

Gender and merit: A history of coeducation and gender relations at an academically-selective public secondary school, Parramatta High, New South Wales, 1913-1958

Helen Proctor

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Abstract

Coeducation is a system of school organisation with both progressive and pragmatic genealogies. From the late nineteenth century its benefits were promoted by progressive educators in terms of individual self-development and the betterment of gender relations. However the overwhelming majority of coeducational or 'mixed' schools were founded by administrators of public schooling systems for pragmatic fiscal reasons. In the words of the 1900-1901 *Report of the United States Commissioner of Education*: 'The coeducation of the sexes makes it possible to have better classification and at the same time larger classes.' In Australia, with its dispersed population, the tolerance of state Education Departments for mixed-sex enrolment from about the 1910s made widespread public secondary schooling economically feasible.

The thesis is a history of coeducation and gender relations at a pioneering New South Wales state high school during the first half of the twentieth century. The school is Parramatta High School, an academically-selective, mixed-sex state high school established by the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction on the western outskirts of Sydney in 1913. The thesis explores the varied and changing theories and practices encompassed by coeducation at Parramatta High School from 1913-1958.

The central argument of the thesis is that coeducation cannot be satisfactorily defined or understood as a single philosophy or practice but rather encompassed a collection of sometimes incongruent ideas, practices and assumptions. It was not a unitary or invariable system, nor one which operated to produce or reproduce a straightforward gender order or hierarchy. Coeducation was shaped by historical time and place, by large and small social and schooling contexts. Being a girl or a boy in the 3A Latin class, for example, meant something different from what it meant to be a girl or a boy on the sports field. Variations in the experiences of gender at the high school are analysed through the interaction of different kinds of sources. Traditional documentary sources, enrolment data, curriculum patterns and oral histories offer different kinds of readings of coeducational theory and practice which correspond with different aspects of school life.

The thesis also argues that theories and practices of coeducation are revealing of broader gender relations. The coeducational high school, by its very nature, was compelled to address questions of gender difference or commonality across various realms; academic, social, moral and physical. The study of a coeducational site offers fresh perspectives on topics which have been more commonly studied separately as issues either about women or about men.

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This thesis is dedicated to my family, Peter, Anna and Louisa Studman, and to the late Tish and Gerry Proctor.

Introduction

One of the key features of the development of Australian education over the first half of the twentieth century was the rise of the academically selective state high school, organised around the competitive academic curriculum and the public examination; a development which followed slightly different trajectories for each of the six Australian states. In New South Wales the first state high schools – all single-sex institutions – were established in the 1880s on a limited scale and with mixed success. A second more enduring wave of high school establishments began in 1911-12. New high schools were founded throughout regional and rural areas of New South Wales. This set of foundations included Parramatta High School, the subject of this study, established on the western outskirts of Sydney in 1913. The new schools were promoted by the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction both as expanding opportunities for higher schooling beyond the eastern population centres, and providing an important step on the meritocratic educational ladder between the elementary schools and the Sydney University.¹ Like the already existing non-government providers of higher schooling, the public high schools were not open to all-comers. However it was seen as an important distinction by their supporters and clients that the barriers to entry were merit-based – in the form of an entrance examination – rather than financial or social.

The language of the Department of Public Instruction scarcely acknowledged gender difference in relation to academic study (as opposed to vocational or technical training). New South Wales high schools provided access to the main public examination credentials, the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates, to both boys and girls under ostensibly the same circumstances. While the majority of New South Wales adolescents were educated in single-sex schools, the willingness of the Department of Public Instruction to tolerate coeducation – to recognise that boys and girls had needs or abilities enough in common to justify joint instruction – was an important factor in the success of its high schools, allowing students to gather in large enough numbers in rural and regional areas to justify the

expense of the secondary schools. In the words of the 1900-1901 *Report of the United States Commissioner of Education*:

The coeducation of the sexes makes it possible to have better classification and at the same time larger classes. Unless proper grading is interfered with and pupils of widely different attainments are brought together in the same classes, the separation of the sexes requires twice as many teachers to teach the same number of pupils.²

In fact very few schools either in Australia or overseas in the early twentieth century were explicitly founded or run according to thought-through theories of coeducation. Most were coeducational because of the way they had grown out of the upper grades of elementary schools or for economic reasons, or both, with practices of gender management being made up as they went along.

Initially attended by very small numbers of New South Wales youth, the state high schools grew in size and number until secondary schooling became commonplace with the introduction of compulsory high schooling associated with the Wyndham Report of 1957 and the Education Act of 1961. In the same process academically-selective secondary schooling went into (temporary) decline, and understanding of the term 'high school' shifted from the identification of an academic elite to the signification of an institution for all adolescents. The idea of the coeducational high school also changed. Coeducation by this time not only provided economies of scale in an expanding system, but also had become increasingly associated with modern social-psychological beliefs about adolescent development, and with the idea that secondary schools should assist with this process in addition to their academic duties. Public high schools founded after the Education Act of 1961 were routinely coeducational, with pioneering schools like Parramatta High having provided the living proof that coeducation 'worked.'

¹ For example see the booklet: New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Three years of education*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1913, pp. 6-7.

² United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the year 1900-1901* Government Printing Office, Washington, 1902, p 1241n.

This thesis is a history of coeducation and gender relations at a pioneering New South Wales state high school during the first half of the twentieth century. It explores the varied and changing theories and practices encompassed by coeducation at Parramatta High School from 1913-1958. The central argument of the thesis is that coeducation cannot be satisfactorily defined or understood as a single philosophy or practice but rather encompassed a collection of sometimes incongruent ideas, practices and assumptions. Coeducation was not a unitary or invariable system, nor one which operated to produce or reproduce a straightforward gender order or hierarchy. It was shaped by historical time and place, by large and small social and schooling contexts. Being a girl or a boy in the 3A Latin class, for example, meant something different from what it meant to be a girl or a boy on the sports field.

Variations in the experience of gender at the high school are analysed through different kinds of sources, which correspond with different aspects of schooling practice. Authorship, intended audience and other circumstances of production contribute to substantial variations in representations of coeducational theory and practice, and of gender identities and relations at Parramatta High School. The main sources for the study can be grouped, although not neatly, into three working categories. First are the most traditional documents of policy-making and high theory, of central government and expert. These include books and articles published by educationalists about coeducation, and New South Wales Department of Education reports. Second are the local records generated by the school, including enrolment records, examinations results lists, confidential correspondence files and school magazines. Third is a set of oral history interviews with ex-students in which they reflect upon their schooling and its significance in their own life histories.

The thesis also argues that theories and practices of coeducation are revealing of broader gender relations. Theorists and practitioners of coeducation have made assessments about the nature of gender, disputing the balance of fixed and educable elements in 'femininity' and 'masculinity' as well as what constitutes good gender relations. The coeducational high school, by its very nature, was compelled to address questions of gender difference or

commonality across various realms; academic, social, moral and physical. Moreover, a study of a coeducational site offers fresh perspectives on topics which have been more commonly studied separately as issues either about women or about men.

Thesis organisation

The study is organised into ten chapters.

Chapter 1 anchors the history of Parramatta High School in new and existing traditions of writing about the history of Australian state secondary schooling and about coeducation. In addition to Australian literature the chapter surveys some international studies which shed light on the Australian experience.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine the background to the establishment of mixed-sex high schools in early twentieth century New South Wales in terms of educational theory and government policy. The chapters explore what was meant or understood by the term ‘coeducation,’ in late nineteenth and early twentieth century England, the United States and New South Wales.

Chapter 2 examines the main arguments in an international debate about coeducation which occurred in England and the United States during the first decade or so of the twentieth century.

Chapter 3 explores the policy background to the adoption of coeducation in New South Wales country high schools in the 1910s.

Chapters 4-8 move the focus of discussion from the generalising level of educational theory and high policy to the specifics of the coeducational organisation of the Parramatta High School between 1913 and the late 1930s. This section of the thesis reads coeducation and

gender relations at Parramatta High School through different kinds of local sources including documentary sources, enrolment data and oral histories.

Chapter 4 examines the school's place in its local education market and in the New South Wales public education system.

Chapter 5 explores school culture through a reading of *The Parramatta High School Magazine*, finding ways in which gender was mediated by other kinds of social relations as the magazines worked to build a sense of institutional identity.

Chapter 6 analyses the social class and gender composition of three of the cohorts of students which passed through Parramatta High. The progress of these students through the school is tracked in terms of yearly promotion and the award of public examination credentials, two fundamental aspects of the structure of the modern secondary school.

Chapter 7 explores the importance of gender in shaping the organisation of discipline and pastoral care at the high school. The chapter uses the letters, memoranda, forms and reports written by parents, teachers and bureaucrats which were collected on the New South Wales Education Department's confidential school correspondence files between 1913 and 1940.

Chapter 8. This study argues that coeducation was complicated by cleverness, age and social class. The chapter reads the nature of these interactions through the recollections of former students of Parramatta High School.

Chapters 9 and 10 take the high school from the early 1940s to the late 1950s, in the context of changing age relations regarding adolescent behaviour and nurture, and new discourses about the psycho-social purposes of secondary schooling.

Chapter 9 discusses different aspects of management of the mixing of boys and girls at Parramatta High during the 1940s.

Chapter 10 sets Parramatta High in the context of the expert and popular debates about coeducation that were associated with the Wyndham Committee review of secondary education in New South Wales during the 1950s.

Overall the study addresses four main questions. These are: What did educationalists, policy-makers and other experts mean and understand by the term, 'coeducation', during the first half of the twentieth century in Australia? How was coeducation practised at Parramatta High School between 1913 and 1958? How was gender mediated by class, age and merit in the schooling of young men and women at Parramatta High School? In what ways does the study of coeducation shed light on broader issues of gender relations and the nurture of gender identities in the public high school? Reading different kinds of sources to explore different aspects of school experience, the study aims to achieve a rich and layered understanding of what it meant to be a girl or boy at a coeducational and academically-selective public high school in New South Wales during the first half of the twentieth century.

Chapter 1

Gender, coeducation and the early New South Wales public high school: A review of the literature

This thesis argues that coeducation can only adequately be understood as historically varied, contingent and contextual. It operated in different ways in different historical settings. It meant or implied different things according to the perspectives of the authors of different kinds of historical texts. Coeducation was founded upon particular assumptions about the nature and needs of young males and females, and produced or reproduced various kinds of social relations of gender. The thesis examines the meaning of coeducation in different settings and contexts and through different kinds of sources, from the level of high theory and government policy to the daily repetitive practices of the organisation of an ‘ordinary’ school and the students and teachers who worked in its classrooms. It is intended to be an institutional and policy history as well as a study that is local and specific, a history which attempts to accommodate, in Clifford Geertz’s metaphor, some of the ‘hard surfaces of life – the political, stratifactory realities’ together with issues of daily experience and of meaning.¹ The formulation of the questions addressed in this thesis and the ways in which they are approached have been influenced by the author’s reading of certain themes in the historiography of Australian secondary schooling as well as related international literature, mainly from England, the United States and Canada. This chapter is a survey and discussion of that literature.

This study is partly a response to gaps in the New South Wales literature. To the author’s knowledge, there are no detailed studies of coeducational experiences or practices in early New South Wales high schools, despite the periodic interest expressed by educational psychologists, sociologists and administrators in the pros and cons of coeducational classrooms. More broadly, however, there is a need for further research and writing about many aspects of the New South Wales public high school. Not only are there gaps in our understanding of administrative and policy history but there is also

much that we do not know about the students who attended early high schools. There is no dedicated history of the development of the New South Wales state secondary schooling system, for instance, and some of what we do have is quite old. The standard reference remains Barcan's general history of New South Wales education, first published in 1965, revised for the 1988 edition, which includes accounts of the establishment and development of public high schools.² There are no studies of the purpose or culture of the public high school of the kind and scope of those of either Janet McCalman or Geoffrey Sherington and his co-authors on the wealthy non-government secondary sector.³ Nor is there a body of work for New South Wales comparable to Craig Campbell's writing about the backgrounds and experiences of state and corporate secondary school students in twentieth century Adelaide.⁴ This is notwithstanding a number of useful heritage projects put together by individual schools.⁵ In terms of the historical analysis of gender the main work on girls' secondary schooling is for the nineteenth century, including analyses of Sydney Girls High School by Marjorie Theobald and Noeline Kyle.⁶ There has been less discussion of twentieth century girls, although Lesley Johnson's study of textual representations of the 'modern girl' has

¹ Clifford Geertz, *The interpretation of cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, pp. 193-293.

² Alan Barcan, *A short history of education in New South Wales*, Martindale Press, Sydney 1965, pp. 206ff.; *Two centuries of education in New South Wales*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1988, pp. 182ff.; see also, E. W. Dunlop, 'The public high schools of New South Wales, 1883-1912,' *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 51, no. 1, 1965, pp. 60-86.

³ Janet McCalman, *Journeyings: the biography of a middle-class generation 1920-1990*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993; Geoffrey Sherington, R. C. Petersen, and Ian Brice, *Learning to lead: a history of girls' and boys' corporate secondary schools in Australia*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1987.

⁴ For example, Craig Campbell, *The rise of mass secondary schooling and modern adolescence: a social history of youth in southern Adelaide, 1901-1965*, Ph. D. Thesis, University of Adelaide, 1994; 'Pioneering modern adolescence: the social significance of the early state high schools of Adelaide,' in Campbell, Carole Hooper, and Mary Fearnley-Sander, (eds), *Toward the state high school in Australia: social histories of state secondary schooling in Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia, 1850-1925*, Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society, Sydney, 1999, pp. 55-78; 'Inventing a pioneering state high school: Adelaide High, 1908-1918,' *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 29, 2001, pp. 5-20.

⁵ For example, Paul Taylor, (ed.), *Parramatta High School: history and heritage*, Parramatta High School, 1997-2004, retrieved 19 July 2004 from <http://www.faxmentis.org/html/setup.html>; Audrey Armitage *Newcastle High School: the first 75 years*, Newcastle High School, Newcastle, 1983.

⁶ Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing women: origins of women's education in nineteenth-century Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 91-129; Noeline Kyle, *Her natural destiny: the education of women in New South Wales*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1986, pp 100-125; see also Coral Chambers, *Lessons for ladies: a social history of girls' education in Australasia 1870-1900* Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1986, pp. 144-146.

established a useful theoretical framework for understanding the mid century period.⁷ The application of modern gender analysis to boys' education is in its infancy. Histories of boys' and girls' schooling have tended to be seen as separate projects, an exception to this being Jo May's oral history of former students of Newcastle Boys and Girls High Schools.⁸

The thesis is also a response to a history of questioning in the literature – both implied and explicit – about the meaning and purpose of public education history. This has included debates about the extent to which public secondary schooling has been repressive or emancipatory of particular social groups, as well as the related issue of whether schools and schooling systems are best understood through accounts of the actions of policy-makers and administrators or from 'below,' from the perspectives of students, teachers, parents.⁹ Connected to these themes is the question of what constitutes historical information. The 'hard' facts of institutional and policy development have long been recognised as important but in recent years historians of education have argued for a more human view of the experience of schooling, foregrounding non-material dimensions of human behaviour and experience, notably the psychological and the cultural.¹⁰ Recent work on the social history of the classroom has sought to disinter the histories of the 'interiority' of the school institution and the 'everyday reality' of schooling practices, experiences and human relations.¹¹

⁷ Lesley Johnson, *Modern girl: girlhood and growing up*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993.

⁸ Jo May, 'A very big change: transition from primary to academic high school in Newcastle, New South Wales, from the 1930s to the 1950s,' *Change: Transformations in Education*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2001, pp. 19-32; Gender, memory and the experience of selective secondary schooling in Newcastle, New South Wales, from the 1930s to the 1950s, Ph.D. thesis, University of Newcastle, 2000.

⁹ For example, Campbell, 'The social origins of Australian state high schools: an historiographical review,' in Campbell et al, *Toward the state high school in Australia*, pp. 9-28; Theobald, 'Educational history,' in Graeme Davison, John Hirst, and Stuart Macintyre (eds), *The Oxford companion to Australian history*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1998, pp 206-208.

¹⁰ For example, Barbara Finkelstein, 'Education historians as mythmakers,' *Review of Research in Education* 18, 1992, pp. 268-289.

¹¹ For example, Ian Grosvenor, Martin Lawn, and Kate Rousmaniere (eds), *Silences and images: the social history of the classroom*, Peter Lang, New York, 1999, pp. 1-10; Kate Rousmaniere, Kari Dehli, and Ning de Coninck-Smith (eds), *Discipline, moral regulation, and schooling*, Garland, New York, 1997, pp. 3-17; M Depaepe, 'Educationalisation: a key concept in understanding the basic processes of the history of western education,' *History of Education Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1998, pp. 16-28.

This chapter organises the literature into three groups. The first part of the chapter reviews literature concerned with the governance of public secondary schooling together with writing which argues for a stronger focus on the history of education from ‘below.’ The second part of the chapter discusses writing which theorises the public high school as a site for the making of middle class masculine and feminine identities. The third part surveys literature which directly addresses policies and practices of coeducation.

Public secondary schooling: histories from above and below

The development of the New South Wales public high school system

That Parramatta High School was a government high school, with entry regulated by merit-based rather than financial, social or religious criteria, was central to its identity and operation during the first five decades of its establishment. Part of the task of this study is to explain the place of the high school in the New South Wales public education system including interactions between policies and practices. The building and operation of colonial and state schooling systems have been topics of longstanding interest to historians of Australian education. Some writing has been devoted to individual colonies or states, other authors have made generalisations across state boundaries. Although the development of the public high school varied from state to state, there is enough common ground for similar themes to emerge from the literature. The intention and effect of the participation by the Australian state governments in secondary education has been the subject of considerable debate, especially during the 1970s and 1980s. For twentieth-century New South Wales it is useful to identify three main historical periods: the expansion of the educational ladder in 1911-12, a middle period of relative ascendancy for the academically-selective public high school, and the period from the 1950s to the 1960s which saw the introduction and expansion of comprehensive high schooling. These periods have been written about in different ways.

Parramatta High School was established under the great New South Wales education reforms of 1911-12. Early histories of this period were written from a liberal perspective

and were closely based upon contemporary Reports of the Minister of Public Instruction and other official government documents. The 1911-12 settlement – the establishment of a meritocratic educational ladder of opportunity – was regarded as a decisive moment in state intervention in secondary education. It was represented as the successful culmination of a process launched in 1880 which had previously been frustrated by civic immaturity among other obstacles. Authors such as E. W. Dunlop and Alan Barcan wrote about the expansion of state secondary schooling, and the drawing of firmer boundaries between elementary and secondary schooling, as self-evidently progressive.¹² Peter Board, the Director of Public Instruction, credited as the architect of the reforms, was fairly uncritically portrayed as the embodiment of the rational, efficient, public servant.¹³

According to Barcan the period from 1911 until approximately the late 1950s was more or less the golden period for the New South Wales public high school, combining equality of opportunity with high academic standards, safeguarded by merit-based barriers to promotion.¹⁴ From about the 1970s, on the other hand, revisionist writers such as Bob Bessant, Richard Teese and Pavla Miller argued that the hierarchical state schooling systems were powerful operatives in the production or reproduction of unequal power relations of class, gender, race and ethnicity.¹⁵ Their analyses of Australian secondary schooling were influenced by Althusserian explanations of the legitimisation of structural inequality as well as new sociological concepts such as the hidden curriculum and cultural capital. Bessant argued that the emancipatory potential of early public high schools in Victoria was fatally compromised by the hegemonistic practices of the elite private schooling sector and the universities.¹⁶ Early state high schools,

¹² Dunlop, 'The public high schools of New South Wales'; Barcan, *Two centuries of education in New South Wales*, pp. 182ff. As mentioned above Barcan's 1988 book was a new edition of an earlier work. His interpretation of the 1911-12 reforms remained substantially unchanged.

¹³ See especially A. R. Crane and W. G. Walker, *Peter Board: his contribution to the development of education in New South Wales* Australian Council for Educational Research, Melbourne, 1957.

¹⁴ Barcan, *Two centuries of education*, pp. 182ff.

¹⁵ Bob Bessant, 'The influence of the "Public Schools" on the early high schools of Victoria,' *History of Education Review*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1984, pp. 45-57; 'The emergence of state secondary education' in J. Cleverley and J. Lawry (eds), *Australian education in the twentieth century: Studies in the development of state education*, Longman, Melbourne, 1972, pp. 124-143; Richard Teese, 'The evolution of the Victorian secondary school system,' *Melbourne Working Papers*, vol. 5, 1984, pp. 95-167; Pavla Miller *Long division: state schooling in South Australian society*, Adelaide, Wakefield press, 1986, pp. 114ff..

¹⁶ Bessant, 'The influence of the "Public Schools"'.

according to Bessant, became 'lower level extensions' of the corporate schools, organised around ruling class hierarchies of knowledge.¹⁷ A privileged position was quickly accorded to the competitive academic curriculum, despite the intentions of early policy-makers to promote technical education.¹⁸

An important theme was the role of high schools in legitimising inequality through the sorting and streaming of students according to socially-produced notions of ability, and the introduction and rise of beliefs about the scientific testing of intelligence. A key period for this interpretation began about the time of the 1930s depression as state governments increasingly considered the possibility of 'secondary education for all.' As the public secondary system expanded, runs the argument, sorting and streaming technologies within schools took the place of policies which had formerly operated to restrict entry.¹⁹ The revisionist project in historiography was less influential in New South Wales, however, than in other states of Australia, notably South Australia and Victoria.²⁰ Although a number of accounts included references to New South Wales, the major revisionist interpretations of the state in secondary schooling did not come out of New South Wales universities or, for the most part, from examinations of the specifics of the New South Wales high schools. A partial exception was Noeline Kyle's feminist history of girls' schooling in New South Wales to 1920, which was critical of Peter Board's creation of post-primary Domestic Science schools, but her account lacked the critique of the competitive academic curriculum which was fundamental to the work of Miller and others.²¹

That revisionist historians took exception to both the linear narrative and the 'whiggish' character of this kind of interpretation is well known.²² It is also true that there are

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁸ Bessant, 'The emergence of state secondary education'.

¹⁹ For example Miller, *Long division*, pp. 227-234; David McCallum, *The social production of merit: education, psychology and politics in Australia, 1900-1950*, London, Falmer press, 1990.

²⁰ An exception to this is Terri Seddon, 'Social justice in hard times: from "equality of opportunity" to "fairness and efficiency,"' *Discourse*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1990, pp. 21-42; see also Seddon, *Schooling, state and society: the federation settlement in New South Wales: 1900 to the 1930s*, Ph.D. thesis, Macquarie University, 1987.

²¹ Kyle, *Her natural destiny*, pp. 118-125.

²² For example, see Campbell, 'The social origins of Australian state high schools', pp. 26-27.

dimensions of the establishment of early public high schools examined for other states, which would be useful to explore for New South Wales settings and personnel. R. J. W. Selleck's 1982 biography of Frank Tate, Victorian Director of Education, for example, is richer than anything written about Board.²³ Selleck's Tate emerged as a character of almost novelistic complexity, an individual of relative enlightenment nevertheless operating within the constraints of his times, race and gender. More recently, Carole Hooper, also for Victoria, discussed the changing demarcations between state elementary and higher schooling and documented a history of successful opposition by corporate schools, fearful of losing their monopolies over secondary education, to the establishment of public high schools during the late nineteenth century.²⁴ Again, this is under-explored territory for New South Wales.

The third important historical period in terms of the current study is the period which marked the introduction of universal secondary education and the breaking of the identification of the public high school with an academic elite. This is usually associated with the production of the Wyndham Report into secondary schooling in New South Wales and the Education Act of 1961.²⁵ Barcan is one historian who has been very critical of this change, which he disparagingly described as the replacement of a ladder by a conveyor belt.²⁶ Writing about New South Wales government activity for this period, however, has mainly been concerned with the reform of secondary schooling as a kind of case study of policy-making, including the limits and possibilities of post-war bureaucratic power. John Hughes and Jill Duffield analysed the operation of the Wyndham Committee enquiry and the making of its report in the context of detailed examinations of the considerable archival material preserved by Wyndham and others, assessing the actions, motives and alliances of key participants in the process.²⁷

²³ R. J. W. Selleck, *Frank Tate: a biography*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1982.

²⁴ Carole Hooper, 'Opposition triumphant: against state secondary schooling in Victoria, 1850-1911,' in Campbell et al, *Toward the State High School in Australia*, pp. 29-54; see also Selleck, pp 134-210

²⁵ [Wyndham], *Report of the committee appointed to survey secondary education in New South Wales*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1957.

²⁶ Barcan, 'The transition in Australian education, 1939-1967,' in Cleverley and Lawry (eds), *Australian education in the twentieth century*, p. 202.

²⁷ Jill Duffield, *Independent advice: a comparative study of secondary education policy-making; Scotland and New South Wales 1943-1957*, M. Ed thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1990; 'The making of the Wyndham Scheme in New South Wales,' *History of Education Review*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1990, pp. 29-42;

The making of modern institutions

In addition to Australian literature, this review surveys some international studies which can shed light on Australian experiences. The late 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of fresh perspectives on state power, notably in writing about the origins and development of Canadian state schooling. Bruce Curtis, drawing together Marxist political understandings with Foucauldian analyses of the exercise of power, theorised a diffuse 'educational state'.²⁸ He argued, for nineteenth-century Canada, that the construction of state schooling was also the construction of a bourgeois state. Curtis's discussion was specifically of mass elementary rather than minority secondary schooling; the disciplining by a middle class state of a large working class population. Nevertheless his interpretations of the educative nature of bureaucratic practice, the routines of report writing and the work of early school inspectors offered useful insights as did his deconstruction of such aspects of schooling as the perceived separateness and integrity of the school space itself and the involvement of the school in changing age relations.²⁹

Building on this sort of analysis have been writers such as the contributors to an international collection of essays edited by Kate Rousmaniere and others who theorised the state school as a principal site for the making of the modern citizen:

Moral regulatory processes are integral to historical processes of state formation, especially to those hierarchical relations through which people are invited to see themselves as members of political communities, as simultaneously free individuals in, and as subordinate subjects to, regimes of government and rule.

"'Blissfully unaware": gender and secondary education reform, New South Wales, 1953-61' *Australian Studies* 9, 1995, pp. 70-85; John Hughes, 'The development of the comprehensive high school in New South Wales: the influence of Harold Wyndham and the 1957 Wyndham Report,' *Education Research and Perspectives*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2001, pp. 1-32; 'Harold Wyndham and educational reform in Australia, 1925-1968,' *Education Research and Perspectives*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1-268; also K. Smith, *Influence and leadership in educational policy-making at state level: a case study of the Wyndham Report and the New South Wales Education Act, 1961*, Ph.D. thesis, University of New England, 1975. I am grateful to John Hughes for this reference.

²⁸ Bruce Curtis, *Building the educational state: Canada West, 1836-1871*, London, Ontario, The Falmer Press, 1988.

²⁹ See also Curtis, *True government by choice men? inspection, education and state formation in Canada West*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1992.

State schooling in capitalist societies forms an important set of sites where such invitations are differently offered, and where “freedoms” are made available in ways that claim generality and equality, while producing and reproducing relations of power and difference.³⁰

These sorts of approaches, emphasising the role of public institutions in the disciplining of populations, offered useful ways of theorising the kinds of school practices which had begun to be identified by the revisionist historians of Australian education. A period examined in this way for Australian secondary schooling is the 1950s. Writing by Lesley Johnson and Ester Faye discussed the significance of changes in secondary schooling provision during the 1950s in the production of the modern adolescent.³¹ Johnson argued that this was the period during which the Australian post-primary population was brought under the sort of surveillance described by Curtis for the nineteenth century Ontario elementary school. As the public high school was reformulated to accommodate the expanding post primary population, Johnson argued, it became a normalising institution for Australian adolescents in the way that the elementary school had earlier become for younger children. This was the period during which the secondary school ‘was brought more into line with the elementary or primary school, expanding the sphere of public administration whose chief concern is with the shaping of the population.’³² In accordance with changing discourses about the purposes and dangers of adolescence, the secondary school became a protected and watched over space within which young men and women could undertake the task of shaping their adult selves. Faye identified the importance of the Psychology Branch of the Victorian Education Department as a key state apparatus in managing the increasing numbers of teenagers enrolled in that state’s public high schools.³³

Another kind of approach was R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar’s detailed account of the nineteenth-century ‘invention’ of the Canadian high school, an account which

³⁰ Rousmaniere et al, *Discipline, Moral Regulation, and Schooling*, p. 6.

³¹ Ester Faye, ‘Growing up “Australian” in the 1950s: the dream of social science,’ *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 111, 1998, pp. 344-65; ‘Producing the Australian adolescent as a schoolchild in the 1950s: the fantasised object of desire,’ *History of Education Review*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1991, pp. 66-79; Johnson, *Modern Girl*, pp. 57-86.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³³ Faye, ‘Producing the Australian adolescent’.

incorporated resistance, negotiation and the contingencies of centre-local relations.³⁴ Gidney and Millar examined nineteenth century Ontario high schools in terms of the emergence of modern institutional forms and documented the historical construction of features associated with twentieth century state secondary schooling. During the nineteenth century, they explained, the high schools were defined and solidified as a dominant and durable form, with a monopoly on the type of education they offered. The authors explored this process through specific interactions of bureaucrats, politicians, teachers, parents and local school boards, finding administrative and organisational answers to questions about the development of state high schools. The state that emerged was complex, inconsistent and sometimes powerless in the face of local routines. There was no seamless connection between policy and practice. In a similar vein was David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot's history of coeducation in the United States.³⁵ Tyack and Hansot identified an 'ambiguous historical relationship between silence, policy talk and gender practices' and theorised the sphere of the local, especially the classroom, as crucial in determining schooling practices in regard to gender, whether in accord with or in contradiction to the ideas of experts and the intentions of policy-makers.³⁶

The analysis of tension between 'centre' and 'local', or between 'policy-maker' and 'school', is an instructive theme for Australia, with its strongly centralised colonial and state education departments. The authority of the school principal in the early government secondary school was the subject of an essay by Marjorie Theobald which compared the governance of Brisbane Girls' Grammar with Sydney Girls' High School. Theobald examined the interactions of pioneering headmistresses with the state appointed trustees and bureaucrats to whom they were answerable, explaining the assembling of new models of girls' secondary education as a process of negotiation and renegotiation among the competing interests and visions of educators, parents, trustees and bureaucrats.³⁷ For the headmistresses of Brisbane Girls' Grammar School, a state-

³⁴ R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Inventing secondary education: the rise of the high school in nineteenth-century, Ontario* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1990.

³⁵ David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning together: a history of coeducation in American schools*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990.

³⁶ Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, p. 291.

³⁷ Theobald, *Knowing women*, pp. 91-129.

supported school which nevertheless 'aligned itself with the Queensland governing classes', the task was to accommodate the social texture of an elite ladies' college with the attainment of public examination honours.³⁸ Sydney Girls' High School, on the other hand, 'pushed upwards from the elementary school system', provided credentials for a less economically secure stratum of the middle class, its principal subject to the strictures of a parsimonious bureaucracy.³⁹

Local perspectives and the history of 'everyday reality'

A number of writers in Australia and overseas have indicated ways in which studies of schooling from local or community perspectives might inform our understanding of the purposes and practices of schooling, or challenge and alter what we see as important in education history. The work of Curtis, Gidney and Millar and others in emphasising the importance of local practices in the making of education systems suggests a particular rationale and direction for local studies. Another argument is that the study of small social contexts can provide a more human view of the experience of schooling than is to be found in larger analyses of systems and structure. Finkelstein described community as a rich and important analytic category, within which it becomes possible to examine non-material dimensions of human behaviour and experience, notably the psychological and the cultural:

As a result of explorations of the role of community in educational history, schools acquire new dimensions and emerge as powerful structures of persuasion mediating between the increasingly differentiated worlds of men and women, young and old, parent and child, and household and work site. They appear as protracted group-learning settings within which teacher culture, youth culture, work culture, and the culture of the book form important new forms of human association, ways of feeling, believing and knowing.⁴⁰

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127; see also Campbell, 'Whose bailiwick? the problem of legitimate authority and status in a pioneering state secondary school: Adelaide High School 1908-1918,' in C. Campbell (ed.), *End of a century: new work in the history of education: proceedings of the twenty-eighth ANZHES annual conference*, Sydney, 1999.

⁴⁰ Finkelstein, 'Education Historians as Mythmakers,' pp. 284-285.

Recent essay collections by Rousmaniere and others, mentioned above, and by Ian Grosvenor and his co-editors on the social history of the classroom analyse the 'interiority' of the school institution and the 'everyday reality' of schooling practices, experiences and human relations.⁴¹ Some Australian historians of education have also argued for a local focus at the levels of region, community or school institution.⁴² This thesis, among other things, is a response to the call by Campbell and his co-authors for single-school studies which contribute to our understanding of 'secondary schools as social institutions engaged in class formation, the making of youth cultures, the structuring of daily life, and gender order and identity making.'⁴³

Useful local or single-school studies of the Australian public high school include Geoffrey Sherington's study of schooling and social class in the Illawarra district of regional New South Wales.⁴⁴ Sherington demonstrated the importance of understanding patterns of school attendance and attainment among boys and girls within the framework of local labour markets. He found, for example, that in the absence of other modern forms of employment for middle class girls in the area, that Wollongong High School had relatively high proportions of female enrolment in comparison to boys and that these girls were more likely than those in other places to nominate teaching as their intended occupational goal.⁴⁵ Alison Mackinnon's history of the Adelaide Advanced School for Girls analysed the changing class composition of students and traced post-school destinations to examine the role of early higher schooling for girls in the modernisation of gender relations.⁴⁶ Campbell's work on South Australian high schools found complex interactions among family and secondary schooling and the making of modern

⁴¹ Rousmaniere et al, *Discipline, moral regulation, and schooling*, pp. 3-17; Grosvenor et al *Silences and images*, pp. 1-10; also Depaepe, 'Educationalisation'.

⁴² For example, Campbell et al, *Toward the state high school in Australia*, pp. 116-118; Theobald and Selleck (eds), *Family, school and state in Australian history*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1990, pp. ix-xiv.

⁴³ Campbell et al, *Toward the state high school in Australia*, p. 117.

⁴⁴ Sherington, 'Families and state schooling in the Illawarra, 1840-1940' in, Theobald and Selleck (eds), *Family, school and state in Australian history*, pp. 114-133; see also Winifred Mitchell and Geoffrey Sherington, *Growing up in the Illawarra: a social history 1834-1884*, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, 1984.

⁴⁵ Sherington, 'Families and state schooling in the Illawarra', pp. 127-130.

⁴⁶ Alison Mackinnon, *One foot on the ladder: origins and outcomes of girls' secondary schooling in South Australia*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1984.

adolescence.⁴⁷ Sherington's, Mackinnon's and Campbell's studies were strongly grounded in the mapping of student populations using various kinds of data including schools admissions registers. Each used quantitative methods of analysing the social class origins of students. A study by Jo May of the Newcastle Girls and Boys High Schools, north of Sydney, took a different approach, reading a collection of oral history transcripts of interviews with former students of the two schools.⁴⁸ She emphasised the feelings and emotions of individual students in her analysis, offering insights into the ways in which young men and women understood and positioned themselves within the prestigious, academically-selective public high school of the pre-comprehensive period.

Making modern social relations: Gender and class

The first part of the chapter surveyed questions raised by and in the literature about the meaning and operation of state authority through the public high school and about how and where to look for answers to these large questions. This second section discusses ways in which the high school has been read as a site for the making of social relations of class and gender.

Themes and questions in histories of girls' schooling

Until the late 1970s much history of education either ignored women completely or tended to assume that girls were an unimportant sub-group which could be more or less understood under the umbrella categories of 'student' or 'pupil' or even 'boy'. This was true of both liberal and early revisionist writing and was connected with their focus on the male personnel at the top and centre of policy-making. The situation altered with an increasing interest in the social history of schooling and the entry of second wave feminism into the field. In 1977 Joan Burstyn explained the theoretical underpinnings of feminist history from first principles: that existing education histories did not address or accommodate the experiences of women and that it was the business of historians to

⁴⁷ Campbell, *The rise of mass secondary schooling*.

⁴⁸ May, *Gender, memory and the experience of selective secondary schooling*.

develop new categories for understanding them.⁴⁹ By 1999 Campbell was arguing that ‘some of the best social history of Australian secondary education’ was writing about girls, girls’ schools and women teachers.⁵⁰ The history of feminist participation in the rewriting of the history of secondary schooling is worth briefly rehearsing here because of the questions that have been raised and recast about how women – and gender relations – are to be understood. Work such as that of the Victorian studies scholars of the late 1970s, as well as Australian discussions of the gendered curriculum, established useful analytical frameworks and highlighted some tensions in the feminist history project. These included the drawing of distinctions between ‘women’s’ and ‘feminist’ history and shifts in emphasis from women’s experience to gender relations.⁵¹

Early writing about women attempted to recover lost women’s experience or to add a heroic history of women’s achievement to existing male histories. For liberal feminism a persuasive narrative was the path from higher schooling to the attainment by women of full adult citizenship in the form of suffrage – sooner for Australia, later for England. In England this was told as a story belonging to individual, entrepreneurial women such as the Shirreff sisters who founded the Girls Public Day School Company.⁵² For Australia Helen Jones argued that the early establishment of a state high school for girls in South Australia was an important factor in that colony’s early extension of the franchise to women.⁵³

An important and influential body of work which contributed to the recasting of the women’s history project was the work of the English Victorian Studies scholars of the late 1970s and early 1980s. This was one of the foundation topics for the emerging inter-

⁴⁹ Joan Burstyn, ‘Women’s education in England during the nineteenth century: a review of the literature, 1970-1976’, *History of Education*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1977, pp. 11-19.

⁵⁰ Campbell, ‘The Social Origins of Australian State High Schools,’ p. 16.

⁵¹ Burstyn, ‘Narrative versus theoretical approaches: dilemmas for historians of women,’ *History of Education Review*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1990, pp. 1-7; Jill Matthews, ‘Feminist history,’ *Labour History*, vol. 50, 1986, pp. 147-151.

⁵² Josephine Kamm, *Indicative past: a hundred years of the Girls' Public Day School Trust*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1971; also Kamm, *Hope deferred: girls' education in English history*, Methuen, London, 1965.

⁵³ Helen Jones, *Nothing seemed impossible: women's education and social change in South Australia, 1875-1915*, Brisbane, University of Queensland Press, 1985.

disciplinary field of Women's Studies and during this period a large number of books and articles appeared which investigated the class and gender making practices of the first generation of modern academic schools for English girls. Burstyn and others developed rich interpretations of Victorian middle class ideology. In examining the writings of the (often appallingly misogynous) opponents of women's higher education in the late nineteenth century, Burstyn theorised gender relations, specifically the Victorian domestic ideology of separate spheres for men and women, as at the very centre of middle-class English social organisation.⁵⁴ Sara Delamont coined the phrase "double conformity" to describe the constraints placed on female scholars to conform to a strict feminine ideal at the same time as attempting to participate in an equally narrowly-defined male academic curriculum.⁵⁵ Early advocates of academic education for women, she argued, were acutely concerned to differentiate middle class women who worked or studied outside the home from wage-earning working class women. Carol Dyhouse emphasised the centrality of the family (rather than school) in the experience of middle-class girlhood.⁵⁶ Her discussion of early twentieth century theories of adolescence was instructive, notably in terms of differently perceived dangers of adolescence for middle class and working class girls as well as for boys. Dyhouse was an early critic of the use of the domestic science curriculum in the regulation of working class girlhood, and its early twentieth century extension to middle class girls' schools. Sheila Fletcher's *Feminists and Bureaucrats* was a call for histories of girls' schooling to jettison a preoccupation with great pioneering women and to engage more with the importance of the state in the organisation of schooling.⁵⁷

An early work to apply these sorts of questions to an Australian setting was Mackinnon's revisionist study of the Adelaide Advanced School for Girls.⁵⁸ In contrast with Jones, mentioned above, Mackinnon argued that pioneering academic high schools for girls such

⁵⁴ Burstyn, *Victorian education and the ideal of womanhood*, London, Croom Helm, 1980.

⁵⁵ Sara Delamont 'The contradiction in ladies' education' and 'The domestic ideology and women's education' in Delamont and Duffin (eds) *The nineteenth century woman: her social and cultural world*, London, Croom Helm, 1978, pp.134-163 and pp. 164-187.

⁵⁶ Carol Dyhouse, *Girls growing up in late Victorian and Edwardian England*, London, Routledge, 1981.

⁵⁷ Sheila Fletcher, *Feminists and bureaucrats: a study in the development of girls' education in the nineteenth century*, Cambridge 1980; see also Felicity Hunt, *Gender and policy in English education: schooling for girls, 1902-44*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1991.

as the Adelaide Advanced School 'were not challenging women's role, they were modernising it.'⁵⁹ She concluded, 'an examination of the school clarifies the process whereby an apparently radical innovation can be harnessed to a conservative ideology.'⁶⁰ In fact, one of the persistent tensions in the feminist history project has been, to use Theobald's words, 'the conflicting agendas' of 'celebration' and 'critique'.⁶¹ The 'new' women's history was a timely corrective both to male versions of education history which excluded female experience, and to liberal feminist accounts of change which over-emphasised the agency of the female heroes and wrote about women as if they were classless. On the other hand some early feminist revisionism was overly rigid, unable to accommodate resistance and variety. Of Delamont's 'double conformity', Theobald wrote: 'A theoretical construct which was, in the 1970s, a new and stimulating way of accounting for the "failure" of women's education now stands squarely in the path of conceptual advance.'⁶² Both Theobald and Mackinnon have used the study of individual lives to address the tensions between constraint and possibility in the sphere of women's education experience. Mackinnon's *Love and freedom* is a richly textured study of the first generation of formally educated professional women in Australia.⁶³ The study was innovative in a number of ways: in its use of a variety of both quantitative and qualitative data, in its making of connections between late nineteenth/ early twentieth century family limitation and women's agency and in its examination of the implications of education for the personal, private worlds of intimacy and family as well as the public world of paid employment.

Other sorts of approaches were adopted by McCalman and Johnson in their studies of specific twentieth century generations of girls.⁶⁴ Where McCalman collected oral histories, Johnson explored the contexts of girls' lives through the reading of key contemporary texts. From each of these studies gender emerged as a complex and

⁵⁸ Mackinnon, *One foot on the ladder*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶¹ Theobald, *Knowing Women*, pp. 210-211.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁶³ Mackinnon, *Love and freedom: professional women and the reshaping of personal life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997.

⁶⁴ McCalman, *Journeyings*; Johnson, *Modern girl*.

unstable category: historically constructed, shaped by particular interactions with social relations of class and race, and grounded in the specifics of time and place. Johnson argued that young women may have understood themselves in different ways within different and overlapping discourses, some of which were more strongly gendered than others:

While not wanting to deny the significance of the times when girls were spoken about as defined first and foremost by their sex, I want to argue that other identities or subjectivities constituted in the educational and other discourses about young people of the 1950s and early 1960s did also address young women in quite different forms.⁶⁵

Curricula for girls

An important issue for historians of Australian women's education has been the provision of gendered curricula, under the three categories of accomplishments, academic schooling and domestic science or arts. These have been lined up chronologically as associated with mid-Victorian repressive ideologies of femininity, first wave feminism and early twentieth century backlashes against female incursions into the public sphere. The historiography has been critical of both accomplishments and the vocational domestic science curriculum broadly on the grounds that each, in its own way, was designed to curtail women's economic autonomy. It has not been strongly influenced by revisionist critiques of the competitive academic curriculum. Notions of cultural capital and academic selection and streaming were central to the analyses of McCallum and others in a way that they have not been to feminist writing.⁶⁶ At the same time an important contribution to the literature was Theobald's revision of the liberal feminist critique of accomplishments. Theobald argued against the dichotomised view of accomplishments and academic subjects put forward in such writing as Kathleen Fitzpatrick's celebratory history of Presbyterian Ladies College Melbourne.⁶⁷ She found

⁶⁵ Johnson, *Modern girl*, p. 8; see also Johnson, 'The schooling of girls in the 1950s: problems with writing a history of "women's education,"' *History of Education Review*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1990, pp. 69-80.

⁶⁶ McCallum, *The social production of merit*.

⁶⁷ Theobald, "'Mere accomplishments'? Melbourne's early ladies schools reconsidered,' in *Women who taught: perspectives on the history of women and teaching*, Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald (eds), University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1991; 'The PLC mystique: reflections on the reform of female

both that early private ladies' academies should be taken more seriously and that modern schools like PLC continued to teach accomplishments. However the focus of any feminist critique of modern academic secondary schooling has tended to be more on those elements of school conduct and organisation which operated to constrain the transforming potential of education than on the academic curriculum itself. Kyle's criticism of the establishment of the New South Wales girls' public high schools, for example, was in terms of external restrictions on access for working-class girls (wages forgone and fees) rather than of content:

In the area of curriculum the state high school for girls began on a high note, scorning much of what had passed for female education in the realm of accomplishments and steering a course as far as was possible away from domestic science.⁶⁸

Judy McColl's critique of a high status Perth high school of the 1950s was in terms of its affirmation of high achievement by the few at the expense of 'self esteem' for a larger group.⁶⁹

Part of the reason for the lack of feminist critique of the academic curriculum has been that the alternative might be domestic science. There has been broad agreement amongst feminist historians of education that the modern domestic science curriculum was a backward step in girls' education. Kyle's criticism of Peter Board's establishment of domestic science schools in the 1910s was one of a number of studies which documented both early twentieth century Australian governments' encouragement of a modern domestic ideology and their active hostility to the idea of the economically independent woman – philosophies which were often in conflict with their need for women to fill white collar public service jobs such as clerical occupations and teaching.⁷⁰ Bessant and

education in nineteenth century Australia,' *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 23, no. 92, 1989; Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *PLC Melbourne: The First Century, 1875- 1975*, Presbyterian Ladies' College, Melbourne, 1975.

⁶⁸ Kyle, *Her natural destiny*, p. 117.

⁶⁹ Judy McColl, 'Perth Modern School 1954: gender, self-esteem and academic achievement,' *Studies in Western Australian History*, no. 14, 1993, pp. 60-86.

⁷⁰ Kyle, *Her natural destiny*, pp. 118-125; Desley Deacon, 'Political arithmetic: the nineteenth-century Australian census and the construction of the dependent woman,' *Signs*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1985 pp. 27-47; Beverley Kingston, *My wife, my daughter and poor Mary Ann: women and work in Australia*, Nelson,

Jill Matthews emphasised the way in which domestic science functioned to divide middle class from working class girls' schooling.⁷¹ Johnson found it to be the area of school study in which the category, 'girl', was most narrowly theorised.⁷² On the other hand, Judith Biddington noted sizeable gaps between the rhetoric and material provision of domestic science in the early twentieth Victorian high schools she investigated.⁷³ She found that whatever the intentions of the Education Department, the domestic science curriculum was often not observed as conscientiously by high school administrators and students as might appear from a reading of policy statements. In a similar kind of argument Margaret King found that the history Burwood Girls' Domestic Science school in Sydney could not be satisfactorily explained as merely a narrative of constraint.⁷⁴ More recently, in a study of the career of the organiser of domestic science for the early twentieth century South Australian Education Department, Edith Devitt, Kay Whitehead and Lynne Trethewey argued that the promotion of domestic science was not necessarily inimical to women's interests either in ideological or practical terms.⁷⁵ If nothing else, the authors concluded, the establishment of domestic science centres created new senior positions for women teachers.

Another kind of curriculum for girls, which has received less attention from historians, was commercial education, although Kyle argued that it would have been a more enlightened alternative to the academic curriculum than domestic science in public post-elementary schools.⁷⁶ She also pointed out that working class families in New South Wales resisted the domestic science curriculum offered by state schools in favour of

Melbourne, 1975; Kereen Reiger, *The disenchantment of the home: modernising the Australian family 1880-1940*, Oxford, Melbourne 1985; Theobald and Donna Dwyer, 'An episode in feminist politics: the Married Women Lecturers and Teachers Act, 1932-47,' *Labour History*, no. 76, 1999, pp. 59-77; see also Jan Milburn, *Girls' Secondary Schooling in New South Wales, 1880-1930*, M.A. thesis, University of Sydney, 1965, pp. 244-248.

⁷¹ Bessant, 'Domestic science schools and woman's place,' *The Australian Journal of Education*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1976, pp. 1-9; Matthews, "Education for femininity": domestic arts education in South Australia,' *Labour History*, no. 45, 1983, pp. 30-53.

⁷² Johnson, *Modern girl*, pp. 78-84.

⁷³ Judith Biddington, 'Something to fall back on': women, work and education in seven Victorian high schools 1905-1945, Ph.D. thesis, University of Melbourne, 1993.

⁷⁴ King, M., 'Girls' state secondary education 1911-1957: a vehicle for social change,' BA Hons thesis, University of Sydney, 1987.

⁷⁵ Kay Whitehead and Lynne Trethewey, 'Edith Devitt, domestic science and feminist ideas in state schools, 1910-1925,' *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 29, 2001, pp. 85-94

vocational commercial courses for girls offered in private colleges.⁷⁷ In her study of the commercial education curriculum in Victoria, however, Jill Blackmore identified ways in which an apparently neutral body of knowledge was taught in artificially gendered ways to young women and men in private colleges, state high schools and offices.⁷⁸

Commercial education, she concluded, trained girls for lower level, dead-end jobs, boys for the lower rungs of a career ladder.

Middle-class masculinities

Although the application of late twentieth century gender theory to masculinities is very recent, historians of education have long been concerned with the making of men, especially the making of white, ruling class men. The literature of the Arnoldian transformations of the English Public School is formidable in size and its concerns with manliness, games, Christianity and colonial leadership have had resonances in the Australian literature. An early celebratory work which sought to place Australian ruling class masculinity in an English Arnoldian tradition was C. E. W. Bean's *Here my son: An account of the independent and other boys' corporate schools of Australia*, published in 1950.⁷⁹ As a younger man during the First World War Bean had done much to instigate the Great War's Australian ANZAC legend, an enduring masculinist myth of mateship and egalitarianism.

From the late 1980s, influenced by newer understandings of gender and social class, historians of schooling in British Empire nations began to explore the colonial legacies of the English Public School in less Whiggish, more analytical accounts. In *Learning to Lead*, Sherington and his co-authors examined the participation by Australian corporate schools in the production of an Australian 'directing' class.⁸⁰ McCalman's rich oral history account of a middle class generation included supple and detailed explanations of

⁷⁶ Kyle, *Her natural destiny*, pp. 197-199.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Jill Blackmore, 'Schooling for work: gender differentiation in commercial education in Victoria 1935-60,' *History of Education Review*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1987, pp. 31-50.

⁷⁹ C. E. W. Bean, *Here, my son: an account of the independent and other corporate boys' schools of Australia*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1950.

the operation of schooling in a generation of students who attended a group of elite corporate schools in Melbourne's eastern suburbs in the 1930s.⁸¹ (Both *Learning to lead* and McCalman's *Journeyings* discussed girls' as well as boys' schooling.) More recently Robert Morrell's *From boys to gentlemen* included the development of secondary schooling in South African colony of Natal to explore the making of 'settler masculinity.'⁸² Martin Crotty's *Making the Australian male* was an exploration of hegemonic middle class masculinity which included chapters on its production through the elite secondary schools from 1870 to 1920, including discussions of athleticism and militarism.⁸³ Both Morrell and Crotty were influenced by R. W. Connell's theories of masculinity.

A number of authors over a long period of time have one way or another attempted to measure the Australian state high school, especially in New South Wales, against this elite corporate tradition. In a study connected with the *Journeyings* project, Mark Peel and McCalman found that proportionately more leading New South Wales than Victorian citizens (most of whom were men) had attended state high schools, especially those of nineteenth century foundation such as the Fort Street and Sydney Boys High Schools.⁸⁴ For Bean, however, it was more a case of Mr Chips versus Spencer Button. *The advancement of Spencer Button* was a satirical novel of a state high school teacher in thrall to the petty New South Wales Education Department bureaucracy, published by 'Brian James' in the same year as *Here my son*.⁸⁵ Bean suggested that the public high schools did good work for those boys whose parents could not afford to send them to a corporate school, but that the quality of their product was compromised by the uniformity imposed by state education bureaucracies and a lack of church oversight.⁸⁶ Thirty years later in an essay about the career of an early principal of Fort Street High, D. L. Webster

⁸⁰ Sherington et al, *Learning to Lead*.

⁸¹ McCalman, *Journeyings*.

⁸² Robert Morrell, *From boys to gentlemen: settler masculinity in colonial Natal, 1880-1920*, University of South Africa, Pretoria, 2001.

⁸³ Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian male: middle-class masculinity 1870-1920*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001.

⁸⁴ Mark Peel and Janet McCalman, *Who went where in "Who's Who 1988?": the schooling of the Australian elite*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 1992.

⁸⁵ Brian James [John Tierney], *The Advancement of Spencer Button*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1967

⁸⁶ Bean, *Here my son*, pp. 76-79.

argued that the headmaster, Kilgour, had been frustrated in his attempts to reproduce something like a leading English Public School in Sydney because of the over-centralised control of the New South Wales Education Department.⁸⁷ Bessant was critical of the culture of early state high schools in Melbourne, coveting, as he saw it, the accoutrements of the corporate ('Public') school, such as dress and sports fields, never quite able to measure up, and by implication, displacing or devaluing working class masculinities.⁸⁸ From a different political standpoint Clifford Turney had also argued that state high school culture was imitative.⁸⁹ Sherington documented Sydney Boys' High School's desire to be identified with the corporate sector with its (successful) attempts to be included as the only government school in the corporate boys' schools sports 'club', the Athletic Association of Great Public Schools.⁹⁰

The possibilities and dimensions of a specific state high school culture of masculinity have only recently begun to be explored, though the work of liberal champions of the early state high schools such as Rupert Goodman and Alan Barcan has long suggested an important point of departure in their meritocratic organisation.⁹¹ Sherington summarised the differences between the corporate and public secondary schools in the following terms:

While both the corporate schools and public high schools were still closely associated with the tradition of 'character formation', with its accompanying gendered dimensions, the latter became more focussed on a new secular and civic ethic which sought to supplant the corporate schools which were principally associated with specific Christian religious denominations. Some believed that the

⁸⁷ D. L. Webster, 'Kilgour of Fort Street: The English headmaster ideal in Australian state secondary education,' *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 1981, pp. 184-206.

⁸⁸ Bessant, 'The Influence of the "Public Schools"'.

⁸⁹ C. Turney, 'The advent and adaptation of the Arnold Public School tradition in New South Wales, Part 1,' *Australian Journal of Education*, vol. 10, no. 2, 1966, pp. 133-144; 'The advent and adaptation of the Arnold Public School tradition in New South Wales, Part 2.,' *Australian Journal of Education*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1967, pp. 29-43.

⁹⁰ Sherington, 'Athleticism in the Antipodes,' *History of Education Review*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1983 pp. 16-28.

⁹¹ Barcan, *Two centuries of education in New South Wales*; Rupert Goodman, *Secondary education in Queensland, 1860-1960*, Australian National University Press, 1968.

public high schools could help to produce a new aristocracy of talent and civic leadership.⁹²

Barcan's criticisms of the mid twentieth century movement to comprehensive schooling was in a sense a lament for the old meritocratic high school which supplied national intellectual leadership.⁹³ Sherington, however, was critical the assimilationist character of the New South Wales public high school:

In contrast to England, Canada and much of Western Europe, the educational settlements reached in the Australian colonies in the late nineteenth century denied religious and social pluralism in the interests of establishing a common civic culture in schools founded and funded by the state.⁹⁴

For South Australia, Campbell described the early Adelaide High School as a complex organisation, having to accommodate the cultures and legacies of disparate predecessor institutions, a site for various kinds of competing discourses and struggles over governance and territory.⁹⁵ The desire to identify with an Arnoldian tradition was strong, as were the imperatives of the public examination system. The school was shaped by its meritocratic entry system which distinguished it both from the fee-charging corporate schools and the larger elementary state school system. The academic state high school pioneered new kinds of age and gender relations. Unlike the corporate schools, Adelaide and Unley High Schools were coeducational and restricted their enrolments to a very specific life stage, adolescence.⁹⁶ The high school also played an important role in establishing the modern nexus between school credentials and white collar labour markets. In terms of the current project, one of the issues suggested by Campbell's work which warrants further investigation is the relationship between gender and the meritocratic organisation of the high school.

⁹² Sherington, 'Public commitment and private choice in Australian secondary education,' in Richard Aldrich (ed.), *Public and private: studies in education and knowledge*, London: Woburn Press, 2003, p.171.

⁹³ Barcan, 'Transition in Australian Education'.

⁹⁴ Sherington, 'Public commitment and private choice,' p. 169.

⁹⁵ Campbell, 'Inventing a pioneering state high school'.

⁹⁶ Also Campbell, 'Varieties of youth disenchantment: teenagers in the post-war secondary schools of Unley and Mitcham,' *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 26 1998.

Studies of United States high schools also suggest possible directions for the Australian literature about the high school and middle class formation. David Labaree set the history of the (boys only) Central High School of Philadelphia in the context of the local education market, finding the school periodically redefining itself to maintain its elite status and the value of the credentials it offered, in response to threats from the widening provision of secondary education in Philadelphia.⁹⁷ Although the United States history of state high schooling is different from New South Wales in important ways, such as the lack of a comparable corporate sector, and a more de-centralised administration, Labaree's discussion of the connections among meritocracy, 'cultural property' and schooling markets is instructive. The work of Reed Ueda for Boston high schools also suggests specific developing middle class cultural traditions for the state high school.⁹⁸ Ueda explored the high school's transformation of notions of community, including the development of a strong peer group culture which to some extent supplanted family affiliation.⁹⁹

Coeducation

Among educational psychologists, sociologists and policy makers in Australia coeducation in secondary schools has been a topic of periodic interest for the past fifteen years or so. Writing about coeducation has tended to take the form of a debate in which the relative merits of coeducational and single-sex settings have been argued out according to various measures of social and academic benefit. These debates, however, have mostly lacked a historical perspective. There has been little historical writing about coeducation in Australian high schools and almost none which deals with the period before the 1950s. Traditionally Australian historians of education have been more interested in the older single-sex secondary schools, in both the state and corporate sectors, than the newer coeducational high schools founded in the twentieth century. It is also true that historians of gender in Australia have tended to deal with the experiences of

⁹⁷ David Labaree, *The making of an American high school*, New Haven, York University Press, 1988.

⁹⁸ Reed Ueda, *Avenues to adulthood: the origins of the high school and social mobility in an American suburb*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-152

girls and boys in separate pieces of writing. The historiography of gender in Australian secondary schools is still weighted towards both the understanding the making of femininities and masculinities as separate projects and the experiences of students in single-sex schools. This section of the chapter reviews historical writing about coeducation mainly from England, North America and Australia.

Writing about the history of coeducation has tended to frame discussion in terms of the educational oppression or advancement of women. It has also tended to focus on specific kinds of educational institutions, those which provided for boys and girls beyond the elementary school, or put another way, people of a certain age or academic proficiency. A conventional explanation for the apparently smoother path for United States than English women to higher educational equity has been the early creation of coeducational institutions at these higher levels.¹⁰⁰ Thomas Woody's landmark 1929 history of women's education in the United States saw widespread coeducation, along with the vote, as in itself a guarantee that women's emancipation was complete.¹⁰¹ That position was challenged by the work of Jill Ker Conway and Geraldine Clifford who saw women in nineteenth and early twentieth century American coeducational institutions as being accorded supplementary or subordinate status as students, and also as academics where women were given junior or non-faculty positions, or non-academic jobs supervising female students.¹⁰² Ker Conway located emancipatory potential, if not necessarily its fulfilment, in all-female colleges. Florence Howe sought to expose what she described as a national myth, 'that if women were admitted to men's education and were treated exactly as men are, then all problems of sexual equity will be solved.'¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Christine Bolt, *Feminist ferment: 'The Woman Question' in the USA and England, 1870-1940*, London, UCL Press, 1995, p. 78.

¹⁰¹ Thomas Woody, *A History of women's education in the United States*, New York, Octagon Books, 1929, vol. 2, pp. 224-303.

¹⁰² Jill Ker Conway, 'Perspectives on the history of women's education in the United States', *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 1-13; Geraldine Joncich Clifford, (ed.), *Lone Voyagers: Academic women in coeducational universities, 1870-1937*, New York, Feminist Press, 1989, pp. 1-46; see also Barbara Finkelstein, 'Education historians as mythmakers', pp. 269-270.

¹⁰³ Florence Howe, *Myths of coeducation: selected essays, 1964-1983*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984, p. x; see also Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, pp. 243-278.

In Britain, Julie Gilbert and Carol Dyhouse disagreed about the experience of female undergraduates in non-collegiate coeducational universities in the early decades of the twentieth century. Where Gilbert described a 'coeducational student culture' with women active in social and extra curricula activities, Dyhouse, found a number of ways in which women were not equal: in provision of scholarships and grants, study space, access to facilities such as libraries, and government of university organisations.¹⁰⁴

Notwithstanding Gilbert's findings, the claims of the universities, and even the memories of some (but not all) students, Dyhouse questioned even the possibility of equality: 'what do equal opportunities or identical provision mean in a system of deeply entrenched inequality or difference?'¹⁰⁵ More recently Dyhouse described the arguments among principals and governing boards of male and female tertiary colleges in mid twentieth century England for and against extending enrolment to the other sex.¹⁰⁶ She argued that the debates were complex and could only be understood in specific institutional contexts, including the micro-politics of institutional leadership. She found examples of feminism and misogyny among the opinions of both supporters and opponents of coeducation as well as 'no simple division between men and women over [its] desirability.'¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless she concluded that where strong, well-resourced female-governed institutions existed, women abandoned them at their peril, citing women's persistently unequal share in 'teaching, learning and governance of the mixed college.'¹⁰⁸

A number of articles discussing the history of coeducation in English secondary schools began to appear during the 1980s. This was part of a broader reassessment of what was widely interpreted as the failure of post-war education reform, specifically the failure of coeducational comprehensive high school of the 1970s and 1980s, in redressing gender

¹⁰⁴ Julie Gilbert, 'Women students and student life at England's civic universities before the First World War', *History of Education*, 1994, vol. 23, no. 4, p. 411; Dyhouse, *No distinction of sex? Women in British Universities 1870-1939*, London, Cambridge, 1995.

¹⁰⁵ Dyhouse, *No distinction of sex?* p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Dyhouse, "'Apostates" and "Uncle Toms": accusations of betrayal in the history of the mixed college in the 1960s,' *History of Education*, vol. 31, no. 3, 2002, pp. 281-297.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

inequity.¹⁰⁹ This view was predicated on two main bases: first that girls as a group had interests and needs which were distinct from, even at odds with, those of boys and second, that an examination of the detailed practices of the coeducational classroom revealed that an apparently equitable setting was in reality advancing the interests of boys at the expense of girls' learning and achievement. It was further suggested that these problems might be incorrigible under present social conditions and that the solution was to move girls into single-sex classrooms.¹¹⁰ Books on the subject edited by Rosemary Deem and Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah included essays by Kevin Brehony and Jill Laviguer respectively, which looked for historical antecedents for current inadequacies.¹¹¹

One field of investigation was the writings of a small but prominent group of advocates of coeducation active in England at the beginning of the twentieth century. In particular, a number of historians revisited a widely-cited essay collection, *Co-education*, which had been edited by the Froebelian Alice Woods and published in 1903.¹¹² Reading the book in the light of second wave feminism, Brehony and others identified a number of flaws in Woods' espousal of coeducation as a theory of equality. These included her willingness to compromise on the issue of women teachers' career paths in mixed schools, and to tolerate as a fellow-traveller the reactionary clergyman and headmaster Cecil Grant, who argued among other things that coeducation would promote the divinely-ordained differences between the sexes. Brehony also pointed out that Woods and her group were

¹⁰⁹ For example, Rosemary Deem (ed.), *Co-education reconsidered*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1984; Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah (eds), *Learning to lose: sexism and education*, The Women's Press, London, 1980.

¹¹⁰ For a review of the literature of the 1980s see Judith Gill, *Which way to school?: a review of the evidence on the single sex versus coeducation debate and an annotated bibliography of the research*, Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, 1988.

¹¹¹ Kevin Brehony, 'Co-education: perspectives and debates in the early twentieth-century,' in Deem (ed.), *co-education reconsidered*, pp. 1-20; Jill Laviguer, 'Co-education and the tradition of separate needs,' in Spender and Sarah (eds), *Learning to lose*, pp. 180-190.

¹¹² Alice Woods (ed.), *Co-education: a series of essays by various authors*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1903. In addition to Brehony and Laviguer, Woods' essay collection has also written about by: Ian Brice, 'The early co-education movement in English secondary education,' *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 1980, pp. 134-177; Dyhouse, 'Feminism and the debate over co-education/ single sex schooling: some historical perspectives,' in June Purvis, (ed.), *The education of girls and women: proceedings of the 1984 annual conference of the History of Education Society of Great Britain*, Leicester, 1985, pp. 47-60 and James C. Albisetti, 'Un-learned lessons from the new world? English

only interested in introducing coeducation into well-resourced, upper class 'progressive' schools. They were uninterested in or even disapproving of those state-sponsored schools in Britain which had been mixed for economic rather than ideological reasons.

Nevertheless the crucial flaw in Woods' ideology, according to Brehony, was that she was unrealistic in her belief that schools could alter larger social problems in gender relations. He cited Professor of Education, J. J. Findlay: 'at the heart of the matter ... women's equality with men had first to be achieved in all areas of social life before inequalities in education could be reduced.'¹¹³ Ian Brice, on the other hand, argued that early twentieth-century coeducationists such as Woods' comrade, J. H. Badley of Bedales School, should be given credit for 'pointing out the deficiencies in the late-Victorian version of manliness, and offering a broader, more civilised ideal.'¹¹⁴ Where Brehony and others were writing in a context of late twentieth century concerns about the impact of coeducation on girls, Brice's discussion came from a different lineage. Brice was contributing to a critique of muscular Christianity and the 'games cult' which he saw as defining a damagingly narrow masculinity for late Victorian and Edwardian Public School boys, and to which coeducation, however imperfectly organised, seemed to provide a better alternative. The writings of Woods' group are discussed further in chapter 2 of this thesis.

Sheila Fletcher examined coeducation as economics rather than ideology, writing about the role of the late nineteenth century English state in the establishment of coeducational secondary schools, either as a means to extend education to girls without incurring the expense of a new school, or to make secondary schooling available in sparsely populated areas where there were not enough boys alone to fill a school.¹¹⁵ Mixed schooling was adopted or rejected in different parts of the country according to very specific local circumstances and cultures, none of which were to do with philosophies of coeducation. Fletcher concluded, 'the cause [of coeducation] has never been pressed by government on

views of American coeducation and women's colleges, c. 1865-1910,' *History of Education*, vol. 29, no. 5, 2000, pp. 473-489.

¹¹³ Brehony, 'Co-education', p. 13.

¹¹⁴ Brice, 'The early co-education movement', p 176.

¹¹⁵ Fletcher, 'Co-education and the Victorian Grammar School,' *History of Education*, vol. 11, no. 2, 1982, pp. 87-98.

Mary Wollstonecraft's grounds - grounds which have been urged for *comprehensive* schooling: namely that it is intrinsically "right" and would benefit society.¹¹⁶ She also found that coeducation was tolerated mostly only for very specific kinds of schools, for 'Third Class' grammar schools which were in effect junior high or upper elementary schools which provided for sons and daughters of the lower strata of the middle classes. In fact a number of writers have argued that coeducation must be understood in terms of specific local or national practices. Laviguer explained coeducational and single-sex schools in England as coming from distinct traditions. England had a strong tradition of upper class, academic girls' schools, in the tradition of Frances Buss and Emily Davies. The coeducational comprehensives, on the other hand, were descendants of a line which ran from board school through upper elementary to secondary modern, where boys and girls were schooled on the same site, but segregated as much as possible, with girls instructed in the domestic/vocational rather than academic curriculum.

That the feminist alternative to coeducation might be all-female institutions depended on national or local setting. In England the tradition of well-organised single-sex academic schooling for upper or middle class girls was predicated on substantial funding as well as sufficient populations of girls to make the schools viable. Fletcher pointed out that in certain localities coeducation was a pragmatic way to expand grammar school provision for girls where the alternative might mean no school at all, or at least no efficient, academically-sound school. Nelleke Bakker, writing about The Netherlands, argued that parents sent their daughters to coeducational schools because the schools which also accommodated boys were those which provided access to the formal examination credentials necessary to obtain paid, skilled employment.¹¹⁷ This was despite widespread opposition to coeducation on principle amongst leading educationalists. Parents, argued Bakker, valued useful credentials more than they feared coeducation. James Albisetti identified a similar paradox in his discussion of coeducation in the catholic nations of

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹¹⁷ Nelleke Bakker, 'A curious inconsistency: coeducation in secondary education in the Netherlands, 1900-1960,' *Paedagogica Historica: Supplementary series* IV, 1998, pp. 273-92.

Europe.¹¹⁸ In 1929 Pope Pius XI issued a major statement about catholic education which briefly but decisively condemned the practice of coeducation. Coeducation, it was declared, was a system which not only risked blurring the boundaries between male and female, but also encouraged immorality. Despite this, coeducation was routine in a number of state schools in Catholic countries in western and central Europe, if not in church schools themselves, predominantly because of cost. Girls studied alongside boys in mixed schools because the foundation of special, separate girls' schools was not considered a priority for public spending. Tyack and Hansot and John L. Rury argued that under the economic constraints of public school funding in the United States, separate provision for girls typically meant lesser provision.¹¹⁹ Similarly, Gidney and Millar pointed out that although some parents of girls in nineteenth century Ontario might have preferred single-sex schools, local authorities lacked either the funding or the political will to found such institutions.¹²⁰

The United States (and to a lesser extent, Canada) was seen by English and European educators as the home of coeducation.¹²¹ For Europeans, argued Albisetti, New World coeducation signified both modernity – the leaving behind of fussy European distinctions between ranks and kinds of people – and the primitive – interpreted as a response to a rough and ready frontier culture. For North Americans on the other hand, coeducation was so embedded by the turn of the twentieth century as to be almost invisible.¹²² Useful insights into the operation of 'American coeducation' have been provided by Tyack and Hansot and John Rury for the United States, Gidney and Millar for Ontario. Gidney and Millar discussed coeducation as an element in the 'invention' of the modern public high school, Rury in the context of the history of women's educational opportunities. Tyack and Hansot's book-length study of two hundred years of United States coeducation is the most comprehensive treatment of the subject. These authors agreed that a key issue in

¹¹⁸ Albisetti, James C. 'Catholics and coeducation: rhetoric and reality in Europe before *Divini Illius Magistri*.' *Paedagogica Historica*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1999, pp. 667-96.

¹¹⁹ Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, p. 4; John L. Rury, *Education and women's work: female schooling and the division of labor in urban America, 1870-1930*, State University of New York Press, Albany N.Y., 1991, p. 39.

¹²⁰ Gidney and Millar, *Inventing secondary education*, pp. 106-9.

¹²¹ Albisetti, 'Un-learned lessons'.

