GENDER AND CHOICE: GIRLS, SINGLE SEX SCHOOLING AND SCHOOL CHOICE

by

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A thesis

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ABSTRACT

New Zealand, like many other OECD nations, has introduced market-style policies into educational provision. The 'rationale' for these policies was derived from New Right or neo-liberal theory. Over the past decade there has been an increasing amount of research aimed at exploring the impact of market-style policies in education, with particular emphasis on issues of equity. However, there has been very little research concerned with examining the implications of the marketisation of education for the schooling of girls. Exploring the implications of marketisation for girls has not been high on the agenda of either critics of marketisation, or of feminist researchers. This thesis is a contribution towards that work.

Policies aimed at increasing school choice have been one of the key ways that market-style policies have been introduced into education. The research on which this thesis is based is an exploration of school choice from the perspectives of a group of twenty four girls at a single sex state secondary school in a New Zealand city. In a series of focus group interviews I asked the girls about how they had come to be at Girls' College, their perceptions of their schooling experiences and their reflections on what it meant to be a Girls' College student. Using aspects of feminist poststructural theories, I argue that school choice might be viewed as a site where various discourses are negotiated by girls in the process of educational decision making. These include discourses of gender, which are shaped by social class and ethnicity, as well as by the biography and dynamics of the girls' families; and discourses of choice which have assumed dominance in educational policy. There are also discourses made available to the girls in the context of their schooling experience. If we are to understand the impact of market policies in education on the schooling of girls, we need to consider how girls are negotiating and mediating these discourses and the subjectivities, or ways to do being a 'girl', they make available. We also need to consider the perspectives of girls from a range of social class and ethnic backgrounds since these discourses are shaped by social class and ethnicity to position girls in differing, and often contradictory, ways. Furthermore, in order to understand the impact of market-style policies on the schooling of girls, we also need to consider the girls' schooling experiences in relation to their reasons for being in the school.

This exploration of choice and schooling from the girls' perspectives presents a different account of choice to that which is currently available in the research literature or that which is assumed by neo-liberals. By placing the girls' narratives of choice within the broader

contexts of their lives and schooling, I have been able to explore the complex dynamics of power that operate inside and outside of school to position the girls, and the school itself, in variously powerful ways. I have been able to show that the assumptions on which the neo-liberal account of choice is based are overly simplistic and serve to marginalise and silence other aspects of the girls' lives and schooling experiences that are not encompassed by a neo-liberal view of the world. Furthermore, this exploration of choice in a particular context and from the perspectives of a certain group of girls also enables me to consider the broader implications of the operation of school choice and market-style policies for the schooling of girls.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my godmother Margaret Hardy who taught me about perseverance, and to my wonderful son, Max Newton.

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The introduction of market-style policies into educational provision in New Zealand, and in a number of other OECD nations, has been the focus of a growing body of research literature (Lauder et al., 1999; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998). Many of these studies have been concerned with exploring the impact of these policies in relation to the equity aims that have frequently been used to justify their implementation. Most of the studies have focussed on social class and race and ethnicity. However, as David (1997) argues, there has been very little research that has been concerned with examining the rise in market forms of education in relation to the education of girls. Exploring the implications of marketisation for girls has not been high on the agenda of either critics of marketisation or, as Kenway (1995) argues, of feminist academics. This thesis is a contribution towards that work.

In order to examine the relationship between gender and market-style policies in education I have chosen a particular focal point: school choice. Policies aimed at increasing school choice have been one of the key ways in which marketisation has been introduced into education. Neo-liberals believe that increasing the level of competition in educational provision will improve outcomes because schools will be forced to compete for students and will therefore raise their educational standards in order to do so (Chubb & Moe, 1990; The Treasury, 1987). A central mechanism for creating competition is to increase parental choice of school. In New Zealand, school zones were removed so that parents would, in theory, have the freedom to choose a school for their child (Picot et al., 1988). The key to understanding these assumptions about educational decision making in a market context is the notion of instrumental rationality used by neo-liberal theorists (Lauder, 1991).

Neo-liberals see individuals as being driven primarily by self-interest and believe that they should be able to freely exercise choice in order to pursue their educational goals. Linked to this notion of freedom is a view of human nature in which individuals make decisions via the operation of instrumental rationality. The theory of instrumental rationality assumes that people can 'rationally' calculate the means to achieve their goals (Lauder, 1993). It also assumes that the sole motivation for human behaviour is self-interest and that it is in the market place that individuals can best realise the freedom to pursue their self-interest (Lauder, 1991). In practice, given the relationship between educational achievement, credentials and job

prospects, it is typically assumed by policy makers of neo-liberal persuasion that most parents will seek to send their children to schools that achieve the best results (Chubb & Moe, 1990). In other words, that choice based on this form of instrumental rationality will lead to a rise in standards because parents will remove their children from schools that are under-performing. In these terms, a major reason why parents will choose schools for their children is on the basis of the levels of educational achievement of the students at the school.

Using aspects of feminist poststructural theories, the neo-liberal notion of instrumental rationality can be thought of, not as a description of the ways in which individuals behave, but as a discourse. This discourse constitutes the rational, autonomous individual, one who is able to make 'rational' choices in the education market place. Or, to put it another way, instrumental rationality constitutes the truth of rational individuals who are motivated by self-interest. But instrumental rationality and the related discourses of choice and self-interest are only a few of the discourses that are in circulation in the current educational context. If we are to understand something of the relationship between gender and marketisation we also need to consider discourses of femininity, as well as social class, ethnicity and sexuality, and how these intersect with the discourses of marketisation described above. As the existing research on gender and school choice suggests, educational achievement is not the only reason parents choose schools and gender is an important consideration in understanding how and why educational decisions are made (David, 1997; Watson, 1997). School choice is a focal point around which discourses of femininity and marketisation coalesce and these are negotiated by girls and their parents. The 'choice' of a school might be seen as an outcome of that process of negotiation. Furthermore, if we are to understand the impact of marketisation on the schooling of girls, we need to consider how girls are negotiating and mediating these discourses and the subjectivities or 'ways to do' being a 'girl' (Jones, 1993) that they make available. There is currently almost no research that considers student's perspectives on choice (David, 1997).

The research on which this thesis is based is an exploration of school choice from the perspectives of a group of twenty four girls at a single sex state secondary school in a New Zealand city. In a series of focus group interviews I asked the girls about how they had come to be at Girls' College, about their perceptions of their schooling experiences and about their reflections on what it meant to be a Girls' College student. I chose Girls' College as the site for my study for several reasons. Firstly, single sex schooling for girls has assumed additional significance in the light of recent studies that report that this type of schooling is becoming

increasingly popular for girls in New Zealand (Stockwell & Duckworth, 1998; Gordon, 1996), the United Kingdom (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995) and in some states in America (Lewin, 1999; Datnow, Hubbard & Conchas, 1999). Researchers have noted that while little is known about why this type of schooling is becoming increasingly popular for girls (Gordon, 1996), the increase in popularity is occurring where market style policies have been introduced into education.

Secondly, Girls' College is in a vulnerable position in the local education market as it is considered to be less 'desirable' than other, more 'elite' girls' schools. While there has been some research by feminist academics which explores single sex schooling for girls, most of this has been in relatively 'elite' schools that are able to exercise some degree of control over their student intakes. In contrast, Girls' College is not considered 'elite' since it must take 'all comers' and, as my research shows, the diversity of its student population is a factor that contributed to its 'undesirability'. Since it is considered 'less popular' in the local hierarchy of schools, it therefore needs to attract students.

The third reason I chose Girls' College as a site for study was the diversity of its student population which provided me with the opportunity to invite girls from a range of social class and ethnic backgrounds to participate in the research. In doing so I was able to explore the ways in which the discourses of femininity and instrumental rationality are shaped by discourses of class and ethnicity, and also to consider how these were mediated by the girls in a school with a diverse mix. As Orfield and Yun (1999) point out, schools with (what they term) interracial and multiracial populations have received virtually no attention from researchers. Yet, "students in such schools go to school in highly complex and dynamic environments, and whose complex interactions are poorly understood" (p. 15).

My research therefore enables me to do three things. Firstly I am able to consider the ways in which the girls negotiate and mediate the range of discourses that are made available to them in the context of their schooling experience as they become 'girls'. Secondly, using school choice as a focal point, I explore the relationship between discourses of marketisation, femininity, social class and ethnicity and in doing so, I am able to develop a more complex and dynamic account of the notion of school choice than that which is assumed by neo-liberal theorists. And thirdly, I am able to consider the broader implications of the operation of school choice and market style policies for the schooling of girls.

In the first chapter I give a brief history of the introduction of school choice policies in New Zealand and an overview of the research on school choice to date. I discuss the ways in which a school's ability to compete is related to the social class and ethnic mix of its student population, and I also show how the ability of parents and students to exercise choice is related to their social class and ethnic background, with Pakeha and middle class students most able to access schools of their parents' choice. I argue that the existing research has considered the relationship between social class and (to a limited extent) ethnicity and school choice, while paying little attention to gender. The research that exists shows that gender is an important consideration in understanding how and why educational decisions are made. The research on the choice of single sex schooling for girls indicates that there are a range of often contradictory reasons given for choice of such schools and that there is a need for a more developed theoretical analysis of the relationship between gender and school choice.

In the second chapter I outline my reading of the feminist poststructuralist theories that I have used to think about the question of gender and school choice. I show how gender and the notion of instrumental rationality on which neo-liberal theory is based may be viewed as discourses that constitute certain kinds of subjects. In this way I argue that girls are not pre-existent subjects who make rational choices in the education marketplace, but that school choice may be viewed as a discursive field in which discourses of femininity and rationality coalesce. Furthermore, since 'girl' is not a unitary category of identification, poststructural theories also enable us to think of ethnicity, social class and sexuality, not as descriptions of 'identity', but as discourses that make available a range of positions or subjectivities to 'girls'. I also discuss the epistemological and methodological issues that arise from the use of feminist poststructural theories to explain how, from a poststructural perspective, research may be viewed as discursive practice and the researcher as an active agent who constructs an account which is both situated and partial.

Chapter 3 begins with a description of the specific context for the research and of Girls' College in particular. I then describe the research method I used. Using focus group interviews was a participatory method that enabled me to negotiate the process and interpretation of the research with the girls and to acknowledge the multiple relations of power which operated within the research context. Chapter 4 introduces the girls who participated in the research. As well as providing a reference for reading the two interview chapters that

follow, it also situates the girls' comments within the broader context of their family history and their lives outside of the school.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the reasons the girls gave for attending Girls' College and their perceptions of school choice. I explore discourses of gender and rationality that are woven through the interview extracts and the ways these are shaped by the girls' social class and ethnic backgrounds and their family history.

Chapter 6 takes up these discourses in more detail and I trace the ways in which the girls alternatively accommodate and resist them in the process of their schooling experience in an ethnically and socially diverse school like Girls' College. I consider what it means to be a Girls' College girl and how the girls and the school are positioned within the school and in the broader social and educational context.

In the final chapter I discuss the key points made in Chapters 5 and 6 about the discourses that are negotiated and mediated by the girls within the context of their schooling experiences and consider how these are related to discourses of marketisation. In the light of the interview material I then revisit the neo-liberal assumptions on which the introduction of choice policies are based, in order to argue that the assumption of instrumental rationality is an impoverished view of human motivation and behaviour. Furthermore, by applying a feminist poststructural critique to the notion of instrumental rationality, I argue that it is a highly contradictory and problematic discourse for girls. Girls' College, and the girls themselves, must negotiate a complex array of discourses of femininity, discourses which are silenced in the neo-liberal version of school choice. I conclude by considering more broadly the implications of market-style policies for the schooling of girls.

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL CHOICE RESEARCH AND THE CASE FOR A MORE DETAILED CONSIDERATION OF GENDER

School choice policies were introduced into New Zealand in 1989 as the result of the report of the Picot Task Force (Picot et al., 1988) which had been asked by the Labour government of the time to review educational administration. New Zealand was not alone in adopting school choice policies and other OECD nations, including the United Kingdom and Australia as well as some American states and Canadian provinces, have adopted similar policies (Whitty et al., 1998; Cohn, 1997; Walford, 1996; Hirsch, 1994). In New Zealand, equity concerns featured prominently in the rationale for the introduction of market-style policies into educational provision. These policies, it was argued, would benefit those who had been the most disadvantaged by the previous system of educational provision (Chubb & Moe, 1990; The Treasury, 1987).

Ten years later we are in a position to consider the efficacy of these reforms in relation to the equity aims that were used as one of the key justifications for their introduction. This thesis examines the notion of school choice as it has been applied to and operates in the context of the New Zealand education system. The existing literature on the impact of school choice policies in New Zealand (and in other OECD nations where similar policies have been introduced) has focussed primarily on social class and to a limited extent, ethnicity and race (David, 1997). This study focuses on gender, examining choice from the perspectives of a diverse group of girls at a single sex state secondary school in a New Zealand city.

As I will argue in this chapter, this research contributes to the existing literature on school choice in several ways. Firstly, it examines school choice from the perspective of students, an area which has previously received little attention as most studies examine parental choice of school. Furthermore, the students in my study are from a range of ethnic and social class backgrounds, whereas the literature on students' perspectives is over-represented by accounts from middle class and white students. Secondly, this research enables me to explore in some detail the relationship between gender and school choice, an area which David (1997) argues is important if we are to understand the operation of choice, and yet it is one which has received little attention in the literature which has focussed almost exclusively on social class. In particular, the research explores the choice of single sex schooling for and by girls. Single sex schooling for girls has assumed additional significance in the light of recent

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studies which report that this type of schooling is becoming increasingly popular for girls in New Zealand (Stockwell & Duckworth, 1998; Gordon, 1996), the United Kingdom (Gewirtz et al., 1995), and in some states in America (Lewin, 1999; Datnow et al., 1999).

And finally, since the study is retrospective and involves in-depth, sequential interviews, I am also able to consider the outcomes of the girls' attendance at Girls' College in relation to their reasons for being in the school. Since girls were one of the 'disadvantaged' groups who were singled out to benefit from school choice policies (Picot et al., 1988), it is important to consider whether these policies have achieved, or will achieve, the expected equity outcomes. While there are some studies which have attempted to measure the outcomes of school choice policies in relation to academic achievement at the individual and school level (Lauder et al., 1999; Witte, 1996), there is little research which considers other outcomes of schooling. As numerous studies by feminist researchers have shown, if schools are to promote equity for girls, they need to do more than to improve academic achievement (Kenway & Willis, 1997; Lucey, 1996; Kenway, Willis, Blackmore & Rennie, 1994; Byrne, 1993; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989).

I begin by briefly describing the background to the introduction of school choice policies into New Zealand with particular reference to the notion of equity as it was used as a justification for these reforms. I then give an overview of the existing literature on school choice and discuss the existing research which examines the relationship between gender and school choice. In the next section I focus on the choice of single sex schooling for girls which, I argue, suggests that this is a fruitful site for exploring the relationship between gender and school choice. I also consider existing ethnographic studies in single sex girls' schools in order to place my research in the broader context of the literature on girls and single sex schooling. I conclude by describing the specific context for my research and suggest that feminist poststructural theories provide a useful theoretical tool for this kind of research, an argument I develop more fully in the next chapter. This research, I suggest, has the potential to present a more dynamic and complex account of school choice and enables the implications for the schooling of girls to be considered.

The Introduction of School Choice Policies into New Zealand

The history of the introduction of school choice policies into educational provision in New Zealand has been well documented (Lauder et al., 1999; Codd, 1993; Marshall & Peters,

1990; Lauder, Middleton, Boston & Wylie, 1988). However, a brief summary is useful here to provide a context for overseas readers. Prior to the introduction of school choice policies, a system of school zoning was in place in New Zealand whereby each secondary school was given a prescribed home zone. The intent of the zoning policy was that schools would draw the majority of their students from their local zone and that students had the right to attend the school for which they were in zone[1]. In 1988 the Picot Task Force produced its report. This report argued for a 'market'-led approach to secondary school enrolments by recommending the abolition of zoning (Picot at al., 1988). However, the reforms that followed (*Tomorrow's Schools*, 1988) retained a measure of state control over enrolment policy. The *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms had only one year of operation, (1991) before being superseded by reforms under the 1991 Education Amendment Act, following a change of government. These later reforms were intended to reduce state involvement in enrolment policy and open the way to intensified market competition. Home zones were abolished and enrolment schemes are now only put in place where schools are at serious risk of overcrowding (Lauder, Hughes, Waslander, Thrupp, McGlinn, Newton & Dupuis, 1994)[2].

Equity Concerns as a Rationale for the Introduction of Choice

It is important to understand that in New Zealand, New Right (or neo-liberal) theorists argued that a major reform of the education system was necessary because the existing system (as it was then) had continually failed to address the needs of many groups of students. As it was expressed in the Picot report:

> "We detected widespread concern that the delivery of education is failing in significant ways, and we see the creation of more choice in the system as a way of ensuring greater efficiency and equity" (Picot, 1988, 1.1.2).

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[1] However, as McCulloch (1991) has shown, zoning policies both by intent and default, upheld selective practices whereby so called 'desirable' schools were able to select a proportion of their students from outside of their school zone and thereby to exercise some control over their students composition.

[2] In 1998 parliament passed the Education Amendment Act (No. 2). Included in this Act were new enrolment scheme provisions which require enrolment schemes to be worked out in consultation with parents, the community and other schools. Schemes will have to take into account the desire of students to attend a 'reasonably convenient' school. They will also have to be made public and be approved by the Secretary of Education who will have the power to force a school board to drop its enrolment scheme if overcrowding is not a problem or to direct a school to enroll a particular student who has been denied enrolment at a school. However, during the period of time within which the research on which this paper was undertaken, the school choice policies were those introduced in the 1991 Education Amendment Act.

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Equity was to be one of "two fundamental objectives for the education system as a whole" (Picot, 1988,1.1.4). As the authors of the Picot report stated:

"Education should be fair and just for every learner regardless of their gender, and of their social, cultural or geographic circumstances" (Picot, 1988, 1.1.4).

One of the key ways in which the widespread reform was legitimated was by arguing that the system was inequitable, despite the large amount of government spending on education. The neo-liberal argument, which informed the recommendations of the Picot report, was that government intervention had caused the inequalities and that less, not more, intervention was required (Lauder et al., 1988). The Picot Report argued for a system of educational provision that was based on market principles, an idea that had been previously expressed in a 1987 Treasury report to the Labour government at that time. Lauder et al. (1988) argued that that document, entitled *Government Management, Vol II*,

"provides one of the clearest statements of New Right goals and strategies to be found anywhere in education policy literature" (p. 15).

Central to these New Right ideas is the belief that education is a commodity similar to any other that can be traded in the market place. In asserting that education is a commodity, neo-liberals argue that state intervention hinders the efficiency of relations between the producers of that commodity (schools) and the consumers. They go on to argue that if the market were allowed to function unhindered, educational equality would be advanced, freed from the self-interested interference of the state system (Gintis, 1995; Chubb & Moe, 1990).

So, while social democratic theorists pointed out the continued inequalities generated by a system based on class, gender and race, neo-liberals took up these criticisms for a very different agenda—the reduction of the role of the state to allow the 'free' market to distribute educational opportunities.

As Lauder (1991) explains, neo-liberals see individuals as being primarily driven by self-interest and believe that they should be able to freely exercise choice in order to pursue their educational goals. Government interventions, such as zoning schemes, are seen as hindering individual freedom.

"What binds this 'family' of theories into an apparently coherent political economy is a common set of underlying assumptions that individuals are rational-egoists, fundamentally concerned with the pursuit of self-interest, and that it is in the market place that individuals can best realise the freedom to pursue their self-interest" (Lauder, 1991, p. 148).

Linked to this notion of freedom is a view of human nature in which individuals make decisions via the operation of instrumental rationality. Decisions based on instrumental rationality do not necessarily have to be linked to self-interest. What marks out neo-liberal theory from other theories of instrumental rationality is precisely the assumption that the goal or end to which instrumental rationality is put is the realisation of self-interest. Of course, what one person may consider to be in their best interest may not be the same as what another may consider to be in their best interest. In a formal sense, what constitutes self-interest is left open. As Lauder notes:

"The theory of instrumental rationality assumes that individuals are 'pleasure machines'—that people can rationally calculate the means to achieving a predetermined and stable set of preferences" (1993, p. 21).

Furthermore, it assumes that individuals are free to determine these preferences. Neo-liberal theory is based on the assumption that we are all rational, self-interested individuals who are able to assess the value or otherwise of a course of action and to act accordingly. In other words, neo-liberals assume that we 'know best what is good for us' and that we are all equally free to act on that knowledge to get what is best for us (Witte, 1996; Carnoy, 1993; Hula, 1984).

In practice, given the relationship between educational achievement, credentials and job prospects, it is typically assumed by policy-makers of a neo-liberal persuasion that most parents will seek to send their children to the schools that achieve the best results. The exercise of self-interest in the context of an education market will result in an increase in educational equality in several ways. Firstly, schools will no longer have a guaranteed intake of students and will therefore have to raise their standards in order to compete for students. Secondly, parents will no longer have to send their child to their neighbourhood school, a policy which was seen as disadvantaging low income families in particular whose children were forced to remain in (apparently) under-performing schools. In these terms, schools which experience roll growth are 'successful' as they are able to attract students because of the (apparently) high achievement they offer. On the other hand, those which experience a drop in their roll are

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deemed to be 'failing' since their (apparently) poor achievement means they are not able to attract students (Ball 1997; Gewirtz et al., 1995). And thirdly, it was envisaged that consumers would have the power to influence school policy to be more responsive to their learning requirements and this would ultimately encourage diversity of provision within the education market.

When these assumptions about the operation of the education market are applied to a consideration of gender equity, the following effects might be assumed. Firstly that all parents, regardless of their ethnicity or social class background, will have an equal ability to choose schools for their daughters. Secondly, that parents will choose schools for their daughters that they perceive will raise their educational achievement and furthermore, that parents know 'what is best' for their daughters in terms of their schooling. Finally, market mechanisms will increase gender equity by resulting in increased diversity of provision in terms of schooling contexts for girls.

School Choice Research

Over the past decade there has been a growing body of international research and literature that has examined the impact of school choice policies (Dale, 1997). The introduction of these market style policies into education in New Zealand and elsewhere has caused intense debate and the underlying assumptions on which these policies were based have been examined in the context of the lived reality of the education market. (Lauder et al., 1999). Much of the research has been concerned with tracking the patterns of school choice that have occurred since these policies have been introduced to see if the education market does, in fact, operate in the way assumed by its proponents. The research has focussed particularly on the assumption that school choice policies would improve equality of access and opportunity, particularly to those groups who had been disadvantaged by the previous systems which were seen to limit parental choice.

The New Zealand research has shown that the ability to exercise choice of school is not distributed equally in that middle class parents are more able than working class parents to be able to access schools of their choice (Gordon, 1994). The Smithfield Project, for example, has undertaken detailed tracking of parental choice in one New Zealand city and has been able to show that it is the 'relatively advantaged' students in poorer residential areas who are able to

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travel to schools in adjacent areas[3] (Lauder, Hughes, Waslander, Thrupp, McGlinn, Newton, Dupuis, 1994). This finding indicates that it is still the 'least advantaged' parents within a residential area who have the least ability to exit their local school. Class-based inequalities in the ability to access schools of choice have also been found by researchers in the United Kingdom (Gewirtz et al., 1995; Edwards, Fitz & Whitty, 1989) and the United States (Smith & Meier, 1995; Wells, 1993; Maddaus, 1990).

While, in the neo-liberal view, schools will be judged on their merits and on their ability to provide academic success to students, it is clear that the popularity of a school is closely related to its student mix. Schools are chosen because of their social class and ethnic mix, a factor that is closely related to their geographic location. In a review of school choice research in New Zealand, Gordon (1994) notes that:

"patterns of choice are ...directly related to the class and ethnic character of the area in which schools are located" (p. 13).

While choice policies were aimed at increasing parental choice of school, it is also clear that in some cases, it is the schools as well as parents who are doing the choosing. The Smithfield Project has termed this 'school selection' and has shown that some 'popular' schools which are able to select students, do so on the basis of the student's ethnicity and social class background (Lauder et al., 1995). Because of this, schools do not compete on equal terms. Those with a high proportion of white middle class students are considered more 'desirable' and are therefore able to select students (Lauder et al., 1995). In the U.K. researchers have also found that the 'supply side' of the market does not operate in the way envisaged by pro-choice components. Edwards and Whitty (1992) argue that some schools are able to select students on the basis of their prior achievement, a practice which has the net effect of enhancing, "some suppliers' capacity to choose" (p. 104). In an overview of the research in the United Kingdom on school choice, Whitty et al. (1998) also conclude that popular schools are able to 'cream off' the most able students and have become increasingly selective on both academic and social grounds (p. 116). Whitty et al. (1998) also review the school choice literature in Australia and New Zealand and they conclude that school selection is a major issue in the operation of school choice.

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[3] Schools which were clearly not the local school and for which some travel was required were considered adjacent.

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The combined effects of the operation of parental choice and school selection in the context of an education market that is highly stratified by social class and ethnicity, has been to increase segregation of school intakes along class and ethnic lines (Lauder et al., 1999). These findings in the New Zealand context have also been confirmed in the United Kingdom where similar parental choice policies were introduced in the late 1980's (for a comparison of choice policies in the U.K. and New Zealand see Gordon & Whitty, 1997). Gewirtz et al. (1995) note that:

"The selective and exclusionary practices of schools, working in association with the class-based nature of the market as a form of social engagement, and the selection of schools by parents according to class-and-'racially'-based criteria, appear likely to intensify the social segregation of schooling" (p. 186).

Furthermore, in a comparative report of choice and markets in six countries (including New Zealand and the United Kingdom) undertaken on behalf of the OECD, Hirsch (1994) notes that:

"There is strong evidence in a number of countries that choice can increase social segregation. Sometimes it is because more privileged groups are more active in choosing 'desired' schools. Sometimes it is because such schools are in more prosperous neighbourhoods, whose residents continue to get privileged access to them once they are full" (p. 7).

As well as examining the choices made by parents and the effects these have on school composition, other researchers have begun to explore *how and why* it is that parents make the choices they do. That is, they have begun to test the underlying assumptions about instrumental rationality on which these choice policies are based. Is school choice the result of 'rational' cost/benefit analysis or are there other reasons for choosing schools? Is the meaning of choice the same for all?

Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1992) draw from Bourdieu (1974) to argue that school choice may be understood with reference to the notion of cultural capital. They develop three categories into which parents may be divided on the basis of the ways they think about and act in relation to school choice.

a) The privileged parent, "who has both the inclination to 'play' the market and the capacity to do so in ways which appear to be to his or her child's advantage."

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b) The frustrated parent who "has the inclination to engage with the market but lacks the capacity to exploit it in ways which appear to be advantageous to the child."

c) "The disconnected parent [who] is not inclined to interact with the market" (Gewirtz et al., 1992, p. 8).

Thus, those with the least resources are least able to exercise or even perceive of the existence of choice, while those with the greatest resources are both aware of their choices and able to exercise them. Gewirtz et al. argue that because of this unequal distribution of power, marketisation will create greater polarity and segregation between schools as families with the greatest resources choose the more 'desirable' schools while those with the least resources are unable to exercise any choice at all.

"Our interviews with parents indicate very striking class-based differences in family orientations to the market both in terms of parental *inclination* to engage with it and their *capacity* to exploit the market to their children's advantage" (Gewirtz et al.,1995, p. 181).

That is, while there are clearly material differences in parents' ability to access schools of their choice for their children, there are also class-based differences in the ways in which school choice is conceptualised. For example, working class parents were more likely than middle class parents to be happy for their child to attend their local school, while middle-class parents were more likely to actively pursue enrolment at 'elite' schools which may have been outside of their local area. Lauder et al. (1999) argue that school choice policies advantage middle class families since they are able to use their cultural capital and knowledge of the 'rules of the game' to gain access to the schools of their choice. They term the ways in which different social class groups think about education, the 'wisdom of the class' (Lauder et al., 1995), and argue that an individual's aspirations are 'determined' by the limits and possibilities generated by social class. It is within this context that 'rationality' operates and decisions are made.

The combined effects of school choice and school selection have been to introduce a system of educational exclusion that Brown (1997) terms parentocracy. He argues that in an educational parentocracy:

"a child's education is increasingly dependent upon the wishes of parents, rather than the ability and efforts of pupils" (p. 393).

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The notion of instrumental rationality assumed by neo-liberals to be universal, is that which conforms most closely to middle class patterns of choice. Therefore, school choice policies, rather than being a mechanism for increasing social equality as argued by their proponents, instead operate as a system which shores up middle class advantage (Brown, 1997).

In addition to these class-based differences in the processes of school choice, the Smithfield Project has shown that there are also differences related to ethnicity (Watson, Hughes, Lauder, Strathdee & Simiyu, 1998). For example, Maori[4] parents were more likely than other parents to consider sending their child to a church denominational Maori boarding school or to a school which was perceived to offer a bicultural context. On the other hand, there was a significant proportion of Pacific Islands parents who wanted their children to attend schools with a high proportion of Pakeha students (Watson et al., 1998).

Research by Wells (1995) in the United States suggests that the rationale for school choice will differ within as well as between ethnic groups. Wells interviewed 37 African-American high school students and 34 of their parents and grandparents about their choice of school. She concluded:

"And while both race and class affect students' habitus, and therefore the way they perceive school choice opportunities, not all low-income minority students and parents will react the same way. Some will actively seek out schools that they believe will help them to attain higher status; others who fear competition or failure in a high-status school and those who have lost faith in the educational system will be most likely to choose not to choose" (p. 33).

The research shows that the meaning and processes of choice are not the same for all and that parents' choices are shaped by their social class and ethnic backgrounds, their wider social context and the dynamics of the education market itself. In doing so, it presents a challenge to the a-contextual assumptions on which choice policies are based and therefore to the equity gains that it was argued would result from the operation of parental choice.

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[4] Maori are the indigenous people group in New Zealand and comprise approximately 20% of the total population of students in New Zealand Schools (NZ Ministry of Education, 1994b).

Gender and School Choice

The existing research which explores the relationship between social class, ethnicity and school choice draws heavily on Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'cultural capital'. However, while the notion of cultural capital may be useful in understanding the relationship between social class and school choice and, to some extent, ethnicity and school choice, it is not as useful in understanding the dynamics of gender and may in fact lead to this important aspect of school choice being ignored. For example, in Gewirtz et al.'s (1992) work, there are gendered discourses that run like a thread throughout their interviews but the role of gender in choice of school is not discussed. As David (1997) observes:

"They use Bourdieu's theories here to develop a typology of different types of 'choosers' but do not relate it at all to other researchers' approaches to choice and/or social class, and therefore do not provide a rich and complex understanding of social class in post-modern Britain and the relation of gender, especially of parents, to social class" (p. 80).

For example, the families Gewirtz et al. interviewed chose between single sex and coeducational schools and were influenced not only by their socio-economic background but by their perceptions of femininity and masculinity. For some families the school conformed to their perceptions while for others the school presented a challenge to their perceptions and was rejected for that reason. One of the 'privileged' families they use as an example mentions an all-girls school as one option they pursued because the husband 'quite liked' the idea of an all-girls school. When they visited the school however, they were not impressed. A teacher also suggested that Blenheim, a coeducational school, might not have been the best for their daughter because:

"Miranda keeps her head down and she's quiet and maybe Blenheim's not the best school for her" (Gewirtz et al., 1992, p. 20).

Gewirtz et al. acknowledge their lack of consideration of gender in a more recent paper (Ball & Gewirtz, 1997) in which they revisit their data to track the ways in which decisions were made about girls' schooling. Their paper highlights the often contradictory nature of comments made about single sex schooling and, importantly, shows how the discourses about single sex schooling for girls are mediated though differing social-class contexts. They

illustrate the tension between traditional and liberatory discourses which operate in the context of single sex schooling for girls. They conclude:

"While it may be the case that market forces provide a renewed validity for aspects of equal-opportunity discourses in schools, they also open schools up to other discourses which articulate less emancipatory concerns related to fears about adolescent sexuality and resting upon regressive definitions of femininity. Schools must construct their practices within this nexus of opportunity and constraint"(Ball & Gewirtz, 1997, p. 220).

Furthermore, they are able to show that some girls are clearly 'more desirable' than others from the point of view of some 'elite' girls' schools.

Similarly, an earlier study by Edwards, Fisk and Whitty (1989) of the Assisted Places Scheme in the U.K. involved interviews with both parents and students about their choice of school. In their analysis of the interviews they make several references to comments that allude to gendered considerations being significant in school choice. For example, they found:

"many examples among independent school parents of preference for a 'gentler', safer and more 'civilised' environment than comprehensives were believed to provide—especially for girls" (p. 187).

However, the dynamics of gender and school choice are not taken up as the study is concerned with the ways in which school choice is structured by social class.

As David (1997) argues, there is very little school choice research which considers the relationship between gender and school choice. However, she argues that what research there is, shows that gendered considerations are important in understanding why and how choices are made.

"Gender is a major operating principle although it may operate in contradictory ways" (p. 85).

David, West and Ribbens (1994) have researched school choice by examining the processes by which school choices are made and the differing role of the parents in that process. Their research considered the role of gender in school choice in two ways. Firstly, they explored the ways in which choices were made by family members. David et al. found that mothers were more likely to be involved than fathers.

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"In summary, we have found that the processes and the procedures for parents making a choice of secondary school are indeed complex and complicated. However, we can summarise our key findings by saying, first that *mothers* are invariably involved in those processes and procedures whatever the kind of family and child" (p. 130).

Secondly, they considered whether the gender of the child affected the choice that was made by parents. They concluded that the gender of the child is an important consideration in school choice and that different types of schools were chosen for boys and girls and for different reasons. For girls, the single sex character of the school was cited most often as the reason for choice of school, whereas for boys, facilities and discipline were cited most often.

The Choice of Single Sex Schooling for Girls

Research in the New Zealand context shows that there is no difference on the basis of gender in students' ability to access the school of their parents' choice, but there are differences in terms of the *type* of school chosen for boys and girls (Lauder et al., 1995). A recent report to the Ministry of Education (Stockwell & Duckworth, 1998) states that since 1990, single sex schooling for girls has become increasingly popular, to the extent that in one New Zealand city, the Ministry of Education has undertaken research aimed at addressing the need for additional provision of these types of schools for girls. The Smithfield Project research has shown that the exit of girls from some coeducational secondary schools has meant that they now have an imbalanced intake, with some schools having as few as a third of their year eight intake comprised of girls (Hughes, Lauder and Strathdee, 1996; Lauder et al., 1994).

However, while single sex schools are a more popular choice for girls, it is important to recognise that not all single sex schools are equally popular. The Smithfield Project research shows that girls' schools with a diverse ethnic mix and with a relatively low SES mix are less popular than their 'elite' counterparts (Lauder et al., 1995). This becomes self-perpetuating to a large extent since, as previously cited, the 'elite' schools which are able to operate enrolment schemes can select their students. Since they tend to select those students who are most likely to achieve highly on external exams, they are able to ensure their apparent 'success' and therefore their continued popularity. As I have already discussed, the ability to access 'elite' secondary schools is closely related to a student's social class and ethnicity. Because many of the state single sex girls' schools in New Zealand are in this 'elite' category, girls from working class backgrounds and Maori and Pacific Islands girls are less likely than middle class

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Pakeha girls to be able to access these elite single sex schools, a finding which confirms that of Ball and Gewirtz (1997).

As well as girls' schools and the girls themselves being stratified according to social class and ethnicity in terms of their 'desirability' in the education market place, there are also important issues which relate to the meaning and 'rationale' of the choices made by girls and their parents. Research in Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, and my own earlier research in New Zealand has shown that, for example, different choices of school may be made for girls and boys and for different reasons.

A study by Connell, Dowsett, Kessler and Ashenden (1982) in Australia, while not directly focussed on choice of single sex education, does include choice of single sex schools within its framework. The authors' primary interest was on equality of educational opportunity and they were influenced by reproductionist theorists such as Bourdieu but wanted to go further in exploring how individuals could respond to, and overcome, structural inequality by their own actions. Their key interest was on the effect of socio-economic status on educational outcomes.

Connell et al. studied fifty upper middle class families and fifty working class families. The first group attended private single sex schools and the latter coeducational comprehensive schools in working class suburbs. Their interviews were extensive and included the students, their parents, teachers and school principals.

Their work points out the contradictions between the different discourses of femininity and masculinity that were at work within the home and school. These discourses varied on a class basis and were not simply reproduced within schools. The schools themselves "subvert conventions and restructure gender relations" (p. 173).

They point to a hierarchy of femininity and masculinity within schools and the need to understand the background of the families from which students come, their life histories and the ways in which they have negotiated their way through gender and class relations. In taking this broad perspective, Connell et al. give an insight into the influences at work on the students and the way they alternatively resist and accommodate the aspirations and world view of their parents.

Connell et al. also point to the need to understand something of the schooling context the students are in and the different discourses around class and gender that are at work. The discourses at school may be in conflict with those at home or they may serve to reinforce them

In the United States, Lee and Marks (1992) studied choice of single sex and coeducational private secondary schools to compare "Whether families and students choose single-sex over coeducational schools for traditional reasons or because they value these schools as opportunity structures" (p. 226).

By 'traditional' reasons, they mean choosing single sex schools because they can offer, "elite socialisation and a protective environment" for girls. By 'opportunity structures' they refer to the decision to choose such schools because of their potentially empowering effect on young women by offering them academic achievement. They concluded that the fact that a school was single sex was the most important discriminating factor, especially for girls, and that more girls than boys chose single sex as opposed to coeducational private schools.

"That finding says that these [girl] students are choosing single-sex schools because the schools are single-sex, not because otherwise desirable schools (by virtue of their academic reputation, small size, and the like) just happen to be single-sex schools" (Lee & Marks, 1992, p. 241).

The question then arises as to why single sex schooling was seen to be more important for girls than boys. Lee and Marks show that in the choice of single sex education by the students themselves, traditional reasons are more important for girls, and opportunity structures more important for boys. Or, to put it more simply, they concur with similar research on Catholic schools conducted by Bryk et al. (1984) that, "The emphasis is on academic achievement for boys and a safe social environment for girls" (p.51, as cited in Lee & Marks, 1992, p.245).

Lee and Marks go on to make an important point about the congruence between traditional and opportunity structures for boys since academic success and a career is an accepted pathway, whereas for girls, they argue, the two are in conflict. Academic achievement for girls is at variance with traditional structures that see career aspirations as a threat to what Connell et al. (1982) term 'marriageable femininity'. In this way, single sex schools face a dilemma in trying to satisfy both demands since if they stress opportunity structures for girls, families seeking more traditional structures may be turned away.

It is important to note that Lee and Marks' study only looked at families choosing independent schools. These families were of high socio-economic status, comprised less than

ten percent minority students and many of the parents had themselves attended independent schools.

My earlier research (Watson, 1997; Newton, 1994) also began to explore the relationship between gender and school choice by examining the choice of an 'elite', state, single sex school by five girls and their parents prior to the girls' enrolment in secondary school. That research showed that the school was chosen, not just because of the access to academic success it was perceived to offer, but for the 'type of girl' it was seen to be able to produce. Parents, and the girls themselves, had ideas about femininity which they sought to have reinforced by the school (Newton, 1994).

At the same time as some parents in my earlier study said they wanted an environment in which their daughter could be given the opportunity to take up a leadership role (for example) and to be freed from the sex-based harassment that was perceived as occurring in a coeducational environment, they also expressed a desire for them to maintain 'appropriate femininity'. Alongside the belief in the efficacy of girls' schools in providing academic success through 'equal opportunity' was the belief that such schools are able to produce certain 'kinds of girls'. In other words, for some parents and their daughters, academic success was not to be at the expense of their femininity. What my interviews highlighted was the contradictory nature of discourses around femininity and the meanings of education for girls. It was apparent to me that the processes of school choice, and in particular single sex schooling for girls, provided a rich context for exploring these issues.

The existing literature on the choice of single sex schooling for (and to a limited extent) by girls suggests that educational decision making is a complex process and one which is made within particular familial and social contexts. The desire for academic achievement is not the only reason parents, or the girls themselves, choose single sex schools and a fuller understanding of choice must be able to account for the relationship between gender and school choice and the social class and ethnic contexts within which gender is shaped.

Single Sex Girls' Schools: What Do We Know?

As well as the small number of studies that have explored the choice of single sex schooling for girls, there have also been attempts to measure the outcomes of this type of schooling. The task of measuring outcomes is notoriously difficult and has lead to a large body of inconclusive literature (see for example Mael, 1998; Shmurak, 1998; Byrne, 1993; Lee &

Bryk, 1989). The issues here are two-fold. Firstly, while some researchers can agree about outcome measures, such as norm-referenced exams or participation in 'non-traditional' subjects, there is no consensus on whether girls' schools are better than coeducational schools on these measures. The reasons for this lack of consensus relate to methodological disagreements about the effects of contextual factors, such as the ethnic and social class mix of schools, with some researchers arguing that those who find effects either way do so without enough attention to this issue (Harker, 1999; Hughes, Lauder & Strathdee, 1996; Lauder & Hughes, 1990).

In the United States Shmurak (1998) undertook a longitudinal study to compare the development of future career aspirations of girls in four independent schools—two coeducational and two single sex. Although there were some minority students in her sample, as the schools were independent, her sample was not representative. Shmurak used qualitative and quantitative methods in her study and concluded that there were very few differences between the schools in the aspirations and attitudes of the girls, or in their achievement.

Other ethnographic researchers have also tried to understand the ways in which single sex schools socialise girls in particular ways and in doing so they draw attention to other outcomes of schooling apart from, or as well as, academic achievement. For example, in New Zealand, Jones (1991) tracked a class of Pacific Islands girls and a class of mainly Pakeha (white/European) girls in their third year of secondary schooling at an 'elite' state girls' school. Jones was interested in exploring how, "patterns of privilege and advantage in New Zealand society are maintained through schooling" (p. 14). Her detailed ethnographic study was important as it began to unpack the complex processes by which schooling impacts differentially on different groups of students within a school. Her study considered the inter-relationship of class, race and gender and how these shaped the girls' schooling experiences.

In Australia, Kenway (1990) studied 'privileged' (white middle class) girls in a private girls' school to look at how the school promoted self-esteem amongst its students. She studied the 'culture of success' within the school and in doing so, problematised it. She was able to show that success for these girls was produced:

"in part, through a set of severe attitudinal restrictions and a series of damaging comparisons with the values and practices of other institutions and social groups" (p. 132).

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That is, rather than seeing success as unproblematic, as educational sociologists have tended to do, by focussing on students who are deemed to be 'failing', Kenway was able to show the exclusionary processes by which success for white middle class girls was constructed within their school.

