

## 2 Conservative times: Cold War, hot sex and the consumer revolution

The carpet of the 50s was woven of many colours, in fine threads, even if much of it was pastel, or fawn, or dove grey.<sup>1</sup>

The national context was an evil one.<sup>2</sup>

On New Year's Eve 1963 two deaths occurred in Sydney that mystified the country for decades. The semi-naked bodies of Dr Gilbert Bogle and Mrs Margaret Chandler were found, covered with cardboard and with no apparent injuries, in a lover's lane area of the Lane Cove River. As the coverage in the national press reached fever pitch and the coronial inquiry proceeded, a strange mix of the bohemian, the intellectual and the sexual emerged. Dr Bogle was a handsome and accomplished physicist, a former Rhodes scholar, a linguist and musician, married with four children and with a reputation for philandering. On the night in question he had attended a New Year's Eve party at the home of a colleague. His wife did not accompany him. Bogle was employed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) as an astrophysicist but had recently resigned and was to take up an appointment in the United States. Mrs Margaret Chandler, trained as a nurse and a mother of two, had also attended the New Year's Eve party with her husband, Geoffrey, also a CSIRO employee, although not as senior as Bogle.

Part way through the party Geoffrey Chandler left to attend another gathering of a bohemian group on the far side of Sydney. There he spent time with his lover. He had reached an understanding with his wife Margaret that if she wished to stay and be with Gilbert Bogle, to whom she was obviously attracted, she was free to do so.

1 A.S. Byatt, *The whistling woman*, Vintage, London, 2003, p. 50.

2 Kerr, *The gold and the blue*, p. 28.

Bogle and Chandler left the party and sought privacy at the secluded river bank. Their bodies were found the next morning in grotesque positions, having been violently ill but modestly covered. As no signs of a struggle were found it was assumed that they had been poisoned, although a rigorous forensic inquiry failed to identify the poison. Theories as to the cause of death proliferated and Geoffrey Chandler became a prime suspect, although he was able to provide a watertight alibi. One of the most bizarre theories, found on websites to this day, developed a Cold War theme. Were Bogle and Chandler involved in espionage, given the scientific organization they worked for – and the emerging and important field of astrophysics? And had Bogle been murdered for that reason?

This case is still formally unsolved, although new theories have recently emerged. It fascinated Australians for a range of reasons. Perhaps the most astonishing for the period was the realization that in highly educated and well-to-do circles, in respectable leafy suburbs, some couples were ‘swingers’, allowing each other a degree of sexual latitude in an otherwise sexually repressed society. A mystery woman appeared at the inquest, later identified as one of Bogle’s lovers. She was not required to testify publicly so as not to offend. Some conventions had to be observed. The Bogle/Chandler case in all its deeply mystifying aspects raises some of the major themes for this chapter. Beneath the apparent quiet of suburban life was there, in certain circles at least, a stirring that belies the descriptions of the 1950s and early 60s as drab and colourless? Beneath the pastel, fawn and dove grey of the suburbs was something emerging that would reshape the lives of those who followed? Beneath a veneer of respectability sexual passions simmered. Subcultures did live differently, if well below the radar of popular culture. The untrusting climate of the Cold War led to suspicions of scientists engaged in little-understood activities and fostered beliefs of secret scientific findings.

Was the context of the 1950s and early 60s then ‘pastel’, ‘fawn’, ‘dove grey’ – all colourless, insipid tones, but ultimately safe? Or was it ‘evil’, in the far from insipid words of Clark Kerr? In Lane Cove, Sydney, it might be both. It could be evil and colourless, at different

times, in different places and to different actors in that ever-changing social fabric of the time. While life in the mushrooming suburbs and sleepy provincial towns might be fawn, even drab, in the hotbed of university politics and government witch-hunts it could appear distinctly evil. In this chapter I focus on three major defining aspects of those years, all of which brought with them other significant developments. I look first at the Cold War and all that followed in its path. Secondly I trace the growth of consumerism and its impact on the gender relations and popular culture of the time. Thirdly, I sketch the understandings of sexuality of the time, the psychological and therapeutic approaches to everyday life and to gender relations, the focus on Freud and his followers and their contribution to shaping women's lives. As well there were challengers to that view, such as Alfred Kinsey, with his startling revelations about sexual behaviour.

In reality these were not separate issues but intertwined and strongly overlapping, as the Bogle/Chandler case reveals. The Cold War *zeitgeist*, for instance, played a large part in consolidating a very specific view of gender relations. It also fostered divisions amongst feminist groups, leading to their decimation at this time.<sup>3</sup> Consumerism in America and Australia was saturated with gendered imagery and was used to differentiate the lives of their citizens from those in the Soviet Union. Equally the Cold War search for communists and other subversives ultimately narrowed the discourses available for teachers and students in universities and colleges in all areas, denying many of this cohort exposure to critical and progressive views on politics, on capitalism and on sex.

Several recent writers have argued that the Cold War destroyed the US left.<sup>4</sup> In Australia it split the Labor Party, the party of the left,

3 Pat Ranald, 'Women's organizations and the issue of communism' in Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (eds), *Better dead than red: Australia's first Cold War, 1945–1959, volume 2*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1986.

4 Noam Chomsky et al., *The Cold War and the university: toward an intellectual history of the postwar years*, New Press, New York, 1997; Peter J. Kuznick and James Gilbert (eds), *Rethinking Cold War culture*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, DC, 2001.

and ensured it remained out of office for decades. It was disastrous for Australian intellectual life.<sup>5</sup> Others argue that some elements remained as an elusive thread to be taken up by social movements of the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> Where labour radicals had been a strong if minority presence on campuses in both Australia and the United States in the immediate post-war years, by the mid-fifties they had all but disappeared. It is increasingly being recognized that the Cold War also derailed feminism from its earlier more radical and redistributive form to a cautious and liberal feminism in both the US and Australia.<sup>7</sup> At Smith College, for example, like many other American and Australian campuses, there had been a vocal group of progressive students and faculty who became increasingly subdued from the late 1940s.<sup>8</sup> Those who accused women of complicity in communism frequently saw them as ‘unwitting dupes’,<sup>9</sup> a view that denied them agency and reinscribed them as vulnerable to male influence. Women were not supposed to have a politics of their own.

At UCLA ‘professors approached radical ideological movements gingerly and critically if at all’.<sup>10</sup> At Smith, as elsewhere, progressivism was to disappear or reinvent itself in a different guise. During the 1950s in the United States dissenting views could rarely be expressed in political parties on university campuses but were displaced to reli-

5 John Docker, *Australian cultural elites: intellectual traditions in Sydney and Melbourne*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1974, p. 152.

6 Kate Weigand, *Red feminism: American communism and the making of women’s liberation*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD, 2001.

7 Joanne Meyerowitz, ‘Sex, gender, and the Cold War language of reform’ in Kuznick and Gilbert, *Rethinking Cold War culture*, p. 117; Landon R.Y. Storrs, ‘Red scare politics and the suppression of popular front feminism: the loyalty investigation of Mary Dublin Keyserling’, *Journal of American History*, 90(2), 2003, pp. 491–524; Ranald, ‘Women’s organizations and the issue of communism’; Weigand, *Red feminism*.

8 Renee Landrum, ‘*More firmly based today*’: *anti-communism, academic freedom, and Smith College, 1947–1956*, Honours thesis, American Studies Program, Smith College, Northampton, 1998.

9 Ranald, ‘Women’s organizations and the issue of communism’, p. 41.

10 Banner, *Finding Fran*, p. 109.

gious organizations and groups concerned with race, providing the seedbeds for the next generation of student activism. As Renee Landrum notes of the US, 'liberal opinions on racial issues were as far left as one could safely be in the age of anti-Communism'.<sup>11</sup> Even this was sometimes too far.

## The Cold War

At Cold War's end we can view with some distance the ways in which the tentacles of national hysteria encircled even the towers of academia, supposedly separate from political turmoil, in the post-World War II era. As several authors have shown recently, universities and colleges were not immune from the fear and paranoia that seized the free world.<sup>12</sup> For many that fear seemed justified. China had fallen to the Communists in 1949. The Korean War began in 1950 after North Korea invaded South Korea. Much of Eastern Europe was behind the 'Iron Curtain'. In Australia the 1954 Royal Commission on Espionage (the Petrov Commission) stirred simmering anxieties. In the United States McCarthyism traumatized a generation.

Although the start of the Cold War is generally dated from the dropping of the first atomic bomb on Japan, commentators see it as reaching its fullest expression in the 1950s.<sup>13</sup> In Australia a paradoxical

11 Landrum, 'More firmly based today', p. 46.

12 Ellen Schrecker, *No ivory tower: McCarthyism and the universities*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1986; Chomsky et al., *The Cold War and the university*; Kerr, *The gold and the blue*; Stuart Macintyre and R.J.W. Selleck, *A short history of the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003; Fiona Capp, *Writers defiled*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1993.

