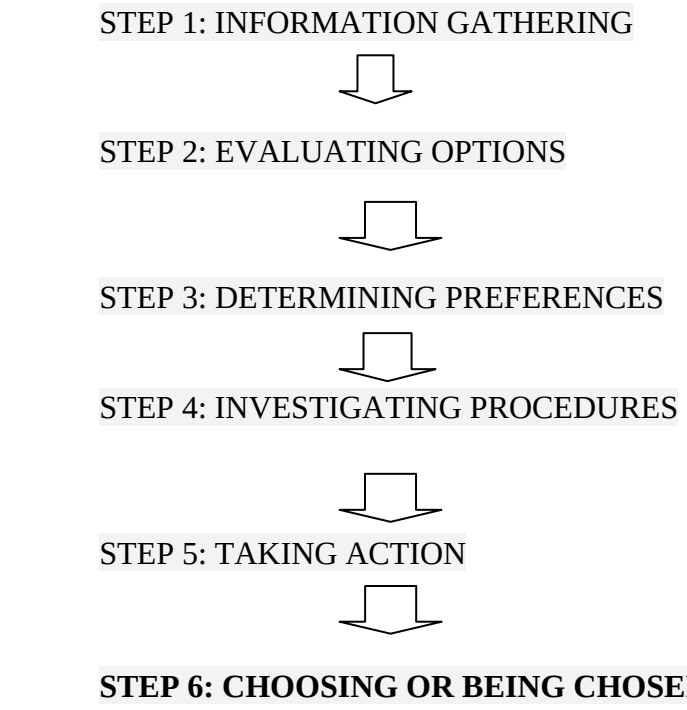


Figure 8.1 Steps in the process of school shopping

Neoliberal understandings of 'choice' have already been discussed in the preceding chapters, and in particular in Chapters 2 and 3 where the ideological underpinnings of market-orientated policies, and the gendered implications of changing notions of

'family' were originally raised. In the light of the data from this study, Chapter 8 revisits and extends these insights. Section 8.2 presents major fields of criticism of the neoliberal market orientated educational policy changes giving particular attention to the concerns raised by feminist thinkers. Section 8.3 and 8.4 revisit the neoliberal promise of 'choice' in order to tease out the rhetoric from the reality. In focussing on the data, the remaining sections of this chapter illuminate just how 'choice' is played out in the lives of these women situated in Sydney's inner west in 2002 /2003.

8.2 Understanding the neoliberal economic framing of educational policies

Feminist economists amongst others, have critiqued the foundational assumptions about how markets and consumers actually operate (Ferber & Nelson, 2003). Many feminists critique classical economics and its modern reincarnation, neoliberalism, as 'masculinist' in its characterisation of the individuated, self-interested consumer in the competitive market that ignores the contribution of all non-profit making labour (R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996; Ferber & Nelson, 2003; Gardiner, 1997; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Kenway & Epstein, 1996; Trigilia, 2002; Waring, 1999). Amongst other things, these "masculinizing logics" (Apple, 2001, p. 116) ensure that the contribution of non-paid domestic work, namely housework and other care work – mostly performed by women, remains invisible on labour and productivity national accounts (Gardiner, 1997; Waring, 1999).

Economic man, *Homo economicus* (Strober, 2003) or 'rational economic man' (R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996) permeates contemporary economic thinking. This view of human nature underpins politics and increasingly social opinion as well as calculations of economic growth, value, and consumer behaviour.

Some commentators point to the implications of such a masculinist orientation for the construction of models of consumer behaviour (Apple, 2001; R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996; Waring, 1999). For example, Edwards and Duncan (1996) propose that the mainstream economic model of the consumer as 'rational economic man' portrays all consumers as independent, rational economic units motivated by a desire to maximise personal welfare based on objective cost-benefit calculations.

> In particular, 'rational economic man' is a self-contained uncontextualised and emotion-free individual agent, whose actions are governed and calculated by the self-interested drive to maximise economic well-being to himself (and, perhaps, to members of his family).
>
> (R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996, p. 116)

In the public sphere of the market, individual selfishness is portrayed as the most rational course of action, whereas in the private sphere of the family, "a collective rationality" is assumed (R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996). The contradiction is obvious and also gendered: rather, decisions manifest in the public sphere are generally the outcome of private sphere (familial and social) interactions and complexities. And yet, as Edwards and Duncan point out, mainstream economics and economic modelling which infuse public discourses and drive policy formations and research, remain deeply embedded in the theoretical assumptions embodied in 'rational economic man'.

In regard to lone mothers and paid work, Edwards and Duncan (1996) argue that mothers bring different, context-bound rationalities to decision making; "The concept of rational economic decision making, and what factors are relevant to and constitute it, are not neutral and gender-free" (p.116). Their thesis is that mothers negotiate particular 'gendered moral rationalities' embedded firmly within particular social and cultural, rather than theoretical and neutral, settings.

As neoliberal economics increasingly permeates contemporary society, the language and the ideology of the market "creeps into [our] consciousness", is taken up by politicians and becomes public policy (Waring, 1999, p. xxii). The confluence of economic 'imperatives', political will and changing social values towards individualism and consumerism in part explain why the neoliberal ideology has been so widely embraced. The ideology of this new direction is centred on the market and its associated emphasis on individual choice (marketisation), user pays (privatisation) and flexibility (labour market deregulation) (Blackmore, 2000c). These discourses influence and arbitrate the ways that institutions and individuals act and interact locally and globally, and mediate how we position ourselves, or are positioned as participants. Through the pervasiveness of the market, the neoliberal ideology has influenced every aspect of daily life so that the market and money has come to be seen as "the only reliable means of setting value on anything" (Pusey, 1996, p. 1). The global

restructuring of education exemplifies the "frenzy of policy-borrowing" between nation-states confronting the uncertainties of post-welfarist global environment (Blackmore, 1999, p. 9)

8.3 Theorising choice

Advocates of neoliberal markets claim 'choice' brings personal, social and national benefits. An individual's right to choose has been used globally as a rationale for the introduction of educational markets. The supporters of educational marketisation and privatisation claim improvements in the diversity of provision, in efficiency, effectiveness and equity arising from the shift to markets[12].

The landmark American text on school marketisation by Chubb and Moe (1990) advocated choice as a means to improve social justice via fairer access to good schools for all. Whitty and Power (2000) claim however that despite Chubb and Moe's argument that equality is better 'protected' by markets than by political institutions, they nevertheless "concede that choice of school in a democracy cannot be unlimited or entirely unregulated" (p. 104).

In Britain choice has been promoted as a market mechanism for achieving social change (Ball, 2003), better schools overall (Fitz, Gorard, & Taylor, 2002), and as a superior means for organising society in general, and education in particular (Woods, Bagley, & Glatter, 1998). In Australia too, choice has been used to sell market orientated policies. For example, in March 2004, the then Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson, released a media statement under the title of *Leading together: Achievement through choice and opportunity in NSW* (Nelson, 2004).

Choice operates at an individual level as the outcome of complex and interacting factors involving particular and idiosyncratic psychological and social dimensions, economic and physical capabilities.

From the point of view of neoclassical economics, the consumer, framed by the concept of rational economic man (R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996), is an autonomous agent that

[12] For a useful comparative account of the claims, policies and initial outcomes of school marketisation in England, the USA, Australia and New Zealand, see Whitty and Power (2000).

engages in the market by choosing between products in an independent and rational way (Ferber & Nelson, 2003; Gardiner, 1997; Strober, 2003).

> Choice is central to neoclassical economic theory, for faced with perpetual scarcity and unlimited wants, it is through the making of choices that *Homo economicus* maximizes well-being. Being quintessentially rational, he spends his life evaluating options, weighing costs against benefits, and making choices that maximize utility. (Strober, 2003, p. 147)

The neoliberal economic model with its tenets of scarcity, self-interest, value, competition, efficiency and choice, has been increasingly applied to education irrespective of its questionable applicability or desirability (Strober, 2003). According to the rationale of mainstream economics 'parents', positioned as 'rational economic man', make self-interested objective choices based solely on economic logic that regards children as human capital and education as an investment via future returns (Marginson, 1997b; McLaren & Dyck, 2004; Strober, 2003). If a parent (consumer) perceives a school (product) as faulty or sub-standard, then it is in their interests to choose an alternative and thus choosing a 'good' school has become synonymous with good parenting (Marginson, 1997b).

As demonstrated in Chapter 5 especially, theories of consumer behaviour offer possibilities for moving beyond such economic models of behaviour. This orientation provides opportunities to consider the powerful role of the market itself in shaping consumer behaviour especially in understanding the complex psychological and emotional (ie 'irrational') responses engineered by marketing and advertising.

Beyond the domain of an individuated action, choice is both an input and an outcome of the market: the cumulative results of individual choices have social effects which in turn then affect individual choosers. Mainstream economics argues that the sum total of individual acts of choice in a competitive market, produces desirable social outcomes. For example in education, good schools prosper and poor ones are forced to close, thus providing efficiencies across the system and thereby benefiting all. Thus the operations of the market absolves guilt "by varnishing the status quo with a veneer of justice" (Strober, 2003, p. 147). The feminist economist Myra Strober goes on to say that this 'invisible hand' is:

> A kind of secular deity magically transforming individuals' inherent self-interest into societal beneficence, markets determine not only the value of goods and services and the value of everyone's labor and capital, but also everyone's fair share of those goods and services. (Strober, 2003, p.147)

The idea that choice works as a mechanism for social selection and exclusion privileging the already privileged, has already been noted. According to Ball (1993, p. 94), choice in an educational market works to advantage the already advantaged because; firstly it assumes everyone has equal and generalised cultural capital, second the discourse of the market positions non-choosers and poor choosers as 'bad parents', and thirdly the link between distribution of resources and distribution of choices disadvantages the 'poor chooser'. Thus despite the rhetoric which argues for some autonomous and 'equal' choice, in fact choice in the educational market is embedded strongly in a social context that produces generalised and unequal social outcomes.

