

‘Good Catholic Girls’:

The Experiences of Working-Class Women in 1970s Melbourne

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This thesis follows the lives and stories of six working class Catholic women from both Italian Catholic and Irish Catholic backgrounds who came of age in the 1970s. The thesis aims to understand how Catholic lessons of sexual morality, feminism and socio-cultural variables intersected, not only in the everyday lives of the women during their adolescence, but how they have changed and morphed as the women grew and experienced life.

Based on oral history interviews with the women, the thesis follows their lives chronologically, from their first memories of Catholicism as young children, through to the education they received in both primary and secondary school, with specific emphasis on sexual education (or lack thereof) and morality, and how that effected their navigation of adolescence throughout their teen years. In considering the women's young adult years I explore the relationships that the women had with second wave feminism and how it related to the Catholic morals that had been instilled in them by their families and educators. In the last section of the thesis the women look back upon their experiences and lives, commenting on how their views, morals and relationship with their faith changed and altered over time.

The thesis explores the themes of perfection, shame and practicality. Oral history methodologies combined with photographic material enable an exploration of the concepts of memory, the constructions of life narratives and how the recall of those can be impacted by the relationships shared between not only the interviewees, but with the interviewer.

The thesis reveals a nuanced and delicate relationship between the women and their faith in particular, one affected by variables of education, socio-economic status and cultural background. Despite their varied and at times 'rebellious' lives, the imperative to be 'good Catholic girls' framed both their life experience and the narratives they tell about it.

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the relevant Ethics committee.

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INTRODUCTION

The Women

Every day for seven years in the 1960s Annette walked through her suburb of West Heidelberg in Melbourne's north to her primary school St. Pius X. She did so at the behest of her Catholic mother and despite the abuse that she received on a daily basis. Annette did so because as she put it, she was the "Good Catholic Girl".

Even though the public primary school was walking distance from my house... my mother preferred that I attend a Catholic primary school...I was just the girl that used to walk past the primary school in West Heidelberg and be referred to as a 'Catholic Dog'.¹

Annette's experiences reflect those of many young women across Victoria born into working class Catholic families, feeling the pressure to conform and abide by the rules set out by the intermingling factors of their culture and their faith. Annette, Fran, Sophie, Lucy, Bernadette and Gail represent a group of women whose stories and experiences of life in 1970s Melbourne are yet to be addressed by the academic community in depth, often falling to the wayside in comparison to the broader political and social narratives of the 1970s.

Whilst the women's lives intersect in many ways, their stories depict the nuances and differences that factors such as education, cultural heritage and parental control can play in how one progresses and views their life and moral decisions.

¹ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2019). In order to ensure anonymity, some of the participants chose to adopt pseudonyms

In the case of Irish-Catholic Annette, she continued her Catholic education even further away in the inner-city suburb of Clifton Hill, attending St. John's commercial college.

Annette remained at St. John's until form four and left after being recruited to undertake administrative work at Preston police station at age 16 in 1974. Defining much of Annette's journey throughout this thesis is her sheer will, independence and headstrong behaviour.

Complementing these personality traits throughout Annette's adolescence was her 'partner in crime' – Lucy.

A Clifton Hill native, Lucy shared Annette's curiosity and tenacity in the classroom and the schoolyard. However, the homelives of the two women varied greatly: born in Australia in 1958 to Italian-Catholic parents, Lucy was originally sent to Spensely Street State School for three years, before moving to St. John's where she completed form four and continued her education at Santa Maria College, attaining her Higher School Certificate (HSC). Lucy married her husband in 1980 after dating and living together for many years. She has moved through a myriad of different professions including nursing and now works in the corporate sphere. Sharing Lucy's Italian Catholic background and educational journey was Sophie.

Unlike Lucy, Sophie was born in Sicily and moved to Australia with her mother at age five in 1964. Initially living in North Fitzroy, Sophie's family moved to Clifton Hill where she joined the other girls at St Johns. Speaking no English, Sophie was placed directly into grade two and left to socialise with the other children. Like Lucy, Sophie continued her education through to Santa Maria. However, unlike the other women Sophie went on to university, completing a Bachelor of Arts at La Trobe University.

Directly affected by her experiences as a child, Sophie's most notable occupation was as an ESL teacher, teaching English to Italian speakers. Whilst Sophie has now retired, she still resides in the northern suburbs and lives with her husband and remains in contact with her school friends.

Rounding off the friendship group from St Johns is Fran. Like both Sophie and Lucy, Fran came from an Italian background and her family was deeply committed to the Catholic faith. Born in Australia in 1958, Fran identified herself as a 'change of life baby' for her parents after her mother had her at a relatively older age. This therefore created a thirteen-year age gap and fostered a more parental as opposed to sororal relationship between Fran and her older sister, causing some friction within their household. Similar to Annette, Fran made the longer journey to St. John's from working class Collingwood on a daily basis, attended both Catholic primary and secondary schools and completed her education up to form four in favour of heading into administrative work. From there Fran went on to work in the entertainment industry which she referred to as a 'wild time'. Marrying her husband relatively later in life, Fran now has two children and resides in the northern suburbs. Unlike many of the other women, Fran experienced an adolescence free of restrictions as her parents were far less strict due to previous experience with her sister and an attitude-altering trip to Italy. Such freedom, however, was not something that was enjoyed by Bernadette.

Geographically removed from the other participants, Bernadette was born in north-western Victorian town of Sea Lake in 1961 to a relatively large Irish Catholic family (she was the eighth of nine children). Early in Bernadette's childhood the family moved to ministry housing in Geelong where she spent her childhood and teenage years.

Bernadette attended both Catholic primary and secondary schools. More than any of the other participants, Bernadette felt constrained by both her location and more specifically her restrictive home life in which her parents kept firm control over herself and her sisters. After completing her HSC and turning eighteen, Bernadette immediately moved to Melbourne to begin her training as a nurse, where she met her future husband whom she married in 1986 and has three children with. Sharing the same relative geographical isolation compared to many of the women interviewed and only meeting most of the other women in the process of thesis, is the final participant of this thesis, Gail.

Growing up in Pascoe Vale, Irish Catholic Gail was one of four siblings and attended numerous Catholic schools throughout her education, primarily receiving her schooling in South Melbourne at St Peter and Pauls girls' school and Loretto College. Gail completed her education at age sixteen and by seventeen was a single mother to a baby boy. Like many of the other participants including Annette, Bernadette, Lucy and Fran – Gail went on to work in the health industry and in that time met her husband whom she married in 1977 and shares a daughter with. Unfortunately, her husband passed away in 1993. Gail now resides in the northern suburbs with her daughter. Gail, like all of the participants, imbued the interviewing process with a sense of humour, openness and honesty that allowed for an in-depth understanding of what it meant to experience the 1970s as a young, working class, Catholic girl.

Historiography

The works of Lisa Featherstone, Frank Bongiorno, Marilyn Lake and Michelle Arrow have all made significant contributions to our understanding of the historical context in which these women's early adult lives unfolded.² In particular, their articulation of the changing attitudes towards and experiences of sexuality, and the ways in which Australian society reacted to the changes that took place, in the seventies and preceding decades, provides the frame within which this research sits.

Featherstone's work and her particular attention to the topic of female desire and sexual pleasure presented historical context in regard to the ways that the Australian public reacted to the concepts of female sexuality and sexual agency across decades. Frank Bongiorno addressed cultural practices and sexual education that offered insight into the ways that young Australians navigated their sexuality and relationships in the decades leading up to and inclusive of the 1970s. Marilyn Lakes work served as guidance for two different aspects of this thesis, like Featherstone and Bongiorno she addressed the era leading up to the 1970s. This provided an idea of the events that took place and precipitated the radical and social changes of the 1970s. Lake also addressed the history of feminism

²Lisa Featherstone, *Let's Talk About Sex: Histories of Sexuality in Australia from Federation to the Pill* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011); Lisa Featherstone, 'Rethinking Female Pleasure: purity and desire in early twentieth century Australia', *Women History Review*, 21/5 (2012); Frank Bongiorno, *The Sex lives of Australians: A History* (Melbourne: Schwartz Publishing Pty, Limited, 2015); Marilyn Lake, 'Female Desires: The Meaning of World War II' in Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake (eds) *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1999); Michelle Arrow, *Friday on Our Minds: Popular Culture in Australia Since 1945* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009); Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies: The personal, the political and the making of modern Australia* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2019).

directly, enabling an understanding of the ways in which feminism developed and how it was put in to practice across Australia – most importantly, whom it had an effect on. Susan Margarey complimented this in her work *Dangerous Women*, which delves even deeper into the growth of feminism and consciousness raising movements throughout Australia.³

Michelle Arrows contribution to this thesis and its argument has been formative. Her book *The Seventies* has provided crucial insight into both the social and political changes that took place throughout the 1970s.⁴ In particular her conclusion that the changes forged by the feminist and sexual-revolutions of the 1970s, and women's growing awareness of the intersections of the personal and political, provided the groundwork for what took place in the 1980s, ignited a complete shift in the way that I viewed not just the life narratives of my participants but the decade as a whole.

This thesis builds on the work of these scholars, contributing a specific focus on the interrelationship between culture, socio-economic status and faith, and what I refer to as the everyday 'lived in' experience of the social and political changes they chart. In doing so, it accepts Arrow's key argument that what was happening in women's personal lives is crucial to understanding the transformations within Australia in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵

³ Susan Margarey, *Dangerous Ideas: Women's Liberation – Women's Studies -Around the Globe* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2014)

⁴ Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies*.

⁵ Arrow, *The Seventies*, 8-11.

As the women's experience of their religion is a key theme of the thesis, the work of religious historians has been equally important. David Geiringer, Callum Brown and David Hilliard all address religion and the nature of secularism and faith throughout their multiple works.⁶ While the focus of Geiringer and Brown is British, the developments they discuss in regard to secularisation and the decline in religion's popularity tend to parallel the Australian experience on the whole, and their insights have been invaluable. David Hilliard's appreciation of the religious historical context provided a basis for understanding the experiences of the women I interviewed, and the beliefs and actions of their parents, and also situated these with the context of the broader Australian community. Concepts of Catholic moral superiority and the eventual decline of religious control in Australia over the space of the 1950s and 1960s became key in understanding why the women and their parents shared such a gap in their faith and the part it played in their lives.

The primary research of this thesis is a number of oral history interviews I conducted with the women – individually and collectively – over the course of a year. Oral history is now a field of significant scholarship with its own sub-themes and extensive historiography around both the practice of oral history and theories of memory. Valerie Yow proved a useful guide in navigating this work, while the work of both Alistair Thomson and Lynn Abrams have had the most direct and tangible effect on my analysis of the interview material and final thesis.

⁶ David Geiringer, 'At Some Point in the 1960s, Hell Disappeared': Hell, Gender and Catholicism in Post-War England', *Cultural and Social History*, 15/2 (2018), 255-272; David Geiringer, 'Catholic Understandings of Female Sexuality in 1960s Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 28/2 (2016), 209-238; Callum G Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding secularisation 1800-2000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); David Hilliard, 'Church, family and sexuality in the 1950s', *Australian Historical Studies*, 27/109 (1997), 133-146; David Hilliard, 'The Religious Crisis of the 1960s: The Experience of the Australian Churches', *Journal of Religious History*, 21/2 (1997), 209-227.

In particular Alistair Thomson's theory of 'composure' was especially useful for interpreting the interviews.⁷ Composure refers to both the psychological and social process of trying to compose one's own memory narrative. These narratives can be affected by numerous factors. However, Thomson suggests that the biggest influence is need for memories to be reconciled with the person that one has become, and argues that the composure of memories and the creation of a "past we can live with", are vital for those who need to protect themselves from particularly "traumatic and painful memories".⁸

Lynn Abrams further develops Thomson's concept of memory as a constantly active process. Her insight that one does not simply experience something and then place it in some form of stagnant storage waiting for recall, but that a person's memories are constantly evolving and changing throughout their lives based on the variables of their present,⁹ was especially pertinent to my participants: they recalled events from upwards of forty years ago, and in the intervening years they had changed, gained hindsight and matured greatly. Secondly, Abrams emphasised reading into the silences and misremembering's just as deeply as the answers and contends that these aspects of interviews are important as they reveal how the interviewee relates to their own past experiences and how they both consciously and subconsciously recall it in the present.

⁷ Alistair Thomson, *ANZAC Memories: Living with the Legend* (Clayton: Monash University Publishing, 2013).

⁸ Thomson, *ANZAC Memories*, 251.

⁹ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 88-91

Methodology

Oral history interviews have provided the substantive primary research for this thesis, offering insight into how women remember navigating 1970s Melbourne as a young Catholic woman. The six women introduced above represent the two most prominent Catholic demographics in Melbourne during the 1970s – Italian and Irish Catholic.¹⁰ The decision to focus on these two groups provided a comparative demographic snapshot to the study, and a contrast between the two faiths. This in turn offered insight into just how deeply cultural background and the migrant narrative intertwined with the women's experiences of faith and socio-economic background.

Two rounds of individual interviews and one group interview were conducted across the span of twelve months. The interviews primarily took place in the homes of the women with a few exceptions over zoom and in a workplace. This was in order to facilitate the most comfortable environment for the participants, especially given the delicate and personal nature of the topics that were going to be broached; being in the women's homes and having privacy felt far more appropriate than a public space.

¹⁰ Many of the participants used the phrase Anglo interchangeably with Irish Catholic throughout the interview process.

Initial interviews were conducted individually with the women so as to hear the women's life stories without having any interruptions, being influenced or more importantly feeling silenced by having other women in the room.¹¹ This was especially pertinent for the women who attended school together and had an established friendship group.

In 2020, the second round of interviews that focussed on the more adult lives of the women and used their photographs took place. However, due to extenuating circumstances (addressed below), only Fran and Annette took part in this round. A final group interview took place over zoom and included Annette, Fran, Lucy and Bernadette. The purpose of this interview was the opposite of the individual one – an attempt to shift the dynamics and encourage the women to bounce ideas and memories off one another. Whilst much of the information and quotes that feature throughout the thesis are derived from the individual interviews, the group interviewed served to enhance understandings of the relationships shared between the women and provided opportunity to analyse beyond the narratives that were simply being spoken about. The relationships the women shared became increasingly more important as the thesis continued and expanded, as did the women's relationship with myself.

¹¹ Valerie R. Yow, *Guide to Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015); Valerie R. Yow, 'Interviewing Techniques and Strategies' in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *Oral History Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Valerie R. Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014).

It should firstly be noted that Annette is my mother and through her all of the other participants were sourced. They range from school friends (Lucy, Sophie and Fran), lifelong family friends and workmates (Bernadette and Gail), many of whom I have known since childhood. This factor created an awareness of my position in regard to the information and answers that were going to be provided in the interviews, and the delicate nature in which interpretations of those answers would need to be handled (more so than usual). While my existing relationship with the women did raise issues which I discuss in the thesis, overall, I assert that my work greatly benefitted from the relationships shared with the interviewees. Given the sensitive nature of topics such as sexuality and religion, the level of familiarity between myself and the women was far more conducive to an honesty and openness that may not have been afforded to a stranger.

Alternatively, the possibility that the complex web of relationships between the women (especially the four women who attended school together) would have a negative and possibly silencing effect on some of the information that was being shared cannot be ignored. Participating in the interviews may have presented a minefield to some of the women who found themselves in the position of maintaining their own personal memory narrative in line with their current image and reputation, whilst knowing that other participants/friends have full access to this work. Therefore, their personal narrative would also need to fit within the framework of their friendship group's collective memory. This was the main concern with the group interview, because being in the presence of friends may have forced some of the women to bring up episodes and events of their past that they were uncomfortable with purely because they knew they would be held accountable by the other participants who were present at the time.

In the expansion from the original honours thesis into this masters, I also made the choice to utilise visual mediums to illicit more detailed memories and asked the women to bring a selection of images to discuss. It became clear that whilst the choice of images is important, it is the silences and omissions which surrounded them that drew attention and analysis.¹² This relates to the conditions around the photographs, the physical state of the image and the ways in which it was obtained. Again, due to surrounding circumstances the main sources for photos within the thesis belong to Annette and Fran, although after the first round of interviewing many of the other participants provided photos that feature throughout the thesis.

The second round of interviews took place under more difficult circumstances than the first, namely the COVID-19 pandemic. The difficulty that the pandemic and ensuing restrictions placed on the production of this work cannot be disregarded. The impact was most significant for the conduct of the interviews, especially the group interview, due to consistent lockdowns. This factor along with the constantly shifting rules and time constraints forced the use of virtual mediums.

Although still extremely worthwhile information, the digital platform through which the interviews took place was not ideal, compromising the ability to read and therefore analyse non-verbal cues and nuances in tone and body language.

¹² Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *Oral History and Photography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Katie Holmes addresses these intricacies in her piece 'Does it matter if she cried?', emphasising their value in understanding both how the interviewee recognises and relays their memories and how they are emotionally impacted by the process of recollection.¹³ A hitch in someone's voice or an unintended nervous giggle can imbue so much more complexity to a story than what the person is simply saying, and unfortunately due to technological limitations like pixelated faces and fluctuations in audio quality, I lost this exceedingly crucial aspect in some of my interviews.

My research using oral interviews and images has been complemented by primary sources such as sex education books and behaviour guides readily available through the 1950s to 1970s. These proved indispensable sources about the specifics of what was being taught and they also provided an insight into the general moral standards of Australian society at the time. None of the women interviewed specifically recalled experience with the books authored by Sister Mary Winefride and the Father and son Welfare Movement.¹⁴ The menstruation guides however, were referenced by the women.¹⁵ Articles from *The Australian Women's Weekly* and other newspapers provided an understanding of the Australian society's shifting values and reflected the same topics the women had spoken about in the interviews.

¹³ Katie Holmes, 'Does It Matter If She Cried? Recording Emotion and the Australian Generations Oral History Project', *The Oral History Review*, 44/1 (2017), 56-76.

¹⁴ Sister Mary Winefride, *'Instruction for Girls aged 12-16 years'* (Melbourne: Polding Press, 1968); Sister Mary Winefride, *Youth Looks Ahead: A Guide for Catholic Girls* (Brisbane: Polding Press, 1966); Sister Mary Winefride, and Patrick F Dorian, *Approaching Maturity: A Guide for Catholic Youth aged 17-21 years* (Melbourne: Polding Press, 1969).

¹⁵ Harry Finley, 'Very Personally Yours', *Menarche Education* [website], (2007) <<http://www.mum.org/verperb2.htm>>, pgs 1-20, accessed 20th July. 2020.

Structure

This thesis follows the lives of the six women chronologically. As this was how many of the women tended to structure their life stories within their interviews it felt fitting that the thesis do so as well.

The first chapter explores the women's first encounters with Catholicism, often based around their homelife and routines within their families, and moves into their primary school years, where they received their first and sometimes only glimpses of sex education. In the second chapter the women's adolescence and experiences of high school are explored, and it is here where the key themes of shame, guilt and perfection begin to present themselves and become increasingly instilled within the women's narratives. This is evident through topics such as their involvement with boys, their tales of schoolyard shenanigans and the pressure they were beginning to feel within their home lives.

Chapter three provides a pivot point or a methodological bridge in the middle of the thesis in which visual mediums are utilised in order to explore the women lives and in particular the society that they were beginning to navigate. Self-expression and representation comes to the forefront of this chapter in regard to how fashion was used by the women to both individualise themselves and aid in their personal safety. The use of photography in chapter three provides the opportunity for an in-depth analysis of the silences and omissions within both the photographic evidence and the interviews in general and raises conceptual questions of memory and how the women retold their own life stories.

Chapter four addresses the moral decisions made by the women as they left school, found work, met partners and began to establish their own adult lives away from the influence of educators or their parents. This chapter considers questions of if, and how the lessons of morality that they had been taught throughout their lives had an effect on their decision making as working-class adult women. Far more reflective in tone, the final chapter of this thesis explores the attitudes that the women expressed towards feminism and the changes that took place in society as they were growing up. In particular it discusses how the women have changed and morphed their relationship with their faith in order to best suit their lives in the years since. For some this required a revaluation and redefinition and for others this meant a complete severing with their faith (but not their culture).

The aim of this thesis was to gain a full understanding of what it meant to experience life as a Catholic, working-class female throughout the 1970s in Melbourne. What became evident throughout the interviews and in analysis, and is the core of my argument, was the ways in which the narrative, image and primarily the expectations of the 'Good Catholic Girl' permeated the women's lives from a very young age. Beyond featuring in their anecdotes and experiences, it also informed the way in which they composed themselves and their memories. All of the women went on to practise and live out at least some expectations of the 'Good Catholic Girl' whether they intended to or not, revealing how deeply ingrained and inescapable these early lessons were in the lives of the women.

Academic contribution

The common narrative of the 1970s in Melbourne sees broad sweeping social, cultural and political changes and mass a consciousness raising amongst white middle-class women, changes previously unseen in Australian history.¹⁶ Whilst this narrative reflects one version of the decade, it does not address the fact that conservatism was consistently at odds with these changes, and although progress prevailed eventually, the dramatic changes that people often refer to only happened for particular social sets and were incremental in the lives of others. What previous scholarship has also failed to recognise is the everyday experiences of young Catholic, working-class women who weren't old enough, nor politically engaged enough to be involved with the feminist movement or Women's Liberation. It is the intersection between faith, socio-economic status and cultural background and how this effected the women experiences of the 1970s that drives this thesis and with this focus, the aforementioned incremental changes in the behaviour, choices and lives of the women can be witnessed.

The oral history component of this thesis adds a further contribution to both scholarship, our understanding of 1970s Melbourne and the process of composing life narratives.

Through the women's recollection of their youth and young adult lives, we see the ways the Catholic church and education system imbued in them an understanding of what it meant to be 'Good Catholic Girls'; we see them navigating the opportunities available to them as young women discovering their city, their freedom and sexuality and pushing back against

¹⁶ Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies*, 88.

the strictures of their religious and cultural upbringing; and we hear them recalling their life histories within frameworks of feminism, faith and lives lived, mostly, as Good Catholic Girls.

CHAPTER ONE – GROWING UP CATHOLIC

In 1960s Australia, church was still firmly at the centre of family life. Ministers and clerical leaders still held a position as moral guides for masses across the country.¹⁷ In Melbourne in particular, the Catholic religion (which was primarily practiced by the Irish community) was bolstered by the influx of migrants from Catholic countries such as Italy, Malta and Croatia.¹⁸ They brought with them different practices, traditions and expectations of the Catholic faith.

In this first chapter the early lives of six Catholic women will be investigated, from childhood to menstruation. The women's first memories of Catholicism in both the home and at school, their first and sometimes only foray into sexual education and specifically their education surrounding menstruation will be analysed. This is in order to gain an understanding of how the women were brought into the Catholic Church and in what way they were first introduced to the notions of sex and the body through their introduction to puberty and sexual education, and how the women interpreted those decisions and lessons then, compared to now. This chapter explores the women's childhoods, and how the place of religion, sex and the body featured in their memories of this time in their life, before they reached sexual maturation. It was in these early years that the women learnt the foundational lessons of what it meant to be a Good Catholic Girl.

¹⁷ Hilliard, 'The Religious Crisis of the 1960s', 211.

¹⁸ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 'The Catholic Church', *About Australia: Religious Freedoms* [website], (January 2008) <<https://web.archive.org/web/20100806082535/http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/religion.html>>, para. 19, accessed 19th July 2019.

Early experiences with Catholicism

For the women in this thesis Catholicism was not just a religion, it was practices and rituals that had been passed down from one generation to the next. It encompassed all aspects of their lives and their families and played a central role in their identities.

Annette recalls feeling a lack of choice in her practising of Catholicism, due to the beliefs of her mother and being placed in a Catholic primary school in the working-class suburb of West Heidelberg in the mid 1960s:¹⁹

I didn't have any say or choice, I was just at the Catholic school because that's what mum thought would be the better thing for me with education, and mum came from a background of Irish Catholic family, my grandfather instilled into his seven children that it was the done thing that everybody be brought up as a Catholic. ²⁰

David Hilliard points out that the Church was an integral part of the Australian family during the early 1960s and that "Church membership, Sunday school enrolments and new congregations" were all continually growing.²¹ All of the Christian denominations in Australia had reached peak confidence "in their special role of moral leadership receiving media coverage which further bolstered their sense of moral authority".²² This power did eventually deteriorate during the late 1960s into the 1970s.²³

¹⁹ West Heidelberg is located in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne. In 1956 it was used as the athlete's village for the Melbourne Summer Olympics. After the games concluded the village was converted into ministry housing. Due to this fact, many of those who moved into the area came from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Since the 1960s the area has suffered from a poor reputation due to the higher rates of violent and property crime, a reputation which continues into the present day.

²⁰ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

²¹ Hilliard, 'The Religious Crisis of the 1960s, 211.

²² Ibid.211.

²³ John McCallum, 'Secularisation in Australia between 1966 and 1985: A Research Note', *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 23/3 (1987), 407-420.

There is much debate in current academic literature surrounding the diminishing power of the Catholic Church during this time, especially within the context of Australian secularisation. In his book *The Death of Christian Britain* Callum Brown attributes this weakening of the Church to women, arguing that women were foundational pillars of the church and the main religious educators in their children's lives, therefore they were the figures who passed down the family's religious practices from one generation to the next.²⁴ Once women began to stop passing on those lessons, faith became progressively less crucial within society. Interviews with Annette and Bernadette provided a sense of nuance to this argument – as both of the women who no longer practiced Catholicism chose to pass on the religious culture they had practiced in their youth and raised their children within the Catholic faith. Although still speaking within British context, David Geiringer accurately summarises the experiences of many of my participants and attributes the changing attitudes towards faith to the way in which people began to conceptualise key theoretical aspects of religious faith – such as hell and damnation.²⁵ The key shift was the transition from seeing hell as a literal location in their childhoods into seeing it as more of a conceptual place of eternal moral torment. Whilst this means of seeing religion freed many from the more literal aspects of faith, the style of education and reinforcement of a strict moral code by the parents and educators of my participants, meant that many of the women in this study still took the weight of their moral decisions and choices into their adolescence and adult lives.