In the United States, Lesko (1988) undertook a study in a parochial Catholic high school to examine the construction of femininity through what she terms the 'curriculum of the body'. She uses this term to describe:

> "the total set of intended and unintended school experiences involving knowledge of the body and sensuality, taken by curricularists, sociologists of education, and feminists as central to the schooling experiences of young women and to the perpetuation of gender identities and inequities in contemporary American society" (p. 123).

Lesko's detailed descriptions of the ways in which girls' 'identities' are actively produced through processes of bodily constraint and regulation alert us to the need to consider girls' embodiment in understanding how schooling processes work to construct certain kinds of 'girls'. In a more recent study, also in the United States, Proweiler (1998) examined the upper middle class youth culture in an elite independent girls' school to study the "identity formation processes among a cohort of upper middle-class adolescent females" (p. 1). Her study was important for the ways it was contextualised within the broader economic and political changes which, she argues, have impacted negatively on private schools by undermining their funding base.

Byrne (1993) undertook research to consider the effects of single sex schooling for girls once they leave school and move on to further education or the labour market. She argues that while some girls may achieve more highly in single sex schools, they are disadvantaged when they leave these schools and move into coeducational employment and education environments since they are unprepared for the male domination of these settings. It is her contention that single sex schools:

> "cushion [girls] against the real world of training and work in which men remain the powerbrokers, and it does not teach them strategies for coping in the interim until we succeed in changing a masculine learning environment to a gender-neutral user-friendly one" (p. 185).

Possibilities for Further Research

The importance of the ethnographic research on the efficacy of single sex schooling and the within-school processes of socialisation is that it suggests that there may be a range of reasons why parents might choose single sex schooling for their daughters. The research which examines the choice of single sex schooling for girls reflects this complexity and alerts us to the need to attend a range of factors which may influence the cultures of these schools. Proweiler's work suggests that we also need to consider the broader political and economic context within which these schools are positioned. An overview of the existing literature on single sex schooling for girls also reveals that most of the research has been undertaken in 'elite' independent or state schools that have relatively privileged populations and/or are over-subscribed and therefore have some degree of control over their student intakes.

There is a need for further research on the choice of single sex schooling for girls which considers those schools that are not 'elite' and that have to work to attract students in a competitive market environment. This is important as is enables us to consider how such schools are responding to 'market pressures' and whether they are able to develop the kinds of practices that may improve outcomes for girls across a range of measures. Secondly, we also need research that examines the perspectives of students from diverse backgrounds since schooling cultures clearly have differential effects on students and, in turn, students' cultures impact on schools in varying ways.

In a recent review of the international literature on school choice Dale (1997) argues that further research on school choice should not be a high priority:

> "Rather, we need to focus more on the processes underlying it [school choice] and especially on the institutional and organisational contexts through which it is realised and takes on its meaning" (p. 466).

He goes on to argue for the need for work that explores the ways in which choice is conceptualised and the effects this has on the experience and role of schooling. The research literature to date has been important in highlighting the effects of school choice policies at a systemic level, and has raised serious concerns about the goal of improving equality of opportunity and access when the ability to exercise choice is not equal, and when schools are not competing on equal terms. However we still know very little about the reasons why students and their families make the choices they do and the effects of these choices on their

subsequent schooling experience and life chances. What happens while students are in school and how does the wider context of the education market influence school choices and within school processes? Witte (1996) makes a similar point when he argues that more research on parent and student motivation about school choice is needed (p. 173).

The research to date on the choice of single sex schooling for girls contains some of the most finely grained analysis of the processes of school choice which are to be found in the literature on school choice, yet it remains largely descriptive in nature. That is, while it has begun to document the contradictory discourses that underlie the choice of single sex education for girls, it has offered little in the way of a means of accounting for these apparent contradictions. Neither has it considered the implications for broader issues relating to school effectiveness and educational equality for girls. Furthermore, as David (1997) points out, the research has primarily focussed on parental choice of school and there is almost no research which considers the students' perceptions of choice.

It is for this reason that I turn to feminist poststructuralist theory since it has the potential to offer a more dynamic and complex account of gender and school choice than that which is currently available in either the neo-liberal version of school choice or in the existing research literature described above. The existing literature on school choice draws primarily from Bourdieu's theories of cultural reproduction in which gender, social class and ethnicity are taken for granted as pre-existent, 'natural' categories of representation. Rather than conceptualising identity as stable and pre-existent, feminist poststructural theorists argue that identity, or rather subjectivity, is constituted through discourse. Gender can be thought of, not as a description of a naturally occurring phenomenon or category of representation, but as the description of an *effect* which is created through discursive practice. From this perspective, the focus is on the ways in which gendered subjectivities are discursively constituted. How does discourse work to produce the subject 'girl' and how does the meaning of 'girl' change in different discursive contexts?

The context in which educational decisions are made can be viewed as a discursive field, one in which discourses of gender, social class, ethnicity, sexuality and those associated with marketisation, such as rationality and autonomy, operate. It is a discursive field that girls and their parents must negotiate their way through in the process of school choice. In doing so, the girls become 'girls' as they take up and resist the subjectivities that are made available to them, often in contradictory ways. In this way, feminist poststructural theories enable me to

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shift my focus away from looking at how certain types of girls make school choices, to using school choice as a focal point from which to consider the discourses that are made available to the girls in the contexts of their families, their school and the wider cultural and social contexts of their lives. As Middleton (1993) describes, feminist poststructural theories enable the research to:

> "accommodate people's multiple and simultaneous positionings in complex, changing, and often contradictory patterns of power relations…" (p. 128).

Furthermore, as I describe in the following chapter, feminist poststructural theories enable the researcher to locate herself within the research, to acknowledge the complex power relations that operate within the context of the research and to make explicit the partiality of the account. There exists a growing body of research that uses these theories to explore girls' schooling experiences and to consider the impact of various educational and broader social policies on girls (see for example: Kenway & Willis, 1997; Davies, 1994; Arnot & Weiler, 1993; Jones, 1993; Fine, 1992; Walkerdine & Lucey, 1989). However, thus far, with the exception of my earlier exploratory work, these theoretical perspectives have not been used to examine the notion of school choice or to consider the impact of market-style policies from girls' perspectives.

Research Focus and Design

The research on which this thesis is based focuses on the processes of school choice of a group of senior girls and explores the familial, school and wider social contexts within which their 'choices' were realised and took on their meaning. In this study, I take up some of the issues raised by my earlier research work and I develop them in a different context. Firstly, I began by choosing a single sex school, Girls' College, which was not considered a highly 'desirable' school in the context of the local education market. Girls' College had more places available than girls to fill them, a factor that was related to its social class and ethnic mix. Most of the girls who attended the school lived within the school zone and were therefore attending their local school. However, as we shall see, this did not necessarily mean it was their first 'choice' of school. This is important since the existing literature on the choice of

single sex schooling for girls and its effects has tended to focus on 'elite' (and therefore oversubscribed) state and independent schools.

Having chosen the school, I then invited the senior (Year 12) students to participate in the research. The twenty four girls who agreed to participate were from a range of social class and ethnic backgrounds as indicated by the girls' descriptions of their ethnicity and their parents' occupations and levels of education. This diversity was important since it enabled me to consider how the girls' perceptions of and involvement in school were shaped by their differing backgrounds, a perspective which seems to be lacking in the existing literature on gender and school choice in that it focuses almost exclusively on middle class and white girls.

Furthermore, unlike most of the literature on school choice, this study was retrospective, that is, I interviewed the girls when they were in their final year of schooling and several years after they had enrolled at the school. Because of this, I was able to consider the relationship between their reasons for being in the school and their subsequent schooling experiences. The girls talked about what it meant to be a 'Girls' College girl', an 'identity' which needs to be understood in relation to the broader social context within which the school is positioned and the discourses of femininity which the girls negotiated. Furthermore, the focus group interviews were interactive and sequential, enabling me to explore a range of related issues and therefore to gain a broader perspective than that which is typically afforded by 'one-off' interviews used in school choice research, which tend to be narrower in focus.

Taking a retrospective analysis enables me to consider three important questions about the ways I which school choice policies were envisaged to improve gender equity. Firstly, are all parents and girls equally able to exercise choice in the education market place? Secondly, why and how do parents and girls choose schools? Thirdly, how does the operation of choice improve outcomes and increase diversity of provision in the education sector?

In the following chapter I outline in more detail the aspects of feminist poststructural theories which I use in my study and the methodological implications this has for my research.

CHAPTER 2: RECONCEPTUALISING GENDER AND RATIONALITY

In the previous chapter I reviewed the existing literature on the relationship between gender and school choice. I suggested that while there is some research which shows that school choices need to be understood in relation to the gender of the student, this research is largely descriptive in nature. That is, while it documents the gendered discourses that are negotiated in the process of school choice, it provides little theoretical consideration of either gender or the notion of school choice itself. I concluded by suggesting that aspects of feminist poststructural theories might be useful since they enable exploration of the ways in which girls negotiate and mediate the discourses of gender, race and class that are made available to them. School choice can then be understood as an outcome of this process of negotiation. The choices made for and by the girls need to be considered in relation to the discursive context of their families, the school and the broader social and cultural contexts of their lives.

In this chapter I begin by locating my research on girls and school choice within the context of the existing research literature on girls and schooling. The history of the development of feminist theories of schooling has been well documented and it is not my intention here to give a detailed account of this (see, for example, Weiler (1988) and Proweiler (1998) for an overview of this literature). However, I want to make a couple of points about the development of feminist theories of schooling and gender since they are a necessary prelude to the development of feminist poststructural theories. I then go on to discuss in some detail the aspects of these theories that have been used by feminist researchers to give a more dynamic and complex understanding of the ways in which, as Jones (1993) would have it, girls become 'girls' in the context of their schooling. Using this theoretical perspective I then consider the underlying assumptions from which the notion of school choice is derived and suggest that there may be particular issues for girls in the discourse of rationality that dominates the current educational policy environment.

In the final section of this chapter I explore the implications of poststructural theories for the ways in which research is conceptualised. I argue that these theories present a significant challenge to the ways in which research is traditionally thought of and I discuss this in relation to the focus for this research. This discussion of methodological issues provides the theoretical background to the research method outlined in the following chapter.

The Development of Feminist Poststructuralist Theories in Education

In giving a brief overview of the development of feminist theories of education, I do not want to imply that feminist poststructural theories represent the culmination of the research trajectory, or that they have assumed dominance in current feminist research. A survey of the current literature on girls and schooling shows that there are a number of theoretical perspectives being applied in the area and each produce different understandings. Flax (1998) uses the term 'theoretical tool box' as a metaphor for thinking about the kinds of theories she finds useful in her work. I take a similar approach here and, in the analysis of the interviews which I present in Chapters 5 and 6, I draw from a range of perspectives. However, while acknowledging the usefulness of a range of theoretical perspectives, I also want to present an argument as to why I think feminist poststructural theories are particularly useful for my research.

Weiler (1988) shapes her overview of the development of feminist theories in education by setting up two key paradigms: reproduction and production. Reproduction theorists, she argues, are concerned with the social reproduction of class and gender through the processes of schooling. That is, they take the view that schooling is largely reproductive of existing social structures and that it is not capable of contesting them (see for example Kelly & Nihlen, 1982; Wolpe, 1981 & Deem, 1978). Weiler argues that the work of these women was important because they challenged the ways in which Marxist analyses had inadequately theorised the experiences of women. While these feminist theorists focussed on the social reproduction of gender, other feminist researchers were concerned with the ways in which individuals are able to contest or resist dominant class and gendered norms and expectations. This was termed production theory. Acker (1982), Thomas (1980) and McRobbie (1978) exemplify feminist researchers who have taken this approach. In addition, Fuller (1980) was one of the first feminist researchers working in this area to consider race as well as class and gender in her study of black girls in a London comprehensive school.

Weiler concludes her overview of the development of feminist theories in education by arguing that a synthesis of critical education theory and feminist theory has the potential to take account of existing social structures while creating the possibility for contestation and change. Critical feminist theorists argue that individuals can be taught how to resist dominant and oppressive social structures through the exercise of critical rationality.

"By this they mean the creation of a self-conscious analysis of a situation and the development of collective practices and organization that can oppose the hegemony of the existing order and begin to build the base for a new understanding and the transformation of society"(Weiler, 1988, p. 52).

However, while critical feminist theorists argue that counter-hegemonic work can be undertaken to bring about social change, they are not able to explain why it is that individuals might continue to collude in their own oppression. For example, why is it that women might continue to consent to their subordination, even when they have a critical appraisal of the ways in which they are being oppressed? Gilbert and Taylor (1991) frame the question in the following way.

"We need to understand how it is that gender ideologies continue to work at a personal level, and why women apparently consent to their own subordination" (p.24).

Henriques, Hollway, Irwin, Venn and Walkerdine (1984) give as an example the apparent contradiction that may be invoked when a woman decides to have children.

"It is neither a question of free choice or false consciousness. For example, women can recognise child-rearing as restrictive and oppressive and yet still want to bear children" (p.220).

Following from this, we need a theory which is capable of accounting for the (apparent) contradictions in women's experience. If it is not 'false consciousness' or 'free choice', how do we understand the ways in which girls and women both accommodate and resist the discourses which are made available to them? It is here that I propose that aspects of feminist poststructural theories are useful. These theories present a challenge to the notion of rationality on which critical feminist education theories are based and in doing so, to the individual or subject who is the assumed to have the capacity to exercise critical rationality. That is, rather than asking why it is that girls and women both accommodate and resist dominant notions of femininity, poststructural theories instead focus on the contradictory discourses of femininity which operate in various contexts.

Feminist Poststructural Theories

Feminist theorists have traditionally understood girls to be unitary subjects who are socialised in certain ways in a range of contexts. That is, they have assumed that 'girl' is a pre-existent category of representation and that what is open to contestation and change is the ways in which girls become gendered. In contrast, feminist poststructural theorists offer a reconceptualisation of gender identity. Rather than conceptualising identity as stable and pre-existent, feminist poststructural theorists argue that identity, or rather subjectivity, is constituted through discourse. That is, it is not that individuals are capable of exercising rationality in certain contexts (for example), but that the discourse of rationality constitutes the truth of what it is to be a rational, stable subject. From this perspective the focus of research and theoretical work for feminist educators is on exploring the ways in which discourse works to produce particular effects, such as gender.

Butler, building on the work of Foucault, develops the notion of performativity to describe the process of discursive production. She describes performativity as:

"the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993, p. 2).

The reiterative power of discourse is such that it not only produces gender as an effect, but it also regulates and constrains it. Indeed, it is in the process of regulation and constraint that the effect is materialised. Butler argues that this process is achieved through reiteration of the 'normal' as well as the 'abject'. By abject, Butler (following Kristeva's (1982) use of the term) refers to, "those 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life" which constitute the boundaries of social life. It is the abject which defines the boundaries of what is allowable and in doing so, constitutes the 'normal'. So, while these discourses are constituted as binaries, they are in fact inter-dependent and serve to define one another. For example, the process of assuming a gender identity, that of 'girl', is one in which certain sexed identifications are enabled and in which others are 'dis-allowed'. The key point here is that while the abject and the normal are constituted as mutually exclusive, they are in fact inter-dependent and serve to define one another.

Feminist poststructuralist theorists argue that these binaries are not 'natural' divisions, but constructed ones and, importantly, that they are inherently hierarchical in nature (Butler,

1990). That is, they are based on relations of dominance whereby the power to define as 'Other' resides with the dominant side of the binary. Since:

> "To constitute a difference and to control it is an act of power since it is essentially a normative act" (Wittig, 1992, p.28).

A key point about this binary regime is that both sides of the binary are not equally valued. The more highly valued term is that which defines and is defined, while the lesser valued term is defined by lack, by what it is not.

> "The members of these binary pairs are not equal. Instead the first member of each is meant to dominate the second, which becomes defined as the 'other' of the first. Its identity is defined only as being the negative of the first. The other has no independent or autonomous character of its own; for example, 'woman' is defined as a deficient man in discourses from Aristotle through Freud" (Flax, 1990a, p. 36).

Butler (1990), following Foucault, argues that discourse not only describes, but that it has a productive function. At the same time that language enables us to speak or to think about something, it also constrains and regulates since it generates the categories of representation by which we can speak (Jones, 1995).

Power

The focus on discursive production offers different ways of thinking about power. Rather than conceptualising power as an external force which is possessed by a few and which operates to oppress (such as occurs with the use of the concept of patriarchy), poststructural theorists conceive of power as being exercised (Sawicki, 1991). Power is seen as being productive rather than repressive and as operating through discourse to produce effects. As Weedon (1987) explains:

> "Power is exercised within discourses and in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects" (p. 113).

Conceiving of power in this way has implications for the ways in which we might think about change. Power is not seen as monolithic, universal and oppressive, but rather as being particular, situated and inconsistent. From this perspective the possibility for change resides in

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the inconsistencies and contradictions in, for example, discourses of femininity. Jones (1993) argues that:

"the social order within which femininity is discursively constructed (i.e. structured through the various meanings historically given to 'girl', for instance) is not seamlessly consistent; girls—within and between class and ethnic groups—cannot simply be seen as uniformly repressed. It is in the gaps opened by this unevenness that the possibilities for resistance and change can be developed" (p. 161).

Flax (1990b) argues that power relations are not fixed but they are in need of constant maintenance and are therefore open to subversion.

A group of feminist educators, following the work of Foucault and Butler, have been particularly concerned with the ways in which gendered subjectivities are constituted. They have explored questions such as, how does discourse work to produce the subject 'girl' and how does the meaning of 'girl' shift in different discursive contexts? Jones (1993) explains:

"Girls become 'girls' by participating within those available sets of social meanings and practices—discourses—that describe them as girls…And the discourses which provide the available positions or 'ways to be' (subjectivities) shift in contradictory ways" (p. 159).

This focus on the ways in which discourse works to produce certain subjectivities or 'ways to be' suggests possibilities for change. Rather than thinking of individuals as having a stable gendered identity (like 'girl') which is affected by differing contexts, this focus on discursive production enables us to think about how different contexts make certain gendered subjectivities available. In an educational setting, for example, there are a range of subjectivities made available, or ways to 'do' being a 'girl' and, as Jones (1993) argues, these are often contradictory. The ways to 'do being a girl', also need to be understood in relation to class and race. As Jones (1993) explains, 'girl' is not a unitary category of identification:

"Taking such a position is not to argue that *any* set of meanings/positionings—and practices—is available to girls. A different constellation of positions confronts both working-class and middle-class girls at school, for instance, as a result of the differing material and discursive conditions within which they exist…Similarly the subjectivities/subject positions available to girls vary considerably on the basis of 'race', reflecting the contradictory conditions within which ethnically different families have been understood" (p. 160).

For example, feminist researchers have explored the ways in which discourses of femininity are shaped by social class. Initially, as Weiler (1988) describes, this research focussed on the schooling of working class girls and understood their resistance to academic success as a necessary prerequisite for their object position within traditional discourses of femininity (Gilbert & Taylor, 1991; Anyon, 1983; McRobbie, 1978). More recently, researchers have also begun to research middle class girls and to argue that their achievement in school is highly problematic (Fine, 1992; Davies, 1989; Lesko, 1988). For example, Lucey (1996) has examined discourses of success and failure and shown that for middle class girls, their success is driven by powerful fears of failure, fears which are masked by discourses of rationality.

> "A philosophy of personal agency operates within the middle class families very forcibly through the fostering of independence, self-motivation, responsibility and individualism...But always lurking behind are powerful fears: behind rationality is the irrational; behind empowerment, powerlessness and behind agency, chance or fate" (p. 11).

Other researchers have been developing accounts which examine how discourses of femininity are shaped by race and ethnicity, as well as social class, and the ways in which these are negotiated by girls in the context of their schooling (O'Connor, 1997; Jones, 1991; Bryan, Dadzie & Scafe, 1987). While initially, most research on girls and race focussed on the experience of students of colour, there has been a growing consideration of the way in which racial discourses structure those they privilege as well as those they oppress:

> "In other words, any system of differentiation shapes those on whom it bestows privilege as well as those it oppresses. White people are 'raced', just as men are 'gendered'" (Frankenberg, 1993, p.1).

By focussing on the positions that are made available to girls through differing discourses and the ways these are shaped by social class and ethnicity, the contradictions that have been found in relation to girls' schooling experience, such as those evident in the school choice research on gender, take on a different significance. Rather than being viewed as 'irrational' or as an example of 'false consciousness', these discourses can be understood within the broader context of the gender regime and the ways it works to position girls in

certain ways in relation to discourses of rationality which have assumed dominance in education.

For example, Walkerdine (1989) uses feminist poststructural theories to explore girls' participation and achievement in mathematics, arguing that there is a contradiction between discourses of femininity and rationality. Rather than asking what is wrong with the way maths is taught or what is wrong with girls, she follows up two lines of inquiry, or 'genealogies' as she, following Foucault, calls them. Firstly, she looks into the history of mathematics as a subject and of the way it is taught and secondly, she looks at the development of ideas about the female body and mind. In doing so she charts the history of the idea that females do not possess the capacity for reason and following from this, that they cannot therefore possess 'mathematical minds'. It is in the intersection of mathematical and gendered discourses that truths about the mathematical ability of girls emerge.

Neither the subject 'girl' nor the subject 'mathematics' are seen (by poststructuralist theorists such as Walkerdine) to be pre-existent. Instead, Walkerdine explores the way in which the subject 'girl' is produced within mathematical discourse. In doing so, she shows how girls come to be positioned outside of rationality or the power to reason that is seen to be necessary for achievement in maths. She also argues that, when girls do achieve, their achievement is highly problematic since it threatens the Enlightenment concept of the rational, autonomous male subject.

When this reconceptualisation of the notion of rationality is considered alongside that of gender, there are particular issues for girls. Lloyd (1993) argues that throughout the history of Western philosophy, the concept of rationality has historically been associated with masculinity, while the concept of irrationality has been associated with femininity. In the regime of gender, masculinity is defined and valued, and femininity is defined in terms of what it is not, by the *lack* of those qualities we associate with masculinity, such as rationality.

The key point here is that while discourses of rationality are consistent with discourses of masculinity, the two are contradictory for girls. To take up a position as 'rational subject' and to be positioned as 'girl', is to invoke two contradictory subjectivities. It is worth reiterating here the point that the binaries by which the truth of gender is constituted are mutually exclusive, and this is important in rendering invisible the dependence of the dominant term on the marginalised or excluded 'other'. For example, masculinity, while being the dominant term in the gender regime, is dependent on the constitution of the feminine

'other'. The dominance of the term masculinity masks its dependence. In the same way, for example, objectivity finds its meaning in relation to subjectivity, and rationality in relation to irrationality.

The binary regime by which the truth of the rational individual is constituted is dependent on certain exclusions and erasures. These exclusions are the same ones that the truth of the identity 'girl' is dependent upon. For example, rationality is dependent on the constitution and exclusion of 'irrationality' in such a way that 'rationality' becomes the defined and more highly valued term. Irrationality is a term that coheres with discourses of femininity. Therefore, to do 'girl' is to be also positioned as 'irrational other' (Flax, 1998).

I want to take up the notion of discursive production to examine school choice and the underlying assumption of instrumental rationality on which it is based. I then want to consider the relationship between discourses of femininity and rationality to explore the implications for girls in the context of school choice.

Reconceptualising Instrumental Rationality

From a poststructural perspective, instrumental rationality can be thought of, not as a description of the ways in which individuals behave, but as a discourse. This discourse constitutes the truth of the rational, autonomous individual—one who is able to make 'rational' choices in the education market place. To put it another way, instrumental rationality constitutes the truth or existence of rational individuals, motivated by self-interest. The notion of school choice which has recently assumed dominance in educational provision in New Zealand, can be viewed as being part of a discourse which supports the truth of this rational individual. That is, 'choice' implies that there is a 'chooser', one who is free to make decisions in the educational market place. It is a common sense notion that reproduces and sustains deeper 'truths'. Dale (1997) puts it like this:

"So, choice might be seen as a slogan, with a *political* rationale that contrasts it with compulsion...It is based on a notion of *entitlement* linked to a goal of *equity*. It seeks to empower *citizens* through equalising *access* to schooling. It is evaluated on the basis of its effects on *individual achievement*" [emphasis in original], (p. 466).

As a discourse, neo-liberalism sets up a range of binaries that, by implication, are mutually exclusive. It sets up as oppositional concepts that are inherently linked, and defines

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one half as being more desirable and dominant in relation to the other. On the dominant side of the binary are those discourses that cohere with the neo-liberal view, such as those described by Dale, while on the other are the marginalised and excluded 'others'. These 'others' are then treated as if they do not exist because they do not appear to conform to the assumption of the 'rational individual' that is assumed.

For example, in the neo-liberal view, the role of education is to prepare individuals to take up their place in the public sphere, success in which is determined by the exercise of rationality. However, this public sphere is dependent on the constitution of a private sphere, considerations of which are to be excluded from the realm of educational decision making. Yet, as the research literature reviewed in the previous chapter shows, the gendered 'private sphere' is an equally powerful determinant in the process of school choice. McLaren (1996) makes a similar point in her discussion of her research on the ways in which young women make sense of the multiple gendered discourses made available to them at school:

> "schooling has been largely premised on masculine liberal discourses concerning individual rationality and freedom of choice, it aligns itself with a male model of the public world...The private realm of reproduction, family and woman is naturalised and devalued, and it is seen in opposition to the public realm of work and career. Young women must find their way within this socially constructed paradox" (McLaren, 1996, p. 292).

In relation to girls, these 'private' and 'public' spheres may be seen as making available differing and contradictory subjectivities. Although the neo-liberal individual is apparently ungendered, as I have discussed, the truth of the rational individual is consistent with dominant discourses of masculinity which position girls outside of this rational subjectivity. This is not to say that actual 'girls' cannot make decisions that conform to the neo-liberal view of rationality, but it means that their uptake of this subjectivity is highly problematic.

As O'Neill (1993) argues:

> "rational market-man (always theoretically dressed in unisex clothes) is very definitely a gendered conception of the individual" (p. 54).

She goes on to describe how the exclusion of girls and women from this notion of the 'rational market man' has real material effects on their lives. Thus, it is not just that this

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exclusion operates at the symbolic level, but it also serves to limit and prescribe girls and women's lives and the resources they have available to them. Furthermore, since 'girl' is not a unitary category of existence, we also need to consider how discourses of 'race' and class intersect with those of gender and rationality to position girls in different ways.

School choice for and by girls might be viewed as a time where discourses of rationality and femininity are negotiated and contested, and the 'choice' of school can be seen as an outcome of that process of negotiation. Furthermore, once girls are in the school, this process continues and, as my research shows, they must also negotiate the discourses made available within the school, discourses that are shaped by the ways in which the school is positioned within the broader social context. The school may be viewed as a site of both opportunity and constraint and it is a site where girls construct their gendered subjectivities from the contradictory positions that are made available to them. Proweiller (1998) in a review of the research on girls in schools, concludes:

> "Their work makes clear that female identities are constructed discursively through active struggle and negotiation, pointing us in new theoretical directions that open up the possibility for girls to design complex discursive constructions of who they are becoming on a daily basis in school" (p. 198).

As discussed in the first chapter, previous research has indicated that the choice of single sex schooling for and by girls is a particularly fruitful site for exploring these discourses. We still know very little about girls' involvement in and perceptions of school choice largely because most of the research has focussed on parental choice. We also know very little about the discourses which operate in the context of choice and single sex schooling and how the girls both accommodate and resist these multiple subjectivities as they become 'girls'.

Methodological Implications

Thus far, I have discussed the possibilities that feminist poststructural theories offer for reconceptualising the particular notions of gender and rationality which have assumed dominance in educational policy. However, further possibilities are enabled by these theories, some of which I want to take up here. In particular, I want to explore the implications they have for the research process itself.

I have outlined the poststructural conceptualising of gender, not as a pre-existent category of representation, but as an effect that is constituted via discursive production. This focus on discursive production has implications for the way we might think about other 'truths' and therefore, for the act of research. From a poststructural perspective, 'truth' and 'reality' are effects (like gender) which are constituted via discursive production. That is, rather than seeing truth as correspondence between a pre-existent social reality and our description of it, we can reconceptualise 'truth' and 'reality' as being constituted in and through discursive production. From this perspective, research can no longer be thought of as a process which 'tells the truth' about 'reality'. Instead, research is seen as a discursive act or practice which, in the process of 'telling', constitutes certain truths. That is, we need to consider research as being productive of truth/s rather than as simply descriptive— finding out and telling the truth (Maynard, 1994).

Poststructural theories also challenge the claims to neutrality and objectivity that have traditionally been made by researchers. Poststructuralists argue that, just as there is no pre-existent truth or reality, so there is no objective, neutral observer or researcher who stands outside of social reality, looking on and accurately reporting the truth (Lather, 1996; Fine, 1994). Instead, the researcher is positioned with/in the research, with vested interests and located within the complex regimes of power which operate within the research process.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe the challenge to the notion of objectivity which is made by poststructural theory in the following way:

> "On the one hand, qualitative researchers have assumed that qualified, competent observers can with objectivity, clarity, and precision report on their own observations of the social world, including the experiences of others. Second, researchers have held to a belief in a real subject, or real individual, who is present in the world and able, in some form, to report on his or her experiences... Recently, this position and its beliefs have come under attack. Poststructuralists and postmodernists have contributed to the understanding that there is no clear window into the inner life of an individual. Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed" (p.12).

How is it then possible to undertake research once the claims of objectivity on which research has traditionally been founded and legitimated have so seriously been called into question? Lather (1991) describes the task of trying to produce objective truth accounts via

research as a 'failed project'. Instead, according to Lather, research can be thought of as a two-fold process. Firstly, it is one in which certain truths are constituted and secondly, it is a process that exposes both the means by which those truths are constituted and the interests that they serve. A poststructural account can not make any greater claims to accuracy or 'truth' than a traditional account, but what it can do is to acknowledge the multiple perspectives and interests that are served by the account. Lather (1991) argues that rather than asking whether or not research is biased, we need instead to ask 'whose interests are served by the bias'.

There are several methodological strategies that have been developed by feminist researchers as a means of exposing the ways in which the research process itself is productive of truth, rather than merely descriptive. These strategies require the researcher to come out from behind the veil of objectivity under which they are typically hidden and to acknowledge their own, often multiple and contradictory, positions in the research process.

"Researchers/writers self-consciously carry no voice, body, race, class, or gender and no interests into their texts. Narrators seek to shelter themselves in the text, as if they were transparent" (Fine, 1994, p. 74).

There is a growing body of literature in which researchers locate themselves within their text as active constructors and interpreters of knowledge. They acknowledge the ways in which their own position/s affect(s) the way they position their research subjects.

In the research method I developed, I wanted to be able to include the various interests and positions I brought to the research since it was clear to me that they were highly significant in every stage of the research process, from the selection of the research topic and focus, the research design, interpretation of data and the writing of the account. This is not a study undertaken by a disinterested researcher, but rather one who is both invested and situated within a particular context and moment. It does not aim to be normative or universal, 'telling the truth about' girls and school choice, but it is, of necessity, situated and partial as it examines a particular group of girls within a specific schooling context. My own experiences and perspectives inform my work to shape the research in particular ways.

As a feminist academic, I bring to my work a concern with issues of gender and it is from this position that I identify my investment in social change, my 'wanting it to be different' for girls, and my concerns and questions about how the introduction of neo-liberal policies are impacting on girls in schools. However, my investment in these issues is also

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informed by my position as 'woman', a position which locates me within the gendered dynamics which my research explores. In this way I am both outside of the research, looking in at the ways in which gender and rationality are discursively constituted, and yet I am positioned within the research by these same discourses. As an academic, I am deeply invested in 'rationality' since it gives me access to a subject position which I find both pleasurable and powerful. However, I am also 'woman' and a 'mother', gendered subjectivities which are highly contradictory since they threaten my access to this rational subjectivity and shape, in tangible ways, the material circumstances of my life. In the process of legitimating and credentialising myself as an academic, I must construct a research account which is 'rational' and which positions me as a rational subject. However, as a feminist academic and as 'woman' and 'mother', I also have a vested interest in troubling these claims to authority and in exposing the exclusions they necessitate. In this way, my research might be viewed as what Lather (1996) terms a 'double science', both employing the tools of rationality while at the same time calling them into question.

There is another issue that needs to be considered here. While I am 'woman' I am not 'every woman'. I am a white, middle class heterosexual woman. At the time I undertook this research, I was a single parent living in financially constrained circumstances in a provincial town four hundred kilometers from the university in which I was enrolled. Now, as I write, I am a Research Associate at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States. These multiple positionings and the material circumstances of my life shape the ways I 'make sense' of the experiences of the girls who participated in the research.

Lucey (1996) begins her account of the research she undertook with middle class girls in the following way:

> "But I have to come clean here and admit my fascination to know the 'other', for the middle class girls and their families are in many ways the 'unknown other' to me, someone who grew up working class and who simply does not recognise any of the ways of being that I witness in the middle class families (although I would now count as middle class myself using almost every yardstick). In some ways this is a god-send—on the one hand it means that I understand as perfectly 'normal' many working class practices which are routinely seen as evidence of a 'lack' or 'pathology' of some sort, and on the other, this non-recognition of middle class practices allows me to ask questions which may not normally be posed" (p. 2).

In prefacing her account in this way, Lucey foregrounds her own shifting positions both as a working class girl and as a woman who now 'passes' as middle class. These positions inform her perspectives and interpretations, at times providing her with an 'insider' knowledge of the lives of the working class girls, while also being an 'outsider' in terms of her status as an academic, a position which makes her access middle class. In similar ways, I was both insider and outsider in the process of my research. For example, I was more familiar with the kinds of experiences the white middle class girls described than those of the working class Indian girls, and, because of this, I noted that I did not ask the white middle class girls for descriptions about their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In this way, I assumed a knowledge and familiarity with their lives while viewing other girls as 'Others' (Fine, 1994). However, I was also an outsider in relation to the white middle class girls because of my position as woman, mother, ex-teacher and feminist academic and I was wary of allowing my class and cultural background and shared experiences of attending a single sex school to lull me into a sense of 'knowing' or 'identifying with' these girls.

One of the strategies that Flax (1990a) argues is necessary if we are to reveal the partiality of our account, is to be aware of voices that "sound foreign to or critical of our 'native' ones" (p. 12). I take this to mean that we should be especially careful to notice what is excluded or silenced in order to make an account seem coherent or true. Since, as I have argued, 'truth' is dependent on the constitution and exclusion of the 'other', this work of paying attention to what is absent as much as to what is foregrounded, is important in exposing how truths come to be read as such, and whose interests they serve. Rather than seeing the production of a research account as being one which legitimates a particular reading or truth, the postmodern project is about exposing how an account comes to be *read* as true and the erasures and silences that must be maintained in order to legitimate that truth. Acknowledging the partiality of my account is to create the possibility for other readings or interpretations.

"They are not to think of themselves as author(ities) or as un- or dis-coverers of Truth, but rather as potentially interesting members of an ongoing conversation. Their responsibility is to offer listeners a variety of moves from and against which further movement becomes possible" (Flax, 1990a, p. 37).

This move to locate myself within the research, to acknowledge the ways in which I am positioned and the interests I bring to the research is a strategy that enables me to also

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acknowledge the girls who participated in the research as multiple subjects who are positioned in a range of ways, both by the research process and by the discourses that are made available to them. Jones (1993) argues that:

"What to me seems an important role for researchers is to expose or explore the gendered subjectivities offered to girls and women, and the ways we take them up, or reject them..." (p. 164).

That is, rather than seeing the girls (or myself) as stable, unitary subjects, I can reconceptualise them as being variously and multiply positioned by the discourses that are made available to them. Furthermore, as well as proposing to 'come clean' in the construction of my research account, I also wanted to do so in the process of the research with the girls. The methodological perspective I took up enabled me to discuss my own history, politics and culture with the girls and to acknowledge the ways they shaped my understandings of their words and experiences. In this way, I was making visible the productive work of research in which meaning was being made, and in doing so, I opened up the possibility for reciprocity in the research process. Lather (1986) defines reciprocity in the following way:

"Reciprocity implies give-and-take, a mutual negotiation of meaning and power" (p.263).

By conceptualising myself as being 'in conversation' with the girls, I was also able to respond to their questions about my work, ideas and life experiences. By actively 'taking down' and giving up any claims to objectivity, and by revealing my own interests, I invited the girls to do the same and created an opportunity for us to speak with each other across our differences (Ellsworth, 1989). When the 'researched' know how and why the researcher is interpreting their words and experiences and for what purpose, they can then take part in the negotiation of meaning, rather than being constituted as 'passive objects' of research. Furthermore, this move makes visible the unequal power relations which operate in the context of the research. Since there is no way to remove the power relations between the researcher and the researched, it is important that we acknowledge these inequalities and make them visible (Maynard, 1994).

The strategy of positioning the researcher within the text is now used widely (but not exclusively) in feminist research. However, in the area of educational policy research to which

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this study contributes—school choice—there is little research that employs these methodological strategies. This is probably because, as David (1993) points out, there is very little research in the area that is informed by feminist perspectives. Her subsequent research (David, Davies, Edwards, Reay & Standing, 1996) on parental choice of school concluded with the researchers relating their own lives to the lives of the mothers they researched:

> "There is a dissonance between public and private discourses as we ourselves, as not dispassionate researchers, have experienced and here reflect on. These balancing acts that absorb mothers' time and attention have also absorbed our time and attention, in part as researchers and in part as mothers, and yet again...as feminist academics" (p.223).

In a more recent paper, David (1998) argues in favour of the feminist poststructural notion of 'reflexivity' being applied to educational policy research, and school choice research in particular. The methodological approach I take in this study therefore represents a departure from that which has been employed in the research literature to date in the field of school choice.

In the next chapter I describe the context for the research on which this thesis is based and the research participants. I then describe the research method I used that was developed in response to the methodological considerations outlined above, the constraints and possibilities of the context and the questions I wanted to explore.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH CONTEXT, THE PARTICIPANTS AND THE RESEARCH METHOD

In the first chapter I reviewed the school choice literature, noting that there is little research which considers school choice from the perspectives of girls. I argued that this is a significant omission given that one of the stated aims for the introduction of school choice policies into New Zealand was that they would improve educational opportunity and outcomes for girls. In the second chapter I outlined some aspects of feminist poststructural theories, arguing that they have the potential to enable a complex and dynamic account of the processes of school choice and of the ways in which gender is constituted. I concluded by discussing the methodological implications that arise from the use of poststructural theories. In this chapter I discuss the context within which the research being described here was undertaken, and give a brief description of the research participants (Chapter 4 introduces the participants in more detail). I conclude with a description of the research method I used.

The Context for the Research

In Chapter 1 I outlined the aim of this study as being to explore girls' involvement in, and perspectives on, school choice and to consider their subsequent schooling experiences in relation to their reasons for being in the school. I described the specific focus of the study, which was a group of senior girls at a state single sex secondary school in New Zealand, a school that I have called 'Girls' College'.

The decision to undertake the research at Girls' College was influenced by several factors. Firstly, my research with the Smithfield Project (outlined in Chapter 1) had given me a good knowledge of the education 'market' in one New Zealand city—'Green City'. I had a detailed knowledge of the student composition of eleven of the state and integrated secondary schools in the city and how it had changed over the six years since the enactment of the 'school choice' policies in 1991 under the *Tomorrow's Schools* reforms, and the subsequent amendments contained in the 1991 Education Amendment Act which abolished home zones.

The Smithfield Project research had shown that not all schools were equally able to compete in the education market, and, as a result, schools were differentially impacted on by these policies. While some schools had experienced almost no change in their student composition, others had experienced a significant decline in numbers and a change in their

student intake (Hughes et al., 1996; Lauder et al., 1994). The impact of the policy changes was closely related to the student composition of the school, so that those which had high proportions of white middle class students were least affected, while those schools with high proportions of working class and Maori and Pacific Islands students were most adversely affected. However, the research also identified schools that were situated between these two extremes. Those schools had relatively balanced intakes in terms of social class and ethnicity and had either a stable or slowly declining student population. They were also under-subscribed, that is, they had more places available than students to fill them. Most of the students in these schools lived in local or adjacent areas. As such, these schools relied heavily on enrolments from 'local' students and they were in a vulnerable position since any change in their 'popularity' could have a negative impact on their student numbers and a subsequent decline in their social class mix. Girls' College was one of these schools.

Girls' College needs to be understood in relation to the other schools which are easily accessible by public transport to girls in the area of the city in which it is located. These fall into three types: state, integrated and private.

State schools are those which, in theory, are available to all students who apply to them. However, because one of the schools, Girls' High, is oversubscribed, it is able to operate an enrolment scheme and therefore can exercise some degree of control over its student population. Schools which operated enrolment schemes (at the time my research was undertaken) could define their own criteria for acceptance of students, provided they did not contravene the requirements of the Race Relations Act (1971) or the Human Rights Commissions Act (1990). Girls' High's enrolment scheme is based firstly on a geographical zone which is drawn up in consultation with Girls' College. The principals of these two schools had an informal agreement to protect each other's zones so that if a girl who lived in the Girls' College zone applied to Girls' High, she would be very likely to have her application rejected. However, there are exceptions to this. For example, if a girl has or has had a sister at the school, they are likely to gain entry. The third criteria for entry is described in the 1994 prospectus (which describes the enrolment scheme that was in place the year the girls in this study entered secondary school) for Girls' High in the following way:

"where the prospective student would benefit from the curriculum mix offered by the school."

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The other state school available to the girls in this study is City High, a coeducational school which is also under subscribed and which accepts all students who apply. There are also several integrated schools available. Integrated schools are funded by the state but maintain the right to have a 'special character' (Ministry of Education, 1993). These schools were established by a religious denomination, are partly financed by the church and are almost all single sex in character. The Catholic schools, for example, have a policy of maintaining a student population that is no more then five per cent non-Catholic. This policy, by necessity, limits their availability.

The third type of schools available to the girls in this study are private schools. These receive some state funding but students who attend them have to pay a substantial amount in fees. These schools limit their availability to students on the basis of their cost.

For the girls in this study, there were therefore only two schools which were 'freely' available to all; Girls' College and City High. By 'available', I mean those schools which were easily accessible by public transport. The other schools were able to restrict their availability either by their enrolment scheme, religious criteria or by cost.

In the following tables, I give student composition data for the three *state* schools which were, in theory, available to the girls who took part in this study. The composition data is for the years 1994 and 1997. The girls who took part in my research mostly entered the school in 1993, but these statistics were not available for that year. My research was conducted in 1997 when the girls were in their final year (Year 12) of schooling. However, statistics on school composition ceased to be publicly available in 1996 and I had to use the Official Information Act (1996) to gain access to the comparative data for 1997. Since, as discussed in Chapter 1, the popularity of schools is closely related to their student mix, it is perhaps not surprising that this composition data has been withdrawn since it is perceived as highly sensitive information.

