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## Section Three: Marriage and Aspirations: Colonial Families

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This section of the book examines the dynamics of family life that evolved as the five colonial families confronted the realities of marriage and raising children. It begins with an exploration of the implicit and explicit understandings present within each individual marriage. Four of the marriages evolve within the single male breadwinner mould; one develops within the framework of a professionally employed couple, whose prominent positions within a small educational community raised expectations. As the standard bearer of the city's feminist aspirations that focused on the suffrage and access to higher education for women, Helen Connon, as university graduate and headmistress, raised the prospect of a different future for middle-class women within marriage. Her marriage to John Macmillan Brown may be seen as an experiment which moved into new territory and raised questions about relationships within marriage that reached beyond the common experience of her class and generation. The understandings in which the other four marriages are anchored belong to those of the previous generation, when the university study that might unlock a professional career was not available to women. Within each marriage we observe men and women endeavouring to build family anew and give effect to a generalised goal of social betterment.

The distinctive understandings that inform each couple's attempt to create a colonial family is most clearly expressed in the education of their children. Historians have drawn attention to the role of the middle classes in the push for higher education for girls, and two chapters have been devoted to tracing the education of daughters within the families observed in this study. Put simply, and in advance of the argument, all play instrumental roles in the education of their daughters. There is, however, variation in the intensity with which education for daughters was pursued. It is difficult, for example, to imagine a more observant and meticulous mother than Julia Wilding, or a more compliant and dutiful daughter than Gladys. If there is an element of ambivalence to be found in attitudes to the education of daughters, it lies at the junction between school and university. The pursuit of a university education for daughters may be seen as a useful indicator of progressive liberal thought, but one strand of middle-class thinking saw it as an indulgence. The pursuit of a professional career through university qualification prevented the full realisation of middle-class social obligation by limiting a young woman's involvement in philanthropic and charitable activities. Such was the view of Mary Masson.

Until recently, the education of sons within the middle-class family had received somewhat less historical attention than that of their sisters. One of the outcomes of the recent literature on masculinities has been to put the father back in the family. It has done so primarily by emphasising the father's role in the upbringing of his son, but it also acknowledges greater fatherly involvement in the education of his daughters. The case studies that follow point to ways in which, in their colonial settings, there is an increase in both maternal and paternal influences in the lives of their sons. If the public dimension of the woman question in some instances lends something of an obsessive dimension to the mother/daughter relationship, so, too, does the day-boy status that prevailed throughout a son's schooling provide the opportunity for a greater maternal influence. Conversely, a father's role often seems to be ubiquitously present within the family, but harder to isolate. The case studies presented here point to direct paternal engagement in the upbringing of daughters, in ways that reflect individual preoccupations or enthusiasms. If fathers were judged, as Tosh suggests, they were judged according to their

ability to induct sons into the ranks of the professional middle class.<sup>1</sup> Those observed here thought deeply about the education of their sons. That all chose to send sons 'Home' to a British university is testimony to their recognition that the problem of what to do with boys was as real in the new world as it was in the old.

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1 Tosh, *A Man's Place*, pp. 79, 82, 84–85, 89–90, 98, 100–1, 114–19, 122.

This text is taken from *Family Experiments: Middle-class, professional families in Australia and New Zealand c. 1880–1920*, by Shelley Richardson, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.