¹²² Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, p. 1.

coeducation was the extent to which girls and boys had access to a common curriculum in mixed schools. 'Identical coeducation' was a term coined in the nineteenth century to refer to the practice of mixing boys and girls together in the same classroom, teaching them the same subjects, and making them abide by the same rules and regulations.¹²³ Gidney and Millar argued that Ontario high schools had been established in the first instance as boys' institutions which girls happened to attend, even if in large numbers. Girls were taught 'like the boys' and 'with the boys'.¹²⁴ Coeducation and a not very differentiated curriculum came to dominate secondary education despite rather than because of prevailing Canadian gender ideologies and the intentions of senior bureaucrats.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, argued Rury, 'coeducation [in the United States] was ... founded, to one degree or another, on a premise of male-female equality in intellectual and social terms.'¹²⁶ It exposed women's equal academic ability with men and raised the question of paid employment for middle class women, even if most educated women did not in fact join the paid work force. Whatever the origins of coeducational practice, Rury observed that contemporary attitudes to coeducation in high schools and colleges, notably the debates involving its leading opponents, Edward Clarke and G. Stanley Hall, exposed broader or deeper beliefs about gender: 'In the minds of opponents and supporters alike, the issue of coeducation was intimately connected to the future roles that women would play in American life.'¹²⁷ Greater degrees of coeducation-in-practice were congruent with those ideologies of femininity which allowed women relatively more equality with their male peers.¹²⁸

As in nearly all writing about gender, the provision or enforcement of the girls' vocational curriculum, associated in the United States with the Progressive Era, was characterised as reactionary. Rury drew a distinction between the late nineteenth century period of high school establishment, when girls and boys studied the same subjects, and the early twentieth century period which was marked by incursions of vocationalism into

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²⁴ Gidney and Millar, *Inventing secondary education*, p. 314.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 231-249.

¹²⁶ Rury, *Education and women's work*, pp. 24-5.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

the high school curriculum, including domestic science for girls. Tyack and Hansot, however, argued that 'identical coeducation' continued to thrive in the United States despite the strongly-expressed opposition of some eminent educationalists and leading bureaucrats. This was explained as a victory of convenience and routine over policy and ideology. Tyack and Hansot found that just as coeducation had been introduced into American public schools without ideological underpinning or debate, it survived as the dominant schooling form, for the most part unthreatened by 'policy talk' and critique. They argued that this remained the case, with limited variations during the school day, even during the Progressive Era, when high school timetables were altered to accommodate increased curriculum differentiation by gender.¹²⁹ Schools operated under organisational imperatives in ways that might be different from or even at odds with prevailing directions of policy or the views of theorists such as Stanley Hall. 'Institutional convenience, the preference of educators for familiar ways, and demographic and economic pressures have often had more to do with the introduction and retention of gender practices in the schools than consensus reforms or gender ideology.'¹³⁰

Tyack and Hansot argued for a complex understanding of the ways in which schools mediate gender, finding that gender varied in importance as an organising principle within schools in different schools settings, for example from classroom to play ground, and that gender relations in schools were different in specific ways from those in families, work-places and so on. The coeducational classroom, they found, is hard to categorise as distinctly male or female, unlike other aspects of schooling: administration, vocational education and sports.¹³¹ They concluded, among other things, that gender was less influential historically than race and class as a predictor of school performance and less important than 'age and proficiency' in school regulations and organisation.¹³² For

¹²⁸ See also Rury and Glenn Harper, 'The trouble with coeducation: Mann and women at Antioch, 1853-1860,' *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 4 1986, pp. 481-501.

¹²⁹ Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, pp. 227-242.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.289.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 290.

United States feminists, argued Tyack and Hansot 'the coeducational public school, with all its defects, was still already more egalitarian than the workplace or the family.'¹³³

There has been little historical writing about coeducation in Australia. Although the feminist reassessments of the 1980s were influential in educational psychology and sociology, mostly this interest did not extend to a search for historical explanations or precedents. Noeline Kyle, however, responding to Florence Howe's coinage of the 'myth of coeducation' contributed an essay in which she outlined some key points in the specific history of nineteenth and early twentieth century New South Wales.¹³⁴ Kyle argued that while there was some mixing of, or co-enrolment of, boys and girls in New South Wales elementary schools from the nineteenth century and in high schools from the early twentieth century, this fell well short of truly equal education provision. The sort of egalitarianism that is implied by the term, 'coeducation,' she found, was experienced neither by female students nor women teachers in state schools. On the other hand she argued that single-sex provision was not necessarily preferable, as in the twentieth century this meant not only the elite academic girls' high schools but also the domestic science post-primaries.

While Kyle's discussion of women teachers was in general terms of pay and conditions relative to male colleagues, others have looked at specific crises in women teachers' careers. Kate Deverall documented the career of the early twentieth century teacher unionist Annie Golding including her opposition to the expansion of coeducational schools under Peter Board.¹³⁵ Golding opposed coeducation on several grounds: that it was inimical to the interests of women teachers, that it was a system which worked in the interests of boys and men at the expense of girls and women, and that it was morally perilous. Theobald's essay on the life of Catherine Streeter, a nineteenth century 'teaching matriarch' from Victoria viewed coeducation through the lens of the teaching

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹³⁴ Kyle, 'Co-education and the egalitarian myth in colonial Australia,' *Journal of Educational administration and history*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1988, pp. 22-28.

¹³⁵ Kate Deverall, 'A bid for affirmative action: Annie Golding and the New South Wales Public School Teachers' Association, 1900-1915,' *Labour History*, no. 77, 1999, pp. 117-39. I am grateful to Kay Whitehead for this reference.

labour market during a period of increasing colonial government erosion of women teachers' career paths.¹³⁶ The mixing of girls and boys, and perhaps even more importantly big girls and male teachers, in state supported schools suggested a role for the woman teacher not as manager or principal but as 'moral worker.'¹³⁷ The 'educational state' as Theobald put it, 'was obliged to purchase respectability through a female presence in its classrooms' and teachers like Streeter became expert technologists of 'moral regulation.'¹³⁸ It is an important point that in Australia coeducation has been characteristic of the government sector, single-sex provision of private, church or corporate schools. In his history of Catholic education in Australia Thomas O'Donoghue noted that the church insisted on single-sex schooling for pupils in or above the senior levels of elementary education.¹³⁹ This was not only to 'protect the children from what were seen as their own evil sexual impulses' but to safeguard the chastity of male and female members of the teaching orders.¹⁴⁰ These single-sex environments, he argued, were also more conducive to instructing girls and boys in their different future social roles including the preparation of girls for motherhood.¹⁴¹

Other writing has discussed the intention and impact of the expansion of coeducational high schooling in the post war period. For Richard Teese possible coeducational equities were compromised by the specific arrangements of high school provision in post-war Victoria.¹⁴² The persistence of the technical school system for boys was paralleled by the survival of domestic science high schools for girls. The rejection by girls and their parents of the domestic science schools drove large numbers of their potential clients into the academic high schools. Teese found that the reorganised high schools marginalised their new female clients through tracking and streaming to the extent that subsequent to this period Victoria experienced a decline in girls' high school retention rates relative to

¹³⁶ Theobald, 'Moral regulation and the nineteenth-century "Lady Teacher": the case of Catherine Streeter,' in Rousmaniere et al, *Discipline, moral regulation and schooling*, pp. 161-81.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Thomas A. O'Donoghue, *Upholding the faith: the process of education in Catholic schools in Australia, 1922-1965* Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2001.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁴² Teese, 'Gender and class in the transformation of the public high school in Melbourne', *History of Education Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1989, pp. 237-259.

boys. In New South Wales the Wyndham inquiry into secondary education was associated with long-running expert and popular debates about coeducation. In a study of the transcripts of evidence presented to the Committee Duffield noted an almost total absence of female voices.¹⁴³ She also found that the theoretical pupil in discussions of the impact of coeducation was male. Coeducation was discussed in terms of whether the presence of girls might have a beneficial effect on boys in schools.

Another way of looking at coeducation has been suggested by recent analyses of adolescence and gender relations. Johnson's discussion of coeducation was a departure from much of the other writing on the subject in that its emphasis was on gender-making more than on girls' disadvantage, about the shaping of girls' and boy's identities more than access to academic credentials.¹⁴⁴ Reading the Wyndham debates of the 1950s she identified the central concern of both supporters and opponents of coeducation to be the management and regulation of adolescent (hetero)sexuality. Johnson's discussion, although brief, was instructive in the connections she made between coeducation and broader contemporary discourses, notably the high school's mid century assumption of responsibilities for social adjustment and the guidance of adolescent development, including socio-sexual development. For New Zealand, Sue Middleton used a Foucauldian analysis of teachers' oral histories to examine the ways in which early-mid twentieth century high schools were sites for the disciplining of sexuality.¹⁴⁵ This included, for example, discussions of the rituals of the caning of boys and of the spatial restrictions on the movements of girls around the coeducational high school.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter, in addition to identifying some gaps in the literature, has been to look at debates and issues of relevance to my own study of the administration and operation of a coeducational state high school during the first half of the twentieth

¹⁴³ Duffield, 'Gender and secondary education reform'.

¹⁴⁴ Johnson, *Modern girl*, pp. 84-86.

¹⁴⁵ Sue Middleton, *Disciplining sexuality: Foucault, life histories, and education*, Teachers College Press, New York, 1998.

century. The chapter reviewed Australian literature as well as studies from England, Canada and the United States which have either been influential in Australia or are able to shed light on the Australian experience. Certain themes and directions are suggested by the literature surveyed in this chapter, including a central and continuing debate about the intentions and effects of the foundation of public high schools, especially in terms of the making of social relations of class and gender. The examination of schooling practices by Curtis, Gidney and Millar and others suggests a place for studies which analyse the operation of state schooling from a local perspective. This study is a history 'from below', which places an individual school at the centre of its analysis. It is intended to contribute to an understanding of the significance of local sites in the making of social relations by close observation of the common routines and events of schooling, and investigation of the meaning of these in the lives of students and their families. It argues that the twentieth-century New South Wales public high school was an institution in which particular ways of behaving and of seeing the world were produced and affirmed. In common with Gidney and Millar and others it nevertheless reads the progress and operation of the public high school in history as a less than straightforward process, a process of 'invention' and negotiation.

In terms of gender this study draws both on the literature of the history of girls' schooling – notably its insights into the connections between curriculum and ideologies of femininity – and the historiography of public high school culture, which began in Australia as a narrative of competition between varieties of middle class masculinity. It especially aims to investigate the relationship between gender and the meritocratic organisation and ethos of the high school. There has been little research into the history of coeducation in Australia, so this thesis is aimed at making some inroads into relatively under-explored territory. The international literature about coeducation to date has largely grown out of feminist studies in which coeducation was assessed in terms of constraints and possibilities for female students and teachers. The central question has been whether coeducational schools reproduced and entrenched the gender inequities of the external world or whether, by offering girls access to 'male' educational credentials, they were in fact relatively emancipatory institutions. An important collective contribution of this

literature has been the finding that coeducation cannot be usefully understood as a simple or unitary system. It meant different things in different national or regional settings. It also, as Tyack and Hansot in particular have pointed out, operated differently in different settings within the school. Most of the historiography of coeducation indicates that it operated in a particular relationship with meritocratic public school systems. Writing by Johnson and Middleton suggests, in addition, that coeducation might be usefully examined in relation to the newer, mid-century understandings of the high school as a site for the surveillance and regulation of adolescent sexuality.

Chapter 2

Debating coeducation in England and the United States of America: Advocates and opponents, c1900-1911

Our object is to bring up both sexes together through the whole course of school education, from the nursery to the time of professional training, and to bring them up, so far as may prove to be possible, alike; to see, that is, where and to what extent differences of treatment are necessary, and to base these on experience rather than on *à priori* grounds. Thus only, so it seems to us, can girls get as real an education as boys to fit them for any career and thus only – and this in our view is still more important – can the interaction of each sex on the other be complete, and boys and girls grow up with common interests and sympathies and mutual understanding, a common tradition, so to say, the outcome of a common life and common training.¹

Undoubtedly co-education [in American schools] has had an influence in improving discipline, and making the tone of the schools intellectually more stimulating The natural modesty of each sex induces both girls and boys to behave better in one another's presence than they would apart; intellectually, too, the task of school work is made easier by co-education. The boys' greater initiative and independence add to the intellectual vigour of the class, while the steady industry and greater conscientiousness of girls automatically help to keep up the standard, with much less effort on the part of the teacher than is needed here [in England].²

The purpose of this thesis is to explain something about the richness and complexity of 'real' school life by reading the school through different kinds of sources. Different categories of text, it is argued, highlight different aspects of school experience through expressions of the various perspectives of different kinds of participants in the educational process. This chapter examines the coeducational secondary school from the perspective of expert discourse and high theory, reading an international debate about coeducation which occurred in England and the United States during the first decade or so of the twentieth century. The purpose of the chapter is to establish what was

¹ J. H. Badley, 'Some problems of government in a mixed school' in A. Woods (ed.), *Co-education: a series of essays by various authors*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1903, p. 3.

² Sara A. Burstall, *Impressions of American Education in 1908*, Longmans, Green and Co, London, 1909, p. 26.

understood at a theoretical or policy level by coeducation, and what sorts of issues were considered to be relevant to its implementation and practice by contemporary policy-makers, educational theorists and school leaders.

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the high tide of a debate about coeducation which occurred within and across a number of western countries, notably England and the United States. The debate was primarily focussed on the desirability and practicality of coeducation for students over the age of about thirteen, the age beginning to be understood as the age of adolescence. The term, 'coeducation', was understood in two main ways. In the United States, and increasingly in other countries, it described a form of school organisation in which boys and girls were taught together in order to facilitate other forms of segregation, such as by age, course of study or proficiency. In England for Froebelian and other 'progressive' educators, it was argued that mixing the sexes in schools would enhance the personal growth and development of both boys and girls so that they might be given the opportunity to move beyond narrowly-conceived Victorian prescriptions of masculinity and femininity. Reading the arguments of leading advocates and opponents of coeducation is a useful foundation for building an understanding of the possibilities and constraints of the coeducational high school in the first half of the twentieth-century.

This international interest in coeducation coincided with the period during which the question of the possibility of coeducational high schooling was being settled in New South Wales, as part of a much larger project of post-primary education reform. The texts and authorities discussed in this chapter were either those consulted by would-be reformers of New South Wales education such as G. H. Knibbs and J. W. Turner, or those likely to have been read by educationalists in New South Wales.³ England and the United States were the two main nations conventionally referred to by New South Wales

³ See New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Interim report of the Commissioners [Knibbs and Turner] on certain parts of primary education*, Government printer, Sydney, 1903, pp. 91-92, 464-468; New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Conference of inspectors, teachers, departmental officers and prominent educationists*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1904, pp. 161-166.

educators as offering models – both positive and negative – for Australian practice. New South Wales responses will be discussed in the following chapter.

Definitions of coeducation

Coeducation was an abbreviation of the phrase, ‘coeducation of the sexes.’ It was one of a number of similar though not exactly synonymous terms which included ‘co-instruction’, or ‘joint’, ‘composite’, ‘mixed’ or ‘dual’ education. Definitions of the term were influenced by national practice. In the United States public secondary schooling was well established, if still far from universal, by the beginning of the twentieth century, and nearly all public high schools were coeducational, including more than ninety-eight per cent of high schools by 1901, according to the United States Commissioner of Education.⁴ Even in the smaller non-state sector coeducation was practised in the majority of secondary schools.⁵ United States writers therefore tended to assume that their readership was familiar with both the term and the concept. The implication was that the practices of coeducation were self-evident (though not uncontested) and that the readership knew what they were. The United States Commissioner defined coeducation briefly as ‘the education of the youth of both sexes in the same schools and classes ... instructed together without distinction of sex’, spending the remainder of a hundred page summary of the practice to debating pros and cons.⁶

The education landscape in England was different from the United States. The meritocratic educational ladder was still very much under negotiation and single-sex schooling for older students was well-entrenched, persisting even after the expansion of secondary schooling in the wake of the 1902 Education Act.⁷ Early twentieth century debates about coeducation in England were strongly focussed on the kind of elite secondary schooling which could be understood as a social category as much as a specific

⁴ United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the year 1900-1901*, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1902, p. XLIX.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. XLIX.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1217-8.

⁷ Kevin Brehony, ‘Co-education: perspectives and debates in the early twentieth-century,’ in Deem (ed.), *co-education reconsidered*, p. 5.

stage of education. Public writing about coeducation was dominated by a small but prolific group of principals or supporters of high fee-charging private schools.⁸ Much of the English literature was concerned with explaining coeducation, including the range of practices and philosophies accommodated under the term, and advocating specific kinds of coeducational organisation over others. The leading coeducation advocate Alice Woods was one of several writers who suggested that some practices were truer or better than others.⁹ English writers suggested that there were degrees of coeducation, from ‘thoroughgoing’ through to various degrees of separation including sex-segregated classes within the one school.¹⁰ Other variables included the extent to which teachers were mixed and the extent of mixing in sports or in school government such as appointment of prefects and so on. The educationalist Michael E. Sadler drew a distinction between the classifications, ‘mixed’ and ‘dual’ schools under the English Board of Education:

“Mixed schools” are those in which, for most subjects of the curriculum, boys and girls are taught together by the same teachers: in “dual schools” there are separate boys’ and girls’ departments under a single principal, but with separate entrances, classrooms and playgrounds for the two sexes It is not safe to assume, however, that all the mixed schools were completely co-educational in their work, or that the dual schools were not co-educational in respect of certain subjects or parts of the course.¹¹

Key texts

Despite the differences in context, English and United States writers focused on a number of similar issues, cited each other in bibliographies, and responded to each other’s arguments in their books and articles. The texts referred to in this chapter were all well known in the field and include those either consulted by, or likely to have been known

⁸ Brehony, ‘Co-education’; Jill Laviguer, ‘Co-education and the tradition of separate needs,’ in Spender and Sarah (eds), *Learning to lose*, pp 180-190.

⁹ Woods, ‘The dangers and difficulties of co-education’ in Woods, *Co-education*, pp. 126-142; Woods, ‘Principles’ in Woods (ed.), *Advance in co-education: articles by various authors*, Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., London, 1919, pp. 25-38.

¹⁰ M. E. Sadler, ‘Co-education,’ in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 11th edition, 1910-1911, vol. VI, pp. 636-640; Woods, ‘Dangers and difficulties’, pp. 127-129.

¹¹ Sadler, ‘Co-education,’ p. 636.

about by, educators in New South Wales. Among them these publications cover the main issues raised in expert writing about coeducation during this period. The three central texts discussed in the chapter are a collection of essays published by the English feminist and Froebelian Alice Woods in 1903, the psychologist G. Stanley Hall's chapter on girls' education in his major work, *Adolescence*, and a detailed survey of the topic authorised by the United States Commissioner of Education, William T. Harris, in his annual report of 1900-1901.¹²

Woods' *Co-education* was a short and readable essay collection which Woods had commissioned during a 1901 fact-finding tour through various English counties.¹³ Despite a strong emphasis on the elite private boarding school the book was widely read even outside England and addressed a number of issues considered to be of wider relevance, notably to do with gender relations in the coeducational school. The contributors were mostly school principals. Among the more well-known authors were J. H. Badley of Bedales school and the Rev. Cecil Grant. Badley, like Woods, was socially progressive and had some feminist credentials, including a suffragette wife.¹⁴ Grant, in contrast, had a more Ruskinian view of gender and saw coeducation as a system for the nurture of complementary social roles in boys and girls.¹⁵ Less evangelical, and less examined in the historical literature, are essays by two headmasters of endowed grammar schools, Charles J. Mansford and T. C. Warrington.¹⁶ These represented the less wealthy regional day schools which adopted coeducation for pragmatic, financial reasons. No such schools were included in Woods' 1919 follow-up book, *Advance in co-education*, which was even more exclusively focussed on the private sector than *Co-education* had been.

¹² A. Woods (ed.), *Co-education: a series of essays by various authors*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1903; G. Stanley Hall, 'Adolescent girls and their education' in *Adolescence: its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion and education*, Sidney Appleton, London, 1904, vol. 2, pp. 561-647; *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, vol. 2, pp. 1217-1315.

¹³ Woods, 'Editor's preface' in *Co-education*, p. v.

¹⁴ Brehony, 'Co-education,' p. 6.

¹⁵ Cecil Grant, 'Idleness and co-education' in Woods, *Co-education*, pp. 15-32; Cecil Grant and Norman Hodgson, *Case for co-education*, Grant Richards, 1913.

¹⁶ Charles J. Mansford, 'The personal element in joint schools,' in Woods, *Co-education*, pp. 89-103; T. C. Warrington, 'An experiment in co-education' in Woods, *Co-education*, pp. 104-120.

A leading supporter of coeducation in the United States was William T. Harris, Commissioner of Education from 1889-1906. Harris was one of a number of leading educators in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to argue that mixed schooling was more or less the same thing as equality of educational opportunity and his statements on mixed schooling first published in the early 1870s continued to be considered current into the twentieth century.¹⁷ Harris's two-volume *Report of the Commissioner for the year 1900-1901* included a hundred page chapter which was a comprehensive summary of coeducation practice and debate to date.¹⁸ Conscious of the United States' status as the leading international practitioner, the information gathered for his report was intended not only for domestic consumption, but also as a document which might be consulted by educators of other nations.¹⁹ It included a round-up of thirty years of bureaucratic information-gathering with statistical tables and surveys of the views of public school district officials, as well as a summary of medical opinion, excerpts from the reports of some European observers and an extensive bibliography.

Probably the most famous opponent of coeducation in secondary schools was the American psychologist G. Stanley Hall who included passionate arguments against the practice in several publications including his landmark study, *Adolescence*. Hall advocated the dismantling of coeducational high schools in the United States on the grounds that too much contact, and too similar a curriculum would damage the development of both boys and girls during what he insisted were the crucial adolescent years. He argued in dramatic terms that the necessary and natural differences between the sexes had already become alarmingly blurred by coeducation in the United States: that the mixed-sex classroom feminised boys and was dangerously damaging to the menstrual rhythms of girls. Hall was strongly implicated in early twentieth century United States concerns about the feminisation of the high school.²⁰

¹⁷ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, pp. 1241-1247; see also David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning together: a history of coeducation in American schools*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990, pp. 101-103.

¹⁸ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, pp. 1217-1315.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. XLVIII-XLIX.

²⁰ Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, pp. 146-164.

Supporters and opponents of coeducation debated a substantially common set of topics, which included issues of morality and health as well as questions about the comparative intellectual aptitudes of boys and girls, and the proper role of the school in preparing students for their future social and economic lives. Coeducation was controversial for a specific age group – students over the age of about thirteen – and a specific stratum of education – the level beyond the elementary. It was also a debate which addressed boys and girls as different kinds of participants in the schooling process. Boys were theorised as the fixed quality in schools, girls as the variable who might benefit or harm themselves through coeducation, or who might hinder or ameliorate the discipline and learning of boys. Subsidiary strands of debate addressed pragmatic and administrative issues. The admission of large numbers of girls to schools made possible the economies of scale necessary to make widespread secondary schooling financially viable, especially in less densely populated areas. Another practical consideration was that of teachers' careers. Two issues were included under this topic: firstly the denial of a career path to women teachers, who might not be employed in senior positions, notably headships and secondly, the gender troubles of the male teacher in a 'feminised' school.

The question of who was considered to be expert in these discussions, and what was considered to be the source of their expertise, is significant. The bulk of the contributors to the *Report of the U.S. Commissioner* as well as to Woods' *Co-education* derived their authority from practical experience or observation of the classroom either as teachers or school administrators. This was especially true of coeducation's supporters and advocates who offered experiential evidence for their contentions about the natures of boys and girls and the dynamics of classroom management. The difference between the United States teachers and administrators and the English progressive educators was over the question of theory. For United States supporters by and large it was enough to argue that coeducation made economic sense and was pedagogically sound. For the leading contributors to Woods' book, on the other hand, coeducational projects were suspect if not underpinned by more thoroughgoing educational principles, including a philosophy of gender roles and relations. The category of expert other than education practitioner or manager was the medical-psychological professional. The child psychologist Hall was

among those who located the site at issue, not in the readily-observable classroom but deep inside in the growing bodies and minds of female and male students. Hall supported his views with physiological and psychological evidence drawn from specialised bodies of scientific knowledge. This was information not easily accessible to the teacher or other layperson.

Economics and the classification of students

Debates about coeducation included the consideration of whether gender was the most important category for the organisation of students, or whether other aspects such as age, intelligence, ambition or social class should be more influential in grouping school populations. The most controversial level of education for coeducation was the secondary level, complicated by the fact that the divisions between elementary, secondary and tertiary education were still fluid, and had differing meanings in the United States and England. Educationalists in both countries agreed that coeducation was uncontroversial for younger children.²¹ Nor was coeducation strongly debated at post-secondary level, except for those who opposed the higher education of women per se. Universities were seen as exceptional institutions. As the United States authors of a 1911 encyclopaedia entry put it: 'The expense of university instruction makes separate provision for women practically out of the question' and 'in the higher work of the university, the maturity of the students and their intellectual attainments would seem to make the scholastic purposes of their common work so dominant as to exclude any disturbing influences from the association of the sexes.'²²

In the United States the development of the coeducational high school was an important element in the development of the meritocratic educational ladder. Mixed sex classrooms substantially reduced the cost of higher schooling and therefore the opposition to their

²¹ For example, Ernest N. Henderson and David S. Sneddon, 'Coeducation', in Paul Monroe (ed.), *A cyclopedia of education*, Macmillan, New York, 1911, vol. 2, p. 44; Sadler, *Introduction to Woods, Co-education*, pp. xi-xiv.

²² Henderson and Sneddon, 'Coeducation', p. 46.

construction from the taxpayers who were called upon to fund them.²³ William T. Harris argued for the importance of coeducation for the development of public high schools in the following terms:

Economy has been secured through the circumstance that the coeducation of the sexes makes it possible to have better classification and at the same time larger classes. Unless proper grading is interfered with and pupils of widely different attainments are brought together in the same classes, the separation of the sexes requires twice as many teachers to teach the same number of pupils.²⁴

Coeducation also facilitated other kinds of classifications and specialisations, for example by race or disability. Some public school superintendents reported to the United States Commissioner that in their districts students who were 'white' or 'colored', 'deaf-mute' or blind were enrolled in schools according to those categories rather than by gender.²⁵

While no one argued that economic grounds alone were adequate reason to justify coeducation, cost-saving was crucial to the establishment of coeducation all over the world. In writing about the United States tradition, coeducation was frequently framed as a question not only of making high schooling affordable but of opening up high school education to girls.²⁶ For example a Norwegian observer was impressed by the facilities made accessible in this way to girls as well as boys:

When I consider the equipment of the American high schools, as I saw them in most cities, and then imagine these expensive buildings doubled in order to accommodate each sex separately, there arises a strong doubt in my mind. Would it be possible to furnish these schools with expensive laboratories ... with excellent microscopes, well-supplied libraries? Hardly in smaller cities where there is at present only one high school; however well the boys' high school might be equipped, the girls' high school would no doubt leave much for improvement.²⁷

²³ For example, *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, p. 1227.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1241n.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1219, 1224.

²⁶ For example, M. Carey Thomas, 'Coeducation,' in F. C. Beach and G. E. Rines (eds), *The Americana: a universal reference library*, The Scientific American, New York, 1911 [no page no.]; Henderson and Sneddon, 'Coeducation'.

²⁷ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, p. 1275.

On the other hand for the English grammar school headmasters, Mansford and Warrington, who contributed to Woods' essay collection, the enrolment of girls into their schools was a way to increase student numbers for the purpose of rescuing struggling boys' grammar schools.

While Harris argued that the experiment of coeducation, initially undertaken for economic reasons, had in practice been found to be educationally superior to sex-segregation, the English grammar school headmaster Mansford described coeducation more or less as a compromise, albeit a workable one.²⁸ Mansford did not recommend coeducation for larger towns where single-sex schools were economically feasible and speculated that were his school to grow large enough he would recommend its division.²⁹ There was also a belief that coeducation in regional or country areas was qualitatively different from the cities because of the nature of the school population. Even Mabel Hawtrey, an English opponent of coeducation who otherwise criticised coeducation in the strongest terms, conceded that it might be permissible in sparsely populated country areas where there was no alternative way of providing higher schooling.³⁰ In such places, she argued, schools could be organised on a family model, and the families whose children attended were likely to know each other. Similarly a teacher from the Girls' High and Latin Schools of Boston explained:

In towns and small cities having a substantially homogeneous population coeducation works well in the main, for there the conditions approach in simplicity the conditions of family or neighbourhood life. In large cities, however the case is different. There the population is not homogeneous, the families in the school are not known to one another, the numbers brought together in a single school are much larger, and the proportion of coarse natures among the pupils is apt to be somewhat greater.³¹

These kinds of fears about wrong mixing were recorded in the United States Commissioner's Report by a handful of representatives from the large cities of Boston

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1241-1242.

²⁹ Mansford, 'The personal element in joint schools', pp. 95-96.

³⁰ Mabel Hawtrey, *The co-education of the sexes*, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and c., London, 1896, pp. 15-16.

³¹ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, p. 1260.

and New York. As well as social class there was a concern about the 'cosmopolitan'³² population of these places: 'In the more densely inhabited parts of New York City there is a good deal of opposition to coeducation, particularly where there is a large foreign element.'³³ However the strength of this opposition should not be overstated. Most local representatives of United States school districts reported that coeducation was either supported or uncontroversial in their communities.³⁴ Alternatively coeducation could be seen as part of the great American project of assimilation. The Norwegian Anna Bentzen saw the public school, including the high school, as integral to this process:

One should remember the rough material which American schools receive. Recent immigrants, no matter if from the east or west, and without knowing a word of English are received in the common schools or high schools There is something in the surrounding air that softens the uncouth nature of the child, and ... as he becomes familiar with the language of his new fatherland, he imbibes the respect for his own worth as a human being and for the rights of his comrades, which is the profoundest principle in an American community.³⁵

Coeducation was undoubtedly more controversial in England than in the United States and one of the themes in Woods' collection was how to persuade parents of its safety. This question had different implications in the different kinds of schools represented in her book, according to differing ideals of masculinity and femininity in different social ranks. For Badley and Grant it was a question of challenging nineteenth century boarding school masculinity on the one hand, and 'accomplishments' femininity on the other. For Mansford it was more about work and credentials, about the provision of a useful secondary curriculum to those students who might otherwise be unable to access higher education. Mansford suggested that parents did not so much endorse coeducation as 'realise that in this coeducational school satisfactory work is being done.'³⁶ He described his student population in the following terms:

³² *Ibid.*, p. 1256.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 1223.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 1218-1230.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.1274.

³⁶ Mansford, 'The personal element in joint schools', p. 91.

The class of scholars attending the school is similar to those attending any other boys' or girls' Grammar School. Their parents' occupations vary; it may however be stated that, now the novelty [of coeducation] has worn off, the parents who at first hesitated to send their children hesitate no longer, and each term sees on the whole a better class of children enter.³⁷

For Warrington it was the parents of girls who proved reluctant to enrol their daughters in his school, especially as a local headmistress had established a girls' high school at the same time as the boys' grammar had been reorganised into a mixed school.³⁸ He argued that the key to attracting more girls to the school was in respectability:

The editor [Woods] asks me to say how opposition was overcome. I have already said that opposition was passive rather than active Discussion of the advantages or disadvantages of co-education would only be likely to turn passive into active opposition. So no public talk of co-education was allowed. It appeared useless to keep dinning into the ears of townsfolk about joint schools succeeding here and there and elsewhere, so long as they could watch the testing of the principle in their midst What was done was to *disarm* opposition by concentrating the energy of the staff on the general efficiency of the school For this reason – in addition to other and better ones – all questions of morals and manners had constant and unremitting care.³⁹

Woods, however, was sceptical both of United States coeducation⁴⁰ and of those English, Welsh and Scottish schools where, as she saw it, the economic motive outweighed the principle, fearing that such half-hearted experiments would do more harm than good to the cause:

Economy, then, being their main object, little or no regard is paid to any of the really important issues at stake. On the one hand, since public opinion ... will presumably be *against* the education of boys and girls together, prejudice is overcome by keeping them apart as much as can possibly be managed – free speech being forbidden in some cases. Separate playgrounds are carefully provided, and though lessons are given in the same class-room, boys and girls are never allowed to sit side by side. On the other hand, since money-saving looms so large, no regard is paid to those precautions so earnestly pressed by all advocates

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

³⁸ Warrington, 'An experiment in co-education', p. 105.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴⁰ Woods, 'Principles', pp. 26-27.

of true co-education, and we get schools in which the utmost carelessness is shown in regard to such matters as even lavatory arrangements.⁴¹

Leadership and guidance, she argued, had to come from the private sector: ‘those advanced schools, started either by individuals or small companies which lead the common-sense of the nation.’⁴²

By the late 1920s coeducation advocacy in England had diverged even further from the United States idea of the community or public high school and was more exclusively associated with ‘new’ or ‘progressive’ pedagogical theories; with personal rather than social understandings of schooling. The cover of the special education issue of the London journal of the New Education Fellowship, *The new era: A review of education* 1927 shows a drawing of a group of babies marching under banners reading: ‘Freedom through method, psychological freedom, freedom through environment, freedom through creative art, freedom through international understanding, freedom through co-education.’⁴³ At its extreme the English coeducation movement was very much within an ‘alternative’ tradition of schooling. As one of the Wedgwoods put it in Woods’ 1919 symposium: ‘It has been associated in the general mind with crankiness – with sandals, draughts, vegetarianism, a certain slackness in Latin grammar and a consequent inaptitude for serious application to business in after-life.’⁴⁴ The progressive tradition which flowered in the 1920s with the foundation of schools like A. S. Neill’s Summerhill (1924) and Beacon Hill (1927) by Bertrand and Dora Russell, are about as far away from the experience of Parramatta High as it is possible to imagine.

A common curriculum?

By the time of the debates discussed in this chapter it had been established on both sides of the Atlantic that girls instructed in the same subjects as boys – whether in the same

⁴¹ Woods, ‘Dangers and difficulties’, pp. 129-30.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.130.

⁴³ Reproduced on the cover of *History of Education*, vol. 29, no 2, 2000, a special issue on progressive and child-centred education, edited by Kevin Brehony.

⁴⁴ Ethel Wedgwood, ‘A parent’s point of view’ in Woods, *Advance in co-education*, p. 52.

classrooms or not – would perform as well if not better in examinations. The belief that girls were incapable of higher intellectual achievement, persuasive in the nineteenth century, had been well and truly overturned on evidence. However, as a number of writers have pointed out, this discovery was far from the end of discussion about girls' higher schooling, or coeducation.⁴⁵ Opponents of either or both practices argued that girls might jeopardise their reproductive health with excessive brain-work or that girls should study a different curriculum from boys which was more suited to their future social role as wife and mother. There was also a strong belief that in any case girls' apparent intellectual parity with boys masked fundamental distinctions between the sexes.

Coeducation, whether underpinned by financial considerations or philosophical ideals, relied on a largely common curriculum, either for its economies of scale or for the shared tasks at which girls and boys could work together and learn about each other. Just to what extent girls and boys should study the same subjects was a point of contention. While Woods believed that the school should be concerned with much more than the transmission of knowledge – 'mere co-instruction'⁴⁶ – the line she took, in common with J. H. Badley and others, was that differences of treatment of all kinds should be minimised; that coeducation was a kind of experiment which would help reveal which were real and which were artificial differences of sex:

Do we want to produce *first*, human beings with as many perfections as are common to the human race; and, *secondly*, human beings who are also men or women? If so, it seems impossible not to hope most for those experiments that go to lessen all imaginary differences of sex as much as possible.⁴⁷

A common curriculum was also implied in the contention by United States educationalists that mixed schooling was more or less the same things as equality of educational opportunity for girls, such as the statement by William Harris in his

⁴⁵ For example, Burstyn, *Victorian education and the ideal of womanhood*, London, Croom Helm, 1980; Carol Dyhouse, *Girls growing up in late Victorian and Edwardian England*, London, Routledge, 1981; Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*; John L. Rury, *Education and women's work: female schooling and the division of labor in urban America, 1870-1930*, State University of New York Press, Albany N.Y., 1991.

⁴⁶ Woods, 'Principles', p. 26

⁴⁷ Woods, 'Dangers and difficulties', pp. 139-140; also Badley, 'Some problems of government', p. 3

introduction to the 1900-1 Report of the Commissioner of Education, '[Coeducation] explains in a great measure the freedom that women enjoy in this country with respect to the pursuit of careers.'⁴⁸

Opponents of coeducation often represented themselves as defending girls' special interests against being overwhelmed by those of boys, or their special needs being put aside in schools which were designed to serve boys' interests only. Those who criticised coeducation on curriculum grounds argued along the lines of the English educationalist Michael Sadler: 'Co-education is generally so organised that it is the girls' training which is more or less assimilated to the boys', not that of the boys to the girls.'⁴⁹ He continued,

Many of the studies most suitable or necessary for boys of fourteen years or upwards would be a good deal out of gear with [a girl's] future practical needs, at any rate if she is to be a home-maker, and still more if she is to be a mother of children.⁵⁰

Others argued that the provision of different subjects was merely an organisational question; that the needs or aptitudes of girls and boys were common enough for the differences to be accommodated within the one institution. The English grammar school head Warrington, for example, suggested that girls in the senior secondary school might be offered the opportunity to study biology or physiology rather than advanced chemistry or physics, but argued against making such distinctions compulsory.⁵¹ Edward Brooks, superintendent of Boston schools, suggested provision, though again not compulsion, for divergence in senior subjects: 'A modern language could be substituted with girls for advanced Latin or Greek, and also girls that have no taste for mathematics could substitute literature for some of the more abstract subjects in that branch.'⁵² Warrington and Brooks both noted that the coeducational school was able to accommodate

⁴⁸ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, p. XLIX, 1228; see also Henderson and Sneddon, 'Coeducation'; M. Carey Thomas, 'Coeducation'.

⁴⁹ Sadler, Introduction to Woods, *Co-education*, p. xiii.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. xiii-xiv.

⁵¹ Warrington, 'An experiment in co-education', p. 115.

⁵² *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, p.1227.

divergence in manual work. Warrington suggested girls might learn needlework and cookery, Brooks mentioned stenography or typing.⁵³

Anticipating the reforms of the Progressive Era in the United States and what they would mean for coeducation, Ernest Henderson and David Sneddon in Paul Monroe's 1911 *Cyclopedia of Education* predicted that the 'widening' of the scope of secondary education – 'certain tendencies now at work' – might add new dimensions to the question of coeducation.⁵⁴ Secondary education was at present more coeducational in some curriculum aspects than others. 'Co-instruction' was 'largely out of the question' in physical or vocational education but feasible in 'civic or moral education.' However in the future subjects such as 'mathematics, science and art,' might become less suited to joint instruction if they became more vocational. Henderson and Sneddon came up with the following revised model of the coeducational high school:

In the public high school of the future we may expect that certain classes will be pursued exclusively by the girls, and others by the boys; but that certain other studies for economy of administration and social reasons as well, will be followed by both girls and boys. Under these circumstances, different tastes and interests will be consulted, and the necessities for physical overwork will be diminished. Each sex will have a curriculum adapted to their needs, but will be educated to a certain extent in the atmosphere of the other, thus combining the opportunities for moderate social intercourse with opportunities for the pursuit of studies along distinctive lines.⁵⁵

Different kinds of minds

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century concerns by anti-feminists about the effects of excessive brainwork on menstruation are well known (and will be discussed further below), but many among both supporters and opponents of coeducation were disinclined to take girls' academic success at face value, finding explanations which went beyond straightforward ones of academic talent or intellectual parity with or superiority over boys. Both advocates and opponents of coeducation frequently theorised boys' and girls'

⁵³ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, p. 1227; Warrington, 'An experiment in co-education', p. 113.

⁵⁴ Henderson and Sneddon, 'Coeducation', p. 45.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

minds and/or learning styles as different. Girls were more suggestible, docile, obedient or conscientious learners. Boys were more capricious yet more original and creative. Girls were precocious but boys would surpass them eventually. Some believed these differences were innate, others that they were social, but either way theories of complementary gender natures were pervasive in writing about coeducation, and those who believed in these differences were in agreement as to which human characteristics were feminine and which masculine. Disagreement was about the degree of difference, the degree to which difference was natural or socially-produced, and the implications for educational practice: that is, whether the differences required separate or common schooling.

Writers such as Hall and Hawtrey made the case that girls' undoubted scholastic achievements, paradoxically, marked them out as intellectually inferior to boys. Girls' achievement was a product of their passivity. Boys were more difficult to govern, but this indicated that they were more able to think for themselves. They were more original and individual. Hall disparaged girls' intellectual achievements by describing them as a sort of precocity or early ripening. He saw adolescence as a stage at which girls' maturation is more or less complete. While girls remained the sorts of generalists who did well in high school, knowing a little about a lot of things, boys continued to progress. Even a (moderate) supporter of coeducation like Warrington who asserted that 'the key to a successful policy is to boldly grasp the not very formidable nettle, to ignore difference, and to treat boys and girls in the same fashion,' subscribed to the view that, 'it is generally recognised that a girl is a more willing worker than a boy, that she must often be restrained from doing too much, while he must often be driven to do more While the girl plods, however, the boy has his moments of inspiration.'⁵⁶

Warrington argued that the management of gender-based learning differences (rather than the moral question) was the real challenge in mixed classrooms. Others viewed the complementary natures of the sexes as more or less the axis upon which coeducation turned. In the coeducational classroom, it was argued, qualities of each sex might rub off

⁵⁶ Hall, 'Adolescent girls', pp. 109, 115.

on the other to mutual benefit. Undesirable extremes of masculinity or femininity would be moderated by routine contact. The English headmistress Sara Burstall commented favourably on American coeducation (although she was cautious about advocating it for England): 'The boys' greater initiative and independence add to the intellectual vigour of the class, while the steady industry and greater conscientiousness of girls automatically help to keep up the standard.'⁵⁷ According to a Massachusetts headmistress, the girls in her classes could be relied upon to be 'more punctual and get their lessons better,' while boys were needed 'to bring the outside life into the school; to know what is going on in the world.'⁵⁸ In coeducational schools, according to William Harris, both boys and girls were able to make progress in areas that were not traditional areas of strength, for example the girls in mathematics, the boys in literature.⁵⁹

The civilised or feminised high school

Supporters of coeducation frequently claimed that a coeducational school was a civilised school, in particular that the behaviour problems of boys were moderated by the presence of girls. The boys were aware that the girls were watching them, it was argued, and otherwise 'barbaric' groups of boys were 'humanised' or 'civilized' by the collective influence of girls.⁶⁰ The teacher of the coeducational classroom had a more peaceful life – at least than the teacher of boys – with less need for extrinsic discipline or technologies of correction such as the cane. To a lesser extent the girls were also seen to improve their standards. Girls stood to lose their 'frivolous and silly bearing,' their 'prurient sentimentality.'⁶¹ Their characters would be strengthened if exposed to the freer and more vigorous boy-world in which they would be expected to live up to higher ideals of 'courage and honor and defence of a cause.'⁶² Opponents of coeducation feared that girls would be roughened by their contact with boys, rather than strengthened.⁶³ Only a small

⁵⁷ Burstall, *Impressions of American education*, p. 26.

⁵⁸ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, p. 1226.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1242n.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1263.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1242n.

⁶² Woods, 'Dangers and difficulties', pp. 138-40.

⁶³ For example, Hawtrey, *Co-education of the sexes*.

number of coeducation opponents argued that girls might lose confidence under the gaze of boys.⁶⁴

That coeducation might compromise masculinity was argued in different ways in England and the United States. Contributors to Woods' *Co-education* were aware that they were challenging deeply held beliefs by the English upper and middle classes that boys should be schooled by men in boys' schools. Parents of the upper social strata to which Woods mostly addressed her arguments tended to remove their boys from coeducational schools around the age of thirteen or fourteen, which meant that in some schools she had visited all or most of the older students were girls. Under such unbalanced conditions, she argued, the younger boys lacked leadership opportunities and were 'apt to be made too much of and spoiled.'⁶⁵ Further, older boys needed the direction of male teachers and should not be too much left to the influence of women.⁶⁶ Mansford reassured his readers about sports:

It is found that the presence of girls ... has no effect upon the boys' powers of playing cricket and football – this may appear an unnecessary remark to the experienced co-educational teacher, but one does occasionally meet those who fear that the co-educational system makes boys effeminate.⁶⁷

Both Mansford and Warrington presided over schools in which there was a greater number of boys than girls. This was not viewed as a problem, but a shortage of male teachers was. Mansford argued that the ratio of male to female teachers ought to reflect the ratio of male to female students, putting forward two reasons for what he considered to be a gender imbalance on the staff of coeducational schools.⁶⁸ Firstly, experienced male teachers were hesitant to accept employment in other than boys' schools as it might hinder career advancement. Mixed schools were considered by heads or governors of boys' schools either as lesser, or the skills of dealing with boys were considered sufficiently categorically different from those of teaching girls, or mixed classes, as not to

⁶⁴ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, pp. 1260-1261, Maude Royden, 'Doubts and difficulties' in Woods, *Advance in co-education*, pp. 1-7.

⁶⁵ Woods, 'Dangers and difficulties,' p. 141.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

⁶⁷ Mansford, 'The personal element in joint schools', p. 94.

be easily transferable. Secondly, as schools were frequently mixed for economic reasons there was a 'temptation' to employ women teachers because they were paid lower wages.⁶⁹ Mansford also remarked on a related imbalance of skill between male and female teachers:

To enter the classroom of a trained mistress, and to see her methods, and then to follow this by a visit to the newly appointed, heaven-born, untrained assistant-master is an experiment only possible in a co-educational school, and perhaps, not one calculated to improve the harassed headmaster's state of mind.⁷⁰

As part of the solution to these problems he advocated equal pay, and that women should be given opportunities to be appointed to headships of mixed schools.⁷¹

The twentieth century saw the development of new fears about the masculinity of boys in United States high schools. There were substantially more girls than boys in United States secondary schools in the early twentieth century and it was claimed, most famously by Stanley Hall, that the high school was a feminised environment in which the false docility of adolescent boys was sapping the manhood of America.⁷² Hall used words like 'eviration' (emasculation) and 'demoralization' to describe the effects on male students of the 'feminization' of the high school. He argued that it was wrong and even dangerous to civilise boys prematurely; that a period of wildness or roughness was a necessary part of adolescent development. The reasons for the relative difference between boys and girls enrolments are beyond the scope of this chapter – though they included the gendered nature of the youth labour market – but Hall and other writers either argued or implied that coeducational high schools, and the girls and women teachers who dominated them, were at fault in a number of ways. Boys, it was argued, felt overwhelmed both by the numbers of girls and were demoralised by girls' intellectual precocity. The curriculum was insufficiently geared to the practical needs of boys. The success of girls was evidence that there was something wrong with the subject matter

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

⁷² see Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, pp. 146-164.

taught in schools. Boys needed firm handling, girls gentle; conflicting disciplinary requirements which could not be fairly met in the common classroom. Hall was also alarmed by the idea of boys mixing with menstruating girls. Girls needed special care at the time of the 'critical years' of the 'normalization' of menstruation, 'but in mixed classes every form of such concession is baffling and demoralizing to boys.'⁷³

Fears about the feminisation of the United States high school incorporated fears about the feminisation of the teaching staff, theorised in the same florid terms by Hall as other aspects of his gender analysis. Hall implied that the feminisation of the United States secondary teaching staff was a baneful effect of coeducation itself, although others such as Woods, for England, and M. Carey Thomas for the United States, attributed the imbalance to wider social or labour market forces.⁷⁴ Hall expressed the strongest concerns about the effects of feminisation on male teachers. These men, he argued, were in danger of becoming ladies' men: 'the time is at hand when popularity with [the female sex] will be as necessary in a successful teacher as it is in the pulpit.'⁷⁵ Again the image invoked was one of loss of manhood:

The progressive feminization of the high school works its subtle demoralization on the male teachers who remain It is hard, too, for male principals of schools with only female teachers not to suffer some deterioration in the moral tone of their virility and to lose in the power to cope successfully with men.⁷⁶

In England coeducation was opposed by women teachers denied the career paths and headships they had access to in girls' schools. As Woods put it, 'A fear has been expressed that the class of women who have proved a great power in the lives of girls would die out.'⁷⁷ In 1905 the English Conference of the Association of Headmistresses overwhelmingly voted against coeducation, in response to a paper presented by Sophie Bryant in which she contended both that headships of coeducational schools would be given to men, and that girls would suffer in confidence in mixed schools under

⁷³ Hall, 'Adolescent girls', p. 624.

⁷⁴ Woods, 'Dangers and difficulties,' pp. 130-133.

⁷⁵ Hall, 'Adolescent girls', p. 623.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Woods, 'Dangers and difficulties,' p. 132.

contemporary social conditions.⁷⁸ Contributors to *Co-education*, such as Warrington, suggested that ambitious women teachers bide their time:

In time ... the association of man and woman on the staffs of joint schools may diminish the feeling of superiority which many men entertain, and so bring both sexes more nearly on an equality as regards their chances of headships.⁷⁹

In the meantime he offered personal advice to facilitate smooth working relationships among men and women teachers, especially the male head and the senior woman in charge of girls, along the lines of the mutual demonstration of respect and so on. He also asserted that in his own school women were routinely given senior classes to teach – ‘No difference is made merely on the score of sex. The teachers are mostly specialists and the women take the higher work in the natural order of things’ – although that this needed to be spelt out suggests that this was another troubled issue for women in mixed schools.⁸⁰

Sexual morality and reproductive health

The public supporters of coeducation during this period were mostly school teachers or administrators. Their main emphasis was on the conduct and tone of the classroom – that coeducation worked well in day to day school management – though they also projected that the well-supervised mixing of girls with boys in the classroom would result in healthier long-term relations, notably in the future families that the boys and girls whom they taught would create together. Of his own experience of mixed schools Harris observed, ‘I had noticed that the atmosphere of “mixed” schools was desexualized, where that of separate schools seemed to have a tendency to develop sexual tension.’⁸¹ He added,

That the sexual tension be development as late as possible, and that all early love affairs be avoided, is the desideratum, and experience has shown that association

⁷⁸ Dyhouse, ‘Feminism and the debate over co-education’ pp. 53-54; Albisetti, ‘Un-learned lessons’.

⁷⁹ Warrington, ‘An experiment in co-education’, p. 120.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, p. 1241.

of the sexes on the plane of intellectual contest is the safest course to secure this end.⁸²

These were near universal contentions in writing on coeducation. Words like ‘wholesome,’ ‘natural’ and ‘healthy’ were used to describe the atmosphere or tone of mixed classrooms and of the gender relations they fostered. Comforting images of family were invoked, either that of brothers and sisters learning together or of boys and girls eventually forming healthy, rational marriage partnerships, free of the superficial glamour of ‘mere external charms’ which comes from incomplete knowledge of the other sex:⁸³

If it is right for brothers and sisters to live in the same house and eat at the same table, then it is right that they should attend school together If wedlock is right and proper, then coeducation is right and proper. If men and women are to marry, they should know each other summer and winter before marriage, and the more they know of each other the less likely will divorces result.⁸⁴

Moreover teachers and school administrators contended that it was better for boys and girls to mix in the school where there was professional guidance and surveillance rather than ‘other unavoidable associations on the street and on social occasions.’⁸⁵

Whatever tendency toward indecency might manifest itself was far more easily checked in “mixed” schools by reason of the cross fire of watchfulness which made intrigue more difficult to keep secret. The brothers and sisters and other relatives and intimate acquaintances of the pupil attended the same school, and ... parents could not fail to have a more faithful account of the behaviour of their children than when isolated in different schools. Brothers and sisters mutually protect each other from shame. Besides this ... the chief association of the sexes ... takes place under the eye of the teacher.⁸⁶

A more extreme view was that espoused by the Englishman Rev Cecil Grant, one of the leading contributors to Woods’ *Co-education*, whose 1913 book was an explanation of coeducation and the heterosexual order.⁸⁷ Grant insisted that the presence of girls – who

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 1242n.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 1241.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1253.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1259.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1241.

⁸⁷ Grant, ‘Idleness and co-education’; Grant and Hodgson, *The case for co-education*.

were innately purer, gentler and more spiritual than boys – would solve what he saw as an urgent problem of the upper class boys' boarding schools – the twin evils of homosexuality and masturbation.

Coeducation's opponents included teachers but also other kinds of health experts who argued in more theoretical or technical terms about adolescent health and development. These were mainly medical doctors and importantly included the pioneering psychologist, Hall, who anchored his ideas in medicine and other developing fields of professional theoretical expertise such as psychology, rather than in the experience of school people. By the early twentieth century older concerns about the possibilities of immediate sexual danger in mixed schools – which teachers were able to argue against from their own experience – had been overlaid by fears about girls' reproductive health, the perils of menarche and the regularisation of menstruation in adolescent girls, about which classroom teachers could not claim expertise. Girls' health and the future of the race were considerations expressed in different ways by the opponents and supporters of coeducation. Supporters emphasised preparation for good gender relations through common sympathies and experiences, opponents argued for the preservation of bodies and guarding of differences. Supporters emphasised the companionship of marriage, opponents its fertility.

Many writers opposed to coeducation on health and development grounds also tended to object to the higher education of girls. This was formulated in a specific way as over-education in inappropriately masculine forms of knowledge. There were two related strands to the argument: one, that female fertility might be compromised by excessive brainwork during menstruation and two, that girls' femininity might be jeopardised by attempts to mimic male ways of thinking. Girls were at risk of being both physically and intellectually de-sexed. Coeducation opponents frequently expressed themselves in alarmist language. The English writer Hawtreys, who published a tract against coeducation in 1896, warned of the proliferation of the 'type of man-woman,' a 'species [which] flourishes' in America.⁸⁸ Over-educated women were 'stunted' and

⁸⁸ Hawtreys, *Co-education of the sexes*, p. 36.

‘monstrosities.’⁸⁹ Hawtreys, as did Hall, reiterated the belief that intellectual effort could affect the supply of blood for menstruation. This was a vivid and frightening image which had persisted from the 1870s:

Either the whole economy is exhausted by the strain that is put upon the brain, and a girl in course of time becomes utterly shattered and anaemic; or the blood is utilized too exclusively to feed the brain, and other organs, being deprived of their due nourishment, act imperfectly, or may even become stunted in their functions and growth.⁹⁰

Hall was also concerned about these kinds of issues – the blurring of gender boundaries and the danger of infertility – though he was more modern than Hawtreys. A pioneer of the early twentieth century development of theories of adolescence, he saw this life stage as the most crucial in the nurture of heterosexuality, both in terms of procreation, and of the development of the necessarily complementary natures of men and women. Hall argued that girls and boys needed to be separated at adolescence so that their different and opposing natures could develop unfettered, and so that this difference would later fuel the ‘sexual tension’ which would be the impetus for marriage.⁹¹ One of the reasons Hall wanted to separate girls and boys during adolescence was so that their over-familiarity during this crucial period of development would not have the effect of dulling the sexual urge, hypothesising that the spread of coeducational high schooling had already affected marriage rates in the United States. He disapproved of the new ideal of the companionate marriage. Nature had designed men and women, he argued, to be sexual partners, not colleagues.

Hall passionately theorised girls and boys as innately and necessarily different, in body and in mind. Those differences could be modified by social intervention – as demonstrated by girls’ academic prowess in high schools – but this was a dangerous and unnatural project. Hall wrote about women’s bodies with a tone of horrified awe, or reverent fear. On menstruation he claimed:

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

We venture to raise the question, whether for a girl in her early teens, when her health for her whole life depends upon normalizing the lunar month, there is not something unhygienic, unnatural, not to say a little monstrous, in school associations with boys when she must suppress and conceal her feelings and instinctive promptings at those times which suggest withdrawing, to let nature do its beautiful work of inflorescence.⁹²

Hall saw much that was unnatural in the intellectual woman, especially the woman who did not marry, whom he termed the 'bachelor woman,' a designation which accrued negative connotations through his text. He saw excessive academic schooling for girls as emphasising the mind at the expense of the body, expressing himself in very strong terms. For example: 'a purely intellectual man is no doubt biologically a deformity, but a purely intellectual woman is far more so.'⁹³ Hall's images of the over-educated woman were terrible. Women who refused to procreate were 'the very apotheosis of selfishness from the standpoint of biological ethics.'⁹⁴ Further, they were ultimately doomed creatures. They might seem attractive as younger women but as they aged they would deteriorate quickly and inevitably, subject to 'invalidism,' 'sourness' and 'stagnation of the soul.'⁹⁵

These women are often in every way magnificent, only they are not mothers, and sometimes have very little wifehood in them Some, though by no means all, of them are functionally castrated; some actively deplore the necessity of child-bearing, and perhaps are parturition phobiacs, and abhor the limitations of married life; they are incensed whenever attention is called to the functions peculiar to their sex and the careful consideration of the monthly rest are thought "not fit for cultivated woman."⁹⁶

Women who abused their bodies and minds through programs of prolonged or overly ambitious study might either become infertile or otherwise be inadequate mothers, physically and mentally, passing on to their families, and the American population, 'nervous taint or disease.'⁹⁷ In eugenic terms they stood to do harm, not only to their own

⁹¹ Hall, 'Adolescent girls', p. 621.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 618.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 640.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 633.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 630.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 633-634.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 571.

selves, but to 'the race.' That it was the cleverest women who were so failing the race was disastrous. In evolutionary terms it was an urgent problem that it was the very fittest women who were becoming procreative failures or 'defective' mothers.

Supporters of coeducation took these claims seriously. The United States Commissioner's report on coeducation included a section on the 'physiological and hygienic aspects' of coeducation which included an excerpt from the influential 1873 polemic *Sex in Education* by the pioneer of menstrual panic, Edward H. Clarke along with a number of rejoinders.⁹⁸ These included a study of the health of female college graduates originally published by the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor and extracts from an 1890 survey of Boston physicians in which the majority had found in favour of mixed schooling.⁹⁹ Paul Monroe's 1911 *Cyclopedia of education* had entries under the headings both of 'Coeducation' and 'Coeducation, hygiene of.'¹⁰⁰ It was agreed that in well-regulated mixed schools special attention was paid to the health of developing girls, with carefully structured physical education programs, medical inspections and so on.

Conclusion

Coeducation is a system of school organisation which has both progressive and pragmatic genealogies. In the early decades of the twentieth century its benefits were promoted by progressive educators of various kinds in terms of individual self-development and the betterment of gender relations. At the same time most coeducational or 'mixed' schools were founded by administrators of public schooling systems for pragmatic fiscal reasons to facilitate the development of hierarchical school systems based on grouping by age and merit. This chapter examined the views of advocates and opponents of coeducation in England and the United States of America in the early twentieth century. The main focus was on texts compiled or written by three key participants in the coeducation debates of

⁹⁸ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, pp. 1275-1283; See Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, pp. 146-150; For a discussion of menstrual panic in late Victorian England see Burstyn, *Victorian Education*, pp. 84-98.

⁹⁹ *Report of the U.S. Commissioner*, pp. 1278-1283.

that time: the progressive English educationalist, Alice Woods, the United States Commissioner of Education, William T. Harris, and the pioneering child, psychologist G. Stanley Hall. The purpose of the chapter has been to examine what was meant and understood by the term, 'coeducation', during the period in which the question of the foundation of mixed high schools in New South Wales was being considered and settled. The texts discussed are either those known to have been consulted or likely to have been read by New South Wales educationalists.

The chapter argued that debates about coeducation exposed broader contemporary beliefs about gender relations. Early twentieth century theorists and practitioners of coeducation put forward arguments about the nature of gender, disputing the balance of fixed and educable elements in 'femininity' and 'masculinity' as well as what constitutes good gender relations. They argued about how gender operated in the present, how it was possible to alter these relations, and whether this was desirable. Supporters and opponents of coeducation debated a substantially common set of topics. These included issues of morality and health and the proper role of the school in preparing students for their future social and economic lives. The debates went well beyond the here and now of classroom practice into the large realm of the future gender order of society. Both supporters and opponents tended to agree that boys and girls were capable of studying a common curriculum, at approximately the same standard. Frequently they also agreed that boys and girls were different kinds of people. The main issue on which they disagreed was that of the implications for practice of these differences and similarities. Supporters of coeducation argued that gender differences made for a more balanced classroom, opponents that gender boundaries might be dangerously eroded by coeducation.

An important feature of the debates was the question of expertise. The bulk of the contributors to Harris's reports and Woods' essay collections were either school teachers or administrators, who derived their authority from practical experience or the common sense observation of their own workplaces. The psychologist Hall, however, supported his opposition to coeducation with specialist psychological and physiological knowledge.

¹⁰⁰ Leo Burgerstein, 'Coeducation, hygiene of' in Monroe, pp. 46-47

He argued that the problems with coeducation lay deep within the minds and bodies of young women and men and thus were not readily visible to those who lacked his particular specialist credentials.

Coeducation was most controversial for specific kinds of students. These were boys and girls over the age of about thirteen, yet below the age of adulthood. This was a life stage which Hall would make such a strong contribution to categorising as 'adolescence', although both the term and the concept were new at this time. They were also students who were enrolled in some version of post-primary or secondary schooling. Again these were concepts which would alter in meaning over the following decades, and meant somewhat different things in England and the United States. For the period of this chapter they denoted minority groups of students, distinguished by setting-specific combinations of 'intelligence' and social class. This thesis argues that it is important to understand coeducation in the context of national or local settings. The English literature of coeducation was substantially focused on elite non-government schools, the United States writing on the more widespread public high school.

Chapter 3

Coeducation and the construction of the meritocratic educational ladder in New South Wales, 1880-1913

The year has been exceedingly rich in the fulfilment of educational promise. It is somewhat trite to remark that the educational road should lead direct from the Kindergarten to the University, but as far as New South Wales is concerned, this condition, since the passing of the "University Amendment Act of 1912," is actually realised. It is possible for every boy or girl in this State who possesses the requisite ability and determination to pass from the public schools to any profession, whose doors can be entered only through the University, whatever the social or financial status of the parent.¹

In practical terms coeducation was a significant feature of the expansion of secondary schooling in New South Wales in 1911-12, and the establishment of a meritocratic ladder of educational opportunity. The willingness of the Education Department to establish mixed high schools in sparsely populated areas opened the way for the successful expansion of a public high school network into regional and rural areas, a movement which had been frustrated in the 1880s. However there was little public debate about coeducation in late nineteenth or early twentieth-century New South Wales, which lacked either the private experimental schools of the English upper-classes or the wide-spread locally-financed high schools of North America of which coeducation was seen to be characteristic. New South Wales lacks the sorts of helpful early twentieth century texts, such as those discussed in the previous chapter, which spelled out the main issues associated with coeducation in England and the United States. Yet it is possible to assemble a picture of the ideas and beliefs about gender and high schools which informed the Department of Public Instruction's policy first to proscribe (on idealistic grounds) and then tolerate (on pragmatic grounds) its adoption in high schools at Parramatta and in other regional towns. This chapter examines this policy transition by reading representative or indicative discussions from three key moments in New South Wales public education history. These are: the New South Wales parliamentary debates over the

¹ New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Report of the Minister of Public Instruction for the year 1912*, Government printer, Sydney, 1913, p.1.

clauses to establish high schools in the Public Instruction Bill of 1880, calls for educational reform at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the settlement of 1911-12. In only one of these discussions was coeducation argued out directly – as part of the intense examinations of 1901-5. For the most part New South Wales Education Department attitudes to and policies about coeducation – and gender – need to be inferred by reading more general kinds of discussions about the role of the state in higher education and about the aims and purposes of secondary schooling.

Gender in the 1880 New South Wales Public Instruction Act

The first attempt to construct a meritocratic educational ladder in New South Wales – an articulated public system of elementary, secondary and tertiary education – was through the 1880 Public Instruction Act. Under this Act, and in the debates that preceded its passing, the state high school was conceived of as a strictly single-sex institution. The 1880 New South Wales Public Instruction Act provided for the foundation of separate high schools for boys and for girls. Although eight schools had been established by the end of 1884, only five remained open by 1888, and only four survived into the twentieth century, including the Sydney Girls and Boys High Schools. All the schools were single-sex by enrolment, despite some early sharing of premises and staff. There has been little written about the non-surviving high schools and the standard interpretation remains essentially that of E. W. Dunlop: that the schools closed in the country towns of Bathurst and Goulburn because of an insufficiently large middle class to provide the pupils, of competition from existing state and non-state providers of higher schooling, as well as the government's unwillingness to take advantage of the economies of scale which coeducation would have allowed.² The competitor institutions comprised on one hand the superior public schools – elementary schools which also provided higher classes – which offered access to the same examination preparation courses as the high school for lower fees, and on the other, denominational and private schools which did what they could to preserve their traditional middle class markets. Dunlop was writing in the 1960s, when

² E. W. Dunlop, 'The public high schools of New South Wales, 1883-1912,' *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 51, no. 1, 1965, pp. 60-86.

coeducation had become associated with the expansion of state secondary schooling under the 1961 Education Act, and he argued that it would have made economic sense for the late nineteenth century Department of Public Instruction to establish mixed-sex schools in the country, instead of separating the tiny numbers of boys and girls who enrolled in the Goulburn and Bathurst schools.³ Dunlop applauded the pragmatism of the Department's establishment of mixed institutions under the 1911-12 reforms.

The possibility of coeducation in New South Wales high schools does not seem to have been seriously entertained in the course of the foundations and closures of the 1880s and 1890s, and it is useful to speculate about the reasons for this, as part of exploring the history of the 1911-12 settlement. The Legislative Assembly debates over the high school clauses of the 1880 Public Instruction Bill offer useful insights into the discursive context of these decisions. By the 1880s mixed high schools were well-entrenched in the United States and Canada, countries to which New South Wales might have looked for high school models, yet a question on the topic during the Legislative Assembly debates over the 1880 Public Instruction Bill was dismissed out of hand by the Bill's architect, Henry Parkes. After the clause to establish boys' high schools had been passed, one of the participants in the debate, Arthur Onslow, the Member for Camden, asked whether there were plans for the new high schools to be coeducational, arguing that this would make the secondary schooling of girls less expensive. Onslow cited the American experience, arguing along the already conventional lines that coeducation had been proven to work well, the girls tending to 'soften' the boys; the boys to 'strengthen' the girls. Parkes did not enter into this discussion, replying curtly, 'We do not propose to teach courtship in these schools.'⁴

Obstacles to the mixed-sex classroom certainly encompassed fears about respectability as is suggested in Parkes' reply to Onslow, but it was also an indication of the reach of the new high schools in terms of social class, a question of respectability that referred to more than flirting. The schools were to be specifically set apart and differentiated from

³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁴ New South Wales Parliamentary debates, First series, session 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1191.

the existing and proposed elementary schools – many of which were or would be co-instructional – and this included establishment by separate clauses under the Bill, entry by competitive examination, payment of a sizeable fee and segregation by sex: not just in different classrooms, but different institutions. Where the North American coeducational high school had grown out of the local mixed elementary school, a process described by Gidney and Millar for Ontario, Tyack and Hansot for the United States,⁵ the New South Wales educational ladder was to be centrally planned and administered from the start, and this included the fiscal confidence to mandate single-sex schooling.

The clauses to establish high schools for boys and girls were debated and passed separately, first the boys' clause and then the girls. The debates on the clause to establish high schools for boys turned on the question of social class: whether the state had any business either footing the bill for the wealthy to school their sons, or on the other hand, disrupting the social order by educating the worker above his station, or 'tempt(ing) people away from their real interests.'⁶ The supporters of the clause expressed a vision of the high school as an institution for social cohesion, open to all and accommodating all classes, which included the extension of the benefits of the city to the country regions. Parkes represented the high schools as institutions for social mobility, arguing that New South Wales should look to Scotland and 'America' where those of humble origins had been able to rise through education to high positions in literature, science and politics:

Put the schools within their reach, and we shall see the poor families of the country, from one end of it to the other, sending their boys and girls to the schools at any sacrifice, in order to fit them to run a virtuous and honorable way through life.⁷

The debates over the high school clauses reveal ways in which the idea of secondary education as a specific stage of schooling was not yet agreed upon in New South Wales. Competing ideas of the high school appear in the debates. Use of terms 'grammar,' 'high

⁵ R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Inventing secondary education: the rise of the high school in nineteenth-century, Ontario* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1990; David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning together: a history of coeducation in American schools*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990.

⁶ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1122.

school', 'intermediate' (in the sense of a stage between primary and university) all had different shades of meaning in the debates. Parkes' 'high school' looked towards the assembling a ladder of opportunity as existed in Scotland and North America. A competing idea was that a high school was a middle class alternative to the primary school, more of a parallel institution than a step on the ladder. This view underpinned two distinct threads of class-based opposition to the expenditure of public money on high schools. One was the argument referred to above that the 'poor' or 'working man' had no business with higher education, which would only alienate them from their proper kinds of labour. From a quite different perspective was the criticism that the creation of publicly-funded high schools would downgrade and devalue the elementary school and thus move higher education further out of reach of the 'working man.' The state would, the argument ran, be using public money to subsidise the children of the wealthy: 'The rich would have an advantage of which the poor could not avail themselves, although the poor paid the larger share of taxation.'⁸

Resistance to the idea that the state had any, or much, business with the funding of and interference in higher schooling for either boys or girls persisted well into the first half of the twentieth century.⁹ There were common themes in the debates about boys' and girls' high schools. In both cases the arguments ran that the poor were being called upon to subsidise schools for the wealthy. That both boys and girls both were in danger of being educated away from manual labour applied similarly to working class boys or girls, in their different spheres. According to Samuel Charles, Member for Kiama, 'Young women who were educated were apt to acquire a disinclination for house-work and the duties of very-day life. Schools to teach cooking, sewing and other necessary arts were far more needed.'¹⁰ In some ways the debates over the clause about high school for boys also embraced girls. Rising by talent was seen as a family as much as an individual project, in the same way that universal suffrage literally meant men only at this stage but was assumed to incorporate the interests of women, as members of male-headed families.

⁷ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1190.

⁸ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1125.

⁹ See for example Terri Seddon, 'Social justice in hard times: from "equality of opportunity" to "fairness and efficiency,"' *Discourse*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1990, pp. 21-42.

However there were important differences. In the debate over the clause to establish high schools for girls the central issue in contention was whether exposure to higher education would or would not interfere with women's duties of mothering and housework, or 'disturb the relations between the sexes.'¹¹ Supporters of the clause argued that schooling would not turn girls away from their home duties: 'Would a lady, through being able to speak French, to sketch a landscape, or to play a popular song, be less capable of making a pudding or darning a stocking?'¹² In fact the high school would even enhance – indirectly – their domestic skills: 'The higher we educated our women the better would our children be trained and the happier our homes.'¹³ The power of the high school in this argument, was a sort of generalised civilising, refining one. None of the supporters of the clause argued that girls should actually be taught housewifery in the high school.

Supporters of the establishment of state high schools for girls also argued that girls might make practical use of the training they received at school should they fall on hard times, especially in the case of the loss of male protection. According to William Davies, Member for Argyle,:

It was said that by educating women beyond a certain point we made them aspire to be bread-winners. But were not a large proportion of our females bread-winners already? They helped their husbands in various trades, and often, when the husband died, the wife had to carry on the business, and in so doing laboured under a great disadvantage on account of her scanty education.¹⁴

Onslow contended that:

Girls had the same claims upon our consideration that boys had – perhaps, considering their helplessness, they had stronger claims. Whenever a woman was left destitute she could only have recourse to teaching, while a man had many employments open to him.¹⁵

¹⁰ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1185.

