London Review of Education, *Vol. 1, No. 3, November 2003*

The Risks of Social Reproduction: the middle class and education markets

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ABSTRACT We live, as some theorists put it, in a 'risk society'. Risks are diverse and new forms are constantly arising. There is an 'over-production' of risk. We face the brittle uncertainties of individual self-management, as Beck sees it, alone and 'fragmented across (life) phases, space and time' (1997, p. 26). This is a bleak and elemental social world. This paper takes a rather different view of risk, as having both collective and divisive dynamics and effects. It offers not so much an alternative view as one that is re-socialised. Focusing on middle class families and the 'risks' of school choice some key features of the 'prudentialist' risk management regime extant in the UK are examined. That is, those 'definite social exertions' that middle class families must make on their own part or face the very real prospect of generational decline are considered. Risks are perceived to arise from the engagements between the family and the education marketplace, and are embedded in the paradox wherein society becomes structurally more meritocratic but processually less so, as the middle class work harder to maintain their advantages in the new conditions of choice and competition in education. The paper is peppered with extracts from interviews with middle-class parents. These serve for illustration and discussion.

Introduction

> modernity . . . brings uncertainty to the very mode of existence.
> (Giddens, 1991, p. 102)

Risk is almost an obligatory concept in social theory and analysis these days, although it has a plurality of meanings [1]. We live, as some theorists put it, in a 'risk society'. Risk society according to Beck (1998, p. 10) is 'the end of nature and the end of tradition'; and it is 'a society increasingly preoccupied with the future' (Giddens, 1998, p. 27). Risks are diverse and new forms are constantly arising. There is an 'over-production' of risk. We are all effected and Beck suggests, 'Risks display an equalizing effect' (1992, p. 35). We face the brittle uncertainties of individual self-management, as Beck sees it, alone and 'fragmented across (life) phases, space and time' (1997, p. 26). This is a bleak and elemental social world. Concomitantly 'risk monitoring presupposes agency, choice, calculation and responsibility' (Elliott, 2002, p. 298)—both individualisation and reflexivity.

ISSN 1474-8460 print; ISSN 1474-8479 online/03/030163-13

DOI: 10.1080/1474846032000146730

This paper takes a rather different view of risk, as having both collective and divisive dynamics and effects. I offer not so much an alternative view as one that is re-socialised. As Douglas (1992, p. 3) opines 'it is hard to maintain seriously that the perception of risk is private'. The focus here is on the 'mundane' risks attached to the day-to-day processes of social reproduction in middle class families. I shall indicate some of the processes involved in the 'definite social exertions' (Parkin, 1979, p. 63) that middle class families must make 'or face the very real prospect of generational decline' (Parkin, 1979, p. 63). I have written at greater length and in more detail about these exertions elsewhere (see Ball, 2003a). Here I map out some of the social and emotional complexity, for the middle class [2], of social reproduction in relation to educational institutions and the education of their children. These risks arise from the engagements between the family and the education marketplace, and are embedded in the paradox wherein society becomes structurally more meritocratic but processually less so, as the middle class work harder to maintain their advantages in the new conditions of choice and competition in education (Halsey, 1995). 'People have to take a more active and risk-infused orientation to their relationships and involvements' (Giddens, 1998, p. 28). The paper is peppered with extracts from interviews with middle class parents. These serve for illustration and discussion.

While Beck and Giddens have written the sociological headlines of the 'risk society' their representations of risk have a number of weaknesses and limitations (see Dean, 1999; Crook, 1999; Elliott, 2002). In particular, 'Beck's approach to risk can be characterised as totalising, realist and relying on a uniform conception of risk' (Dean, 1999, p. 131). Elliott (2002, p. 304) argues that 'Beck fails to adequately consider . . . that individualization . . . may directly contribute to, and advance the proliferation of, class inequalities and economic exclusions'. While I would not demur from his realism, Beck's portrayal of risk as an ontological condition of all humans fails to take adequate account either of the social differentiation of risk or of the existence and social consequences of different regimes of risk and risk management. Therefore the discussion here draws to a greater extent on the more nuanced work of Crook (1999), and to a lesser extent Douglas (1992), rather than the 'super-realists' Beck and Giddens. Crook's conceptual framework provides a language for thinking about the relationship between risk regimes and different forms of risk management behaviour. In other words, it creates a theoretical space in which it is possible to think about both the role of the social actor and the role of the state, together.