²⁴ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 170-191.

²⁵ Geiringer, 'At Some Point in the 1960s Hell Disappeared', 255-272.

Regardless of the changes happening within faith, the women made it very obvious that in the early years of their lives there were no questions asked by parents; following a religion was just an inherent part of their life in Australia.

Catholic texts aimed at young adults, such as *Approaching Maturity*,²⁶ exude the heightened sense of moral authority projected by the Church, especially in the disdain expressed towards those outside of the Catholic Church due to a perceived lack of morals. The books encouraged young Catholics to only date and socialise with other Catholics to ensure they wouldn't encounter the problems that were characteristic of interfaith marriages. This fear of non-Catholics sometimes resulted in pressure to end interfaith relationships; Annette recalled that her grandfather "forced my mother out of an engagement to a non-Catholic and made her marry a Catholic."²⁷ Her mother continued this trend even after suffering the ramifications of this mindset from her father, by both insisting her children follow her family's traditional Catholic faith, and on a deeper level by instilling and enforcing her own Catholic views of morality within intimate relationships on her daughter in later life. This will be further explored in the chapter regarding adult morality.

Bernadette addressed the fact that due to children's lack of experience and an inability to analyse "you believe everything you are told and that's the way it is".²⁸ She highlights that without the ability or knowledge to query other lifestyles and beliefs, children and many Catholics will take the information they are given and accept it without question.

²⁶ Sister Mary Winefride and Patrick F. Dorian, *Approaching Maturity*, 1-111.

²⁷ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

²⁸ Bernadette, 'Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2019)

Being brought up by Catholic parents and attending Catholic schools meant that especially in their younger years, many of the women were not exposed to lives outside of their own as Lucy stated in the group interview “We didn’t know what we didn’t know”.²⁹ In the group interview Annette spoke about how lucky she felt to be exposed to multiculturalism due to the nature of the schools she attended. However, whilst Annette was exposed to many different cultures throughout her education, they were all through the acceptable Catholic lens, maintaining that Catholic social bubble.³⁰ Lucy described her family’s religious practices of church, saying the rosary and holy masses, stating that she and her sisters “just thought that everybody did that.”³¹ Due to the sheltered nature of their Catholic upbringings there was an assumption that this was everybody’s life – as there was no other imaginable existence with which to compare.

Annette recalled her memories of Sunday mass at her northern suburbs church in grades three and four (in the late 1960s):

I couldn’t see the purpose, because I felt like I was a cocky mimicking what was being said...I was able to go through the whole mass service with all the words and all the singing and all of that type of thing, when the next person has to go up and have communion and I can’t have communion until I’ve made my communion... Yeah it was just, it was there. It was always there.³²

²⁹ Lucy, ‘Group Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’ [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2020)

³⁰ Annette, ‘Group interviewed by Bethany Higgins’ [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2020)

³¹ Lucy, ‘Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’ [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2019)

³² Annette, ‘8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins’

Annette's recollection demonstrates just how deeply entrenched the rituals of Catholicism were in her life, likening Catholicism to almost a constant background noise and the ritual of mass as some form of muscle memory. Her tone also reflected the weight of this burden and her annoyance at the tediousness of the continual rituals. Annette maintained that her dissatisfaction with family's religion at such a young age was borne out of an amalgamation of boredom at the repetitive nature of mass and all of the different ceremonies she attended, and the constant tension between Catholicism's emphasis on meekness and faithful acceptance and Annette's childhood curiosity and natural proclivity for questioning. Whilst she recalls this memory through the lens of her adult self (which will be further discussed in the section regarding composure), the sense of herself as bored, dissatisfied and questioning her faith from a very young age aligns with her specific memory of wondering why the child next to her was able to have communion and she couldn't.

Annette and Bernadette both had one parent who exhibited a strong commitment to the Roman Catholic Church and another who was mildly apathetic or was Protestant. In both cases it was the Roman Catholic parent, with a decidedly stronger and more forceful attitude towards faith, who was the deciding voice in the matter of their children's spirituality. For Annette, her Catholic mother overruled her "High Church of England" father, although she acknowledged that her father's lax approach towards religion was a direct result of his incredibly busy life as he was often working numerous jobs simultaneously.

Annette speculated that perhaps he was too busy to debate religion or practise his own faith regularly.³³ Annette also maintained that despite the limited time in which she saw her father, they shared quite a close bond throughout her childhood. This may also provide reason as to why Annette had the ability to question her faith from such a young age, as she was witness to somebody whose life did not revolve around their faith.

Bernadette's father was a devout Roman Catholic who took his nine children to mass every Sunday and led the decades of the rosary after dinner on a nightly basis. This routine is highly reflective of the encouragement by religious leaders in the late 1950s to place "church at the centre of family life".³⁴ Bernadette described her family's religious dynamic: "Dad's side of the family was more...religious than mum's. Mum never really went to Church every Sunday, but she made sure that we went, dad was responsible for that". Bernadette also recalled the religious images: "I remember lots of photos, Christ with the bleeding heart and the stigmata and statues".³⁵ Religion was an overarching feature and routine in Bernadette's life, and her father was the spiritual influence in a household of up to 13 members. Fran shared a similar early life to that of Bernadette, coming from a family of "devout Catholics" who attended "mass every Sunday" and refrained from "eating meat on a Friday, not only Lent, every Friday throughout the whole year."³⁶

³³ Annette's father was her mother's second husband. Her mother divorced the Catholic man her grandfather had forced her to wed. Although, her mother justified the match by stating that Church of England was the closest thing to a Catholicism you could find. This will be expanded upon in the adult morality chapter.

³⁴ Hilliard, 'Church, family and sexuality in the 1950s', 138.

³⁵ Bernadette, 'Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins; David Morgan, *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (London: University of California Press, 1998), 154.

³⁶ Fran, '3/9/2019 Fran Interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University 2019).

Despite this, Fran did not feel as stifled and constrained by religion and routine as Bernadette. This could possibly be due to the much more insular nature of Bernadette's family and the controlling nature of her parents. Bernadette stated that they spent all of their time in the home and relatively isolated from larger cities. This is a direct contrast to the abundant freedom that Fran experienced throughout her adolescence, due to her parent's freer nature she was allowed to go out and spend her time in urban Melbourne.

Annette and Bernadette showed a distinct cynicism and disillusionment towards faith when they were retelling their early experiences of the Catholic Church. All of the women shared the same experience of not being given an option in their faith, like a majority of their generation, yet Bernadette and Annette's recollections are infused with negativity.³⁷ They were the only two women within the group who no longer identified as Catholics, and they also expressed the most critical and cynical views of their upbringings. There is a distinct element of composure in how they express their memories. In this instance the women who had now separated themselves from the Catholic Church and were highly critical of its practices, articulated their memories with much more pessimism than those who still identified with it and still practised their faith.

³⁷ Other reasons could include the range of different life experiences that the women went through in their years since high school, the ability to analyse their past and religious views more deeply or possibly a different cultural expectation of the women to uphold their faith.

Sexual Education

The women that interviewed shared very similar yet differently nuanced views in regard to their religious experiences as younger women. However, when it came to their opinions in regard to the sex education afforded to them throughout primary and secondary school, they all shared the same opinion. It was, as historian Frank Bongiorno suggests, “plainly inadequate”³⁸. All of the women stated that they weren’t provided any sex education in high school and what they did receive in primary school did not provide them with the appropriate knowledge on topics such as puberty, sex, marriage and pregnancy.

In the 1970s formal sex education for students varied from school to school. In the case of government schools, the decision to run sex education classes was left to the discretion of the school leaders and local community. Whilst many were supportive of providing sexual education to students, there was consistent fear of moral panic and the inability of teachers to address such a delicate topic. In order to alleviate this fear, third party organisations such as the Father and Son Welfare movement were utilised.³⁹ Although not specifically Catholic, the Father and Son Welfare Movement were heavily Christian influenced. Therefore, even though Catholics had their own very particular set of beliefs, children attending state schools were receiving a morally similar education.

³⁸ Bongiorno, *The Sex lives of Australians*, 224-225.

³⁹ Mitchell A, Smith A, Carman M, Schlichthorst M, Walsh J and Pitts M, ‘Sexuality Education in Australia in 2011’, Monograph Series No. 81, (Melbourne: La Trobe University, the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health & Society, 2011) 4.

In the case of Catholics, as early as the 1950s the Catholic Church in Melbourne was providing information evenings and booklets for parents on how to teach their children about sex, sexuality and puberty, in accordance with Catholic doctrine.⁴⁰ This was partly in response to an array of newspaper articles stating that parents were not fully equipped with the information, nor willing to speak to their own children.⁴¹ The sessions themselves were led by priests and ministerial figures who separated the sexes and taught the respective topics.

By the 1970s the Royal Commission on Human Relationships highlighted that this type of education surrounding sex and sexuality was no longer viable.⁴² Initiated by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam after a failed attempt to reform abortion laws in the ACT, the 1974 Royal Commission on Human Relationships aimed to explore the family, social, educational, legal and sexual aspects of male and female relationships. However, as Michelle Arrow's work has shown, it also gathered information on topics such as homosexuality, domestic violence and rape within the Australian community. The Commission thrust the private and domestic spheres of Australian life (which women dominated) into public and political scrutiny, exposing the hidden link between the personal and political and forging an opportunity for women to voice their concerns and opinions on their everyday lives.

⁴⁰ 'SEX EDUCATION CLASSES HERE', *The Horsham Times*, 13th June 1950, 2, in Trove [online database], accessed 13th May 2019

⁴¹ E. Stanley Brookes, 'Parents and Sex Education', *The Herald*, 22nd February 1950, 9, in Trove [online database], accessed 13th May 2019

⁴² Elizabeth Evatt and Felix Arnott and Anne Deveson, *Royal Commission on Human Relationships*, [online], (21st November 1977, Australian government Publishing Service) < <https://apo.org.au/node/34438> >, volumes one and two, accessed 1st October 2019.

The Commission also found that rates of sexual ignorance amongst the younger Australian demographic was exceedingly high.⁴³ However, as Gail's quote below demonstrates, the Catholic church were not of the same mind in this regard, seemingly unaware that their style of sex education was inadequate.

Gail recalled her 'sex education' at a South Melbourne Catholic commercial college in the early 1970s:

The only sexual education...was we had the mothercraft nurse come [laughs], and that was it. And really you just didn't get...we had to have a book that we put all bits and pieces in, we were what 12? 13? That was about mothercraft, looking after a child rather than the way a child came about.⁴⁴

The Catholic Church's endorsed 'no nonsense' sex education of the time was consistently focused on signifiers of femininity such as menstruation and motherhood. These were treated as markers and bodily processes that were mere inevitabilities in the life of a young female and should be dealt with in a rational and relatively unemotional way. Catholic education also made the point of addressing these topics not only in their physical ramifications but in their spiritual as well. As Gail's quote demonstrates, the emphasis of sex education was not on sexual intercourse or how babies were created in a practical and scientific sense – because sex was still considered impure or dirty and not an appropriate topic for young minds – but only on the resulting baby and the joys of motherhood.⁴⁵

⁴³ Arrow, *The Seventies*, 8.

⁴⁴ Gail, 'Gail interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2019)

⁴⁵ Andrew Greenley, *The Catholic Imagination* (California: University of California Press, 2000) 62-64.

Family sources of information on sex could be equally unforthcoming. Bernadette and Sophie spoke about how their mothers often remained completely silent on any issues of sex and the body. This was usually put down to the fact their mothers had no concept of how to talk to their daughters about these topics.⁴⁶ This silence within families around sex and the body was not simply limited to Catholic families; many Protestants also felt the same lack of ease with such delicate topics. Hence the movement by larger umbrella Christian and Protestant organisations tending towards the organising of pamphlets, lectures and sex education classes, taking the onus and responsibility of sex education away from parents who lacked the confidence and skills to deliver such information to their children.⁴⁷ Sometimes the task fell to other family members. As Bernadette recalled, “No, no, no, no mum never did speak about it, even when we were older, she never spoke about it with us, it was left up to my sister, mum knew that she was going to tell me. So, she didn’t have to worry about it.”⁴⁸ Bernadette acknowledged that her mother remained silent on these topics long into her adult life. The silence and awkwardness around sex during such a critical developmental time, stayed with a number of these women: it was an apprehension which plagued Bernadette’s relationship with her mother long after Bernadette became a wife and mother herself.

⁴⁶ Featherstone, *Let’s Talk About Sex*, 124.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 125.

⁴⁸ Bernadette, ‘Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

Menstruation

If sex was off limits, menstruation wasn't far behind. Sophie felt her Italian mother lacked the skills to talk to her about menstruation and other bodily functions. In their few conversations there was a clear fixation on how menstruation correlated to the ability to bear children:

My mother had never told me about it, so I was never told – I mean I knew... I don't think she knew how, or how to approach it. So when I actually got my period I had to tell my mother because I needed, - they would give you these massive pads [laughs] she said to me 'so you know now that you're a woman and you can get pregnant' sort of thing, not 'this is what happens'.⁴⁹

For Sophie's mother, menstruation raised the stakes surrounding sex and possible pregnancy. Although, the women did not specify if they were made aware of the link between sex and pregnancy at that time. Menstruation was mentioned specifically by all of the women as the primary focal point of their sex education at puberty. When questioned about what they were taught about menstruation, the answers given were in line with many of the sex education texts presented at the time – the idea of cleanliness, the need to conceal and paradoxically the wonders and triumphs of womanhood.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2019)

⁵⁰ Carla Pascoe, 'The Bleeding Obvious: Menstrual ideologies and technologies in Australia, 1940 -1970', *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal*, 20 (2014), 89.

Carla Pascoe addressed this type of education, citing examples of medical professionals suggesting excessive douching and described the advertisements by Cellucotton (makers of Kotex pads) as depicting “obsessive cleanliness”.⁵¹

Bernadette recalled how her Catholic high school education concentrated on “keeping yourself clean, making sure you had pads, making sure you were always prepared”.⁵² When the girls were spoken to by nuns about menstruation it was about being prepared at all times for their periods, maintaining an acceptable level of hygiene and making sure that they didn’t allow others to know they were menstruating.

The sex education booklets at the time also suggested practices such as changing sanitary napkins when going into a new room, in order to keep “yourself fresh and clean” or changing napkins up to and in excess of five times a day.⁵³ This was not for comfort, but a form of what Suellen Murray calls “menstrual etiquette”.⁵⁴ The impractical, time-consuming and expensive actions undertaken by young women were in order to shield those around from any knowledge of menstruation.

This idea of concealment pertains to the responsibility of young women to not only take care of their physical selves but to have accountability for how others might perceive their condition. The immaculate reputation of a young women was seen to be as, if not more important, than her actual physical and mental health.

⁵¹ Ibid. 86

⁵² Bernadette, ‘Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins’

⁵³ Ibid.89

⁵⁴ Suellen Murray, ‘Keeping their secret safe: Menstrual Etiquette in Australia, 1900-1960’, *Hecate*, 24/1 (1998), 62-80.

The idea that a man could be made aware that a woman was menstruating due to either the young woman's change in behaviour or by not taking all of the necessary steps in order to hide her condition, was imagined as having disastrous effects on her pristine image and feminine prestige.

This constant reinforcement of menstrual etiquette and the ensuing stigma around the process itself also simultaneously contradicted the attitude that sensible young women were meant to foster surrounding menstruation. The widely distributed pamphlet *Very Personally Yours* (produced by Kotex from the 1930s until the 1970s) demonstrated this contradiction in chapter titles alone.⁵⁵ One chapter titled "You need never feel the least bit embarrassed", which deals with the stigma around buying feminine hygiene products, was immediately followed by the chapter "Never give your secret away", which detailed ways in which a girl should both literally and emotionally hide the fact that they were menstruating. They were to do this by joining in on group activities and strategically placing themselves in positions that hid their discomfort and condition. The pamphlet used the example of a group outing to the beach to demonstrate this point:

...go along with the crowd and have fun. You can don your pet playsuit and get a tan while the others swim. Just be careful not to get cold, or tease the boys so they wind up by tossing you into the briny...⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Harry Finley, 'Very Personally Yours', *Menarche Education* [website], (2007) <<http://www.mum.org/verperb2.htm>>, pgs 1-20, accessed 20 July. 2020.

⁵⁶ Harry Finley, 'As One Girl to Another', *Menarche Education* [website], (1999) <<http://www.mum.org/asone9.htm>> pgs 9 -12, accessed 20 July. 2020.

This encouragement of concealment, which also worked to infuse a sense of shame about menstruation, was diametrically opposed to the other primary lesson being taught to young women by their Catholic educators. Young Catholics were being taught that the ability to menstruate and bear children was “So very wisely arranged by God and they should feel empowered by this womanly gift”.⁵⁷ On a physical and daily level menstruation, although natural, was regarded as an unseemly and uncomfortable event that women must confront and accept, yet concurrently shroud from public sight; Bodily functions were something to be ashamed of. On a religious level, menstruation was the gateway and a tool created by God to aid women in fulfilling the female destiny of bringing children into the world.⁵⁸

Annette’s recollection of getting her first period in the 1970s and the reaction of her mother, highlights many of the inconsistent lessons that the young women had been taught throughout their childhood and adolescence by both their teachers and possibly other family members (if they were lucky enough).

And of all days I wore a pair of bright yellow shorts... I got home, I went up to have a shower and I just took my clothes off and mum being mum strode into the bathroom, picked up my clothes and I’d obviously bled, and it was all hands on deck. ‘Well you’re going to have to do this and you’re going to have to wear these’ and big pads were pulled out, you know the big guns were pulled out.

⁵⁷ Harvey Sutton, *A Guide Through Girlhood: a reliable book for Australian girls, 8-11 years* (Sydney: Father and Son Welfare Movement of Australia, 1961), 19.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 23.

As the anecdote continued, Annette went on to explain how the placement of hygiene products in the house and her mother's actions caused further shame and embarrassment for Annette at the time.

Mind you it was nothing but sheer embarrassment, because mum would store them downstairs ... in the kitchen cupboard, not in the laundry where the toilet was but in a kitchen cupboard, under the sink near where everybody gathered in the house. So, if ever you went down there to get a pad out of the cupboard there would always be somebody there... I got over the fact that I got my period... and in saying that it was, I was so embarrassed by itthe day I got it mum ... went into my next door neighbours...to say 'oh yes well Annette has become a woman today'. Well I really didn't want her to know that. It seemed to be a thing that went with her all of her life, because it was the same for my children and my cousins and cousins' children. It was like it was something to celebrate, to me it was the grossest thing in the world.⁵⁹

Annette's anecdote about her and her mother's reaction epitomises the multiple aspects of how many Catholic women reacted and treated menstruation. First, it emphasises Annette's bodily experience in the discomfort and unpleasantness of having to confront the realities of her period. Second, it highlights Annette's intense embarrassment that other people knew and demonstrates her desire to conceal she was menstruating. Third, her mother's desire to tell others about the event reflects the spiritual aspect: menstruation as a symbol of the transition to womanhood and something to celebrate.

⁵⁹ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

Annette highlighted the fact that this was the only way in which her mother spoke about puberty, refusing to talk about or acknowledge any 'unseemly' details. This attitude is very much in line with the way in which the young women were educated, often being spoken to by their educators and mothers directly about the more conceptual and 'beautiful' aspects of menstruation and referring to pamphlets and guides for the more graphic and explicit elements. The spiritual perspective on menstruation is not something the women interviewed, or their friends, felt had any dramatic effect on their day to day lives or how they handled their menstrual cycles. To them menstruation was a painful and inconvenient interruption.

The fourth and more general aspect is the way in which menstruation is one of the first introductions for young women to the politics of owning a female body, and the constant battle between the public and private. Annette had been taught her whole life that part of being a 'Good Catholic Girl' involved keeping her body and its functions private. It was an attitude instilled from her early years of Catholic education both in school and in the many booklets that were circulated. This is manifested in her natural embarrassment and shame around the whole ordeal of menstruation in general. Annette's mother however exemplifies the public nature of the female body when she exposed Annette in public by announcing the event to their neighbours. This quite brutally placed her daughter at the mercy of the comments and opinions of those around her.

Throughout this chapter I have explored the women's earliest memories of both Catholicism and their introduction to sex education. I argue that for these six girls their parents were central to the transmission of religious culture within their family units. Catholic faith and class status intermingled and affected the knowledge they received about menstruation, the dangers of pregnancy specifically and about sex education from their mothers, Catholic schools and Catholic publications. The competing lessons around menstruation were particularly confusing; the women's schools preached concealment-based hygiene, whilst some mothers (such as Annette's – the only participant to specifically mention this reaction) saw menstruation as a celebratory event and entrance into womanhood. Some of the women also expressed their burgeoning dissatisfaction and internal questioning of Catholicism. The ideas of feminine Catholic perfection also began to take root in this period of the women's' lives. In the next chapter, these themes are amplified by the women's sudden dramatic shift into womanhood and the deluge of new rules and expectations placed upon them by both their schools and parents.

CHAPTER TWO – EARLY ADOLESCENCE: THE CONFUSING YEARS

If messages from the Catholic education system and within families about menstruation conveyed contradictory messages about female purity and women's bodies, instructions about behaviour around boys was equally confusing. It conveyed particular understandings about sex, about marriage (the only legitimate context within which sexual activity was sanctioned) and was heavily imbued with ideas about female perfection.

Gail recalls the only education she received from the nuns about how young women should behave with boys.

Interviewer: How did they [the nuns] address relationships with boys with you?

Gail: They didn't. Stay pure until you get married; that was the adage...Just keep yourself pure and nice until you get married that's what I'm repeating from what they [nuns] said. So the inflection of it was that you don't have sex before marriage.

That was their take on [boys].⁶⁰

Currently, the historical discussion surrounding these areas of the women's lives comes from primarily British or American sources (with the exception of Lisa Featherstone and Marilyn Lake), and there is a tendency to provide a more generalised idea of the evolution of sex education across classes and across both religious and state education.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Gail, 'Gail interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

A noteworthy omission from any of the sex education provided to the women, was the concept of homosexuality. The Father and Son Movement booklets did address homosexuality in men and women however this is only addressed as a perverse and deviant act, associated with those with abnormal sexual tendencies. See Harvey Sutton, *A Guide Through Girlhood: a reliable book for Australian girls, 8-11 years* (Sydney: Father and Son Welfare Movement of Australia, 1961), 28-30.

⁶¹ Geiringer, 'Catholic Understandings of Female Sexuality in 1960s Britain'; Leanne McCormick, *Regulating Sexuality: Women in twentieth century Northern Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) 79-112, 180-206.

Whilst this is useful for the purposes of context, it lacks the detail and specificity that the oral history approach of this thesis provides. Research that takes a similar oral history approach to my own has tended to place the emphasis on the lack of information that young Catholic women received and how this rendered the women feeling somewhat naïve when entering the world outside of their education.⁶² However, the attention in this thesis to the specific intersections between both the class status of the women and their migrant backgrounds and how that entwined with their experiences of Catholic sex education brings greater nuance and detail to our understanding of Catholic women's experiences of adolescence and early adulthood

⁶² Angela Davis, 'Oh no, nothing, we didn't learn anything': sex education and the preparation of girls for motherhood, c.1930–1970', *History of Education*, 37/5 (2008), 670;

Lack of sexual knowledge

Throughout every interview the women commented on the distinct lack of information about sex and the body within their sex education. To begin with, the fact that sex was referred to as the 'marriage act' is indicative of the fact that sexual intercourse was still seen as only permissible within the context of (heterosexual) marriage. To further this avoidance of explicit or confronting term, whenever sex was addressed it was done so in either an infantile manner in which body parts and bodily processes were renamed or ignored or the topic was taught in the context of holiness and one's duty to God.⁶³ This ideal is expressed by a former student of a Catholic boarding school in the text *Growing Good Catholic Girls* when she talks about the young women's sex education as preparing them for life in the realms of "domesticity, motherhood... modesty and faith", as Catholic women were "handmaidens of the Church".⁶⁴

This attitude towards censorship around the more nitty- gritty aspects of sex was not exclusive to the Catholic education system. Many non-Catholic texts shared the same discomfort in discussing the body and sex, as is evident in the way they crudely referred to male and female anatomy, substituting biological terms such as vagina with labels like "front passage" and "door", and referring to the penis as a "tube".

⁶³ Angela Davis, 'Oh no, nothing, we didn't learn anything', 670; Simon Szrezer and Kate Fisher, *Sex before the Sexual Revolution: Intimate life in England 1918-1963* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 65-112.

⁶⁴ Christine Trimmingham Jack, *Growing Good Catholic Girls: Education and Convent Life in Australia* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 31.

The only organs that were deserving of attention and education were those that facilitated reproduction, again emphasising the ideal that sex and the body parts that were involved in the act of intercourse were strictly to be used for procreation and not for hedonistic pursuits of pleasure and gratification.⁶⁵

Both the Catholic Church and state education system followed the similar trend of providing the most basic biological information, completely circumventing topics like orgasms and refusing to use words such as vagina, vulva, hymen, urethra and clitoris.⁶⁶ Any claims of possible ignorance by the state run education system in regard to these topics is ill founded as public knowledge of human sexual anatomy and physiology had been advancing since the start of the twentieth century. Popular publications such as Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Marie Stopes' 1918 book *Married Love*, Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* and the groundbreaking work of Masters and Johnson into sexual physiology in the 1960s shed light on topics such as female pleasure, sexuality within marriage and even went into explicit details about the multiple types of female orgasms.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Sutton, *The Guide Through Girlhood*, 18; Patricia Jung, 'Sexual Pleasure: A Roman Catholic Perspective on Women's Delight', *Theology and Sexuality*, 12 (2015), 26-47.

⁶⁶ Anne Mitchell et al., *Sexuality Education in Australia in 2011* (2011), <<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30672663.pdf>>, 4, accessed 13th of October.

