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Can't Buy Me Love?

Young Australians' views on parental work, time, guilt and their own consumption

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Avoiding 'mother-blame' or parental blame: A note on the research approach

During our study one mother contacted us when she received our request to participate. She asked whether our study would lead to blame of single mothers like herself if it found that their children were more negatively affected by parental work than others. She felt that context is important; she had neither sought to be a sole parent nor to experience the ill-health that now prevents her from working in her professional occupation for the hours she prefers.

She is right to be concerned. There is a very sizeable international and Australian literature that attributes children's characteristics – whether schizophrenia, emotional breakdown, homosexuality, rebelliousness, drug use, sexual activity or delinquency – to mothers' failures or characteristics, especially those of sole parents who are mostly mothers (Garey and Arendell, 2001; McDonnell, 1998; Terry, 1998; Thurer, 1993). These criticisms often find fertile ground as many parents look to themselves when things go wrong for their children. However, parental preferences about health, hours and jobs do not determine labour market outcomes any more than children's preferences for certain Christmas presents can assure their delivery.

No parent is omnipotent in relation to outcomes for their child, and families face diverse situations shaped by income and wealth, ethnicity and race, geography, family size, access to social, economic and human resources, relationship and marital outcomes and health. Each of these influences young people's situation and perspectives. While parental work choices certainly affect children's experience, they are far from the only determinant. In many cases parents have only limited degrees of real freedom, especially in relation to labour market outcomes such as employment, hours, and earnings.

By and large, children do not blame their parents for things they find hard about the work, care, money and time outcomes in their households (Lewis, Tudball and Hand, 2001). The perspectives of young people are very alert to the context of their parents' lives and they are remarkably forgiving; this discussion should, we think, follow their example.

There are those who see such research as inevitably contributing to mother blame and feeding the epidemic of parental, especially maternal, guilt. A retreat from research on this basis, however, is also a mistake. Parents, among others, need accurate information to inform their choices. Without relevant, reliable research they may act on assumptions that are wrong. This seems to be the case in relation to several issues in the paper that follows.

Summary

This discussion paper examines the perspectives of young people about their parents' paid and unpaid work, its implications for their lives and the links between work and consumption. It analyses qualitative empirical data collected in Australia in late 2003.

Twenty-one focus groups amongst Year 6 and Year 11 males and females were conducted in urban and rural locations in two Australian states in both high and low socio-economic locations. In total, 93 young people were consulted for the study. They came from nine schools; one in the country and eight in cities. Four city schools were in lower socio-economic areas and four in higher socio-economic areas.

The paper falls into five sections. The first discusses previous studies of parental work, children and consumption. The subsequent four sections consider results as follows:

1. young people's preferences about time and the trade-off between work and money;

2. work 'spillover' and how parental work affects children;

3. the nexus between money and parental guilt; and

4. children's own consumption and its links to work, identity and self.

In Australia the links between changing patterns of paid work and consumption are complex. More paid work potentially drives more parent-replacing consumption of services and more guilt-salving expenditure. At the same time, changing cultures of parenting, intensified advertising to children, and new youth cultures also drive new levels of consumption. While several previous studies have explored how parental work affects young people, this study takes the analysis further by linking it to consumption.

Time versus money: Young people's preferences

It is clear from this study that the majority of young people want more time with their parents rather than more money through more parental work. This is true of boys and girls from dual earner and single earner couple households as well as single parent earner households. There are signs of a 'hyper-breadwinner' phenomenon in couple households where the single earner (usually the father) has a demanding job and works long hours to generate income. In these households, children's preference for time with their absent parent is especially strong. This finding may explain the counter-intuitive observation that a preference for more time appears just as strong in households with a mother at home as in dual earner households.

A preference for time with parents in place of money is less pronounced in Sydney than in Adelaide and the country. However, in households where parents are working long or unsocial hours, the preference is very consistently in favour of more time over more money. Not all parental time is seen in the same way. 'Hanging time' with an unstressed parent is especially prized by children, including older males and females in Year 11. Young people particularly want parents present for special school events,

celebrations, sporting achievements, and when problems arise. They show signs of 'parent-specific' time hunger; a parent at home, for instance a mother, does not substitute easily for an absent parent, such as a father working long hours. A significant number of children miss their absent fathers in particular, even when their mother is at home outside school hours. Many children with a long hours parent or one who is away on weekends are keen to avoid falling into the same pattern when they become parents themselves.

Job spillover

Parents' jobs can have strong effects on their children. However, the key question is not whether parents go to work but the state in which they come home. This state is influenced by certain objective characteristics of jobs such as hours and work intensity, as well as the extent to which parents' work preferences match their jobs.

For many children, their parents' jobs have positive spillover effects. Kids value the money and security that parents' jobs bring. Beyond this, they can see that many parents enjoy their jobs, or aspects of them. But negative spillover is also widespread. Bad jobs affect families badly. They contaminate family relations in a number of ways although their effects differ in lower and higher income groups. Children from lower income areas tend to notice physical injuries as a result of parental jobs while children in higher income areas more often mention moods, tiredness and emotional spillover. While the work and family debate is dominated by the issue of whether mothers should work or not, a more important question for young people is how jobs affect their mothers *and* fathers. These results suggest that a new emphasis on the work patterns and circumstances of fathers is important to a properly focussed work and family debate.

Negative spillovers are especially associated with disappointed parental desires such as occur when a parent who doesn't want to work must, or when a parent is unable to work the shifts they want. It is also associated with some specific job characteristics including risk of physical harm, job insecurity, work overload, and long or unsocial hours. These often send a parent home from work unhappy or bad-tempered. Their moods are obvious to young people and have a marked effect on the household. As a result, job spillover is not confined only to the parent; both good and bad job effects are transmitted directly to children.

The fit between job-preferences and job-reality is critical to the level and nature of spillover. For example, a mother who is happy working at home caring for the household has much less spillover from her work to her children than a mother who is unhappy doing domestic work. A father who loves his job and works long hours may bring home less negative spillover than one who works part-time but hates his job. Long or unsocial hours are consistently associated with negative spillover and the majority of parents who work them appear to their children to be sometimes grumpy, tired and stressed.

By and large, young people cannot prevent these spillovers, although some try. Most commonly they protect themselves by physically withdrawing. In the longer term, they

may turn to the other parent and distance themselves from the absent or overworked and bad-tempered parent.

Parental guilt

Many young people say that their parents feel guilty about their work and absence from the home. On the other hand, where parental work does not intrude excessively on to family relationships, young people do not notice guilt. Nor is it obvious in those parents who seem reconciled to the necessity of their work patterns. However, in many households, guilt is seen as especially afflicting parents who work long or unsocial hours or who spend extended periods of time away from their children. Both mothers and fathers are affected.

The signs of guilt which arise from a mismatch between the way parents *are as workers* and the way they *want to be as parents* are obvious to the children in this study who identify several common responses. Some parents simply talk about how they feel and young people appreciate the discussion. Others spend extra time with their children and this is valued by young people. More common are 'time and stuff' strategies; parents attempt to make up for their absence by spending extra time and money on kids. Young people like this 'two for the price of one' approach; but if they have to choose they prefer more time to more stuff. The substitution of stuff for time does not work.

Most young people are not on the lookout for material compensation; they prefer more time. 'Contrition through spending' appears to work better for the market than for young people. It therefore seems sensible for parents to avoid compensatory spending, not least because earning more money to buy more stuff means sacrificing more time. The 'cure' becomes the disease.

Consumption

This study suggests that many young people share a well-developed critique of materialism. While they enjoy having material goods, they are sharply critical of those with 'too much' and see them as greedy, spendthrift, socially inauthentic, irresponsible and poorly equipped for later life. However, young people live within a powerful force field of competitive consumption. They consistently name these pressures and can easily describe the items that matter. They clearly articulate their reasons for 'keeping up' – belonging, power and identity. This force field is active in higher and lower income areas, and amongst boys, girls and primary and high school children. It is less powerful in the country where consumption must sometimes be deferred until a city visit.

The costs of falling behind are seen to be high – teasing, not fitting in, feeling bad, failing socially. There are some who define themselves against the prevailing fashions of clothing, phones or cars. They find identity by being different and being in groups that are different, that adopt anti-market and anti-fashion attitudes. However, they are a minority and some actively pursue less fashionable forms of consumption.

This youthful competitive consumption drives paid work patterns in two obvious ways; through child pressure on parents to buy stuff and through young people's own

paid work to generate spending money. There is no doubt that working parents feel the pressure of this acquisitive race. Nagging is a common tactic and ‘pester power’ is actively encouraged by advertisers. Time-pressed working parents find it difficult to resist.

This study confirms key links between changing work patterns and consumption. Increased parental work drives increasing commodification of care, including through guilt-induced consumption. Most of the young people in this study are planning to have jobs and a family and many want to do it in ways that are different from their own parents. In many cases, young men want an active role in parenting and to be there for their children more than their own fathers have been. Young women want to share the tasks of earning and caring with their partners. Very substantial institutional changes will be necessary if workplaces and labour markets are to accommodate these preferences and give these parents of the future the kind of flexibilities they seek. This study shows that disappointed preferences contribute significantly to the negative job spillover that children perceive. A good match between preferences and work realities is critical to maximise positive job spillover and minimise negative effects on family relationships.

1. Mapping the links: Young people, parental work and consumption

Changes in patterns of paid and unpaid work, and in consumption and household shape, have been the subject of much recent analysis in Australia (HILDA 2001; Hamilton 2002; Campbell 2002; Hamilton and Mail 2003; Pocock 2003; Pusey 2003; Summers 2003; Watson, Buchanan, Campbell and Briggs 2003, Tanner 2003, Megalogenis 2003). From all of these accounts the perspectives of children is missing, yet such a perspective is important to consumption, household experiences and the effects of paid work on household 'ecology'. Children's perspectives will shape the future. If parents, and governments, knew more about children's perspectives on Australia's work, care and consumption regimes, they might do things differently, or think about their decisions differently. More information about children's views might affect the policy options that voters and elected governments consider supporting.

The existing literature suggests a number of factors and relationships that link work patterns and market and family changes to an increase in consumption. Five main categories of change are significant, and they are discussed below and set out schematically in Figure 1.

1.1 Trends in work and consumption

More work, more consumption

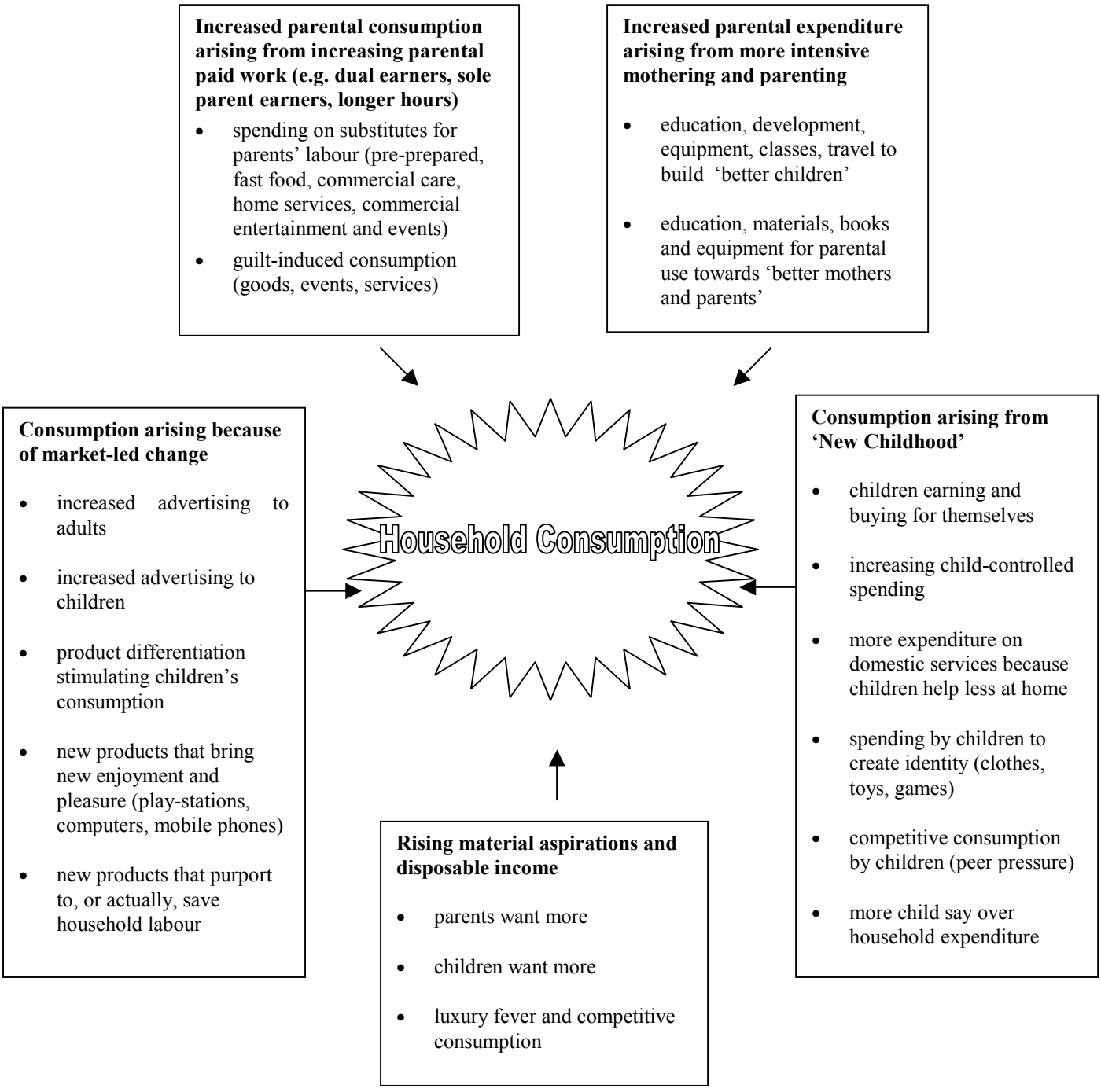
First, and most obviously, rising household participation in paid work by mothers drives new patterns of spending, especially on goods that substitute for mothers' (and fathers') labour. These changing work patterns are sometimes given further impetus by a greater reliance upon children to purchase and prepare goods, like food, independently of their parents. Some have suggested that increased child consumption also arises from the 'weakness' of working mothers' and their 'tendency to yield' to child requests (Cook, 2000: 495).

More work, more guilt, more consumption

Alongside the very direct link between working parents and new levels of commodified household labour, is consumption induced by guilt to compensate for parental absence (Waldrop, 1991: 191; Pocock 2003; Ehrensaft, 2001). Ehrensaft argues that the straightforward commodification of children is linked to pressure on dual income families and leads to a new construction of the child as 'the kinderadult' (old before their time, with responsibility for consumption and other adult matters while still a child) who is born of 'parenting by guilt':

> *A fast-paced culture and a driven generation of workaholic parents have created a technologically savvy, sophisticated cohort of children who have no time or can find no place for childhood (Ehrensaft, 2001: 305).*

Figure 1 A map of some linkages between work and consumption



Ehrensaft points to whole markets devoted to children ('even a children's bank in Manhattan'), as 'big business both designates and reflects the image of the child as a highly complicated being with distinct needs and desires', while at the same time childhood and economic dependence on parents is actually growing longer (Ehrensaft 2001: 305). This 'kinderadult, half miniature adult, half innocent cherub' is born because:

> *The irresolvable tension between work and family has forced mothers and fathers and the society at large to unwittingly develop a concept of a child who they believe will weather the storms of life with harried working parents (Ehrensaft, 2001: 306).*

Ehrensaft argues that the focus on the importance of nurture has placed a heavy burden on parents and has fed guilt. Parents are not just held accountable; they are led to believe that they have the potential to achieve perfection through appropriate intervention. 'Parents grow to believe it is their personal failing rather than a dearth of time that prevents them from being good parents' (Ehrensaft, 2001: 316). Where they 'fail', they parent out of guilt, substituting things for time:

> *Their guilt gets the best of them, however, and they find themselves overcompensating for their extended absence from the children by catering to them, granting their every desire and demanding nothing from them. Each day parents are internally driven by the mantra, "I ask so much of you in my absence (while away at work), how can I possibly ask anything of you in my presence (when I return home)?" (Ehrensaft, 2001: 316)*

McKee, Mauther and Galilee (2003) observe material compensation for parental guilt in middle class households in Scotland where fathers, absent for long periods, compensate for their absence and stress with gifts and spending.

Market-led change: Advertising

Children are affected by, and affect, their parents' decisions about paid work, care and consumption. Advertising companies are well aware of this and, in some cases, deliberately target elements of their strategy at young household members including strategies in relation to purchases that go well beyond those that children have an immediate interest in (toys, computers and clothes) to care, holidays, houses and furniture.

Since at least the 1930s, advertisers in industrialised countries have been alert to the potential of marketing to children (Cook, 2000) and there is no doubt that children are involved, one way or another, in the significant increase in consumption in industrialised countries. One US estimate suggests that children influenced about $5 billion of their parents' purchases in the 1960s but by 1984 'that figure increased ten-fold to $50 billion. By 1997 it had tripled to $188 billion. Kids marketing expert James McNeal estimates that by 2000, children 12 and under influenced purchases to the tune of $500 billion' (Newdream, 2003).

The literature suggests that young people's consumption is growing rapidly, that they increasingly influence household consumption, and are the target of marketing especially through schools and social networks (Quant, 2003; Ehrensaft 2001; Fien and Skoien, 2000). It also suggests that 'competitive consumption' (Lane 2000) is at work amongst children as they are affected by peer pressure and that they use a variety of techniques to persuade parents to buy for them, including advertising and 'the nag factor' (Cook, 2001: 1).

New childhood: 'I consume therefore I am'

Alissa Quant has documented the strategies used by US marketers to build teenage consumption (2003). They are diverse and effectively penetrate households, schools and children's own networks. Cook argues that such marketing is part of the process of extending 'personhood to children'. He says that in order for the creation of '[young] personhood through consumption' to be untainted by the profane, it is necessary to naturalise consumption in ways that reaffirm 'the sacredness of childhood in the context of market relations by making self-expression appear as the inevitable, necessary completion of the commercial process' (Cook, 2000: 489). In other words, the creation of the self through shopping and consuming must be seen as a good thing rather than a grubby thing if children are to be 'made' through it. Many young people increasingly construct their identities through what they buy and consume, a trend that marketers avidly encourage. 'I shop therefore I am' is an element of marketing to children, just as it is to adults. Young people see aspects of themselves confirmed and created through what they buy and use, a perception marketing manipulates by increasingly 'pitching' to them and their emergent identities (McNeal 1992; Seiter 1993; Acuff 1997; Cook, 2000).

Intensive mothering (and fathering?)

In the UK and Australia the changing role of women has shifted consumption in significant ways so that by the 1950s and 1960s parents were spending 'unprecedented' amounts on their children, and requiring them to do less around the house (Roberts 1995). These developments have been accompanied by changes in the nature of motherhood. There is much less discussion in the literature about the changing nature of fatherhood and, as we shall see, this is an important gap. As Hays has argued, in industrialised countries at least, there has been an 'intensification' of motherhood, with a growing library of motherhood manuals, and expectations of 'professional' motherhood on terms that intensively manage the physical, material and emotional outcomes of children (Hays, 1996). This intensification throws its own material shadow by increasing the consumption of services designed to educate and develop babies, children and young people, and ensure that they participate in an ever-widening array of extra-curricula activities. The commodification of women's labour in paid work has been accompanied by the commodification of their *unpaid* labour, with increasing reliance on products substituting for maternal (and paternal) care, including pre-prepared and fast-food, household and gardening services, entertainment, clothing, transport and straightforward care (Bittman and Pixley 1997). Stewart recently drew attention to the specific phenomenon of children's entertainment, pointing to the massive expansion in expenditure on children's birthday parties that are now highly commodified (Stewart 2003).

In sum, there are several forces arising from changing work and household patterns that imply a positive link to increased consumption. Some qualitative evidence suggests a close connection between parental decisions about paid work and consumption. There is some Australian evidence indicating that parents believe that their children support their work and consumption decisions, connecting more hours of parental work to 'more stuff' for kids (Pocock 2003). Some parents hope that 'more stuff' substitutes for love, and that the loss of time with children is compensated for

with the material rewards garnered as a result of paid jobs. Some parents talk of compensating their children for their absences and the effects of their jobs.