13 Kuznick and Gilbert, *Rethinking Cold War culture*; Stephen Alomes, Mark Dober and Donna Hellier, 'The social context of postwar conservatism' in Ann Curthoys and John Merritt (eds), *Better dead than red: Australia's first Cold War, 1945–1959, volume 1*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1984.

cal mix of economic growth on the one hand and perceived threats to security on the other led to the 'orchestrated anxiety of the Cold War'.<sup>14</sup> In spite of an ongoing rhetoric of progress, monocultural Australian society was fraught with fears and paranoia fuelled by sectarian rivalry between Catholics and Protestants, anxieties about high levels of immigration of people other than the Anglo-Celtic majority into Australia, and the need to renegotiate foreign relationships after World War II.<sup>15</sup> Turning from a weakened Britain to a strengthening America, Australians were no longer sure of their identities or allegiances.

Commentators on the period note a heightened sense of conformity characterized by educational conservatism, a growing moral conformity of social groups, increasing isolation in the suburbs, and very closed sexual subcultures between men and women.<sup>16</sup> Although these trends were by no means all-pervasive and small dissident political and cultural groups spoke out throughout, a conservative, conformist culture dominated. Artists and writers fled to more sympathetic pastures. Universities were seen as places of suspicion, their leftist professors possibly stirring subversion. Some spoke of 'pinkies' in universities, of campuses 'harbouring nests of communists'.<sup>17</sup> In 1952 the head of the Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), Colonel Charles Spry, appointed by Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies, wrote to the prime minister: 'I am sure that you will readily appreciate the inadvisability of employing in any university lecturers who are likely to infest students with subversive doctrines'.<sup>18</sup> The use of the word 'infest' is far from innocent, conjuring up the notion of communists as vermin, to be eradicated at all costs.

14 Alomes et al., 'The social context of postwar conservatism', p. 2.

15 John Murphy, *Imagining the fifties: private sentiment and political culture in Menzies' Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2000.

16 Alomes et al., 'The social context of postwar conservatism', pp. 18–27; Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marion Quartly, *Creating a nation, 1788–1990*, McPhee Gribble, Melbourne, 1994, p. 275.

17 Alomes et al., 'The social context of postwar conservatism', p.10.

18 Macintyre and Selleck, *A short history of the University of Melbourne*, p.103.

At the University of Melbourne, considered the ‘reddest’ of Australian universities, Spry searched for such subversives. He found ‘grounds for suspicion in no fewer than sixty-three of them’. Historians were well represented amongst these. Sylvia Dowling, President of the Melbourne University Historical Society in 1954, was probably unaware that her request to the Hon. Arthur Caldwell MHR to address a public meeting for the centenary of the goldminers’ rebellion at Eureka would result in her listing in the ASIO files. Caldwell’s office requested advice of the Attorney-General’s Department as to how to reply to Miss Dowling. As a result of the request on 20 September 1954,

Mr Caldwell was informed ... verbally that:

- a) Miss Sylvia Dowling was unknown to this office
- b) The Melbourne University Historical Society was not adversely known to this office.

However ‘In connection with Sylvia Dowling, the possibility exists that she has some relationship with DOWLING [sic] Mary Leonore [word deleted], recorded in this office as at one time a Committee member of the MELBOURNE UNIVERSITY PEACE CLUB’.<sup>19</sup> Peace clubs and their followers were usually seen as communist fronts.

At the Labor Club Review later that year two women students appeared as innocent history students singing:

We’re red, we’re red, he’d rather see us dead  
Devoid of any intellect,  
The facts we learn are incorrect ...<sup>20</sup>

How quickly the climate had changed at Melbourne University from that described by Amirah Inglis in 1945: ‘But we were all Labor Club members, arguing passionately about socialism with Catholics and conservatives, agitating for a socialist Australia and, in the short run,

19 ASIO Files, Memo for Headquarters, letterhead Attorney-General’s Department, Melbourne, headed ‘Secret’, 27 October 1954.

20 Macintyre and Selleck, *A short history of the University of Melbourne*, p. 104.

for a more just post-war world'.<sup>21</sup> From 1946 to 1948, Inglis argues, Labor Club members dominated the Students Representative Council at the University of Melbourne and 'within it' the Communist Party members – 'the fraction' – decided who was to stand for the executive positions'.<sup>22</sup> 'We were for world peace', Inglis explains, 'but also for class war and our words were filled with the imagery of war'.<sup>23</sup> Describing their 'starry-eyed idealism' Inglis and her Labor Club friends believed that 'the poorest he and she, once they had dared to reach beyond their grasp, could change the world'.<sup>24</sup> For Inglis, university in the late 1940s proved, in her terms, socially, politically and sexually liberating. Yet on leaving the campus the personal choices were few for the young woman and her communist lover Ian Turner. Marriage was the only real possibility if they were to continue their relationship. So Inglis began 1949 as a wife and Communist Party worker. She proudly joined the editorial team of *The Guardian*, the official organ of the Communist Party, and attended party meetings at night. In the same year, ominously, the Liberal Club (in Australian parlance the conservatives) 'had broken left-wing control of the Students Representative Council (SRC)'.<sup>25</sup>

Yet for all the suspicion, the anti-communist climate in Australian society and universities was never as chilly as in the US. The 1951 referendum to ban the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) failed, albeit narrowly. Had the 1950 *Communist Dissolution Act* not been declared unconstitutional, the situation may well have been much worse. It has been argued that the Act not only sought to proscribe communists but also communist sympathizers who could be defined widely as 'a person who supports or advocates the objectives, policies, teachings, principles or practices of communism as expounded by

21 Amirah Inglis, *The hammer and the sickle and the washing up: memories of an Australian woman communist*, Hyland House, South Melbourne, 1995, p. 15.

22 p. 23.

23 p. 26.

24 p. 30.

25 Macintyre and Selleck, *A short history of the University of Melbourne*, p. 119.

Marx and Lenin'.<sup>26</sup> Affiliated associations that came under suspicion were defined imprecisely as those, 'the policy of which is ... influenced, wholly or substantially, by persons who ... are communists'.<sup>27</sup> Under this rubric ASIO was deeply suspicious of such diverse groups as the Fellowship of Australian Writers, the School of Modern Writers, Realist Film Societies, the United Association of Women, the International Women's Day Committee, the Australia Peace Council and the National Union of University Students.<sup>28</sup> But for all that June Factor, an arts student at Melbourne University, claims that even in the second half of the 1950s, 'when the Cold War was at its iciest and words like "peace" and "socialism" were never printed in the press without their pejorative inverted commas', left-wing views could be found on campus.<sup>29</sup>

But something vital was lost. The heady idealism of Amirah Inglis had gone. Jill Ker, teaching in the history department at Sydney University after completing her degree, was advised by a sympathetic female colleague: 'Go somewhere where you can see things from another perspective. Whatever you do don't just stay here'.<sup>30</sup>

The infamous case of philosophy professor Sydney Sparkes Orr, dismissed in 1956 from the University of Tasmania for seducing a female student, not only revealed the fear of communism endemic in Australian universities of the time but the egregious misogyny.<sup>31</sup> The story, which I shall elaborate later, reveals a sordid tale of respected Australian male professors, in the name of academic freedom, smearing the name and reputation of a female student who had had the te-

26 Jenny Hocking, 'Cairns, Keon and the battle for Yarra: a microcosm of Labor split politics' in Peter Love and Paul Strangio (eds), *Arguing the Cold War*, Red Rag, Carlton North, Vic, 2001, p. 51.

27 Ibid.

28 p. 52.

29 June Factor, 'June Factor' in Hume Dow (ed.), *More memories of Melbourne University: undergraduate life in the years since 1919*, Hutchinson, Hawthorn, Vic, 1985, p. 129.

30 Conway, *The road from Coorain*, p. 215.

31 Cassandra Pybus, *Gross moral turpitude*, William Heineman Australia, Melbourne, 1993.

merity to report a case of ‘gross moral turpitude’ before the term sexual harassment had been invented. From the perspective of Cold War fears, however, it is significant that the University of Tasmania chose to appoint a professor with dubious, indeed fraudulent, qualifications above other more worthy candidates on the grounds of his apparent anti-communism and, ironically, his moral integrity. In this context, Cassandra Pybus argues, ‘what may seem today like rampant paranoia was common enough, and acceptable, in the late 1950s, with World War II not yet a distant memory and the hysteria of the Cold War rife’.<sup>32</sup> Defenders of Professor Orr managed to convince themselves that the womanizing professor had been framed by a totalitarian dictatorship, that tactics such as brainwashing were in play, with little evidence but fevered imaginations to support them.<sup>33</sup> Young women with courage who accused their male professors had little chance in such a time and few defenders.