Table 1 shows the student composition of the three state schools that were easily accessible by public transport to the girls in this study. Girls' High had the lowest percentage of Maori and Pacific Islands students and the highest SES of the student composition. In contrast, Girls' College had the lowest SES of the student composition and the largest percentage of Maori and Pacific Islands students, with nearly forty percent of the students being either of Maori or Pacific Islands descent.

Table 1: Student composition of Girls' College, Girls' High and City High in 1994.			
	Maori roll %	Pacific Islands roll %	SES decile of school
Girls' College	17	20.8	5
Girls' High	5.4	4.6	9
City High	14.5	5.2	7

Source: New Zealand Ministry of Education, New Zealand Schools, Statistical Index, 1994b.

Note: SES decile: the socio-economic indicator used to provide additional funding to schools. Based on census data for the areas from which each school draws students. A decile is a ten percent grouping or tenth, with schools drawing from the lowest socio-economic groups being closest to decile one and schools drawing from the highest socio-economic groups being closest to decile ten (Ministry of Education, 1994a).

Table 2: Student composition of Girls' College, Girls' High and City High in 1997 and comparison of roll change from 1993 to 1997.					
	Maori roll %	Pacific Islands roll %	Asian roll %	SES decile of school	Roll change 1993-97 %
Girls' College	11.4	19.1	18.5	6	-3.4
Girls' High	6.2	4.4	12.3	10	1.1
City High	10.5	4.2	4.6	8	0.8

Source: Ministry of Education, Official Information request, October 1998.

Note: Roll change 1993-7 (%): the percentage change in the July 1 headcount roll from 1993 to 1997.

Table 2 gives the student composition for these schools four years later, in 1997. In 1997, there was more information available including the percentage of Asian students on the roll and the percentage roll change between 1993 and 1997. As in 1994, Girls' College has the lowest SES of the student composition and the highest percentage of Maori and Pacific Islands students. Girls' College also has the highest percentage of Asian students. Both City High and Girls' College experienced a decline in the percentage of Maori students on their roll, while for Girls' High, the ethnic mix remained relatively stable. In 1997 the SES of the student composition of all the schools had increased, although the schools' ranking in relation to each other remained the same. The most significant change for Girls' College over this five year period was the decline in student numbers. While the roll of Girls' High and City High increased slightly over that time, Girls' College experienced a decline in numbers from 1993 to 1997.

Taken together, these tables illustrate several important points. Firstly, Girls' College is in a vulnerable position in the local education market, relative to the other state schools available to girls, because of its socio-economic and ethnic composition. This vulnerability is illustrated by its decline in the student roll for the five-year period from 1993 to 1997. The position of Girls' College in the local education market was one of the reasons why I chose the school as a site for study. In the context of the local education market, Girls' College might be thought of as 'second best' in terms of its popularity. However, I wanted to know how the girls who attended the school perceived it and why they were at the school. Although their ability to access Girls' High was restricted by the enrolment scheme, the girls were able to attend City High. I was therefore also interested to know what significance, if any, the single sex character of Girls' College had on their 'choice'.

The single sex character of the school was the other reason for choosing Girls' College as a site for study. As a feminist educator I am interested in the schooling of girls and I had taken a close interest in the debates around the merits or otherwise of single sex schooling for girls (as I discuss in Chapter 1). I had also attended a single sex school myself and taught in a girls' school. My decision to locate my research at Girls' College was therefore also influenced by my own schooling and teaching history and my interest in single sex schooling for girls. I wanted to know how the school choice policies were impacting on girls and to explore the relationship between gender and school choice in the context of a single sex school.

As I outlined in the first chapter, research had indicated that this type of schooling was becoming an increasingly popular choice for girls in New Zealand. However, it is also clear that not all single sex schools are equally 'desirable', and that their desirability is closely related to their ethnic and social class composition (Lauder et al., 1995). In my earlier research (Newton, 1994) I had focussed on the choice of Girls' High, an elite state girls' school, but in this study I wanted to consider the choice of a school which was in a very different position in the local education market. It is important to note that Girls' College historically has always had a lower SES student composition than Girls' High and a lower percentage of Pakeha students. The introduction of school choice policies has not created these differences, however, as Table 2 shows, the operation of choice has resulted in a drop in the number of students in the school.

The existing literature on the choice of single sex schooling for girls (outlined in Chapter 1) has focussed almost exclusively on 'elite' state or private schools. The exception to

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this is Ball and Gewirtz's (1997) study of two girls' schools, one which had a high proportion of white middle class students and the other which had sixty five per cent of its students from ethnic minority backgrounds. However, both schools were 'over subscribed' and therefore able to exercise some control over their student intakes. In contrast, Girls' College has to accept all students, and as Table 2 shows, actually has a declining student population.

A focal point such as this enabled me to compare the abstract theoretical assumptions on which the introduction of school choice policies are based, against the lived reality of the operation of 'choice' in a particular schooling site.

The Research Participants

My decision to undertake the research with the girls who were students at Girls' College was to address the silence about girls' perspectives in the school choice literature and the lack of understanding about gender and school choice. Most of the literature on school choice is undertaken with parents before, or just after, school choices have been made. In contrast to this, I decided to undertake my research retrospectively, that is, with senior students, several years after the girls had arrived at the school. There were several reasons for this. Firstly, I wanted to interview girls who were attending Girls' College, which by necessity meant they already had to be in the school. Secondly, I wanted to consider not only how the girls had come to be at the school, but also their subsequent schooling experiences and what it meant to be a Girls' College student. As the girls who participated in the research were between sixteen and eighteen years of age and in their final year of schooling, they were able to reflect on their schooling experiences and to clearly articulate their views. Furthermore, the research would be published after the girls had left the school, thereby providing them with additional assurance of confidentiality that may have enabled them to speak more freely.

Thirdly, there were consent issues. I wanted to be able to interview the girls while they were in school and, in discussion with the principal, we decided that the girls had the right to participate in the research without their parents/caregivers' informed consent. Had I chosen to interview younger students, parental/caregiver consent may have been required. Finally, there was a practical issue in terms of holding the focus group interviews. All Year 12 students had at least one study period during the day and the girls decided this was the best time for the interviews since they had a high number of commitments during the lunch hour and after school. I was anxious not to make unrealistic demands on the students' time and as senior

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students, they were therefore able to make their own decisions about attending the interviews depending on their availability and work load. Interestingly, the rate of attendance at the focus group interviews was very high with sixteen of the twenty four girls attending all five focus group interviews and another four missing only one interview.

While the girls were all in their final year of schooling, they had not all been at Girls' College since the start of their secondary education, in Form Three. Four of the girls had arrived after their Form Three year. Those that had been at Girls' College for all of their secondary education arrived in 1993, three years after the introduction of 'school choice' policies in 1990. I interviewed the girls in 1997 when most had been in the school for four years.

In the course of the interviews, a wide range of issues were discussed, but because of the open-ended interview format, there were differences in the information that was given by the girls. A written questionnaire (Appendix A) was therefore used at the conclusion of the research to gain some basic background information about each of the girls. The questionnaire asked the girls where they had lived, the schools they had attended, their family composition and their involvement in paid work and extra-curricular activities. The written questionnaire also asked the girls about their male and/or female caregivers' current paid employment and education.

It was not my intention to use this information to categorise the students into social class groups in any formal way for reasons that were both practical and theoretical. On the practical level, there were several considerations. Firstly, the information was incomplete as some students did not know the answers to these questions or chose not to fill in this section of the questionnaire, and I had stressed their right to leave any questions they did not want to answer. At the meeting where the written questionnaire was handed out, I had guided the students through the questionnaire, explaining what the questions meant and stressing their right to leave out any questions they did not want to answer. However, Alfreda was not at that meeting and, although when I sent the questionnaire to her, I said she did not have to answer all of the questions, she included the following comment at the bottom of the questionnaire when she returned it to me:

Alfreda: "My parents (and sister) thought this questionnaire was a bit personal towards the end."

The questions 'towards the end' were those about caregivers' employment and education. There was also (in hindsight) a badly worded question which asked:

"What is your relationship to each of the people you live with?"

Alfreda had interpreted this question to mean the quality of the relationship, whereas I had intended it to mean the type of relationship, for example, sister or mother. Alfreda's comment confirmed to me the importance of giving research participants the right to withhold information, even when they have agreed to participate in research. This is particularly important when researching with school students since their lives are already subjected to a high level of surveillance within the school and their relative powerlessness means information about them can be used in a range of ways without their consent. Furthermore, my experience as a teacher had alerted me to the fact that many students are anxious to protect their own lives and the lives of their family from the scrutiny of the school—and from academic researchers.

The second reason why I did not attempt to categorise the students into social class groups in a formal way was because of the methodological complexity of the task. For example, there are several issues that need to be considered in developing a class typology. Duke and Edgell (1977) divide these into three key areas. The first concerns the conceptual scheme which is to be employed. They cite two schema; those that are based on occupational class (e.g. Goldthorpe & Hope, 1974) and those that are based on divisions within the relations of production (e.g. Wright, 1985). The other problems associated with ascribing social class are, according to Duke and Edgell, whether the family of the individual is the unit of class analysis and whether those in paid work as well as those who are not should be included. These problems relate directly to the relationship between gender and social class. Delphy and Leonard (1986) note that women are frequently 'non-holders' of occupations in the paid workforce that are easily defined in terms of social class and that, as such:

"...individuals who are 'in' a class but who do not occupy positions which define the class, find themselves in a very different position from those who do" (p. 58).

Thus, while there may be significant differences in the way in which power is distributed between families on the basis of class, there may also be significant differences in the distribution of power within families on the basis of gender. In a similar way, there are

often differences between the qualifications and training of a person and their current occupational status. For example, Sandy's father was a civil engineer in Vietnam but after leaving Vietnam as a refugee, he works as a skilled trades person in New Zealand.

The discussion thus far highlights the complexity of categorising students into social class groups and raises a caution about the use of measures of SES such as those used by the Ministry of Education and shown in Tables 1 and 2. However, there are also theoretical concerns that relate to the use of feminist poststructuralist theories that make the notion of social class problematic. As I described in Chapter 2, from a feminist poststructural perspective, social class can be thought of as a discourse (like gender and race and ethnicity) that makes available certain subjectivities. As Jones (1993) explains, the subjectivities available to girls vary on the basis of class. Furthermore, gender and class are not unitary categories of identification, and the ways to do being a 'girl' are shifting and often contradictory. The importance of this perspective is that it enables us to examine the ways in which girls are variously positioned, rather than seeing girls from particular social class backgrounds as uniformly privileged or oppressed.

Having outlined the practical and theoretical complexities of categorising girls according to their social class background, I wanted to ensure that I included girls in my study who were from a range of backgrounds. This would enable me to explore the ways in which discourses of femininity were shaped by social class since, as discussed in Chapter 2, previous research has shown that this is an important consideration in understanding girls' schooling experiences. I wanted to include girls whose parents had different kinds of occupational and educational experiences, and in this way to also ensure the girls in my study represented, to some extent, the SES student composition at Girls' College.

The information from the focus group interviews, together with the written questionnaire, was useful in giving an indication of the range of social class backgrounds of the girls as indicated by their parents/caregivers education and occupational status. In the discussion of the interview material in Chapters 5 and 6 I have used the very general terms working class and middle class to describe the girls, and where it has seemed important, I have given additional information to qualify these terms.

In terms of social class background, the majority of the girls came from working class or lower middle class backgrounds, with the notable exception of four girls where both parents/caregivers had a high level of education and worked as professionals. Where there

were two parents/caregivers in a household, both of them were in paid employment except for one father who was retired. Four of the girls came from single parent families with three of these being single mothers. Eight of the mothers were working as cleaners, laundry workers or in a supermarket. Ten others were also working in service industry jobs that required some level of training such as secretarial work or early childhood workers. Most of the women were therefore working in occupations which did not require tertiary education but four were professionals; a doctor, a dentist, a lecturer and a counsellor. The majority of fathers and male caregivers were in skilled and semi-skilled work. Six were self-employed.

In the course of the interviews I also asked the girls how they would describe their ethnicity. The information contained in the Ministry of Education statistics presented in Tables 1 and 2 is gained from schools who code the information they receive from parents/caregivers on enrolment forms. This measure is highly problematic since, for example, decisions have to made about how to code the ethnicity of students who have one parent who is Maori and one who is Pacific Islands. In New Zealand, such students are usually coded as Maori since preference is given to Maori as the indigenous people group (Hughes et al., 1996).

The descriptions of ethnicity given by the students in my study is an indication of the ethnic diversity of the Girls' College population. In my first interview with the principal, she commented that there were thirty two ethnic groups represented in the school. The twenty four girls in my study were from at least eight ethnic groups, more if the different countries of origin were taken into account for the Indian and Asian students. Nine girls were Pakeha, five Indian, three Maori, two Vietnamese, one Chinese, one Taiwanese, one Samoan, one Tongan, one Iranian. Eight of the girls were born outside of New Zealand. A concern for me in terms of the ethnicity of the students who participated in the research was the low number of Pacific Islands students. According to the Ministry of Education figures, in 1994 and 1997, approximately twenty percent of the population of Girls' College was described as Pacific Islands. In my sample, only two girls (eight percent) described themselves as of Pacific Islands descent. At the time it was decided that it was not appropriate for me make further approaches to the Pacific Islands girls to participate and that I needed to respect their decision not to participate in the research, for whatever reasons.

Just as the few studies of choice of single sex schooling for girls have focussed on 'elite' schools, the small literature on student choice of school (outlined in Chapter 1) describes research that has been undertaken with students who are mostly from middle class

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and white/Pakeha backgrounds. Wells' (1995) research on Afro-American perspectives on school choice is a notable exception: however, her work has no gender perspective. The ethnic and social diversity of the girls in this study is important if we are to consider school choice from the perspectives of girls from a range of backgrounds.

In the introductions to the students that are presented in the following chapter, more detailed information about the employment and education of parents and caregivers is given (when provided by the girls), as is information on the ethnic background and country of origin of the girls. In some cases, information has been changed or omitted in order to protect the identity of the girls.

Setting Up the Research

The process of gaining access to Girls' College began in October 1996 when I met with the college principal to discuss my research aims. I had met the principal previously because of my involvement with the Smithfield Project, and her knowledge of that research was one of the reasons she was willing to consider my proposal. My understanding of the vulnerable position of the school and of the complex dynamics of the local education market was viewed favourably by the principal and helped to establish my credibility as a researcher and a relationship of trust. I discussed possible designs for the research with the principal which would meet my aims while ensuring that it would be practical for those involved and we decided that it would be useful for me to meet with a small group of the current Form Seven (Year 12) students to canvas their ideas about the research. The principal selected nine girls from a range of ethnic backgrounds to attend the meeting which was held in the lunch hour at the school. With the girls' consent, I recorded the interview.

The purpose of the interview was two fold. Firstly, I asked the girls a range of questions about how they had come to be in the school and about their schooling experiences at Girls' College. Secondly, I discussed my proposed research design and asked their advice about how to gain student participation, meeting times and the composition of the focus groups. Some girls thought it best that the principal decide who should be invited to participate in the research since she would know which girls would have something to say and who would be likely to be committed to the research process. However, other girls disagreed and pointed out that although they had not been invited to the meeting, they were interested and had come to express their ideas. That discussion was a salient reminder to me of the complex power

dynamics that operate within schools, and the relative powerlessness of students. It was decided that it was important to stress to the principal my independence as a researcher and the need for the girls to make their own decisions about participation and their right to confidentiality about their involvement in the research. The decision, on the girls' advice, to hold the focus group meetings in their study breaks, meant that the girls did not require their teachers' or parents'/caregivers' permission to attend and therefore their participation in the project could remain confidential if they chose.

The meeting with the out-going Form Seven students was a valuable pre-requisite to the development of the research design. It reassured me that there would be students who would choose to participate and that the focus of the research was of interest to the students. I wrote a brief summary of that meeting, without ascribing comments to particular girls, and gave a copy to the principal. The girls were offered a copy but none chose to receive one.

I had two further discussions with the principal to discuss the research design and she then confirmed her willingness for me to undertake the research in the school and signed a written consent form. At the start of 1997 I met with the Form Seven Dean to discuss the research and she became my key liaison person in terms of organising times to meet with the Year 12 students to invite them to participate in the research.

The Research Method

My first meeting with all of the one hundred and thirty 1997 Year 12 students was held on 19 February 1997 during their 'form time'. At that meeting I introduced myself and gave a brief description of the aims of the research and the proposed design and invited any students who thought they might be interested in participating to attend a meeting two days later in the lunch hour. I printed fifty information sheets for students who were interested and all were taken.

Approximately thirty students came to the second meeting to find out more about the research. I discussed the aims of the research in more detail, including my background as a teacher and an educational researcher, and I identified myself as feminist saying I was interested in the schooling of girls. I also explained what the research would be used for—to help me to gain my doctorate, to contribute to the policy debates about the impact of school choice policies and to address the silences about students' perspectives on school choice. I also acknowledged that my cultural background and life experiences gave me certain view points

and perspectives. I explained that I was particularly interested in hearing from girls who were from a range of cultural and social backgrounds so that the research participants would represent the diversity of the student population in the school.

Twenty five of the girls chose to stay and after discussion they decided they wanted to form their own focus groups. The girls filled in a contact information sheet that included a question on whether they were willing to be contacted at home. They signed a consent form (Appendix B) and each focus group chose a facilitator who would take responsibility for contacting their group about meetings.

Focus Group Interviews

The research design was based around the use of focus group interviews, a method I chose for several reasons. Firstly, as discussed in the previous chapter, I was concerned to use a method that would enable me to both acknowledge and manage the unequal power relations which operate in the context of research. This inequality was exacerbated by the fact that I was older than the students, by the students' relative powerlessness within the context of the school, by my skill as a researcher and interviewer, and by my institutional authority which meant that I may have been able to exercise coercion in eliciting information that students were not comfortable about disclosing. The focus group provided some degree of protection to students by maintaining a group focus rather than focussing on specific individuals. Furthermore, I hoped that students may have been able to discuss with each other outside of the interviews anything they were not happy with and to develop a collective strategy of 'resistance' if required. Secondly, as Krueger (1988) has argued, focus groups enable a high level of interaction with the researcher, but also between the research participants. This

conflicting power relations. These were related to such things as their culture, their institutional status within the school and to more subtle factors such as the dynamics of their peer culture. Because of this, it was not safe to assume that power was equally shared between the students in the group and it was important that students not be coerced into participating in the discussion when they were not happy to do so. A particularly powerful illustration of this occurred in Group Three. While this group of six girls began with some degree of ethnic and social class diversity, over time, the four middle class Pakeha girls who were friends became the most regular attenders. Miriama, a Samoan girl, attended only the first interview and then chose to withdraw. When I phoned to confirm her decision to withdraw, she explained that she did not feel safe sharing her thoughts, "they can't relate to what I'm going through". Ironically, in that first interview, Miriama had explained how she had come to Girls' College because of her negative experiences at a "really poshy school. And I just didn't get along with the people there, cause they were all white", yet she ended up in a focus group with all-white students. This was a salient reminder to me of the power relations which operate between students but at the same time I was also reassured that students felt able to withdraw from the research of they felt unsafe.

Krueger (1988) suggests that focus groups should ideally be composed of people who are similar to each other, that is, they should have something in common but they should not be known to each other.

> "Focus groups are usually composed of people who do not know each other—ideally it is best if participants are complete strangers. In some communities, this is virtually impossible; nevertheless, close friends or those who work together shouldn't be included in the same group" (p. 28).

He argues that, 'familiarity tends to inhibit disclosure'. In my case, it was simply not possible to have focus groups composed of girls who were not known to each other. However, the girls formed their focus groups on the basis of two factors; their desire to be with certain girls and/or the practical concern of finding a time in common to meet. This created a diversity in terms of group composition, with some groups being comprised mainly of friends and others being composed of girls who said they had little contact with each other outside of the group.

There were several safeguards I put in place in acknowledgment of the unequal power relations which operated in the context of the research and the school. Firstly, students had the right to withdraw from the research at any time and without explanation. Secondly, their attendance at the group was voluntary and they could participate as much or as little in the discussion, as they chose. Thirdly, we had a contract of confidentiality within the groups which meant that nothing that was said in the groups was to be shared with anyone outside of the group.

The focus group interviews were held at school in the Form Six common room during the girls' study break. I recorded the interviews using a 'sound grabber' microphone and they were later transcribed. The interviews were approximately an hour long.

The focus group interviews were sequential and occurred over a four month period, from February to May 1997. The interviews were held every two weeks, except where school holidays intervened, and the proximity of the meetings helped to maintain the girls' involvement and interest in the research. There were five focus group interviews in total with each group, making the total number of focus group interviews twenty five. After each round of focus group interviews the interviews were transcribed and I began the next interview with the students reading over the transcripts from the previous week. The students had the opportunity to correct, change or delete anything they had said and they were also given a further opportunity to check their transcripts at the final meeting I held at the conclusion of the research.

Students were able to negotiate, to some extent, the meaning I took from the focus group interviews and the transcripts and during the course of the interview I would often say how I was 'making sense' of what they said and ask them to comment on my analysis. However, the selection of interview material for inclusion in this thesis and the interpretation, in the final analysis, is my own. The students have had no opportunity to comment on this text or on how they have been represented. I am not sure how this would have been possible, primarily because of the time lapse between the interviews and the writing up of the research a year and a half later when the girls had left the school

The interviews were loosely based around a series of pre-prepared questions and they were interactive in that the students often initiated or directed the discussion. For example, one of the interviews was held just prior to the school ball and the girls came to the group wanting to discuss this. I would often ask the students to explain their views and ideas and sometimes I

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would disclose something about my own life to illustrate why I held a particular view or to invite further discussion from the girls. The focus group format also allowed for discussion within the group that was not solely initiated by me and I encouraged the students to comment on each other's views and my own.

The use of open-ended interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992) was also important as it enabled me to develop a broader focus than that which is typically adopted by research into school choice. My earlier research had indicated that school choice is a complex process that involves a number of practical considerations as well as the negotiation of discourses which operate in the context of the family, school and the broader social context. I did not want to limit the discussion to only those issues that I had decided were relevant to school choice and I therefore enabled the discussion to range over a wide area. In this way I wanted to avoid influencing their understandings of school choice and instead, I was able to explore how the girls understood the notion of choice and the issues that were important and significant for them.

Concluding the Research

Once the focus group interviews were completed, I held a final meeting with students to give them an opportunity to check their focus group transcripts and to ask them to fill in the written questionnaire. Several students were not able to attend the meeting and I either posted the transcripts to them for checking or met them in the senior common room at school.

While my reasons for undertaking the research were obvious, I also wanted to ensure that there was 'something in it' for the girls. At the conclusion of the research I wrote each student a formal letter detailing their involvement in the research and their experience as participants in social science research. As the girls were in their final year of schooling, many of them talked about their desire to have a portfolio describing their involvement in the life of the school and they valued the letters I wrote which added to their list of 'achievements'.

At the time of the interviews, an article appeared in a local paper about the National Oral History Archive and the need for more oral histories to be recorded. I discussed this with the students and offered to help them facilitate an oral history project involving any students who wanted to participate. I contacted the National Library Oral History Archive and found out that they had almost no material of young women speaking about their lives. Several of the students wanted to pursue the idea so together we visited the library for training. The students

subsequently devised the questions for the interviews and asked me to conduct them. They organised the interviews, transcribed them and collated a significant amount of biographical material about themselves for inclusion in the archive. Together we presented the tapes, written materials and photographs to the National Oral History Archive. Most of the girls chose to embargo their material for twenty five years. With the permission of the principal and the girls themselves, I arranged for media publicity and an article and photo was printed in the daily paper about the oral history project. The oral history project was not connected publicly with my research.

I also told the students about a national hui (meeting) that was being held by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and some of the students expressed interest in attending. Despite the name of the organisation, which seems rather traditional and religious, the YWCA has a reputation as an organisation that promotes the health and welfare of young women. It is considered by some to be 'radical' because of its involvement in initiatives such as educating young women about sexual health, self defense and diversity (YWCA & Ministry of Women's Affairs, 1996). Juliet (a student participant in the research) acted as a liaison person with the YWCA and organised a spokesperson to speak at the school assembly. She also attended the hui with a friend from school. Other girls said they had wanted to attend but felt their parents/caregivers would not approve.

But perhaps the main way in which I felt that reciprocity was achieved was by the enjoyment most of the students gained from participating in the research. This was obvious for two reasons. Firstly, there was a very high rate of attendance at the focus group interviews and secondly, as the following comments illustrate, many of the students said they had enjoyed taking part in the research. Note: the names used in the transcripts are the pseudonyms the girls chose for themselves.

Frances:

"It's just interesting. Like what everyone else was saying. You come—it is interesting to hear what other people say, and whether you think the same, and stuff. Yeah, it's just real nice. I have never done it before, been interviewed and stuff. It's just, it's fun." [Group 2, interview 5, p.9]

Michelle:

"In general I think the research project has been good for my own knowledge as I have learned a lot about myself by the questions being asked, questions that I probably would not even consider asking myself, and working in small groups I found about a lot of other people's different opinions." [written comment on questionnaire]

Sandy:

"I think it's like—when you come here, we get to hear—we wouldn't talk about stuff like this if you weren't here. We wouldn't hear what everyone else thinks. And it is just interesting to hear you ask questions. You know, it's just sort of, like, you know, the way you ask questions. It just makes me think. I don't know. No one has ever interviewed us, or me, like that. And it's just like, it just fits in. We come here every second week, and talk to you, answer your questions, and we learn a lot about each other and even stuff about us. So, yeah." [Group 2, Interview 5, p.9]

Group 3:

Sue: Can I ask you another question, then. I was just reflecting on the method I have used in the interview process. Can you give me some feed-back about how it has worked for you, or if you have got anything out of it? Or if it hasn't worked for you? Or if there is anything you have particularly thought about? Or just give me some feed-back on this process we have gone through?

Yoko: It doesn't seem like an interview, though.

George: We get side-tracked so easily.

Yoko: Yeah, it's like 'Bang!', we're onto something else. It's like, yeah. Even when you ask a question, and we start answering it, then we completely go off on something completely different. It is different from most interviews, which are just, 'Question. Answer. Question. Answer'.

George: But it's good though, because it means you get —

Yoko: You get a lot said, if there's no set —

George: It's more interesting.

Yoko: I like what you have done because it's not set. You don't have a set list of questions that you are just reading off the sheet.

Yogi: It's better than a one-on-one.

Sue: Yeah. Why is that, Yogi?

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Yogi: Because you hear what your friends say, and then you get to talk about that, and then you are more likely to think of something when you are with a group of people. [Interview 5, p.8]

Tupac: A letter written to me by Tupac from Group 5 at the conclusion of the research:

Dear Sue,

Just writing to say a big 'Thank you' on behalf of Alfreda, Waima, Mandy, Diana and myself. We hope that we were of some help to you and your project and we wish you luck and prosperity in the future.

Thanks for the experience and we'll see you around.

Take care and God Bless
ps: sorry about the cheap paper. BYE!!!. Remember, JESUS LOVES YOU.

Alfreda, Group 5: A note at the end of her written questionnaire:

My parents (and sister) thought this questionnaire was a bit personal towards the end. I liked the research project because I got to sit and talk about things to people who wanted to sit and listen and also discuss about it too. I found it interesting because we got to talk about the issues and the way the College boys treated us (see, not many people like to talk about those sorts of things—they'd rather ignore it) and about being able to cope in the real world. That made me think about my life in general and where I want to be in 10-15 years.

Thank you Sue for coming and discussing that! I enjoyed it immensely.

ps: I didn't find it boring!!

I also enjoyed meeting with the girls and felt privileged to have been given small glimpses into their worlds. For me, the girls' participation in the research brings with it several responsibilities. Firstly, to present their words respectfully and accurately. Secondly, to use the research as a vehicle for enabling the girls' voices to be heard in the research and education community. And finally, to use the research to make a contribution to the existing policy debates on the marketisation of education and its impact on the schooling of girls. These were the promises I made to the girls, and it is my hope that this thesis is a step towards that work.

In the next chapter I introduce the focus groups and the girls who participated in the research. The 'introductions' are intended to be both a reference for reading the chapters which

follow and also to give some detail about the girls' families, the kinds of activities they are involved in, and their aspirations.

CHAPTER 4: INTRODUCING THE FOCUS GROUPS AND THE GIRLS

It is a challenging task for me to select out the details of each of the girl's lives to communicate to the reader a little about their background, their family and the different aspects of their lives that they shared during the focus group interviews. In the previous chapters I have described some of my background and the interests I bring to the research. In a similar way, the girls' views and perspectives are shaped by their family and by the other social contexts in which they are located. I have focussed here on information that is relevant to the discussion of the interview transcripts in the following chapters and I hope that the information presented provides a broader context against which the girls' comments can be read.

The interviews generated a large amount of material but because of the 'open-ended' interview style I used, it is not possible to give the same information about each girl. For example, while some girls talked about their families, others chose to keep the details of their family life private. While I began the interviews with a series of prepared questions and discussion starters, the discussion would often move in different directions so that I did not attempt to ask the same questions of each girl in a structured way. While most groups covered similar material, not all of the girls answered all of the questions, some were absent and some chose not to contribute at different times. Furthermore, the composition and dynamics of the focus groups also determined the kinds of information that was shared. In larger groups, there was less 'talking time' available to each girl and this fact, by necessity, limited the amount of information that was given. Furthermore, as in any group, there are those who are more confident about contributing and consequently, when I checked back over the transcripts it was obvious that there were several girls who had said very little about themselves.

The use of focus group interviews also presented some difficulties with transcribing. The girls were given written transcripts of the interviews to check and this was helpful in identifying who had been speaking. However, sometimes it was not possible to identify who had made a particular comment and a question mark is used to show that the speaker is unknown.

So much was spoken about over the four months we met and the things that I feel are significant or interesting may not be those which the students would have chosen to communicate about themselves. In hindsight, I would have liked to have given the girls the

opportunity to write their own introductions or at least to edit my attempts, an opportunity of the kind that Lather and Smithies (1997) gave to the women who participated in their research. The girls did choose their own pseudonyms.

I have used the present tense in describing the girls' lives since the information was given to me at the time of the interviews. At the time of writing these introductions, the girls have left school and some of the details of their lives are likely to have changed.

Group 1

This group of three was not based on friendship as some of the others were and the girls, while known to each other, said they had rarely spoken prior to the interview process. This group had a hundred percent attendance and the girls became more confident about expressing their ideas despite the huge differences in their backgrounds.

Juliet: Juliet was the facilitator for this group, she organised the oral history project, the speaker from the YWCA and attended the YWCA hui. During the course of the interviews she also had her photo in the paper as one of the teenagers at a suburban party that had to be broken up by the police. Juliet lives with her younger sister and her mother who works as a temporary secretary and has income support from the government from time to time. Juliet's father does not live with her and she described him as having worked in forestry earlier in his life. She also has an older brother. Juliet is a Pakeha student and her mother's parents were from Europe. She is taking five Bursary subjects and is involved in a wide range of extra curricular activities including dragon boating, theatre, peer tutoring, music and she is a school prefect. She also goes to street jazz classes. Juliet works as a cleaner in an office downtown for three hours every two weeks and does some baby sitting. When she leaves school she would like to do a Bachelor of Science degree and possibly to work with animals.

Danielle: lives with her brother and her parents. Her older sister is doing a Bachelor of Arts degree. Danielle's mother came to New Zealand from China with her parents when she was three and Danielle describes herself as a Chinese New Zealander. Danielle's mother went to university and now works as a secretary; her father is a skilled trades person. Danielle is taking five Bursary subjects and would like to study family law when she leaves school. She works as a checkout operator at a supermarket fifteen hours a week and does some housework at home. She is involved in peer tutoring, is a buddy for special needs students, does library duty and is involved in Interact (a Rotary service organisation).

Anju: lives with her brother, her grandparents and her aunty and uncle and her two cousins who stay in the weekends. Her mother works in the hospital laundry and her father works in their family dairy from seven in the morning until nine at night. Anju's parents were brought up in India and she describes herself as Indian and Hindu. Anju does about fifteen hours of unpaid work per week; baby sitting, helping in the dairy, cleaning and cooking and helping at cultural festivals. At school she is involved in Interact, SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving), peer tutoring, library duty and she is the leader of the school's Indian group. She is currently taking a Link course at Polytechnic and would like to go full time next year to do a secretarial course. She is taking five Higher School Certificate subjects.

Group 2

Like Group 1, this group of six girls had almost one hundred percent attendance with only one absence. They all participated in the oral history project which was organised by Michelle who was also the group facilitator. The girls came together because they had the same study break and most were not close friends. As these introductions highlight, the girls represent significant diversity in terms of their family backgrounds, ethnicity and aspirations.

Michelle: lives with her parents and her twenty six year old brother. She has one other brother and two half brothers in her family. Her father came from Rarotonga when he was a teenager. He is now retired but worked as a head orderly at the hospital for twenty six years. Michelle's mother is a hospital laundry worker. Michelle describes herself as half Cook Islands, part Maori and part Pakeha. Michelle is taking five Bursary subjects and at the time of the interviews she had 'no idea' what she wanted to do the following year. She spends about three hours a week doing housework. At school she is involved in the Young Enterprise Scheme, peer tutoring and she is a prefect.

Sandy: lives with her parents. Her older sister is a doctor and her brother is in his final year of university. Her father is a self-employed trades person but he was a qualified civil engineer in Vietnam and her mother was a teacher in Vietnam but here she works at the library. Sandy came to NZ when she was a year old. She is taking five Bursary subjects and thinks she will probably go to university next year. Sandy works six hours per week at Burger King and does about three hours housework. She is involved in peer tutoring, Interact, SADD and Young Enterprise.

Gwen: lives with her parents, her sister, two brothers, her sister in law, brother in law and her nephew. She did not give any information about her parents' employment or background. Gwen came to New Zealand from Vietnam when she was four and her family is friendly with Sandy's family, although the girls said they are not friends. Gwen is taking five Bursary subjects and would like a career in photography. Gwen works as a waiter for ten to twelve hours per week and at school she is involved in Young Enterprise, SADD and Interact.

As I read through the transcripts to check the comments that Gwen made, I realised with some concern that she was virtually silent for most of the interviews. The longest comment she made was about twenty words and she said nothing about her family and little about her life or her opinions. I am dismayed at my apparent collusion with her silence. It is as if she has learned to be 'invisible'. While I would argue that it is important to respect her privacy and not to pressure her to contribute, I am concerned at my lack of direct and follow-up questions to her. Yet, she continued to come to the meetings and commented that she had found them interesting.

Frances: lives with her parents and her sister and brother. Both her parents work as counsellors in residential care programmes and because of their work the family have moved around a lot. Frances went to four different schools between the ages of five and eleven. She began her secondary education at a girls' school in another city and moved to Girls' College in her Form Six (Grade 11) year.

Frances works approximately sixteen hours per week as a checkout operator and at school she is involved in Young Enterprise, peer tutoring, dragon boat racing, SADD, Interact and she is the chairperson of the school council. She also spends time at the gym. She is taking five Bursary subjects. If she, "can't think of anything else" she will be a teacher.

May: is Maori (Iwi affiliations given but omitted here) and lives with her parents and her sister. Her mother works at a Kohanga Reo[5] and her father is a prison officer. May does not have a paid job but she works as volunteer at the Kohanga Reo in the school holidays. At the time of the interview she was looking for a paid job to, "Help pay my school fees, just to give my parents a break."

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[5] Kohanga Reo are early childhood centers operated by Maori, the purpose of which are to provide educational contexts which are 'culturally appropriate' for Maori students.

At school she is involved in SADD, Interact, Stage Challenge, the Samoan group and she is a third form 'buddy'. May is taking Bursary English and four higher school certificate subjects. She would like to go to Polytechnic to study tourism, photography or nannying.

Kellie: lives with her parents, brother and sister. She describes her ethnic background as, "My grandfather and grandmother are Irish. My father was born here, and my Mum was Pitcairn. Her Mum was Danish and her Dad was American" (Interview 2, p. 10).

Kellie's father works as a financial adviser and her mother is a school secretary. Kellie works about thirteen hours a week at a fast food restaurant and she is involved in a large number of activities both in and outside of school. Many of these involve music and drama and she often takes a leadership role in performance groups, directing and producing. She is also a prefect, secretary of the school council, is involved in Young Enterprise, SADD, Interact and she is a Girl Guide leader. Kellie estimates she spends about twenty five hours each week on these activities.

Kellie is doing five Bursary subjects and plans to go to university next year to study science or criminology.

Group 3

While this group of six girls began with some degree of diversity, over time, the four Pakeha girls who were friends were the most regular attenders. Jane, the facilitator, was not friends with the other girls and she attended only two of the five focus group interviews. Miriama attended only the first interview and then chose to withdraw. She was the only Pacific Island girl in the group and her phone conversation with me indicated that she did not feel safe about sharing her thoughts: "they can't relate to what I'm going through". Miriama chose not to continue with the group interviews. However, she did fill in the written questionnaire. I have named her Miriama as she did not have the chance to choose her own nickname.

The four girls who made up the core of the group were all Pakeha and were from middle class backgrounds. They were confident and articulate with each other and often discussed friends and experiences they had in common. I think this closeness also made it difficult for Jane and may have contributed to her limited attendance.

Jane: is Pakeha although, "My Mum's adopted so I think there could be a bit of Chinese on that side of the family". She lives with her parents, sister and brother. Her father has his own skilled trade business and her mother is a teaching assistant. Jane also works about

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twenty hours a week as a 'senior experienced service waitress' at a restaurant and she helps with baby sitting for the neighbours and cooking and housework in the family home.

She is taking five subjects for Higher School Certificate and is Deputy House Captain, Deputy Form Captain, a third form buddy, a school representative for dances and she is involved in SADD and Interact.

Miriama: is Samoan and lives with her extended family including her grandfather, uncle, nephew, mother and brothers. Her father does not live with them. Her mother cleans houses once a week and Miriama babysits five to seven hours each week for which she is paid. She also helps with the housework and cooking and cares for children in the family. Miriama is involved in SADD, Stage Challenge and a Pacific Island culture group. She is taking five Higher School Certificate subjects.

Yogi: lives with her parents, her two brothers and her sister. Her mother is English and Yogi was born in England, moving to New Zealand when she was ten. Yogi's mother is a dentist and her father is a university lecturer. Yogi had a part time waiting job over the Christmas holidays and she looks after her younger brothers and does some cooking and cleaning. She is involved in a large number of activities in and outside of school including cricket coach and captain, soccer, school orchestra, two chamber groups, rock band, school productions, peer tutoring, youth orchestra and the church youth group. This takes about twenty hours each week. Yogi is taking six Bursary subjects, including Japanese by correspondence.

Doris: describes herself as 'New Zealand European'. She lives with her parents and brother. Doris's mother is a lecturer at polytechnic and her father is a head technician at polytechnic. Doris gets paid for typing assignments for university students for about five hours a week. At school she is involved in a number of activities, Stage Challenge, Shakespeare festival, house plays, she is the drama and speech prefect, plays cricket and badminton and is involved in SADD, School Council and Interact. Outside of school she helps with the City Opera productions, takes Judo and is in the youth drama festival.

George: lives with her parents and sister. Her mother is a skin care consultant and her father an accountant and George works three hours a week at an ''old people's home'. At school she is in two choirs, is a prefect and library prefect, a third form buddy for special needs students and a School Council representative. She is involved in SADD, Interact, Young Enterprise and a number of drama productions. Outside of school she is in Girls' Brigade,

youth group and takes ballet, jazz, tap and singing lessons. George is taking five Bursary subjects.

Yoko: lives with her mother, her brother and her mother's boyfriend and her stepsister. Yoko's mother is a senior computer training consultant and her mother's boyfriend is a senior computer programmer. Yoko spends about ten hours a week looking after her nine year old brother after school and she organises SADD and is on the Student Council. She is taking four Bursary subjects and Higher School Certificate Legal Studies.

Yoko moved to Girls' College half way through her fifth form (Grade 10) year from a girls' college in the South Island.

Group 4

The four girls in this group were all from different ethnic backgrounds and three of them had moved to New Zealand with their families. The girls were friendly with each other and it seemed that their friendships strengthened over the course of the interviews as they came to know each other more and to share their involvement in the research. I found some of these discussions the most intriguing of all the interviews as they gave me some understanding of these 'other' lives and the very different experiences of these girls compared to my own at their age. At times I felt like a voyeur, looking in at their lives or at least at those aspects which they chose to share with me. This 'outsider' perspective was also shared by the girls who spoke across their differences, listening and comparing against their own lives.

Swat: Comment at the end of written questionnaire.

"I learned a lot from people [in] my group about their culture and what they do."

Swat: is Taiwanese and moved to New Zealand when she was nine. Her parents came ahead of the children, who stayed on with their grandparents in Taiwan. Swat had lived with her grandparents since she was a baby as her parents had gone to work in Singapore before coming to New Zealand.

Swat now lives with her parents and her five sisters. Her mother has her own retail business and her father is a self employed trades person. Swat's parents work long hours, often six days a week, and as the eldest, Swat cooks every week night and takes responsibility for the household while her parents are working. At the time of the interview, her grandmother

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had come from Taiwan to help as her mother was very busy. At school she is involved in peer tutoring, is a member of the school orchestra, plays the flute and is a librarian. She also plays basketball at the Chinese Sport Cultural Centre. She is taking five Bursary subjects and would like a career in commerce.

Tina: is Indian and lives with her mother who was born in India, her New Zealand-born father and her two older brothers. Her mother works in a laundry and her father is a driver. Tina works at a supermarket nine to fifteen hours a week and helps with child minding, house cleaning and cooking. At school she is involved in peer tutoring, SADD, Interact and she is a librarian. She is taking a mixture of Higher School Certificate and sixth form subjects and she wants to go to polytechnic the following year and thinks she will work as a secretary.

Anjini: is a Fijian Indian student who lives with her parents and her younger sister. She came to New Zealand from Fiji in the middle of her form three (Grade 9) year, seven years after her parents. Her father is self-employed as a trades person and taxi driver and her mother works as a retail assistant at the supermarket where Anjini also works for twenty six hours each week. Anjini also spends ten hours a week baby sitting her sister's baby and five hours on housework each week. At school she is involved in peer tutoring, SADD, Interact and she is a librarian. She also helps her father preparing functions at the Indian temple. She is taking five Bursary subjects. Anjini would like to go to Otago university to become a physiotherapist.