1.2 What do we know about how young people see parental work?

There now exists a very sizeable body of literature which examines how work affects home life (and vice versa) and establishes the notion of 'spillover'; that is, a flowing into the home of effects arising from work and from work to home (Galinksy, 1999). There has been much less international research about *children's* views of parental work (Galinsky, 1999; Jensen and McKee 2003). As we find in this study, some of these studies reveal children as 'sophisticated observers' of their work and family contexts (McKee *et al.,* 2003). However, there has been little Australian research from this perspective with the exception of Lewis, Tudball and Hand (2001). Neither Galinsky nor Lewis *et al.* discusses the links between paid parental work and consumption.

Galinsky (1999) took a comprehensive look at the views of US children concerning paid work by their parents and compared them with those of their parents. The study asked 1000 children from school years 3-12 (about 8-18 years old) about their views of their parents' work. The analysis was largely confined to a comparison of the effects of full-time versus part-time work on children and parents, with little direct analysis of work generally, the types of care children experience, or reference to consumption. Galinsky argues that the 'work/family' debate has been misframed with too much focus on whether working mothers in particular are 'bad' for children, and not enough focus on how work affects parents and, through them, children. Galinsky finds:

> *Having a working mother* is never once predictive *of how children assess their mothers' parenting skills on a series of twelve items that are strongly linked to children's healthy development, school readiness, and school success. Other characteristics of their mothers'* and their fathers' *lives are very important (1999: xiv, emphasis in original).*

The real question about parental work is not whether parents work but how their work affects them and how attentive or focused they are able to be towards their children when they are with them. Galinsky found that older children, more than younger children, longed for increased parental time, especially 'hang around time' and especially with their fathers. She argues, on the basis of this evidence, that the *nature* of parents' jobs is very important to children. This result is confirmed by the work of Nasman who analysed the views of Swedish children about parental work and found that work affects parents' 'state and physical condition. This 'colouring' spills over to family life, overriding the idea of work and family as separate social spheres' (Nasman, 2003: 51). This spillover was higher for parents with irregular or long hours and for single mothers and manifested itself most obviously through parental fatigue, although it was not confined to this side-effect: 'Parents are tired but also fretful, irritated, angry, grumpy, surly, sad, dizzy, inattentive, occupied and in pain' (Nasman, 2003: 52).

In a Scottish study, McKee *et al.* (2003) found that children were profoundly aware of their parents' work and its effects; they noticed the exhaustion of working mothers at home, and the effects of their fathers' long hours and absences in the oil and gas industry. They were negatively affected by household mobility and 'disrupted friendship networks, lack of a sense of belonging, and lack of rootedness and distance from kin' (McKee *et al.,* 2003: 43). These children could 'competently assess how work made their parents feel' (McKee *et al.,* 2003: 39) and many wanted to avoid the stress and tension arising from external control of working patterns in their own future adult lives.

In Australia, Lewis, Tudball and Hand (2001) undertook interviews with a non-random group of Australian parents and children from 47 families in Melbourne. The majority of children in the study felt that their parents worked 'about the right amount of time' and that, in accord with Galinsky's work, 'it is not whether and how much parents work, but how they work and how they parent, that matters' (2001: 23). Nonetheless, most of the children talked about the impact that work has on the time that parents spend with them (2001: 23) and 'the responses were divided roughly evenly between those saying that they wished their parents spent more time with them and those who said their parents currently spent enough time with them' (2001: 24). Many parents in the study wanted to have more time with their children and 'some parents had changed jobs to reduce pressure, although they lost work status and income' (2001: 24). Some children in the study showed great delight when a parent's hours became more 'reasonable', for example after giving up shift work. Lewis, Tudball and Hand's study supports some of Galinsky's US results, especially the significance to parents and children of time spent together, and the value children attach to having their parents available to attend school and other events. While children valued parental earnings, some talked about lack of time spent with their parents as a negative consequence of parental work and most children referred 'to the impact of work on the time that parents spent with them' (2001: 23). Only two parents in Lewis, Tudball and Hand's study worked more than 50 hours a week.

1.3 Do young people's views matter?

Children's perspectives are relevant to both public policy and individual and household decision making. Several aspects of paid work in Australia are changing with potentially significant impacts upon workers' dependents. Most significant amongst these changes are increases in the proportion of Australians working long, or very long, hours (Campbell 2002); the intensity of work (Watson, Buchanan, Campbell and Briggs, 2003); the increasing participation of women in work and the growth in dual income and sole parent sole earner households (Weston, Gray, Qu and Stanton, 2003; Pocock, 2003). Each of these might reasonably be predicted to affect young people in negative ways. Evidence about household contamination[1] arising from the effects of extended hours and the 'bad-tempered' workers infected by them, suggest significant spillover effects for spouses (Pocock *et al.,* 2001) and might well

[1] This 'contamination' refers to the effects of long hours which flow over into negative consequences for those who live with long hours' workers.

be expected to extend to dependents, including children, in such households. If spillover is *not* significant (that is, children don't notice or care about their absent or grumpy parents), the arguments for policy to reduce extended hours of work are weakened.

Secondly, such studies are relevant to parents' decisions with respect to individual and household labour force participation. If children perceive great benefit and little cost from higher household participation in the labour market, individuals might choose to increase such participation. If, on the other hand, children come down on the side of 'time over money', parents may modify their hours in the opposite direction. At least they may try to as working hours are far from a simple reflection of employee preferences (Watson *et al.,* 2003). Further, if children do not *see* parental guilt, or do not find parental compensation effective, working parents might make other choices.

While no sensible labour market policy should be based exclusively on what young people think, it is useful to bring their preferences and perspectives to labour market debates and policy questions, given that these often reflect implicit assumptions about how children are affected by labour market phenomena. It is also useful to connect these views to the larger question of consumption and the mechanics of work, time and spending.

Discussion of our results falls into four sections. We consider:

1. young people's preferences around their parents' work, time and money;

2. the issues of work 'spillover' and how parental work affects children;

3. the money and guilt nexus; and

4. children's own consumption and its links to work, identity and self.

1.4 Study methods

This is a study of the perceptions of young people in Year 6 (10-12 years old) and Year 11 (16-18 years old) in Australia about parental work. It examines the perceptions of children which, like the perceptions of adults, are often not the same as facts or reality. However, the perceptions of children are relevant to the actions and decisions of adults and to policies that affect the world of children.

We collected these perceptions in 21 small focus groups. Focus groups allow 'deep' analysis through the pursuit of complex issues within complex contexts, and they expose ambivalence and unanticipated factors more so than closed questionnaires. They also allow an exchange of ideas amongst participants which can reveal unexpected lines of thought and views. Interviews do not always permit this kind of exchange and comparison of views, and they tend to rely more upon pre-prepared questions that are asked intensively, one on one. Focus groups allow an exchange that can trigger unexpected directions and test different observations and their rationales (Probert & McDonald, 1996).

More practically, focus groups allowed us to include a larger number of participants. We conducted 21 focus groups, collecting the attitudes and opinions of 93 young people in total. For each young person in this study, we analyse their views with respect to their family, income and spatial situation, and provide a context, often complex, for those views. Through small focus groups of, on average, four participants we could ensure that each young person spoke and that their opinions were extensively canvassed. This is why we chose this method of analysis.

Table 1 sets out details of the focus groups which were selected from stratified sub-groups of schools in two states, in high and low socio-economic groups based on their score on the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (one of the five measures of disadvantage published by the ABS[2]). A sub-group of schools, selected on socio-economic criteria, was then approached to participate (following ethics approval by education departments and the university). Where schools agreed to participate, parents were invited to consent in writing to their child's participation. Before the commencement of recording, young people were invited to consent in writing to their participation and to the recording of their views. The participation of low income schools and their students was more difficult to secure.

[2] A score of 1000 on this index is the Australian average. We selected schools located in areas above the average for Comfort and Leafy Schools and below it for Strive and Struggle Schools. This is an imprecise means of approaching the income level in young people's homes. In fact, a wide range of income households were represented in most groups For example, children in Struggle High spoke of being 'comfortable'. On the whole, however, households in the lower income schools tended to be, on average, poorer than in higher income schools.

Table 1 Composition of the focus groups

Location	No. groups	No. participants	Per cent of total participants
Country Primary	2	5	
Country High	2	8	
Struggle Primary	2	7	
Struggle High	2	9	
Strive Primary	2	9	
Strive High	2	7	
Comfort Primary	2	9	
Comfort High	3	15	
Leafy Primary	2	12	
Leafy High	2	12	
Total	**21**	**93**	
Higher Income Areas	9	48	52%
Lower Income Areas	8	32	34%
Country	4	13	14%
Female Only Groups	9		
Male Only Groups	7		
Mixed Sex Groups	5		
Females		57	61%
Males		36	39%
Family Type			
Two-parent, dual earner		53	57%
Two-parent, single earner		20	22%
Two-parent, no earner		2	2%
Single-parent earner		13	14%
Single-parent no earner		5	5%
		93	**100%**

We call the two higher income schools 'Leafy' (in Sydney), and 'Comfort' (in Adelaide). We call the two lower income schools 'Struggle' (in Adelaide) and 'Strive' (in Sydney's west)[3]. Kids at Struggle Primary were unambigiously from poorer households and had a high level of geographic mobility. Incomes were more mixed at Struggle than at Strive High where one child spoke of his trust fund, and dual earner households included a manager and an engineer alongside truck drivers, nurses and unemployed. However, in Sydney's west, 'Strive' accurately describes an area where households are financially stretched, and where, according to their kids, parents hold strong aspirations for the educational success of their children and strive hard, as do their children, to achieve financial security and upward mobility. They are poorer, striving households.

No young person refused to have their views recorded. Twenty-one focus groups were conducted, four in rural community schools,[4] eight in lower income areas and nine in higher income areas. Thirteen were conducted in South Australia and eight in New South Wales. Five of the focus groups mixed males and females while 16 were single sex (nine females, seven males). All the groups were age-specific, mostly Year 6 or Year 11.[5] Focus group discussions were transcribed. They ran for between 60 and 90 minutes except for two that were shortened to 35 minutes because of a school excursion. A set of open-ended questions was used to stimulate discussion but answers were liberally pursued in relation to the themes of the research. Participants chose or were allocated pseudonyms and the identity of schools and individual participants, along with any other identifying details, are concealed. In a few cases we have changed chosen pseudonyms because of repetition or to protect identities, or to clarify sex or ethnicity.

We set out with some concerns about the willingness of young people to talk about these issues with researchers over 35 years old, particularly in front of their peers. We were also concerned about whether young men and boys would feel constrained in front of two female researchers.[6] In fact, the participants were enthusiastic talkers, by and large. Most were eager to share their thoughts and feelings, as a lively set of tapes and over 700 pages of transcript attest.

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[3] This is not to imply that these schools or these students were themselves 'struggling' or necessarily 'comfortable'. Many were far from either. Instead, these labels are intended to help the reader connect voices to relative socio-economic areas.

[4] We randomly selected the country town location. It is 200 km from a large city, served by a large Area School and with mixed income households, based mostly around rural and service industries.

[5] Two of the older focus groups were actually conducted amongst Year 10 students because of exam constraints for Year 11s in the school.

[6] When we debriefed with some focus groups, both young women and men felt that they would have talked differently in front of participants of the other sex, so the decision to separate most groups by sex, especially amongst adolescents, was important. Young men did not feel that female interviewers had affected their views, but protective politeness may have been at work here.

Focus groups have strengths and weaknesses. They can be unrepresentative. We attempted to minimise this problem in three ways. First, by working through schools selected randomly within socio-economic groups rather than, for example, a snowballing method working from a non-random group of individuals; second, by randomly choosing a rural location; and third, by including a sizeable number of people in relevant categories incuding sex, rural and urban locations, socio-economic status and age. We did not know anyone in any of the focus groups or schools personally.

The focus groups contained a good mix of family types. Australian households are now very diverse and many are complex. For example, one child described his situation: 'I've got two step-dads and a real dad. I don't know my real dad and my mum is separated from my first step-dad and now I've got a second-step-dad and he works'. An increasing number of young people live in blended households or have more than one household. Thirteen per cent of those in our study live in blended families, double what ABS data suggests holds for the larger population, and a fifth live in sole-parent households thus matching the figure for the population overall in 2001 (ABS Cat. No. 4102.0, 2002: 30). Seventy per cent of children living in couple households in our study live in dual earner households, while 28 per cent live in traditional 'breadwinner' households with one earner, usually the father. These reflect current household and work population patterns whereby both parents work in almost two-thirds of couple families with children while a third rely on a single breadwinner (ABS Cat. No. 6203.0, 2003). Eighty one per cent of children in our study live in intact couple households, close to the Australian average of 79 per cent (Sanson and Lewis, 2001: 5). Children from non-English speaking backgrounds were well represented in the group, while Aboriginal children probably were not (we did not identify any specifically).

The group under-represents males and children living in households with unemployed parents. Six per cent of participants were living in households with no working adult, compared to 18 per cent of all children in Australia in 1999 (Sanson and Lewis, 2001: 4). This probably reflects the fact that the invitation to participate mentioned paid work.

Forty three of the participants (46 per cent) live in households where at least one parent works long or unsocial hours, based on the account of the child.[7] This may be higher than for the overall population depending, as it does, on children's perceptions. However, in many cases children recount the working hours of their parents with persuasive precision, and most so-defined were working more than 45 hours a week (many do much more) and shift work. This proportion of households affected by long or unsocial hours may not be an overstatement for three reasons. First, twelve children in our study were living with self-employed parents who work notoriously long hours. Ten of these had at least one parent working long or unsocial hours. Second, in 2000 over a quarter of Australian employees worked more than 45 hours a week (up from

[7] This contrasts with Lewis *et al.* which, using a snowball selection method, included only two adults working long hours and under-represented long hours workers.

13 per cent in 1985) (Campbell, 2002: 94). Of the 93 participants, 57 lived in households with two parents (where each parent had at least a one in four chance of working long hours). Third, these perceptions include both long and unsocial hours (shifts, two-week working stints away from home). The reach of long or unsocial hours is now widespread in the households of young Australians and these are well represented in this study.

Reliance on school administrators and teachers for communication about the project may have introduced a selection bias in favour of more articulate or 'good' students. It is hard to predict how such a selection bias might influence our findings; it may mean that more 'serious' anti-consumption views are included in the study than actually exist amongst 11 and 16 year olds. Further, our methods relied on parental literacy and spare time to read about the project and give permission; this may have worked against the participation of children in low-literacy or time-poor households. Our method seems to have worked in favour of female participation. Alongside this, children of harried parents who are concerned about their children reporting negative work spillover effects (like the single mother who contacted us with this concern), may be under-represented in the study. Overall, if a bias exists it seems more likely that our sample group under-represents, rather than over-represents, the negative effects of parental work on children.

A group interview and discussion might introduce pressure to concur with opinions that have been expressed rather than to state a participant's own and this might be expected to be stronger amongst young people who seek peer approval. To counter this, participants were specifically invited to say what they thought and not to be afraid to disagree, so that we could canvass the full diversity of views. Many offered contrasting views. We took care to ensure that all participants in each group were invited to speak on each question so that no one dominated discussion and the full range of views was heard.

Anyone who has worked with transcripts, especially focus group transcripts, knows that comments rarely emerge in whole sentences. We have therefore edited the transcripts, removing 'like' and other common 'fill' words used by young people. However, we have taken great care to preserve meaning. Where there is intervening text that is extraneous to the point, or a probe question, we have deleted it and indicated the edit with three dots.

2. Time *versus* money: Young people's preferences

When it comes to their parents' work patterns, the young people in this study show a preference for more time over more money. While this is the dominant preference, it is shaped by income, geography and household circumstances. The preference for time is more pronounced in higher income areas, and especially in the country and in Adelaide. Somewhat surprisingly, the pattern of preferences is not very different between dual-earner and single-earner couple households or sole parent-earner households and seems to reflect the fact that in many single earner couple households, with one parent at home, children miss the earner parent who increasingly works long or unsocial hours.

A 'hyper-breadwinner' model exists in such households where, in order to keep the household financially afloat, the breadwinner makes a larger contribution at work and a lesser one at home. A parent working long or unsocial hours is strongly associated with children's preferences for time over money. For many children, a 'hyper-breadwinner' drives a 'parent-specific' preference for more time with the absent parent, usually their father. Many children miss their fathers as a consequence of this growth in hyper-breadwinning. At the same time, many appreciate the presence of a parent at home, and they especially value parental presence at key events. Many children plan their own balance between money and time in reaction to the way they see their parents live.

2.1 Choosing between time and money

Working parents have to choose between free time and income. What do young people think of these choices? We asked our 93 participants *'If you could choose to have more time with your parents on the one hand, or more money because they worked more, which would you choose?'* A fifth refused this choice and nominated both. Of the 65 who made the choice, less than a third chose more money while more than two thirds chose more time.

As in other countries, young Australians are pragmatic about the necessity of paid parental work (McKee *et al.,* 2003). They are well aware of their parents' need to earn and, in most households, value their parents' jobs and understand the necessity for work. In some lower income areas in particular they are also valued for stability and security. Overall, however, the majority of young people in this study demonstrated a preference for more time with their parents over more money acquired through more parental work. Almost half of all the 93 children preferred more time with their parents, a fifth preferred more money, and many couldn't decide, nominating 'both'. Less than a tenth said that they liked things as they were. It is interesting that only four young people said they didn't know. These results are summarised in Table 2.

The preference for time over money was stronger in the country, and also, predictably, in higher income areas. Those in lower income areas are often concerned about financial pressure and the need to have money to pay bills. However, even in lower income areas, over a third of young people chose more time over more money, and only a quarter unambiguously chose more money. More of them wanted to keep things 'as is' than in higher income areas. Many in both low and higher income areas

wanted both, if only they could have them. Both younger and older children showed a preference for time over money; only a fifth of each preferred more money to more time, while more than double this proportion of both Year 6 and Year 11 participants preferred more time. Younger children were more likely to have difficulty choosing and nominated 'both' (31 per cent, compared to ten per cent of older children).

Table 2 Young people's preferences for more time with parents or more money (per cent)

	More time	More money	Both	As is	Don't know	Total
Country	92	8	0	0	0	100
Lower Income	38	25	22	16	0	100
Higher Income	44	23	21	4	8	100
ALL	**48**	**20**	**19**	**8**	**4**	**100**

The results presented in Table 2 must be interpreted with caution. They are indicative of the views of the 93 young people in our focus groups rather than reliable indicators for the larger population. However, they are suggestive of a significant preference for more time in the minds of many young people, even those whose households are not located in more financially comfortable areas.

Our focus group methodology was designed to discover, however, the more complex story underlying these summary statistics. Where children feel they currently enjoy enough time with parents, they often choose more money. Andre from Leafy Primary put it as did many others: 'I'd probably choose more money because I can see my parents basically whenever I want. My mum [an architect] doesn't do that much work and my dad [an artist] is at home'. A fifth wanted both. Charlie at Leafy High wanted more time with his father ('I don't really see my dad'), and more money because he sees his father's employment in the entertainment industry as sometimes unpredictable. Like many others, his 'both' answer reflects his view that he sees enough of one parent (like most, his mother) and not enough of his father. Brittany at the same school also finds it hard to choose; she likes it 'the way it is. I would like to see my dad more because I don't see my dad [a truck driver]'.

More young people from financially comfortable households in Adelaide and from households in the country would prefer additional time with their parents rather than more money. In households feeling financial pressure, in Struggletown (northern or western Adelaide) or Strivetown (western Sydney), views are evenly split; money matters more than in more comfortable areas but, despite financial pressure, a fair number of young people want increased time with their parents. Many mention specific money pressures like meeting the loan repayments and the bills. Some cannot choose, especially where money is tight: 'I can't really pick because we need the money, but I also need my parents … so I don't think I could choose' (Strive High). Audrey's dad is retired, and her mother works part-time. She mentions earnings 'stability' several times:

> *I'd prefer more money … so my parents wouldn't have to rely on the banks for a huge loan, like take 20 years to pay it off, you know. I'd prefer to have more money so they can be stable and also pay off their debts at the same time. It wouldn't matter to me if I didn't see them, if my time with them lessened because they were working more. It wouldn't matter to me. (Audrey, 16, Strive High).*

2.2 Children are pragmatic about parental jobs

Many children are pragmatic about the need to earn, the consumption benefits it brings, and the sacrifice of parental time that it requires:

> *I would like them to work a lot because my mum needs money to live and pay the rent and bills cause she's got a lot of bills to pay. Cause I've got Foxtel and I've got other stuff (Harry, 11, Struggle Primary).*

Others are ambivalent. They can see the need, but they also look for family time to do things like solve problems together:

> *I like my dad to work because all his friends work at the same place, but I don't like it because sometimes we can't have proper family time, and I like having family time because sometimes if we have problems, they help solve them (Hayley, 12, Strive Primary).*

> *I like [them working], but I don't like it. Dad and Mary [step-mother] don't get home until 7 pm. Mum [in a different household] gets upset because she isn't able to work with her friends anymore. It makes me upset (Kelly, 11, Struggle Primary).*

> *When my dad wasn't working, I liked him at home because I liked to play with him and that. But now he's not really any fun any more … because he's always at work. So I've got no one to play with so it's no fun at home. But sometimes it's a good thing because when he works he gets the money and we need the money. Yeah (Eddie, 12, Struggle Primary).*

Eddie's father works six days a week driving a truck and moving furniture but is now 'really sick … Underneath his lungs it is all crappy. And his lungs are just inflating.' He says he feels bad about his dad's illness 'because I can't play with him and, yeah, he can't buy me stuff without the money'.