⁶⁷ Kate Fisher, *Birth Control, Sex and Marriage in Britain, 1918 – 1960* (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 28-75; Sigmund Freud and James Strachey, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (New York: Avon, 1965); Marie C. Stopes and Ross McKibbin, *Married Love* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Alfred C. Kinsey and Wardell B. Pomeroy, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998); William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson, *Human Sexual Response* (California: Ishi Press International, 2010); Hera Cook, *The Long Sexual Revolution: English Women, Sex and Contraception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 225-260.

According to David Geiringer, the highest echelons of the Catholic church were very aware of these new theories and understandings of sexuality – female sexuality in particular – as they conducted an internal investigation into the matter in order to determine how the Catholic Marriage Advisory Council should be educating couples about such topics.⁶⁸

However, little to none of this material was incorporated into Catholic or state-run sex education. The ramifications of this lack of knowledge was that young women had very little understanding of not only their gynaecological and reproductive health but also their relationship to sex and sexual pleasure.

The women interviewed expressed their sense of inadequacy in relation to their sexual knowledge compared to their friends, whom they assumed knew more. The reasons given for these assumptions were very diverse and reveal contemporary assumptions about gender and ethnicity. Lucy thought the “Anglo girls” were more informed because their mothers or sisters spoke to them more openly, whilst Anglo women like Annette thought that the Italian girls knew more because she believed they physically matured faster and seemed to boast more experience.⁶⁹

A story shared by both Lucy and Fran illustrates the lack of knowledge they felt they had in comparison to a sexually active friend. Lucy recollected.

⁶⁸ Geiringer, 'Catholic Understandings of Female Sexuality in 1960s Britain', 209-238.

⁶⁹ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

We just didn't know; we didn't know what things happened and how things happened...I think we were in form four and there was one girl who was a little risqué and she came back from the lunch break and said she had a pearl necklace [laughs]. And we all looked at each other and we went 'oh that's nice, can you show us?' We had no idea what a pearl necklace was, I'm still laughing, I've got tears in my eyes laughing because you know we didn't find out until about 10 years later what it was. We were all so naïve, except this one girl and she was quite proud of her pearl necklace.⁷⁰

Whilst this story is recalled with humour, it is also indicative of the vicious cycle of misinformation that seemed to permeate throughout the women's recollections of sexual knowledge amongst their girlfriends. None of the women felt that they knew enough, yet they all relied on one another for information causing the spread of wild falsehoods.⁷¹ Annette recalled another incident in which she had missed the sex education class at school and was told by one of the other girls that the penis is actually bent on a ninety degree angle in order to facilitate the demands of missionary sex.⁷² While Annette was very sceptical of this story, it still serves to illustrate the extreme nature of the myths that were being spread amongst the young women. It also demonstrates that although this young girl had been introduced to the concept of sex, apparently missionary sex was the only conceivable and respectable form of intercourse, to the point that the male body was adapted to it.

⁷⁰ Lucy, 'Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

⁷¹ Mary Jane Kehily, 'Contextualising the sexualisation of girls debate: innocence, experience and young female sexuality, *Gender and Education*, 24/3 (2012), 263-265.

⁷² Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

What also enabled these misunderstandings to disseminate was the fact that there was nobody to deny them or provide the girls with the truth, as many of the women stated that they had no trusted adult to whom they could speak to regarding these kinds of topics.

None of the women felt that this lack of information severely impacted their later lives as Lucy acknowledged the lack of sex education “didn’t make me any more curious, and it didn’t deter me either”.⁷³ However, many of the women felt that due to their lack of sexual education, sex and intimacy were going to take the form of a lot of experimentation. As Fran said “It [sexual relationships] wasn’t [discussed]. I just learnt as I went, just yeah bit of trial and error, a lot of trial and error”.⁷⁴

Again, whilst the women I interviewed exhibited a relatively relaxed attitude to how they approached sex, numerous studies have found a correlation between a lack of sex education and consequences such as sexually transmitted infections, violent and risk-taking sexual behaviour and unwanted pregnancy.⁷⁵ Unwanted pregnancy in particular was a point of stress in many of the women’s relationships with their mothers, and rightly so. Nationally, teenage fertility (the number of births in a given year per 1,000 females aged 15-19 years) reached its peak in 1971, it then proceeded to drastically decline throughout the decade.⁷⁶

⁷³ Lucy, ‘Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

⁷⁴ Fran, ‘3/9/2019 Fran Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

⁷⁵ Laura Duberstein Lindberg and Isaac Maddow-Zimet, ‘Consequences of Sex Education on Teen and Young Adult Sexual Behaviors and Outcomes’, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 51/4 (2012), 332-338.

⁷⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Demographic Statistics* (2000), cat. No.3101.0, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/featurearticlesbyCatalogue/DBF3DB6CCF56413ECA2569DE002139C3?OpenDocument>>, para 1, accessed 3 Sept 2020.

Whilst there are many other variables that may have triggered this decline, changing social attitudes and greater concern in how sex and intimacy was being taught helped young Australians and young women specifically in moving past the once acceptable trial and error approach. The other major change in Australian society that facilitated this decline was the advent and wide distribution of 'the Pill' in 1961, forever changing the way in which women were able to take control of their sexual and reproductive health.⁷⁷ In the case of the women interviewed, they were a part of the first generation of women who had relatively unencumbered access to the pill. By 1972 the 27.5% luxury tax which had rendered the pill inaccessible to most women (especially those of the working class) had been lifted and the willingness of doctors to prescribe the pill to young, unmarried women increased drastically in the mid-70s.⁷⁸ The primary issue that faced young Catholic women was the moral ruling made by Pope Pius XII in 1958 in which he labelled oral contraceptives "gravely sinful". The issue was addressed again in 1963 by the Pontifical Commission on Birth Control which led to Pope Paul VI deeming oral contraceptives as immoral. Despite this ruling by the Catholic Church, the pill became increasingly popular and by 1971 26% of young wives were actively taking the pill.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Defining moments : The Pill', *National Museum Australia*, [website], (2019)

<<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/the-pill>>, para. 2, accessed 17th June 2019.

⁷⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends* (1998), cat.No.4102.0,<

<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/e50a5b60e048fc07ca2570ec001909fb!OpenDocument>>, para. 13-17, accessed 17th June 2019.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

The participants who spoke about the pill, tended to reflect the wider social trends surrounding its use. The moral dilemma posed by the Catholic Church did not seem to feature heavily in their personal decision-making process. Bernadette stated that she started taking the pill almost immediately after moving to Melbourne and starting her training and Annette revealed that she had secretly taken herself to a clinic in East Melbourne when she was eighteen in order to get her prescription.⁸⁰ Both of the women chose to take the pill in order to gain some semblance of control over their bodies and in an effort to balance their work lives with their personal health. Sophie began to take the pill after she was married as a means of family planning after she had her first child. All of the women noticeably approached the pill with purely practical mindsets. However, the fact that the women made these decisions either outside of the home or without the knowledge of their parents indicates the generational divide and the strength that the Catholic stigma surrounding oral contraceptives still had on their parents.

⁸⁰ Annette noted that she was unable visit her family doctor due to issues of confidentiality. This is due to the fact that Annette knew that if her parents visited the doctor, he would most likely have mentioned Annette's visit and request.

Sexuality and the Passive Female

In addition to the lack of information on sexual intercourse, Catholic education was significantly lacking in the area of sexuality and sexual expression.⁸¹ In interviews, when asked questions about whether or not sexuality was discussed, the answers were either non-existent or extremely short, paralleling the way in which the topic was taught to the women.

Sophie described how sex and pleasure was addressed with her in the mid 1970s

You only have sex to have babies okay. You don't have sex for pleasure, and that was...probably things the nun's said to us as well, thinking back.⁸²

Numerous sex education books from the 1960s and 1970s went beyond the realm of describing the practical act of coitus itself and addressed many of the other facets that surround sex and intimacy. For example, Sister Mary Winefride referred to the emotional, the physical and the spiritual aspects of sexual intercourse.⁸³ However, none of the women could recall any positive explorations of female sexuality within their Catholic educations. The message they felt they were receiving was that whilst females and the female body should be admired for its ability to bring children into the world, which requires the act of sex, there should be no active desiring of sex and sexual pleasure.

⁸¹ I refer to sexuality here in regard to desires, urges and pleasures found within sex. Not just the act of sexual intercourse itself.

⁸² Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

⁸³ Winefride, and Dorian, *Approaching Maturity*.

In 1912 spiritualist purity campaigner Sister Veni Cooper-Mathieson articulated this idea when she asserted that sex was “intended by God for one purpose only, that is procreation of the species, not for pleasure, but to give our life, or portion of it, to form another life”.⁸⁴ Sixty years later little seemed to have changed.

As Sophie’s memory demonstrates, this early twentieth century attitude towards sexuality, in particular Catholic women’s sexuality, had not altered much by the 1970s. The image of women as passionless vessels for procreation had lingered, even though in the widely accepted Australian narrative, major cultural shifts during and after WWII had changed the idea of what constituted a ‘good woman’; from the maternal, morally righteous and fertile woman into the alluring, sexually attractive and youthful woman.⁸⁵ Good Catholic Girls were neither sexually attractive or sexually active.

What Sophie’s quote also demonstrates is the idea that pervaded sex education books, wider society and was passed onto young women: that sex was something that was done to women. Sex was not something that women were necessarily expected to take an active role in; it was their duty as a wife and female. Sophie recalled a similar lesson being taught to her in the late 1970s: “I had an older person once say to me – it was in and out, that’s all you were there for”.⁸⁶ This lesson also acknowledged that women were expected to submit to men even if it was only to satisfy his sexual urges and not procreate.

⁸⁴ Featherstone, ‘Rethinking Female Pleasure: purity and desire in early twentieth century Australia’, 719.

⁸⁵ Kereen Rieger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernising the Australian Home, 1880-1940*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1985), 206-208;

Lake, ‘Female Desires: The Meaning of World War II’, 60-80.

⁸⁶ Sophie, ‘Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

Although women should strive to be sexually attractive and satisfy the male sexual urge, concurrently having any sexual urges and desires of your own was considered a betrayal of your feminine purity. Women, in particular wives, were imagined as passive participants; sex was something to which they must simply resign themselves for the sake of their husband, because “that’s what being a woman is for”.⁸⁷

Throughout many of the interviews there was a very clear sense that young women were presented with the idea that passivity was the ideal way in which to engage in sexual intercourse. To deviate from this attitude was to go against the norm and was presented as something unusual. To compound this, the concept of female sexual fulfilment was barely acknowledged or explored by formal sex education. When female desire was addressed, it was not depicted as something that the woman could seek and enjoy for herself – the sexual satisfaction was not her own. In the case of sexual intercourse, the enjoyment and possible gratification that a woman could have was, as historian Lisa Featherstone observes, “God-given luck” and solely incidental to her male partner.⁸⁸ Female pleasure was also derived from the fact that the woman was taking part in the act of procreation and fulfilling her feminine duty. There was heavy emphasis in both sexual education booklets and by the participants in their interviews that they were taught sex and sexual pleasure should never be sought for the sake of self-indulgent gratification.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Lisa Featherstone, ‘That’s What Being a Woman is For: Opposition to Marital Rape Law Reform in Late Twentieth Century’, *Gender and History*, 29/1 (2017), 92.

⁸⁸ Featherstone, ‘Rethinking Female Pleasure’, 719.

⁸⁹ Winefride, *Youth Looks Ahead*, 28.

Throughout multiple interviews Annette, Sophie, Fran and Lucy all mentioned the same friend in their group who epitomised the opposite of what the young women were being taught (the same friend from the pearl necklace anecdote). She was highly sexual, confident and more than anything, she was proud of her sexual exploits, often bragging to her friends about what she had been doing. While the truthfulness of her reported sexual adventures might be questionable, the way that the women brought up this friend and her stories was indicative of the how powerful the effect of a self-possessed and sexually confident young woman was. Although they laughed at how clueless they were in the moment, they still spoke of her with this sense of awe and disbelief that she was able to do what she was doing without any obvious semblance of guilt or shame. Notably, in the group interview when Bernadette (who didn't go to school with the other women) asked whether or not the other women partook in similar activities, they were very quick to dismiss and deny that they were involved in anything of the sort. Lucy called themselves "Good Catholic Girls", indicating that although the women felt they were aware of how rigid and impractical the lessons they were being taught were, they still felt the need to separate themselves and their reputation from their sexually adventurous friend.

I'm Living in the Seventies

Although I specifically asked the women about sexuality and morality, it is also important to understand the context in which their adolescence was taking place. Here Sophie recalled her memories of growing up in 1970s Melbourne.

I think it was safe, it was happy...You know as a child we could cross the main streets. Well 70s I guess I wasn't a child, but we were safe... it was lovely. You know we could go to a park; we could play. I think we were a lot more innocent and I think also it was a little bit more ignorant in some areas. I think I saw the world as a nicer place.⁹⁰

While their memories may carry a commonly observed nostalgia for the 'simpler time' of childhood and youth, when questioned about growing up in the 1970s, the women used specific terms like the 'electric' vibe of Melbourne, carefree, fun and safe. Fran, Annette and Lucy focussed on the music and fashion.⁹¹ Gail recalled the political movements and motherhood and Bernadette recalled the 1970s as just 'home'. That said, the women recognised years later with both life experience and hindsight, that many of these attitudes could also be put down to ignorance and blissful unawareness of the darker side of Melbourne at the time, (discussed below in the sections addressing how geography and exposure effected the ways in which the women recalled their adolescence).⁹²

⁹⁰ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

⁹¹ Lynda Mannik, 'Remembering, Forgetting and Feeling' in Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *Oral History and Photography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 87.

⁹² Homicide rates in Australia reached an all-time peak in the 1970's with a rate of around 2.0 in 100,000. See Samantha Bricknell, *Trends in Violent Crimes* (2008), <
<https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi359>>, pgs.1-6, accessed 7 Aug 2019.

Sophie, Lucy and Bernadette, who had more sheltered lives, felt that their parents weren't distrusting of their daughters, but were more distrusting of the world that they were heading into. This attitude was exacerbated in migrant narratives due to parents' unfamiliarity with Australian youth culture themselves.

Sophie described the dances held at the popular Carlton venue, the San Remo Ballroom in the 1970s that Italian youth had been attending for decades. The girls would "be dropped off there, and sometimes the fathers would stand at the back of the room".⁹³ This memory demonstrates the kind of space that not only Italian parents, but Anglo parents had to navigate with their daughters. The girls needed to socialise in safe spaces with boys and local dances, according to Bongiorno, had historically always offered this type of restrained and controlled environment for those "whose lives still moved within the orbit of the church".⁹⁴ The actions of the fathers staying and watching indicated a level of distrust and protectiveness. First, they wanted to ensure the general safety of their daughter in an environment that was unfamiliar to them both, and second, with fathers present, the teens would not be afforded the opportunity to do anything that would compromise a family's reputation. Parents' fears and the resulting protectiveness were borne from a mixture of both unfamiliarity and their own life experiences.⁹⁵ Due to their migrant background the parents were largely unaware of Australian social practices and had no familiarity and friendships with others in whom they could place their trust.

⁹³ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.)

⁹⁴ Bongiorno, *The Sex lives of Australians*, 161.

⁹⁵ S Vahl, 'Some Problems of Migrant Assimilation', *The Australian Quarterly*, 32/3, (1960), 59.

As discussed later in the chapter, parents were often familiar with stories and life experiences from both Australia and their home countries about disreputable young women which also would have skewed and impacted their judgement about how much to trust their daughters in these social situations.⁹⁶

It appears as though the way in which the women experienced the 1970s was heavily influenced by the fears, insecurities and life experiences of their parents, which directly affected the ways in which the women were permitted to interact with the world around them. This attitude also led to the enforcement of many rules surrounding the young women's clothing and social conduct by both their parents and their schools.

⁹⁶ Francesco Ricatti, 'Was I cursed?' 'Was I hypnotised?' Ethnic Moralism, Sexual Dilemmas and Spectral Fantasies of Italians in Australia (1956-1964)' *Women's History Review*, 21/5, 2012, 753-771

Policing of Image and Behaviour

Policing of the young women's image, behaviour and ways in which they expected to comport themselves both in and outside of school became the centre point of their life and decisions. The weight of these expectations followed the women throughout their teenage years and into their young adult lives.

Annette recalled the rules for the numerous formal dances held at St John's Clifton Hill throughout her high school years in the 1970s:

The nuns would make the girls all enter through the one entrance and they would check out what they were wearing, and they'd always discuss with us leading up to the ball you weren't allowed to show any cleavage. [laughs] In form one the girls had to wear short dresses because they weren't women and then form two, three and four you were allowed to wear long ball gowns. So that was another thing that I couldn't understand either, because you know we had legs and [laughs] we were allowed to show them in form one, but we weren't allowed to show them in form two, three and four. And the nuns at the ball would stand up on the balcony and make sure that we weren't engaging in too much conversation with the boys during the ballroom dancing.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

This anecdote features the kind of rules that dominated the lives of young Catholic women at the time.⁹⁸ Rules regarding the tightness of one's top, length of skirt or even how one can move. These behaviours were also constantly reinforced through pamphlets and booklets such as *Youth Looks Ahead*.⁹⁹ The junction between this change in rules and sudden social expectations of young women, was at the exact point in time in which they began showing secondary sex characteristics such as breasts, a 'feminine figure' and were possibly aware of and exploring their sexuality.

Gail, who attended Loreto commercial college in South Melbourne, recollected the same kind of rules with her uniform when she reminisced that her school skirts "had to be below the knee and you had to kneel on the ground to make sure that your skirt actually hit the floor".¹⁰⁰ These similar narratives indicate the widespread nature of these rules, as the schools attended by my participants were located across Victoria and were run by different orders within the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰¹ However, there was a similarity in socio-economic factors as all of the women's schools were located in pre-gentrified, low socio-economic suburbs. In fact St. John's (the school attended by Lucy, Annette, Fran and Sophie), was labelled by the 1970's Karmel report as being "one of the poorest schools, with teachers who weren't actually qualified."¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Sister Mary Winefride, *Youth Looks Ahead*, 61.

⁹⁹ Alison Happel, 'Ritualized girling: school uniforms and the compulsory performance of gender', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 22/1 (2013), 92-96.; Winefride, *Youth Looks Ahead*.

¹⁰⁰ Gail, 'Gail interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

¹⁰¹ Annette, Sophie, Lucy and Frans school was run by the Sisters of Charity, Gail by Loretto nuns and Bernadette by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart.

¹⁰² Lucy, 'Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

Commissioned by the Whitlam government in 1972, The Karmel report was the result of an investigation by the Interim Committee for Australian Schools Commission into both State and non- State school across Australia. The purpose of this investigation was to understand the needs of schools and how to meet those needs through government reforms (previously promised by Whitlam)

This would suggest that the tedious image-based rules that were enforced upon the young women whilst they were at school (including in their travel to and from school) were also based upon the desire for upwards social mobility, and in this way the schools used the image of the girls and their uniforms to project a certain level of decorum and refinement expected of higher class institutions.

Although Catholic run education had been a part of the Australian educational landscape since the 1830s, and by the 1970s 1,781 of the 2,180 non-government schools in Australia were Roman Catholic, there is a very strong sense that the Catholic education system imbued their students and followers with the concept that they were simultaneously victimised by other religions (which was only furthered by the continual secularisation of the country) and also something special; they upheld a sense of moral superiority and righteousness.¹⁰³ Hence, this idea needed to be projected through the image and behaviour of their students. Considering the working-class demographic of my participants, this attitude would have been exacerbated in the schools they attended.

As discussed earlier, the numerous behaviour manuals addressed this Catholic superiority by encouraging the socialising of Catholics with other Catholics. However, many of the women spoke about their daily experience of being victimised for being Catholic in their travels to and from school.

¹⁰³Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Canberra, Australia, Schools* (1970), cat. No. 42020, <[https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/1A2610672C3999DFCA257441007AC87D/\\$File/42020_1970.pdf](https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/free.nsf/0/1A2610672C3999DFCA257441007AC87D/$File/42020_1970.pdf)>, pg.9, accessed 5 Oct. 2019; Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends* (1994), cat. No. 4102.0, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/10072ec3ffc4f7b4ca2570ec00787c40!OpenDocument>>, para. 1-4, accessed 12 Aug. 2020; Marion Maddox, *Taking God to School: The End of Australia Egalitarian Education?* (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 2014), 1-6.

When speaking about her “Catholic dog” experience on her morning walks, Annette noted that it was the uniform of her school that signposted the fact that she was Catholic to the other children; rather than conveying the desired effect of a neat and relatively elaborate uniform which evoked awe or respect from the other children, her uniform instead evoked ire, spite and an othering of Annette from the other children in her neighbourhood – with whom she ironically shared the same socio economic status. Such experiences are indicative of the level of sectarian tension that was still pervasive in Australian society.¹⁰⁴

In order to enforce these image-based rules, the nuns and families alike, effectively inculcated the emotions of fear and guilt. The importance of monitoring personal reputation, the school’s image and family’s social status was constantly stressed and used as a device for maintaining girls’ conformity to morally acceptable female norms.¹⁰⁵ This attitude was again not exclusive to Catholics, however, in comparing purely Catholic authored etiquette and behaviour manuals to those that were broadly Christian and protestant leaning, there is a clear difference in the bluntness and advice regarding behaviour – specifically sexual behaviour. In the booklet *Just Friends* by the protestant led Father and Son Welfare Movement there is a section addressing female masturbation and although it suggests that girls should not allow themselves to be distracted from daily life and develop a habit, they do suggest that “no girl should feel discouraged if she finds herself indulging in the practise from time to time”.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Australia, Parliament, *Freedom of Religion and Belief in Australia*, Canberra, 53, < file:///Users/bethhiggins/Downloads/http___www.aphref.aph.gov.au_house_committee_jfadt_religion_relch ap4%20(1).pdf>, accessed 10th October 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Jane Kehily, ‘Contextualising the sexualisation of girls debate’, 260.

¹⁰⁶ The Father and Son Welfare Movement of Australia, *Just Friends?: A Practical Guide to boy-girl friendships* (Sydney: Father and Son Welfare Movement of Australia, 1959) 28.

Much less forgiving was the Catholic Sister Mary Winefride, which described masturbation as a bad habit that breeds sexual selfishness in women and will cause issues with intimacy once married. This stance on such practices is indicative of the aforementioned responsibility that young Catholic women must bear – that even masturbation is not something that can be enjoyed purely for oneself but will have an indirect effect on a future partner.

There was little room for Good Catholic Girls to develop their own understanding of sexual pleasure. It also serves to show how much more the Catholic texts lean into the use of shame as a tool of enforcement and control. This emphasis on shame and how the guilt associated with it goes beyond oneself to reflect those around them was concisely summed up by Bernadette when she recalled the almost mantra-like list of what she couldn't bring shame to: "Don't bring shame to the family...don't bring shame to the uniform....and don't get pregnant".¹⁰⁷ This adage was equally relevant for the next rule laden area of the young women lives: relationships with boys.

¹⁰⁷ Bernadette, 'Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2019)

The Male Female Relationship

The other main facet of the young women's lives that was scrupulously regulated both at home and school was their interactions with boys. However, there is a primary difference in motivations for this policing – practicality and appearance. As previously mentioned, the women's schools had a vested preoccupation with their reputation and prestige; the way that this effected the young women was as a pressure that Gail articulated and labelled the "Ladylike Catholic persona". She explained it as "that you had to exude this type of thing. With nuns you had to look a certain way, 'you're going to this school, you're being taught by us you have to behave'. You have to look the part".¹⁰⁸ When pressed further about what this persona meant, and when all of the women were asked about what constituted 'naughty' behaviour, everybody had a similar answer: boys. Walking, talking or spending time with boys was all very much frowned upon by teachers, parents and sex education booklets alike. In the text *Instruction for girls aged 12-16*, Sister Mary states that 'all through your teen years',

You must bear in mind that a good girl is always a modest girl. Her modesty protects her purity. Girls must be careful of their behaviour with boys, and their ideal must be to imitate the purity of Our Lady.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Gail, 'Gail interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2019)

¹⁰⁹ Winefride, 'Instruction for Girls aged 12-16 years' 15.

Sister Mary's words illustrate just how immediate and dramatic the link between interaction with boys and the maintenance of virginity was in the eyes of adults, as the quote jumps from the mere suggestion of interaction to comparing the young women's behaviour to the Virgin Mary. Many of the women interviewed, especially Annette and Fran, felt that these rules and concepts were particularly ridiculous and illogical as they maintained numerous platonic relationships with boys throughout their adolescence.

To demonstrate how profoundly such ideas impacted the daily lives of the young women, Sophie recalled a memory of passing contact with a male friend in the northern suburbs in the early 1970s and its ramifications with her father:

Il Globo [laughs] is the Italian newspaper... and he [dad] was taking me to my aunties... so he sent me down to the shops to buy *Il Globo*. Went to buy *Il Globo* and I met a male friend, so I was walking next to him... We weren't holding hands; we weren't doing anything. Came home gave dad the paper...A friend of his had seen me...Went to mum and dads and said, 'Oh I saw your daughter at the shops' and she was walking next to a boy' and dad was pretty good, and he said, 'what was she doing?' And he said, 'oh nothing she was just walking next to him' and he [dad] said 'was she kissing him, holding hands?' and he said, 'no she was just walking next to him'. I still remember it vividly and dad turned around and said 'what if she'd really been doing something? Would you have let me kill her? Because I would have killed her'. He said, 'how dare you just come say something like that?'"¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

In this anecdote the smallest instance of bumping into a friend escalated into an extreme argument between two people who were completely separate from the actual interaction. The severity of Sophie's father's level of investment in the reputation of his daughter was intense enough to warrant the threat of 'killing her' at the mere insinuation of Sophie doing something 'wrong' with the boy. Jock Collins addresses this "disciplined supervision" of migrant children in particular and notes that parents' regulation of their children's (especially daughters') lives often led to intergenerational conflicts.¹¹¹ In the case of Sophie she felt that her father was "pretty good" despite the comment about killing her. It's possible that hindsight and her own experiences of parenthood since this event have shaped Sophie's interpretation of this incident, as she was hesitant to acknowledge the level of violence her father implied or, more likely that in comparison to other Italian parents that Sophie knew about at the time, her father was relatively moderate in his reaction.