¹¹ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1185.

¹² NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1191.

¹³ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1193.

¹⁴ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1192.

¹⁵ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1185.

Despite the way that sex-segregated schooling was assumed in the use of separate clauses to establish high schools for boys and girls, the debates do not suggest that higher education was understood to be categorically different in content in the boys and girls schools. In the final bill the clauses were brief and identical: ‘high schools for boys may be established,’ ‘High schools for girls may be established.’ In earlier drafts they had been more prescriptive, with the detail of the curriculum differing for boys and girls by offering masculine and feminine versions of the modern English middle class curriculum. The boys’ curriculum comprised ancient and modern languages, history, literature, mathematics and the physical sciences. The girls were to study modern languages, history, music and the elements of mathematics and the physical sciences.¹⁶ It was clear even at this stage that the schools for girls were to be grounded in the academic curriculum of the schools established under first wave feminism in England, that they were neither ladies’ academies nor domestic science schools. The high schools were to provide a useful rather than ornamental curriculum, but not a practical one in the sense of manual or domestic training.

There was an awareness of first wave feminism running through the debate, the idea that higher education might have something to do with ‘the women’s-right doctrine.’¹⁷ Michael Fitzpatrick, Member for Yass Plains, feared a slippery slope from women’s education to the breakdown of the family.¹⁸ David Buchanan, Member for Mudgee, on the other hand, declared, ‘Among all nations there was a desire to strike down the disabilities which had hitherto pressed too heavily upon woman, and which were felt to be a scandal and a shame by all thoughtful men.’¹⁹ Participants in the debate named representatives of first wave English feminism such as John Stuart Mill and George Eliot and mentioned, approvingly or disapprovingly, some of the movement’s key aims and achievements: girls’ public examination successes, female doctors, the vote – although

¹⁶ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, pp. 1183, 1184.

¹⁷ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1185.

¹⁸ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1185-6.

¹⁹ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1186.

the first girls to enter the new high schools would be well into adulthood before they achieved full citizenship.²⁰

The provision of higher education for women was also argued to be a measure of Western civilisation. In his question about coeducation mentioned earlier, Onslow had drawn a distinction between the mixing of sexes and the mixing of races. American schools, he said, were mixed by sex but not 'colour.'²¹ The discussion of the education of women reveals the sorts of anxieties about the precariousness of Australian whiteness which had been and would be expressed, for example, in immigration restriction legislation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Where boys had been discussed in terms of the rights and duties of citizenship, the bodies and minds of women were crucial to the preservation of civilisation in the Antipodes in a number of ways. In the Public Instruction Bill debate the provision of education for its women was agreed among the supporters of the clause to be a sign of the superiority of the men of a western civilisation. This can be read in a string set of responses to Fitzpatrick's claim that: 'I am very much afraid that the tendency of the age ... is to disturb the relations between the sexes which have hitherto ... happily existed among the Christian nations of Western Europe.'²² Several members responded: 'Were women to be tabooed, to be kept away from all enlightenment?'²³ 'Amongst the aboriginals the most menial positions were assigned to women. Were we to adopt that policy with our females in regard to education?'²⁴ Denying higher education to girls would be 'a barbarous oriental idea.'²⁵ However the idea of going so far as to collect the sexes in the same classrooms, as in the United States, was also foreign. A number of members quoted Hepworth Dixon, the English observer of American life who published in the 1860s and 1870s.²⁶ American gender practices, including coeducation, were represented as strange and foreign. The speakers identified themselves with the Old World observer, Hepworth Dixon, rather than the people of the New World.

²⁰ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1189.

²¹ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1191.

²² NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1185.

²³ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1186.

²⁴ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1187.

²⁵ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1189.

Early twentieth century calls for schooling reform in New South Wales

In New South Wales state schools it was the policy of the Department of Public Instruction to separate girls from boys where possible. This meant that city schools were either single-sex by enrolment, or were divided into girls' and boys' departments. Country and regional schools were mixed for economic reasons, though an understanding of exactly what this meant in practice, the exact terms and extent of mixing and segregation within classrooms, including the variations possible, requires further investigation. As in England and the United States, mixing was more contentious for older school pupils. Infants departments were routinely mixed, as was the University, where women had been admitted to full membership in 1881.²⁷ Coeducation was primarily a matter of economics and administration. In a state with a large, sparsely-populated interior it was too expensive to provide separate school amenities for boys and girls. As an issue of educational theory or philosophy it was of only intermittent or marginal interest to early twentieth century educationalists in New South Wales, as measured by the volume and intensity of public debate. This is probably because New South Wales lacked the precipitating factors for the sorts of detailed writing that was produced in England and the United States. There were neither the elite experimental schools which produced outspoken English advocates such as Alice Woods and J. H. Badley, nor the widespread United States practice of coeducational high schooling which provided the material base for the reporting collected by the United States Bureau of Education. Nevertheless it is likely that many New South Wales teachers and parents held strong personal views on the subject, based on their own experiences and observations, and there are indications of how these might run in the material discussed in this section, which examines a small public debate which occurred during the first few years of the twentieth century.

²⁶ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, pp. 1185, 1188-9, 1191.

²⁷ The details of the dimensions of, or limits to, the coeducational practices within these institutions is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The issue of coeducation was raised in the broader education debates of the reform movement of the first decade of the twentieth century in New South Wales, initially in Professor Francis Anderson's 1901 attack on the current system.²⁸ It is useful to examine the terms of the ensuing discussion, limited as it was, to provide an understanding of the sorts of interpretations of coeducation which were extant in the community at the time of the foundation of the first mixed state high schools. At the same time it is important to keep in mind that coeducation was not the only or most important issue even for its advocates – Francis and Maybanke Anderson and J. W. Turner. It was an issue that tended to be either subsumed by other matters, or in Turner's case, strategically put to one side in favour of other issues.

The year that Alice Woods was travelling around England gathering information for *Co-education*, the essay collection discussed in the previous chapter, Francis Anderson, Professor of Logic and Mental Philosophy at the University of Sydney delivered an influential address to the Annual Conference of the Public School Teachers' Association of New South Wales. He was strongly critical of the New South Wales state education system and his speech was one of the opening volleys in a long campaign which resulted in the reform of the primary school syllabus, the transfer of teacher-training from the pupil-teacher system to a post-secondary college, and the reorganisation and expansion of secondary schooling.²⁹ However the address opened with a statement about coeducation in which Anderson argued that coeducation as a system of school organisation was superior to the sex-segregation which was the Education Department's preference and that sex-segregation was in fact morally and socially harmful. In common with many twentieth century advocates of coeducation he saw its value in the nurture of 'healthy' relations between women and men:

²⁸ Francis Anderson, *The public school system of New South Wales*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1901.

²⁹ See for example, S. H. Smith and G. T. Spaul, *History of education in New South Wales, 1788-1925*, George Philip and Son, Sydney, 1925; A. R. Crane and W. G. Walker, *Peter Board: his contribution to the development of education in New South Wales*, ACER, Melbourne, 1957; Jan Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: sex, suffrage and social reform*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1993, pp. 152-7; Alan Barcan, *Two centuries of education in New South Wales*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1988, p. 176.

It seems to me that a false step was made when New South Wales departed, in the case of many of the larger schools, from the honest and healthy custom of educating boys and girls together. The separation of the sexes in education may lead to greater and more permanent evils than any which are likely to be the chance outcome of a system of co-education. In the latter case the evils are accidental, or sporadic, and are counteracted, if not prevented, by the stimulating influence of healthy human companionship. In the former, the evils, if they exist, probably follow from the system, may tend to become permanent, and may gradually lead to a lowering of the moral tone of the community. In this respect Victoria and South Australia have chosen the better way. There is nothing in the special conditions of New South Wales to justify her departure from a sound principle.³⁰

The medium term outcome of the 1901 Teachers' Conference was the appointment by the Public Instruction Minister, John Perry, of two Commissioners to inquire into education abroad. After an extensive international study tour the Commissioners G. H. Knibbs and J. W. Turner, produced the lengthy *Interim Report of the Commissioners on Certain Parts of Primary Education*. This document, together with reports on secondary and technical education, summarised just about every educational issue current in the first decade of the twentieth century. The discussion and re-examination of educational goals and systems precipitated by the 1901 meeting forced otherwise embedded or routine educational practices and beliefs into the open. A number of otherwise taken for granted issues, including coeducation, became briefly visible as they were argued through in public reports and meetings. Although the question of coeducation raised by Francis Anderson was quickly overwhelmed by others (such as the reform of teacher-training) it was duly investigated by Knibbs and Turner. A summary of their findings, authored by J. W. Turner, appearing in a section entitled, 'General matters not previously referred to,' in the report on primary education.³¹ (Although the report ostensibly concerned 'primary' education, the sections which discussed coeducation referred to all levels of education.)

Turner expressed a 'personal conviction ... that coeducation is desirable' and his findings were in favour of mixed schooling, not only as an economical alternative to sex-

³⁰ Anderson, *The public school system of New South Wales*, pp. 5-6.

³¹ New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Interim report of the Commissioners [Knibbs and Turner] on certain parts of primary education*, Government printer, Sydney, 1903, pp. 91-92.

segregation, but as a superior system.³² However he was aware that coeducation was a controversial issue, and one on which it was difficult to be authoritative, as all teachers might claim expertise:

Perhaps on no question concerning education is there so much diversity of opinion as is to be found on the question of co-education of the sexes. Teachers in the same school hold different views on the subject, teachers and schoolmen in the same town do not agree; some teachers, in countries where co-education has little recognition, approve of the dual system, while others, in countries where co-education has great recognition, are just as strongly opposed to it.³³

Probably strategically, he stopped short of recommending any rapid or large-scale changes to the present New South Wales system of separating pupils by sex in the elementary schools of the cities and larger towns, though he did recommend that there be no reduction in the amount of coeducational teaching currently occurring. Somewhat stronger was the advice that mixed enrolment might facilitate the expansion and development of post-elementary schooling, including pre-service teacher-training:

In the scheme of superior schools with specialised courses which he has recommended, the Commissioner is of the opinion that co-education might be introduced with benefit; and in regard to the new training schools, the classes should be co-educational.³⁴

Turner was particularly impressed by the accounts of the coeducational high school in the *1900-1901 Report of the United States Commissioner of Education* and interviewed the United States' leading supporter of mixed schooling, the 'whole-souled advocate' William T. Harris.³⁵ Turner was persuaded by the explanations by Harris, and Schools Superintendent Edward Brooks, that this economic solution to the issue of higher schooling expansion had also proved to be pedagogically sound. Brooks had argued that the mixed high school could be organised flexibly to accommodate a variety of courses to accommodate points of divergence between the needs of boys and girls. Schools could be conveniently and economically structured to provide a general course to be taken by both

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92, 464-468.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 464.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

sexes in common, together with separate specialised vocational courses for boys and girls.³⁶

Turner and Knibbs were travelling the world, gathering educational ideas, during a period of heightened English and United States discussion of the merits and dangers of coeducation and Turner referred to two of the main texts discussed in the previous chapter, Alice Woods' *Co-education* and the *1900-1901 Report of the United States Commissioner* in his review. Although Turner acknowledged that the issue was controversial, and included statements for and against coeducation in his summaries, it is revealing to look at which kinds of opinion or evidence he chose to either highlight or omit. It is unclear how much of Woods' book he read but he reproduced little from it. It is possible to speculate that he was less persuaded by arguments which associated coeducation with progressive education, or any kind of abstract idealism, than those of the public education system bureaucrats of the United States, who were grappling with issues more analogous to those facing New South Wales. The United States, moreover, had already achieved the sort of enviable level of higher schooling participation that was the aim and ambition of the New South Wales reform movement. The United States report, especially where it recorded the views of public school administrators, was the source for most of the material on coeducation cited in the Knibbs Turner Report. Among the comments taken up by Turner were those to the effect that mixed schools had a more moral tone than single-sex schools, and that mixing modified the 'peculiarities' of each sex where segregation intensified them.³⁷ He reproduced William Harris's much reprinted comment:

To insure modesty I would advise the education of the sexes together; for two boys will preserve twelve girls, or two girls twelve boys, innocent, amidst winks, jokes and improprieties, merely by that instinctive sense which is the forerunner of natural modesty.³⁸

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 91-2, 465, 468.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

Although Knibbs' and Turner's investigations predated the publication of Stanley Hall's *Adolescence*, it is nevertheless noticeable that Turner almost completely avoided the issue of girls' health, which occupied a substantial section of the United States Commissioner's Report, among other available publications.³⁹ Nor did he include the line of argument which suggested that coeducation specifically operated to civilise boys. Rather his findings tended to suggest that girls and boys were common or reciprocal beneficiaries, for example:

Intellectually, the influence of the sexes upon each other is most marked. Girls in the presence of boys have a higher intellectual idea. They unfold intellectual possibilities that society did not think they possessed, and that they themselves were not aware of. The boy is, of course, stimulated by the unexpected competition of the other sex.⁴⁰

Turner did not open up discussions of feminisation or of career problems for male or female teachers.

Turner's findings were strongly criticised at the 1904 Public Instruction Department Conference held to discuss the first volume of the Commissioners' findings.⁴¹ The leading opponent of coeducation was Annie Golding, who was well-prepared and drew on the collective authority of the 'the lady-teachers of New South Wales:'

I come before you in a rather important position in this matter, because I think, without one reservation, I voice the opinions of the lady-teachers of New South Wales. We have gone to extreme trouble since Christmas to find out their opinions, and I know that by them I will be loyally supported in bringing forward their views.⁴²

³⁹ United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the year 1900-1901*, Government Printing Office, Washington, 1902, pp. 1275-1283.

⁴⁰ *Report of the Commissioners on ... primary education*, p. 465.

⁴¹ New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Conference of inspectors, teachers, departmental officers and prominent educationists*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1904, pp. 161-166.

⁴² *Conference of inspectors etc.*, p. 161; Golding's speech was also printed in *The Australian journal of education: official organ of the Teachers' Association of New South Wales*, 1 June, 1904, p. 7; see also Kate Deverall, 'A bid for affirmative action: Annie Golding and the New South Wales Public School Teachers' Association, 1900-1915,' *Labour History*, no. 77, 1999, pp. 117-39.

Golding moved 'that the system in regard to coeducation should remain as at present' and the proposal passed easily. This meant that coeducation was acceptable only in Infants' Departments (usually headed by women teachers) and in small country towns. Coeducation was least acceptable for senior pupils over the age of about twelve, especially girls. There was no discussion about mixed enrolment at the university or dispute about the development of a mixed-enrolment teachers' training college. Frederick Bridges, Under-secretary of the Department, and Peter Board's immediate predecessor, seconded Golding's motion. Bridges declared, 'If the sexes were not separated everywhere throughout the schools it was because the country could not afford it.'⁴³ Another delegate opposing coeducation contended that even in mixed schools girls and boys were carefully separated in class and in the playground.⁴⁴

The discussion was led and dominated by Golding, who was supported by Bridges and another (male) teacher. There was little argument in favour of coeducation other than some restating of the material in his report by J. W. Turner. Golding argued on both practical and theoretical grounds, quoting skilfully and selectively from several sources, including Turner's report and Woods' *Co-education*. She explained, 'I have made it my business during the last two years to study this question.'⁴⁵ Bridges, on the other hand, claimed the expertise of the seasoned practitioner. When Bridges made the statement, 'This system of co-education I have studied for over forty years,' he was making it clear that he valued the daily experience derived from a long teaching career and 'as the father of a family' as highly as any other authority.⁴⁶ 'I remember well when a boy and when all schools were mixed,' he joked, 'that the greatest punishment you could inflict upon me was to make me go out and sit among the girls.'

Golding rehearsed a role for woman teachers which would be quite enduring in the New South Wales public school system, and which would be embodied in the position in mixed high schools, from 1920, of Supervisor of Girls. However growing girls were

⁴³ *Conference of inspectors etc*, p. 165.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

safest in girls' schools, under the care of experienced and sympathetic female teachers. This was the professionalisation of moral guardianship. Girls were the future 'mothers of the race' and must be preserved from both the moral danger of mixing with boys in schools, and damage to their health from studying too similar a curriculum, at too similar a pace.⁴⁷ That the delicate business of the nurture of gender would be compromised by any extension of coeducation was illustrated by a report from an Australian woman teacher who had recently undertaken a study tour to California and observed that in mixed schools 'the boys become effeminate in manners, and the girls bold.'⁴⁸ In a sense Golding's arguments were a critique of the concept of the educational ladder, which did not seem to accommodate sufficiently the social and moral purposes of schooling. Education, she argued, 'must tend to preserve and elevate family life.'⁴⁹ From this perspective, gender was emphatically a more important category for classifying children into schools than 'intellect:'

The girl, if she sits in the same class as boys, may sit behind a brilliantly intellectual boy, yet one who is not fit to be her companion. And a boy may sit beside a brilliantly intellectual girl who may contaminate him.⁵⁰

The other speakers against coeducation, Bridges and Herlihy, supported Golding on two main, and contradictory, points. One was the danger of feminisation, the driving of men and boys out of the schools by the simple circumstance of having to deal too much with women:

It is possible, no doubt, under this mixed system that the teacher in charge will be a male teacher; all the other teachers in the subordinate positions will be ladies. That is the experience of America, and it would simply mean driving a number of our youngest and best men out of the Service.⁵¹

The other, paradoxically, was the loss of 'the most desirable pupils,' that is, older girls, to the private and denominational schools. Bridges argued:

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

I know, too, from practical experience as an Inspector, that the people of New South Wales strongly desire this separation of the sexes. So strongly is this opinion held in favour of girls' schools that in many of our country towns parents, very devout Protestants, will send their girls to convent schools in preference to the mixed schools.⁵²

In the absence of a representative feminist statement in support of coeducation at the 1904 conference it is useful to look at an address delivered by Maybanke Anderson a year later to the Child Study Society and published in *The Australian Journal of Education*.⁵³ While Bridges at the Public Instruction Conference had characterised coeducation as an old-fashioned or rural method, employed where more modern forms of sex-segregation were not economically feasible, Anderson described single-sex institutions as having descended from a medieval, monastic tradition which also tended to exclude women from higher education. She represented coeducation as progressive and feminist and advocated a curriculum which was not differentiated according to sex. She dismissed the moral objections, the danger of the roughening of girls as having been disproved by decades of successful practice in the United States, and argued that 'sex attraction' in adolescents was less of a problem under supervision by experienced teachers than illicitly pursued. Anderson, like Golding, argued that the nation, and the British Empire, was made up of family units and that the school's role was to nurture this private form of citizenship in order to strengthen the larger body. However she saw coeducation rather than sex-segregation, as the better foundation for future family life. She restated the idea of the mechanism of coeducation, by which undesirable extremes of boy and girl culture would be moderated by mixing: the idleness and roughness of boys, the over-sensitivity and sentimentality of girls. Addressing the problems of teachers she argued that the feminisation of the teaching service in the United States was to do with broader labour market conditions – too many choices for men, too few for women – rather than coeducation, though agreed that it was a problem. She acknowledged the problem of promotion for female teachers but argued, in common with Alice Woods,

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁵³ Maybanke Anderson, 'Co-education: an address delivered by Mrs Francis Anderson, before the New South Wales Society for Child Study,' *The Australian Journal of Education: Official Organ of the Teachers' Association of New South Wales*, 15 May, 1905, pp. 13-16.

whom she had read, that this issue might be resolved over time and should not in itself block the development of coeducation, or feminist support for it.

The 1911-12 settlement

By the turn of the twentieth century two types of providers of state secondary schooling had developed under the 1880 Public Instruction Act. These were the full single-sex high schools in Sydney and Maitland and the Superior Public Schools which, in addition to a full elementary program, offered some secondary classes on the same site. These secondary 'tops' were either mixed or single-sex depending on local circumstances, though further research is required to understand the range of practices these forms encompassed. In 1906 the first coeducational New South Wales high school was established at Newcastle, north of Sydney, along with nineteen District Schools in smaller regional centres. These were reorganised Superior Public Schools, where the secondary classes were more clearly differentiated from the elementary. Secondary schooling was conducted in separate departments with, by preference, specialist subject teachers with university qualifications. The District Schools were the direct antecedents of the regional mixed high schools established from 1912.

The toleration of coeducation for older pupils in the early twentieth century allowed for the strengthening in New South Wales public schools of educational distinctions and categorisations other than gender. In the 1880s one way to differentiate high from elementary schools was to restrict enrolment to one sex, as was the practice in the denominational and other non-government secondary schools in Australia and in England. From about 1906, however, the differentiation of secondary from elementary schooling became more important. In regional areas the separation of secondary schooling in this way took precedence over separating the sexes, or indeed considerations of what might be the special needs of girls. In his report for 1906 the Education Minister explained the desirability of the physical separation of the secondary classes conducted within Superior Public Schools:

Where practicable a separate building on the school site for this class of work is required so as to mark the distinction between it and the primary instruction and at the same time afford facilities for the special methods that should prevail in this section of the school.⁵⁴

In the 1912 Report entirely separate sites were recommended:

The practice of allowing the headmaster of the local Primary School to act also as headmaster of the Secondary School has been found ineffective. Similarly the practice of having the Primary School and High School in the one building has also proved to be ineffective. It has been decided, therefore, to completely separate the Primary and Secondary Schools in country centres, with distinct staffs, and, as soon as buildings can be erected, in distinct premises.⁵⁵

The years 1911-12 in New South Wales can be said to mark the real beginning of the establishment of a meritocratic ladder of state education, after the false dawn of the 1880s. New regulations and legislation included the abolition of high school fees in 1911, the establishment of post-primary continuation schools organised around vocational curricula, and the passing of the Bursary Endowment and University Amendment Acts of 1912, which, among other things, extended the provision of financial assistance for high school and university study to clever but needy students. The public examination system was also reformed with revised entry barriers to high schools, and the establishment of the Intermediate Certificate and Leaving Certificates, around which the new high schools organised their courses of study. During 1912 and 1913 coeducational high schools replaced the secondary departments of the District Schools in Grafton, Orange, Wagga, Bathurst, Goulburn and Parramatta. By 1913 there were fifteen high schools in New South Wales, three for girls, five for boys including the specialist Technical and Hurlestone Agricultural High Schools, and seven high schools for both boys and girls. The routine establishment of coeducational high schools was a big change from nineteenth century policy, which had allowed schools to close for lack of numbers rather than become mixed, and was also a departure from the practice in the non-state schools,

⁵⁴ New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Report of the Minister of Public Instruction for the year 1906*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1907, p. 36.

⁵⁵ *Report of the Minister ... for the year 1912*, p. 3.

private and denominational, where those schools which could be classed as secondary were characteristically single-sex by enrolment.

Coeducation was adopted where it made economic and administrative sense to enrol both boys and girls in the new high school rather than trying to establish two separate schools in every town. Larger schools were cheaper to run, especially as the high schools required the employment of specialist subject teachers, mostly on higher rates of pay than their colleagues in the elementary schools. It is not clear that coeducation was considered by the Department to be 'modern,' associated as it was with small country schools. It is also possible that it was regarded as temporary. In the case of the first coeducational high school, Newcastle High, as numbers grew, and building funds became available, the girls and boys moved to separate sites to form the Boys and Girls High Schools in the late 1920s.⁵⁶ Similarly, Fort Street Model school had enrolled both boys and girls until being divided in two upon being recognised as a full high school in 1911.

One of the failures of the 1880s attempts to establish high schools had been the failure to win public support, or in other words, to persuade sufficient numbers of parents, especially country parents, either to send their children to high school or to keep them there for prolonged periods. For the 1911-12 settlement, considerable emphasis was placed on the need to explain the new school system to parents. However mixed schooling was not a topic on which the Department sought to encourage public discussion, and was not characterised either as an innovative or defining feature in Department Public Instruction publications such as the annual *Report of the Minister for Public Instruction*, or the booklet explaining the reforms, *Three years of education*, published in 1913.⁵⁷ The term coeducation was not used, nor were any of the other terms such as 'mixed' or 'composite.' Official publications were clear about what was regarded as innovation and what was routine. The inclusion of 'boys and girls' in the same high school was treated as routine.

⁵⁶ See Josephine R. May, *Gender, memory and the experience of selective secondary schooling in Newcastle, New South Wales, from the 1930s to the 1950s*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Newcastle, 2000, pp. 24-25.

The document, *Three years of education*, is a useful summary of the way the Education Department's leaders spoke and wrote about what they saw as the most thorough and far reaching schooling developments in New South Wales history, and places the introduction of coeducation into New South Wales high schools in context. The central trope of the booklet was of the educational ladder: the idea of social mobility or self-improvement by progress through a series of educational institutions. In the first few pages of the booklet was a double-page photo spread illustrative of the path 'From bush school to University.'⁵⁸ [Figure 3.1]. The rhetorical force of the idea of the University as the summit of educational attainment was strong here as elsewhere in the booklet. In terms of gender, each of the institutions pictured was ostensibly open to boys and girls, and the small group of students gathered at the front of the 'small Public School in the country' comprises boys and girls lined up in no apparent order. The commentary was organised around the message that 'the road to higher education' had been 'broadened' and that 'equality of opportunity' had been 'given ... to every child in the State.'⁵⁹ 'Boys and girls, of whatever class, creed, or station, living in the most remote parts of the state, may reach the University It is thus possible for the clever child of the miner, the shearer or the tradesman to enter any of the professions which require a University training.'

A more detailed chart of the new system was reproduced at the end of the booklet [Figure 3.2] which again showed the University as the ultimate possibility.⁶⁰ This more detailed representation of educational pathways demonstrated essentially two alternate progressions, the academic and the vocational. The vocational was quite clearly divided by gender, with girls and boys progressing through different institutions. The provision of vocational post-primary schools was claimed as a 'practically' a world first.⁶¹ The students who were to attend these schools were described as 'a great many boys and girls

⁵⁷ New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Three years of education*, Government printer, Sydney, 1913.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, inside back cover.

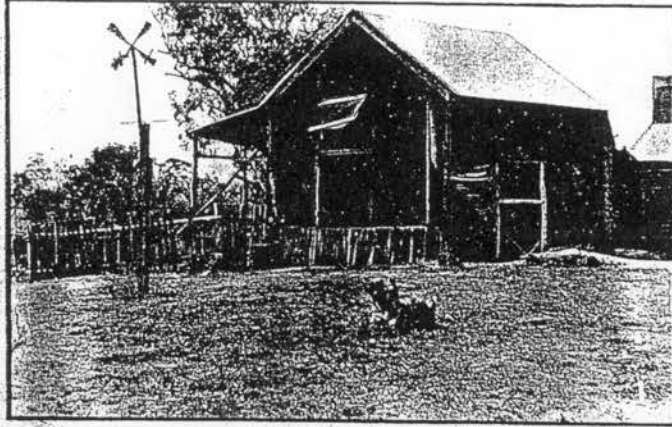
⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Figure 3.1

“From Bush School to University!”

New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Three years of education*, Government printer, Sydney, 1913, pp. 6-7. [continued over page]

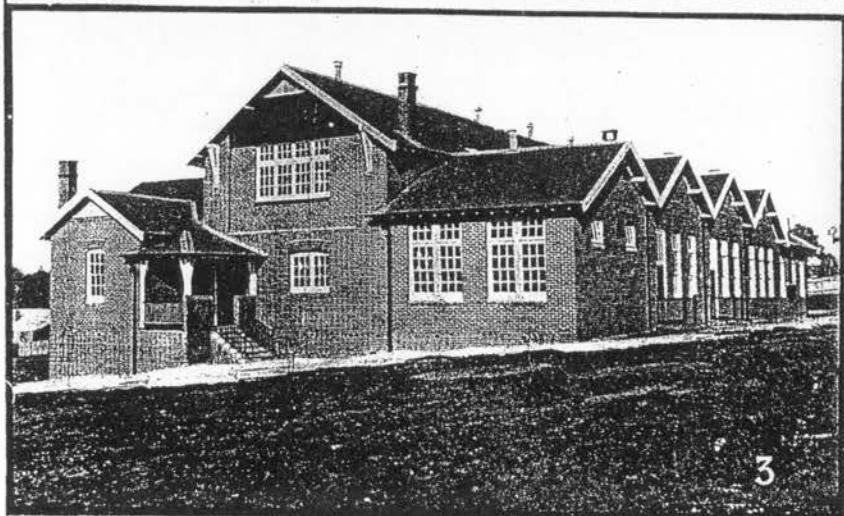
A Provisional School, established temporarily in a deserted miner's hut.



A small Public School in the country.



The new School at Tumut (1913).

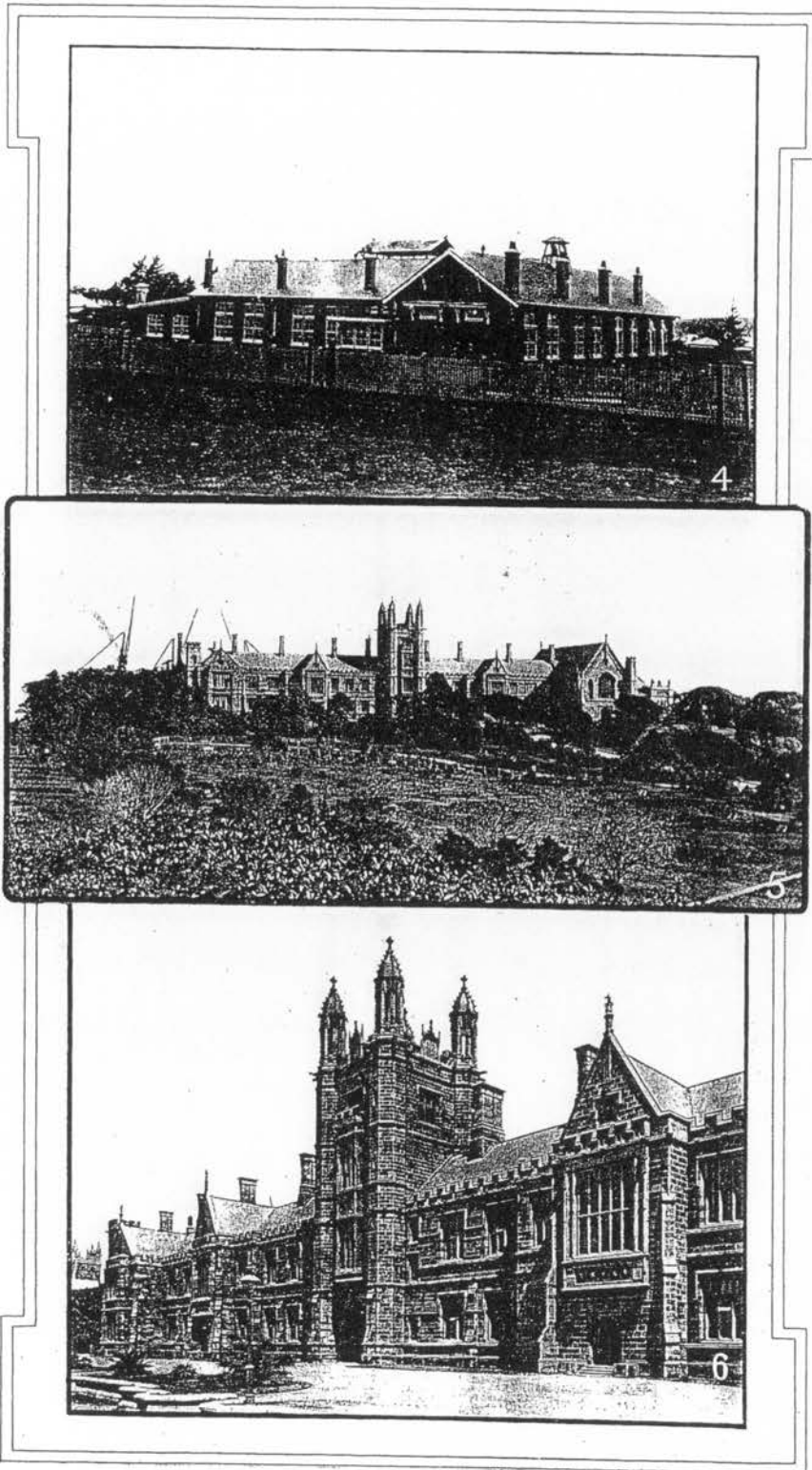


“From Bush School

Figure 3.1

“From Bush School to University!”

[continued from previous page]



The first building specially erected in New South Wales for a High School (Orange, 1913).

View of Sydney University.

The Main Building, Sydney University.

to University!”

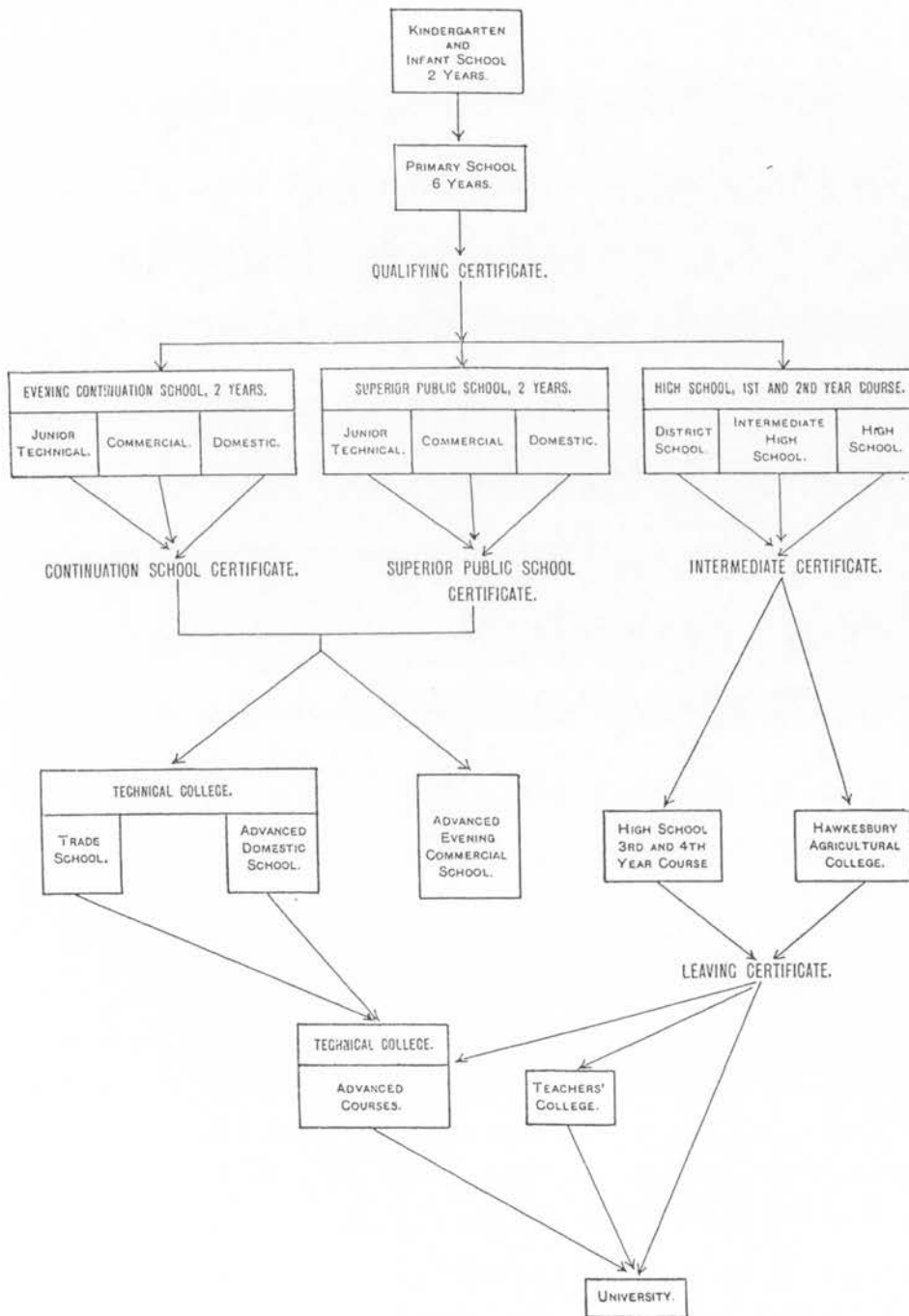
Figure 3.2

A diagram of the New South Wales educational ladder of opportunity.

New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Three years of education*, Government printer, Sydney, 1913, inside back cover.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION.

Chart showing the General Scheme of Public Education in New South Wales.



[who] were able to remain at school for a year or two after completing the primary course, but could not afford to remain at school for the full four years necessary for a course of High School education.’⁶² The vocational curriculum was clearly and unproblematically differentiated by gender: the boys’ schools were either commercial or technical, the girls, ‘domestic.’ Gender patterns in the high school are less clear in the document. Writing about high schools used the collective phrase, ‘boys and girls.’ The academic path on the right hand side of the chart, through the high school, offered ostensibly the same track for girls and boys.

The issue of intellect or ability was a very important issue for the high school, and one which altered in definition and theoretical underpinning over the first half of the twentieth century. The reforms of 1911-12 predated the wide use of intelligence testing in New South Wales schools and the entrenchment of the idea, drawn from educational psychology, of ability as a quality distinct from achievement and effort. Well-regulated public examinations were seen as objective facilitators of educational opportunity. The examinations measured learned knowledge, rather than ‘ability’ or ‘aptitude’ as occurred later in the century. The qualities required to pass through the three articulated examinations, the Qualifying Certificate to enter high school, the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates, to climb the educational ladder were not spelled out in detail but were implied to be not for everyone, rather they were opportunities for the ‘clever’ child, who exhibited also ambition and application. Another word used was ‘merit,’ in the sense of something which is deserved or earned.⁶³ The main ideas were that ability was classless, that the role of the state was to compensate for the lack of parental funds, and that promotion should depend upon the deserts of the child and not on class background or family connections. Geography was very important as a category of potential inequality for which it was the role of the state to compensate. The ‘decentralisation of High School education’ was especially emphasised.⁶⁴ Detailed information is given to the allocation of bursary and scholarship money according to residence in the city or country – there was a formula by which to ensure that country children, especially those from

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

one-teacher schools, were not disadvantaged in the public examinations according to which these funds were distributed.

Origins of coeducation at Parramatta High

Although the state schooling system had been substantially reorganised, and it is certainly true that the 1911-12 settlement was a key moment in the making of the modern New South Wales high school, there were continuities as well as changes between the old and new systems. In 1913, Parramatta High School was a new school, but also an outgrowth of the elementary system. Schools like Parramatta High had grown out of and supplanted the District Schools and Superior Public Schools, which had previously provided both the compulsory elementary course and some secondary education. Before 1913 small numbers of clever and ambitious students, boys and girls, had been able to undertake a secondary education in the higher classes of the main local elementary school, which had been the Parramatta District School from 1906 to 1912, and before that the Parramatta Superior School (1887 to 1906).⁶⁵ When Parramatta High School was founded the headmaster, his deputy and a large number of their female and male pupils had been relocated, en masse, from the District school, which lost its 'top.'⁶⁶ This was part of the process described by Gidney and Millar for nineteenth Ontario, in which the high school was differentiated from the elementary school to achieve a monopoly over a particular stage and form of education.⁶⁷ After the high school pupils left, the Education Department tried out other kinds of post-primary courses for older students at the former District School, combinations of different kinds of vocational training with subjects from the junior part of the high school course.⁶⁸ The vocational courses were gender-segregated, and included technical courses for boys and domestic science courses for girls. Parramatta High School enrolled both male and female students, as had the District school.

⁶⁵ New South Wales Department of Education and Training, *Government schools of New South Wales, 1848-1998*, Open training and education network, Sydney, 1998, p. 119.

⁶⁶ Note to file, 21 April 1913, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.1.

⁶⁷ Gidney and Millar, *Inventing secondary education*.

⁶⁸ See Geoff Stewart, *A century of schools, 1975-1975: a history of education at Macquarie Street, Parramatta*, M.Ed. thesis, University of Sydney, 1977.

Parramatta High School was different from the coeducational English and North American schools mentioned in the previous chapter in important ways. It was far removed from the experimental progressive tradition of upper class boarding schools like Bedales, yet neither was coeducation a taken for granted feature in New South Wales, as it had become in the United States and Ontarian public day high schools. The school had something in common with the English subsidised board schools, but it was part of a far more centralised system than existed in England, so while coeducation was similarly economically motivated, it was a system of organisation determined and, to a large extent, run by head office rather than either by a headmaster or by local committees. This also set it apart from the older North American tradition.

Parramatta High was among the first coeducational high schools in New South Wales, and the number of students in single-sex secondary schooling outnumbered those in coeducational institutions until the great explosion in secondary high school building in the 1960s and 1970s. Its nearest coeducational neighbour in 1913 was at Bathurst, about 175 kilometres west, on the other side of the Blue Mountains. In an education landscape and market which was dominated for decades by single-sex schooling for adolescents in all sectors – in the declining private venture schools, and in the expanding state, catholic and corporate schools – it remained the only coeducational full high school in greater Sydney for more than forty years. It remained the New South Wales Education Department's policy to found single-sex high schools by preference until the late 1950s.

Conclusion

The previous chapter looked at what was meant or understood by coeducation in terms of international early twentieth century debates on the subject in England and the United States. Although there is evidence that these debates were followed to some extent in New South Wales, there was relatively little home-grown public discussion of coeducation. This was partly because New South Wales lacked either the upper class progressive private school advocates of England or the large numbers of mixed high

schools of the United States upon which the overseas debates were based. Nevertheless there was a change in New South Wales government policy between the late nineteenth century, when high schools were permitted to close for want of students rather than become coeducational, and the 1911-12 reforms after which mixed high schools were routinely established in regional areas. To understand the gender beliefs underpinning this transition this chapter has looked at texts from three key moments in New South Wales public education history. These were the New South Wales parliamentary debates over clauses to establish public high schools in the 1880 Public Instruction Bill, calls for educational reform from 1901 to 1904, and the settlement of 1911-12.

In 1880 the possibility of coeducation on the North American model was rejected out of hand by the architect of the New South Wales Public Instruction Bill, Henry Parkes. This was partly because of concerns about respectability but also because of a desire to differentiate the high school from the elementary system in this and other ways including the charging of higher fees. Parliamentary debate over the 1880 bill also showed how higher schooling could be seen as having similar or different purposes for boys and girls. In some ways the provision of high schools for girls and boys was seen as part of the same, meritocratic, project. The education of girls, however, carried additional meanings. Girls needed something to fall back on in case of economic emergency and the race needed educated mothers. Moreover, the higher education of women was a mark of civilisation which set white Australia apart from its indigenous inhabitants and oriental neighbours.

The idea of coeducation was raised again in early twentieth century criticisms of the New South Wales public education system, initiated by Francis Anderson's group and investigated by G. H. Knibbs and J. W. Turner. Although the discussion was limited, its nature suggested that many New South Wales educators had formed strong personal opinions about coeducation which might be aired in a forum such as the 1904 Department of Public Instruction Conference to discuss the first volume of the Knibbs Turner Report. These opinions included opposition from women teachers. The Under-Secretary for Education, Bridges, declared that coeducation was only ever a compromise: 'If the sexes

were not separated everywhere throughout the schools it was because the country could not afford it.⁶⁹ It was apparent that coeducation was a controversial topic and one that its supporters, such as Turner, were willing to set aside in public forums in favour of other more pressing issues. At the same time Turner admitted to having been personally persuaded by the arguments of senior United States educators such as William T. Harris and Edward Brooks that coeducation had both economic and pedagogical benefits.

It could be argued that coeducation was adopted by stealth in New South Wales in the higher grades of the Superior Public Schools and in the secondary 'tops' of the District Schools which were the predecessor institutions of the regional high schools. In any case by the time of the settlement of 1911-12 it had apparently been decided by policy-makers that tolerance of the co-instruction of the sexes would facilitate other kinds of categorisations than gender, specifically merit and age. Coeducation made it economically feasible to clarify the boundary between elementary and high school and to extend the reach of the stand-alone high school institution further into regional New South Wales. This expansion was more important than the separation of the sexes. However despite going to some lengths to publicise the 1911-12 reforms and to promote the new high school system to parents, coeducation was not a topic upon which the Department of Public Instruction sought to encourage public discussion. It is also possible that it was considered a temporary solution to the problem of high school expansion. Nevertheless, as Rury argued for the United States, coeducation was not economically feasible unless policy-makers and educators considered that boys and girls had needs and abilities enough in common to warrant common instruction in schools.⁷⁰ Even if only a pro tem measure, the establishment of mixed high schools in New South Wales was significant. It was also significant that co-instruction was only practised in institutions providing the academic high school course. The new post-elementary vocational courses were quite clearly intended to be differentiated by gender.

⁶⁹ *Conference of inspectors etc*, p. 165.

⁷⁰ John L. Rury, *Education and women's work: female schooling and the division of labor in urban America, 1870-1930*, State University of New York Press, Albany N.Y., 1991, pp. 24-46.

Chapter 4

Parramatta High School: Competing in a local education market, outpost of a state bureaucracy

A new high school

In 1913 Parramatta was a moderately sized regional centre on the western outskirts of Sydney, about 25 kilometres from the Sydney city centre by road or rail, less by river. The town of Parramatta was a busy commercial and administrative centre, serving a larger district which included agricultural, suburban and industrial areas. In 1912 the Parramatta District Progress Association estimated the population of the town and district it served to be 40-50 thousand.¹ To the north and west of the town were rural areas comprising small-scale businesses such as orchards, market gardens, poultry and dairy farms. These were gradually being pushed further away from Sydney, increasingly replaced in the following decades by suburban housing estates. To the south and west were the industrial suburbs of Granville and Clyde which accommodated large manufacturing works such as Clyde Engineering, James Hardie and Wunderlich, as well as agricultural processing factories such as Austral Flour Mills. The plants and factories were surrounded by workers' cottages. The catchment area for Parramatta High School varied somewhat over the period included in this study, and many students travelled considerable distances to and from school, especially during the earliest years of its establishment. Nevertheless the neighbourhoods providing the largest numbers of students remained the local council areas of Parramatta and Granville.² Broadly speaking, Parramatta was a more middle class district, Granville a working class area.³

Parramatta High was among the first of the new state high schools to be established as a result of the 1911-12 reorganisation of public post-elementary schooling discussed in the

¹ Progress Association president to Education Minister, 21 February 1912, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/1 7283.1.

² P.H.S. *Registers of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal*.

³ See Terry Kass, 'Portal to the west,' in Terry Kass, Carol Liston and John McClymont, *Parramatta: a past revealed*, Parramatta City Council, 1996, pp. 251-369.

previous chapter. It was one of six regional mixed secondary schools founded during 1912-13, along with high schools at Grafton, Orange, Wagga, Bathurst and Goulburn. When Parramatta High was founded it was classified by the Department of Public Instruction as a country school, although by 1919 it was considered to be part of the Sydney metropolitan area. The school initially opened in makeshift premises in a rented church hall, these lean beginnings soon becoming part of its mythology.⁴ By the end of February 1913 there were 190 students, 100 boys and 90 girls, with the majority enrolled in the first year of the high school course. In 1915 the school moved to purpose-built premises on a hill overlooking the town. By 1919 there were sufficient numbers of students in the senior grades for the school to be ranked by the Department of Public Instruction as a 'first class high school.' In practical terms this meant a higher salary for the principal, and the establishment of an extra layer of hierarchy amongst the teaching staff in the form of subject masters. (There were no subject mistresses during the period covered by this study, except in subjects taken only by girls.)

In hindsight, that the school was coeducational seems one of its most notable characteristics. This is partly because coeducation became more rather than less remarkable during the school's early history, with no further mixed high schools founded in Sydney until the 1950s. This, however, was not the view from 1913. At the opening ceremony of the new school, for example, as reported in the local newspaper, coeducation did not seem a significant feature at all of the new school's purpose and organisation.⁵ Questions about the nature, extent and desirability of coeducation were neither explicitly asked nor answered in the speeches by eminent men at the celebrations of 1913, and remained almost entirely unexamined in other contemporary public statements about its purposes and achievements. Official speakers instead emphasised again and again the school's place in the meritocratic educational ladder of opportunity. For Campbell Carmichael, Labor Minister for Public Instruction, the school's foundation was part of the fulfilment of his Department's commitment to provide higher education to country as well as city children. The establishment of Parramatta and other schools like it

⁴ *Parramatta High School Magazine*, June 1917, pp. 36-38; *Phoenix: Parramatta High School annual magazine*, Golden Jubilee edition, 1963.

⁵ *The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*, 26 February 1913.

in country and suburban areas meant that it would now be 'within the privilege of every parent to give his boy or girl an education that would lead the child right to the doors of the University.' Director of Education Peter Board explained that 'an opportunity to enter the learned professions was now afforded to every boy.'⁶ The local paper, *The Cumberland Argus* declared that some of the schools' students, 'future men and women of Australia' were 'destined to rise to high places in the Commonwealth.'⁷

Just how coeducation operated in terms of these promises, or how they might have been differently intended or received by girls and boys is a complex question. It is not easy to unpack the 'boys and girls' of conventional bureaucratic discourse, nor to explain exactly under what circumstances the 'and girls' might be dropped, as in Peter Board's comments above. It might have been possible on this occasion for the clever boys and girls who were the school's first pupils to see themselves at the 'doors of the University,' perhaps at the same time as locating themselves within a gendered order of organisation in which the public speakers were male, while the catering was arranged by a 'ladies' committee' and the speakers' wives, here as silent participants in their husbands' careers, were presented with commemorative china tea sets.⁸

Competing in a local education market, outpost of a state bureaucracy

When the second wave of New South Wales high school establishments was being considered in New South Wales, the issue of coeducation was not at the centre of debate, though it was raised in general terms. Nevertheless, the willingness of the Department to tolerate coeducation, as it had not done in the nineteenth century, made its high school expansion into the rural and regional areas of New South Wales economically feasible and thus facilitated the replacement of the pupil-teacher system by a combination of high schooling with study at the coeducational teacher Training College in Sydney.

⁶ *Cumberland Argus*, 26 February 1913.

⁷ *Cumberland Argus*, 1 March 1913.

⁸ *Cumberland Argus*, 26 February 1913.

So far the discussion in this thesis has been at the generalising level of educational theory and high policy, but as Tyack and Hansot and others contend, an understanding of theory and policy intention is only part of an understanding of how schools operate.⁹ The following chapters investigate aspects of the organisation of coeducation in a local Australian high school. The guiding questions are as follows: What did coeducation look like at Parramatta High School and how was it managed in terms both of the public profile of the school and of school practices? How important was gender as an organising principle for Parramatta High and how did gender operate with and/or across other social forces, especially social class? What was the nature of the interactions between gender and the idea of meritocracy? What evidence is there for the argument that girls suffered (and boys prospered) under coeducation? With what constraints and possibilities did the girls and boys of Parramatta High School live and work?

This chapter examines the institutional identity of Parramatta High School, reading two specific moments in its history. The first and main part of the chapter places the school in the context of its local education market, focussing on the first three or so years of the introduction of the state high school into Parramatta, as its headmaster and other supporters worked to attract the numbers of students necessary for it to survive and prosper. The second part reads aspects of the state's administration of gender through proposals to move the girls to another site.

Schools like Parramatta High operated simultaneously as outposts of a highly-centralised state education bureaucracy, and as local social institutions participating in and recognised by their surrounding communities in specific ways, alongside other institutions such as churches, hospitals, the reformatories, asylums and so on. They were competitors in local education markets, vying for students and/or resources with private, denominational and other varieties of state schools, at the same time that they carried messages from the centre about national development and the regulation of youth. This

⁹ David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning together: a history of coeducation in American schools*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990, pp. 1-12.

chapter explores aspects of the institutional identity of Parramatta High as it operated in both of these contexts: as a school among other schools in the Parramatta locality and as a school in a centrally-administered state system.

Schooling markets and hierarchies in Parramatta

The Public Instruction Department's new arrangements for secondary and post-primary education meant potentially considerable changes for all the schools operating in Parramatta during the 1910s. Increased state control of the main public examinations coupled with the establishment of schools expressly designed to prepare students for them meant that the new high school might draw students away from existing providers of secondary education. On the other hand new state funding arrangements meant that non-state schools prepared to teach to the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates might attract students supported by state bursaries. In the 1880s state high schools had competed for students both with non-state schools and the state superior schools. The nature of the reforms of 1911-12, however, meant that the high school at Parramatta did not have to compete for students with other state schools in the district. The division between elementary and secondary schooling was more clearly drawn and new divisions were established between providers of academic and vocational schooling, although the latter became more blurred later in the period covered by this study. The vocational courses were segregated by gender: technical courses for boys and domestic science courses for girls.

Of the non-state schools the leading providers of secondary schooling in Parramatta during the 1910s were The King's School, which had been founded in 1831 as a boarding school for the sons of country gentry, and Our Lady of Mercy College, a convent school providing both academic and accomplishments curricula for girls. There were also smaller schools which have left fewer historical traces. These include a day school for boys, the Church of England Grammar School, run from the main Anglican Church in Parramatta, and the private ladies academies, Tara, conducted by the Misses Waugh, and

Hanley Ville, by the Misses Inglis. The two ladies' academies taught small numbers of middle-class girls of various ages, together with a few younger boys.

According to their historians, local non-state schools had various reactions to the changed schooling market. Tara, apparently unable to meet the criteria for registration under the Bursary Endowment Act, withdrew from teaching older girls after 1912 and closed down for a period during the later 1910s.¹⁰ Our Lady of Mercy College, on the other hand, flourished and was able to expand with the new state funding from the Bursary Endowment Act.¹¹ Hanley Ville survived until the death of its proprietor in 1948, although in exactly what form is unclear as the records are thin.¹² There were some problems at The King's School, documented by its 1931 historian, the Rev. S. M. Johnstone.¹³ Secondary enrolments and public examination results initially suffered in the face of competition from the state sector, but recovered with the tenure of a new headmaster in the middle of the war years, who, as Johnstone saw it, restored an emphasis on the academic standards which had been somewhat neglected earlier.

Of course this is a period before secondary schooling came to dominate the lives of adolescents. The majority of Parramatta children left school as soon as they were legally able, either for paid employment or domestic duties, which might be combined with other, non-school, forms of education. There were many forms of vocational training available for youth in and beyond Parramatta, including apprenticeships and clerical or commercial training. From the 1920s increasing numbers of 'clever' girls left school to complete their education at secretarial colleges either locally or in Sydney.

This chapter reads the high school from the perspective of civic leaders and men of authority: the headmasters, public servants and others of official or governing rank who had some interest in or power over schooling in Parramatta. These men had differences of opinion about education – about the role of central government, about the desirable

¹⁰ Bronwyn Hubbard, *Tara: a telling of the tapestry*, Tara Anglican School, Sydney, 1997, pp. 80-83.

¹¹ Madeleine Sophie McGrath, *These women?: women religious in the history of Australia: the Sisters of Mercy, Parramatta, 1888-1988*, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, n.d., p. 50.

¹² Hubbard, *Tara*, p. 143.

balance between tradition and innovation, for example – as well as ideas in common, but their views were grounded in a shared belief in the importance of stable and efficient social institutions. A good way to track some of these opinions and debates is through the principal local newspaper for the period, *The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' Advocate*. In common with other regional papers of this period, *The Argus* saw its role as a kind of meeting place for the governing and managing classes of Parramatta; a virtual central office for the receipt and distribution of information about local events and institutions.

To read *The Argus* for the 1910s is to imagine a well-regulated, ordered community within which members were attached to specific institutions such as schools, churches, the hospital and the Clyde Engineering works. The newspaper was respectful of civic hierarchies and boundaries, representing Parramatta as a unified community within which everyone, nevertheless, had his or her place. This was especially apparent in *The Argus's* regular reports of local gatherings such as meetings, balls, weddings, fetes, parades, school speech days. The huge Empire day celebration of 1915 is an example: 'everyone' contributed, 'small and great, rich and poor, men and women of every class and occupation and creed', 'all factions, all classes, all churches.'¹⁴ The participation of local schools in a large street parade was described with an underlying sense of common agreement about their various places in the social order of the town. The boys of The King's School, as members of the gentry, were the leaders, marching at the head of the schools' section of the parade with a well-disciplined military band, followed by the boys of the public schools. The fallen girls of the reformatory school were shown as doing their best to be patriotic. Their membership of the community was only conditional, but that they were allowed out for the occasion was evidence of their own improvement, and of the their keepers' charity and good-heartedness. The high school students were sketched in as the clever ones: 'The children of the Parramatta High School, when taking part in the singing of "the Marseillaise", rendered the French words.'¹⁵

¹³ S. M. Johnstone, *The History of the King's School, Parramatta*, T.K.S., Sydney 1932, pp. 283-286.

¹⁴ *Cumberland Argus*, 26 May 1915.

¹⁵ *Cumberland Argus*, 26 May 1915; see also 29 May 1915.

When the high school was introduced into Parramatta in 1912-13, it was part of *The Argus*'s project to settle it in to the town's orderly set of institutions. This embraced both the tasks of defining its character, and of establishing local ownership. Lists were important in *The Argus*. Most reports of public events began with a list of important people who were present. The high school headmaster, W. L. Atkins, as a local dignitary, was regularly listed as making contributions to war chests, serving on organising committees and sitting, along with his wife, with the official party at this or that jubilee or parade. Different kinds of lists made different kinds of maps, revealing various social hierarchies. Functions at The King's School, for example, might be reported as having a 'fashionable attendance' and include long lists of the dresses worn by female family members and associates of the school's male population.¹⁶ The high school, on the other hand, was likely to be placed in the kinds of lists that characterised Parramatta as a prosperous modern commercial centre, as in the following billboard, proposed in 1912 for the railway station by the Parramatta Progress Association:

This is historical Parramatta, population---; good water; sewered throughout; area--; splendid park; good roads; pretty views; temperature, minimum---, maximum--; rainfall average---; orchards; vineyards; poultry farms; mills; factories; High School; technical, primary and secondary schools; private colleges; annual output of works---; annual wages distributed---; beautiful residential sites; closing hours of mails---.¹⁷

Parramatta High School was quickly established by *The Argus* as a leading institution in the town. It was reported on and celebrated more than any school other than The King's School, certainly more than the providers of girls-only schooling, and also more than the other state schools. It occupied a position in the paper's reporting that made clear that it was both categorically distinct from and more important than other state schools, both the district's public elementary, and the providers of post-primary vocational education. Early twentieth-century high schools in New South Wales were tightly controlled by the Department's Sydney office. Nearly all important decisions were made or approved from beyond the local area. Yet part of the celebration of the high school was dependant upon

¹⁶ For example, *Cumberland Argus*, 13 September 1913.

¹⁷ *Cumberland Argus*, 7 December 1912. The dashes refer to figures which would be periodically updated.

its being seen as an institution that was, in some way, unique and autonomous rather than entirely controlled by the centralised state; autonomous like The King's School, but more modern, less elitist, an institution for and of the sons and daughters of Parramatta: 'the people's school.'¹⁸

During the first three or so years of the school's foundation, a kind of competition between the state and the town for ownership of the school provided a minor subtext to *The Argus's* reporting on its progress. For the writers of *The Argus* the school was a local institution in all sorts of ways. Its presence was a validation of the importance of the town of Parramatta, and its students would supply the future leaders of the nation.¹⁹ The school would become 'the Oxford of Australia.'²⁰ The long process of planning and constructing a permanent building for the school became, in the newspaper, a struggle between town and state for recognition of the school's importance. The establishment of a suitable building for the school – both for a material presence of a particular status, and for a bricks and mortar guarantee of the institution's permanence – was an story that could be followed through *The Argus* for two years, as local leaders were reported making representations to the Minister about everything from site selection to expenditure on facing bricks. At the laying of the foundation stone in 1914 the Education Minister, Campbell Carmichael, reassured town leaders that the building was to 'stand for the very latest development in school architecture', but in the end *The Argus* was only moderately satisfied, regretting that the school was not imposing enough and that it had been built facing out onto the Great Western Highway, with its back to the town.²¹ From Carmichael's perspective the foundation of Parramatta High was an expression of the expanding influence of his Department. In 1914 he declared, 'At the present time there is no Government Department and no civic organisation that comes so intimately into touch with the lives and the homes of the people as the Education Dept of New South Wales.'²² Carmichael made a number of speeches in which the importance of Parramatta High School was in its membership of a group of high schools just like it, and as one of a

¹⁸ *Cumberland Argus*, 19 December 1914.

¹⁹ *Cumberland Argus*, 1 March 1913.

²⁰ *Cumberland Argus*, 1 March 1913.

²¹ *Cumberland Argus*, 11 April 1914; 2 May 1914.

number of elements in a much larger state-provided network of education. This message was reasserted as Carmichael visited the school on key occasions such as its opening and the laying of the dedication stone for the new building.

Public addresses by Parramatta High School's headmaster, Atkins, were also frequently reported in *The Argus*, explaining the idea of the modern high school. From late 1912 Atkins worked to persuade parents to postpone their children's paid employment for the four year duration of the full high school course in exchange for social and economic mobility, and in the interests of national progress. Two early speeches in particular were reported in detail, to meetings organised by the Parramatta district Parents and Citizens Association and the Parramatta branch of a men's church group called the Brethren in late 1912 and early 1913 respectively.²³ The high school described by Atkins was a modern, meritocratic institution. It was democratic, practical, suited to the requirements of a fast-moving world of science and commerce, international in outlook, and offering cultural and material rewards to the industrious and the 'capable, promising child'.²⁴ The high school would supply the 'leaders among men and women of Australia' and 'inculcate the virtues of courage and truth and reverence. It would give high ideals and noble aspirations, and encourage honor, comradeship and esprit de corps'.²⁵ It would 'substitute for the flash and the vulgar the cultured and the restrained and refined.' At the same time the postponement of gratification in the form of early wage-earning would pay off in terms of 'positions carrying higher emoluments, and greater personal credit and responsibility than those enjoyed by young men and women not so well equipped'.²⁶

On the other hand Atkins painted an unflattering picture of traditional upper class education, on the 'old English Public School system', as having 'the old classical "aroma"... and the aloofness which that bred.' Moreover, he questioned the manliness of its products who, he claimed, had performed inadequately as officers during the Boer War:

²² *Cumberland Argus*, 11 April 1914.

²³ *Cumberland Argus*, 11 December 1912; 22 March 1913.

²⁴ *Cumberland Argus*, 11 December 1912.

²⁵ *Cumberland Argus*, 22 March 1913.

Young officers trained under the old English Public School system, with its mainstay of classical education, were not found virile in the application of their powers to the requirements of strikingly new situations.²⁷

Atkins was ambiguous about whether the high school would be competing for students with the non-state sector or whether his speeches were intended only to persuade those parents of youth who would formerly have done without further education. In any case this comment about the English officer class must have struck at the heart of the nearest thing to an English Public School in the vicinity. For the next year or so the headmaster of The King's School, Rev. P. S. Waddy, can be found in the paper indirectly replying to it in one way or another in the paper, and offering competing versions of masculinity.

It is hard to know on what terms the indirect debate might have continued had the Great War not broken out. Almost as soon as it did these sorts of discussions disappeared and the reporting on schools became less analytical, more celebratory. As the war progressed and increasing numbers of King's School old boys enlisted the public image of King's School masculinity diverged further from that of the high school. Parramatta High was not old enough to produce many soldiers. While its male students continued to be seen more or less as children, as 'boys,' passing exams and so on, stories about The King's School increasingly included heroic war references and a roll of honour. In 1915, for example, the report of the annual prize giving was headed, 'Glorious Dead/ The Quasi-Military School-That Turns Out Men/ and Patriots!'²⁸

Nevertheless from 1913 to 1914 the domains of the two schools were close enough that a number of Waddy's speeches addressed elements of Atkins' high school manifestos. He asserted his pride in The King's School's long history and English Public School traditions, declaring that King's was a school for the making of Christian gentlemen, a school for 'Christian living' rather than for 'making a living.'²⁹ He protested against the

²⁶ *Cumberland Argus*, 11 December 1912.

²⁷ *Cumberland Argus*, 11 December 1912.

²⁸ *Cumberland Argus*, 19 June 1915.

²⁹ *Cumberland Argus*, 18 February 1914.

new Education Department examinations, arguing that there had been insufficient advice taken from the Great Public Schools, who 'have done secondary work for 80 years.'³⁰ He complained of the new curriculum's neglect of the classics and deplored the encouragement of an instrumental view of schooling, including the measurement of a school's worth by examination success.³¹ While his arguments were ostensibly directed at the Education Department rather than the new school down the road, his use of words like 'coaching' and 'training' to describe preparation for the new public exams would certainly have been understood by *The Argus*' readers as criticisms of the high school.³²

Except for the participation of the high school, the secondary schooling markets in Parramatta were entirely separate for boys and girls. Just as The King's School offered a different version of masculinity from the high school, different beliefs about what it meant to be a young woman were suggested in *The Argus* by the girls' schools Our Lady of Mercy College and Hanley Ville. The female principals of these schools were not public figures in the way that Atkins and Waddy were – women's voices were rarely heard in the newspaper – and in the instances below the spokesmen for the schools were visiting churchmen. In fact the historian of the Mercy order has suggested that the Principal of Our Lady of Mercy College, Sr. M. M. Francis Kearney, was discreetly at odds with the 'anti-intellectual' Archbishop Kelly, over academic achievement for women.³³ Nevertheless, public opinions about the purpose and worth of girls' education were decisively put and explicitly differentiated from needs and duties of boys in ways which made them easily distinguished from any of the public statements by or about Parramatta High.

The Anglican minister of St John's Church in Parramatta, S. M. Johnstone, used the occasion of the annual break-up of Hanley Ville ladies' academy to offer the following vision for the training of 'the children of this land':

³⁰ *Cumberland Argus*, 14 June 1913.

³¹ *Cumberland Argus*, 18 June 1913.

³² *Cumberland Argus*, 18 June 1913. In 1913 the two schools were only a short walking distance apart.

³³ McGrath, *These women*, pp. 50-51, 59.

Dealing with education he said that whilst he was free to admit that a system of public education was one of the most desirable things that could exist in the life of a community, he also was one of those who believed that they could not do without their private schools. (Hear, hear.) Such a school as that at “Hanleyville”, for instance, stood for the conservative forces in education as represented in the best ideas of the country. In these days of new “progressive” ideas and ideals, it was well that there should be in our private schools a force standing for the conservation of many of the old ideals, most necessary to us.³⁴

In addition to the development of physical, intellectual and aesthetic qualities, declared Johnstone, there was a need to train the ‘spirit’.

Were he talking at a boys’ school, he might here refer to training in relation to matters of courage, self-reliance, and self-control; but as he was speaking to more particularly a girls’ school, he would dwell upon the necessity for attention to the important development of the graces of character, of sympathy for others, thoughtfulness, and gentleness.

These qualities, he suggested, would be learnt not from books, but through daily contact with the ‘Christian ladies in charge of “Hanleyville”’, whose ‘whole system of teaching expressed those graces of character.’

Archbishop Kelly also took care to distinguish between the aims of male and female education when called upon to open a new secondary school building at Our Lady of Mercy Convent in September 1914. Where Hanley Ville had been represented as a school for the production of gentlewomen, Archbishop Kelly spoke about the good housewife:

[He] said he very willingly took part in the blessing of these educational establishments, as there was nothing more important from an ecclesiastical or democratic standpoint. The great factor in the community was the good woman – good mothers and good housekeepers. But the men who engaged in the battle of life – for life was a battle even in times of peace – required all that education could do for them, intellectually and morally.³⁵

Coeducation

³⁴ *Cumberland Argus*, 21 December 1912.

From 1912-1914 the main priority for the headmaster and supporters of Parramatta High was to establish a place for the school in the local educational market, and much of the reporting in *The Cumberland Argus* was concerned with explanations of the high school as an institutional type. This did not include, as has been mentioned earlier, either explaining or naming the school as a coeducational institution. Nor, for the most part, were the school's boys and girls discussed as if they belonged to separate categories of student, this being a feature which distinguished the high school from the single-sex non-state providers of secondary schooling. 'Boys and girls' was a conventional phrase which acted as a collective noun, interchangeable with either 'students' or 'children.' Yet some comments were directed especially – possibly exclusively – at boys, such as W. L. Atkins' contention that a 'boy' who attended a high school might increase his wage-earning power.³⁶ In the absence of comments addressed specifically to girls it is unclear whether female students might have applied these sorts of promises to themselves. To what extent these sorts of gaps and silences signified either free spaces within which girls might manoeuvre, or marginalisation both in terms of the school and the larger meritocratic project, are questions to be explored further.

In terms of the daily practices of coeducation there was almost total silence. Students were rarely represented as interacting with one another. Rules or conventions for either separating or grouping the sexes are difficult to infer from these public sources, though buried within a longish list of features of the new building in 1915 is the information that the girls and boys had separate entrances to the school, at either end of the building.³⁷ (They nevertheless were routinely taught together in the same classrooms.) Girls and boys participated on ostensibly the same terms in examinations and were similarly equally eligible for scholarships and bursaries. It would have been possible for readers of the newspaper to tell from the lists of public examination results in *The Argus* that girls performed as well if not better than boys academically for the high school's first few years. These achievements were quite visible. Gender did not appear, however, as a

³⁵ *Cumberland Argus*, 23 September 1914.

³⁶ *Cumberland Argus*, 11 December 1912.

³⁷ *Cumberland Argus*, 24 February 1915.

category for analysis of these successes, and academic stars like Lillian Whiteoak, the first dux, were depicted as representative of their school, rather than of their sex.³⁸

By the end of 1914 more detailed reporting of school activities meant instances in which some specific activities of boys and girls were seen to be different. During this early period high school girls and boys were not represented as having different characters or attributes. Where activities were differentiated by gender this was assumed rather than explained, such as in regular reports about charitable war work. In late 1914 the Parramatta High School girls were commended by *The Argus* for making shirts to send to the Australian troops. Their 'self-denial' (in doing this work in holiday time rather than neglecting their studies) and patriotism were remarked upon, as was the quality of their sewing.³⁹ In 1918 they were described as 'busily knitting (socks for soldiers) this month, while the boys in all probability will do their share by helping to purchase wool.'⁴⁰ Age and gender relations functioned in different ways for boys and girls. In this arena 'the girls' dominated, able to contribute as little women to the work of the home front in ways that were not available to the boys. At the same time the knitting and sewing was explicitly described as public labour rather than as having home-making associations. The production of clothing for soldiers was described in the same sort of language as other kinds of schooling effort and achievement. Sport was the area of school life in which students were divided most decisively along gender lines. High school sports were increasingly reported in the newspaper with the development of the inter-school competitions of the Public Schools Amateur Athletics Association, and it is probably unsurprising to discover that boys' rugby was given more coverage than girls' hockey or lacrosse.⁴¹

Growing out of coeducation

³⁸ *Cumberland Argus*, 4 April 1914.

³⁹ *Cumberland Argus*, 21 October 1914.

⁴⁰ *Cumberland Argus*, 18 May 1918.

⁴¹ See for example the 'High School Notes' column in *The Argus* weekly from 18 May 1918.