As has already been made clear there is an inevitable and enduring connection between an individual's choice and their capital (social, cultural, economic and emotional). In this thesis Bourdieu's perspectives on educational choice as a means of social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1977, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) is favoured because it is cognisant of a range of impacting factors thus facilitating a far more complex and nuanced appreciation of the way the market works. Bourdieu's conceptual frames propose a means to counter mainstream economic theorising about consumer behaviour because he locates choice as a component of its social context.

Bourdieu's perspective suggests that certain kinds of families are more adept at using the market to their advantage than others – ie socially and economically privileged families fare better in an education market. In a general sense Bourdieu argues that families and parents use different forms of capital (wealth, taste and style, social networks) in a myriad of ways in their engagement with the education market. Parents with the right cultural capital can access social networks for knowledge of schools unavailable through 'official' channels. They might have superior ability to locate, read and interpret information about schools and school systems and/or the time, knowledge and capacity to 'work the system' positioning their child for selection tests, scholarships and other entry criteria sought by the schools. And, further, parents with the 'right' social economic and cultural capital appeal to schools in a competitive market

environment. Bourdieu proposes that people make choices either consciously or unconsciously, that maintain and/advance their social position, and argues that families, and especially mothers, are central instruments in this process (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253).

8.4 Activating choice

Some school choice studies use approaches that compile lists of criteria used by parents for choosing between schools (for a good overview of such research see Walford, 1996). These studies typically list factors such as proximity, discipline, the capacity to produce better academic results, curriculum, reputation and examination results as key influences on choice in a market context. But there are limitations to such studies since this **'wish list'** approach fails to account for changing contexts and changes of mind that occur over time and in particular markets**.** A longitudinal and local-specific study such as this has the potential to address some of these limitations.

Market **information**, or lack of it, affects choice. As markets in education grow and the competition between schools increases, school markets have become increasingly complex with diverse systems for admissions, selection and screening so that the task of choosing is becoming more difficult and time consuming. As shown in Chapter 5 knowledge of, and access to, information about local schools is a crucial first step in determining the range of school options for families.

In addition, not all choosers have equal **resources** to call upon, either to undertake the research prior to choosing a school, or to enable them to afford a school of choice anyway. Of course even prior to contemporary school market policies, economic capital has been recognised as a means for social differentiation via school choice. Private schooling has long been the prerogative of the wealthy (Anderson, 1990; Connell, Ashenden, Kessler, & Dowsett, 1982; Marginson, 1997b) by and large leaving the bulk of the population, middle Australia, to attend local Catholic or government schools. In a market orientated school system, economic capital permeates the entire experience of education from birth to higher education. Sufficient funds can buy better childcare and schooling, can supplement inadequacies through extra tuition and extracurricular activities, can purchase superior learning resources such as texts and IT, and as we have seen, people are encouraged to 'buy out of' the free government system.

Some consumers simply do not participate in exercising choice. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) speak of **'self-exclusion'** which may occur because of a belief that "the system does not work for them" (Ball, 1993, p. 95). Ball's study of choice in higher education illustrates this well - Ball showed how those from higher status private schools identified with higher status universities while the working class students often felt a "conflict of habituses, a stark non-recognition" (Ball, 2003, p. 91). One student acted upon this disconnection and as a result purposely failed to submit her application to Cambridge University. Market discourses that privilege competition over community simply may not resonate with some who would not consider options beyond their community, be that geographic, religious or other (Green & Vryonides, 2005).

Some non-choosers are **'locked out'**, for example, their child may not have the necessary skill/attribute required by a specialised school such as a sports or academic secondary school. In some cases, such as isolated or rural communities, the only 'choice' is correspondence school or expensive/undesirable boarding school options. This severely restricted choice or non-choice is especially true of those who have children with special needs where parents struggle to find any school able to meet their child's special needs (Bagley & Woods, 1998).

For some, school choice may be influenced by a view of education as an **investment** aimed at bringing future longer term advantages to the child and the family. Such 'discriminating investors' (Marginson, 1997b) hope the right school will provide their children with outcomes that offer greater security against unemployment, preferable options for tertiary education and social advantage. In this way education works as a positional good and positional goods work best in a context of scarcity and hierarchy. Although individuals operate independently to secure advantage, positional goods are interdependent since as more investment in education occurs by more people, the value of that positional investment declines (Marginson, 1997b). The basic premise of the market for positional goods is that, while theoretically everyone can get an education, not everyone can derive economic and social benefit from education. As more people spend on positional goods, the goods become undervalued and yet more expenditure is required in search of further advantage (Hirsch, 1976, cited in Marginson, 1997b). Thus, a 'good' education becomes more expensive and society becomes more credentialised. Education as a positional good acts as a screening device to protect

advantage for a minority since the sum total of individual benefits is not to the social good (Reid, 2002).

If the proposition that choice is good for individuals and for society is scrutinised against everyday reality in a particular context, this rhetoric is severely challenged. The dehumanising neoliberal ideology makes the real interplay of multiple competing pressures, of hope and desire, of the essential interrelatedness of human experience, invisible. Such mainstream rhetoric, at best, devalues, and at worst obscures alternative decision making processes and motivations: those not based on economic markets but which recognise social relations and moral rationalities as equal if not more important. In particular this depersonalised rhetoric works against familial and gendered understandings and experiences.

8.5 Choosing or being chosen?: Step 6

This study showed that mothers engaged in a process of choosing a secondary school for their child that took them through a series of steps culminating in Step 6: Choosing or being chosen. For these women this task of school shopping spanned months, even years, and involved considerable amounts of time and physical and emotional labour on behalf of the whole family. For most, the process began with the task of gathering information which was then evaluated for the purposes of narrowing down options and determining preferences. Information gathering never really ceased but rather broadened as these women investigated procedures for implementing their choices. Once they had acted on these investigations, then it was mostly the prerogative of the targeted school to accept or reject the family's choice. For those opting for local comprehensive government high schools, Step 6 was the most benign aspect of the process – these families were assured of receiving a place in these schools. They chose the school and the school was obliged to take them. For the majority of the women in this study however, this final step was far from empowering – having acted to register interest in a school most families then had to wait for the school to decide if they would accept the application. In such cases the schools, rather than the family, were the choosers.

8.5.1 Who (really) gets to choose?: Lines of demarcation and exclusion

Step 6: Choosing or being chosen articulates the inequality created by market orientated education policies – in an educational market for provisional goods it is impossible for everyone to get what they want. As the theory of classical economics dictates; the market is the mechanism for the distribution of scarce goods, and so in the absence of moderating policies, the only goods where the consumer is really in charge of 'choosing' are those goods where there is no scarcity. In the secondary school market place of Sydney's inner west at the time of this study, there was no competition for the unpopular local comprehensive high schools hence the consumer of these products was able to exercise 'choice' for these goods. However for the popular alternatives – the government selective schools, Catholic schools and the independent private schools, it was the school that exercised choice.

In economic terms then, on the demand side of the market equation, the situation can be unequal with some consumers locked out of choosing altogether if there is a greater demand than supply. For example where there are insufficient numbers of a particular type of school and/ schools are full or over-full, then it is the schools, rather than the parents that do the choosing (Walford, 1996).

Table 8.1 below documents the origins and school outcomes for the families in this study. In constructing this table, I originally aimed to tabulate the secondary school preferences articulated by the mothers for their children, however this was far from easy or useful since most mothers changed or reordered their preferences during the course of the study. For example at the first interview Angelica was seriously considering private schooling but by the second interview she was opposed to the idea, similarly Iris and Ivy included both independent schools and selective schools as possibilities but ultimately favoured only private schooling.

This chapter explores why some mothers got (and others didn't) the school of choice, but also, and perhaps more interestingly, it reveals when and why mothers changed what they wanted.

Table 8.1 School Choice Outcomes by Individual Child*

2002		2003	
Government primary	**17**	**Government secondary**	**11**
Co-educational		-Local comprehensive co-ed	2
		-Comprehensive, co-ed with selective/ G&T stream	2
		-Single sex, not local (girls)	2
		-Selective, co-ed (academic)	1
		-Selective, co-ed(arts)	3
		**Government, primary	1
Catholic primary	**1**	**Catholic secondary**	**5**
Co-educational		-Systemic, single sex (boys)	3
		-Systemic, single sex (girls)	1
		-Non-systemic (girls) ***	1
Independent primary	**1**	**Independent secondary**	**3**
Single sex (girls)		-Single sex (boys)	2
		-Single sex (girls)	1

* While 20 mothers were interviewed for this study the group included a lesbian couple therefore only 19 children are represented.
** One child repeated Year 6 in primary school in 2003
***This school is a mid range Catholic school costing less than the typical private independent school but more than Catholic systemic schools.

The majority of the women in this study were disenfranchised consumers in that they may have acted to secure their preferences, but ultimately it was the school, rather than they, who did the choosing. Only Daphne and Poppy elected to attend the local high school (and, indeed, this was not Poppy's first choice, and nor was this their closest government school). No other families had automatic entry to their school of choice. Even the other three families who hoped for non-selective government schools needed to be offered a place as out-of-area families, and further, these families hoped their children might be selected for the gifted and talented streams - again, the choosing being by the school not the family. Similarly the four families who sought entry to Catholic systemic schools needed the school to offer them a place before proceeding. In this study then only two families could be regarded as 'choosers'; clearly this is a sellers' market.

Arguably the elite independent schools provide the best chance for schooling 'success' through ample academic and social resources; better teachers and learning environments plus a more homogenised, higher status social context that combine to support the

academic curriculum (Teese & Polesel, 2003). And yet only three of the families in this study gave serious consideration to these types of schools. To some degree self-exclusion was operating (eg Clover and Veronica) but for the great majority, the ever rising fee structures of such private schools effectively kept them from considering this privileged realm.

Young families and special needs: Angelica's story

Angelica is an example of a mother whose school choice altered quite radically within a space of five months. As she struggled to find a school to accommodate her child's special needs she oscillated between favouring an independent school and the local high school.