In an unintended restatement of Parkin's (1979) thesis of class and social closure Erenreich (1989, p. 83) makes the point that the 'barriers that the middle class erected to protect itself make it painfully difficult to reproduce itself.' That is to say, the individualist mode of social reproduction is fraught with difficulties and beset by anxiety and 'the fear of falling.' To put it another way: 'Utterly dependent on market and state, the social fate of the many is becoming the particular fate of each individual' (Berking, 1996, p. 191). The regime of choice, of neo-liberalism, in social policy threatens an equality that was unthinkable within collectivist modes of social reproduction—the risks of choice are, in theory, open to all. As Kemshall (2002, p. 1) argues 'risk is replacing need as the core principle of social policy formation and welfare delivery'. While the middle class enter the education market with considerable advantages, tangible and otherwise—'resources to at least attempt to live [the] dream of order' (Crook, 1999, p. 186)—there are no guarantees, no certainties of a smooth and uneventful process of social reproduction. This is the paradox of political liberalism. A version of what Giddens (1998, p. 41) calls the 'risk/reward ratio'. Middle-class parents, like all parents, can only do their best—deploy their capitals as strategically as they are able and 'through careful moulding and psychological pressure . . . predispose each child to retrace the same long road they themselves once took' (Erenreich, 1989, p. 83). In particular, these families rely heavily on 'the domestic transmission of

cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1986b, p. 244). This is very evident, for example, in the way middle-class students have the necessity of higher education inculcated into their thinking as something 'automatic', obvious. In other words, social reproduction is a risky business—'There are fewer and fewer unquestionably given paths of life conduct available' (Berking, 1996, p.195). This sense of risk in the enterprise of education interplays forcefully with the strong sense of 'responsibility' which is so central to middle-class individualism. 'A key feature of risk in the "risk society" is the meshing of risk, responsibility and prudent choice' (Kemshall, 2002, p. 1).

In effect, risk theorists like Beck and Giddens now see the whole of society and social life as dominated by a kind of strategic morality. 'In the individualised society, the individual must therefore learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of activity, as the planning office with respect to his or her own biography, abilities, orientations, relationships and so on' (Beck, 1992, p. 55). Risk constantly reinforces a particular kind of individual responsibility and mirrors and 'calls up' the liberal values of the developmental self. Commenting on this, Giddens (1998, p. 33) at least nods towards the classed aspects of such strategic morality. He suggests that within 'risk society the middle classes detach themselves from public provision', that they have 'a more active orientation to their lives' and that 'it is not surprising that those who can afford to, opt out of existing welfare systems'. Individual responsibility is increasingly replacing collective assurance against risk. This touches upon the main tenet of my analysis. First, that the construction of an educational career by middle-class parents for their children is denoted by particular kinds of planning and thoughtfulness. Second, that the skills and orientations of, or dispositions for, such work have some particularly to the middle class. This gives rise to a new form or perhaps exaggerated form of inequality, that is, 'the inequality of dealing with insecurity and reflexivity' (Beck, 1992, p. 98). Douglas (1992, p. 34) goes further and argues that increased risk, or fear of danger, leads to social closure, the strengthening of the 'lines of social division in a community'.

Perversely then, while the market form privileges middle-class families, the sense of risk and uncertainty experienced by the middle classes in relation to social reproduction is almost certainly heightened by the market. There is a constant interplay between risk and control here. That is to say, there is 'risk anxiety inherent in neo-liberal over-production and under control of risk' (Crook, 1999, p. 181). The market has a degree of openness and unplannedness which constantly threatens to overwhelm the orderliness and planning, the futurity, which denotes many middle-class households. 'The more risks, the more decisions and choices that have to be made' (Beck, 1998, p. 10). However, it is often not clear what the right choice is. Choice of childcare, of school, of post-compulsory education is often, for middle-class families, a matter of uneasy compromises. Indeed, there is currently a kind of moral panic around schooling and school choice, particularly in metropolitan settings.