The first part of this chapter looked at representations of Parramatta High School in the earliest years of its establishment, speculating that at this moment of building and innovation, aspects of the school's shape, nature and aims might become visible that were otherwise taken for granted. A reading of the local newspaper, *The Cumberland Argus*, revealed aspects of the public image of the new high school, especially in comparison with other local providers of secondary schooling. Salient features of the two leading schools providing secondary education for boys, Parramatta High School and The King's School, became well-rehearsed in *The Argus*. They were portrayed, respectively, as institutions for modern meritocratic citizenship and muscular Christianity. Representations of girls' education at Parramatta High School, Our Lady of Mercy College and Hanley Ville School were more discreet and more confusing. Yet still the characteristic which distinguished Parramatta from the other two schools was its competitive, meritocratic organisation. Explanations or justifications of coeducation were not part of the public relations campaign which accompanied either the education reforms of 1911-12, or the establishment of Parramatta High in 1913. Coeducation was not an important feature of the school's official identity in its early years (and did not become so until the 1950s). Girls and boys were seen to be pursuing common, if not joint agendas on the same site but this state of affairs was not given substance or validated by use of the terms 'coeducation' or 'mixed schooling.' The practice of teaching boys and girls together was not named.

Coeducation was somewhat more apparent in other less public sources, in a variety of ways which will be discussed further in the following chapters. In this chapter the intention is to draw a comparison between the meritocratic and to some extent gender-blind discourses of *The Cumberland Argus* and some specific references to coeducation in the confidential correspondence files kept by the Department of Public Instruction, the letters and memoranda sent back and forth between the headmaster and the Department of Public Instruction's offices in central Sydney.

The enrolment of both boys and girls on the one site, and their sharing of classrooms and teachers was treated as an administrative circumstance in the school files, much like the

maintenance of the buildings or the cleaning roster, for example. Where the words, 'coeducation' and 'mixed school' appeared in the confidential correspondence files it was always in regard to a problem. The headmaster Atkins wrote about coeducation not in terms of academic or social benefit or harm for his students, but as extra work and worry:

The duties incidental to the government and organisation of this large staff and body of pupils are the more severe and taxing on account of the coeducation of the sexes, and demand tact and forethought which, perhaps, even a larger school consisting of boys would not require.⁴²

There were two kinds of problems in the files. One was the logistical difficulty of timetabling those activities for which boys and girls had to be separated – mostly sports – and the second was to do with the extra care required to safeguard the bodies and morals of girls. In 1918, for example, the headmaster found himself in a dispute with the itinerant teacher of girls' physical culture over which day she might be able to visit the school. The teacher, Ella Gormley, refused to alter her weekly travel arrangements to coordinate with the boys' cadet drill. Atkins complained to central office for more than three pages of the trouble he had taken to try to provide 'for both boys and girls to get equal treatment in the matter of lessons.'⁴³ His 'difficulties' – which 'do not, of course, arise in a purely girls' school' – included issues such as 'the question of change of costume.' 'Girls [in a girls' school] can come to ordinary classes in their training costume, a proceeding which is, of course, out of place where there are boys.' On another occasion Atkins was forced to make a rule prohibiting the boys and girls of the school from travelling in the same train carriage after reports by a delegation of unhappy parents of the conduct of kissing games.⁴⁴ Issues about discipline and the maintenance of respectability at Parramatta High School are further discussed in the following chapters, but here it is important to note that these two problems were seen to have arisen precisely because the management of Parramatta High School was different, or difficult, as a mixed rather than single-sex school.

⁴² Headmaster to Chief Inspector, 29 November 1917, P.H.S. files 5/17283.3.

⁴³ Headmaster to Chief Inspector, 8 July 1918, P.H.S. files 5/17284.A.

Parramatta High must have looked slightly provisional in 1913, notwithstanding the celebratory treatment of the local paper, but the growth of its senior classes meant that it was able to progress through the Department's system of high school rankings, from third to first class by 1919. Coeducation had been the solution to a problem about attracting sufficient numbers to a regional high school. There is evidence on the files to suggest that both the school's headmaster and senior Departmental officers such as the Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools, W. J. Elliott, saw it as a temporary inconvenience, a medium term measure until the school attracted sufficient enrolments to divide in two. Once it grew large enough the girls would move to another site and Atkins would remain as headmaster of the Parramatta Boys' High School. However there was no suggestion by the headmaster at this time that girls were academically less capable than boys. He was well aware of the academic dominance of the senior girls in the crucial early years. The girls had kept the senior classes alive for the first two years, contributing impressively to the public examination passes that were the lifeblood of the school. In 1917 he used their success in an attempt to gain early reclassification of the school to first class rank:

In the matter of ... examinations this school may fairly claim to have held its own with the older-established Metropolitan Schools. In the Intermediate Certificate Examination of last December two girls, Dorothy Nichol and Eunice Killip, surpassed all other girl candidates in the state by obtaining 7 A passes. An examination of the Girls will also show many other very good passes besides.⁴⁵

At the same time the evolution into a boys' high school might be the next logical step after the school had reached first class status. Atkins wrote to the Department in 1919, the year of Parramatta High's reclassification, recommending the purchase of a local property which might provide 'a possible site for a future separate girls' high school.'⁴⁶ William Elliott, agreed with him, and endorsed the letter, 'would give a good site for a separate High School when necessary'. They were overruled by Peter Board on the ground of economy, and the matter was held over indefinitely. From the perspective of

⁴⁴ Director to Headmaster, 17 August 1917, Headmaster to Director 23 August 1917, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17283.3.

⁴⁵ Headmaster to Chief Inspector, 29 November 1917, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17283.3.

⁴⁶ Headmaster to Chief Inspector, with annotations by Secondary Schools Inspector and Director, 14 October 1919, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17284.A .

the Department of Public Instruction it might be preferable, even a matter of policy, to separate the schooling of boys and girls, but it was not a matter of priority when money was short. The school seems to have remained mixed almost by accident, as successive plans to move the girls to another site fell through. The division of Parramatta High by gender was still being considered until the late 1950s.⁴⁷

D. H. Drummond and Domestic Science

It was on the watch of the conservative Education Minister, David Drummond, in the early 1930s, that Parramatta High School came closest to losing its female students. A plan was approved to build a separate girls' high school in Parramatta and to limit enrolment at the existing school to boys. The new girls' high school was to be one half of a dual girls' post-primary campus which would also include the Parramatta Domestic Science school, one of the anticipated benefits being that the high school girls would benefit from better access to domestic science facilities. In the previous chapters it has been discussed that opposition to coeducation had various justifications. There is no evidence that the headmaster Atkins' earlier suggestion that the school might divide was precipitated by any sort of critique of higher schooling for girls, or belief that girls should study different subjects or courses from boys. A reading of the correspondence concerning the proposed separation of the early 1930s, however, reveals how a division of the school might be associated with the desire to reinvigorate the study of domestic science. At the same time it should be borne in mind that these plans, organised as they were from central office in Sydney, seem to have impinged little on the business of daily school life.

The two main state post-primary schools for girls in Parramatta were the high school on the hill and the combined elementary and post-primary campus on the flat land to the east. They were situated a couple of kilometres from each other at either end of the main commercial centre of the town. By the late 1920s overcrowding was considered to have become a problem both on the Parramatta Public School site and at the high school. In

⁴⁷ For example, Note to file, 6 March 1950, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 14/7781.

both cases it was framed as a problem about where to put girls. For Parramatta High School it was noted, 'Adequate permanent accommodation exists for a greater number of boys than enrolled, but does not meet the needs of combined boys and girls enrolment.'⁴⁸ Notwithstanding the success of the Parramatta High School in terms of enrolments and public examination results, the desirability of separate high schools for boys and girls was considered by the Department of Public Instruction to be self evident. In discussions of vocational schooling this separation was embodied in the divided curriculum – technical training for boys, domestic science for girls – but even in the academic high school, where there was a more or less common curriculum, there was no question in the correspondence that the preferable state of affairs was separation by gender: 'The need for establishing separate schools for each sex instead of the composite school now provided has been recognised for some time.'⁴⁹ Further, it was argued that not only should the boys and girls be in different schools but these schools should not be geographically too close to one another: 'Another point which has been exercising the Department's mind recently is the undesirability of placing Boys' and Girls' High schools on contiguous sites.'⁵⁰ 'Experience points to the fact that wherever possible High Schools for the different sexes should be located on sites which are definitely removed from one another.'⁵¹

Separating boys from girls was one principle, another was the anchoring of schools in an appropriate local population. The documents reveal how narrowly conceived was the range of options for the schooling of adolescent girls. An early proposal was to place the domestic science school in the more working class electorate of Granville and the new girls' high school in the middle class Parramatta. In this proposal the industrial suburb of Granville would house the Technical College for boys and the domestic science school for girls, while Parramatta had both the girls' and the boys' high schools. The Minister 'was inclined to the view that Granville was more a centre of technical and Domestic

⁴⁸ Note to file, 1 November 1934, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17286.C.

⁴⁹ Note to file, 21 November 1928 P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17285.3.

⁵⁰ Note to file, 12 August 1928 P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17285.3.

⁵¹ Note to file, 6 November 1928 P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17285.3.

Science Training while Parramatta would produce the larger number of high school pupils.’⁵²

In 1911-12 it had been more important for the Department Public Instruction to establish economically viable secondary schools than to separate girls from boys, but by the late 1920s these priorities had altered. The subject, domestic science, had been made compulsory in all girls’ high schools in 1929 and now it was considered preferable to have the vocational and academic girls’ schools on the same site. As explained by Drummond:

It has been my policy, since taking control of the Department of Education, to encourage the introduction of Domestic Sciences into High School work, and, for this reason, there is a distinct advantage in placing the Domestic Science School and the Girls’ High School on contiguous blocks.⁵³

It is not a straightforward exercise to untangle the reasons for local actions by state governments, such as the building of a new school or the prioritisation of one set of expenses over another. In justifying his plans to place the girls’ schools together, Drummond was also responding to charges by the Member for Granville that the two schools would be located in the conservative electorate of Parramatta rather than the Labor seat of Granville as a favour to his political allies. Both local councils campaigned for the schools to be placed within their bailiwicks. There were other reasons for the purchase of a particular site: price, availability, proximity to public transport and suitability to adapt existing departmental building plans. In 1930 the purchase of a large block of land at Parramatta was finalised and plans were drawn up for a pair of buildings to accommodate the two schools.⁵⁴ Although it was desirable, however, a new academic high school for girls was not a funding priority, as Drummond explained to the Member for Granville in late 1929: ‘there is no intention on my part of proceeding, in the reasonably near future, with the construction of a girls’ high school at Parramatta.’⁵⁵ The girls stayed at the Parramatta High School and a new wing was added in the mid 1930s to

⁵² Note to file, 26 November 1928, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17285.3

⁵³ Minister to MLA Granville 18 October 1929, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17285.3.

⁵⁴ Notes and correspondence, 3 August 1928-29 January 1931 P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17285.3.

accommodate the extra numbers of boys and girls. Drummond was in favour in principle of building a separate girls high school at Parramatta, but it was less urgent than building a new domestic science school.

The Parramatta Domestic Science School was completed in 1933, using Depression labour. It was a show piece, which later became the comprehensive girls' school Macarthur High. It was a costly school to build, more so than a new academic high school, because of the extra facilities for the domestic arts subjects.⁵⁶ There was more than one reason for building the new domestic science school ahead of a the girls' high school – for example the overcrowding was more desperate than at the high school – but for the local member for Parramatta the priorities were clear:

I think it is quite evident to you and the members of the Cabinet that the establishment of Domestic Science Schools in our community is of greater importance than the establishment of high schools.

The tutoring of our girls in a domestic science course is of primary importance, and will have the effect of making girls realise that housework and housecraft is not a drudgery, and at the same time equip them for being better wives and mothers and citizens generally.

The professional course to-day is overcrowded, even with our male population, and there is no good purpose to my mind being served by establishing further high schools for girls, whereas the domestic science course is most essential in the natural development of the growing girl.⁵⁷

Conclusion

This chapter was concerned with the institutional identity of Parramatta High School at two important moments in its history, and from two particular perspectives. The first part of the chapter analysed the newly-established high school as a participant in its local education market, through the eyes of community spokespeople. The second part

⁵⁵ Minister to MLA Granville, 18/10/1929 P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17285.3.

⁵⁶ Government Architect to Department, 25 June 1931, Parramatta Central Domestic School files, SRNSW 5/17287.2.

⁵⁷ MLA Parramatta to Minister, 12 October 1932, Parramatta Central Domestic School files, SRNSW 5/17287.2.

examined the school from the perspective of the Minister for Education and his department, reading the New South Wales state's administration of gender through plans to reorganise the provision of girls' post-primary schooling in the district during the early 1930s. These analyses were based on specific texts. These are Parramatta's principal local newspaper and the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction correspondence files on Parramatta High School respectively.

A reading of the representation of Parramatta's schools in *The Cumberland Argus* offers some useful insights into the place of the Parramatta High School in its local education market during the very early years of its foundation. The headmaster and other supporters of the school can be seen working to create a particular institutional identity. The school was represented as a modern, meritocratic institution and a 'public' school of a specific kind. From the point of view of *The Argus's* writers it was both 'the people's school', open to all regardless of family circumstances – and the 'Oxford of Australia', accommodating only an intellectual elite. The high school was characterised differently from non-government providers of secondary schooling described in the newspaper, especially in terms of gender. Although the nature and extent of its coeducational practices were not explained, it would be difficult to mistake the mixed enrolment Parramatta High for the determinedly single-sex King's School, Hanley Ville and Our Lady of Mercy College. At the same time it is not easy to unpack the conventional 'boys and girls' of public education discourse. There is very little in *The Argus* between the taken for granted gender divisions associated with activities such as sports matches or knitting for the Red Cross, and the apparent meritocratic equality of public examination results. The girls and boys of the high school frequently appeared in the paper as a sort of ungendered collective, whether as Australia's theoretical future leaders or in singing the Marseillaise in French.

By the late 1920s, however, there were senior people in the Education Ministry or Department who were troubled by the apparent neglect of gender difference at the high school. Plans for the separation of the sexes into two different schools were approved in principle in the early 1930s. This thesis has pointed out that the foundation of Parramatta

High School as a coeducational institution was for pragmatic economic rather than theoretical educational reasons. In 1919, as the school became established enough to earn its classification as a first class high school, it seemed to the headmaster as well as to the Inspector of Secondary Schools that the next logical step might be for it to grow into two single-sex institutions, along the lines of the other metropolitan high schools. A decade later, proposals for the division of the school became associated with a project to reinvigorate the study of domestic science in New South Wales. The development by the Department of Public Instruction of a plan to move the girls of both the high and the domestic science schools onto the same site, albeit in different institutions, indicated that categorisation by merit might be less important than division by gender in the minds of some senior policy-makers. The implication was that the high school girls would benefit from their proximity to the domestic science school. Nevertheless, while the removal of the girls from Parramatta High School might have been considered desirable by leaders such as Drummond, it was not a funding priority in hard times and the school remained coeducational.

Chapter 5

Categories and boundaries: Gender and identity in *The Parramatta High School Magazine, 1913-1935*

We come now to the most interesting group of all – the feminine portion of the class. We fully agree with Mr James when he said that young ladies always act as a stimulus to the lagging spirits of boys. We could say the same thing – from experience. The girls have improved wonderfully of late, since studying Ruskin's essay, "Of Queen's Gardens."¹

Our girls always won at least one premiership in the interschool competition matches, until the Girls' Secondary Sports Association abandoned the competition in 1940. The boys, too, ... won at tennis, cricket and athletics. On the occasion of this last success, Mr Atkins, while congratulating the teams, told them it was really a remarkable achievement, seeing that half our boys were girls.²

An influential text of second wave feminism was Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, first published in 1969.³ Millett, along with many other second wave feminist scholars, searched in the nineteenth century for an understanding of the struggles of contemporary western women. She identified two key ideologues of Victorian womanhood in John Ruskin and John Stuart Mill, whose respective tracts, 'Of Queen's Gardens' and 'On the subjection of women,' were first published in the 1860s and read and studied not only in England but throughout the British Empire.⁴ Ruskin's and Mill's views were diametrically opposed. Where Mill argued for individual independence in the form of educational, economic and citizenship rights, Ruskin's ideal woman was protected by and dependent upon a male household head, living within her family as the selfless, 'Angel of the House,' her purity and goodness subtly yet importantly affecting those around her.

¹ '4B Boys' *Parramatta High School Magazine*, December 1919, p. 252.

² 'Memoirs by "Auntie May" of P.H.S. 1913-32,' *Phoenix: Magazine of the Parramatta High School*, 1945 p. 38.

³ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, Virago, 1977 (first published 1969).

⁴ 'Polemical, Mill versus Ruskin' in Millett, *Sexual Politics*, pp. 88-108. Millett's essay was also published in much the same form as 'The debate over women: Ruskin vs. Mill' in the foundation women's studies text, Martha Vicinus (ed.) *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, Indiana University Press, 1973, pp. 121-139.

It could be argued that versions of both Mill and Ruskin were present in the early years of Parramatta High School. Mill had argued that equal opportunity for higher education was a prerequisite for female independence, economic and otherwise. His views had been cited in the 1880 New South Wales Public Instruction Bill debate which had determined that it was the state's responsibility to provide higher schooling for girls as well as boys.⁵ The foundation of Parramatta High was an extension of this provision, offering rigorous academic training and valuable employment credentials to boys and girls together. On the other hand the satirical excerpt from the *Parramatta High School Magazine*, above, apparently referred to comments by Augustus James, New South Wales Minister for Public Instruction, who had recently attended the school's annual prizegiving. Here, perhaps confirming the worst suspicions of late twentieth-century feminist critics of coeducation, was an Education Minister evoking Ruskin, with girls in classrooms looking after the needs of boys. Given access to higher schooling they were nevertheless still learning to be agents of quietness, order and civilisation. Later they might be expected to exercise much the same influence as school teachers or mothers.

The second excerpt at the head of this chapter, written by needlework teacher and long-serving school 'character' May Crouch, suggests another aspect of gender relations at Parramatta High. This is a version of the argument that in coeducational high schools girls were just there to make up the numbers, as something like second rate boys. The categories 'girl' and 'boy' were most distinct and separate when organised around physical rather than mental activity, bodies rather than minds. The school, having approximately half its places taken up by girls, had fewer boys to choose from when selecting sporting teams, a significant deficit in the production of competitive masculinity. The status of girls' sport is ambiguous in Crouch's recollections. On the one hand they seem to be more successful than the boys, winning more premierships. On the other their competition is of lesser importance, eventually folding. At the same time it was in the context of these inter-school matches – the least 'mixed' of school activities – that the school began to be recognised and labelled as a coeducational school, because of

⁵ NSWPD, Ser. 1, 1879-1880, vol. 2, p. 1189.

its difference from the single-sex state high schools from other parts of Sydney against which it played. As James put it in 1919:

The schools against which the Parramatta school had been competing ... were not "mixed schools" like the Parramatta High School, but contained very much larger numbers of lads, or girls, as the case may be, from which teams could be picked.⁶

Gender in the modern high school

Coeducation is a form of school organisation which varied in detail according to historical time and place. At Parramatta High School boys and girls were mixed and separated to varying degrees under different school executives and in different school settings. They were separated more for sports and physical activity, less for academic subjects, more in junior classes, less in senior, and kept entirely apart for a succession of versions of health instruction. In common with the United States coeducational high schools described by Tyack and Hansot, the boys and girls of Parramatta High were taught, for the most part, a common curriculum in the same classrooms by the same teachers.⁷ They were similarly subject to the rules and customs of modern 'efficient' schooling, including organisation into class groups, orderly conduct, degrees of respect for teachers and other authority figures as well as the demonstration of learned tasks in response to specific verbal or written commands. An essential fact of New South Wales's state education system common to both girls and boys was the apprehension of one's place, both by qualifying – or not – to attend the high school and by grade, stream and class placement within the school, in a rigidly hierarchical system of academic effort and measurement by examination. These were fields across and within which gender – and indeed class and race – were enacted.

The previous chapter looked at Parramatta High School as a participant in a local schooling market, which included a variety of state and non-state schools. The school was an institution written and spoken about by its headmaster and others in ways which

⁶ 'Presentation of prizes,' *Parramatta High School Magazine*, December 1919, p 246.

⁷ David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning together: a history of coeducation in American schools*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990, p. 7.

both prescribed and implied specific attributes and aspirations for the theoretical high school student in terms both of gender and social class. Although it did not announce itself as a coeducational institution, the fact that Parramatta High was able to survive and grow as a mixed school was an important element of its differences from the other providers of youth training and education in the community at the time. It is almost impossible, for example, to imagine The King's School, Hanley Ville or the Parramatta Domestic Science School as coeducational. This was substantially because of the centrality to the high school of meritocratic discourses, which were ostensibly blind to categories other than those of intellectual effort and ability. However, that there were senior officers in the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction who were troubled by this relative invisibility or marginalising of gender is evident in the assumption that the establishment of a separate school for girls was just around the corner, and the considerable financial investment in the building of the new home for the Domestic Science school in the early 1930s.

Where the previous chapter looked at the school as a whole, in relation to other kinds of schools for boys and girls, the next four chapters view coeducation and gender relations from within the school. The chapters explore coeducation from various viewpoints, in various settings and contexts, during the period to the late 1930s. This chapter explores school culture through a reading of twenty years of *The Parramatta High School Magazine*, from the first issue in June 1916 to the final inter-war issue (before a ten year gap) in 1935. The chapter pursues two principal lines of inquiry. First it asks how gender was mediated by other kinds of social relations as the magazines worked to build a sense of institutional identity. Secondly, while coeducation was not explicitly explained or described in the magazines, the chapter nevertheless looks for clues about the daily and weekly functioning of coeducation, for ways in which boys and girls were separated or brought together.

The Parramatta High School Magazine

The Parramatta High School Magazine commenced publication in June 1916, after the school had already turned over three years' worth of public examination candidates and moved into permanent accommodation. It published once or twice yearly between 1916 and 1935, after which there was a nine year hiatus. The magazine was partly written and edited by students, with one of the teachers usually acting as editor-in-chief. Although there was certainly a censorship process of some sort, the details have not survived. It was probably a combination of teacher supervision and student self-consciousness. The magazines provide a systematic record of school life, within, of course, a highly conventional and tightly-edited framework. One issue looked much like another, and much like other student magazines of the period: partly a record of the usual school events – sports days, prizegivings and public examination results – and partly a forum for the expression of (selected) student voices. As well as the more formal editorials and reports on school associations and activities, there were other more personal and individual categories of writing. The Class Notes were a regular feature to which each class contributed a paragraph or so of news and witty observations. A second category of student writing was the individually authored essay, poem or short piece of fiction. These included travellers' tales, odes to the Australian bush, meditations on daily life and adventure stories.

The Parramatta High School Magazine functioned to build community in a number of ways. Most of the writing published within the magazine was about belonging to one or another group or hierarchy, within or beyond the high school. Its articles, stories and lists encouraged its writers and readers to place themselves within a number of groups and networks – belonging to a sports teams, winning or losing the rugby, being appointed as a prefect, collecting As or Bs in the public examinations. This encompassed simpler forms of affiliation such as club and committee membership, sports and academic achievement, as well as the making of deeper and more far-reaching cultural identifications. The idea that high school people shared not only common experiences and knowledge, but belonged to a common cultural group, was reiterated in a number of ways in different

parts of the magazines. Writing in the magazines operated both to identify and shape the features of a shared culture – whiteness, literacy, good taste, rational behaviour – as well collectively to define high school students by the ways in which they could be seen to be different from others categories of people, including working-class people and non-English speaking foreigners. Of central importance to the magazine’s writers were statements of ‘who we are’ and ‘who we are not’, which encompassed explorations and understandings of merit, age, race, nationality and social class as well as gender.

Reading the school magazines reveals a version of official school culture assembled by small groups of teachers and students. Although ostensibly the magazine was a publication representing the whole of school life, ‘every branch and section,’⁸ it is evident that certain voices were privileged over others. The magazine was a conservative publication. It dealt in optimism, or at least certainty, and the conventions within which its contributors operated meant that it tended to document stability or achievement, rather than doubt or disruption – and it is remarkable how consistent the magazine was over this twenty year period, not only in format but also in tone and ideology. Just how important the school magazines were in school life and just how representative of school culture is a moot point. Who wrote for them? Who read them? How were they understood? These are questions for which there can be no simple answers. The pool of contributors was small, despite regular exhortations by the editors for the students to support the magazine. The extent of readership, and the importance of the magazines themselves in shaping school life is harder to determine. The magazines privileged the voices and experiences of those boys and girls who were the most adept practitioners of the meritocratic high school culture: those who were near the tops of their classes, those who stayed longest at the school, those who were good with words. Different kinds of experience are visible mainly by reading against the grain, or in examining representations of the ‘other.’

⁸ Editorial, *Parramatta High School Magazine*, December 1917, p. 66.

Gender and other categories

The magazine's editors were keen to promote its role in the building and shaping of school community. The student-authored editorial of the June 1925 school magazine used a Rudyard Kipling story to provide a metaphor for this process:

Kipling has a capital story, "the Ship that found Herself," describing the maiden voyage of a tramp steamer. All the new parts of the ship, from the obscure rivets in the steel plates to the delicately centred piston rods of the engine, have their little grouch, one against the other; but before the voyage is over, all learn to work in unison ... and the babel of sound "melts into one voice which is the soul of the ship." Have you ever thought how like that ship our school is? In our clubs and societies, our classes and our different "years," we have our grouch, but at the right time we speak with one full-volumed chorus of unanimity – the voice of the school.⁹

The writer's choice of allusion summarised some of the central organising themes of the writing in *The Parramatta High School Magazine*. These included the idea of a community which is hierarchical yet engaged in a collective endeavour, the notion of progress, modernity and journey and faith in the civilising power of effort. The ship could be a metaphor for school, nation or Empire. Kipling himself, as a writer of colonialism and empire, had special resonance for Australian student readers.

Just as in the hierarchical mechanism of Kipling's ship, students at Parramatta High were organised into subcategories according to their work, arranged into grades and streams by academic expertise and age. The voices most strongly heard in the school magazines, were those of the 'A' or 'B' stream students. Amongst the competing affiliations within the school, the class group was the strongest and most consistent. The magazines devoted large sections to Class Notes in which students made comments such as 'we are the best Third Year class' or '[we are] 1A, who are A1.'¹⁰ These identifications were reinforced by various kinds of competitions. In addition to the tests and examinations, which determined the membership of the classes, classes competed to win sports matches or

⁹ Editorial by E.J.L 5A, June 1925, p.1.

¹⁰ '3A Girls', June 1926, p. 34; '1A' June 1916, p. 15.

team events in the athletics carnivals, or collect the most eggs for the Red Cross. Student contributors to the school magazine were usually identified by grade and class, even where initials or pseudonyms were used instead of names. Sporting houses, which might have provided a competing membership structure within the school, were not introduced until after 1935.

In terms of the gender of contributors to *The Parramatta High School Magazine* it is true to say that male voices were over-represented in ways that were consistent with the male hierarchy of the school. The words of adult males such as the headmaster and eminent guest speakers far outweighed those of adult females. Yet in terms of student voices participation was less unequal. The magazines consistently included contributions from both male and female writers, and it is not possible to say that Class Notes or reports on extra-curricula activities consistently or systematically allocated more space to boys than to girls during this period. To what extent the magazines privileged male experience is harder to say. Gender grouping and categorisation took a number of forms. There were places in the magazines where boys and girls were categorised as separate and different, such as the witty attribution of different personal qualities to male and female class members in the Class Notes. There were others where separation into 'boys' and 'girls' was very visible, but apparently arbitrary, as in the conventional separate listing of boys' and girls' public examination results.

The school seemed most divided in the reporting of sports, which were almost entirely separate, though even here there were substantially overlapping conventions in the way teams and games were written about. An example of this can be seen in the following excerpts from boys' and girls' sports reports in successive years. The language of the description of the boys' rugby team, below, apparently appealed to the following year's lacrosse captain, Letty Hancock:

Parramatta boys have always held the reputation of being good sports, of playing a hard, clean game ... other schools welcome their advent and look forward to a

game free ... from those “shrewd” tactics that may add a few points, but certainly do not add manly qualities.¹¹

Judging from remarks made by other High School lacrosse teams, Parramatta girls hold the reputation of being good, clean sports. This reputation is better than the winning of many points, for we have never been guilty of those “shrewd tactics” which characterise some teams.¹²

Messages about gender could be ambiguous and open to interpretation by the magazines’ readers, and representations of masculinity and femininity difficult to disentangle. An example of this is a 1920 editorial in which the school’s languages master, C. P. Smith, meditated on the responsibilities of citizens in the post-war world:

Today the world stands in need of sane, thoughtful, sympathetic, citizens, and it is to our schools that we naturally turn for the new material. Our High School students, after four years’ steady influence of supervised studies and recreation, must reap such benefits to character as will enable them to perform the many civic functions when they shall have entered into their rightful heritage – the franchise.¹³

While this passage is ostensibly ‘gender blind’ (including its use of the plural pronoun, ‘they’) the central image in the editorial was a description of an oath of citizenship, including a commitment to military service, taken by boys in ancient Athens and it could be argued that the model of good citizenship described in the editorial, based as it was upon service in the public sphere, was a masculine one. It is interesting to consider the terms on which girls may have been included in this; whether a teacher such as Smith imagined, or perhaps took for granted, that the adult responsibilities of the girls in his classes were likely to diverge on the whole from those of the boys. If girls were at these times compelled to place or imagine themselves within ‘masculine’ discourses, the opposite was not required of boys. As has been observed by feminist historians, ‘he’ might mean either ‘he’ or ‘he and she’ but when women or girls were discussed it was clear that they alone were being addressed. On the other hand it is certainly clear that Smith’s editorial, directed to ‘the boys and girls of the advanced classes’, privileged the

¹¹ Rugby report, December 1920, p. 285.

¹² Lacrosse report, December 1921, p. 46.

¹³ Editorial, December 1920, pp. 278-279.

experience of the minority of students who stayed at the high school until the final year. In some contexts this form of categorisation was stronger than gender. It was not at all clear where those boys and girls who left earlier – who after all were in the majority – would gain their finer citizenship training, or what sort of role they had to play in the world. The ideal or archetypal high school student in the school magazines was one who followed a path of orderly promotion from first year to the Leaving Certificate.

The writing in the magazine rarely projected or imagined dichotomous adult futures for girls and boys, or different kinds of citizenship. Exceptions to this were two interventions from outside the school in the form of prizegiving addresses by the Education Minister, Augustus James, in 1918 and 1919. The theme of both of the speeches was the importance of the high school sports program. For boys the value of this was illustrated ‘by a reference to the achievements of sportsmen of the British race in the Great War.’¹⁴ For girls ‘the Minister’s opinion was that ... their games improved their health as well as their physique and became more fitted for the great part they would play as the future womanhood of our race.’¹⁵ It is striking in the context of the other writing in the magazines that that he spoke about self-improvement in terms of body rather than mind, and thus in entirely different terms for boys and girls. That his speeches were somewhat at odds with what the students were used to hearing is suggested by the 4B boys’ comment about Ruskin quoted at the head of this chapter. A counter to James’s image of the production of healthy mothers was the following satirical poem which came close to suggesting that the sporty high school girl may be too hoydenish for a future of domesticity:

Here’s to the robust hockey girl,
Who lays the game with hair in curl,
And strikes the ball with joyous shout,
Regardless of her rivals’ clout,
Whose limbs are marked with blue and black,
As evidence of many a crack.
Here’s hoping that she’ll not when wed,

¹⁴ ‘Presentation of prizes,’ December 1918, p. 136.

¹⁵ ‘Presentation of prizes,’ December 1919, pp. 245-6.

Play hockey with her husband's head.¹⁶

Reports of the school's ex-students – the Ex-Students' Association was established in 1918 – also privileged or foregrounded specific kinds of high school and adult experience which was not explicitly divided by gender:

To you who teach in far-off lands, in Woop Woop and such lonely places To you who work in dismal dens, in offices and shut-up places, with painful pushing of tiresome pens, and hearty longing for the day to end To you who yet do stew and study at the Uni. or the Training College, and have always before you some pleasant exam.¹⁷

From the first issue the magazine carried news of the school's ex-students, with these reports weighted towards those who had completed their Leaving Certificates and were studying at the Sydney University or the Teachers' College or were in early teaching careers. The main exception to this was those students (and teachers) who had left to serve in the Great War, whose letters and news appeared in each issue. However most of the ex-students who remained in touch with the school had not moved very far outside the sort of world that was comprehensible to the high school, and imagining or representing these sorts of futures in the magazines did not necessarily require any sort of acknowledgement that there might be different paths for girls and boys. The student editor of the December 1927 magazine Thora Boesen, later dux of the school, confidently imagined high school students as having a free choice of future careers:

We may think of [the high school] as an elevated spot from which we may see the surrounding country and pick out from the radiating paths one to follow to the end. ... Some of us may tread the Alpine path to the giddy heights of fame, while others lose themselves in the maze of everyday life; but one and all are the better for having attended here.¹⁸

High school boys and girls were also represented as collectively distinct from other kinds of people, from 'the uneducated' or from non-white, non-English-speaking foreigners. It is not that gender differences and distinctions disappeared or became immaterial at these

¹⁶ 'To a hockey girl,' August 1924, p. 48.

¹⁷ 'P.H.S. Ex-students,' November 1923, p. 5.

moments, but that gender was mediated by other kinds of groupings. The idea that high school people belonged to a common cultural group, was reiterated in a number of sub-genres of magazine writing, for example in collections of individually-authored poems, essays and narrative pieces. The common theme of these original contributions was students' observations of the world around them. The subtext was students' efforts to align with or to differentiate themselves from aspects of these worlds. Writers tended to adopt a persona from within a fairly narrow range of possibilities: possessed of a rational observing eye, a certain self-containment, and a head full of lines from the great poets. Writing of all kinds was reliant on the understanding or recognition of literary allusions from the English poets, though more self-consciously patriotic descriptions of the Australian bush might refer to Australian writers such as Dorothea Mackellar or Henry Kendall (conspicuously absent was the most famous chronicler of Australian working class life, Henry Lawson.)

Contributors to the magazine demonstrated that they were observant and appreciative of the detail of the world around them as well as proficient in middle class book-based culture. They advocated the nurture of the special verbal expressive qualities of the high school intellect, and the cultivation of an aesthetic eye. An editorial by a fourth year girl in August 1922 advocated spending time in unstructured intellectual contemplation: 'For every half-hour spent in care-free, restful thought, independent of time, place or circumstance, rids one's brain of worry and renders it capable of clear, concise working like a vitalised machine.'¹⁹ Other pieces mused on the history of a second hand copy of the Iliad found at a book stall, or listed 'Pleasant sounds,' which encompassed the elements of a personal world which made the author feel peaceful, including 'the compositions of Mozart played by a master hand 'the singing of the kettle on the fire ... [the] merry chatter of the family tea-table.'²⁰ Many issues of the magazine included essays describing the simple pleasure of a walk in the bush or the countryside, a genre which was sent up in 1926 by Cyril Walsh:

¹⁸ Editorial, December 1927, p. 3.

¹⁹ Editorial, August 1922, p. 62.

²⁰ 'Second hand book stalls,' December 1926, p. 16; 'Pleasant sounds,' June 1926, pp. 20-21.

As for other phenomena of Nature, who does not rather see a jelly set or a wireless set than a sunset. The stars are too far away, and most people now prefer film-stars. Again, electric light is considered more up-to-date than "the long glories of the winter moon."²¹

As well as identifying and shaping the features of a shared culture, some of the writing in the magazines operated to distinguish high school students from others kinds of people. This variety of belonging and identification was apparent in the informal 'wit and wisdom' sections, especially the humour. A number of issues carried lists of 'exam howlers,' including howlers from the high school entrance examinations: 'The pyramids divide France from Spain;' 'The South Africans worshiped idles.'²² Presumably the people who were currently enrolled at the high school had not made such mistakes and to be able to see the joke was to be literate in the cultural references of the educated middle classes. High school students were able to display their special knowledge in a witty, studiously offhand manner. The following poem, for example, was contributed by a Leaving Certificate student:

Advice from our poetess to would-be Latin students:-
A little Latin is a dangerous thing;
Drink not of the Bandusian spring;
Livy and Virgil no more con,
But the joyful cap of ease now don.²³

In an editorial from 1925, high school students were set apart from the 'uneducated:'

For many, the end of 1925 marks a turning point in their lives, when they cease to be school children and assume the graver responsibilities of citizens of the world. ... the school has not only provided them with ... a good education which will enable them to gain a livelihood in the near future, but has also given them a point of view and a sense of the cultural value of education. It has broadened their outlook and opened up pleasures unknown to the uneducated.²⁴

²¹ 'The truth about nature,' December 1926, p. 11.

²² 'Some exam howlers,' June 1919 pp. 209-10; see also, for example, 'Qualifying exam howlers,' December 1917, p. 72; 'Some howlers from Q. C. Papers,' December 1921, pp. 59-60.

²³ '4A', June 1918, p. 111.

²⁴ Editorial, December 1925, p. 3.

Students also set themselves apart from non-white or non English speaking foreigners. Two descriptions of weddings are indicative of the way the behaviours and bodies of non-white colonial subjects were described. An early piece of Orientalism was a description of an Egyptian wedding, sent to his old school by an ex-student overseas as a soldier during the First World War.²⁵ It is very clear in the story who is the foreigner and who is the observer and that the observer is 'one of us'. Within the story appear bemused groups of English and Australian soldiers who are the spectators, 'our' eyes and ears. A drummer 'plies his sticks in a frenzied manner.' An old man 'wore a marvellously clean turban and fez, contrasting vividly with the remainder of his dress.' 'The bridegroom in all his finery strutted along.' The wedding party is most comical when trying most to be European: a brass band in western dress 'murdered "the Men of Harlech."' The description of a Christian wedding, performed by a white missionary, on one of the islands of the New Hebrides, though written by a younger student and not so deliberately witty, nevertheless similarly views the wedding party as 'other:'

The bridegrooms wore trousers and dark coats, treasures which they had stored away for years for such an occasion. One of them had actually secured a pair of boots, which he proudly displayed to the envious gaze of his friends It was noticed that one of the brides had allowed her petticoat to hang about six inches below her dress. On being asked the reason for this she explained that the lace was far too pretty to be hidden away under her dress, which was not half so beautiful.²⁶

These pieces and others like them placed the writer, and by extension the high school student reader, within a particular observing group and in a particular relationship with the 'other' who was the subject of the description. The high school students were reminded of who they were. They were literate, rational and normal observers, white and English speaking. They were also defined by who they were not. The high school students were in an entirely separate category from these foreigners who spoke odd languages or broken English, who had childlike and/ or comical habits and demeanour, were prey to superstition and magical thinking, whose emotions were unregulated, and who did not dress normally.

²⁵ 'An Egyptian wedding,' December 1919, pp. 269-271.

Foreignness in a number of adventure stories was more frightening. Some stories had 'foreign' villains, who might be identified by physical appearance (colouring, shape of face), violence or incomprehensible language. Most of the stories in which the foreigner had any sort of power (though little humanity) were published during or shortly after the Great War, with Australian or English protagonists and German adversaries, 'those barbarous dogs'²⁷. The identification of foreignness was extended to an imagined incident in the Greek-Persian Wars in which the writer imagined the 'gallant' Athenian protagonists as foreign yet closer to 'us' than the Persian antagonists. The girl who is the heroine of the story is described in the following terms as exotic yet heroic: 'her eyes glowed and her proud Grecian head was raised with the indomitable spirit of her race.' The Persians, on the other hand, are foreign in a bad way, and the Greeks regard their dishonourable 'Oriental methods' with 'scorn.' The Persians are more foreign than the Greeks: 'the clear Greek voice was interrupted by the smooth, liquid, evidently foreign speech.'²⁸

In fact language and speaking were important in evoking both foreignness and social class. Foreign villains were silent in a menacing way, or guttural, and colonial subjects were silent or spoke broken English. Working-class characters in stories spoke in ways that revealed themselves to be uneducated. A satirical character study, 'The Thingummies,' made fun of the pretensions and lack of self-knowledge of a working-class family: The father is 'Lord and master'. The son is 'son and heir'. The mother/wife sends the daughter to learn 'type-hand' and 'short-writing'.²⁹

Beliefs about the British Empire and colonialism bound a number of these observations and interpretations together. In some instances the idea of Australianness was identical to that of English or Britishness. At other times there was some tension, which included social class as well as nationality, between being English and being Australian.

²⁶ 'A memory of the New Hebrides,' June 1926, pp. 16-17.

²⁷ 'An incident somewhere in France,' December 1916, p. 32.

²⁸ 'Ismene: a tale of Greece,' December 1919, pp. 271-273.

²⁹ 'The Thingummies,' December 1925, p. 31.

Indigenous Australians were rarely mentioned and the moment of Australia's birth was unquestionably the arrival of the British. That the school belonged to the British Empire was reasserted on formal, public celebrations like Empire Day and ANZAC Day:

Yet again we met ... on May 24th [Empire Day] to signify our loyalty to the Empire, when Mr Atkins [headmaster] addressed us feelingly and impressively concerning the claims that our Mother Country has upon us. He spoke of the great power of the British Navy, its significance for us, and of the ideals of The British Empire, founded as they are upon the principles of justice, equality and unselfishness. As on ANZAC Day we sang patriotic songs, including the national Anthem, [God save the King] which we felt had an added solemnity in its wider application to the King as representing the Empire.³⁰

Travel by former students and teachers to Europe and the Middle East for war service between 1914 and 1918 provoked reflections on identity, nationality and class. A letter from an ex-teacher, John McCallum, published in 1917, described his visit to England almost as a pilgrimage.³¹ As he stood in a lobby of the Houses of Parliament in London before a group of statues of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century English politicians, he felt confident in assuming that his readers would know who Fox and Gladstone were, would understand where he was, and would share his sense of recognition. A very different letter, from an ex-student, Victor Harding, worked through some more complicated feelings about home and belonging:

You know we used to talk of England as 'Home' in pre-war days, but now it is always Australia that is meant I have become very fond of the Australian 'Billjim.' One time I used to be nauseated by his language, especially just after I went into camp in Australia, but close acquaintance with the big things of life (and death) has left me an admirer of the real Billjim. One does not see the big side of things till in the midst of an actual battle ... but once there, one sees so much that is wonderful and overwhelming revealed by the ordinary Billjim that old prejudices seem foolish, small and inconsequent by comparison, and one is ashamed of ever being guilty of them.³²

³⁰ 'School notes,' June 1917, p. 39.

³¹ 'School notes,' December 1917, pp. 69-70. This teacher later became Senator McCallum, Liberal Party, New South Wales, 1949-1962.

³² 'P.H.S. honor board,' June 1918, p. 109-110.

The letter, as well as being very moving in its description of Western Front battlefields, indicates that Harding had not yet resolved the tension implicit in being a middle-class colonial subject. High school students were encouraged to speak, write and think in a language which marked them out as educated. A broad Australian accent and way of speaking was seen as rough, unmusical, working class. Yet even here Harding was still distanced from the category 'Billjim.' 'Billjim' and his accent and demeanour, however much now admired, was still categorically distinct from the letter's imagined readers. In the context of Victor Harding's letter it is useful to speculate again about the intersections of gender and social class in high school culture. The letter addressed the problem of how to be a man, including an image of 'a great bullet-headed uncouth fellow, whose language would turn the air blue' comforting a dying 'mate' in a way that Harding compared to the tenderness of a woman. It was this demonstration of these womanly, nurturing qualities, in combination with physical toughness, which caused Harding to question his former prejudices.

The experience of being a soldier in the Great War was closed off to most of the boys and girls of Parramatta High alike (few boys were old enough to enlist) but a number of both girls and boys imagined themselves as young adults at the war front in fiction published in the magazines during this period. It is interesting to read how the adventures of adult men and women were imagined by high school students as having similar and different trajectories. The stories had several elements in common. Each imagined a young protagonist at the moment of experiencing his or her first real taste of adult life, facing a test requiring individual courage and quick-wittedness. The enemy was present for the purpose of precipitating the action but the writers were more interested in the self than the other and the focus was on the strong feelings and quick actions of the individual hero or heroine. Where the individual was acting within a larger group, s/he nevertheless experienced his or her passion, fear and excitement alone: 'Why did his hands tremble so? What was the moisture on his forehead?'³³ Yet nearly all of the stories concluded with some sort of reintegration into the group in the form of recognition by (male) peers or authority figures who had observed the heroic action at close quarters. The moment of

³³ 'A grain of loyalty,' December 1917, p. 90.

testing was concluded by the reassertion of a just external order. The apparent chaos of the war zone was not really chaos at all but a purposeful test, a step in the process of producing, or singling out, a particular, meritorious, kind of adult citizen.

Most of the stories had male protagonists who were members of the armed forces. Of the female heroes, one was the daughter of a soldier and the other a Red Cross nurse. The male principals face the enemy directly, in various kinds of combat, the women do rescue or courier work, temporarily cut off from male protection. In 'An incident somewhere in France' the peak experience is an aerial dogfight: 'He is filled with the lust of battle and feels strangely elated.'³⁴ In 'An adventure of an Australian soldier in France' a soldier with 'a stern and immovable face' single-handedly captures a German saboteur.³⁵ In 'A daughter of Australia', Nan, a heroine who might be related to Mary Grant Bruce's Norah, carries a message past enemy lines to save a French village.³⁶ Women were mostly absent in the male stories or slightly written, waiting as 'dear ones' somewhere remote from the war zone.³⁷ The only female character sketched in at all – given a face and occupation – was the future wife who turns out to be a dead comrade's sister.³⁸ On the other hand it is possible to speculate about how the author of 'A grain of loyalty' understood the powerful embrace of the symbolic woman who carries a young English sailor into adulthood in the following:

It was not the fact that the destroyer had been taken that filled Slater with new heart. It was something infinitely wider, inexpressibly higher—the new sense of loyalty, of patriotism, that had come upon him and had thrilled every fibre of his body. He felt, in that moment of victory, a feeling the flag-waving, anthem-singing patriots will never know—the genuine, unmistakable love of the Motherland. He turned his eyes across the tumbling waves in the direction of the homeland; and his thoughts moved into words:
"England!" he murmured huskily. "Dear England!"³⁹

³⁴ 'An incident somewhere in France,' December 1916, pp. 31-32.

³⁵ 'An adventure of an Australian soldier in France,' December 1917, pp. 94-95.

³⁶ 'A daughter of Australia,' June 1918, pp. 128-130.

³⁷ 'An incident somewhere in France,' December 1916, pp. 31-2; 'An adventure of an Australian soldier in France,' December 1917, pp. 94-95.

³⁸ [title missing], June 1916, pp. 17-18.

³⁹ 'A grain of loyalty,' December 1917, pp. 90-91.

Male recognition and regard, while an important element of closure for the male heroes, was crucial to the romantic trajectory of the female stories, both of which closed with a real, rather than metaphorical, embrace, 'Every soldier's face was alight with enthusiasm, and many a soldier gave a glance at Nan, thinking what an Empire it would be if everyone would face danger for his country like Nan had done.' These gazes distract Nan for a moment but her real reward was her father's regard:

After the last soldier had marched away Nan stood looking after them till she felt her father's hand on her arm. She turned around and showed him a face radiant with joy. "I'm proud of you, Nan!" said he, and Nan, looking into his face, felt amply rewarded.⁴⁰

Where Nan was reunited with her father, the 'sweet-faced' Red Cross nurse found a husband. After rescuing soldiers from a burning field hospital and physically carrying one of them across a paddock to safety, she swoons femininely into the arms of the doctor she loves.⁴¹ This story is particularly interesting in that it appears to be a reworking of a real episode involving a Parramatta-born nurse, Dorothy Cawood, who was awarded the Military Medal, together with two other nurses, in 1918.⁴² The medal was mentioned in the student's retelling but the nurse is at least ten years younger, acts alone rather than with her colleagues, and the doctor husband seems to have been fictional. It is also worth noting here the conventional contrast between the German enemy, briefly sketched in as 'the brutes', and the chivalrous conduct of the Allied soldiers. In this context the nurse's marriage was expressed as the consummation of her adult citizenship. She begins her adventure as 'a sweet-faced [Australian] girl' and completes it as one of 'two staunch Britishers, leaving to carry on the work of the "Glorious Red Cross".'

⁴⁰ 'A daughter of Australia,' June 1918, p. 130.

⁴¹ 'A Red Cross nurse,' December 1919, pp. 273-276.

⁴² J. Abbott, 'D. G. Cawood' *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 7, p.594.

Working and learning together

The magazines offer far from straightforward or transparent accounts of the daily operation of coeducation. Although coeducation was plainly in view in the magazines it was not named or explained during this period. In daily school life it is apparent that boys and girls mostly shared classrooms and teachers and sat for the same examinations. They were also shown participating together in some ongoing extra-curricular projects such as the Tuck Shop, the Red Cross and the school magazine's editorial committee, though exactly how much mixing was involved, and on what terms, is unclear. School drama activities such as play nights appear to have had mixed casts. The Ex-Students' Union, which organised various social activities including dances, was mixed. Novelty competitions were periodically reported in the magazines which pitted teams of girls against teams of boys.⁴³

In the lists that were the backbone of the school magazines, such as examination lists, male and female names were usually separate. Female and male prefects were listed separately but photographed together. The photographs were always the same format. Boys and girls were together, but in same-sex rows or blocks within the larger group; together and separate at the same time. Male and female teaching staff were listed by teaching subject (rather than gender) at the front of each magazine, though there were different conventions for male and female names. Men were identified by initial and surname, women teachers were 'Miss' or (rarely) 'Mrs.' That the staff was led by male teachers was visible in the listing of headmaster, deputy headmaster and subject masters. Other routine gender inequalities visible in this way included the Tuck Shop accounts allocating a greater proportion of its profits to boys rather than girls' sports, and the election of a boy captain of the school in 1915, five years before a parallel position was established for girls (in 1920), even though during this early period there were more girls than boys in the senior classes.

⁴³ 'Baseball,' December 1921, p. 45; 'Hockey match: Girls v. Boys,' December 1927, p. 36.

Another aspect of the high school gender order which can be read in the school magazines is a conventional division of labour between boys and girls in terms of their participation in school citizenship duties. Girls' contributions were decorative, charitable or domestic. They made decorative wreaths for ANZAC day, knitted for the Allied soldiers and provided afternoon tea for visitors to the school. The boys, on the other hand, as well as 'supplying the materials' for the girls' knitting projects, assisted with building and maintenance tasks around the school. They moved earth for the tennis courts and repaired the venetian blinds.⁴⁴

The sections of the school magazine which most explicitly addressed the daily operation of coeducation were the Class Notes. These were a regular feature to which each class was supposed to contribute a paragraph of news and witty observations. Authorship was anonymous and ostensibly collective. After the first couple of issues, the girls and boys of each class often, though not consistently, wrote separate pieces. The Notes were full of in-jokes and sly comments about school events and personalities. The coded references make them quite difficult for the outsider to read, which was no doubt the point. They were discontinued from 1927 having apparently eventually gone too far in their irreverence. The August 1927 issue of the magazine included the stern comment, 'Class Notes will not be printed until there is some attempt to make them worthy of a place in the magazine.'⁴⁵ However from 1916 until 1926 the Notes provided a forum for the expression of a particular set of student views on coeducation. This was coeducation as flirting, as a battle of the sexes, as joking around. Noticing or interacting with the boys or girls was usually a subversive act in the Notes. It was something that was done to be funny, or as counter to the main business of studying. The relatively sharp definition of gender in the Notes, nevertheless, co-existed with other strong categorisations, especially the measurement of academic prowess which led to students' entry into the high school, and their placement in a particular stream.

⁴⁴ Editorial, June 1917, p. 35; 'School Notes,' December 1926, p. 5.

⁴⁵ 'Omission of class notes,' August 1927, p. 5. They reappeared for one issue, in October 1935, but the magazine ceased publication from 1936.

Coeducation was not directly questioned or addressed in the Notes but it was made over by the students in their own terms. Interactions between girls and boys were frequently represented as competitive or combative. The boys tended to represent themselves as comedians or pranksters, often with more or less obscure nicknames and characterisations: 'Grey Podargus: Cartoonist and general funny merchant. Smilah: militarist ... [and] The Oirishman: Our long friend, who, in the opinion of the girls, is the only bhoy in the class.'⁴⁶ The girls were frequently depicted as the audience for or the victims of the boys' jokes: 'Some of our exceedingly witty members (boys, of course) seem to think the girls' principal actors at a wedding, for during the day they blow rice at them, but the girls do not seem to appreciate it.'⁴⁷ In December 1916 the boys hung mistletoe in the doorway of the 3A's classroom, with 'girls crowded round the door, prevented from going in.'⁴⁸ In these two examples the boys occupied space and restricted the movement of the girls, initiating flirtations which took the form of real or threatened assaults on the girls' bodies. Classroom disobedience was represented as being acted out differently by boys and girls. For example, the 2A girls were 'ornaments'; the Remove B boys 'had to sit still with their hands on their heads for half an hour to keep them from doing too much work'; the boys behaved like 'monkeys' or 'animals,' the girls giggled and talked too much, they were 'the talkative sex,' a 'babbling brook.'⁴⁹ Much of this was represented as reinterpreted teacher talk and its expression here in the exchange of comic banter suggests both endorsement of and resistance to these messages about gendered behaviour.

Portrayal of the boys remained consistent through the period, but representations of the girls changed somewhat from the 1910s to the 1920s. During the 1910s there were several representations of girls as passive, not alert or inquisitive enough; the sort of image that was played with in the following excerpt from the 3A Girls of 1919:

⁴⁶ '4A boys,' June 1917, pp. 45-46.

⁴⁷ 'Remove A,' June 1918, pp. 118-119.

⁴⁸ '3A,' December 1916, p. 12.

⁴⁹ '2A,' June 1916, p. 13; '2B,' December 1918, p. 157; '2C,' June 1916, p.14; 'Remove A Boys,' December 1918, p. 155; '3A girls,' December 1926, p. 35; '3C Boys,' June 1926, p. 37; '5B,' October 1935, p. 12.

We have many grievances to put before the public: The right of women are again being sadly abused. The other day ... [a] member of our fair sex was told sternly to “stop gazing out of the window and dreaming.” ... Someone else was accused of being frightened to ask a question. 3A Girls frightened? Never!⁵⁰

Into the 1920s, however, the girls’ voices in the notes became somewhat stronger, invoking the image of the ‘modern girl,’⁵¹ who was more mature and serious than the boys, yet who had also some of the independence and chutzpah of the flapper. This was expressed as a sort of small gender war which the girls were winning:

Starting debates is our favourite game – so far as we never got beyond what the discussion is about, because the thick-headed males persistently, and with great obstinacy, resign when nominated to any position We think they are afraid of coming up against the girls, because they are such good arguers.⁵²

Girls found themselves to be more reliable than the boys: ‘Our hospital week was a great success ... though the girls did the bringing and the boys did the thinking of bringing.’⁵³ It became more common for the girls to adopt a tone of disapproval of the boys’ unruliness:

We must also remark that care and anxiety [caused by the recent examinations] left the masculine portion of the class enough of their natural overflow of animal spirits to persist in ducking each other, hanging up bags on window cords, and changing desks.⁵⁴

When the girls of 3C topped the class in the half-yearly examinations they noted that it had been at the boys’ expense: ‘In this matter, and only in this one, do the gentlemen keep to the rule, “Ladies First!”’⁵⁵ At the same time this was a largely one-sided contest in which the girls appeared to be more aware of the boys than the boys of the girls.

⁵⁰ ‘3A Girls,’ December 1919, p. 253.

⁵¹ ‘3C Girls,’ December 1926, p. 37.

⁵² ‘2B Girls,’ December 1926, p. 39.

⁵³ ‘2B Girls,’ June 1926, p. 38.

⁵⁴ ‘3A girls,’ December 1926, p. 35.

⁵⁵ ‘3C girls,’ August 1924, p. 6.

Conclusion

This thesis argues that different kinds of historical sources offer different readings of coeducation theory and practice. Authorship, intended audience and other circumstances of production contributed to variations in the representation of gender relations at Parramatta High School. In this chapter interactions between gender and other categories of identity were explored through a reading of the first two decades of *The Parramatta High School Magazine*. The magazine commenced publication in 1916, three years after the school's opening, and ceased in 1935 before being resurrected in the 1940s. It was a conventional publication, varying little from issue to issue, which sought to build community and culture by creating a systematic record of important school personnel and achievements. The magazine functioned to build community at a number of levels. For those who wrote for it, and/or read it, its articles, stories and lists encouraged them to place the high school and its students within a number of groupings and networks, such as belonging to a sports team, winning or losing the rugby, being appointed as a prefect, collecting As or Bs in the public examinations, as well as being a first year or a fourth year or 'one of the girls' or 'one of the boys.' Most of the writing was about belonging to one or another group or hierarchy, within or beyond the high school. This encompassed simpler forms of affiliation such as club and committee membership and sports and academic achievement, as well as the making of deeper and more far-reaching cultural identifications. Numbers of high school boys and girls were adept practitioners of this culture. That others were not is more evident in other kinds of sources, discernible in the magazines only by close reading.

The idea that high school people shared not only common experiences and knowledge, but belonged to a common cultural group, was reiterated in a number of ways, in a number of sub-genres of magazine writing. Writing in the magazines operated both to identify and shape the features of a shared culture – whiteness, literacy, good taste, rational behaviour – as well to collectively define high school students by the ways in which they could be seen to be different from others categories of people, including working-class people, the uneducated and non-English speaking foreigners. Of central

importance to the magazine's writers were statements of 'who we are' and 'who we are not', which encompassed explorations and understandings of merit, age, race, nationality and social class as well as gender. The chapter explored the ways in which gender, in this coeducational school, was mediated by these other categories of identity and identification. It argues that important sections of the school magazines privileged other kinds of distinctions over gender. This is certainly not to say that gender as a category disappeared or became immaterial at these moments, but that it was mediated by other kinds of groupings which are important to consider in order to achieve an understanding of the range of meanings that coeducation and gender held for the boys and girls of Parramatta High during this period.

Chapter 6

Who were the ‘boys and girls’ of Parramatta High? Gender, social class and examination success

This study argues that concepts of merit and social mobility were central to the organisation and culture of Parramatta High School. Chapters 3 and 4 of the study looked at how public school authorities in New South Wales and elsewhere used coeducation of the sexes to facilitate other forms of grouping and sorting of students for efficient higher schooling. Boys and girls were grouped together in schools and classrooms for the purpose of effecting finer gradations of age or merit. Chapter 5 tracked the building of a specific kind of middle-class, meritocratic culture at Parramatta High School through the agency of the school magazine. The chapter looked at representations of ‘self’ and ‘other’ in the magazines, arguing that gender, in this mixed high school, was a variety of identification which coexisted and interacted with others, notably academic prowess, seniority, race, nationality and social class. This chapter uses quantitative information to ask questions about the specific makeup of three of the student cohorts which passed through Parramatta High. How many boys and girls were enrolled at the school during different periods? To what extent were patterns of persistence or academic achievement differentiated by gender? To what extent did girls and boys share common school careers? From which social classes were children recruited to the high school? The chapter maps the social class and gender composition of those cohorts which commenced post-primary schooling in 1913, 1921 and 1933. Their progress through the school was tracked in terms of yearly promotion and the award of public examination credentials, two fundamental aspects of the structure of the modern New South Wales secondary school.

The New South Wales Department of Public Instruction was also interested in the question, ‘Who were the girls and boys of Parramatta High?’ Fundamental to the twentieth century state schooling project were record-keeping and the measurement of achievement; the systematic gathering of data and logging of students’ progress in ways

that might be counted and quantified. This chapter works with two sources of this kind of modern information, the Parramatta High School *Registers of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal* and the annual published lists of results of the main public examinations taken at high school. Each of these was essential underpinning for the kind of publicly accountable and meritocratic institution that the high school purported to be. The information gathered was of a concrete, 'objective' nature, amenable to being added up or listed. The perpetual *Register of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal* was a large book of forms in which personal details for each student were entered when they enrolled at the school and updated year by year.¹ The kind of information required for each student remained almost unchanged over the period of this study and the registers were centrally printed to ensure uniformity. Data was collected on the age and sex of each student, his or her religion (more than 50 per cent of students were Anglican, more than 80 per cent Anglican, Presbyterian or Methodist), name, address and occupation of parent or guardian, progress from year to year within the school, former school and intended occupation. Unfortunately this last category was frequently left blank. This chapter relies for its analysis on the data for sex of student, 'progress' and 'parent's occupation'.

The second kind of information used in the chapter, the public examination lists, recorded details of the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate results of every candidate in New South Wales. This included lists of all subjects passed at the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations, with the grade awarded for each, for example, A or B. The lists were published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* every summer, a big event in the school year. Students were listed collectively in alphabetical order under the name of their school. The names of boys and girls were sometimes listed together but more often under separate headings.

Together the *Admissions Registers* and examinations lists offer insights into the gender and social class composition of the school, the mix of boys and girls in junior and senior years, and the comparative achievement of boys and girls in the business of gaining formal academic credentials. These overviews of important aspects of the identities and

¹ The registers held by the school except for the years 1915-1916 which are missing.

behaviour of whole cohorts are useful in understanding the interaction of merit and gender in practice at Parramatta High, for specific moments in its history. They suggest a variety of possibilities and constraints for the participation in state secondary schooling of girls and boys during these decades. The discussion in this chapter refers to data summarised in an appendix to the chapter, Tables 6.1-6.31, pp. 165-183.

The cohorts

The students examined in this chapter began their post-primary careers in 1913, 1921 or 1933. These years were chosen because of compatibility with Campbell's major study of secondary schooling in twentieth century Adelaide.² Campbell selected Commonwealth Census years for his study. Censuses were taken in 1921 and 1933; 1913 was chosen as the closest year of enrolment of students at Parramatta High to the 1911 census. The cohorts include all students who were entered in the *Admissions Register* as beginning at the school in first year in 1913, 1921 or 1933, or who joined the groups in subsequent years, for example in second, third, fourth or fifth year in 1922, 1923, 1924 or 1925 respectively. The neatness of these allocations is slightly confounded by those students who skipped or repeated years. Such students were included as if they had stayed with the main group. By the same token only those students who belonged to the cohort at the time of their enrolment were included. Students who 'fell back' from higher years through repetition of grades were not included. This made little difference to the cohorts of 1921 and 1933 but had some effect on the 1913 cohort for which the pattern of yearly promotion through the school was less settled. The cohort of 1913 was also complicated by some missing data. The Registers of 1915 and 1916 have been lost.

Gender, social class and school persistence

Parramatta High School was truly a 'mixed' school in the sense that it accommodated substantial numbers of both boys and girls. It was neither a girls' school with a few boys

² Craig Campbell, *The rise of mass secondary schooling and modern adolescence: a social history of youth in southern Adelaide, 1901-1965*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Adelaide, 1994.

enrolled, nor vice versa. However an examination of the cohorts of 1913, 1921 and 1933 indicate that the exact dimensions of the gender balance varied from period to period or from grade to grade. (Tables 6.1-6.3) Many students remained at the high school for only brief periods, with only a small minority persisting for the final two years (third-fourth year for the 1913 cohort, fourth-fifth year for subsequent cohorts), so that student composition changed between the junior and senior parts of the school. There were some differences between patterns of progression for male and female students through the high school, as well as among groups of students from different social class backgrounds.

For this study judgements were made about the social class origins of each student according to the nature of the parent's occupation recorded in the *Admissions Register* at the time of enrolment. (Tables 6.7, 6.9, 6.11) Occupations were allocated to social class categories according to the detailed coding system used by Campbell.³ These categories were proprietorial middle class (rural and urban) employed middle class, skilled working class, semi-skilled or unskilled working class, or 'Other/ indeterminate.' Campbell found that different occupational groups used the state high school in different ways for their for sons and daughters according to class-based strategies for securing their future employment.

Only the occupation of one parent or guardian was recorded in the registers, and this was conventionally the father's occupation. Where mothers' occupations were recorded they were given in almost every case as 'domestic duties' or equivalent. There were sizeable minorities of students in the 1921 and 1933 cohorts whose class of origin was categorised according to the occupational code as 'other' or 'indeterminate.' (Tables 6.9, 6.11) These were mostly students who fell outside the model of the family headed by a male breadwinner. For 1921 this category included a large number of female household heads, possibly as a result of the 1914-1918 war. Eighteen students, five boys and thirteen girls were from families with female household heads reporting their occupation as 'domestic

³ Campbell's occupational coding system was based on the system developed by Mackinnon and Davey for Mackinnon's study of the Adelaide Advanced School for Girls (Mackinnon, *One foot on the ladder: origins and outcomes of girls' secondary schooling in South Australia*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1984). See Campbell, *The rise of mass secondary schooling*, pp. 376-406.

duties.’ In addition to female household heads, the large number in the ‘Other’ category for the 1933 cohort reflects the enrolment of pupils, mostly boys, who were under the guardianship of children’s homes. Nine boys from this cohort were under the care of the William Thompson Masonic School at Baulkham Hills which sent groups of children, mainly boys, to Parramatta High from the 1920s. Although the Masonic School (established 1922) cared for both boys and girls, high schooling for girls was not encouraged during this period.⁴

Representatives of all occupational categories were enrolled in each of the three cohorts, which reflects not only the school’s relatively broad social reach but also the diverse nature of the region’s economy at the time. The school’s catchment area included commercial, industrial and rural districts. The occupational information collected suggests also that significant numbers of parents were unlikely to themselves have experienced a high school education. (Tables 6.6, 6.8, 6.10) In the early decades of the twentieth century Parramatta provided relatively low cost higher schooling to selected children of families who were non-traditional consumers of prolonged formal education. There were variations, however, in school persistence among different class groups. Broadly speaking, children of middle class parents tended to stay at school longer than working class children. (Tables 6.12-6.14)

The employed middle class was the strongest single group in terms of staying on at high school over all three cohorts, though the Leaving Certificate year for each cohort included representation from each social class category and there were variations from cohort to cohort. This is consistent with Campbell’s study. Persisting at high school, especially remaining at school beyond the legal age for departure, or beyond the Intermediate Certificate year, was influenced by a number of factors. Students were not only required to pass examinations at the end of each year to achieve promotion, to prove their academic fitness again and again, but to make choices about alternative ways to spend their time. Alternatives to high school included other forms of training such as

⁴ Beverley Earnshaw, *A start in life: the history of the William Thompson Masonic School, 1922-1988*, The William Thompson Masonic School Council, Parramatta, 1988, pp 65, 113.

secretarial colleges, increasingly popular with girls from about the mid 1920s, and apprenticeships or other forms of on-the-job training for boys. Staying at school beyond the minimum leaving age was also influenced by the availability of desirable paid employment. Youth employment markets were more restricted for girls than for boys, though specific patterns of employment availability altered over the period.

Cohort of 1913

The most striking feature of the gender composition of the cohort of 1913 is that girls were more persistent, and slightly more 'successful,' users of the high school than boys. (Table 6.1) Although boys outnumbered girls in total enrolments many of them did not stay at the high school very long. In first year there were more boys than girls but more than half of all students who entered in first year did not stay for second year, boys in larger numbers than girls. (Tables 6.4, 6.5) By second year there were more girls than boys. By third year girls numerically dominated by a ratio of about three to one, four to one in fourth year. One explanation for these figures is the gendered nature of the local employment market. As the first dux of the school, Lillian Whiteoak, commented about her own senior year (1913), 'The two boys in our class left school about the middle of the year. I don't think the preponderance of girls was too much for them. Good positions were offering to boys of Intermediate standard.'⁵ In fact few of either boys or girls remained at the high school beyond the Intermediate year and only 38 of 194 students stayed to fourth year. Most boys and the majority of girls of this cohort left the high school without gaining either the Intermediate or Leaving Certificates. (Table 6.15) In this cohort there were a number of students for whom the pattern of entry at first year and orderly year by year promotion through the school did not apply. Many students left during or at the end of first year, others skipped or repeated years. Before the high school course was extended to five years in 1918, students sat for the Intermediate Certificate at the end of second year and the Leaving at the end of fourth year. Members of this cohort passed the Intermediate examination in the years 1913, 1914, 1915 or 1916, the Leaving Certificate in 1915, 1916, 1917 or 1918.

⁵ Letter from Lillian G. Whiteoak, *Phoenix: Parramatta High School Magazine* 1963, p. 6.

Students of the cohort of 1913 came to the school from a range of social class backgrounds with strong representation from middle class students. (Table 6.7) Adding together the number of students from the three middle class groups – proprietorial (rural and urban) and employed – more than 50 per cent of the cohort in total could be classified as middle class. The largest group was the employed middle class, comprising 60 students or 31 per cent of the enrolment. (Examples of occupations included in this category are school teacher, clerk and station master.) The next largest group was children of skilled working class parents (such as blacksmiths or carpenters) comprising 40 students or 21 per cent of the cohort. There were some differences between the class categories of male and female students, however. There were more male than female middle class students, more working class female than male students. While middle class males outnumbered working class boys by nearly two to one, numbers of middle class and working class girls were more even. Although the children of employed middle class parents continued to comprise the largest group in the cohort as it moved through the school, it is interesting to note the relative persistence of children of semi- or unskilled workers in comparison with other groups. Representation of this group in the cohort actually increased in percentage terms each year as students from other groups left the school in greater numbers. (Table 6.12)

Cohort of 1921

The students of the cohort of 1921 experienced more modern enrolment and progress patterns than those of the 1913 group. Nearly all students entered in first year and were promoted from year to year until they left, although there were still large departure rates from first and second years, and Intermediate and Leaving Certificates were gained in similar proportions to the earlier cohort. (Tables 6.2, 6.16, 6.17) More than 60 per cent of students left without either the Intermediate or the Leaving and very few gained the Leaving. Girls outnumbered boys in first year but most of the ‘excess’ of girls left before enrolling in second year. In second to fourth years numbers were practically equal. More

girls than boys enrolled in the Leaving Certificate year, but the overall numbers are too small to make much of this.

In common with the cohort of 1913, this cohort included students from each social class category. (Table 6.9) About half of the cohort were the children of middle class parents, a third of working class parents, with the remainder unable to be classified. This relatively large group of 'other, indeterminate' was, as described above, mostly comprised of children who had been enrolled by female parents giving their occupation as 'domestic duties.' Overall the three largest categories of students in nearly equal numbers of a fifth of the cohort each were children of the urban proprietorial middle class, of the employed middle class and of semi- or unskilled workers. There were more middle class boys than girls but working class parents for this cohort enrolled sons and daughters in equal numbers. The largest gender difference was for the category 'other.' This imbalance reflects the larger number of girls than boys enrolled by women. The relative representations of these social classes, however, changed as the cohort progressed to the senior grades of the high school. (Table 6.13) Once persistence is taken into account it is apparent that the students from employed middle class families were the strongest users of the high school from this cohort, especially amongst the boys. Students from this class were the most numerous group by third year and increased their representation in the cohort in relative terms into the senior years. Of the few boys who persisted past the Intermediate Certificate year, more than half were from the employed middle class. Numbers of girls who persisted were more evenly spread across the groups. The sharpest decline in post-Intermediate representation was for the children of skilled workers. Most members of this group left school during or at the end of the Intermediate year.