For older women who had been part of the political ferment of the thirties and forties the fifties represented a retreat. From 1945 to 1951 Ruby Payne-Scott, a physics graduate, was a leading Australian radio astronomer, helping to lay the foundations of a new branch of science. She was also a strong exponent of women’s rights. Ruby Payne-Scott’s experience of the Australian Cold War climate led her to silence about her scientific past. However politics was not the deciding factor in her retreat from radio astronomy. Payne-Scott was known as a supporter of Americans caught up in McCarthyism and had also helped form a union at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) where she worked, an act that inevitably brought her under suspicion. Thus she was a target for an ASIO investigation. ASIO was known to be sensitive to left-wing influence in the Division of Radio Physics, particularly in wartime, and they maintained a lengthy file on Ruby Payne-Scott. One entry reads: ‘She is a queer girl. A bright student but very erratic, was a member of the University Christian Union which seems to be a forerunner of activity in leftist

32 p. 149.

33 p. 176.

groups. It's thought that she is in a feminist group. I would not put anything beyond her'.<sup>34</sup> In spite of much investigation, and the presence of an informer in the CSIRO, ASIO concluded that there was no evidence that Miss Payne-Scott was a member of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). This was an extraordinary acknowledgment of ineptitude (or of the loyalty of friends and colleagues) as Payne-Scott was a member of the CPA and others in the lab all knew it. The crucial fact for Payne-Scott's resignation was her marriage to Bill Hall, which she kept secret for several years. Married women in the public service were expected to resign.

Her eventual pregnancy led to the exposure of her marriage and to her inevitable resignation. This seems to have been regretted by all concerned including the CEO of the CSIRO. He wrote: 'Unfortunately, we cannot give married women leave without pay but I assure you that I at least would be very pleased to see you return to radio physics in due course'.<sup>35</sup> Ruby Payne-Scott did not return to radio physics, devoting the next twelve years of her life to her two children, then turning to part-time teaching. In this she was typical of many graduate women of the time. Yet her strong feminism and communism, shared by a small group in the 1940s, was hidden from view until recently under the earlier less nuanced picture of the 1950s. Her experience illuminates the damping down of both the political culture of the fifties and the possibilities for feminism. Ruby Payne-Scott retreated from a highly professional career amongst male colleagues in an area deemed unsuitable for women to a traditional combination of marriage and school teaching.

Ruby Payne-Scott's sanitized fifties and sixties experience can be compared with that of an American, Mary Dublin Keyserling. In 1964 Keyserling was appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson as head of the US Women's Bureau. This was a senior and influential appointment, a triumph even for women, although, as Landon Storrs points

34 Item read by Dr Miller Goss in 'Ruby Payne-Scott: radio astronomer' on *The science show*, presented by Robyn Williams, ABC Radio, 14 February 2004.

35 Letter from F.W.G. White, read by Dr Miller Goss on *The science show*, ABC Radio, 14 February 2004.

out, radical feminists of the 1960s and 1970s tended to reject women like Keyserling ‘as part of the repressive liberal establishment’.<sup>36</sup> Yet during the 1940s Mary Dublin Keyserling, Barnard alumna of 1930, a talented economist and statistician, held key positions of authority across the US federal bureaucracy. Like many other women in the administration of the time Keyserling was a ‘left-leaning feminist’ and a believer in ‘the social democratic potential of the New Deal’.<sup>37</sup> What links the stories of Keyserling and Payne-Scott are the events of the intervening years of the Cold War, specifically the increasingly conservative politics of the time, ‘red scare politics’ in Storrs’ term, and the hostility to feminism that accompanied them. Both women had their burgeoning careers totally derailed, both retreated from the workforce, returning later with their more active pasts subdued, hidden even, in the climate of constraint into which they re-emerged. Both faced accusations of disloyalty, a powerful tool in silencing both present action and the representation of the past. Keyserling underwent a lengthy loyalty investigation. As well, Payne-Scott faced the narrow prescriptions for married women, an equally limiting tendency in the 1950s. Where were highly educated women’s loyalties to reside in this difficult time? This is one of the intriguing questions of the period.<sup>38</sup>

There were many in Australia and the US who were well aware of the threat to institutions that the Cold War fears engendered. University women from an earlier generation were well to the fore. In Melbourne, as Cold War rhetoric bit, Kathleen Fitzpatrick, much loved university lecturer in British history and a foundation member of the Melbourne University Labor Club, recounted the Putney Debates as

36 Storrs, ‘Red scare politics’, p. 524.

37 p. 496.

38 See also Weigand, *Red feminism* and, for an example of the severing of the link between left feminism, peace activism and social reform, see Amy Swerdlow, ‘The Congress of American Women; left-feminist peace politics in the Cold War’ in Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris and Kathryn Kish Sklar (eds), *US history as women’s history: new feminist essays*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1995.

'oblique commentaries on the referendum to ban communism'.<sup>39</sup> A history student in Adelaide was shocked when her student newspaper in the early 1950s asked students if they were prepared to 'dob in' a 'pinko'.<sup>40</sup> Many were.

Women teachers in Australia, who agitated for equal pay throughout the 1950s, frequently came under suspicion, particularly if they were involved with teacher unions. Lucy Woodcock, 'whose CV is a snapshot of the left intelligentsia in the middle decades of the twentieth century'<sup>41</sup> suffered for her left-wing involvements. Lucy was a member of the New South Wales Teachers Federation from 1918, served on the executive from 1924 to 1953, and was senior vice-president from 1934 to 1953. She was the first woman president of the Australian Teachers' Federation. Her other affiliations included the NSW Peace Movement, the Australia–China Society, the Australia–Soviet Friendship Society, the New Education Fellowship, the International Women's Day Council, the Left Book Club, the Australian Civil Rights Defence League, Jessie Street's Australian Women's Charter and the Equal Pay Committee. 'The Australian Aborigines Evangelical Fellowship', Theobald tells us, 'was set up at a meeting at her Enfield flat in 1956, in Faith Bandler's words, because she was one of the only white people they trusted'.<sup>42</sup> Given the flashpoint issues of links with China and with the Soviets, as well as her concern with women's issues, with peace and with racial equality, and a proven international outlook, Woodcock was typical of the type of left progressivism that flourished before World War II. She was also bound to attract the eye of ASIO and the anti-communist agitators. ASIO kept a detailed file on her.<sup>43</sup> In 1954, in the heightened atmosphere of the Petrov Royal Commission, Woodcock was initially de-

39 Macintyre and Selleck, *A short history of the University of Melbourne*, p. 120.

40 Interview, 'Graduating in the fifties' project.

41 Marjorie Theobald, "'Red" women in the teaching profession, 1930–1960', paper presented at ANZHES Thirtieth Annual Conference, Adelaide, 6–9 December 2001, p. 3.

42 p. 3.

43 p. 3.

nied a passport to attend the Stockholm Peace Conference and, following that, the International Alliance of Women conference in Denmark and an accompanying women's summer school.<sup>44</sup> Teachers were also to attract attention in the United States as we shall see, particularly those with that trinity of subversive interests: women, peace and racial equality.

In the US, fear of communism was manifest most noticeably in the witch-hunts of the McCarthy period, the House Un-American Activities Commission (HUAC) inquisitions that devastated individual lives and reputations. The Cold War touched far more than those who faced the HUAC investigators, however. The significance of the Federal Loyalty-Security Program has long been overshadowed by a focus on McCarthyism though it involved a much larger part of the population. California was one of the states at the heart of the communist scare, not surprisingly as it has always had a unique link with the American Communist Party.<sup>45</sup> It was not only Hollywood that suffered. Clark Kerr, former Chancellor of the University of California, a man with a background in industrial relations, identifies the loyalty oath controversy of 1949–50 at the University of California as one of the most bitter confrontations between a Board of Trustees and its faculty in all American university history.<sup>46</sup> The vigorous and protracted attacks on the university by the California legislature's Committee on Un-American Activities, he argues, politicized the board of regents and the Berkeley faculty. Berkeley was to some extent a paradox, symbolizing both the rise of the research university, embedded in the military-industrial complex, but also (possibly because of that link) at the heart of political controversies. Yet it suffered disproportionately for its leftist reputation. Of 69 faculty members dismissed for their political views across the US during the McCarthy period, Kerr claims, 31 were at the University of California.<sup>47</sup> In June 1949 the

44 Rana, 'Women's organizations and the issue of communism', p. 54.

45 Gerald Home, 'The reddening of the women', *Science and Society*, 66(4), 2002–03, pp. 506–510.

46 Kerr, *The gold and the blue*, p. xxviii.

47 p. 27.