Having moved to Australia from New Zealand because of her husband's employment, Angelica worked hard to establish herself in the local community, to maintain some work as a freelance writer and parent educator, to undertake studies for a career change, and to look after her three young children. Angelica estimated the combined family income as between $100 – $139,000 p.a. When we met, her husband had had to spend increasing amounts of time interstate for business and there was the likelihood the whole family might have to move again.

Angelica was a capable, warm and feisty woman for whom the question of school choice was extremely vexed. Her own schooling had been defiantly local and comprehensive - by her own admission she had attended the local school with the "worst reputation", had beaten the odds, and had done very well. Her husband also attended government schools. She would have liked the same for her own children; however she was worried that her daughter's very different personality and special needs would militate against her success in the local school environment.

Her daughter was shy and although artistically talented suffered from multiple special physical and intellectual needs arising from her premature birth. In March Angelica had only just begun gathering information and considering their options. She had two schools in her sights – the local comprehensive high school and an expensive private girls' school. By mid year she had rejected the private school and decided on the local school, and then by September, she had opted for her daughter to repeat Year 6 at the local primary school where they were moving interstate.

Many issues were impacting on Angelica's decision making. She had to reconcile her own experience of and preference for attending the local school, against her daughter's particular needs. Like Lily, who was discussed in Chapter 6, Angelica felt she was forced to consider options outside her comfort zone, outside her automatic, unconscious

disposition or habitus. Like Lily, she struggled to come to terms with the task of school shopping; and her views were still evolving.

> *I guess I haven't done it in earnest. I guess I'm still getting my head around the concept of not going for the local school - that is what I thought just happened – that the public school was good enough … that's what I thought. But I have changed my ideas because my friend has taken her kids out and gone to a private school. And when I hear what is going on with their children, the supportive environment … all the resources … so I've had to re-think …*
> Angelica (1)

At the second interview Angelica explained how she had changed her mind:

> *… we thought about sending her to [private school] but for all that money and the transport issues, we thought we could do a lot of extra-curricula. … It really made us examine why do we want to go private, and why State, and that enormous amount of money for no guaranteed return on our investment, sort of thing … So we settled with [local high school]. We were very pleased … because the new Principal was very fired up with the money that was going to be coming their way, very positive and new class sizes to go down.*
> Angelica (2)

Angelica's choices were limited by a range of issues, including their child's needs, familial circumstances, personal/ideological beliefs, and systemic imperatives.

Being one of the younger couples in this study, with the major breadwinner still in early career, and with small children, Angelica's school choice making occurred at a stage-of-life for the family where the demands for 'home and family maintenance work' were especially high.

Angelica is the primary carer in the family, devoting most of every day to child care. The eldest child has special needs and the other two are only 6 years, and 8 months old respectively. Angelica's weekly schedule showed little spare time outside of walking to and from school each day, helping at school and afterwards with homework, minding the baby, and accompanying her daughters to extracurricular activities three afternoons a week. In addition she was trying to study and take in occasional work which she did from home and / or fitted around childminding obligations. Further, because her husband's developing career required him to be away a lot she did most of this on her own. Compared to many of the other mothers in the study, Angelica was particularly 'time poor' and as well physically unable to devote much time to school shopping.

The demands of her husband's career trajectory both expanded and closed off options. Their income was such that they could afford to consider private schooling, however his current position was not secure enough to make it really viable – and certainly not an option for all three children. The promise of travelling for work held out the possibility for greater financial rewards, but also of greater instability. Additionally Angelica's commitment to the local community and her restricted access to transport (she didn't drive and wasn't confident her daughter could cope with public transport) further limited their choices.

Angelica also held negative views about certain school-types; she refused to consider Catholic schooling and was strongly opposed to the selective system: *I cannot see any advantage in having this classist system [selective schooling] within the State system – there is enough disparity between the State and private sector without adding another tier – "So what – you've got a bright kid – do something about it in your own time!…" …and, you know when you have a selective component in a school, it becomes 'The Selectives' and 'The Others'* (2). Despite her views on the selective system, the local high school that Angelica was to send her child to, did have a newly instituted selective stream.

Of course, given the circumstances, it is unlikely that Angelica's child would have been able to access the selective system even if Angelica supported the concept. Neither did Angelica want a school entirely dedicated to children with special needs. Because she wanted her daughter to be able participate in normal classes along with a certain degree of special care, Angelica needed to find a supportive school and one that had the prerequisite physical and learning resources. There are very few such opportunities in her area. The local high school did offer some support for students with special needs, but nevertheless had a reputation (both within and outside the special education classes) that was concerning.

As Angelica lamented – *Where's the middle?* (2) – she felt their choices were limited to either the under-resourced local school, or the expensive private school. Accepting either of these 'choices' would come at a price; either economic, social and/or personal. The elite school would put the family under considerable financial strain which was

particularly undesirable at this early stage of her husband's career path; it would also compromise Angelica's ideological beliefs and her preferred habitus. Attending the local school would match her belief system and fall within her habitus; however she was concerned that her daughter might have to bear the cost of a less impressive educational experience as she saw it. It was no wonder that Angelica expressed great relief at the opportunity presented by her husband's interstate transfer: *After all that decision –making it was a breakthrough; it all just fitted in. We are so fortunate. I wouldn't have repeated her here.* (2).

By way of contrast, many other families in this study expressed an interest in sending their child to the selective system because they believed that good grades were virtually guaranteed in these schools. Even though a small number of participants in this study held strongly different views, there is no doubt that in NSW, selective schools are widely preferred over local comprehensives and most Catholic schools in that they hold status and are regarded as a passport to university and employment security. There is considerable prestige in having one's child at a selective school or a 'free private school' (Teese & Polesel, 2003). As such they appeal to those who cannot afford 'real' private schooling and / cannot afford to move to areas with better school options (Lucey & Reay, 2002a).

Chapter 7 traced the stories of a number of women who favoured the selective system and indicated some of the attendant emotional labouring associated with preparing a child to be selected or chosen by these schools.

Even having accounted for the fact that there were only two families who could be regarded as real 'choosers', this study shows the degree of 'choice' available was severely limited, fractured and context-specific. It is possible to see that a number of mechanisms operate to dissuade potential customers from specific schools, that is, to activate 'self exclusion'. In addition to systemic causes where schools select or 'lock out' students, this section has also pointed to structural and familial 'stage-of-life' factors that impinged on choice.

Such factors perhaps fit more readily within the realm of 'rational' decision making as advocated by the supporters of marketised schooling. However in tracing the individual

experiences of these women, and especially in the understudied context of their familial settings, this study shows the limits of this rationality. The focus of the next section is on the family dynamics that affect school choice and Section 8.5.2 shows that this milieu is one where individuals constantly "bump up against the limits of their own rationality" (Ball, 2003, p. 102).

8.5.2 Who (really) gets to choose?: Family dynamics

In this study the window into the family was via the mothers who related their perceptions of events and interactions. These interviews with mothers revealed a remarkable eye for detail, and for analysis of the minutiae of everyday happenings that affected their families. These women showed an extraordinary sensitivity to the familial relationships around them, be that the interactions of partners, children or extended family members.

As indicated in Chapter 4, many of the women in this study had partners from different religious, cultural or social backgrounds. We have already seen how these differences often came to the fore over school choice. Where partners held different views families had to find ways of resolving these. In some cases it was the parents who resolved their differences and determined which schools to pursue, in some cases structural factors intervened to determine an outcome (ie non selection for an out-of-area school).

In this study the active players in school choice were mostly the parents – children rarely had a say beyond contributing views and acting as informants. There were some cases where the parents had pursued options that differed from the child's view, but in the main, the children seemed to comply with the views of their parents. In more than one case however, there was a suspicion that a child might have acted to affect the outcome. Holly reflected that having visited both the selective high and the private school perhaps their son, understandably, may not have strived so hard for the selective place since he preferred the private school option, *You know, I'm not sure – I thought of this later, but if I was a kid looking at those two choices, well … maybe…*(2).

As detailed in Chapter 7, Poppy also had to deal with a child who didn't like the choice her parents made, thus causing Poppy considerable anxiety and additional work. So while children in this study may have relatively limited roles in school choice, they

could, when they wanted, act to affect outcome and certainly have an impact on family dynamics and especially impact on mother's physical and emotional labouring.

This next section explores how the value systems of two sides of an extended family impacted on school choice.

'Piggy in the middle': Ivy's story

Where there was familial conflict it seemed the mothers most frequently stood at the centre, either to resolve or mediate differences, or to take the brunt of the discontent. The following example shows how one mother struggled to reconcile different views within her immediate and extended family.

Ivy's own education was disrupted by her father's employment and she briefly attended a government prep school as well as private girls' schools in England. In Australia she went to a number of government primary schools for a short period of time and twice to a private girls' school in NSW. Her husband attended Catholic schools**.**

Ivy had a permanent part time job. After taking a mid-life career change, Ivy's husband's new career was insecure, and a source of family anxiety. She estimated their combined income as between $80,000 – $99,000. They had recently finished paying off the mortgage and there was only one other older child from a previous marriage who lived interstate and who was largely independent.

Ivy's son was very keen on sport and was also relatively academically talented. Ivy had been gathering information and investigating their options for years and by the second interview she and her husband had rejected, or been rejected by (for being out-of-area), the local comprehensive high schools. Instead they were considering a nearby private boys' school with terrific sporting and other extra-curricular opportunities. They also favoured two government selective schools, but were concerned about the limited sporting and extracurricular opportunities.

Of all the participants in this study, Ivy's process of school choice was the most thorough, and the most vexed. Ivy reported attending three 'Schools Expos', eight open days and visiting four of those schools on more than one occasion. In addition they had specially arranged school tours of two schools and made contact with at least four others. Their investigations included attending parent evenings, appointments with principals, continuous checking of the internet for school and policy updates, a letter to

the local member about planning for a particular government school, all supplemented of course, by a continual stream of information from informal social networks.