Farzela: moved to New Zealand in the middle of her form four (Grade 10) year. She is originally from Iran and lives with her father who is a skilled trades person and her sister and brother. Farzela describes herself as Muslim and she speaks two languages from Iran, as well as English. Her mother lives in Iran. Farzela does not have a paid job but she cleans the house and does some cooking. At school she is involved in the choir, SADD, peer tutoring and she is a librarian. Outside of school she is learning two musical instruments, performs as a singer, takes art classes and is in the Sea Cadets as well as playing some sports. She is taking five Higher School Certificate Subjects and when she leaves school she would like to study computer science at university, but she may also study medicine. Farzela would also like to be a singer in her home (or first) languages.

Group 5

This group of five girls were from a range of ethnic backgrounds. They had one hundred percent attendance. Although they were not all friends, they seemed to be open about

their views and there was a lot of discussion between the members of the group about their different opinions and experiences.

Waima: was the group facilitator. She lives with her mother, her brother and sister, her mother's partner and his son. Waima describes herself as European although her grandmother is Maori and her father's side of the family is, "all Maori". Waima's mother owns her own retail business and her mother's partner is also self-employed as a trades person. Waima does two hours of housework each week and she does not have a paid job. At school she is involved in peer tutoring, SADD, Interact, Dragon Boating, Stage Challenge and she is the World Vision organiser.

Waima is taking five Bursary subjects and she would like to go to university to do a degree in social work.

Tupac: is Tongan and lives with her four sisters and her mother. Tupac's mother works as a hotel cleaner and she is doing a hospitality course at polytechnic at night. As Tupac has not heard from her father in a long time, she is not sure where he works, although he studied law at university. Tupac works as a housekeeper at a hotel for three to eight hours a week and she has a cleaning job at the school for an hour and a half each day and she helps out with baby sitting.

At school she is in three choirs, the Samoan group, on the school leaving committee, is a third form buddy and she is a prefect. She is also involved in church and youth group outside of school. Tupac is taking five Bursary subjects and she is not sure what she wants to do when she leaves school although she would like to continue with her singing.

Diana: was born in England and moved to New Zealand when she was seven and she lives with her parents. Her parents were born in Dubai and she describes herself as Indian. Her mother works part time as a cleaner and her father is a skilled trades person. The family also owns a dairy that they live behind and Diana helps out when needed. Diana works eight hours per week as a checkout operator and she also does about fifteen hours of unpaid cooking and housework at home. At school she is involved in SADD, Interact, the Indian group and she is a librarian and Form Captain. She is taking five Bursary subjects and would like to be a pharmacist.

Alfreda: lives with her parents and five brothers and sisters. She is Maori (iwi affiliations given but omitted here). Her mother is an assistant supervisor at an early child care

centre and her father is a process worker. Alfreda works at a child care centre three hours a week.

At school Alfreda is a prefect, she is in three choirs, plays badminton, soccer and cricket and is in the Dragon Boat team. She also is involved in the school production, SADD, Interact, and is a peer tutor and form three buddy. Alfreda is taking five Bursary subjects, including Maori language by correspondence. She would like to be a bilingual (Maori/English) primary school teacher.

Mandy: lives with her mother and father. Mandy was born in North Africa, then the family moved to India for ten years, then to Australia and she came to New Zealand in her form five (Grade 10) year. She describes herself as Indian. Her mother is a doctor and her father is an engineer. Mandy works for five hours a week doing paid data entry and she helps with the housework at home. At school she is involved in peer tutoring, library duty and she is a Special Needs Unit buddy. She also does Taekwon-do once a week. She is taking five Bursary subjects and would like to study medicine.

Summary

In total, 24 girls took part in the interview process and research. Three of the girls' mothers were parenting alone, as was Farzela's father. Two girls live in 'blended families' with their mother's partners. While most of the girls live with their parents and siblings, four of the girls also share their homes with other relatives and extended family is important to many of their families while both parents are in full time employment.

Twelve of the girls' parents and eight of the girls were born outside of New Zealand and four of the girls had arrived at Girls' College having begun their secondary education at another school. As I described in the previous chapter, the girls were from at least eight ethnic groups with some of the girls identifying with more than one ethnic group.

All of the girls' parents and caregivers are in paid work, except for Michelle's father who is self-employed. Most of the girls' parents are employed in skilled trades or service work. Seven of the girls' mothers were working as cleaners, laundry workers or in a supermarket, another ten were in clerical, retail and educational work and four were professionals. Of the fathers and male caregivers, five were professionals, nine were working in skilled trades and five were in semi-skilled and 'blue collar' work. Only two of the fathers were middle class, white collar workers.

Seventeen of the girls also had part time paid jobs. The average hours worked per week was ten, with Anjini working the most doing twenty six hours per week as a checkout operator. Their jobs included cleaning, waiting, baby sitting, typing and check out operators. For some of the girls, their paid work did not provide discretionary income. The money they earned made a vital contribution to the family finances and paid for clothing and other expenses. This was especially so for Juliet and Tupac who do not have male caregivers in their households but also for May who was aware of the need to 'help her parents out'.

Eighteen of the girls were taking a full Bursary course and six of the girls were taking Higher School Certificate. All of the girls were 'successful' in that they had all completed five years of secondary schooling and were likely to leave school with some form of school qualification. Furthermore, their involvement in extra-curricular school activities meant they were achieving in a range of areas and making a vital contribution to the life of the school. Lucey (1996) makes the point that educational researchers have tended to ignore students who are doing well at school, focussing instead on those who are perceived to have 'failed':

"In problem-centered youth research, the assumption remains intact that those who are achieving well at school, staying on at school and going on to higher education, do not need to be explained. There is nothing more to say about them, they simply 'are', while the conviction that they are 'the norm' renders them invisible" (p. 1).

Lucey points out that since middle class girls are most likely to be perceived as succeeding at school, their experiences are the most likely to have been ignored. However, the point also applies to working class girls where the emphasis has been on 'failure' rather than on those who do succeed.

When the information on paid employment is considered along with the high number of extra-curricular and family and community responsibilities the girls are involved in and their academic course work, their willingness to participate in my research seems all the more remarkable. These young women are the next generation of 'super women' who negotiate a range of often conflicting demands on a daily basis. They are students pursuing academic work, daughters and family members, friends and lovers, employees and participants and leaders in their school and wider community. The term 'school girl' seems woefully inadequate as a description of these young women.

In the following chapter I begin my analysis of the interview data by considering the girls' accounts of how they came to be at Girls' College.

CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVES OF 'CHOICE': HOW DID THE GIRLS COME TO BE AT GIRLS' COLLEGE?

As discussed in the first chapter, the introduction of school choice policies in New Zealand was based on several key assumptions about how individuals would behave in the education market. In the neo-liberal view, school choice is the outcome of a rational process whereby individuals are free to exercise choice in the pursuit of self-interest, expressed as the desire for upward mobility. Given the relationship between educational achievement and labour market participation, it is further assumed that parents will seek to send their children to the schools that achieve the best results. As well as these assumptions about human motivation and behaviour, school choice accounts typically assume that it is parents who do the choosing and there is a silence about students' perspectives, both from proponents of choice and in school choice research.

In this chapter I explore the abstracted assumptions on which school choice policies are based by examining the lived reality of the education market and the choice of a particular school—Girls' College—by a group of girls. I present extracts from the focus group interviews in which senior students discussed the reasons why and how they came to be at Girls' College. Why were they at this school and not at one of the other schools which were, in theory, available to them in the city? Did they want to come to Girls' College? What role did they take in the process of choosing a school and how much influence did they have over the decision? As the interview extracts will show, school choice is the outcome of the negotiation of a complex interplay of discourses of social class, ethnicity and gender as well as the structural constraints which operate in the education market.

As well as exploring the reasons the girls gave for their choice of school, I am also interested in the discourse of choice itself. That is, I consider how the girls are positioned within their choice accounts either as rational and autonomous choice makers and/or as passive recipients of the choices that are made for them.

The following extracts do not include all of the girls' descriptions of how they came to be in the school, but they include girls from a range of backgrounds and experiences. All of the extracts are from the first focus group interviews which began with discussion of the girls' backgrounds and how they had come to be in the school. In Chapter 6, I draw from all of the focus group interviews and broaden the focus of my inquiry to explore the girls' subsequent schooling experiences as Girls' College students.

Girls Who 'Choose'

According to neo-liberals, in the education market, 'rational' choosers are those who choose the most 'successful' schools (Maddaus, 1990). In this city, Girls' High, with an (apparently) high rate of achievement in external exams, was the 'first choice' for six of the girls, or their parents. Kellie said she had enrolled for four schools and as a white middle class student, she and her parents seemed to have a detailed 'insider' knowledge about each of the schools, the application procedures and the confidence and resources to actively engage in the choice process:

> Kellie: Well, I enrolled for Victoria College [a private girls' school] and Girls' High and City High and Girls' College. You don't really need an application form because you can, like, you didn't have to worry in the middle of the year about the application form to Girls' College. Whereas you had to apply for Victoria College and Girls' High. Girls' High declined me cause I'm not in their zone. Um, City High, my parents know quite a few teachers there and they think its a wonderful school and the teachers really like working there and though there are some negative stories about it they don't find that a problem. But, I have a twin brother and we went all around the guys schools as well and he got turned down by Boys' High cause we're not in zone and he wouldn't fit into Boys' College and so that only left City High and he got first choice for City High. Because there wasn't that much option for him whereas there was more option for me. So he got City High, so he goes to City High. [Group 2, Interview 1, p.5]

Kellie and her parents adopted a 'consumer' approach to school choice, shopping around for the school which best suited their needs. Gewirtz et al. (1995) describe families like Kellie's as 'privileged/skilled choosers' who:

> "are inclined to a consumerist approach to choice of school, that is, the idea and worth of having a choice between schools is valued and there is a concern to examine what is on offer and seek out 'the best'. These choosers demonstrate a marked capacity to engage with and utilize the possibilities of choice" (p. 182).

Although Gewirtz et al. drew this conclusion from their research on *parental* choice of school, it is clear that there are also students, like Kellie, who conceptualise school choice in this way. Kellie and her parents assessed the relative merits of each school, a process in which Kellie seemed to have been an active participant in and it appears that the choice of Girls' College was finally made by her, albeit with her parents' approval. In some ways, the choice process Kellie outlined appears to conform closely to that envisaged by neo-liberals where

informed choosers undertake a rational cost/benefit analysis of the available schools (Lauder et al., 1997; Picot et al., 1988; The Treasury, 1987).

This discourse of rationality positions Kellie as an autonomous individual who is free to make choices in the education market place. In her description of her consideration of the available schools, she did not mention the single sex character of Girls' High or Girls' College, and gendered considerations were apparently of no account in her, or her parents', deliberations. Although Kellie had a twin brother, there was no suggestion that certain schools were considered more suitable for either of them because of their gender. Rather, the emphasis was on the suitability of schools in relation to their individual needs.

However, like each of the six girls who applied to Girls' High, Kellie was not accepted, a point that highlights the ways in which choices are made within the constraints created by the exercise of competition. As explained in Chapter 3, Girls' High is able to operate an enrolment scheme as it is over subscribed. This means the school has considerable control over its student intake and the fact that it rejected a capable student like Kellie is an indication of the school's success. As it already has a high SES student composition and a high percentage of Pakeha students, it can afford to reject students like Kellie who are likely to achieve well in external exams. In contrast, Girls' College must accept all students who apply but students like Kellie are considered a valuable asset by the school for the high achievement they bring. As we shall see in the following chapter, these girls are not unaware of their 'value' to the school.

Kellie's choice of Girls' College might be seen as a compromise made in response to the structural limitations of the market and the dynamics within her family. Although Girls' College might be considered her second choice, Kellie commented later in the interview that she was happy to be at the school as her involvement in music meant she had already met some of the teachers and students at Girls' College.

Kellie: But when it came down, Girls' College seemed the closest, easiest, and I was already part of the school. [Group 2, Interview 1, p. 6]

Kellie did not see her choice of Girls' College as 'second best' and she gave an account of choice which emphasised her agency in the choice process, rather than the constraints within which her choice was made.

Yoko, who was also from a middle class Pakeha background, moved to Green City half way through her secondary schooling. Yoko's mother researched the available schools prior to their arrival in the city.

> Yoko: My Mum recently moved from [the South] to Green City, and had an older daughter, older than me. She'd been to school here, and she sort of learned all the schools in the area. We wrote to City High, Girls' High, and here [Girls' College], and got sent all the stuff, enrolment forms and everything. [Group 3, Interview 1, p. 3]

Unlike all of the other girls in the study, Yoko was in zone for Girls' High and wanted to go there, although because of her late arrival, her application was declined. Their second choice was Girls' College as Yoko's mother had decided she wanted a single sex school.

> Yoko: Besides, she'd read a lot, and she decided that I'd learn better in a single sex school. [Group 3, Interview 1, p. 3]

A single sex school was valued by Yoko's mother since it was seen as what Lee and Marks (1992) term an 'opportunity structure'. That is, as a context where academic success could be promoted for girls, away from boys. Although Yoko described her mother's desire to have her attend a single sex school, the choice of Girls' College seemed to be a mutually agreed compromise when their application was declined at Girls' High. For Kellie and Yoko, the choice process was taken seriously and they made sure that they had as much information as possible from both formal and informal sources.

Mandy, an Indian student from a middle class background who moved to New Zealand in Year 10 (Form Five), applied to Girls' High and she also was not accepted. However, while Kellie described the process of school choice as one in which she was able to exercise a high degree of choice, Mandy's account was less autonomous and she began by describing what her father wanted.

> Mandy: Well, I guess Dad got a job here. We moved up here and—well, Dad was actually quite keen on me going to Girls' High, 'cause through all the family friends we have, a lot of their daughters go to Girls' High. Since it's—Dad had heard that it is a very good academic school. And my parents, like, were quite keen on me being good at the school. It is nearly all they care about! So, they thought that would be a really good school to go to. But then, we went there, and—first we came to Miss Scott, and after that we went to the principal—

Sue: This is at Girls High?

Mandy: No, I mean, here. And we went to the principal at Girls' High.

Sue: Was that Mrs Wilson back then?

Mandy: I wouldn't have a clue!

Sue: It must have been, yeah.

Mandy: But we were out of the zone. So—what happened then? Yeah, we came and got told that they can't take me. Because it's quite over-populated. And Dad pressed on and pressed on. And I said 'no I don't want to go to Girls' High any more. I just want to go to Girls' College', cause it's much easier for me. The way that Miss Scott came and talked to me. I found that really cool actually! So I came here.

Sue: What did you notice about the way she talked to you?

Mandy: She actually wanted to see how I did at my other school. The principal at Girls' High, she didn't bother or anything. She just said 'No, I can't take you', and that was it. But like, Miss Scott actually came and sat and talked to us, and stuff. And like, she actually came and said, 'What are you going to take?'. She actually took some interest in what I was doing at that time, and I found that really good. So, I came here. [Group 5, Interview 1, p.6]

Mandy's family had friends who were already attending Girls' College, a network which gave her parents information about the local school hierarchy of 'desirability'. For Mandy's father, academic success was important and Girls' High was seen as being able to offer that. However, because of their late enrolment, and as Mandy lived out of zone for the school, she was not accepted. At that point Mandy pressed to have her preference considered and she was keen to attend Girls' College because of the consideration and attention that was paid to her by one of the senior teachers who interviewed her. At Girls' High the principal took no interest in her, a fact that made a significant impression on Mandy and she chose a schooling context where she felt welcome and valued.

I might also read Mandy's decision to value the social context of Girls' College as a strategy that enabled her to accommodate her rejection at Girls' High and her relative powerlessness in the choice process. Rather than 'making a fuss' about not being accepted at Girls' High as her father wanted to do, Mandy modified her desires to suit the choice that was

available to her. She accepted her rejection at Girls' High and rather than complaining, she 'made do' with what was available.

The fact that none of the six girls who applied to Girls' High were accepted presents a challenge to the neo-liberal account in which a 'level playing field' is assumed to operate, one in which all are free to compete on equal terms in the pursuit of educational goods, and in which all of the clients of educational services are equally free to choose from a range of 'providers'. In practice, some 'elite' state schools have been able to retain their zones and therefore can actively exclude students. When the girls were denied access to Girls' High, other factors then assumed significance in their choice of Girls' College. For Kellie it was because she was already involved in musical activities at the school and for Mandy the attitude of the staff was important. While these may seem less than rigorous reasons in educational terms, as the interviews show, 'intangibles' such as atmosphere and 'belonging' are often mentioned by the girls as significant in their choices. David et al. (1994) note that good music facilities and friendly teachers were important considerations in school choice for the girls in their study who were mainly from middle class backgrounds, a finding which concurs with the reasons mentioned by Kellie and Mandy.

Yogi, a Pakeha middle class student, also mentioned the atmosphere of the school as being a significant reason for her choice of school, a factor, which for her, took priority over purely 'academic concerns'.

Yogi: I went to Bayview primary, too. And for me it was pretty much Girls' College or Girls' High. I don't think I really thought about Saints, 'cause it was a Catholic school, and I'm not Catholic. And City High, it was more that it didn't have a very good reputation as a good school, and I'm pretty much an academic person; rather than the fact that it is a co-ed. I was quite interested in going to Girls' High cause I didn't have that many friends at Primary School, and I had a couple of other friends who were going there. I went to the open night of Girls' High, and I went to the open night of this school, and Girls' College just struck me as having a much more friendly environment. Oh, and my sister went here before me as well.

Sue: Now, saying that you have quite a strong academic emphasis—cause that's a reason that quite a lot of girls would chose Girls' High You know, that's a more academic school.

Yogi: Yeah, but it was really the open night that changed it for me, cause Girls' College had a much better environment, atmosphere. It was—And I didn't just want to be an academic. I wanted to have some fun as well!

Sue: What about the multicultural nature of the school? Was that a plus or minus, or something you took into account?

Yogi: It was definitely a plus, cause it made the atmosphere much more friendly, much brighter and everyone was really loud and stuff.

Sue: Everyone was really loud?

Yogi: Well, I don't know, like, everyone was walking around singing and stuff. *(Others respond)* Yeah, and it was really musical, so—I'm musical as well, and Girls' College was really musical, so … [Group 3, Interview 1, p.4]

From Yogi's comments, it seems that the decision as to which school she went to was left up to her and she did not mention her parents in her account. Although her sister had been to Girls' College, she said that she was not bound by family dynamics or history and was 'free' to make her own choice. Yogi considered Girls' High to the extent of attending the open night but City High was not an option as it, "didn't have a very good reputation" and she didn't consider it to be a good academic context. The single sex character of Girls' College was apparently not an important consideration and she argued that her rejection of City High was on the basis of its reputation, rather than because it was coeducational.

However, despite her description of herself as an 'academic person' she then described how she, "wanted to have some fun as well", and Girls' College with its friendly environment seemed to be able to offer this. Rather than valuing the school for academic reasons, Yogi seemed confident in her own ability to succeed academically and looked for a schooling context which would provide the kind of social and cultural environment she wanted. Yogi's account emphasised her apparent autonomy as evidenced by the fact that she felt free to choose from any of the available schools and even to reject Girls' High to the extent of not applying for it, a school which was considered highly desirable by other middle class girls.

While she rejected City High because it was not academic enough, she chose Girls' College because it was more 'fun'. The multicultural mix of the school might be read as giving Yogi access to alternative subjectivities or 'ways to do being a girl' (Jones, 1993). She described the atmosphere as being loud and bright, ways of being that are typically eschewed in 'elite' schools where more traditional discourses of femininity are reproduced (Proweiler, 1998; Lee & Marks, 1993; Connell et al., 1982). Like Kellie, Yogi also mentioned the musical atmosphere of the school as being important to her and it is an indication of the reputation for

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promoting musical ability which the school had, a reputation which enhanced the school's desirability to some middle class girls.

Yogi's confidence in her academic ability freed her to choose a school for apparently 'non-academic' reasons, and the cultural mix had a kind of 'novelty value' for her. Her rejection of Girls' High was not a rejection of academic success, but an indication of the confidence she had in her ability to succeed academically. Girls' College might be seen as a risk she could afford to take.

It is also worth noting that none of these middle class girls mentioned the single sex character of Girls' High or Girls' College as being significant in their choice of school when they described why they had come to Girls' College. I read this silence about gendered considerations, not as an indication that they were not significant, but as a silence that must be maintained if the girls were to think of themselves as autonomous individuals who had the freedom to exercise choice, unconstrained by their gender.

Girls Whose 'Choice' was Made for Them

While Yoko had the confidence to reject Girls' High in favour of a context she perceived to be less academic, Juliet's mother saw Girls' High as giving her daughter access to the kind of middle class cultural capital and academic success that Yogi took for granted.

> Juliet: I think I wanted to go to City High cause there were guys there, of course. But most of my friends were coming here. Mum didn't want me to go—at this stage Dad wasn't living with us, so it was just me and my Mum. She wanted me to come to Girls' College because, single sex girls' school. It would stop me having, um, stop me mixing with boys so I wouldn't be distracted from my school work. So she, I guess she just wanted me to do really well at school so she chose this one and cause I couldn't get into Girls' High cause I was out of the zone.
>
> Sue: Why?
>
> Juliet: I s'pose she just liked that strictness, that restriction... I don't know. Girls' High just seemed more disciplined and also because my brother went to Boys' College which is Girls' High brother school and I guess it just has the reputation of having better teachers, nicer people. I don't think she likes that multicultural sort of atmosphere either. She likes me mixing with 'good people'.

Sue: And was that a situation that caused conflict between you and your mother? I mean you were saying one thing and she was saying another, or did you accept that was what she wanted?

Juliet: I guess back then I just accepted it. I just thought... Yeah also cause my friend... I'm just remembering, I'm just trying to think if I wanted to go to Girls High or not. I don't think I wanted to go to Girls, I think I was happy with Girls' College cause my best friend Jennie was going here too.

Sue: Is she still your best friend?

Juliet: Oh Yeah, I don't have best friends but she's a really close friend cause we've known each other since we were about three or four.

Sue: Oh so she did come here and she stayed.

Juliet: Yeah, but she was thinking of going to City High, that's why I was thinking of going to High. So she came here and I was happy coming here in the end.

Sue: What happened when you didn't get accepted for Girls' High? Do you remember your mother being angry or disappointed or...?

Juliet: No, she doesn't really show emotions so I don't know. And then she tried to get me in there in the fourth form too, but I didn't get accepted again.

Sue: OK, so she was obviously pretty clear that was what she wanted?

Juliet: Yeah.

Sue: Would you say that Girls' College was your first choice at the time?

Juliet: No [Group 1, Interview 1, p.1]

Juliet's mother's first choice was Girls' High as she didn't like the, "multi-cultural sort of atmosphere" at Girls' College. She was keen to have Juliet mix with 'good people'. Girls' High, with a predominantly white, middle class population was seen to be able to provide that. Her strong desire to have Juliet attend the school was evidenced by the fact that she reapplied the following year and her desire might be understood in relation to her ethnicity and social class background. As a working class Pakeha woman, Girls' High offered access to the middle class Pakeha 'cultural capital' that she perceived was necessary for success.

However, Juliet's mother's 'outsider status', while creating a desire to gain access for her daughter to an 'elite' school, also worked against her gaining entry. In the education market, the 'most desirable' schools can select the 'most desirable' students through the

operation of enrolment schemes (Whitty et al., 1998; Ball & Gewirtz, 1997; Lauder et al., 1995). Ironically, it is their rejection of working class girls like Juliet which fuels the desirability of these schools. Unlike Kellie, Mandy and Yogi, as a working class student, Juliet cannot take her achievement for granted and Juliet's mother was not happy for her to attend Girls' College.

Gewirtz et al. (1995) describe parents like Juliet's mother as 'semi-skilled choosers' who tend to be from working class backgrounds.

"Semi-skilled choosers are strongly inclined to engage with the market, but they do not have the appropriate skills to exploit it to maximise their children's advantage" (p. 182).

In neo-liberal terms, desirability is determined by merit so that the most desirable schools are those which are perceived to be the most successful educationally. The middle class girls' accounts uphold this view of desirability being linked to academic success. However, as Juliet's comments indicate, the social class and ethnic mix of a school is a powerful determinant as to where a school is located within the local hierarchy of desirability. Juliet's comments break the silence about the relationship between school mix and 'desirability' that is maintained by the middle class girls. For Juliet's mother, success is a cultural as well as an educational achievement.

Her desire for Juliet to attend a single sex school also needs to be understood in terms of femininity. Juliet's mother wanted her to attend a single sex school to stop Juliet mixing with boys and being 'distracted' from her school work. In this way, a single sex school was seen to offer protection from the dangers of heterosexual desire, a kind of safety zone where engagement in the practices of heterosexual desire could be delayed (Watson, 1997; Ball & Gewirtz, 1997). Heterosexual desire was seen as a threat to academic success. However, Girls' College was 'second best' for Juliet's mother since, while it met her desire for a single sex context, it could not offer access to the white, middle class culture of femininity at Girls' High.

Much of Juliet's choice account is taken up with the description of her mother's preferences and views on the available schools and her own views are constructed as opposed to her mother's. While Juliet's mother wanted her to attend an elite single sex school, Juliet initially wanted to attend City High because it was a coeducational school and because her best friend was thinking of going there. However, when she was not accepted to Girls' High and her friend 'ended up coming' to Girls' College, Juliet was also happy to do the same. Rather

than positioning herself as an autonomous individual who was free to exercise choice, Juliet's account highlights both her and her mothers' relative powerlessness. As a working class woman and single parent, Juliet's mother lacked the material and cultural resources to give Juliet access to an elite school. However, her status as parent gives her the right to make choices on behalf of Juliet. Juliet's position as 'girl' is also contradictory. On the one hand, she is positioned as needing to be protected from the dangers of heterosexual desire, or, in one sense, from herself. The discourse of sexuality here is one of risk and danger. On the other hand, the discourse of 'girlhood' positions Juliet as a child who needs to obey the wishes of her mother.

Friendship

Within this nexus of constraint, Juliet's friendship with Jennie provided a kind of haven where she could escape from and/or make palatable her mother's desires for her. Juliet was happy to go to Girls' College because Jennie was going there, and their friendship compensated for her initial desire to attend a coeducational school. In her ethnography of girls' friendship, Hey (1997) examines the importance of friendship in girls' lives at school. She points out that girls' friendships:

> "promised and frequently provided immediate rewards of prestige and popularity (company, fun, support, protection, advice, solidarity), tokens which could not be conferred by school. The 'best friend system'... 'hangs heavily here' and as one of the main forms of friendship it offered modes of gratification against which the adult world of school could never hope to compete" (p. 127).

Girls' friendships, while marginalised in dominant accounts of school choice which emphasise 'educational' concerns, were an important consideration for many of the girls, a finding also supported by David et al. (1994). While Juliet foregrounded her friendship with Jennie as a key reason for her willingness to go to Girls' College, Kellie, Mandy and Yogi also described social factors as being significant in their reasons for choosing Girls' College.

Like Juliet, Jane also wanted to go to City High because it was coeducational, but her mother wanted her to go to a single sex school. However, unlike Juliet, Jane's mother wanted her to attend Girls' College.

Jane: All my—my sister came here before me. And we never really had a choice in what school we were going to, cause my mother came here.

Sue: Ah!

Jane: I did want to go to City High, but my Mum didn't really want me hanging around with all these boys and everything. Plus she kind of had—there was a bad reputation for that school. So, basically there was no other choice but this school. Mum didn't really want me to go to any of these other schools, like Saints and that, because, um, I don't think she knew why. But it was that we're not really into our religion. We don't really have a—we don't follow any of that stuff. So it wasn't really my place to be there. Well, that's what my mum said, anyway. So this was basically the only other choice.

Sue: Now you said you wanted to go to City High.

Jane: Yeah. I don't know. It's just kind of—like, because my old Intermediate was boys and girls it was strange coming to a school with just girls. But it seems all right now. I don't really notice it now. But, yeah ...

Sue: When you said that your mother didn't want you to be around boys, what was she thinking of?

Jane: I don't know. Probably just like—I don't actually know. She just didn't want me to grow up—She wanted me to focus on my school work and most probably the boys would, you know, distract me and all that.

Sue: Did you think that too?

Jane: Well, I went through Intermediate, and I thought I was—well, I was kind of top of the class, and—I don't know. I guess it has made a difference, but I don't know.

Sue: Has it kept you away from boys?

Jane: No. [Group 3, Interview 1, p.2]

Jane began her account by stating that, "we never really had a choice in what school we were going to" and the weight of family history 'determined' the choices that would be made for Jane. As her mother and sisters had been at Girls' College, Jane also had to go there. In contrast to her mother's certainty that being in a coeducational school would distract Jane and interfere with her school work, Jane was less convinced. She noted that she achieved well at her coeducational intermediate school but she commented, "I guess it made a difference" being at a single sex school, but she was not really sure. It is as if she was not convinced of the need to be kept away from boys, but neither was she willing to reject it. I note my own collusion

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with the meta-discourse of compulsory heterosexuality in my question, "Has it kept you away from boys?", a comment which reinscribes the dominance of this discourse by presuming Jane's resistance to her mother's attempt at protection. Jane's answer, 'no', is a chink in the negative framing of heterosexual desire. Presumably Jane hasn't kept away from boys because she enjoys being with them. Furthermore, despite Jane's mother wanting her to be in a single sex school to be away from the 'distractions' of boys, this is presumably to be a temporary respite from engagement with the practices of heterosexual desire. After all, although Jane's mother also attended Girls' College, she is now married with children herself. I read this as evidence of what Fine (1992) terms the 'missing discourse of desire'. That is, she argues that girls' sexuality is primarily constituted in terms of risk and that:

> "the naming of desire, pleasure, or sexual entitlement, particularly for females, barely exists in the formal agenda of public schooling on sexuality" (p. 35).

The choice of a single sex school is one which was made in response to the constraints which compulsory heterosexuality imposes on girls and by their 'at risk' sexuality. As a 'girl', Jane is positioned as both in need of protection from the dangers of heterosexual desire and yet considered not autonomous enough to make her own decision about the school that is appropriate for her. As Jane commented about her mother, "she didn't want me to grow up" and Girls' College was a context where engagement with the dynamics of heterosexual desire could be delayed to create space for academic achievement, a kind of 'suspended animation' between childhood and adulthood. The fact that Jane was not allowed to make the choice herself is an indication of her position outside of the rational subjectivity required for choice. She is presumably 'too young' to be fully rational about school choice and her gender also threatens her access to rationality. As 'girl', Jane is positioned as powerless to choose and yet vulnerable to the power of heterosexual desire. Jane's mother assumed that she would be at risk in a coeducational school, an assumption which Jane seemed less sure of.

Jane described the choice of school as having been made *for* her, not *by* her. This was in contrast with Kellie and Yogi who described themselves as having agency in the choice process. Perhaps the access to the academic success which Kellie and Yogi take for granted is not so assured for Jane, who is from a lower social class background? The threat that her gender poses to rationality is therefore articulated and explicit, whereas for Kellie and Yogi,

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their assumed access to rationality is one that requires the exclusion of the abjected realm of femininity. It is a subjectivity that cannot be acknowledged.

Jane's mother brought her own assumptions about femininity and schooling to her choice of Girls' College for Jane, assumptions which were shaped by her own history and the 'investments' (Hollway, 1984) she had in positioning Jane in certain ways. Walkerdine (1984) argues that femininity is seen by many as:

"the result of a struggle in which heterosexuality is achieved as a solution to a set of conflicts and contradictions in familial and other social relations" (p. 163).

Discourses of heterosexuality and femininity are in turn filtered through and shaped by the specific dynamics, history and cultural context of each family. Tupac, a Tongan girl from a working class background, described how her mother's own educational and life experiences shaped her desires for her daughters.

Tupac: OK. Well, when I was in Form Two I wanted to go to City High. I mean, I heard about Girls' College from my sister because my sister used to come. And my Mum made me come to Girls' College. Like, I sort of was thinking about City High, because, I don't know why, cause you don't have to wear uniform. And, but then when I got here I was actually glad that my Mum had chosen for me to come to Girls' College, cause I liked the school. College is fun.

Sue: What—why was your mother so clear that she wanted you to come here?

Tupac: Um. She just wanted me to come here. Maybe because City High had boys. *(general laughter)* And probably because she wanted me to go where my sister had gone. Like, when she goes to one school we always follow, have to all go to the same school.

Sue: You said, because City High had boys. Is that kind of important to your mother that you keep away from them?

Tupac: Probably. I'm not allowed to go to dances and stuff like that. Cause she dropped out of 5th Form, So she's pretty strict on us and stuff like that.

Sue: Did your mother go to school in Tonga?

Tupac: No, she did college in New Zealand. This lady paid for her fees and stuff, so she did boarding in New Zealand. But then she dropped out and went back to Tonga.

Sue: She was happy for you to come here. So what was it about City High that you liked?

Tupac: I don't know. I think it was just that you didn't have to wear uniform. Yeah. And there was, like, a lot of—

Sue: What was it about uniform that you hated?

Tupac: The skirts. But like, a lot of our friends from [primary school] would come back and tell us about—stuff like that. I asked my Mum, but she said 'no', so, OK, fine. I wasn't really upset, cause I didn't mind coming to this school.

Sue: Did you have friends who came here?

Tupac: Yep. You mean in the same year?

Tupac: Yep. [Group5, Interview 1, p. 4]

Despite her desire to attend City High, Tupac came to Girls' College, following in the footsteps of her older sister, and no doubt her three younger sisters will do the same. For Tupac's mother, the single sex environment at Girls' College was an important consideration as she believed it would enable her daughters to experience academic success and gain access to the kinds of choices she was denied when she left school at fifteen. As for Jane and Juliet's mothers, it seems that contact with boys was seen as potentially undermining to Tupac's academic success. This fear of the dangers of heterosexual desire needs to be understood in relation to Tupac's mother's life. As a single parent who works as a housekeeper to support her family of four daughters, while also studying at night, she knows the realities of the low pay and insecurity of the unskilled labour market, a context she was no doubt anxious for her daughters to avoid. A coeducational context might therefore be seen as a risk that she could not afford to take for her daughters. Jones's (1991) research with a group of Pacific Islands girls at a single sex school found that the girls were keen to succeed academically since they believed it would enable them to escape the occupational fates of their mothers, most of whom were in working class jobs. As the next chapter will show, Tupac shared this 'positive orientation' to schooling, and her mother was also determined that her daughters would experience a fate different to her own.

The extract from the interview with Tupac also presents a challenge to the individual focus of the dominant notion of school choice which assumes that choices are made which best suit the needs of individual students, as is illustrated by Kellie and Yogis' descriptions. In Tupac's case, this is not about making individual choices for each girl in the family but a 'one size fits all' approach where family cohesion is valued above individuality. Given the limited

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financial resources of Tupac's one parent family, there were also good practical reasons for all of the girls to attend the same school, such as sharing uniform clothing and a reduction in school fees. This is a different approach to middle class families like Kellie and Yogis' where, as Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) argue, individual autonomy and rationality are encouraged by teaching children to make 'choices' and where the availability of material resources make 'individual choice' a possibility. However, in making this point, it is important not to assume either that 'individual choice' is better or more desirable than 'family choice' or that students from middle class families are less constrained than those from working class backgrounds. Furthermore, according to Walkerdine and Lucey, it is not that middle class girls are any less constrained than working class students, but rather that the familial practices of regulation and constraint seem less explicit since they cohere with those practices which are culturally dominant in schools. In a more recent paper Lucey (1996) explores the ways in which,

"middle class young women's choices are bounded and restricted in ways which are impossible to see when they are held up as the undisputed and healthy norm" (p. 3).

Previous connections with the school were an important consideration and thirteen of the girls had family connections with the school. Three of the girls had mothers who had attended the school, seven had sisters who had been or were at Girls' College and four had aunts or cousins. In this way, the school might be viewed as providing a context of continuity, one where mothers and daughters know what to expect and the cultures of femininity that will be reproduced. It is a 'safe' and familiar context.

While Tupac seemed happy to be at Girls' College, her initial preference was for City High because it did not have a uniform. In particular she mentioned the uniform skirt. In one sense, uniform may seem a relatively unimportant reason for choosing a school but, as I discuss in the next chapter, the girl's bodies and how they are clothed is a significant site of struggle over which issues of identity are played out and contested. David et al. (1994) and Ball and Gewirtz (1997) also found concerns relating to school uniform mentioned in students and parents descriptions of school choice.

Sandy, a Vietnamese student who came to New Zealand as a young child, also discussed the prohibition that was placed against her attending a coeducational school and she understood this in relation to her cultural background. In fact, she was so sure that she would not be allowed to go to a coeducational school that, unlike Tupac, it seems she did not even

mention the possibility to her parents. She also wanted to go to Girls' High but her knowledge of the zoning restrictions and the fact that her sister had gone to Girls' College meant that she 'knew' where she'd 'end up'.

Sandy: I basically had, oh, I wasn't allowed to go to a coed school. My sister came here.

Sue: Is she older then you?

Sandy: Yeah, a lot older, but she was never here the same time I was here and, um, so, anyway my parents wanted me to come here too, cause she was here. But I wanted to go to Girls' High.

Sue: Yeah, now did you apply?

Sandy: No

Sue: Why not?

Sandy: Because I sort of wanted to but I knew I'd come here anyway, sort of, you know

Sue: What do you mean you know you'd end up coming here?

Sandy: Well cause, like, I'm also out of zone for Girls' High and cause my sister came here...

Sue: The single sex thing, you said that you just had to go to a single sex school, what was that about?

Sandy: My parents, they didn't want me to go to a coed school?

Sue: Yeah, now why was that?

Sandy: I don't know, probably cause there's boys, nah, I don't know. Just cause I think they thought it would be better, cause that's just sort of the way they were brought up and that, in our culture and that. [Group 2, Interview 1, p. 2]

Like Tupac, there is no sense of Sandy being able to make her own choice of school, and she followed in the footsteps of her older sister. The constraints within which Sandy's choice of school was made present a challenge to the assumption of freedom implied by the notion of school choice. Sandy is constrained by zoning restrictions that deny her access to Girls' High, the family history of school choice, and her parents' prohibition on her attending a coeducational school.

In the following extract, Anjini, a working class Fijian Indian girl, describes the understanding that informed her parents' decision for her to attend Girls' College. Anjini's family moved to New Zealand at the start of her secondary education.

Anjini: My parents—Oh, I wanted to go to City High, because I've always gone to a co-ed school—in Fiji.

Sue: Oh, OK. The schools are—most of them are co-ed, even the High Schools?

Anjini: Yes. Except for one school, but that is, like, takes all Christian people. It is a Christian school, and if you want to that school you have to become a Christian. It wasn't that great, either, so I thought, 'Na. I want to go to a uni-sex school'. And then my parents said 'Na'. They have had experiences with people who had grown up to be really spoilt, and got into drugs and stuff, who went to City High, and they get kicked out really easily, too. My cousin, one of them, he got kicked out of City High, and then he was always wagging. And they caught him wagging all the time. So they thought it would be really easy to wag at City High. So they sent me here.

Sue: So they'd done this research before you got here?

Anjini: Yeah. They thought this might be a better school than City High.

Sue: Was the single sex thing important?

Anjini: Yeah, I think for them it was. Because they're really single-minded about everything. They think if you go to a unisex school you might get really spoilt.

Sue: Spoilt?

Anjini: I mean, you'll go out with boys and stuff. And they don't like it.

Sue: That's interesting using that word 'spoilt'. Does that—in your family, if you see girls from a similar background to you going out with boys, that's the expression you would use—'spoilt'?

Anjini: That's the expression my parents use. 'That she is a spoilt little brat'.

Sue: Meaning, like, she gets her own way?

Anjini: No. It doesn't really mean that, actually. More that she wasn't brought up properly. That she gets to do stuff that I don't. And in their view that is worse than the way I was brought up.

Sue: So is Girls' College seen as quite a protective environment, then, by your parents?

Anjini: Yeah. [Group 4, Interview 1, p. 5]

Anjini wanted to go to City High because it was coeducational, a schooling environment she was used to in Fiji. However, her parents' networks in the Indian community had convinced them that City High would not be suitable for Anjini since she might become 'spoilt' and, "go out with boys and stuff". As a single sex school, Girls College was seen to be a protective environment, one which was able to maintain the cultural values and notions of appropriate femininity that were seen to be at risk in a coeducational school. Anjini's initial desire to go to City High suggests that, like Jane, she was less convinced than her parents of the need to attend a single sex school.

Appropriate Femininity

As Sandy and Anjinis' comments suggest, notions of appropriate femininity are closely linked to the cultural context of the family and discourses of femininity are shaped and mediated by social class and ethnicity. For Pakeha middle class students like Yogi and Kellie, gendered discourses seem to be subsumed under discourses of rationality which emphasise academic success. For Yogi, the multicultural context of Girls' College was seen as enriching and novel, one which she saw as being friendly, loud and musical. As a middle class Pakeha student, she was assured of a context where her culture was dominant and valued and her desire to attend Girls' College might be viewed as a strategy of resistance to dominant notions of femininity, a site where she can 'try on' other identities.

In contrast, unlike Yogi and Kellie who take their academic success for granted and have their culture affirmed and valued by the school and the wider social context, other girls and their parents can not be so sure. For Juliet's mother, the multicultural context of Girls' College was seen as a threat to Juliet's success since it threatened her access to the white middle class culture of femininity that she desired for Juliet. Girls' College was less desirable precisely because it was seen to reproduce the 'lower class' culture that Juliet's mother wanted her to escape from.

For girls from non-Pakeha backgrounds who are positioned as 'Other' in relation to the dominant and more highly valued Pakeha culture, the schooling context becomes an important site for both cultural maintenance and contestation. Girls' College might be viewed as a site where culturally appropriate notions of femininity can be protected for non-Pakeha students

although, as I discuss in the next chapter, the girls are exposed to knowledge and experiences which challenge these.

Girls as Negotiators

In many cases, the girls seemed less convinced than their parents of the need for an 'appropriate cultural context', as suggested by their desire to attend City High. However, it is important to acknowledge that just as there are differences between the girls on the basis of their social class and ethnicity, so there are differences within groups. It is not the case, for example, that all girls from 'ethnic minority' groups are positioned as powerless within the process of choice. Some girls reveal themselves to be skilled cultural interpreters and negotiators, finding ways to mediate the often conflicting discourses of femininity between home and the dominant culture which are played out in the process of choice (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1998).

For example, Tina, a working class Indian student, gave a choice account which emphasised her agency in the choice process and her desire to attend Girls' College. She began by describing the importance of relationships with girls in her extended family as a source of 'insider' information about the school.

Sue: OK. Tina. What do you remember?