The work and spend cycle is clearly evident to many young people: 'They earn more money so they can buy you more things, but I don't get to see them as much if they're working more' as one girl at Struggle High puts it.

Young people in lower income areas show a high level of understanding about how their parents' work patterns fund necessities and loans. They understand their parents' situations: 'I'd prefer a bit more money because we've got a lot of loans to pay off and we're really tight for money recently, so I'd prefer a bit more money, not too much that I don't see them at all, but just a bit more' (Melinda, 16, Strive High). If a little more money now means faster loan repayments, Audrey (also at Strive High) is

positive about trading time *now* for time *later* and a greater sense of 'being stable'. Others agree.

In the Strivetown (western Sydney) focus groups, eight young people preferred more time with their parents; two wanted both more time and more money; and six preferred more money (several mentioned loan repayments, bills and repairs). One wanted her parents to work less so that they were less tired: 'Because then they get to rest more, so they don't have to work as hard as usual'. These children see their parents working *hard,* and they feel that this is for *them*. They see money as essential to alleviate pressure on parents. Younger and older children in Strivetown share similar views.

In the country, nearly all children (12 out of 13) would choose more time with their parents, even though each of these either had a mother at home most of the time or, if not, mostly at home outside school hours. They were mostly sympathetic to their parents and their jobs but looked for more time with their fathers in particular. Like young people in the city, they understood the need for money.

Interestingly, there was little difference in preferences between different household types, with around half of those in dual earner couple households, single earner couple households and sole parent earner households looking for more time, while about a fifth of each would choose more money through more parental work.

2.3 Differences in time and money preferences

In many cases, specific family circumstances construct preferences. Two very sick unemployed parents, for example, mean that a young man at Struggle High places great value on time with his parents whose health is threatened, even though 'we absolutely need the money'. The most striking differences in money and time preference patterns lie not with income or household type, but with location and the demands of parents' jobs, including their hours.

Sydney: Money matters more

A sizeable difference in time and money preferences exists between those who live in Sydney, whether in low or higher income areas, and those who live elsewhere. Sydney-based young people lean toward more money over more time and many mention the need for money to pay loans and meet the costs of living. This consciousness is weaker in Adelaide where opinion is more evenly split. Sydney children were three times more likely to prefer more money than children in Adelaide and in the country. Mike, 17, at Sydney's Leafy High is unambiguous:

> *Put it this way, this day and age, it's just money. Cause I reckon people our age don't really hang around with their parents much. I only see my dad [a plumber, and single parent with whom he is now living] when he's about to go to bed. We don't spend time together that much. Maybe on a Sunday we might go for a walk at Manly, [so it's] money for sure.*

Mike has decided not to have children for the same reasons:

> *Just think how much money you can keep for yourself. My dad says, Mike, we spend so much money on you three kids - just one of you costs about $250,000, just raising you … If you didn't have kids you could keep it all to yourself. Just be rich.' (Mike, 17, Leafy High).*

Some of Mike's class-mates saw this as selfish and extreme.

A demanding job drives preference for more time

The second striking difference with respect to money and time preferences occurs around job demands, especially jobs with long or unsocial hours. We did not ask any direct questions about the impact of, or views about, working hours; instead we asked about the 'upsides/good' and the 'downsides/bad' of mothers' and then fathers' jobs. Forty-three of the total group of 93 young people had at least one parent who, in their perception, worked long or unsocial hours, for example shift work. This is not surprising given the growing proportion of Australians working longer and non-standard hours (Campbell, 2002; Watson *et al.,* 2003; see discussion in 1.4 above).

Forty-three participants mentioned that long working hours constitute a significant downside of the job of at least one of their parents. Only a couple of children who live with a long hours parent felt that it did not affect them, and in at least one case, this was because they were 'used to it'. Fifty-six per cent of those living with a parent working long hours wanted more time with their parents while only 19 per cent wanted more money. This compares with 38 per cent of those with a parent not seen as working long or unsocial hours who preferred more time.

A number of young people defined their own futures *against* their parents' working lives. They plan to make sure they spend enough time with their own children, or want to avoid demanding jobs and are determined to have weekends off. They refer to the kind of 'work/eat/sleep' cycle that long hours workers also apply to themselves (Pocock *et al.,* 2001):

> *Dad earns money and gets out, but he hardly spends any time with you. He comes home, eats tea and watches TV. We'd like* time *… He feels bad because he can't spend time with the family. He puts Mary [step-mother] before my sister and me (Kelsey, 12, Struggle Primary).*

Bonnie's dad is a truck driver and she notices that he doesn't like long trips that mean he is away for days at a time. She says that:

> *He's just not there, and you start to miss him after a while … Sometimes he has to miss things and he doesn't like that. He's done it since I was a little baby and he's missed all kinds of things like when I was a baby and things like that. He's missed out on lots of things and he doesn't like it, he doesn't like going in the truck all the time (Bonnie, 11, Country Primary).*

When it comes to choosing between time and money, she does not hesitate: 'More time, even if that means you mightn't get everything that you wanted'. Brittany, also the daughter of a truck driver, but in Sydney at Leafy Primary agrees; she wants more time.

Melissa, an international student, says that her father's split shifts which he works in Asia, mean that 'he works at hours when you can't see him'. As a result she does not feel close to him: 'I can't really talk to him that much'. Similarly, Aislan feels that her dad's job (which he likes) has distanced him from her: 'The problem is that he only gets one holiday a year so that can be a pain, and I'm not as close to him as I could be if he wasn't working so much' (Aislan, 16, Leafy High). In this group long and unsocial hours are clearly associated with children's preferences for more time. As we see in the next section, they are also associated with very significant job spillover reflecting the effect on workers of long work hours.

2.4 The 'hyper-breadwinner'

Children in two earner families might be expected to demonstrate a greater preference for time with parents than children in couple families with a single earner. However, this does not appear to be so. Many children in traditional, single-breadwinner households miss their breadwinner parent and are specifically seeking more time with them. They may spend adequate time with the other parent, but this does not prevent them from yearning for time with the absent, working parent, especially one with a demanding job. In the traditional single earner or 'breadwinner' home, a form of 'hyper-breadwinner' is evident. This breadwinner is often absent for long periods as he (they are mostly men) takes on the task of earning enough to maintain the household which increasingly means overtime, longer hours at work, or travelling long distances to work intensively.

A parent who works long hours drives a preference for time over money in the children who are clear that they want time with the parent – always the one working longest or seen least. As Ali at Leafy Primary in Sydney describes his taxi driver dad's situation: 'I think it's not good because I don't see him in the morning at all. He has to leave really early before I wake up and he comes home really late so it's annoying cause I never really see him. I never really get to interact with him. So it's kind of lost time with him' (Ali, 11, Leafy Primary). The good thing about his father's job is that he 'gets lots of money'. All four children of truck drivers in the study had very similar accounts about their fathers' hours, and of missing them.

Parent-specific time hunger

In many households where children prefer time over money, their preferences relate more to one parent than the other. At Comfort Primary, for example, with relatively secure higher incomes, most children choose more time with their parents over more money and often mention preferring that time with the parent who is absent most. Nicky is an exception; she would choose more money, reflecting the fact that she lives with her mother who works part-time while her dad lives in another city. The 'breadwinner' household structures with a time-rich parent at home, usually the mother, do not eliminate children's time hunger; instead they show a *parent-specific time hunger*. For example, Bob, whose dad sometimes works long hours while his mum is part-time, wants to spend more time with his parents 'especially my dad because he hasn't spent a lot of time at home', and would choose that over more money. Nonetheless, he pragmatically recognises why his parents work the way they do:

They are trying to get us more money so we can live a better life … I'd like to see them more, but they are doing it for us (Bob, 11, Comfort Primary).

2.5 What do young people want from parental time?

The most common activity young people say they want their parents around for is 'just being together' to 'do nothing/do anything'. Anna from a non-English speaking background mentions that she learns a lot from hanging around her parents. It's good for how she feels about herself:

Finding your roots and stuff … Like where you come from, how your background is, keeping the tradition going, all that. It's a good thing (Anna, 16, Strive High).

Some children value time when the whole family is together, others time spent with a specific parent. Typical of other 11 year olds, Bob wants to hang around with his dad more: 'Just kicking the footy or soccer ball around with him'. Thomas too would choose more time with his dad 'to kick the footy … help us with the veggie garden'. Todd would choose more time with his mum who leaves at 7 am and arrives home at 6.30 pm:

Probably [I'd choose] more time [with her] because I don't see her very much. I see her at nights. I like Mum working, but sometimes it gets pretty lonely (Todd, 11, Comfort Primary).

Rove would like to see more of his mum 'cause we don't see her for that two hours after school … She'll play Monopoly with us', but he is also in favour of more money: 'I'd prefer it if we had more money, cause we're trying to save to go to Italy in two years. But I'd like it if Mum and Dad were home all the time'. Carrie and Ashley would both choose more time: 'It's nice being together' (Carrie, 11, Comfort Primary).

Amongst 16-17 year olds in Comfortville, the preference is more for time over money. For example, Geoff, Jade, Jane, Ann, Amanda and Mark in dual income households chose time, often emphatically, while Thanh in a single income household says:

It's up to my mum. It depends on the circumstances … Like I want more time with her, but I know there will be problems that will occur if I choose that … if my mum doesn't work we don't get money (Thanh, 17, Comfort High).

Jade misses her father when he travels overseas and is away for two weeks at a time: 'Well, I just miss him, because I don't live with my mum [she lives with her step-mother and father]. I guess I just miss him because he's my real father … he helps me out with lots of things, and with my school work'. A few would choose things 'as they are' rather than more time or money: 'They are at home a fair bit anyway so probably I'd … leave it the way it is' (Abraham, 16, Comfort High).

In a higher income school area in Sydney, amongst 16 year olds the preference shifts more towards money, although it is far from universal. Six of the 12 from Leafy High

want more time, five want more money, and one was happy with the way things were. Hannah in a relatively low-income household for the leafy area prefers more money:

> *Not because I want more money, but because if we didn't have the money, even if we had more time together, it might not be so good because obviously money is so important. It will affect us all. It will just be really hard. I think more money for that reason (Hannah, 16, Leafy High).*

Later she reflects:

> *[Earlier] I said 'more money, of course', but I'm thinking if that was the case, my parents wouldn't be around and you'd have to work harder, and therefore life wouldn't be as good, cos you'd be working, and you'd have this money, and money can't really bring happiness, you know (Hannah, 16, Leafy High).*

Gary agrees with Hannah that money cannot buy happiness, and points out that people with more money 'kind of take things for granted'. For Peter in the same group, not having enough money for the basics, 'food, electricity and stuff', would 'make me all stressed and just angry, and so I think [you need] a fair bit of money so you can have what you want basically, not everything, but basically most things you *need*'.

'The right money and *the right life'*

Many in Sydney see the money *versus* time question as one of balance, but a balance underpinned by money. Vanessa reflects on her plans for work and children in the future. She is not as oriented to money as her classmate Mike, but takes a careful approach:

> *[When I have children] one of us will have to work full-time because I know that money just has to be there … Maybe one of us would work full-time at one stage and then another, so that we both have time with the kids so that they are raised properly with the right money and the right life. You need a balance of that (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High).*

Smithy, who grew up in a poor household but is now comfortable, is keen on more time, not necessarily because he wants more time with his parents but because it would be better for them to work less:

> *With my mum and step-dad I wouldn't mind seeing them make less money if it meant they don't have to work so damn hard. My mum is working way too hard trying to tackle everything and with my dad [an artist], I'd like to see him make more money but I'd also like to see him more … I don't really want to spend any more time with my parents. My mum and step-dad I see them every day … They can do their own thing (Smithy, 17, Leafy High).*

For some young people a parent's full-time job did not mean a lack of time with them. Ellie, for example, who lives with her mother who works full-time, says that her mother 'really enjoys her job … but I still see her, and my mum and I are pretty close and we still can spend heaps of time together. So it's good. She really likes it … She says it's really satisfying (Ellie, 16, Leafy High).

Time for special events

Young people from both Year 6 and Year 11, speak of the importance of their parents being there for special events such as sports, choir, public performances, when they are receiving an award, or for special family events like birthdays:

> *Like important things, you know like starting a new school, or moving or when something really bad or really good happens. And you want to tell them and you want them to be proud of you (Tanya, 16, Strive High).*

This result confirms other findings (Galinsky 1999; and Lewis *et al.*, 2001). Children like to share their successes and public events, and they also want time with their parents when there are problems to receive help in solving them. Many remember with sadness key events that their parents had missed and several didn't think that 'make up' strategies later really compensated; they wanted their parents to witness their achievements and activities. The young man whose father has missed his birthday for three years in a row seems unlikely to forget it. At Leafy Primary, Charlie, 12, thinks it is important to have his mum around on speech day: 'Hopefully Mum is there. She's been working on every speech day … [I've felt] disappointed cause it's been like two years in a row now. But she'll be able to make it to this one because she won't be at work'.

2.6 Time and household relationships

Time patterns in households affect relationships in many different ways according to the accounts of young people. For example, while all of the young people in the country had a mother at home or working only school hours (none full-time), several were very conscious of long hours and their impact on household relationships and saw the need to balance money with time. As Adam, son of a carpenter and an aged care worker puts it:

> *It's good to get money coming in and probably it's good to work as hard as you can when you're younger so when you're older you can retire with some money. But there should probably be a limit to so much before your relationships with other people start to strain because you are never there (Adam, 16, Country High).*

Kyle, son of a farmer and school assistant, agrees: 'Yeah I think working, the money area of it is good. But it depends on the hours and the times that they have to be away and what sort of time they get to spend with their family and stuff like that' (Kyle, 16, Country High).

Relations with fathers

Based on the repeated comments of 16-18 year old boys, young men, as they grow up, do not give up wanting time with their working fathers. While not all young men feel the same (indeed some speak of now feeling distant from their dad because of the effect, over time, of their jobs), others are straightforward about their sadness. In the country, both Kyle and Kevin miss their fathers:

> *I reckon my mum [who works part-time] is pretty much fine the way she is. Just leave her like that. But I suppose a little more time with my dad would be good, seeing as I usually get to see him for about five minutes in the morning after I get up and he usually gets home around the time I'm doing homework so I only get to see him around tea time, and onwards at night. So not too much going on there (Kyle, 16, Country High).*

> *I probably would want more time. Not so much my mother, cos she's around a fair bit. I see her all the time. My old man, he works a fair bit. I see him mainly at tea time, and after that he's on the phone, and I'm doing my homework. I don't really talk to him that much (Kevin, 17, Country High).*

Kevin, whose father works very long hours in the country, would like more time playing backyard cricket with his dad, more 'hang around time': 'I wouldn't mind if I just sat in the next room, but it would be better if he wasn't doing as much work.' Adam, from the same region, agrees. His father works in an industry with peaks and troughs. He can remember when:

> *It wasn't busy at all, and Dad was just around more … and not so involved in his work, not under as much stress. It makes it easier to live in the same town (Adam, 16, Country High).*

Some young people with older parents feel that their work 'wore them out' more than it had in the past: 'My old man, he seems to get more tired these days. He's getting older' (Kevin, 17, Country High). Kyle has noticed that his dad's job has developed new demands with a new farm:

> *[He used to] come home early and we got to play heaps of backyard cricket. It was pretty good. He was around most of the time, I got to talk to him, have heaps of chats. It was pretty good. But … now … he is having to work really hard … and he gets heaps cranky. He's really tired … and he has to go on the telephone. Then he comes in and if the house isn't clean and he's had a bad day, he'll go pretty spastic (Kyle, 16, Country High).*

Living in the country with fathers who work long or unsocial hours, these young men are clear about missing time with their dads and are very alert to paternal stresses, a situation not so obvious amongst boys of 11. It is not surprising that they do not miss their mothers, given that most of their mothers are usually at home or work part-time, but the clear preference for time with their fathers, especially with *unstressed* fathers, suggests that time with one parent does not easily substitute for time with another. Father-time has its own function and is sought by young men, supporting the findings of other studies (Flood, 2003).

A 'good parent' needs time

For many children, *time* is a key first requirement of a 'good dad' and a good relationship with parents. Time is also seen as valuable in relation to mothers but as many children see more of their mothers who tend to work either part-time or normal hours, it is more often spoken of in relation to dads. In particular, many young men defined a 'good dad' as someone who spends time with them:

> *Actually taking the time to go down and watch you do sport … and maybe kick the footy or play cricket with you, just helping you out … Watch the footy together. He tells me about what's happening. He's more experienced than me. I think that's pretty good (Kevin, 17, Country High).*

Kyle would prefer to talk to his dad rather than his mum, but he isn't there.

> *I guess mums aren't really as important to guys as dads are. Don't talk to your mums about some things I suppose. But I don't really talk to my dad about all that much stuff as he's not usually there, so I talk to my mum heaps about it … If he was around more I'd talk to him more (Kyle, 16, Country High).*

Like others in the study, both Kevin and Kyle see the value of 'hanging' with their parents, which leads to talking:

> *Interviewer: Is it talking with your folks or is it 'hanging' with them?*
>
> *Hanging sort of leads into talking (Kevin, 17, Country High).*
>
> *If you hang around your folks, you'll probably end up talking to them about things … If you don't hang around them they might not see you're worried about something (Kyle, 16, Country High).*

This also resonates in the cities. Smithy, 17, who lives with his mum and step-dad and goes to Leafy High, misses his biological dad a great deal. He speaks with total delight about his father's new-found artistic success, but longs for more time with him:

> *I guess it's hard because I don't see him very often cause he's always travelling, he's always in a recording studio … and what not, and I would like to see him more, like to see him every week like I'm meant to, but sometimes it will be a month, two months, in between seeing him with only a couple of phone calls here and there. He's in some random place. I just miss not having my dad* there*. It's just not the same (Smithy, 17, Leafy High).*

Kelsey, 12, at Struggle Primary describes a 'good dad' as someone who 'spends time with you'. Her friend Kelly agrees: 'Someone who mucks around with you'. For Zoe, whose dad left her life some time ago, a 'good dad' is 'some one who doesn't just come and leave'. In the same school, Harry whose father left when he was very young because 'he didn't like kids', agrees: 'A good dad would be if he was part of my family again because it would be better if he still had a job and came back. If he came back and lived with my mum and still got paid $700, it would be great' (Harry, 11, Struggle Primary).

When discussing a 'good mother', young women stress the importance of someone to talk to about issues of importance, particularly social relationships. While some young men also refer to this circumstance, they tend to place more stress on the importance of time with their fathers. Young men are more likely to equate a good mother with a good cook, and value their help with homework.

A number of young people are positive about their mothers being at home either because they work part-time or do domestic work full-time. They tend to view their fathers at home less as carers and more as people out of work (sick, retired, unemployed or retrenched). Young people like the time their mothers at home can spend with them. They like hanging time, weekends, and time before and after school:

> *They don't both have jobs, but if they did I wouldn't like it at all … because it would be boring. My sister's annoying when Mum's not around (Olaf, 11, Struggle Primary).*

Later, however, Olaf whose parents live separately – his dad 'with lots of money' and his mum with much less – says that 'what's bad about her not having a job is she doesn't have that much money'. He contrasts this situation with his weekend visits to his father's house where 'I get what I want when I want it'. While he likes having his mum at home, in a sole-parent household the price is high for him in terms of money and things: 'I like spending time with my mum but I think we need more money' (Olaf, 11, Struggle Primary). Olaf is keen for his mother to work part-time so 'we get money for it and we still get to see Mum'.