When questioned about why their parents wouldn't let the girls spend time with boys one-on-one, the main reason the participants theorised was that their mothers (in the case of Fran – her elder sister) didn't want their daughters to end up pregnant. Lucy spoke about her parents making 'lessons' of pregnant girls; "They would sit us down and say "so and so is pregnant, she's a little tart, this is what happens, now your life is ruined, you've got a bad reputation, no one will ever marry you".¹¹² Lucy acknowledged the irony in the fact that although Italian parents demanded that their daughters get married and produce children, doing so out of order would upset the preordained and socially respectable 'timeline' to which the young women (not exclusively Italian women) had to conform.

¹¹¹ Jock Collins, 'Immigrant Families in Australia', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 24/3 (1993), 299.

¹¹² Lucy, 'Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

Although not official, this commonly understood timeline dictated the order of and appropriate durations of courtship, dating, engagement, marriage and of course having children. The lessons about the value of women from Lucy's parents is repeated constantly throughout the Sister Mary booklets in which sexually active and unwed pregnant women were referred to as "leavings" and as having "spoiled their whole lives by the premature experience of sex".¹¹³ Shame would be their lifetime burden.

The only two women who shared more relaxed relationships and platonic bonds with males were Annette and Fran. Fran noted that she was even allowed to go on nights out and go on weekends away with her male friends, prompting her sister to say to their parents "you're giving her too much freedom, she'll come home pregnant".¹¹⁴ This opinion falls in line the experiences of the other women, who recalled that they weren't even allowed to bring male friends to their homes or to meet their parents unless there was the intention of pursuing a serious romantic relationship or as Sophie stated "until you were ready to marry".¹¹⁵ Such surveillance and restrictions further instilled the idea in the young women that male interaction was only permitted if it was to aid in pursuing their ultimate goals of wife and mother.

¹¹³ Winefride, *Youth Looks Ahead*), 15, 58.

¹¹⁴ Fran, '3/9/2019 Fran Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

¹¹⁵ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

Lucy labelled dating and boys as “completely taboo”.¹¹⁶ This shared mentality that the only value in opposite sex friendship was the possibility of future marriage was highly reflective of the Father and Son Welfare publication *Just Friends?*, in which platonic friendships between members of the opposite sex were deemed impossible, as any “opposite sex partnerships will in the end, probably lead to the lifelong partnership of marriage”.¹¹⁷ For Sophie and Bernadette this rule was so ingrained that Bernadette felt she had “no relationship with boys”; hence, when a boy wanted to meet her family in an effort to be respectful and do the right thing in his mind, she already knew “that’ll be the end of it then” and she was proven right when she was grounded for letting the boy meet her family.¹¹⁸ This incident corroborates Sophie’s statement that these rules only served to force the girls to do everything behind their parent’s backs; if Bernadette had kept the boy a secret from her family, she would have most likely been able to continue her relationship with him and had the interaction of which she felt so deprived.

The women interviewed felt that male-female relationships was one of the most pressing issues they dealt with throughout their adolescence; it was also the area of their lives that was the cause of most of the tension with their families. This was not restricted to exploring romantic or sexual relationships, but how the women were taught to interact with the males in their lives, how the relationships altered with age, and the contradictory standards that were perceived by the participants socially.

¹¹⁶ Lucy, ‘Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

¹¹⁷ The Father and Son Welfare Movement of Australia, *Just friends?*, 8.

¹¹⁸ Bernadette, ‘Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

Male-female relationships tended to be addressed throughout the interviews from the end of childhood and onwards: as soon as there was any discernible changes in their appearance indicating womanhood their relationship with the males in their lives altered dramatically. Most notably, the kind of carefree, easy interactions with boys ceased. In this very short time frame the participants went from being children who could play with boys in the street without concepts of responsibility and decorum to being women who now had an acute understanding of image, accountability and a newfound reputation. This in turn had a profound impact on how the women perceived the experience of growing up. As Annette quite bluntly stated about this transition in her first interview: “Become a woman? I couldn’t think of anything worse”.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Annette, ‘8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

Socio- economic status

The second most pressing factor for the young women in the context of their higher education was the financial and socio-economic status of their families. All of the participants came from working-class backgrounds and were all educated in schools located in lower socio-economic suburbs. However, a significant difference in the women's narratives and experience was their migrant or non-migrant backgrounds.

Those who came from migrant backgrounds found that they were placed under a different type of pressure in comparison to their peers. Sophie reflected on this experience in the 1970s:

The only reason they migrated was for a better life for us, so I think that was drummed into us as well, that they came for us, they worked hard for us. So we had to be a step above it....it became a bit of a greed. They wanted bigger houses, and every family wanted their child to be better than the other child. It became quite competitive....now their grandchildren have gone to another level again – say we might have been teachers and accountants, now there's doctors and lawyers.¹²⁰

Sophie's reflections convey the importance of cultural background and the immigrant mindset; the idea of upward social mobility is entwined with migrant motivations for a better life for themselves, but most importantly for their children.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

¹²¹ Stephen Castles, *Australia's Italians: Culture and Community in a Changing Society* (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1992) 155-169.

This includes their children receiving a better education, better jobs and eventually more money so they don't have to struggle in the same ways that their parents did. This was and still is a significant pressure to place on to the shoulders of young adolescents, as not only are they trying to achieve goals that they have for themselves, but they have the wishes and hopes of their family to strive for as well. In the case of young migrant girls this was also in addition to the responsibilities that they already carried due to their gendered expectations.

The migrant attitude to young women working was nuanced. The women I interviewed of Italian heritage, believed that their parents still felt that work and earning a wage was important and this was possibly why they were sent to commercial colleges. However, this decision to allow their daughters into the workforce (and having wives working in order to support the family as well) was interwoven with cultural factors relating to the fact that many of the Italian families came from communities in which women were not expected to work, and to do so was a failure on the part of the husband to provide and support his family. But if the motivation of coming to Australia was to provide their children with more opportunities and to have a more prosperous life, having both parents working and coming to terms with the idea that their daughters would also need to as well was not really a question; it was a necessity. It also meant that denying their daughter further education if it was possible would have been counterproductive.

In the case of my Irish Catholic participants, the parents still placed some value in education. However, there simply was not the same type of emotional motivation that was present with the Italian parents to balance with socio-economic factors. All three of the Irish Catholic participants had varying reasons as to why they finished their education when they did, the common factor between them being financial.

Bernadette finished her schooling and went straight into pursuing her career as a nurse. The drive for this quick transition was a mix of three main factors: First, her childhood ambition to become a nurse which she stated was inspired by her older sister and was seen as one of the few appropriate occupations for young women. Second, Bernadette desired freedom from her controlling homelife and parents and third, the well-established and understood expectation amongst her family that the children would need to earn a wage and support themselves from the moment they turned eighteen. This last reason in particular highlights the practical struggles of young working-class women; when presented with this option there was no choice in this scenario for further education.

Gail left school at 16, as this was normal within her family, and by age 17 had become a mother. In this scenario single motherhood and the realities of taking care of an infant emotionally and financially took precedence over further education. Lastly, Annette left school at the conclusion of form four in 1974, after passing a touch-typing test and began full time work less than a fortnight later. Annette mentioned numerous times that she did have the opportunity to continue her education as she was eligible for a scholarship.

However, when asked why her family did not take advantage of this opportunity she stated that there was simply no incentive; there was no encouragement or enthusiasm from her family; and she did not want to attend the school that the scholarship offered, as it was also a Catholic girls school. In the interview with Annette she was adamant that the choice not to continue was one in which she was actively involved and okay with. Nevertheless, Annette's tone, body language and almost defensiveness in responding to the question, suggest her recognition of the lost potential.

Gail communicated this same type of loss though talking about her mother as opposed to herself, which could possibly be another means of separating and disguising her disappointment with past decisions and loss of potential: “My mum was a very bright women, got a scholarship but she had to go to work. She could have been anything. And it’s a shame that she didn’t have those opportunities”.¹²² Gail’s quote highlights another example of a young woman who due to the socio-economic circumstances had lost the chance of higher education along with the professional and personal growth that it may have presented. Although Gail’s mother went through this experience decades earlier and Gail recognises that there were more prospects in the 1970s, the story of class restriction and financial pressure had not altered in the intervening years between Annette and Gail’s mother.¹²³

Whilst, these socio-economic restrictions and expectations would have also been felt by working-class young men, women felt these economic restrictions whilst also being expected to competently navigate the already substantial and well-established factors of gender expectations, the double standards that surrounded them and image. They were thus placed at a far greater disadvantage than their male peers in attempting to pursue long term careers outside of those deemed acceptable.¹²⁴

¹²² Gail, ‘Gail interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

¹²³ In 1974 the Whitlam government in Australia provided free tertiary education in hopes of attracting working-class youths in to university. This program lasted for 14 years.

¹²⁴ John Clarke et al. ‘Subcultures, cultures and class’ in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds.) *Resistance through Rituals: Youth subcultures in Post War Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1975), 49.

Double standards

Overwhelmingly present in the analysis of sex education booklets, newspaper articles and magazine pieces was the double standard experienced by women and particularly women from working-class backgrounds, in relation to the ways they were expected to navigate sex, relationships and basic socialising. It seems that enforcement of these standards and rules felt the most intense for the women during the formative years of their life. However, even within these strict boundaries, many of the participants questioned the lessons that they were being taught at the time. Lucy and Annette outwardly challenged their teachers about religious rules and biblical paradoxes:

I would argue with the nuns...and there was another person in particular that would support me [Annette] and the two of us would argue with the nuns about different points, but of course we were just told to sit down and behave ourselves.

The women clearly recalled that when they spoke up or out of turn, they were punished. However, they weren't necessarily being punished for the specific questions they were asking, but more likely being punished for questioning the status quo. Fran noted in her interviews that although she was felt similarly and was in awe and supportive of her friends' curious and outspoken natures, which she felt males would be applauded for, she chose not to vocalise her feelings as it was simply too much trouble and effort to follow through with. This was due to both the admonishment it would elicit and the tediousness in trying to argue with those who simply would not listen and were in positions of power.

For the participants with male siblings, there was a very clear sense that the freedom to go out and socialise was the most perceptible and quantifiable double standard between the sexes in their home lives. Lucy recollected just how quickly this double standard fell into place when she spoke about the birth of her younger brother: “he became the golden child because he was a boy, and after three girls so yeah, we always knew our place in the family”.¹²⁵ Lucy suggests that her brother’s birth had suddenly caused a movement in the family hierarchy, surpassing his female siblings, purely on the basis of being a male.¹²⁶ This was not a conscious choice, and Lucy held no resentment towards her younger sibling, however, Lucy and her sisters could clearly detect the social and cultural preference and glorification of male children in the behaviour of their family and friends. There were also clear differences in his treatment that caused them to reach this conclusion: Lucy stated that he “never had to do any chores, whatever he wanted he would get, if he wanted a set of drums he would get it, he was allowed to go out wherever he wanted, whenever he wanted”.¹²⁷

Bernadette’s experiences confirmed Lucy’s: she emphasised the severity of the divergence between the expected social behaviour of men and women when she talked about her brothers. She recalled that her brothers had the freedom to not only to leave the house and socialise, which Bernadette and her sisters were forbidden to do, but the freedom to drink to excess, fight and get into trouble with the law with barely any ramifications from their parents.

¹²⁵ Lucy, ‘Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

¹²⁶ Victor J Callan and Poo-Kong Kee, ‘Sons or daughters? Cross-Cultural Comparisons of the Sex Preferences of Australian’, *Population and Environment*, 4/2 (1981), 106.

¹²⁷ Lucy, ‘Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

They were allowed to go out and do whatever they liked really, this is in my teenage years the 70s, so my brothers were all already older than me anyway. But they got up to no good ... and into trouble with the police and you know mum would line up, put her good suit on, and up there at the courthouse to speak up for them and say 'their father's an alcoholic and it's not their fault' and we [laughs] we used to think oh god.¹²⁸

The anecdote is highly reminiscent of themes found throughout many of the sex education booklets detailing appropriate behaviour, and the 'boys will be boys' type mentality that permeated most of society.¹²⁹ There was a pervasive willingness to readily excuse boys for their actions because they were seen as products of their biology or, as in the case of Bernadette's brothers, victims of an 'imperfect' homelife. Such an excuse was never extended to the women in the family as they were expected to know better and be in control of themselves. Sister Mary referred to this regularly in the context of chastity, stating that although purity was important for males, "boys often have to struggle to stay pure".¹³⁰ Underpinning such an assumption was the belief in the hydraulic model of male sexuality which started at a young age for boys, and required more time in order to try and control.¹³¹ This attitude, when applied to much larger contexts, often meant that young males could be forgiven for most behavioural outbursts as they had not yet learnt to control themselves.

¹²⁸ Bernadette, 'Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

¹²⁹ Karen G. Weiss, 'Boys will be Boys: and other gendered accounts', *West Virginia University*, 15/3 (2009), 110-130.

¹³⁰ Winefride, *Youth Looks Ahead*, 6.

¹³¹ Featherstone, *Let's Talk About Sex*, 47.

Bernadette recalled approaching her mother about this hypocrisy ten years later, pointing out that the daughters seemed to face constant restrictions even though there was never an intention to misbehave. In contrast to herself and her sisters, her male siblings disobeyed both family rules and the law with their consistently troublesome behaviour, yet received little to no consequences, in fact they received support and empathy:

You know you always stood up for the boys, you know they went out, they would drink, get in to trouble with the police, they'd do all the wrong things and I said none of us girls ever did anything wrong, we never got pregnant...And yet you treat us like we were no good and that you know we should be doing better, it's not fair.¹³²

Bernadette's recollection of her confronting her mother also revealed an extra layer of pressure that she felt was placed upon her sisters and herself: even perfection was simply not good enough and was deserving of reprimand, that somehow the female siblings could be "doing better" even at their best. This is a frustrating contrast to her brothers whose behaviour could objectively barely be considered sub-standard.

In this chapter I have demonstrated the issues that the women felt were most pressing during their adolescence and young adulthood. Arguing that the amalgamation of interlacing factors such as gender, migration and socio-economic status greatly determined the rules and regulations that had begun to take hold in the young women's home and school lives.

¹³² Bernadette, 'Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

As these rules and regulations began to intensify and instil themselves within the women, the pressures that would follow them throughout their adolescence and into their adult lives started to reach a boiling point as they came into conflict with the women's sense of practicality and movement into the outside world, fostering their redefinition of faith and morals; they began to challenge what it meant to be 'Good Catholic Girls'. In the next chapter, I will use the visual medium to deconstruct how the women utilised fashion as a tool of self-representation throughout their school years and into their adult lives. The intersecting themes of security, exposure and the impact of memory on the way in which the women recalled their youth are further explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE – VISUAL ANALYSIS: AGENCY, PLEASURE AND DANGER

Throughout the interviewing process many of the women passionately recalled the fashion and music culture of the 1970s in Melbourne, in particular how the cultural shift that took place paralleled their own coming of age. This chapter utilises visual mediums to investigate the concepts of self-representation through the use of fashion, by placing the women in the context of the broader Australian attitudes towards fashion and self-expression throughout the 1970s. The chapter functions as a fulcrum, thematically, both between their childhood and adulthood, in their deployment of feminism, agency, culture and sexuality in their construction of their stories, and lastly as an introduction to the way in which the emphasis on Catholicism in the lives of the women begins to shift towards their identities and experiences as working class.

Beyond the practical information regarding what fashion 'was' in the 1970s that came from sources like *The Australian Women's Weekly* and *Cleo*, this chapter draws on the works of Liz Conor, Yuniya Kawamura and Patrizia Calefato to interrogate ideas about feminine visibility and the ability of fashion to demarcate more than just the personal whims of the wearer, and how it can be utilised in social, cultural and political contexts.¹³³ These are explored in the unexpected relationship between fashion, safety and security that was highlighted by Annette in her second interview and expanded upon by other participants in the group interview.

¹³³ Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004), 15-39.

Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018); Patrizia Calefato, *The Clothed Body: Dress, Body and Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

The chapter concludes with a discussion about the correlation between photography, oral history and memory in general and how they relate to truth as historical sources.

Self-Representation through fashion

Fran's response to the question 'what was it like to be a teenager in 1970s Melbourne?' was indicative of the women I interviewed: "...The fashion! The music! It was great!"¹³⁴ For all interview participants, music and fashion were the defining and most memorable features of their teenage years in 1970s Melbourne. Fashion is a constantly changing and evolving aspect of culture, but in 1970s Australia the way fashion was utilised as a form of self-representation (especially for those deemed working-class) was more diverse than ever before. Whilst mainstream fashion evolved in the mid 1970s for women to represent a more down-to-earth ideal of femininity, Australian teenagers were also exposed to and took part in counter cultural fashion movements such as the Skinhead, Sharpie, Surfie and Rocker movements.

Fashion in 1970s Australia varied widely, there was however, a common thread that ran through all of the subcategories and trends available to young women. The 'dolly bird' look and attitude as epitomised by women like Jean Shrimpton and Twiggy in the 1960s was no longer de rigueur.¹³⁵ Not only had the boxy, geometric dresses of the 1960s given way to the flowing lines and cuts of the 1970s, but the attitude of women themselves had changed; confidence and intelligence replaced vapidty and passive obedience as the hallmark of attractive women. Everyday women also found themselves far more politically aware – as by 1972 the concept of the personal becoming political had already reached the mass media, and efforts in mass consciousness raising had begun to take place across Australia.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Fran, '3/9/2019 Fran Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

¹³⁵ Deborah Thomas and Kirstie Clements, *The Australian Women's Weekly Fashion: The First 50 Years* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 2014) 113.

¹³⁶ Arrow, *The Seventies*, 88.

Magazines such as *Cleo* (founded in 1972) presented the image of the liberated woman for the new era and encouraged their readers to become more aware and engaged with the world beyond the home. In regard to the cultural shifts taking place within fashion, both *Cleo* and *The Australian Women's Weekly* urged their readers to look towards Australian designers and brands, meaning that Australian fashion no longer heavily relied on international influences; designers were given freer rein to be original in their work as opposed to religiously trying to recreate and bluntly copy the European and American style. Though there were many facets of mainstream fashion in Australia in the 1970s, the style that was applicable to the women that I interviewed was the arguably more achievable and varied streetwear style typically characterised by denim jeans (now a fashion staple) which were loose legged and high-waisted on both men and women, knitwear, hotpants and stacked shoes. This style emphasised individuality as both knitwear and jeans were typically customised by the wearers in order to make their clothing stand out. Knitwear and the patterns provided by fashion publications allowed for the implementation of different colours and designs, whereas jeans often had embroidery or appliques attached to make them specific to the person wearing them.¹³⁷ The importance placed on individuality was very much in line with the changing attitudes towards fashion and the realisation of its power as a tool of self-representation.

¹³⁷ Margaret Maynard, *Out of line : Australian women and style* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001). 79

Whilst these fashion trends were taking place in the broader Australian context, the magazines that they featured in such as *The Australian Women's Weekly* and *Cleo* were aimed at adults. As the women interviewed were only in their teenage years during the 1970s, not all of these messages felt particularly relevant to them, the stores and designers being recommended were still out of reach for the working-class teenage girls. *Dolly* magazine, which was first published in 1970, provided a fresh answer to the gap in print media for teenage girls and it was the magazine many of my participants read and spoke about.¹³⁸ The magazine succeeded in taking the broader trends in Australian fashion and making them approachable and achievable for younger Australian women.

Considering the drastic cultural shift that had taken place through fashion, it naturally highlighted a generational gap between the younger generations and their parents.

Annette was able to address the nuances of this relationship and how the older generations reacted to newer fashions through her aunts and her mother.

The likes of say mum and my aunties, they were pretty progressive with their fashion...they'd sort of moved with it, and they'd seen a lot of fashions too as they were growing up, so it was something you accepted.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Suzanne Fleming, 'Reading Dolly: The reading practices of adolescent girls', Honours thesis (Edith Cowan University, 1996. 70-77

¹³⁹ Annette, '10/4/2020 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2020)

Annette's quote corroborates Yuniya Kawamura's core belief about what defines fashion – change.¹⁴⁰ Fashion is constantly reflective of the “acceptance of certain cultural values”, hence why it is so susceptible to dramatic and rapid change.¹⁴¹

In Annette's anecdote she speaks about how women of her mother's age had seen fashion dramatically shift from wartime fashion to the 'new look' silhouette of the 1950s and then to the mini skirt; they were well placed to accept the trends of the 1970s.¹⁴² Although there is a common perception that older generations are generally resistant to change, such a view negates the idea that every generation has had to adapt and accept change at some point in time.

However, later in Annette's interview there is a glimpse of where the line was drawn in regard to how far fashion and self-representation was allowed to be taken in her own household. Annette recalls two anecdotes involving her mother's disapproval and its passive aggressive expression. The first story involved Annette's ripped jeans:

I remember I had a pair of jeans once and they had tears on the knees which is fashionable now – but it wasn't then. She was ironing them, and she ran the iron through the holes to make the holes bigger, so I couldn't wear them again. Well that just made me more determined (laughs) so I got some tapestry ribbon and embroidered the knees and also the cuffs of the jeans. So, they were another fashion statement.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, 5.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁴² Bonnie English, *A Cultural History of Fashion in the 20th and 21st Centuries: From Catwalk to Sidewalk* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), 101-103.

¹⁴³ Annette, '10/4/2020 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

The second story revolves around a jumper.

I had a jumper I used to wear that was very, very tight and she didn't like that so she washed in boiling hot water to try and shrink it so I couldn't wear it again, which only made it smaller and made me want to wear it more.¹⁴⁴

There are numerous threads that link these stories to one another, the passive aggressive game played between Annette and her mother is quite humorous and a story that has played out across the world between teenagers and their parents. However, what entwined the anecdotes is that in both instances there are the points reached where Annette's mother decided she did not agree with her daughter's fashion choices, yet she knew she was no longer in a position to openly oppose her daughter, nor could she tell her daughter what was and wasn't acceptable.

Both anecdotes point to this disagreement being brought about when the clothing choices Annette was making were in opposition to classic feminine styles. Even though her mother had lived through many different fashion trends throughout her life – they all tended to celebrate femininity (mainstream fashions at least). As Annette had explained in her first interview, her mother refused to wear pants until much later on in her life and was meticulous in how she dressed herself and Annette when she was a child: most of hers and Annette's clothing was tailor made. The fact that she accepted her daughter's proclivity for denim jeans which were not only pants, but extremely casual and not particularly acceptable for women throughout her life, reflects an openness to change.

¹⁴⁴ Annette, '10/4/2020 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that ripped jeans were a step beyond what she deemed acceptable – the jeans had now become a complete affront to the polished and curated feminine image that Annette's mother would have wanted to portray – jeans themselves may not have been a paragon of femininity, but jeans that were ripped and dishevelled were completely unacceptable.¹⁴⁵

The particularly tight jumper also falls into this category. As with the jeans the jumper's issue is that it fell beyond what Annette's mother deemed as an acceptable expression of femininity. Unlike the jeans, the issue that the jumper brings forth is more deeply seated within the world of Catholic feminine perfection and ideology. Modesty is listed by many of the behaviour manuals and specifically focussed on by author of *Youth Looks Ahead* and *Approaching Maturity* Sister Mary Winefride as one of the crucial aspects of a morally righteous Catholic woman.¹⁴⁶ Tight jumpers were specifically mentioned in her books as surreptitiously immodest as although jumpers tend to cover the person up and there is no obvious skin showing, the tight nature of the jumper can enhance and show off breasts and the feminine figure that lies beneath. Whether or not Annette's mother was consciously thinking about the covert sexual nature of tight jumpers, there is clearly an element of discomfort in her daughter so comfortably 'showing off' her body, which can be linked back to the stringent morality that she was taught in her strictly Irish Catholic upbringing.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ English, Bonnie and Pomazan, Liliana, *Australian Fashion Unstitched: The Last 60 Years* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 181.

¹⁴⁶ Winefride, *Youth Looks Ahead*; Winefride, *Approaching Maturity*

¹⁴⁷ Arrow, *Friday on Our Minds*, 116.

Ironically, the lengths that Annette's mother took in order to deter her daughter from wearing the jumper, only served to render the jumper even more immodest and in the mind of Annette, more attractive as both a means of rebelling against her mother and as a way of fitting in with the popular fashion of the time, which was in fact very tight jumpers and knitwear.

Fashion and Subculture

Whilst there were numerous teen subcultures prevalent in Australia in the 1970s (some original and some as iterations of previous gangs such as the bodgies, widgies and mods) for the purpose of this thesis I focus on the Sharpie group of the counter cultural movement, as they had the greatest effect on the lives of my participants, due to both social and class related factors.¹⁴⁸

Sharpies were a purely social group that had been a fixture of Australian youth culture since the early 1960s; the group itself was primarily working class, aggressive, territorial, relatively open to both genders and whilst considerably more multicultural than other groups, was primarily made up of Anglo Celts.¹⁴⁹ The name itself comes from the fact that members were 'sharp' dressers; emphasised by their custom made, tailored clothing and constant preoccupation with short hair (to serve as the opposition of the long haired hippy movement).¹⁵⁰ The knitted 'connie' or 'conti' cardigans worn by both male and female Sharpies as almost a uniform were often custom made by Italian tailors in Melbourne's northern suburbs; they could be made with bespoke colours and patterns to individualise the wearer, placing the Sharpies in a paradox of wanting to fit in with one another, yet desperately trying to stand out from their respective groups.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ James F. Short and Lorine A. Hughes, *Studying Youth Gangs* (Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2006), 163;

¹⁴⁹ Ian Chapman and Henry Johnson, *Global Glam and Popular Music: Style and Spectacle from the 1970s to the 2000s* (London: Routledge, 2016), 263-267.

¹⁵⁰ Peter Beilharz, 'Rock Lobster: Lobby Loyde and the history of rock music in Australia', *Thesis Eleven*, 109/1 (2012), 64-70

¹⁵¹ Sarah Baker, Brady Robards and Bob Buttigieg, *Youth Cultures and Subcultures: Australian Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2015) 266.