Board of Regents adopted the requirement of an oath that included the words: 'I am not a member of the Communist Party'.<sup>48</sup> As well as the 31 who were dismissed for not signing the oath several others resigned in protest including Erik Erikson who moved to Yale. The Californian loyalty committee was one of the most long lived: Kerr notes, 'the real targets were the liberals'.<sup>49</sup>

Lois Banner (then Wendland), a student at UCLA in the 1950s, experienced the impact of McCarthyism on young people, describing the conservative curriculum she studied: 'The sense of national superiority generated by World War II in addition to the anti-communism of those years dampened radical criticism in general and influenced my professors towards centrism and cynicism'.<sup>50</sup> 'They approached radical ideologies gingerly and critically, if at all.' The most leftist book Banner read was Jack Kerouac's *On the road*, a rallying call for the beat movement of the 1950s but one supremely uninterested in politics. Banner too noted the longevity of the loyalty oath. She had to sign it to work part-time in a university office.<sup>51</sup> The ban on Communist speakers on campus was not lifted until 1963.

Helen Laville argues that 'the image of the happy housewife, which has come to dominate our idea of American women in the 1950s, should be understood not as historical fact but as a cultural fantasy'.<sup>52</sup> She notes that many historians are now challenging the conventional historical wisdom on women's political inactivity and domestic isolation but that this work has yet to influence accounts of women's role in the Cold War. 'While gender is becoming an increasingly central trope to studies of the Cold War, women as actors, rather than as symbols, metaphors and poster-girls for American democracy, remain elusive'.<sup>53</sup> Laville examines the political activity of American

48 p. 28.

49 p. 49.

50 Banner, *Finding Fran*, p. 109.

51 Ibid.

52 Helen Laville, *Cold War women: the international activities of American women's organisations*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002, p. 2.

53 pp. 7–8.

women's organizations in the Cold War. She points to the way in which women's organizations claimed a role for educated women in international affairs, based on traditional notions of an essentialist female identity that stressed nurturing and pacifist leanings. 'American women's organisations in the post-war period were determined to claim and justify an international role for themselves', she notes, '[arguing] forcefully that they had an interest in and understanding of women of other nations because their shared identity and experience created an "international sisterhood"'.<sup>54</sup> This was clearly a view shared by Australian Lucy Woodcock and many other women throughout the world. 'The atomic threat increased women's claims of political obligation by making the penalty for ignoring that obligation monstrous. The threat of atomic destruction gave new urgency to the age-old wisdom that women could, if they made the effort, divert men from their aggressive ways'.<sup>55</sup> The Committee on the Cause and Cure of War (CCCW), a coalition of nine organizations, and the Committee of Women in World Affairs (CWWA) both called for the inclusion of more women in international affairs.<sup>56</sup>

Cold War anxieties were also used to bolster claims for a greater role for women at a national level. The American Association of University Women (AAUW) petition to President Truman in 1950 argued that the US could not afford to waste women's 'abilities and energies'.<sup>57</sup> These were 'voluntary' organizations as Laville points out: 'The involvement of the leaders of American women's associations in government, albeit on an ad hoc and unofficial basis, diminished in their eyes the urgency of demands and efforts to increase the number of women in policy-making roles'.<sup>58</sup> She suggests that 'voluntary associations counted success in terms of gaining federal attention, but not necessarily federal appointments',<sup>59</sup> such that 'co-operation between the

54 pp. 25–26.

55 p. 28.

56 p. 32.

57 pp. 33–34.

58 p. 22.

59 p. 23.

leaders of American women's organisations and their government, channelled through the Women's Bureau, created a partnership between the private and public spheres'.<sup>60</sup> Leaders of women's organizations exchanged expertise and goodwill for involvement and status in international affairs especially relating to the education of women.

It is worth looking more closely at one of those organizations, the American Association of University Women, and its role in the Cold War. Highly educated women were again caught in a difficult bind, wanting to reject communism but concerned that the methods to do so were eroding hard fought freedoms. In January 1951 the editorial of the *Journal of the American Association of University Women* was headed 'Education in mobilization'. It grimly noted: 'As we go to press, the declaration of a national emergency is immanent'.<sup>61</sup> Dr Lois Meek Stolz worried that 'This is 1950 and these are serious and troubled days'.<sup>62</sup>

Ina Corinne Brown continued the theme, declaring that not only 'our political and economic freedom' was at stake, but 'our freedom as individuals to think, speak and worship is threatened'.<sup>63</sup> Brown, a professor of social anthropology at Scarritt College, saw the threats coming from two major directions: either from war itself or from the debilitating fear of war. 'Whether this remains a cold war or becomes a full-scale conflict, we face the peril of either rapid or long-drawn-out disorganization and deterioration of our society as the result of prolonged tension and repeated crises', she predicted. Furthermore she worried that in this state of mobilization and semi-mobilization the US would lose the very values that 'made our lives worth living'.<sup>64</sup>

60 p. 63.

61 'Editorial: education in mobilization', *Journal of the American Association of University Women*, 44(2), 1951, p. 67.

62 Dr Lois Meek Stolz, *Journal of the American Association of University Women*, 44(3), 1951, p. 134.

63 Ina Corinne Brown, 'We can make history', *Journal of the American Association of University Women*, 44(2), 1951, p. 131.

64 Ibid.

Not all members were impressed with the rhetoric of the journal or its political leanings. Mary Beard, writing to her friend Marine Leland, a professor at Smith College, snorted:

If only some one in the AAUW could laugh, what a boon to that organization and to outsiders that would be! ... Their 'packaged thinking' seems never to burst a package. When I saw in the last AAUW *Journal* that Truman was called 'Commander of the Nation', I threw that issue into the fire – too mad to have it in sight. I shall not renew my membership in such a stupid organization.<sup>65</sup>

During this period, educated women, particularly those in senior positions, worried a great deal about the impact of the Cold War on their liberties and values. Among those values was a strong belief in the individual. Brown's fear of the threat to individual freedom was widely shared by intellectuals who feared a loss of individualism in the conformist, other-directed mass society of the time. In the United States then as now the individual was paramount. Susan B. Riley, in her presidential address, spelt out the pre-eminence of that concept: 'On individualism; the concept of the importance of the individual, singly and organized into social groups and his [sic] freedom to determine the manner of his life has been basic to the American democratic experiment', she claimed. However, she worried that 'Suspicion, accusation, condemnation before proof of guilt is established' were 'cutting at the roots of self-assertion and encouraging the safety of negativism'.<sup>66</sup>

This was a time of major mobilization. The US Department of Defence sought to recruit 72,000 young men by the end of June 1952. In keeping with her ideas of equality for women, Mildred McAfee Horton, former President of Wellesley, argued that women should also be drafted.<sup>67</sup> Throughout the early 1950s the *Journal of the AAUW*, the

65 Beard to Leland, 17 February 1951, Leland Collection, College Archives, Smith College.

66 Susan B. Riley, 'Presidential address: we choose the future', *Journal of the AAUW*, 49(1), 1955.

67 Mildred McAfee Horton, 'Drafting women for the armed forces', *Journal of the AAUW*, 44(3), 1951, p. 141.

national mouthpiece of university women, agonized over the ramifications of both the threat to the country and the even graver threat to individual freedom. The McCarthy era and the calls to testify to the House Un-American Activities Committee rocked the world of educated people, frequently under suspicion. Although the explicit target of the investigation was members of the communist party or communist sympathizers, Clark Kerr's contention that 'the real targets were the liberals'<sup>68</sup> seems justified.

Again in 1951 in a piece titled 'Making freedom a reality' Althea Hottel pointed out that the world of independent thought was in peril. She identified sources of danger: the external power of the Soviet Union; and the fact that 'some of our citizens ... endeavour to sap the strength of our nation through subversive activities' (and, she noted approvingly, 'we must have loyal Americans in our government, our schools and our industries'). But equally she feared that we might be losing the right to differ and in some instances the right to a fair trial, claiming that 'thinking men and women must be equally concerned with the preservation of individual liberty'. Like Brown she feared that Americans might be facing the 'slow disintegration' and the disorganization of their social institutions.<sup>69</sup>

Hottel advanced a further, more radical, claim. How could the US preach democracy if not all its citizens were enfranchised? She urged that in order to spearhead democracy America must overcome the racism within its own house. This theme was taken up by others who wrote for the AAUW journal. 'Our failure to guarantee full equality and full freedom to some of our citizens undermines our integrity in the United Nations and abroad', wrote Edith Sampson, who had worked for the UN.<sup>70</sup> Even within that climate of fear some women saw opportunities to advance issues they held dear, particularly at international level. They evinced similar concerns for peace, for

68 Kerr, *The gold and the blue*, p. 49.

69 Althea Hottel, 'Making freedom a reality', *Journal of the AAUW*, 44(4), 1951, p. 196.

70 Edith Sampson, 'Freedom and responsibility', *Journal of the AAUW*, 44(4), 1951, p. 6.

women's issues and for racial equality as the Australian women. But a more specifically American fear can be seen in Moran's concern. Voicing a common anxiety, Frances Moran of the International Federation of University Women claimed that the masses were taking control. The only way of having free government, she declared, is in educating the masses.<sup>71</sup>