School choice for Ivy was extraordinarily labour-intensive, both physically and emotionally: *probably we over-fussed… we were waking up at 2 in the morning just worrying about this all* (2). Ivy identifies conflict within their extended family as aggravating their dilemmas. …*I was going through such agony …Because the process was so complex and difficult with friends and family having different views. It's been very, very difficult.* (3). A huge proportion of each interview was given over to relating the differing views of her husband, her in-laws, her mother, and tempered by her own and her son's views.

The major conflict was an ideological one between choosing public or private; *[School choice] tests your ideology to the limit* … (2). Ivy outlines some of the conflicting views within her family:

> *My husband's family are lots of public school teachers … and they are very left-wingers … So on that side of the family there would be quite a lot of resistance if we did go private and on the other side I've got my parents in my ear; they very much want us to go private – it's very much the family culture; let's face it they are North Shore parents* [13] (1).

These views of the extended family are more than benign; Ivy relates many examples of moral blackmail by her parents, for example, *I remember once referring to one of the public school options we had for [our son] and my mother said "I hope I'm dead already if you send him there"* (1). She relates examples of pressure from the other side of the family too: *One of them [in-laws] said to me "Do you realise that you even considering a private school is like a stab in the heart to me?"* (1).

Ivy is torn between the habitus of her inheritance; her parent's class, and the social and cultural position she has adopted. Until this issue of secondary school choice Ivy had considered herself very much distanced from her upbringing. *Of course you can change. I mean I don't live on the North Shore, and that's a deliberate choice, I've left that. I don't feel comfortable with that. And now I'm just confused. It's left me in a very difficult place and it's causing a lot of tension between my husband and me* (2).

[13] Sydney's North Shore is a wealthy suburb with a reputation for a certain snobbishness.

There is a playing out of economic, cultural and social capital in Ivy's description of her immediate family circumstances:

> *We actually own the house outright, we have now got reasonable furniture, I've been updating my wardrobe so that that will do me for the next 6 years. It sounds stupid but I have been using my income to work towards this for a while so I know things are in place for the next 6 years.*
>
> *My husband grew up in a very austere home environment with no inheritance but I tell my husband money for us is not that much of an issue. Of course we are not rich like those people in the Eastern suburbs, but we don't have values that require us to upgrade our house or our old car (I'm not that kind of wife), or whatever; and there are plenty of people who do. Some people spend money on material things and getting their nails done etc. They think these things are really important, but we don't.* (1).

There aren't necessarily tensions here around different aspirations for their child, but rather how to best to achieve them, overlaid by the pressures of two different class outlooks and ideological orientations.

This family is also carrying the attendant uncertainties and strains of changing gendered roles played out on the domestic front. Ivy had been the main breadwinner for some time due to her husband's mid-life career change. As a result caring roles were less 'traditional' than for many other families. After her husband quit teaching, Ivy provided the stable source of income while her husband studied and took up a larger share of child duties due to being at home more. Also, subsequently his new career path was proving to be uncertain as he struggled to secure permanent employment. There were also influences stemming from a former marriage. Ivy said her husband still felt strongly about being excluded from choosing the school for his first child and he has been very involved in the process this time.

Her husband's preference was for their son to go to a government selective school and she tended towards the private option. Their son's preference was originally for a selective school, but as his anxieties mounted about passing the selective test he became more ambivalent.

> *There is this huge pressure on him to succeed in selective because of his father's job and I think that is unhealthy, and his dad helps him preparing and shouts at*

> *him etc. He is stressed and unhappy about it, he wants to know where he is going. He's not enjoying this. The whole thing it is dreadful. My husband has also been getting really stressed about this trying to help him prepare for the selective tests and he is also under another set of stresses around the uncertainty of his employment. He never knows from day to week how much work he will have*. (1).

Clearly, entry into the selective system would have eased the financial pressures on the family, would have pleased the father, and placated one side of the family. In keeping with British research into middle class families (Ball, 2003; Reay & Ball, 1998) the child's role in decision making was very limited – he was consulted, however this school choice was a decision for the adults.

Ivy struggled to reconcile the views of her extended family, her husband and her son – but she also had her own conflicting views.

> *But I've also my own internal dilemmas I've thought about it and I think that's [public] the system I've been through most, and I've been to some great schools. I think about my sister-in-law who is so anti-private schooling but actually she's never known anything different. And I thought it's what you know, it's what you understand and what you're comfortable with. For example, I expect a school to be aesthetically nice and not look like a prison. It's just what my experience was. I expect science labs with equipment and libraries with books and AV in them. But if you've been to xxx County High and that's all you know, then that's what you expect.* (1).

As Ivy rationalises her thoughts about the conflicting familial views, she articulates a sense of taste that is the product of her own upper class experiences - even reverting to British nomenclature in her descriptions. Clearly social capital here is a powerful and long-lasting motivator of aesthetics. Despite Ivy's changed social status she brings this pre-determined set of expectations to the task of school choice.

By way of contrast, another woman in this study of a similar age, also educated in Britain but in the government system, actively seeks to avoid her child experiencing what she did. *Back then a lot of us were not encouraged to go on, we just left school and went to work… people just left, they didn't do Year 11 and 12.* (1). Primrose wants something different for her son: *I hope his experience is different to mine. I was a bright child that didn't get the opportunity* (2) and so she hopes for a scholarship place in a private school or a place in the selective system. Unlike Ivy she doesn't discuss her

school choices with her mother because she says of her parents – *their philosophy is that you go to the local school* (1).

By the end of September, Ivy's son had not received an offer from either of the selective schools they had favoured. They had only been offered a place in a newly created selective stream in a government high school struggling against a poor reputation and with extremely limited grounds and poor facilities. Despite the government rhetoric, the family were not convinced that these shortcomings were going to be resolved in the short term. Like the families in Ball's research this family showed a distinct lack of trust in the government (Ball, 2003). Instead the family decided to pay for the private school option.

The range of conflicting views that impacted on Ivy's world, illustrates how school choice can become a forum for the playing out of complex intergenerational beliefs, that in a Bourdieuian sense can be regarded as the contestation of habitus and social capital. Ivy's process of school choice demonstrated one person's attempt to balance out inherited habitus against her new dispositions and the particular interests of her son.

The familial context in this school choice outcome was also significant. The particular and evolving sensitivities around familial roles married with the stage-of-life for this family brought about a confluence of opportunities that facilitated the consideration of private schooling. There is no doubt that Ivy's role was pivotal. Her own positive experience of private schooling predisposed her to her inherited habitus but she also engineered the family's economic preparedness to enable this habitus to be activated if necessary. In addition she steered the path between the contested ideological and class positions of her extended families to a resolution she believed offered her son the best schooling available to them.

Unlike Veronica or Clover as discussed in Chapter 6, Ivy had had personal experience of exclusive schooling which she found very satisfying. Compared to Veronica she would prefer to spend the family's limited economic capital on private schooling rather than on travel or other life-style choices. All three women aim to solidify and advance their family's social position, but the way that they factor schooling into that equation is very different. Unlike Clover, Veronica or Jade, nowhere in Ivy's conversation does

she indicate alternate paths for social advancement and yet compared to these women the economic and social position of her family is far less stable. Perhaps this instability has contributed to her desire for promises for advancement that are held out by private schooling.

8.5.3 Choice as investment

The notion that schooling could affect the lot of one's child and of the family was widely recognised, especially as the women reflected on their own schooling. However, in most cases the mothers spoke about their hopes from secondary schooling in terms of shorter term impacts. Most spoke about what they considered important to achieve happiness and some degree of 'success' during the period of secondary schooling. There was relatively less talk about longer term rewards (such as good jobs, good social contacts) arising from particular school choices. Quite a few mothers expressed a desire to avoid 'trouble' in the teenage years by making the wrong school choice. Their concern was for the child in particular, and more widely the effects this could have on themselves and the whole family. It was clear that many mothers were prepared to make extra sacrifices during the secondary schooling years if they thought a particular school could offer some protection against such concerns.

However women had differing capacities (capitals) to put into practice measures to activate these aims. Those with more scholastically able children, and / or those who could afford to buy extra support to assist their child's learning (eg via extra coaching, extra music lessons etc) had more school options because these children were more likely to be chosen by the schools themselves. But nevertheless all these women engaged in school choices that were future-orientated within the constraints and limitations of their (economic, social, cultural and emotional) capital. And for most of these women such choices brought associated costs that they may have lamented, but nevertheless willingly undertook in expectation of some deferred gratification for the child, the family and themselves.

For women like Ivy or Iris the reward they imagined might come from this investment was perceived in positive terms, - a better education, a more capable person: Holly describes their decision: *it's going to be an investment and we are going to get a good result* (2). The perspective for these mothers was more optimistic, articulating the

potential for long term outcomes: *it will shape their future* (Hazel, 2). For others such as Primrose or Lily, there was less certainty about the future and the investment was seen as their best chance to avoid a negative outcome: *This is the last leg and you really want to get it right* (Lily, 2) and, *It's … more important than primary school, I suppose, because it's your last chance* (May, 2). These differing views about future possibilities may arise from the confidence of having a bright child and / the economic and cultural capacity to support their education. The economic and the social position held by Ivy and Iris, albeit perhaps compromised, was substantially different to that of Primrose or Lily.

The two mothers of children with special needs brought yet a different orientation to school choice and its connection to future possibilities. They were less convinced that schooling would be the thing that would make a difference. Angelica was pleased when circumstances relieved her of having to make a choice of schools – at least for another 12 months. However it was her belief, borne out by her own experience, that *some people are going to make it no matter what school they go to and I think I was lucky – I was one of them* (1) although she is less sure of this is the case for her first child. Veronica's unsatisfactory experiences as a mother of two children with special needs, had led her to hold very constrained expectations of what schools might do, or offer: *mostly I've found the schools really don't want to know* (1).