Many children value a clean house, and young men in particular mention cooking and plenty of food in the house as a benefit associated with a mother working at home:

> *Well the housework is always done and stuff, which is good. And she cooks tea which is good. I don't know if there are any downsides for her. I suppose she doesn't get much help around the house. We help her for a minute, and then, that's it. Yeah, she's doing it all (Robert, 17, Country High).*

Adam, 16, is disappointed that his mum's job means that 'There isn't as much cooked food around now. We have got to do that, or I cook my own food. [When she was around more] there was always cake or a box of homemade cookies or something'.

Kyle in the same group had cooked a sponge cake the night before 'for me to eat'. Like a number of young men who discussed their cooking with us, he left it in the oven too long ('about five hours') so it was burnt.

Time alone

Many young people spend some time at home alone, often as a consequence of their parents' work demands. Some 16 and 17 year olds value time alone but a significant proportion also like to have a parent around. As Geoff put it 'I think it's always good to have a parent home, just so you can touch base, but it's also good to have some time without parents' (Geoff, 16, Comfort High).

At present Mike lives with his father who works six days a week, 7 am to 5 pm. His dad's hours affect him in a positive way 'cause I've got the house basically to myself the whole 168 hours of the week!' He likes the time alone. Louise at Struggle High in Adelaide agrees: 'Cause there's no one there to bug me and I can just do my own thing'. Some younger children also like to have time alone to roam:

> *I don't mind being on my own. I go out with friends. I play or roam the streets on my bike. Sometimes I go to the quarry (Kelsey, 12, Struggle Primary).*

Similarly Ricky liked it when his mum worked until 8.30 or 9 at night: 'I like it when my mum works lots after I have organised things with my friends … [because] I just go riding and do jumps and hang around and stuff' (Ricky, 12, Struggle Primary). However, others were scared about being at home alone at night.

2.7 Controlling time

Adult work time affects young people in how it *synchronises,* or fails to synchronise, with their preferences, and in the way it *determines* their time and its use. Young people describe how their waking, social and holiday time is built around the working parent, as it has been in the main for centuries (Gillis, 2003):

> *I had to get up at 6 am in the morning to go to friends (Kelly, 11, Struggle Primary).*

Jenny at Country Primary describes going to her mother's workplace after school and having to wait for her to finish, which she finds very annoying and boring: 'I just want to be home. It's a long time for me because I don't do much' (Jenny, 11, Country Primary). Kate describes how the family's holidays are built around the farm and her father's work:

> *At Christmas time we can only go away for about two days, like Christmas Eve and drive back Boxing Day cause Dad can't do anything and we can't go on big holidays because he can't leave the farm (Kate, 16, Country High).*

Melissa is an international student whose parents, both working, live in Asia. Her mother's work comes in irregular bursts and she enjoys the times when her mother isn't busy. However, she describes how the times when she needs her mother often do not synchronise with when she is available:

> *When I really need her, she's not there, when I'm really busy with my school work and other stuff. When I feel like hanging around with my friends, she has the spare time. That's the bad thing (Melissa, 18, Leafy High).*

When parents come looking for time with their children, it is not always a happy synchronicity:

> *[Dad] misses opportunities to be with the family, so he tries to come and boss [us]: "Where are you?" I find that a bit of a downside, because it's* my *routine, and he's not used to it, so when I want to go out, he's like "Where are you going? Why aren't you staying at home?" ' (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High).*

> *Mum tries to organise family events and then I still don't want to hang out with them. I want to hang out with my friends and then she gets mad at me cause she's trying to be nice and organise to do stuff with me. But I don't want to hang out with her (Louise, 15, Struggle High).*

2.8 Planning money and time trades in the future

Many young people already have plans for their own work and home lives as they leave study. Some, especially young women, have clear ideas about the number of children they will have, which days they will work and when they will take time off from work. It is fair to say that in the main young women adopt a 'time off from paid work' approach to their projected parental care and work futures. All in our study anticipated working for money, although many expected to take some or primary responsibility for children, generally with their partner's active support. For many it was '50/50'. Being 'established' in terms of housing was seen by some as a critical precursor to having a family, so they expect to work, earn and then reproduce.

> *You need to get yourself started, a house, wife, furniture, all that other stuff [before you have kids] (Mike, 17, Leafy High).*

Many young men anticipate work patterns that are different from their own fathers', and define their plans against their own experience. They talk of spending a considerable amount of time with their children, taking care not to miss weekends and evenings.

> *I'd love to be able to take a few years off and not work and spend it with my kids and with my wife and just starting a family and being there for my kids for the first few years of their life. But then I'd definitely go back to work like when they start school, but I'd make sure I was there for them in the evenings, help them with their homework and on the weekends do sporting activities and all that. And when they are older and think I'm just boring and not cool, let them do their own thing, but I'll still try and sneak in some quality time (Smithy, 17, Leafy High).*

Peter agrees: 'Yeah growing up they need both sides of gender put into the kids', while Gary also looked for a balance in terms of father and mother care:

> *You need to both work the same amount, and spend the same amount of time with the kids (Gary, 16, Leafy High).*

If young men and women are to realise their plans, much will need to change. Young women's plans to share domestic and paid work with their partners rely upon a sea-change in the patterns of men's participation in domestic work. Young men's desires to share parenting with their partners will, in turn, rely upon very significant change in workplace practices and cultures. As we see in the next section, the extensive negative spillover arising from frustrated preferences has powerful effects upon children, parents and their households. These findings provide a strong argument for change that allows such preferences to be realised.

3. Job spillover: How parents' jobs affect young people

Not all jobs are the same. And not all children's perspectives are the same even about jobs that might appear similar. The effects of work on children are highly context-specific and diverse. Nonetheless, some similarities are striking and reinforce existing research. This section reviews the effects of parents' jobs on young people and concludes that job spillover into children's lives is often negative, especially where parents are exhausted by their work or dislike it. Young people perceive many positive spillover effects as well but on the negative side long or unsocial hours have significant consequences and children, who are accomplished 'mood monitors', have adopted various strategies to deal with bad-tempered parents.

The basic notion of 'spillover' is that one aspect of life, such as work, leaves a legacy that spills into another aspect, such as home, or *on to* a person such as a partner or child. The concept of 'spillover' in relation to work can be traced back at least to 1977 (Pleck, 1977) and takes several forms; there can be positive or negative spillover from work to family, and from family to work. Some suggest that positive 'work to family' spillover is more evident amongst women, and negative 'work to family' spillover more evident amongst men (Pleck, 1977; Barnett and Marshall, 1992).

3.1 To work or not to work is *not* the question

A great deal of public attention in Australia has focused on *whether* parents should work, especially whether mothers should work. For young people in this study, this is the wrong question. Young people understand that their parents often need to work and they do not see parents' work as intrinsically bad or good. For example, Kelly from Struggle Primary says that when both her parents started working she thought 'Why? But now I like it'. Like many of her friends she could see a positive side: '[Now Mum has] heaps of friends. They are really nice and funny. They bought me things'.

The important question for these young people is not whether parents go to work but the state in which they come home. Children and young people comment about the *nature* and *effects* of their parents' jobs rather than about *whether* they work or not. They talk about the effects of their parents' jobs on them and their brothers and sisters rather than perceiving a problem with parents having jobs at all. Many can see positive outcomes for their parents from their paid jobs, outcomes that flow on to children in the way of material comfort and, beyond this, to a happier parent and a happier household environment. This is a consistent finding, evident in most focus groups, age groups, and in various household types.

Young people are very alert to *how* work affects their parents, including parents working at home caring for the family. Job spillover is not a phenomenon related to paid work only. Once again, however, it is not the job itself that causes noticeable spillover but the way it interacts with parental preferences. Children comment upon mothers who do not have paid jobs and seem *happy* doing domestic work. Others mention that they observe maternal depression, tiredness, physical injuries, social isolation or a heavy domestic load that mothers often carry, mostly alone.

Paid work results in clear spillovers on to children. The daughter of two full-time working parents who said 'My parents try not to bring the work life home' is unusual amongst participants. She appreciated their containment: 'I don't really need their stress as well as mine' (Jade, 16, Comfort High). Many young people who feel that stress agree with her. The world of parental work has significant effects upon the worlds of young people; they are intersecting spheres. And young people take action in response to this intersection, often withdrawing from the parent who is 'spilling' work into home, or contesting the parent's spillage: 'I say, well *I've* had a hard day at school!'

Most young people in this study can easily tell what kind of day their parents have had when they walk in the door. To use Nasman's expression (2003), jobs 'colour' parental moods, and influence a parent's 'state and physical condition'. However, these effects go beyond mere 'colouring' of parental mood. They are directly transmitted to others in the household including children, who not only *observe* their parent's 'colour', but are themselves affected by it and experience the results, yelling, arguments and household tension.

As studies in other countries have found, young people in Australia sense tired, stressed, injured, worried, grumpy or sad parents (McKee *et al.*, 2003) and are especially alert to *negative* spillovers; it is these they notice and respond to, often withdrawing from their parent to cope. However, they also perceive many positive spillovers from parents' jobs with dividends for both parents and their children.

3.2 Positive work spillover

Young people see many benefits from their parents' jobs. Most obvious amongst these is income, a necessity that they well understand as we have discussed. In addition, many young people see benefits from the skills of their parents: 'Dad can do all the electrical things around home ... he can teach me how to fix cars' (Abraham, 16, Comfort High).

Children enjoy the things parents bring home, from old computers to food, golf balls, big ball bearings, and pens: 'They're really good pens!' As well as valuing income, they speak positively when their parents' work is flexible, when parents' work hours mean that they are home at the same time as children, and when children are able to participate in a meaningful way in their parents' work. Many children speak positively about visiting their parents' workplaces. However, if they are required to spend long periods there they are less enthusiastic.

There are some gendered differences; young men are more likely to notice positive physical outcomes ('stuff' from work), the chance to ride vehicles associated with their dads' jobs, and skills transfer ('he teaches me stuff, he brings stuff home for me to take apart'). Young women are more inclined to mention the social and enjoyment benefits their mothers experience as a result of their work.

Many young people see that their parents have fun at work. Delta at Strive High sees that her dad loves his information technology job, that he is 'good at it', and that his seasonal overtime ('he doesn't do much') during university enrolment brings them

valued extra income. Peter's father also works in information technology and loves his job. Peter enjoys many positive consequences as a result; he can 'get more stuff' when his dad is happy. He compares his dad to his less happy mother:

> *I just tease my Dad about his job cause it just looks like such a bludgy job and he gets paid, I think, fairly well and he works from home most days … He just cruises … plays his games on the computer then eventually he'll have a phone call that might mean he'll talk for three hours or something, some conference. And he travels all over, well not so much any more cause he got deep vein thrombosis, but he has a job that he's enjoying and he just* loves *his job and that's always good. So he isn't like my mum, always kind of 'I'm sick of working, sick of that'. He's always basically in a good mood which I think is good … Because when he's in a good mood you can get things out of them that normally you couldn't when they're in a bad mood … such as money, just going out places (Peter, 16, Leafy High).*

Tanya at Strive High feels that her dad's job delivering parcels is good for his health 'cause he has diabetes. So he has to get a lot of exercise and it's just good health cause he walks a lot'.

Jobs also sometimes introduce excitement into kids' lives. Nathan's dad is away from home for two weeks, then home for two weeks, working on a remote mining facility. Nathan thinks this is 'not too bad sometimes. It's exciting when he comes back' (12, Country Primary). Others feel that their mothers enjoy making friends, having laughs and social connection through their jobs, a circumstance that reinforces research suggesting that adults make many social and community connections through work (Pocock 2003). This is evident to many children, and affects their own plans for work in the future:

> *She has heaps of friends [at work]. They are really nice and friendly (Kelly, 11, Struggle Primary).*
>
> *I think my dad's job is good because he enjoys it and he doesn't mind going there (Karl, 11, Comfort Primary).*
>
> *She tells funny stories from work, the people at work. My mum likes her job (Susie, 16, Comfort High).*
>
> *It just makes her happy because she gets to meet new people, and she comes home with funny stories (Nicky, 12, Comfort Primary).*
>
> *She gets to meet more people. She has more friends, so she can get out a bit more. And not just spend time at home (Bob, 11, Comfort High).*
>
> *My mum loves her job, unless something goes wrong. She's usually happy (Kate, 16, Country High).*
>
> *[Mum] has fun with her co-workers. They mill about, and joke about their kids. It's really funny. Sometimes I notice her laughing and cracking jokes and bagging other people (Delta, 17, Strive High).*

> *Now she knows how to drive and she's meeting more people but sometimes she gets stressed … but she's happy though because she meets more people and she can do more stuff (Jacqueline, 11, Strive Primary).*

Chloe who lives with her mum, a physiotherapist, sees many positive benefits from her mother's job, a sense of purpose and reward, and ongoing learning. Chloe values the fact that her mother is flexible and able to be there when Chloe needs her. What is more, the positive benefits of her mother's job are directly transmitted to Chloe:

> *Mum's job is really good. She's good at what she does and she gets a lot out of it, and she's willing to be flexible for when I need her for things … She gets a lot of pleasure out of helping people because it's a very rewarding job that she does. And there's always new things to learn about it as well … And it rubs off on me … It makes me think about what I want to do in my future to get those same sort of [rewards] (Chloe, 17, Leafy High).*

Eddie from Struggle Primary thinks his dad and mum enjoy a break from him, while also enjoying other aspects of their work:

> *[Dad] gets to have a break from us kids and he also gets to muck around with his mates and that … It's pretty relaxing cos he can get away from me. [The good thing about Mum's job] is that she can buy me stuff … She buys me games and she always has fun with the friends as well. Yep. As well as selling the clothes, she has fun … Like she laughs and mucks around … And she can get away from us kids and relax with her friends (Eddie, 12, Struggle Primary).*

Some children mention stress and enjoyment simultaneously: 'She gets stressed … but she likes it. I know she does because she enjoys the people there, she's made really good friends since she's been there' (Melinda, 16, Strive High).

A number of boys particularly like the fact that their dad's job means they can ride motor vehicles like a tractor around the sporting ground, or motor bikes on the farm. Even though jobs are not necessarily well paid and job effects can be mixed and include demands that spillover on to the whole household, young people notice when their parents enjoy their work.

> *Dad really enjoys what he does, that's why he does it … He's very passionate about it … The bad side though is it's full on, it's every aspect of his life. I don't think he gets time off and for me, for him, it's really hard because it's really demanding hours and everyone wants him and needs his advice. We constantly have meetings in our house and that's hard on the family I guess. Financially it's not that great but that's not why he does it (Hannah, 16, Leafy High).*

Young people also had a nose for parents who they felt faked finding their job 'hard'. As Gary said of his stockbroker dad who lives overseas: 'He always claims that he hates his job, but he loves it, you know, he says my job is pissing me off, or whatever, but you just know that he loves it. He's been there for the last 30 years or whatever'.

Several young people of non-English speaking background spoke of the confidence their mothers gained from their jobs:

> *It builds up her determination … cos she's kind of sensitive like most women are and often she has problems and it is an upside because she has had to battle a few staff … It makes her more confident (Thanh, 17, Comfort High).*

> *A benefit [of Mum's job] is the social interaction that my mum's had. Like before – she wasn't born in Australia – before this she didn't really know many people and I just think she has grown a lot through her having her own business. She's just got a lot more friends and all that (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High).*

3.3 Negative work spillover

Australian children and young people are very alert to negative aspects of parents' jobs. These include physical injury, emotional or mental distress, bad moods, stress, tiredness, sadness, uncertainty and fear. In the perception of children, the spillover is obvious and sometimes severe when work negatively affects parents. Tania, whose father is a farmer, uses the language of 'spill': 'Well sometimes he gets angry at the cows when they don't move. And it sort of spills over a bit [at people]' (Tania, 11, Country Primary).

Such spillover is common to all socio-economic groups. However, it sometimes takes different forms. Young people in lower income areas talk more about the *physical* impact of their fathers' and mothers' jobs on their parents' bodies and they worry about this. Harry, 10, says that his step-dad's 'body hurts' from work. Harry's mum has been sick for a couple of months and 'she mostly lies on the couch'. While it is not clear how her illness relates to work, the impact on Harry is obvious:

> *It's hard for me to let my friends inside to play … It's really hard because my mum works really hard, but she's got no battery when she's sick (Harry, 10, Struggle Primary).*

In the same group, Eddie's dad moves furniture and drives a truck. Eddie notices the physical impact. 'He gets lots of cuts and bruises':

> *The other day he was moving tin and he accidentally knocked a cupboard and there was stuff up there on the shelf and it fell and cut his back (Eddie, 12, Struggle Primary).*

> *[Dad] had a six wheel ute fall on him and he had a metal bar hit him in the temple. I couldn't give him a hug because it hurt him (Kelsey, 12, Struggle Primary).*

In the same school, Ricky says that his mum who runs a canteen 'feels sore because she has been working'. Kelsey sees many positives beyond money for her mum through her job but her mum has an injured shoulder from her work in the chicken factory and that means she can't work with her friends. This 'upsets' Kelsey: 'She used to go with her work friends to the pub on Fridays. She was happy'. Her mother's

duties have changed so that she is no longer with her friends, and her job is on the line:

> *She has heaps of friends. They are really nice and funny. They bought me things … Mum gets up at a quarter to four each morning to go to work and comes home on a break to take us to school and then goes back to work and then picks us up from school. We used to get free chickens … It's bad seeing her upset. They may have to sack her because of her injury. They don't have a use for her (Kelsey, 12, Struggle Primary).*

In Sydney, at Strive Primary, Lee notices that her Vietnamese dad who works in a car wash often has a sore back. At Strive High, Anna notices that her mother comes home from her customer service job 'sometimes stressed out. She doesn't know what to do, how to handle the situation'. In the same group, Delta's mother has a repetitive strain injury arising from her sewing job ('She's worked pretty hard for a long time'), while Anna worries about the physical effects of her dad's labouring job, and she feels sorry for him:

> *I feel sorry for my dad because he spends months [labouring]. Seems like his whole life is busy and stuff … If he works in the area where we live, he's home early, but when he works at Bondi, he's home about 7 pm … He doesn't exactly* complain *about it, but … I feel sorry for him myself. Like he doesn't exactly like doing the job he does every day. But that's his job and he's got to do it (Anna, 16, Strive High).*

Also at Strive High, Melinda says her mum 'gets really bitey … She was heaps stressed yesterday and the day before'. Melinda leaves her alone most of the time, but also tries to support her: 'She needs a lot of confidence boosting … So yesterday we're, like, "it'll be okay, it'll be okay" '. Melinda finds her mother's lack of confidence irritating, but she supports her.

Lee at Strive Primary takes action to try to relieve her mother's tiredness which arises from her job and the fact that:

> *When she comes home she has to do all the cooking and my dad's not home yet so she has to do most of the housework. She gets really tired and I always have to massage her and my hands get really tired as well (Lee, 11, Strive Primary).*

Lanh's parents in western Sydney both work in a restaurant and he notices that they are often very tired; they work from '9 in the morning to 10 at night'. He notices that his mum and dad are 'stressed, tired' and he can 'tell by his [dad's] face, [I] just look at him'. Lanh feels 'like you want to help them … [It] makes you feel down … They're just too old to work hard'. At Struggle High in Adelaide, Alana, 16 year-old daughter of an electrician, talks about his 'cuts and stuff. I feel bad for him because he gets hurt'. Katelin sees the same effects for her dad, a locksmith: 'My dad is a bit like Alana's. He's always dirty and cuts himself, and he's always busy so he's grumpy all the time … He's just stressed out'. Her dad works from 9 to 6 most days, 'but then he

does paper work at night'. When he is grumpy, Katelin just tries to 'stay away from him'.

Children living in higher socio-economic areas are also far from immune to negative spillovers. However, they are less likely to mention physical issues and more likely to mention *emotional* or *mental* effects like stress, sadness or worry. Rove, 12, in a higher socio-economic area, describes how his dad, a mechanic, 'gets moody' if he's had a bad day. This affects Rove 'quite a bit, because Mum's not home until later'. He deals with it by 'just staying out of his way'. The daughter of a couple running a small business, whose father also works at a second job as a security guard, describes a similar transmission:

> *They just come home grumpy and start yelling at you. Not always, but they always just discuss all this crap … It makes you upset, cause it's just really annoying and you end up grumpy because they're grumpy (Jane, 16, Comfort High).*

At Struggle High in Adelaide, Jack notices that his dad's anxieties flow on to his mother. They both work in their own business. Self-employment is often associated in children's perceptions with demanding jobs that affect dependents:

> *She takes some frustration from Dad, and also myself, I also get frustrated at times … It basically [gets] carried through the whole family, cause we're a very strong family … You can't get away from it (Jack, 15, Struggle High).*

Jack's holidays are constrained and built around the business. On the positive side he learns valuable skills, and can find holiday employment.