This contradiction is also exemplified in the image below in which many Sharpies wore the name of their local group on their shirts in order to set themselves apart as a sharpie yet maintain their group allegiances. It also served to both inform and intimidate those around them.



Fig. 3.1 In this image multiple versions of the Sharpies signature shirts are represented. Members of gangs took pride in advertising their local allegiances and dressed around the shirts accordingly – with tight jeans, stagger shoes and ‘conti cardigans’.

This emphasis on social demarcation by the Sharpies is an attribute of 1970s fashion that the modern market lacks in the eyes of participants such as Fran, who stated that fashion these days “means nothing”. This accords with what Annette observed about clothing as a signal of allegiance to the numerous subcultures and groups around Melbourne at the time. Like Annette, Fran stated that if you wanted to join or even be on the periphery of a certain group, dressing in line with their standards was the best and most obvious way to do so;

this came in the form of the previously mentioned short cropped hair, 'conti' cardigans, 'stagger' jeans and 'treads' shoes.¹⁵² Fran also added music to this equation, stating that the bands you followed were also a means of designation to certain groups, for example, if one was a fan of ACDC or Buster Brown it generally meant you were a Sharpie, whereas if you followed Australian Crawl or Fleetwood Mac you were in generally placed in the Surfer group. This symbiotic relationship between music and fashion suggests the degree of fashion influence musicians had on their followers.

The emphasis on appearance and fashion stayed with the Sharpies throughout their many iterations, and by the early 1970s my participants had reached adolescence just as the Sharpie culture itself was about to enter its third iteration, undergoing its most dramatic transformation due to the infiltration of glam rock in the Australian music scene. Glam rock acts such as David Bowie, Slade and Australian bands like the Skyhooks and Hush brought with them a disregard for gender norms and standards, with make-up, costuming and androgyny key aspects of their images as artists. This meant that the stringent masculinist images of the Sharpies began to soften slightly and a more glamorous and eccentric attitude towards fashion became acceptable. Such a shift also aligned with the Sharpie emphasis on class aspiration influencing their fashion choices as glam rock embraced excess and over-the-top indulgence in their image.

¹⁵² Calefato, *The Clothed Body: Dress, Body and Culture*, 15-17.

What also rendered these acts a part of a turning point in Australian culture was their attitude towards sexuality – with songs such as ‘Smut’ and ‘You just like me ‘cos I’m good in bed’ overtly addressing not only sex, but (public) masturbation, homosexuality, drug use and specific sex acts. The Skyhooks group also addressed issues of class and socio-economic disparity, Australian politics and political movements in many of their works, reflecting the highly politicised attitudes that were becoming present in the 1970s.¹⁵³ These songs were not only accepted by the general public but were very popular and spent weeks at the top of the Kent music charts.¹⁵⁴ The broader Australian public’s tolerance for song with representations of sex and overt sexuality was increasing, providing a distinct juxtaposition between what my participants were being taught in the Catholic school about socially acceptable expressions of sexuality and what was now taking place in their communities and their social lives whether they were Sharpies or not.

¹⁵³ There would obviously be factions that were still uncomfortable however in using the Kent music charts as a guide this discomfort of niche factions did not affect the popularity of the music itself.

¹⁵⁴ The Kent Music charts were a precursor to the ARIA charts.

Fashion and security

The many subcultures and youth gangs that were thriving throughout 1970s Melbourne created a level of tension that was constantly present in the background of social events and in some cases everyday life. The Sharpies and Skinheads provided a majority of that tension, whilst Surfies and Surfers (there was a distinct difference between the two) provided a much more relaxed and easy-going alternative whilst still offering some semblance of allegiance and belonging.¹⁵⁵

Many of the women spoke about these subcultures as a constant presence during their adolescence. However, it was Annette who had the most involvement with the gangs, rendering her recollections of these groups the most acute and detailed. Annette recalls these groups with a much more sympathetic view of the Sharpies' behaviour than current academic literature affords them.¹⁵⁶ Annette acknowledged that the Sharpies still fostered a relatively fearsome reputation: "you always tried to make friends with one or two of them (Sharpies) because better having them close to you or not your enemy because there was some pretty rough types". However, she didn't implicate them in the same kind of criminal activities and violence that she associated with their rivals – the Skinheads:

¹⁵⁵ According to Annette in her second interview to be a Surfers meant someone that actually participated in surfing. To be a Surfie was purely an aesthetic decision, it embraced the beachy bohemian style of the Surfer without actually surfing.

¹⁵⁶ Judith Bessant, 'Hanging around the street': Australian rockers, sharpies and skinheads of the 1960s and early 1970s', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 19/45 (1995), 15-31.; Ian Chapman and Henry Johnson, *Global Glam and Popular*, 263-267.

It was the criminal factors that was behind them [the Skinheads] which made me, I suppose appreciate my friends and my group of people that I would hang around with ... like we would go out to a hotel mid-week and there would always be a fight and you'd always know that there would be a Skinhead involved in some shape or form. Again, you associated them with a little more of a violent culture.

The way in which Annette spoke of the Skinheads as having a criminal element, moving “together in like a pack” and as having a much more violent culture and temperament as a group, is exactly the same way that many academics and the media have described the actions and behaviour of the Sharpies, yet Annette never attributed any of this behaviour to them.¹⁵⁷

In Judith Bessant's piece ‘Hanging Around the Street’ she notes that violence, hostility towards both authority and to other rival groups, and general aggression were trademarks of all of the ‘gangs’ of the time, with Sharpies and Skinheads the most prolific fighters. One of Bessant's own interviewees (a former Sharpie himself) specifically notes that the Sharpies tended to move in packs, as the numbers in a group provided the most adequate protection and the most threatening image to those who would try to intimidate them.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 15-31; ‘Bottle, chain brawl alleged’, *Canberra Times*, 6 Dec. 1967, 10, in Trove [online database], accessed 7 July 2020; ‘Youths ‘terrorised’ Parramatta people’, *Canberra Times*, 9 April 1975, 8, in Trove [online database], accessed 7 July 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Bessant, “Hanging around the street”, 15-31; Chapman and Johnson, *Global Glam and Popular Music*, 263-267

¹⁵⁸ Peter Beilharz, ‘Rock Lobster: Lobby Loyde and the history of rock music in Australia’, 64-70

Iain MacIntyre notes that there were never peaceful relationships between the different gangs in Melbourne, however, fear mongering by the media only served to throw “bucket loads of fat on to the fire” and that whilst each group fought one another, the most common fighting was Sharpies fighting other Sharpies in a show of superficial territoriality.¹⁵⁹ So whilst MacIntyre tends to underestimate the alarming nature of the Sharpie culture and chalks the violence down to the simple need for a deviation and some exhilaration from their own lives, Bessant and her interviewees speak to the intimate social bonds fostered within these groups and the threatening way in which they ‘hunted’ and fought their ‘enemies’. Bessant alludes to a darker and more sinister faction of the Sharpie culture, which Annette elaborated on in her interview when she spoke about safety and awareness.

Annette’s relationship to the Sharpie subculture and her apparent sympathies was complicated by factors of class, geography and personal relationships; it is highly nuanced and difficult to fully encapsulate. There was a connection to the group fostered by a shared economic and geographic upbringing; Annette also knew many of these people directly and indirectly through her own group of friends, therefore the ability to empathise and ‘see’ the real person behind the Sharpie gang image became far easier. However, Annette did acknowledge the fact that there were insidious factions within the Sharpies, like those that Bessant had mentioned.

¹⁵⁹ Iain MacIntyre, *Tomorrow is Today: Australia in the Psychedelic Era, 1966-1970* (South Australia: Wakefield Press, 2006), 44.

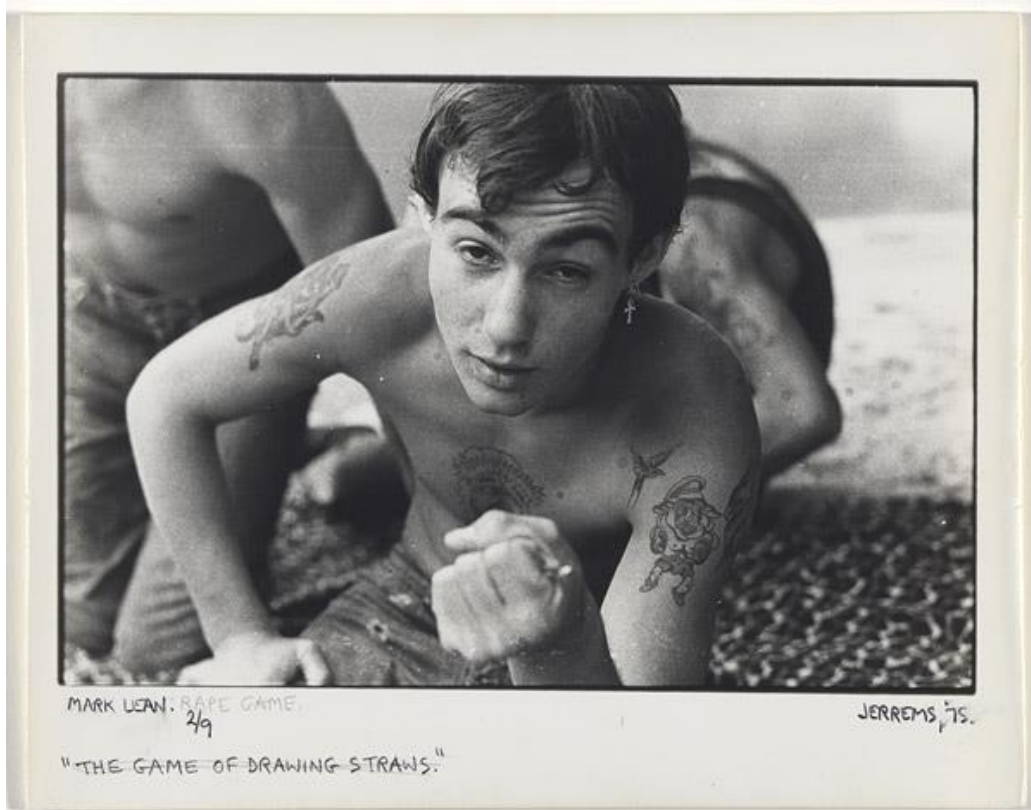


Fig 3.2 This image captured by Carol Jerrems sees teenager Mark Lean playing a game of drawing straw with the other boys in his group. The purpose of the game was to identify which of the boys would rape Jerrems in the nearby bushes, hence the unofficial title 'Rape Game'.¹⁶⁰

In Annette's first interview she detailed a spate of sexual assaults and rapes that she later found out were perpetrated by Sharpies from her local area, whom she had known through intersecting social circles. In figure 3.2 by photographer Carol Jerrems the Sharpies' emphasis and obsession with sexually motivated violence is depicted through one of its members playing a 'rape game' with the photographer.

¹⁶⁰ Carol Jerrems, *Mark Lean: Rape Game*, 1975, National Gallery of Victoria.

Whilst undertaking this work Jerrems, who was considerably older and had previously been the boys' teacher, apparently shared the strongest relationship with Mark (the subject of the image) whom organised a game of drawing straws with the other teenage boys – the prize being the opportunity to rape Jerrems in the nearby bushes. This obsession with sexual violence is further reinforced in a short documentary about the work of Jerrems in which a former Sharpie stated "Before our time there used to be a lot of gangbangs (rape) and stuff like that, but the girls' parents found out... some big cases in Heidelberg and a lot of people went down".¹⁶¹

Annette admitted on numerous occasions that there was also a fear associated with going out to parties and dances. There was not the expectation that there would be a fight at every single event, but it was commonly understood that there was always the chance for things to go awry.

Annette went even further to link her fashion choices with safety and protection around these groups, describing it as "dressing for where you were going", meaning that if you were going to a Sharpie centric event you would dress to blend with other Sharpies, or if you went to the beach you would dress in line with the Surfie aesthetic. Such efforts were taken in order to not draw attention to oneself and avoid inciting threats or violence, a responsibility which fell to the women rather than men controlling their behaviour. This form of thinking is also incredibly reflective of how the young women were taught to use dress as a tool of socialisation from a young age, that clothing choices are latent with

¹⁶¹ *Sharpies From Heidelberg 1975* [video], (Gezza1967, 29th March 2012) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNVQgNukKkg>>, accessed 7th September 2020.

meaning.¹⁶² Like the reputation related dress rules from Annette's dance, the women were now using fashion as a means of communicating allegiance, treading the line between trying to look attractive, yet not so attractive that you stand out and could be perceived as 'asking for it.'

It was also a way of women asserting their agency in relation to fashion and safety, navigating risk through their choice of clothing. Significantly, the risk being navigated here was not pregnancy, as their Catholic education had led them to expect, but sexual violence. When this topic was broached in the group interview none of the other participants felt as strongly about this need for safety as Annette did. When Fran was asked the same questions in regard to navigation and how she managed to maintain her personal style, she simply stated "It was easy...no one cared". Lucy associated her style with the disco subculture and aesthetic and due to Bernadette's location outside of Melbourne she was simply not exposed to these subcultures.

There are some nuanced differences in the way the women recalled navigating the diverse social groups within Melbourne. All of the women acknowledged fashion as a key means of identification, Annette believing that fashion provided the opportunity for somebody to project the image of whomever they wanted to be, that one could mix and match their outfits and styles based on individual personality. However, it was at this point where the differences began to show in how some of the women recollected their navigation amongst all of the very defined factions and subcultures when they were out socialising.

¹⁶² Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology*, 3-5; Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body: Fashion, Dress and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015) 168-175.

Where Annette recognised that fashion was indeed fun and means of personal expression, she also acknowledged both its danger and its utilisation as a tool of protection, choosing to dress to match the groups of people that would be present at an event, in an effort to avoid any conflict that could arise from perceived slights and group allegiances. Fran echoed this sentiment in her interview when she was questioned about whether she fitted in to any of the groups specifically, stating that along with her friendship group she did not particularly fit into any one style or subculture, but instead chose to float between all of the different groups and their associated styles.

This difference in the women's accounts could possibly be due to geographic reasons, as Annette grew up in West Heidelberg, which was a lower socio-economic area and consistently seen as home to more extreme and violent factions of the different 'youth gangs' of Melbourne.¹⁶³ Therefore, Annette grew up knowing that violence was a real threat and she was more aware of what could possibly precipitate it. Unlike her childhood experiences of being bullied for being Catholic, now the risks were associated with class and geography.

¹⁶³ Peter Wilmoth, 'The 70s stripped bare', *Age*, July 17 2005, para. 13 – 20, in Age archive [online database], accessed 27 May 2020.

Fran had a very different account in regard to the level of threat she felt on a daily basis:

I grew up across the road from the Leinster Arms Hotel which was a pub that was notorious for underworld, so yeah that was a whole different ballgame for us. Like Chopper Read [a known violent criminal and gang leader] he was across the road, especially as younger kids we felt so safe, because we had all these people there... no one was going to touch us because they were there. It was quite bizarre.¹⁶⁴

Fran's memory suggests that there must have been at least some level of threat or prospective trouble as she speaks of gaining a level of protection— this inherently means that there is something that one needed protecting from; in this case Fran's home and its location afforded her the protection of the more experienced, sophisticated and imposing members of Melbourne's criminal underworld from the comparatively low level danger of the inexperienced and peripheral youth gangs such as the Sharpies and Skinheads.

Fran maintained throughout her interviews that social navigation was easy, safe and that people were generally afforded the right to express themselves as they saw fit; this aligns with Annette's acknowledgement of that aspect of fashion as well. For Fran, fashion was a direct expression of freedom and individuality and she had no need for it to also function as a strategy for safety and protection.

¹⁶⁴ Fran, '9/5/2020 Fran Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

Fran didn't feel that she or her social life were heavily tainted by any of the gangs within Melbourne at the time – maintaining that she had complete freedom of movement without fear of reprisal or violence (even more so than other participants as her parents were far less strict than the rest of the women's).

The impact of geography on how one interprets memories of safety and everyday experiences is evident in Fran and Annette's recollections. Annette's suburban upbringing thrust her into the centre of one of the most volatile factions of one of the most aggressive 'youth gangs' within Melbourne's suburbs. Their constant presence is what provoked Annette into acknowledging the dangers that dictated her everyday choices. Whilst Fran felt that the same groups were no real cause of alarm to her relatively inner-city upbringing as she was in proximity to much larger and commanding threats within the Melbourne community.

Reading beyond the photograph

In preparation for the second round of interviews the participants were asked to gather any photos that they felt were relevant to their life story. They provided many images ranging from first communions, birthdays, holidays all the way into their older adult years with their husbands and children. The intention was to replicate work done by historians such as Penny Tinkler, Janis Wilton and Lynda Mannik who used photography and visual stimulus in order to garner an emotional response.¹⁶⁵ The aim for this thesis was primarily to gain context and ignite a conversation. The secondary aim was the ability to also analyse why the specific photos themselves had been chosen. How were the women shaping their narrative and what did they want to share? Whilst only able to discuss the photos in depth with Annette and Fran and admittedly the initial expectation of flowing conversation about the photos and memories they sparked did eventuate within the interviews, it led to a particularly relevant investigation into the silences, omissions and situations surrounding many of the images provided.

In the group interview Annette commented on Fran's hesitance in speaking about a section of her life:

Fran you've blotted your whole life out, you know I'm saying goodbye to you at 16 and then all of the sudden you're 28 and you're married (laughs)...

¹⁶⁵ Penny Tinkler, 'When I Was a Girl . . .': Women Talking about Their Girlhood Photo Collections', in Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *Oral History and Photography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 45-61; Janis Wilton, 'Imaging Family Memories: My Mum, Her Photographs, Our Memories', in Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *Oral History and Photography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 61-77.

¹⁶⁵ Lynda Mannik, 'Remembering, Forgetting and Feeling', 77-97.



Fig 3.3 In this image a toddler-aged Fran stands in the alleyway of her Collingwood home. She dressed in boys' clothes as she felt that her parents used her somewhat as a replacement of the baby boy they had lost in between her sister and herself. Whether these clothes are direct hand-me-downs or bought new is uncertain.¹⁶⁶

In the first image of Fran she is 3-4 years old and standing in the side alleyway of her family home in Collingwood. What Fran focussed on within the image are the overalls that she is wearing. Fran discussed throughout both her first and second interview that she was a “change of life baby” and was supposed to be a boy (to replace the one that her parents had lost in between her sister and herself). Hence, when she was young, she was often dressed in boys' clothing.

¹⁶⁶ Fran- Private Collection



Fig 3.4 In this image a kneeling Fran is surrounded by her schoolmates at St. John's. The image itself was taken during the summer months as the uniforms consist of a dress, a jumper and the infamous 'coveralls'.¹⁶⁷

In this second image Fran – kneeling in the front of the photograph – is joined by her school friends. Notably, Fran is sporting the highly fashionable 'Dolly cut', she was one of the only girls in the group who was able to do so, as the other women often stated that their parents and mother in particular would not allow them to cut their hair to such a short length as it was quite the affront to 'traditional femininity'. This is very reflective of how much freedom Fran experienced throughout her adolescence in comparison to the other women in the group.

¹⁶⁷ Fran – Private Collection

The image also evokes the contrast of schoolgirl spontaneity with the perfected image of young womanhood, witnessed both in the posed nature of the photo and in the girls' uniforms themselves.

Whilst the image itself is quite natural in the way that Fran is leaning and the girl behind has her arm around her friends, there is also a level of performance in the image as the young woman on the right shifts her weight and poses with her leg popped and hands neatly placed in front of her, clearly understanding how to flatter herself best and present well in a photograph. The uniforms present this juxtaposition as well – Fran noted in the image that the three girls behind her were all wearing vest-like smocks or 'coveralls' that the students had to wear over their uniforms all day in order keep them clean for when they travelled to and from school. Again, the image of the practical, carefree schoolgirl is undercut by the concept of the pristine image and reputation that she was expected to uphold at all times.



Fig 3.5 In this group shot Fran and Lucy (blonde standing next to Fran) are featured with the other members of the Youth Calabrian Club netball team. In this image Fran is 16-17 years of age.¹⁶⁸

In the third image Fran and Lucy are pictured with the other members of the Youth Calabrian Club. This image is again representative of the comparative freedom that Fran experienced throughout her youth. In the most visually obvious way Fran looks to be wearing much more make-up in comparison to the other women, as she was allowed to experiment with make-up far earlier than her friends. Even more indicative is the reasoning behind the formation of the club in the first place;

¹⁶⁸ Fran – Private Collection

when I asked Fran why she helped to organise the group she laughed and said that it gave a legitimate reason for many of the Italian girls to be able to go out and socialise without their parents questioning what they were doing. The fact that many of the girls in the image weren't even Calabrian (one of them is not even Italian) serves to demonstrate just how badly many of the young women needed the excuse to be able to socialise with their friends. This is very similar to the dances in the previous chapter.

Many of the images Fran provided revolved around her younger life and teenage years. Those from her early adulthood were primarily based around social events with her friends. As in her first interview Fran chose to place her emphasis on very particular years of her life, whilst completely negating her earlier adult years and time within the music/entertainment industry, which she simply summarised as a "wild time" in her life.

Fran's hesitance in discussing that particular time and facet of her life can be related to a theory of 'composure'. Whilst Fran did not completely omit or ignore those years of her life, she focused her general emphasis in other periods and when pushed revealed only morsels of amicable yet vague information, maintaining at least a public image of something that reconciled to the woman that she is at present. Annette's discussion of her images was similarly selective.

In Annette's second interview, she explained and deconstructed a series of photos taken throughout her life. What was prominent in this conversation was a distinct shift in how Annette recalled the images – her posture, body language and tone of voice changed as she moved from the younger, primary school-aged photos into those from her teenage and adult years.

When presented with the images of her younger self, of her communion in particular, Annette was not overtly negative, but the distinct dismissiveness from her first interview returned when she recalled the events. Annette talked about the flaws within the photos and their context, often noting the ridiculous nature of how the photos were set up and the illogical nature of the day itself. She described the day of her communion in West Heidelberg after which she was 'paraded around' to her parents' 'best friends':

it was a Sunday morning and it was beers all around on a Sunday morning. So Dad's got a bit of glow in his face, he always did have. So he was there with his best mate and mum was there with her favourite and bestest friend and yeah...so we were there and then we went to another Aunt and Uncle's place... got taken home and shown to the next door neighbours and then went back for the breakfast that was put on by the church or the school that I was at, at the time.... Similar to a wedding breakfast I suppose.

As the quote above demonstrates, Annette does not look back on the day as a major turning point in her spiritual life, in fact she never mentions the actual church ceremony at all, the day's memory is condensed to its social implications and the small but almost blasphemous ways that Annette and her parents celebrated the occasion. The fact that the celebration itself did not centre around the spiritual implications of the day for Annette is indicative of the event being something that was beyond the realm of specifically Catholic and more in line with a working-class celebration of a cultural rite of passage. It is not the theological reasons and consequences of the day that are necessarily important, but it was the idea that Annette was growing up and partaking in a ritual in which most of her family participated.

As will be explored in the next chapter, Annette had particularly negative and disillusioning experiences with the Catholic church and members of the clergy in her young adult years. It is for this reason that her memory of this particular episode of her life (communion being an incredibly important element on the life of young Catholics) may be marred and recalled with a particular bitterness. She is framing this memory through the lens of her adult self, not as the young girl in the image.



Fig 3.6. In this image, Bernadette is pictured on her communion day. She wears the classic white dress and veil. However, it should be noted that her dress is relatively short for a communion dress, possibly due to a hand-me-down from one of her sisters. This issue is rectified with the white stockings.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Bernadette – Private Collection



Fig 3.7. This image is a professional portrait taken of Annette in her communion day. In addition to the expected communion garb of the veil and long-sleeved dress, Annette was also wearing a cross necklace and a shield ring.¹⁷⁰



Fig 3.8. This image features Lucy in far more elaborate communion wear as compared to both Annette and Bernadette. Notably the amounts of lace, the addition of gloves, the intricate necklace and the fact that the gown was full length and tiered made it obvious just how incredibly important this day was in the life of Italian Catholic girls and their families.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Annette – Private Collection

¹⁷¹ Lucy – Private Collection

In the images above Bernadette (Fig. 3.6) Annette (Fig. 3.7) and Lucy (Fig. 3.8) are all seen in their communion outfit. They are all representative of what was expected in communion fashion at the time – the white, long sleeved and modest dress (Bernadette’s dress is slightly shorter -possibly the result of a hand me down) the veil, and Lucy is pictured with gloves as well.

There are numerous connotations and implications of why young girls had to dress this way for their communion, and the discussion of these images provided the most emphatic and emotional comments that Annette made about the day itself.¹⁷² Exasperated and acrimoniously, Annette described the young girls as “dressed up like a miniature bride pretty much, so whether that was you know, us sort of giving ourselves to the Catholic Church as young brides...who knows”. As in Annette’s first interview she also expressed her annoyance with the double standards and ignorance surrounding what women and girls were expected to wear to church. In her first interview she referred to the wearing of a veil to exemplify her point. While girls and women were instructed to wear them inside the church (as seen in the photographs above), she was never told why and therefore didn’t understand the purpose or ideals behind the double standard that was being enforced.¹⁷³

This section of Annette’s interview in particular, mirrors her first interview’s section regarding her younger Catholic life. The despondency and constant questioning of what she was being taught was brought to the forefront of her mind when presented with these photos of her younger self.

¹⁷² ‘First Communion Attire Rules To Pick The Perfect Dress and Outfits’, *Sophias Style* [website], (8 Feb 2019) <<https://www.sophiasstyle.com/blog/1st-communion-dress-guide/>> para. 4-16, accessed 15 Feb 2020.

¹⁷³ The double standard being that boys were not expected to hide their faces or at least their heads in Church

The images also served to ignite Annette's current discomfort with the kind of rituals and traditions she took part in as a child, without question or argument; as a child she may well have been excited to partake in due to the social and celebratory nature of the event.