In this study no one was extremely well-off. The three families who chose private schooling did so knowing they would have to make sacrifices to cover the associated costs. Excepting Veronica, most of the families who went to the more affordable Catholic schools had limited economic capital. Veronica's views about schooling were no doubt a result of her experiences as a mother of children with special needs but further, like Angelica she believed in, and had had personal experience of 'making it' despite school; *Irrespective of the money I would be shying away from the upper rung schools – I mean growing up working class didn't do me any harm. I really don't want my kids mixing with upper class people!* (Veronica, 1). Of the two people who chose government schools within their local area, both elected the school with the better reputation even though it meant travelling further. As we saw in Chapter 6, although Clover also had a working class background, hers was one of the more wealthy families in the study and one that rejected the non-government options.

The immediate short term costs for investing in schooling varied greatly for the families dependent on their economic and social circumstances, but was also dependent on the stage-of-life of the family. For those with more than one child, and for younger couples at earlier stages in their career pathways the short term sacrifices seemed much greater. The burdens of mortgages, uncertain career projections, of juggling small children and working lives, were significant factors for some families compared to others, where dual, stable incomes, smaller or zero mortgages, and well established homes and life-styles were the norm. For those families in the latter stages-of-life there was generally greater certainty borne of greater accumulated wealth and knowledge (especially where other children were older), and fewer familial, career and financial pressures impacting on choice.

For Primrose, things seemed to be getting harder rather than easier for the family as her children faced secondary schooling. Having missed out on a selective place, Primrose's son attended the Catholic school her husband had attended as a new immigrant. At the start of 2003, Primrose said, *I am doing extra work now … I don't mind having to pay [for the school] I would have preferred to get a free education but never mind. It's OK for one at the moment, but I don't know how I will go with all three* …(3). In addition she had to work harder around the house *I have to get up at 6.30 to make the sandwiches and go to the bus stop with him. It's rush, rush rush. … and there is the extra homework.*…as well as maintain her commitment to the schools *I'm now doing the P & C at two schools* and the extra curricular classes of music lessons, band, dancing and soccer for the three children.

For Primrose, the move to secondary schooling increased her domestic workload substantially. She was even more time poor. This transition added a greater burden on the family at a time when for others, family life was beginning to get easier. Their investment in secondary schooling in financial terms may have been less than some, but much more than those attending government schools, and in the short term at least, this investment would cost the family a great deal.

8.6 Conclusion

This chapter has taken up the neoliberal discourses around markets; the central assumptions of rational decision making and the associated discourses of choice, as the framing for the discussion of the final step in the Process of School Shopping. By attending yet again to the theoretical foundations of 'choice' it showed the origins and influences of this idea on contemporary school policy making. That discussion situated the analysis of data that tracked the progress of these women as they reached an outcome from their engagement in school shopping.

This chapter documented these outcomes and showed that school shopping is more than simply activating a check list. In doing so it has pointing out the conundrum of neoliberal 'choice' that promotes the idea that consumers have the freedom and the power to choose their own school. The stories presented in this chapter and those revisited from earlier chapters illustrate the falsehood of this promise. The data shows that of the 20 participating families only two were really 'choosing the school'; the other families were 'chosen by the school'.

And further, unlike the rhetoric of markets, school 'choice' is far from a linear, 'rational' event, based on the logic of a unitary decision-maker at a point in time. In its analysis of Step 6: Choosing or being chosen? this chapter shows that school shopping is a complex process involving interrelations within and between families; it is a heavily gendered activity that includes the resolution of conflicting capitals and habituses, within a particular location and time-specific field. Irrespective of the roles and views of individual mothers, ultimately their decision making is an outcome of concern for the whole family and arises out of the particular conditions of that family; including economic, social and stage-of-life factors. For the women in this study, resolving these kinds of familial tensions was a wholly embedded aspect of their approach to the task of school shopping. But ultimately, in contrast to the public discourse, most of these women found that school choice, in reality, was not part of their experience.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This research set out to explore the experiences of a group of mothers engaged in secondary school choice for their children in a particular urban setting in an Australian market-oriented policy context. In order to understand how they came to make 'choices' about schools the study hoped to explore the processes, behaviours, emotions and influences that may have featured in their experiences. Secondly the study commenced with the intention of exploring the personal, familial, cultural and social dimensions of their experience.

To address these aims the study reviewed two keys sets of contextualising literature; emerging market-orientated schooling systems, and changing forms of the family. The adoption of a feminist and phenomenological approach to the research facilitated the focus on gender and experience necessary to pursue my objectives. By seeking out and drawing on relevant theoretical frames, Chapters 5 – 8 documented the major themes arising from the analysis of data.

The aim of this chapter is to pull together what has been found in pursuit of these endeavours.

As indicated in Chapter 4 the location of this study was chosen because it offered a broad cross section of Australian family life in a context rich with school 'choice'. The suburbs that make up Sydney's inner west typify the gentrification occurring in many large cities where, alongside the bulk of middle class citizens, pockets of poverty and wealth exist. Importantly this location has a wide range of school types; old and new government school options, plus Catholic and private schools all within easy access of the participants.

In socio-economic terms the group that make up this study are overwhelmingly drawn from middle Australia. The incomes, educational attainments, occupations and lifestyles of these women and their families situate them as middle class Australians.

The mothers who are the primary data source for this study were mostly older, and in long-term stable relationships with one or two dependent children. Even though most have temporarily foregone their careers in favour of work that accommodates family needs, (eg Jade, Angelica, Primrose, Poppy, Hazel, Veronica, Daisy, Ivy, Heather, Holly, Rosa, Peony) the majority of these mothers have careers built on tertiary qualifications. No one was a full time mother in the traditional sense of staying at home full time, however most families operated within the traditional 'male breadwinner model'. This division of labour was further exemplified by the primacy of the mother's role regarding the establishment and maintenance of the family's relationship to the child's school and education in general.

Perhaps, given the mode of recruitment, an unsurprising but nevertheless potent characteristic of this group is their strong connection to education as parents, students and professionals. Also interestingly this group of families had been relatively mobile up to the time of the study. In terms of the market this group of mothers could be considered ideal consumers: educated, moneyed and joining the market as new customers who value the product on sale (education).

The group was characterised by a reasonable degree of diversity of cultures, religious affiliation, partnership arrangements, and economic circumstances as detailed in Chapter 4 and elsewhere. Additionally these women had a fairly equal spread of male and female children and the study included two children with special needs. On the other hand some people were not part of the study: neither Aboriginal women nor the very rich or the very poor were represented in this study.

Thus the site and sample outlined, along with the process of continuous reflexive analysis of data internal and external to the study (Yates, 2003), enable interpretation to be contextualised and legitimised in the following discussion.

9.2 The process of school shopping

In Chapter 5 I argue that the easy and continual application of the shopping metaphor to school choice marks a distinct departure from experiences of earlier generations of women. This practice of school shopping was identified as a set of six steps in the Process of School Shopping which was adopted as the meta-structure for analysis,

interpretation and presentation of data. It is worth reiterating that although these steps are presented as a generalised linear pattern of behaviour, in practice mothers moved backwards and forwards in stops and starts sometimes revisiting earlier steps as they progressed towards a resolution. This section now reviews the major findings associated with each of these steps.

For the families in this study, it was the mothers who took overwhelming responsibility for doing the school shopping commencing with market research into school options for the family. The mothers actively engaged in the market as 'hunters and gatherers of information' that they brought home for examination and dissection by their families. Fathers played limited and particular roles in school choice, mostly engaging at the point of decision making.

Forced to take on the role of consumers, these women engaged in a wide range of information seeking activities. They relied most heavily on informal sources of information particularly their social networks since these provided not only information, but also a forum for discussing the validity and applicability of the information. Contacts with schools were also a major source of information, and visits to schools were a particularly valued activity. Of the official sources of information, mothers clearly valued school generated publications over information from the media.

Like Pusey's 'middle Australia' (2003) these women hold the government to blame for forcing them and their schools to relate as buyers and sellers in a market. They recognise that as consumers they are being solicited by marketers and wooed by advertising, and, that they must respond by endlessly seeking and trading information, visiting schools, assessing and comparing, evaluating and judging in order to make the right purchase. They also recognise that schools have no choice but to operate as entrepreneurs. They submit to the market, but they don't like it; on one hand they admonish schools for simply telling them what they want to hear - for their marketing hype; but on the other hand, they are unforgiving if a school fails to present itself well.

Hence, like any other competitive marketplace, image and reputation take on special significance in the drive to secure 'customers'. In such a context schools cannot take their communities for granted. The rejection by these women of one local school in this

study shows very clearly how, even when customers don't approve of marketised schooling, they will reject schools that fail to live up to market expectations. The vivid descriptions of schools, and what was said and displayed there, left impressions longer lasting and more powerful than any official publicity.

Having gathered information about schools, mothers in this study typically then moved to Step 2: Evaluating options in order to determine preferences for particular schools or types of schools.

In a marketised system where schools operate as businesses and parents as consumers, the symbolic role of schools as commodities increases. Thus choices about schools become infused with issues of taste and style, dreams and aspirations; so that school is more than simply a priced commodity.

This study shows families responded to this altered construct of 'school' through a vibrant interplay of social, economic and cultural capitals in the course of familial decision making. Additionally the context and one's natural inclination towards a particular action (explored via the Bourdiean concepts of 'field' and 'habitus') are shown to interact in the tension between individual and familial actions and systemic imperatives.

Bourdieu (1986) proposes that families and in particular mothers, use schooling to try to advance a family's social position. This study problematises this proposal by juxtaposing it against a number of scenarios presented in the data. Research has shown that single mothers are particularly vulnerable to poverty (O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999). In the case of Lily the decision to choose a non-government school was taken neither to improve the family's social standing, nor out of habitus, but rather, in her view, this change of habitus was necessary to maintain, or at least halt the decline in the family's social position because the field (of schooling and of the family) had changed.

As shown in Chapter 6, for some women Step 3: Determining Preferences, was about mobilising inherited cultural capital resulting in a continuation of intergenerational familial habitus (as illustrated by Iris and Veronica). In contrast, for Lily, Holly and

Clover, actively choosing a school was not an inherited norm, and yet changed fields facilitated them undertaking this practice.