Families are expected to take responsibility for choosing and to choose responsibly; although responsible actions may also be opportunistic and detrimental to the interests of others—a 'new moral economy of welfare' (Rodger, 2000, p. 3). Rose (1996, p. 57) goes as far as to suggest that the new advanced liberal regime of choice, the empowerment of the citizen-consumer, produces a further paradox and is a yet more sophisticated means of government: 'It has become possible to actualize this notion of the actively responsible individual because of the development of a new apparatus that integrates subjects into a moral nexus of identifications and allegiances in the very process in which they appear to act out their most personal choices'. They are drawn into the ontology of the market. Within the regime of choice increasingly the failings of quasi-markets become lodged within the shortcomings of individuals or families rather than with the 'organised irresponsibility' (Beck, 1998) of 'out-moded' bureaucracies. Douglas (1992, p. 321) argues that the culture

of the market, of individualism, 'is so organised that incompetence and weakness cannot be compensated for'. For middle-class families there is both too much choice, and thus always a possibility of wrong or unsuccessful choice-making in the education market place, and never enough. Choice of school, and schools chosen both require assiduous and careful attention if the risks of social reproduction are to be minimised and control of the future maximised. When it comes to children, parental responsibility has no limits and indeed seems to be continually expanding. 'Individual agents must become risk monitors and risk calculators' (Crook, 1999, p. 171) who operate within 'the precautionary principle' (Tait & Levidow, 1992, p. 220)—'we knew we could get my son into the local school and the question is whether there's something better' (Mr Simpson). The calculus of uncertainty and choice makes all decision-making reflexively unstable. The concern about getting things wrong is ever present.

> . . .you think of the happiness of your child for the next 5 or 6 years, of course it's a big decision, you wonder if you are going to make the right one, cos' ok, you can change, but you don't want to unsettle them. (Mrs Hillerman)

In the changes and contrasts outlined above two very different forms of risk and risk management are juxtaposed. On the one hand there is the modernist, welfarist, one-fits-all, 'organised risk management' solution of comprehensivism and neighbourhood schooling which is perceived, by large numbers of middle-class parents, as engendering the risks of levelling and massification in relation to their projects of social reproduction and differentiation and developmentalism—making the most of the child. The continuing political and media critique of state schooling generally, and comprehensive schooling in particular, emphasises their dangers, rightly or wrongly, in these respects. On the other, there is the privatised and more open, post-welfare, choice solution—the education market. And again risk is an inherent characteristic of the market form, an essential part of its dynamic—a quality that is celebrated and set over and against the conservatism of bureaucratic systems. The market form rests both on responsibility and resourcefulness and an absence of certainty.

Part of the riskiness of the post-welfare choice system inheres in the importance of and elusiveness of useful and 'accurate' information. Knowledge is increasingly indeterminate and contingent. Complete and completely reliable information may be an impossibility in human processing institutions, and the perceived adequacy or reliability of information available both undermines parents' trust of lay and expert actors and exacerbates anxieties.

Trust/Distrust of Professional and Expert Systems

In the education market you can never know enough but often know too much, and within all this it is difficult to know what is important and what is not; 'for the educated middle classes of the advanced societies, at least, risk communications merge with problems of consumption and lifestyle choice in a general information overload that is more likely to provoke anxiety and insecurity than a sense of safety and control' (Crook, 1999, p. 180).