Gary describes his mother, a single parent who works as a secretary, as 'always in a bad mood, tired and stuff'. She does not like her job:

> *If she doesn't work, she'll be in a good mood in the afternoon … I think it's just* strenuous*, you know, like she's always on her feet cause she works for two or three long days a week … She gets tired out (Gary, 16, Leafy High).*

Gary can tell during phone calls from Asia what kind of day his dad has had: 'When I speak to him on the phone I can always tell whether he's had a good day or a bad day, that's just pretty much in a good mood or bad mood'.

Peter describes his situation as very similar to Gary's; he sees his mother, who leaves the house at 7.30 am and arrives home at about 7 pm, as *stretched*. What is more, she 'can't hassle me to do my homework' which he says he needs 'deeply'. In the same focus group, Smithy says:

> *[Mum] hates her job … and she wants to get back to singing, cause when she does it she's happy and she gets energetic. When she comes home from work (now) she's always tired and grumpy and not in a good mood and all she can think about is getting out of it (Smithy, 17, Leafy High).*

Smithy wants his mother to change her job so that she can do the work that she loves instead of a job that makes her grumpy. He also understands that she 'strayed off her path' for financial necessity: 'Sometimes you have to do things you don't want to do' (Smithy, 17, Leafy High).

In the same group, a good work environment that she likes has the opposite effect for Mike's mother. Mike now mostly lives with his single dad, though he lived with his mother until recently:

> *My mum has increased her work since my parents broke up. She used to be part-time. Now she's full-time … And yeah, she basically says that the environment she works in is really good. She doesn't really mind working there because it's clean, air conditioned and she says it's just a good environment to be in … Yeah [that makes a difference for me because] she doesn't get stressed really (Mike, 17, Leafy High).*

The emotional impact of parents' jobs also flow to children. Amanda's mother works with very sick people: 'She gets to know some of the people and then they die and it's pretty upsetting for her and that happens all the time … so it's pretty hard for her I think' (Amanda, 16, Comfort High).

Altered working hours sometimes create significant change for young people. Once again, more hours do not necessarily mean more negative spillover. The nature of the job and its fit with parental preferences are more important as Jacqueline's and Judith's contrasting experiences of changing maternal hours illustrate. Jacqueline's mother has moved from part-time to full-time work which is positive because 'She's more happy … She's not as grumpy around the house'. But Jacqueline's mother hasn't given up all her irritability: 'She can be [grumpy] if the house is really messy and we haven't cleaned it'. On the other hand, Judith's father works long hours, and her mother has recently switched from part-time to full-time work with negative spillover effects:

> *It's made the household really stressful too because I've never really seen Mum so stressed before. I had seen Dad but we'd all learned to cope with that, but now Mum is stressed. She says 'Do that!' and she gets angrier quicker, whereas she didn't do that. So we've had to adjust to that. It just makes everyone really stressed and on edge all the time, because they are* both *really stressed out now (Judith, 18, Country High).*

In lower income areas the work effects on parents and the flow-on to children is stark. Once again, it is not necessarily *having* a job that is the source of the problem:

> *Dad's not really fun. He's mean and bossy. Mum's happier when she's got a job. She's nice. She has depression and she had to stop work. She's happier when she has a job (Kathie, 11, Struggle Primary).*

Some children like the freedom that an absent parent brings. Jacqueline is pleased that her mother has taken up full-time work because 'She's more happy and she knows more people and she lets us do more stuff and when she's gone we can listen to music

louder. … We can do our homework when we want'. However, such freedom holds dangers for young people:

> *Dad gets stressed. Sometimes he goes out to the pub every Friday night because he's stressed. I'm all right about that because I get to do what I like. I'd rather my mum work [because otherwise] after school, she always wants to know what am I doing. 'Where are you going? What are you doing?' she asks me (Zoey, 11, Struggle Primary).*

When we fed back the finding that it was not time but the nature of parents' jobs that affected young people more, girls at Leafy High readily agreed:

> *Yes, you notice if they're* stressed *(Chloe, 17, Leafy High).*

> *Yeah, because the time when they're actually around you, you notice what they are like. So you might be thinking 'Oh my mum is not here'. But when she is actually there, you're not thinking 'Oh I'm with my mum', but 'Oh why is she in such a bad mood?' (Ellie, 16, Leafy High).*

3.4 Young people's awareness of parental mood

Young people easily recognise how work affects parents and can quickly determine the physical, verbal and behavioural signs of a happy or unhappy parent. Parents are happy and laughing, or shouting, moody or sad. Most children say they can tell without any difficulty what kind of day their parents have had. There are exceptions:

> *I can't tell, because she always pretends to be happy to me … But then she hides all the stuff inside. So we don't really know (Binh, 11, Strive Primary).*

Much more commonly, young people can tell how work affects parents. Many indicate that there are times when their working parents are 'grumpy' as a result of work stress or tiredness:

> *My dad if he comes home and he's a bit grumpy … and he wants to sleep that's how I know he hasn't had a too good day. My mum, she normally just sits there, really quiet, and watches TV and that's how I can tell (Sarah, 11, Strive Primary).*

> *Well, when my dad [a chef] comes home, he gets in a really bad mood and he always shouts at us. Even if we do a little bit wrong. Yeah (Emma, 11, Strive Primary).*

> *Well I can tell when they've had a good or bad day. Like they're out of energy or they're complaining about the director because he wanted something then he changed his mind and they had to do it again, and it's like they feel like just not cooking and getting takeaway (Charlie, 12, Leafy Primary).*

Bonnie whose father drives a truck long distances, says she can tell what kind of day he has had: 'He comes home sort of grumpy and when he's had a bad day, he's always

sort of on the phone and talking, ringing people up' (Bonnie, 11, Country Primary). She can also tell when her mum has had a bad day: 'She gets really, like, het up … she's just grumpy then'. Bonnie is very understanding about good and bad days: 'Everyone would have to have their bad days'.

3.5 The negative transmission mechanism

Very specific linkages exist between work and home; bad events at work affect parents and then directly affect children. For example, spillover directly transmits from unhappy client to worker to child. Once again this occurs in various socio-economic settings. Bob has no trouble telling what kind of day his mum has had:

> *My mum works on a phone. She gets crazy people who keep on yelling at her … and they get really angry at her and then she gets in a bad mood with us cause she's had a bad day at work (Bob, 11, Comfort Primary).*

Rove describes very similar direct effects:

> *When she works from home she spends a lot of time on the phone and sometimes they give her really a hard time and if something like that happens she gets really mad at us if we mess up the house (Rove, 12, Comfort Primary).*

In a lower socio-economic area, Kelly says:

> *When she is happier I'm not stressed out myself. I don't get as upset myself. I get to see my friends (Kelly, 11, Struggle Primary).*

Kelly notices her father is cranky when he works extended hours which she and the rest of the family dislike:

> *When he does overtime, he gets a bit cranky. He says "I just got back from work". And I say "Well, I just got back from school". There are arguments when he has done overtime. He doesn't get to do much with his friends because he works on Sunday sometimes. He is mostly cranky. He is a bit of a control freak. He likes things his own way. If he wants to go out and Mum doesn't want to go out, he has a tantrum. We all [Mum, brother, me] tell him to shut up (Kelly, 11, Struggle Primary).*

When talking about what made a 'good dad', Kelly says that her dad used to play with me, 'do horsey rolls around on the grass. He doesn't do that anymore'.

Zac at Strive Primary in Sydney's west says that his dad comes home 'tired and cranky'. He can tell because 'he yells at us'. If he yells, Zac says 'I just go and play somewhere else, to let him rest'. He takes action that removes himself from his father and his care, essentially taking care of his tired father. Of his mother who works in a canteen, Zac says 'She doesn't work a lot and she still earns money and she's not tired'.

These effects are often associated with the ongoing nature of their parents' jobs, their hours and physical and emotional demands. However, there are other important spillovers arising from more occasional or episodic events such as job loss, redundancy, demotion or reassignment. Where parents' jobs change in negative ways, children are well aware of the change and it often affects them.

> *Yeah, my mum at the moment has to go and reapply for the job that she's got. So she was happy till yesterday and now she's hell stressed and grumpy (Chanel, 17, Comfort High).*
>
> *Interviewer: You can tell when she walks through the door?*
>
> *Yeah cos they take it out on everyone else (Chanel, 17, Comfort High).*

In some cases the transmission mechanism runs from work to one parent, then to the other and finally to the young person who commonly withdraws:

> *When he gets home he's really stressed, or really tired or he's on the phone ... It's really hard ... then Mum gets stressed, they argue, and you just have to go on your own (Judith, 18, Country High).*

Candy, whose mum works at home and whose dad works full-time, describes a similar transmission:

> *He gets really grumpy ... He either sits in the lounge-room or sits at the computer and plays games. He keeps out of everyone's way ... It affects Mum because she gets grumpy as well. So we stay out of her way as well (Candy, 17, Country High).*

Jack, 15, at Struggle High describes how his sister, if she gets home first, takes 'heaps more before I get there … Oh yeah, if Mum's had a bad day, Anna will find out and she will tell me'. He can tell his parents' moods 'when they wander in the door', and when the signs are bad he 'runs away' to his room.

Children notice when a parent's work situation improves. Rove's mother had changed jobs which meant she now worked with people she liked and with a friend: 'She's happier'. His mother had been travelling interstate each week but she had now stopped with positive effects for both of them. When she travelled 'she was really sad about that, she was just sad'. As a result, 'cause we didn't get to see her, we were sad … and now we just get to see her more' (Rove, 12, Comfort Primary).

3.6 Spillover from long or unsocial hours

Forty-three children in this study had a parent who, in the child's perception, worked long or unsocial hours. In most of these cases, hours are mentioned as a first effect of their parents' work and with almost universal negative reactions. At Leafy Primary, Ali, son of a taxi driver, says that he rarely sees his dad: 'It's lost time with him'. What is more, 'sometimes when he comes back in the afternoon he gets angry at simple things cause he's stressed'. Andre's father, an artist, is also 'stressed and tired' when he has been working late on a painting. Charlie, also at Leafy Primary, has

parents working in the entertainment industry and both put in long hours and experience insecurity in their jobs:

> *[Mum] enjoys it, but the industry's kind of push and shove now … She's earning good money, but like my dad, it's sometimes long hours and she's all tired and sometimes I have to stay at friends' places because of night shift and stuff (Charlie, 12, Leafy Primary).*

When this happens for several nights in a row, Charlie can miss 'home a bit and miss seeing mum'.

The effect of long hours is the first issue Judith mentions at the beginning of the country focus group amongst Year 11 girls. Her mother works full-time and her father works long hours:

> *I know that I don't like the hours that my dad works because he gets up at 5.30 in the morning and goes to work at quarter past six and doesn't finish work until about 10.30 at night, and he's sitting on the phone for two or three hours getting prices for different people (Judith, 18, Country High).*

Like others, Judith sees the phone as extending her father's workplace into the home.

For some young people, household social organisation is shaped around the phone and their dad's job. The effects and spillover of these patterns extend well beyond formal work hours and physically into the home where work is done: 'We can't watch TV when he gets home because he sits on the phone … If we do, we have to watch it on mute … We've got captions' (Judith, 18, Country High). Her dad's phone follows them on holidays: 'We might go on two or three holidays a year. He's on his mobile phone, still ringing through, and then we'll visit head office, so he never leaves his job really, no matter where we are … It's boring' (Judith, 18, Country High). In western Sydney, Melinda's father who runs a spare parts shop experiences a similar situation:

> *It is very stressing for him because he is in charge of everything. They all rely on him even when he's not working. They still call him up … Even when we are on holidays they call him on the mobile, so he's got a lot of pressure on him I think (Melinda, 16, Strive High).*

While her dad enjoys his job ('he likes being in charge … he's good at it … he gets car parts'), Melinda notices his stress and the way his job follows him beyond the workplace.

Almost all children of parents who work extended hours identify this as a negative aspect of their parents' jobs. Some are understanding about it and do not *blame* their parents. Vanessa, whose father works long hours in his own business which he enjoys, is an exception to the common pattern:

> *[His hours] don't really seem to stress him out or anything … he just seems like 'Oh, you know, another day, another dollar' kind of thing. Like it's just routine for him (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High).*

More representative is Chloe's dad (who doesn't live with her) whose demanding small business meant that 'he was often in a bad mood at the end of the day, because he was tired and sore and exhausted' (Chloe, 17, Leafy High). He has recently sold the business.

Children identify the direct negative effects of long hours upon their parents. The word 'grumpy' is frequently used to describe parents, just as it is by partners of long hours workers, and long hours workers themselves (Pocock *et al.,* 2001). Kyle says of his farmer father: 'He's got to work long hours, go and do things if he finds something wrong in one of the paddocks just as he is about to knock off. He has to go and fix it or whatever.' He agrees ('definitely!') with Robert, also the son of a farmer, that his dad 'gets a bit stressed out sometimes'. As Kyle describes it: 'You do something wrong and he gets up you'. 'Yeah' replies Robert 'he usually comes home in a pretty foul mood and you've got to tread lightly around him' (Country High). In the same group, Adam's and Kevin's fathers are also very busy: 'Usually he's gone before I wake up and gets back at tea time' (Adam, 16, Country High). Kate, daughter of a farmer, declares with passion 'I will *never* marry a farmer'. Kate says her dad is not at home very much when she is, and that the family has to plan holidays around his work.

Kevin, whose father works in a rural service business, is angry about his dad's long hours:

> *I think his job is crap. I don't want to do it … It's the amount of work he has to do, the amount of pay that he gets – not all that good for all that much work. You'd [think he'd] get more money (Kevin, 17, Country High)*

Young people do not see the negative consequences of long parental hours stopping with the adults; they are directly transferred to children. They become grumpy or sad themselves. The transmission is direct and strong. Some are protective of their parents; they feel guilty when they wake them up, or resent that they are not paid better for their extra hours.

These effects flow with the work cycle. Candy's dad works 12 hour shifts in the wine industry and he lives a 'work, eat, sleep' cycle:

> *When he's not on vintage we see a lot more of him because he's not doing 12 hour shifts, like two weeks at a time, and he's still up early, but he comes home a lot earlier and sits down and helps us with whatever. [When he's doing] overtime he gets up first, goes to work, comes home and goes to bed (Candy, 17, Country High).*

James' dad is a long hours truck driver. James can't see anything good about his father's job and describes how its effects spill over into non-work time:

> *Money's always going back into the truck and, yeah, I only see him for a few hours and he's off to bed … He's very tired, restless of a night. Just not as active on the weekends. He doesn't want to do a lot, just wants to sit around and have a beer and watch TV. Yeah, doesn't like to get out, can't walk a lot [because of an injury] (James, 15, Struggle High).*

Sometimes James goes on trips with his dad 'so I get to see him and all that'. He has grown accustomed to his father's job and doesn't think the hours 'have a big effect on me … He's been doing it for four or five years now … You get used to it. You just adjust. Make the most of it … Just whenever he goes out somewhere I go with him'.

Young people adopt strategies of withdrawal when their parents are grumpy or angry. For example Bob's dad runs a sporting facility:

> *He has to work longer hours sometimes ... He has to go back there at 9 o'clock at night and doesn't get home till 10 or something like that ... He doesn't like it ... [When he's tired] if we do the slightest thing wrong, like run around the corridors he will yell at you* really well *[he yells loudly to illustrate]. You try and keep in your room a lot if that happens (Bob, 11, Comfort Primary).*

In a higher socio-economic setting, Mark's dad works two jobs. He has given up a third which has made him 'happier'. One of his jobs involves night shifts:

> *He's incredibly tired, all the time, because he is just constantly going and he gets aggravated. He's not violent, he just yells and he can yell* really *loud. He doesn't do it all that often considering the stress he's under (Mark, 17, Comfort High).*

When his father yells at him for waking him, Mark describes his reaction: '[I felt] kind of disappointed in myself because he's under a lot of pressure and we kind of let him down'. Mark doesn't think very much about how this affects him anymore, reminiscent of the 'boiled frog' syndrome that long hours workers describe[8]: 'It's not something that I notice any more, because it's been going on for so long'. Mark was quite clear about what he missed as a result of his dad's hours:

> *When he is around, we have great times, fun, playing, wrestling, all that stuff and when he's not, it's just not there (Mark, 17, Comfort High).*

In the same group, Geoff's father works very long hours which Geoff resents:

> *He leaves for work at about 6.45 am and gets home around 6 pm. So he works pretty long hours too, and he gets paid a standard rate, not what hours he works, and often gets heaps of extra jobs thrown on him that he just has to do and catch up on and goes in all weekends sometimes (Geoff, 16, Comfort High).*

Geoff observes that it is very important for his dad to feel valued in his job. His dad's hours mean that:

> *He gets agitated easily ... he gets tired by how long he works and, I mean, he is a great dad, but especially when he gets home from work, he seems to be a*

[8] Workers use the 'boiled frog' analogy to describe how they have acclimatised to long hours (Pocock *et al.*, 2001: 34).

> *bit agitated just because he's had a long day and had a lot of people to talk to, and had a lot of stories about bad things that happened (Geoff, 16, Comfort High).*

Geoff can see positive things in his dad's job but he clearly feels its destructive impact. He distinguishes his 'great dad' from his agitated behaviour, but also sees that, as his son, he pays a price too: 'It doesn't scar me for life or anything … [But] I miss out on his company, because he is a great person to play cards with and, yes, just have fun'.

'The hours aren't worth it'

Several children think that their parents' long hours are under-paid: 'He doesn't get paid very well for the hours he puts in' (Abraham, 16, Comfort High). Others could see that their parents liked their jobs but this didn't prevent them from noticing the negative effects:

> *He [a manager] comes home late sometimes cause he has to take clients out to dinner and he gets stressed out cause he doesn't get much sleep and then he has to go interstate heaps, and he doesn't get to see us as much as what he probably would like to. And then sometimes lately he's been working on weekends and he has to get up at 6 o'clock and go to work. Yeah. He gets paid well, so he likes it (Emily, 16, Struggle High).*

In some cases long hours mean a very early start for the whole family and time without a parent present: 'Dad leaves around 2 or 3 am … It just means that we're by ourselves and then when Mum leaves it's just us kids at home. So, it's not always that safe. Well Mum doesn't think it is. She gets a bit scared' (Mary, 17, Comfort High). At Strive High, Audrey, 16, sees long hours as bad but not without a good side: 'Bad because you won't see them … Sometimes there's brothers and sisters and they'll have to fend for themselves but then sometimes it's good because it is also freedom involved'.

Weekends, nights and shifts

Many young people specifically mention the loss of weekend time with their parents. For example, Sarah, 11, at Strive Primary, would like it if her dad had a weekend day off rather than Wednesday because she really enjoys *family* time on weekends. Others want their parents around on weekends for more utilitarian reasons, because otherwise 'we couldn't get anywhere'.

Some specifically mention night work and do not like their parents working at night: 'I wouldn't like it if Mum worked at night'. 'No I wouldn't either.' (16 year old girls at Struggle High).

Shift work is also seen as a source of parental tiredness. Sarah's mother is a nurse:

> *It makes her heaps tired, because of all the shift work and everything. It's bad (Sarah, 16, Comfort High).*

These effects cut across most boundaries; city and country, high and low incomes, boys and girls; they affect workers in blue, white and pink collar jobs, and reach into many occupations and industries. Both small business owners and operators and wage earners are affected.

Where fathers are working long hours there is considerable sense of loss and, in some cases, hurt and anger, particularly amongst boys and young men. Many young men express a desire to have more time with their fathers. Boys in particular want more 'hanging' time. They do not even have to be in the same room as their dads; they just want to have them about.

3.7 Strategies to deal with a grumpy parent

With parents on a short fuse, young people know when to 'keep out of the way', the most common strategy being to withdraw from the parent. For example, Abraham, 16, feels that his mum's primary class with its 'bad kids' means that she 'is always in a bad mood when she comes home … I just try and stay away from her' (Abraham, 16, Comfort High). Many young people are quite forgiving of their parents, understanding that we all have bad days. Some adopt care strategies like massage or helping out. Others are resentful, angry or hurt.