Holly recognised that the context or field of schooling had changed and, in addition, her partner's inherited field and habitus was a different and powerful influence that helped normalise school choice and choice for private schooling in their family. Clover embraced the opportunity to choose, and did so choosing in favour of community, rather than simply choosing what they could afford or what might be considered 'normal' for people of their social standing. Clover's 'choice' shows that abundant economic capital alone does not facilitate school choice.

Like Jade and Poppy, Veronica's preferred means of maintaining and improving her family's social position fell largely outside of school choice. The cultural and social capital she valued, in her estimation, could be more dependably secured through lifestyle choices. To what extent this idea of the 'self made man' may reflect a peculiar 'Australian-ness' is debateable and beyond the scope of this thesis, however may be worthy of investigation elsewhere especially as it stands in contrast to much existing school choice theorising.

By extending Bourdieu's notion of capitals to include 'emotional capital' and by using the lenses provided by the concept of 'emotional labour' this study was able to address the often neglected affective aspects of school choice and demonstrate the importance of emotions within families and to the work of mothers engaged in school choice.

Step 4 and Step 5 of the Process of School Shopping were shown to be increasingly complex undertakings, and of necessity ones accompanied by an increased potential for error and therefore for anxiety. The story of Jade illustrated how errors in Step 4: Investigating procedures resulted in incomplete knowledge of procedural matters thus producing guilt, anxiety and frustration. Over a period of months Jade had to manage her own fragile emotions as well as those of her child. Poppy also took on the primary role of managing the emotions associated with an unhappy child – in this case caused by parental wishes rather than by the systemic imperatives.

This study shows how in Step 5: Taking action a range of short and long term strategies were adopted to secure school options: but all required physical and emotional work on the part of these mothers. In many ways, Peony's family lacked 'the right' cultural and social capital and had limited economic capital to draw upon. However the influence of Peony's Chinese cultural inheritance that brought with it important attributes favouring educational success, combined with her long-term investments of emotional capital was influential in their successful school choice outcome.

The data pertaining to Step 6: Choosing or being chosen? – the outcome of school choice, showed that even in Sydney's inner west where schools are abundant, the neoliberal promise of 'choice' in a school market is a hollow promise indeed. Despite the government rhetoric for choice, apart from Angelica whose child repeated interstate, only two of the women in this study were in fact school choosers; the vast majority were instead 'chosen' by the schools. An examination of the final stages of school choice Chapter 8, showed that 'choice' involved much more than activating a wish list – rather it was the outcome of many interrelated factors

Most mothers in this study began thinking about school choice by initially considering a wide range of schools, and during the Process of School Shopping this collection of options was reduced down, ultimately to one. However there were also examples where self-exclusion truncated the process. For example, from the outset both Heather and Angelica refused to consider Catholic schools, similarly both Clover and Rosemary refused to consider private and Catholic schools, and Jade, Lily, Angelica and Clover refused to consider selective schools. Except in the cases of Rosemary, Clover and Lily these examples illustrate a playing out of habitus – a preference for what one had experienced oneself, a prejudice against the unknown. I have written elsewhere about the influence of past experience on school choice (Aitchison, 2002), and how negative prior experiences are more likely than positive ones to result in a reversal away from the familiar, ie to bring about a change in habitus.

Overt self-exclusion occurred where mothers and/families consciously refused to consider types of schools for ideological or religious reasons for example, but more subtle self-exclusion also occurred where mothers and families failed to pursue options because they considered their chances of success to be minimal. For example, some

families didn't pursue selective schooling options either because they didn't consider their child's skills sufficient, or they hadn't been able to, or hadn't considered fostering these talents sufficiently over the long term in order to guarantee a high probability of success. Further, as marketisation increasingly turns education into a provisional good (Marginson, 1997b) and the spiralling of credientialism continues (Teese & Polesel, 2003) the bar for 'academic success' is ever rising and ever more difficult to achieve affecting all but especially the middle classes (Ball, 2003).

Along with self-exclusion, some families are locked out of certain options. For example, for nearly four months Jade believed her child was locked out of the school of their choice because her daughter didn't compete as well as some others in the entry selection process to the performing arts high school. For those families with children with special needs such as Veronica and Angelica, their options were severely restricted and indeed they were locked out of most schools.

9.3 Complexities

Contemporary education policies are framed within a neoliberal ideology that draws on neoclassical economics to promote markets as the ultimate mechanism for a nation's economic advancement (Marginson, 1997b). Within this framing, markets permeate all aspects of politics, policy development, and increasingly social life (O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999; Pusey, 2003). Market oriented policies have been promoted to the Australian public under the guise of the right to choose (Goward, 2005; Nelson, 2004; Patterson, 2005). Markets have been lauded by politicians as beneficial to the public and essential for the economy (Pusey, 2003). The successful operation of markets is based on a set of assumptions about consumer behaviour that constructs consumers as rational, un-gendered, context-less actors seeking to maximise self-interest through the logical application of 'choice' (R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996; Ferber & Nelson, 2003; Gardiner, 1997; Strober, 2003).

Like larger studies overseas (Ball, 2003; David, West, & Ribbens, 1994; Woods, Bagley, & Glatter, 1998), this longitudinal Australian study shows just how far the neoliberal assumptions about markets fall short of the everyday realities of this group of consumers in this educational market.

9.3.1 Gendered not gender-neutral

Firstly as evidenced in this work, women are indeed "the labourers of school choice" (Reay & Ball, 1998). Neoclassical economics assumes markets are gender-neutral, but social institutions are in fact gendered (Connell, 2002; Smith, 1987) and so are markets (R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996; O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999; Strober, 2003). This study underlines the falsity of this assumption since these mothers not only assumed major responsibility for the work of school shopping, they also did so in a qualitatively different way to their male partners. In their families, these women exercised considerable power as well as expertise in the execution of this task and in bringing about the resolution of 'choice'.

These mothers oversaw the whole process of school shopping as well as undertaking the bulk of the legwork, the everyday minutiae of the multiple physical and emotional tasks, from initial market research to the outcome and beyond. For these women the task of choosing a secondary school for their child was a natural extension of their existing educative and shopping responsibilities in their families.

9.3.2 Collaborative not individuated

While these mothers generally initiated, managed and executed school choice, there are important examples in this study where this was not an individuated self-interested activity. The modus operandi of these women was overtly collaborative - in their communities, between networks of families and within their families. Their behaviours thus illustrating the interconnectedness of their lives:

> Neoliberal individualism gives no ground for reconciling the claim to autonomy with the constraints of human interdependency and the connectedness to others that is most fully developed in the lives of women (O'Connor, Orloff, & Shaver, 1999, p. 54)

This research provides many examples of collaborative community minded anti-competitive responses to the market. Poppy initiated, and Daphne, Clover and Rosemary were active participants in efforts by women at their schools to inform other families about school options and procedures. School shopping was characterised by anti-competitive behaviour as these women colluded to undermine the operations of the market that would have customers compete against each other for scare goods. The

open and frequent sharing and discussion of information within the mothers' networks shows how information was interrogated and contested, and sometimes discounted by these astute shoppers. Within families too, there was plenty of evidence of mothers' preparedness to sacrifice their own needs/wishes/habitus for the good of their child or of the family, thus exercising "collective rationality" (R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996) on behalf of the family.

While it is possible to argue that each of these actions could be sheeted back to self-interest, it seems fair to say that these examples show a concern that goes beyond simple personal gain and that does genuinely reflect a preference for community-mindedness as opposed to individuated self-interest. There was a very strong feeling amongst this particular group of women **for** community and against individualised consumerist constructions, a clearly negative response, if not resistance, to marketised schooling. However, these mothers also recognised that the shift to markets extended beyond schooling and was endemic in their lives – and ultimately there was a sense that attempts at collective resistance had limited chances of success.

9.3.3 Emotional and subjective not 'rational'

This study makes very clear that the operation of the market is not simply a benign and 'rational' activity that flows from an objective cost-benefit analysis. Entrepreneurs side-step 'rationality' in favour of sophisticated marketing and advertising: "consumers are led to believe that they are operating freely when, in fact, great effort has been made to control their actions without them being aware of it. They are led to buy and spend more than they intend …" (Ritzer, 2001, p. 8). On the demand side of the equation, 'rationality' is equally malleable: consumers endeavour to be 'rational' (Ball, 2003; Gorard, 1997) but find that choice is rarely so simple, instead mothers bring other different "context-bound rationalities" (R. Edwards & Duncan, 1996) to the task.

This study shows that school choice is a richly subjective and emotional activity that engaged mothers in very particular ways. Mothers became the managers of emotions associated with school choice – managing their own emotions, those of the target child and the whole family.

The strongest, most destructive emotions around uncertainty, powerlessness and guilt, demand more time and greater management skills from mothers, and in this research such emotions either arose or were exasperated by structural factors. Increased anxiety is a natural bi-product of a competitive system caused by inbuilt structural factors such as limited places, scholarship and entry testing procedures and timing, and further aggravated by market tactics such as marketing and advertising. A marketised school system is built on competition which leads to a greater diversification of 'school types' as schools aim to differentiate themselves from their competitors. This changing and diversified secondary school landscape brings with it changing procedures of application and school selection thereby increasing the risk for error.

Anxiety is a natural accompaniment to risk and parents-as-consumers risk making judgements based on misinformation, or by misunderstanding procedures, or simply by being overwhelmed they may opt out altogether or choose the easiest course of action. Either way there are major implications for access and equity affecting not just the individuals but the whole system.

So, school choice is an emotional activity because, as documented by others (Ball, 2003; Brantlinger, 2003) and borne out by this study, women play a pivotal role in developing, maintaining and carrying forward the family's social and cultural capital. Chapter 7 especially showed that women not only managed the family's emotions they also drew on emotional capital for the benefit of their children, especially in improving their educational chances and thereby effecting the family's social position. Lucey and Reay (2002a) point out the particular burden of this task for middle class mothers and their children. Like the families in their study, these 'aspirational' families are characterised by high anxiety around social position which they regard as under threat in the current neoliberal economic context (Ball, 2003; Ball & Vincent, 2001; Pusey, 2003). For these families education takes on a more significant role and the stakes are high.