> . . .I'd like to be able to pick up so much more, it's this thing that you can't pick up until you get into the classroom: how good are they? And I don't mean when they're on display, that means you want some kind of independent judgement system . . . I'd rather have too much than too little . . . a whole variety, capital rate of spending, floor space of gyms whatever. If we're not too careful we're going to concentrate on one aspect of it, that is examination results. (Mr Christie)

'This overload connects with the arbitrariness and necessary incompleteness of even the most assiduous individual risk calculation' (Crook, 1999, p. 180). Mr Christie's point also highlights what Bourdieu (1986b, p. 253) describes as 'the gratuitous expenditure of time' involved in ensuring reproduction, here spent on collecting more and more information, which leads to more and more discussion within the family and the family's social network. Distrust, self-interest and the over-supply of information within market societies are a heady and unstable combination. This may be a paradox of reflexive modernisation, on the one hand the idea that information is related to control, and, on the other, the idea that all information is potentially unreliable. Indeed, Douglas (1992, p. 32) suggests that 'knowledge is falling apart' and that 'no one offers us certainty'. In a way that parallels Parkin's analysis, Douglas suggests that the move from 'hierarchy' to 'market' or individualism removes certainty. Thus, another of the paradoxes of choice is that the market itself (applied to schools, as elsewhere) 'undermines the communicative conditions of intersubjective trust' (Berking, 1996, p. 1997). Market systems produce a particular genre of communication which is not to be trusted—tradition is displaced by new modes of communication and new forms of 'knowledge'—promotion, advertising and 'aggressive accounting' (Ball 2003b) for example. The result is, for middle class parents, a frustration of reason, the lack of a perfect science of choice, of complete, accurate, robust information.

Within neo-liberal risk regimes, especially in the creation of quasi-markets, the shifts from direct provider to being a quality monitor and source of comparative and evaluative information (see Ball, 2000), for example, in education, through the publication of league tables, inspection reports etc., but again there is a paradox. Crook (1999, p.180) argues that 'the provision of advice and information means, precisely the "production" and communication of risks in greater numbers'. Somebody is always at the bottom of the league table or below average performance or have a poor inspection report. This is the substance of 'scaremongering' as Giddens (1998) calls it and we rarely know whether such mongering is accurate or not. However, it would also be irresponsible for middle-class parents to simply leave the collection and provision of information to the state. Responsibility must be played out, taken seriously. 'To rely on the state to deal with the harmful effects of known, calculable and individually manageable risks appears feckless and culpable' (O'Malley, 1996, p. 202). This leads to a collecting, sifting, checking, and re-checking of information, and the use of perceptions, experiences, advertising and hearsay. In a sense, all information is considered but none, or almost none, is trusted.

> Yes, we went to open days in the private sector, we went to Overbury and Tideway open days . . . the year before we chose for Tim . . . we went to them the year we chose for Tim . . . we went round in the day and we also made an individual visit to Tideway . . . So yes, we must have gone round Tideway four or five times. (Mrs Mankell)

All information is considered, but not unthinkingly, there is a degree of scepticism about the information required from schools by the state. 'Expert systems', schools and state information systems have to be dealt with skilfully. In the processes of school choice information does not stand up on its own and has to be supplemented by the immediacy of the visit and direct questioning by the family themselves. Again, the family must take responsibility for collecting and 'managing' their own 'first hand' information. There are themes from classical liberalism embedded here: the importance of self-reliance and the concomitant 'suspicion' (Collini, 1979) of the state.

> Yes, especially now that they have little choice but to include exam results and truancy rates and all the rest . . . I'm fully in favour of public information, so yes, I would say . . . you know, any organisation, and schools are stupid if they don't . . . again present themselves as best they can, so if anybody didn't take care of a prospectus I'd wonder what on earth they were up to. The little bits of paper shoved in the back are usually what we poured over because that was exam results, details about how they split up the curriculum, list of staff and what qualifications they'd got . . . so it did matter, yes, and we did look very carefully at them . . . and that was often out of the prospectuses, that we got our kind of hit list of three or four key questions . . . that we wanted straight answers to . . . when we visited.

Again considerable time, effort and expense, and skill, are involved—resources which are not equally available to all families. These families have a certain 'distance from the world' (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 54) that permits planning and reflection, relatively unencumbered by 'material constraints and temporal urgencies'.