Tina: Well, I did want to come here. And—

Sue: This was your first choice of school?

Tina: Yeah, really. Cause, I've got four cousin sisters, and they all came here.

Sue: Cousin sisters?

Tina: Yeah. I treat them like my sisters. They're like from my Dad's brother or my Dad's sister. [Group 4, Interview 1, p. 4]

In addition, Tina's sister had been to Girls' College and had done well at school.

Sue: Yeah. But you grew up with them, did you?

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Tina: Not all the time. I mean, I was always with my brothers. But I didn't want to go to a co-ed school. So I chose here. So is my sister. She was really brainy. I thought, 'I might as well come here'.

Sue: She came here. Did well?

Tina: She did really well. She became a lawyer. So I thought, 'I might as well come here'. And then I got in straight away. So it was pretty cool. [Group 4, Interview 1, p. 5]

Tina's comment that, "she got in straight away" to Girls' College is an indication of her limited knowledge of the formal structures of the local education market such as zoning. Girls' College does not have a zone and is therefore not able to deny entry to students. However, despite her lack of formal knowledge of the available schools, Tina's informal networks were an important source of information for her about the available schools. Because the relational aspects of schooling were as important to her as academic success, she rejected Girls' High, for similar reasons to those given by Yogi.

Sue: Did you apply for Girls' High though?

Tina: Nope. I didn't think about Girls' High. I don't like Girls' High 'cause they think they're real—They're real snobs and I don't like them very much. They're all stuck up.

Sue: What sort of experiences have you had with those students?

Tina: I haven't. Some of the girls I know, they've kind of got attitude problems, and they're real—I just don't like them? I know a few.

While Tupac and Sandy said the single sex character of Girls' College was important to their mothers, Tina made the choice to go to a single sex school herself.

Sue: What about the single sex thing? I mean, you could have gone to City High.

Tina: I didn't want to go to City High.

Sue: What was that about?

Tina: Oh, cause like, a few of my Dad's friends work there as teachers, and I thought 'Ah, I don't want to go there!' Plus my auntie lives near there, across the road from there. I thought 'Na, I don't want to go there'.

Sue: Was the single sex thing important for you? Coming to a single sex school.

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Tina: No. Na. I didn't care where I went, really. I thought it was just a school.

Sue: What about your parents? Was the fact that it was single sex, did that matter for them?

Tina: No. It was all my choice.

Sue: So if you said 'I want to go to City High', that was fine?

Tina: Hmm [yes]. [Group 4, Interview 1, p. 4]

Tina's account emphasised her sense of autonomy in the choice process. Rather than seeing a single sex school as restricting, or Girls' College as 'less desirable', Tina chose the school because of her negative impressions of Girl's High and City High, her desire to go to a single sex school and the positive experiences of her relatives. Girls' College was a familiar context where she believed she would be able to achieve well.

Farzela arrived from Iran with her father and sister in the middle of her form four year and as her account shows, family networks were also an important source of information for Farzela who had no knowledge of the local schools.

Sue: How do you get to [come to] this school?

Farzela: Oh, because my cousin's sister, she's British born, and she's Iranian as well but she was born overseas. She is studying in this school, and she came here. And she says this is a nice school. And my Dad's bring a City High form. I have to fill it. He wants me to do the co-education because I've been study all my life in co-education. Then I change my mind, and for the first time in my life I come to the single sex school. I really enjoy. And it's my cousin and my choice to come in this school.

Sue: So your cousin, is she the same age as you?

Farzela: No. She is 30 years old. She is being 29 years old last year, and she is turning 30 now.

Sue: But she went to this school?

Farzela: Yes. A long time ago...

Sue: So what was coming to a single sex school, why did you do that?

Farzela: Ah, because I never had this experience before. I want to see how it is. All my life—about 9 years—I study in coeducation. So I just want to have a little bit of life change.

Sue: Do you think, though, coming to NZ too, that—like, you've been in co-educational schools in Iran. Was there something about coming to NZ, to a different culture, that you felt it would be better to be in a single sex school?

Farzela: No. My parents don't worry about it, because they believe me. They don't mind if I go to coeducation.

Sue: So they weren't fearful that you would get into trouble, or—?

Farzela: No. They won't worry. They are satisfied from me. When I came in Girls' College I see some little bit difference. Like, in a school we've got our boyfriend, we got out, like this. But in Iran parents normally doesn't let you to go out like this. Same as in culture—when you grow up and you finish the College study, then you're engaged or something, then you can go. But before that it is impossible to go out with a pair, like this.

Sue: What about Girls' High? Why didn't you go there?

Farzela: Oh, because when I came in NZ I just came, moving and have fun out there. And I had no idea about the colleges and the school. And I just knew the two names of Girls' College and City High. That's why I came here. And because my cousin's staying in a very nice school, and I think as well. Because she had an experience— [Group 4, Interview 1, p.6]

Farzela's account began with a description of how her father had wanted her to attend a coeducational school since this was the type of schooling she had always had. He brought her the enrolment form for City High and, as Farzela said, "I have to fill it". While I read this as an indication of Farzela's relative powerless in the choice process, Farzela did not position herself this way and she went on to give an account which emphasised her agency, beginning with, "Then I change my mind". This notion of 'Muslim' women being positioned as 'passive victims of oppressive cultures' is discussed by Dwyer (1998) who argues that Muslim women like Farzela construct their identities within and against these racialised discourses. It is an issue I take up in more detail in the following chapter.

Farzela decided she wanted to go to a single sex school, a decision that was influenced by her thirty year old cousin who had attended Girls' College and who told her it was a "very nice school". Farzela had also decided she wanted a, "little bit of life change" since she had always been in a coeducational school. In this extract, I asked Farzela why she wanted to go to

a single sex school, suggesting that her cultural background may have been a factor in her choice, a question which reveals my own assumptions as a white middle class woman and my positioning of Farzela as a powerless 'Other' in the choice process. However, it is a question and a positioning she refuses. While I assumed that the choice to attend Girls' College would enable Farzela to accommodate culturally-derived prohibitions on contact with boys, Farzela dismisses this by saying that removal from boys is not necessary to achieve this. Her parents trusted her to uphold their prohibition on dating and Farzela's decision to attend Girls' College was not about removal from boys but rather, the desire to be with girls.

Thus, while I attempted to position Farzela as disadvantaged 'Other' (Jones & Jacka, 1995) and to read her attendance at Girls' College as a sign of her 'oppression' within her cultural context, Farzela positioned herself as a risk taker who was prepared to challenge her father's authority and to go to the school of her choice. Her relationship with her older female cousin provided her with the knowledge and the support to make the choice, an indication of the importance of family networks as source of cultural interpretation to new migrant families.

Miriama, a Pacific Islands student, was also determined to attend Girls' College.

Sue: Just—why did you end up coming to this school? You were at Bayview. That goes to Form 2, doesn't it?

Miriama: Yeah. I only came here because it was one of the nearest. No, actually it was because there was heaps of culture. There were some girls that were Islanders here that I could relate to. Plus, my friends and their friends, all of their daughters had been here. So that was basically one of the reasons why I came here. Plus I did want to come to a single sex school.

Sue: You did. Not just your parents?

Miriama: Yeah. Sort of, but—I pushed my Mum into bringing me here. Cause I needed to focus in the school, on my school work.

Sue: So did you find in Form 2, did you find it hard having boys around?

Miriama: Sort of yes and sort of no. Cause I didn't really understand English at Intermediate and Primary. It was only when I came here when I really picked it up. And it just made—it turned everything around. And I tend to concentrate more now.

Sue: Do you think that being in a school that has a lot of Pacific Islander students, do you think that was an advantage for you?

Miriama: Yeah. It was an advantage.

Sue: How does it work, though?

Miriama: Cause a lot of them are already attending the school. And they just helped me out. [Group 3, Interview 1, p. 3]

Miriama gave several reasons for wanting to go to Girls' College; the location, the ethnic mix of the school and its single sex character. Perhaps the most important reason she wanted to be at the school was because there were other 'Islanders' there. Earlier she had spoken about her struggles being at a primary school with a white middle-class population where, as a Pacific Island girl, she felt she was the 'odd one out'. Her sense of familiarity at Girls' College was enhanced by the fact that her friends and their daughters had been to the school and it seemed to have been a significant reason for her decision. I read the extract as conveying the impression that her networks of family and friends had strongly influenced her decision to attend the school and that she was determined to be in an environment where she felt 'culturally safe'. Her emphasis on a safe cultural context seems to have paid off in terms of the help that she has been given by other Pacific Islands students and the subsequent improvement in her English language skills.

Alongside her considerations about the ethnic mix of the school, was her desire to attend a single sex school, "cause I needed to focus on my school work". Her comment indicates her apparent collusion with the dominant discourse of femininity which positions girls as 'at risk' in the context of compulsory heterosexuality, a risk she is keen to avoid. But her insistence on attending Girls' College might also be read as an act of resistance to her positioning within discourses of heterosexual desire. Thus to do 'girl' in the context of compulsory heterosexuality is highly contradictory. Girls are positioned as passive and vulnerable to the effects of heterosexual desire, a position they are also (ironically) expected to actively resist.

For Miriama, Girls' College might be seen as an 'opportunity structure', a safe and supportive context which had given her access to academic success. Thus, while school choice research has emphasised the desirability of schools with high proportions of white middle class students, schools with ethnically diverse populations are clearly more desirable to some ethnic minority students. Furthermore, as Miriama illustrates, a white middle class context is not necessarily the best learning environment for these students.

Wells (1995) makes a similar point from her research on school choice with black students in America. She identified a group of 'return students' who transferred to mainly white schools outside of their area but who later returned to their local black college. The main reason for their return was the rejection they experienced from white students. However, in Wells' research, the black colleges were all-black and she describes the return students as resisting the ideology of achievement. In contrast, Miriama's decision to attend a school in which she feels 'culturally safe' is not a rejection of achievement *per se*, but a strategy that she felt enabled her to achieve.

Cultural 'Resistance'

Alfreda, a Maori student who was achieving very well at school, also described her resistance to the white middle class culture at Girls' High and the "bad attitudes' of the students.

Alfreda: OK. I didn't choose to come to Girls' College. I actually wanted to go to City High as well. It was my Mum who chose for me to come here because I had an older sister here already. And that way I would have known someone in the school, if I hadn't made friends. And—yeah, I don't know. I think it was the fact of having to wear the same clothes over and over every day sort of turned me off coming here. My mum didn't mind, but she wanted me to go where my sister was. I don't know, a family thing.

Sue: What about Girls' High? Did you think about going there?

Alfreda: No. No I didn't. I'd heard some stories about it, and—

Sue: What sort of things?

Alfreda: Like they are quite anti the other girls' schools and that. Like, not nice girls went there. *(laughs)*

Sue: Not nice in what way? Rough?

Alfreda: No, not really rough. Just have really bad attitudes.

Sue: What sort of attitudes? To what?

Alfreda: To other girls in schools and that. But, I mean, yeah, being here—I'm glad I came, that my mum made me come. Because I've made so many friends, and I've done things through this school that I know I wouldn't have been able to do through City High or probably Girls' High.

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Sue: What sort of things?

Alfreda: A lot of musical achievements. Like meeting Nelson Mandela, and singing at government, and stuff like that. Like being a Prefect! I don't think I would have been a Prefect at City High. There's just so many other people. It's like a big achievement for me to come here. Cause my sister didn't do to well here, but I have.

Sue: What do you think what happened for her? If I was interviewing her now would she be saying the same great things? What was different?

Alfreda: She loved boys and didn't like school, things like that.

Sue: She went to a single sex school but she hung out with guys outside of school?

Alfreda: She knew heaps of guys. Most of her friends were guys.

Sue: So being at a single sex school is not a guarantee that it's going to keep you away from guys, is it? Don't tell your mother that, though.

Alfreda: No, my mum's not too anti against boys. [Group 5, Interview 1, p.5]

For Alfreda, the environment at Girls' High was one where competitiveness and 'bad attitudes' were fostered. In contrast, Girls' College was a place where she had been given access to opportunities that she believed she would not have had elsewhere and one in which she had been able to make friends. Like Miriama, Alfreda believed her achievement was facilitated by the school's ability to provide a safe cultural context. While the neo-liberal discourse of school choice emphasises competition and individuality, Alfreda's comments emphasise communality and friendship as providing a context for achievement.

However, despite being pleased in hindsight about going to Girls' College, like Tupac, she had initially wanted to go to City High because she would not have to wear a school uniform. Although Alfreda said her mother 'didn't mind' where she went, she also said that it was her mother who chose for her to come to Girls' College as her sister was already at the school.

Alfreda's emphasis on the success that she has achieved at Girls' College is notable in relation to her sister who did not do well. Alfreda ascribed her sister's lack of success at Girls' College to her love of boys and her dislike of school, again invoking a tension between academic success and involvement in heterosexual desire. Her sister's 'failure' (in Alfreda's terms) might be viewed as providing tangible evidence of Alfreda's vulnerability and had

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therefore strengthened her determination to succeed. This sense of threat lurks beneath many of the girls' comments about their attendance at Girls' College and it is strongest and most explicit for those girls whose access to academic success was the most tenuous. Her final comment that her mother was, "Not too anti against boys" suggests that unlike other students whose parents wanted them to attend a girls' school as a protection against heterosexual desire, this was not so important to Alfreda's mother.

Having No Choice

All of the extracts presented thus far have indicated that for either the girls' parent/s and/or the girls themselves, choice of school was seen as being a significant educational decision and one which the girls and their parents were involved in to varying extents. However, for Waima this does not seem to have been the case.

When Waima was at Intermediate school, her older sister who was in the sixth form at Girls' High, had become pregnant and had dropped out of school. Soon after, Waima's older brother was killed in a car accident. It was shortly after that a decision had to be made about where Waima was to go to school.

Waima: Yeah. She [Waima's sister] left here [Girls' College] in the end. We came down, and me and my mum weren't getting on at all, so my sister sort of took over the role. She said 'Just go to Girls' College', and so since she had been there I just gone there. Cause we weren't really bothered, at all, to do with what schools to go to or anything. She goes, 'Oh, no, you're not going to City High'.

Sue: So she took quite a protective role of you? It is interesting, isn't it, that she came through here. Some people have said this to me, that their parents wanted them to come here to protect them from boys, and yet she managed to get pregnant, obviously not to someone in the school. But did she feel quite protective towards you? Did she want to protect you from that sort of experience?

Waima: I'm not sure, but she just sort of—we weren't really—just after it all we didn't really give a care of whatever, what happened. I just needed a school, and I needed to enroll, and she'd been to Girls' College, and so we just thought I might as well go to Girls' College. I wasn't like—Saints, 'Oh, na, Catholic school and stuff', and we're not really religious, so it's like, I'll just go to Girls' College. A public school and stuff. [Group 5, Interview 1, p. 7]

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The decision about her schooling was left up to Waima's sister as Waima and her mother were not 'getting on'. Waima went to Girls' College because her sister had been there and at the time the decision was made, there was no choice, a point she makes in response to the girls in her group who had been discussing the schools they had considered, and to my questions about the possible reasons why they might have 'chosen' Girls' College. Although Waima's sister had become pregnant while at Girls' College, the school was (presumably) not held to be responsible and Waima's sister was clear that she was not allowed to go to City High, because it was a coeducational school and/or because of its reputation. The difficulties that family had faced did not mean that Waima could do what she liked, rather, it meant she had to do as she was told.

Summary

While the discourse of school choice assumes that individuals (or their parents) are free to exercise choice in the education market place, the extracts presented in this chapter begin to develop a very different account. Although some girls' narratives of their school choice process highlighted their autonomy and apparent freedom to choose a school, for others, the choice was not one in which they felt they had any 'choice' and they went to the school that was chosen *for* them, rather than *by* them. The differences in the apparent autonomy of the students were related to social class and ethnicity. It was the Pakeha middle class girls who gave accounts which constituted themselves as rational, autonomous subjects and whose narratives of choice conformed most closely to the choice process assumed by neo-liberals.

In contrast, it was mostly the girls from working class, Maori and ethnic minority backgrounds who described themselves as having to do as they were told and as having little agency in the choice process. The latter needs some qualification however, since Tina, a working class Indian girl, gave an account which emphasised that her attendance at Girls' College was her own choice. Farzela and Miriama, who were also from 'ethnic minority' backgrounds gave accounts which showed how they resisted their parents' desires in order to access their school of choice.

One of the ways to think about this difference in the apparent 'autonomy' of the girls is in relation to Walkerdine and Lucey's (1989) research on mothering. Walkerdine and Lucey argue that in middle class families, mothers playfully teach their daughters rationality and

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autonomy in order to prepare them for entry into the professions. To do so, they teach their daughters to be self-regulating and in this way, the practices of regulation are implicit. As Lucey explains in a subsequent paper:

> "we argued that the construction of the ideal of the sensitive mother through psychological discourses reinforces the fundamental illusion of democratic culture—that we have ultimate agency and control over our lives. We argued then that 'sensitive' mothering, which works at constructing an 'autonomous child', merely shores up this illusion. Through a discourse of sensitivity, (taken up far more by middle class women), the idea is that mothers can produce 'rational', autonomous and empowered citizens who do not have to be governed precisely because they have learnt how to and are willing to regulate themselves." (Lucey, 1996, p. 10).

In contrast, working class mothers exercise explicit authority over their daughters, a strategy that, it is argued, prepares them for the realities of working class employment. Thus, they argue, it is not that middle class girls are any more autonomous or rational than working class girls, but that the processes of regulation by which this rational subjectivity is constituted are internalised. The outcome of this in relation to choice, I suggest, is that middle class girls are more likely to be in agreement with their mothers about their choice of school since they have internalised their mother's authority. In contrast, since their mother's authority is externalised, working class girls must do as they are told.

This critique of the notion of rationality presents a challenge to the rational, autonomous chooser assumed by neo-liberal theory. As I suggested in Chapter 2, choice might be thought of as a discourse that constitutes the rational subject. My research has shown that this rational subjectivity is more easily available to Pakeha middle class girls, than to the girls from working class, Maori and ethnic minority backgrounds. Thus, Pakeha middle class girls appear to be the kinds of choosers assumed by neo-liberals, yet, as Walkerdine and Lucey's work shows, their apparent rationality and autonomy is dependent on processes of regulation and constraint.

David et al. (1994) take up the issue of whether parents and children agree about the school of preference. In their study, they report that eight out of ten parents said their children wanted to go to the same school that their parents wanted them to go to. However, they make the point that their study was over-represented by middle class families. They cite research by Ball et al. (1995) which shows that in middle class families, the child's input into choice is more limited than for working class families. My findings present a different picture. They

show that girls from middle class families are (apparently) more likely to agree with their parents about their school of choice than those from working class families. While the middle class girls in my study described the choice as being their own, most of the working class girls described being told where they had to go and this was often not what they had wanted.

Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) make a further important point about the uptake of this autonomous, rational subjectivity by middle class girls. As outlined in Chapter 2, they argue that the achievement of this subjectivity is highly problematic since discourses of rationality and discourses of femininity are contradictory. Taking on this rational subjectivity requires the simultaneous constitution and abjection of femininity. Thus, it is not that the middle class Pakeha girls in my study are free from the constraints of gender, as their silence about gendered considerations might indicate, but rather that the tensions between rationality and femininity are covered over and silenced in their accounts. To put it another way, for middle class girls, the constitution of themselves as rational, autonomous subjects requires that discourses of femininity are silenced.

In contrast, most of the working class girls constituted themselves as relatively powerless in the process of school choice and many mentioned the ways in which gendered considerations shaped their mother's choice of school for them. Thus, for these girls, the threat that their femininity posed to their rationality was explicit and voiced. Girls' College was chosen by many of the working class and lower middle class mothers because it was seen to provide an environment where the girls could be protected from the dangers of heterosexual desire. Within this discourse of compulsory heterosexuality, the girls were positioned in contradictory ways. They were both passive victims of the desires of boys and actively desiring subjects who needed to be protected from themselves. Their sexuality was framed in terms of risk and danger and seen as threatening their access to academic success. Attendance at Girls' College was seen by some mothers as a context which enabled the girls to manage this tension between femininity and the rational subjectivity that is required for academic success. It is a 'time apart' from the dangers of heterosexual desire, a kind of sanctuary where the girls' entry into the practices of heterosexual desire could be delayed.

As Byrne (1993) points out, there is a considerable body of literature that asserts the advantages of single sex schooling for girls. Much of this literature is based on the assumption that girls need to be separated from boys in order to be given an equal opportunity to succeed. The emphasis, as Byrne argues, is on altering the girls, rather than the 'ecology' of the school.

That is, it is about preparing girls to achieve in an androcentric world, rather than challenging androcentricity *per se*. As Kenway et al. (1994) point out, the liberal feminist discourses from which arguments in favour of single sex spaces for girls are derived, position girls as relatively passive and in need of extra protection and support. Thus, while asserting girls' right to equal opportunity to succeed, arguments in favour of single sex schooling for girls can have the ironic consequence of reinscribing their powerlessness.

The danger of heterosexual desire is not only voiced, but, for some of the working class girls, it is actively embodied by their sisters. Waima's sister's pregnancy resulted in her leaving school and Alfreda ascribed her sister's lack of success as being related to her relationships with boys. The ways in which 'success' is constituted within differing class contexts will be taken up in more detail in the following chapter.

It is also worth noting here that these findings support those of David et al. (1994) who show that it is mainly mothers (as opposed to fathers) who are involved in the choice process and who do the 'leg work' in finding out about schools. For example, Yoko described how her mother had done some reading about the advantages of single sex schooling and Juliet's mother persisted in applying to Girls' High. However, there were exceptions. For instance, Farzela and Mandira who had newly arrived in New Zealand, described their father's involvement in school choice and Waima said the decision had been made by her sister.

The discourses of femininity that operated in the context of school choice were also shaped by ideas about multiculturalism and ethnicity, as well as by social class. While some girls and/or their parents viewed the multicultural context of Girls' College as an advantage, others saw it as undesirable. Juliet described how her mother did not like the 'multicultural sort of atmosphere' at Girls' College and her choice of Girls' High was an attempt to give Juliet access to the white middle class culture of femininity at the school. In contrast, Miriama, a Samoan student, wanted to go to Girls' College because of her negative experiences at a white middle class intermediate school. Girls' College was seen as a 'culturally safe' context where she could be with other Pacific Islands students. Yogi enjoyed the multicultural mix of the school since, as a white middle class girl, it gave her access to alternative discourses of femininity or ways of 'doing girl'.

Sandy and Anjinis' accounts emphasised their parents' desire for them to attend a single sex school as a context where their cultural notions of 'appropriate femininity' could be maintained. The girls described the prohibitions that were placed on them in terms of having

contact with boys and the single sex character of the school enabled this prohibition to be upheld. Thus, while for some parents the single sex character of the school was a space where girls could be kept away from boys in order to succeed, for others, it was a context where cultural notions of femininity could be protected, particularly where their notions of femininity were seen to be different to those of the dominant culture.

However, while many of the girls said their parents wanted them to go to Girls' College as a means of protecting them from boys, for most of the girls, this seemed less important. Several girls said they had wanted to go to City High because it was coeducational and two girls mentioned the lack of uniform at the school as being important to them. So, while the girls' parents tended to position the girls as relatively powerless and needing to be protected from boys, this was a position that many of the girls resisted. The desire to be at a school with no uniform may also be read as an indication of their resistance to being positioned as a particular kind of 'girl'. As I show in the following chapter, the desire to not wear a uniform makes sense in the context of the amount of harassment the girls are subject to while wearing the Girls' College school uniform.

The negative ways in which the girls' heterosexuality was constituted by their parents contrasted with the pleasure the girls said they experienced from their same-sex relationships. Friendship with other girls was an important source of pleasure and the 'friendly atmosphere' at Girls' College was mentioned often. Many of the girls said the atmosphere of the school was an important reason for their desire to come to Girls' College or the reason why they liked being at the school. These reasons included friendship; many of the girls had friends at the school, familiarity; many had relatives who were at or had been to the school, the friendly staff and the fun they experienced being with other girls. Farzela and Tina said they had wanted to come to the school because it was single sex. Thus, rather than the single sex character of the school being a means of getting away from boys, which their parents emphasised, for many of the girls, it was a context where they could be with other girls.

The friendly atmosphere at Girls' College was contrasted with the atmosphere at Girls' High. Girls' High was seen as a competitive context where academic success was valued above the relational aspects of schooling. Despite the emphasis on academic success at Girls' High, some girls felt they had achieved more highly at Girls' College as it had provided them with a context where they felt valued and supported and where they had been given opportunities to succeed. This is an interesting counterpoint to the 'hierarchy of desirability'

which the existing research on parental choice of school illustrates. As I have described in Chapter 1, schools with higher proportions of white middle class students are widely considered to be the most desirable to parents, whereas the girls in my study valued Girls' College because of the diversity of its student population. Their desire for a context that they saw as fun and friendly was not a rejection of academic success, but an expression of their desire to succeed in an enjoyable social context.

However, while Girls' High was rejected by some of the girls because it was seen to be competitive, 'snobbish' and overly academic, City High was rejected by some girls and their parents as it was seen to have a bad reputation, presumably meaning it was not academic enough. I read this as an indication of the girls' desire to succeed academically in a context in which they felt valued and 'safe'. While the neo liberal view of school choice assumes that parents will choose schools on the basis of 'educational concerns' such as exam results, this examination of students' perspectives on school choice has shown the importance of the social and cultural environment of the school and of gendered considerations.

This chapter has provided an introduction to the girls' perspectives on school choice and the reasons why they were at Girls' College. All of the extracts are from the first focus group interviews and as such, represent a 'first take' on the issue of school choice by the girls. They have identified the often contradictory discourses which operate in the context of school choice and of Girls' College in particular. Furthermore, the extracts show that girls actively mediate and negotiate these discourses and that an examination of student's perspectives on and involvement in choice is vital to understanding how school choice operates. In doing so, the extracts present a complex picture of the ways in which school choice decisions are made and they suggest that the outcomes of these decisions may not be those assumed in the policy documents which supported the introduction of greater choice.

In the following chapter I broaden my focus to consider to include all of the interviews in order to consider how the discourses which operate in the context of school choice are negotiated by the girls in the process of their schooling experiences.

CHAPTER 6: GIRLS AT SCHOOL

In the previous chapter I drew mainly from the first interviews with each focus group to explore the reasons why the girls were at Girls' College. I looked at the girls' narratives of choice to consider how they thought about school choice, how they perceived their own involvement in the choice process and the ideas they had about Girls' College and any other schools that they had considered. I used the term 'narrative' to try and convey the idea of a story—that is, something that is constructed and told by a particular person who sees things from their unique perspective. However, while I wanted to show that there were patterns that could be traced across their stories that related to the social class background and ethnicity of the girls, I was also wanted to highlight the differences between the girls from similar social and cultural backgrounds. In this way I was able to show that the 'choice' of Girls' College was a process in which a range of discourses of gender, social class and ethnicity were mediated by the girls and their parents.

One of the important aspects of my analysis of the interviews about school choice is that it showed that the girls came to Girls' College with a range of sometimes contradictory aspirations and expectations. They may also have been aware of their parents' expectations for them as young women and of the role they expected the school to play in their education. In this chapter I broaden my discussion to consider all of the focus group interviews, rather than primarily focussing on the first interviews, as I did in the previous chapter. I am interested in exploring how the girls described their schooling experiences at Girls' College and how they talked about themselves and others. I want to see how the reasons the girls gave for being at Girls' College were related to what happened to them at school. In the previous chapter I referred to the discourses which circulated in the context of school choice. For example, I argued that there were discourses of rationality and sexuality, and using Walkerdine's (1989) work, I also tried to show how these were related to each other.

In this chapter I examine all of the interview material to look at the discourses that were made available to the girls in the context of their schooling. That is, taking the idea that 'girls' are not pre-existent subjects but are a kind of 'work in progress', I am interested in considering the kinds of subjectivities or 'ways to do being a girl' that are made available to the girls. As well as there being discourses that operate in the context of the school, as the previous chapter has shown, there are also discourses made available to the girls in their

families, their cultural and social communities, the peer culture and the broader political and social context in which they live. It is important to note that these discourses are not all equally powerful. Or rather, that the power of discourses differs according to context. In the context of the school, there will be some discourses that will be dominant and some which are excluded or marginalised. Likewise, there are some 'ways of being' which are more powerful or privileged than others but these are not always consistent. In one context a particular subjectivity may be powerful, while in another, it may be excluded or marginalised. I am interested then in exploring the discourses that arise in the girls' discussions of their schooling experiences and how these are negotiated by the girls.

One of the most challenging aspects for me in writing this chapter was in deciding how to shape or structure the analysis of the interview material. My perspective as a feminist and a sociologist has led me to notice particular aspects of people's lives, while not noticing or recognising as important some others. I think that the social class background, the ethnicity and the gender and sexuality of a person has a significant impact on shaping their lives. However, while acknowledging these aspects of peoples' lives as significant, I do not want to suggest that they are immutable and I am interested in looking for the ways in which people become gendered, classed, raced and sexualised. If I think of gender and social class (for example) as discourses which position people in certain ways, or make certain subjectivities available, then I can think of them as having the possibility of these subjectivities being contested or changed.

Taking this perspective means I am interested in exploring the inconsistencies between and within these categories. So, rather than focussing on Pakeha middle class girls at school, and assuming that their identities along these trajectories are fixed or pre-determined, I can look at these girls to consider how the discourses of class, ethnicity and gender position these girls in certain ways. Furthermore, I am also interested in considering the contradictions between and within these categories of identification.

Because of the 'open-ended' format of the focus group interviews, while I often began with similar 'starter' questions, the discussions always took on a different trajectory in each group. The analysis of the interviews presented here works with rather than against this diversity. I have structured the analysis into three broad sections which focus, in the most part, on three of the Groups: Group 3 which was comprised mainly of Pakeha middle class girls;

Group 5 which had girls who were mostly working class Maori, Pacific Islands and Indian, and Group 4 which had girls who were Fijian Indian, Indian, Taiwanese and Iranian.

Group 3

'At Least We're Not Snobs!'

Group 3 began with six girls. Four of the girls were Pakeha from middle class backgrounds and were close friends. The facilitator of the group was Jane who was Pakeha. Jane's mother was a teaching assistant and her father had his own trades business. In general terms Jane might be described as 'middle class', however, from my perspective as a middle class woman, there were clearly class-based differences between Jane and the other Pakeha girls. Jane also saw herself as being different from these others and she came to only two of the five interviews which I took as an indication of her discomfort with the four 'close-knit' group of friends. The sixth member of the group was Miriama, a Samoan girl who lived with her extended family and whose mother worked as a cleaner. Miriama only came to the first group interview since, as I explained in Chapter 3, she did not feel 'safe' being the only Pacific Islands girl in the group.

The dynamics within this group were an indication of larger power dynamics that operated in the context of the school. While I was interviewing the girls in this group, I was struck by what seemed to me the very obvious privilege that the four Pakeha middle class girls experienced in their lives and in the context of the school, and it is their comments that I focus on primarily in this section.

In the previous chapter I discussed how these girls were the most likely to describe the process of school choice as being one over which they had a high degree of autonomy and choice. They wanted to achieve academically but I suggested that they could afford to 'take the risk' of attending a school which they knew was considered 'less academic' because they were so confident of their ability to succeed. For these girls, the atmosphere and social context of the school was important and when they talked about the school, they emphasised these aspects. Their assessment of the merits of Girls' College was made in relation to the other girls' schools that were, in theory, available to them. The following extract contains a number of discourses that are woven through the interviews with the girls in this group. As I will discuss, discourses of diversity and tolerance, egalitarianism, competition, success and

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individualism are taken up and negotiated by the girls as they defined themselves and their school in relation to the local educational hierarchy.

> Yogi: I don't know. It would have been much easier to slack off in this school. If I wanted to. In schools like this they don't really push you that much. It's more that you have to push yourself if you want to do well academically. It would be hard if you're not very motivated—
>
> George: It's not so competitive.
>
> ?: All areas in Green City and basically up to [the city border] are in zone. Our school accepts anywhere in Green City.
>
> George: We don't have zones. Girls' College accepts everybody! *(laughter)* I think only Girls High is zoned, isn't it? And the rest is if you can afford it. [Group 3, Interview 2, p. 1]

Competition

The girls' awareness of the zoning restrictions that operated at Girls' High, and their laughter at George's comment in the above extract that, "Girls' College accepts everybody", might be read as indicating that the girls were not threatened by the less 'exclusive' student mix at Girls' College, rather, it was something they were pleased about. One of the reasons for this may have been that as Pakeha middle class girls, they were in the cultural 'minority' at the school and there was therefore less competition for them. That is, it was not so much that Girls' College was 'less competitive' but that there was less competition for these girls to succeed.

In an education system where there is a statistical relationship between academic achievement and ethnicity and social class (Ministry of Education, 1994b; Coleman, 1990), these girls were more likely than those from Maori, ethnic minority or working class backgrounds to succeed academically. This means that in a school like Girls' High, where there is a high proportion of Pakeha middle class girls, there is, in theory, more competition for academic success. However, at Girls' College, there were fewer Pakeha middle class girls and therefore these girls were more likely to have their academic achievement acknowledged. George alluded to the advantage they experienced in her comment, "There's not the ranking problem as much" in the following extract.

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George: And we can get just as good marks as they [Girls' High students] do.

Sue: So do you feel confident that you haven't missed out?

George: Yeah. I think in some ways we've done better. Because we are slightly—we have above average students at this school. And so we get good marks, because there's not the ranking problem as much. [Group 3, Interview 2, p.3]

George believed she had achieved just as highly at Girls' College as she would have at Girls' High. The 'ranking problem' she referred to is the way in which Sixth Form Certificate grades are allocated on the basis of a student's relative position within a subject. Therefore, George may assume that the more high-achieving students there are in a subject, the more competition there is for the higher grades.

The girls' enjoyment of their position of advantage at Girls' College also needs to be understood within the broader context of the education market. As Ball and Gewirtz (1997) and Lauder et al. (1995) have shown, some girls are 'more desirable' than others in a 'quasi-market' (Whitty et al., 1998) where schools are forced to compete with one another. Because the 'best' schools are considered to be those with the highest exam scores and/or the highest proportion of white middle class students, students from these backgrounds are considered highly desirable. Girls' High already had more students than it needed and could therefore afford to turn away middle class girls like Kellie and George. However, Girls' College was in a far more vulnerable position and, according to the logic of the market, needed to attract white middle class girls to the school. The cultural capital and academic success these girls brought to the school was a valuable commodity in the local educational market place. Thus while decrying the 'snobbish' attitudes and advantages of girls in more 'elite' schools on the basis of their social class and ethnicity, in their own schooling context, these girls experienced a similar advantage. Their response to, or legitimation of, their privilege within the less 'elite' context of Girls' College was to emphasise their 'moral' qualities.

Nice Girls

Yogi: Socially, Girls' College has probably a much better environment and you are more likely to grow socially at Girls' High than at a school like Victoria College where there's so much academic pressure.

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George: We're more socially mature. [Group 3, Interview 2, p.3].

In this extract Yogi compares three of the single sex girls' schools in the city with each other on the basis of two criteria which she set up as oppositional: academic pressure and social maturity. At one end of the spectrum is Victoria College, a private girls' school, which was seen as having the highest level of academic pressure. At the other end of the spectrum was Girls' College where 'social maturity' is achieved as a result of the girls having to learn how to be self-motivated. These Girls' College students were aware that their school was considered 'less desirable' but they turned their lower status into an advantage by arguing that they had been able to develop qualities that they would not have been able to if they had been in a more 'elite' school. While these girls were from Pakeha middle class backgrounds, they were anxious to distinguish themselves from other Pakeha middle class girls who went to Girls' High and who they regarded as 'snobs', presumably because they 'looked down on' other girls.

Yoko: But we're a nice school in general, we are nice to each other. It's just against the school, I think, everyone goes—

George: Bananas! *(laughter)*

Sue: Isn't it interesting how these hierarchies get set up? I was interested in your comment George. I think you said that the Girls' High girls are snobs, when you get positioned as the 'beasts', and as the school that is second best—

George: Well at least we're not snobs!

Sue: Yeah, exactly. So you need to think of something that is kind of a defensive response in a way, so then you have to find something to say about them. Is it like that? Kind of makes you feel OK about where you are?

Yoko: This school accepts anybody. Accepts people for what they are. It's not where they come from, or anything. It's just generally the person. If they're not a nice person they won't make friends. [Group 3, Interview 2, p. 3]

George's exclamation, "Bananas", in response to Yoko's assertion that, "we are nice to each other", was an interruption which reminded me of the times where these girls alluded to the hierarchies of power that operated within the school and which I discuss in more detail later on in this chapter. The girls were suggesting that that while they did have some privilege,

they were deserving of it on the basis that they are 'nice girls'. Being 'nice' as Hey (1997) points out, is, "specific to the formulation of white middle class femininity" (p. 134). The implication here is that other 'disadvantaged' girls can also achieve well if they are nice enough and try hard. It is acceptable to be privileged, as long as it is not used to put others down.

Yoko's emphatic statement that, "this school accepts everybody" is an assertion that I read as intending to override any suggestion that there is a lack of acceptance within the school, it is a way of silencing any allusion to a reality other than the one she is determined to construct. I also read this extract as being a reflection of the egalitarian ideals these girls espouse. Egalitarianism is a discourse about equality which assumes that everyone is equal and that everyone should therefore be given an equal opportunity to succeed (Middleton, 1992; Jones et al., 1990). As other extracts will show, this is a dominant discourse in the school and one which is used to both distinguish Girls' College from other schools and, as I will argue, to obscure the inequalities and relations of power which nevertheless operate within the school.

In contrast to the egalitarian context at Girls' College, the girls described the elitism that they believed was practiced at other, more 'exclusive' schools. In the local education hierarchy, Girls' College students were often described as 'beasts', a description that constitutes them as un-desirable and embodied. That is, their identity was defined by what they looked like. It is a comment that is about the girls' physical appearance and their bodies and which positions them outside of access to any kind of desirable feminine subjectivity. The response of these girls was to emphasise 'dis-embodied' characteristics, such as moral qualities. The girls saw themselves as 'nice girls' who were socially accepting and friendly. As I commented in the interview, it seemed to me that the girls' investment in identifying as 'nice girls' was a strategy aimed at countering the negative, 'undesirable' image the school had in the local educational market. If they can't be desirable like Girls' High girls, then they will be 'nice' girls who will ultimately be rewarded for their good behaviour and their egalitarian ideals.

These Pakeha middle class girls were anxious to define themselves as being free from concern with body image which is traditionally associated with femininity. In rejecting these concerns they were constituting themselves as more 'rational' than the girls at Girls' High.

Yoko: No. It's like, at Southern Girls', because you were stuck with those people. And here you're not. I am pleased I came to this school. And especially after hearing about Girls' High, I am glad I didn't go there!

Yogi: Another thing about Girls' High...

George: They lost the Stage Challenge[6]!'

Yogi: Shut up. I was talking to a friend, and she said that they went through a stage when instead of saying 'Hi' to each other they would say, 'Hi. You're fat and you smell'.

George: *(laughs)* What!?

Yogi: And then, if a new girl would come into the group, and it would be, like, "You are fat and you smell", and she'd go ... I don't think we'd do that at our school.

Yoko: No. It's just—it's just this school, I guess.

George: It's good.

Yoko: It is a good school.

Sue: Yes. That phrase "It's a good school"—That's fine, but what is good about it? I want you to be more specific.

Yoko: The people. I don't know.

George: The people are more from a variety of backgrounds, so it's more interesting. [Group 3, Interview 5, p.3]

These Girls' College girls rejected the culture of femininity which they saw as being dominant at Girls' High, a culture which emphasised the surveillance of the body and conformity to a certain body image. Against this embodied culture at Girls' High, they asserted the dis-embodied characteristics that, they argued, were valued at their school—'goodness' and tolerance of those from a 'variety of backgrounds'. The relationship between the two girls' schools was constructed as oppositional, with each defining the abject in relation to the other.

I would also argue that this strategy of abjectifying[7] the Girls' High students used by these girls was one that enabled them both to acknowledge and to legitimate their own

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[6] Stage Challenge is an inter-school drama competition held each year in which schools develop a performance according to strictly determined criteria.

[7] Abjectifying refers to Butler's (1993) use of this term, described in Chapter Two.

privilege at Girls' College. Although they were aware of their advantage in a school where their cultural capital was highly valued, their assertion that, "at least we're not snobs" was a kind of defense which reinforced their egalitarian stance.

In her exploration of the culture at a private girls' school in Australia, Kenway (1990) makes the point that in order for the girls at the school to develop a positive image of themselves and their school, they constitute and designate as 'the other' girls who attend public schools. That is, in order for these private school girls to feel good about their schools and themselves, they must construct what Kenway terms a 'negative referent' against which they can define themselves. As she describes:

> "Essentially, what is seen by most girls to distinguish their type of private school from state schools are the strictness about the students' appearance, behaviour and their academic standards. The value of the private school, in its girls' eyes, is its capacity to produce academic and career success" (p. 147).

Proweiler (1998) makes a similar observation in her study of an elite private girls' school in the United States. She describes the students at 'Best Academy' as narrating themselves as being different from other girls who attend coeducational schools. It is interesting that the girls in my study, who attended a public (state) school, used the same process of 'othering', but their 'negative referents' were the elite girls and the qualities they espoused. This strategy of 'othering' is a means by which 'identity' is constituted and it is therefore used both by those who are constituted as powerful by dominant discourses, and those who are positioned as powerless.

Diversity: Developing 'Tolerance'

One of the reasons why Girls' College is such a 'good school', as the girls explained in the previous extract, is because it has people from a 'variety of backgrounds' and it is therefore 'more interesting'. The diversity of the school's population has given the girls the opportunity to develop qualities that they would not have developed in a more academic, competitive and 'elite' schooling context.

> Yogi: Especially if you are white, middle/upper class, being surrounded by so many cultures is really good for you. Also, I think— [Group 3, interview 2, p. 4]

Yogi and George explained earlier in the interview:

Yogi: I think that this school has more than its fair share of problems.

George: But that's because our school accepts all the refugee girls and ESOL[8], and—

Yoko: But we're a nice school in general, we are nice to each other. It's just against the school, I think, everyone goes— [Group 3, Interview 2, p.3]

The girls believed their experience of diversity was preparing them for a world 'out there' which was also diverse. They believed that girls from private schools like Victoria College would be disadvantaged because they would not be able to cope in a more diverse social and ethnic context. This discourse of 'tolerance' only makes sense in a context of unequal power relations. To tolerate someone is to assume that they are different and therefore in need of tolerance. But this begs the question of to whom they are 'different', and on whose terms difference is defined? Since, as Wittig (1992) argues, the power to define as 'other' resides on the dominant side of the binary, defining as different is a strategy of domination. Or as McLaren (1995) would have it:

"Discourses have been revealed to possess the power to nominate others as deviant or normal" (p. 56).