9.3.4 Context-specific not context-less

Neoliberal rhetoric also promotes markets as context-less, as operating most efficiently when independent of government interference, community or moral persuasion (Strober, 2003). This study shows most vividly that markets, and their buyers and

sellers operate in very specific familial, cultural, intergenerational, social and structural contexts that deeply effect how the market works in a particular time and place.

The family is an important component of the context of school choice and in this study the market favoured some **family types** over others. Families headed by older couples typically had older children (and hence less intensive child-care demands), better established and more secure career and income paths, had accumulated more economic (and social and emotional) capital, and thus were better positioned to make future orientated decisions especially those requiring financial commitment. For those women in newer families (or in single parent families) with more and younger children and less secure, and established income streams (such as Angelica and Primrose), school choice was a more restricted, higher risk venture. Their options were reduced.

This study also provides insights into the impact of **family dynamics** not often captured in discussions about school choice. Many women spoke of the difficulties and tensions that surfaced within their families around the issue of school choice. Those women for whom this wasn't an issue were those whose capitals and habitus most closely matched with other involved members of the family, or where the women were solely in charge of school choice. For example, some women never reported conflict between themselves and their partners over school choice. By their own admission Hazel, Veronica, Angelica, Heather and May took full responsibility for school choice thus avoiding potential conflict by being the primary or sole decision maker. Clover, Jade, Poppy and Peony either held or upheld the same views as their partners, thus also avoiding conflict. However, all the other women experienced varying degrees of conflict with their partners over school choice. The relationship of Iris and Holly as detailed in Chapter 6 provides a detailed example of how such conflicting views originating in different inherited capitals and habituses can play out over weeks and months of school choice. The story of Ivy as detailed in Chapter 8 is another example of contested habituses and capitals extending across generations and interfacing with changed fields.

This study pointed to how **culture** can play a role in school choice. Using the lens of emotional capital and emotional labour this study showed how one family drew on a particular kind of emotional capital that capitalised on cultural attributes advantageous

to educational attainment. As noted by others (Francis & Archer, 2005; Kao & Thompson, 2003) Chinese immigrant families, often lacking in the dominant forms of social and cultural capital pertaining to their host countries, bring other advantageous capitals to bear. Over a long period of time, and facilitated by emotional labouring, Peony brought to bear her cultural inheritance that valued educational attainment significantly effecting her family's successful pursuit of school choice.

Intergenerational factors also proved to be a significant contextualising issue. In this study the women believed a mother's work around a child's schooling had altered qualitatively and quantitatively compared to previous generations. As children, the women in this study attended schools along with their communities. For them, the school one attended was not the outcome of independent actions by one's parents; rather it was in keeping with one's community practice. That is, Catholics attended the local Catholic school and non-Catholics attended the local government school and /or the local selective school, if they were lucky. For May, attending a boarding school in the city was normal practice amongst the isolated farming communities in rural NSW. For Iris and Ivy private schooling was the established generational norm within their families.

By contrast for these women as mothers in the inner west there appeared to be no 'automatic fit' between their families and the practice of their communities regarding school choice. If anything there was a sense of uncertainty and dislocation; there was no clearly delineated 'norm' for them and their peers.

As related by these women, for them, school choice commands substantial amounts of time and effort compared to the experiences of their own mothers. This extra labouring is both physical and emotional. Despite many changes away from traditional family life, these mothers spent considerably more time than did their own mothers (or male partners) in support of their child's education – and, on school choice.

In this study school choice was a highly **gendered** activity. Mother's work in school choice was also qualitatively different from that of the fathers in this study. In general, women did the 'leg work' while men's involvement was mostly at the point of decision making. Further this study shows vividly how it was the mothers rather than the fathers

who took on the demanding, but important job of the emotional labouring of school choice.

While neoliberal markets are theorised as best operating freely there are important contextualising factors that affect how this plays out for any one family. Markets may be said to operate independently and without prejudice, however neither schools nor their constituent families operate in a sterile, neutral or level playing field.

School choice wasn't trouble free for any of the families in this study. Tensions and difficulties arose in response to both external factors such as structural imperatives arising from the workings of the market as well as internal factors such as the contestation of familial differences. This study showed how a variety of capitals interacted within families to mediate the structural imposts in this particular market

Economic capital has always been crucial for the allocation of goods in a market. For these mothers money was the essential first requirement for considering non-government schooling options - but the relevance of financial capacity extended beyond this. Families were acutely aware of the impact of money on a child's education; to buy into a school and to sustain their education. Those families with greater financial resources could afford more expensive schools and / they could pay for coaching for entry into selective schools or private school scholarships. Money could be used to support a child's academic development thus facilitating their desirability by (and success in) any school, it could also provide parallel educational support irrespective of the child's school.

This study provides many examples of how choice involves complex interactions of different and **altering capitals, fields and habituses**. As illustrated especially in Chapter 3, contemporary experiences of 'family' are in flux and this diversity and change is occurring at a time when families are straining under the pressures of economic change (Mackay, 1997; Probert & Macdonald, 1998; Pusey, 2003). The impact of this changing field of the family came to the fore when combined with the changing field of schooling as illustrated in the experience by Lily. Familial tensions around school choice seemed to be least fraught where parents shared common cultural and social capitals and habituses. For example Rosemary and her partner had similar

upbringings, occupations and tastes. Their marriage was well established and they were financially secure and their school preferences were the same. By contrast Ivy and her husband brought very different habituses and capitals to the task of school choice. For this family, like Holly and Iris, the defining characteristic of their experience of school choice was the management and resolution of these conflicting familial differences.

In summary this study shows how choice in a secondary school market unfolds very differently from the neoliberal rhetoric that accompanies its promotion. The experiences of these consumers testify just how erroneous the theoretical tenents of rational, self-interested, decontextualised economic decision making actually are when tested out in a real, familial, context-specific location.

The data about how women gathered information about schools most clearly illustrates the ambivalence of mothers-as-consumers. It shows the power and the limitations of the mechanisms of marketing and advertising in particular, to affect both the rational and the irrational aspects of consumer behaviour. The collusive behaviours of these women clearly contradict the neoliberal market discourses of a theoretical consumer motivated by competitive self-interest. Further, these women mostly demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how the market tried to manipulate both them as consumers and the schools as commodities. The stories told by these women and their children showed how markets use many methods to construct schools as meaning-making commodities. The experiences of these women reveal how in a marketised environment school image takes on an even more crucial role in attracting or repelling potential consumers.

The data also showed how markets impacted on families in a highly gender specific way that lead to changed and increased work for mothers. This impact was illustrated though scenarios which show the complexities of the physical, mental and emotional tasks of school shopping. It also highlighted the important and intricate negotiations of field, habitus and capitals that occurs within families in response to structural and market realities.

9.4 Implications

At this time it appears Australian school policy is largely the result of borrowing from other countries wedded to neoliberal economic reform, rather than being the outcome of detailed research and theorising based on the particular Australian experience of schooling. Policy makers would do well to research and heed the experiences of mothers in particular, who have been shown in this study to be the primary and expert shoppers for schools.

This study has also raised implications for further research and for theory building. Here the focus has been on mothers in families, however more work is required to develop a better view of how markets impact on other family members. The study also raised interesting issues around culture that would benefit from further investigation especially given the rising popularity of religious and selective schools in NSW. In particular it would be valuable to undertake empirical work that might illuminate the very different experiences of more marginalised families in the Australian school market; for example, poor, Aboriginal and rural families and communities.

A range of theoretical lenses have been used in this study. Feminist lenses have proven to be invaluable for exposing particular gendered facets of school marketisation in Australia and for exposing how family life has been discursively shaped by these policies. This methodological approach could well be extended to explore further the intergenerational influences as women's public and private lives continue to change under neoliberal policy frames.

The application of Bourdieuian concepts for data analysis helped problematise the complex internal familial interplay of taste and lifestyle, and also shed light on how the resolution of familial tensions and differences may be actioned in the interface with school choice. There is great scope for further application and extension of this theorising to familial and gendered experiences of school choice in Australia in order to interrogate different settings and experiences such as might be found amongst Australia's poorest families or in rural settings, for example.

This study pointed out the value of applying theoretical frames from cultural studies particularly for the analysis of consumer behaviour in these new and emerging markets. As Australia's experience with school markets continues, knowledge of how marketing is applied and responded to will become more pertinent as a means for understanding how markets work and how consumers are thus positioned.

Most clearly this research has shown that there needs to be a re-conceptualisation of how markets in secondary schooling actually work. The experiences of this group of women challenge the assumptions upon which neoliberal marketised educational policy changes are based. Neither the schools-as-commodities nor these mothers-as-consumers operate as theoretically neutral, 'rational', de-contextualised agents. Policy makers would do well to attend to empirical data that helps build specific, contextualised understandings of the ways markets actually work and particularly how these are evidenced in families in particular locations.

Further, the guarantee of 'choice' which has become a central platform of both of Australia's major political parties is demonstrated clearly by this study to be for most families, a false promise. Even in a location with many school options the ability of families to access those choices is neither equal nor universal. Many factors emanating both from the public and the private sphere impact on the capacity of those families to action this choice and to secure the school of their choosing.

The impact of school markets into families has profound, but less well documented effects. This study has revealed how mothers' work has been affected both qualitatively and quantitatively. It has also shown how policies of school marketisation have served as a mechanism for the surfacing and contestation of differing habituses, cultural, social, emotional and economic capitals in families already pressured by changing familial norms and additionally carrying the burden of economic restructuring. Current market-orientated school policies seem set to proceed, thus for families further eroding the separation of public and private, and, for our education system further eroding the viability of the already residualised government school system thus aggravating existing inequalities. For the already time-poor and economically strained middle Australian mothers these policies mean even greater demands on their limited time and resources

as they steer their families through the allure created by schools competing in a market aimed at attracting and selecting only certain kinds of families.