Your own impressions are important but even they cannot always be trusted. Social capital provides informational resources and emotional reassurance. As Crook (1999, p. 175) suggests hyper-reflexive ordering 'operates through networks rather than institutions . . . It is associated with individualism and the reflexive monitoring of the self'. Normativities and performativities are embedded in 'good parenting'. What the good parent does/is, taking responsibility and the vital contribution of social capital to decision-making are all embedded in social networks.

> You visit one school after another, sometimes on consecutive evenings . . . you don't really get a chance to sit down and think about the school that you've seen, you're just bombarded with information, bits of paper to read, and it's not really long enough to sit down and really think about it, and also if you go and visit a school on one day, they could be having a bad day or you could be having a bad day and you don't really get a true picture of that school. So it was really friends who'd got older children, who felt that they really didn't have long enough to make that decision . . . plus if we wanted Alex to go privately he would have to be tutored, and it takes about two years really . . . for them . . . to get used to the idea of having to sit exams, doing things within a time limit, and they are just taught in a different way in the private sector, so if you really want to do that you've got to give your child a fair chance . . . so we thought . . . so we wouldn't feel rushed in our decision that's why we started looking two years ago.

When it comes down to it information may not be enough. Indeed, as suggested earlier, the more you know the more doubtful you can become. And in this arena of choice, for these parents, mistakes may be 'low probability' but 'high consequence'. Their child's whole future, as they see it, is at stake.

Spatialisation of Risk and Class: strategies and concerns are localised

Over and against the generalised sense of anxiety which besets the middle-class project of social reproduction it is also important to acknowledge that risks and the perception of risk vary. In education the risks of relative 'failure' or 'drop out' or learning fatigue vary, to some extent, according to the resources available to the family. Some families minimise risk by deploying their economic capital to buy educational advantages in the private system. This is a fairly sure and certain way of doing your best for your children in terms of ensuring a high probability of educational success and social advantage (more of which below). Also

some families are able to use economic, social, cultural and emotional capitals at moments of crisis or key moments of transition to ensure access to privileged trajectories or to avert calamity (see Ball, 2003a, chapter 5). Interventions of various kinds are a key tactical device in managing the 'uncertainties' of schooling (see Vincent & Martin, 2002). There is indeed a growth of 'risk services' that can be bought in to support or prepare the child in the quest for educational success—this is part of the commodification and privatisation of risk (Elliott, 2002). Somebody's risk is somebody else's commercial opportunity. However, the risks, or perceptions of risk, with which we are concerned here, also vary according to where you are, that is, where you live, and who else lives there. Risk is spatialised.

School markets are different in different localities. They differ by virtue of who attends the schools and in terms of the organisation and history of education provision and in relation to local politics. The directing and socialising effects of local social networks also differ in relation to stability and integration. Furthermore, classes and class fractions are realised in subtly different ways 'in interaction', in participation in the 'lifestyle' of the locality and its social networks. These are different 'spaces of subjectivity'. There are different engagements between class and locality; 'people make choices about where to live that are informed by their sense of "who they are", which, in turn, confers an identity on them' (Butler & Savage, 1995, p. 204). These differences give rise to particular local class cultures, infrastructures and histories, what Butler and Robson (2002a, p. 21) call 'narratives of the areas'. In turn these give rise to different 'risks positions' and 'situated risk logics' as Lupton (1999, p. 6) calls them. Or in Douglas's (1992) terms, in some settings grid and group are strong and provide bases for the mobilisation of collective sentiments. Mrs Connelly makes the point very nicely:

> I mean this area, which is St Vincent's [in Riverway], is a very odd area, 'cos what happens is . . . people move in . . . into it, and then they start to have children . . . they like the local schools, and then you find that where they might have moved out they tend to stay and really only move within the area, to stay within the state sector because they either find that they've got a large mortgage so they can't afford to pay the fees for private education or they want to support state education and actually it's very easy if you live here. You know it's easy to really support state education because if you look at the results they're pretty good . . . and having said that . . . the type of parents that live in Riverway and Tidewell . . . they should be good. I mean I think everybody that I know have got a degree . . . so the chances are that our children will go on and at least do A levels, so I think if you're dealing with that type of parent, whether they go privately or state, the results should be good. And there's a lot of those type of people living round here.
>
> I didn't think it was necessary within this area to send her to a private school. The only reason I would ever consider an independent school would be if I was living in an area where I felt the schools were appalling. (Mrs Dexter)