University women saw their role primarily as educators. Many agreed with Ina Corinne Brown that the special concern of university women should be the presentation and strengthening of a free and democratic public school system. Brown argued that 'in many areas our public schools are threatened by both communist and fascist individuals and groups who seek to control the schools for their own ends'.<sup>72</sup> This was attempted through 'so-called economy drives, attacks on any and all new education methods, efforts to intimidate teachers and school officials by special loyalty oaths and whispering or smear campaigns, attempts to ban certain books from school libraries and to control the selection of textbooks'.<sup>73</sup>

Brown might have been speaking about the Canoga Park case in California, one such witch-hunt, although it occurred a few years earlier. Two senior and well-respected teachers of 'Senior Problems', journalism and student government at Canoga Park High School were called before a Californian Joint Legislative Fact Finding Committee on Un-American Activities (the Tenney Committee) in 1946 to answer charges of subversion. The two women were accused apparently on the evidence of a disgruntled former student who felt that they had not commented sufficiently favourably about capitalism. They were questioned about their subjects, their teaching methods, extracurricular activities and the organizations to which they belonged. In the course of the enquiry the teachers' association with various organizations deemed to be communist fronts was raised: the American Federation of Teachers caused concern. Perhaps this federation did have

71 Frances Moran, *Journal of the AAUW*, 44(4), 1951, p. 12.

72 Ina Corinne Brown, *Journal of the AAUW*, 45(2), 1952, p. 68.

73 Ibid.

something in common with its Australian counterpart, which was communist-led at this point.<sup>74</sup>

An LA Board of Education initially cleared the teachers, a decision that the Tenney Committee considered a whitewash. The transcripts of this case are preserved in a bound booklet in the papers of Mellie Miller Calvert, a historian of Canoga Park High School, who taught science at the school.<sup>75</sup> She was a keen advocate of developing warm relations with alumni, a very sensible notion as it turned out. Calvert was incensed at the investigations and felt, presciently, that citizens needed to be alerted to dangers ahead. She took it upon herself to collect the transcripts and to write an article to *The Clearing House: A Journal for Modern Junior and Senior High School Faculties*. ‘Only the alumni can save you: what happened when a school faced “red” charges’ she titled her article, ensuring that its message could not be missed.<sup>76</sup> And the alumni did come out in droves for their teachers, forming a Fair Action Committee, circulating petitions, lobbying meetings of the Board of Education and testifying that they were taught ‘American methods and ideals’, rather than the ‘pro-Russian’ thinking for which they were accused. Dozens wrote letters. It took four days for the testimony volunteered by alumni and parents to be heard.<sup>77</sup>

The Senior Problems course, the root of the concern, was required as a prerequisite for graduation. Investigators were concerned that the open discussion of controversial issues was permitted in these classes, and that students were encouraged to debate issues and discuss political candidates in class. Those testifying for the teachers felt differently. They claimed that the school produced ‘citizens of high quality’, who ‘cared about intellectual integrity, freedom, truth and jus-

74 Theobald, ““Red” women in the teaching profession’.

75 Mellie Miller Calvert papers, 1938–1960, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

76 Mellie M. Calvert, ‘Only the alumni can save you: what happened when a school faced “red” charges’, *The Clearing House. A Journal for Modern Junior and Senior High Schools*, 21(6), 1947, pp. 323–325.

77 pp. 324–325.

tice'.<sup>78</sup> The course also aimed to develop international thinking, code to committees such as Tenney's for subversive comparisons with their own country's way of life, a challenge perhaps to an unthinking patriotism.

Encouraging students to think critically was dangerous ground. Teaching social studies in South Australia in the mid-fifties, one young woman was warned against teaching 'contemporary political material'. 'I said the students' questions have to be dealt with, they have a right to question ... Within two days I had a visit from the Inspector ... asking to see my exercise books to assess the way in which I was teaching social studies, to see what kind of bias I was putting on it', she recalls.<sup>79</sup> Although this young teacher was discouraged from teaching about Cold War ideologies (she had bravely sent a copy of Karl Marx's manifesto to an interested parent) no harmful consequences followed.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) took a cautious stand against the excesses of McCarthyism, trying to tread a fine line between condemning communism but, equally, deploring fascist methods of control. This was spelled out in a statement prepared by the Social Studies Committee in 1953 and adopted by the AAUW Board. The statement was unequivocal in its title 'The communist threat to freedom and democracy'. It began: 'Let us be explicit. Communism is a threat to freedom and democracy. We are against it'. It continued: 'Fascism is likewise a threat to freedom and democracy. We are against it. The use of totalitarian means to fight communism and fascism is a threat to freedom and democracy. We are against it. The differences between democratic and totalitarian values are clear. Let us list some of them ...'<sup>80</sup>

One of those differences of course was the importance of the freedom of the individual. And that could be developed through education, as those defending the Canoga Park teachers argued.

Above all, AAUW women saw their role as educators as paramount, a view that dovetailed well with the 1950s insatiable drive for

78 p. 324.

79 Anonymous survey respondent, 'Graduating in the fifties' project.

80 *Journal of the AAUW*, 46(2), 1953, p. 67.

school teachers. Local AAUW branches undertook campaigns to strengthen local schools and many women joined school PTAs and other groups. The educated individual had to be able to oppose false thinking and empty slogans. But how were women to oppose the sloganizing, the conformity of their time and in what settings?

The answer came in an unexpected way from Adlai Stevenson in a commencement address to the Smith College class of 1955.<sup>81</sup> The very best of western civilization was embodied in the independent individual, Stevenson claimed, urging the graduating class at the elite women's college to embrace their future roles as housewives and mothers. There they could *influence* those supreme beings, 'typical Western man – or typical Western husband' and their children, to think in ways that rejected conformity and the drift towards totalitarian collectivism.<sup>82</sup> 'You may be hitched to one of these creatures we call "Western man"', Stevenson declared, 'and I think part of your job is to keep him Western, to keep him truly purposeful, to keep him whole'.<sup>83</sup>

Stevenson's particular target was 'adjustment', which he equated with 'groupers and conformers'. These undesirables needed to be balanced by independent thinkers, those who were 'more idiosyncratic', with open minds. 'Women', he claimed, 'especially educated women such as you, have a unique opportunity to influence us, man and boy, and to play a direct role in the unfolding drama of our free society'.<sup>84</sup> Reminding the graduating class that 'women had never had it so good', he suggested, perhaps in an attempt at humour, that they could be sure to 'keep their man straight on the differences between Botticelli and Chianti'.<sup>85</sup>

81 Adlai E. Stevenson, 'Smith College commencement', 6 June 1955, Smith College Archives.

82 p. 3, original emphasis.

83 p. 4.

84 p. 5; see also Ruth Rosen, *The world split open: how the modern women's movement changed America*, Viking, New York, 2000.

85 Stevenson, 'Smith College commencement', p. 6.

A former student who heard this message recalls that she felt insulted and that many other probably felt the same.<sup>86</sup> Three years later the commencement address was given by Senator John F. Kennedy, who took a very different approach. He asked the class of '58 'to accept the obligation and opportunity of participation in the public solution of the great problems of our time'.<sup>87</sup> Kennedy saw the same problems as Stevenson – the need to meet the 'single-minded advance of the communists', to counter 'the mobilization of a totalitarian society' – but his solution included women as social actors, not merely as influences on their husbands and children.<sup>88</sup>

The AAUW was also concerned with countering conformity and misinformation with critical thinking. In response to the sloganizing of the times the AAUW reported in 1952 on a symposium on 'propaganda in American life today'. In 1953 one writer reported worryingly of the need to distribute material on the United Nations, often under suspicion in the period, to counter those 'concerned with spreading apathy and antagonism towards the UN'.<sup>89</sup> The fear of spreading propaganda was fuelled by a worrying concern that if individuals did not resist the 'group think', the conformity of suburban life, they would be prey to communism and fascism. How could the individual be strengthened to have a mind of their own? What would this mean for women? Above all it was important to understand the individual's psychology and to train them to resist the blandishments of propaganda and advertising.

86 Alison Prentice, personal communication, 19 March 2004.

87 John F. Kennedy, 'Smith College commencement address', presented at Smith College, Northampton, MA, 8 June 1958, p. 7.

88 p. 9.