Cohort of 1933

In the junior part of the school girls and boys enrolled and persisted to second year in roughly equal numbers, with boys slightly outnumbering girls in the Intermediate year. (Table 6.3) For this cohort there was a second, smaller, intake of students in fourth year. The majority of these were boys who came from the Parramatta Boys' Intermediate High

School, which terminated at the Intermediate Certificate. Fourth year entry was not as competitive or as prestigious as first year selection. 27 boys and nine girls arrived in fourth year, resulting in a fourth year student population of 50 boys and 26 girls, but many of these boys spent less than a year at the high school, either because they found employment, or for other reasons to do with the adjustment to the high school itself, so that the male dominance caused by this influx was less marked for fifth year. It is possible to speculate that some of these movements were related to the contraction in youth labour markets, especially for boys, of the 1930s depression.

As with the cohorts of 1913 and 1921 the coding of parents' occupations shows that there was representation across all social class groups. (Table 6.11) The largest single group, comprising nearly 30 per cent, was of the children of middle class employees, 65 of 224 students. Of the three middle class groups fewer girls than boys were enrolled, for the two working class groups numbers of girls were equal (for unskilled workers,) or greater (for skilled workers.) One in ten students was either from a household represented by a woman or from the surrounding children's homes, enrolled by the homes' superintendents, as described above. A smaller proportion of students left before third year than in the 1913 or 1921 cohorts with about half of those enrolled in the junior part of the school gaining their Intermediate Certificates. (Table 6.18) Working class students tended to leave school earlier than middle class students. (Table 6.14) This trend was discernible by third year, becoming more marked in fourth and fifth year. The children of the employed middle class, the largest group on enrolment, also increased in relative terms from first to fifth year. In fifth year half of the 16 girls remaining at the school were from employed middle class families, 14 of the 38 boys. Another 12 boys and five girls had parents from the proprietorial middle classes. Only 3 girls and 6 boys remained from the working class groups.

Gender and academic success

This section of the chapter compares boys' and girls' achievements in the two major high school examinations, the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates. Although these boys and

girls had already been selected for their ability to meet the high school's academic entrance requirements, and the processing of students through public examinations was ostensibly the school's core business, the academic records of the cohorts of 1913, 1921 and 1933 demonstrate that the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates were far from universally attempted or achieved. (Tables 6.15-6.19) Of the 1913 cohort nearly 70 per cent of students left without a public examination credential (other than high school entrance) and fewer than 20 per cent gained the Leaving Certificate, 36 students of a total enrolment of 194. For 1921 more than 60 per cent left empty handed and fewer than 16 per cent passed the Leaving, 25 of 158 students. Even by the mid 1930s, when the high school and examinations systems were well-established in New South Wales, fewer than half of the first to third year enrolment of the cohort of 1933 gained the Intermediate Certificate. Just over one in ten of the total enrolment, 27 students, passed the Leaving.

The figures for the 1913 cohort show the early success of the school's female students. More girls than boys gained public examination credentials both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of enrolments. (Table 6.15) Four out of five boys left school without either an Intermediate or Leaving Certificate. The proportion for girls was just over one in two. The Leaving Certificate was strongly the province of girls with 34 per cent of the original enrolment of girls gaining a Leaving Certificate, compared with just six per cent of boys. Differences between girls' and boys' achievements for the 1921 and 1933 cohorts were much smaller. (Tables 6.16-6.19) Of the 1921 cohort slightly more girls than boys gained Certificates, though the proportion of passes relative to numbers of enrolments was very even for boys and girls. Once a boy or girl enrolled at the school they had a more or less equal chance of gaining an examination credential regardless of gender. Of the 1933 cohort boys were slightly more successful in gaining credentials than girls in both relative and absolute terms.

The results of the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates were widely publicised, in the main Sydney newspaper, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, as well as in school magazines, headmasters' reports and so on. The names of individual candidates were listed, under the name of their school in the *Herald*, along with the details of each subject passed and at

which level. Intermediate candidates were awarded an A or B grade in individual subjects according to the quality of their answers at examination. The more As the better the pass. In the Leaving Certificate students gained passes in individual subjects at different levels, either by attempting a more difficult honours examination paper or by gaining an A grade in the common paper. For the purpose of comparing high achievement for girls and boys subjects passed at A or Honours level were tallied and summarised. Overall these figures do not show strong differences in the standards of examination passes between boys and girls. Both girls and boys from each cohort were among those who gained minimum numbers of passes as well as outstanding results. (Tables 6.20-6.25)

Using the examination lists it is also possible to compare the kinds of subjects passed by girls and boys. (Tables 6.26-6.31) There is a limit to what can be inferred about subject choice as this was constrained in the Intermediate by the requirement to study several compulsory subjects and in the Leaving by what was on offer by the school. The lists do not show subjects taken but not passed so that variations between girls and boys in numbers of passes might indicate either that fewer or more sat for the subject, or passed or failed the subject, or a combination of both. Overall the lists of subjects show the varieties of knowledge which were valued and taken seriously by the high school. These were, overwhelmingly, subjects which were based on theoretical rather than practical knowledge. The high school determinedly measured mental rather than manual aptitude or effort. Foreign languages (French and, to a lesser extent, German) were taken by the higher streamed students in New South Wales high schools, though the country's geographical location meant they were of cultural or symbolic rather than practical use as may have been the case in Europe, for example. Latin was a prerequisite for matriculation to certain Sydney University courses until 1940s. Higher mathematics and the 'hard' sciences of physics and chemistry were important subjects for a boys' school. Girls' high schools, whether conducted by the state or private interests, instead tended to teach biology or botany. It was a somewhat paradoxical effect of coeducation that by neglecting what might be seen as girls' interests, girls had more opportunity at Parramatta than elsewhere for the study of higher mathematics and hard sciences at Leaving Certificate level.

Apart from the manual subjects, woodwork, needlework and dressmaking, which were universally demarcated by gender during this period, the lists do not reveal that boys and girls were restricted by their gender from taking particular subjects. In terms of numbers of passes in individual subjects there were some differences in achievement between boys and girls along conventional lines. In the Intermediate results for the cohort of 1913, for example, a higher percentage of girls than boys passed in English and French, a higher percentage of boys than girls in mathematics I (but not mathematics II) and science. (Table 6.26) In this group's Leaving Certificate examinations, on the other hand, although the numbers of boys are too small for persuasive comparison, a higher proportion of boys than girls passed French, a higher proportion of girls than boys passed physics. (Table 6.27) There were similar conventional differences, and some similar exceptions, across all three cohorts. The lists of public examination subjects for the cohorts of 1913, 1921 and 1933 suggest the existence of some gender specialisation in the curriculum both in terms of subject choice and examination passes, but not that it was either very strong or entirely consistent. This changed for the post Second World War cohorts studied, discussed in chapters 9 and 10 of this thesis.

Conclusion

The examination of three cohorts which passed through Parramatta High School during its first two and a half decades offers a number of insights into practices of gender and meritocracy. Firstly it is clear from information recorded in the school's *Register of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal*, as well as from public examination lists, that many students spent a relatively brief time at the school. The model of high school participation for the overwhelming majority of students was not the orderly progression from first to fifth year implied by the school magazines, for example. This was a period in which high school attendance in itself had some exchange value in the youth employment market place, the Intermediate Certificate was not yet a credential possessed by nearly everyone and the Leaving Certificate was required for very few fields of work. In 1913 and 1921 only about a third of students who enrolled in the junior part of the school were

successful in gaining their Intermediate Certificate. In 1933 the proportion was about half. Students seeking employment in areas other than teaching or the professions would have little reason to remain at school beyond the Intermediate Certificate. While first year enrolments were consistently large in all three cohorts, ranging from 131 to 174 students, final year numbers were very small, only about a classroom full in each case.

Representatives of each social class category identified in this study – proprietorial middle class (rural and urban), employed middle class, skilled working class, semi-skilled or unskilled working class, or ‘other/ indeterminate’ – were enrolled in each of the three cohorts. There were variations, however, in school persistence among different class groups. Broadly speaking, children of middle class parents tended to stay at school longer than working class children. The employed middle class was the strongest single group in terms of staying on at high school over all three cohorts, though the Leaving Certificate year for each cohort included representation from each social class category. This is consistent with Campbell’s study of secondary schooling in twentieth century South Australia.

A study of the proportions of boys and girls in each of the cohorts of 1913, 1921 and 1933 shows that Parramatta High School was truly a ‘mixed’ school in the sense that both boys and girls enrolled in substantial numbers. It was neither overwhelmingly a boys’ or a girls’ school, although there were some variations in the gender balance in different cohorts. For all three cohorts the junior part of the school was fairly evenly balanced. For the cohort of 1913, however, girls dominated numerically in the senior grades as did boys, to a lesser extent, in the senior years of the cohort of 1933.

Despite some variations in girls’ and boys’ performances in the public examinations it could not be said from the figures analysed in this chapter that either sex was more consistently academically ‘successful’ than the other. The girls and boys of Parramatta High School, especially the majority who had passed the rigorous examination to gain first year entry, tended to perform more or less as well as each other. Nor is it possible to identify strongly gendered patterns of subject choice for this period. Instances of

gendered patterns of achievement, such as stronger performances by boys in maths or science or by girls in English or French, were neither invariable nor outstanding. Apart from the small candidature manual subjects taken for examination – woodwork, needlework and dressmaking – it is not apparent that either boys or girls were restricted from studying particular subjects on account of gender. In fact it was a somewhat paradoxical effect of coeducation that by neglecting what might be seen as girls' interests – such as the provision of the 'soft' sciences, biology and botany – girls had more opportunity at Parramatta than elsewhere for the study of higher mathematics and 'hard' sciences at Leaving Certificate level. What is also evident from a study of the examinations lists is the narrow academic focus of the high school. The most important subjects, those which were able to be parlayed into public examination passes, were almost invariably theoretical subjects from the modern competitive academic curriculum.

Appendix to Chapter 6: Tables

Gender, social class, school persistence and examination achievement

Table 6.1: School persistence by gender (N & %): Cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School*

<i>Year level</i>	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
First year	75	57.3	56	42.7	131	100.0
Second year	53	44.5	66	55.5	119	100.0
Third year	13	26.0	37	74.0	50	100.0
Fourth year	7	18.4	31	81.6	38	100.0
<i>Total enrolments</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>54.1</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>45.9</i>	<i>194</i>	<i>100.0</i>

* The cohort includes all students who are entered in the *Admissions Register* as beginning at the school in first year in 1913 or second year in 1914, the first two years of the school's existence. It is likely that other students joined and left the cohort during 1915 and 1916 but the Registers for those years have been lost. 131 students enrolled in first year, 75 boys and 56 girls. 63 students enrolled in second year, 30 boys and 33 girls. The table shows the cohort's changing size as students either progressed through the school or left. Many members of this first cohort experienced uneven promotion paths from year to year. Some students were promoted during rather than at the end of the school year; others repeated years. Students who repeated years are included as if they stayed with the main group. By the same token only those students who belonged to the cohort at the time of their enrolment are included. Students who 'fell back' from higher years through repetition of grades are not included.

Table 6.2: School persistence by gender (N & %): Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School*

<i>Year level</i>	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
First year	66	43.4	86	56.6	152	100.0
Second year	43	50.6	42	49.4	85	100.0
Third year	39	50.6	38	49.4	77	100.0
Fourth year	19	48.7	20	51.3	39	100.0
Fifth year	12	42.9	16	57.1	28	100.0
<i>Total enrolments</i>	<i>68</i>	<i>43.0</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>57.0</i>	<i>158</i>	<i>100.0</i>

* The cohort includes all students who are entered in the *Admissions Register* as beginning at the school in first year in 1921, second year in 1922, third year in 1923, fourth year in 1924 or fifth year in 1925. For this cohort all but six students arrived in first year. The table shows the cohort's changing size as students either progressed through the school or left.

Table 6.3: School persistence by gender (N & %): Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School*

<i>Year level</i>	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
First year	86	49.4	88	50.6	174	100.0
Second year	78	51.0	75	49.0	153	100.0
Third year	61	54.0	52	46.0	113	100.0
Fourth year	51	67.1	25	32.9	76	100.0
Fifth year	22	57.9	16	42.1	38	100.0
<i>Total enrolments</i>	<i>121</i>	<i>54.0</i>	<i>103</i>	<i>46.0</i>	<i>224</i>	<i>100.0</i>

* The cohort includes all students who are entered in the *Admissions Register* as beginning at the school in first year in 1933, second year in 1934, third year in 1935, fourth year in 1936 or fifth year in 1937. 63 students enrolled in second year, 30 boys and 33 girls. The table shows the cohort's changing size as students either progressed through the school or left. The majority of students arrived in first year. The second largest group arrived in fourth year, 36 students of which 27 were boys and nine girls.

Table 6.4: Year level on admission to high school (N & %), cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School*

Year level	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
First year	75	71.4	56	62.9	131	67.5
Second year	30	28.6	33	37.1	63	32.5
Total	105	100	89	100	194	100

*This table, summarising admissions to the high school, and the following one, summarising departures, have been included for the 1913 cohort only. They show that for this first cohort to enrol at the school the pattern of entry at first year and orderly year by year promotion did not apply. More than half of the students who entered in first year did not stay for second year, boys in larger numbers than girls. Information is missing for 1915 and 1916 entry as the relevant Admissions Registers have been lost.

Table 6.5: Year level on departure from school (N & %), cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School*

Year level	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
First year	52	49.5	23	25.9	75	38.7
Second year	40	38.1	29	32.6	69	35.6
Third year	6	5.7	6	6.7	12	6.2
Fourth year	7	6.7	31	34.8	38	19.6
Total	105	100.0	89	100.0	194	100.0

Table 6.6: Occupation of household head (N & %): Cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School*

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional and urban proprietor	2	1.9	4	4.5	6	3.1
Merchant, manager & agent	14	13.3	8	9.0	22	11.3
Business employee	9	8.6	6	6.7	15	7.7
Government & institution employee	15	14.3	10	11.2	25	12.9
Seller of services & semi-professional	12	11.4	8	9.0	20	10.3
Manufacturer & master	3	2.9	1	1.1	4	2.1
Skilled worker	21	20.0	19	21.3	40	20.6
Transport worker	3	2.9	1	1.1	4	2.1
Operative, semi- & unskilled worker	6	5.7	16	18.0	22	11.3
Domestic & other service worker	3	2.9	2	2.2	5	2.6
Rural proprietor	10	9.5	4	4.5	14	7.2
Rural worker	2	1.9	2	2.2	4	2.1
Other, indeterminate	5	4.8	8	9.0	13	6.7
Total	105	100.0	89	100.0	194	100.0

*Pupils were sorted into occupational categories according to the information given to the school by the enrolling parent, and recorded in the school's *Register of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal*. In most cases the occupation recorded was the father's.

Table 6.7: Social class (N & %): Cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School*

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Proprietorial middle class (rural)	10	9.5	4	4.5	14	7.2
Proprietorial middle class (urban)	19	18.1	13	14.6	32	16.5
Employed middle class	36	34.3	24	27.0	60	30.9
Skilled working class	21	20.0	19	21.3	40	20.6
Semi- & unskilled working class	14	13.3	21	23.6	35	18.0
Other or indeterminate	5	4.8	8	9.0	13	6.7
Total	105	100.0	89	100.0	194	100.0

*Occupational categories in Table 6.6, above, were recoded into social class categories as follows:

1. 'Rural proprietor' was recoded as 'Proprietorial middle class (rural).'
2. The categories 'Professional and urban proprietor,' 'Merchant, manager & agent' and 'Manufacturer & master' were recoded as 'Proprietorial middle class (urban).'
3. The categories 'Business employee,' 'Government & institution employee' and 'Seller of services & semi-professional' were recoded as 'Employed middle class.'
4. The categories 'Transport worker,' 'Operative, semi- & unskilled worker,' 'Domestic & other service worker' and 'Rural worker' were recoded as 'Semi- & unskilled working class.'

Table 6.8: Occupation of household head (N & %): Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional and urban proprietor	4	5.9	8	8.9	12	7.6
Merchant, manager & agent	11	16.2	9	10.0	20	12.7
Business employee	2	2.9	6	6.7	8	5.1
Government & institution employee	6	8.8	12	13.3	18	11.4
Seller of services & semi-professional	4	5.9	1	1.1	5	3.2
Manufacturer & master	0	0.0	2	2.2	2	1.3
Skilled worker	11	16.2	11	12.2	22	13.9
Transport worker	6	8.8	4	4.4	10	6.3
Operative, semi- & unskilled worker	7	10.3	8	8.9	15	9.5
Domestic & other service worker	2	2.9	1	1.1	3	1.9
Rural proprietor	5	7.4	9	10.0	14	8.9
Rural worker	2	2.9	2	2.2	4	2.5
Other, indeterminate	8	11.8	17	18.9	25	15.8
Total	68	100.0	90	100.0	158	100.0

Table 6.9: Social class (N & %): Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Proprietorial middle class (rural)	5	7.4	9	10.0	14	8.9
Proprietorial middle class (urban)	15	22.1	19	21.1	34	21.5
Employed middle class	12	17.6	19	21.1	31	19.6
Skilled working class	11	16.2	11	12.2	22	13.9
Semi- & unskilled working class	17	25.0	15	16.7	32	20.3
Other or indeterminate	8	11.8	17	18.9	25	15.8
Total	68	100.0	90	100.0	158	100.0

Table 6.10: Occupation of household head (N & %): Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School*

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional and urban proprietor	4	3.3	3	2.9	7	3.1
Merchant, manager & agent	14	11.6	12	11.7	26	11.6
Business employee	7	5.8	9	8.7	16	7.1
Government & institution employee	22	18.2	12	11.7	34	15.2
Seller of services & semi-professional	7	5.8	8	7.8	15	6.7
Manufacturer & master	3	2.5	1	1.0	4	1.8
Skilled worker	13	10.7	19	18.4	32	14.3
Transport worker	6	5.0	4	3.9	10	4.5
Operative, semi- & unskilled worker	13	10.7	11	10.7	24	10.7
Domestic & other service worker	0	0.0	5	4.9	5	2.2
Rural proprietor	15	12.4	9	8.7	24	10.7
Rural worker	2	1.7	1	1.0	3	1.3
Other, unknown	15	12.4	9	8.7	24	10.7
Total	121	100.0	103	100.0	224	100.0

*The large number of 'Other, indeterminate' reflects not only sole female parents who gave their occupation as some version of 'household duties' but also students from the surrounding children's homes who were enrolled by the institutions' superintendents rather than by a parent. 11 household heads gave their occupation as domestic duties, five parents of boys, 6 of girls. Nine children came from nearby residential institutions, eight boys from the William Thompson Masonic Homes and a girl from Carlingford Homes.

Table 6.11: Social class (N & %): Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Proprietorial middle class (rural)	15	12.4	9	8.7	24	10.7
Proprietorial middle class (urban)	21	17.4	16	15.5	37	16.5
Employed middle class	36	29.8	29	28.2	65	29.0
Skilled working class	13	10.7	19	18.4	32	14.3
Semi- & unskilled working class	21	17.4	21	20.4	42	18.8
Other or indeterminate	15	12.4	9	8.7	24	10.7
Total	121	100.0	103	100.0	224	100.0

Table 6.12: High school persistence by social class and gender (N & %): Cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School*

(a) Males

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	8	10.7	13	17.3	27	36.0	16	21.3	8	10.7	3	4.0	75	100.0
2 nd	3	5.7	9	17.0	20	37.7	7	13.2	12	22.6	2	3.8	53	100.0
3 rd	1	7.7	1	7.7	7	53.8	1	7.7	2	15.4	1	7.7	13	100.0
4 th	0	0.0	1	14.3	2	28.6	1	14.3	2	28.6	1	14.3	7	100.0

(b) Females

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	2	3.6	6	10.7	15	26.8	13	23.2	16	28.6	4	7.1	56	100.0
2 nd	4	6.1	10	15.2	17	25.8	12	18.2	16	24.2	7	10.6	66	100.0
3 rd	3	8.1	4	10.8	11	29.7	7	18.9	10	27.0	2	5.4	37	100.0
4 th	3	9.7	4	12.9	9	29.0	6	19.4	8	25.8	1	3.2	31	100.0

(c) Total

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	10	7.6	19	14.5	42	32.1	29	22.1	24	18.3	7	5.3	131	100.0
2 nd	7	5.9	19	16.0	37	31.1	19	16.0	28	23.5	9	7.6	119	100.0
3 rd	4	8.0	5	10.0	18	36.0	8	16.0	12	24.0	3	6.0	50	100.0
4 th	3	7.9	5	13.2	11	29.0	7	18.4	10	26.3	2	5.3	38	100.0

*Tables 6.12, 6.13 and 6.14 expand on the information summarised in Tables 6.1-6.3, categorising students by social class as well as gender as they progressed through the school or left.

Table 6.13: High school persistence by social class and gender (N & %): Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School

(a) Males

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	5	7.6	14	21.2	11	16.7	11	16.7	17	25.8	8	12.1	66	100.0
2 nd	1	2.3	10	23.3	11	25.6	6	14.0	9	20.9	6	14.0	43	100.0
3 rd	0	0.0	10	25.6	11	28.2	5	12.8	8	20.5	5	12.8	39	100.0
4 th	0	0.0	5	26.3	8	42.1	1	5.3	3	15.8	2	10.5	19	100.0
5 th	0	0.0	3	25.0	7	58.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	0	0.0	12	100.0

(b) Females

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	7	8.1	19	22.1	18	20.9	11	12.8	14	16.3	17	19.8	86	100.0
2 nd	4	9.5	10	23.8	10	23.8	5	11.9	5	11.9	8	19.0	42	100.0
3 rd	4	10.5	7	18.4	9	23.7	5	13.2	5	13.2	8	21.1	38	100.0
4 th	1	5.0	3	15.0	7	35.0	2	10.0	3	15.0	4	20.0	20	100.0
5 th	1	6.3	2	12.5	5	31.3	1	6.3	3	18.8	4	25.0	16	100.0

(c) Total

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	12	7.9	33	21.7	29	19.1	22	14.5	31	20.4	25	16.4	152	100.0
2 nd	5	5.9	20	23.5	21	24.7	11	12.9	14	16.5	14	16.5	85	100.0
3 rd	4	5.2	17	22.1	20	26.0	10	13.0	13	16.9	13	16.9	77	100.0
4 th	1	2.6	8	20.5	15	38.5	3	7.7	6	15.4	6	15.4	39	100.0
5 th	1	3.6	5	17.9	12	42.9	2	7.1	4	14.3	4	14.3	28	100.0

Table 6.14: High school persistence by social class and gender (N & %): Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School

(a) Males

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	12	14.0	15	17.4	24	27.9	10	11.6	19	22.1	6	7.0	86	100.0
2 nd	9	11.5	14	17.9	23	29.5	10	12.8	15	19.2	7	9.0	78	100.0
3 rd	6	9.8	13	21.3	17	27.9	10	16.4	9	14.8	6	9.8	61	100.0
4 th	7	13.7	13	25.5	13	25.5	7	13.7	1	2.0	10	19.6	51	100.0
5 th	6	27.3	6	27.3	6	27.3	1	4.5	2	9.1	1	4.5	22	100.0

(b) Females

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	6	6.9	13	14.9	23	26.4	19	21.8	18	20.7	8	9.2	87	100.0
2 nd	4	5.4	13	17.6	20	27.0	14	18.9	17	23.0	6	8.1	74	100.0
3 rd	4	7.8	11	21.6	16	31.4	8	15.7	9	17.6	3	5.9	51	100.0
4 th	4	16.0	3	12.0	10	40.0	2	8.0	5	20.0	1	4.0	25	100.0
5 th	2	12.5	3	18.8	8	50.0	1	6.3	2	12.5	0	0.0	16	100.0

(c) Total

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	18	10.3	28	16.1	48	27.6	29	16.7	37	21.3	14	8.0	174	100.0
2 nd	13	8.5	27	17.6	44	28.8	24	15.7	32	20.9	13	8.5	153	100.0
3 rd	10	8.8	24	21.2	34	30.1	18	15.9	18	15.9	9	8.0	113	100.0
4 th	11	14.5	16	21.1	23	30.3	9	11.8	6	7.9	11	14.5	76	100.0
5 th	8	21.1	9	23.7	14	36.8	2	5.3	4	10.5	1	2.6	38	100.0

Table 6.15: Public examination certificates awarded (N & %): Cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School*

Examination	Boys (n=105)		Girls (n=89)		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Intermediate Certificate	20	19.0	40	44.9	60	30.9
Leaving Certificate	6	5.7	30	33.7	36	18.6

*Before the high school course was extended to five years in 1918, students sat for the Intermediate Certificate at the end of second year and the Leaving Certificate at the end of fourth year. However many members of this first cohort experienced uneven promotion paths from year to year. For example a few students were promoted during rather than at the end of the school year; others repeated years. Members of this cohort passed the Intermediate Certificate examination in the years 1913, 1914, 1915 or 1916, the Leaving Certificate in 1915, 1916, 1917 or 1918. The table shows that most boys and the majority of girls of this cohort left the high school without gaining either the Intermediate or Leaving Certificates.

Table 6.16: Intermediate Certificates awarded, as a percentage of 1st to 3rd year enrolments (N & %): Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School*

Boys (n=66)		Girls (n=88)		Total (n=154)	
N	%	N	%	N	%
25	37.9	30	34.1	55	35.7

*Pupils sat for the Intermediate Certificate at the end of third year. They could only progress to fourth year if they had successfully passed the Intermediate examination. The table shows that the majority of both boys and girls left the school without gaining either the Intermediate or Leaving Certificates. All but one of these students gained their Intermediate in 1923. One male student passed the following year.

Table 6.17: Leaving Certificates awarded (N & %): Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School*

Boys (n=68)		Girls (n=90)		Total (n=158)	
N	%	N	%	N	%
11	16.2	14	15.6	25	15.8

Students of the cohort of 1921 sat for their Leaving Certificate at the end of fifth year. Few students reached this level. 23 of the students passed their Leaving in 1925. The remaining two, both girls, passed in 1926.

Table 6.18: Public examination certificates awarded, as a percentage of 1st to 3rd year enrolments (N & %): Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School*

Boys (n=92)		Girls (n=94)		Total (n=186)	
N	%	N	%	N	%
48	52.2	42	44.7	90	48.4

*Pupils sat for the Intermediate Certificate at the end of third year. They could only progress to fourth year if they had successfully passed the Intermediate examination. The table shows that about half of all students who had enrolled by third year left the school without gaining either the Intermediate or Leaving Certificates. All but two students passed the examinations in 1935. One male and one female student passed the following year.

Table 6.19: Leaving Certificates awarded (N & %): Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School*

Boys (n=121)		Girls (n=103)		Total (n=224)	
N	%	N	%	N	%
15	12.4	12	11.7	27	12.1

*Students sat for their Leaving Certificate at the end of fifth year. Few students reached this level. 23 of the students passed their Leaving in 1937. The remaining four, three boys and a girl, passed in 1938.

**Table 6.20: Intermediate Certificate subjects passed at A grade level (N & %):
Cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School***

Number of A grades	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	8	40.0	22	55.0	30	50.0
1	5	25.0	12	30.0	17	28.3
2-3	6	30.0	6	15.0	12	20.0
4-5	1	5.0	0	0.0	1	1.7
Total	20	100.0	40	100.0	60	100.0

*Pupils were awarded an A or B grade in individual subjects according to the quality of their answers at examination; the more As the better the pass. The table summarises the number of A grades gained by students who passed the Intermediate Certificate.

**Table 6.21: Leaving Certificate subjects passed at A or Honours level (N & %):
Cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School***

A or honours grades	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	1	16.7	9	30.0	10	27.8
1	3	50.0	8	26.7	11	30.5
2-3	0	0.0	8	26.7	8	22.2
4-5	2	33.3	4	13.3	6	16.7
6-7	0	0.0	1	3.3	1	2.8
Total	6	100.0	30	100.0	36	100.0

*Pupils gained Leaving Certificate passes in individual subjects at different levels, either by attempting the more difficult honours examination paper or by gaining an A grade in the common paper. This table summarises the number of A or honours grades gained by students from the 1913 cohort who passed the Leaving Certificate.

**Table 6.22: Intermediate Certificate subjects passed at A grade level (N & %):
Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School**

Number of A grades	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	8	32.0	10	33.3	18	32.7
1	6	24.0	4	13.3	10	18.2
2-3	7	28.0	11	36.7	18	32.7
4-5	3	12.0	4	13.3	7	12.8
6	1	4.0	1	3.3	2	3.6
Total	25	100.0	30	100.0	55	100.0

**Table 6.23: Leaving Certificate subjects passed at A or Honours level (N & %):
Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School***

Number of higher grades	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	5.6
1	3	37.5	4	40.0	7	38.9
2-3	2	25.0	3	30.0	5	27.8
4-5	2	25.0	2	20.0	4	22.2
6	0	0.0	1	10.0	1	5.6
Total	8	100.0	10	100.0	18	100.0

**Table 6.24: Intermediate Certificate subjects passed at A grade level (N & %):
Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School**

A grades	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	20	41.7	18	42.9	38	42.2
1	7	14.6	8	19.0	15	16.7
2-3	15	31.3	10	23.8	25	27.8
4-5	5	10.4	4	9.5	9	10.0
6	1	2.1	2	4.8	3	3.3
Total	48	100.0	42	100.0	90	100.0

**Table 6.25: Leaving Certificate subjects passed at 'A' or Honours level (N & %):
Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School***

A or honours grades	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	6	40.0	3	25.0	9	33.3
1	2	13.3	4	33.3	6	22.2
2-3	3	20.0	3	25.0	6	22.2
4-5	4	26.7	2	16.7	6	22.2
Total	15	100.0	12	100.0	27	99.9

Table 6.26: Intermediate Certificate subjects (N & %): Cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School*

	Boys (n=20)		Girls (n=40)		Total (n=60)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	14	70.0	36	90.0	50	83.3
Mathematics I	18	90.0	31	77.5	49	81.7
Mathematics II	18	90.0	35	87.5	53	88.3
Science	16	80.0	24	60.0	40	66.7
Latin	6	30.0	14	35.0	20	33.3
French	6	30.0	20	50.0	26	43.3
History	14	70.0	33	82.5	47	78.3
Geography	10	50.0	22	55.0	32	53.3
Art	10	50.0	19	47.5	29	48.3
Music	2	10.0	1	2.5	2	3.3
Woodwork	7	35.0	0	0.0	7	11.7
Needlework	0	0.0	13	32.5	13	21.7

*The table lists each of the subjects passed by the Intermediate Certificate students of the 1913 cohort. The table shows the number of students who passed each subject as a percentage of the total successful candidature for each gender. For example for the compulsory subject English, 70 per cent of all the boys who gained their Intermediate Certificates achieved a pass in English as did 90 per cent of Intermediate Certificate girls. Overall 83.3 per cent of all successful candidates passed English.

Table 6.27: Leaving Certificate subjects (N & %): Cohort of 1913, Parramatta High School*

	Boys (n=6)		Girls (n=30)		Total (n=36)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	6	100.0	26	86.7	32	88.9
Mathematics I	5	83.3	23	76.7	28	77.8
Mathematics II	6	100.0	16	53.3	22	61.1
Mechanics	1	16.7	5	16.7	6	16.7
Chemistry	5	83.3	10	33.3	15	41.7
Physics	0	0.0	4	13.3	4	11.1
Latin	4	66.7	8	26.7	12	33.3
French	6	100.0	16	53.3	22	61.1
Modern History	6	100.0	28	93.3	34	94.4
Geography	2	33.3	16	53.3	18	50
Art	2	33.3	9	30.0	11	30.6
Music	1	16.7	1	3.3	2	5.6
Dressmaking	0	0.0	3	10.0	3	8.3

*The table lists each of the subjects passed by the Leaving Certificate students of the 1913 cohort. The table shows the number of students who passed each subject as a percentage of the total successful candidature for each gender. For example for the compulsory subject English, all the boys who gained their Leaving Certificates achieved a pass as did 86.7 per cent of Leaving Certificate girls. Overall 88.9 per cent of all successful Leaving Certificate candidates passed English. English was the only compulsory subject in the Leaving. All other subjects were by students choice, limited by what the school was able or prepared to offer.

Table 6.28: Intermediate Certificate subjects (N & %): Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School*

	Boys (n=25)		Girls (n=30)		Total (n=55)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	25	100.0	29	96.7	54	98.2
Mathematics I	23	92.0	25	83.3	48	87.3
Mathematics II	22	88.0	23	76.7	45	81.8
Science	11	44.0	13	43.3	24	43.6
Latin	7	28.0	5	16.7	12	21.8
French	3	12.0	7	23.3	10	18.2
German	3	12.0	4	13.3	7	12.8
Greek	0	0.0	3	10.0	3	5.5
History	23	92.0	27	90.0	50	90.9
Geography	3	12.0	6	20.0	9	16.4
Art	4	16.0	9	30.0	13	23.6
Music	1	4.0	0	0.0	1	1.8
Needlework	0	0.0	5	16.7	5	9.1

Table 6.29: Leaving Certificate subjects (N & %): Cohort of 1921, Parramatta High School*

	Boys (n=8)		Girls (n=10)		Total (n=18)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	8	100.0	10	100.0	18	100.0
Mathematics I	7	87.5	9	90.0	16	88.9
Mathematics II	7	87.5	8	80.0	15	83.3
Mechanics	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	5.6
Lower Mathematics	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	5.6
Chemistry	3	37.5	2	20.0	5	27.8
Physics	3	37.5	2	20.0	5	27.8
Latin	2	25.0	9	90.0	11	50.0
French	3	37.5	7	70.0	10	55.6
German	1	12.5	2	20.0	3	16.7
Greek	0	0.0	1	10.0	1	5.6
Modern History	5	62.5	6	60.0	11	61.1
Ancient History	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	5.6
Geography	3	37.5	1	10.0	4	22.2
Economics	1	12.5	0	0.0	1	5.6

Table 6.30: Intermediate Certificate subjects (N & %): Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School*

	Boys (n=48)		Girls (n=42)		Total (n=90)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	46	95.8	41	97.6	87	96.7
Mathematics I	44	91.7	29	69.0	73	81.1
Mathematics II	39	81.3	32	76.2	71	78.9
Elementary Science	44	91.7	33	78.6	77	85.6
Latin	19	39.6	30	71.4	49	54.4
French	31	64.6	33	78.6	64	71.1
German	8	16.7	4	9.5	12	13.3
History	35	72.9	34	81.0	79	87.8
Geography	5	10.4	4	9.5	9	10
Art	6	12.5	1	2.4	7	7.8
Music	0	0.0	1	2.4	1	1.1
Needlework	0	0.0	4	9.5	4	4.4

Table 6.31: Leaving Certificate subjects (N & %): Cohort of 1933, Parramatta High School*

	Boys (n=15)		Girls (n=12)		Total (n=27)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	14	93.3	12	100.0	26	96.3
Mathematics I	8	53.3	11	91.7	19	70.4
Mathematics II	8	53.3	8	66.7	16	59.3
Mechanics	5	33.3	0	0.0	5	18.5
Chemistry	8	53.3	4	33.3	12	44.4
Physics	8	53.3	1	8.3	9	33.3
Latin	4	26.7	7	58.3	11	40.7
French	9	60.0	10	83.3	19	70.4
Modern History	4	26.7	4	33.3	8	29.6
Ancient History	2	13.3	0	0.0	2	7.4
Geography	0	0.0	3	25.0	3	11.1
Economics	1	6.7	6	50.0	7	25.9

Chapter 7

Teachers and students: Disciplining gender

The bureaucratic methods of rational and uniform regulation developed in western democracies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were anchored by the collection and preservation of large amounts of paperwork, within which it is possible to locate traces of interactions between state authorities and the children and adults under their jurisdiction. For each state school the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction maintained confidential correspondence files in which were collected copies of documents concerning aspects of the school's management, including grievance and disciplinary matters considered serious enough to need attention or authority from head office. This chapter looks at the letters, memoranda, forms and reports written by parents, teachers and bureaucrats which were collected on the Parramatta High School files between 1913 and 1940.¹ These papers mostly do not purport to address the careers of boys or girls as academic learners. Rather they document cases in which small numbers of unruly parents, students and teachers questioned or resisted the school's or the Department's authority in some way, thus occasionally forcing the headmaster or senior inspectors to explain practices, rituals or structures which might at other times be taken for granted.

Fundamental to this study is the examination of an institution which had to accommodate in some way the circumstances and aspirations of both boys and girls as students, and both men and women as professional teachers. Unlike early public statements by the headmaster and others which rarely either alluded to coeducation or described separate educational experiences for boys and girls at Parramatta High School, the confidential Departmental files reveal ways in which the school's disciplinary and pastoral duties towards boys and girls were viewed quite differently. The chapter also examines the importance of gender in shaping teachers' careers at Parramatta High.

¹ P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17283- 5/17287.

Safeguarding girls

Female and male students appear in quite different contexts in the school correspondence files. Girls were represented as requiring protection from physical and moral harm in a way that was quite distinct from the writing about boys. Some of the anxieties about girls were specifically to do with coeducation, others reflected more general contemporary concerns about the care and protection of adolescent girls. Nevertheless the presence of both boys and girls in the same files highlights the different ways they were characterised, in a school where ostensibly they occupied the same position. It is evident that the headmaster saw the girls as causing more work than the boys. Individual boys were more trouble – serious disciplinary cases for the years to the late 1930s were almost all about the bad behaviour of individual boys – but the need to safeguard girls as a group created more difficulties for teachers. While individual boys appear on the files episodically, creating problems which call for punishment or reprimand, it is the collective bodies of girls which are represented as requiring more constant vigilance. The extra consideration apparently demanded by girls arose from anxieties about health and respectability and this was embodied in the position of supervisor of girls established by the Department of Public Instruction in 1920. That the only promotion position for women in the mixed school was predicated upon girls' special needs could only operate to reinforce beliefs about girls' vulnerability and dependence.

It is apparent in the files that girls were regarded as being generally more fragile than boys. A number of papers on the files addressed aspects of girls' health. In 1918 a girl was removed from the school because the long train trip was 'prejudicial to her health.'² In 1927 the headmaster Atkins used an incident of a female student's 'nasty' playground fall to try to persuade the Department to increase its expenditure on landscaping.³ In 1933 a father complained about his daughter being sent home 'wet through' after her sports lesson was rained out.⁴ A 1938 incident at the school in which girls were accidentally gassed during a science demonstration was subject to a detailed investigation. The

² Record of conversation between parent and Minister, 13 August 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

³ Headmaster to Secondary Schools Inspector, 30 March 1927, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17285.1.

⁴ Parent to Minister, 28 July 1933, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17286.A.

account of the incident is interesting in the casual stereotyping of the girl victim, who was hospitalised after apparently inhaling chlorine gas: '[The teacher] gathered ... that she is an hysterical type of girl.'⁵ The teacher's reading was supported by the school inspector called in to investigate the incident in the following terms: 'I might add that I have had considerable experience with chlorine as gas officer during the war and frequently encountered cases of hysteria as suggested by [the teacher] even among adults.' Boys on the other hand were viewed as tougher. They were tough enough to participate in the manual labour of making the school's tennis courts and tough enough that when a boy broke his arm during a football match the tersely-worded accident report recorded that he was taken home on the train 'by another lad.'⁶

Whereas few parents of boys initiated contact with the school, a number of parents of girls – almost always fathers – wrote to the school or the Department to express concerns about their daughters' moral and physical safety. Coeducation was not named by parents as a concern in itself but the dangers of unregulated contact with other young people was a frequent sub-text. For example a father expressed his opposition to the school's provision of (girls only) 'sex hygiene' lectures in the following terms:

[My daughter] has already received all the instruction necessary, and in what I consider is the only right and proper way – privately and individually I have the greatest misgiving concerning putting these matters before young people collectively as it opens the door for discussion among themselves afterwards and experience both as a teacher and a clergyman has convinced me of the evils attending such conversation whether among girls or boys.⁷

Reporting the criticism to the Chief Inspector the headmaster reiterated the pains taken to ensure that the subject matter, as well as the audience, was not only all-female but entirely respectable:

The doctor herself informed me that it would be confined to matters relating to the female sex Miss Collins, Superintendent of the girls, who has attended the

⁵ Inspector's report, c. 21 October 1938, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17287.1.

⁶ Note to file, 11 July 1921, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.2; Accident report, 28 July 1938, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17287.1.

⁷ Parent to Headmaster, 3 August 1921, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.2.

lectures given up to the present, is quite satisfied that the matters, so far treated, are free from the possibility of anyone's criticism.⁸

The sorts of dangers that might beset girls at a coeducational school are suggested by a 1917 case in which Peter Board, the Director of Education, was informed by high school parents of 'undesirable conduct of boys and girls travelling to and from school in Western trains.'⁹ One girl had told her mother that 'three of her friends had been kissed by the boys travelling in the same carriage, and that the boys make bets that they will kiss the girls so many times going up and down the train.' Asked by the Department to 'caution the boys of your school ... as to their behaviour', and responding to the implied reprimand, headmaster Atkins replied in detail:

Three girls of this school have been subjected to the treatment complained of, quite against their wills as they declare. They name boys attending four schools other than Parramatta High School ... in addition to two boys attending this school. The undesirable conduct ... stopped in consequence of a rebuke which I gave ... occasioned by my having knowledge of somewhat noisy conduct on the part of some boys and the use of water squirts. I also had heard that some of the girls were a little noisy in calling to one another and strolled up and down the platform more than was necessary. I ... forbade boys and girls to travel in the same carriages. This caused the whole of the objectionable conduct to cease at once according to all the witnesses examined so far.¹⁰

As well as implicating boys from other schools, the Parramatta girls questioned by Atkins informed him of the bad example set for the boys by 'young women students attending the Metropolitan Business College in Sydney [who] have been kissed in the same carriage and in their presence by a young man who goes to business in Sydney.' In defence of his students, and of the efficacy of his own authority over them, Atkins found the girls unwilling accomplices in the kissing game, and the boys, although culpable, subject to bad influences from unregulated women from the world beyond the school's control. 'The evil', concluded Atkins, 'is a difficult one to overcome' and 'generally occurs with First Year students who have not yet been influenced strongly by the tone of the school.'

⁸ Headmaster to Secondary Schools Inspector, 3 August 1921, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.2.

⁹ Director to Headmaster, 17 August 1917, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

¹⁰ Headmaster to Director, 23 August 1917, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

Concern for the safety of travelling girls extended to the consideration of providing state supported or endorsed residential accommodation near the school. In 1918 Atkins recommended 'Mrs and Miss Waugh' of 'Tara' as candidates to run a boarding hostel for the school, 'ladies of refinement and education', one of whom had formerly 'conducted a private school for several years'.¹¹ Again in late 1919 he suggested the Department set up its own boarding house, speculating that 'some girls, no doubt, do not attend the school at all for want of such a place to stay as the hostel would provide.'¹² In 1921 Atkins informed Elliott that girls had been removed from the school because of problems with travel and accommodation.¹³

Again the need to protect female students was the key issue in the case of a fifteen year old boy who in 1918 was suspended from school for passing a note in class containing an off-colour joke. The student was in serious trouble because he passed the note to a girl. In the ensuing investigation the girl testified that she did not read the note, being 'busy with my arithmetic,' and the boy apologised, writing in his own defence that the joke 'was not meant for the girl but the boy behind her.'¹⁴ The school inspector investigating the case, George Blumer, (whose daughter also attended the school) recommended the boy be expelled:

The painful part of the affair is that, whilst one does not wish to be too hard upon a boy, one also has to consider the welfare of the other pupils, and especially the girls who attend a school of both sexes.¹⁵

He was, however, overruled by Dawson, the Chief Inspector of schools, who 'consider[ed] that at the opening of his career the young chap should not be so heavily handicapped in order to point a moral.'¹⁶

¹¹ Headmaster to Chief Inspector, 9 November 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

¹² Headmaster to Chief Inspector, 14 October 1919, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

¹³ Headmaster to Secondary Schools Inspector, 29 August 1921, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.2.

¹⁴ Record of investigation, c.15 July 1918; Students' statements, 8 July 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

¹⁵ Inspector to Chief Inspector, 15 July 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

The extent and force of parents' fears about the management of coeducation is difficult to distinguish from more general concerns about the health and safety of adolescent girls, not least because of confounding factors such as the relative prestige of the older single-sex high schools. This is true of two letters from the 1910s requesting that girls be transferred from Parramatta High to Fort Street and Sydney Girls High, respectively. Both Fort Street and Sydney Girls, established as they were in the nineteenth century, might be seen as more prestigious schools than Parramatta High. One father argued that his daughter wished to study botany, which was offered at Sydney Girls High School but not at Parramatta. Botany was considered to be the science most suitable for girls to study. Parramatta taught only the 'hard' sciences, physics and chemistry. The request, which the headmaster described as a 'ruse,' was not acceded to.¹⁷ Another father wrote that his daughter would not be able to attend a high school at all if compelled by the Department to attend at Parramatta as 'she would have to wait two or three quarters of an hour for the train or loiter about on the streets all that time'.¹⁸ He wanted her to attend Fort Street High School as 'in Sydney she has my sister [with whom to] to spend her spare time'. Whatever the full reasons behind the request, the parent hoped that the dangers of 'loitering' might persuade the Department to waive its rules about attending the school nearest home. This request also was denied, although only after the headmaster provided a report about the safety of train travellers. He reassured the Department that the five or more pupils who used that train were supervised, studying, on school premises: 'the surroundings of the school here are quiet and pupils are safe from any serious temptations'. In any case, he argued, Parramatta was a safer place than Sydney.¹⁹

Making high school men

The duty of the school towards boys in terms of pastoral care was perceived to be quite different from that towards girls, by parents, teachers and officers of the Department of

¹⁶ Chief Inspector to Director, 18 July 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

¹⁷ Headmaster to Chief Inspector, 21 May 1919, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.1.

¹⁸ Parent to Department, 12 February 1913, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.1.

¹⁹ Headmaster to Chief Inspector, 19 February 1913, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.1.

Public Instruction. Boys were represented in the Parramatta High School files as having potential or actual individual autonomy in a way that was not the case with girls. Where girls were seen as collectively in need of protection, the challenge with boys was the shaping of character; the cultivation of middle-class values and behaviours which was central to the high school's citizenship project. The coeducational nature of the school was reasonably immaterial to the paperwork involving boys. The principal exceptions to this were the cases described above where it was possible that boys might jeopardise the respectability of girls. The files also included instances in which girls, as a group, assisted with the disciplining of boys by reporting their misbehaviour. In recommending that consideration be given to the expulsion of a second year boy in 1926, for example, Atkins wrote to Elliott that the boy 'was reported to me by certain girl students for continued unseemly conduct on the trains; such conduct consisting of bad language and smoking.'²⁰

In comparison with the parents of girls, few parents of boys initiated contact with the school, and when they did their concerns were quite different. Boys' parents, or boys themselves, questioned the school or the Department about work issues. For example, in 1913, a nineteen year old boy seeking entry to the new high school asked to be exempted from part of the course because of his age. He was invited to 'present himself to the headmaster and 'consult.'²¹ In 1921 a father wrote to transfer his son to a commercial high school course on the grounds that 'should my health fail me my son will have to leave school at the finish of the first three years, and then strike out for meeting the different contingencies of life.'²² Where boys' parents were mentioned in the files it was likely to be because they had been summoned by the school in regard to their sons' misbehaviour. The punishment of students was mostly carried out within the school, without recourse to central office, and documentation for these routine punishments has not survived. The cases which appear on the correspondence files are those in which expulsion was considered. For the boys whose misdemeanours were argued through the files, judgements were made based on assessments of character and motivation which

²⁰ Headmaster to Secondary Schools Inspector, 9 March 1926, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17285.1.

²¹ Student to Department, 22 May 1913, Director to Student, 25 May 1913, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.1.

²² Parent to Director, 21 December 1921, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.2.

presupposed capacities for independent decision-making not accorded to the mostly passive, mostly anonymous girls. The tension or struggle in the boys' cases was located in the transition from childhood to adulthood. Unruly boys had problems in achieving the balance between autonomy and the sort of compliance which was demanded by the school setting. The decisions made by the authorities turned on evaluations of 'self-control' – a frequently used and resonant term in discussions of expectations of behaviour – and corrigibility.

One boys' expulsion occurred because his parent failed to respond to pro forma warning letters about his behaviour: 'This quarter he has been reported three times in a week by prefects for offensive language and violent and mischievous behaviour.'²³ The headmaster concluded that the boy was 'incorrigible' and 'the leader of other boys in all kinds of disorder and larrikin-like conduct'. A letter was sent to the student's father from the Director of Education informing him that his son 'has evidently no inclination to take advantage of his educational opportunities' and that 'it would appear better in his own interests that he should be placed in some employment.'²⁴ The author of the off-colour note discussed above, was, on the other hand, saved from expulsion by his readiness to apologise – therefore to tacitly acknowledge the specific power relations of the teacher-student hierarchy – as well as his savvy in admitting only to the lesser part of the offence, that is that he had written the note but had not intended a girl to see it. Also in his favour was a phone call in his support from the local Anglican curate and a mother who 'appears to be a respectable, worthy woman ... much distressed by her son's conduct'.²⁵

Donald McDonald, at seventeen years of age, was less willing to defer to school authority. In the most strongly contested case on file McDonald stood to lose his teachers' scholarship and his chances of future employment in the state teaching service, after his conduct was found 'not satisfactory' in the mid year report of his Leaving

²³ Director to Parent, 12 April 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

²⁴ Headmaster to Secondary Schools Inspector 19 April 1918; Director to Parent, 2 May 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

²⁵ Chief Inspector to Director, 18 July 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

Certificate year.²⁶ The section for ‘remarks’ at the bottom of the page provided the headmaster with an opportunity to describe the student as lacking in ‘self-control’ and to report that he had been ‘impertinent to one of staff.’ In a fuller, non-public memorandum to Peter Board, Atkins expanded on his observations, using more of the vocabulary of classroom power relations: Donald McDonald’s character, despite ‘much that might develop into good,’ was ‘impulsive and ill-balanced’. He had been previously reprimanded for his ‘insubordinate attitude’, ‘boisterous conduct’, ‘disrespect’, ‘insolence’ and ‘provocation’ and:

the accumulation of offences caused me to consider it my duty to report as I have done with the object of impressing him with the need of a more earnest amendment of his faults and with the object also of informing the Department, more particularly in the case of a lad seeking to fill the office of a teacher.²⁷

The precipitating event had been a confrontation between McDonald and a teacher of science, F. A. Booth, in which the student had refused to apologise for his ‘impertinence and insubordination.’²⁸ Angry letters from McDonald and his father to the Department counter-accused Booth of abuses of power.²⁹ They alleged that he had struck McDonald (rather than caning which would have been more acceptable) and also that he had crowed over the incident: ‘This teacher did not forget to give it out in front of the other class and Boasted that He had made one of the big boys climb down is this the spirit of a gentleman I think not.’ This was a dispute which drew together issues about masculinity and age relations. It was significant that McDonald was a ‘big boy.’ In 1916 other boys of his age would have been either already in full-time paid employment, or preparing to embark on active war service. In the setting of the school, however, he was still in some ways expected to maintain the demeanour of a well-behaved child. While the teacher believed he had the right to expect unquestioning obedience, the student claimed the right to argue his case as an adult. In their letters McDonald and his father insisted that McDonald’s

²⁶ Quarterly report on Probationary Student, 16 June 1916, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

²⁷ Headmaster to Director, 4 July 1916, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

²⁸ Secondary Schools Inspector’s report, c. 18 August 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

²⁹ Student to Bursary Endowment Board, 26 June 1916; Parent to Director, 26 June 1916, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

defiance of the teacher had been in defence of his younger brother, whom Booth had accused of obscene writing on a desk. According to Mr J. W. McDonald, his elder son:

was only defending the honour of his young Brother which you will admit was Perfectly right for him to do but why a teacher should so far forget himself as to assault the boy by striking him in the face with his fist and then call upon him for an apology is beyond all reason.

The issue was considered serious enough to be investigated by Elliott, the Inspector of Secondary Schools. Elliott evaluated McDonald's character as immature but not incorrigible and concluded that 'both master and boy lost their tempers.' He recommended that the boy retain his studentship, 'dependent on future good conduct' and that Booth be 'admonished for his want of control of hand and speech.'³⁰

For this period there are almost no records of individual girls being disciplined at this level for bad behaviour, and those whose cases were reviewed by central office were for different kinds of infractions from the boys. Where the boys' cases were about disorderly conduct or open defiance, the girls' cases were for the more solitary and private offences. A letter was sent to the mother of one first year girl who was considered to have missed too much school for 'illness and mother's necessities.' She was informed that her daughter's 'permission to attend' would be withdrawn if her attendance did not improve.³¹ Two others were found guilty of stealing small amounts of money. While the misdemeanours of boys were usually described as demonstrating a want of 'self-control,' a girl who stole might be 'artful.'³² At the same time it was clear for both boys and girls that the high school might demand higher standards of conduct and character than elsewhere. In the case of the one of the girls found stealing it was recommended that she either be sent back to the elementary school to sit the high school entrance again, or to the domestic science school until such time as she could prove herself worthy of return to the high school.³³

³⁰ Secondary Schools Inspector's report c. 18 August 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

³¹ Headmaster to Secondary Schools' Inspector, 1 March 1928; Director to parent, 14 March 1928, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17285.2.

³² Headmaster to Secondary Schools' Inspector, 21 June 1916, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17285.1.

³³ Inspector's report, 22 September 1928, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17285.2.

Teachers' work in the coeducational high school

The Australian novelist and playwright Dymphna Cusack taught at Parramatta High for three years from 1932-1934, in a teaching career which lasted from the late 1920s until the mid 1940s. She described her time at Parramatta, and the other state high schools she had taught in, in a memoir written towards the end of her life, describing Parramatta High in the following terms:

It was a moderately good staff with the usual number of men who considered that their genital equipment gave them the actual superiority their salaries implied There was the inevitable man who couldn't keep discipline and complained that women were a danger to the school But good subject masters and a splendid head. Little Tommy Atkins was one of those rare people who are born without sex prejudice – something rare in our day – and had a genius for handling people as well as staff.³⁴

Cusack, like all New South Wales state high school teachers, was moved around the state from school to school by the Department of Education, with limited say in where she went and when. She taught at three coeducational high schools: Broken Hill, Goulburn and Parramatta (with a brief stint as a relief teacher in Canberra). Her play about the creepy relations among a group of women teachers in a girls' school, *Morning Sacrifice* was a fictionalised account of her experiences at the prestigious Sydney Girls High, to which she was 'elevated' after her years in the two country coeducational high schools and at Parramatta.³⁵ The women-only staffroom in which the play is set is a terrible place of claustrophobic pettiness and vindictiveness, fuelled by the denial and repression of female sexuality, and described by the young heroine of the play as 'hag-ridden.'³⁶ At the end of the play the sane and sensible Mrs MacNeil, the only married character, declares that she will be sending her own children to a coeducational school, as if that is the solution to the horrors of 'Easthaven.'³⁷

³⁴ Dymphna Cusack, *A window in the dark*, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1991, p. 95.

³⁵ Cusack, *Morning Sacrifice: a play in three acts*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1986 [1943]; *Window in the Dark*, p. 105.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Act I scene i, p.10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Act III scene ii, p. 77.

However while coeducation might have been an ideal towards which the socially-progressive Cusack was drawn in theory, the reality of the coeducational schools in which she taught was a more complicated matter. In fact she saw the coeducational high schools she taught in as very inadequate, badly constrained by the larger state education system within which they were forced to operate. She was critical of a number of aspects of New South Wales secondary education, the narrow curriculum, over-directed by the requirements of university-entrance, and the lack of serious attempts to address practical life-skills, especially health and sex-education. (She saw sex education as especially important in coeducational schools.) She was also scathing about the treatment of women teachers, and felt that her experience teaching in coeducational schools served to expose the inferior conditions under which they suffered throughout the system. Of the women friends she made at Parramatta High she wrote, 'It's amazing how much kindness and decency survived in days when frustration, professionally and sexually, was the lot of women teachers.'³⁸ Notwithstanding enlightened headmasters such as 'Tommy' Atkins of Parramatta, a coeducational school was one in which women teachers with the same training and qualifications as men laboured at identical tasks, 'and were often better teacher [yet] received only four-fifths of the male salary [and] had to resign on marriage or be compulsorily retired.'³⁹ Women teachers were treated as second-class employees, but this was not so much peculiar to the coeducational school as made visible by it, as a local manifestation of a larger system.

Parramatta High School had a mixed teaching staff, unlike the single-sex secondary schools of the period in which it was policy and practice to employ either men or women only (with some exceptions). It was not possible for the teaching staff to confine their teaching solely to boys or to girls, or for boys or girls to avoid addressing or being addressed by both male and female teachers. Male and female teachers were also compelled to mix with each other in the daily organisation of covering the curriculum, setting examinations and so on, despite having separate men's and women's staffrooms.

³⁸ Cusack, *Window in the Dark*, p. 96.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

This working communication set Parramatta High School apart from other city high schools, as well as from the secondary schools run by private concerns. This section of the chapter explores the nature of the gender order at Parramatta High School from the perspectives of the teaching staff. It focuses on two questions. These are, 'How important was gender in shaping teachers' careers at Parramatta?' and 'In what ways did the coeducational organisation of the school affect teachers' lives?' The texture of teachers' working lives is doubly important to understand in a school where substantial numbers of its students, male and female, had their eyes on teaching careers.

It is reasonably easy to determine the gender balance on the staff due to the convention that on staff lists men were identified by initials and surname, where women's names were prefaced by 'Miss' or 'Mrs.' Numbers are too small to make claims about whether men or women consistently outnumbered each other on the staff as a whole or in particular academic subjects – except for science which was taught almost entirely by men – and the records are too sparse to ascertain whether there were systematic inequalities in the allocation of senior or higher classes. However the most readily visible gender imbalance at Parramatta High, as at all coeducational public high schools, was that all promotions positions – principal, deputy, heads of subject departments – were held by men, with the significant exception of the pastoral care position supervisor of girls.

Looking at teachers as they worked at just one school offers specific kinds of insights. A reading of the Parramatta High School files sheds light, not so much on the formulation and development of policy, or the longer term progress of women's or men's lives, but on the local application and interpretation of government regulations and on the aggregation of experience in one place at a specific time. Teachers were employed centrally by the Department rather than by the school or a local board and were moved around the state from high school to high school mainly according to supply and demand and seniority. Teachers' conditions of service including pay, leave and superannuation were also administered by the Department and the Public Service Board. Until the late 1930s copies of papers relating to pay and conditions – as well as disputes and other kinds of anomalies

– were kept on individual school correspondence files, which therefore provide a particular kind of site-specific snapshot of teachers' working lives for this period.

One of the insights to be gained is the way in which policy decisions were incorporated into daily, mundane practice. The bureaucratic conventions of written expression and reporting and the use of pro formas in the correspondence files encouraged the belief in a specific kind of social order as routine, natural and uncontested. The processes being implemented in the files were crafted to appear rational and neutral by the way they were presented, when in fact the Education Department, as part of the larger civil service, was engaged in ambitious acts of social engineering. For the high school's teachers the private world of family, financial conduct and the body, were seen as routinely subject to Departmental oversight. The disciplining of teachers' lives outside the classroom was additional to the work-determined structures of assessment and promotion which were organised around credentialling and inspection. Women teachers had their own set of regulations in addition to those governing male workers, predicated on a social model of the family led by the male breadwinner. The marriage bar legislated under the Married Women Teachers' (and Lecturers) Act of 1932-35 was an outstanding example of this as was the considerable wage differential between male and female salary scales, indicative of the Education Department's assumptions about the financial rights and requirements of the male and female employee.

The Parramatta High School files include a substantial amount of correspondence implementing those regulations which addressed the person of the teacher. Fine gradations in age were significant. An ageing William Atkins was required to submit a form each year after his sixtieth birthday certifying his continued medical fitness for the position of headmaster until mandatory retirement on his sixty-fifth birthday.⁴⁰ A music teacher was disciplined for lowering her age by two years to become eligible for a travelling scholarship.⁴¹ Judgements were made about what constituted family in terms of bereavement or funeral leave. Paid leave was granted to a teacher to attend her aunt's

⁴⁰ Retirement of headmaster, c. 9 May 1934, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17286.B.

⁴¹ Scholarship application, c. 1 March 1936, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17286.C.

funeral only after she was able to confirm that the woman lived with her, and then for her grandmother's funeral because the death occurred 'at my home'.⁴² The Department, advised by the headmaster, had final say over what constituted ill health. Sick leave, for example, was determined by a complex system of length of service and medical certification. The files are full of sick leave forms which indicate what was considered legitimate illness. They also include a small bundle of correspondence about a teacher who was in danger of failing the medical examination she needed to undertake to become a permanent employee, considered to be 'unfit' unless she would agree to have a bad tooth removed.⁴³ In this case the teacher attempted to call into question the expertise of the Departmental medical officer by setting him up against her own, private, practitioners. There are several cases such as this in the files, where teachers or other complainants insisted that their case was specific or unique, but the Department responded by determining that in fact the established rules and procedures applied. The work of the Department was to absorb the specifics of local circumstance into its structure of rule and system.

Teachers and marriage

The marriages of male teachers were all but invisible at Parramatta High School. Mostly there is no indication in any of the sources of a male teacher's marital status. There are only a handful of exceptions to this, including glimpses of a gender order in which a teacher's wife might become an unpaid participant in his career, such as the headmaster's wife, who was frequently present at formal occasions. For women teachers, on the other hand, marriage was a defining commitment, immediately apparent, of course, in change of name and title, but also occasioning a change in career. Even before the 1932 Act it was conventional, if not mandatory, for women teachers to resign on marriage. Few married women appear in official lists of the teaching staff of Parramatta High before the 1950s.

⁴² Leave forms and correspondence between teacher and Secondary Schools Inspector, 20 April-15 June 1926, 24 October 1927, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17285.1.

⁴³ Medical report and correspondence between teacher and Department, 2 February-1 November 1917, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

In the traces of the Married Women Teachers Act which appear on the high school files, employment as a teacher is represented as something like a gift which the Department had the right to bestow or withdraw. Letters from the Department frame married women teachers as second rate workers – being permitted or not to work or to draw a salary – rather than as having either skills to contribute to schools or a legitimate right to employment. There are no direct challenges to the Act on file – that struggle occurred elsewhere – but the files include several instances of women trying in practical and mundane ways to minimise loss of income by finessing their wedding dates. One woman who married during the long summer break had to pay back a month's salary. Had she been married in January as she had told the Department, instead of in December, she would have been entitled to keep the payment.⁴⁴ Another teacher was allowed to stay at Parramatta because the headmaster was pleased with her work and she married in May, after all the new graduates had been placed.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, she still had to resign as a permanent employee and be reemployed on a temporary contract, which would expire at the end of the school year to make way for the next new influx of Teachers College graduates the following January. Another woman declined to postpone her wedding until Easter, as advised by the Department, instead writing to inform the school and the Department, that she had been compelled by its attitude to accept a position at the private girls' school, Abbotsleigh.⁴⁶

The Parramatta High School correspondence files are not the best source for an overview of the situation of married women or for understanding the introduction and eventual overturn of the married teachers' legislation.⁴⁷ However, as argued above, it is instructive not only to view the various kinds of school and staffing practices documented on the files together, but also to read them together with other local sources. For example that the 1932 legislation, framed in response to the labour surpluses of the Great Depression,

⁴⁴ Director to former teacher, 24 February 1938, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17287.1.

⁴⁵ Minute, 10 May 1938; Public Service Board certificate, 31 December 1938, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17287.1.

⁴⁶ Former teacher to Department, 24 January 1939, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17287.1.

⁴⁷ see Marjorie Theobald and Donna Dwyer, 'An episode in feminist politics: the Married Women Lecturers and Teachers Act, 1932-47,' *Labour History*, no. 76, 1999, pp. 59-77.

was underpinned by powerful public discourses of romance and desire, can be seen in the celebratory mode of reporting women teachers' engagements in the school magazines. The marriage of the teachers Gladys Taylor and R. D. Mulvey, before Mulvey's departure overseas during World War One was recalled nostalgically by former students and teachers Lilian Whiteoak and J. R. Croswell writing for the 1963 school magazine.⁴⁸ Croswell recalled, 'Miss Taylor was a universal favourite and we all delightedly watched her growing romance with Mr Mulvey.'⁴⁹ Gladys Mulvey did, in fact, continue to work at the school while her soldier husband was overseas, but this was seen as an unusual circumstance. More often the case was the celebratory farewelling of women teachers who married, for example, 'and in one case, the services of a very able lady were lost for all time to the Department. Cupid found his mark!'⁵⁰

Careers for women teachers in the coeducational school

For the most part women and men teachers performed identical tasks at the high school in their daily working lives, despite women being paid less and having access to fewer staff management opportunities, but they were not always viewed as having identical capabilities. There are suggestions in the files that women teachers, like female students, were viewed as generally less robust than their male colleagues. These include a disciplinary case from the early 1920s in which a young female teacher was transferred to a girls' school for her lack of authority in the classroom, especially her inability to 'manage boys.'⁵¹ Headmaster Atkins tended to be more solicitous about women's than men's health, adding supporting comments to women's sick leave applications such as 'has not completely recovered yet but feels it her duty to return to school at the present juncture'⁵² 'has resumed duty although not quite recovered as appearances go,'⁵³ and

⁴⁸ Letter from Lilian G. Whiteoak, Letter from J. R. Croswell, *Phoenix: Parramatta High School Magazine*, 1963, pp. 6, 7-8.

⁴⁹ Letter from J. R. Croswell, p. 8.

⁵⁰ 'School Notes,' *Parramatta High School Magazine*, December 1920, p. 280.

⁵¹ Correspondence between Headmaster and Secondary Schools Inspector, teacher and Secondary Schools Inspector, 8 March 1922-30 January 1923, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.2.

⁵² Leave form, 16 September 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.A.

⁵³ Leave form, 24 May 1926, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17285.1.

‘Miss Macintosh shows evident signs of strain.’⁵⁴ However there was more than a whiff of strategy as he wrote to persuade the Department that a veranda at the school should be enclosed in the late 1920s, on the grounds that ‘the strain [of speaking above the traffic noise] is such a severe one at present that I fear for the voices of some of the lady members of staff,’ and that some changes be made to the art room as ‘Miss Crouch’s health has been frequently affected’ by her room’s exposure to the westerly winds.⁵⁵

As has been mentioned earlier, women teachers were not appointed to management positions in coeducational schools as heads of subject departments, principal or deputy principal. The one area of expertise in the coeducational school in which women remained unchallenged was the special care of girls’ morals and bodies. Women who sought promotion other than to the position of girls’ supervisor, had to move to one of the girls’ high schools. When a reclassification of Parramatta in 1919 led to the creation of head of department positions, all of which were taken by men, the altered balance of sexes on the staff was described satirically in the school magazine:

We now have eight gentlemen instead of five. The school has become quite masculine in tone. Much more frequently now, interspersed with the silvery cadences of the voice feminine, one hears the booming bass and resonant roll of man At lunch time the sound of seven male voices, discussing with much vigour the faults of Single Tax, the burden of superannuation or some other such political topic, gives one quite a feeling of protection.⁵⁶

One teacher who attempted to carve out a career for herself at Parramatta High before the position of girls’ supervisor was instigated was Meta Latreille. Latreille, thirty-nine years old when she entered the state teaching service in 1917, first applied for a promotion to Mistress of Modern Languages in January 1918, writing, ‘I am anxious to get a position which will give me fuller scope for my experience.’⁵⁷ When this was unsuccessful –

⁵⁴ Leave form, 7 March 1927, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17285.1.

⁵⁵ Headmaster to Secondary Schools Inspector, 11 June 1929; Headmaster to Secondary Schools Inspector, 22 July 1926, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17285.1.

⁵⁶ School Notes, *Parramatta High School Magazine*, June 1919, p. 187.

⁵⁷ Teacher to Chief Inspector, 4 January 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

‘there is no mistress-ship vacant’⁵⁸ – she wrote to the Chief Inspector suggesting the creation of a position of Mistress in Charge of Girls in Mixed Schools:

There are many questions, especially those relating to health, sport, behaviour and dress, which can best be handled by a woman, who could interview mothers anxious about their daughters’ welfare. An arrangement such as this would greatly relieve the headmaster. I saw the advantage of this system, which is now pretty generally adopted, when I was visiting schools in England, and especially at the secondary school Hendon, one of London’s latest Mixed Schools. The matter has also been more particularly brought to my notice lately by a trained nurse, who tells me she has been appealed to by a mother, troubled about the health of her daughter at one of the Schools.⁵⁹

Elliott responded:

A wise Head Master would naturally consult the most experienced woman assistant on his staff and refer mothers to her in all questions relating to their daughters’ health. In other matters such as sport, dress etc the women assistants should use their influence without regulations. There is, however, much to be said for Miss Latreille’s suggestion, provided it could be carried out without inducing friction between the Head Master and the appointee It should be made clear that the position is in no sense independent of the Head Master’s authority and that the duties are such as he may delegate.⁶⁰

Peter Board, Director of Education, agreed in principle with the proposal to appoint a girls’ mistress, but it did not go ahead at that time due to cost.⁶¹ As this possibility fell through for Latreille she applied for the position of Subject Mistress of Modern Languages at Parramatta High, suggesting that, while she was ‘aware that these positions in Mixed Schools have hitherto been granted to men’, the Department might, ‘in view of the Limitation of Funds’, consider the appointment ‘a Lady who could also undertake the charge of the girls.’⁶² Her strategy was not only unsuccessful, but hostilely received by Elliott:

⁵⁸ Chief Inspector to Teacher, 25 January 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

⁵⁹ Latreille to Chief Inspector 28 June 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

⁶⁰ Secondary Schools Inspector to Chief Inspector 26 July 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

⁶¹ Chief Inspector to Director 8 August 1918; Director to Chief Inspector 18 August 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

⁶² Teacher to Chief Inspector 9 November 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

I do not recommend Miss Latreille's appointment to a Mistress-ship, either in a Girls' or a Mixed School. In my opinion she has not the personal qualifications necessary and, if she were appointed, I should expect difficulties with members of the staff over whom she had control. Further, if it were proposed to appoint Mistresses of Subjects in Mixed Schools (under whom male assistants would have to work), there are other teachers in the Service with equal or better qualifications and longer service than Miss Latreille.⁶³

One of the most prolific contributors to files for this period was May Crouch, teacher of art and needlework at the school from 1913 until 1945. Prior to that she had been a pupil teacher in the late nineteenth century and then had taught in infant and primary schools around New South Wales.⁶⁴ She was appointed to Parramatta High to teach art, needlework and sewing and was briefly also given supervision of first year geography and girls' gymnastics.⁶⁵ In April 1915 she was teaching art and needlework at the high school and art and home decoration in the girls' department of the superior public school at Parramatta South, but by the end of 1915 the Department considered that there were sufficient classes to confirm her position as a full-time art and needlework teacher at the high school.⁶⁶

She encouraged the development of a middle class culture amongst the students of Parramatta High. Apart from her teaching subjects, which had their origins in the ladies' accomplishments curriculum, she was an energetic organiser of charity work and a leading supporter of the Parramatta High Ex-Students' Union. She worked at the promotion of a culture of extra-curricular participation at the school, and her activities were extensively reported in the school magazines. During the First World War she organised at Parramatta High School the largest Junior Red Cross Circle in the state, a school club which involved both boys and girls and had representatives from every class in the school. She was an instigator of knitting circles for the war effort, led a group of girls in crafting decorative wreaths for the first ANZAC Day commemoration and

⁶³ Secondary Schools Inspector's report, 14 November 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3.

⁶⁴ Teacher to Chief Inspector, 12 April 1933, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17286.A.