As the photographs progressed through Annette's life, there was a drastic change in her demeanour, especially once they focussed on her later teen years and young adult life, specifically her life after leaving school. There was a particular focus on freedom – represented through Annette's new found financial independence – which as can be seen in the later images, enabled her to choose and buy her own new clothes and represent herself in a way that she saw fit; the freedom to socialise with whomever she wanted as she was no longer under the constant gaze and pressure of her school and the nuns that taught her; and lastly yet seemingly the most important to Annette was the independence and freedom that Annette found through travelling.



Fig. 3.9. Here 17-year-old Annette is pictured on her first 'proper' holiday in Perth. She is standing in the foyer of the hotel in which her and her cousin began their trip. Annette's clothing features the highly fashionable, high-waisted, tight and flared jeans with a cropped top that was a halter neck and completely exposed at the back.¹⁷⁴

Annette recalled one of her first major trips away (to Perth) with her cousin when she was 17.

She was 18 and I was 17, but I had a false birth certificate so I could get into hotels and so forth in Western Australia... I think probably here is where my love of travelling started to come into being, travelling around and seeing other parts of Australia. Yeah it was a fun time.

¹⁷⁴ Annette – Private Collection

Annette's recollection of this first taste of freedom reveals the origins of her ongoing love of travel. It also provides an insight into Annette's outgoing nature and inner confidence in her own 'street smarts' and ability to adapt to new situations. There are undoubtedly a multitude of variables throughout Annette's life that could account for these facets of Annette's personality, however, being raised as a female in West Heidelberg amongst so much diversity and apparent danger intimately shaped her confidence, situational awareness and ability to think ahead. Therefore, travel and the prospects of being faced with the unknown in unfamiliar places became far less daunting for somebody who was so capable.

A majority of the photos that Annette had specifically chosen and spoke about at length were photos from her travels around Australia. Body language and the change in voice suggested that these photos provided Annette with a sense of pride and happiness. This is in direct opposition to how Annette behaved and spoke about the images of her younger life, indicating her discomfort with the images of herself as the good, compliant Catholic girl that she left far behind. The photographs Annette chose, emphasise both the highlights of her youth but also foster the image of the liberated, determined young women that is more in line with the strong willed, opinionated and highly independent persona that Annette now projects. Both Annette and Fran used the selection and discussion of the photos to emphasise parts of their lives that align more closely with their current self-image. This relates to both the way in which they see themselves, but also in the way that they want to present themselves to others.

Like the silences and omissions within oral history interviews, photographs present the historian with the task of trying to read into the silences of the image, which are often far more telling than the literal aspects of the image itself. This line of questioning felt the most productive with Annette and Gail – in very different ways.



Fig.3.10. In this cropped image Annette is modelling her hair as she prepared for a night out with her partner at the time. Notably the image features an item of clothing from a store that Annette mentioned on numerous occasions throughout her interviews - 'Merivale and Mr. John'.¹⁷⁵

As Annette presented original photos in the interview, I noticed that numerous images shared a common trait – they had been cut like the image above. Annette had gone through her photo albums and cut a person out of the images, often leaving behind awkward shots of Annette posing or sitting by herself at an event.

¹⁷⁵ Annette – Personal Collection

When Annette reached the images and began to talk about them, she spoke only of what was actually left in the image – her hair or where she had purchased her top from – not the photograph in its previous entirety. The person that had been cut from these images was Annette’s first husband whom she had not yet acknowledged during her previous interviews. Annette was married by age 20 to her first ever serious partner and was divorced within four years of the marriage due to infidelity on the part of her husband. This story and relationship will be expanded upon in chapter four discussing the transition into adulthood. However, it is pertinent here as again Annette decided to omit this facet of her life in favour of other more pleasant aspects, and ones that conform more closely to her current personality and outlook.



Fig. 3.11. This school photograph feature Gail in approximately grade two. At this point in time Gail was attending Oliver Plunkett Primary School in Pascoe Vale.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Gail – Private Collection

Gail also chose to omit significant sections of her life story from the photographs she selected to reflect it. In this photograph of eight-year-old Gail we are presented with the image of a smiling schoolgirl; it is a seemingly simple portrait. However, what is revealing about this image is the circumstances in which I attained it and the fact that it is one of the only childhood photos that Gail had access to. When I first asked my participants to start thinking about what photos they would like to provide and start collating them, Gail immediately stated that would not be able to provide any images as they had been lost in the multiple house moves throughout her life. For the sake of consistency and in disbelief that one would not have any images of their younger selves I asked for at least one image and eventually received the portrait above. The access to childhood photos, however, is dependent on certain conditions of family life.

In Gail's interview she spoke about her mother leaving her father due to his issues with alcohol addiction, and whilst Gail saw this as a positive and strong decision made by her mother for the sake of herself and her siblings, what her childhood photo illustrates is the dramatic and swift nature in which this decision was made and acted out. When her mother decided to leave the family home and her husband, Gail, her siblings and her mother had only a few hours to pack everything they could. The photo albums that would have held Gail's childhood images were left behind in the rush and eventually lost.

What both of these two photographs of Annette and Gail highlight is the power that lies beyond the literal composition of an image, as in both cases it is not what is in the images that sheds light on the person's memories and how they have chosen to recall them – but the circumstances surrounding them. Annette and Gail's photographs and the stories that surround them reveal the deceptive nature of photography and the darker realities that it can mask. Adultery and domestic abuse have been excised from an image to focus on hair and fashion; alcoholism and divorce had been concealed in the image of a happy school child.

Whilst always a part of the lives of women; homicide, sexual assault and violent crime were all statistically trending upwards throughout the 1970s in Victoria and many of my interviewees corroborated these statistics with their own anecdotes throughout their interviews.¹⁷⁷ Violence was a part of their daily experiences, as Fran recalled a typical night out in the group interview

That was like going to the Croxton Park (hotel) and coming out and walking over all the pools of blood on a Thursday night...

None of my participants chose to highlight this level of violence or anger in any of their images. As stated previously, many of the women chose to focus on the narrative of the 1970s that they felt comfortable with – the positive and incredible cultural shift in music and fashion, the feelings of freedom and seemingly sudden opening up of the world just as they were entering into it.

¹⁷⁷ David Indermaur, *Violent Crime in Australia: Interpreting the Trends* (1996), <<https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/tandi061.pdf>>, pgs. 2-6, accessed 4 Sept. 2020.

It is here where the distinct relationship and parallel can be found between the use of oral history interviewing and the use of images as historical resources. In both cases the historian allows for the participant to present their version of the truth, and the participant can choose to omit, emphasise and dictate the memories of their lives in the way that they see fit. These memory variables could be due to their own personal traumas, the ways in which public memory has altered their perception of their lives or simply how their lives since have dictated how they recall the experience of an event in the first place.

Oral and photographic sources also allow one to look beyond the surface of the words spoken, or the image chosen. In the case of Annette and Fran's second interviews, their change in body language, tone and emphasis when talking about different images within the interview revealed how both of the women had chosen to recall and narrate their life story. I was initially shocked by the lack of detail that the women conveyed when encouraged to address the images provided; rarely did the image trigger the types of stories and anecdotes that I had expected or that previous historians had managed to glean from their participants.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, the information provided by the women about the circumstances of the photographs as opposed to what they said about the images themselves became of utmost importance.

¹⁷⁸ Holmes, 'Does it Matter If She Cried?', 56-76; Alistair Thomson, 'Family Photographs and Migrant Memories: Representing Women's Lives in Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *Oral History and Photography* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) 169-187.

The intrinsic and long held concern with both of these methods is the power the interviewee wields to shape and represent an image of the truth.¹⁷⁹ Sometimes this is done with full awareness of their ability to present the version of themselves that they choose, other times this is a subconscious decision and the subject is unaware of their internal biases.¹⁸⁰ Gail's single motherhood is an example of this type of omission, as throughout her interview she was incredibly forthcoming and open talking about her experiences as a single mother, yet she never spoke of her son or his father specifically – always basing this aspect of her life on the narrative of the headstrong and competent young woman that she was. This is possibly due to the relationship she shares with her son now and the nature of the relationship she had once shared with his father.

However, it is a part of the role of an oral historian to be able to comprehend, appreciate and work with those variables of the truth. To understand that just because what is being presented is one person's own truth, does not devalue or diminish its importance to the historical narrative as a whole. In fact, by interrogating, comparing and delving deeper into each person's version of the truth they provide complexity, richness and nuance to a historical event.

¹⁷⁹ Alistair Thomson, 'Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History', *Oral History Review*, 34/1 (2007), 49-70.

¹⁸⁰ William W. Cutler, 'Accuracy in Oral History Interviewing', *Historical Methods Newsletter*, 3/3 (1970), 1-7; Barbara Tuchman, 'Distinguishing the Significant from the Insignificant', *Radcliffe Quarterly*, 56 (1972), 9-10.

In this chapter I have looked beyond the confines of home and the educational institutions that the women attended in order to examine their place in the broader Australian society. Through the use of visual mediums, the ways in which the women strategically conducted and represented themselves within the context of a society that was becoming more progressive and somewhat dangerous was investigated, whilst still maintaining and anchoring themselves to their moral upbringings. On a more conceptual level the visual mediums allowed for a deeper engagement with the ways in which the women presented themselves and their memories throughout the interviewing process and they relate to the concepts of truth within the historical context.

CHAPTER FOUR – TRANSITIONING INTO ADULTHOOD

In the following quote Sophie discusses what it felt like for the girls her age going into the outside world after leaving the confines of school and being influenced by the movements taking place in Melbourne.

I think we became more worldly; I think we became more aware and that there was more than just you know the closed little [home]. Look! there's a whole world out there, it's not just us. It's not just Melbourne.¹⁸¹

As Sophie alludes to in her quote, for many of the women, this time in their life was a catalyst for monumental changes in how they saw themselves and their place in the world. In this chapter I will be exploring the women's later teens year and their transition into adult life. For many of the women these years marked the end of their time in the Catholic education system and their first time living outside of the influence of their parents. Firstly, the relationships that the young women shared provided support and strength throughout their teen years, paying particular attention to the morality of their choices will be explored. Secondly, I focus on how Catholic schools addressed career opportunities and professional advancement with the young women whilst still managing to police and maintain gendered expectations in doing so. Thirdly, I will analyse the life choices made by many of the women in regard to education, romance and career after leaving school; this furthers the understanding of the balancing act the women performed between abiding by Catholic morals and values and attempting to make practical choices for their lives within the context of the broader community and away from the structure of school and home.

¹⁸¹Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

Friendships and relationships

Throughout the interviewing process the women (especially those who attended school together) often noted that one of the main factors that aided them in getting through their daily struggles at both home and school, was the friendships and bonds they fostered with the other girls. Like many women their age without any truly trusted adult figure in their lives, the girls they often had no choice but to turn to one another for guidance and support. Even those with trusted adult figures felt more at ease confiding in girls their own age. Lucy discussed why the young women relied so heavily on another for information in the group interview, with a particular focus on the migrant perspective:

We didn't have our parents to go to as migrant children, so people that we would speak to would be our peers and we would hope that they would have more knowledge than what we had about what was happening either to ourselves and bodies or to the people around us.¹⁸²

Whilst Lucy focusses specifically on the migrant experience in her quote, it was made clear by the Irish Catholic participants that they also shared in this feeling of censorship with their parents: even if they had a close relationship like Annette and Gail did with their mothers, they were never going to have that complete honesty and transparency that they had with their friends or, in the case of Bernadette her sister, for fear of judgement and reprimand. All of the participants insinuated throughout the course of multiple interviews that the views and morals of their parents heavily intersected with those that they were being taught on a daily basis by the nuns and priests who oversaw their education.

¹⁸² Lucy, 'Group Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

The guidance and morals espoused by their parents carried the same judgements borne of their Catholic religion. Therefore, if the girls wanted to confide in somebody or find information that wasn't going to be skewed by the values of their parents or educators, like most teenage girls of the time, they only had each other to turn to.¹⁸³ Bernadette was a point of difference to the other participants: with a social life strictly controlled by her parents, she found her strongest and most influential relationship with her older sister as opposed to school friends.

Fran specifically mentioned the level of trust and lack of judgement amongst the school mates, stating "I think also with our group and maybe our school, I don't know what it was, but it was non-judgemental. Everyone just accepted everyone, I don't know if it was the same at other schools, but we were just so lucky."¹⁸⁴ Trust and confidentiality were highly prized by the young women. Their support for one another and their maintenance of privacy was because many of the women were acutely aware of what the consequences of broken trust would be for one another in their homelives. Fran, Lucy and Sophie all echoed the sentiment that physical retribution within Italian households was commonplace when family reputation was deemed at risk. This style of corporal punishment, though not limited to migrant Italian families, was commonplace within the community due to its historical legacy and cultural prevalence.¹⁸⁵ Therefore if women breached this trust, they risked exposing their friends to such punishment.

¹⁸³ Jacqueline P. Wiseman, 'Friendship: Bonds and Binds in a Voluntary Relationship', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 3/2 (1986), 191-211.

¹⁸⁴ Fran, 'Group Interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2020)

¹⁸⁵ Stefania Carioli, 'Historical legacies and use of corporal punishment of children in the home, in Italy', *Rivista Italiana di Educazione Familiare*, 16/1 (2020), 25-42.

In the women's emphasis on the importance of the relationships they shared with their friends, the question of hindsight and how their memories had been affected by the friendship they currently share was raised. However, the women did mention on multiple occasions that they don't just recognise the importance of these relationships in retrospect, they were in fact intensely aware at the time of just how important their friendships were in their lives. I attribute this to the immediate nature of the benefits these relationships provided for the young women, like most female friendship groups – Catholic or otherwise, the support, advice, understanding and solace that the women found in each other on a daily basis as opposed to their own homes provided a very tangible and obvious reason for them to appreciate each other at the time.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Matthew L. Clark and Marla Ayers, 'Friendship Expectations and Evaluations', *Youth and Society*, 24/3 (1993), 299-313; Gerald E. Jones and Myron H. Dembo and Gerald P. Jones, 'Age and Sex Role Differences in Intimate Friendships During Childhood and Adolescence', *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 35/4 (1989), 445-462.

Geography and Exposure

In both the secondary rounds of interviews and the group interviews, Annette, Lucy and Fran discussed their early exposure to adult themes and the darker aspects of life. They focused on and compared the impact of this exposure and its ability to force them to “toughen up” and adapt to whatever they were going to be thrust into in life. This is in stark contrast to Bernadette who felt that she was greatly underprepared and naïve when she entered adulthood. The primary factors that caused this forced awareness, or in Bernadette’s case a lack thereof, are geographical, socio-economic, and cultural.

Geography quickly became the most recognisable cause for the differing experiences between Bernadette and the other participants, as she spent her childhood and teenage years in Geelong. Bernadette noted on numerous occasions throughout her interviews that not only was she raised in a smaller (at that point in time) country town; her parents were also very strict on the whereabouts and movement of herself and her sisters and restricted their social lives to school and home. Although Bernadette may have been provided more opportunities for freedom had she lived in Melbourne, given her family, it is likely she still would have experienced a very sheltered upbringing.

The closest that Bernadette ever felt to actual freedom and exposure to the outside world was at the ‘stranger camps’ organised by her school in which select students from different Catholic schools from the local area were all sent to a camp together to meet one another and socialise. Bernadette explained the stranger camps to the other women in the group interview:

There was about 80-100 of us thereit was another form of retreat and ‘getting to know you’ so you knew you had all of these connections when you left. We all got a bible and signed each other’s bible ...Of course [it was] only Catholic friends! It was only Catholic schools.¹⁸⁷

Bernadette indicated that one of the primary drives for the stranger camps was for the schools to foster relationships amongst Catholic youths that they could carry into life after school. Whilst this two-day camp presented Bernadette with some opportunity for freedom and experiences outside of her home, she still remained sheltered in a Catholic bubble. Such an approach was promoted by the work of sister Mary Winefride who advised early on in her guide for young Catholics *Approaching Maturity*, that it was better to stay within the Catholic community, as those outside of the Catholic church only served as temptations for sin and to impede your ability to make moral judgements.¹⁸⁸ Considering just how sheltered Bernadette was, when asked about how she felt when she moved to Melbourne to start her career after school she stated “I don’t think Catholic school prepared me well for the real world personally”.¹⁸⁹ She believed lack of exposure due to her parents and her Catholic education put her at a disadvantage in her young adult years as she felt she had to catch up with everybody around her.

¹⁸⁷ Bernadette, ‘Group Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’ [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2020)

¹⁸⁸ Winefride, *Approaching Maturity*

¹⁸⁹ Bernadette, ‘Group Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’

This experience is a complete contrast to the women who lived in the inner-city suburbs of Melbourne who felt that their location and proximity to fashion, music and culture meant that they were regularly exposed to both the good and bad aspects of Melbourne – despite the attempts of both school and parents to keep them within the ‘Catholic bubble’. This leads into the other determining factor of the girl’s exposure and awareness: their cultural background.

As mentioned earlier, Annette, who lived relatively far away from her high school, suffered ridicule from the other children in her area when she travelled to and from home each day. This abuse was based around the fact that Annette was attending a Catholic school as opposed to a public one, which her uniform denoted. The verbal abuse eventually became physical as Annette retold one instance in which she was set upon by a group of siblings from the local public school and physically assaulted until she fought back, calling the siblings ‘bloody bastards’, which ironically Annette felt more guilty about (because she swore), than the fact that she was merely defending herself and was the victim of an attack. This incident is revealing of just how the women were exposed to the difficulties of not only their lower socio-economic neighbourhoods, but also the issues of secularisation in Australia which was still relatively prominent in the women’s childhood years in the 1960s, but began to slowly change and ease as the women entered their teenage and young adult years.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Graeme Davison, ‘Religion’, in Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Australia vol.2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 233-236

¹⁹⁰ Sectarianism in Australia was still a facet of 1970s Australia. However, as the census’ from 1966, 1971 and 1976 indicate there was a major trend in turning away from identifying as either Catholic or Protestant,

Annette used the same phrase as Sophie, 'sink or swim', to describe living in these areas and dealing with these threats on a constant basis; the young women learnt to adapt and modify themselves situationally in order to function freely and happily in their respective communities. Annette also alluded to how these experiences and exposure helped in developing a certain mental acuity and situational awareness that she has carried with her ever since; she describes this as "always having your peripherals going".

Heavily entwined with socio-economic status of the women was the migrant identity of half my participants (the Italian women interviewed were a mix of first and second-generation migrants). This meant that whilst already navigating the working-class identity, many of my participants were also dealing with the hardships and misunderstandings that came along with their cultural heritage and how it was perceived in Australia at the time. Sophie spoke about this at length in her interview in which she stated that she and the other migrant children were perceived as dumb and mocked by both non-migrant children and by their teachers.¹⁹¹

Lucy also highlighted these attitudes as they developed during her teenage years into more physically violent and overt expressions such as her nightly walks home from school

instead choosing to identify as neither. See. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends* (1994), cat. No. 4102.0, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/10072ec3ffc4f7b4ca2570ec00787c40!OpenDocument>>, para 1-4, accessed 5 Sept. 2020.

¹⁹¹ Sophie interview, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

We were discriminated against, we were bullied...I had to walk home under the subway, and I'd get beaten up by the Fitzroy High girls...I'd risk my life crossing Hoddle street, just so I didn't get beaten up by the girls.¹⁹²

This anecdote emphasises the unforgiving nature of the communities where most of the young women lived throughout their teens and the type of bullying they received. However when discussing this in the group interview, what immediately followed this story was Fran and Lucy agreeing that although what happened to them was far from acceptable and put them through a lot of mental anguish throughout their adolescence, it did provide them with a sense of 'toughness' and enabled them to grow a 'thick skin' that would prepare them for anything that life threw at them. Such an attitude is common within migrant communities across the globe and is often referred to as 'migrant resilience'.¹⁹³ Arguably, the style of resilience differed between the young women and their families, as the parents and wider community strived to maintain the practices and traditions that they remembered from home – therefore remaining resilient in the face of cultural change. Alternatively, their daughters were forced into accepting change and embraced the secondary definition of resilience in the way that they adapted to their lives and the choices they were given.

Threaded throughout this section was the concept that whilst the experiences that the young women went through were incredibly difficult and scary at the time, the women all credited their exposure to them to becoming the women they are today. While they are

¹⁹² Lucy, 'Group Interviewed by Bethany Higgins' [sound recording] (La Trobe University, 2020)

¹⁹³ Abraham P. Greeff and Joanita Holtzkamp, 'The Prevalence of Resilience in Migrant Families', *Family & Community Health*, 30/3 (2007), 189-200.

unable to change their pasts and what they grew up with, they felt the most positive means in which to deal with this was to learn to appreciate the skill and qualities they fostered in the women for use in later life.

Catholic schooling: Careers and further education

Throughout the interviews many of the women specifically noted the different professional and educational opportunities offered to young men and women. These differences can be attributed to both class, gender and institutional factors. Amongst the women there was a spread of different education levels - some leaving high school at the first opportunity for work at 16, some completing their HSC and one attending university.

In her interview Fran recalled the extent of the careers education provided by her Catholic high school in the mid 1970s

I remember when we were in form four our careers education. We had a mothercraft nurse that came in and she got us all to bath a doll, and that was our careers education.¹⁹⁴

Fran's memory exemplifies one of the shared experiences that tied all of the women's high-school educations together, regardless of when they finished and to what level. They were all encouraged into the caretaker professions that were deemed suitable for women in the workforce. All of my participants recall being taught subjects like shorthand, sewing, bookkeeping, deportment and having a course on mothercraft nursing – in which they were

¹⁹⁴ Fran, '3/9/2019 Fran Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

taught how to care for infants. This course in particular was already being called into question in Australia by the mid 1970s by feminist groups across the country.¹⁹⁵

Annette describes how the mothercraft program was implemented in her commercial college in the mid 1970s:

In secondary school there was no sex education, the only sex education we got was when we were told what one of our other career paths would be, and that would be to be a mothercraft nurse. You're either going to be a mothercraft nurse or a mother. The mothercraft nurse would come in once a week, and I think it was for a whole term and we had like art folders where we had to put together a project about being able to change babies nappies and what food we should give them, so there was all these little stick figures and we had to cut out cards with babies' photos on them and make the albums or art folios look pretty and present it . And at the end of it, we got a certificate to say that we could be a mothercraft nurse.¹⁹⁶

The vivid ways in which mothercraft nursing was recalled by all of the participants served to show what a distinct and memorable part of their education it was. The emphasis in their memories reflects the strength of the push from their schools for them to aspire to maternal careers and eventual motherhood after they had left school.

¹⁹⁵'Mothercraft course "unrealistic" students', *Tribune*, 6 Oct. 1976, 11, in Trove [online database], accessed 3 Sept. 2020.

¹⁹⁶Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

All but one of my participants attended commercial colleges in inner city suburbs of Melbourne, which were intended to provide young women with skills such as shorthand, typing and consumer education in order to go into the workplace confidently.

Lucy stated that it was common knowledge amongst the girls that the schools and their parents' intention was for the girls to leave school, work for a few years (in which time they would hopefully find a husband) and then once married, leave the workforce to pursue motherhood; "that girls' education, Catholic girls' education wasn't warranted. It was just like you'd just go on have children and you'd be married..."¹⁹⁷

For the women with Italian parents, this view was further compounded in their home lives. Both Sophie and Lucy recalled that due to cultural reasons discussed earlier in regard to Italian women working, there was a hesitance in allowing their daughters to enter the workforce so early, if at all. Such activity may have damaged the reputation and status of their family in the eyes of other Italians in Melbourne and overseas. There was also the insinuation that if they entered the workforce it would disrupt the 'timeline' of expected marriage, motherhood and domesticity.¹⁹⁸ Working offered the young women social and financial freedoms that they had previously never experienced and may tempt the women to delay serious relationships and potential marriage.

¹⁹⁷ Lucy, 'Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

Whilst the participants spoke from a purely Catholic perspective, it is worth noting that in 1972 3% of school children finished year 12, so this lack of emphasis on finishing or furthering education was something that was felt across the religious divide and across Australia in general.

¹⁹⁸ 'Mothercraft course "unrealistic" students', *Tribune*, 6 Oct. 1976, 11, in Trove [online database], accessed 3 Sept. 2020.

Sophie and Lucy also addressed other reasons as to why they were made to finish their education. Sophie felt that her father valued education because it was an opportunity that was denied to him in his youth: due to the socio-economic status of his family it was simply not viable or practical for a young boy from an agricultural background to have more than a basic education.

Lucy emphasised that one of the reasons her father valued education so much was because he attended night school when he came to Australia to learn English. She commented “the people that he mixed with were all Australians, so I think that helped in the way he could think, he could forward think”.¹⁹⁹

Lucy inferred here that it was the Australian mindset that enabled her father to progress, taking him out of the “village mentality” that he had grown up in and updating his way of thinking. In both Lucy and Sophie’s case the ability of their parents to provide more than what they received in their own childhood became the overwhelmingly emotional motivating factor in continuing their daughter’s education and making sure that their daughters took advantage of every opportunity.

By the mid to late 1960s both the Catholic and state education systems had come to terms with the fact that modern women wanted to, or in many cases were required to enter the workforce, but they continued to promote the idea that working was merely a hiatus on the path to the ideal goal of becoming a wife and mother.²⁰⁰ That was the pathway for ‘Good Catholic Girls’. If women insisted on working it needed to be in roles that suited their

¹⁹⁹ Lucy, ‘Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

²⁰⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book Australia* (2001), 1301.0, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/A75909A2108CECAACA2569DE002539FB?Open>>, para. 39-43, accessed 19th June 2019.

feminine talents – nursing, teaching and secretarial work were examples of occupations that still required the traditional supportive, nurturing and caretaking traits expected of women (also known as ‘social motherhood’).²⁰¹

Therefore, the subjects that the young women were taught in secondary school were designed to segue perfectly into these professions, whether that was through further or higher education or via government and private companies going into the schools and recruiting the students, which is how both Annette and Fran found employment when they left school in form four.