Here the local schools are seen as a reflection of the locality and of the parents who send their children to them. There is strong support from community members in Riverway for 'authority, commitment, boundaries and structure' (Douglas, 1994). Depending on circumstances, this can provide a sort of guarantee, an assurance of success, or alternatively it can generate a sense of heightened risk. The school is not represented as an independent variable with qualities of its own separate from its intake. This gives a general indication of the way in which perceptions of schools and perceptions of risk are constructed. The logic of this is that in another setting, as Mrs Dexter says, the evaluation of the state sector, as a

whole or locally, might be very different. In this way, the choice between state and private schooling, as a form of risk management, has to be understood as socially located in local class relations. In all this risk is not a stable category. Rather: 'Risk is a way—or rather a set of different ways of ordering reality' (Dean, 1999, p. 131).

The State Sector as a Risk

For some parents, entrusting their children to the state sector is simply one risk that they are unwilling to take. Mrs Crichton explained, very simply, that she was 'nervous about the state sector' and the 'problem of taking a chance with your child and throwing them into the state sector.' For such parents private schools provide environments and opportunities and forms of provision that are simply not available, as they see it, in the state sector. Parents like Mrs Crichton regard entering their child in the state sector as putting their child and their child's future *at risk*. Such a position is both moral and strategic. It is a choice for 'best' and for 'better'. Private schools are 'class enclaves' (Teese, 2000) which offer 'long term protections from potential risk in an increasingly uncertain world' (Sedden, 2001, p. 139). As such 'the class project feels like good parenting' (Sedden, 2001, p. 139). Private schools offer a cultural milieu, 'a communicative order of self-recognition' (Teese, 2000, pp. 103–4), which is coherent and undiluted, and constitutes a 'protected enclave for class formation' (Sedden, 2001, p. 134). As Teese (2000) concludes, private schools are fortified sites within diverse school systems, which represent class projects and 'renew middle class culture and collectivity in predictable ways across generations' (Sedden, 2001, p. 136). They also work to transform or reinvest economic into cultural capital. In effect these enclaves work to export risk of failure to state schools. They protect and reproduce classed 'communities of destiny'. In effect choosing the private sector, as a response to the risks of the state sector, can be seen as a different, older, form of risk management. That is, what Crook (1999, p.182) calls 'neo-traditonalism' which can produce 'local solidarities, whether defined by taste, ethnicity, place or other markers that take their significance from a balance of inclusion ("us") and exclusion ("them")'. The private school provides a definitive form of boundary maintenance, of closure. It avoids the possibilities of social 'pollution', which can arise when order and boundaries are breached—indiscriminate mixing can threaten 'ontological insecurities' (Giddens, 1991). Private schooling limits the degree of social mixing to tolerable levels. It is a choice for exclusivity and also for advantage. It is, as Crook suggests, a basis of solidarity, in effect, of 'recognition'. In a sense, it is an enclave in which neo-liberal policies do not operate. The risks threatened by equality through choice can be avoided but have to be paid for. And indeed, for some families the private sector has an obviousness to it. It is a non-choice. It is 'an alternative to constant "choice", anxiety and isolation' (Crook, p. 181) and mobilises 'versions of safety and certainty' (p. 182). Choice of private school avoids the 'chronic problematization of the signifier' (Lash, 1994, p. 157) that attends the question of what is a 'good' state school. The private schools are 'instead rooted in shared meanings and routine background practices' (Lash, 1994, p. 159). As Beck (1998, p. 10) puts it, 'Risk society begins where tradition ends'—private schooling is a reinvention of tradition.

> Everyone I know either went to a grammar school or a private school . . . so it's something . . . comprehensive to me is a complete unknown quantity, so therefore it's alarming, only based on ignorance really. And also you do have to handle those . . . varying degrees, you are not in an environment where everybody wants to work.