Australia has not escaped the colonising influence of globalised neoliberal reforms in education and this study reveals the extent of the intrusion into our communities, schools and families, and especially into the lives of mothers. Despite the rhetoric of an individual's right to choose, 'choice' for most families is a fraud. Even in a well-stocked market of secondary schools, in reality choice is pre-ordained according to structural constraints pertaining to locality, a family's capacity to activate the 'right' economic, social, cultural and emotional capital at the 'right' time, and the physical and emotional labouring of the mothers who are responsible for school shopping and more broadly for family-school relations.

In a market already stacked in favour of advantage, and for an economy that demands ever increasing levels of academic achievement from our children, mothers' labouring over school choice is likely to grow ever more pressured as families are inveigled into 'choosing' only to discover that 'choice' is, in reality, the prerogative of the market.

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APPENDIX A

Are you trying to choose the right high school for your child?

If you have a child currently in year six and this is the first time you have had a child entering high school, I would be interested in talking to you.

As part of my Doctoral studies at UTS I am researching the experiences of mothers who are choosing a high school for their child(ren) for the first time. I'm not so much interested in the particular schools you may or may not consider, but rather, I'm interested in hearing about how you go about making your choices.

I am seeking to interview mothers on three occasions; from early 2002 until early 2003. Each interview should take approximately one hour.

If you think you might be interested in participating please contact me, Claire Aitchison on 0419438627 or at work on 96859266.

My research has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney. The research findings will be presented as a thesis. Neither schools nor individuals will be identified in any resultant findings or publications.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW ONE
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Date
Start time
Finish time

Part One – You and schooling
1. What do you remember most about your own school experiences?

2.1 And now I want to turn to your experiences as an adult as a parent.
You have a child in year 6 this year?
What's their name?
Have they enjoyed school so far?
*Tell me about **your** experiences as a **mother** of … through his/her primary schooling years.*

2.2. What have you enjoyed most about being a mother of a primary school student so far?

2.3 Has there been a down /up side ?

3.1 Tell me about how you have been involved in your child's schooling so far?

3.2 Families seem to work out different arrangements to fit around kids and school. Can you tell me how your family arranges some school related activities?

Follow up questions such as;

*-How does ….. get to and from school? **Transport***

*-What do you do about school lunches? **School lunches***

*-How do you handle **interactions with the school,** eg parent-teacher interviews, writing permission notes, sick notes, etc*

*-Does …. do any sport, music (**extra curricula activities** associated with school)? -How does your family handle this (eg transport, paying for this? etc)*

*-And how about **homework?** Does …. get on with this OK?*

*-How does your family handle the **financial aspects of schooling**?*

4. This will be ……'s last year at primary school. How do you feel about that?

Part Two – Your child and schooling

5. Remember when you changed from primary school to high school. How was the transition for you?

6. When you think about choosing high school for …..… how do you feel?

7. *What are some of the things you are thinking about as you consider which school to send ….. to next year?*

Follow up questions such as;

- *When thinking about high schools what kinds of things do you consider to be important for your child? (eg sporting facilities, academic achievement, grounds, proximity?)*

- *How did you find out about the various schools you are considering? (eg from your primary school, school publications, open days, friends, family,?)*

- *Have you been to any information sessions run by the high schools? Where they useful?*

- *Who have you talked to about the school choices? (eg your partner, the child, other siblings, other parents, your own mother?)*

- *Have you read/heard about these schools through the media at all?*

  -Are there additional things you might like to know about these schools that you've not yet found out? – If so what?

8. What do you want out of a school for your child?

9. How do you think life will be different for you when … goes to high school?

10. Depending on what has been elicited in no.7 follow up with questions that arise from their answers to 3.2.
eg Earlier you said … took … to school each morning. How will you manage that at high school?

11. Are you looking forward to … starting at a new school ?

12. Do you think …'s experience will be different from your experience as a high school student?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW TWO
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Date
Start time
Finish time
Name

Additional demographics
Mother's educational background
Primary
Secondary
Additional

MOTHER'S OCCUPATION

PARTNER'S EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND
PRIMARY
SECONDARY
ADDITIONAL

PARTNER'S OCCUPATION

HOW SECURE WOULD YOU SAY YOUR FAMILY'S INCOME STATUS IS?

Very secure fairly secure pretty dependable not very secure very insecure

---

1. *Since we met last what's been happening?*

2. *How do you feel? How does your child/ other members of the family feel about things now?*

3. *I want you to think back to end of July, early August when schools began sending out letters of offer.*
   Tell me how your family fared during this time.

4. Last time we spoke your preferences for school were ?
   Has this remained the same since we last met?

5. *How do you rate high school choice making compared to other educational decisions you've made for your child? Eg child care, primary school, musical instrument, coaching, what ever?*

6. *How and why do you think this decision is so different? If it is?*

7. *How do you think your family has been affected by this process? You – your partner, the child, other siblings, the 'family unit'*

8. *Regarding this process of decision making, from the position you are now in, if you could do anything differently would you? and what would it have been?*

9. *Again from your perspective as a participant in this process to date, have you got any comments about the process itself?*

10. *I'm interested in your role in this process. How much of your time and energies have been expended on this process?*

11. *What kind of emotional impact has it had on you?*

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW THREE
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Name
Date
Start time
Finish time

1. The new school

1.1 So tell me, what's happened since we last spoke - where is _____ going?

1.2 How does (s)he feel about the new school?
He's really enjoying it

1.3 How was the first day at school for _____ and for you? Did you take/collect?

1.4 What are your impressions of the new school so far?

1.5 Are there any things about the new school have impressed/surprised you?

1.6 What are the main issues for your child (regarding starting at a new school)?

1.7 What are the main issues for you (regarding starting at a new school)?

1.8 How does high school compare to primary school in the following ways:
Transportation to and from school

Out of school hours care

Out of school hours extracurricular activities

The amount/type of commitment family must give to the school

The amount/type of financial commitment required?

2. Transition of child to high school

2.1 How do you compare your child's transition to high school to that of your own?

3. Transition for the mother

3.1 Regarding the transition of your child to high school - what effect (if any) has there been on you (as the mother)?

3.2 Do you see yourself differently now that you are a parent of a high school student?

3.3 Has your relationship with your child altered?

-*with your partner?*

-*with other siblings?*

-*with the school?*

3.4 *Have the changed circumstances impacted on you in regard to work, family responsibilities, social life, financially?*

4. 'Mother's work'

4.1 Is there a difference between how your and your partner's money is spent in regard to the children?

4.2 Is there a difference between how your and your partner's time is spent in regard to the children?

4.3 If there is a division of labour in your family how would you say it is divided in regard to the children and educational responsibilities?

AND FINALLY …

5.1 *Why did you volunteer to participate in this study?*

THANKS SO MUCH !

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Date

1. Name

2. Marital status

3. Children and ages (eg 1 x 12 year old male, 2 x 3 year old girls)

4. Cultural/religious background

5. Your age range (please tick)

29 and under	30 - 39	40 - 49	50 and over

6. Your income range (please tick)

$19,000 and under	$20,000 – 39,000	$40,000 – 49,000	$50,000 – 69,000	$70,000 – 99,000	Over 100,000

6. Your combined income range (please tick)

Under $49,000	$50 – 79,000	$80 – 99,000	$100 – 139,000	$140 – 179,000	Over $180,000

7. Your suburb

8. Contact details

Thank you,
Claire

APPENDIX F

Name

SEMESTER ONE 2002

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT'DAY	SUNDAY
B'fore school							
Dur'g school							
After school							
Even-ing							

SPECIAL HOLIDAY ACTIVITIES?

SEMESTER TWO 2002

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT'DAY	SUNDAY
B'fore school							
Dur'g school							
After school							
Even-ing							

SEMESTER ONE 2003

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SAT'DAY	SUNDAY
B'fore school							
Dur'g school							
After school							
Even-ing							

APPENDIX G

Pseudonyms

Camellia. Although now found all over the world, the camellia comes from China, and once it puts down roots it is not easily moved.

Peony. The Chinese regard this as 'the king of flowers' and it is the quintessential Chinese flower. Peony is popular name with Chinese women around the world.

Angelica. Although most varieties are from the northern hemisphere there are also some New Zealand species. Angelica was known for its culinary and medicinal uses.

Jasmine. Jasmine comes from tropical America and is now a well loved creeper all around the world.

Heather. From the north of England and Scotland, this plant is sturdy.

Clover. Clover is passionate and political, she also recognises how lucky she is.

Poppy. The poppy is Eurasian and associated with the Golden Triangle amongst other things. The poppy is a bright and open flower.

Rosemary. Rosemary has British origins however it is special to Australians on ANZAC Day when it symbolises remembrance. It is also used in cooking and home making.

Holly. Holly may seem prickly at first but this is an enduring and endearing plant.

Rosa. This name is evocative of her Italian connection and also Rosa can be hard to tie down.

Ivy. Ivy is tenacious, and over the issue of school choice she clung to her views despite considerable pressures and conflicts.

Jade. Jade has lived in Asia. Chinese jade is often regarded as a symbol of luck and this reflects something of her experience in the educational marketplace.

May. The may flower is small and delicate and grows on a spindly bush, that is hardy and long lasting.

Hazel. Like the tree, Hazel is strong, steadfast and useful. Her value is not limited to providing food.

Veronica. Veronica is not fussy about soil or position, which is lucky because she has moved successfully from tropical to cold and temperate climates.

Primrose. Historically the primrose is valued throughout Europe and England and more recently where ever the climate is cold enough for this delicate flower.

Iris. The iris is a bold flower of solid colour, although originating in Northern Europe it now grows everywhere.

Daisy. The daisy is most often thought of as European; however there are some Australian varieties, mostly smaller and more hardy than their European counterparts. These are social plants, best grown in groups.

Daphne. Although Mann (1995) claims Daphne is temperamental and can sulk, in the right environment Daphne is true and delightful.

Lily. There are many kinds of lilies; they can grow singularly or in a group. They are tall and proud.