89 Janet Macdonald, 'The advantages of danger', *Journal of the AAUW*, 46(2), 1953, p. 53.

## Swaying the masses: the rise of consumerism

The need to resist both propaganda and advertising ran counter to the vast build up of both manufacturing of goods and the push to consume. Lizabeth Cohen suggests that consumption had close ties to the Cold War, that it provided ‘powerful symbolism as the prosperous American alternative to the material deprivations of communism’.<sup>90</sup> She argues that consumption was central to many Americans’ lives, and that it was a more potent shaping factor for many than Cold War developments. ‘In the postwar Consumers’ Republic’, Cohen claims, ‘a new ideal emerged – the *purchaser as citizen* – as an alluring compromise’.<sup>91</sup> In this context, she argues, the consumer satisfying material wants actually served the national interest, economic recovery being dependent on a dynamic mass consumption economy. John Murphy, on the contrary, sees the notions of purchaser and citizen as contradictory in Australia in the late 1950s: if the good citizen was marked by responsibility and constraint, the consumer was ‘driven by gratification’.<sup>92</sup> Nevertheless, in countries such as the US and Australia, generations who had internalized notions of self-restraint and thrift at their mothers’ knees had to be convinced that spending was a necessary act and that hire purchase, or consumer credit, was not immoral. It is scarcely surprising that in this context teachers such as those involved in the Canoga Park case could be seen to be subversive in their lack of obvious enthusiasm for capitalism.

Women’s magazines played a significant role in educating women as consumers in the United States and in Australia.<sup>93</sup> It is not unexpected then that many college women sought employment in this

90 Lizabeth Cohen, *A consumers’ republic: the politics of mass consumption in America*, Vintage Books, New York, 2004, p. 8.

91 Ibid.

92 Murphy, *Imagining the fifties*, p. 188.

93 Susan Sheridan with Barbara Baird, Kate Borrett and Lyndall Ryan, *Who was that woman? The Australian Women’s Weekly in the postwar years*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002.

field after graduation, as writers, editors and publishers, as we shall see. The centrality of growing consumption shaped the lives of many young college women, concerned with fashion, glamour and romance and the myriad ways of purchasing an enhanced, modern self. It also motivated the young college-educated wives, who desired the well-advertised consumer goods on offer for their homes and social status, and often joined the workforce in order to supply them. Glamour and domesticity combined to attract the increasingly younger wives who found a new independence from parental patterns as postwar economies turned to producing previously luxury goods en masse.

The young woman of the 1950s at Radcliffe College, for instance, was assumed by her student journal *The Radcliffe News* to be interested in fashion. In July 1950 she was advised to 'Be lovely, be comfortable in a Perma-Lift Girdle'. In October 1952 she was informed, 'Dior, Fath, Heim Favor straight skirt: lines stressed in Paris collections'. In March 1953 there was an entire fashion issue. In 1957 new students were advised to select their wardrobe 'with Utility, Space in mind. For arriving, departing, and attending the President's reception, a suit – with hat and gloves – is your best bet. Wear your high heeled pumps, by all means, but don't forget to bring a pair of flat-heeled ...' The March 1958 issue warned her that 'The chemise trend seems to be here to stay. Although the full sack dress is less common, it is still seen in a variety of summer-weight materials.' The sack did not marry well with hat and gloves: perhaps the fashion mood was changing. At the University of Texas (Austin) young women students posed as models for local dress shops. How relevant was this fashion advice for women attending less privileged colleges and universities? While it may have established the parameters for a few young women at elite colleges, others rebelled against such dress codes, creating the carefully crafted bohemian appearance of the art students, the barefooted defiance of the scholarship girls and the insouciant muu muus and sandals of girls in a Sydney summer. Not all students – or wives – were at the mercy of the advertisers, although commentators feared that they were. A sizable minority rebelled against the growing dominance of mass consumption.

The magazines that educated women to be consumers frequently reinforced traditional ideas of love, marriage and relations between men and women. Although they employed educated women, they were often ambivalent about women's education and professional life. Lyndall Ryan, about to start an arts degree at Sydney University in 1961, describes her love affair with the iconic magazine *The Australian Women's Weekly*. She enjoyed reading about the lives of TV and movie stars, the quizzes about marriage, the features on musicals such as *West Side Story* – as well as the advice columns, the fashion and the fiction.<sup>94</sup> Ryan was alarmed to find in February 1961 a featured story 'Do women really benefit from a university degree? Education a burden for women', by Maren Lidden, BA, LLB.<sup>95</sup> Lidden had received the 20-page questionnaire sent out to women graduates by Madge Dawson, one of the surveys I refer to throughout this book. The questionnaire clearly irritated Lidden: 'While attempting to answer all 84 questions honestly and dispassionately, it occurred to me out of the entire questionnaire a single question – the old but burning one still stands out "Do women really benefit from a university education?"'.<sup>96</sup> After informally surveying 18 women graduates herself she concluded that the answer was very often 'no'. Indeed some believed that it could prove a disadvantage, both before and after marriage. It was not an attraction to men, it could narrow the field of prospective husbands, male vanity would be offended by competition, and 'housework, boring afternoon teas and hit-and-giggle tennis' were dreary and stultifying to women who had enjoyed higher education before marriage. This discouraging article provoked a flurry of letters, most disagreeing with Lidden – and encouraging the young Lyndall Ryan as she began her studies.<sup>97</sup>

94 p. 63.

95 *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 8 February 1961, pp. 29, 31.

96 Lyndall Ryan, 'A turning point for the Weekly and a turning point for women? The debate about women and university' in *The Australian Women's Weekly* in 1961', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies*, 6(1), 2001, p. 55.

97 Ibid.

Were young people in burgeoning consumer societies the helpless victims of mass advertising and conformism? Max Harris wrote of Australian youth ‘whose international symbol is the espresso bar, whose mythic ideal is Elvis Presley, and whose cultural values, superficially at least, have been formed by impressions from outside their communities’.<sup>98</sup> Harris was concerned at the vast social conformity that characterized Australian youth. In this he was at one with noted American commentator David Riesman, who in the influential book *The lonely crowd: a study of the changing American character*<sup>99</sup> argued that Americans were developing a greater orientation to peer groups, becoming more ‘other directed’ rather than, as earlier, ‘inner directed’. John Kenneth Galbraith went further in his landmark book *The affluent society* in deriding private affluence, writing of ‘private opulence amid public squalor’.<sup>100</sup> This mass conformity was to be strongly resisted, as Adlai Stevenson had argued, and educated women could ensure their husbands and children were not caught up in it. They were to be individuals, yet individuals at the service of their families, a paradoxical and ultimately explosive mix.

## Sex and the college girl

In the early 1960s at the University of Melbourne my residential college allowed men to visit women students in their bedsits in the afternoons until 6 pm. The door of the room was to be left ajar so that a patrolling tutor could observe both student and guest. Further, if the

98 Max Harris, ‘Morals and manners’ in Peter Coleman (ed.), *Australian civilization*, F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1962, p. 54.

99 David Riesman, *The lonely crowd: a study of the changing American character*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1950.

100 John Kenneth Galbraith, cited in Cohen, *A consumers’ republic*, p. 10.

students did choose to sit on the bed, and there was often nowhere else to sit, they had to ensure that each had one foot on the floor, a fact that could be easily checked through the open door. In such a hothouse atmosphere, constantly policed, surges of youthful sexuality strained against the bonds of regulation. An atmosphere of the forbidden, the unspoken, the almost concealed typified the sexuality of the period. Only so much was allowed but no more. This had not changed since the early 1950s when a focus on restoring ‘normality’ after the disruptions of the war years predominated. However, as Beth Bailey points out, the hectic increase in rules by the late fifties and early sixties for university and college students was an indication of their increasing irrelevance.<sup>101</sup>

Both consumerism and the Cold War shaped 1950s sexuality. Above all sex was represented as heterosexual, monogamous and domestic, as many writers have pointed out. Marriage was the norm and the single state in some way deviant, possibly a sign of neurosis. Even as late as 1989 *The encyclopedia of marriage, divorce and the family* listed ‘college education’ alphabetically between ‘coitus interruptus’ and ‘colostrum’. How could college education compete, bracketed between sex and breastfeeding? Against ‘college education, impact on marriage and women’ was the notation ‘see spinster’.<sup>102</sup> Following these clues further we find, under ‘spinster’ the words ‘a negative term used to refer to an unmarried woman’. To be a spinster then was not a desirable outcome even in 1989. It was not, however, as deviant as homosexuality, which was pathologized in the medical and political discourses of the time. In Australia, Joy Damousi argues, patriotism was all important. The patriot had a ‘transparent’ self and ‘the tools of psychology’ could be used ‘to root out undesirable categories of people – the communist, the misfit, the homosexual, the egghead, the dupe’.<sup>103</sup> In Cold War America to be gay or lesbian was not only devi-

101 Bailey, *Sex in the heartland*.

102 Margaret DiCanio, *The encyclopedia of marriage, divorce, and the family*, Facts on File, New York, 1989, p. 124.

103 Joy Damousi, *Freud in the antipodes: a cultural history of psychoanalysis in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2005, p. 233.

ant but also possibly traitorous. Jane Rule, later a well-known Canadian lesbian writer, wrote of her student years:

When I was a student at Mills College, from 1948 to 1952, it was an offence to be sexual, never mind of what orientation. Men were not allowed in our rooms. Even the doors of the smaller living rooms were to be left open if we were entertaining men ...