Here Mrs Grafton is willing to take the risk of sending her child to state school but she does this reflexively and her language of 'panic' and 'alarm' gives some indication of the emotional underpinnings of the decision-making involved. Rational and affective responses are messily mixed. For Mrs Grafton the comprehensive school is an unknown and potentially dangerous place to learn; she is anticipating difficulties in 'an environment' where not 'everyone wants to work'. The 'not everyone' is the 'other', those children who are not like mine—those who might be blamed for difficulties. These are the risks of social mix, of boundary crossing, of going outside of grid and group (Pakulsi & Waters, 1996). Risk can make us cautious, inward-looking. In the case of schooling, these are risks that have to be managed, 'handled' by the family.

Again there is a clear sense of the perspective of reflexivity and planning that underlies the enterprise of education within the family. Indeed, there are glimpses here, and throughout these accounts of what Crook (1999, p. 175) calls 'a hyper-reflexive ordering'. This is particularly evident in the 'over response', the hyper-responsibility, of many middle-class families in their management of the problem of choice. They appear in their own accounts, and indeed may be concerned to want to appear, 'as responsible and calculating prudentialists' (O'Malley, 1996, p. 199).

Anxiety, Emotion and Class Choosing

Obviously, we see various capitals intertwined here. There is an emotional as well as social and material expenditure involved in choice-making. While I do not want to overplay the emotional and psychological aspects of the market behaviour of parents and students, there are constant worries about getting things wrong, about failing the child, about mistaking priorities, about not finding the perfect school or right university; 'the extent of parents' ethical and social responsibility today . . . is historically unprecedented . . . The contemporary family is under a pressure to educate' (Beck-Gersheim, 1996, p. 143). The other side of all this is various forms of guilt. Both a personal guilt about letting the child down and in some cases social guilt about choosing private schooling in preference to the state sector (see Ball, 2003c). As one parent put it simply, you make 'judgements about yourself' (Mrs Cornwell).

Again concerns both about getting it right and doing the right thing are engendered and reinforced within social networks. Indeed, as market theorists, like Hayek, make clear, markets, given their very different 'institutional conditions' (Hindess, 1987), are typically messy places, places that rely heavily on appropriate traditions and morality to work 'properly'. Parents, in part, become middle-class moral subjects by learning and acquiring behaviours and attitudes from others in their class setting. In this, anxiety can be contagious but panic is offset by deliberation, emotion by rationality: 'we don't just make judgements, we worry, sometimes agonise, about them' (Kymlicka, 1989, p. 11).

> I did it with my husband . . . Allan [son] knew that we were looking at schools, because what happens is, in September and October and November, the school is abuzz with manic parents . . . and that filters right down . . . we just said we're going to have a look just to see so that when the time comes for you . . . we don't feel panicked and rushed. (Mrs Cornwell)

Emotions are also in play in parents' responses to schools—both negative responses, such as aversion, and positive, such as recognition. These are part of the lived reality of class and its 'emotive intimacies'. Those 'gut feelings' that are a 'primitive' form of class awareness, an identification of and with 'people like us'—'the taken-for-granted understandings' which

are brought to 'relationships with others' (Reay, 1997, p. 226). Such responses are outside the rational, not irrational, but irreducible to a simple calculability.

Futurity

Choice has a history within families and their class logics and also, and crucially, it has a future. Choice, in part, is about getting from the present to a particular kind of class and social location in the future. It is about prediction, imagination and assurance. This is why control is so important and why also risk is ever present. Planning and anxiety go hand-in-hand (Giddens, 1991). The future is now 'more absorbing' but also 'at the same time more opaque' (Giddens, 1998, p. 28). For the middle class the future is a trajectory of the development of personhood. Middle-class ontologies are founded upon incompleteness, they are about becoming, about the developmental self, about making something of yourself, realising yourself, realising your potential. This is an essential feature of a liberal identity—the unfinished self. The parents quoted here envisage certain sorts of futures for their children of both a worldly sort and of the person, of character. They see themselves as having the responsibility to make particular futures possible or available through their actions and planning in the here and now. These are possibilities that cannot be taken for granted, but they are 'worth striving for' (Lewis & Maude, 1950, p. 245). Individualism must be tempered by hard work and 'the productive use of time' (Allatt, 1993, p. 153). The future has to be invested in and actively 'joined up' to the present. It is important to know what you want to be [3]. Lewis and Maude (1950, p. 288) suggest that the English middle class 'are what they are . . . because of what they wanted to be'. The future, possible futures, and ways of getting to those futures are talked about.