Tolerance, then, might be viewed as a discourse which both obscures and legitimates the relations of dominance by which difference is defined and constituted. So, while the Pakeha middle class girls disavowed the privilege exercised by girls like themselves in more 'elite' schools, the 'tolerance' they said they had developed might be viewed as a discourse that is only available to those who are already in a privileged position. It is the dominant culture which must tolerate the marginalised 'other', and should do so if it is morally 'good'.

McLaren (1995), writing about the American context, describes this as 'liberal multiculturalism'.

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[8] English for Speakers of Other Languages. This acronym is officially used to designate a curriculum area, rather than a group of people but it is informally used to refer to the group of students who are seen to be in need of this curriculum.

"Liberal multiculturalism argues that a natural equality exists among whites, African Americans, Latinos, Asians and other racial populations. This perspective is based on the intellectual 'sameness' among the races, that is, on their cognitive equivalence or the rationality imminent in all races that permits them to compete equally in a capitalist society...This view collapses into an ethnocentric and oppressively universalistic humanism in which the norms which govern the substance of citizenship are identified most strongly with the Anglo-American, cultural-political communities" (p. 40).

Defining Difference

The girls define 'refugee girls' and those who have first languages other than English as 'problems'. It is these girls who are the problem, not the school context or the attitudes of the Pakeha students who have little understanding of or ability to communicate with these students. The principal told me that there were more than thirty cultures represented in the school. In the context of the education market where 'desirability' is closely related to the SES and ethnic composition of the student intake, there is a real incentive for schools like Girls' College to down-play the diversity of their student population. As long as Pakeha culture is seen to be dominant, other cultures can be tolerated for the diversity they bring to the school and for the opportunity to develop 'tolerance' that they offer to Pakeha girls.

Experience of 'diversity' does not necessarily unsettle the dominant culture and may even serve to reinforce it where non-dominant cultures can be constructed as exotic 'others'. It is these 'others' who make the school more 'interesting' and more attractive to supporters of the liberal multiculturalism referred to by McLaren. In this way it is possible for the girls to support 'diversity' without threatening their own privilege. In fact, their affirmation of the need for tolerance may even serve to strengthen their privilege.

> Yoko: Yeah, but at this school also, through being at this school, you've probably learned how to deal with lots of different—with people of other languages, and people with disabilities and stuff. [Group 3, Interview 2, p.3]

The categories of difference are collapsed here so that girls with disabilities and those who speak 'different languages' are grouped together. Yoko saw them all as 'different' and the specific ways in which they might be different were not considered important. It was students with disabilities and who have a first language other than English who were considered 'different' so that the difference is defined on Yogi's terms and in relation to her. However, I

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also noted Yogi's self-correction in describing some of these girls. She began by saying, "lots of different" and then changed to, "people of other languages"—a shift which I read as an indication of her awareness of the political issues that surround the naming of students who have a first language other than English (Barnard, 1998).

Yogi then went on to assert the value of being in a context where girls who are not Pakeha are given opportunities to succeed in a range of ways.

Yogi: One of the ways that you help them lose all the superior attitudes is that in assemblies you have so many, like, the Samoan and Maori and other culture girls getting up on stage, and being Head Prefect, or winning sports prizes or doing well academically, sporting.

George: You sort of don't notice their colour. It doesn't really matter.

Yoko: I think this school has prepared us more, to deal with real life, with different cultures outside, the work force and stuff.

Yogi: The thing about Girls' College is that it really prepares you for the real world.

George: Because you're not necessarily going to be working in a place that is just white middle class.

Yogi: Especially with the work and stuff. If you go to a school like Victoria College and you'd just be pushed and motivated to do all the work. Whereas at Girls' College you have to tell yourself that you're going to do the work. You have to get yourself to do it. Which is more like the real world.

Yoko: In the real world if you don't push yourself, you fail, basically.

Yogi: It's just up to you. [Group 3, Interview 2, p.5]

Being 'Colour-blind'

While describing the ways in which girls from a range of cultural backgrounds have been able to achieve well at the school, the girls then went on to point out they, "don't notice the other colours" and, "you don't notice the other cultures, really".

Yoko: You don't notice the other cultures, really.

George: You don't notice the other colours. We are all friends. I think the seventh form is really quite a close form.

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Doris: We don't have the real ... You've got your Chinese over here, your Japanese over there. You've got your Assyrians, your—

George: That don't mix at all.

Doris: Yeah. Instead of having those really definite—You've got them, but they still interact.

Jane: The only ones that don't interact in our Common Room is the Asians. They don't. They sit there, they talk their own language. Which irritates me.

Doris: They all come to school and they have their lovely prepared Chinese food and the microwave-able containers. And there's a big line-up to the microwave. And each one goes in, gets their lunch, and then they sit on the same side.

George: It's like, 'I just want to put my scone in for 30 seconds!'

Jane: The rest of the girls in the Common Room, they mix, they'll jump over people, they—

George: But it's also—

Jane: If they hit someone they will turn around and say sorry. I was whacked by one of the girls in the Asian group, and they just look at you, like, 'It wasn't my fault'. All the other girls will apologise.

George: The Asians that are separate are the ones who have come over recently. I mean, like Cindy and Christina and that.

Doris: Amy hasn't. The ones which, like, talk to the rest of us are the ones who are more 'New Zealand-ised'. Like—

George: Like Christina, and Chuhua.

Jane: They don't really—

George: Well, she does with my group of friends

Sue: Do you think that's a way of them—that they feel unsafe in the school community, so they stick together as a way of feeling safe?

George: It's really because they are more comfortable with their own language. It's just easier for them.

Jane: But real life's not—

Doris: But here we don't have big Asian-bashing circles. If there's going to be bullying, it's going to be either white against Polynesian, or Polynesian against white.

Jane: But we really don't have that either, because they accept us, for what we are. [Group 3, Interview 3, p.2]

One of the first things I noted about this extract was the high level of involvement in the discussion. The girls wanted to talk about this, they wanted to describe how the 'Asian' girls kept themselves separate in the senior common room—"They don't mix at all". They argued that the 'Asian' girls were responsible for their own isolation by speaking in their own language, by the food they ate and by their refusal to apologise and to obey the informal behavioural codes of the common room. These 'Asian' girls were constituted as selfish, unfriendly and exclusive, even violent, in contrast to the girls in the focus group who in this narrative are constituted as having their tolerance severely tested by the 'unreasonable' and exclusive behaviour of these 'other' girls. Their comments challenge the girls' earlier claims that they were tolerant of difference. The extract concludes with Doris commenting that the main race-based antagonism in the school is between the white and the 'Polynesian' students. Jane counters this by arguing that this is not really a problem because, "they accept us for what we are".

I think it is worth noting in the context of this focus group interview that this was the group that Miriama withdrew from because of her dis-comfort at being the only Pacific Islands girl in the group. She said she felt the girls, "wouldn't understand what I was going through". Thus while Jane said that the Pacific Islands students accept the Pakeha students, there are clearly Pacific Islands students who did not feel understood or safe in a predominantly white group.

Diversity as Novelty

As Yogi commented in relation to her reasons for choosing the school, she felt the 'multi-cultural' mix of the school population created a fun and friendly atmosphere. It took on a kind of novelty value for her which she viewed as 'enriching'. I want to suggest that it was enriching because it was not threatening, and at the same time it allows them to feel morally superior to the Girls' High girls who are not as 'tolerant'. If the dominance of her culture was threatened by these 'other' girls, she may have had quite different response. It does not require

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her to change, she can 'try on' different cultures of femininity while not having her access to the dominant cultural subjectivity threatened. Just as I argued that she could afford to 'take the risk' of being in a 'less academic' context since her access to academic success is assured, so I would argue that she can also afford to risk being in a culturally diverse context where her cultural dominance is assured.

Frankenberg (1993) argues that in order for racism to be disrupted, more is needed than simple exposure to 'other' cultures or the development of 'tolerance'. In her research on 'whiteness', she aimed:

> "to begin the process of defamiliarizing that which is taken for granted in white experience and to elaborate a method for making visible and analyzing the racial structuring of white experience" (p. 44).

She shows how white folk see 'others' as being raced while ignoring the ways in which they too are raced. 'Whiteness', she explains, has a set of linked dimensions:

> "First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint', a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society . Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (p. 1).

That is, whiteness as an unmarked category is only possible through the existence of its 'other'—blackness. In a similar way, Lucey (1996) explores how a group of middle class young women's:

> "choices are bounded and restricted in ways which are impossible to see when they are held up as the undisputed and healthy norm" (p. 3).

Normalisation

Frankenberg and Lucey are referring to the processes of normalisation whereby white middle class girls, like those in my study, learn to see themselves as 'normal' and as the referent group against which the experiences and realities of 'others' can be understood and defined in the particular cultural contexts in which they live. As I was meeting with the girls and reading over the interview transcripts, I was very aware of my own position as

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white/Pakeha and middle class and of the things I 'took for granted' and the things I noted as 'different'. As I have commented in Chapter 3, I often asked the Indian, Chinese, Vietnamese and Iranian students about their 'cultural backgrounds' and their cultural practices while I assumed a familiarity with those girls who were, apparently (but not necessarily) most like me. In presenting this analysis, I have noticed the processes of normalisation and problematised the egalitarian, rational critique of these girls. I have tried to make visible the exclusions through which the appearance of the 'normal' is sustained. It is clear that for the girls in this study, constituting 'others' is an important strategy that enables them to constitute 'themselves'.

These girls saw themselves as different from girls at Girls' High and Victoria College who they described as 'overly academic', competitive and elitist. Against this discourse of inequality and privilege, they constituted themselves as being egalitarian and tolerant. While they acknowledged their potentially privileged position as white middle class students within their school, by constituting themselves as morally superior to girls in these other schools, they legitimated their access to their powerful position in their own school. It is acceptable to be privileged as long as you do not use your privilege to disadvantage others. In presenting these extracts, I have suggested that the privilege these girls experienced at school was not threatened or undermined by the success of those 'others'. Furthermore, their desirability within a social and schooling context structured by class and race maintained their power.

The middle class Pakeha girls in my study described their schooling experiences at Girls' College in ways which emphasised their rationality and autonomy. They characterised themselves as young women who felt in control of their destiny and who were capable of making the choices that would ensure their success. Their attendance at Girls' College, which they were aware was considered less academic and less desirable in the local education market, is an indication of their confidence in their ability to succeed. They described themselves as being in control of their lives, freed from the constraints of class, race and gender. These are 'reasonable' young women who embrace egalitarian ideals. In a similar way, the girls' narratives of choice that I described in Chapter 5 constituted them as rational, autonomous choosers who were free to make decisions in the educational market place, and their schooling experiences reinforce this rational subjectivity.

While their access to an 'unraced' (white/Pakeha) and 'unclassed' (middle class) subjectivity is largely uncontested, I think their access to discourses of rationality which cohere with discourses of masculinity is highly problematic, although, when talking with the girls, it

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seemed that all was well. In this next section I use Lloyd (1993) and Walkerdine's (1989) work on rationality to explore in more detail the ways in which these girls position themselves in relation to discourses of rationality in order to constitute themselves as rational, autonomous subjects.

Being Harassed: 'You Got the Wrong Girl'!

These girls saw themselves as being in control of their lives, freed from the constraints of their gender. In this way, they might be seen as taking up the rational subjectivity referred to by Lloyd (1993). Within the school gates, this perception of themselves seemed secure. However, outside of the school, they had experiences which had the potential to threaten their access to this rational subjectivity. In the extract below, Kellie, a Pakeha middle class girl in Group 2, describes an incident in which her identity as a 'Girls' College' student while wearing the school uniform made her the target of harassment.

Kellie: I used to get that walking to school. I stopped walking to school. I'd wait for my friend at the bottom of William St. There'd be this truck of builders or something, and they'd go round and round and round the block.

Sue: And leering out at you?

Kellie: No, they'd just scream stuff at you. You'd get really embarrassed, though, standing on the corner, waiting for your friend. And she was always late! All these guys kept going round and round the block. [Group 2, Interview 2, p.7]

In the incident she described, Kellie was sexually harassed by men driving to work, an experience which she described as embarrassing and which she altered her behaviour to avoid—she stopped walking to school. The harassment by the men might be read as positioning Kellie as an object of male desire and it was an experience which perhaps strengthened Kellie's determination to take up a rational, disembodied subjectivity which (apparently) distanced her from this embodied 'object' position. But while the harassment from the men positioned Kellie as object of male desire, in another incident of harassment, Kellie is harassed because of her un-desirability.

Sue: Has anyone else had things like that happen? Outside of school, or maybe in school, I don't know.

Kellie: You get it when you go down to Boys' College.

Sue: What sort of things?

Kellie: I believe you've heard about our potato and gravy incident?

Sue: Oh, were you one of the people with that? Tell us about that.

Kellie: The day of our ball some of us went down the driveway to get some posters for the senior drama ...(*too soft*). And some Boys' College guys were coming back from lunch at KFC[9], and they threw their potato and gravy at us, while screaming rude comments.

Sue: Were you in your uniform?

Kellie: Yeah. I got potato and gravy all through my hair. I had to go home and wash it, and go to the hairdressers—

Sue: See, I find that—to me—Was it really upsetting?

Kellie: Yeah, it was. The guys we took to the ball were really pissed off. It kind of ruined our night a bit. [Group 2, Interview 2, p.6]

In this incident, Kellie and her friends were at the end of their school driveway when they had food thrown at them by boys from the neighbouring school who were driving past. Much of the resonance of the act resides in the differing ways in which the two schools are positioned in the education market. Boys' College is an elite single sex state school that has a student composition with a high SES (SES decile 10). The school is able to operate an enrolment scheme as it is over-subscribed. Girls' College is lower down on the hierarchy of desirability in the education market and has a student composition with a lower SES (SES decile 6). Because the girls were in uniform and standing outside the school, they were easily identifiable as Girls' College students, although the girls did not think the boys knew them personally. The boys who threw the food were driving a Pajero, an expensive car in New Zealand and a symbol of middle class status. The girls were harassed because their identity as Girls' College students positioned them at the undesirable end of the hierarchy of femininity. They were harassed not only because they were girls, but because they were the 'wrong kind'

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[9] Kentucky Fried Chicken: a fast food outlet.

of girls. Later in the interview, Kellie described how she believed she was more at risk from this kind of harassment when she was with a group of girls, rather than on her own.

Sue: I was saying to the girls in the other group who told me that—it must have been some of your friends—Do you think they would have done that if you were Girls' High students?

Kellie: No. It's only a few people from our school that give Girls' College a bad reputation. Cause, I've been down there [Boys' College] doing junior drama. And their Juniors don't believe that I go to Girls' College. Because they think that I'm too nice to go to Girls' College. [Group 2, Interview 2, p.7]

Kellie's strategy of resistance to this kind of harassment was to maintain her sense of herself as autonomous and as a different kind of girl to that which is typically associated with Girls' College. The potato and gravy incident is a case of mistaken identity, 'you got the wrong girl' and she pointed out that when she was on her own, Boys' College students thought she was 'too nice' to be a Girls' College student. Implied in this is a sense that there are girls who are deserving of the abuse. There are good girls and bad girls, and bad girls are those who attract harassment and even deserve it. As I will discuss later in this chapter, for girls who are positioned outside of this privileged raced and classed subjectivity that Kellie has access to, this 'nice girl' strategy is not available.

This attitude is echoed in the comments made by three other Pakeha middle class girls in Group 3 when they also discussed the harassment they also experienced from the boys at the neighbouring school.

Yogi: Another thing that you have got to think about is that if the guys have attitude problems, then that is their problem. If we get harassed, then it affects us, but nothing is going to be too serious. I mean, that potato and gravy thing was just going to be like a one-off thing. That is not going to happen very often. I think the school is—I'm not saying it is our fault we are getting harassed or anything, but our school needs more pride. Like, there are a lot of girls here who just go here because they have to be at school until they are sixteen or whatever. And they don't like it. They are the ones that give the school a bad image, because they talk about it negatively and stuff.

George: And the uniform, I reckon is a big thing. Because we have been having for years this uniform being surveyed. And it hasn't happened. That is half the problem, because our uniform looks so bad.

Doris: If you take pride in what you wear, you take pride in your uniform, you take pride in your school. And that contributes to the whole image that you portray. [Group 3, Interview 4, p.6]

An Attitude Problem

In Yogi's view, harassment is the result of an 'attitude' problem by the boys, and while she acknowledged that it was not the girls' fault, she argued that if the students had more pride in the school, they would be less likely to be harassed. Underlying her comment is a strong sense of individual responsibility: if girls behave appropriately and have enough pride, this will act as a buffer against harassment. Their argument presumes that the harassment is a predictable and somehow deserved response to the behaviour of some of the girls at school and it also implies a kind of inevitability. Since there is nothing that can be done to change the behaviour of boys, the girls therefore have to modify their own behaviour in order to avoid the harassment. So, while Yogi states that the girls are not to be blamed for attracting the harassment, her strategy of resistance involved the girls modifying their behaviour. Later in the interview, the girls discussed the boys who they thought were responsible for most of the harassment.

Doris: But, the thing is that in Boys' College the primary group who is doing the harassment is the rugby lads. Yeah, the 'rugger heads'. And—

Sue: Why do they feel they can do it, though?

Doris: Because, 'We're in the First Fifteen[10]. We drink a keg every Saturday night. We're so—'

George: It's just a big macho thing.

Yoko: Male egos!

Sue: Yeah, but aren't we letting them get away with it? It doesn't stop after school, you know.

Yoko: It's just—

Doris: The thing is, they attack the weaker boys at Boys' College anyway.

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[10] The First Fifteen is the top rugby football team in the school.

George: Definitely. The music boys get hassled.

Yogi: I don't think it is a matter of them getting away with it. There are not a lot of ways you can change a person's attitude. You can discipline them if they do something really stupid, really bad, like something major. Or you can talk to them, but it will probably just go in one ear and out the other, because there's nothing in between. (*laughter*) [Group 3, Interview 4, p.7]

Just as there are different discourses of femininity which operate in the context of Girls' College, so there are discourses of masculinity at Boys' College, some of which are dominant and some of which are marginalised. The 'rugger heads', the boys who are in the senior rugby team at the school, are those who seem to wield the most power in the school. They are the ones who define who is in and who is out and the criteria for acceptance. The 'music boys' are hassled, presumably because their involvement in the arts disqualifies them from entry into the dominant masculine subjectivity embodied by the 'rugger heads' in a context where physical strength is equated with power. The binary between body and mind is made explicit by Yogi when she commented that the behaviour of the boys who are responsible for the harassment is difficult if not impossible to change since, "there's nothing in between" their ears. In the girls' terms, the boys' lack of rationality means they are slaves to their bodily responses. The power of these boys is seen to reside in their sporting accomplishments, it is seen as embodied. The girls' response is to emphasise their own dis-embodiment, to distance themselves from their own bodies and to regulate their behaviour as a means of avoiding the harassment they are subject to. The girls take up the rational subjectivity which is vacated by the boys, a subjectivity which they perceive as being a powerful buffer against the boys' 'irrational' behaviour.

In their study of policies aimed at addressing sex-based harassment within schools, Kenway and Willis (1997) give the example of teachers who understood sex-harassment as:

"resulting from some natural characteristic of masculinity which at times ('occasionally') exhibits itself in extreme and unacceptable forms. The more extreme forms of male behaviour are seen to be a symptom of a particular individual boy's incapacities or anti-social behaviour and are not part of a wider system of social relations which impart power to males in particular ways" (p. 111).

In a similar way, these white middle class girls express an acceptance of the inevitability of this kind of behaviour from boys. These girls have little understanding of the

broader relations of power within which they are positioned and as such, resistance to harassment is seen as an individual responsibility, something they have to learn to deal with.

In Chapter 5 I noted that the Pakeha middle class girls did not mention the single sex character of Girls' College in their narratives of choice and gendered considerations were apparently not important in their decision making process. The girls gave accounts that constituted themselves as being freed from the constraints of their gender and as rational subjects who were free to exercise choice. However, their descriptions of the sex-based harassment they were subject to suggest that the choice of a single sex school might also be seen as a rational management strategy in the face of the sex-based harassment they were subject to from boys.

Rationality and Femininity

While, at the discursive level, feminist theorists like Walkerdine (1989) have argued convincingly that discourses of rationality are highly contradictory for girls, for these Pakeha middle class girls it seems as if femininity is consistent with rationality. The question for me is whether this rational, feminine subjectivity they constitute is problematic? I want to suggest that it is. I want to suggest that it is not that this rational subjectivity is unproblematic but that in order for it to appear consistent, all that is in-consistent, the 'ir-rational', the 'other', the 'feminine' must be excluded and silenced. That is, these girls access to this rational subjectivity is not a kind of fulfillment of their femininity but is dependent on the disavowal of femininity.

Fine and Macpherson (1992) describe their conversation with four teenage girls and consider the girls' interpretations of discourses of femininity, adolescence and feminism. They noted that for these girls:

"femininity meant the taming of adolescent passions, outrage, and intelligence. Feminism was a flight from the 'other girls' as unworthy and untrustworthy. Their version of feminism was about equal access to being men" (p. 176).

In a similar way, I think the girls in my study also constituted themselves as rational subjects by constituting themselves as different from 'other girls', but also as different from the irrational and unreasonable behaviour of the boys. In one sense, it was as if they were

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constituting themselves as more worthy than the boys of access to a rational subjectivity on the basis of their more reasonable, tolerant behaviour. In their terms, (their version of) femininity has been redefined as rationality.

In the context of the school, these girls are positioned as powerful because of the dominance of Pakeha middle class culture and their access to a rational subjectivity is uncontested. In a single sex environment, these girls' femininity does not threaten their access to rationality and in fact, their rational subjectivity is reinforced by their tolerance and by their academic achievement. However, outside of the school, in mixed sex environments, their dominance is threatened by their embodied, gendered subjectivity. While their assertion of their rationality may be an effective defense against the dominance of boys, as expressed via sex-based harassment, when they are in the relative sanctuary of their all-girls' school, I am not so sure of its efficacy when they leave. Here I would agree with Byrne (1993) who argues that all-girls schools are less than adequate in preparing girls for, what she terms, the 'male domination' in coeducational educational and employment environments.

In describing the girls in this way I am aware that my critique of their comments may seem judgmental or harsh. As an older woman with many years of experience as an educator and researcher, these girls may seem 'easy targets' for my feminist critique. My commentary could be read as one which accuses the girls of not being 'egalitarian' or 'feminist' enough and that, despite their protestations to the contrary, they have their own elite culture in the midst of a diverse student population which privileges their 'ways of being' and a naïve understanding of gender and power. Instead, I want to suggest another reading which shifts the focus from the girls to the educational experiences they have had.

These girls are, in many ways, the kinds of good, rational girls that they have been encouraged to be in the course of their schooling. These girls have come through the 'Girls Can Do Anything' campaigns of the 1980s where girls were told they need no longer experience constraints on the basis of their gender (Kenway et al. 1994; Middleton, 1992; Jones et al., 1990). The 1980s was also a time where discourses of 'multiculturalism' gained ascendancy in education, in which students were encouraged to 'celebrate diversity' in the absence of any developed critique of power (May, 1994; Irwin, 1989). I suggest that they have had no or very little exposure to the kinds of critique of relations of power which I have highlighted in my analysis. It hardly seems fair then to blame these girls for embracing these egalitarian ideals. In the final chapter of this thesis I will take up these ideas in more detail and

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outline some of the possibilities a school like Girls' College has for undertaking this kind of critical work with girls.

In the next section of this chapter I discuss the Maori and Pacific Islands' girls in Group 5, a group that reflected some of the cultural diversity that the girls in Group 3 said they enjoyed at Girls' College. In a similar way, I explore the interview transcripts to consider the experiences of girls who were not so easily positioned within the powerful raced and classed subjectivities that the Pakeha middle class girls had access to.

Group 5

Positioning Myself

In contrast to Group 3 which, once Miriama left, was all-Pakeha, Group 5 was made up of five students from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Waima was the only student who described herself as 'European', although her father (who she didn't live with) was Maori (she did not give his iwi[11] affiliations). Alfreda identified as Maori (iwi affiliations given but not included here), Tupac was Tongan and Diana and Mandy were Indian although these girls had different countries of origin (as described in Chapter 4). Mandy was the only one in the group whose parents were middle class—her mother is a doctor and her father an engineer.

However, in discussing these issues and my interpretation of these girls' comments, I want to begin by acknowledging and addressing the challenge that Smith (1992) makes to white feminists as we attempt to interpret and define the experiences of Maori girls.

" Basically, there is a tension between the projects of white women and those of Maori women…Although we may value the revelations of how white patriarchy works (revelations which have come to us from the work of white women), we have also witnessed the practice of white matriarchy. Our rage as an oppressed group is directed at dominant white structures which sit over us, and so encompass white women as much as white men" (p. 48).

Smith argues that Maori women must claim control over the interpretation of their struggles, an assertion that I read as challenging my right to interpret the experiences of the Maori girls who participated in my study. A similar argument might also be made with regard

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[11] Iwi is the Maori word meaning tribe.

to all of the girls in my study who were not Pakeha—like me. In response, I refer to the work of Jones (1992) who (writing in the same volume as Smith), considered these issues in relation to her research with Pacific Islands girls.

"In writing these things, I wished to avoid the position of guilt, occasioned by being a middle-class, white, relatively powerful woman daring to write about working-class Polynesian, non-powerful girls. Invariably, this position involved my personal implication in their oppression. This, however, seemed disabling of me as a political actor...I opted instead for a self-conscious stance which indicated how social relations limited and shaped my interpretations" (p. 22).

Following Jones, I have also tried to take a 'self-conscious' stance in my writing, not claiming to 'tell the truth' about the girls, but to critically engage with existing literature written by educators from a range of race, ethnic and class perspectives. Jones suggests (after Haraway, 1988) that in acknowledging the incompleteness and partiality of our accounts, we invite the possibility for others to 'enter a conversation' through our work.

"In this way, the authority of the author is used to break down the authority of the text, and thus invites response rather than simple acceptance (or rejection)" (p. 26).

The second point I want to make here is that in Aotearoa/New Zealand there is very little research that considers the schooling experiences of girls from a range of ethnic and class backgrounds, and there is almost no research that explores single sex schooling contexts like Girls' College that have a relatively balanced student mix in terms of ethnicity and social class. For example, Carkeek, Davies and Irwin (1994) make the point that there is:

"very little research available and virtually no empirical research which specifically focussed on the schooling experiences of Maori girls and women" (p. 9).

Their report entitled, 'What happens to Maori Girls at School' was a start in addressing this gap. Their research was undertaken in seven coeducational primary schools: three mainstream, two Maori-language immersion[12] and two bilingual—Maori-English. The mainstream classrooms had relatively high proportions of Maori students (between 23 and 80 per cent).

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[12] Immersion schools are those in which either all or most curriculum subjects are taught in the Maori language.

My research was undertaken in a different context and I want to suggest that it contributes to an understanding of the experiences of (different) Maori girls in a range of schooling contexts. I offer my research as a contribution to the research in this area, not to assert that the perspective I bring is the only, or the 'correct' one, but to contribute to the discussion about girls in schools and in doing so to (hopefully) invite others to do the same.

While I have focussed on Maori girls in schools in this discussion, I would also argue that there is a similar lack of research about girls who are Samoan, Chinese, Indian and 'new-migrant' (for example). This was obvious to me as I searched literature to provide a context from which to think about the girls in my study. Consequently I have also drawn from a range of international literature, making comparisons and discussing the issues they raise as they seem relevant to my own research.

Equal Opportunity

Although Group 5 (which this section of the chapter focuses on) was ethnically diverse, when I reviewed the transcripts I noted the absence of direct discussion about race or ethnicity. In fact, as the following extract shows, Alfreda resisted my attempts to have race, culture or gender 'discrimination' as an issue for discussion:

Alfreda: Can I just say something? It's not really on what you were talking about. I was just thinking about this thing that happened the other day. It's not really related. I was sitting with the girls and stuff, and we were talking, and I heard that someone else had said about one of my friend's—she's Maori. And they go—one of these other girls, an outside girl, a friend, or a sister of one of the girls who goes to our school. And how she was saying she was racist about one of the girls in our school. And it sort of blew me away a bit, because it is not something that goes on in our school. We are in a real cultural environment, and you don't think, 'she's black, she's white', and all this stuff. It's not around us. The racism thing isn't around in school. It's not really a thing that's happening. That's why, with the guy-girl thing it's not really a thing that goes on around here, but you sort of know that it's out there. Even though racism and discrimination, you know, it is not here in our school, but you know that it's out there. It's not part of the thing here. But that's like the guy-girl thing. It's not in here. To us it's not a big major thing. But it is out there.

Tupac: Because a lot of girls pose a threat to a lot of guys, and they think, 'She's better than me. I've got to try and be better.' I don't know. It's really weird.

Waima: It's not a superior-inferior thing to us, that guys are better than girls. It's like, 'She's black, she's white. And white is superior.' It's not like that. Even though you are

coming in here saying, 'What do you think of the guys? Are they better than girls?' It's not like that. We don't see it like that. [Group 5, Interview 5, p.5]

Waima and Alfreda drew an interesting analogy between the 'racism thing' and the 'guy-girl thing' in a way that effectively collapsed race and gender together as categories of difference. For these girls, 'discrimination' was the issue and was the result of attitudes of superiority, rather than any systemic or institutionalised process. They argued that 'racism' and 'sexism' did not exist in their school, presumably because no one has 'superior' attitudes and because racial difference is not noticed ('you don't think, she's black, she's white'). However, they believed that discrimination operated outside of the school. In a similar way to the middle class Pakeha girls, they constructed the school as an egalitarian context where all are given equal opportunity to succeed.

Tupac, who is Tongan, agreed with Alfreda and asserted that she also had been given equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of her gender.

Sue: Do you think there are different expectations about how men should be and how women should be, or should turn out? Like, 'young men should aim for these kinds of things, and young women should aim for these kinds of things.'

Tupac: It used to be, but things change. Like, a lot of people say, 'You can do anything. It doesn't matter what sex you are. As long as you put your mind to it, and motivate yourself to do it.' [Group 5, Interview 5, p. 5]

From my perspective as an educational researcher and educator who has read a great deal about the institutionalised racism which operates within mainstream educational settings, I was surprised that these girls were apparently so 'unaware' and in fact convinced that racism and sexism didn't happen in their school. While I could see how it was in the interests of the Pakeha girls to claim the school as a haven of egalitarianism, it was less obvious to me how such a claim could be in the interest of these Maori and Tongan girls. Each of these girls had achieved very highly at school both academically and in many other areas. Alfreda had a high profile leadership role in the school, she was taking five subjects for Bursary and, as the description in Chapter 4 indicates, she was involved in a range of other cultural and sporting activities. Similarly, Tupac was a talented singer, she was also taking five Bursary subjects and participated in and had a leadership role in a number of other activities at the school. While the little research there is on Maori and Pacific Islands girls in schools has focussed for the most

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part on the reasons why so many of these students under-achieve, I was interested in considering how it was that these two girls had achieved so highly.

Collective Solidarity

For Tupac and Alfreda, there seemed to be no doubt that Girls' College had provided them with opportunities they would not have had at other schools. An important aspect of the school was the sense of belonging and the support provided by the students to one another. In the following extract Alfreda asserts her belief that the opportunities provided to her at Girls' College have been important in enabling her to succeed, but equally importantly, she feels that she has also been able to contribute to the success of the school.

> Alfreda: Can I just say something else? I am also glad I came here. I feel that I have actually done something towards the school, like with choirs and stuff, and singing. I feel like I have helped bring the school along, along with heaps of other people. Because I didn't really know [Girls' College] very well when I was in Form 2, and hardly ever heard about them. But now we are, like, winning Stage Challenge, and getting into Shakespeare Nationals, it's like, things that you wouldn't expect the school to get in. Because a lot of people think we were just singing and that's it, and they—I don't know. I just feel that I have helped bring the school along.
>
> Sue: So do you feel, then—Is it like feeling that you can actually make a difference to this school?
>
> Alfreda: A lot of people can, yeah.
>
> Sue: It's not in an unchangeable body, that you can't do anything about, but that you matter in some way?
>
> Mandy: Yeah. Group achievements.
>
> Alfreda: Yeah. And that is what our school is known for, is how we stick together, and how we move things along to be successful. [Group 5, Interview 5, p.2]

Alfreda did not see achievement and collectivity as mutually exclusive and she expressed a strong sense of responsibility, not only to her family, but also to the school. She saw herself as helping the school to gain the recognition that had been lacking but which she believed was deserved. She did not only value her success for what it could offer her, but for what it could offer the school community as a whole. Furthermore, she saw success as a group

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achievement, rather than an individual achievement. Alfreda's communal/collective focus is a strong contrast to the individualistic terms in which the Pakeha middle class girls described their achievement. Success for Alfreda was not about self-interest but about collective interest and she had a sense of both responsibility and efficacy. She believed that she could make a difference to the reputation of the school. Furthermore, her commitment to the well-being of the school community also extended to that of the Maori community. I read her aspirations to be a teacher in a bilingual (Maori/English) school as an expression of this.

> Alfreda: My Mum already knows what I want to be, that I want to be a bilingual primary school teacher. Because she's gone back to doing her Early Childhood Diploma. So she's at school on Wednesdays. I don't think she's finding it hard to get— just the Maori side to help her along. Like, I've already told her. I'd figured out that I wanted to go last year, and I'd already—sort of thing. She is trying to help me get money from Trusts, already. [Group 5, Interview 2, p. 8]

While the Pakeha girls and the girls in Group 5 defended the school against criticism by asserting the egalitarianism of the school, the girls in Group 5 also asserted the value of Girls' College as a place of belonging and solidarity where students support one another to succeed.

In an article in which she discusses the issues that Maori parents (like herself) face in raising children in a political context in which New Right principles have assumed dominance, McCarthy (1997) argues that the principles of individualism and competition are in direct conflict with the collective and co-operative focus in Maori society.

> "the promotion of the individual is in conflict with one of the most central Maori principles: the collective (Smith, 1992). The collective mode of operation as found in the whanau or extended family concept is fundamental to Maori culture. It is a mode of operation that is still widely utilised, encouraged and fostered by many Maori. Today the term whanau has been extended to denote groups who are not necessarily descent-based but who are working together under a common cause. Such groups are commonly found in government departments, schools, Te Kohanga Reo and sporting clubs. The important point is that despite the changing nature of the whanau, what remains unchanged are the core values and practices which recognise qualities such as obligation, reciprocity, group responsibility, aroha and manaakitanga" (p. 27).

McCarthy's work provides a way for me to think about Alfreda's emphasis on the value of the collective. I read Alfreda's comments as an indication that although she is in a schooling context in which is Eurocentric and where Western 'ways of being' are culturally

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dominant (Irwin, 1989), she had been able to maintain her commitment to the collective and this had enhanced, not hindered her success. McCarthy cites work by Johnson et al. (1981) to suggest that co-operative learning environments may be more effective in promoting student achievement than competitiveness and individualism. The collective emphasis and acquired skills from Maori tikanga might therefore be viewed as an enabling resource for Alfreda at school. Here I want to suggest that although Girls' College privileges Eurocentric ways of being (such as those expressed by the Pakeha girls discussed earlier), it has also rewarded Alfreda for her communal emphasis by giving her an important leadership role in the school. However, it is also the case that Alfreda's commitment to the collective is a responsibility that the Pakeha girls in Group 3 did not share and it therefore placed an extra load on her to not only succeed academically and in many other ways, but to also attend to the well-being of the school community to which she belonged.

I was interested to read a study by Fordham (1988) in which she studied six high achieving Black students in a predominantly Black school in the United States to consider the kinds of tensions they experienced as a result of their success.

"Black children who grow up in predominantly Black communities, then, are raised in the collective view of success, an ethos that is concerned with the Black community as a whole. But since an individualistic rather than a collective ethos is sanctioned in the school context, Black children enter school having to unlearn or, at least to modify, their own culturally sanctioned interactional and behavioral styles and adopt those styles rewarded in the school context if they wish to achieve academic success" (p. 55).

One of the strategies she argues that students use to achieve success is to develop a 'raceless persona'. By this she means that these students purposefully dis-associate themselves from the collective, kinship-based system of the Black community. She gives the example of one of these students, Rita, who constructed a raceless persona for herself and along with it, a belief that society is basically equal.

"Rita is convinced that if only people—Black and White—would seriously begin to discount race as a factor in their interactions with each other, discrimination and other invidious distinctions would disappear. She does not view racism in America as an institutionalized phenomenon. It is in connection to this belief that she has built the raceless persona she presents in the school and non-school context" (p. 69).

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This belief that racism is the result of individual ignorance rather than the systemic and institutionalised racism which Fordham describes seems very similar to the statement by Alfreda cited earlier where she asserted that although she was aware of racism, she believed it did not exist in her school. It seems to me there are two issues here: the constitution of a 'raceless persona' and the belief that racism is the practice of individuals rather than as something which is institutionalised. While Fordham sees these two issues as inter-dependent, I think they can be separated out in Alfreda's case. Alfreda had found a way to achieve at school while maintaining a strong sense of identity as Maori and a commitment to collectivity, but at the same time, she held to a belief in egalitarianism.

In her book which examines race, class and gender in the context of the American political system, Flax (1998) makes the point that those who are positioned outside of privileged raced, classed and gendered subjectivities, yet who succeed in the public sphere (as Tupac and Alfreda had done), have a strong investment in believing in egalitarianism. She makes the argument that to believe that the success of some is dependent on the subjugation of 'others', is a knowledge that is intolerable.

Threatening Success

My emphasis on Alfreda and Tupac's academic success is an indication that I view it as significant and not to be taken for granted, a perspective that is informed by my knowledge of the fact that Maori and Pacific Islands students (as a group) are less likely to experience educational success than their Pakeha counterparts (Ministry of Education, 1994b). But it also seemed that Alfreda was aware that her success was hard won and there was a very real possibility that she might not 'make it'.

Alfreda's father was a process worker and her mother was an early childhood educator and they had high expectations for her, expectations which were influenced by their family history. Both of Alfreda's parents left school without formal qualifications as did her older sister who had also attended Girls' College.

Alfreda: Both my parents have high expectations of my education. My Dad couldn't list my subjects, in all honest opinion. My Mum probably could. My Dad knows I'm doing

music and P.E.[13], and correspondence Maori, but that's about it. But they always push me, because they expect a lot. Whereas my older sister dropped out, and my Mum and Dad both dropped out of school, they want me to get the best out of my education. But I've got another sister here, and a sister at intermediate and a brother at primary. So that's probably why she couldn't list my subjects. [Group 5, Interview 2, p.7]

Alfreda explained that her parents probably couldn't list the subjects she was taking at school because she had three other siblings, but she was convinced of the value they placed on educational achievement. In the following extract, Alfreda describes the anxiety she felt prior to knowing she had passed the School Certificate examination.

Alfreda: For me it would just be to know that I am doing things right. Like, I felt this big peace inside me when I passed School Cert., and I thought, 'Wohoo! That's over and done with! Oh, no, 6th Form!'. And things that are like a challenge to me I find good. And I think it's just that if I found things a challenge throughout my life, that I would be able to deal with them. And getting to where I said is not far from where I am now, but—

Sue: Why do you think people don't get there? Someone might have set out with the same ideas as you, but didn't get there? What would stop them from getting there?

Alfreda: It could be things that went wrong for them. Like, if they didn't get Bursary, or if they didn't get into the University they wanted to go to. Or things went wrong in relationships, like family or boyfriends and stuff like that, I suppose. [Group 5, Interview 4, p.7]

Presumably, it was passing the examination that was important rather than the marks she received. Alfreda described the things that could go wrong, that could prevent her from succeeding. One of these things was relationships, "like families and boyfriends and stuff like that". For Waima, the possibility and the implications of 'not making it' were also very real and immediate.

Waima: My sister had been living down [here] —my half sister had been living down [here] with her Dad, and she'd been going to Girls' College. And she was in the Sixth Form and she got pregnant and she dropped out of school. [Group 5, Interview 1, p.7]

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[13] Physical education

And in a later interview she explained:

Waima: My Mum has got this real thing for education, and that it is really important. My brother went to university, and after my sister dropped out of school, after she had Mark, she was, like, all the time, 'You've got to stay at school. See what happened to Nicky. You've got to learn from this. Look how hard she's struggled!', and all this stuff. And she's always going on about homework, and if you've got stuff to do she's always pushing it. It's really important for her—to her for us. She wants to have a big part of it involvement in things. I want to go next year to Massey[14] to do my degree, and she's always talking about how I've got to get down and study hard and do all this stuff if I want to—But she tries to get in, but I can't be bothered talking about it. She wants to know, but I can't be bothered including her. If that makes sense. [Group 5, Interview 2, p.7]

Waima's sister's pregnancy while at school was held up as an example of what can go wrong if Waima neglected her school work in favour of relationships with boys. Alfreda and Waima had direct experience of the dangers of heterosexuality and in the face of this reality, their parents' desire for them to attend a single sex school is understandable. Kellie, on the other hand, a Pakeha middle class girl, had no direct experience with educational 'failure'. Her experiences of failure, of being a 'bad' girl, were second-hand.

Kellie: It's worse when you see someone who is really bright who has just dropped out. Because you think that they could have gone on.

Sue: Why do they do that?

Michelle: That's like, 'A.', because she was really smart. ... She had home problems. She was really rich and really smart. I don't know much about her.

Sue: Doing drugs and stuff? Why does dropping out feel—?

Kellie: It's like a rebellion against the parents. Because her parents wanted her to do well.

Sue: What is the difference between you and her? Why are you still here? Various ones of you have got pressures on you as well from your parents. Why are you here and she is not?

Frances: If I dropped out there would be more pressure on me than if I stayed at school. It's a hassle. It's easier to stay here at school and sit through the day. [Group 4, Interview 2, p.6]

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[14] Massey University

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Kellie tells the story of a student who was, "really rich and really smart", a middle class girl who dropped out of school and now works in a massage parlour. 'A', as Kellie refers to her (presumably because her story is so shameful that she cannot be named), had assumed a kind of mythological status. She was a warning to all students of the dangers of rebellion against parental desire and academic success. But for Kellie, unlike the girls in Group 5, educational failure because of engagement with practices of heterosexual desire is a scenario that cannot even be contemplated. It is something that happens to 'other' girls, but not to her.