Young people value some explanation about their parents' moods, as these young women, both 16, at Strive High discuss. They don't like their parents being 'shitty' with a consequent spillover into interrogation of their daughters. But an explanation of these spillovers mitigates the effect:

> *I can tell [what kind of day they have had]. They complain about it. We'll sit at dinner and they'll complain about it a lot and they'll just be overall stressed and angry at society and all that, but they usually eventually talk about it so I know what happened and I know they've had a bad day and why (Melinda, 16, Strive High).*
>
> *Interviewer: So is that better for you – that you understand?*
>
> *Yeah I like it cause it gives me an understanding of why they're so shitty – am I allowed to say that? – why they're so shitty at that time, so I'd rather* know *than them just being really, yeah, really mean (Melinda, 16, Strive High).*
>
> *You can tell. Especially my mum, she's very emotional. She'll come home and she'll be all mad and stuff. She'll be like 'What have you done?' And don't talk to her or she'll bite your head off, you know, but then she'll talk about it during dinner as well. She'll sit down and start complaining and it's like, 'Oh* Okay' *(Audrey, 16, Strive High).*

3.8 'I have to do more when Mum works'

In cases where both parents are in the paid workforce young people note heightened expectations of children around the house. They are expected to do more:

> *She used to do most of the housework and cook, but now she's got a job we have to do more stuff. Dad's not there very often. He gets angry when Mum wants to do anything (Adam, 16, Country High).*

In some families this is negotiated and discussed:

> *Mum sat us down [when she went full-time] and she said 'Okay now things have to change in the house. You're going to have to start doing things. I haven't got the time any more to do the washing a couple of days a week, or cooking. When I get home from meetings, tea will have to be ready, everyone is just going to have to get their own meal, there won't be a set meal'. It's pretty stressful, but we talked about it at the start, about how things were going to change (Judith, 18, Country High).*

3.9 Job spillover from domestic work and being at home

Positive and negative spillover from work is not confined to those with paid jobs. While fathers at home are viewed differently from mothers at home,[9] both are seen to experience and transmit effects from their work situation.

Audrey notices that her dad, who is retired, misses his job: 'He wants to get back to work and do something because I think he feels like he doesn't have things to do'. William at Struggle High observes similar restlessness and lack of social connection where his parents, both at home, are concerned. His father has a work injury:

> *Socially it would affect them, they wouldn't get a lot of chances to meet new people. It limits their social interaction. It could lead at times to unrest, disturbance because they're in each other's hair all the time … [Work] gives them something to do. My Dad is currently injured and he sits around the house all day cause he can barely walk and he hobbles, keeps himself occupied … He's used to being extremely occupied at work (William, 15, Strive High).*

William feels that his parents' sickness means that they are absorbing the stresses of their children's lives rather than the other way around: 'It's more like a reversal of roles. They're taking the stress from our lives in school rather than [us taking stress from] their role in work'.

Many young people with mothers at home, full-time or part-time, appreciate having them around: 'She's always there. She cooks for us'. They see positives both for themselves and for their mothers: 'She gets satisfaction out of it – keeping her family intact', as Aislan (16, Leafy High) puts it. Many children are well aware that their mothers are energetically maintaining the home and protecting their children from these tasks: 'She keeps the house clean and I don't have to do anything. There's no

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[9] Young people are more likely to describe their at-home fathers as retrenched, retired, sick or unemployed rather than working at home or 'looking after us', as they describe their mothers. Fathers at home are defined in relation to their attachment to the labour market, while mothers at home are seen as carers.

bad things because she's always happy' (Hayley, 12, Strive Primary). Young people are very aware that when their mothers enter paid work, more domestic jobs fall to them; some don't like this.

However, being at home is not without some spillover effects for mothers, confirming results that Lewis *et al.,* (2001) report. These include physical and emotional effects as Emma recognises:

> *[Mum] keeps the house clean a lot and I don't have to do anything at all … [But] my mum is getting old and she does everything and my dad just cooks, and my mum's hands are getting blisters and cracks everywhere and I think that's bad (Emma, 11, Strive Primary).*

Sarah agrees:

> *The good thing about my mum is she always keeps the house clean and I don't have to do anything either, but I just help out round the house because my mum gets tired because she has to look after my brother and she has to do all the housework and … she's got to make the house clean again. Bad thing is she gets really tired, she needs a good night's sleep (Sarah, 11, Strive Primary).*

Fred sees that 'my little brother was really hard work for my mum' when she looked after him full-time (Fred, 11, Comfort Primary). Another comments 'If [Mum] was at home all the time she'd get bored' (Susie, 16, Comfort High). William at Struggle High can remember when his dad was working: 'He really enjoyed his work and that was passed on to the family. We noticed that it was a passion for him'.

Young people are also aware of the under-valuation of their mothers' work at home, and several mention depression:

> *[Being at home] can have its good points and its bad points. In a way, [Mum] does all this good stuff, but she's kind of under-appreciated, and I don't imagine it would be easy for her, considering she's had to raise two kids with depression. But if she gets satisfaction out of raising kids then it's good for her all round (Aislan, 16, Leafy High).*

Aislan reflects that her mother builds her life around her children's routines and has little time 'for herself'. She has to 'remember everything':

> *And it just seems she has to stick to our routines, so she can do stuff for us, and she doesn't really get much time for herself, and sometimes she feels under-appreciated because we take her for granted a bit (Aislan, 16, Leafy High).*

Julia, also at Leafy High, whose mother is at home while her dad lives overseas, wonders if her mother would 'feel more competent' if she had a paid job. Vanessa is clear that she would like her mother to have a paid job:

> *Well I see my mum every day, which is okay. She's there but I prefer her to go out a bit and be occupied. Her house is her life. She just loves cleaning and nagging. So I'd prefer her to be out more. She needs to get out … I'd rather like it if she was enjoying herself, rather than sitting at home doing nothing (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High).*

Melinda is glad her mother is not at home all the time:

> *It gives them something to think about. My mum has two months off. She got bored at home and it gives them something to do. It keeps them occupied. They're not always there in my face all the time (Melinda 16, Strive High).*

Binh, whose mother is a widow with six children, sees both positives and negatives from her mother's work at home. On the positive side she keeps the house clean:

> *So we don't need to pack up … and she doesn't need to go outside too much and get sore and stuff and the bad thing is that she works a lot and sometimes she doesn't sleep and she worries … When she's not doing anything she thinks about life and she gets sad and that. Yeah (Binh, 11, Strive Primary).*

When her mum is sad, Binh 'feels sad too'.

3.10 Job spillover: Good, bad, ugly

This discussion affirms the body of research (Galinsky, 1999; Nasman, 2003; McKee *et al.,* 2003; Lewis *et al.*, 2001) suggesting that *it is not whether parents go to work or not, but the state in which they come home that affects children*. This 'state' reflects objective characteristics of jobs (like hours and intensity) as well as the extent to which parents' preferences match their jobs. As Galinsky (1999) has argued with reference to the US, the debate about whether to work or not needs to be reframed in Australia.

For many children, their parents' jobs are associated with positive spillover. Kids value the money and security that parents' paid jobs bring. Beyond this, they can see that many parents enjoy their jobs, or aspects of them. They love their stories, sense their social connection through work, and see that their parents have fun and feel good about doing a job well.

But negative spillover is also widespread. It is especially associated with disappointed parental preferences, for example a parent who doesn't want to work part-time but has to or a parent who cannot work the shifts they want. It is also associated with some specific job characteristics; risk of physical harm, job insecurity, work overload, or long or unsocial hours which often send a parent home from work bad tempered. Their mood 'colours' are obvious to young people from physical, verbal and behavioural clues. Children read their parents easily and negative spillover is sometimes seen as having very significant consequences. At the end of one discussion, when invited to make any final comments about the issues of work, time and consumption, Gary linked his parents' divorce to his dad's 'strenuous' job as a stockbroker and the mobility it required:

> *I think one of the reasons I think my mum and dad broke up was because my dad's work was not very stable. He lives in Asia, but before that he was in Hong Kong, before that he was in Malaysia, before that he was in America, and you know, it's all the moving around. So I just reckon if he didn't have such a strenuous job maybe he might be in Australia, he might still be living with me or whatever (Gary, 16, Leafy High)*

Job spillover, however, does not end with the parents. Both good and bad job spillover is directly transmitted to children. It affects them, their moods, concerns and behaviour.

The fit between job preferences and job reality seems critical to the level and nature of spillover. For example, a mother who is happy doing domestic work will have much less spillover than a mother who does such work but is resentful, bored or feels isolated or under-valued. A parent who loves his job and works long hours may bring home less negative spillover than one who works part-time but hates his job and has no say over his hours. That said, long and unsocial hours are consistently mentioned as associated with negative spillover and the majority of parents who work them appear to children to be sometimes bad tempered, tired and stressed.

By and large, young people cannot, prevent spillover although some try: 'I just tell him to shut up'. However, many attempt to take protective action. They respond to negative spillover in several ways, most commonly by physically withdrawing from a grumpy or shouting parent in the short term. In the longer term, they may turn to the other parent and distance themselves from the absent or grumpy parent. Some take steps to look after their tired parent; they give them a massage or show concern. Some just worry about their parents, while others dislike, or hate, the contamination of their emotional states by their parents' jobs. Parental guilt is one further consequence of this spillover.

4. Parental guilt and compensation

Previous research has recorded that parents, especially mothers, say that they often feel guilty for not 'being there' (Ehrensaft, 2001; Pocock, 2001). Several questions arise in relation to guilt. Firstly, do young people perceive parental guilt? Secondly, what methods do parents use to compensate for guilt? Thirdly, what do young people think of parental guilt and these compensation strategies? Do they work and are they necessary?

4.1 Do young people perceive parental guilt?

Many, indeed the majority of young people say that their working parents feel guilt for not being there. Where parents are around their children a lot, there are fewer or no signs, but where longer absences occur, many young people are aware of parental guilt. There are exceptions; in some other cases, where there is no real choice around working time, guilt is absent:

> *My mum [doesn't feel guilty] because she has taken it easy. She sees us a lot of the time. But my dad probably, I don't know if he feels guilty but I think he would prefer less hours and more time with us. I don't know if it's guilt ... I think he'd much rather be with us than work but I think he sees that he doesn't have much of a choice (Geoff, 16, Comfort High).*

> *I don't reckon my dad feels guilty because he's making money that will pay for the bills and pay for the stuff, like the telephone, which he won't shut up about cause we use it too much* apparently. *And so I don't reckon they feel guilty cause they're there when I need them and stuff (Louise, 15, Struggle High).*

In the same group, Mark agrees with Geoff: 'I don't think he's guilty because he can't help it and he knows that and so there's no guilt'. Where work is seen as unavoidable, it drives out guilt. However, for many mothers the lack of choice is less clear-cut. The perceived scope for 'choice' to be a working mother or mother at home fosters higher levels of guilt.

In other cases, young people think habit 'wears' paternal guilt away. Bob at Comfort Primary considered that his dad 'probably' felt guilty when he started his job in a sports facility five years ago:

> *He probably started to feel guilty, but it has worn in so he doesn't feel that guilty any more (Bob, 11, Comfort Primary).*

Sometimes young people notice guilt more in relation to one parent than another, for example that their dad feels more guilty than their mum if he works long hours and she is at home. Sebastian's dad, a boilermaker, sometimes works long hours:

> *Just as an example, my dad just comes home pretty late. He feels guilty, he demonstrates it to us, he wants to spend time with us ...yeah, he's at work, and they give him overtime, he feels guilty so he wants to take us to the*

> *soccer field. He makes it up by taking us out shopping as a whole group, or he takes us out to dine somewhere … (Sebastian, 17, Strive High).*
>
> *Interviewer: And when he does that, does it work, does it make it up?*
>
> *Yeah it works heaps … Being together, he, you, just feel happy enough spending time together, quality time together. You never know, something could have happened to them at work. Or I don't know, you've got to cherish that time I suppose (Sebastian, 17, Strive High).*

Sebastian enjoys soccer with his dad and values the time his dad takes to compensate for his absence. Jack at Struggle High says that his dad feels guilty 'a lot'. He can tell because:

> *When I'm doing something and, just out of the blue, he'll come over and start talking to me and I just don't want to … He feels guilty because he's had long hours at work and he wants to come home and talk to me. But I'll be doing homework or something. You can't get away from him! (Jack, 15, Struggle High).*

At the other end of the economic scale, at Leafy Primary in Sydney, young boys also identify parental guilt easily along with various compensating strategies. They mention mostly fathers in relation to parental guilt, reflecting fathers' longer absences from their children. Andre's father is an artist who, when his paintings sell, promises special treats, like a plane trip, to make up for his absence. Another class-mate says his dad 'feels oh so sorry for not being around 12 or 13 hours a day'. Matthew's dad takes him to the movies to make up, while others in the group talk about their dads coming to watch them play sport or spending extra time: 'He does make it up by spending more time with me'.

When invited to choose between compensating *time* together or *stuff,* like a CD, Sebastian, 17, chooses 'both the present and the time going out together … because they're giving you something as well as time … Two for the price of one'. But he is clear that the gift without the time is inferior and is not his choice.

Young people also notice their mothers are guilty, and some feel that their dads are guilt-free:

> *When Mum had to go to Canberra every week, she felt guilty. It was Okay. We didn't blame her for anything. Cause that was her job … Dad doesn't feel guilty. Dad, he just* can't *feel guilty. No, he doesn't feel guilty about anything (Rove, 12, Comfort Primary).*

Often recognition of parental guilt is followed with a quick recognition of why parents work. As Rove said, 'She was doing it for us'. Many young people are well aware of why parents are absent, as the following exchange between young women at Comfort High illustrates:

> *No [they don't feel guilty] cause they're working heaps hard and earning money for the family and stuff (Sarah, 16, Comfort High).*

They don't really have a choice (Jade, 16, Comfort High).

It's not like they're doing it on purpose (Mary, 17, Comfort High).

It's not like they go out every night to party and then come home and go 'Oh, we don't have any money. I don't want to go to work' (Susie, 16, Comfort High).

Sarah's mother uses *time* strategies to make up and Sarah knows her mother does her best to be with her:

My mum usually tells me and stuff. If she's working five or seven nights in a row, I'm left by myself all those nights, she feels really guilty, but she can change her shift sometimes, even though heaps of people don't want night shifts, so if she can she does and I know she's trying and she tries to spend more time with me (Sarah, 16, Comfort High).

Young people describe many direct signs of parental guilt. Bonnie says of her mother 'She tells me':

Well, I know Dad feels guilty when he can't be there for things. When I talk to him on the phone he always keeps on talking about saying sorry and things like that (Bonnie, 11, Country Primary)

Others can just tell, feel it or notice because their parents try to make it up to them by being 'extra' nice. Guilt is recognised by young people in both Years 6 and 11, in the city and the country, and in high and low-income area schools, whether in a single income or dual income households, or in intact, sole or blended families. It crosses all these boundaries. It is less prevalent in households where the parental need to work is obvious, for example where income is lower. In these homes, economic necessity drives out guilt, just as it undermines hunger for parental time.

In higher income homes there is sometimes an acceptance of life as it is.

I think, my mum or my dad, it's not that they don't feel bad, because it's just been like this the whole time, not being there, so there's no apology needed. It's something that has to be accepted (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High).

Yeah, I can remember my dad was away like three years in a row for my birthday and I just went kind of angry at him each time but he just [says] 'There's not much I can do. It's work, I have to do it'. But he didn't really apologise or anything. It's just, that's what he has to do. It's part of his job (Peter, 16, Leafy High).

4.2 How do parents ameliorate guilt?

Young people, whether in low or high income households, in the country or in the city, can readily name the things their parents do when they feel guilt. Four main strategies for dealing with parental guilt are obvious to young people; firstly, parental talk and apology; secondly, compensation through time; thirdly, compensation

through ‘stuff’; and, finally, compensation through ‘time and stuff’. We consider these in turn.

Talk and apology strategies

These are named by a number of children whose parents talk about the squeeze on their time and explain their absence. Some apologise:

> *She tries to hang out with me and she tries to play games with me and talk to me (Eddie, 12, Struggle Primary).*

> *My dad feels guilty if he’s not there and I’m just at home. He’ll ring me on the mobile and say I’m sorry for not being there, and I’ll try and be there next time (Matt, 12, Leafy Primary).*

Compensating with time

In some cases a talk and apology approach is accompanied by making extra time:

> *Well my mum tells me when she feels guilt and just apologizes, so then I know what she’s feeling. Then she tries to make up for it just by being there a bit more (Mary, 17, Comfort High).*

> *I think my dad he feels guilty for never really ever coming to watch me play tennis. He does make it up by spending time with me (Ali, 11, Leafy Primary).*

These time compensations are not always welcome:

> *Doesn’t really matter to me. She feels guilty but she doesn’t like to give us extra stuff or anything just because of that … She comes and watches TV with us which is really weird (Jill, 17, Comfort High).*

Compensating with ‘stuff’

In other cases young people identify material compensation. When Eddie spoke of his dad’s guilt he said:

> *He misses out on seeing us. He wants to see us heaps and heaps to make up for it (Eddie, 12, Struggle Primary).*

> *Interviewer: And how can you tell Eddie?*

> *He buys stuff and he can see you feel sad (Eddie, 12, Struggle Primary).*

When Ricky’s mum couldn’t make it to his football game she compensated with money and relaxed limits on time out: ‘She gave me money and let me go out late’ (Ricky, 12, Struggle Primary). In the same lower income area, Olaf’s dad ‘misses out on seeing us. He wants to see us heaps and heaps to make it up’. Kelsey, also at Struggle Primary, has a dad who says he is sorry for ‘being out late’ and takes them out for movies, tea and mini-golf. Kelly’s mum ‘feels guilty’ and she takes Kelly and

her friends out to movies and for holidays. The father of Melinda at Strive High feels guilty and compensates by taking the family to their holiday house: 'He works every second weekend. And I think he would like to have the weekend off, but we can't afford it. He needs to work, so he feels guilty about that'. For her dad, guilt lies in the gap between the time he would like with his family and the time he must give to work. Melinda is not at all confused about why he works as he does.

4.3 Can 'stuff' substitute for parental time?

Many parents attempt to substitute stuff for time. It does not work well with children. They don't mind getting the stuff, but they don't see it as a substitute for parental time. Some young people clearly feel, and regret, the parental distance that comes from not enough time with a parent, often as a result of long or unsocial hours. Two examples illustrate this with poignancy and in both cases the long-term closeness of daughter-father bonds are made precarious, one in a higher income area for an 11 year old, and the other in a lower income area for a 16 year old. At Leafy Primary, Brittany, 11, describes her dad's truck driving hours and how they affect her: 'He drops me and my sister down to school at around 7.30 and he comes back home at around 12 at night'. She says he feels guilty:

> *Because he works full-time and he knows that he can't spend time with me and he knows that I really like to spend time with him. And once I had a lot of trouble and I didn't come to school for a couple of days because I just wanted to stay with my dad as long as I could (Brittany, 11, Leafy Primary).*
>
> *Interviewer: What do you like about being with Dad?*
>
> *My dad, he understands me better than my mum … And I can always know that if I have something to talk about I can always tell my dad.*
>
> *Interviewer: And when you say your dad feels guilty, how can you tell?*
>
> *Because once I saw him crying and talking to my mum, saying that he didn't want to work at the job he's working at now because he knew he was missing out on my younger years and he knows that when I grow up I might go out of the house and he won't have a chance to share as much time as he could have.*
>
> *Interviewer: Does he do anything to make up for not being there?*
>
> *Yeah. Sometimes on the weekend he takes me out, just me and my dad, and we go out to dinner or we just go out to late night shopping.*
>
> *Interviewer: And what do you think about him making up to you like that?*
>
> *I think it's good because I get a chance to talk to him.*
>
> *Interviewer: If you could choose between a new thing, like a CD, and time with him, what would you choose?*

Spending time with him.

Brittany does not hesitate in her answer. She wants her missing father and, like him, she doesn't think that time later will substitute for time now. She sees the quality of her relationship, now close, as connected to time with him. She fights for time with him, 'staying away from school for a couple of days' to be with him. She sees his sadness.