⁶⁵ Appointment of Miss Crouch, 1 February 1915, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.1.

⁶⁶ File notes, 13 April 1915, 29 November 1915, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.2.

spearheaded the fundraising effort to donate an extra bed to the local hospital.⁶⁷ She worked with a committee of senior girls and boys to run the school tuck shop and was a patron and organiser of the ex-students union, helping, among other things, to decorate the venues for ex-students' dances. She also saw herself as a guardian of students' morals and respectability, for example reporting a school cleaner, who was dismissed, for talking to herself and using 'objectionable language' to which students might be exposed.⁶⁸ At some point in her career at Parramatta she adopted or accepted the nickname, 'Auntie May'.

Crouch remained more or less the only teacher on the staff without a university degree, and without the credentials to teach anything other than art and drill. She therefore had even less of a career structure or an earning capacity than the other women with whom she taught. The files document a number of attempts she made to gain material recognition, in the form of increased pay and conditions, for her personal leadership role in the building of the school culture and community, as well as for her achievements in teaching subjects which she considered to be important but were not at that time accorded equal status with the more theoretical subjects. As early as 1916 she applied for an increase in pay on the grounds of having to contribute to the financial support of a widowed mother and invalid brother.⁶⁹ In 1917 and again in 1920, 1921, 1933 and 1935 she wrote to the Department asking for changes in pay or classification.⁷⁰ She complained in 1933 that despite having been 'in charge of Art and Needlework to Leaving Certificate standard for 19 ½ years at Parramatta High School [she remained] on the lowest grade salary paid to assistant mistresses.'⁷¹ In 1920 she was unsuccessful in her application for the newly-created position of supervisor of girls.⁷² It does not seem that her application

⁶⁷ *Parramatta High School Magazine*, 1916-1935; for a summary by Crouch's of her achievements and contributions see teacher to Chief Inspector, 12 April 1933, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17286.A.

⁶⁸ Minute, 4 May 1932, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17286.A.

⁶⁹ Teacher to Secondary Schools Inspector, 19 April 1916, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.2.

⁷⁰ Teacher to Secondary School Inspector, 29 November 1917, 2 June 1920, 14 December 1920; Teacher to Director, 14 March 1921; Teacher to Chief Inspector, 12 April 1933, 12 December 1933, 1 August 1935, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3- 5/17286.B; also correspondence between Couch, Lynch and Wilson, Teachers of Art and Needlework at Parramatta High School, North Sydney Girls' High School and St George Girls' High School and Departmental officers, 28 June 1916-27 July 1917, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.2.

⁷¹ Teacher to Chief Inspector, 12 April 1933, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17286.A.

⁷² Teacher to Secondary Schools Inspector, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.2.

was taken seriously but in any case the position went, and continued to go, to women qualified to teach the more prestigious academic subjects such as English and mathematics. In 1933 she sent a letter of application for the Departmental position of Assistant Supervisor of Drawing which, again, was sent direct to file.⁷³

For two decades Crouch worked to persuade the Department that while she lacked the qualifications to teach the more highly-regarded academic subjects, her leadership role in the school community and her success in the subjects she did teach, should be counted towards her formal status and conditions. She mostly, however, declined to abide by the forms and conventions of bureaucratic communication and was repeatedly blocked by terse departmental replies citing this or that invariable regulation. In a sense her struggles were those of a woman attempting to fit an older, feminine, tradition of skills and achievement – aesthetics, charity, hospitality – into a modern patriarchal model, a system structured to accommodate only very narrow definitions of knowledge, credentials and career.

She did, however, enjoy some success for her role in a campaign, launched in 1916, to upgrade the classification of high school art mistresses.⁷⁴ This was a collective effort, for which she joined forces with the art and needlework teachers at St George and North Sydney Girls' High Schools. The three women took it in turn to write letters to the Education Department. They had some support from the Superintendent of Drawing, J. E. Branch. Branch also recommended the establishment of specialist examinations for teachers of art, though the Inspector of Secondary Schools, Elliott, was guarded about enhancing the status of non-academic subjects. The three teachers wanted not only an increase in salary commensurate with other high school mistresses but also a pay scale which would reward efficiency and seniority, and a more formal credentialling system. By March 1917 the women had achieved a partial success. They gained salary increases

⁷³ Teacher to Chief Inspector, 12 December 1933, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17286.A.

⁷⁴ Correspondence between the Teachers of Art and Needlework at Parramatta High School, North Sydney Girls' High School and St George Girls' High School and Departmental officers, 28 June 1916-27 July 1917, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17284.2.

and a reclassification to 'Art and Needlework teacher,' but not the salary range or full recognition as high school mistresses that they had sought.

Male teachers

That the Department sought to nurture some kinds of male careers in a way that it did not with women is indicated, apart from the sorts of differential treatment already discussed, by the special provisions for enlisted men and returned soldiers during and after the Great War. For example running at approximately the same time as some of Crouch's battles for recognition was the case of William Mulholland, ex Australian Imperial Forces, whose paperwork had been mislaid or overlooked when he returned late from his war service overseas.⁷⁵ His letter was responded to quickly and courteously in a way that stands out in a file of correspondence that mostly is about blocking complaints or questions. In accordance with the special regulations created for ex-serviceman, Mulholland was given credit in seniority for his years of war service and instated to the level he might have occupied had he had no gap in his teaching career. Elliott reported, 'Had he not enlisted he would have been in receipt of that salary at least, and would probably have been appointed as a master.'⁷⁶

The grievance or disciplinary cases on the files about male teachers addressed somewhat different concerns from those of female teachers. Male teachers who appeared on the correspondence files tended to be in trouble for exceeding the boundaries set by an organisational structure which strongly limited individual autonomy. Even the founding headmaster, represented in the school magazines and elsewhere as a sort of modern, secular, Arnoldian figure, was strongly limited by Departmental regulation and practice in what he could do.⁷⁷ Minor excesses of authority for which masters were reprimanded included Atkins skipping some steps of procedure to allow a new student into second instead of first year to compensate for delays caused by the 1918 influenza epidemic, and

⁷⁵ Teacher to Chief Inspector, 8 January 1921, Deputy Chief Inspector to teacher, 3 February 1921, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17284.2.

⁷⁶ Secondary Schools Inspector to Director, 23 November 1920, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17284.2.

the Master of Science, William Pillans, spending a small amount of money on teaching equipment before he had sent the correct form to the Department.⁷⁸ F. A. Booth, mentioned earlier, was cautioned by William Elliott for taking upon himself the investigation into and punishment of a student instead of referring the matter to the headmaster.⁷⁹

Other cases concerned conduct which did not measure up to high school standards of masculine character. Personal moral probity was important. The creditors of one teacher understood that that they could approach the Department for debt recovery. The teacher continued to dispute the claims against him and was eventually suspended for 'dishonorable conduct in his financial transactions.'⁸⁰ Two other cases of masculinity problems concerned, again, the assistant science master F. A. Booth. On one occasion Booth was denied paid sick leave when his absence from work had immediately preceded an examination for a course he was taking at the university. The headmaster commented on the leave form that Miss Whiteoak (a very young teacher and ex-student of the school) had had extra duties because of Booth's absence even though she had been preparing for the same examination. Atkins implied that Booth had been unchivalrous.⁸¹ (Although forty year later Whiteoak specifically mentioned the encouragement Booth had given her in her ambitions to pursue a career in science.⁸²) The following year, 1918, Booth wrote to the Department to complain of his lack of promotion in the teaching service, having been unable to secure the Mastership in Mathematics at Fort Street Boys' High.⁸³ His complaint was that he had been compelled to remain as Assistant Master in Science at Parramatta because of the shortage of science teachers, a circumstance, 'for which I am in no way responsible.' An anonymous Departmental officer was dismissive of Booth's complaints. An unsigned marginal note on Booth's letter reads, 'The shortage is due to so

⁷⁷ See also D. L. Webster, 'Kilgour of Fort Street: The English headmaster ideal in Australian state secondary education,' *Melbourne Studies in Education*, 1981, pp. 184-206.

⁷⁸ Chief Inspector to Headmaster, 17 June 1919, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17284.A; Secondary Schools Inspector to Teacher, 29 November 1926, SRNSW 5/17285.1.

⁷⁹ Secondary Schools Inspector's report, c. 18 August 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW, 5/17283.3

⁸⁰ Report, 23 August 1925, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17284.3.

⁸¹ Leave form, 20 March 1917, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17283.3.

⁸² Letter from Lilian G. Whiteoak, *Phoenix: Parramatta High School Magazine*, 1963, p. 6.

⁸³ Application for Mastership, 25 March, 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17284.A.

many teachers of science going to the FRONT where he is not.' Booth resigned over the issue and left to teach at the Anglican boys' school, Barker College.⁸⁴

The case of C. P. Schrader drew several themes together. Schrader's case was among the earliest papers on file and concerned complaints made against him by 'women teachers,' supported by the headmaster.⁸⁵ Schrader was described as being on bad terms with both the women on the staff and with the headmaster. He had overstepped the bounds of correct behaviour firstly by interfering with the women's running of girls' tennis at the school, in ways which are not spelled out in the correspondence, and then, when he was stopped from participating, arranging for female students to be invited to participate in social tennis at his own local tennis club. Schrader's case touched on both professional conduct and respectability. William Elliott commented in his report, 'a teacher of Mr Schrader's experience should know better,' and recommended that Schrader be transferred as soon as possible to a boys' school, because 'in a mixed school such interference cannot be too strongly deprecated.' Elliott recommended not only transfer to a boys' school but to a boys' primary department, which was a demotion.

Conclusion

Parramatta High School was an outpost of the highly centralised New South Wales public education system. In accordance with the bureaucratic organisation of the early twentieth century Department of Public Instruction, many aspects of the operation of the school were accompanied by the formal production and preservation of paperwork, thus creating a valuable record of particular kinds of communications between school personnel and senior Department officers. This chapter examined papers in the Department's Parramatta High School correspondence files which concerned the management of the school's students and teachers. The files included routine paperwork, such as teachers' leave forms, together with correspondence concerning matters of grievance or discipline: instances in which small numbers of parents, teachers and students questioned or resisted

⁸⁴ Letter of resignation, 22 May 1918, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17284.A.

⁸⁵ Secondary Schools Inspector's report, 20 September 1913, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17283.1.

school authority in some way. These were cases which were considered sufficiently serious to require intervention or authorisation from central office, thus occasionally compelling the headmaster or Department to describe practices or structures which were otherwise taken for granted. Also evident in the files is the operation of the modern bureaucratic styles and systems of authority which encouraged the belief in a specific kind of social order as routine, rational and just. Communication was shaped and controlled by the use of very specific forms of language and expression.

The cases in the correspondence files addressed issues in the social, moral and physical rather than intellectual or academic realms. The correspondence concerned interpersonal relations such as issues of unruly behaviour (for boys) and physical or moral safety (for girls). Gender was an important and explicit category of distinction in a way that sets the files apart from other kinds of sources of historical information about the school such as the school magazines. Males and females were represented in the correspondence files to some extent as different kinds of people. Female students were passive and collectively in need of protection from physical and moral injury. Boys were more autonomous and independent. Problems arose for boys when they were unable to resolve to their teachers' satisfaction the tensions between this relative autonomy and the docility and compliance required of the school pupil. Some male teachers, similarly, had trouble negotiating the demands of modern organisational masculinity, with its strict adherence to regulation and correct procedure. The files also demonstrate ways in which male and female teachers' careers were viewed differently by the Department, such as during the period of the Married Women Teachers' Act. While the collection of information about both sexes means that inequities between men and women, boys and girls, are quite apparent in the files, it is not evident that these were necessarily caused or made worse by coeducation itself – an important exception to this being the male monopoly over management positions.

During the period before the second world war, coeducation at Parramatta High School was to some extent viewed as a practical and administrative feature of the school rather than as having educational or social value. Although beliefs in gender difference are more

apparent on the correspondence files than in other historical sources, beliefs about coeducation itself remain elusive, apart from those few instances in the 1910s, described in this chapter, where fears were expressed about the moral protection of girls in a 'mixed' high school.

Chapter 8

Remembering Parramatta High School, c.1913-c1940

Donald Horne

The historian and essayist Donald Horne spent two and a half mostly unhappy years as a student at Parramatta High School in the mid 1930s, an experience he described in a celebrated memoir, *The education of young Donald*, first published in the 1960s.¹ The main reason for his unhappiness was almost certainly that his years at Parramatta culminated in his father's commitment to a psychiatric hospital, however his sense of pain and dislocation were reflected in what he saw as his unimpressive, alienating surroundings. It is instructive to compare his unflattering portrait of Parramatta High with that of the school he attended previously, Maitland Boys' High School. He spent only a year at Maitland yet embraced it wholeheartedly, and his memoir recreates the way his younger self imbued the school in his imagination with the aura of English boarding school stories. Horne lived in a boarding house attached to the school and he lovingly details its initiation rituals, nicknaming system and hierarchy of violent bullying. He recalls that he had been proud that Maitland High (founded in 1884) was the 'second-oldest government high school in the state' and that he learnt to sing the school song with gusto. He hero-worshipped his housemaster, Mr Elgar, and noted, as middle-class Australians were trained to do, the quality of his spoken vowels.² The young Donald was unimpressed when a transfer for his school-teacher father meant a move to Parramatta High in 1935, 'a nondescript city school.'³ The writer Dymphna Cusack, who had taught at Parramatta High in the years just before Horne arrived, had found it in some ways culturally preferable to her next school, the prestigious Sydney Girls High School, which was 'conventional and narrow' and too 'middle class.'⁴ For Cusack the 'outer city'

¹ *The education of young Donald* (1967) and two other autobiographical works were revised and consolidated into a single volume: Donald Horne, *An interrupted life*, Harper Collins, Sydney, 1998.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 94.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

⁴ Dymphna Cusack, *A window in the dark*, National Library of Australia, 1991, Canberra, p. 105.

Parramatta was somehow more honest, more real. Horne had the opposite feeling. He found Parramatta a comedown after Maitland Boys:

No one seemed proud of it At Parramatta we acknowledged that we were the most inferior of the city's dozen or so high schools. We were stuck out on the edge of the city, at the end of the Western Suburbs electric railway line, with only some straggled suburban settlements west of us, some of them only the beginnings of suburbs, and then other settlements that were more country than city. Being both a girls' school and a boys' school seemed to make us neither one thing nor the other.⁵

Unlike Maitland, Parramatta High had no school song, no elaborate initiation rites, no bullying. Or as Horne remembered it: 'There was no bullying and nobody got hurt. But some of these boys talked so bleakly that it seemed to deaden the senses.'⁶

Celebrating the Parramatta High School tradition

Horne's ironic and sharp-edged account of his teen years is very different in tone and purpose from a collection of memory pieces published in the school's golden jubilee edition of its magazine, *The Phoenix*, a few years earlier in 1963.⁷ The commemorative magazine was not the forum for the expression of discontent or of social analysis of the kind either of Horne or Cusack, but rather was a vehicle for story telling and myth making. It included contributions from former students which were celebratory, affectionate and nostalgic. School life was represented as a series of sketches of detail and incident: stories about teacher nicknames, some boys' pranks, girls' uniforms and wistful recollections of old friendships. The recollections were determinedly local – specific individuals were named, specific incidents were relived – at the same time that much of what they described could apply to any high school of the period, such as the historical narrative of the school's evolution from its tough beginnings – 'we had no playground, no toilets, no washroom' – into a modern institution with a proud tradition.⁸ According to these accounts the school was a good place, well run, fair and well

⁵ Horne, *An interrupted life*, p. 106.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁷ *Phoenix: Parramatta High School Magazine*, 1963, pp. 5-17.

regulated with nevertheless enough flexibility or slack for a few funny stories. The contributors were clearly those who had been at ease with or adept at high school conduct.

The early 1960s was a time of public debate about coeducation and some of the pieces reflected an awareness of this. For C. A. Walsh (1922-1926) 'I think we boys were the better for the company of the girls.'⁹ According to Lyn Brown (1930-1935), 'We could tell these present day worriers, couldn't we, how well a co-ed. high school can work?'¹⁰ However there was no explicit questioning or exploration of exactly what it meant to be a 'co-ed high school' or in what way the boys (or girls) might have been 'better' for it. That the school was mixed is apparent in the names of the personnel in anecdotes. Each piece referred to both male and female teachers and students, though the importance of single-sex friendship and activity groupings was also evident. Some of the anecdotes relied on the shared understanding of a traditional gender order: a playground fist-fight, a frog hidden in a girl's inkwell, the girls 'smirking' while the boys are told not to behave like 'yahoos,' the girls feeling self-conscious in their large black gym bloomers.¹¹ Less apparent were differences between girls and boys as learners or academic achievers. It was clear that girls and boys were separated for sports, but these were described according to similar kinds of narrative patterns of wins, losses and playing the game.

Several pieces included references to the post-school achievements of former students in paid employment; achievements that the school community might be proud of and take some credit for. Those who were mentioned were individuals who had achieved a level of public eminence. Such individuals were disproportionately male and Justice C. A. Walsh, reporting on the successful careers of a number of his male schoolmates, was a little troubled by the relative public invisibility of adult women. He apologised, 'I have said very little about our girl companions and I fear that so far as this article is concerned they

⁸ Letter from J. R. Croswell (1913-1917), *Phoenix*, 1963, p. 7.

⁹ Letter from the Hon. Mr. Justice C. A. Walsh (1922-1926), *Phoenix*, 1963, p. 10.

¹⁰ Letter from Lyn Brown (1930-1935), *Phoenix*, 1963, p. 14.

¹¹ Letters from M. H. Hungerford (1915), *Phoenix*, 1963, pp. 6-7; Croswell, *Phoenix*, 1963, p. 8; E. Brown (1927-1931), *Phoenix*, 1963, p. 12; Lyn Brown, *Phoenix*, 1963, p. 14.

will have reason to feel sadly neglected, as I have not much information about them.’¹² He mentioned two female classmates who had become teachers but other kinds of women’s life stories did not really fit into his narrative structure. Lyn Brown in her less formal piece, in contrast, introduced herself as ‘now a middle-aged housewife ... with today’s washing lifting in the breeze and the house quiet for a moment before the children come crashing in from school.’¹³ Another contributor, played with the same sort of self-deprecating humour in describing her teenage daughter’s ‘deflating effect upon me [in] urging me to write about “the olden days.”’¹⁴ However the purpose of none of these pieces was to unsettle the reader or to provoke questions. The fiftieth anniversary of the school was a party, a celebration, and former students wrote accordingly, to contribute to a positive sense of community. This did not only mean that negative experiences or stories of ‘failure’ were less likely to be heard, but also produced a kind of uniformity. One or two letters were published to represent each decade, the implication being that schooling history was neat and easily understood, a matter of a few universal activities with a changing cast list and props. It was more or less understood that everyone had the same experience and felt the same way, notwithstanding some superficial sub-cultural distinctions and categorisations, such as those between boys and girls.

Oral histories of Parramatta High School

Previous chapters of this thesis have read Parramatta High School through sets of official sources such as school magazines and Department of Public Instruction correspondence files. These sources reveal a variety of context-specific beliefs and assumptions about the nature and importance of gender. The central argument of this study is that the high school’s gender order was complicated by cleverness, age and social class. In this chapter the nature of these interactions and inconsistencies is read through the recollections of former students, using a set of oral histories collected by the author during 1999 and

¹² Walsh, *Phoenix*, 1963, p.12.

¹³ Lyn Brown, *Phoenix*, 1963, p. 13.

¹⁴ E. Brown, *Phoenix*, 1963, p. 12.

2000.¹⁵ As has been found in a number of studies, oral history material offers rich insights into meaning, subjectivity and ‘lived experience’.¹⁶ In contrast with the institution’s own records the oral histories privilege individual over collective experience. School experiences are set in the context of home, family and subsequent career or life course. These are rich accounts of education in which adult men and women assess and reassess the meaning of the high school in their own lives. Complex interconnections are described among families, peers and institutional practices. Participants in this study had both varying and overlapping interpretations of the meaning of their schooling at Parramatta.

Material from interviews with fifteen ex-students, seven men and eight women, is used in this chapter. Listed by pseudonym and approximate period of enrolment, they are, in order of seniority: *Bert*¹⁷ (1910s), *Jean, Florence and Leonard*, (1920s), *Gordon, Marcia, Marion* and *John* (late 1920s/early 1930s), *Ken, Max, Anne, Olive, Vera, Bill* and *Dorothy* (1930s). All entered the high school in first year except for *Ken* and *Bill* who arrived in fourth year from the Parramatta Intermediate High School. As can be seen from this list, the chapter is weighted towards experiences from the mid 1920s.

¹⁵ Six participants (*Ken, Anne, Max, Olive, Vera, Bill*) were either known to the author or contacted through the author’s own networks. Nine participants (*Bert, Jean, Florence, Leonard, Gordon, Marcia, Marion, John, Dorothy*) either responded to an advertisement in the RSVP column of *The Sydney Morning Herald* or were referred by others who had read the advertisement. Copies of the text of the advertisement, Information Sheet and Permission forms are attached in an appendix to the thesis, together with a letter of approval from University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee. Each of the volunteers was interviewed separately except for *Max* and *Anne* who participated in a joint interview. Interviews lasted approximately an hour each.

¹⁶ The conduct of this oral history project was informed by a number of texts and studies, especially Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The oral history reader*, Routledge, London, 1998; Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994; Janet McCalman, *Journeyings: the biography of a middle-class generation 1920-1990*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993; Josephine R. May, Gender, memory and the experience of selective secondary schooling in Newcastle, New South Wales, from the 1930s to the 1950s, Ph.D. thesis, University of Newcastle, 2000; Christine Trimmingham Jack, *Kerever Park: a history of the experience of teachers and children in a Catholic girls’ preparatory boarding school, 1944-1965*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney, 1998; Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording oral history: a practical guide for social scientists*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 1994.

¹⁷ Italics have been used, as in McCalman’s *Journeyings*, to identify the names as pseudonyms.

Coeducation

Ex-students were well-aware in retrospect that Parramatta High School had been a pioneering coeducational high school in New South Wales, but they did not necessarily recall having had this impression as students. For some, coeducation had been a notable feature of the school from the outset. For others it was merely matter of fact. The idea of enrolling at a mixed high school was more or less remarkable depending on where students had been educated previously. Parramatta High School was the westernmost high school in the metropolitan area, situated on the dividing line between suburban Sydney and rural New South Wales, and therefore enrolled a mix of city and country children. While primary schools in Sydney were divided into boys' and girls' departments, the smaller country schools were mixed (although exactly what this meant is likely to have varied). For local students such as *Marcia*¹⁸ whose elementary years had been spent at the sex-segregated Parramatta Public School, the main feeder primary for the high school, coeducation was strange and somewhat alarming. *Marcia* described being awe-struck on her arrival at the high school in first year 1928. It was 'heady stuff' for a little first year girl to arrive at the school to see the fourth year 'men' competing in sports, for example. 'They were like men to us. Big fellows.' For *Florence*¹⁹, in contrast, educated at one-teacher primary schools and coming from a large family of boys, there was nothing remarkable about coeducation. She recalled being disconcerted when asked about coeducation at an interview preparatory to entering the Sydney Teachers' College:

When I went for my interview to be admitted to the Teachers' College in 1930 the interviewer asked me how did I feel about going to a co-ed high school. I thought it was a strange question because all education was co-ed to me I think I told him that I got to mix with boys without being too shy or too nervous. I always had mixed with boys. I had six brothers.

*Bill*²⁰ entered the high school in fourth year after completing his intermediate post-primary years at Lidcombe Commercial School and then the Parramatta Intermediate

¹⁸ *Marcia* (late 1920s/ early 1930s), interviewed by the author, 13 March 2000.

¹⁹ *Florence* (1920s), interviewed by the author, 12 March 2000.

Boys' High School. The difference between the rough and tumble Lidcombe where 'the cane ruled' and the civilised Parramatta High was particularly noticeable for the young *Bill*, although he suggested that this was as much to do with the elite academic ethos of the senior years of Parramatta as the presence of girls. *John's*²¹ transition was different again, as one of a number of students who was enrolled at Parramatta High from the William Thompson Masonic Schools, a home established in 1922 for orphan or destitute boys and girls. Coeducation was not an important feature of the high school for *John* but he did note that the mixing of boys and girls was handled very differently at Parramatta from the very strictly segregated Masonic schools where even brothers and sisters were kept entirely separate.²²

Other ex-students pointed out that the term 'coeducation' should be understood in its historical context. During the decades since these women and men attended Parramatta High the idea of the coeducational high school had come to represent something that they did not recognise from their own youth. *Gordon*²³ explained that coeducation in the late 1920s and early 1930s must be understood as being practised in a world without either the consumer culture or personal freedom which had characterised, as he saw it, late twentieth century youth experience: 'Boys and girls had different relationships then from today'. *Marion*²⁴ observed, 'I still think coeducation is a good thing but it's overlaid now by so many social problems it's murky.' *Max* and *Anne*, educated together at Parramatta High from the mid 1930s, saw their very positive experiences of coeducation as directly linked both with academic selection and older more traditional kinds of power relations between teacher and student. One of the problems that *Max* and *Anne*²⁵ saw with modern practices of coeducation was a lack of regulation. Some students in the post-war comprehensive high schools lacked a sense of proper conduct, and the contract between authority and student had been broken. *Anne* and *Max* contrasted the culture of

²⁰ *Bill* (1930s), interviewed by the author, 26 August 1999.

²¹ *John* (late 1920s/ early 1930s), interviewed by the author, 4 April 2000.

²² See also Beverley Earnshaw, *A start in life: the history of the William Thompson Masonic School, 1922-1988*, The William Thompson Masonic School Council, Parramatta, 1988.

²³ *Gordon* (late 1920s/ early 1930s), interviewed by the author, 10 March 2000.

²⁴ *Marion* (late 1920s/ early 1930s), interviewed by the author, 20 March 2000.

²⁵ *Max* and *Anne* (1930s), interviewed by the author, 25 November 1999.

Parramatta High in the 1930s with that of the comprehensive high schools in which they and their friends had taught during the 1970s:

Max: I've got my own opinion about this. Parramatta High School was successful as a coeducational school mainly because it was selective. My experience of non-selective coeducational high schools hasn't been nearly as good because I think that the boys and girls have little else to think about other than sex. The boys are trying to impress the girls. The girls are trying to impress the boys.

Anne: The girls don't want to come top of the class in a co-ed school. They don't want to beat the boys. And yet a girl in our class was top of the state in Maths, over the boys.

Ex-students recalled varying degrees of regulation of contact between girls and boys. For the most part they recalled a broad congruence between school policies about contact and students' own preferences and behaviour. *Gordon* remembered, 'We didn't mix on the whole ... but by choice or convention rather than noticing rules,' *Florence*, 'In that day and age ... you didn't question,' and *Vera*,²⁶ 'Mostly the girls all stuck together and the boys all stuck together.' Ex-students described mixing between boys and girls as limited in a number of ways. *Leonard*²⁷ drew a mental map of boys' and girls' spaces in the school, recalling in some detail the way boys and girls were kept apart in different school settings. The association of boys and girls, as he described it, was neither 'fostered' nor 'forbidden,' but boys and girls 'were kept fairly well apart' in places other than the classroom and the tuck shop. For example girls had separate assemblies, and the girls had to finish their swimming lessons at Parramatta Baths before the boys were allowed in. During play or lunch breaks girls were confined to the grounds closest to the school building while boys had more freedom of movement in the adjacent park. But there were exceptions and exceptional occasions. Both *Jean*²⁸ and *Marcia* had kept snapshots of casual relaxed groups of boys and girls picnicking together at Parramatta Park on sports day. *Marcia*'s elder sister was in one of the photos, acting as 'chaperone': 'And here we are: co-ed. That's what it was like on sports day You'd take a picnic and set it out and your best boyfriends would come and have lunch you see. It was cosy, wasn't it?' *Gordon* recalled mixed school concerts and 'bits of theatricals' as well as an orchestra

²⁶ *Vera* (1930s), interviewed by the author, 20 November 1999 and 27 November 1999.

²⁷ *Leonard* (1920s), interviewed by the author, 15 May 2000.

made up of male and female pupils and teachers. *Jean* described fourth and fifth year dances in the school gymnasium on the afternoons of the half-day at the end of term. Details of the regulation of mixing varied with different school administrations, notably the appointment of the formidable Edith Mackaness to the Girls' Supervisor position from mid 1930s, but rules appear to have become more overt, possibly because more contested, in the 1940s and 1950s.

In the classroom students tended to be grouped, or to group themselves, according to gender; girls on one side and boys on the other. However as *Olive*²⁹ put it, 'there was always the middle block where you overlapped,' and *Jean* described shrinking back in mock horror if the classroom seating arrangements meant sitting next to a boy. *Olive* and *Bill* remembered being in mixed groups in the late 1930s for practical science lessons such as chemistry experiments.

In things like ... practical chemistry you'd be together and sometimes you'd be in mixed groups if you were doing experiments. I think sometimes the teacher very wisely used to – If there were a couple of girls who were a bit fumble-fingered, he'd put one of the better boy students in the group so that he could rig up the apparatus and that sort of thing.³⁰

This observation by *Olive* about gender and aptitude is taken up below. However the instances of students actively participating in the lessons were apparently rare and teaching methods very traditional, so it may have been to some extent beside the point whether there were both boys and girls in a classroom. Several ex-students stressed the authoritarian nature of the teaching which meant that students were learning side by side rather than interacting. *Florence* recalled, 'There was very little discussion at all [in class]. You just listened to what you were told and remembered it. There was no deviation.' It is evident that contact between students in class was frequently incidental rather than part of formal learning – a look here, a comment there. Many of the instances

²⁸ *Jean* (1920s), interviewed by the author, 26 March 2000.

²⁹ *Olive* (1930s), interviewed by the author, 24 November 1999.

³⁰ *Olive*.

of classroom contact between girls and boys recalled by ex-students were illicit, in the form of ‘banter’ or ‘ragging,’ as in *Bert’s*³¹ anecdote about an English lesson:

There were four or five lines of desks in the classroom and you had your own separate desk. The girls would be on one side and the boys on the other side. There was always a lot of banter going on. I remember one little episode in remove³² There was a girl whose father was a principal of one of the schools or in a Government Department and she was a little bit snobbish and there was a fellow called ‘Pussy’ who was from the bush. We had to write a story in class and I was quite good at English so I wrote one about the two of them as if they were two pussycats. The story was quite highly commended and read out aloud to the class. The girl came over and gave me a smack!

An elite institution

Students were aware that in being permitted to attend the high school they were marked out as different from other young people, exceptional in some way, and this distinction was almost certainly more important for high school students of the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s than the fact that their particular high school was coeducational.

Only two children from my primary school, North Auburn, qualified to get to Parramatta High School Students came to Parramatta from all over the place, such was the prestige of the school then. It was a privilege to go there and they travelled enormous distances.³³

Anne: We were definitely aware of ... the kudos of going to Parramatta High when the other kids were all dropping off at Liverpool Domestic Science School. Poor and all as we were and the uniform cheap and hand-down ... you were always aware that you were superior. You thought you were. Later on in life you get a big shock!

Max: We almost felt sorry for the ones who couldn’t make it to Parramatta High.

Students might feel themselves to be superior to those attending different kinds of post-primary education, as *Anne* and *Max* admitted to, or even to those who came to the high school in fourth year having ‘failed’ to enrol from the beginning. The second intake was

³¹ *Bert* (1910s), interviewed by the author, 27, 28 April 2000.

³² ‘Remove’ was a name given to the second year of high school during the 1910s.

³³ *Dorothy*.

mainly comprised of boys who came from the Parramatta Intermediate Boys' High School and was less competitive than the first year enrolment. Both *Ken*³⁴ and *Bill* clearly remembered the circumstances under which they had not been able to gain high school entry on their first attempt and understood that this meant that they belonged to a particular sub-category of high school student. As *Ken* expressed it, 'I went there as one of the dull pupils from the Parramatta Intermediate Boys' Commercial High School.' For *Bill*, 'I got up there [in fourth year] and we weren't very welcome.'

To gain a first year place at the high school, primary students had to achieve a good result in an examination taken at the end of sixth class. The examination operated to regulate supply and demand for places as well as to ensure that those children who were permitted to enrol were only those who were clever enough to take advantage of an academic education. Some of the interview material also suggests ways in which this meritocratic instrument operated together with other factors such as family knowledge and sixth class teacher expertise. For example, *Ken* compared the record of a teacher he taught with in a large city primary school in 1940 against that of his own teacher a decade earlier in a smaller country school:

Trevor Worth was a crackerjack teacher. He was also a single-minded fellow who spent more time at the blackboard, and preparing for the blackboard, than most of us [teachers] used to do. Of the class of Lidcombe school ... he sent to Parramatta High School *twelve pupils*. That was a quarter of the intake into class 6A! Now that was significantly greater than the usual because if you got one or two ... you considered yourself doing well.

Ken recalled that from his own final year as a pupil at the little Castle Hill Public School, 'nobody managed to get into [Parramatta High School].' As mentioned above, *Ken* instead spent his first three post-primary years at Parramatta Intermediate High School.

Bill's first attempt to enter Parramatta High was from a one-teacher school at Chakola in the Snowy Mountains, a place from which there had previously been little demand for high school places. *Bill*'s mother was determined for him to go to high school but did not

³⁴ *Ken* (1930s), interviewed by the author, 1 December 1999.

adequately understand the selection process. When she took him to Sydney to enrol she discovered that the primary teacher had either mismanaged or failed to explain the fine details of the application system and *Bill* was denied entry both to the high school and initially also to the Intermediate High School. As *Bill* described it:

My grandmother here at Ermington agreed to take me. Mum brought me down here in January '35. Then we struck problems. No school would have me. I had planned to go to Parramatta High but they wouldn't have me.

The incident is revealing of the cultural knowledge that was frequently brought into play – or might be lacking – in the management of a high school education. As with *Ken*, *Bill* finally gained entry in fourth year.

Ken suggested that for students from the smaller country schools it helped to have a school teacher father. *Jean's* and *Florence's* fathers were country primary teachers who had trained under the old pupil-teacher system. While they had not themselves had a high school education they appeared in their daughters' testimonies as adept and deliberate in their use of state post-primary schooling for their families. They used the Education Department's sorting and streaming system in common-sense ways. *Jean* and *Florence* began at Parramatta High School in the mid 1920s, gained Leaving Certificates and won Sydney Teachers' College Scholarships to become primary school teachers in the state teaching service. In *Jean's* family three out of four children attended state high schools. (That she travelled two hours each way on the train to Parramatta says something about the seriousness of her family's intentions.) She went to high school because, 'My father was a teacher and he, in his delusion, thought I was bright.' *Jean's* younger brother, on the other hand, went to 'Granville Tech' because, 'he was good with his hands.' *Florence's* siblings were similarly grouped: five to the high school, two to the 'tech.' By the time decisions were being made about the sixth child, however, family circumstances had changed. *Florence's* father had died and her aunts clubbed together to pay for the youngest boy to attend the local Marist Brothers High School.

A similar distribution system was operated by the guardians of the children who came from the Masonic Schools:

We did our primary schooling at the school. There was no facility for secondary school there so we sat for what, if my memory serves me correctly, was called the Qualifying Certificate³⁵ There were three choices as far as the school was concerned. Parramatta High, at which in my day I suppose there would be no more than twenty boys³⁶ – that would be the extreme number. Then there was what was called the Intermediate High, Parramatta Intermediate High, where there would be roughly fifty per cent of the balance. And the third one was Granville Tech. So that was the spread. We were divided in that way.³⁷

Each of the men and women referred to in this chapter was a family pioneer of high schooling, either the first one or among the first of their families to attend a state high school. *Marcia* was one of several interviewees who offered an interpretation of educational change from generation to generation expressed in terms of social mobility:

[My mother] was obviously bright – I could tell anyone she was fairly intelligent – but she was top [of her primary school] at eight and there was just nothing for her to do but stay there My mother had finished all the school opportunities that were available to her at eight. Now when she was forty-one she had me and I always say that by default I was able to go on and do the Leaving Certificate. I finished up marrying twice but ... had no family. My sister did the orthodox thing and married young and her son, my nephew The sky's the limit as far as academics are concerned.

These parents, who had had quite different schooling histories themselves, had a range of attitudes to their children's attendance at the high school. According to *Marcia*, it was her elder sister who 'bullied' her into enrolling at Parramatta High, and persuaded their parents to agree to it. It seems that *Marcia's* parents viewed the high school as a safe place in which she might spend her teenage years, rather than having any particular expectations of its benefits. Her parents 'didn't have too many clues about what we were to do. My father had his business and it was doing fairly well so it wasn't urgent that I get

³⁵ The examination which regulated high school entry went through changes of name and form over this period but it continued to be commonly referred to as the Qualifying Certificate or 'Q.C.'

³⁶ According to its historian girls were not usually sent to the high school from the William Thompson Homes. Earnshaw, pp. 65, 113.

³⁷ *John*.

out and go to a pickle factory or anything.’ *Marcia* shared the view with some other interviewees that other members of her family might have benefited from and enjoyed the experience of higher schooling had they been given the ‘opportunity’.³⁸ *Marcia*’s elder sister had attended the Parramatta Commercial Household Arts School (later the Domestic Science School) rather than the high school because, according to *Marcia*, there was ‘no guiding hand’: ‘She did very well at school and got very good marks. But nobody was there to advise her.’

Ken’s father ‘knew nothing’ about formal schooling: ‘He always regarded himself as a somewhat more broadminded citizen of the world by reason of his early travels’ (including overseas service during the First World War). It was his mother who insisted he gain his Leaving Certificate, despite – or perhaps because of – the intermittence of her own schooling in rural Queensland:

There was no background of books or anything like that in my place. We couldn’t afford them and didn’t think they were much good anyhow, you see But I remember my mother saying when a very adverse report came back about my dereliction of duty at ... high school ‘Well’, she said, ‘You’re going back.’ She said, ‘I don’t care if you’ve got a beard. You’ve got to finish school.’ So that was the reason why I didn’t join all those who left and why I went on and did my Leaving Whether she realised that there were no opportunities for somebody who didn’t have a reasonable education or whether she had some particular insight into the way the world would develop, I don’t know, but she believed in education so she insisted that I went. It might have been a reflection of her frustrations. I mean she was quite quick. She was very quick but she obviously just didn’t have that sort of background.

Anne’s parents, though neither had attended schooling past the age of about twelve, also encouraged their daughter to gain the Leaving Certificate. For *Anne* this formal education credential would be something to fall back on should more conventional economic systems fail:

Well my father used to say, ‘I want all of you kids’ – I was the eldest of nine – ‘I want all of you kids to have your Leaving Certificate so when your husband dies

³⁸ For example, *Olive* and *Ken*.

you don't have to take in washing.' And I grew up with that ground into my ears. You know, that if I didn't get the [Leaving] I'd be taking in washing.

Other parents were less convinced of the value of prolonged schooling:

There were some Jewish people [at school] who had escaped from Europe Their parents realised the value of education whereas my parents didn't. [My parents] were of their time and believed that girls were just going to get married. The emphasis then, by my mother was on cooking and sewing. In fact when I was forty and quite successful she declared in amazement, "You must be clever after all!"³⁹

Dorothy left Parramatta High School in the late 1930s, with her Intermediate Certificate, and went to one of the business colleges which flourished in Sydney at the time in the educational gap left by the state post primary system.⁴⁰ This was a time when having attended a state selective high school in itself had exchange value in the employment market. According to *Dorothy*, 'I got the first job I applied for on the basis of having attended Parramatta High'. She described a subsequent position in a lawyers' firm in which all of the female office workers had attended state selective high schools. (The lawyers and articled clerks, all male, were from upmarket boys' corporate schools, 'patronising snobs' as *Dorothy* told it.) Nevertheless by the late twentieth century, educational credentialling had changed in such a way that *Dorothy* and the other ex-students who left school without the Leaving Certificate felt the need to explain or justify their decision. For *Dorothy* it was her parents' decision. They told her they could afford only to support her brothers all the way through high school. Her brothers attended Fort St Boys High and then the Sydney Teachers' College.

For *Vera* it was the glamorous adult life of a business girl that beckoned. After her Intermediate year she won a scholarship to the all-girl Stotts Business College in Parramatta, which her mother, according to *Vera's* reading of events, felt was a safer or more proper place for her than the coeducational state high school. Years later she

³⁹ *Dorothy* (1930s), interviewed by the author, 10 March 2000.

⁴⁰ Noeline Kyle, *Her natural destiny: the education of women in New South Wales*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1986, pp. 197-199.

expressed her regret at not having completed school to a friend, who replied, 'Don't be silly. I thought you were so sophisticated because you were working and I was studying.'

Bert, John and Bill also left without gaining the certificates for which they were supposed to be aiming, despite having parents or guardians who had intended for them to stay longer. Their narratives demonstrate ways in which they felt ill at ease with the high school and its culture. *Bert* and *John* entered Parramatta High School in first year and left before the Intermediate in the 1910s and early 1930s, respectively. According to *John*, he was simply unsuited to high school study: 'I'm not a student. I'm not academic and how I got there I don't know.' *Bill* enrolled in fourth year in the late 1930s but left the following year without his Leaving Certificate. Although he loved English, and was encouraged in this by the teacher Bob Crosswell, *Bill* mostly found that his skills and abilities were not those recognised or validated by the high school or its examination system. His education to that point had been strongly practical and vocational, light on the sort of abstract, theoretical thinking most prized by the high school. There was no outlet or recognition for the practical and creative technical skills he had honed at home and at his previous schools. Moreover, having not studied either Latin or other languages, widely held to be the markers of higher intelligence, he felt he could not hope truly to fit in, let alone excel as he had at other schools. In his oral history interview he expressed regret that in his mother's quest to find him a city education she had not considered enrolling him at the Granville Technical College where he 'would have really shone.'

Bert transferred from Fort St Boys to Parramatta High School in the 1910s:

They were all very bright boys at Fort St and I didn't know anyone. All my mates were at Parramatta. I was travelling on the train all by myself and there was no one to help me catch up with my work. Anyhow I asked if they could send me to Parramatta which shocked them a bit because Parramatta was only a new High School and Fort St was, well, Fort St was Fort St! It was a long way to travel to Fort St, travelling on your own.

Although he found the regional Parramatta less intimidating than the prestigious city school, it was still a foreign environment, quite different from the out of school world he

described, which revolved around the elder sons of three families who all lived in the same area:

All my mates lived in an area of Auburn south of the railway and close to the Lidcombe boundary. It was out in the tea tree scrub in those days. We were a closely-knit group As a group we mostly played football and other sports in the big meat works paddock, including swimming in the meat works dam located on the local creek. Mostly it was the older boys of the three families who attended Parramatta High.

At the high school the teachers were mostly clothed in cap and gown, there was a 'sharp-tongued' languages teacher who insisted that students addressed her in French, even in the playground, and he had to play Rugby Union, the 'gentleman's game' rather than soccer or Rugby League. *Bert* was clearly sufficiently adept in high school language to gain places at both Fort St and Parramatta, and he enjoyed aspects of academic study such as English and Latin. Although he described feeling more comfortable in a mixed school than he had at Fort St, however, the girls who people his recollections are somewhat intimidating presences, in some ways representing the middle class high school culture in which he did not feel entirely at home:

One morning on lines at assembly three girls of senior years to our group were chatting together when they were called to order by Mr Booth Mr Booth was rather a portly, cheery fellow and very bright with his tongue. During his remarks he referred to them as being 'buxom, blithe and debonair.' The term struck us younger male students strongly, especially me as I had never heard it used before and at that time did not quite understand its references.

Bert stayed two years at the high school, leaving at the beginning of his Intermediate Certificate year, despite his parents' wishes that he stay longer:

I left before the Intermediate. At the start of third year my mates didn't turn up. They had left to get jobs. My mates all had money. They were getting 10/- a week and I had only a bob a week pocket money. My parents agreed to let me go to work. My parents weren't happy that I left school but I found it too competitive. You had to beat your mates.

In common with many interviewees *Bert* reported a generational change, 'All my children bar one have university degrees.'

The purpose of this chapter is not so much as to compare the categorical experiences of boys and girls as to explore the complexity of individual experience, the ways in which gender was mediated by other kinds of social relations. However among these students none of the women reported the same broad sense of unease experienced by *Bert*, *Bill*, or *John*. Each of the women interviewed felt socially comfortable at the high school and comprehended, or even took pleasure in, its ritual and language. However in common with *John* and *Bill*, some of the women were also bothered by the rankings they felt were assigned to them in the streaming and sorting system. In the 1920s *Marcia* felt, 'Because we took the non-Latin course we were second class citizens.' For the late 1930s *Vera* recalled:

When you got to Parramatta there were 8 first forms, 'A' to 'F.' The academic classes were A, B and C. Once you were in a class it was almost impossible to move up. I was in the 'B' class. Looking back, I think we were made to feel that we were second rate. I'm not sure how but it was just a feeling I had. At Parramatta there were two streams, the 'academic' which had languages and the 'other' which had subjects like Business Principles. The elite took the languages. I remember Miss Edmonds my French teacher said to me, 'One day you will be eating Crepes Suzette in Paris, *Vera*'.

Jean expressed the feeling that she had been an under-achiever at high school, a 'late bloomer,' and that it was only later at the Sydney Teachers' College that she 'blossomed.' Her teaching career was a very successful one and she recalled being proud of this success at a Parramatta High School reunion, pleased to be able to hold her own at last with the 'bluestockings' and other clever and confident girls with whom she had been at school.

Ex-students from this period did not tend to generalise about boys' and girls' abilities, or the ways in which these were viewed at the high school, in spite of being invited to do so during the interview process. According to *Marcia*, '[Boys] were just someone else in the class who had to be beaten if possible academically.' Parramatta High School seems

either to have avoided or done poorly at both traditional and modern girls' curriculum. The needlework teacher and a music teacher appear in the transcripts as difficult women and ineffective teachers and domestic science subjects (as well as the equivalent practical subjects for boys) are scarcely mentioned either in the interviews or the school's own records. Instead there were opportunities at the coeducational Parramatta High School for girls' to study the 'hard' sciences and higher mathematics that were not available at most girls' schools. However while the school's annual examination results lists demonstrate that it was possible for girls to excel in these fields, mathematics and science were the subjects in which some of the women in this group characterised themselves as weakest. About mathematics lessons *Dorothy* remembered: 'I was in a constant state of terror.' *Jean* claimed, 'I wasn't very good [at science] but that was probably my fault more than anyone else's.' *Dorothy* and *Jean* were not measuring themselves against the boys in their classes so much as against other more academically adept females among the teachers and students. *Dorothy* felt intimidated by a female teacher of mathematics who was one of a number of teachers who she felt, 'had no patience with children who weren't as clever as they were.'

Olive's experience suggests a different kind of engagement again with high school learning and achievement. On one hand she was very strategic in seeking outside assistance for subjects she was interested in or felt herself to be good at, partly to compensate for gaps in the high school's teaching.

I enjoyed my time at school, maybe because I was not a poor student. I didn't find I was battling against odds that I couldn't meet, and that there were goals I couldn't possibly reach. I'd sometimes only get an average pass in some things. In maths. I used to study when it came to the time. I used to study and I had a good retentive memory and I had a good ear, being a musician, with French. I got honours in oral French because I could reproduce the sound of the French speaking people and I went to the Alliance Française and I listened and so I was more or less just regurgitating the sounds that I heard the real French people speak.

Unhappy with the music teaching at Parramatta, she took up extra study at Our Lady of Mercy College and then the Sydney Conservatorium, with the help and encouragement of her mother.

Although I'm not a Catholic, my mother sent me up to the nuns to learn music and to do the theoretical components of the course and so on I sat for the [Leaving Certificate] music exam and I sailed through that you see.

For assistance with mathematics and science she looked to the boys in her classes:

I was good at English and I was good at French. But mathematics and chemistry and those sorts of subjects – I was jolly glad to have one of the boys a bit sweet on me so that I could find out or whisper to them “is that what I do?”

These observations by *Olive* and others about their own abilities and performance suggest that they may have internalised social beliefs about what girls were or should be good at. At the same time it is hard to disentangle genuine beliefs in these accounts from a reluctance to ‘put on side’ – an expression which *Olive* explained as ‘imagining that you’re one step better than everybody else.’ The careful underplaying of achievement was part of the high school culture.

Coeducation and respectability

Parramatta High School taught adolescent girls and boys about what it means to be female or male in different ways in different school settings, but women were made to feel more specifically female than men to feel male. This was least subtly expressed in the detailed and systematic regulation of girls’ physical appearance presided over by successive occupants of the girls’ supervisor position. These women played a key role in the operation of the coeducational high school, and students were aware that the only management position occupied by a woman at the school was one which was expressly concerned with the maintenance of respectable femininity. The observance of proper dressing was a daily consideration for girls, strongly remembered in anecdotes about uniform parades, black stockings, box pleats, over-sized bloomers and the difficulty of

affording the uniform or the fabric to sew it in the hard economic times of the 1930s. Girls were to look neat, modest, uniform and not too fashionable. Ex-students recalled a number of exhortations and admonitions. For example, no skin or undergarments were to be revealed:

And the supervisor of girls [Miss Doubleday] used to say, “Now girls, be sure that your junctions are nice!” This meant that you weren’t showing anything in between your blouse and your pleated bloomers at the waist or between your pleated bloomers and your stockings.⁴¹

Tunics were to be neither too short nor too long: ‘You had to kneel on the ground. Your skirt had to just touch the ground or heaven help you!’⁴² Appearance was more important than comfort. *Anne* was reprimanded by Miss Mackaness for trying to hide a non-regulation hand-knitted green cardigan under her school blazer on a cold day. Girls were not to look too much like adults. *Marion* was called in to see the Girls’ Supervisor for wearing face make-up:

[Miss Doubleday] had an all-seeing eye. A friend and I were going away for the Easter holidays. She noticed from across the road that I had the palest lipstick on. She called me in to see her on the Tuesday. She said it was ‘not suitable.’ My mother would have backed her up completely.

Olive’s recollection of a discussion about hat brims is indicative of the considerable energy spent managing the fine details:

There was a vogue at one stage: Girls started to turn the brims up to try to be a bit more fashion conscious. And Miss Mackaness said, ‘we are either all going to turn our brims up or we are all having them turned down.’ So she said, ‘We are going to vote on it.’ She got up – this was at assembly – and we knew that she wanted them turned down And she said, ‘So all those who want to have them turned up –’ Of course everyone knew, so there’s only a few brave souls put up their hands. ‘Oh yes. All those who want them turned down? Oh well, it’s quite obvious that it’s down. So from now on all the brims will be turned down and I don’t want to see any girl out of uniform.’

⁴¹ *Marcia.*

⁴² *Vera.*

The policing of dress applied only to the girls. Boys recalled either that they had not noticed it at all or had been only dimly aware of this kind of activity. *Ken* remembered a school badge, but no uniform for the boys: ‘Well I can honestly say that in the whole of my secondary school career I never heard anyone say, “Why aren’t you in uniform?” I wasn’t aware that there was a uniform.’

Another important dimension of feminine respectability was the repression or postponement of sexual activity, and on this topic ex-students’ recollections demonstrate the belief by school authorities that girls’ morality was more problematic than that of boys. It is probably unsurprising to discover that it was girls, rather than boys, who were disciplined for unauthorised mixing:

I can remember myself getting into trouble once, very bad trouble and I didn’t know why We used to stay behind at school, after school, because the train didn’t leave until half past five. So we stayed behind at school to do our homework. We used to be innocently doing our homework. And May Crouch decided we were doing other things. And she sent for my parents. Oh and there was a great big to do about it. But I had no idea what she meant or what she was talking about It didn’t enter my head that I was doing anything that I shouldn’t have been doing. We were just doing homework.⁴³

I’ll tell you a funny little thing. *Max* and I in fourth and fifth year used to meet at the station and walk up together and Miss Mackaness – by that time she was there – and she called me in and said, ‘I saw you walking up to school with that [name] fellow. If it happens again you will lose your prefect’s badge.’ So it didn’t happen again anyhow. Not that she saw.⁴⁴

The idea that adolescent boys and girls might be attracted to one another or form lasting relationships was a fairly common theme in the oral histories. Some narratives also discussed teacher sexuality. Older unmarried women teachers were more likely to be cast in the role of repressive agent as in the instances above, but younger females might be objects of desire. In *Marion*’s recollection, ‘A lot of the teachers were rather attractive young women. They liked these big boys. They would bat their eyelids. One of the young

⁴³ *Florence*.

⁴⁴ *Anne*.

teachers who used to bat her eyelids most beautifully was Dymphna Cusack.’ *Max* remembered being ‘in love’ with another young woman teacher:

Another boy and I used to talk a lot in class during Latin lessons and she called us back to the staffroom. ‘Look I’m willing to be fair. Why do you go on like this? You know I’m only a poor woman that you people ...’ – you know: she went on. And she was a gorgeous looking thing. They used to call her Flapper Hanley. We were all in love with her. That was the problem! And I think she put that story across. Because she never really had any trouble.

Jean recalled having a ‘crush’ on the young, pretty Miss Ross, who left the school to marry:

She was Miss Ross and then she was Mrs Urquart I used to take roses, bunches of roses to her almost every week and my father would come and say, ‘I came out early this morning and there’s not one of those good roses left!’

Mrs Urquart’s young married life seemed glamorous and desirable to the young *Jean*:

We went over for [afternoon tea]. There was another girl, too, who’d been at Parramatta High and the two of us went together. Oh and I can remember she asked if I’d like a crumpet, and I’d never seen a crumpet before. I’d never seen one and I said, ‘No thank you’, because I didn’t know what I was going to do with it. I was very shy.

The idea that female teachers might be attractive was an unthreatening one in the reminiscences, incorporated into comfortable sections of narrative, expressed lightly, sometimes humorously. This is not to say that women teachers’ bodies could not be embarrassing or transgressive. One narrator remembered a female teacher sitting on the desk at the front of the class revealing glimpses of her underwear.⁴⁵ Another woman was notable because she wore a wig.⁴⁶ Male teachers’ bodies might also be unruly or odd in the eyes of students. One would return from lunch each day with gravy stains on his waistcoat.⁴⁷ Another man was rumoured to have a ‘steel plate’ in his head from the First

⁴⁵ *John*.

⁴⁶ *Vera*.

⁴⁷ *Gordon*.

World War.⁴⁸ *Olive* speculated that the men who taught at Parramatta during the Second War must have had ‘flat feet’ or been otherwise physically ineligible for military service. Male teachers were not described as sexually desirable, and when *Vera* described the much-loved Mr Croswell as ‘adored [by] the girls’ she was quick to add, ‘not in a romantic way – he was older.’ *Vera* reported ‘a bit of a scandal’ when a teacher married one of the senior girls (too) soon after she left school.

Anne remembered silence, powerlessness and a lack of recourse open to one of her school friends who was sexually molested by a teacher. The girl had been alone with the man who had offered her extra help after school, and she turned to her teenage friend, rather than her parents or school authorities, for guidance. The girl learned to avoid being alone with the teacher, nothing was said, and the man continued to work at the school.

[She] said to me, ‘Mr – ... puts his hand up my skirt and touches me’ So I went home and told my mother. And my mother’s statement was, ‘He shouldn’t do that.’ But no thought of reporting it or anything. And I said to her ... ‘You shouldn’t stay behind after school.’ And she never did She didn’t tell her parents. I told mine and all my mother said was, ‘He shouldn’t do that.’

It is not hard to imagine why the teacher was never reported for his actions, including factors suggested by *Anne*’s own accounts of high school age relations – a combination of contemporary conventions of obedience to school authority figures and not speaking about sexual matters. Parents also were unlikely in the 1910s, 1920s or 1930s to trouble the school or to directly question school governance beyond the traditional method of withdrawing their children. Almost no indications emerged from the oral histories of parents’ concerns or fears about coeducation or their children’s moral safety – justifiable or otherwise. For the most part, it seems, having made the decision to support their children financially while they studied, parents left the school to do its job, for whatever combination of historically specific reasons. *Vera*’s mother was exceptional in having fears about both the respectability of coeducation, and of the state high school. *Vera* represented her mother as first trying to convince her daughter to attend the local convent, Our Lady of Mercy College, (‘I didn’t want to be the poor girl at O.L.M.C.’)

⁴⁸ *Vera*.

then being pleased when *Vera* was persuaded to leave Parramatta High for a single-sex business college, then alarmed again as she applied for a 'man's' job (as a court reporter). More common in the interviews was the attitude of *Marcia's* mother:

I know my mother didn't worry [about coeducation] because she had lots of brothers and sisters She always said she didn't worry about us because the friends we brought home were always nice girls. She didn't worry about us getting into bad company. She seemed to think we could pick 'em.

Social coeducation

In terms of having themselves been shaped by learning in a coeducational setting, ex-students emphasised the social rather than the academic. They compared themselves with their peers at single-sex schools. At Parramatta High – whether because or in spite of the efforts of school authorities – they had, by daily exposure to the other sex, developed 'natural,' 'healthy,' 'normal,' 'matter-of-fact,' 'everyday' gender relations. According to *Olive*, when the girls from Our Lady of Mercy College and the boys from The King's School visited Parramatta High as they did each year to sit for public examinations, they became 'all coy' in the presence of the opposite sex. The Parramatta High School girls on the other hand, 'just treated the boys like everyday individuals.' *Marion* recalled:

A friend of mine who was at MLC Burwood [Methodist Ladies' College] at the time said later, "We used to be so envious of you girls at Parramatta High School, just to be able to talk to boys so naturally. We didn't know what to say. We got all giggly and purple."

Max and *Anne*, having begun their relationship at the high school, later married, as did many other couples. As *Anne* told it: '[The classes] were graded on the exam results at the end of first year and we both got into the 2A's – and we stayed there for the term of our natural lives, it seemed like.'

Olive claimed that coeducation helped her in her professional dealings with men in her later work for an organisation in which all her co-workers were male.

Well I think the main thing that I got out of it, this is speaking very broadly, is that I'm not intimidated by men I had to deal with men. But whereas I've never ever felt women have been superior to men, in general, I don't feel we're inferior either. I was able to say, quite calmly, 'Well, I don't think I can agree with you on that point' and that didn't faze me. I've often thought back to it. I've thought, 'I think this comes of having to coexist with boys at Parramatta High, and jog along with them.' I wasn't in awe of my male colleagues at all and I never had to call on female wiles I felt, no, I can put the facts forward and let them speak for themselves.

For *Marcia* the presence of boys added glamour to her school experience, a chance to be auxiliary to, if not fully participate in, the robust world of boys. She described the thrill of being able, as a Parramatta High School girl, to shout out the school war cry:

We yelled [our school war cry] at the tops of our voices at the *Boys'* Combined High School sports in Sydney. Then when we had finished, Kempsey, say, kids would take over and give their way cry and so on. And so these fearsome sounding war cries would throb – that's the word – around the ground. This is something we *girls* from Parramatta High School enjoyed but of which girls at Sydney Girls High School, North Sydney Girls High School, Fort Street Girls High School, St George Girls High School would know nothing.

However it was mostly female interviewees who illustrated the benefits of coeducation with concrete examples. Girls figured little in the memories of *John*, rendered somewhat irrelevant in his recollections of sports success, academic struggles, and an unpleasant but routine initiation ceremony where older boys held his head under a tap:

I was initiated. I had my head put under the tap. Dripping like that. But it wasn't until some weeks after I'd started there they grabbed me and I struggled. Anyhow, that was my initiation I was just twelve Yes, it was [frightening] not so much the tap but the struggling. What to do. I suppose I was fairly large for my age It was the struggling, I suppose, frightened of being hurt through the struggle. I don't think I cried. I think I took it. I wouldn't be sure. I think I was able to last it out, got my ducking, and everybody was happy. Except me I never did it [to younger students.]

The presence of girls could also be seen to weaken the masculine school culture. *Ken*, *Gordon* and *Leonard* all referred to a shortage of boys for sports teams, especially rugby union – 'our school was only half boys' – although *Gordon* noted that this problem did

not seem to affect the girls who 'were the top hockey team around Sydney' when he was at school.

Leonard and *John* were more cautious than some of the women ex-students about the extent of the influence of coeducation:

I wasn't particularly good at mixing. I thought girls were rather frightening I found myself that it didn't really give me any confidence in socialising with the girls. They seemed rather to be admired from a distance.⁴⁹

I think the most obvious impression that one has is that one was better able to relate to the other sex [but] ... whilst we were associated in class, there was very little, if any, association in the playground. I don't ever remember having gone and spoken with girls. I may have done so but I can't remember having conversation with them outside the classroom.⁵⁰

Conclusion

This chapter is a discussion of the ways in which experiences of schooling have been remembered and interpreted by a number of ex-students educated in a coeducational, academically selective high school during the first half of the twentieth century. The main focus of the chapter was on a set of oral history interviews conducted by the author during 1999 and 2000. The transcripts of these interviews are rich and revealing texts containing accounts of complex and historically specific interactions among family, state, school and the (gendered) employment market. They demonstrate some of the ways in which gender at Parramatta High School was complicated by 'intelligence', age relations and social class.

In the course of the interviews, former students were expressly invited to reflect upon coeducation. Despite this, interviewees gave little indication that coeducation had been something that they had been encouraged to reflect upon during their schooling. It was in later life that some had come to form opinions or theories about the way that it operated

⁴⁹ *Leonard*.

⁵⁰ *John*.

or affected their experiences at Parramatta High School. Some ex-students found coeducation to have been either unimportant or unremarkable. For others it meant the possibility of developing a more 'natural' social life and a less charged attitude to the other sex. Others recalled a sense of frisson from participation in a classroom subculture of banter or flirting. For some boys the 'disadvantage' of a coeducational school was that there were fewer boys from whom to select sports teams. Students did not tend to make assessments about coeducation in terms of gender equity. Nor, on the whole, did they view it as an important factor in their academic work. If coeducation was influential, it was in terms of interpersonal relations.

The interviews revealed ways in which gender, and coeducation, had different meanings in different school settings. Former students remembered being taught together in the same classrooms on roughly equal terms. However the pedagogical styles prevalent at the time in high schools meant that, for the most part, students learned side by side rather than interacting. Most students agreed that girls and boys conducted their lives separately in settings other than the classroom, by a combination of choice and regulation. Exceptions to this were special occasions such as the sports day picnic, or cultural activities such as play night. The main difference between the treatment and experience of girls and boys was in the regulation of the body, including marked differences in the policing of appearance.

Almost all of the students interviewed for this chapter were family pioneers of higher schooling, either the first individual or of the first generation to experience this form of prolonged schooling. The concept of social mobility through schooling was important in the narratives. A number of interviewees consciously set their personal stories against a historical context in which the meaning and purpose of secondary education had undergone radical transformations. Some regretted that their own parents or siblings had not had the opportunities for higher schooling that they had, others felt the need to explain why they had left school earlier than would become conventional by the late twentieth century.

For most of the students interviewed the most important feature of Parramatta High School was its academic selectivity. Enrolment at Parramatta High conferred a special status. It was an institution within which students were encouraged to aspire to middle class occupations and cultural practices, even if these were different from those of their parents. Ex-students remembered both achieving entry to the school and being allocated to a position once there: defined and ranked according to the core business of public examination passing. These school-authored assessments of academic ability have proven to be very robust, retained by students over a number of decades. The New South Wales education department's systems of academic measurement had the power to make students feel both great and small.

Chapter 9

Drawing an 'invisible line'? Managing coeducation in the 1940s

In our local high school the acting-headmaster is using Gestapo methods to separate boys and girls. His idea of co-education is to draw a line down the middle of the quadrangle – boys right, girls left. Pupils are wondering if they may be asked to bring their own barbed wire. "Internee"¹

Secondary schooling in the 1940s

The terms 'secondary education' and 'high school' underwent significant shifts in meaning during the middle decades of the twentieth century in New South Wales. Under the great reforms of 1911-12, described in Chapter 3, schools like Parramatta High had been founded to extend the reach into non-metropolitan areas of the meritocratic educational ladder. An important element of this had been the clarification of a set of categories and boundaries which included the decisive separation of secondary from primary education and of academic from vocational or technical post-primary schooling. One way of achieving these categorisations was to sacrifice others where necessary, so that the spread of the academic high school into country areas was achieved partly by the New South Wales Education Department's willingness to tolerate the co-instruction of girls with boys in certain circumstances. In policy terms coeducation could be understood as an organisational rather than an educational feature of New South Wales high schools; one to be avoided where circumstances allowed. In 1939 an Australian Council for Educational Research publication summarised 'Co-education in Australia' as follows:

In the absence of any statement to the contrary, one must ... assume that there is a general tendency to favour separate schools for the sexes [in Australia], especially at the secondary school level. Segregation of the sexes is carried furthest in New South Wales.²

¹ c. 25 September 1943, unnamed local newspaper reproduced in Paul Taylor (ed.), *Parramatta High School: history and heritage*, Parramatta High School, 1997-2004, retrieved 19 July 2004 from <http://www.faxmentis.org/html/setup.html>.

² K. S. Cunningham, G. A. McIntyre and W. C. Radford, *Review of education in Australia, 1938*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1939, p. 21.

By the 1940s the meritocratic view of the high school was competing with a revised understanding of secondary education which emphasised the social adjustment of the individual.³ This opened up new possibilities for theorising coeducation as not just a practical system of organisation, but an educational process in itself.

In 1946 a key publication, *To-morrow is theirs*, under the name of the Education Minister R. J. Heffron, set out the New South Wales government's intention to initiate substantial post-war reforms of the state schooling system.⁴ The language of *To-morrow is theirs* expressed an altered view of the purpose of state education from the meritocratic vision of the 1910s. The role of the modern state, according to Heffron, was the promotion of individual growth and harmonious social relations. 'Schooling is,' argued Heffron, 'essentially a training for living The school [is] a society in which pupils learn to live and grow.'⁵ Heffron's government would consider any changes to its education system 'thought necessary to assist pupils to lead a fuller and happier life and to fit them for the society of which they will soon be members.'⁶

The post-primary sector had grown enormously since 1911. According to Heffron the number of pupils in 'secondary schools' had grown from 'only 6,000 pupils in Australia' in 1911 to 83,000 in New South Wales alone in 1946.⁷ There were fifty-four 'full' high schools accommodating a total of 31,000 pupils. ('Full' signified that they offered the five year course to the Leaving Certificate.) The Minister's collection of all post-primary students into a single category was indicative of a partial revision of the boundaries which had been drawn between the different kinds of post-primary institutions in the

³ For example, K. S. Cunningham (ed.), *Education for complete living: the proceedings of the New Education Fellowship conference held in Australia, 1937*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1938; see also C. Campbell and G. Sherington, 'A genealogy of an Australian system of comprehensive high schools: The contribution of educational progressivism to the one best form of universal secondary education,' paper presented at the International Standing Conference for the History of Education, ISCHE XXVI, Geneva, 14-17 July, 2004.

⁴ R. J. Heffron, *To-morrow is theirs: the present and future of education in New South Wales*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1947.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 36.

1910s. In his 1935 publication, *Secondary education in New South Wales*, the former Inspector of Secondary Schools W. J. Elliott (1911-1933) had been critical of a trend he discerned in New South Wales to conflate 'high school' and 'pre-vocational' or 'polytechnic' education into the term 'secondary education.'⁸ Elliott argued that 'the true secondary course' should be distinguished from other kinds of 'higher courses.'⁹ His preferred definition was taken from the English Board of Educators' regulations which '[required] secondary schools recognized by the Board as efficient to include in their courses certain subjects, one of which must be a foreign language.'¹⁰ In *To-Morrow is theirs*, however, 'secondary education' was an umbrella term describing all of the educational institutions which housed 'three years or more' of the particular life stage, adolescence.¹¹ In Heffron's view, 'It [was] the aim of modern secondary education to help each boy and girl to grow up as a worthy citizen of a democratic community Secondary education must not be regarded as training for employment. The purpose of the Secondary School is to train for life rather than livelihood.'¹²

To-morrow is theirs fell well short either of advocating comprehensive secondary schooling or of challenging notions of academic streaming. Rather, as revisionist critiques of post-war secondary schooling have argued, the idea of difference according to merit was replaced by difference according to scientific testing of ability or aptitude.¹³ In Heffron's 'modern' secondary school 'each child is given an opportunity to study those subjects and participate in those activities which satisfy his interest and are suitable to his ability.' The Department's 'special service of trained psychologists, school counsellors and careers advisors ... provides expert guidance in the selection of the right kind of school and course of study consistent with the varying needs of children.'¹⁴

⁸ W. J. Elliott, *Secondary education in New South Wales*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1935, pp. 30-33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹ *To-morrow is theirs*, p. 36.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹³ For example, David McCallum, *The social production of merit: education, psychology and politics in Australia, 1900-1950*, London, Falmer press, 1990.

¹⁴ *To-morrow is theirs*, p. 35.

Coeducation was not named or addressed in *To-morrow is theirs* beyond a brief acknowledgement that ‘While the metropolitan [high] schools are mainly separate boys’ and girls’ high schools, the country high schools, with few exceptions, have mixed classes of boys and girls.’¹⁵ It is worth noting here that mixed enrolment for high school was taken to mean also mixed classrooms rather than an alternative form of organisation which would have meant the separation of boys and girls into sex-segregated classes within the same school. The association in New South Wales of high schooling with single-sex institutions was reaffirmed in the book’s illustrations. In the chapter on secondary schooling all the photographs were of single-sex schools. Throughout the book almost every illustration of secondary school-aged groups of students was of a single-sex grouping (with the exception of two combined schools musical ensembles.) Nevertheless the idea of ‘learn[ing] to live and grow’ was compatible with the way in which coeducation might become to be seen, more than an efficient method of ensuring school provision in sparsely populated areas, as part of a project of fitting students for social participation. On the other hand the idea of organising schooling to accommodate the aptitudes and needs of individual students was also congruent with the idea of a differentiated curriculum for boys and girls, such as is evident in the following extract about the school subject, home science:

In New South Wales there are now 27,000 girls learning something of the latest developments in homecraft. The girl of to-day, like her brother, is being brought up to take her place in the modern world by means of an education which fits her for her special duties as a woman and at the same time promotes her development as an individual with ambitions of her own.¹⁶

At the same time as considering the implications of the kinds of ideas espoused in a document like *To-morrow is theirs* it is useful to bear in mind the complicated genealogies of single-sex and mixed schooling in New South Wales in terms of traditions of prestige and social class. The most prestigious schools in New South Wales were single-sex schools. This included the entire private and corporate sector as well as the leading metropolitan state high schools. In her autobiography, *The road from Coorain*,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

the Australian expatriate academic Jill Ker Conway, recalling her schooling in Sydney during the 1940s, associated coeducation with the hellish state elementary school where she spent a day of torment before being rescued by her mother:

The school, a brick building with an iron roof, was like a furnace I hated it from the moment I walked in the door. I was a snob, and I knew the accents of the teachers and most of the students were wrong by the exacting standards we'd had drummed into us at home. Worse still was the unruly behaviour of everyone of every age. Boys pulled my hair when I refused to answer questions I took as rude or impudent; girls stuck out their tongues and used bad language. Teachers lost their tempers and caned pupils in front of the class. Few books were opened as the staff waged a losing battle to establish order My mother persuaded the headmistress of Abbotsleigh, one of the most academically demanding of the private schools for girls in Sydney, to accept me as a pupil Miss Everett ... spoke in the plummy tones of a woman educated in England, and her intelligent face beamed with humour and curiosity Thereafter, I hurried quickly past the desert of the local state school to the railway station and rode the seven minutes south to Wahroonga, the suburb of my new school [It] seemed as though I had already arrived in paradise.¹⁷

Parramatta High School in the 1940s

For the earliest leaders of Parramatta High School, notably its foundation headmaster, William Atkins (1913-33), coeducation was an organisational rather than an educational feature of the school. It was also very possibly only a temporary arrangement until the school grew large enough to divide. 'Mixed' schooling encompassed a range of practices from the 1910s to the 1930s. While girls and boys substantially shared the same classrooms, studied the same subjects and sat for the same examinations, there were formal and informal ways in which they were physically separated as well as categorised as having different needs and duties. Differences in treatment were more strongly evident in the social and physical than the academic or intellectual realms. There were differences in pastoral care and discipline and sports were conducted in different locations. On the other hand gender as a form of identification within the school coexisted with other categorisations and affiliations, the most strongly developed of which were academic

¹⁷ Jill Ker Conway, *The road from Coorain: an Australian memoir*, William Heinemann Australia, Melbourne, 1989, pp. 93-97.

proress and middle class cultural literacy. This chapter examines the management of coeducation at Parramatta High School during the 1940s and asks to what extent school practices of this period expressed the sorts of new discourses about secondary education identified above. During the 1940s there were changes as well as continuities in the ways in which coeducation was practised and theorised at Parramatta High.