Lucey (1996) has explored the differences between middle class and working class girls in relation to discourses of educational success and failure. She argues that:

> "There is little difference between the different groups in terms of their sexual experience, but major differences in the outcome of those experiences. The working class girls are more likely to have become pregnant, to have had babies as teenagers. For many of the middle class girls this is unthinkable" (p. 8).

In the light of the very real threat that engagement with the practices of heterosexual desire may make to academic achievement, Alfreda's parent's desire for her to attend a single sex school seemed to me to make sense. Furthermore, as research shows, girls in coeducational schools are also subject to sex-based harassment from boys[15]. However, while removing boys from the school environment frees the girls from sex-based harassment from boys while they are in school, it does not protect them sex-based harassment when they are outside of the school. Like the Pakeha middle class girls, the girls in Group 5 also talked about the harassment they experienced while wearing their school uniform.

'It's Good to Feel Big and Loud and Strong'

> Tupac: A lot of the other schools don't like our school. I don't know why, but they always pick on our school. I've got a couple of cousins who go to Boys' High, and they go to our church, and they're always going, 'Oh, yeah, shut up Beast!'

> Waima: [Girls' College] Beast!

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[15] See Carkeek et al., 1994 for descriptions of the kinds of harassment Maori girls are subject to in coeducational primary schools; Rout, 1992 for descriptions of the ways college-age boys sexually harass girls in New Zealand, and Halson, 1991 for research on sex-based harassment in the U.K.

Tupac: But I don't really care, because I've been called names like that for so long that I've come to accept it, I suppose. [Group 5, Interview 2, p.4]

For girls who were positioned outside of access to the privileged raced and classed subjectivity that the Pakeha middle class girls had access to, the option of distancing themselves from the 'beast' subjectivity was not available[16]. Tupac described how she had come to accept the identity that was ascribed to her through the harassment she was subject to. However, while I might read this as a kind of defeat where Tupac accepts her lower status within the hierarchy of femininity, for Tupac, it is a position which is potentially powerful. By accepting her position as 'undesirable Other' within dominant discourses of femininity which position girls as objects of male desire, Tupac gained access to a more powerful subjectivity in which she was freed from the 'normal' expectations of femininity.

Tupac: I don't know. I guess I'll always be a [Girls'] College girl, no matter how old I am. It's like, a lot of them are scared of us as well. My sister told me there's only three of them, her and two mates. And they went to KFC[17] and there were a whole lot of Girls' College girls in there and it was just sort of—I don't know. But I always think I'm a College girl. It's just something that sticks with you.

Alfreda: It's like, I went to a function on Saturday, and there was a—you know Sharon T. from Atiawa? Well, we were talking with her, and she used to come here and she still sees herself as a College girl. Which is quite funny because she is twenty six or something like that. [Group 5, Interview 2, p.4]

While Tupac's identity as a Girls' College student meant she was the object of harassment, it was also a source of pride and belonging and her sense of solidarity with other girls provided her with a powerful identity. Alfreda mentioned a former Maori student who was a local celebrity and who identified as a Girls' College student. Her willingness to be identified with the school provided Alfreda with a position of pride which countered the negative way in which her identity as a Girls' College girl was constituted by others. This group identification and solidarity was a powerful strategy of resistance which many of the girls used and their belonging within the group enabled them to take up positions against dominant discourses of femininity. In the following extract Waima and Alfreda describe how

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[16] See Hey, 1997, p. 125 for a discussion of this point.

[17] Kentucky Fried Chicken

they resisted being positioned as objects of male harassment by positioning the boys as objects of female desire.

Waima: They all feel intimidated by us because we stand together as a group. Like, we're all cool sisters, it's like one big family. And all the other schools aren't like that. It's just their own little group of friends. And when they see us all together it's like, they get freaked out.

Alfreda: At the third form camp we went on a hike, and there was a bunch of the third formers from Boys' College who had gone through, and they were just standing in this one big group making fun of us. And then we were sitting there waiting for our ride back, and they started walking out in twos and threes, so when they were walking past we were yelling out, 'Oh, you're so fine!' And they'd go bright red, and run away quickly so that they wouldn't be walking in front of us. It was really funny. As a group they could make a lot of fun of us, and then as individuals they just really scared of this bunch of girls.

Sue: Were these boys walking along?

Alfreda: Yeah.

Sue: Isn't it interesting when you position the boys as the object. Like, when you were viewing them, you were saying 'You're so fine!'. You were a group of girls.

Alfreda: We just thought, 'Oh well, let's see how they feel', and we just started making fun of them, and they just took off! They were really embarrassed. Then afterwards, I knew one of the boys, and I said to him, 'I hope you weren't saying anything about our school'. And he was, like, 'No, no. I wasn't saying anything!'. 'You'd better not have been.'

Sue: So, in one way, people talk about how this school is seen to be really rough and tough. And when you do things like that people probably think, 'Yeah. It is.' But you didn't physically abuse them or anything. It's kind of being powerful, eh? Like, putting yourself in a quite a powerful position?

Diana: Maybe that's why they call us 'Beasts'. Maybe we are. I don't know.

Waima: No, they just take judgement without even knowing. They just make their own judgement.

Sue: Or do you think it's when girls stand up and say, 'Hey, that's not ok', and we're going to take some power, that's very threatening. And so the put-downs come. My experience of school—I was reflecting on one of the other groups, where one girl said, 'When I came here I really wanted to come to this school because it was really loud. When I went around the school girls were talking loudly and they singing, and they were making all this noise.' And she said 'I really liked that'. I remember always being told off—cause I like talking, you see—for talking too much and being too loud. It's like because I was a girl I'm not meant to be loud. Do you have that experience?

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Alfreda: I think they tend to say that it's alright to be loud at certain times. I like how they [the school] put us in very powerful positions, so that we can feel powerful. I can't say that I'm not quiet, because I'm not, and I know others here aren't either. And it's good to feel loud and big and strong. [Group 5, Interview 2, p. 5]

Alfreda commented, 'it's good to feel loud and big and strong', a subjectivity that is traditionally dis-avowed within dominant discourses of femininity. Fordham (1993), writing about the experiences of Black women in the academy in the United States, argues that 'white womanhood' is defined as universal and is against this that 'other women' are defined. She describes her delight in reading an article by Grace Evans (1980) entitled, 'Those Loud Black Girls' in which Evans describes her experiences as an African-American teacher in an inner-city London school. Evans recounts the ways the white teachers would often describe their Black students as, 'those loud Black girls!' She reflected on her own experience as an African-American student in a predominantly white school who was determined *not* to be one of those girls. Evans explains:

"I was not a loud Black girl myself; I was one of the quiet, almost to the point of silent, Black or 'colored' girls who did her homework, worked hard, seldom spoke unless spoken to and was usually to be found standing in the margin of activities" (Evans, 1980, p. 184 as cited in Fordham, 1993, p. 9).

For Evans, being a good, quiet girl was what enabled her to be the 'successful' student she was at school. Fordham takes up these ideas to explore the experiences of a group of Black girls in an inner city coeducational American high school with a predominantly Black population, but one with a diverse social class mix. She describes five girls who achieve well at school by being the 'good girls' and contrasts them with one girl, Rita[18], who takes a more contradictory positioning. Rita is also a high achieving student but:

"She is far less willing than her high-achieving counterparts to camouflage, in the school context, her perceptions of the gendered African-American female 'Self'" (Fordham, 1993, p. 15).

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[18] It is not clear to me if the 'Rita' she describes in this 1993 article is the same 'Rita' she describes in her 1988 article cited earlier.

However, despite Rita's subversive enactment of alternative ways of being, Fordham argues that the dominant strategy taken by high achieving Black girls in the school is one of, "passing for someone they are not: the white American female and, ultimately, the white American male" (p. 23).

She argues that these girls pay a high price for their passing and their silence including alienation from their, "more communal and popular underachieving female cohorts"(p. 24).

While I acknowledge there are, of course, significant differences between African – American and Maori and Pacific Islands cultures, just as there are between the 'white' cultures of American and New Zealand, the point is that 'blackness' and 'whiteness' as categories of identity are, by their very nature, constituted as homogeneous and mutually exclusive. I have cited Fordham at length here because I think her ideas provide a way to think about the experience of these 'Black', high achieving girls in Group 5. In describing the experience of Rita, a 'loud Black' girl, Fordham makes the argument that taking up this position at school is highly problematic. However, I want to suggest that in contrast, Alfreda's assertion that, "it feels good to be loud and big and strong" is an indication that this subjectivity is one which is not dis-avowed within the context of her school, but one which has in fact been an important part of her success.

Unlike the coeducational, mainly Black high school Rita attended, it may be that the single sex, socially and ethnically diverse context of Girls' College enabled Alfreda to take up a subjectivity that is not consistent with dominant 'white' femininity and yet enabled her to experience success. Rather than isolating her from her 'Black' counterparts, Alfreda described a strong sense of solidarity and support which she both gave and received at school, but also from 'significant others' in the Maori community who had been Girls' College students. This is not to say that this is the only subjectivity that Alfreda took up or that to do so was unproblematic. As the Maori women like Irwin (1992), Smith (1992) and McCarthy (1997) document, there are a range of subjectivities or 'ways to be' made available to Maori girls in the context of their schooling experiences, only some of which might be considered to be consistent with Maori cultural values and world views.

The Policing of and by Same-Sex Relationships

Friendship with other girls was also an important source of protection for girls who were harassed *within* the school. Despite the claims of the girls in Group 3 that everyone was 'accepted' at school, this was clearly not the case. Just as Girls' College students were harassed outside of the school and positioned as 'undesirable' in terms of dominant discourses of femininity, there was also harassment within the school directed at those girls whose bodies did not conform to the 'normal' or the 'ideal' as this is constituted within the context of compulsory heterosexuality. May, a working class Maori student from Group 2, spoke about the harassment she was subjected to at school.

Sue: What have you found, May? Have you experienced any harassment, in the last four years?

May: Only about my bigness.

Sue: Oh, OK. In this school or outside of it?

May: Both.

Sue: So even in the school, people would hassle you?

May: Yeah. Like, in third form, this girl used to be fast.

Sue: What does that mean?

May: Oh, fast at running. And she'd go, 'Oh, I can beat you. You're too fat to run'. I'd tell her, 'Shut up!'. And that really made me feel stink. So I'd always be quiet in the class. Then my friends would go, 'what's the matter?', and I'd say, 'oh, nothing'. 'Yeah, something's up'. 'What's wrong?'. 'Nothing'. Then they would stick up for me if I told them. And that would happen outside, too, like with the boys' schools. That's why I'm a bit iffy[19] about going around by myself. Because I get hassled a lot. [Group 2, Interview 2, p. 7]

In thinking about the harassment that the girls were both subjects of, and subjected others to, I found Fine and McPherson's (1992) article on their discussions with four young women and Hey's (1997) ethnography of girls' friendships helpful. Each of these researchers explore the processes of 'othering' by which gendered, raced and classed subjectivities come

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[19] Tentative

to be constituted. As Fine and McPherson put it in discussing the girls' distrust of female solidarity:

> "Their examples overturned our notions of sisterhood by showing us that both young women and young men proficiently police the borders, the tenets, of masculinity and femininity among today's teens. They are often reminded of their bodies as a public site (gone right or wrong), commented on and monitored by others —male and female"(p. 185).

Young women are subject to a high degree of external surveillance, by boys and men, was well as by each other, and class and culture determine what the 'norms' of the body are. Hey (1997) argues that practices of normalisation which operate within and between girls friendship groups need to be understood in relation to the discourse of compulsory heterosexuality.

> "The girls in my study therefore, despite their differences, could not avoid the superordinate intense scrutiny of hegemonic masculine culture. In many respects they did the work of that culture amongst and between themselves in positioning each other into particular places" (p. 131).

This is an important point in relation to the single sex environment of Girls' College. Many of the girls' parents expected that by removing their daughters from boys at school, they would enable them to escape the 'distractions' and 'dangers' of heterosexual desire. However, as Hey suggests, the work of constituting 'feminine' subjects goes on even in the absence of boys or men, as the girls enforce these cultural practices on each other. Girls' friendships are both a place of safety and comfort as well as a place of danger where the boundaries of 'normality' are strongly policed.

The harassment some girls were subject to from each other, as well as the sex-based harassment they experienced from boys (and other school girls outside of the school) might be understood as positioning girls as 'undesirable' subjects within the terms of compulsory heterosexuality. Against this, the sense of solidarity and belonging many of the girls experienced at the school acted as a buffer and/or a place of comfort. However, their same-sex friendships are also subjected to what Hey terms the 'male gaze' (p. 129) which shaped their behaviour with one another, even within the privacy of their girl-only spaces.

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Two years prior to my interviews, Girls' College had started a 'lesbian support group', presumably in response to and in recognition of the fact that there were girls in the school who did not identify as heterosexual. The initiative was given coverage in the city paper and the girls described the kinds of harassment they received at that time while wearing their school uniform.

Juliet: Last year there was a thing about lesbians in the paper.

Danielle: Oh, yeah, there was.

Juliet: And a lot of people refused to wear uniform, because they were getting teased.

Danielle: Was that last year? I thought it was in 4th Form [Year 9]. I remember sitting around in 4th Form History talking about it. Do you remember?

Juliet: People just refused to wear uniform.

Sue: What? Because they might be identified as lesbian?

Juliet: Yeah. Because a lot of people—I got told that all lesbians go to this school. I said to them that's not true. [Group 1, Interview 2, p. 12]

The girls in Group 3 explained why they thought they were subject to harassment.

Yogi: I think that what is happening in the schools, why the boys are harassing us, they must have problems of their own. Why are we getting harassed—because of the image we have, and why we have that image. That sort of thing.

Doris: One of the major attitudes—Other people think that [our school] is a lesbian school. Because—but we were the first all-female school in [the city] to publicly announce that they had formed a lesbian support group. [Group 3, Interview 4, p.7]

Although the intent of the support group was to offer lesbian students in the school a place of support, it had the unintended consequence of making all of the girls in the school the target of homo-phobic harassment. Furthermore, the girls said that the support group had made it un-safe for lesbian students to 'come out' at school. The support group was subsequently dis-banded but the incident is testament to the dangers of singling out certain groups of students within a school community without challenging the dominant discourses or the behaviour and attitudes of the dominant group. As Quinlivan and Town (1999) argue,

discourses of hetero-normativity are the appropriate target for exposure, not the students who are positioned as 'other' in relation to them. Capper (1999) also makes the point that:

"Administrators and other educators need to understand more clearly how sexuality intertwines every day experience in schools with all students. We need to know the ways the sexual culture and structure of schools can reinforce, resist, reproduce, and disrupt unequal power relations" (p. 10).

In addition, I suggest, we need also to undertake this kind of critical work with students.

Group 4

Moving Between 'Lifeworlds'

In this section I draw primarily from the focus group interviews with Group 4 which was made up of four girls, each from different ethnic backgrounds—Taiwanese Chinese, Gujarati Indian, Fijian Indian and Iranian. In addition, three of the girls had moved to New Zealand with their families and one girl (Tina) might be described as a 'first generation' New Zealander as her mother was born in India and moved to New Zealand as an adult. Because of my own 'identity' as a Pakeha middle class woman, I had little familiarity with the differing cultural contexts of these girls' homes and communities, nor did I understand how it was for them at school. Because of my position as 'outsider', I often asked the girls for descriptions of cultural practices and beliefs, questions I did not ask of those girls whose cultural practices I assumed some familiarity with.

In thinking about how to read the interviews with the girls in Group 4 I took note of Mohanty's (1997) assertion that 'Third World' women are often positioned in feminist studies as oppressed by their cultural traditions while white, 'First World' women are positioned as the norm against which these 'other' women's lives are read. Mohanty points out that 'Third World' women are often presented:

"as a homogenous, undifferentiated group leading truncated lives, victimized by the combined weight of 'their' traditions, cultures and beliefs, and 'our' (Eurocentric) history" (p. 557).

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In a similar way, Pallotta-Chiarolli (1998), an Italian-Australian feminist academic who has been talking with girls from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences, argues for the need to move past the 'assimilating' discourses which assume an 'either/or' position for young women as they move between different cultures. She uses the notion of 'lifeworlds' (after Cope & Kalantzis, 1995) to think about the different demands and expectations (or 'ways to be'/ subjectivities) that girls experience in differing contexts. Rather than seeing young women as passive and helpless victims of their culture (defined as 'other' in relation to the dominant white, middle class, heterosexual culture), she instead identified the strategies the young women were developing to negotiate their way through the differing 'ways to be' in their lives in such a way that the differences between them were not polarised.

> "In other words, they are assertively interweaving 'lifeworlds', positioning themselves and others as home-sites of confluence and intermixture, rather than having to assimilate one 'world' or the social rules of one category at the expense of others.... I use the word 'interweaving' as it metaphorically represents fluidity, boundary-blurring, and the diversity of strategies girls and young women use to 'come out', to negotiate, maneouvre and resist the codes and identities of various categories" (p. 1).

Reading Pallotta-Chiarolli and Mohanty's work provided me with a way to think about the girls in Group 4 who described lives that were so different to my own and to most of the other girls who participated in my research. These were the 'people of other languages', the 'Asians' and the 'ESOL' girls, the 'problems' whom the girls in Group 3 said they had learned to 'accept'. As I reviewed the transcripts, I was aware of the need to not only identify the contradictions these girls experienced between their differing 'lifeworlds' but to also consider how the girls negotiated their way through them.

Pallotta-Chiarolli also points out the need to acknowledge differences *within* groups of students who may be labeled as ESOL, or 'new-migrant' or 'Asian': all labels that could have been applied to most of the girls in Group 4. Of course, a similar lack of recognition of difference applies to all of the girls in my research, but given the historical under-representation and silencing of these particular girls' voices in educational research, I felt it was important to create the space for each of their voices to be heard. In the following section I take up the notion of 'lifeworlds' to explore the girls' accounts of their schooling and life experiences and of themselves.

Tina and Anjini: Achieving Marriageability

Tina, who had lived in New Zealand all of her life, often spoke of her frustration at what she described as her mother's refusal to adjust her expectations of Tina to life in a different cultural context to what she had experienced in India. Tina described the cultural norms that operate for girls in her Indian community—some of which she said she rejected:

Tina: Indian parents think that girls don't need to get educated, the men do, so they can bring home the money. And you can just sit home, look after the kids and clean the house. I reckon that's a lot of crap. Because all the Indian girls here want to work for themselves, get money. You know, you share your money with your husband, right, but you don't want to be stuck at home.

Sue: Well, your mother's not at home, is she? She's working at the laundromat.

Tina: But she had to work at the laundromat then, too.

Sue: So obviously women—There aren't many families where you don't need the income from the woman. That's true for all of your families, isn't it?

Anjini: Yeah. But they have to work. But the man gets more money. That's what they want, my parents want, a person who gets more money than me. Like, even my sister, they wanted a person who is better educated than her. She just finished seventh Form, and then she got married at the end of seventh Form. So that was it for her. They wanted her to do something, like polytech., but it wasn't that important to them.

Tina: That was like my sister, she became a lawyer. And they want to find her a husband who is more educated than her, and they can't find a more educated person than a lawyer. Because she is so brainy! And then she just got married, and he is not as educated as her. He wanted to become a lawyer, but he doesn't do it in English, so it's no use here.

Sue: Oh, he's from India?

Tina: Yeah, She fell in love and got married.

Sue: So is she working as a lawyer now?

Tina: She works for the government, yeah.

Sue: She gets paid as a lawyer?

Tina: Yeah.

Sue: So she probably gets paid more than her husband?

Tina: Yeah, because he works at New World[20]. [Group 4, Interview 3, p. 7].

Tina began by describing how Indian parents don't think that girls need to get educated, but that men do as they are to be responsible for providing financially for the family. Later, she qualifies her comment, in response to my questions, to explain that achievement is a relative concept: girls are to achieve, but not as well as boys. Tina saw education as a means to escape from the expectation that as a married woman she will stay at home and look after the children and the house. She argued that most Indian girls want to be in paid work and to be able to contribute financially to the household. It is interesting that she did not contest the expectation that she will be married, but she did contest what her role in the marriage will be.

The dilemma here is that she needs to make a finely balanced decision about how much education she should have. If she has too much she potentially undermines her ability to find a husband who is better educated than her, apparently a requirement for finding a suitable marriage partner within a system of arranged marriage. She explains that this is what happened to her sister who is a lawyer. The family could not find a husband who was as well educated as she, but her sister's response to this dilemma was to enter a 'love' marriage with an Indian man. Presumably the discourse of romantic love provided her with an alternative position, one which exempted her from the formal requirements of an arranged marriage. A 'love marriage' is seen as liberating for well educated women who might otherwise find themselves unable to secure a husband. In contrast, Anjini's sister was married at the end of her seventh form year in an arranged marriage which exempted her from further education. The contradictions between discourses of rationality and femininity here are explicit. A woman who is well educated can find this threatening her marriageability.

Independence

In the following extract, Tina describes how she values independence, a quality that her family does not understand the need of in a culture which is bound by close family ties and inter-dependence.

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[20] New World is a large supermarket chain.

Tina: We want independence, and our family don't understand it. My father understands it, but he wants the best for us, so he agrees with my Mum, and we argue with them. But we still don't get anywhere. My Mum goes to me, 'When you get married, you can go and live in our other house.' I said, 'OK!'

Sue: So really, in a way it is like marriage is the only way to get—

Tina: To get out of it. Yeah.

Sue: For you to try something new or different.

Tina: Yeah. But that is even more of a bigger commitment, and you have got no life then. [Group 4, Interview 4, p.7]

For Tina's parents, marriage is the accepted way for young women to gain some independence from their families. It is the only acceptable way to 'get out of it'. Even then, independence means living in her parent's *other* house. However, as Tina notes, the freedom that marriage offers is also limited and, unlike familial restrictions, "it is for life". Anjini, a Fijian Indian who moved to New Zealand when she was thirteen, also spoke about the different educational expectations for girls and boys and of her desire for independence.

Anjini: No. I had a cousin brother. He wasn't quite brainy. He came from Fiji to study here. His parents paid most of his fees. But my parents helped too. It was $8,000 a year, for Boys' College. He went there. And then he didn't do quite well. His marks were really low. He did fifth form, that was last year. And then he had to go back, because his marks weren't that good. And if he did it again it would be $16,000 for two years. And he can come back after going to school in Fiji and doing it again, when he comes back after two years. It would be $11,000 for polytech.

Sue: Do you think that girl cousins get—that's a lot of money of a family's resource, isn't it?

Anjini: The girls wouldn't be able to do that. They won't do it. I mean, he has a small sister, but I am sure they won't ever do that for her. He is the oldest son. But they won't ever do it for the sister.

Sue: So why are you studying hard, then? Why are you bothering?

Anjini: Because I don't want to get married and end up like my sister or my mother.

Tina: Same with me.

Sue: What would you see yourself that you want to be?

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Anjini: I want to earn more money than my dad. Oh, my dad earns quite a lot. I can't earn more than him.

Tina: I have already told my dad that I want to be independent, and he said, 'Go for it.' So I applied for a job. I am just waiting for them to say, 'Yeah, you've got it', or whatever. Even at City New World. Well, it's the only place I can go for.

Sue: Is this a part-time job?

Tina: Yeah.

Sue: You'll stay at school?

Tina: I said that I want to be independent, and he said, 'Yeah, you can.' And I said, 'I want to pay for some of my fees.' My mum wants to go to India at the end of this year, get my brothers married. So I am going to save up for that, as well as go to polytech. I want to pay for some of my own stuff. I don't always want to depend on my parents.

Anjini: My dad doesn't want to pay for my fees. He says, 'You have to do it on your own if you want to be independent.' I don't think that my dad minds that I am a girl, not a boy. He thinks I will be a good student, but he didn't think that my sister was. [Group 4, Interview 3, p. 9]

Anjini gives the example of her 'cousin brother' who did not do well at school and notes that his fees were paid for by the extended family. Clearly there are high expectations for boys and their success is seen to benefit the extended family, not solely the individual or his immediate family. In contrast, Anjini notes that money would not have been spent on a girl's education. However, while I would have expected the apparent lack of value that is placed on girls' achievement to be a dis-incentive for Anjini to study, on the contrary, she states that educational achievement is a means for her to avoid getting married and 'ending up' like her sister and mother. Anjini's father, like Tina's, understands her desire for independence and supports her desire to go to university in another city to study. Her comment, "I don't think my dad minds that I am a girl, not a boy" I read in two ways—either as an indication that although boys are favoured in her culture, Anjini feels loved and valued, or that her father does not mind that she is seeking independence, even though she is a girl. Whichever is the case, it is clear that Tina and Anjini are finding ways to negotiate their way between the culturally defined expectations for them as young women and their desire for greater independence.

Shameem (1992), writing about the experiences of Indo-Fijian women migrants to New Zealand notes that:

"Sometimes in our analyses of such women as 'victim' we tend to ignore the active resistance strategies of women to all types of domination" (p. 109).

I think it is possible to read Anjini and Tina's desire for independence through educational achievement and participation in the labour market as 'active resistance strategies'. However, it is also important to note that they were resisting the expectation that they would have poorly paid jobs and be tied to the home, they were not resisting marriage itself. In fact, for these girls, marriage (on their terms) was something that they looked forward to and there was a lot of talk about weddings they had been to, the elaborate rituals and a sense of excitement and pleasure in their discussions. Marriage was not necessarily seen as a hindrance to independence, but was a means by which they would gain more independence from their families.

Love and Marriage

Tina: It's really different. I can communicate with my dad but not with my Mum and it should be the other way round. And then, ah, I went to India the last year and my Dad said that you communicate with your mother better. Every time that I talk to my Mum, it always becomes a fight. But he goes, you can communicate with your Mum better. I think I can't. I mean if I talk to her I have to talk to her about different things not the things that I want to talk about. And she's like, for me already, she thinks about marriage. Which is so stupid because I'm going to [another city] soon. And she goes, if you see a guy, you know, keep him in mind. I said Mum, it's not my job. And she goes, yes it is, it's your job. Yeah, right.

Sue: It's your job, to what?

Tina: Keep a guy in mind. Cause if he's my caste, so, in future I should get married to him, sort of thing. I'm going, it's not something that I'd think about, cause I'm too young, I'm only 17. Like she thinks I'll probably get married at 19.

Sue: And that's fine, that would be fine with her?

Tina: Yeah, because she got married at 19 and I didn't, I won't.

Anjini: All parents think…

Tina: All Indian parents think.

Anjini: They want us to get married. My sister got married when she was 18.

Sue: And that was fine?

Anjini: Yeah, it was fine with her because she didn't really, she didn't mind I guess. It was just an arranged marriage. But I can communicate better with my sister than my Mum. Cause I can tell, her like, if I have a bad result, I'll go to my sister and tell her. [Group 4, Interview 2, p. 7]

In this discussion Tina and Anjini describe their parents' expectations that they will get married before they are twenty, as both of their sisters have done. It is an expectation both of the girls resist and they seemed determined not to succumb to what Anjini refers to as, "just an arranged marriage". For these girls a 'love marriage' is seen as a means of avoiding some of the complex requirements for selecting a partner. However, their contact with boys is very closely monitored by their families and there are serious consequences for violating behavioural codes which can include being ostracised from their family and the wider Indian community.

Tina: This is what my mother said to me, 'If you go flatting, or marry some other guy from another caste, I'll kick you out of the house and I never want to talk you ever again'. So just the thought of that, I think, 'No way'!

Anjini: Parents don't like you flatting outside, with anyone else. [Group 4, Interview 4, p. 7]

Anju, an Indian girl from Group 1 who was born in New Zealand, described the consequences if she were to transgress the culturally defined norms of behaviour for girls:

Anju: Um, in the Indian community, if you go out with a guy its a bad thing and people talk and, yeah, and your families, I mean they sometimes even kick you out of the house.

Sue: Even now say at 17?

Anju: Even now at 17, yeah, they would kick you out of the house, it doesn't matter how old you are. If they find you with a boy you got to know that you're a dead girl or a dead boy.

Sue: In the sense that you would be cast out from your family?

Anju: Yeah

Sue: And when would that, when does it stop, when are you allowed to have a boyfriend?

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Anju: Well, you're not exactly allowed to have a boy friend. I mean your parents choose. When you go to get married your parents choose five or six boys and you've got to exactly choose from them. [Group 1, Interview 1, p.6]

In a cultural context where strong family ties are maintained and members are closely supported in every area of their lives including finding employment, a marriage partner and somewhere to live, to be cast out from this support network would have serious consequences. In addition, the girls clearly valued the close relationships they had with their families, particularly their older sisters.

So, while the girls yearned for more independence, it is an independence that is carefully constructed so as not to transgress behavioural codes. It is about independence *within* the framework of their families and of marriage, it is not independence *from* these relationships. At Girls' College the public discourse is about equal opportunity for girls while the private discourse is about compulsory heterosexuality in which dominant (white, middle class) expectations of femininity are upheld. The 'good/nice' girl subjectivity is one which does not contradict the 'good girl' subjectivity of these Indian girls, but there are other subjectivities made available in the peer culture at school that are problematic for them.

Sue: Do you think that single sex schooling—for some of you that sounds like something quite important in your family, and others it's not.

Farzela: Yeah. My family is important. My family let me come, and let me go to the coeducation, because they know I won't go to any wrong way. They believe me. But it's unacceptable to go with any boy, in our culture—in [Iranian] culture.

Sue: Is that true for you?

Tina: It depends. My parents basically don't find out a lot of things about me. They may know me how they know me in the house, but I try to keep my school life kind of separate from my family, though. Cause they take it really personal, and I don't really like it much.

Sue: What do you mean? What do they take personally?

Tina: The things that I do in school. They take it too personally.

Sue: What's an example?

Tina: Like, if I went out with a guy, my Mum especially wouldn't like it. Cause she's from India and they don't understand much. And if it was my Dad, he would understand if it was a friend, but if it wasn't a friend he would kind of jump to conclusions as well.

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Sue: But you said to do with your school life. Do you meet boys through school?

Tina: Yep.

Sue: Where? What sort of things?

Tina: Well, you kind of meet them in town and in the library, and, yeah—My Mum stopped me going to the library because of that.

Anjini: The other thing is that all the boys go to the library just to see the girls.

Tina: But that's true too. *(laughter)* Indian guys, they do that. [Group 4, Interview 1, p. 7]

Tina described how she tries to keep her school life separate from her family. By her 'school life', she was referring to her friendships with other girls and their strategy of meeting school boys in town and at the city public library. Their presence at the library was legitimated as a study venue but it also provided a venue which enabled her to socialise with boys away from the surveillance of her family. However, when her mother found out, she was not allowed to go there, an indication of the powerful surveillance her family are able to maintain over her life.

Girls College as a single sex school is a context which their parents perceived as 'safe' and it therefore provided the girls with a space of relative freedom. At school they are freed from the close surveillance they experience from their families and from others in the Indian community and it seems that the behavioural codes of the school are less restricting than those of their families. It is a context where they can enjoy the company of other girls and where they find friendship and support. Because there are no boys, they do not have to monitor their dress and behaviour to the extent they would in a coeducational context. Nor do they have to lower their expectations to ensure they do not outperform boys. However, their achievement does potentially cause problems when they leave school since high achievers may find it difficult to find a suitable marriage partner.

Both Tina and Anjini were fluent speakers of English and it was one of their first languages. The two other girls in Group 4, Swat and Farzela, had moved to New Zealand with very little English so they had been required to develop fluency in a language other than those they spoke at home. As the interviews extracts show, they have done this very well, with Swat

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being the most fluent in English as she arrived when she was nine, while Farzela had only been in the country for three years at the time of the interviews.

Swat: 'I Don't Want You To Be Like Me'!

It was no surprise to me that 'Swat' named herself in this way for the purposes of the research. 'Swat' is the label given to students who take their schooling seriously and who spend a lot of time studying. Survival on a daily basis would, I imagine, consume most of Swat's energy as she met the demands of being caregiver to her five younger sisters while her parents work long hours, and the demands of her academic work. Swat described the high price that her parents had paid to bring the family to New Zealand and how hard they work now they are here. For her family, education is very important:

Sue: I would think of the word 'ambitious', someone who has a lot of ambitions or drive. She [Swat's mother] wants to achieve a lot of things. Is that like—?

Swat: Yeah. That is what she wants me to do. She said, 'I don't want you to be like me, like, work hours and not be with the family'. She says, 'I want you to work, like, in an office, and not work Saturday and Sunday and be with your family'. That's what she wants us to do.

Sue: You reminded me there that your parents worked in Singapore, so that was obviously something that they felt they had to do, was it, to earn enough money?

Swat: Yeah. It was because we have got six children in our family, and my Dad's work is just not enough. So my mum and my dad went to Singapore together. And then bought a house later. And we were going to move, but we came here. And then we bought our own house. It's just that—the Indian culture is very similar to ours. A couple get married, the female has to go to the male family and work there, and do the housework and everything, while the men go out and work and earn the money and back. But now days I think we don't follow that culture tradition any more. It's just like we wouldn't get married and go and live with the husband's family. You want to go out and work and have your own place, not with the family. It's what my mum says. Everything has changed. You don't have to follow that way any more. And for my mother, she doesn't work for my grandparents, because she doesn't like the idea of it.

Sue: Do you notice that the education of boys is more highly valued than of girls?

Swat: In my mum's time it was. Because my mum only got three years of education. She's got 5 brothers and 4 sisters, and older girls come first. And then the boys came later. So it was later, about 10 years—like, my uncle is about thirty and my Mum's forty something,

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so that's like 10 years later, and they had more money when my mother went out to work, so he got more education.

Sue: So have some of her brothers been to university?

Swat: Yeah. I've got one older uncle, older than my Mum, and I don't think he got much education either, because they had no money problem. And so many children, like, 10 in the family. And my grandmother died so early, like, forty something. So only my uncle got to go to university. [Group 4, Interview 3, p. 9]

In a later interview she explained:

Swat: Well, you know, in Chinese it's always education comes first. And if you don't study you get a bad job, and you don't have a good life, and stuff. But she [Swat's mother] doesn't want me to [be] in the dead end. She wants me to study hard, have a good education, and stuff like that. She always—she never did as well as she could, just 2 or 3 years in her life, that's all. And she doesn't want me to follow her way. She wants me to study, get good marks, and stuff like that. [Group 4, Interview 5, p. 5]

Swat's mother has worked very hard to support the family and she still does—often working weekends in her retail business. Swat described her mother as being the one in the family who has the most drive, pushing herself and her children to succeed. Although Swat was aware of the traditional Chinese view that women are expected to get married and to remain at home to run the household while men go out to paid employment, she said that many no longer adhere to this. In fact, Swat's mother did not live with her husband's family or work for them and she had a business of her own which was vital to the economic survival of the family. Following the example of her mother, Swat believed that women have to work harder than men and she is expected to be strong and to succeed. She expects to be in paid work for all of her adult life and success at school is vital to secure her a job that will provide upward mobility in the form of higher pay and better working conditions than those of her parents.

When the girls were talking about relationships with boys, Swat explained her mother's perspective:

Swat: Yeah. But she wouldn't like me walking in town with a guy with me. She understands but she doesn't want other people to think it was my boyfriend. It would put her reputation down, and stuff like that.

Sue: So if you said, 'I've met a boy, a guy, that I really like and I want to go out with him', she would say 'You can't'?

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Swat: Yeah. She would. Because—She actually said that education is more important. Because where my parents come from, she always relate her life. She doesn't have a very good life. She had to work so hard. She had to work at 5 o'clock in the morning, and go to work, and she only go to school for 3 years. That's it. 3 years of education. That's it. And she doesn't want us to have that experience. Like, not going to school. She says, 'If you have education, you have to do your best'. And then she says, 'Having boyfriends, you could do that later in your life. It's not in a rush.' It's like, after University or something. Have a job. And that's when you have your time. At the moment it's education that's very important.

Sue: Does that seem good to you? Does that seem right?

Swat: Yeah.

Sue: That makes sense. Has that produced any conflict for you at the moment, or problems for you?

Swat: No. I always, because—even when I'm small, I go to a co-ed school, because that's the only school in my village, in town. Because, also, I think that the village is like this, that education comes first. And then whatever happens, like, when you get 20 years old, you get a boyfriend, that's fine. So it's like when you study, and then you have a boyfriend it is not right in my parents' sense. I think they always talk about this, from when I was really quite small. I'm not sure, but they always talk about it. [Group 4, Interview 1, p. 8]

While dominant cultural representations of Chinese women emphasise their subservience and obedience, understanding the background of some of the migrant Chinese (of many nationalities) and the extra-ordinary lengths their families have employed to get their children access to New Zealand education, it is not surprising that many take their education so seriously.

The pressures on Swat, from my perspective, seem extra-ordinary. Not only is she expected to achieve very highly at school but she also takes the major responsibility for her five sisters while her parents are at work. Most nights her parents do not arrive home until after ten o'clock and Swat does the cooking and housework as well as supervising her sisters' schoolwork. I asked Swat if she talked to her parents about her feelings:

Swat: I think it was for my family we don't actually say our feeling to each other. We sort of like ... like in a Pakeha family they would actually, say, ...maybe...if they have a daughter that goes to any school then she goes to a counsellor and ask for advice and tell her feeling to someone and that person wouldn't tell. But for us, we just don't say anything. I think were not used to telling people our feeling. I don't know like that we sort of express our feelings in silence. It's like that a good point. I think that my parents, my family do that thing. Silence is sort of go around in our family. It is like we don't say much

...We don't... Oh, I'm very sad today, I have a good day today. We don't say that its sort of like, my mum she sort of like she knows it. If I tell her things I done that and that she say, oh right, she know it. And then she doesn't like question me much. If you want to tell her something you just say it. [Group 4, Interview 2, p. 5]

Swat explained how feelings are not openly expressed in her family but that they are aware of each other's feelings, "my Mum, she sort of like, she knows it." However, it does raise the question for me of how Swat copes with the considerable pressure she was under and where she would go to talk. The school counsellor is obviously not someone she would use, and unlike the Indian girls who seemed to openly talk with one another about their families and the conflicting expectations they experienced, the value of silence in her culture would seem to provide a strong dis-incentive for her to pursue help if she needed it or to discuss her 'problems' with other girls. Fine and Macpherson's (1992) discussions with four young women included a 'Korean American'. One of the issues that came up was the way that the Korean and white teens valued a 'cultured privacy' in which the 'personal problems' they faced were not discussed. They argue that the cost of this 'internalisation' by what they term as 'elite' students, is absorbed by their bodies and expressed in such ways as bulimia and depression. The 'elite' girls in my study did not talk about these 'problems' in relation to themselves but they did discuss the elite girls at Girls' High who they described as eating tissues in order to lose weight. Swat, and the other new-migrant 'Chinese' girls in my study did not discuss their 'personal' problems, and it was not my intention to encourage them to do this given that I would not be around to follow-up or offer support in any meaningful way.

Swat's attitude to her schooling seemed to be to keep her head down and to work as hard as she could. She was not interested in challenging the dominant culture at the school, but rather to use the resources of the school to achieve while maintaining her own cultural identity through her silence and being a 'good girl'.

Swat: Yes. Because if I don't do my work I see my Mum saying, 'Why aren't you doing your work?' You are not supposed to put yourself down. She always expects me to do very well. It's like that because—I think it was like the Chinese girls. Whenever we go to—what you call it? Report evening. Teachers always have a good position about me. I don't know. They always say good things. Then my Mum and Dad are quite impressed. It's just when I do something, like—I never wag, in my life, never, ever. And if I do that, I thought—it's not right. It's just not right. It just comes out of my mind. I just see it. It is wrong. [Group 5, Interview 5, p. 9]

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Kenway and Willis (1997) make the point that some equity initiatives aimed at 'liberating' 'minority' students, are often misguided in that they assume that all girls are uniformly oppressed in 'minority' cultures. Within-group differences are often ignored, a point that is highlighted by my research which shows that girls from 'minority' groups bring very different expectations to their schooling experiences. Anjini and Tina were aware of the often conflicting expectations for them to achieve academically but they were also aware of the need to achieve in terms of their 'marriageable femininity'—an achievement which limited their independence. In contrast, Swat's family's aspirations for her were not restricted because of her gender. If anything, she was expected to achieve more highly because she was a woman and to be even stronger than a man. It is my suggestion that girls like Swat do not need to be told that 'girls can do anything', one of the official discourses of the gender equity campaigns in New Zealand, rather they need to be told that they don't have to do *everything*. As Lucey (1996) and Fine and Macpherson (1992) suggest, there may be unintended and damaging consequences that result from the high expectations many girls experience to succeed.

Farzela: Negotiating Cultures

Farzela, a Muslim student from Iran, brought a different perspective to her schooling and her comments further highlight the differences between new-migrant students.

In the previous chapter I described how Farzela chose to come to Girls' College even though her father had wanted her to attend a coeducational school. While she said that it would be unacceptable to date in Iranian culture, she did not view this prohibition as restricting and she was not interested in challenging it. Farzela described herself as having a strong sense of identity and pride in her culture while also being aware that she was often viewed with curiosity by other students:

Farzela: I don't worry at all if people give me any comments. ... if the people tell me 'Why is she wearing Iranian dress?', I don't say, 'if they talk behind me'. I'm not worried about it. But if they talk in front of me I never answer, but I never really rude with anybody. I will always be nice to them, but said until I can cope with my passion

Sue: So do you experience people making comments about what you wear?

Farzela: I couldn't understand you.

Sue: Do people make comments about the clothes that you wear, people at school?

Farzela: No, not everyone. Just me. If they do, it's my life. Whatever I want to wear, I wear it. If it [unclear] them, better look after their own self, rather than saying about the other person's garments. [Group 4, Interview 4, p.5]

There was no doubt that Farzela was sometimes ridiculed by other students. When I asked the girls in Group 5 if there are any girls at school who get mocked, they named Farzela.

Waima: Farzela does.

Alfreda: Farzela gets mocked, yeah.

Sue: Gets mocked, for—?

Alfreda: I don't know.

Mandy: Being different, I suppose.

Tupac: And because—you're not going to tell anyone, eh?

Sue: No.

Tupac: Because she has got quite bad 'BO'[21]. But nobody tells her. But, like, she's got—She uses— [Group 5, Interview 5, p.8]

Later in the discussion when the Indian girls in her group are talking about the clothes they have to wear to Indian functions, Farzela says:

Farzela: I feel comfortable in them [Iranian clothes]. I feel more comfortable in the English clothes. Because I normally wear both of clothes. Since I have grown up, I still wear all the clothes. So I wear in Iran also the tracksuits like this, but never wear the shorts, always wear the long ones.

Anjini: I wore shorts in India. Ha! I wore shorts—

Farzela: I wore long dresses to cover myself. [Group 4, Interview 4, p. 5]

As Lesko (1988) describes, the body is an important site of 'identity construction':

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[21] Body odour

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"Being feminine involves learning sets of attitudes and actions conceived and completed upon and through the body" (p. 123).