At Strive High, Audrey reflects on her relationship with her father, both when he ran a driving school when she was younger, and now that he is retired:

> *He felt guilty because I know I got spoilt really, really badly when I was little, by him, and I remember I hardly ever saw him. It was usually just me and my mum at home, but then when he retired my mum went to work and I still see her cause she's usually [away] only school hours and my dad's at home. I think my dad feels guilty because he missed out a bit on my childhood like when I was growing up, so maybe that's the reason why I'm not that close to him. I'm close to my mum (Audrey, 16, Strive High).*

Audrey, having missed his presence during her childhood, has not become close to her father later in her adolescence despite his full-time presence at home. Her father's strategy of substituting stuff for his time has not worked; it has not 'made up' for his time. Indeed, she says she didn't need it and is implicitly critical, seeing herself as 'really, really' spoilt:

> *When I was little, you don't need all this stuff. I had heaps, the handbags, all these hats and dresses and stuff. I was really, really, really spoilt by him when I was little … I had everything that I wanted when I was a baby (Audrey, 16, Strive High).*

At Comfort High, Mark's mother brings back little presents and things when she gets back from work trips: 'It's not necessary. An act of good fun' he says. Susie at Comfort High agrees: 'They try to give you things and they're all nice'. She likes this situation. 'It's nice to make them feel guilty! So that Mum becomes '*overly* nice'. In the same group, Jill also recognises her mother's guilt, but she compensates with time rather than stuff.

Aislan also identifies the purchase of goods as compensation:

> *I actually think he covers up his guilt with material things. You know he feels guilty for not spending time with us, but he will make it up to us by buying us something … Like, we just got this big screen TV and I think it might be his way of saying, "Oh, I'm not with you, but kind of look what my job is doing for us, we can get this stuff". But I think we all understand that he has to work for us to have those things. I think all of us are old enough to understand that now (Aislan, 16, Leafy High).*

Aislan thinks it is 'kind of cool' getting things. She is now so accustomed to her father working a lot and receiving gifts as compensation that she says: 'Honestly I've just become so used to it that I don't really know what I think of it'. When asked her

advice for parents who compensate for not being with their children, she said that she would probably suggest to parents who are 'never there' that they spend more time with their kids because 'it can affect them'. In the same Leafy High school, Ellie's Dad 'wants to spoil us' when they get together 'because we haven't seen him for so long and he wants us to know that he's still there and he can still do things for us'.

In the country, Judith's dad who works very long hours is a soft touch for stuff because of his guilt. Judith sometimes works on the weakness:

> *I'll get [shopping stuff] out of Dad cause he'll feel guilty and I go 'Come on Dad, I need it and I want it'. But getting it out of Mum [who works part-time] – can't do it (Judith, 18, Country High).*

She also identifies that her father gives her money sometimes because he gives it to her step-siblings. Other parents who are away a lot bring gifts home:

> *Well, when my dad isn't there he brings home presents to make up for not being there ... just little things, he buys me clothes and sunnies ... He bought me a watch. He just buys me little things but they're good (Jade, 16, Comfort High).*

Compensating with time and stuff

Parents often make up for not being there by spending special time with children and doing things that they like such as going to the movies, playing mini golf, or going out for dinner. Many involve both time and money:

> *Well sometimes if he feels guilty he normally tries to make it up to us and then we play, we go places and stuff ... He takes me shopping and to the beach if I want to go, or the pools, or the movies (Hayley, 12, Strive Primary).*
>
> *Mum doesn't really [do anything] but Dad would like to take us out to speedways or something or to the cinemas or something like that (Candy, 17, Country High).*
>
> *Dad doesn't but Mum does. She takes friends to movies, friends to holidays. Takes me to movies (Kelly, 11, Struggle Primary).*

These strategies vary between city and country. In the country where most mothers are either home all the time or work only during school hours, young people recognise parental guilt and see the main compensating strategy as time and physical contact. They are more likely to discuss guilt in relation to absent fathers than to mothers and this guilt is less likely to manifest itself in meals out, movies, presents or buying things. It is more likely to result in an apology, a hug or with time being spent with the children or young people in an activity they like.

4.4 What do young people think of parental guilt and compensation?

Young people enjoy the compensations that flow from parental guilt whether in the form of time or stuff or both. Where there was no open parental recognition or

contrition about absence, some children express resentment and hostility and others define their own futures *against* the inadequacies that they see in their parents' working lives: 'I will *never* work in [his occupation]. I will *never* marry someone who works in [his occupation].'

Young people and children like parental acknowledgement of sorrow about missing significant events or being absent for long periods: 'He just tells me that he is sorry'. Many do not look for anything more. Many love family time and being 'all together'. Others are not averse to the fruit of parental guilt, whether time or money. This was less obvious amongst 16-17 year olds at Leafy High in Sydney ('we don't really want to hang with our folks so much any more') than amongst others in lower income areas, the country or younger people. However, significant numbers of young people enjoy compensating time and accept it as a good 'make up' substitute. Young people especially like compensation strategies that give them *time and money*, going out for a family meal, to the movies or shopping with a parent (and their wallet). In general, 'make up' compensating time with parents and the whole family is preferred. If it comes *with* consumption well and good, but the *time together* element of this package is critical.

While many children giggled or laughed about the stuff that parental guilt bought them, they obviously preferred the time. When Jade was asked whether she thought her dad should buy gifts to compensate for being away, she said:

> *Oh, yeah, why not. But I'd rather him be there than buy presents, but there is not much I can do about it (Jade, 16, Comfort High).*

Jade would have preferred that neither the guilt nor the compensation were necessary. Smithy in Leafy High in Sydney felt the same:

> *My dad always apologises for not seeing me much and ... sometimes he will call me at the last minute, and [say] 'I'm sorry I can't see you' and he'll try to make it up to me somehow ... He'll take me out to dinner ... [I say] 'Don't worry about it' (Smithy, 17, Leafy High).*
>
> *Interviewer: So when a parent uses a making up strategy like that, do you think they should?*
>
> *I don't know. It shows they care. I don't really ever take up the offer ... I'd prefer them to make that effort because it shows that they actually do care, and I like that, but I'd prefer them to show up in the first place (Smithy, 17, Leafy High).*

Some 16 year olds felt that their mothers made too much of their guilt:

> *When my mum goes away or isn't at home for a day or two, she'll come back and say I'm sorry I wasn't here and whatever. It's kind of like I don't mind that much. I'd think that a 16 year old would be old enough to cope with that, a bit, but she always makes a bigger deal of it (Gary, 16, Leafy High).*

Thanh also finds it annoying:

You can't see it through her behaviour, but she just says it. She just says like 'What do you think of me working so much?' I just [say] 'I don't mind.' I don't want to put her under any pressure.

Interviewer: So when she says she feels guilty you'd rather she didn't feel guilty?

Yes! It gets annoying (Thanh, 17, Comfort High).

4.5 Guilt, time and money: The cure becomes the disease

In sum, many young people perceive that their parents feel guilty about how their work affects time with their children. However, guilt is far from universal. In cases where parental work does not intrude overly upon family relationships, or parents seem reconciled to the necessity of their work patterns, young people do not perceive parental guilt. However, in many households, parents' jobs do intrude and such reconciliation is not complete. In these households, the guilt that arises is widespread in the perception of young people. It especially affects parents, both mothers and fathers, who work long or unsocial hours or spend extended periods away from their children. Often one parent will not feel guilt while the other clearly does.

The signs of guilt are obvious to young people and go beyond the symptoms of tiredness, injury and stress that afflict many parents as a direct consequence of work. They arise from a mismatch between the way parents *are as workers* and the way they *want to be as parents*. Many young people see parents' jobs and hours as immovable objects. They accept them but they are affected by the guilt they notice, and many are concerned about their parents' feelings expressed through that guilt.

There are several common parental reactions to feelings of guilt. The response of 'talk and apology' arises in both high and low income households and is more common in country than in city households. Many young people respond positively to the straightforward acknowledgement that parents' preferences for time with the family are being frustrated. They appreciate the information and the discussion about the household implications. Children and young people remember when their parents have expressed their sadness or frustration about missing them and can readily quote these exchanges. In some cases, young people say they would prefer this verbal acknowledgement not to be 'over done'.

In addition to talk, many parents spend extra time with their children. They go to the park, kick a ball, or hang out with them. Some make sure they spend the weekend together. No child had anything negative to say about these times, but a few of the older ones felt the 'closeness' timetable was set by parents and cut across child time. Most children wanted these special times and appreciated them.

Much more common than simple verbal acknowledgements of guilt or make-up time are 'time and stuff' strategies on the part of parents who compensate for their absences by trying to spend both extra time and money on their families. Young people quite like this 'two for the price of one' approach. If they have to make a choice, however, they choose time rather than stuff. The substitution of stuff does not compensate.

Many young people have a high level of understanding about the necessities and demands placed upon their parents. A large proportion enjoys make-up time but they are not always on the lookout for material compensation and some are sceptical about it, seeing it as unnecessary. Clearly, such compensation contributes to a work and spend cycle, obvious to 11 year olds like Danielle at Leafy Primary:

> *My mum always tries to work in the morning, so she gets more time with me and then she always feels guilty when she is working in the afternoon … (Danielle, 11, Leafy Primary).*
>
> *Interviewer: So does your mum do anything when she feels guilty?*
>
> *Yeah she sometimes takes me shopping and the other day she took me to find my dress for the formal and then she spends lots.*
>
> *Interviewer: And what do you think about her spending on you when she feels guilty?*
>
> *Kind of good, but I think she should save some of her money so she won't have to work that much.*
>
> *Interviewer: If you could choose between a new thing, like a CD, and time with her, what would you choose?*
>
> *More time (Danielle, 11, Leafy Primary).*

Danielle sees that her mother's efforts to compensate for her guilt lock her into more work and she would prefer a different approach. Danielle's preference for time is quickly volunteered, just like her classmate Brittany, who says that being spoiled is no substitute for her father spending time with her. Neither hesitates.

As Danielle understands, this 'compensatory consumption' drives new levels of spending and work. Parental guilt acts as a stimulus to consumption that is usually inessential such as meals out, movies, trips, stuff. Advertisers are on firm ground when they stimulate parental guilt, suggest that it can be satiated by stuff and spending, and that stuff signals love and can substitute for it. Widespread parental guilt feeds consumption, creating soft and fertile commercial terrain. However, the expression of 'contrition through spending' appears to work better for parents and the market than for young people. Children are not so convinced about the merits of the trade-off. Many want their parents, not compensatory stuff. Some see it as cool, but most don't actively seek it and few manipulate guilt to get it. It therefore seems sensible for parents to avoid compensatory spending in favour of talk and time where possible. For many young people stuff doesn't deliver and, most importantly, more stuff and spending requires more money to finance it and consequently more hours of paid parental work. The 'cure' becomes the disease.

5. Young people's consumption

In rich countries rising money incomes drive increasing consumption (Hamilton, 2003). Children and young people in Australia are far from immune. Even in very poor households with welfare dependent parents in poor health, children are keen to have the latest toys and games. These demands soak up parental incomes and, in some cases, dictate longer working hours for parents. Young people in all kinds of households want or have play-stations and computer equipment; in many households a mobile phone for children is seen as important to family communication and social life. Amongst our participants 73 per cent had a play-station or equivalent, 89 per cent had use of a computer in the home, and two-thirds had a mobile phone. Amongst Year 11 students, 85 per cent had a mobile phone.

Access to the right clothes, games, jewellery, movies, telecommunications and social events is widely viewed as an essential gateway to social inclusion. While some take enjoyment and pleasure from their consumption, many talk about a competitive race for 'coolness through stuff' or describe a treadmill of endless desire: 'You get what you want, and then so do they, and you still don't feel good', to paraphrase Mark, 17, at Comfort High.

This sometimes sounds like a cruel and wasteful race. It is one that many young people understand, resist, critique and mock – but participate in nevertheless. Some define themselves against brands and dominant trends, choosing unfashionable, daggy or old clothes. Others work hard to be in the mainstream, acquiring the cool things they hope will confer belonging, power and friends.

Family work patterns and earnings are intrinsically associated with this race for material goods and partially motivated by it. Without their parents' jobs, the 'stuff' is missing. It also stimulates young people's own increasing participation in paid work. Many young people are careful about asking for money, conscious of household budget pressures or the precarious nature of parental earnings. They are also critical of 'kids who have too much', saying that they are spoiled, don't appreciate what they have and won't be able to manage when they are older. However, young people value being able to 'keep up' with the consumption of their peers; keeping up enables them to fit in, to 'have power through things' and to consolidate their identity through clothes, cars, and other possessions.

Advertisers are keenly aware of this fertile psychological ground and they nurture it carefully, cultivating a sense of self through 'stuff' (Cook, 2000, 2001). They stimulate consumption and expenditure by associating 'success' with 'ownership'. Many young people are aware of the power of advertising but it takes a strong determination to buck the trend. The children who reject competitive consumption and define themselves against it are in the minority.

There are signs that some family types or situations may be caught more firmly in the competitive race than others, at least in the eyes of some young people. For example, they observe that sole children or children with more than one household are more likely to have 'a lot of stuff'. Children with more than one household are sometimes

caught in material rivalry between parents, carefully pitch their requests to the more forthcoming parent, or foster material gain through inter-parent competition.

Beyond parental work, young people's *own* patterns of paid work finance their consumption. The cycle of working and spending starts early. The proportion of Australian senior school students with jobs is increasing although precise figures are not available. Robinson estimates that by the early 1990s one third of senior school students spent 'an average of nine hours per week in a part-time job' (2001: ii). In the late 1990s, between 30 and 50 per cent of working age school students held part-time jobs (Smith and Green, no date). This is more than twice the OECD average (Sweet, 2001). Many young people are now working and large numbers rely on their earnings as the chief means of acquiring stuff, especially inessential competitive consumption (brand name clothing, music, the latest mobile phones, cars). New generations of young people are making an early entry to work and consumption with a ready dividend for both producers and labour markets.

In many cases, young people perform a dual function in the changing product and service industries. On the one hand they *provide* services (and receive junior rates of pay), whilst simultaneously fuelling sales of these services through their own *consumption*. Many love their jobs. They enjoy the social connection, the sense of competence and independence that jobs and earnings bring. However, many are early entrants to a teenage work and spend cycle of their own at a time when their developing sense of self is nascent. This acclimatisation to 'self through consumption' creates fertile terrain for markets well into the future. These patterns are not without their critics, however, and most young people do not think that a lot of money is good for them, or necessarily for adults either.

Young people weigh up the costs and benefits of having 'a lot of money'. Many are cautious about it. A 15 year old boy at Struggle High who wants more time with his parents rather than more money, observes that 'Money can tear things apart … Money itself can become an evil presence. There are fights about money' (Jack, 15, Struggle High). Country kids offer similar comments:

> *I think it's important to have enough money, but not too much. It can wreck your family, and people who get too much, get selfish I reckon (Robert, 17, Country High).*
>
> *Like Robert said. It wouldn't be good at all to have heaps of money. Cause then you always get what you want ... [You want] just enough money to be happy and enjoy what you are doing ... I wouldn't want to be rich. Money is just a tool. You need money to get things like food, clothes, a house (Adam, 16, Country High).*
>
> *I agree with what Adam and Robert said. It's more important to have a good family environment, rather than money. Money is not everything in life (Kevin, 17, Country High).*

Like many of their peers living in financially comfortable households, whether in the city or country, they weighed up the value of money and did not consider that more of

it, or a lot of it, was necessarily a good thing. A number of children in lower income households also shared their views. They are seeking relief from worry about bills for their parents and stable secure incomes rather than large sums of discretionary money. All groups, however, identify a powerful culture of competitive consumption. Many participants felt that having too much money affects young people negatively. At Leafy High at Sydney, Aislan says that having a lot of money is not good for young people who 'just spend it all on useless junk':

> *I think it is important for kids to have some amount of money to get out, have a social life and entertainment, otherwise you'd be cramped inside doing homework. Oh God, you'd be going mad! But not too much … and when you get to a certain age … you should start thinking of earning money (Aislan, 16, Leafy High).*

A group of 15 year old boys at Struggle High (characterised by the girls' focus group as 'serious, political' boys) shared a critique of money and consumption. They deliberately carried 'a brick of a mobile phone', or 'abhorred' or 'deplored' them, telling disapproving stories of 'Five and six year old kids at the cinema the other day. They walked out and no parents with them, rang up their parents and 'It's time to come and pick us up'. They were not easily impressed by wealth. Rich people need to 'know how to deal with it'. In the words of Jack: 'You get the rich snobby people and you can get the rich nice people'. The difference is that nice rich people didn't waste their money and have everything. Jack is glad that 'I didn't have a lot of money at a young age' because:

> *Well, at my age, moving on to 16, comes cars. Not for me, but people I know, they have access to drugs. Drugs come into it. Your life ends at the age of 20 if you've got drugs because you're rich. Getting a car, go buy the latest car … But having a lot of money at a young age, I think is a bad idea (Jack, 15, Struggle High).*

At the same school, 15 year old girls also associate drugs with having money. These were the only two references to drugs in our study, both from the same school. Like many young people, they were critical of too much money on several grounds; young people wouldn't know how to handle it, it would lead to inauthentic relationships based on money, and they wouldn't know how to manage money later in life. Lower income primary school children in Adelaide, who were all from poorer households, were scathing about children who have a lot of money:

> *They are spoilt little brats. Think they own the world, think they can do what they like (Kelsey, 12, Struggle Primary).*
>
> *Snobs (Kelly, 11, Struggle Primary).*
>
> *Act like scabs (Zoey, 11, Struggle Primary).*

At the same time they are well aware of what happens if you can't keep up with your peers in terms of possessions: 'You get called a geek, gay, dwerb or a lesbian' (Kelsey, 12, Struggle Primary). Several primary school children in the country felt that

it was unfair for some to have a lot of money. Young people with a lot of money are seen as spoiled and 'taking everything for granted' (Louise, 15, Struggle High):

> *You might not be mature enough to handle the money … As Jack said, you might go out and blow all your money on stuff you don't need (Claus, 15, Struggle High).*

At Strive High, Audrey has decided not to spoil her children because she wants them to value what they have: 'If it's not a necessity they won't get it'. She points out that amongst her school peers 'A lot of people in our year who are working or getting money [for example Austudy] are becoming really tight. They don't want to pay anything cause they know it is their money, they won't give it. So I like the whole idea of working and getting your own money'. Her friend Melinda agrees: '[When I go into a shop] I'll look at that and think 'I want it, oohh, I'll have to work four hours to get it'. Audrey wants to save her money for 'important things' given that she has 'to work her butt off' to earn it in the first place.

Many felt that those with a lot of money would not learn how to save and would waste it:

> *My sister when she has a lot of money she goes and spends it at the canteen and then my big sister she goes to Morning Glory and buys all this junk that she already has (Lenny, 11, Strive Primary).*

Thomas' family is collecting cans to save for a play-station: 'So far we've got $185 … It will teach us how to save up, how to do it when we are older' (Thomas, 11, Comfort High). Jade, whose family has 'a lot of money', is careful not to take it for granted:

> *Because I know my dad could one day lose his job and then we wouldn't have anything … We shop cautiously, probably like everyone else does, and we put what we save away just in case, sort of thing. I don't take money for granted, because maybe one day it may not be there (Jade, 16, Comfort High).*

At Strive High, young people felt that there was a brittle link between money and friendships: 'People end up just liking you for your money, and not for yourself … And when you're out of money … you get dumped':

> *You buy people's respect. Buy your friends: 'Here I'll buy you this. You're my friend now'. I think it's a bad idea. It's not true friendship (James, 15, Struggle High).*

Claus was critical of the consumption mentality of young people: 'It's a motto for the human race: "Let's go shopping"'. Several young people talked about the tenuous link between money and happiness. As Jacqueline says 'The downside is that money doesn't really equal happiness'. Things are more complicated:

> *It's good [having money] but it's bad because when we were younger we had four of our bikes stolen and it's good because then you can pay off bills and you can give it to charity. The downside is that, the same as Coco said,*

both your parents would be working really hard to be rich and then you can never see your parents and you'd be sad (Jacqueline, 11, Strive Primary).

5.1 Competitive consumption: Being cool through stuff

Overwhelmingly, children and young people are aware of competitive consumption, that is, consumption that is less about *need* and more about *want*, specifically wants that are created out of competition to keep up with what peers have. When asked 'Do you think girls and boys of your age try and keep up with each other with stuff? many replied 'definitely!' While this concept varied within age groups, competitive consumption was widely recognised by both age groups.

Eleven year olds felt that their peers consumed competitively to belong and because they feared being teased:

They don't want to be left out, and then everyone will be teasing them and saying 'You're cheap' and stuff (Lee, 11, Strive Primary).

They want to 'look cool' by being 'up with it'. According to Binh, some aim to impress each other by 'being different' but more commonly 11 year olds speak of the pursuit of *sameness* as the road to popularity:

I think everyone is trying to be like everyone else so they don't feel left out and people become popular if they buy new stuff, so they want to be popular too … Because everyone will want to come over and play and stuff like that (Emma, 11, Strive Primary).