Homosexuality was never mentioned, even by the visiting woman doctor enlisted specially to give us two lectures on sex, about which she confessed she was very embarrassed, but mainly she was there to inspire us to keep our virginity as our most precious gift to our husbands.<sup>104</sup>

Rule had been a student at Mills College in California at precisely the time when the [male] President Lynn White had famously written *Educating our daughters*, which ‘redefined the role of women’s education as socializing women for their rightful place in the home’.<sup>105</sup> Within that understanding elaborate regimes of regulation emerged that enabled young women in higher education both to find a husband and yet retain their ‘virginity’ for marriage, although it might only have been retained in the most technical sense. The preservation of virginity, of a girl’s market value, and the fear of unwanted pregnancy in those pre-Pill days, underpinned the vast structure of rules in women’s residences, as we have seen. Women themselves frequently administered the rules (see Chapter 1), acquiring leadership skills at the same time.

Students’ understandings of sexuality were shaped by the popular culture of the time. Many used the language of Freud. In 1953 Sylvia Plath describes her purchase of *The basic writings of Freud* as ‘a coveted book’.<sup>106</sup> Jill Ker bought the *Collected works* of Jung and put it on her bookshelf ‘to go back to again and again’.<sup>107</sup> Alice Gorton confided to her diary that she had been ‘Talking with mom about family and my

104 Jane Rule in *Mills Quarterly*, cited in Marilyn Schuster, *Passionate communities: reading resistance in Jane Rule’s fiction*, New York University Press, New York, 1999, p. 28.

105 Schuster, *Passionate communities*, p. 63.

106 Plath (ed.), *Letters home by Sylvia Plath*, p. 107.

107 Conway, *The road from Coorain*, p. 175.

psychological wounding at an early age & feelings of inferiority'. In a lengthy diary item she fantasized about a sexual and romantic future:

More plans about my future after accident with J. The disappearance, this time to a steel town. Work in a bar, love, violent of a real man (Streetcar named Desire type) of course after I got thin. Loss of baby. Then his passion, which I resist until his mom (my landlady) talks to me. Then the burning desire, which I actually physically painfully experienced just now. Thus violent terrible self obliterating ecstasy. Brutal yet unbelievably tender. Perfect wild animal happiness for two years. I continue to write successful salable stories. We live in steel town. The red sky, the sooted earth, sordid and real, primitive, yet wholly modern and intricate. No kids. He is killed a hero, I am completely desolate because of true love and great wanting, being wholly with him. His mother dies, I am alone, but well off financially (insurance, house, pension, authorship). I go to New York, apartment, beautiful clothes, a gorgeous desirable sensual satisfied wise and loving woman. Job on *New Yorker*, honored, respected, a literary light. I become a discreet, highly sought-after and desired prostitute also. Greatly loving in the Biblical sense too, with no begats, luckily. I can go on as soon as the light goes off, which it must. What a great life that would be.<sup>108</sup>

This fantasy is freighted with the sexuality and popular culture of the time, c. 1952. It also contains the ongoing concerns of an intelligent young woman, who wants to become a writer and to be slim – the desiderata of the time. College girls sought the desired job of editor/writer with the *New Yorker* or *Mademoiselle* even if few could emulate Plath's success. The protagonist in Gorton's piece seeks sexual union but also independence. She wants hot sex but no babies. The piece is redolent of Marlon Brando in *A streetcar named desire* (1951) and the heat and driving passion of working-class heroes.

As for many women of the time these views were filtered through the more popular works of authors such as Lundberg and Farnham, whose 1947 book, as we have seen, endorsed passivity for women – any assertive or feminist behaviour dismissed as leading to frigidity. It was a tricky balance for women: to find the right degree of sexual responsiveness between the undesirable poles of frigidity on the one hand and nymphomania on the other. Alfred Kinsey's path-breaking

108 Journal of Alice Gorton Hart, 1952, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

report *Sexual behavior in the human female* was not published until 1953. Its pages offered women a totally different sexuality, which terrified opponents claimed was a threat to American womanhood, an ‘indictment of American women’. Kinsey’s research suggested that 90 per cent of women engaged in sexual petting, 62 per cent had masturbated, 50 per cent of women had engaged in premarital intercourse, 13 per cent had had at least one homosexual contact and 26 per cent had even engaged in extramarital intercourse. These figures directly challenged the idea of ‘deep passivity’ in women’s sexual lives.

The publication of Kinsey’s work and its predecessor *Sexual behavior in the human male* underlines the link between Cold War thinking and sexuality. In 1953 Kinsey and his funders, the Rockefeller Foundation, were investigated by a committee of the US House of Representatives chaired by Tennessee congressman B. Carroll Reece for possible links to the Communist Party. Although Kinsey was not charged with any offence his Rockefeller Foundation funding was terminated.

### *Trying to live a free life in an unfree world*

Attitudes to sexuality in 1950s and early 1960s Australia were the subject of comments made by several (male) contributors to a symposium on Australian civilization.<sup>109</sup> This volume sums up the period in its total neglect of women except as subjects of occasional – and derisory – interest. Douglas McCallum, for instance, noted that amatory activity in Australia had never been studied with the clinical care devoted to the subject by Kinsey. Romantic love, he declared, except as purveyed by Hollywood or European films, was at a discount. Summing up, he saw Australian sexual mores as ‘puritanical, authoritarian, monogamous and anti-hedonistic’. Doctrines of free love were firmly repelled and an ambiguous ‘double standard’ applied to men as distinct to women. Only a minority of intellectuals, he concluded, ‘car-

109 Coleman, *Australian civilization*.

ried on an unremitting struggle against sexual intolerance and the mean-spirited ethic that goes with it'.<sup>110</sup>

That intellectual minority came spectacularly to public attention in two defining scandals – and well-publicized court cases – of the period: the dismissal of Professor Sydney Sparks Orr from the University of Tasmania for the seduction of a student in 1956, and the mystifying Chandler/Bogle deaths of early 1963, both referred to above. Both events had links to the Sydney 'Push', a group of libertarians and anarchists who advocated a compelling mix of sexual permissiveness and radicalism in the period.<sup>111</sup> This group of men and women met regularly in various inner-city Sydney pubs over two decades for intellectual discussion, in an atmosphere of convivial drinking and a degree of sexual activity remarkable for the time. Push members believed in free love, the rejection of social rules, and in equality between men and women in relation to sexual desire. It was a qualified equality, however, as Ann Coombs notes in her book on the Push. 'Women were men's equals if they could play by the men's rules', she relates.<sup>112</sup> The difficulty was that few could.

Many women flourished in the intellectual atmosphere, the sexual freedom and the experience they gained in this free-wheeling group, radical in its approach to sex in a pre-Pill era. Ann Coombs suggests the way a woman could make her mark: 'One way ... was to be outrageous. A very clever tongue, extravagant behaviour or spectacular promiscuity could ensure a place in the pantheon of Push heroines.'<sup>113</sup> It is not surprising then that the young Germaine Greer, newly arrived in Sydney from Melbourne, fell in love with the Push. 'I found what I did not know I was looking for', she told a Radio 4 interview, 'seriousness and scruple, in the service of the truth'.<sup>114</sup> Others found the rejection of fidelity and the emphasis on a male standard of sexual pleasure difficult to deal with. As Coombs explains, 'it was always

110 Douglas McCallum, 'The state of liberty' in Coleman, *Australian civilization*, p. 39.

111 Coombs, *Sex and anarchy*.

112 p. 77.

113 p. 70.