Whilst the young women were not wives or mothers yet, they were still taking care of men and supporting others in a professional capacity. Deviations from these types of professions were often looked down upon and hopes immediately dashed by the nuns who educated the girls, which fostered a disbelief in one’s own potential. Often a family’s socio-economic status also rendered these professional goals unattainable. Annette, for example, recalled expressing her interest in becoming an air hostess to one of the nuns that taught her:

I remember saying to one of the nuns one day, I’d love to be an air hostess and she said, ‘oh that’s ridiculous, you know they prefer men in the airlines rather than women’. Well why is there so many air hostesses? ‘Oh well you’re just servants anyway’. So... you got put down upon for different things like that...²⁰²

In contrast, Bernadette (the only participant not to attend a commercial college) was encouraged and supported by her teachers to apply for further education. In Bernadette’s

²⁰¹ Glenda Strachan, 'Still working for the man? Women's employment experiences in Australia since 1950', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 45/1 (2010), 117-130.

²⁰² Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

case, it was her parents' wishes and socio-economic factors that were the driving forces in her inability to gain further education outside of the caretaking field:

They (nuns) talked about university, and that was never going to be an option for me, but decided I was going to be a librarian. ...I and (I) applied for it at Ballarat university and I got in, and I wasn't allowed to go because my parents were never going to be able to afford to send me to (university). Growing up I knew that I was going to have to leave home and get a job, in that order basically.²⁰³

Annette and Bernadette shared very similar socio-economic backgrounds, both came from working class families who didn't offer encouragement in regard to tertiary education, and with at least one parent consistently working at all times they were also both very aware that working would be their first priority the moment they left school. The difference in their individual experiences appears to be the relationships that the women shared with specific nuns and the value that the school placed in pushing students towards further education or in moving their students into the workforce as quickly as possible. In the case of Annette, she attended a much larger school where competing for entry to university may have been much more intimidating and difficult. Annette was adamant that although she received the marks and a scholarship to continue her education, she didn't feel encouraged by the nuns and felt that her offer was simply a matter of the school reaching a quota. This is in comparison to Bernadette who went to a smaller and more isolated school in which the

²⁰³ Bernadette, 'Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

student completing their education and moving on to university may have been more of a source pride and added to the school's reputation than just simply being employable (which admittedly was the point of commercial colleges).

Annette confirmed Lucy's earlier view of young women's education not being important, observing that the female students were being coerced into very specific careers and having their academic potential quashed. Meanwhile, the women knew boys from the neighbouring schools who were being offered a litany of professional options and having their intelligence celebrated and cultivated. The women acknowledged the unfair pressure on young men in the form of the traditional masculine expectation to be the bread winner for the family but were conscious that boys were offered far more in the realm of academic progression, career options and even in vocational training than young women were.

Boys were offered the opportunity to find a passion and build the skills necessary to follow that into a career – whether that be vocational, corporate or academic. Booklets such as *A Virile Guide to Manhood* and *The Guide through Boyhood* validated the women's perceptions.²⁰⁴ In comparison, young women seemed to have their career paths chosen already and were only taught the skills required to facilitate movement into a small pool of preselected professions. Annette recalled this comparative lack of opportunity when she spoke about what the Catholic boy's school across the road was instilling into their students.

I sort of think of the comparisons of the boys being told, the boy's at St.

Thomas' being told that they had to better themselves for a higher education

²⁰⁴Percival J. L. Kenny, *The Guide to Virile Manhood: A Reliable Sex Education Booklet for Young Men* (Sydney: Father and Son Welfare Movement, 1954) 29-36; Family Life Movement. *The Guide Through Boyhood: A Reliable Book for Australian Boys 8 to 11 Years* (Sydney: Father and Son Welfare Movement, 1970).

because they would become accountants and bank managers, and you know pilots and police officers and all of these amazing things. Whereas the females were pretty much office people.²⁰⁵

The disillusionment evident in Annette's memory stemmed from a place of envy, the manifestation of the fact that she felt she was never encouraged to look towards further education or university even though she was intellectually capable, due to her socio-economic status. Her experience was compounded by the recognition that even if she had been able to pursue her education or career, she would be limited by her gender and the jobs considered suitable for working women at that time.

Lucy and Sophie, who both attended the same school as Annette and Fran, spoke about why, unlike their friends in similar circumstances, they were allowed to continue with their education, at the behest of their fathers in particular. They both emphasised that the value and merit their parents placed on female education and in their daughters' intelligence was a deviation from the norm. Quoting their parents saying things such as "makes no difference if she's a boy or girl, if she's smart enough to go on she'll go on" highlights a schism forming from the gendered and cultural belief that education was simply not as pertinent for women as men that was widely up-held until the 1960s.²⁰⁶ The encouragement they received to finish school and in the case of Sophie, university, was an exception.

²⁰⁵ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

²⁰⁶ Lucy, 'Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

Sophie recalled her father telling her that “Anybody could take anything away from me, but no-one could take my education away from me dad always said. I think dad was quite wise you knowhe said ‘after HSC you can do what you like, you don’t have to go to uni, you don’t have to do anything’, but he said ‘you have to do that [HSC], because then if you decide to go, at least you’ve got that behind you’”.²⁰⁷ It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why some families placed more value on university than others. However, the principle factor that seems to have affected this choice was having a migrant background. This upbringing tended to lead to an emphasis on constantly moving up and being ‘better’ than the generation before, whether that meant finishing in form four, completing high school or moving on to university. Each generation always needed to take it that one step further.²⁰⁸

This discussion highlights how the gendered expectations of the young women went far beyond the realms of their sexual and moral education and were embedded into their academic and professional lives and goals outside of their high school careers. The women felt they were being groomed to adhere with Catholic teachings even after they had left the control and structure of their school years. Arguably and much to the chagrin of many of the participants, their schools were successful in doing so in multiple different facets of the

²⁰⁷ Sophie, ‘Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins’

²⁰⁸ Gonneke W.J.M. Stevens and Wilma A.M. Vollebergh, ‘Mental Health in migrant children’, *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 49/3 (2008), 276-279.

The only Italian Catholic participant that did not pursue higher education was Fran. However, she made it quite clear that she exercised a considerable amount of freedom in her choices compared to other girls with her background and her parents had little to no say in her life decisions.

women's lives. This section also demarcates the last years under these rules and control, therefore providing a juxtaposition to the next stage of the women's lives as they entered the workforce and were confronted with adult decisions.

Small acts of Feminism

Many of the anecdotes told by the women about their older high school and early adult years reflect feminist values in their decision making. The women made it clear throughout their interviews that they were not aware of feminism's effects on the choices that they made at the time. Even in the present the women tended to place more emphasis on the practical factors that informed their decision making, not the conceptual; this is highly reflective of the concept that unlike the typical notion of middle-class feminism in which women participated in consciousness raising exercises and were often a part of academic or student circles, working class women were not afforded the time, educational environment nor socio-economic status to explore feminism in such a way.²⁰⁹

Each of the women exemplified this element of practicality in their own stories, they also exemplified how feminist decision making could be implemented in multiple facets of their lives. In the case of Bernadette, she made it clear at many points throughout her interview that although she was dating within her first six months of moving to Melbourne and she had the expectation that she would find someone and marry, she had prioritised her studies and her career over marriage and children stating "I wouldn't get married while I was training and while I was studying...".²¹⁰

²⁰⁹Susan Margarey, *Dangerous Ideas*, 57-73

²¹⁰ Bernadette, 'Group Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

So whilst Bernadette's expectations do fall in line with her Catholic upbringing and the idea that marriage is the ultimate goal of womanhood, the mere fact that she decided to establish herself and her career first implies that she saw her career as not just a stepping stone to marriage but as an important part of her life that she had not only been working towards, but given up other passions to pursue.

Bernadette's rationale for her decision is borne of her family's well-established expectation that the children would need to move out of home and become self-reliant immediately after their schooling ended. This is highly indicative of Bernadette's family's particular working-class background and a demonstration of the way that the financial practicalities of life often outweighed the loftier, more romantic desires.

In contrast, Lucy's discussion of her romantic life choices reveals other priorities, a point evident when she recalled her decision to run away with and marry her now husband:

No one was ever going to tell me what to do or how I was going to do it...obviously what my parents wanted was for me to marry a nice Italian boy you know and do all of the right things. I did absolutely [the] opposite, I went to live with somebody who had been married and didn't get married for a while after that, so no one was ever going to tell me what to do ever! No Catholic upbringing, no Italian parents, nothing!²¹¹

²¹¹ Lucy, 'Group Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

Lucy's emphasis on what her parents wanted indicated that she was deeply aware of what was expected of her, with particular stress on her love life and potential husband.

The most intriguing aspect of Lucy's responses and stories about how she rebelled against both the religious and cultural expectations that she was brought up with, was the comparison with the way Lucy spoke in her individual interview. In her first interview Lucy acknowledged that there were flaws and issues with the expectations placed on young women by both their parents and by Catholic schools they attended. However, she had by far the most positive recollections of the women who taught the girls and of the morals that were being instilled in them in general, making the point numerous times in both the individual and group interview that the nuns that taught the girls only wanted the best for them and wanted to guide them into becoming respectable young women.

It was striking that Lucy concurrently recognised the Catholic education system and its influence on her parents' morals as a positive influence in her life, yet completely defied all of them through her behaviour and choices, on the grounds that she knew living by them wouldn't be conducive to her happiness or a loving, supportive relationship. Lucy could predict what her life would have been like if she had followed her parents' expectations of who she was going to marry and why she chose to go against their wishes, stating: "I'm not going to make that mistake...where I'm going to end up you know in a relationship and in a marriage [that's] going to be loveless and I'm not going to be happy in it and I just wasn't going to do it".²¹² Lucy clearly suggests that to follow both the Catholic doctrine and cultural expectation would have been a mistake.

²¹² Lucy, 'Group Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

Lucy's story is a stark contrast to Annette who openly questioned and defied Catholic teachings from a very young age. In hindsight Annette realised that she had in fact gone on to lead the perfect example of a Catholic life – she left school, she worked in an appropriately feminine profession, met a romantic partner and was married by a relatively young age. However, behind this façade of a blissful, good Catholic life, she experienced dishonesty, adultery and blatant psychological abuse:

I met this guy and he was married at the time but he separated probably six months after meeting him and he sort of cocooned me a bit and took me away from a lot of my friends, that's when I lost contact with a lot of the girls from school too... He didn't like that [Annette's friendships with other women] either, he wanted me to sort of move away from my past...²¹³

Here Annette exposed the beginnings of her first marriage, her first child and the psychologically abusive behaviour of her partner: her husband tried to use isolation as a means of controlling and ridding Annette of her independent behaviour. By separating her from her friends and those who encouraged Annette's personality she temporarily lost her independence and did in essence become the paragon of the meek, supportive, Catholic wife.

One of the aspects of the relationship that Annette brought up that felt intrinsically linked to the education that she had received in school, was the sexual relationship and

²¹³ Annette, 'Group interviewed by Bethany Higgins'

philandering that had infiltrated her relationship within the first six months of her first marriage.

One anecdote, involving Annette and her mother, painfully evoked the lessons of Sister Mary Winefride and reinforced the powerful manner in which these lessons affected women across multiple generations.²¹⁴

Mum said to me “he’s been a married man and you know there’s things in his life he needs and wants” and god knows what she thought I was doing! And he was working at St. Kilda police station at the time and I said “Oh well! If he wants that he can go and get it from anyone down that way”. That was stupid, but that was just my take on it...”²¹⁵

Annette’s anecdote reveals the ways the morals and assumptions of both women have been moulded by their Catholic upbringing. Both in Annette’s mother’s assumption that due to her daughter’s fiancée’s former marriage that he would have sexual expectations and it was Annette’s duty to meet them, and Annette’s response to her mother about her partner finding sexual gratification elsewhere. Both of the women’s opinions conform to the culturally accepted tropes about men’s sexuality. First, that men’s sexual urges are hydraulic and therefore their sexuality and sexual behaviour is much more difficult to control than women’s.²¹⁶ Second, and in relation to those urges, because of their overwhelming strength and control over men, it is the duty of his partner to make sure that they are satisfied, if not, men cannot be blamed or held accountable for finding ‘release’ and gratification elsewhere.

²¹⁴Winefride, *Approaching Maturity*

²¹⁵ Annette, ‘Group interviewed by Bethany Higgins’

²¹⁶ Featherstone, *Let’s Talk About Sex*, 47.

Annette's dismissive attitude and comment about her fiancée is indicative of the kind of hopelessness that surrounded the idea of even trying to restrain male sexuality, and that whilst a woman was allowed sexual pleasure within the context of her marriage, like mentioned in all of the sex education booklets; it was ultimately only secondary in comparison to their partner's. In this very short exchange between Annette and her mother, morals regarding women's sexual agency (lack thereof), double standards and the role that sexual intimacy plays in a relationship are highlighted, specifically in how they affected both Annette's mother's advice and the way in which Annette viewed her sexual relationship with her partner.

After Annette eventually discovered the lengths of her husband's womanising, she made the decision to leave her marriage with her child, deciding to put both herself and her daughter first. Annette's choice to get a divorce (even with a child involved) was not uncommon, as divorce rates in Australia grew exponentially since the introduction of the 'no-faults' divorce in 1976.²¹⁷ However, as made clear in *Approaching Maturity*, divorce was unequivocally condemned by the Catholic Church and in general was surrounded by a social stigma.²¹⁸ This attitude was highlighted when Annette sought guidance from a Catholic priest and was instructed to essentially 'put up with' her adulterous husband and 'try harder' for the sake of their marriage.

²¹⁷ Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Divorce rates in Australia*, Catalogue No. 3310.0, <[https://aifs.gov.au/facts-and-figures/divorce-rates-australia#:~:text=The%20crude%20divorce%20rate%20\(divorces,trending%20down%20in%20the%202000s.>](https://aifs.gov.au/facts-and-figures/divorce-rates-australia#:~:text=The%20crude%20divorce%20rate%20(divorces,trending%20down%20in%20the%202000s.>) para. 1-3, accessed 25 of July 2020.

²¹⁸ Winefride, *Approaching Maturity*

The advice provided to Annette was indisputably more concerned with both the sanctity of the institution and the image and reputation of her marriage as opposed to the actual emotional and mental damage that was being caused to Annette herself. This is in keeping with consistent themes throughout the women's lives and in turn this thesis: the Catholic Church's preoccupation with women upholding the façade of perfection as opposed to acknowledging and trying to work with the practicalities of modern life and human emotion, the erasure of women's agency, their wellbeing and their pleasure in the pursuit of the ideal of female perfection.

Up until this point in Annette's life she had questioned and rebelled against her Catholic education. However, she still largely lived by and presented a 'textbook' Catholic life. This episode in Annette's life became the catalyst for her to leave much of her Catholic upbringing and morals behind. Annette acknowledged that, upon reflection, this experience with the clergy member was a defining moment in which she realised that she could no longer turn to her faith and the Church for comfort in moments of crisis. Such a recognition severely weakened her already difficult relationship with faith and the Catholic institution. Her first 'official' departure from her faith came in the form of her divorce from her husband and Annette recognised this as a turning point in her personal life in which she was able to prioritise herself and what she wanted for her life; this included travel, friendships and a new relationship.

The memories of Lucy and Annette juxtapose two women who shared very similar personalities as teenagers (intelligent, outspoken and curious) yet diverged so greatly in their young adult years. Highlighting the way in which the composition of a life narrative can differ so greatly due to present circumstances, Lucy, who recalled her Catholic upbringing with nostalgia, shunned all of those expectations in favour of the decidedly feminist decision to make choices for her own personal happiness. Whereas Annette, who was more open in her dislike for conservative Catholic morals, unknowingly fell into that life herself and found that the reality of living by Catholic morals and lessons was far more complex and difficult than what she had anticipated. In eventually making the practical and arguably feminist decision to leave her husband and separate herself more officially from her Catholic upbringing, Annette found herself in a much happier place, a place in which feminism opened up the space where women's needs, pleasures and employment could be considered as important in their own right, not just because of what they contributed to a marriage or family.

For the participants in this research project the transition into adulthood and real life was marked by an abandonment of many of the perfectionist and Catholic values that they grew up with. Gail asserted her independence as a single mother, Fran entered the (morally questionable) entertainment industry, Annette divorced, Bernadette prioritised her career and education, Lucy's chose an 'unsuitable' partner and Sophie pursued tertiary education. They may not have separated themselves from their Catholic values completely, yet they reworked and re-evaluated what was practical and useful in their day to day lives.

This relinquishment of conservative social and religious values in favour of the more practical and covertly feminist can also be linked to the working-class background of the women; practicality and realism are key for those already encumbered by so many socio-economic obstacles.

For the participants this transition into working life and adulthood was the first instance in which they needed to navigate this decision-making process both without the guidance of parents or educational facilities, or without the constantly enforced concepts like Catholic feminine perfection, shame and responsibility for reputation. Many of the women opted for pragmatism when given the choice and carried this ethos and logic on into their later lives. Raised 'Good Catholic Girls', they declined to abide by the strictures of good Catholic women.

CHAPTER FIVE – ENTERING THE REAL WORLD

For most of my participants there was a pride that they shared in regard to their younger selves – they were proud of the curious, social, carefree and ‘take no shit’ attitudes that they felt they represented. Annette summarised this attitude when she spoke about her fiery nature when at events as a teenager:

Yeah and never stood back from an argument, didn’t like if we were at a party and I felt that somebody was putting down one of the girls I would stand up for them.

Yeah so that was sort of, I supposed that’s me being a feminist.²¹⁹

This recollection of what feminism meant to Annette during her later teenage years highlighted her agency, a theme that becomes prevalent throughout this chapter. As they matured and engaged with the broader world, the women began to define themselves on their own terms, as Annette had done by defining her feminism as her standing up for other women and being unwilling to stand back from conflict. The women’s concept of feminism, whilst moulded by others, was an identity they could accept, reject or manipulate to suit their own needs. A similar trend occurred with their relationship with faith in later life.

This chapter addresses the more conceptual and broader themes in the lives of the women I have interviewed. I explore the young Catholic relationship to feminism and how the women’s exposure to feminism through the Australian media moulded and formed the young women’s ability to relate to and understand feminism and its many facets.

²¹⁹ Annette, ‘8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins’.

Then the women's self-reflection and evolution, both in their shifting attitudes towards feminism and their changing relationships with their Catholic faith will be considered, arguing that the process of personal redefinition that the women went through was the product of being unable to practically exist within the confines of perfection set by Catholicism.²²⁰ This prompted the women to make their own choices in how they expressed their faith.

²²⁰ Jill Julius Matthews, *Good and Mad Women: The Historical Construction of Femininity in Twentieth Century Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1984), 200-202.

Feminism

After the first round of individual interviews it became clear that half of the women felt completely disengaged with second wave feminism and the other half recognised the effects that feminism had on their lives, yet did not engage with it fully either.²²¹ Every woman had a different definition of feminism and they also tended to have a different focus within feminism that they fixated on, whether that be the aggressive image of protesting, the idea of women being equal to men, or the breaking down of traditional gender roles. How they felt about feminism currently was heavily affected by how they originally engaged or disengaged with feminism and the path their lives took after leaving school.

Gail, born in 1953, was the oldest of the group and the only participant to identify with second wave feminism's goals throughout the 1970s. This is heavily linked to Gail's experience of being a young, single mother who had to be self-sufficient and resilient and refused to let the judgement of others define or hurt her. It is not surprising that Gail identified with second wave feminism's policies regarding childcare reforms, the acceptance of working mothers and valuing independent strong-willed women.²²² Gail shared an anecdote from a shopping trip just after the birth of her son in the late 1970s.

²²¹ There are differences between feminism and the women liberation movement. Whilst seen as interchangeable the WLM was a more radical branch of feminism and was usually more concerned with intellectualised feminist politics and philosophies. See. Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1999), 231-251.

²²² Feminist lobbying was instrumental in the opening of communal childcare centres and the eventual introduction of the single mothers' pensions in 1973 which lasted until 1977 and became the single parents pension after being extended to single fathers: Keri Phillips, 'Second Wave Feminism', *Rear Vision* [podcast], (Australian Broadcasting Cooperation, 13 October), <<https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/second-wave-feminism/4983136>> listened to 17 October 2018.

She used this to demonstrate the type of judgements that she and other young single mothers faced on a daily basis: A sales assistant asked:

The girl ... [said] 'oh whose baby?' and I said 'that's my baby', 'oh you're very young' and I said yes and she said 'oh you must have been married very young'. I just turned around to her and said 'no I'm not married'. She was the one that was embarrassed – not me, she went bright red. Because I was just not going to let anyone make judgement on me. And I suppose that's just me.²²³

Here Gail demonstrated the kind of defensiveness and strong will that she felt was necessary in order for her to function amongst the still prevalent social stigma of being a young single mother. For Gail, it was easier and more natural for her to adopt a more tough and unapologetic feminist persona as opposed to allowing herself to be defeated by the disapproving society around her.

Annette and Bernadette believed that feminism was not significant in their youth and young adult lives. However, both women came to appreciate the women's movements of the 1970s later on in their lives, as they looked back and reflected on the meaningful changes that had taken place since their childhood. When I asked Bernadette if there was any part of feminism that she identified with, she responded: "I think being able to be expected to go out into the workplace, like who would want to live in the forties, fifties and sixties where all you had ahead of you was to get married and have kids?".²²⁴

²²³ Gail, 'Gail interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

²²⁴ Bernadette, 'Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

The expectation to leave home and work to earn a wage was not something that Bernadette saw as a negative, rather the idea of working for one's own money was empowering and financially freeing.²²⁵ Working provided Bernadette with the opportunity to leave home and escape the strict rules she was placed under; to start living life and having experiences after being so sheltered and isolated in Geelong.

For Annette, feminism served to reinforce the idea that standing up for herself was okay. The exchange below highlights how Annette felt that she expressed feminism in her daily life, in the mid to late 1970s when she was socialising on a regular basis.

Interviewer: If there was any part of feminism that you identified with, what was it?

Annette: Having my own opinion [laughs]. I never cowered down to 'you shouldn't be doing this because you're a female', even to the point that I played football way before women's football league was around. 'You shouldn't be playing football' – well I did. I played in two football teams, only a few games but couldn't quite understand why I wasn't allowed to get out and kick the footy.²²⁶

According to Annette, the shift in gendered social expectations for women during the 1970s meant that she was able to voice her opinions and questions with relative freedom and not be punished for doing so (at least after leaving school).²²⁷ She felt that she was entitled to opinions and experiences that were once completely out of the question for women her age.

²²⁵ Shurlee Swain and Ellen Warne and Patricia Grimshaw, 'Constructing the working mother: Australian Perspectives, 1920 to 1970', *Hecate*, 31/2 (2005), 51.

²²⁶ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

²²⁷ Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, 'Universal Women's Rights Since 1970: The Centrality of Autonomy and Agency', *Journal of Human Rights*, 10/4 (2011), 433-449.

For both Annette and Bernadette, feminism offered a freedom. For Annette it was the conceptual freedom of having permission to be herself. In the case of Bernadette, it is slightly more complicated. Whilst Bernadette utilised a feminist narrative to positively frame her story as a means of offering her the freedom to leave home and live independently, she also made it clear that in her family she was expected to fend for herself after turning eighteen; this 'freedom' and expectation was also something that caused her to give up hopes of higher education and a different career path. The two women expressed a thankfulness and recognition of how their lives had changed positively due to the impact that the women's liberation movement had made in the areas of family, work and the private lives of women across Australia.²²⁸

In contrast, the Italian women felt that feminism was not something that played a role in their lives at all, especially as young women. This was expressed in responses that varied from a neutral dismissal of feminism from Lucy and Fran to the more disapproving way in which Sophie responded. They tended to focus on what feminism had evolved into in the present, as opposed to concentrating on the feminism of the 1970s.

Fran thought that feminism did not really affect her life, nor did she connect to it, because she never experienced the discrimination or the inequality that feminism was railing against. In her professional career, she believed she was treated equally by her colleagues. Lucy and Sophie both expressed their belief that feminism and other movements like gay liberation and racial equality had caused society to "swing too far in the other direction".

²²⁸ Susan Margarey, *Dangerous Ideas*, 95.

Lucy inferred that major corporations were required to have certain quotas and percentages of 'minority' employees. She suggested that these rules impacted people who were not minorities but qualified for the job and could become unethical and detrimental to business itself. Sophie's answer that society had gone too far in the other direction was in regard to her belief that sexuality and sexual identity in particular had become far too complicated in recent years:

See I don't even believe in sexualism [sexuality] these days. Like bisexual, what are they? There's so many different sexual – asexual. What the hell is it? Maybe that's my narrowmindedness? And have we gone too far the other way?²²⁹

In Sophie's response she rejected any feminist identity outright:

Interviewer: My thesis is about feminism or it goes under many different names as time has gone on. Do you have any recollection of...

Sophie: I don't think I've ever been a feminist. Nope. I don't think I've ever and I don't think – still not. I believe in women's rights.... But I still like to be treated as a female. Does that make sense?²³⁰

Whilst others had said they didn't overly identify with what was happening at the time but could see the value at later points in their lives, Sophie completely rejected a feminist identity, while affirming that she believed in women rights and autonomy, and insisted that she wanted to be valued as female.²³¹

²²⁹Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

²³⁰ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

Sophie's viewpoint offers a counter to Bernadette's, as Sophie benefitted from the work of earlier feminists throughout her life, in the way that she had the opportunity to attend university and was able to enjoy and believe in her own value as a female. However, Sophie did not feel the need to frame her positive narrative of 'the good life' through the lens of feminism in the way that Bernadette did.

What also became influential in the ways that the women composed their narratives was the ways in which feminism was portrayed in the 1970's media. It is to this topic, and its influence on my participants, that this next section turns.

Feminism and the Media

It was apparent in the women's conversations that media representation was a key component in creating this ambivalence to feminism. This happened both directly by the girls reading magazines and watching television, (although many of the women stated that they did not keep up with the news), and indirectly, by their parents consuming media and passing their views and information to them. This parental influence appears to have had the most influence on the women.