> She was crying, saying 'well mummy I don't know what I want to do', but we have actually consciously talked to her about the idea that, if you want to be . . . let's say . . . purely for example, a doctor, you've got to spend a lot of years in college and training and it takes this long . . . so we've actually talked to her about it . . . just so she realises what she's letting herself in for . . . sometimes it worries her a bit because she's got friends who say 'I want to be this'. (Mr Pelecanos)

In particular, these parents envisage their choices at 11 for their child as a precursor to, a step towards, their children's entry into higher education (HE). They work hard to naturalise HE as an obvious future route for their offspring. They are in many cases envisaging their child's educational trajectory in order to position them advantageously in relation to HE entry.

> Ours both are above average, not geniuses but both above average . . . You therefore want to make sure you're going to be able to give them a good education that will allow them to go on and do higher education. (Mrs Mankell)

> Yes, now definitely . . . we really really hope that they will stay on beyond 16 . . . somewhere. We really really want them to do Higher Ed . . . but not saying . . . its got to be the route we took, or that it's got to be a particular route . . . yes. (Mr Symons)

However, within this parents seem careful not to appear as 'pushy', a fine line needs to be trod between attentive support and overbearing pressure. The individuality of the child, their developmental self, has to be recognised, at least to some extent as having an

autonomy, an unpredictability, a 'landscape of possibilities' (Beck-Gersheim, 1996, p. 153). But the riskiness of the future also has to be made clear.

> . . .well after secondary school . . . we'd assume, and I'd be very disappointed if he didn't then go on to sixth form college, that is the sixth form college in Riverway, so that's what he'd do . . . after secondary school I hope . . . and then I hope after that, but you never know what might happen . . . that he'd go to university. (Mr Parker)

In effect, these parents are seeking to achieve some 'narrative coherence', linking and making consistent the lives of their children with their own. They are also reproducing through their children their tastes, distinctions and worldview. However, we should not over-estimate the newness of this, after all the middle class have always been denoted by an orientation to the future. It is the increased ubiquity and sophistication, and also its commodification, the possibilities of buying into the future, that is remarkable; 'the pressure of planning and expectation on parents is not only growing quantitatively, but also assuming qualitatively new forms' (Beck-Gersheim, 1996, p. 139). Such planning is starting earlier and involves, for some families, the mobilisation of a sophisticated set of preparatory experiences. What O'Malley (1996, p. 199) calls 'prudentialism' is deeply embedded in the middle-class habitus inflecting perceptions, appreciations and actions in a particular way—the perception of risk and its management. This sense of risk, or of social ordering, is productive. It makes certain things possible. This is also constantly reinforced by the state's emphasis of the responsibilities of parenthood, and particularly motherhood (see Vincent, 2000, chapter 2). Within such a regime, the prudent subject will invest carefully in their family's future (O'Malley, 1996, p. 201). However, as indicated already, such investments require resources, skills and capitals that are unevenly distributed across the population but with which the middle classes are particularly well endowed. The education market with all its risks is well accommodated to the dispositions and interests of the middle class. Their assiduous engagement with choice, their use of their capitals, their particular sense of responsibility, all contribute to their social reproduction and social closure and thus the assurance of their social advantages.

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Notes

[1] This is a revised and restructured version of a chapter from Ball (2003a).

[2] The families upon which the paper is based all fall within what Goldthorpe (1996) calls the 'service class'; possessors of 'delegated authority' and 'specialised knowledges'. The 'sample' is drawn from four research studies of educational and childcare choice (see Ball, 2003a for details).

[3] There is a tension here between 'becoming' and 'wanting'—the source of a great deal of contemporary fiction.

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