The student population

A cohort of students which commenced at the high school during the late 1940s was analysed in the same way as the cohorts discussed in Chapter 6, using enrolment data and public examination results to explore specific aspects of coeducation and gender relations at the high school. The cohort of 1947 included all students who were admitted to the school for the first time in first year 1947, second year 1948, third year 1949, fourth year 1950 or fifth year 1951. Information was collected from Parramatta's *Register of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal* as well the published lists of examination results for the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates. There were some differences and similarities between this and the cohorts of 1913, 1921 and 1933. As with previous cohorts, students came from a range of occupational groups and social classes, categorised for this study as proprietorial middle class (rural and urban), employed middle class, skilled working class, semi-skilled/ unskilled working class, and 'other/ indeterminate'. (Tables 9.2, 9.3) Overall, middle class and working class parents enrolled their children at the school in roughly equal numbers. Although children from middle class families had stronger persistence rates than those of working class families – again, in common with earlier cohorts – these patterns were somewhat different for boys and girls. The numbers of boys enrolled at the school across class categories were similar in first and fifth year, with a small increase in numbers of skilled workers, who comprised the largest group of boys in fifth year. For girls each occupational category dropped in number as the cohort progressed through the school, but not evenly. In first year daughters of semi/unskilled workers were the most numerous of the girls but by fifth year numbers of girls of the employed middle class were more than double any other category.

There were more girls than boys in the junior part of the school – fewer than forty per cent of students were boys – but by the senior years numbers were more even. This was mainly the result of a large exodus of girls after the Intermediate Certificate. Fifty-four girls left the school at this point compared with only thirteen boys. A large group of boys and girls entered the school in fourth year but the majority left within the year. The new students came mainly from two nearby post-primary schools which terminated at the Intermediate Certificate, Parramatta Boys Junior High School (a newly established successor to Parramatta Boys Intermediate High School) and Homebush Girls Intermediate High School. All together forty-eight boys and forty-three girls persisted to fifth year. (Table 9.1)¹⁸ The most marked change between the 1947 cohort and earlier groups was the increased rate at which students persisted to the end of third year and gained their Intermediate Certificates. For 1947 nearly all students who enrolled in first year stayed at the school to third year and more than eighty per cent gained the Intermediate Certificate. Although a large group of students still left school after the Intermediate Certificate examinations, the decline in numbers was less steep than in the pre-war period. Nevertheless the Leaving Certificate was still a credential for the few, achieved by just over a quarter of students.

As with the pre-war cohorts, girls and boys continued to experience comparable success in achieving examination passes. In relative terms girls and boys were equally successful in gaining the Intermediate Certificate. (Table 9.5) It is not possible to compare their achievements in more detail as subject lists were not published during this period for the Intermediate, although they continued to be published for the Leaving. Roughly equal numbers of boys and girls passed the Leaving Certificate but because of the preponderance of girls in the junior years this represented a lower proportion of total girls than boys. (Table 9.6) The lists of subject passes published for the Leaving reveal a comparable spread of higher and lower passes for boys and girls but differences between the kinds of subjects passed by girls and by boys were more marked for this cohort than they were for the pre-war groups. (Tables 9.7, 9.8) For example passes in mathematics I and II were recorded for nineteen boys but only six girls. There were similar sized gaps

¹⁸ All tables referred to here are collected in the appendix to this chapter, pp. 266-271.

between girls' and boys' physics and chemistry passes. Botany, a traditional girls' science subject which had not been evident in any of the pre-war cohorts studied, appeared on the list and was passed by seven girls, no boys. Girls dominated modern history and geography and, although the differences were smaller, more girls' passes were recorded in French and general mathematics as well as the compulsory subject, English. Latin, with only three passes – two girls, one boy – all but disappeared both for boys and girls for this cohort as it was no longer required for university matriculation.

Managing coeducation: Dangers and problems

The analysis of the enrolment patterns and examination results for the 1947 cohort found some changes and some continuities with earlier cohorts of students. This was also the case with other aspects of school life. While the meritocratic ethos of the school appears to have continued unabated, there is evidence to suggest that the management of gender-mixing outside the classroom became both more visible and more troublesome during the 1940s than before. The next section of the chapter examines the management of respectability by two of the school's leading teachers, the long-serving girls' supervisor, Edith Mackaness and one of the school's deputy headmasters, W. E. Porter.

Edith Mackaness, supervisor of girls

A significant position at Parramatta High School was the senior female teacher position, girls' supervisor. The women who held the position at Parramatta High developed detailed repertoires of practices and procedures specific to the management of girls' manners, morals and health in a coeducational environment. During the 1940s the position was held by Edith Mackaness [Figure 9.1]. Mackaness taught mathematics at Parramatta High for thirty-three years and was the girls' supervisor for eighteen, from 1939-1957, having previously acted in the position from time to time from 1934.¹⁹ She was the only woman on the staff with any executive power: 'The headmaster was

¹⁹ Headmaster to Chief Inspector, 18 April 1934, P.H.S. files, SRNSW 5/17286.B.

Figure 9.1

Caricature of Edith Mackaness, Supervisor of Girls, instructing the female students in 'Digniteh' (dignity), drawn by a first year student, 1956.

Parramatta High School archives.

Retrieved 26 October 2004 from <http://www.parramatta-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/setup.html>

I am grateful to Heather McKay for showing me the original of this drawing.



obviously the king pin but she was perceived as being the person, quite senior, perhaps a lower level than the headmaster, but with a particular responsibility for the girls.’²⁰

Mackanness was remembered vividly by male as well as female ex-students as a leading figure in the school, although theoretically the only authority she exercised over the boys was as a classroom teacher. Ex-students recalled that they had been somehow made aware that her brother was George Mackanness, an eminent historian and literary figure who lectured for some time at the Sydney Teachers College.²¹ Her responsibility was the discipline and pastoral care of girls, but as a long-standing, efficient and personally impressive senior staff member at a time when there was a rapid turnover of headmasters, it is possible to speculate that her influence was wider. Two tributes from the school magazine offer some indication of how her role was viewed. In 1953 on the occasion of the school’s fortieth anniversary, her importance was summarised in terms of the girls’ appearance and manners,

Miss E. Mackanness, B.A., has been at Parramatta High School for a continuous period of 28 years, and has been Supervisor of Girls for the past 15 years. The high reputation of the girls of this school, in the matter of neatness and general deportment, is in no small measure to her kindly influence.²²

When she retired in 1957 another writer for the magazine suggested she had either taken on or been handed a number of administrative duties,

When Parramatta High School reopened at the beginning of 1958, there was the usual excitement and bustle, but there was a difference – members of staff, as well as pupils, asked each other: “What happens about N.E.’s?” “What about train passes?” “What shall we do about school uniforms?” Mostly the answer was long these lines: “Well I’m not sure ... Miss Mackanness always attends to that.” Eventually difficulties resolved themselves, but oh! How we missed Miss Mackanness, who had very detail of procedure at her fingertips.²³

²⁰ Ray, former student (1950s), interviewed by the author, 20 November 1999.

²¹ Ken, Dorothy, Vera (1930s).

²² *Phoenix*, 1953, p. 8.

²³ *Phoenix*, 1958, p. 6.

Ex-students' testimonies suggest that Mackaness had an impressive personal presence and she was apparently skilled in the traditional teacher language of grammatically-correct declaration and direction. Her nickname was 'Sarcy,' for 'sarcastic,' a warning to students that 'she could really cut you with her tongue.'²⁴ *Pamela*, who attended the school during the 1940s, described her as an archetypal spinster schoolmarm:

She was very prim in every way – the way she did her hair She had a plait around her head and of course no makeup She had a very strict, religious and puritanical view of the world and of course, she was 'Miss'. But women were not allowed to marry and still teach at that time anyway so that was perhaps not atypical.²⁵

Mackaness, having authority over the girls of the school, was effectively in charge of the regulation of coeducation, as the extent of mixing during this period was mostly decided by rules about the behaviour of girls. *Janet*²⁶ suggested that Mackaness took quite seriously the idea that a well-organised female population was key to the overall tone of a coeducational school, that in civilising the girls, she was also indirectly in charge of civilising the boys. *Pamela* formed the view that Mackaness herself was opposed to coeducation, and saw it as her duty to limit contact between boys and girls as far as possible:

Edith Mackaness was very much against coeducation. She was against girls and boys mixing together at any stage, which made it fairly difficult for her I'm sure at that time I know I was very naïve, fairly unsophisticated like most girls of that period, but something we all found very amusing was the fact that Miss Mackaness endeavoured to keep girls and boys as separate as possible during our years at high school. It didn't really matter whether we were eleven, twelve or seventeen, it was still necessary, she believed, for the boys to be in one part of the school and the girls in another.

A number of otherwise compliant girls recalled being disciplined over unsupervised fraternisation with boys. *Anne*,²⁷ who subsequently married her high school boyfriend, was threatened with the loss of her prefect's badge after Mackaness saw them walking to

²⁴ *Gwen*, former student (1940s), interviewed by the author, 28 February 2000.

²⁵ *Pamela*, former student (1940s), interviewed by the author, 15 March 2000.

²⁶ *Janet*, former student (1950s), interviewed by the author, 29 November 1999.

school together. *Pamela* and a friend experienced a similar reprimand at the time that they held the offices of girl school captain and vice captain:

I used to come to school in the train with [the vice captain] and [one of the boys] would wait for us at Parramatta Station ... and we walked to school together, the three of us. Sometimes other boys. Sometimes other girls. But the trio were always together and Miss Mackaness saw us one day. We were in fifth year – we were 15 to 16 years of age – and she called me up with [the vice captain] and we had an interview with her and she said that we were never to travel with boys on the train again or meet them or walk from the station with them. And from then on for the rest of the year [the vice captain] and I would have to meet her and travel with her. She came from the city somewhere. So we had to get on the train and get in the same carriage and travel with her on to school every day and do the same at the other end to travel home with her.

Gwen was temporarily stripped of her prefect's badge for organising a boys and girls hockey match:

We got in terrible trouble when – a yearly thing was playing the boys' 1st XIV football team – the hockey team played the football team. We played them hockey of course. And we used to have to do it after school. The school would not allow it in school time so we'd go down Pitt St. There's still a playing field there. We'd go down there and play. I can't think how it happened but we were not supposed to go and we went. And when we got back to school the next day the sports mistress, who was Miss Small, and Miss Mackaness made us all, the girls, hand in our badges: prefects' badges and school badges, the lot I think we lost them for about a week. It was quite a big thing you know. We didn't know whether we'd ever get them back.

It was only decades later, when organising a school reunion, that *Gwen* discovered the boys had not been punished at all, and in fact had no recollection of what had been such a terrible event for her and her team mates, 'The boys weren't made to do it! We had to do it! We were the instigators, apparently, or so Miss Mackaness and Miss Small thought.' Similarly the boys who walked to school with *Anne*, and with *Pamela* and her friends, were not reprimanded.

²⁷ *Anne* (1930s).

Apart from working against unsupervised student fraternisation, Mackaness was remembered for the policing of dress, as described in Chapter 8. The presentation of the girls' bodies was an important aspect of the safeguarding of respectability and the promotion of a middle-class culture. *Pamela* remembered noticing as a teenager that the Parramatta High School girls on the train were different from other state school girls:

We had to wear stockings. We had to wear hats, ties and gloves every day of the year. It did not matter if it was mid summer and thirty-five degrees or mid winter so I suppose because of that you might sort of have a thought, "Oh look at the way those kids from Auburn [Home Science School] are dressed" or "Look at the way they're behaving."

In addition to chaperonage and dress, Miss Mackaness was in charge of unexpected or difficult menstruation. Ex-students remembered this aspect of Edith Mackaness with gratitude, especially in a contemporary climate of extreme awkwardness and embarrassment about menstruation: 'If we had periods it was an 'upset stomach'. We didn't even tell girlfriends. You wore two pairs of black pants. If you had a male teacher you would just say you were 'bilious,' but you wouldn't even tell female teachers.'²⁸ For *Anne* the girls' supervisor 'was somebody you could talk to, because you could scarcely go to the Deputy, who was a man.' *Olive* and *Gwen* each had memories of being helped out by Mackaness, in the late 1930s and 1940s respectively:

The only thing that used to be a little bit awkward [about a coeducational school] was if a girl started to menstruate. Of course by that time the age was upon us, and despite all one's best efforts and one's mother's best efforts this sometimes would happenWhat you had to do if this happened, you had to go and see Miss Mackaness. It only ever happened to me once and I remember going to her almost tearful and she was very matter-of-fact. She said, "Oh that's not a problem", and disappeared into the staffroom and came out with a Modess. And so that was that. But that was the only time where you felt the presence of the boys was something you had to consider.²⁹

I used to have bad menstruation problems and that was when [Miss Mackaness] was kind. I can remember her giving me a ginger drink, powdered ginger or something. It was terribly hot, whatever it was. It was a hot drink, but that was the

²⁸ *Vera*.

²⁹ *Olive*.

cure for the pain and it would knock you out for about an hour, and you'd lie on the sort of [bed] in her office.³⁰

It is difficult to disentangle Mackaness from the mid twentieth-century stock character of 'spinster-headmistress' from fictional representations of girls' schooling. These include the popular English comedy films, *The happiest days of your life*, with Margaret Rutherford, released in the United Kingdom in 1950, and *The belles of St Trinian's* (1954) in which the role of headmistress was played by Alistair Sim in drag – in itself a telling reading of the spinster in authority.³¹ It is hard to know to what extent ex-students' memories for this period have been shaped by the post-war absorption of secondary schooling into popular culture. The remembered figure of Edith Mackaness, an imposing, even fearsome figure of a woman, apparently celibate herself and repressive of teen sexuality, yet kind if you had to go to her, is a familiar one in stories of girls' education. Miss Mackaness was also a mathematician who was, depending on the narrator, either a 'wonderful maths teacher' or someone 'who had absolutely no patience with children who weren't as clever as [she was].'³² Her energetic and well-organised vigilance over the girls is remembered both as an expression of mid century double-standards, and of an enforcement of bourgeois femininity. Yet she was at the same time herself an unconventional woman, a school leader and authority figure, a mathematician, a spinster, who worked to promote the academic progress of the clever girls (and boys) under her care. Hers was an ambiguous position in the coeducational academic high school.

Porter's imaginary line

Rules against fraternisation between boys and girls were mostly enforced by Edith Mackaness, through her authority over the girls. The male executive, headmasters and deputies, was generally much less concerned than the girls' supervisor with the day to day management of this aspect of the school, and proscriptions about mixing were routinely treated as a girls' issue. An exception to this pattern was 'Snaky' Porter and his

³⁰ *Gwen*.

³¹ Frank Launder (dir.), *The happiest days of your life*, British Lion Film Corporation, 1950; *The belles of St Trinian's*, British Lion Film Corporation, 1954.

³² *Pamela; Dorothy*.

‘imaginary line,’ which blew up into a major incident in September 1943. W. E. Porter was deputy headmaster under J. E. Murray (1939-42) before being appointed as acting headmaster in the year’s interval between Murray’s departure and the arrival of T. J. Clyne in 1944.

Porter is most remembered for declaring to an assembly of students in 1943, while he was acting Headmaster, that they were to regulate their movements according to a strictly-defined ‘imaginary line’ down the middle of the playground, that girls were to keep to one side, boys to the other, and that boys and girls were forbidden to speak with one another. Something about the image of the line captured student imagination and a small group of senior boys sneaked into the school one night to paint a real line down the middle of the playground to represent ‘Porter’s imaginary line,’ complete with the directions, ‘bucks this side,’ ‘does this side’ [Figure 9.2]. This was the central escapade in a larger protest which included making contact with the local and Sydney press.³³ A photograph of the line was printed in a local paper and one of the Sydney dailies carried a picture of four senior students, two boys and two girls, cheerfully and confidently walking along a street together to demonstrate their opposition to being segregated [Figure 9.3].³⁴ Fifth year students were reported to have demonstrated outside the school shouting “We want co-education!” and students were quoted as telling journalists that Porter had ‘arrived at the school early next morning to erase the line with caustic soda and a razor blade.’ Porter himself was reported as responding, primly, ‘Parramatta High School had always been noted for its high moral standard. He said the line to segregate the sexes had not been introduced because of any suggestion of immorality between the girls and boys.’³⁵

³³ A number of the former students who responded to the author’s request for interview participants in *The Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that the thesis should include a description of ‘Porter’s line.’ This description of the incident is based on press cuttings collected in the course of the school’s heritage project, displayed online at ‘The Porter line’ in Taylor, *Parramatta High School*, as well as accounts by former students, *Ken*, *Pamela* and *Eric* (1940s, interviewed by the author, 29 February 2000). *Pamela* and *Eric* were both at the school at the time of the incident as was *Ken*’s younger brother.

³⁴ Unnamed local paper; *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 September 1943, reproduced in Taylor, *Parramatta High School*.

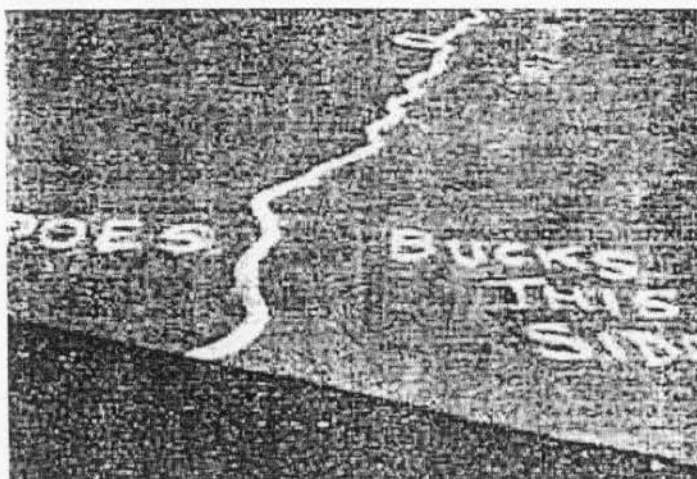
³⁵ *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 September 1943.

Figure 9.2

A photograph of 'Porter's line' from an unnamed newspaper, c. 25 September 1943,

Parramatta High School archives.

Retrieved 26 October 2004 from <http://www.parramatta-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/setup.html>



PAINTED BY A STUDENT at Parramatta High School after the acting headmaster (Mr. W. Porter) had decreed that girl and boy pupils should be segregated in the quadrangle, this white line is flanked on one side by the words, "Bucks this Side." On the other is "Does." Fifth year pupils demonstrated outside the school yesterday, shouting "We want co-education."

Figure 9.3

Students insisting on coeducation, *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 September 1943

Parramatta High School archives.

Retrieved 26 October 2004 from <http://www.parramatta-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/setup.html>



The event became part of school mythology, recalled not only by students who had been enrolled at the time, but also those who had read about it in the newspapers or heard about it at ex-students gatherings and other social networks.³⁶ One ex-student claims to have searched – in vain – for vestiges of the line when he was sent decades later to teach at the school.³⁷ At Parramatta's 75th anniversary dinner in 1988 the ex-student speaker representing the 1940s was addressing an appreciative audience when he jovially called upon the painters of the line to come forward and show themselves; that all would be forgiven.³⁸

Although there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Parramatta High School students had been sex-segregated to some extent for decades – by regulation, convention and preference – Porter is reputed to have believed that school practices about mixing were insufficiently strict and had become too relaxed under the leadership of J. E. Murray.³⁹ It was the belief of a number of students that Porter's regulations were something new and more extreme than in the past:

Up to the time that Bill Murray left the school ... we had carte blanche to fraternise in the playground and then Mr Porter, who was the Acting Principal – he was the Deputy before that – He was an old Latin teacher – of the old school – and he brought in a policy that girls and boys should not fraternise in the playground.⁴⁰

Eric argued that the importance of the incident should not be exaggerated, interpreting it more as a schoolboy prank than a genuine protest:

So three very naughty boys from my year went up to the school and drew the famous - you probably heard of it – 'Snaky's invisible line' in white paint So they drew this wavy line down and labelled it 'Snaky's invisible line' and the next day reporters were up at the school and a lad in my year was telling the reporters, 'It's like a concentration camp', you know, 'It's absolutely a terrible place' which is not true. The relations with the teachers were very good.

³⁶ *Vera, Anne, Gwen, Ken, Keith* (1950s, interviewed by the author, 14 March, 2000).

³⁷ *Ken*.

³⁸ *Gwen*.

³⁹ *Eric, Pamela, Anne, Vera*.

⁴⁰ *Eric*.

Pamela, on the other hand, saw the actual line as only one aspect of a larger ‘student strike’, a legitimate political action jointly led by the girl and boy school captains, who were the democratically elected representatives of the student body. In any case it was one of the earliest moment in the history of the school in which coeducation was publicly named and argued over. As *Vera* put it, ‘For the first time it drew attention to the whole girl boy thing.’

As soon as Porter left the school, transferred to Katoomba High in 1945, the school magazine published interviews with the new Deputy and a new Headmaster in which they answered questions about their views of coeducation:

Questioned about co-education, Mr Smith [the Headmaster] showed that he has very rational views on the subject, believing that a mixed school has many advantages, and that since people have to meet others in later life, they should get to understand each other in school. He mentioned that at Cessnock High [his previous school], regular weekly dances were held, for patriotic purposes, while, several times each term, large dances were arranged for the students. This is definitely something we need, in a school where social events are very few.⁴¹

The use of the word, ‘rational’ is important. The writer was implying his or her disapproval of Porter’s policies, at the same time as working to align the concept of ‘coeducation’ with an already strongly-developed official school culture of intellect, reason and civilisation. The image of a Headmaster rationally and reasonably communicating in this way is also an image which is in strong contrast with the undignified (and possibly fictional) picture of Porter labouring over the school playground with caustic soda and a razor blade.

Educational mixing

The debate ... was won by Canberra, though our debaters put up a very creditable performance. They were Lynette Jordan, Kevin MacGregor, and Milton Brady.

⁴¹ ‘An interview with the new headmaster’, *Phoenix*, 1946, p. 4.

The adjudicator ... when summing up, specially mentioned Lynette, and prophesied she would become a second Dame Enid Lyons.⁴²

The 'imaginary line' incident occurred around the beginning of a time during which Parramatta High School's leaders began to claim, as suggested by the headmaster, Smith's comments, above, that coeducation was actually a beneficial aspect of the educational experience offered by the school. 1943, the year of Porter's line, was also the inaugural year of the annual Can-Parra tournament, which offered a more modern experience of coeducation. If Porter's line represented the repression of coeducation, the Can-Parra was more like a celebration, and it is important to understand that apparently contradictory practices could exist side by side at the school. The Can-Parra was a tournament specifically organised with coeducation in mind. Students from Parramatta and Canberra High Schools, both coeducational schools, would compete against each other in sports and debating, visiting each other on alternate years. Travel would be several hours by train, boys and girls together, the visiting teams billeted with the families of the home teams. The host Parents and Citizens Association would put on a dance and other social activities such as picnics and film nights, all carefully supervised by adults. There were teams representing girls' and boys' sports, as well as mixed debating teams and a mixed doubles tennis competition. Competition points from all these games and matches were tallied up at the end of the visit to decide the award of the perpetual Can-Parra trophy, a toy koala on a stick decorated with the colours of the two schools. ('It wasn't much of a trophy but it was very important to us.'⁴³) Reading the reports of the tournaments in the school magazines, with their comparatively relaxed interweaving of boys and girls names and activities, offers a modern, harmonious view of coeducation in action.

The Can-Parra was one of a number of instances in which coeducation began to be embraced or accepted as a characterising, even a notable, feature of the school. Until it lapsed in the mid 1930s, the Parramatta High School magazine had scarcely identified Parramatta High as a coeducational school. This changed to some extent with its

⁴² 'Report of the Canberra Visit', *Phoenix*, 1945, p. 34. (Enid Lyons was the first woman elected to Australia's Federal Parliament.)

resurrection under a new name, *The Phoenix*, from the mid 1940s. A prize-winning essay printed in the 1947 issue, entitled, 'How Parramatta High School has helped me on the friendly road,' described the school's value in the following terms:

As Parramatta High School is co-educational, I have learnt much of the nature of the fair sex. I have learnt to enter a dance hall with confidence and joy, without diving to the nearest corner and only wishing to be among the happy crowd. At the school dances and similar functions we have been shown how a teacher is friendly and helpful.⁴⁴

The account of the purposes of the high school in this essay was somewhat different from the sorts of statements that can be found in pre-war magazines. The emphasis was more personal and more democratic; less elitist. This was a view of the school which suggested a psychological-social aspect to the high school's responsibilities, and therefore offered a new context for the practices of coeducation and gender relations. The theme of the essay was learning to 'live with others' and the writer concluded, 'Therefore I would say that Parramatta High School's main contribution ... lies, not in the excellent education it offers for advance in our future careers, but in the deeper and more precious education for living in harmony with others.' The image that the student used to illustrate the benefits of coeducation was the social dance, a situation where girls are specifically behaving as girls, that is as dance partners. This was the same example used by the new headmaster in 1945, above. Where early explanations of the meritocratic purposes were made concrete in the image of the academic ladder, it is approximately from this period that the school dance, or school social – regulated mixing under adult supervision – became a recognisable emblem for the success of coeducation. Just as coeducation was most dangerous in the social realm it was also of greatest potential value, assisting with the nurture of adolescent sociability and sexuality.

The students were taught social dancing as part of their sports curriculum in lessons conducted by an eccentric sportsmaster, Nicholson, who would order the boys, 'Get

⁴³ *Gwen*.

⁴⁴ 'How Parramatta High School has helped me on the friendly road', *Phoenix*, 1947 pp. 45-46.

yourself a partner or get flogged!’⁴⁵ (‘He always said silly things like that. You took no notice of him after a while.’⁴⁶) A cartoon drawn by a fifth year student in the 1945 *The Phoenix*, illustrating one of these lessons conducted by ‘Nicko,’ categorises boys into various types of dancing ineptitude, treading on girls’ toes, unable to keep time, spinning around too quickly and so on [Figure 9.4]. The gender interaction here is awkward and reluctant. The boys and girls clearly belong to two different categories and are being ordered to mix by the teacher, the boys awkward and oafish, the girls cool and self-contained. It is also important to note that the social relations of the school dance were entirely compatible with the project of instructing girls and boys in complementary social roles. Girls learnt to dress appropriately, and prettily, and to wait along the side of the hall to be fetched by boys. Boys were schooled in being the active partner, choosing the girl and leading in the dance. There were also well-understood divisions of labour in setting up the party. At the fourth year farewell to the fifth years in 1944, for example, ‘the boys attended to the fruit salad and vigorously polished the gymnasium floor, while the girls, under the guidance of Miss Mackaness and Miss Crouch, prepared sandwiches and cakes, set the tables, and decorated the room with flowers.’⁴⁷

As well as the re-establishment of the school magazine in the mid 1940s, a number of other school institutions were either introduced or renewed including the Parents and Citizens Association and Ladies Committee, the Ex-students’ Union and the School Union. The School Union was a student run body, with some staff oversight, which was responsible for the funding and organisation of extra-curricula activities. The Union’s new constitution was published in *The Phoenix* of 1944 and is indicative of a more detailed and conscious management of coeducation than in the pre-war period.⁴⁸ The authors of the constitution had apparently worked carefully to balance gender representation, and to consider the instances in which boys and girls were separate entities and in which they might be combined into ‘students.’ Some committee positions were designated as ‘student’ positions, such as the position of Secretary, others, such as

⁴⁵ *Gwen*, also *Keith*.

⁴⁶ *Gwen*.

⁴⁷ ‘The fifth year farewell,’ *Phoenix*, 1945, p. 15.

⁴⁸ ‘The School Union,’ *Phoenix*, 1944, pp. 12-13.

Figure 9. 4

'The high school hop' by Valarie Anstiss, 5B

The Phoenix, 1945, p.42.



the Assistant Treasurers, and the student auditors, were 'a boy and a girl pupil.' In the detailed working out the annual House Championship it was decided that 'The Champion House of the year shall be decided by points gained in contests in approved activities, boys and girls counting equally, in the final maximum totals [but that] the competitions for boys and girls shall be conducted separately.' In the same way the 1944 Magazine Committee included one boy and one girl for each category of editor: Literary, Sports, Social and Art, as well as a boy and a girl Business Manager. Although this system seems to have broken down somewhat in practice over the years, and exactly what this formal dividing and balancing of duties meant in terms of day to day interactions is not entirely clear, in 1944 there were three editorials: one by a teacher, one by a girl and one by a boy.⁴⁹

The Can-Parra notwithstanding, the area in which Parramatta appears to have been least comfortably coeducational was sport. This was evident in *The Phoenix*, in which long sections were thoroughly dominated by reports of the boys' sports to the extent that the school appears, not so much as two separate schools, but as a boys' school with a few girls squeezed into the margins. This domination by boys' activities, and near invisibility of girls, was stronger than anything in the pre-war period. One of the reasons for this change is that boys' sports seem to have grown in importance and competitiveness since the pre-war period, in a way that girls' sports had not. Girls' inter-school sport during the 1940s was mainly social, relying on the ad hoc organisation of individual schools and their sports teachers. Even in the school's own athletics and swimming carnivals, where the boys and girls did have ostensibly parallel competitions, some important differences are apparent. The boys were able to publish school records going back to the 1920s, the girls only began to record theirs in the late 1940s.⁵⁰ The boys' records are 'school records'; the girls' are specifically 'girls'' records. Lists of girls' athletics and swimming race results were less dominated by seriously competitive races, including more novelty and beginners races for weak swimmers. The centrepiece of the girls' athletics was an annual ceremony in which the Girl School Captain and the Girl House captain presented

⁴⁹ *Phoenix*, 1944, pp. 3-5.

⁵⁰ 'Existing school records in athletics,' *Phoenix*, 1945 pp 31-2; 'Girls' athletics records,' *Phoenix*, 1947, p. 38.

flowers to a number of the female teachers who assisted with the organisation of the event. There was no equivalent ceremony reported for the boys. Moreover the sports sections contain some comments expressing hostility to the presence of girls in the school. In a competitive inter-school context in which all the other schools were single-sex, some boys observed that having girls at Parramatta, instead of more boys from which to draw teams, put them at a disadvantage. This was not an entirely new observation but it was more strongly expressed during this period than it had been previously, and the observation was not made about girls' teams. The report of the fourth grade rugby team for 1947 included the comment, 'This team, suffering from the curse of the school – shortage of boys – was unfortunate in that it did not meet with the success it deserved.'⁵¹ However *The Phoenix's* editors included a reply, 'PHOENIX would advise footballers that complaining about the "curse" of the school ... does not win matches. They are won by a TEAM, consisting of just fifteen players.'⁵²

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to discuss aspects of the management of coeducation at Parramatta High School during the 1940s in the context of new understandings of the social responsibilities of secondary schools. During this period there were changes and continuities in the organisation of students of Parramatta High. Parramatta remained academically selective and continued to place a high value on eliciting good public examination passes from both its male and female students. Although there is some indication of an increased gender specialisation in the curriculum, it was still the case that girls and boys studied substantially the same subjects, in the same classrooms for most of their school lives. Both girls and boys were spending longer at the high school, most students staying long enough to leave with their Intermediate Certificate, although the Leaving was still a credential for the few. Notwithstanding a larger number of girls than boys in the junior years of the students cohort analysed in this chapter, the school remained truly a mixed school, with significant representations of

⁵¹ Fourth grade football report, *Phoenix*, 1947 p. 27.

⁵² 'Personal and general,' *Phoenix*, 1947, p. 3.

both male and female students. Yet there is also evidence that if numbers of girls were perceived to grow too large, some boys at least would become resentful, as expressed in complaints about competitive sports.

The main discussion in this chapter has been about the practice of coeducation in the social realm. There is evidence that during this period mixing was both more encouraged and less subtly regulated than in the pre-war years. On the one hand school leaders such as Edith Mackaness and W. E. Porter were actively engaged in attempting to limit the dangers and difficulties of coeducation. While Porter did not stay long at the school, Mackaness continued energetically to police the boundaries of contact into the 1950s. On the other hand the 1940s was a period in which Parramatta began to be identified by its leaders and supporters as a coeducational school in a way that had not occurred earlier. An incoming headmaster in 1945 found it appropriate to declare himself a supporter of coeducation, a young male student was able to win an essay prize by expressing his belief in the value of coeducation in his own personal development. At the same time the question of what really was meant by coeducation remained open to different possibilities. The practice of coeducation was various, including the participation of girls and boys side by side in classes, Miss Mackaness's strictures against student-initiated mixing, the annual festival of the Can-Parra, as well as the problem of a school in which at least half the population was unable to play rugby. The school dance was invoked during this period as an emblem of the role of coeducation in the nurture of mid-century heterosexual social relations.

Appendix to Chapter 9: Tables

Gender, social class, school persistence and examination achievement

Table 9.1: School persistence by gender (N & %): Cohort of 1947, Parramatta High School*

Year level	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
First year	51	37.5	85	62.5	136	100.0
Second year	49	35.3	90	64.7	139	100.0
Third year	51	36.4	89	63.6	140	100.0
Fourth year	86	53.8	74	46.3	160	100.0
Fifth year	48	52.7	43	47.3	91	100.0

* The cohort includes all students who are recorded in the *Admissions Register* as entering the school in first year in 1947, second year in 1948, third year in 1949, fourth year in 1950 or fifth year in 1951. The largest number of students in the cohort began at the school in first year. The next largest group, 87 students, 48 boys and 39 girls, joined the cohort in fourth year. The table shows the cohort's changing size as the students either progressed through the school or left. Girls and boys belonging to this cohort had different patterns of admission and progress.

Table 9.2: Occupation of household head (N & %): Cohort of 1947, Parramatta High School*

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional and urban proprietor	4	3.8	5	3.6	9	3.7
Merchant, manager & agent	10	9.4	9	6.5	19	7.8
Business employee	10	9.4	12	8.7	22	9.0
Government & institution employee	8	7.5	10	7.2	18	7.4
Seller of services & semi-professional	3	2.8	10	7.2	13	5.3
Manufacturer & master	1	0.9	5	3.6	6	2.5
Skilled worker	28	26.4	23	16.7	51	20.9
Transport worker	5	4.7	5	3.6	10	4.1
Operative, semi- & unskilled worker	16	15.1	22	15.9	38	15.6
Domestic & other service worker	3	2.8	5	3.6	8	3.3
Rural proprietor	6	5.7	13	9.4	19	7.8
Rural worker	1	0.9	3	2.2	4	1.6
Other, unknown	11	10.4	16	11.6	27	11.1
Total	106	100.0	138	100.0	244	100.0

*Pupils were sorted into occupational categories according to the information given to the school by the enrolling parent, and recorded in the school's *Register of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal*. In most cases the occupation recorded is the father's. More than half of the category, 'Other, indeterminate' comprises enrolling female parents who gave their occupation as some version of 'household duties.'

Table 9.3: Social class (N & %): Cohort of 1947, Parramatta High School*

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Proprietorial middle class (rural)	6	5.7	13	9.4	19	7.8
Proprietorial middle class (urban)	15	14.2	19	13.8	34	13.9
Employed middle class	21	19.8	32	23.2	53	21.7
Skilled working class	28	26.4	23	16.7	51	20.9
Semi- & unskilled working class	25	23.6	35	25.4	60	24.6
Other or indeterminate	11	10.4	16	11.6	27	11.1
Total	106	100.0	138	100.0	244	100.0

*Occupational categories in Table 9.1, above, were recoded into social class categories as follows:

1. 'Rural proprietor' was recoded as 'Proprietorial middle class (rural).'
2. The categories 'Professional and urban proprietor,' 'Merchant, manager & agent' and 'Manufacturer & master' were recoded as 'Proprietorial middle class (urban).'
3. The categories 'Business employee,' 'Government & institution employee' and 'Seller of services & semi-professional' were recoded as 'Employed middle class.'
4. The categories 'Transport worker,' 'Operative, semi- & unskilled worker,' 'Domestic & other service worker' and 'Rural worker' were recoded as 'Semi- & unskilled working class.'

Table 9.4: School persistence by social class and gender (N & %): Cohort of 1947, Parramatta High School*

(a) Males

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	5	9.8	9	17.6	7	13.7	12	23.5	13	25.5	5	9.8	51	100.0
2 nd	5	10.2	8	16.3	7	14.3	12	24.5	12	24.5	5	10.2	49	100.0
3 rd	5	9.8	7	13.7	9	17.6	14	27.5	12	23.5	4	7.8	51	100.0
4 th	6	7.0	11	12.8	17	19.8	25	29.1	19	22.1	8	9.3	86	100.0
5 th	6	12.5	7	14.6	5	10.4	16	33.3	11	22.9	3	6.3	48	100.0

(b) Females

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	7	8.2	10	11.8	19	22.4	15	17.6	25	29.4	9	10.6	85	100.0
2 nd	7	7.8	12	13.3	22	24.4	15	16.7	25	27.8	9	10.0	90	100.0
3 rd	7	7.9	12	13.5	21	23.6	14	15.7	25	28.1	10	11.2	89	100.0
4 th	9	12.2	12	16.2	23	31.1	8	10.8	15	20.3	7	9.5	74	100.0
5 th	6	14.0	6	14.0	15	34.9	4	9.3	8	18.6	4	9.3	43	100.0

(c) Total

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	12	8.8	19	14.0	26	19.1	27	19.9	38	27.9	14	10.3	136	100.0
2 nd	12	8.6	20	14.4	29	20.9	27	19.4	37	26.6	14	10.1	139	100.0
3 rd	12	8.6	19	13.6	30	21.4	28	20.0	37	26.4	14	10.0	140	100.0
4 th	15	9.4	23	14.4	40	25.0	33	20.6	34	21.3	15	9.4	160	100.0
5 th	12	13.2	13	14.3	20	22.0	20	22.0	19	20.9	7	7.7	91	100.0

* The table adds social class information to the data summarised in Table 9.1.

Table 9.5: Intermediate Certificates awarded as a percentage of 1st to 3rd year enrolments (N & %): Cohort of 1947, Parramatta High School*

Boys (n=58)		Girls (n=99)		Total (n=157)	
N	%	N	%	N	%
49	84.5	82	82.8	131	83.4

*Pupils sat for the Intermediate Certificate at the end of third year so the table measures examination success as a percentage of first to third year enrolments only. The table shows that most students who began at the school in first, second or third year were successful in gaining their Intermediate Certificate, girls and boys in similar proportions of their total numbers.

Table 9.6: Leaving Certificates awarded as a percentage of 1st to 5th year enrolments (N & %): Cohort of 1947, Parramatta High School*

Boys (n=106)		Girls (n=138)		Total (n=244)	
N	%	N	%	N	%
35	33.0	32	23.2	67	27.5

*Pupils sat for the Leaving at the end of fifth year. Fewer girls than boys gained this credential in proportion to their total numbers. This was because more girls than boys left school after the Intermediate Certificate.

Table 9.7: Leaving Certificate subjects passed at A or Honours level (N & %): Cohort of 1947, Parramatta High School*

Number of higher grades	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	13	37.1	9	28.1	22	32.8
1	8	22.9	12	37.5	20	29.9
2-3	10	28.6	8	25.0	18	26.9
4-5	4	11.4	1	3.1	5	7.5
6	0	0.0	2	6.3	2	3.0
Total	35	100.0	32	100.0	67	100.0

*Pupils gained Leaving Certificate passes in individual subjects at different levels, either by attempting the more difficult honours examination paper or by gaining an A grade in the common paper. The more As and honours, the better the pass.

Table 9.8: Leaving Certificate subjects (N & %): Cohort of 1947, Parramatta High School*

	Boys (n=35)		Girls (n=32)		Total (n=68)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	29	82.9	31	96.9	60	88.2
Mathematics I	19	54.3	6	18.8	27	39.7
Mathematics II	19	54.3	6	18.8	27	39.7
General Mathematics	13	37.1	15	46.9	28	41.2
Chemistry	20	57.1	10	31.3	30	44.1
Physics	20	57.1	7	21.9	27	39.7
Botany	0	0.0	7	21.9	7	10.3
Latin	1	2.9	2	6.3	3	4.4
French	18	51.4	24	75.0	42	61.8
Modern History	12	34.3	22	68.8	34	50.0
Geography	9	25.7	18	56.3	27	39.7
Ancient History	1	2.9	0	0.0	1	1.5
Music	0	0.0	2	6.3	2	2.9
Technical Drawing	4	11.4	0	0.0	4	5.9

*The table lists each of the subjects passed by the Leaving Certificate students of the 1947 cohort. The table shows the number of students who passed each subject as a percentage of the total successful candidature for each gender. For example for the compulsory subject English, 82.9 per cent of all the boys who gained their Leaving Certificates achieved a pass in English as did 96.9 per cent of Leaving Certificate girls. Overall 88.2 per cent of all successful Leaving Certificate candidates passed English.

Chapter 10

‘We both got beaten by a girl!’ Coeducation in the 1950s: Theories, practices

This school, so well founded by Mr Atkins, has the unique distinction of being the only coeducational high school in the metropolitan area. In its development, the mingling of boys and girls in the various school activities has been, and still is, an important factor. Truly can it be said that the beneficial results of co-education are clearly evident in this institution.¹

The above extract, taken from the headmaster’s speech on the occasion of Parramatta High School’s fortieth anniversary celebrations in 1953 was published in the opening pages of the school’s magazine. Along with the instances discussed in the previous chapter it was an indication that Parramatta High had begun officially to name itself a coeducational school. Coeducation had become officially recognised by the school’s leaders as a remarkable, identifying feature of the school, rather than merely an administrative circumstance. Yet it was still far from clear what coeducation really meant, or exactly what speakers such as the headmaster, Forster, meant or understood by its ‘beneficial results.’ In practical terms coeducation seemed to be both a problem and an advantage, with these competing ideas related to somewhat contradictory beliefs about the management of high school students. The authority of the only female teacher on the school executive, the influential and long-serving supervisor of girls, Edith Mackaness, was directly connected with the separation of the girls from the boys and the policing of respectability, expressed through a traditional emphasis on bourgeois femininity. Coeducation could also be seen to hinder traditional processes of the making of masculinity, in that the girls of the school were unable to contribute to the highly competitive boys’ Combined High Schools Sports teams. On the other hand coeducation provided special opportunities for Parramatta to take up the more modern educational project of the nurture of its students’ social development in such settings as school dances and the annual mixed sports and debating tournament against Canberra High School.

The 1950s was the last decade during which Parramatta High School could claim to be the only coeducational (full) high school in Sydney. It was also the decade which saw a shift in the understanding of the term 'high school' in New South Wales from the identification of an academic elite to the signification of an institution for all adolescents with the introduction of compulsory high schooling. This movement was facilitated by the Wyndham Report of 1957 and the Education Act of 1961. Public high schools founded after the Education Act of 1961 were routinely coeducational, with pioneering schools like Parramatta High having provided the living proof that coeducation 'worked.' However the idea of the coeducational high school in New South Wales had substantially changed since Parramatta High's foundation in 1913. In post-war discussions of education it was evident that coeducation had become increasingly associated with modern social-psychological beliefs about adolescent development, and with the idea that secondary schools should assist with this process in addition to their academic duties.

Of particular interest to this study is a set of debates about coeducation occasioned by the public consultations and deliberations of the Committee Appointed to Survey Secondary Education in New South Wales (the Wyndham Committee), which met between 1953 and 1957. Coeducation had formerly been little mentioned in public discussions of education in New South Wales but the Wyndham Committee, whether intentionally or not, provided a forum for the airing of views from many quarters in the form of public submissions. In response to this the Committee itself commissioned a lengthy report into the domestic and international state of coeducation practice and research from the New South Wales Education Department's Research Division. This material offers valuable insights into what was meant and understood by the term, 'coeducation', in mid-century New South Wales, as well as into the beliefs about gender which underpinned both expert and common sense theories of coeducation. This chapter examines this theoretical

¹ From a speech by J. J. Forster, headmaster, on the occasion of the high school's fortieth anniversary, *Phoenix*, 1953, p. 2.

material together with a reading of the routines and practices of Parramatta High School for the same period.

Secondary schooling in the 1950s

The period from the end of the Second World War was a period of educational reassessment and reform in New South Wales. Reform of secondary schooling had been under consideration by New South Wales governments since the mid 1930s but had been frustrated by a number of factors including the disruptions caused by depression and war. Conditions in the 1950s were more conducive to change. There was a sustained economic boom and a long period of political stability, with the Australian Labor Party in government from 1941 until 1965. The leadership of the New South Wales Education Department was also stable, with Robert Heffron in the Ministry between 1941 and 1960 and Harold Wyndham as Director-General from 1952 to 1968. Heffron's and Wyndham's joint leadership of New South Wales schooling was characterised by a faith in the power and authority of the state, through its bureaucracy, to undertake every aspect of the reform process: research, planning, funding and implementation. This sort of confidence imbued the 1947 publication, *To-morrow is theirs*, discussed in the previous chapter, which established in enthusiastic terms that the New South Wales Government was committed both to change and expansion.

In 1953 Heffron appointed a committee to survey secondary education in New South Wales. The committee, led by Harold Wyndham as chairman, was concerned with negotiating the introduction of a system of comprehensive high schooling under the following terms of reference:

1. To survey and to report upon the provision of full-time education for adolescents in New South Wales
2. In particular, to examine the objectives, organization and content of the courses provided for adolescent pupils in the public schools of the State, regard being had to the requirements of a good general education and to the

desirability of providing a variety of curriculum adequate to meet the varying aptitudes and abilities of the pupils concerned.²

It was a lengthy process – four years from commissioning to final report – which included public hearings in Sydney, Newcastle and Armidale and the consideration of submissions from more than 200 individuals and institutions. The committee employed the Education Department’s Research Division of Research, Guidance and Adjustment to produce forty-nine separate sub-reports for its consideration on specific topics of interest including coeducation.³ The Research Division’s report on coeducation and the records of the committee’s public consultations on the topic provide excellent insights into what sense was made by Australian educationalists of international research and writing about coeducation (in the English-speaking world) as well as a summary of local views and beliefs about what had been learnt from four decades of New South Wales experience of mixed high schooling.⁴

The Wyndham Committee’s Report, published in 1957, was underpinned by specific beliefs about the purposes and nature of secondary schooling, and identified several ways in which the present system fell short. Its principal argument was that New South Wales state school pupils were streamed too early into different kinds of post-primary courses. Broadly speaking those who had most ‘academic aptitude’ – as assessed at the age of eleven or twelve – were sent to a full high school, the next brightest to the intermediate high schools and the ‘less academic’ again to the technical or home science schools.⁵ The brightest students were encouraged to study foreign languages, with one of the determinants of a school’s place in the education hierarchy its provision of more or fewer foreign languages. For the authors of the Wyndham Report, a more ‘satisfactory’ statement of the principle of secondary schooling was that it should be a form of

² H. S. Wyndham [Chair], ‘Report of the Committee Appointed to Survey Secondary Education in New South Wales,’ Government Printer, Sydney, 1957, p 5. A comprehensive account of the Committee’s origins and work can be found in John Hughes, ‘Harold Wyndham and educational reform in Australia, 1925-1968,’ *Education Research and Perspectives*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2002, pp. 106-163.

³ Report of the [Wyndham] Committee, p. 9.

⁴ Division of Research, Guidance and Adjustment, New South Wales Department of Education, ‘Co-education: report prepared for the committee appointed to survey secondary education in New South Wales,’ Department of Education, Sydney, c. 1957, Wyndham committee papers, SRNSW, 7/7254.1.

⁵ Report of the [Wyndham] Committee, pp. 36-7.

schooling for a particular life stage, adolescence, and should provide a common core curriculum for 'all boys and girls from about the age of twelve till the time when they leave school for work or for some form of tertiary education.'⁶ Specialisation could occur at that stage. The problem with the present system was the early differentiation of pupils and the unsatisfactorily complex and inflexible provision of the various combinations of technical and junior secondary courses. Belief in differences of 'aptitude' and 'interest' were not questioned as such, rather it was argued that assessments were made too early and too inflexibly; that there had been problems with the application of knowledge about individual differences, rather than with the knowledge itself.

The line of reasoning of the Wyndham Report was specific and strategic, directing the reader to consider certain questions rather than others. In its discussion of differentiated schooling the report did not open up questions of social inequality or refer to categorisations other than individual, psychological ones. It did not make a connection between differential provision of secondary schooling and social class, despite this kind of analysis being available at the time in, for example, writing by the academic La Nauze, then at the University of Adelaide, and the socialist N. K. Henderson.⁷ Neither did it discuss the gender inequities of the post-primary system.⁸ This was despite the fact that allocation to any school other than a full high school meant a degree of automatic and explicit differentiation of the curriculum by gender. The information sheets for parents enrolling their children in post-primary courses for 1955, for example, were arranged in separate sheets and forms for 'Girls' and 'Boys.'⁹ Parents of daughters were asked to choose from six kinds of courses and four kinds of schools, parents of sons from nine kinds of courses in six kinds of schools. Academic subjects – English and mathematics for everyone, foreign languages for the cleverest – were provided for both boys and girls. Vocational or practical subjects were almost entirely differentiated by gender (the

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁷ Pavla Miller *Long division: state schooling in South Australian society*, Adelaide, Wakefield press, 1986, pp. 215-216; R. W. Connell, D. Ashenden, S. Kessler and G. Dowsett, *Making the difference: schools, families and social division*, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1982, pp. 24-25.

⁸ "Blissfully unaware": gender and secondary education reform, New South Wales, 1953-61' *Australian Studies* 9, 1995, pp. 70-85.

⁹ New South Wales Department Education, 'Choosing a post-primary course,' c. 1954, Wyndham Committee papers SRNSW 7/7254.3.

exceptions being business principles and book-keeping). Where boys might study technical drawing, woodwork, metalwork and agriculture, girls were directed to cookery, home management, needlework, typing and shorthand. The demarcation between academic and applied courses was more rigid for girls than for boys. Boys could choose from two different levels of applied courses, those with or without a choice of foreign language but foreign languages were neither required of nor provided for girls undertaking applied studies. These fundamental inequities were subsumed in the Wyndham Report under general criticisms of premature differentiation of students.

The lack of gender analysis in the Wyndham Report can be compared with observations made by the progressive United States Professor of Education, R. Freeman Butts, who spent several months in Australia on a Fulbright Scholarship during 1954. His long essay, *Assumptions underlying Australian education*, published in Australia by the Australian Council for Educational Research, shared the Wyndham Committee's criticism of early differentiation and specialisation in secondary education but also included a trenchant analysis of gender inequity in Australian schools.¹⁰ He observed powerful hierarchies of social class and gender in the organisation of secondary schooling: 'In general the hierarchy applies to the superiority of academic schools over the non-academic, the boys' schools over the girls' schools, and the city schools over the country schools.'¹¹ In the Australian education systems, observed Butts, resources were disproportionately allocated to academic and social elites and to boys. He was sceptical of Australian coeducation, finding the 'majority opinion' against it, and that: 'Most often coeducation seemed to be a matter of economy and financial exigency in smaller centres rather than a matter of basic and desirable educational policy.'¹² He saw coeducation in Australian high schools as compromised by fundamental gender inequities in Australian society, and interpreted the persistence of sex-segregation as a symptom of this.

I have even wondered whether or not the attitudes towards coeducation may still rest upon certain assumptions concerning the role of women in Australian society. Separation of groups for educational purposes often means that one group is

¹⁰ R. Freeman Butts, *Assumptions underlying Australian education*, ACER, Melbourne, 1955.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹² *Ibid.*

considered to be inferior to another group As Australia is predominantly a man's culture, so is Australian education predominantly designed to meet the needs of boys more fully than those of girls.¹³

Butts was critical of wage differentials between male and female teachers, as well as the lack of female officers at senior levels of the states' education departments. He argued that school subjects also fell into gender-determined hierarchies, 'The dullest take general science whereas all the rest take the real sciences, physics and chemistry. Biology is not a real science. It is apparently for the girls.'¹⁴ Similarly, 'No boys take history. That, too, is for the girls. No boys take art.' He was scathing of the use of foreign language study ability as a marker for ability.¹⁵

The Wyndham Committee and coeducation

The 1950s was the last decade to see a predominance of single-sex over mixed-sex state high schools in New South Wales. In 1954 fewer than fifty per cent of state secondary school students attended mixed institutions: 49,000 as opposed to 51,000.¹⁶ No registered non-departmental secondary school was coeducational. New South Wales state primary schools during this period were, where numbers allowed, divided into separate girls' and boys' departments, with entirely separate classes. As has been discussed, coeducational state high schools had been established in regional areas for practical administrative reasons. By the 1950s, however, a large groundswell of opinion had grown in favour of coeducation on principle. In the course of its public consultations the Wyndham Committee was inundated with submissions advocating the introduction of coeducation.

The largest volume of support was anecdotal and experiential, from current and former teachers, students and parents of the state's regional and country coeducational high schools. In particular, state secondary teachers claimed expertise on the topic because of the way in which their career structure gave them the opportunity to make their own

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Research Division, 'Co-education: report ... for the committee', p. 39.

observations of both mixed and single-sex schools. Teachers in the Department's employ were required to undertake a period of country service and throughout their careers were periodically moved from school to school. The teachers and teachers' organisations who gave evidence to the committee drew on their experiences of the broad state system to present evidence such as the following statement which was included a submission presented by the New South Wales Secondary Teachers' Association:

Co-education in Secondary Schools? Yes! Yes! Yes! A thousand times yes!

I attended a country High School, and even in those far off years (1914-1918) the influence of the girls on the character was most marked. It did not occur to me that there was another way of running a High School.

For a number of years I was attached to Albury High School and certain functions, like the Fourth Years' farewell to the Fifth Year was an inspiration to all who attended. This type of function is impossible in city high schools where the merits of co-education are not yet realised.

For that reason alone I consider Parramatta High School as the best in the Metropolitan Area and am happy that my boy attends it. I view with alarm the suggestion that in the course of time it will cease to be co-educational and I am prepared to fight very hard to preserve it in its present civilised form.

When will it be realised that personality development is as important at least as mental development to the teen-ager and that the normal approach to the inevitable mixing of the sexes cannot be better achieved than by co-education.¹⁷

This excerpt was not entirely typical in tone – it was very passionate – but was indicative of the main observations that were made about the mixed high schools of New South Wales:

1. Mixed high schools were healthy, happy environments,
2. Coeducation was especially beneficial during the adolescent years,
3. Bringing the mixing of the sexes under the gaze of the school was conducive to the 'normal' psychological development of personality and the production of 'normal' sexualities and sexual identities, and
4. The girls functioned as a civilising influence on the boys.

¹⁷ Evidence presented by NSW Secondary Teachers' Association, Yelland Papers, SRNSW 8/2265

The main arguments for and against coeducation were social and psychological rather than academic.¹⁸

The Wyndham Report speculated that community views were more evenly divided than would appear from the public submissions.¹⁹ Even looking more closely at the expressions of support presented to the committee there were a number of caveats expressed. These included support for the continued segregation of some activities and subjects, the retention of some existing single-sex schools to provide parents with a choice, and that primary schools should be made coeducational first.²⁰ One committee member suggested that in the event of widespread introduction of coeducation ‘consideration might be given to ... the appointment of women teachers to promotions positions in mixed schools.’²¹ Nevertheless the committee heard few entirely opposing voices. Two of these came from the corporate school principals L. C. Robson and Dorothy Knox, on behalf of their respective Headmasters’ and Headmistresses Associations. None of the schools they represented was coeducational. Knox, headmistress of Pymble Presbyterian Ladies’ College, argued that coeducation should only be a matter of expediency, not of policy, and feared that girls might become ‘precocious’ in mixed secondary schools.²² L.C. Robson, longstanding Headmaster of the Sydney Church of England Grammar School, ‘Shore’ school for boys, outlined several objections. These included concerns about a lack of boys for games in a coeducational school, that male and female teachers ought not to exercise pastoral care duties over pupils of the opposite sex, and that New South Wales should look to English rather than United States models of schooling. Robson reported of his own observations of United States secondary schools that there was an undesirable ‘preponderance’ of feminine

¹⁸ See also Lesley Johnson, *Modern girl: girlhood and growing up*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993, pp. 84-86.

¹⁹ Report of the [Wyndham] Committee, p. 81.

²⁰ Summary of witnesses’ views about coeducation, Yelland papers, SRNSW, 8/2264.

²¹ Summary prepared by the Committee, Wyndham Committee papers, SRNSW 7/7254.3 The name of the committee member was not given.

²² Summary of witnesses’ views about coeducation, SRNSW, 8/2264; L. C. Robson and C. O. Healey, ‘Coeducation,’ Headmasters’ Conference of Australia, Yelland papers, SRNSW, 8/2264; Research Division, ‘Co-education,’ pp. 17, 19.

influence on the teaching staffs as well as some undesirable relations between boy and girl pupils.²³

A key document in understanding mid-century views of coeducation in New South Wales was the substantial research paper prepared for the committee by the Education Department's Division of Research, Guidance and Adjustment.²⁴ The paper provided expert explanations for the kinds of personal and anecdotal observations made by contributors to the Wyndham Committee's consultations. It assembled historical information, summaries of international trends, readings of adolescent psychology, and reviews of current research, all of which were in favour of coeducation to some degree. The experts it cited included Charlotte Fleming, author of *Adolescence: Its social psychology* and R. R. Dale who was then in the preliminary stages of the research that later became the standard reference, *Mixed or Single Sex School*.²⁵ As interesting as its support for coeducation on principle was the paper's work in attempting to accommodate common sense and anecdotal explanations of coeducation within a theoretical framework of the development of adolescent gender relations. Clearly evident in the paper was a belief in the secondary school as a site for the making of psychologically healthy gender identities through the encouragement of 'normal' gender relations. Gender equity was referred to in the paper mainly as a historical issue. The emphasis was firmly on interpersonal relations rather than, for example, the comparative achievement of boys and girls.

Among the many public submissions it received the Wyndham Committee found 'no general agreement as to the precise meaning of "coeducation."'”²⁶ Its Departmental researchers arrived at the following definition:

The most extreme interpretation of the term 'co-education' ... is that girls and boys are taught the same things, at the same time, in the same place, by the same faculty,

²³ 'Coeducation,' Headmasters' Conference of Australia, Yelland papers, SRNSW, 8/2264.

²⁴ Research Division, 'Co-education: report ... for the committee'.

²⁵ C. M. Fleming, *Adolescence: its social psychology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1948; R. R. Dale, *Mixed or single-sex school?* Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, vols 1, 2, 3, 1969, 1971, 1974.

²⁶ Report of the [Wyndham] Committee, p. 81.

with the same methods and under the same regimen. A more acceptable interpretation is that although there may be differences in the physical and mental powers and needs of boys and girls, they are educated together, uniting in many classes, in many sports and in much of their social life, but with modification of all these to suit their special differences.²⁷

The exact nature of these 'special differences' was not clearly spelled out, perhaps because it was thought that they were so self-evident to contemporary readership to be unnecessary, but the idea that there were degrees and varieties of coeducational practice was mentioned several times in the research paper. In the mixed high schools of New South Wales the nature and degree of mixing of boys and girls was observed to vary with seniority and school setting:

For the most part, in the first three years of their secondary course, the sexes, though taught in the same classes, are separated, usually sitting on different sides of the classroom. However, the size of the class and the classroom, the seating, and the number of boys and girls, often make for more association than would at first appear. In the senior school, 4th and 5th years, pupils are generally allowed to sit where they please in class Both the classroom and the playing area may be thought of as comprising three zones. Two of these are reserved for each sex alone but there exists on the physical boundaries between 'official' areas, a third zone where intermingling of pupils of both sexes occurs.²⁸

For the schools' prefects, it was observed, 'a co-education almost as full as the regular American type is available with school sanction.'²⁹

In terms of psychological explanations of the operation of coeducation two issues addressed were fears about adolescent sexuality and concerns about the appropriate environment for the management of the development of gender identity. The issue of sexual misdemeanours neatly brought together traditional school teacher expertise in postponing adolescent sexual activity with modern psychological beliefs about the subtle nurture of heterosexuality. No evidence was found that 'immorality' or inappropriately 'intense' attractions were more prevalent among students from mixed schools than other adolescents. 'Delinquency' it was argued, was in any case more likely to occur away

²⁷ Research Division, 'Co-education: report ... for the committee', p. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

from the well ordered supervision of the school, as the result of unsupervised mixing in the community or laxity in the 'home'.³⁰ Moreover there was some concern expressed about the incidence of same-sex attractions in single-sex schools in the form of schoolgirls' attractions to their female teachers.³¹ However in this paper's main discussion of the issue, homosexuality was represented as a variety of sexually delinquent conduct – of pre-marital relations – rather than a category of sexual identity. The promotion of heterosexuality was not represented as the opposite of homosexuality but the opposite either of 'sexual misbehaviour' or of the sorts of exaggerated masculinities and femininities that were found in popular culture.³²

The nurture of healthy social relations between the sexes was connected with the development of gender identity. The challenge was to counteract the appeal of 'meretricious' exaggerations and simplifications of masculinity and femininity like the 'glamour' and 'toughness' to be found in other influences from the world beyond the school: in 'advertising', 'journalism' and 'sensational fiction.'³³ The issue of 'masculinity-femininity differentiation,' to use the vocabulary of the research paper, was central to post-war theories of coeducation. The following paragraph summarised the task of the modern coeducational high school:

Co-education of varying degrees of completeness will have obviously different effects on ... masculinity-femininity differentiation. Mixed schools in which boys and girls are urged to compete against the other sex in school-work and conduct will heighten the distinctions in behaviour perhaps undesirably. Co-educational arrangements penetrating more deeply into a child's personality (which naturally contains both masculine and feminine elements) would tend to increase the variety of completeness of development, without setting a type of "boy" and "girl", "man" and "woman".³⁴

One of the questions put by the feminist critiques of coeducation of the 1980s was whether post war coeducational arrangements in fact offered girls access to formerly

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3-4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9, p 16, p. 39.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9, p. 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

male educational privilege, or whether they operated to further entrench unequal power relations of gender.³⁵ The focus in the research paper was on the nurture of good, gendered psychological health rather than opportunity or equity. Both the research paper and the submissions to the committee assumed that gender equity was a historical rather than a current issue in regard to coeducation. A senior teacher from the Sutherland Intermediate High School had argued that the 'emancipation of women' had already occurred in Australia:

Our girls are taught that women may become doctors, dentists, scientists, professors, barristers or solicitors, directors of companies or of public bodies and that they may hold positions of authority and responsibility in the Army or may become members of local councils or the House of Representatives or of the Senate.³⁶

Part of the work of the coeducational school was to prepare boys to cope with this new 'equality of men and women in public life' by working together with girls and being taught by 'lady teachers'. The authors of the research paper explained that a stage had been reached in educational theory in which it was recognised that men and women were of equal intelligence:

Differences within the sexes [according to current English and American opinion on sex-difference and educational capacities] seem to be as great as between the sexes ... in general intelligence and in many mental traits that have been investigated scientifically, no significant sex difference has been found.³⁷

The paper put forward the view that coeducation was entirely congruent with these modern understandings of gender and implied that those who opposed coeducational schools were also those who held 'Victorian,' or possibly 'medieval' attitudes towards women.³⁸ Single-sex schooling was characterised as a legacy from the less enlightened

³⁵ For example, Rosemary Deem (ed.), *Co-education reconsidered*, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1984; Dale Spender and Elizabeth Sarah (eds), *Learning to lose: sexism and education*, The Women's Press, London, 1980; see also David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning together: a history of coeducation in American schools*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990, pp. 243-278.

³⁶ 'Views on co-education of the staff of Sutherland Intermediate High School,' Yelland papers, SRNSW, 8/2265.

³⁷ Research Division, 'Co-education: report ... for the committee', p. 9.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-2, 10-15.

past. In New South Wales, the paper argued, academic high schools had been established as sex-segregated institutions for historical reasons which were no longer valid. The single-sex pattern had been established in the nineteenth century when the state high schools had been compelled to 'emulate or imitate the private schools' in order to compete as new entrants to the education market.³⁹ Technical, commercial and domestic science schools had been single-sex because of now outmoded ideas that 'boys entered certain occupations reserved for men while the girls would become secretaries, domestic servants and housewives.' The introduction of a common Intermediate Certificate for all schools in 1929 had been an important step in 'removing largely the original reason for the segregated nature of these schools.'⁴⁰ The paper implied that by the 1950s women's emancipation was more or less complete, and that the expansion of coeducational schooling would be a recognition of this.

The idea that there might be feminist objections to mixed schooling was recognised in the paper in the context of discussions of the position of women teachers, although it was argued that the majority of female teachers, in common with their male colleagues, was in favour of coeducation.⁴¹ The paper acknowledged that women teachers lacked promotion opportunities in mixed schools but characterised this as a problem either of individual prejudice or of broad social attitudes rather than of historical or contemporary inequalities enacted by, for example, the New South Wales Education Department itself. For example, the paper quoted the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott on social attitudes to women in authority: 'Fear of *woman* is a powerful agent in society-structure, and it is responsible for the fact that in very few societies does a woman hold the political reins.'⁴² These fears, shared by both men and women, were described as 'irrational.'⁴³ Somewhat disingenuously, given the Department's record, the paper argued, 'There seems to be no reason why promotion for any teachers, men or women, should be tied to a sex-division of pupils.'⁴⁴ The paper concluded that further study was required, but there were

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 41-48.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

indications that sympathy for women teachers' frustrations was limited. A summary of writing by R. R. Dale betrayed an impatience with what he characterised as the self-interested, even 'bitter' attitudes of women in authority: 'For some women teachers, especially Head Mistresses, this problem of promotion might so dwarf all other considerations as to make it impossible to get a true estimate of their opinion on co-education by any known attitude scale.'⁴⁵ The paper also suggested that mixed teaching staffs might provide happier working environments than single-sex staffs.⁴⁶ The example given was of all-female staffs and included the speculation that older, single women may be partly to blame for low morale. An unnamed Departmental inspector was cited as suggesting, 'It may be that women teachers, particularly if single and without the distractions and reliefs provided by their own immediate families, become steadily less tolerant of the noise, demands and oppositions of children.'⁴⁷

Overall the research paper argued in favour of coeducational schooling, but its authors expressed the opinion that it was a subject upon which were held many unsubstantiated fears and views:

Fears of the damaging effects of co-education have been shown to survive rational disproof again and again in discussion. The fact, for instance, that there are no easily discernible ill effects of mixed secondary schools in New South Wales country towns does not seem to affect the distrust felt for proposals to extend co-education in other circumstances.⁴⁸

For the Wyndham Committee, concerned with the delicate business of negotiating a blueprint for the introduction of an acceptable system of mass compulsory high schooling, coeducation was a subsidiary issue. The 1957 Report included the cautious recommendation, 'as new secondary schools are established by the Department of Education, they should, generally speaking, be co-educational high schools similar to those already existing in country areas.'⁴⁹ Twenty years later Wyndham reflected,

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61-62.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁹ Report of the [Wyndham] Committee, p. 81.

Two of the snags in the stream which I sought, at all times, to avoid as matters of deep involvement on the part of the Committee were co-education and religious education. Both were likely to be debated on subjective grounds, and thus, endlessly, and I was anxious to ensure that the committee did not become involved in either at the cost of losing sight of its main aims and thus postponing their attainment.⁵⁰

Parramatta High School in the 1950s

Locally in Parramatta the 1950s saw the reorganisation of all the local post-primary state schools into full high schools, although Parramatta High School remained academically selective until the early 1970s. The relative institutional stability of Parramatta High was in contrast with the series of changes which had occurred since the 1910s in other state post-primary schools, especially the boys' schools. Parramatta Junior Boys' High, the successor institution from 1944 to the Parramatta Intermediate High School, became Macquarie Boy's High from 1956, having moved to a new site between 1953 and 1957 (in stages). The Parramatta Home Science School (formerly the Parramatta Domestic Science School) became Parramatta Secondary Home Science School in 1953 and then Macarthur Girls' High School at the end of 1957. Arthur Phillip High School was established between 1958 and 1960 on the foundation of the secondary top of Parramatta Central School, which had been offering secondary classes since 1944, including the euphemistically named 'alternative curriculum' to 'less able' girls not considered suitable for either the high school or the (overcrowded) Home Science School.⁵¹ Arthur Phillip High was founded to meet the 'comprehensive coeducational needs of Parramatta,' accommodating a more economically, socially and academically 'disadvantaged' population than Parramatta High School.⁵²

Although the reorganisation of secondary schooling would eventually fundamentally alter the population, aims and culture of Parramatta High school, in the 1950s it occupied a

⁵⁰ Letter from H. S. Wyndham to Kevin Smith, 1 May 1975, Wyndham Papers, Mitchell Library mss 5089, Box 4 (38). I am grateful to John Hughes for drawing this letter to my attention.

⁵¹ Geoff Stewart, *A century of schools, 1975-1975: a history of education at Macquarie Street, Parramatta*, M.Ed. thesis, University of Sydney, 1977, pp. 92-93.

broadly similar place in the local schooling market as it had in the early years of its foundation – somewhere between the expensive fee-charging Kings School and the newer state high schools – and continued to be organised around key features such as streaming, the competitive academic achievement, public examinations and a largely unchanged set of core studies: English, languages, higher mathematics and the ‘hard’ sciences. By the 1950s the school was recognised as a successful pioneer of coeducation.

An analysis of one of the student cohorts which progressed through the high school during the 1950s, the cohort of 1954, offers some insights into the nature of the school’s population at this time.⁵³ The patterns were quite similar to those of the 1947 cohort, discussed in Chapter 9. An examination of the school’s *Register of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal* shows that students came to the high school from a range of social class backgrounds (Tables 10.1 and 10.2).⁵⁴ Measured by persistence, however, members of the middle classes were more likely to proceed to the senior grades of high school than working class students. (Table 10.3) The school continued to be organised around the two major public examinations, the Intermediate Certificate, taken at the end of third year and the Leaving Certificate, at the end of fifth year. In common with the 1947 cohort and in contrast with the earlier groups analysed in the same way (in Chapter 6), most of the students who enrolled at the school in the junior years, about eighty per cent, gained their Intermediate Certificate. A much larger number of students gained the Leaving Certificate than in any of the previous cohort examined, nearly half the total group.