Second wave feminism and issues like contraception, childcare reforms and workplace rights became a popular topic within newspapers, magazines and on television from the 1960s.²³² In the Australian media, Germaine Greer played a crucial role in how feminism was presented to the public. Her media visibility was evident in that she was the only feminist mentioned by the women and author Christine Wallace labelled her as a "classic Australian figure in modernizing the Australian landscape".²³³ Her impact on the lives of the women I interviewed was usually due to the tempestuous responses by the women's parents.

Annette experienced this through her mother's rants "after reading newspaper articles or perhaps seeing Germaine Greer on the television, saying how she was 'almost like a man' ... she shouldn't be saying those things and women need to be in their place".²³⁴ These memories of Germaine Greer were both negative and positive as Lucy demonstrates, when she spoke about young women reading Greer's famous book *The Female Eunuch*.²³⁵

²³² Michelle Arrow and Angela Woollacott, 'Introduction – How the Personal Became Political: The Gender and Sexuality Revolutions in 1970s Australia', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 33/65 (2018), 1-8.

²³³ Christine Wallace, *Untamed Shrew* (New York: Faber and Faber, 1997), 248.

²³⁴ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

²³⁵ after its release in 1970.

We didn't have it, but I could see it. You know Germaine Greer she led ... so everyone thought... if I want to get a better job I can. I don't have to have children if I don't want to. You know I can be in the workforce. I don't have to be told by a man that I can spend this much money, it's my money and I can do...That was a revolution and that didn't happen before.²³⁶

Lucy reflected on how dramatic this change in mindset was from those of her childhood, and what her parents had been raised with:

You only have to look at the sixties and the good wife stayed at home and she made herself presentable when her husband came home, you know pretty little wife – that didn't happen anymore. That was a complete turnaround...we all read it wide eyed and 'woah really!?' so that was a real shock actually.²³⁷

Germaine Greer was somebody who incited (and still incites) diverse emotional responses. She represented the antithesis of the 'Catholic lady persona'; she was a convent girl who had left the Catholic faith and was now openly sexual despite being divorced and childless. Her opinions fuelled the media cliché of the angry, braless, hairy arm-pitted, concurrently man-hating but also sex crazed, physically masculine feminist.²³⁸

²³⁶ Lucy, 'Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

²³⁷ Lucy, 'Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

²³⁸ Kay Keavney, 'The Liberating of Germaine Greer', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 2 of February 1972, 4-5, in Trove [online database], accessed 17th March 2019; Sandra Lilburn, Susan Margarey and Susan Sheridan, 'Celebrity Feminism as Synthesis: Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch and the Australian Print Media', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, 14/33 (2000), 335-348.

Considering the Australian media's representations of Germaine Greer it is little wonder that women such as Sophie defined feminism – and still do – based on this hyper aggressive, masculine influenced, yet female power centric image that was crafted by the media and Greer herself.²³⁹ In contrast, Lucy looked past the media imposed images of Greer and read *The Female Eunuch* herself, found the messages in the text empowering and forged her own interpretation of what Greer and feminism represented for herself.

²³⁹ Keavney, 'The Liberating of Germaine Greer'.

Relationship with faith

The memories and events that many of the women retold happened over forty years ago. Since then they have had careers, married, had children, experienced loss, grief and gone through various life-defining hardships. However, many of the participants' personalities still reflect stories from their youth. They demonstrate the same attitudes, curiosity and senses of humour. In other ways there are some very distinct deviations in their narratives – changes affected by both their life of adult experiences and by the way in which they chose to compose, view and posture their life narrative.

The greatest change was their relationship to faith. Neither Annette nor Bernadette still identify as Catholic and in both their interviews the two women recount actively questioning their faith from secondary school onwards. Their main issues with religion were the expectation to blindly follow rules that made no logical sense to the women. Bernadette stated: "I started to question things, and I started to not really accept a lot of what was being taught, because it didn't make sense to me".²⁴⁰ Annette echoed this sentiment when she spoke about why she got into trouble in secondary school: "Because I questioned it all the time, I couldn't understand why we had to abide by all the rules that were in the bible".²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Bernadette, 'Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

²⁴¹ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

In direct opposition to Brown's matrilineal centric argument of secularisation being caused by mothers discontinuing the passing on of religious traditions within a household, both women raised their children within the Roman Catholic church and Catholic education system with neither able to explain why. Bernadette explicitly stated that she was already an atheist by the time she had her children, yet she still raised them to be Catholic. Annette had taken an agnostic position, reflecting years of questioning from an early age. As demonstrated in the anecdote she shared about the day of her communion, I argue that although both women may not identify with Catholicism on a theological or spiritual level, it is so intrinsically intertwined with their cultural identity and practices, that in passing on their cultural legacy to their children, Catholicism was unavoidable.

All of the other women maintained their Catholic identities. However, Sophie, Gail and Fran had re-formed their relationship with the Catholic church since their teenage years. This redefinition of identity and of faith became crucial for the women who wished to maintain their identity as Catholics.²⁴²

Fran was the only woman to state that her faith had become stronger since her teen years: "if you had of asked me that when I was nineteen I'd say no way. But now... god forty years later... yeah the spiritual side and all that, is quite a positive".²⁴³

²⁴² This same revaluating of one's place within the Church can be witnessed in Elaine Ecklund's study of women within a Catholic Church community in 2003. Like many of my women, the women in Ecklund's interviews were required to either redefine feminism or redefine Catholicism in order to be able to function happily within both their spiritual faith-based aspects of life and in their day-to-day work and relationships.²⁴² The main difference between the women that I interviewed and those featured in these articles is the time period in which the interviews were conducted, the age of the participants and the high level of involvement Ecklund's participants had within their church. See Elaine H Ecklund, 'Catholic Women Negotiate Feminism: A Research Note', *Sociology of Religion*, 64/4 (2003).

²⁴³ Fran, '3/9/2019 Fran Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

Fran's reliance and strengthening of her faith took place once she had moved through her 'wild years', further strengthening the argument that Catholicism, specifically the type of Catholicism the young women were being taught, was simply not practical or helpful to young working women. It is in her later years that Fran has been able to bring faith back into her life, and like the other women, she brought it back primarily as a means of comfort and security.

Gail and Sophie both still see themselves as Catholics, although Gail refers to herself as lapsed and Sophie tends to identify more heavily with spirituality, as opposed to Catholicism specifically. Neither saw the point in attending church on a weekly basis in order to foster a relationship with God, believing that the connection should be just as strong in private, as it is in church. Gail and Sophie believe that the reason they still have their faith is out of solace and habit. Sophie spoke about going to church when she feels that she is in dire straits: "I still feel that security or comfort".²⁴⁴ Gail related more to the concept of habit:

I'm lapsed now, but people still say to me 'any religion?' and I'll say 'yes, Catholic'. I don't believe that you have to go to church to be able to associate yourself with God or have that you know inner sense of feeling of what you need to do. I mean I truly don't believe that sitting in four walls, in a church with 100 other people brings you any closer to God than you yourself can do.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

²⁴⁵ Gail, 'Gail interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

Margaret Knowlden discusses this attitude and readjustment of faith.²⁴⁶ All of the women who stated that they still identified as Catholic exemplify what Knowlden called being a 'wayward Catholic'; they still found comfort and enrichment in their identities as Catholics, yet they are not "typical Catholics", happy to abide by and accept every rule set by the Church. Like Knowlden, these new, redefined relationships were conducive to a happier and healthier connection with faith.²⁴⁷

Lucy seemed the most emphatically positive about her Catholic education and the effects that it had on her morals and her personality. She stated this in light of the fact that she had proceeded to shirk many of the rules and moral lessons instilled throughout her Catholic education once she left school, going on to state that her education made her the person she is, "the caring person, the more aware person".²⁴⁸ She acknowledged the numerous variables that could have led to this personality, but felt that she owed her positive personality traits to her Catholic upbringing and her parents and the nuns that facilitated it.

My research shows the varied reactions to Catholicism and how these women have continued to practise faith. A distinctive trait amongst the four women who still identify as Catholic is they have altered how they see their place within the Church and the meaning that faith provides in their personal lives. None of the women – lapsed or not – practise the kind of strict Catholicism that they were taught in school and none of the participants followed the Roman Catholic doctrine rigorously into their adult lives.

²⁴⁶ Margaret Knowlden, 'Breakout – on becoming a 'wayward' Catholic', *Women- Church*, 40 (2007), 129-131.

²⁴⁷ Ibid; Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 71-91.

²⁴⁸ Lucy, 'Lucy Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

The women have identified the parts of religion from which they can draw strength and comfort and held on to those parts to aid them in the struggles of everyday life. This has been discussed by Catholic feminist and federal Member of Parliament Kristina Keneally, who feels that whilst she finds many of the teachings and the discrimination in the Church disgusting and wants to change them, the core tenants of her beliefs, the rituals, forgiveness and the evolution of the church provided comfort and moral sustenance in her life.²⁴⁹ This is similar to Sophie's struggles to reconcile the comfort and security that she finds within the Catholic faith, with the rampant clerical abuse experienced by many others that she fiercely abhors.

Sophie suggested that women who did try their best to follow every rule of Catholicism and maintain the 'good Catholic lady' image found themselves becoming older beyond their time:

The ones that were more effected by it [Catholic rules], you see them even now at my age and they look older, they dress differently... you look at some of them at sixty I reckon they look eighty. You know they didn't get further education; they did stop in form two, form three. They did work you know either in a little office or something and then got, married had children and didn't work anymore, and they married men that were like their fathers. They were suppressed, they were made to fear. Some of them are still existing, I'm sure they're still existing.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Kristina Keneally, 'Feminists and Gay Christians who accept the Church.', *Eureka Street*, 22/11 (2012) 24-26.

²⁵⁰ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

Sophie emphasised the role of education in aiding women to see their potential and acting upon it. She also rejects Catholic teachings, suggesting that women who try to live their lives by every rule and limitation that Catholicism sets out for women, will end up unhappy and suppressed. Her use of the word 'existing' is poignant in the way that it suggests that these 'other' women are not truly living and enjoying their lives. At least not in the way that women who have struck a balance of pragmatism and faith like Sophie, Gail, Fran or Lucy have.

It is during these parts of the interviewing process that the relationship shared between the women and myself became the most pertinent to the ways in which they were constructing their life narrative and communicating it. Most of the women still identified as Catholics, and even those who felt that they had strayed away from religion in their youth, still found themselves returning to the comfort and peace that came with their faith. There was the distinct feeling that the women constructed their narratives in a way that was meant to provide guidance and direction for me as a younger female in the establishing phase of my life; that it's okay to take one's own path, be independent and curious and have a good time - provided that you find yourself back in the 'right place' in the end. For many of the women it seemed that the 'right place' was based around their husbands, their children and comfort with the choices they've made that lead them to this point in their life.

In this section the women's reflections on how feminism did or did not impact their lives was analysed. They also looked back on the changes they have made in their years since leaving school and how their faith has morphed and changed into what they currently practise.

These changes to faith, especially for those who still identify as Catholics, contributed to the idea that what was being taught to the girls throughout primary and high school was not feasible and practical to real life. However, the tension between feminism and the Catholic Church was productive in the way that it aided the women to make their own choices, in particular the decision to modify their relationship with faith to best suit themselves and the lives they had chosen to lead. After exploring and assessing the time frames of the women's lives, I contend that the way in which second wave feminism and Catholicism intersected in the lives of young Australian women in the 1970s, was in the way the morals were constantly in tension with each other.

In the next section I argue that although many of the women stated that they were not feminist, many incremental changes born of the second wave feminist movement affected their lives and pulled them away from the traditional Catholic teachings that they had been brought up with. One of the most prominent ways in which the women felt this pull was in the arenas of sexual freedom, birth control, divorce and the redefinition of imagined feminine perfection throughout the 1970s into the 1980s.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ The Introduction of 'The Pill' in the 1961 was thought by many members of the Catholic Church as a major cause for many Catholics to leave the Church and their faith. After Vatican II (1962-1965) and the release of the *Humanae Vitae* (1968) the Catholic church made their no tolerance stance on 'self-sterilisation'

Unattainable Perfection

Woven throughout all of the life stories and anecdotes of my participants was the theme of perfection – or at least the façade of perfection – of being ‘Good Catholic Girls’. The constant pressure of responsibility for how their behaviour is perceived and how others behave towards them is the basis of multiple anecdotes and behind most of the decisions made by their schools and parents. I argue that these socially imposed rules and expectations are borne from gender-based stereotypes and gender roles. Nevertheless, after interviewing the women it became evident that class and socio-economic factors played a central role in facilitating these expectations that burdened the young women – both Italian migrant and Irish Catholic.

In regard to the women’s behaviour, the notion that women were meant to be seen and not heard seemed to permeate the women’s education. Yet all of them referred to their younger selves as cheeky troublemakers. In all of the scenarios the ‘bad behaviour’ was generally looked back on as innocuous by the women – like instances of Fran talking back to her teachers, Sophie bringing an unauthorised thermos into the classroom or Gail having a screaming contest with other girls. In a similar way to Annette and Lucy being chastised for their open questioning of the nuns that taught them, the reason that the girls were so mercilessly chastised for their behaviour was not because of the actual acts themselves, but because it betrayed the image of Catholic female perfection.

(contraception) clear to all followers, forcing many women and couples to make spiritual and moral health choices never before dealt with on history. In Lisa Featherstone’s book *Let’s Talk About Sex* it seems that practicality won, as upwards of 60% of Catholic women admitted to taking the pill at one point in time by the late 1970s. p.??

Having opinions, talking back and instances of not following instructions was seen as truly bad when compared to the standards of the meek, well behaved Virgin Mary whose model of femininity was promoted by the Catholic Church, it was she who encapsulated the image of the 'Good Catholic Girl' and what was expected by their teachers at the time.²⁵²

The most striking similarity through the interviews was that when questioned about sex education every participant's response was that they had never officially received any (at least not in secondary school). However, there were messages of sexual morality being taught to them through different routes, whether that be nuns, lay teachers or their parents. They consisted of the ideas that 'good girls' don't want or desire sex; association with boys will end in pregnancy; and finally girls who have premarital sex will be ruined and no longer seen as viable for marriage, therefore failing in the feminine duty to find a husband and procreate.²⁵³ The ramifications for failing in any of these areas was severe as Fran made clear when she spoke about her older sister's experience: "I remember one time this boy who ended up being her [Fran's sister's] fiancée and then husband drove her home and my father saw her and he virtually bashed her up. She got such a belting because of that and I couldn't believe it." ²⁵⁴

Fran's memory of her sister being 'belted' by her father and Sophie's *Il Globo* memory, in which her father had insinuated that he would have killed her if she was doing 'something' with a boy, show just how immense the fear of lost reputation was for the parents of the young women.

²⁵² Winefride, 'Instruction for Girls aged 12-16 years', 15.

²⁵³ John T. Richardson, *Readings in Catholic School Teaching: Selected Documents of the Universal Church, 1891-2011* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015), 31.

²⁵⁴ Fran, '3/9/2019 Fran Interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

It was acknowledged by all of the Italian participants that many Italian girlfriends were subject to physical assault as punishment for 'bad behaviour' at the hands of their family.²⁵⁵ Fran mentioned that whilst her parents changed in the years between her and her sister and became more relaxed and lenient, the bond between her sister and father was never mended after her teenage years, the pressure to maintain the impossibly perfect feminine image was so pervasive and toxic that it had damaged their relationship beyond repair.

The school's approach to controlling the girls' image was through multiple means – namely a lack of sex education, strict dress and behaviour codes, a constant focus on wifedom and motherhood and by limiting their time with males. The ways their teachers spoke about sex and morality was to control the transmission of Catholic values. Bernadette recounted the story of a particularly outspoken lay teacher who told the younger girls in a Geelong secondary school: "Don't go out and give it [sex] to everybody... you don't want people to call you a slut, because that's what would happen".²⁵⁶ The very clear threat and implication that there are consequences for behaving immodestly, namely the loss of reputation and respect through the use of the term 'slut', and that this would affect not only the young woman in question, but her family and her school as well, compounded the sense of responsibility felt by young women. In relation to the idea of 'giving it out to everyone', Fran remembered quite vividly being told about the difference between 'good girls' and 'naughty girls'.

²⁵⁵ Sybil M. Lassiter, *Multicultural Clients* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 128.

²⁵⁶ Bernadette, 'Bernadette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

The core idea being that good girls do not 'go with' or 'do anything' with boys before they are married, if they do - their respect is lost; the idea of self-worth, value and the respect of others was fundamentally linked with Catholic femininity and female sexuality.²⁵⁷ Women were not desiring subjects and sexual agents in their own right.

Sophie relayed the basic premise of what she was taught about sex and intimacy from both her home life and from secondary school:

It's okay if a boy kisses you but don't you let him touch you anywhere else, that is really sinful. You've got to be a virgin when you get married you know. You don't do anything; you don't get touched.²⁵⁸

Sophie's quote conveys the message that was consistently presented to all of the women. However, the specific wording makes it very poignant in the context of female responsibility. The use of the word 'you' in "don't you let him touch you" places all of the onus on the female. Once again women were seen to be responsible for and the gatekeepers of their pure reputation. Men were not equal participants or equally accountable in the situation; such phrases were 'drummed' into the lexicon of the women.

²⁵⁷ Hanne Blank, *Virgin: An Untouched History* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007), 217-236.

²⁵⁸ Sophie, 'Sophie interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

The Rupture

In analysing the consistent themes and perspectives that presented themselves throughout the interview process, Catholicism and feminism intersected within the lives of the young women in their divergence from one another at fundamental levels.

Both second wave feminism and the Catholic image expected of females have types of perfection as a basis. Catholicism expressed perfection through the veneer of meek, dutiful, maternal and pure women, with no consideration of how unrealistic the expression of this image truly is. Alternatively, second wave feminism aligned itself with a new form of womanhood, encouraging a drawing of power and confidence from the female form and completely railing against the ideals of traditional femininity

I argue that the Australian narrative of the 1970s sexual revolution was not as simplistic and instantaneous as previously depicted by the Australian mass media. Margery acknowledges all of the factions and splits with Australian feminist groups and how this effected the academic pursuit of feminism.²⁵⁹ Michelle Arrow exemplifies the complicated nature of the progression narrative in the last section of her book *The Seventies*, by listing the numerous laws that repealed or undermined feminist progression; the struggles of enacting and maintaining feminist policy from the higher political level such as the Royal Commission in to Human Relationships.²⁶⁰ My interviews highlighted the myriad of responses to feminism and showed the impact of feminism on women in numerous ways.

²⁵⁹ Susan Margarey, *Dangerous Ideas*, 24-41.

²⁶⁰ Michelle Arrow, *The Seventies*, 146-148.

The women's recollections emphasised that the incremental changes in the Australian media, in their access to medications like the pill, in how they were treated in their workplaces (even being able to enter the workplace) was where feminism flourished for the women.

Annette recalled changes made by her northern suburb's mother during the early 1970s:

Mum at that stage was starting to realise that she was allowed to wear trousers. You know up until probably form two...My mum would never have on a pair of trousers; she would always wear a skirt and stockings and twin sets and a coat if we went out. Even when she would clean the house, she wouldn't have trousers on...because that just wasn't being a female...Dad could never quite understand why mum would in the middle of winter, take us children... to the football with slip on shoes, stockings, a skirt and a coat because it would be freezing. And she'd have gloves and a scarf – a scarf on her hair not around her neck. So, dad never really quite understood it, and when mum started to wear trousers, he was all for it.²⁶¹

This story from Annette's life is a reflection of the incremental changes that were being made in many households. Whilst others may simply see this as somebody making a practical change to their lives, to Annette and her father it was a definitive turning point in how her mother presented herself in the public eye and a redefining of acceptable feminine appearance. The acceptance of function and practicality over the unrealistic and constraining ideals of flawless femininity is a key way in which changes resulting from feminism confronted the core beliefs of traditional femininity.

²⁶¹ Annette, '8/7/2019 Annette interviewed by Bethany Higgins'.

On a more intangible level, second wave feminism allowed women to be ‘flawed creatures’. It gave women the permission to publicly embrace their traditionally uncharacteristic anger, opinions and express how they actually felt without censorship or the filter of social graces.²⁶² Annette spoke of the freedom to be herself without hurting others or betraying social expectations, and Bernadette recalled confronting her mother about the hypocrisy she felt as a teen; these are examples of the women both embracing feminism’s permission to be oneself no matter how others perceived the behaviour, and rejecting the Catholic notion of the docile and uncomplaining wife and daughter.

When Gail spoke of the ‘Catholic lady persona’ she referred to the expectation and pressures of behaving and fitting into the specific image at all costs. Gail shared a story of her deportment teacher who attempted to traverse these two worlds when teaching at a South Melbourne Catholic school in the mid 1970s and maintaining her career as a model.

I think it was Mother Joseph... saying – this is when bikinis had first come in: girls shouldn’t be wearing bikinis because it’s not becoming and you shouldn’t be showing off your body, flaunting your body and blah blah blah and that’s all very well and good. Well Pauline [their deportment teacher] was in *The Sun* a couple of weeks later, and guess what Pauline was wearing?! A bikini! We didn’t see Pauline anymore.²⁶³

²⁶² Michelle Arrow, ‘It has become my personal anthem: ‘I am woman’, *Popular Culture and 1970s Feminism*, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 22/53 (2007) 213-226.

²⁶³ Gail, ‘Gail interviewed by Bethany Higgins’

Gail's memory perfectly encapsulates the difficulty faced by women who tried to embrace both sides of the schism that had formed between the progressive, liberated world of feminism and the conservative, traditional beliefs of Catholicism, often forcing women publicly choose one or the other.

In this chapter, I have addressed how the women interpreted feminism in their youth and how it has translated into the beliefs that women still held today. As shown, there were a myriad of different responses to the politics of feminism and whether or not the women chose to utilise feminism as a means of composing their life narrative. The relationship that the women now share with their faith and how the ideas of agency and the tension between conservatism and progression aided in helping the women to redefine their relationship with Catholic faith. Many of the faith-based and image conscious rules experienced by the women throughout this thesis found their basis in Catholic ideals of female perfection, of being 'Good Catholic Girls'.

CONCLUSION

In Australian history the 1970s has become synonymous with social and cultural upheaval through protesting and questioning the status quo. The women discussed in this thesis described the 1970s with words like awakening and electric, they noted that suddenly the world seemed much more open – that there was more to learn and explore. Whilst on a day-to-day level recognisable changes were not always apparent, slowly but surely, incremental revolutions were taking place in the homes of many Australians and in the lives of these young working-class Catholic women. Some gradually spoke up; were able to find some happiness in their bodies, both in their appearance and in their sexuality; and they relished the ability to work and make their own money. All of these choices added up to a monumental shift in the Catholic female existence that their mothers had known although it was not accompanied by a wholesale rejection of their faith.

The life histories of the six women who are the focus of this thesis reveal nuanced negotiations between religion, education, cultural and class background, and feminism. These emerge in particular through the women's discussion surrounding ideas about guilt, perfection and shame. While feminism had a significant impact on the possibilities open to women, the relationship between feminism and their faith was also a cause of tension. This is made evident through a recognition of first, just how pervasive the concept of perfection was in the lives of young women at the time; second, the ways in which socio-economic status, cultural background and agency would interplay and effect the way the women experienced and navigated the world around them; and third, the extent of agency the women had in exercising their own life choices.

While some of the women had a far more ambivalent attitude to Catholicism than others, all still maintained some connection with their early faith, even if just through sending their children to Catholic schools. In this sense, despite periods of rebellion as young women, or even disavowal of Catholic beliefs, the imperative to be 'Good Catholic Girls', remained a guiding principle through their lives.

As a thesis based primarily on oral history interviews, another key theme the interviews raise is that of memory and the way in which the women constructed their own life narratives. The relationship that the women shared with one another, along with their relationship to me, highlighted the power that can be found in the structure, omissions and silences within oral history interviews. Being the daughter of one of the women and thus the daughter of their close friend, and as a young woman beginning to make her way in the world, the interviewees were positioned in an almost maternal relationship to me. While the women seemed ready and willing to speak about difficult and private topics with relative ease, they would also most likely be aiming to project a very specific image of themselves and their life choices in order to protect me from some of the more distressing aspects of their life histories. The narrative arc of each of their life histories followed was predominantly positive, as well as reinforcing their behaviour as, mostly 'Good Catholic Girls'.

Perhaps because of my relationship with the women, or perhaps because there are nearly always some aspects of a person's life that they might regard as not for sharing, there are noticeable silences in the interviews.

For example, Fran's avoidance throughout the interviews surrounding her time in the music industry, Annette's physical removal of her husband from her photographs and Gail's

hesitance surrounding the reasons for her limited childhood pictures. What this indicated was the delicate and often instinctive nature in which the women composed their own life narratives and stories in order to present themselves in a manner that they felt comfortable with.

In composing their life stories, the on-going influence of the women's Catholic upbringing was very evident. But the interviews reveal other aspects about growing up working-class in 1970s Melbourne, including the risks of sexual violence and domestic abuse that posed more of a risk to women, than the commonly feared risk of teenage pregnancy. Whilst they were prepared for pregnancy, they had been left completely unprepared for the dangers they faced on an almost daily basis. They learnt strategies to keep themselves 'safe' from violence, and to utilise fashion and clothing to navigate their worlds and express their growing sense of freedom, individuality and confidence. Protecting themselves from pregnancy seemed an easier task and not one about which the women recalled much angst.

This added consideration of composure in addition to the more obvious themes serves to further distinguish my work within current academia as it imbues my arguments with a level of intricacy and nuance previously unexplored in this context. There is room for further work by drawing out the variables of social status, geography and especially by delving further into the migrant narrative and how women of other nationalities navigated their Catholic faith at the time. This thesis has definitely provided a platform and the groundwork in understanding the much more delicate and real-life experiences of young, working-class Catholic women and most importantly how the impact of these intertwined expectations and the image of the 'Good Catholic Girl' followed them throughout their lives.

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