In Adelaide, boys at Comfort Primary wanted the right clothes and toys, partly because they like to look good, and partly because 'it's cool', though they recognised that pleasure from consumption was often fleeting:

Oh it just looks really good and then when you go out there and you start playing around with it after a few days or weeks or something it gets boring and you never play with it again (Bob, 11, Comfort Primary).

However, Bob and his friends like to brag as they jokingly exchange ideas about stuff and power:

You can go 'This shirt cost $150' (Bob, 11, Comfort Primary).

And you can brag on about it and stuff (Rove, 12, Comfort Primary).

And rub it in their face, so other people will feel they need it as well. They feel that we're better … That we've got power (Bob, 11, Comfort Primary).

That we've got power over them (Rove, 12, Comfort Primary).

Interviewer: And you feel that it makes you better?

No, not really (Bob, 11, Comfort High).

Well, it probably does a bit you know ... (Rove, 12, Comfort Primary).

Despite their pursuit of power through expensive shirts, Rove and Bob are quick to deny that someone else with a better shirt has power over *them*. They find being on the receving end of such bragging 'annoying', and try to convince the owner that his shirt is, in fact, 'hideous'. Competitive consumption is something they use to bolster themselves and their standing, but when others use it against them they try to ignore it or undermine its currency. In either case, competitive consumption is endemic in their friendships and peer worlds.

Many adolescents in the focus groups defined themselves through their consumption: 'It's my identity' as one said. For example, young women at Struggle High thought it important to keep up with material goods like clothes, accessories, shoes, hair and makeup for 'image': 'So everyone thinks you're cool'. Girls at Strive High agreed: 'You want to be cool', 'to show off', 'to impress', 'to look better than everyone else. So there's competition [for sure]':

Some people think it's like a tragedy if you wear something that someone else has seen you wear before ... It's a competition (Tanya, 16, Strive High).

Successful display brings popularity in their eyes.

Such patterns are obvious in both lower and higher income areas. Gary, at Leafy High, feels that 'a lot of what people think of you is based on what you wear'. At Comfort High in Adelaide, 'you are not good enough unless you have everything that everyone else has got; mobile phones for example, and Billabong ... And I don't know who makes that rule. It just happens' (Amanda, 16, Comfort High). Her peers want to have 'nice things' to fit in.

Some distinguished 'belonging and identity construction' from the pure pleasure that having certain things gave them: 'I just do it cause I like it … Not everyone does it just to be cool. It's just that they *like* it. You see this person, and think 'Oh that looks nice. I might get it'. That sort of thing' (Emily, 16, Struggle High). One girl said she felt 'rewarded' when she got things through her own saving.

The race for fashionable brands is widely acknowledged. Three schools of thought are evident; that brands are cool and help you join the in-crowd, or that they are a waste of money, or, thirdly, that they are signs of quality. 'Brands make better looking stuff, so that's why I would buy it. Better quality … Cause they look good' (Alana, 16, Struggle High).

Even those who said they don't participate in competitive consumption recognise the phenomenon amongst their peers, and define themselves *against* the 'cool' consumers. 'In' groups and 'out' groups are readily identified in many locations, based on consumption and look:

You get the latest fashions. You find people with brand names. They're the ones who have got a big group of friends and then you get the ones who just don't worry about brands. They're the ones you usually find huddled

> *together in a little corner … It's the minority versus majority (Jack, 15, Struggle High).*

Jack felt that this majority would have problems when they had to provide for themselves: 'When they find out that they've got to go out in the world and work, everything changes'. While these students could readily critique the pursuit of social success through consumption, they thought that those who didn't keep up 'feel pretty bad'.

Others rejected the pursuit of 'coolness' and belonging through stuff: 'I don't have friends who are obsessed with material things' (Susie, 16, Comfort High). For some of her peers, however, having the right stuff and keeping up was important because 'other girls are bitchy' and some are 'insecure, afraid of being left out'. The young men at Comfort High in Adelaide are aware of competitive pressure and feeling 'jealous' when they see people with things they want: 'I get jealous of things that other people have but I don't publicise that' because he doesn't want to give others the satisfaction of feeling better than him. By having the right gear he felt: 'You get recognition' (Mark, 17, Comfort High). At the same time, Geoff says 'I find the nicest people are people who just don't care about things or objects'. He tries not to show off new things.

There are clear age and gender differences in the pursuit of identity through goods although the ubiquitous mobile phone clearly crosses the gender boundary. Young boys pursue computer games and toys, while young men talk about cars and phones. For young men at Strive High 'It's just *having* a car at the moment. But after a while you get a better car with spoiler, and a muffler, like turbo'. While no one in their group had a really flash car 'as yet', they were aiming for them, for 'popularity'. 'You feel better for yourself. You're more of an individual' because you're mobile and independent of parents. At Leafy High, cars were not only desired, but many had them, including expensive cars 'to try to get the girls in'. While Aislan thinks this strategy is useless and it wouldn't work with her ('What's the thing with cars?'), others are more impressed:

> *I love cars! … I have a friend who spent, like, twenty grand doing up this car and then another friend of his went and bought a better car, so he had to sell his car and buy an even better one (Ellie, 16. Leafy High).*
>
> *Interviewer: And what do you think of that?*
>
> *Oh, it's pretty stupid.*
>
> *Interviewer: But did he get the girl?*
>
> *Yeah, he did actually!*

Girls were more likely to mention competitive consumption in relation to clothes, jewellery, music and looks.

Many young people felt that adults were similarly competitive in their consumption.

> *I think adults are competitive, maybe not so obviously, but they can be. My aunt is, and my mum is with clothes … I think adults are actually sometimes more competitive than children, cause like we are competitive but we don't have the money to actually buy it, but they do (Audrey, 16, Strive High).*

Young people in the country valued being brought up in a less consumption oriented atmosphere, feeling that city kids could shop more often. Most, however, identified competitive consumption and clearly described 'in' and 'out' groups built around possessions within the region:

> *[You see] kids around here in Country Town that have a lot of money. They seem to be the ones that are, you know, too good for everybody else: Like 'I've got everything, I've got all the brand names and the cool car and everything', and they seem to be really stuck up themselves and don't appreciate other people … Like they are the cool people, and can't be seen with people who get clothes at a cheaper place, don't have the fashion stuff ... Being loaded is not a great thing because they don't appreciate anything, like they have no values (Judith, 18, County High).*

In the same group, Kate describes 'distinct' groups. Like Judith she has no time for wealthy people with values that she does not share.

In terms of competitive consumption and being cool by 'looking the same', three of the four country girls were clear: 'If you don't look cool, if you don't have the brand name stuff, you're not with the in crowd' (Kate, 16, Country High). Abby disagreed: 'I reckon I just get what I like. If I say I like a certain brand name of clothes, it's not what other people think of me, it's what I like'. Abby said she didn't notice what others did. Whilst country children had many of the same possessions as children in the city, they sometimes had to wait for trips to the city to acquire them instead of being able to have new goods as soon as they became available.

5.2 The working and spending treadmill: Adolescents' critique

A critique of the loss of quality of life as a result of the pursuit of material goods was evident in more wealthy areas amongst Year 11s but there were few signs of it in lower income areas where money was discussed in terms of meeting essential living expenses. A world of more discretionary expenditure in Sydney's northern suburbs drove a higher preference for time over money; half of those at Leafy High preferred more time over more money. Witnessing a parent's long hours sharpened the critique (a third of the Leafy High participants had a parent working long hours). These young people were concerned about what lay ahead of them and the demands of being 'locked into' jobs. They wished for interesting jobs that would sweeten the years work would consume, and they hoped to avoid long hours and the sense of being trapped that they saw in some of their parents' lives. Some describe an unsatisfying, and insatiable, work and spend cycle:

> *Everyone in their own little way wants to have more. It's kind of like it's the driving thing. You want more than you have. Everyone does, and so*

> *therefore you work and you get more, and you can never have enough (Hannah, 16, Leafy High).*

In Adelaide, at Comfort High, Mark, 17, is similarly critical of the competitive consumption treadmill, seeing its pleasures as fleeting and unsatisfying: you get the stuff, and the brief happiness and 'then you just go back to where it was … You get the great feeling for a little bit, and then you lose some of the good feeling'.

Smithy in Sydney considers some new products as unnecessary luxuries: 'Like satellite navigation systems in vehicles and stuff, for people who can't be bothered to open up a street directory' (Smithy, 17, Leafy High). Young people at Leafy High see their futures narrowing in the pursuit of a secure financial life, and they are concerned for themselves about aspects of their parents' working lives. They want to travel before work because: 'Seeing parents work and all, you just want to at least rest before you have to lock yourself into such an annoying life' as Vanessa puts it. Later she continues, with general agreement from her peers:

> *I think the quality of life is not increasing any more. It's decreasing because of work ... Like they might think they are increasing it because they're getting more money, and they're getting all these other things, but we're losing things that are much more important, that people don't realize. I just think it's really stupid, I don't usually think about it, but it's annoying ... Everybody has to have money now, because if you have money you have a higher status ... so that you feel like you're accepted with everybody ... and you feel more stable and all that. But I don't know. It's going the wrong way. We might be getting more things for ourselves but ... it's not positive at all, and it's scary to think what it's going to lead to (Vanessa, 16, Leafy High).*

These young people discuss how their parents advise them to have their fun now because 'you're going to be working five days a week for the rest of your life'.

5.3 How kids get what they want

Several strategies are used by young people to get the things they want. Most commonly, they ask. This occurs at two levels; the straightforward request and the more pressured 'nag' or 'guilt' pitch.

A large number feel that a straightforward 'ask' is the right approach, often timed in relation to the family budget: 'I ask my mum' (Danielle, 11, Leafy Primary). Those in lower income households often make moderate requests and well understand the household constraints; as one put it, she 'didn't ask' if she knew things were tight. Others were attuned to changes in financial circumstances. Todd (11, Comfort Primary) says that when his parents were together 'We'd get all the latest stuff. Now [they are separated] we have to be careful about what we buy. We don't want to waste all the money'. At Comfort High, Thanh, who lives with his hard-working single mother, constrains his requests:

> *It just depends on Mum's mood. I mean, if she's under heaps of pressure financially, I don't go near any money stuff. I just say I don't want it (Thanh, 17, Comfort High).*

Kate, 16, a farmer's daughter, is also very careful: 'I feel guilty taking money from my parents when they don't have it'. Spending her own earnings feels better.

Many children use birthdays and Christmas, or offer to pay half, to get something they really want: 'I'd ask my mum or if it was something really big, like a bike, I'd wait till my birthday or something' (Katie, 11, Leafy High).

Some 'asking' strategies go to the next level of nagging or mobilising parental guilt. A number of young people are open about 'the nag factor' both in lower and higher income areas:

> *I wear him down slowly, and just nag. A gentle nag (Jack, 15, Struggle High).*

> *I would nag. I would scream and yell until she would yell (Todd, 11, Comfort Primary).*

> *I just bug away until I get it (Nicole, 11, Comfort Primary).*

> *Well sometimes I nag, but sometimes I say 'I'll pay you back' (Tania, 11, Country Primary)*

Harry at Struggle Primary takes care not to overdo it: 'I don't torment her to get something. Because she pays a lot of bills, I don't want to torment her, otherwise I wouldn't get it anyway'.

A small number of young people mobilise parental guilt. A young man at Struggle High spoke of 'manipulating' his parents: 'I say "Gee dad, you haven't spent a lot of time with me lately, I'd really like it – if I put x amount of dollars towards it, would you come and get it?" ' (James, 15, Struggle High).

Household-type was also relevant to outcomes for some. One young person felt that her father bought her things to balance what he spent on his other children, her step-brothers. Several observed that children from dual households are able to mobilise differences to get what they want and a couple reported doing so. Others observe that sole children have much more success getting stuff:

> *I find the connection – it's interesting – I find the connection with single children, because they don't have brothers and sisters to level out and compare themselves to, and – I don't know whether this is just all crap I'm talking – but I know three families where they're all single children and they're all very competitive with what they have (Geoff, 16, Comfort High).*

A second widely used means of acquiring stuff is buying things out of pocket money. Many earn by doing household jobs, receiving pocket money, or through their own employment. Usually these purchases relate to inessential things. In many cases,

young people appreciate more the things they pay for themselves. Many value the independence that buying for themselves brings and do not like to rely upon financially-strapped parents:

> *I usually save up for it … I don't want to depend on my parents. I don't, because I've got my job. I don't feel like I should always be asking them for money (Melinda, 16, Strive High).*

> *Now that I work I don't ask them anymore. I have my own money, so I pay for everything … I like to support myself. I like the independence I feel with having my own money like not having to rely on them any more. It feels really good (Tanya, 16, Strive High).*

Many enjoy their work:

> *I love it! I have friends there and we have fun (Audrey, 16, Strive High).*

> *I love working. I like to show that I bought that for myself. I rely on myself for money … Plus like the whole socialising thing, you make new friends and all (Melinda, 16, Strive High).*

Young people's consumption has been given a hefty boost by the increasing role of mobile phones in their social lives. For many young people, communication is increasingly commodified through the use of the mobile phone. This is not without its hazards:

> *One of my mates clocked up a $387 phone bill for SMSing cause he was told it was costing ten cents a call. Well he did something like 50 a day (James, 15, Struggle High).*

Those without a mobile phone are excluded from many forms of social organisation and activity. Amongst students in our study from Years 10 and 11, 85 per cent had a mobile phone. Overall, two-thirds of all students had a mobile. Keeping up with the latest mobile phone technology is important for many:

> *It's like every time a new phone comes out it has something extra … And you're going to want the newest ones, cause as if you wouldn't rather the phone with a colour screen and a camera rather than just a normal phone, do you know what I mean? (Ellie, 16, Leafy High).*

Some see the competition to keep up as 'pointless', generating goods with features that are not used. However, advertising about the latest thing leads to new demand, as many young people understand: 'I think they target young people because they like new things, want to try new things' (Melissa, 18, Leafy High).

Paid parental work also drives some forms of consumption as busy parents rely on quick market solutions. Children and young people see the obvious link between their parents work and the food, clothes and things they have. They value the income arising from parents' work, and when their parents have lower incomes, are conscious of it. Many referred to spending that is a direct result of parental work patterns, most

obviously in relation to take away food and eating out. This was often mentioned as increasing when a parent is tired, stressed or overworked:

> *When I'm at my dad's we go out more cause he can't be bothered cooking cause he's so stressed out (Chloe, 16, Struggle High).*
>
> *We normally have tea at home unless Mum can't be bothered cooking and then we have stuff like pizza or something (Louise, 15, Struggle High).*
>
> *We sometimes get hot chips or something like that after Mum's worked the whole day (Alana, 16, Struggle High).*

5.4 Modest expectations overrun by competitive consumption?

This analysis suggests that many young people share a well-developed critique of 'too much money and stuff'. While many enjoy getting and having things, they are sharply critical of those with 'too much' on several grounds. Such people are greedy, spendthrift, socially inauthentic, irresponsible and poorly equipped for later life. However, young people live within a powerful force field of competitive consumption. They consistently name it, the items that matter, and clearly articulate, with common accord the reasons for 'keeping up'; belonging, power, identity. This force field is alive in higher and lower income areas, amongst boys and girls and primary and high school children. It is less powerful in the country where consumption must sometimes be deferred until a city visit. But it is still a lively force in country towns and helps construct social success and groupings.

The cost of falling behind is seen as high; teasing, not fitting in, feeling bad, socially failing. There are those, a significant number, who define themselves against the prevailing fashions of clothing, phones or cars. They find identity by being different and by belonging to groups that are different, that are anti-market and anti-fashion. However, they are in the minority. And some of them are not above energetic consumption of items like computers.

This youthful competitive consumption drives paid work patterns in two obvious and significant ways; firstly, through child pressure on parents to buy stuff to keep up and secondly through young people's own paid work to generate spending money. There is no doubt that working parents feel the pressure of this acquisitive race. The tactic of nagging is widely applied, not to the point of 'torture' as one put it, but actively used nonetheless. Time-pressed working parents are perhaps least able to resist it.

Two further points are obvious. Firstly, the mobile phone is now widespread amongst young people. It drives up consumption and is a critical means of social inclusion for young people. Most will acquire one as they approach senior high school and thus family budgets must meet a cost that previous generations did not face. Secondly, many households make use of take away food not only when parents are working but especially when they are tired or stressed. Demanding jobs drive new levels of fast food consumption and must be seen as useful sops to a market hungry for parental earnings.

5.5 Conclusion: What this study shows about links between work and consumption

This study confirms many findings in existing literature about the linkages between parental work patterns and spillover into homes and on to children. It confirms findings by Galinsky (1999), McKee *et al*., (2003) and Nasman (2003) that young people have well-developed antennae for parental moods associated with work. Like the children studied by McKee *et al.* in Scotland, Australian young people are 'sophisticated observers' in their own households (2003: 43). Parental job spillover can be both positive and negative, and certain types of work and work situations exacerbate the negative effects. A significant number of Australian children now live with one or both parents working long or unsocial hours and many miss their absent parents and notice the grumpiness reported by long hours' workers themselves and their partners. In many cases they plan their own work and household futures *against* those of their parents.

This study reveals a greater child preference for time with parents over more money earned as a result of greater parental participation in paid work. This preference varies by location, income and the demands of parents' jobs. A lot of time spent with one parent, for example in a traditional pattern of father working and mother at home, does not mitigate longing for time with the absent parent. While children are understanding and pragmatic about the need to earn, they miss parents who are absent for extended periods. Long or unsocial hours are especially associated with a preference for more time with parents over more money.

In many Australian households, greater commodification of care arises from increasing parental hours in paid jobs. Stressed parents turn to markets for relief, for quick food, or gifts and activities that salve parental guilt. The link between parental guilt and spending is widely observed by young people but in many cases they would prefer parental time over material compensation. The trade works better for the market and, perhaps, for parental relief than it does for young people who value time over guilt-induced spending.

There is widespread evidence of competitive consumption amongst young people living in diverse circumstances. The delicate psychological transition of adolescence is actively navigated by many through the purchase and consumption of stuff. Young people, whether in Year 6 or Year 11, spend to acquire looks either of conformity or difference, social acceptance, and social inclusion. In these age groups, advertisers have successfully penetrated most social strata to stimulate the pursuit of belonging through ownership and to fuel spending. This in turn drives two sets of work patterns; those of parents who are subjected to a wide range of children's strategies in relation to consumption and the work patterns of young people themselves who increasingly want to earn in order to consume independently.

In terms of the connections between changing work patterns and consumption (set out in Figure 1), these conversations with young people confirm the strength of key linkages. Increasing commodification of consumption in the areas of childcare, food, home services and guilt-induced spending, is driven by increasing patterns of parental work. Secondly, many parents finance activities that they hope will 'build better

children', for example music lessons, coaching, and education. There is evidence of this in both striving and comfortable socio-economic settings. Many young people have a say about the consumption patterns in their households and actively try to influence what is bought, including the purchases financed by means of their own earnings. Competitive consumption is fertile turf for advertisers, especially in relation to key symbolic and practical devices like mobile phones. These mechanisms positively link increases in parental and youth work patterns to increasing consumption.

The study suggests that key questions of work and family reconciliation are likely to remain central to social policy as young people begin families of their own, as most plan to. These young people expect to have jobs and families. They plan to share care of their children as couples (females more than males, and males more than their fathers). They optimistically hope to rely on their extended families, especially their own mothers, for support. Implicit in their plans is a new level of shared domestic work and earning by men and women, one that is well in advance of that operating in Australia today. A new workplace, one that accepts that women will take breaks when their children are small and supports fathers in their parenting and domestic obligations will also be necessary if their plans are to be realised. Other institutional changes are also implied in their hopes. Good quality, affordable childcare will be critical and very significant institutional change in Australian work places and labour arrangements will be necessary if today's young people are to realise their preferences.

These expectations will either drive change in households and workplaces or be dashed by inflexible institutions. An absence of personal and institutional adaptation in workplaces and care arrangements, amongst others, will severely frustrate the preferences of a new generation of working parents. This study shows the unambiguous effects of such frustration. From the perspective of children, a mismatch between parental preferences and workplace reality is associated with negative spillover from work into home with adverse consequences for young people who are acute observers of the effects of parental work on the family. New levels of commodified consumption can mitigate only some aspects of this experience and, in many cases, merely serve to stimulate new levels of working and spending with little real relief for any members of the household.

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