Boys consistently outnumbered girls in this cohort in both the junior and senior years by an order that would have been clearly evident to teachers and students within the school. (Table 10.4) Of a total enrolment of 234, 150 pupils, or sixty-four per cent were boys, eighty-four pupils, or thirty-six per cent, girls. It is possible to speculate that this imbalance affected the school’s culture though it would be wrong to view any effect as simple. In any case, as has already been argued in this study, gender divisions co-existed

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵³ For the purposes of this study the cohort includes all students who were admitted to Parramatta High in first year in 1954, second year in 1955, third year in 1956, fourth year in 1957 or fifth year in 1958.

⁵⁴ All tables referred to here are collected in an appendix to Chapter 10, pp. 299-304.

in the high school with other kinds of categorisations. Certainly girls performed as well as boys academically, in proportion to their total enrolments, which has been a consistent finding over the five cohorts studied. (Tables 10.5, 10.6, 10.7). Individual subject passes were not published for the Intermediate Certificate. In the Leaving Certificate passes for these student there is a discernible pattern of subject specialisation according to gender (Table 10.8). Boys dominated higher mathematics and the hard sciences, not only in absolute but also in relative terms. Of the fifty-four passes in physics gained by the school, for example, only nine were achieved by girls, forty-five by boys. Put another way, sixty-three per cent of all Parramatta High School boys who gained the Leaving Certificate gained a pass in Physics, but only twenty-one per cent of girls. The combination of a preponderance of boys in absolute and relative terms must have made these subjects seem especially to be male forms of knowledge. Girls outperformed boys in the only compulsory subject, English, and were over-represented as a proportion of their total numbers in general mathematics, French, geography, history and economics. To what extent these subjects were understood to be female-dominated by the students and teachers of the time is not so clear as, for example, roughly equal numbers of boys and girls passed geography, even though this represented a higher proportion of total numbers of Leaving Certificate girls.

Remembering Parramatta High

This study has argued that coeducation must be understood in context, at the level of practices as well as at the level of theory or policy. The first part of the chapter examined mid twentieth century understandings of coeducation through a reading of popular and expert opinions collected by the Wyndham Committee. The following section examines schooling practices for the same period through the reminiscences of two former Parramatta High School students, *Janet*⁵⁵ and *Ray*,⁵⁶ interviewed by the author more than four decades after they had left school. *Ray* and *Janet* were not necessarily typical or average students. Both were high achievers, gaining their Leaving Certificates and

⁵⁵ *Janet* (1950s), interviewed by the author, 29 November 1999.

⁵⁶ *Ray*, (1950s), interviewed by the author, 30 November 1999.

progressing to university. *Ray* was in the representative debating team. *Janet* was a prefect and one of the minority of girls who specialised in mathematics and physics rather than the humanities. Nevertheless their memories provide insights into the complex patterns of school experience. The experiences of students attending Parramatta High were shaped by a combination of factors including patterns of gender relations within and beyond the school, the strength and persistence of the school's meritocratic culture, and their own families' strategies for social mobility and future employment. In particular, *Janet's* and *Ray's* memories emphasised those aspects of the school which had been evident since its early years: the importance of measurable academic achievement for both girls and boys, and the double standards of dress and deportment.

Categorising the boys and the girls

In common with the Research Division of the Education Department⁵⁷, *Ray* read the coeducational organisation of the mixed high school in terms of zones, or territorial demarcations:

It was about half way between two separate schools ... and one completely integrated school We sat in the same classrooms but the girls tended to sit on one side and the boys on the other. We played in separate playgrounds. At ... assembly the girls would be in one part of the playground and boys in the other. When we went swimming the girls were in one half of the pool and the boys in the other. Now there was a bit of work going on at the edges but nevertheless that was the rule of the game. We played separate sports but there'd be an athletics day where there were girls and boys' events and there'd be a lot of mixing Then there were school dances at which we tended to have our girlfriends and vice versa. So the dances brought us together. School concerts brought us together.

Ray's concrete visual memory of the divided swimming pool included the vague possibilities of trespassing over the central dividing line. In contrast to *Janet's* reminiscences he remembered little coercion about the separation of the sexes, and the description above suggests an equivalence in the status of and space available to girls and boys. The two groups appear to be separate but equal. That he positioned himself as one

of the category, 'boys', as distinct from 'girls', was also apparent elsewhere in the interview transcript:

I always look back on the fact that it was a coeducational high school as being a plus because I think it got young boys – I can't speak for the girls, but for the young boys – used to dealing with young girls so they weren't a novelty.

Students tended to refer to themselves and others as 'one of the girls' or 'one of the boys.'

For *Janet*, being in the category, 'girls' meant that her physical movements were more circumscribed than those of the boys. Caught in a raid by the prefects, 'loitering' by the bus stop, waiting for a male friend, she was made to attend the girls' supervisor's [Mackaness's] special mathematics classes instead of participating in sport. ('Miss Mackaness said young ladies did not loiter'.) *Ray's* main memory of being in trouble was for an entirely different kind of misdemeanour. His punishment was a boy's punishment:

I got caned for throwing an orange around a classroom between classes and breaking the window. Not only did I get four cuts [of the cane] but I had to replace the pane of glass I had to get the putty and...physically do it myself during school. I didn't go to sport. I had to fix the glass Missed out on sport and four cuts from ... the deputy headmaster.

As has been pointed out in previous chapters, there were sharp distinctions between the treatment of boys and girls in the regulation of dress and grooming:

Mr Johnson [the Deputy] used to call assembly He'd say to the boys, 'Now, I want to make sure you're all in uniform. You've all got to have a tie and a badge.' Everything else didn't seem to matter, as long as you had a tie and a badge. And I remember our lot turning up one day with just gym pants on and a tie and a badge and all lining up. Nothing else, just their football shorts and a tie and a badge, because as far as Johnno was concerned if you had a tie and a badge you were right. But of course with Miss Mackaness it had to be everything, gloves, and stockings, and if you had holes in your stockings you had to mend

⁵⁷ Research Division, 'Co-education: report ... for the committee', p. 4.

them The emphasis on girls looking good in their uniform was very important.⁵⁸

In the following extract the boys are physically cut off from the girls to the extent that they are almost a different species of animal:

There was a veranda at the back of the assembly part where we lined up and it had a wire mesh ... and the senior boys would often not bother to come down to the assembly, which was just held out in the playground So often the senior boys would just stand up on this veranda behind this wire mesh area and Johnno's famous lines were: 'All you Darwinians come down off the veranda and line up like everybody else!' And of course it wasn't until later that I realised his reference to Darwinians was that they looked like a lot of monkeys behind the wire mesh.

While the boys might be somehow animal, untamed, the girls were expected to be exert more self-control. *Janet* remembered an expectation of the girls that they should assist, through the policing of their own behaviour, in the civilising of the boys:

I've forgotten what we had done wrong, but I remember [Miss Mackaness] coming down into the classroom, the boys being tossed out of the room, and saying, 'The behaviour in the classroom really depends on you. Boys are like sheep. They will follow whatever standards you set. So if there are any more problems it'll be your fault.' That was her attitude. And in a way I think that was right. I think the boys were a bit like sheep, particularly in the high school group. I think girls mature quicker, or at an earlier age, and therefore the boys tend to be catching up in some respects in terms of social behaviour They're more childish, I think.

Curriculum and competition

Despite newer discourses about social adjustment, it remained very important during the 1950s that Parramatta was academically selective. *Ray* recalled exactly where Parramatta High had been positioned in the local hierarchy of (boy's) post-primary schools.

My sense was that we were one of about eight high schools in Sydney that were a bit special. They were *the* high schools and I can recall they included Homebush

⁵⁸ *Janet*.

and Fort Street and Sydney Boys High and perhaps there was North Sydney Boys. I can't recall the others but there was a bunch of eight ... the only full high schools in those days and ... all selective. I think that if you weren't bright enough ... you would go to Parramatta Intermediate High School ... and if you were not able to go to that school you went to Granville Tech The only other choice was The Kings' School and my parents couldn't afford that.

Janet and *Ray* had both entered Parramatta High School from nearby 'opportunity classes' for bright state primary school children. They were very aware of the selective nature of the opportunity classes and of the high school, and of where they were placed in each school's assessment of their ability and achievement. *Janet* recalled,

When I arrived at Parramatta High I wound up in the C class. Everybody had to be bright enough to get into Parramatta High to start with but then they were graded A, B, C. So I wasn't in the A or B class which were obviously regarded as the brightest. I was in the C group. I was always near the top of the C group.

In terms of the core business of examination passing there were some distinctions between girls and boys in terms of subject specialisation. Boys tended to specialise in mathematics and science; girls in English, languages and humanities and this was quite well recognised by *Janet* and *Ray* and their peers at the time. *Ray* suggested that the male-dominated mathematics and the hard sciences were more highly regarded than other subjects with higher female populations. *Janet* observed that this was one of a number of ways in which the school was geared to the needs of boys. It was not possible for her or her peers to study 'girls' subjects such as biology or art for the Leaving. On the other hand Parramatta High was one of very few schools where girls had the opportunity, if by default, to study physics:

People like my friend Patricia who went to Hornsby Girls' High could only do a combined phys-chem course for the Leaving Certificate and the same if you went to Fort Street Girls or if you went to St George Girls. You could do what was called combined phys-chem. Then you could do biology as well. At Parramatta High we could do physics and or chemistry and so of course going into university I could go straight into physics, which I did.

The association of higher mathematics and science with the cleverest students was challenged in the year that *Ray* and *Janet* sat for the Leaving. *Ray* told the story of the girl who beat him to dux,

[The school] was ... a pretty challenging place academically. I was quite a reasonable student and because I did maths I, maths II, physics, all the sort of subjects where you could get 98 ... I would typically come first or second in the year. And then in the Leaving Certificate the guy I always competed with for first or second: we both got beaten by a girl! She was a hot shot English, French, history type student. Of course you could never get 98 in those subjects but in the Leaving Certificate they were scaled or somehow or other assessed in a different way so we got done!

It is an interesting comment on the visibility of gender and achievement at the mixed high school that in fact the girl who won the dux prize in *Janet* and *Ray*'s year had not come out of nowhere as is suggested by *Ray*'s anecdote, but, according to the school magazines, had been an outstanding student and regular prize-winner since first year.

The arena of school achievement in which it could be said that boys' interests were absolutely more important than girls' was in competitive team sports. *Janet* remembered keeping track of the progress of the 1st XV rugby union team,

Frank Sinn ... my mathematics teacher ... was also the first grade football coach. We used to say that Thursday's lessons really depended on how well the football went on Wednesday. If they'd won he'd be – he was a lovely person but we used to say, 'He'll be a bit depressed today because the boys didn't win.'

Ray remembered that Parramatta's teams were not always regarded as competitive in the Combined High School's competitions, 'because in many ways we were only half of a boys' school.' This was an old complaint, aired by members of the school community since the 1910s. Interest and willingness to participate in sport was an essential requirement of being a boy, and was an important marker of difference between boys and girls. *Ray* remembered the poor opinion the physical training master had of any boy who did not play sport, 'He had all sorts of abusive language to use to describe you. I don't mean bad language but he certainly put you down. You were a real sissy if you didn't

play sport.' Girls were not subject to this regime of enforced competition. Neither was there a girls' competition equal in prestige or seriousness to the boys' Combined High Schools' cricket or rugby. While the girls to some extent were compelled to keep track of the fortunes of the boys' teams, it was possible for the boys to be unaware of girls' sports. Girls' sport was timetabled to fit in with the boys' competitions.

Family, class and social mobility

Janet and *Ray* represented their high school and subsequent university careers as part of family projects of social mobility. Each was the first family member to attain the Leaving Certificate and go to university. Their descriptions of their families included assessments of where their parents, especially their fathers, were placed in Sydney's social and economic hierarchy. *Janet* explained her father's ambitions for his children in terms of the opportunities he himself had never had.

My father was apprenticed as a plumber. My mother worked as a bookkeeper. I think my father saw my brother and me as having the opportunities that he missed out on. Even though he went to the Tech. in later years, and he was a Health and Building Inspector, he could never matriculate because he could never pass English. In fact in some ways he used to scoff at the professional engineers as 'not a practical brain in their head.' They were 'all theory and didn't know.' But I think actually deep down he was definitely university material, but they just didn't have the opportunity.

Neither of *Ray's* parent had experienced prolonged schooling. His mother had worked as a stenographer at one of the big local factories before she married and may have had her Intermediate Certificate. His father was a small businessman:

My father was a butcher in my early days and then by the time I got to Parramatta High School he had gone into a trucking business ... so as a family we were moderately well off. We actually had a car, which many parents didn't have in the fifties, so we were doing ok. I think my father had come up in quite a poor family but had a bit of *nous* and worked his way up. But certainly [I was the] first member of the family to go to high school. Parents very proud.

In explaining their decisions to further postpone full time paid employment by going on to university, *Janet* and *Ray* described how it was they were able to manage financially, not only in terms of the direct costs of study, but the indirect costs of wages forgone. Both *Ray* and *Janet* did well enough in their Leaving Certificate examinations to be eligible for substantial financial assistance from outside their families. *Ray* won an industry cadetship to study engineering so that he was on a full salary through university. *Janet* was awarded a New South Wales Education Department teachers' scholarship which meant that not only did she not have to pay university fees, but she also received a stipend while she was studying with which to support herself. *Janet* explained:

Even if I had got a Commonwealth Scholarship I couldn't have afforded to take it because it didn't have a living allowance, whereas the Teachers' College Scholarship paid for your university and gave you a living allowance. It worked out at four pound ten a week but you could live on it.

Janet and *Ray* were encouraged by their parents to pursue higher education, and *Janet's* father became angry when at one stage she decided to enrol as a trainee nurse at Parramatta Hospital instead of going to university. At the same time *Janet* and *Ray* had siblings who did not experience the same academic trajectory, for different reasons. *Ray's* younger sister left school after the Intermediate Certificate to work in an office: 'She wasn't a bad student but interestingly there was a bit of a view still around that girls didn't need to go on I doubt that my sister got the same support from my parents to go on as I did.' *Janet's* brother, on the other hand, was encouraged to emulate his older sister's academic success but resisted his father's ambitions for him, leading to family conflict, 'And he's done extremely well in his own field but not in the direction my father would have suggested.'

Conclusion

The 1950s was the last decade during which Parramatta High School was the only coeducational high school in Sydney. It was also the last decade in which the school held a monopoly among the local state post-primary schools over Leaving Certificate

preparation, although it retained its status as academically selective school for about another decade. This chapter has drawn together a description of the practice of coeducation at Parramatta High School in the 1950s with an examination of contemporary debates in New South Wales about the theory and principles of coeducation.

In the course of the four-year inquiry into secondary education under Harold Wyndham, the 1950s saw an unprecedented level of popular and expert discussion of coeducation in New South Wales. This occurred in the context of a process of revision of the purposes and aims of secondary schooling in New South Wales under which the Peter Board system of differential provision was to be replaced by a system of comprehensive high schools. In the public debates about coeducation of the 1950s the high school was understood as an institution for the social and psychological nurture of adolescents. Coeducational high schools, it was argued, were socially healthier, happier environments than single-sex schools. Coeducation was especially beneficial during the adolescent years. Bringing the mixing of the sexes under the gaze of the school was conducive to the 'normal' psychological development of personality and the production of 'normal' sexualities and sexual identities. The main arguments for and against coeducation were social and psychological rather than academic and gender equity as an issue was raised in the debate only in a very specific context. It was claimed that equality of opportunity for girls had already been achieved and that the expansion of coeducation was a logical next step. This belief co-existed with a limited recognition of the barriers to promotion faced by women teachers in mixed schools.

During the 1940s and 1950s Parramatta High School discovered itself to have been a pioneer of mixed secondary schooling in New South Wales. However it is impossible to understand the operation of coeducation at Parramatta High outside the context of the school's academic culture. In the 1950s the school continued to provide academic training to substantial numbers of boys and girls who participated jointly in the school's core business of preparation for the main public examinations. *Janet* and *Ray*, former students interviewed for this study, offered a number of insights. Gender was one

category in which they placed themselves. Another category was family member. *Ray* and *Janet* saw themselves as having been part of family projects of social mobility, the first members of their respective families to do the Leaving and attend university. A third and related category was cleverness. *Janet* and *Ray* qualified to attend the high school by scoring highly on tests of academic aptitude. Within the academically selective school they were further placed within the A, B and C streams and understood where they were ranked as individual competitors within these classes. In terms of academic study girls and boys might be equally adept, but were to some extent expected to specialise in different kinds of subjects, boys in mathematics and the hard sciences, girls in languages and humanities. It is hard to discern in the recollections of *Janet* and *Ray*, however, any impact on the management of coeducation at Parramatta High School of the sorts of modern psychological ideas explained in the expert evidence brought before the Wyndham committee. Their memories were of a fairly traditional gender order, especially in terms of pastoral care and character development. Different kinds of behaviour and misbehaviour were expected of and attributed to boys or girls. The girls were expected to be ladylike and to civilise the boys. Boys were expected to uphold the school's honour in sports.

Appendix to Chapter 10: Tables

Gender, social class, school persistence and examination achievement

Table 10.1: Occupation of household head (N & %): Cohort of 1954, Parramatta High School*

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Professional and urban proprietor	2	1.3	3	3.6	5	2.1
Merchant, manager & agent	13	8.7	7	8.3	20	8.5
Business employee	17	11.3	16	19.0	33	14.1
Government & institution employee	16	10.7	9	10.7	25	10.7
Seller of services & semi-professional	8	5.3	5	6.0	13	5.6
Manufacturer & master	4	2.7	0	0.0	4	1.7
Skilled worker	37	24.7	19	22.6	56	23.9
Transport worker	13	8.7	3	3.6	16	6.8
Operative, semi- & unskilled worker	15	10.0	7	8.3	22	9.4
Domestic & other service worker	5	3.3	4	4.8	9	3.8
Rural proprietor	0	0.0	1	1.2	1	0.4
Rural worker	2	1.3	0	0.0	2	0.9
Other, indeterminate	18	12.0	10	11.9	28	12.0
Total	150	100.0	84	100.0	234	100.0

*Pupils were sorted into occupational categories according to the information given to the school by the enrolling parent, and recorded in the school's *Register of Admission, Progress and Withdrawal*. In most cases the occupation recorded is the father's. The large number of 'Other, indeterminate' reflects not only sole female parents who gave their occupation as some version of 'household duties' but also students from the surrounding children's homes who were enrolled by the homes' superintendents rather than by a parent.

Table 10.2: Social class (N & %): Cohort of 1954, Parramatta High School*

	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Proprietorial middle class (urban)	0	0.0	1	1.2	1	0.4
Employed middle class	19	12.7	10	11.9	29	12.4
Skilled working class	41	27.3	30	35.7	71	30.3
Semi- & unskilled working class	37	24.7	19	22.6	56	23.9
Other or indeterminate	35	23.3	14	16.7	49	20.9
Other or indeterminate	18	12.0	10	11.9	28	12.0
Total	150	100.0	84	100.0	234	100.0

*Occupational categories in Table 10.1, above, were recoded into social class categories as follows:

1. 'Rural proprietor' was recoded as 'Proprietorial middle class (rural).'
2. The categories 'Professional and urban proprietor,' 'Merchant, manager & agent' and 'Manufacturer & master' were recoded as 'Proprietorial middle class (urban).'
3. The categories 'Business employee,' 'Government & institution employee' and 'Seller of services & semi-professional' were recoded as 'Employed middle class.'
4. The categories 'Transport worker,' 'Operative, semi- & unskilled worker,' 'Domestic & other service worker' and 'Rural worker' were recoded as 'Semi- & unskilled working class.'

Table 10. 3: School persistence by social class and gender (N & %): Cohort of 1954, Parramatta High School*

(a) Males

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	0	0.0	14	11.5	33	27.0	33	27.0	28	23.0	14	11.5	122	100.0
2 nd	0	0.0	14	12.4	30	26.5	32	28.3	26	23.0	11	9.7	113	100.0
3 rd	0	0.0	13	11.3	32	27.8	33	28.7	25	21.7	12	10.4	115	100.0
4 th	0	0.0	14	14.3	29	29.6	25	25.5	20	20.4	10	10.2	98	100.0
5 th	0	0.0	14	17.3	23	28.4	18	22.2	18	22.2	8	9.9	81	100.0

(b) Females

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	1	1.4	8	10.8	26	35.1	18	24.3	13	17.6	8	10.8	74	100.0
2 nd	1	1.4	7	10.1	24	34.8	16	23.2	13	18.8	8	11.6	69	100.0
3 rd	1	1.4	7	10.1	25	36.2	17	24.6	12	17.4	7	10.1	69	100.0
4 th	1	1.9	8	15.4	21	40.4	9	17.3	7	13.5	6	11.5	52	100.0
5 th	1	2.1	7	14.9	20	42.6	8	17.0	6	12.8	5	10.6	47	100.0

(c) Total

Year level	Proprietorial middle class (rural)		Proprietorial middle class (urban)		Employed middle class		Skilled working class		Unskilled working class		Unknown, Other		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 st	1	0.5	22	11.2	59	30.1	51	26.0	41	20.9	22	11.2	196	100.0
2 nd	1	0.5	21	11.5	54	29.7	48	26.4	39	21.4	19	10.4	182	100.0
3 rd	1	0.5	20	10.9	57	31.0	50	27.2	37	20.1	19	10.3	184	100.0
4 th	1	0.7	22	14.7	50	33.3	34	22.7	27	18.0	16	10.7	150	100.0
5 th	1	0.8	21	16.4	43	33.6	26	20.3	24	18.8	13	10.2	128	100.0

*The cohort includes all students who are recorded in the *Admissions Register* as entering the school in first year in 1954, second year in 1955, third year in 1956, fourth year in 1957 or fifth year in 1958. The majority of students in the cohort began at the school in first year. The next largest group of 23 students, 16 boys and 7 girls, joined the cohort in fourth year. The table shows the cohort's changing size as the students either progressed through the school or left.

Table 10.4: School persistence by gender (N & %): Cohort of 1954, Parramatta High School*

Year level	Males		Females		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
First year	122	62.2	74	37.8	196	100.0
Second year	113	62.1	69	37.9	182	100.0
Third year	115	62.5	69	37.5	184	100.0
Fourth year	98	65.3	52	34.7	150	100.0
Fifth year	81	63.3	47	36.7	128	100.0
<i>Total enrolments</i>	<i>150</i>	<i>64.1</i>	<i>84</i>	<i>35.9</i>	<i>234</i>	<i>100.0</i>

* The table shows the cohort's changing size as the students either progressed through the school or left. Although the numbers of boys and girls were uneven, in relative terms both groups had similar patterns of persistence.

Table 10.5: Intermediate Certificates awarded as a percentage of 1st to 3rd year enrolments (N & %): Cohort of 1954, Parramatta High School*

Boys (n=130)		Girls (n=77)		Total (n=207)	
N	%	N	%	N	%
98	75.4	66	85.8	164	79.2

*Pupils sat for the Intermediate Certificate at the end of third year so the table measures examination success as a percentage of first to third year enrolments only. The table shows that most students who began at the school in first, second or third year were successful in gaining their Intermediate Certificate, girls relatively more so than boys.

Table 10.6: Leaving Certificates awarded as a percentage of 1st to 5th year enrolments (N & %): Cohort of 1954, Parramatta High School*

Boys (n=150)		Girls (n=84)		Total (n=234)	
N	%	N	%	N	%
72	48.0	42	50.0	114	48.7

*Pupils sat for the Leaving at the end of fifth year. The table shows that nearly half of all students who enrolled at the high school were awarded a Leaving Certificate, boys and girls in similar proportions of their total numbers.

**Table 10.7: Leaving Certificate subjects passed at 'A' or Honours level (N & %):
Cohort of 1954, Parramatta High School***

Number of higher grades	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
None	24	33.3	7	16.7	31	27.2
1	15	20.8	10	23.8	25	21.9
2-3	22	30.6	17	40.5	39	34.2
4-5	10	13.9	7	16.7	17	14.9
6	1	1.4	1	2.4	2	1.7
Total	72	100.0	42	100.0	114	100.0

*Pupils gained Leaving Certificate passes in individual subjects at different levels, either by attempting the more difficult honours examination paper or by gaining an A grade in the common paper. A students who gained, for example, a Leaving Certificate result of 2 honours, three As and a B, as did Juliet Rolleston, the dux of the year in 1958, was considered to have achieved more highly than a student who only passed four subjects, all with B grades. This table summarises the number of A or honours grades gained by students from the 1954 cohort who passed the Leaving Certificate. In this cohort girls gained more A or honours grades than boys, in relative terms.

Table 10.8: Leaving Certificate subjects (N & %): Cohort of 1954, Parramatta High School*

	Boys (n=72)		Girls (n=42)		Total (n=114)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
English	63	87.5	41	97.6	104	91.2
Mathematics I	49	68.0	14	33.3	63	55.3
Mathematics II	49	68.0	14	33.3	63	55.3
General Mathematics	18	25.0	20	47.6	38	33.3
Chemistry	53	73.6	10	23.8	63	55.3
Physics	45	62.5	9	21.4	54	47.4
Latin	0	0.0	2	4.7	2	1.7
French	15	20.8	19	45.2	34	29.8
Dutch	0	0.0	1	2.4	1	0.9
Modern History	23	31.9	30	71.4	73	64.0
Ancient History	0	0.0	6	14.3	6	5.3
Geography	27	37.5	26	61.9	53	46.5
Economics	14	19.4	21	50.0	35	30.7
Music	1	1.4	2	4.8	3	2.6
Accountancy	5	6.9	1	2.4	6	5.3
Descriptive Geometry and Drawing	12	16.7	0	0	12	10.5

*The table lists each of the subjects passed by the Leaving Certificate students of the 1954 cohort. The table shows the number of students who passed each subject as a percentage of the total successful candidature for each gender. For example for the compulsory subject English, 87.5 per cent of all the boys who gained their Leaving Certificates achieved a pass in English as did 97.6 per cent of Leaving Certificate girls. Overall 91.2 per cent of all successful Leaving Certificate candidates passed English.

Conclusion

Coeducation in policy and practice

Can anyone fully inhabit a gender without a degree of horror? How could someone 'be a woman' through and through, make a final home in that classification without suffering claustrophobia? To lead a life soaked in the passionate consciousness of one's gender at every single moment, to will to be a sex with a vengeance – these are impossibilities and far from the aims of feminism.¹

There are a number of gaps in the historiography of New South Wales secondary schooling. One of these is a lack of research into the history of the coeducational high schools founded by the New South Wales government under the great schooling reforms of 1911-12. This is despite the considerable interest in late twentieth century coeducational high schools demonstrated by researchers investigating the gender dynamics of Australian classrooms since about the 1980s.² It is also despite the historical significance of coeducation in facilitating the growth of public secondary schooling in New South Wales during the twentieth century. The economies of scale provided by coeducation made possible both major twentieth century expansions in state secondary schooling: the 1911-12 expansion of academically selective high schools for the few and the mid century introduction of comprehensive high schools for all.

This study argues that coeducation is not only important to understand for its own sake but also that an investigation of coeducation can offer fresh insights into the gender relations of the early twentieth century public high school in New South Wales. Theories and practices of coeducation were intrinsically connected with the school's work in the making of both gender identities and gender relations. The establishment and management of coeducational or 'mixed' institutions was underpinned, whether explicitly or implicitly, by specific beliefs about the natures, needs and possibilities of adolescent

¹ Denise Riley, 'Does sex have a history?' in J. W. Scott (ed.) *Feminism and history*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 22.

² Judith Gill, *Which way to school?: a review of the evidence on the single sex versus coeducation debate and an annotated bibliography of the research*, Curriculum Development Centre, Canberra, 1988.

boys and girls. The coeducational high school, by its very organisation, was compelled to address questions of gender across various realms: academic, social, moral and physical.

The thesis is a history of coeducation and gender relations at a pioneering New South Wales state high school during the first half of the twentieth century. The school is Parramatta High School, an academically-selective, mixed-sex public school established by the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction on the western outskirts of Sydney in 1913. The study is not designed to contribute to the literature of comparison between single-sex and coeducational classrooms. Rather it studies one coeducational institution in detail. It is a history 'from below', which places an individual school at the centre of its analysis. It is intended to contribute to an understanding of the complexities and contingencies of coeducation and gender relations by close observation of the common routines and events of schooling, and investigation of the meaning of these in the lives of students and their families. These 'ordinary' processes are examined in the context of the theories and policies concerning mixed-sex schooling espoused by educationalists and policy makers from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s.

The study has been informed by late twentieth century theories of gender which viewed identity as non-unitary, and influenced by historical setting.³ A central argument is that coeducation cannot satisfactorily be defined or understood as a single philosophy or practice, dealing with easily-divided categories of 'boy' and 'girl', but rather encompassed a collection of sometimes incongruent ideas, practices and assumptions. It was not a uniform or invariable system, nor one which operated to produce or reproduce a straightforward gender order or hierarchy. It was shaped by historical time and place and by large and small social and schooling contexts. Most importantly, gender at Parramatta High was mediated by early twentieth century ideologies of merit and academic aptitude; by the sorting of New South Wales children into different kinds of schools and into hierarchical systems of ranks and grades within those schools.

³ Joan Wallach Scott, 'Gender: a useful category of analysis' in J. W. Scott, *Gender and the politics of history*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, pp. 28-50; J. W. Scott, Introduction and Denise Riley, 'Does sex have a history?' in J. W. Scott (ed.), *Feminism and history*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1996, pp. 1-13 and pp. 17-33.

Coeducation is a system of school organisation with both progressive and pragmatic genealogies. From the late nineteenth century its benefits were promoted by progressive educators in terms of individual self-development and the betterment of the social relations between women and men. However the overwhelming majority of coeducational or 'mixed' high schools were founded by administrators of public schooling systems for pragmatic fiscal reasons. The adoption of mixed sex schooling facilitated a movement to meritocratic systems of grouping and grading – the establishment of an educational ladder of opportunity – in a number of countries. Coeducation was an important element of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century expansions of post-elementary schooling in the United States of America, England and Australia. It was also most contested and controversial for the older or 'adolescent' children who populated these kinds of schools.

One of the tasks of this study was to investigate what was meant or understood by the term, 'coeducation' at the time of this foundation period. A useful avenue of enquiry was a set of well-publicised debates about coeducation which occurred in England and the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. These were debates which are either known or likely to have been read by New South Wales policy makers and educationalists. The debates' leaders included the United States Commissioner of Education William T. Harris, the pioneer of adolescent psychology G. Stanley Hall and a vocal group of representatives of English upper class progressive schools. Among them these administrators and experts held a variety of views about what coeducation was and should be. The English progressives believed that coeducation should be adopted for idealistic reasons: for the purpose of creating a more healthy environment for children's psychological development, including the development of their sexual identities.⁴ The United States administrator, Harris, argued that it was an economically responsible solution to the problem of the expense of high school foundation, which had also been

⁴ A. Woods (ed.), *Co-education: a series of essays by various authors*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1903.

proven by experience to be educationally sound.⁵ The psychologist, Hall, expressed the view that coeducation was a dangerous system which was beginning to have disastrous effects on United States girls' and boys' gender identities and on girls' reproductive health.⁶ Hall's opposition to coeducation was part of a broader opposition to girls' exposure to the 'male' academic curriculum.

The early twentieth century debates focussed on a specific set of key issues. Probably the most important was the projected effect of gender mixing in schools on the future of the family. Coeducation, it was argued, might have effects well beyond the here and now of the classroom. Girls and boys in a mixed school stood to develop a wholesome companionship which would make for happier marriages later in life. Working in a classroom together would shift the emphasis in relations between the sexes from superficial, outward attractiveness to deeper and more thoughtful assessments of qualities of mind and spirit. On the other hand the girls might strain their health in keeping pace with boys or be placed in moral danger. Both supporters and opponents took seriously the responsibility of the school in the protection of girls' physical and moral health and 'hygiene'. Neither supporters nor opponents, however, doubted that girls could manage academically as well as if not better than boys in mixed classrooms, the question was whether this was desirable. It is also true that it was possible for both supporters and opponents of coeducation to hold the paradoxical view that the undoubted academic achievements of girls were evidence, not of equal or superior intellect, but of limits in their minds. Girls, it was argued, were conscientious rote learners; biddable and conformist and. Part of their value (or harm) in the classroom lay in this docility, which also operated to calm (or repress) their male peers.

Although they shared many preoccupations, the English and United States coeducation theorists were writing in different national contexts and these different traditions account for differences in the historiography of coeducation between England and the United

⁵ For example, United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the year 1900-1901* Government Printing Office, Washington, 1902, p 1241n.

States. Historians of English schooling such as Carol Dyhouse and Kevin Brehony found early twentieth century coeducation advocates inadequate in several respects, identifying in their writings a willingness to overlook the problems for women teachers' careers and a tendency to subordinate the interests of female students to those of their male peers.⁷ For the United States historians John L. Rury, David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, on the other hand, the coeducational high school, for all its flaws, was nevertheless more egalitarian than other contemporary social institutions.⁸ Historical evaluations of coeducation have depended on assessments of what the alternatives might have been. In England there was a tradition of upper class girls' schools, such as those run by Frances Buss and Dorothea Beale, which offered access to the same high status public examinations as the leading boys' schools. Alternatives to the coeducational high school in the United States, according to Rury, Tyack and Hansot, might have been either poorly funded girls' schools or nominally mixed high schools in which the curriculum was differentiated along vocational lines for male and female students.

New South Wales experienced its own trajectory for the development of coeducational secondary schooling, although its educationalists continued to look overseas for models. New South Wales lacked the detailed coeducation debates of England and the United States, although some interest in the topic was aroused by the Knibbs Turner commission during the opening years of the twentieth century. Coeducation, as well as the beliefs underpinning many aspects of gender organisation in the academic high school, were matters that, for the most part, were not publicly discussed by New South Wales policy makers or educators during the first half of the twentieth century. The contributions of participants in the 1904 Public Instruction Department Conference held to discuss the

⁶ G. Stanley Hall, 'Adolescent girls and their education' in *Adolescence: its psychology and its relations to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion and education*, Sidney Appleton, London, 1904, vol. 2, pp. 561-647.

⁷ Carol Dyhouse, 'Feminism and the debate over co-education/ single sex schooling: some historical perspectives,' in June Purvis, (ed.), *The education of girls and women: proceedings of the 1984 annual conference of the History of Education Society of Great Britain*, Leicester, 1985, pp. 47-60; Kevin Brehony, 'Co-education: perspectives and debates in the early twentieth-century,' in Deem (ed.), *co-education reconsidered*, pp. 1-20.

⁸ John L. Rury, *Education and women's work: female schooling and the division of labor in urban America, 1870-1930*, State University of New York Press, Albany N.Y., 1991; David Tyack and Elisabeth Hansot, *Learning together: a history of coeducation in American schools*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990.

first volume of the Knibbs Turner Report, however, indicate that people associated with the state schools of New South Wales, especially teachers, were likely to form their own opinions from practice, even if these were not recorded in writing. When the Under-secretary of the Public Instruction Department made the statement to the conference, 'This system of co-education I have studied for over forty years,' he was describing an understanding derived from a long teaching career, in addition to his experience 'as the father of a family'.⁹ The education commissioner, J. W. Turner expressed a personal view in favour of coeducation, having been persuaded by the United States Education Commissioner, William T. Harris's arguments that an economic solution to high school expansion might also be pedagogically sound, but he was unwilling to enter into controversy over the issue.¹⁰

From the late nineteenth century, single-sex schooling in New South Wales was associated both with the socially-elite non-government sector and with the leading metropolitan high schools, notably the Sydney Girls' and Boys' High Schools. The public high schools founded under the Public Instruction Act of 1880 were determinedly single-sex institutions, even though they offered access on broadly equal terms for girls and boys to public examination credentials. During the 1880s and 1890s regional high schools were permitted to close rather than become coeducational. By the 1910s, however, while there is little evidence of advocacy of coeducation on principle, the New South Wales Department of Public Instruction had apparently reached the conclusion that coeducation would facilitate the achievement of two of its key aims. These were the expansion of public high schools into regional and rural areas and the clarification of the boundary between elementary and high schools.

Nevertheless, where numbers allowed the Department of Public Instruction continued to found single-sex rather than mixed high schools. Correspondence between William Atkins, the headmaster of Parramatta High School and two senior Department Public

⁹ New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Conference of inspectors, teachers, departmental officers and prominent educationists*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1904, p. 163.

¹⁰ New South Wales Department of Public Instruction, *Interim report of the Commissioners [Knibbs and Turner] on certain parts of primary education*, Government printer, Sydney, 1903, p. 467.

Instruction officers, Walter Elliott and Peter Board, suggests that all three men looked forward to a time when the school would separate into two single-sex institutions. As far as it is possible to tell from the evidence available, Atkins does not seem to have believed that boys and girls should be educated in different ways or that they had different academic needs or aptitudes. Rather his suggestion that the school be divided seems to have been based upon an idea of what the model of a leading high school should be – a school like Sydney Boys or Sydney Girls High – together with his own sense of the extra work caused by the management of two separate categories of student in terms of sports and pastoral care. The division of the school was mooted on somewhat different grounds in the conservative gender policy climate of the Great Depression, when plans were made to transfer the high school girls to a new set of premises which were to be built next door to the Parramatta Domestic Science School. However in neither of these two instances was the opposition to mixed schooling of sufficient strength to outweigh other considerations, especially financial considerations.

During the mid 1950s the Wyndham Committee deliberations provided both a stimulus and a forum for the public expression of common sense, anecdotal readings of coeducation, together with the collection of expert opinions current at that time. Although the academically-selective Parramatta High School was cited as a successful model of coeducation in action, it was evident in these discussions that coeducation had become increasingly associated with modern social-psychological beliefs about adolescent development, and with the idea that secondary schools should assist with this process in addition to their academic duties. A shift was occurring in the understanding of the term ‘high school’ in New South Wales from the identification of an academic elite to the signification of an institution for all adolescents. Coeducation was argued to be beneficial to relations between the sexes and the development of gendered identities and adolescent sexuality. Connected with this was a belief that adolescent sexual and psychological development should take place under the gaze of the high school. The expertise of the school teacher was potentially more to be relied upon than the unregulated governance either of the family – as not all homes were up to scratch – or worse, popular culture. At

the same time the widespread adoption of coeducation in high schools founded from the 1960s was probably as much to do with economics as ideology.

Parramatta High School was founded under the reforms of 1911-12. Although it was one of the first mixed high schools established in New South Wales and remained the only coeducational (full) high school in Sydney until the late 1950s, it did not initially announce itself as a coeducational institution. However, the fact that Parramatta High was able to survive and grow as a mixed school was an important element of its difference from the other providers of youth training and education in the community. It is difficult, for example, to imagine either The King's School or the Parramatta Domestic Science School as coeducational. This was because of the centrality to the high school of meritocratic discourses, which were ostensibly blind to categories other than those of intellectual effort and ability. From the point of view of its supporters, Parramatta High School was both 'the people's school' – open to all regardless of family wealth or station – and the 'Oxford of Australia', accommodating an intellectual elite.¹¹ During this early period the school was rarely described as 'mixed' or coeducational' in public or official forums. Rather it was an academic high school, which both boys and girls happened to attend. Proposals to divide the school in two from 1919 demonstrate that mixed schooling was regarded by some education department officers as system of compromise. By the 1940s, however, there were signs that this view was changing, that coeducation had actually turned out to be an integral part of the school's work rather than merely an administrative circumstance. This was apparent both in the student protest in defence of coeducation in 1943 and the establishment of special ties with the coeducational Canberra High School the same year. At the same time, gender continued to be mediated by strong meritocratic discourses.

The aim of this study has been to achieve a rich and layered understanding of what it meant to be a girl or boy at this coeducational and academically-selective public high school. Working from an understanding that coeducation varied in different contexts, the thesis used different kinds of historical sources to explore different kinds of school

¹¹ *The Cumberland Argus and Fruitgrowers' advocate*, 19 December 1914, 1 March 1913.

settings. Traditional documentary sources, enrolment data, curriculum patterns and oral histories offered different kinds of readings of coeducational theory and practice. Authorship, intended audience and other circumstances of production contributed to variations in the representation of gender relations. Broadly speaking the more public and official sources, such as early accounts of the school in the local newspaper, the school magazines and public examination lists tended to emphasise academic hierarchies and middle-class cultural affiliations over gendered identities. In the confidential correspondence files, in contrast, which documented disciplinary matters, pastoral care and conditions of employment, the school appears to be a more explicitly divided place, where male and female staff and students belonged to different categories of people. Both of these views were evident in interviews with ex-students which included strong recollections of where they were ranked academically, together with accounts of conventional double standards of dress and deportment. Former students were also able to place the school in other social contexts such as family, community and subsequent career.

For the whole of the period examined in this study, Parramatta High School was populated by a very specific group of students, who had in common that they had passed through some sort of meritocratic barrier to enrol at the school. For most students this was a competitive examination taken at the end of primary school. Once enrolled at Parramatta there were powerful discourses operating which encouraged its students to align themselves with or measure themselves against a middle class educated culture. The twentieth-century New South Wales public high school was an institution in which particular ways of behaving and of seeing the world were produced and affirmed. One forum for the expression of this was the school magazine. Writing in the magazines operated both to identify and shape the features of a shared middle class culture as well collectively to define high school students by the ways in which they could be seen to be different from others categories of people, especially the uneducated. The Parramatta High School magazines celebrated whiteness, literacy, good taste and rational behaviour for girls and boys collectively. At the same time it was apparent that there were settings within the school and aspects of school life in which different kinds of behaviour was

expected of girls and boys. These included some divided citizenship duties. Girls might provide afternoon tea for visitors or arrange flowers. Boys might repair the venetian blinds or polish the floors for a school dance. In the satirical Class Notes of the 1910s and 1920s boys and girls assigned themselves and each other to different factions within their academically streamed classes. For example, the boys were the pranksters; the girls were the chatterboxes.

An analysis of enrolment data and public examination results for five of the student cohorts which passed through the school between 1913 and 1958 offered a number of insights into the interaction of social class, gender and merit. Some important features of school life emerged from this analysis. For example although much of the writing in the school magazine implied an orderly progression from first year to Leaving Certificate year, this was the experience of only a minority. Large numbers of students stayed at the school for only a brief time, especially from the earlier cohorts. In each of the cohorts which enrolled at the school before the Second World War, fewer than half of the students who had enrolled in first or second year gained the Intermediate Certificate and a only very small minority the Leaving Certificate. This meant that the populations of the junior and senior parts of the school were not only substantially different in size but also might differ in gender and social class composition. Although it increased in popularity over the period of this study the Leaving Certificate continued to be a minority achievement, but for the 1947 and 1954 cohorts the gaining of an Intermediate Certificate had become fairly routine.

The parents of students came from a range of social class categories, including substantial numbers of both middle class and working class families. The public high school provided relatively low cost secondary schooling to children of parents who were unlikely to have experienced prolonged schooling themselves, or have been able to access private or corporate schooling. Children of middle class parents, however, especially from the stratum of the middle class who were employees rather than proprietors, such as school teachers and clerks, tended to stay longer at the school than those from working class families. Parramatta High was truly a mixed school in the sense

that it accommodated substantial numbers of both boys and girls, despite some differences in patterns of persistence for boys and girls at specific periods which were consistent with the demands and opportunities of the gendered employment market and may also have been affected by changes in local education and training markets.

Entry to the school was academically selective on ostensibly the same terms for boys and girls. Parramatta High School students had in common that they had already proved themselves to be skilled examination candidates. Although the study identified periods in which girls and boys entered or left the school in different numbers, once inside the school there is little evidence that boys or girls academically outperformed each other to any strong or consistent degree, as measured by passes in the two major external examinations. There is no evidence to suggest that either girls or boys were proscribed from taking particular academic subjects on the grounds of gender, although the few vocational subjects taken were divided along traditional lines. For the cohorts of 1913, 1921 and 1933 there were few differences between the kinds of subjects passed by girls and boys. For the 1947 and 1954 cohorts, however, the lists of public examination results were more conventionally gendered, with proportionally more boys passing higher mathematics and physics, relatively more girls passing French or history.

Another kind of perspective on coeducation and gender relations at the high school comes from reading the management paperwork collected on the school's correspondence files, kept by the Department of Public Instruction between 1913 and 1940. Among other things the files documented grievance and discipline cases considered serious enough for intervention or ratification by the central office of the Department of Public Instruction in Sydney. Although many of the cases on the files were, by definition, exceptional rather than routine, they at times forced the headmaster and senior officers of the Department to explain or justify practices that might otherwise be much less visible to the historian. In these files, unlike either the school magazines or the public examination lists gender appears as a fundamental category of identity, for teachers as well as students. Also evident in the bureaucratic forms and language of the correspondence is

the way that a very specific set of gender assumptions and regulations were made to appear routine, rational or natural.

Boys and girls, male and female teachers were differentiated in the files in several ways. Female students were frequently represented as passive and collectively in need of protection by the school from physical and moral harm, perpetually childlike. Boys, on the other hand, were more autonomous, potentially adult. Problems arose for boys when they were unable to resolve the tensions between their relative independence and the docility required of the school pupil. Some male teachers, similarly, had trouble negotiating the demands of modern organisational masculinity, with its strict adherence to correct procedure. The files also demonstrate ways in which male and female teachers' careers were viewed differently by the Department, such as during the period of the Married Women Teachers' Act. While these inequities between men and women, boys and girls, are quite apparent in the files, it is not evident for the most part that these were caused or made worse by coeducation itself. An important exception to this was the lack of a career path for women teachers in the coeducational high school. This was especially important in a school where substantial number of both male and female students aimed to enter the state teaching service. It was also significant that, in the absence of opportunities in the academic posts of department head or principal, the senior position for women teachers, girls' supervisor, was expressly concerned with the maintenance of bourgeois femininity in the form of the presentation and protection of girls' bodies. This was precisely the field of school governance which most set girls apart from boys.

A series of oral history interviews was conducted by the author for the purpose of examining gender, family membership, social class and 'intelligence' in the lives of individual students who attended the school between the 1910s and the 1950s. These men and women expressed a variety of opinions about their coeducational high schooling. For *John*, leaving school before the senior years, coeducation was reasonably immaterial. He recollected having had little to do with girls. *Olive*, who stayed for the Leaving, on the other hand, believed that it gave her confidence dealing with men in her later professional life. *Marcia* enjoyed the influence of the boys' on the school's culture. Some male ex

students, on the other hand, remembered lamenting the lack of sporting talent in a school which was only half a boys' school. For *Gordon* and *Marion* it was important that their coeducation was practised in a youth culture which was different of that of subsequent decades – more obedient, less free, with different patterns of leisure. More important than having attended a mixed school was that ex-students had been family pioneers of prolonged schooling. Many positioned themselves as participants in family projects of social mobility through schooling. For most of the students interviewed the school's meritocratic discourses were very powerful. Gaining entry to the high school was a big step in their lives. Once inside the school, their allocation to a stream or rank was very important. Some opinions about the differing aptitudes of boys and girls were expressed, but not strongly. As in other sources, it was very clear in the interviews that girls and boys were treated differently in terms of the presentation of the body and the regulation of morality. At these moments girls might feel collectively separate, part of a sub-category or subculture.

Although former students routinely referred to themselves and others as 'one of the girls' or 'one of the boys', it was clear that there were many different ways of being a girl or being a boy at Parramatta High School. *Dorothy* and *Anne*, for example, had very different experiences and career paths through the school, as did *Bill* and *Max*. *Max* and *Anne*, secure in the A stream, felt strongly validated by the school, *Bill* and *Dorothy*, on the other hand, recalled instances of feeling less intelligent or capable than their peers. *Anne's* and *Bill's* parents were keen to see them gain high school qualifications, with different degrees of success. *Dorothy's* parents, in her recollection, did not value her educational achievements in the same way they valued those of her brothers.

In their study of United States coeducation, Tyack and Hansot found that coeducation became entrenched in public schools mostly without ideological underpinning or debate. In documenting strongly articulated turn of the century fears that coeducational high schools 'feminised' boys, and concerns of feminists in the 1980s that girls were being disadvantaged in coeducation classrooms, Tyack and Hansot nevertheless found that coeducation survived as the dominant schooling form, mostly unthreatened by 'policy

talk' and critique: 'Institutional convenience, the preference of educators for familiar ways, and demographic and economic pressures have often had more to do with the introduction and retention of gender practices in the schools than consensus reforms or gender ideology.'¹² R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar similarly concluded that coeducation and a not very differentiated curriculum came to dominate secondary education in Ontario despite rather than because of prevailing Canadian gender ideologies and the intentions of senior bureaucrats.¹³ High schools were formulated by policy makers as boys' institutions which girls happened to attend, even if in large numbers. Girls were taught 'like the boys' and 'with the boys'.¹⁴ Tyack and Hansot further argued that gender varied in importance as an organising principle within schools in different schools settings, for example from classroom to playground, and also that gender relations in schools were different in specific ways from those in families, workplaces and so on. They concluded that gender had been less influential historically than race and class as a predictor of school performance and less important than 'age and proficiency' in school regulations and organisation.¹⁵

Despite some important differences between the histories of the North American and New South Wales public high school – notably the persistence in New South Wales of both a strong non-government sector and a tradition of single-sex secondary schooling – there are some consistencies between these studies and the findings of the current project. In the same way that Ontario and United States high schools largely became and remained mixed-sex institutions by practice rather than intention, it seems that Parramatta High School remained coeducational despite the preferences of key figures such as the Education Minister D. H. Drummond. There is little evidence of any detailed theoretical justification of coeducation during the first four decades of the high school's history, notwithstanding a cautious embrace of its mixed status from the 1940s.

¹² Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, p. 292.

¹³ R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Inventing secondary education: the rise of the high school in nineteenth-century Ontario* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1990, pp. 231-249.

¹⁴ Gidney and Millar, *Inventing secondary education*, p. 314.

¹⁵ Tyack and Hansot, *Learning together*, p. 290.

In terms of the practice of coeducation, this study was organised around the idea that schools are complex institutions which encompass a variety of settings and contexts. Accordingly, different kinds of historical sources were analysed in order to achieve a detailed understanding of the different kinds of meanings which gender and coeducation may have had for the school's students during its first forty years. At Parramatta High School it is evident that girls and boys were made aware that they belonged either to the category 'boy' or 'girl'. In certain contexts, especially pastoral care, they were treated as if they were different kinds of people and students must have been aware, at some level, that their female teachers never held the position of principal or deputy or head of department. Coeducation was a visible aspect of school life for Parramatta High School students – more so than in the United States or Canada – largely because of inter-school sports competitions. Boys especially might feel disadvantaged in playing sports against the other metropolitan high schools which were all single-sex schools. On the other hand both boys and girls might feel that they benefited from their coeducational schooling, in that they learned more 'natural' ways of relating to the other sex. Co-existing or competing with this consciousness of gender, however, were strongly expressed discourses of academic merit. The girls and boys of Parramatta High School were encouraged to think of themselves as high school students, an educated elite who had earned their entry to the school and their academic rank within it. This was the dominant culture against which they were encouraged to measure themselves, an experience that was more empowering for some than others. Together they sang the Marseillaise in French on Empire Day, wrote witty pieces for the school magazines and were able to recall decades later whether they had been in the A, B or C classes at the school.

Appendix A

A further note on method

The methodology of this thesis was determined by both its subject matter and theoretical perspective. The central subject matter of the thesis was the everyday world of an ordinary school. In theoretical terms the thesis aimed to explore the mundane but powerful repetitive practices by which gender and merit were enacted. Public and other schools have long been recognised as important sites in the shaping of modern, twentieth century subjectivities. This study set out to explore the interaction of gender and merit in a setting which had been hitherto somewhat neglected in the historiography, the regional coeducational New South Wales public secondary school.

The aim of the thesis was to write a history of coeducation which was grounded in the specifics of the schoolroom and an institutional history which explored the everyday world of students. As a departure from some more conventional traditions of institutional history, the intention of the study was to examine the complex and contradictory nature of ordinary human experience. The study did not set out to uncover a set of simple truths about Parramatta High School, nor to arrive at, through the use of “triangulation” or other tools, a central organising narrative line, for example of cause and effect or action and reaction. Social institutions, it is argued, are ideologically messy places. Human beliefs and behaviours are not only varied, but frequently inconsistent, and therefore it might be more useful to theorise a school institution as a site for competing discourses, rather than in other more straightforward ways. This is not the same as arguing that the school’s students or teachers were able to exercise the freedom necessarily to pick and choose which discourses or readings of their situations suited them best, in some sort of market version of variety. The work of the thesis was not simply to collect or record a set of interpretations, but to labour through close reading to explore the fine dimensions of historical texts for the purpose of identifying and tracking the exercise of different kinds of social power, especially in the organisation and regulation of gender and merit.

The method employed was to identify and read key sets of historical texts. The specific texts are listed below but in general terms they were theorised as a set of competing authorities, representing different and/or similar versions or aspects of school life. Both the collection and analysis of these sources presented particular challenges. The simple act of finding sources is arguably more difficult for studies of the everyday than for the policy or administrative histories which have tended to dominate the field of history of education.¹ On one hand the high school was a public institution, founded and administered by the democratic state and therefore ostensibly open to observation by the community and publicly accountable. Certain aspects of school life were systematically recorded and preserved; some of them, such as public examination results, in considerable detail. On the other hand much of the source material exists in a haphazard or unsystematic form. Correspondence between parents and the school, for example, was collected for the purpose of everyday administration and without an eye on posterity. Other material has undoubtedly been lost or destroyed, either considered too mundane to preserve, or relying on the paper-managing habits of individuals. Another problem is the nature of the sources themselves. Historical documents not only privilege the voices of metropolitan officials and elites, but also frequently appear silent about deeply embedded practices and beliefs, especially in regard to gender. Despite the existence of the educational treatises and policy documents discussed in the second and third chapters of this thesis, it quickly became clear in the research process for this project that coeducation as a form of school organisation was frequently carried out at the high school in accord with taken-for-granted or even unconscious gender theories rather than openly-stated principles.

The identification and reading of sources for this thesis was influenced by a number of writers who had also sought to write histories of “ordinary” schools, scholars and teachers. David Labaree (for the United States) and Alison Mackinnon and Craig Campbell (for South Australia) used records of student enrolment, persistence and public examination passes to describe important aspects of the collective experiences of school students, especially the importance of social class origins in academic

¹ Kate Rousmaniere, Kari Dehli, and Ning de Coninck-Smith (eds), *Discipline, moral regulation, and schooling*, Garland, New York, 1997, p. 10; M Depaepe, ‘Educationalisation: a key concept in understanding the basic processes of the history of western education,’ *History of Education Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1998, p. 24.

success in the modern public high school.² Canadian studies by Bruce Curtis and R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar and a study of Sydney Girls High School by Marjorie Theobald examined the exercise of power by central bureaucracies in public education by fine reading of conventional archival sources such as correspondence files.³ Lesley Johnson read a set of widely disseminated Australian public texts of the 1950 and '60s from the theoretical perspective of the space they delimited within which a 'modern girl' might act or understand herself.⁴ Reed Ueda used the early twentieth century school magazines of a Boston High School to document the formation of modern kinds of youth peer groups.⁵ In Janet McCalman's, *Journeyings*, oral history interviews were analysed to form the collective 'biography of a middle-class generation'.⁶ These studies have in common that they make explicit what it is that particular kinds of sources can tell us about what happened in the past. The identification and reading of the sources is to some extent part of the story.

The sources used in this study of Parramatta High School depended to a large extent on what was extant. It was also important to choose texts which examined different aspects and levels of practice. Educational theory and policy writings were examined to provide a larger context for the everyday world of the high school, as well as to attempt to answer the question of what ideas and beliefs about gender and coeducation might have been circulating in the public domain at important moments in the history of the school. Other contemporary texts were firmly anchored in the local school community. The confidential correspondence files preserved by the bureaucrats of the New South Wales Education Department addressed issues such as staff relations and the pastoral care and disciplining of students. School magazines and local newspaper reports tended to present the school's formal, official face. Public

² David Labaree, *The making of an American high school*, New Haven, York University Press, 1988; Alison Mackinnon, *One foot on the ladder: origins and outcomes of girls' secondary schooling in South Australia*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1984; Craig Campbell, *The rise of mass secondary schooling and modern adolescence: a social history of youth in southern Adelaide, 1901-1965*, Ph. D. Thesis, University of Adelaide, 1994.

³ Bruce Curtis, *Building the educational state: Canada West, 1836-1871*, London, Ontario, The Falmer Press, 1988; R. D. Gidney and W. P. J. Millar, *Inventing secondary education: the rise of the high school in nineteenth-century Ontario* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1990; Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing women: origins of women's education in nineteenth-century Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1996, pp. 91-129.

⁴ Lesley Johnson, *Modern girl: girlhood and growing up*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993.

⁵ Reed Ueda, *Avenues to adulthood: the origins of the high school and social mobility in an American suburb*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp.119-152.

⁶ Janet McCalman, *Journeyings: the biography of a middle-class generation 1920-1990*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993

examination lists and school registers systematically recorded quantifiable details about entire peer groups within the school. Oral history interviews were conducted to explore in detail the meaning of the modern high school experience in the lives of individuals and their families.

In more traditional institutional histories the work of the historian is to synthesise the evidence upon which the writing is based to the extent that the beliefs and viewpoints of the authors of the raw materials are subordinated to an omniscient, unifying narrative or analytic line of argument. The sources upon which the research is based may be intermittently visible in footnotes, reference lists and illustrative quotations, but essentially the reading process occurs behind the scenes. The sources themselves are broken apart, rather than being explicitly theorised as having their own voices, their own unifying principles and perspectives. In contrast, this thesis sought to make visible the reading process by foregrounding the specific characteristics and belief systems of different kinds of sources. Each set of texts was discussed separately in the thesis; a reasonably conventional practice with oral history, much less common for documentary texts. In a sense the thesis is theorised as a conversation among these different groups or perspectives.

As indicated above, the purpose of the thesis was not to arrive at a single pre-eminent reading or to reach one agreed point of interpretation. The principal argument and finding were that neither the system of coeducation, nor the other schooling practices of Parramatta High School, produced a single or uncomplicated gender order or experience. The practice of gender was complex and inconsistent. The thesis employed a mixed methodology to look the high school institution as a site for the interplay of a variety of discourses – some more powerful than others – identified through the close reading of key texts. The “truth” this study aimed to find was an understanding of the ways in which students in particular, but also teachers, parents, politicians and educationalists understood and explained what they were doing when they attended school, sat examinations, made rules and formulated and applied policies. What kinds of texts informed their social and cultural world? How were they represented and how did they represent themselves in these texts? The purpose of the study was to gain as rich and layered an understanding as possible of how it was to be

an Australian girl or boy at a coeducational, academically selective, public secondary school during the first half of the twentieth century.

The oral history project

I have argued that it is unconventional to separate rather than synthesise the voices of documentary records. The position is somewhat the opposite in the case of oral history which is commonly treated as categorically different from other kinds of historical evidence. Oral history is understood to be subject to its own methods and theoretical underpinnings, even mystique. Oral history studies are frequently stand-alone studies – ‘oral histories’ rather than just ‘histories’ – and the historian who embarks on an oral history project must read and make sense of a dedicated body of literature.⁷ This includes guides to method as well as the theoretical discussions about interpretation which have developed over a period of approximately three decades.

The main differences usually identified between oral and traditional documentary sources can be summarised as follows. First, oral history interviews tend to be texts which are created jointly by a historical actor or witness and a historian or researcher. In the case of this study the interviewer was also the person responsible for analysing and writing about the material. In a sense the oral history text is thus ‘contaminated’ by the historian, both because it would not exist if not for the research project, and in the specific line of questioning and prompting employed by the interviewer. Second, oral history interviews are memory texts. The collection and analysis of oral histories rely on particular theories of memory and knowledge. Although older debates about the objectivity of oral history may still persist, this study was more concerned with questions of meaning and interpretation, including the shaping of narratives by larger

⁷ The conduct of this oral history project was informed by a number of texts and studies, especially Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds), *The oral history reader*, Routledge, London, 1998; Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds), *Memory and History in Twentieth-Century Australia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994; Janet McCalman, *Journeyings: the biography of a middle-class generation 1920-1990*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1993; Josephine R. May, *Gender, memory and the experience of selective secondary schooling in Newcastle, New South Wales, from the 1930s to the 1950s*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Newcastle, 2000; Christine Trimmingham Jack, *Kerever Park: a history of the experience of teachers and children in a Catholic girls’ preparatory boarding school, 1944-1965*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney, 1998; Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording oral history: a practical guide for social scientists*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 1994.

communal myths and story patterns as well as by subsequent life experiences.⁸ To some extent the adding or checking of detail about an event in the school's history such as the painting of a white line down the centre of the playground in the 1940s to protest against the separation of senior boys and girls was less important to this study than how the incident had been interpreted by former students. A third issue is the representativeness of oral history. There are many reasons why oral histories do not tend to conform to strict paradigms of representativeness. Oral history participants are characteristically volunteers who feel a strong enough sense of identity with the topic to consider they have something of value to contribute. In the way that all forms of historical record privilege certain voices at the expense of others, oral history may favour the articulate, the confident raconteur. It may also favour the long-lived, the person who is still living in their home town or the reader of the newspapers where historians place their advertisements. Oral history is sufficiently time-consuming and labour intensive at each stage of its production to be usually a small and focused undertaking with a limited number of participants.

The oral history project for this study comprised interviews with 36 former students of whom 21 were directly cited in the final text. The notes and transcripts of interviews with the remaining 15 were used as background. 9 participants were either known to the author or contacted through the author's own personal networks. 27 either responded to a newspaper advertisement or were referred by others who had seen it. Many more offered to assist than it was possible to interview in a project of this size. Although the study did not claim to be representative, it was possible to interview approximately even numbers of women and men and to achieve a good spread of ages. I was able to interview students who had attended the school from each decade of its history, from the 1910s to the 1950s. Former students were armed with the knowledge that the project was a history of coeducation at Parramatta High School and were invited to recount what they could remember of their time at the school in this context. The interviews were very loosely structured with the interviewer using reflective listening techniques to encourage the participants to

⁸ Joan Sangster, 'Telling our stories: feminist debates and the use of oral history' in Perks and Thomson, *The oral history reader*, pp. 87-88; J. Fentress, J. and C. Wickham, *Social memory*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1992; Paula Hamilton, 'The knife edge: debates about memory and history' in Darian-Smith and Hamilton, *Memory and history*, pp. 9-32; Lucy Taksa, 'The masked disease: oral history, memory and the Influenza Pandemic 1918-1919' *Ibid.*, pp. 77-91.

expand on what they felt had been of most significance to them in their time at the school. Interviews lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. The majority of interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The completed transcripts (or in the case of manual note-making, detailed records of conversation) were sent to the participants for corrections, amendment and approval.

Issues of confidentiality and privacy are essential to oral history and in the case of studies conducted within the academy participants are protected by the procedures and protocols of human ethics committees. It was not a requirement for this project that participants' identities be concealed although an offer of anonymity was extended to all interviewees. In all but two instances this offer was declined, however in the end I decided to use pseudonyms for all the participants. This decision was based on the issue of interpretation. While participants had the opportunity and the right to correct, amend or even withdraw any part of all of their transcript texts, the responsibility for writing about those texts was mine as were the interpretations of the material which appear in this thesis. Thus the use of pseudonyms is an acknowledgement not only that these are jointly constructed texts – the product of an interview which was initiated and guided by me – but also that I, as historian, have added an extra layer of meaning in the process of academic analysis.

In this study the oral history interviews were treated in a similar way to other texts. That is, they were read as a group for their own unifying and dividing principles in addition to being examined together with other kinds of sources. In terms of truth claims all kinds of texts should be treated with a mix of scepticism and belief. All texts, not only interview transcripts, were cross-checked and compared using traditional historical tools of determining reliability. It was equally important to be able to imaginatively enter the cultural world of the interviewee or writer, to aim to understand particular cultural references and modes of expression in order to make assessments about the important yet sometimes mundane or taken-for-granted practices of the everyday life of the high school. The particular contribution of the oral history project to the thesis as a whole was in the participants' own interpretations, developed over some decades and expressed through a variety of anecdotes and observations, of their experiences of gender and merit at the high school, issues which had been explained in similar and different ways in the other

sources examined. The oral history transcripts produced for this thesis turned out to be rich and revealing texts containing grounded accounts of complex and historically specific interactions among family, state, school and the gendered employment market.

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Appendix B

Ethics approval and permission forms for oral history project

Approval for the conduct of an oral history project on the subject 'Experiences of coeducation at Parramatta High School, 1913-1968'¹ was granted by the University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee in August 1999. Copies of the letter of approval, information sheet for participants, permission forms and the text of the advertisement calling for participants are included in this appendix as follows:

1. Letter of approval from the University of Sydney Human Ethics Committee, 20 August 1999.
2. Text of the advertisement which appeared in the RSVP column of *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 March 2000.
3. 'Information for participants'
4. 'Agreement to be interviewed' (including permission to be audiotaped)
5. 'Permission-to-use from'

The text of the 'Information for participants' and the permission forms was based on the material used by Christine Trimmingham Jack in her study of 'lived experience' in a mid twentieth century girls' preparatory school.²

¹ The period of the study was subsequently shortened by a decade, to finish in 1958.

² Christine Trimmingham Jack, Kerever Park: a history of the experience of teachers and children in a Catholic girls' preparatory boarding school, 1944-1965, Ph.D. thesis, University of Sydney, 1998, pp. 350-361.



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE
The University of Sydney
Room K4.01 Main Quad A14
Sydney 2006

COPY

Tel: (02) 9351.4474 Fax: (02) 9351.4812 E-mail:human.ethics@reschols.usyd.edu.au

Dr C Campbell
School of Social, Policy and Curriculum Studies
A35

20 August 1999

Dear Dr Campbell

Title: *Experiences of coeducation at Parramatta High School, 1913-1968*

Ref No: 99/04/04


Thank you for your correspondence dated 12 August 1999 addressing comments made to you by the Committee. After considering the additional information, the Committee approved your protocol on the above study. The Committee pointed out that the preferred method of snowballing is for individuals to speak to one another and contact the researcher if they are interested in participating in the study rather than for the researcher to directly contact individuals who have been referred by other participants.

The additional information will be filed with your application.

In order to comply with the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines, and in line with the Human Ethics Committee requirements the Chief Investigator's responsibility is to ensure that:

- (1) The individual researcher's protocol complies with the final and Committee approved protocol.
- (2) Modifications to the protocol cannot proceed until such approval is obtained in writing.
- (3) The confidentiality and anonymity of all research subjects is maintained at all times, except as required by law.
- (4) All research subjects are provided with a Subject Information Sheet and Consent Form.
- (5) The Subject Information Sheet and Consent Form be on University of Sydney letterhead and include the full title of the research project and telephone contacts for the researchers.
- (6) The following statement appears on the Subject Information Sheet:
Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager of Ethics and Biosafety Administration, University of Sydney, on (02) 9351 4811.
- (7) The standard University policy concerning storage of data should be followed. While temporary storage of audio-tapes at the researcher's home or an off-campus site is acceptable during the active transcription phase of the project, permanent storage should be at a secure, University controlled site for a minimum of five years.
- (8) A progress report is provided by the end of each year. Failure to do so will lead to withdrawal of the approval of the research protocol and re-application to the Committee must occur before recommencing.
- (9) A report and a copy of the published material is provided at the end of the project.

Yours sincerely ?


Professor Barry Baker
Chairman
Human Ethics Committee

cc. Ms H Proctor, School of Social, Policy and Curriculum Studies A35

Text of the advertisement which appeared in the RSVP column of *The Sydney Morning Herald* on 9 March 2000, p. 16.

Parramatta High School: Former students sought for historical research about their experiences of coeducation, 1913-1968. Call Helen Proctor at the University of Sydney, 93516224.



INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPANTS

Experiences of coeducation at Parramatta High School, 1913-1968

Your assistance is sought with an oral history project about Parramatta High School. The researcher, Helen Proctor, would like to speak with anyone who attended Parramatta High School as a student, or taught there, or was the parent of a Parramatta High School student at any time between the school's foundation in 1913 and the introduction of the Wyndham scheme in the 1960s.

Helen Proctor is a PhD student in the School of Social, Policy and Curriculum Studies, in the Faculty of Education at the University of Sydney. The oral history project is part of research for her PhD thesis which discusses Parramatta High as a pioneering coeducational state school for adolescents. She is interested in finding out how the school was organised during different periods of its history and particularly in what it was like to be a student, a teacher or a parent associated with one of the earliest coeducational high schools in NSW. The researcher is interested in all aspects of school life, both formal and informal, and in what your experiences of Parramatta High School mean to you now.

If you agree to participate, it will involve an interview of up to an hour that, with your permission, will be tape recorded. You will be given a copy of any tapes made and a full transcript on which you will be invited to make changes or corrections if you wish. If you give your permission for the material to be used in the research, you will then need to sign a Permission-to-use Form. The form will include a section entitled "Restrictions" in which you may set limits on the use of any or all of the information included in the tapes or transcript. You may also indicate here if you do not wish to be quoted by name.

If you do decide to participate in this study, you can, of course, withdraw at any time, or as outlined above, place limits on the use of the information you provide.

When you have read this information sheet, Helen Proctor will discuss it with you further and answer any questions you have. If you would like to know more at any stage, please feel free to contact Helen Proctor, School of Social, Policy and Curriculum Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Sydney, NSW 2006, phone (02) 9351 6224.

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Secretary of the Human Ethics Committee, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811



AGREEMENT TO BE INTERVIEWED

Experiences of coeducation at Parramatta High School, 1913-1968

I (name)
of (address)

.....
have read and understood the Information for Participants sheet for the
research study, 'Experiences of coeducation at Parramatta High School,
1913-1968' and have discussed it with the researcher, Helen Proctor.

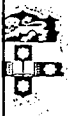
I (give/ do not give) my permission for interviews to be audiotaped.

I understand that, even though I sign this consent form, I am free to
withdraw from the research at any time.

Signed:

Date:

Helen Proctor
(02) 9351 6224



PERMISSION-TO-USE FORM

Experiences of coeducation at Parramatta High School, 1913-1968

I (name).....
give permission for Helen Proctor, a PhD student at the University of Sydney, to use information contained in tape recordings of interviews (listed below) for use in her research about the history of Parramatta High School.

The interviews for which I grant this permission are as follows:

Interview number:

Date:

Interview number:

Date:

Narrator.....

Address.....

.....

.....

Restrictions.....

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.....

.....

Signed

Date

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Bert, 27, 28 April 2000
Jean, 26 March 2000
Florence 12 March 2000
Leonard 15 May 2000
Gordon 10 March 2000
Marcia 13 March 2000
Marion 20 March 2000
John 4 April 2000
Ken 1 December 1999
Max 25 November 1999
Anne 25 November 1999
Olive 24 November 1999
Vera 20 November 1999, 27 November 1999
Bill 26 August 1999
Dorothy 10 March 2000
Eric 29 February 2000
Gwen 28 February 2000
Pamela 15 March 2000
Keith 14 March 2000
Janet 29 November 1999
Ray 30 November 1999.

All interviews were conducted by the author. All interview notes and transcripts are in the possession of the author.

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