Of course, how 'being feminine' is to expressed on and through the body differs culturally and students like Farzela who have not yet learned (or don't want to learn) the complex cultural expectations for bodily adornment which are dominant at Girls' College are likely to 'get it wrong'. However, it is also the case the Farzela deliberately transgresses the dominant dress code at school by wearing both 'Iranian' and 'English' clothes. While Anjini triumphantly proclaimed that she wore shorts in India, a practice that she was aware was highly transgressive, Farzela adheres to the Islamic admonition for women to cover themselves but within this parameter she playfully 'dresses up'.

In her discussion of representations of Muslim women in the United Kingdom, Dwyer (1998) describes the dominant ways in which they are constructed by 'racialised' discourses:

"Through such discourses young Muslim women are defined as 'caught between two cultures' of home and school, torn by a 'culture clash' between the 'secular/modern' world of the school and the 'traditional/fundamentalist' world of the home" (p. 53).

She explains how such constructions deny Muslim women agency and ignore the ways in which these young women contest and negotiate the multiple subject positions that are made available to them. One of the ways that Farzela negotiates her way pleasurably between these multiple subjectivities is through music. In Iran Farzela began singing when she was six years old and when the music teacher at Girls' College heard her sing, she was invited to join the choir.

Farzela: Because in my family, I did the many parts of singing in my country. All the folk songs and all the songs. And I started singing when I was in school, when 6 years old. All teachers in Iran—I have this nice teacher, Miss Smith. I didn't have music in my life when she came. And I went to the combined class, and she hear my voice, even when I sing the Iranian song for her, not English song. And she took me, and she told me to be in the Small Choir. Even though I don't know how to read music. She teach me. She is giving me a really big help. And the Small Choir give me the confidence to go to the stage, because I am a person who is nervous most of the time. I am not a person who doesn't become nervous. But I see in the dream—Once I was singing, and there were millions of the people, and I was the only one on the stage, and I was singing. When I grown up, all in my dream—I get up in the morning, and I think it will become true one day. It will become true in 6, 7 years later. [Group 4, interview 4, p. 8]

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Music was a medium that enabled Farzela to experience success in both the Iranian culture and in the culture of the school where musical talent is highly valued. Tupac had also achieved very highly in music as had Kellie and music was an important reason why Kellie had chosen to come to the school. Farzela planed to be a singer when she has completed her studies, an ambition her father supported.

> Farzela: I plan to go to the university, and to do the computer science. Otherwise, medicine. I have to be educated, then Masters. And then I will be—my Dad tell me to finish my studies, then he will teach me much about the singing, and then I will be a singer. Within my own language.

Despite the fact that she had been subject to harassment by girls at school, Farzela clearly enjoyed being at Girls' College and valued the support and kindness she had been shown by the staff and other students.

> Farzela: It is a good school. Very kind towards staff and girls, everything. And it's my first school in New Zealand, so I have no experience of other schools. Because I came here first, and I was a student to 7th Form. So I have no idea about the other Colleges. I like this College.

> Sue: Kindness. A few of you have mentioned it. How is that kindness shown?

> Farzela: When you are depressed, the teachers come and ask you the problems, and they try to solve. They won't ignore you. If you feel uncomfortable or anything, they will being helpful for you. Every single time.

> Anjini: That's even among the students.

> Farzela: It doesn't matter if you're wrong, a hundred, thousand time. When you have done the mistakes, mistakes and mistakes, or I am wrong in something. Suppose I am lying, then my teacher knows about it, and she knows what's the problem. She even solves my problem. That's happened.

> Sue: What about kindness from other students? How has that been expressed?

> Farzela: When I came here, you came from a different country, you're not the same, from the same country, not the same colour, not the same everything. But they be your friend, they help you to talk, they explain where to go. Every single time. They are really nice.

> Sue: And is this girls from your cultural group, or girls from other cultural groups as well?

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Farzela: My country is a bit like the Indian. I have got some Indian friends here. But Iranian and Indian culture are a little bit different. Not really, but I am the only one girl at this school, so—

Sue: The only one in the school?

Farzela: I'm the only one in the school. There won't be next year anyone. [Group 4, Interview 5, p. 1]

While Swat preferred to keep her problems to herself, Farzela had shared some of her feelings with teachers and students whom she experienced as being very supportive. I have been careful to highlight the ways in which Farzela moved between the different cultural expectations, but she also mentioned being 'depressed' and being the only student in the school from Iran meant she was very alone. She also described how she was exposed to knowledges at the school that were not considered appropriate in her culture. In the following extract she describes how she was forced to watch a human reproduction video in her fifth form class, when, at that time, she said she had no knowledge of sex.

Farzela: Even when I come New Zealand I don't know what's the meaning of sex. Still ask Tina what's the meaning of ...

Tina: Me? Did you ask me?

Farzela: Yeah, just you...? I even don't know about what is the stuff on it. And when my teacher show me the movie I close my eyes and Miss? said, "open the eyes". And I go I'll leave the room and the girls said, "Farzela, what's the problem?" And she grabbed me and said sit here and watch and she teach me everything like this and I'm the naughtiest student in her class in fifth form.

Sue: That must have been quite shocking for you though if you hadn't sort of talked about those things, suddenly to go. You know, cause for the New Zealand girls its like we watch Shortland Street[22]

Farzela: The cartoons?

Sue: Yeah, it's normal, and then to be suddenly having to make, having to look at this film or something would be really quite frightening. And then you have to go home with all this knowledge about something you've seen.

Farzela: I've got a headache about this. I go home and I open the cartoon and I watching the TV and the cartoons and stuff. My dad came in, close the TV. 'Stop it, you're old

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[22] The name of a New Zealand made television 'soap opera'.

enough'. I went, 'no its going to be.' He close, I open, he close, I open, like this and he was saying, 'Farzela, don't act like kid.' But no, I didn't see Mum in three years. My dad doesn't say but I understand what he want to. Like, if they're not, like happy or smiling, it doesn't give the comments, it means they don't like it. He doesn't say me to off, but I understand.

Sue: So did you turn that [TV] on to try and block out what you'd seen at school so you wouldn't have to think about it?

Farzela: Yeah. When I am watching the cartoons, I get up every morning, half past five or five and watching cartoons and then come to school and then go home and watching cartoons and then start my homework. And when my Dad saw me he said, 'oh my God, all this cartoon, cartoon, cartoon.' Yesterday he told me one more thing, 'You are still a kid, like 12 and 13 years old, want.' [Group 4, Interview 2, p.10]

The knowledge of sex that Farzela was exposed to at school gave her a headache and her strategy for coping was to retreat into watching children's television programmes, seemingly to reinvoke her childhood innocence. I read her reference to a headache as an indication that there were very real struggles that Farzela was engaged in. As well as new knowledges that were outside of her previous experience, she also mentioned that she had not seen her mother for three years, and her account conveys to me a deep sense of loss and sadness. Farzela seems remarkable to me. This young woman had moved to New Zealand with her father, learned a new language and a whole new social culture and culture of schooling and yet had maintained (or developed) a strong sense of determination and new relationships while maintaining her 'identity' as a Muslim girl.

Farzela's account alerts us to the resources and skills that students like Farzela bring with them and those they must also acquire at school. Barnard's (1998) report on the programmes currently available to non-English speaking background learners (NESB) in New Zealand schools notes that the national English curriculum states that NESB learners are a valuable resource in the classroom and that the culture of all students should be incorporated and respected. However, he also points out that such programmes need to consider the:

"intercultural knowledge, attitudes and practices of all learners, whether NESB or otherwise"(p. 109).

This is an important consideration since, as the example of the 'lesbian support group' shows, to single out students who are 'different', while leaving the dominant culture

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unexplored is to reinforce the 'difference' that such initiatives seek to challenge. I want to suggest that the processes of normalisation by which difference is defined and constituted should be the focus, rather than those who are constituted as 'different' (Kenway & Willis, 1997). That is, rather than focussing resources solely on the NESB learners to help them to adapt and to gain fluency in English, resources also need to be put into addressing the school culture which is often very hostile towards difference.

Weaving Together

In this chapter I have begun to explore the different accounts of the girls' schooling experiences. In qualitative research such as this in which an enormous amount of transcribed materialal[23] is generated, any analysis is (of course) highly selective both in terms of the extracts that are selected for inclusion and the issues that are raised in relation to the extracts. The selections I have made have been with the intent of developing for the reader a sense of the complexity of Girls' College as a discursive context and of the equally complex work of negotiation and mediation which the girls must engage in each day in the process of 'doing' girl.

There are dominant discourses which make available powerful subjectivities to the girls, subjectivities that are more accessible to some than to others. For example, the girls from Pakeha middle class backgrounds were able to take up a rational subjectivity which positioned them in powerful and privileged ways in the context of the school. These girls were aware of their privilege at Girls' College which needed to attract Pakeha middle class girls in order to enable it to compete in the local educational market. Discourses of egalitarianism, diversity and tolerance provided a powerful legitimation for their privilege as did the strategy of 'othering' girls from more 'elite' schools.

In contrast, the rational, privileged subjectivity these girls took up was not so readily available to girls from working class and from Maori and Pacific Islands backgrounds. The threats to the girls' academic success were explicit and often realised in the context of their family histories. Many had women in their families who had 'not made it'. However, these

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[23] In my case, 120,000 words of transcripts.

girls had experienced success at school in a range of areas; academically, as leaders, athletes and musicians. The girls held to a strong belief in the equal opportunities that the school provided for them to achieve and, like the girls from Pakeha middle class backgrounds, they defended Girls' College against suggestions that it might be either racist and discriminatory or 'second best' to the other girls' schools in the city.

The girls had a number of strategies that positioned them in powerful ways within, and outside of, the school. Rather than attempting to resist the 'undesirable' feminine subjectivity that was ascribed to them via sex-based harassment, the girls took up this position of 'other' and used it to position the boys who were harassing them as objects of 'desire'. The other strategy they used to subvert dominant class and race based relations of power was to develop and maintain a strong collective orientation. The girls expressed an awareness of and commitment to the school community and their success was both enabled by the strength of the collective and was also something they saw as contributing to it. The girls felt a sense of responsibility to others which contrasted with the more individual focus of the girls from Pakeha middle class backgrounds who evaluated success in terms of what it did for them, rather than what it contributed to others.

While the girls from both of the groups described above were able to take up different and yet powerful subjectivities in the context of the school, the situation for girls from other ethnic groups and for girls who had moved to New Zealand in the course of their schooling, was more tenuous. I have been careful to highlight the differences between the girls in Group 4, the last group discussed in this chapter. This seemed important in view of the fact that these girls were often described by other research participants in ways that suggested that little was known about their cultures and histories, a lack of awareness that I also shared.

In the contexts of the girls' families and cultural communities the girls were often positioned in contradictory ways. While academic success was valued, for some of the girls, it also had the potential to threaten their desirability within a regime of compulsory heterosexuality and arranged marriage. The girls therefore had to achieve in two ways: in terms of culturally dominant notions of femininity and in terms of the rational subjectivity that was required for academic success at school. The girls showed themselves to be skilled negotiators who constituted themselves in different ways in the different contexts or 'lifeworlds' they inhabited. However, while wanting to resist positioning the girls as 'victims'

of so-called 'dual cultures', as they are often portrayed, I also wanted to acknowledge the difficulties, pressures and conflicts the girls experienced in this process of negotiation.

Prior to my research in the school, I had heard Girls' College described by some colleagues and friends as a context that was enabling some exciting and 'empowering' possibilities for girls. Furthermore, my own belief in the value of schools with diverse student intakes along class and ethnic lines (Watson et al., 1998) meant that I (like the girls) brought to the school my own assumptions and expectations. What I hope I have done here is to 'trouble', to some extent, not only the girls' assumptions about the school, but also my own, and to produce an account which suggests both the possibilities and limitations of Girls' College for fulfilling the multiple and often contradictory expectations we bring to the school.

In the following and final chapter, I review the key findings of my research and then broaden my discussion to consider the implications of this research for current policy and practices of school choice, and for larger issues concerning the schooling of girls.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this thesis I outlined the reasons why I undertook this research and the issues and perspectives I wanted to explore. I wanted to consider the implications of market style policies in education for the schooling of girls and I chose a particular focal point to enable me to do this—school choice. My involvement in school choice research as a member of The Smithfield Project had given me an extensive knowledge of certain aspects of the operation of school choice policies in New Zealand, and of the growing body of international literature in this area. At the same time I was also reading literature by feminist educators who were developing detailed and complex accounts of girls' schooling experiences. However, I noticed that neither school choice researchers, nor feminist researchers, had been considering the relationships between gender and school choice and the way choice policies were impacting on the schooling of girls.

In order to meet the aims of the research I chose a very specific schooling context and group of participants. In doing so, I wanted to explore the assumptions on which school choice policies were based in the light of the lived reality of a particular group of girls who attended the same school in one education 'market'. That is, I was interested to see whether choice operated in the ways assumed by the neo-liberal theories which underscored the introduction of choice and also whether or not school choice policies would achieve the outcomes they were intended to produce—greater equality of educational opportunity and achievement. I chose Girls' College because it is a single sex state girls' secondary school with a very diverse student intake which is under-subscribed and therefore needing to attract students.

In the research I also sought to explore and present the perspectives of a group of girls who are involved in making choices under this system since student perspectives have been largely absent from the literature on school choice. As I outlined in Chapter 1, most of the school choice literature considers the ways in which parents make choices. There is almost no research which considers students' perspectives on choice or the outcomes of these choices in terms of students' subsequent schooling experience. Furthermore, I wanted to consider the perspectives of girls from a diverse range of social class and ethnic backgrounds since the existing research on girls in single sex schools has focussed mainly on girls from white and middle class backgrounds, or on 'elite' schools which are able to exercise some degree of control over their student intakes.

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I also wanted to use aspects of feminist poststructural theories since it seemed to me that they would enable me to explore the discourses that operate in the context of choice, and in the context of the school the girls attended. In doing so, I was able to investigate the discourses associated with marketisation and choice within the broader context of the discursive fields the girls had to negotiate. I was able to consider the subjectivities or 'ways to do being a girl' these discourses made available. Using this theoretical perspective therefore enabled me to move beyond describing girls from particular ethnic and/or social class backgrounds as either universally privileged or 'disadvantaged'. It has enabled me instead to consider the multiple ways in which the girls were positioned in variously powerful, and often contradictory ways, both inside and outside of the school.

Furthermore, I wanted to locate myself within the research, not as a disinterested, 'objective' observer, but as someone who brings specific interests and perspectives to the research. I developed a research method that would enable me to be in conversation with the girls, to discuss my views, and to enable them to question me, while I also questioned them. I have also tried to write a research account which positions me within the text and which acknowledges my account as partial and situated. I have explained how I read the interview extracts and the theories I have used to do so. In doing so, my intention is to create the possibility for other readings rather than to claim the 'truth' of my own.

Narratives of Choice

In Chapter 5 I examined the reasons given by the girls as to why they were at Girls' College and the discourses that shaped their narratives and were negotiated by them in the process of 'choice'. These discourses included those associated with neo-liberal theory, such as individualism, autonomy and rationality, and those which are marginalised in the official discourse of education but which were equally powerful in shaping the processes of educational decision making. These included discourses of femininity, heterosexuality, friendship, pleasure and diversity.

These discourses made available subjectivities to the girls that positioned them in certain ways. I showed how some girls were able to take up a subjectivity which positioned them as rational, autonomous subjects who were free to make choices in the educational market place. For these girls, school choice was about choosing a school that best suited their

needs and, while they were aware that Girls' College was often considered 'second best' to the other girls' school in the city, their confidence in their ability to succeed academically meant they felt they could afford to 'take the risk' of Girls' College. These girls were (apparently) unhindered by their class, ethnicity or gender, and their narratives of school choice constituted them as the type of individual chooser who is assumed in neo-liberal accounts of choice. Using theories of discursive production, I suggested that the ability of some girls to access this subjectivity was dependent on the constitution and exclusion of the 'other'. Specifically, that discourses of gender, class and ethnicity must be silenced in order for these girls to position themselves as rational subjects who are autonomous and free. In particular, I argued that it was not that the girls' silence about gendered considerations meant that they were 'free' from them, but that the silence needed to be maintained in order for them to constitute themselves as the kinds of rational and autonomous subjects they desired to be.

In contrast, I showed how the choice narratives of some girls made explicit the contradictory subjectivities that were made available to them. For example, for some girls, discourses of femininity and compulsory heterosexuality positioned the girls both as actively desiring subjects and as objects of desire who needed to be protected from boys and from themselves as 'desiring' subjects. Some girls described how their parents (usually mothers) wanted them to attend a single sex school as a means of protecting them from the dangers of heterosexual desire, but for most of the girls, this was less important. However, the threat to academic achievement contained by the girls' embodiment was made explicit by some of the girls as they described the educational 'failure' of women in their families. Girls' College might be seen as a context that enabled the girls 'time-out' from the practices of heterosexual desire, thus enabling them to succeed academically.

The single sex character of the school was also valued by the girls for the opportunity it provided to be with other girls. Friendship and the friendly atmosphere of the school were highly valued, and the girls' desire for a context that was fun and friendly was not a rejection of academic success *per se*. Rather, the social context of schooling was an important dimension in enabling the girls to succeed academically.

I also explained in Chapter 5 how the 'multicultural' atmosphere of the school was constituted in differing ways by the girls depending on their ethnic and social class backgrounds. The Pakeha middle class girls valued the multicultural mix since they felt it created a more interesting and enjoyable context and gave them access to different ways of

doing 'girl'. However, Juliet explained how her mother, a working class Pakeha woman, did not like the 'multicultural sort of atmosphere' at Girls' College and the ethnic and class-based cultures of femininity it was seen to reproduce. For some girls who were not Pakeha, the diversity of the student population and the presence of girls from their own ethnic group was valued for the support and friendship it offered. Girls' College was a context that enabled them to take up subjectivities that were 'other' to the white middle class feminine subjectivities that were dominant in their primary and intermediate schools. For other girls, the school enabled them to uphold the notions of culturally appropriate femininity that were valued by their families.

The girls' accounts of their reasons for being at Girls' College present a different perspective on choice than that which is currently available in the research literature on school choice, or that which is assumed by neo-liberals. By conceptualising choice and the related notions of individuality and rationality as discourses that constitute certain kinds of subjects, I have been able to explore the ways that these subjectivities were taken up by the girls. Furthermore, rather than describing girls from certain social class and ethnic backgrounds as certain kinds of choosers who are more or less privileged, I have explored the ways in which certain discourses position certain girls in variously powerful ways. I have also shown the kinds of exclusions that must be maintained if girls are to take up the rational subjectivity assumed by neo-liberal theory. Thus, I have been able to problematise the apparently 'privileged' rational, autonomous subjectivity assumed in the neo-liberal account of choice. Not only is this account overly simplistic, but it also serves to marginalise and silence other aspects of human experience and schooling that are not encompassed by a neo-liberal view of the world.

This examination of choice from the girls' perspectives has shown that it is not the result of a 'rational' cost-benefit analysis, as assumed by neo-liberal theorists. Rather, the process of choice involves the negotiation of a complex of discourses of gender, class and race. Girls (and their parents) have ideas about femininity and of the kinds of girls they want to be, and they seek to have these ideas reinforced or reproduced by the school. The question arising from this observation then concerns the effects of the girls' choices on their subsequent schooling experiences.

Becoming 'Girls' at School

In Chapter 6 I presented extracts in which the girls discussed their schooling experiences and the broader contexts of their lives. I was able to show the kinds of complex relations of power that girls must negotiate on a daily basis as they become 'girls' at school. The discourses associated with neo-liberal theory that have assumed dominance in official accounts of schooling, are only one of the many different discourses that girls must negotiate. There are other discourses, both dominant and marginalised, that shape the girls' schooling experiences and the subjectivities that position them in differently powerful ways in differing contexts.

All of the girls valued Girls' College as an egalitarian context where they felt they had been given opportunities to succeed academically in a diverse social and cultural context. However, I showed how, for these girls, the discourse of egalitarianism served to mask the unequal power relations that operated within the school and to legitimate the privilege that was experienced by some girls on the basis of their social class and ethnicity. Pakeha middle class girls were considered 'desirable' for the academic success they were expected to bring to the school. The girls were aware of this but legitimated their privilege by affirming their commitment to equality and tolerance. However, while Pakeha middle class culture was valued highly in the school, there were other 'ways of being' that were also made available to the girls.

The Maori and Pacific Islands girls in my study described their pleasure at being 'big and loud and strong', ways of doing 'girl' that are typically eschewed within 'elite' girls' schools. They expressed a strong collective orientation and valued their success not only for themselves, but also for what it was able to contribute to others and to the school. Girls' College was a context which they saw as enabling them to transcend the limitations of their gender, ethnicity and social class, limitations that were imposed on them by others. The girls believed strongly in the egalitarianism of the school and felt they had been able to achieve in ways they would not have had access to in other schools. However, in positioning the school as a kind of haven of egalitarianism, the girls resisted the suggestion that there were class and ethnic-based relations of power that operated within their school.

Girls who had not been born in New Zealand and who spoke a language other than English at home, were those who were least able to access the cultures of femininity that were

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dominant at the school and which positioned the girls in powerful ways. However, rather than positioning these girls as passive victims of the often contradictory cultural expectations they experienced, I used the notion of 'lifeworlds' to emphasise the ways they negotiated their way through the differing subjectivities that were made available to them. These girls were expected to achieve in terms of the notions of femininity that were valued in their families, but also in terms of those that were required for academic success. For example, while their parents may have wanted the school to promote academic achievement, some also wanted traditional notions of appropriate femininity to be upheld in order to maintain their daughter's 'marriageability'. This is turn differed within different familial contexts. The 'good girl' subjectivity, and the single sex character of the school, provided them with ways of managing these contradictions. I was careful to highlight the differences between these girls who were often positioned as powerless 'others' by girls in the school.

As well as describing the school as an egalitarian context in terms of class and ethnicity, the girls also described the school as a context where they were freed from gendered constraints. However, I presented a reading of the interviews that challenged this and which explored the contradictions between discourses of rationality and femininity. There were two sites where these contradictions were most apparent—outside the school and in the context of the girls' friendships.

As Girls' College students, the girls were often subject to sex-based harassment and positioned as 'undesirable' within the context of compulsory heterosexuality and dominant discourses of femininity. The Pakeha middle class girls resisted the harassment by asserting their difference to the sort of girls who were typically associated with the school. They were 'nice' girls who didn't deserve to be harassed and they understood the harassment as a case of mistaken identity and as an outcome of the boys' irrational, biologically determined behaviour. For these girls, their version of femininity was defined as rationality. In a single sex environment like Girls' College, these girls' gender did not threaten their access to the rational subjectivity they desired, and it was reinforced by the academic success they experienced. However, I suggested that while their assertion of their rationality may be an effective defense against the harassment they experience due to their embodiment as 'girls' while they are at school, it may not be so effective when they leave.

The Maori and Pacific Islands girls were also subject to sex-based harassment but they were positioned outside of access to the privileged raced and classed 'nice girl' subjectivity

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that the Pakeha middle class girls had access to. Their strategy of resistance was different. For example, Tupac took up the position of 'undesirable other' that was ascribed to her via the harassment and in doing so, gained access to a more powerful subjectivity that freed her from the expectations of 'desirable' femininity. She also described how she and her friends parodied the position of desiring subjects by positioning the boys as objects of desire. Furthermore, while their identity as Girls' College students made them the target of harassment, it also provided them with a sense of belonging and solidarity with other girls 'like them' and enabled them to take up alternative subjectivities to those that were associated with Pakeha middle class cultures of femininity.

While the girls' friendships were an important site of support and pleasure for the girls, they were also one where dominant notions of femininity were actively reproduced and policed. Several of the girls mentioned the kinds of harassment they were subject to from other girls if their bodies were not seen to conform to the 'normal' or the 'ideal' as this was defined within the context of compulsory heterosexuality. The girls' friendships were both a site of safety and comfort as well as a place of danger where the boundaries of 'normality' were strongly policed. These boundaries were also policed outside the school. I explained how the publicity that was given to the lesbian support group that was initiated by the school had the effect of making the girls the target of homo-phobic harassment. The girls were harassed not only because they were the 'wrong kind' of girls, but also because their identification as 'lesbian' positioned them outside of access to femininity within the terms of compulsory heterosexuality.

Girls' College: Constraints and Opportunities

Overall, I presented a range of girls' perspectives on the processes of choice and of their subsequent schooling experiences. I explored the discourses the girls must negotiate in the context of choice and, on a daily basis, as they 'become' girls at school. By placing the girls' narratives of choice within the broader contexts of their lives and schooling, I have been able to show that the discourses associated with neo-liberal theory which have assumed dominance in educational policy, are not the only ones that provide 'ways to be' to girls. Furthermore, this perspective 'from below' (as Kenway & Willis, 1997, refer to it), which focuses on the girls' perspectives, has enabled me to explore the complex relations of power

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that operate inside and outside of the school to position the girls, and the school itself, in different ways.

Girls' College might be thought of as a nexus of opportunity and constraint in which girls constitute their gendered subjectivities from the contradictory positions that are made available to them. School choice might also be thought of as a site in which various discourses, both dominant and marginalised, are negotiated by the girls and their parents in the process of educational decision making. Neo-liberal theory constitutes the truth of the (apparently) ungendered rational subject and emphasises the role of education to prepare individuals to take up their place in the public sphere. However, my research has shown that this public sphere is dependent on the constitution of a private sphere, considerations of which are excluded in the official educational policy discourse. Yet, as my interviews show, the gendered 'private sphere' shaped the girls' educational decision making-process and schooling experience in powerful ways.

These 'public' and 'private' spheres may be seen as making available differing and contradictory subjectivities to girls. In this nexus of opportunity and constraint, girls constitute their gendered subjectivities from the contradictory positions that are made available to them. I want to suggest that that Girls' College, as a single sex school, enables girls to temporarily resolve the tensions that are generated by these contradictions, such as the contradiction between discourses of rationality and femininity. By providing an escape or respite from the immediate dynamics of the practices of heterosexual desire, the girls gain access to academic success and to the rational subjectivity this enables. Furthermore, the discourse of equal opportunity serves to mask the exclusions that must be maintained in order for some to experience 'success'. At best, the sanctuary that Girls' College is seen to be able to provide may enable only a temporary respite from the contradictions invoked by the intersection of the rational, autonomous subjectivity with the gendered subjectivities made available to the girls.

However, I also want to suggest that Girls' College may provide a subversive site in which girls can have opportunities to do 'girl' differently. I think an opportunity for this subversive work resides precisely within and because of the tensions that are invoked by these contradictory discourses. It is not in attempting to resolve them but rather to make them visible, to name them and to expose the dependence of dominant discourses on the constitution and exclusion of 'other'. For example, the discourse of rationality requires the constitution and exclusion of the feminine, the 'irrational' and the 'private'. This kind of deconstructive

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work is not about asserting girls' right to have access to rationality but rather it is about exposing the means by which rationality assumes dominance through exclusion of the 'irrational' and yet is dependent on the constitution of that same term. One of the ways this might happen is by valuing the 'excluded, irrational other' which the dominance of rationality is dependent upon and displacing them from their negative, dependent position.

In a similar way, there are other dominant discourses related to social class and ethnicity that make available privileged and powerful subjectivities to certain girls. These dominant discourses are also constituted by the processes of exclusion and 'othering'. The process of 'deconstruction' (as summarised in Grosz, 1989) aims to expose the ways in which subjectivities are discursively constituted and in doing so, provides the possibility for subversion and change. This is not to argue that we can go beyond gender as a category of representation but it argues that we can raise suspicion for the regime of gender, the exclusions it is dependent on and the meanings it privileges.

Furthermore, deconstruction might be applied to the notion of school choice and to the underlying assumption of instrumental rationality on which it is based. As I argued in Chapter 2, school choice might be thought of as a discourse which constitutes the truth of the rational individual, one who is free to make choices in the educational marketplace. The neo-liberal theory of choice assumes that individuals (usually parents) will make choices on the basis of 'educational' concerns. For example, in relation to single sex schooling for girls, neo-liberals assume that parents will choose these schools for their daughters because they are perceived to be able to promote academic achievement. However, as my research has shown, the process of choice is more complex than this and students and their families choose schools for a range of reasons that are not encompassed by a neo-liberal view of the world. The dominance of neo-liberal discourses of choice and rationality depends on the marginalisation and erasure of aspects of human experience that are not encompassed by the neo-liberal view of the world. However, as my research has shown, these 'other' dimensions shape the process of choice and students' schooling experiences in powerful ways.

The importance of this deconstructive approach to gender, rationality and choice is that it raises questions about the outcomes of choice for the schooling of girls. In particular, it raises the question of whether the operation of choice will improve equality of both opportunity and outcomes for girls. It is to his question that I now turn.

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Competition and Equity

As outlined in Chapter 1, the introduction of school choice policies was based on the assumption that parents would have greater choice of school for their children, that schools would therefore have to compete for students, and that they would raise their standards in order to do so. In relation to girls, the assumption is that parents will choose schools that they believe will promote the academic achievement of their daughters and their choices will then result in an increase in equality of both opportunity and outcomes for girls.

The first problem with these assumptions is that my research has shown that girls (and their parents) bring a range of often contradictory aspirations to the school. This raises the issue of not only whose aspirations and expectations should be prioritised, but which ones. Furthermore, how should schools respond when aspirations that are valued by some may work against the kinds of equity initiatives that educators have shown to be in the interests of girls? For example, the Pakeha middle class girls I interviewed saw themselves as largely free from the constraints of their gender and therefore having no need of the kinds of 'radical' educational initiatives that feminist educators have argued for. In fact, for these girls, such initiatives may be viewed by the girls as regressive since by promoting the need for 'equality', they reinscribe the assumption that girls are un-equal and therefore in need of special treatment. In a similar way, some of the Maori and Pacific Islands girls' asserted that Girls' College was a haven of egalitarianism and saw no need of practices aimed at promoting their equality.

In this regard, the incident of the lesbian 'support group' is instructive and lends support to the girls' resistance to programmes aimed at targeting those who are considered to be 'disadvantaged'. In this incident, which I described in Chapter 6, the school's attempt to establish a lesbian support group and the subsequent publicity resulted in the girls being subject to homophobic harassment outside of the school. There are two points I want to make here. Firstly, as I will discuss in more detail, schools need to consider very carefully how they go about trying to promote equality for those who are defined as 'other'. How they might best do this is the subject of ongoing research and debate by feminist educators, but whatever these initiatives might be, they must certainly involve practices that make discourses and processes of normalisation and 'othering' their focus, rather than to focus on those who are positioned as 'other' and 'abnormal'.

The second point to be made about the lesbian support group is that it exemplifies the potentially damaging effects of such initiatives, not only to those they are intended to help, but to the school itself. Schools like Girls' College which are in a vulnerable position in the local education market because they are under subscribed and because of their diverse ethnic and social class mix, need to be very careful that any policies or practices they promote do not serve to further undermine their desirability. Rather than increasing the desirability of the school as a context that was attending to issues of inequality and discrimination, the publicity about the group served to reinforce the school's less (than) 'desirable' status in the local education hierarchy. In this way, competition, rather than encouraging schools to develop innovative practices and policies aimed at promoting equity for students, may actually mitigate against them.

The other problem with the assumption that competition will promote equity is that it assumes that all 'consumers' come to the education 'market' on equal terms. This is clearly not the case and not all girls are considered to be equally 'desirable' in the education market place. Pakeha middle class girls are seen to be more 'desirable' since they are believed to promote the academic success of the school, and to help ensure that the school does not appear to be 'too ethnically diverse'. As Gordon (1994) argues, the ethnic and social class mix of a school is an important factor in determining its desirability. Furthermore, in aiming to attract these students, Girls' College has an incentive to be seen to be providing a schooling context which appeals to their (and /or their parents') aspirations. Since, in New Zealand, Pakeha middle class girls are considered to be more 'desirable', they have the greatest 'consumer' power. This was also apparent from the interviews with the Pakeha middle class girls in my study who were very aware of their privileged position within the school. Given the 'desirability' of these girls, it is presumably the case that their needs and expectations are the most likely to be prioritised and responded to and by the school.

However, because of the school's need to attract students, it cannot afford to market itself solely to this group and to cater to their needs alone. There are girls from many ethnic groups at the school and as I have shown, they bring a range of aspirations and expectations with them, some of which are contradictory to those that are dominant in the school. The issue for the school then becomes not only *whose* desires are to be met, but also, *which* of those desires. For example, promoting the social context of the school and its diverse population may appeal to some Pakeha middle class girls, but it may also have the potential to undermine

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'rightful' place in the world, but also to contest it. These pleasurable aspects of schooling may provide a site for change.

One of the aspects of the girls' schooling experience that consistently emerged from the interviews with the girls was friendship. As I pointed out in Chapter 6, being with their friends was an important consideration for the girls in their choice of a school and a significant factor in their enjoyment of school. However, the interviews also showed that friendship was no utopia and as well as being a place of refuge and support, it was also a place where girls defined and policed the boundaries of hetero-normativity.

Hey's (1997) ethnography of girls' friendships, while drawing attention to the work that friendships do in policing the boundaries of normalisation within the context of compulsory heterosexuality, also describes the intense pleasure that girls experienced from doing this work. Hey suggests that educators can look for ways to work with, as well as against, the cultural power of friendships:

"If we have not been surprised by finding girls' talk reflecting and constituting hegemonic narratives, we need to bear in mind that it offered cultural resources of counter-hegemony as well" (p. 140).

Here I think of Alfreda and Waima's description of their response to the sex-based harassment they were subject to by boys from the neighbouring college. Rather than their friendship providing them only with a place of refuge, the girls harnessed their sense of solidarity to take up an alternative subjectivity that positioned them in a powerful way. For these Maori and Pacific Islands girls, friendship was an important resource in enabling them to take up alternative subjectivities. This suggests that friendships, within and across different groups of students, can make available differing ways of 'doing girl' and can provide a safe context for girls to explore the ways in which femininities are constructed. Kenway and Willis (1997) also argue that the most successful programmes in schools that aimed to promote gender equity were those that made visible the relations of power within schools. Such programmes also:

"assisted students and staff to draw out some positive counter-narratives, helped them to build both alternative sources of strength and status and new communities of support for other ways of being male and female. They guided and encouraged students and staff both to discover their own informed truths about gender and to develop their own responsible practices for change in the light of local circumstances" (p. 210).

As well as describing the pleasure of their friendships, the girls also talked about their pleasure in being in a culturally diverse school community. For girls from ethnic 'minority' backgrounds, Girls' College was seen as providing a supportive context in which they could feel a sense of belonging from being with other 'girls like them'. For some of the Pakeha middle class girls, the ethnic diversity was viewed favourably since it was seen as being interesting and as having a kind of 'novelty value'. All of the girls said they valued the opportunity to be with girls who were 'different from' them.

However, while the girls in my study said they valued being in an ethnically diverse school, the interview material presented in Chapter 6 indicates that having a diverse student mix is, of itself, no guarantee that dominant relations of power and privilege will be either exposed or disrupted. Not only were the Pakeha middle class girls adept at legitimating their own privilege (while ironically asserting the elitism of girls at other more 'exclusive' schools), but the discourses of equal opportunity and egalitarianism also served to obscure the effects of these power relations on those who were marginalised by them.

In a recent study in the United States, Orfield and Yun (1999) argue that while many assume that multi-racial schools are intrinsically of value, there is little research which considers the broader impact of these kinds of schools in terms of subverting dominant race based relations of power:

"We have many schools emerging with the types of interracial and multiracial populations that have received virtually no attention from policy makers or researchers, but will doubtless have a significant impact on relationships between these groups. Many teachers and administrators are already working in the kinds of schools neglected in both policy and in research. Many more will be in the future. Students in such schools go to school in highly complex and dynamic environments, and whose complex interactions are poorly understood" (p. 15).

The interview material presented in this thesis is an indication of the dynamics within one 'multiracial' school and suggests that such schools are not havens of egalitarianism, as some might assume. However, I want to suggest that the diversity of the student population

provides an opportunity for undertaking the kinds of critical work that Barnard (1989) and Kenway and Willis (1997) argue is necessary for critically examining how difference comes to be constructed and the relations of power those differences maintain. A legitimation for this kind of work resides in the girls' desire to mix with 'others' and their stated commitment to 'equality' and 'equal opportunity'. My research shows that there is a desire from some students to be in more diverse contexts and this can be nurtured and legitimated. It is a desire that provides a platform or foundation from which to build more in-depth critical work.

I also want to note that the Smithfield Project research indicates that student intakes of schools are becoming increasingly polarised along social class and ethnic lines (Watson et al., 1998). That is, 'elite' schools are becoming less diverse in terms of their school mix while those that have no control over their intakes are becoming more diverse, or in some cases, have no or very few Pakeha students. The result is that Pakeha students are the least likely of any ethnic group to be in ethnically diverse schools, a finding that Orfield and Yun (1999) also make about white students in their overview of segregation in American schools. It therefore seems ironic that school choice policies, that had the stated intent of improving equity, are contributing to increasing segregation of school intakes. If as a society we value schools as contexts where students can learn how to live in a culturally diverse world, then schools like Girls' College should be acknowledged for the important work they do in this regard and educators should be given the resources and training necessary to undertake this work.

I also want to raise the issue of how much agency students should have in the choice process. The rhetoric of school choice assumes that parents are the ones who make the choice, and students are positioned as passive recipients of the choices that are made for them. While some of the girls gave choice accounts which emphasised their autonomy (mostly, but not only, those from middle class backgrounds) others described the choice as one that was made *for* them rather than *by* them. It seems to be the case that several girls would not have attended Girls' College if they had been given the choice, with the majority of these preferring City High (prior to attending secondary school), a nearby coeducational school. David et al (1994) also discuss this issue in relation to their research which showed that in middle class families, the child's input into choice is more limited than that for working class families. My findings present a different picture. They show that girls from middle class families are (apparently) more likely to agree with their parents about their school of choice than those from working class families. While the middle class girls in my study described the choice of Girls College

as being their own (and one which their parents presumably agreed with), most of the working class girls described being told where they had to go and this was often not what they had initially wanted.

David (1994) et al's research also showed that while the child was usually involved in the decision making process, it was rare for them to have been given the sole and main responsibility (p. 132). They go on to discuss the lack of clarity in society about the degree of autonomy that students should be given over their educational decision making. As they point out, while children can be held legally accountable for crimes in the United Kingdom (where their research was undertaken), they cannot be responsible for signing, with their parents, the transfer from at age 11 to their preferred secondary school (p. 132).

Noddings (1999), writing from a liberal democratic perspective, makes the argument that students should be given a greater choice over their education since it trains them to make 'sound choices', a necessary skill for participation in a democracy. Although there are problems with this argument in terms of the notion of rationality on which the liberal democratic state is premised (Flax, 1998; Jaggar, 1983), it may be politically useful in making the argument that students need to be given greater opportunities to think critically about educational decision making, including school choice. Since 'rationality' has assumed dominance in the policy on educational provision, it is an argument that is likely to find favour with girls, their parents and with educators and policy makers.

By way of conclusion I want to make the point that my research has shown that school choices are not solely made or thought about in the ways assumed by advocates of school choice policies and, because of this, they are unlikely to achieve the equity outcomes envisaged. My research, and that of others, suggests that choice policies work to stifle, rather than to encourage diversity, both in terms of student mix and curriculum. While many of the girls in my study enjoyed the diversity that was made available to them at Girls' College, for most of them, it was valued as long as it did not threaten the relations of power and privilege that operated in the school. Furthermore, some of the girls' narratives of choice indicated that their parents were less likely than their daughters to value the diverse student mix. Replacing a meritocracy with a parentocracy (Brown, 1997) in which those with the greatest cultural and material capital have the greatest choice is no solution to the persistent and growing inequalities that stratify society. It raises the question of what role the state should have in legislating to ensure that all schools attend to issues of equity (in the broadest sense of that

term) and furthermore, in ensuring that schools and teachers are resourced to do this critical and potentially transformative work. As a society, I believe we need to continue the conversation and to stimulate debate about the kinds of world we want to work towards, not to abdicate this responsibility under the guise of individuality and the (apparent) right to choose.

However, it is difficult to see how the political will to dismantle school choice policies can be engaged in New Zealand. I want to argue that as well as putting in place safeguards that mediate to some extent the most obvious inequalities perpetuated and generated by choice, such as balloting for extra places in over-subscribed schools, there is also the possibility of continuing to disrupt the dominant discourse of choice by acknowledging those 'other', marginalised desires and aspirations that the girls and their families brought to choice. Desires for community, solidarity, diversity and pleasure which are so much more expansive than the narrow focus on achievement allows. In other words, I am suggesting that there are many people who want more from schools than the fulfillment of self-interest and upward mobility and it is important that the academic community, as well as parents and the wider community, continue to give voice to these aspirations. It is also my hope that attending to the voices of students, as I have attempted to do in this thesis, will encourage both the motivation and the necessary understandings to go about this work.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE
Sue Watson's PhD Research Project
(NOTE: THIS WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL)

NAME_____

1. Where have you lived?

place	school	age
a)_____		____
b)_____		____
c)_____		____
d)_____		____

2. What paid work do you do?

work	hours per week
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. What unpaid work do you do?

work	hours per week
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4. What extra-curricular activities are you involved in?
(i) School-based

(ii) Outside of school

(iii) How many hours per week do these extra-curricular activities take (in total)?

5. How many brothers and sisters do you have?

gender	age
a)_____	_____
b)_____	_____
c)_____	_____
d)_____	_____
e)_____	_____

6. What is your relationship to each of the people you live with?

7. Mother or female caregiver's current paid employment:

8. Mother or female caregiver's education:
a) at school:

b) after leaving school:

9. Father or male caregiver's current paid employment:

10. Father or male caregiver's education:
a) at school:

b) after leaving school:

11. Use this space and the back of the page for any comments you would like to make about the questionnaire or the research project in general.

THANK YOU FOR FILLING IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION

Student consent for participation in research project

Title of project: Choice of Single-Sex Schooling by Girls
Name of researcher: Sue Watson

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions, and they have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that information I give to Sue will not be used in a way that will identify me or my family.

I understand that Sue may be taping interviews with me and that the content of the interviews will remain confidential to me and to Sue. I understand that any interview materials will be securely stored.

I understand that I may be required to participate in approximately six group meetings and interviews over the next three to four months.

I understand that I may withdraw myself and all or any part of the information I have provided at any time without having to give reasons and without penalty of any sort.

I understand that the school has consented for me to be involved in the research.

My name is:_____

My address is:_____

Signed:_____

Date:_____