114 p. 111. Germaine Greer, 'The strongest influence on my life', Radio 4, 28 May 1975.

women's 'frigidity' that was the cause of unsatisfactory sex, not men's inadequate performance'.<sup>115</sup> And no-one wanted to count the costs: the pregnancies, the inability to deal with jealousy, the opportunities forgone and careers delayed. Before women's liberation and the development of a language to express women's particular needs some women felt frustration and rejection from such an exciting yet puzzling group. Others disdained their double standards. Jill Ker liked their ideas but felt that 'their intellectual originality went along with a stultifying conformity to what were considered "advanced" sexual mores'. 'Everyone regarded marriage and monogamy as bourgeois conventions, and it was more or less *de rigueur* to join in the sexual couplings of the group to share its intellectual life', she observed. She judged this the standard Australian left view of women, one that was decidedly asymmetrical in relation to sexual liberation.<sup>116</sup>

Push women were different – and could recognize each other by the duffle coats, long hair and black apparel of the time. Ker noted wryly that as they had rejected bourgeois fashion they often appeared rather drab. From this group several leaders of the feminist movement emerged. It was, as Push regular (and now social commentator) Eva Cox recalls,

a much better jumping off point than marriage and suburbia. And the women who tried to jump off from marriage and suburbia had a lot more ground to make up. It [the Push] put women in a good position to do something different when the opportunities came up. Disproportionately really, because an awful lot of women came out of the Push and into political activism.<sup>117</sup>

Given their approach to sexual freedom it was not surprising that some members of the Push defended Professor Sydney Sparks Orr when he was dismissed from his university post as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania. Orr, an exponent of progressive ideas such as free love, and an enemy of conventional morality, had conducted an affair with a female student. Although the affair ap-

115 Coombs, *Sex and anarchy*, p. 78.

116 Conway, *The road from Coorain*, p. 221.

117 Coombs, *Sex and anarchy*, p. 304.

peared to be consensual the professor was deemed to have taken advantage of a young and vulnerable student, exposing her to views that directly affronted the repressed and parochial Tasmanian society. In such a climate this was seen as grounds for dismissal. The libertarians of the Push were not happy that Orr denied the charges of seduction instead of proclaiming them and striking a blow against convention.

Far more devastating was the mystery of the Bogle/Chandler case, a case which to this day has not been solved, although a plausible theory has recently been put forward.<sup>118</sup> Geoffrey Chandler, the husband of the murdered woman, Margaret Chandler, had left the fateful party for a gathering of the Push. This window into the accepted sexual behaviour of some highly educated groups came as a shock to middle-class Australia and was a portent of what was to become broadly proclaimed in the decades ahead, the right to sexual freedom. It belies the comments of Max Harris in *Australian civilization* that ‘the sexual act is usually considered a fairly binding commitment to marriage’. ‘Casual sexuality is not as mandatory as it is in America’, Harris argued, ‘not as a result of religious training or moral scruples ... but because casual sex indicates a “skirt-chaser”, and the skirt-chaser is considered something of a ratbag, a weirdo, a solitary’ – all pretty nasty things to be in early 1960s Australia.<sup>119</sup> Deriding the youth who proclaimed his interests in girls as a ‘crumb’ Harris noted, nevertheless, that ‘the poofster is the lowest form of life’.<sup>120</sup>

Harris’s comments suggest a derisory dismissal of homosexuality among Australian society at the time, negating the very real dangers for those suspected of unacceptable behaviour. Far more sinister anxieties underlay any suspicion of deviation from the heterosexual norm. In California in 1954 Jane Rule, recent Mills graduate and coming to terms with her lesbianism, was uncomfortable with the atmos-

118 Peter Butt, ‘Who killed Dr Bogle and Mrs Chandler?’ ABC TV, 7 September 2006. The new theory suggested controversially that a highly toxic gas emanating from the polluted river may have been involved.

119 Harris, ‘Morals and manners’, p. 60.

120 Ibid.

phere of McCarthyism in even relaxed middle-class surroundings.<sup>121</sup> As Marilyn Schuster recounts in her exegesis of Rule's essay 'The 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1954', 'Rule quickly understood the slippage between "homosexual" and "communist" in McCarthy's understanding of "subversive", and realized that just as she was preparing for her first teaching job, schools would be under close surveillance, and McCarthy's "activities gave a national focus to my personal discomforts"'. This was to be a defining moment for Rule who later wrote: 'I left the country ...'.<sup>122</sup>

Here, before the slogan had become a catch cry, the personal was undoubtedly the political.

### *Psychoanalysis and other therapeutic solutions*

Based on Freudian understandings of sexuality, psychological and psychoanalytical therapies were brought to bear on a range of social 'problems' afflicting women. They were part of the armoury of adjustment considered so important at the time. The notion of therapy became so much part of the life of highly educated women that it appeared routinely in several surveys of the time. In Betty Friedan's survey of her Smith College classmates, which famously informed her book *The feminine mystique*, the question was posed: 'Have you had psychotherapy? Your husband or children? Do you feel you need it? If need, but haven't had, why not?'<sup>123</sup> Many replied that they had, or, if not, that they felt they would benefit from psychotherapy but were inhibited by the expense.

In Baruch and Barnett's survey of women in the middle years the question 'Have you ever had a nervous breakdown?' was posed. This too elicited a surprising number of positive responses and was certainly seen as entirely appropriate by the respondents.

121 Schuster, *Passionate communities*, p. 53.

122 Rule, cited in Schuster, *ibid.*

123 Betty Goldstein Friedan papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

Another loving mother and journal writer agonized over her daughters' futures. An interesting diary entry concerns her older daughter studying at Columbia, not sure of what she wanted to do in life, of 'what her objective honestly was'. The solution encouraged by her parents is a typically fifties one: 'October 1958. All this indicated she should not try to go on as before and that she needed psychoanalysis first.' This was duly arranged – five days a week.

On 5 October 1959 the concerned mother was worried about her daughter's expensive psychoanalysis, a drain on the family finances, as she also worried about her younger daughter's unmarried state:

It's hard to believe that she has a hard core of inner neurosis that is so different from the tangle of motives and instincts existing in any young person of high calibre facing the world with some wounds from previous mistakes. Like other mothers I suppose I lean on the prescription of a happy marriage and suitable employment.<sup>124</sup>

The linking of a happy marriage and suitable employment was pre-scient. Happy marriage alone was not enough for many highly educated women as we shall see – and as Betty Friedan revealed. Shelby Moorman Howatt, writing for her twentieth Smith College reunion, reflected that after college she had abdicated responsibility for plotting her own life, 'mindlessly following the Very Easy Simplicity Pattern for good girls, circa 1958'. The pattern included marriage to 'an intelligent successful man', two children and multiple voluntary activities. Ten years later she noted that her reflections on her deep dissatisfaction, spurred by reading Friedan and Greer, led to two more children in an attempt to quieten her inner anxieties. It also led to an eventual visit to a psychotherapist:

I told the psychotherapist I finally consulted that I had no idea why I had sought his help. Four healthy kids, a reasonably happy marriage, a decent home ... I was even sneaking in some graduate school between dentists and diapers. It was

124 Dorothy Smith Dushkin papers 1906–88, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

all very embarrassing, whining in the face of such richness. And then I saturated every tissue in the considerably placed box.<sup>125</sup>

Moorman Howatt claims she was not alone in her misery. 'Almost one third of us [her class of 1958] reportedly seriously considered suicide in the late sixties'. The women's movement and Friedan's famous revelation of 'the problem that has no name' came just in time for the class of '58. While Howatt's reflections and the statistically unsound samples of campus reunion books cannot be considered a reliable estimate, there is no doubt that the recourse to psychotherapy was a common one for conflicted highly educated women in the US.

The clearest example of the need for and experience of psychotherapy has become almost iconic for later generations of feminists through Sylvia Plath's life and work. In *The bell jar* Plath fictionalized her own breakdown while working in the much desired job as guest editor for *Mademoiselle*. Plath noted wryly, 'A psychiatrist is the God of our age'.<sup>126</sup>

Not all women accepted the psychoanalytic models of the time. Australians in general were wary of psychoanalysis. Although, as Jill Ker noted, medical fashion in the 1950s decreed giving troubled middle-aged women such as her mother tranquillizers and sedatives, she disagreed with Plath on psychiatry's reach. Ker considered psychiatry in the Sydney of her day 'the recourse of weaklings and emotional cripples'.<sup>127</sup> Older women in particular repudiated fashionable models as narrow and restrictive. Edna Roper, an Australian Labor Party parliamentarian, was critical of Helen Deutsch's argument that 'sex is the common denominator to which all women's activities can be reduced'.<sup>128</sup> She saw the dangers for highly educated women of accepting a model of sexuality that validated feminine masochism:

125 Howatt, 'Straddling two worlds (or) thank god we knew how to post'.

126 Karen V. Kukil (ed.), *The unabridged journals of Sylvia Plath, 1950-1962*, Anchor Books, New York, 2000, p. 151.

127 Conway, *The road from Coorain*, p. 175.

128 Damousi, *Freud in the antipodes*, p. 246.

Hidden away in the clinically repulsive language is the definitive suggestion that many women, ‘prominent because of their initiative and indefatigable efforts, who have made valuable contributions to the welfare of mankind because of their will and energy’ are not normal sexually. *As such conceptions have a currency in academic circles, it is not surprising that so few University women are prepared to join in the struggle for female emancipation.*<sup>129</sup>

Shaped by the Cold War and its anxieties, the consumer ‘admass’ society advancing at a rapid rate, and a psychoanalytically based re-thinking of sexual and marital behaviour, young highly educated women of the 1950s and early 1960s were facing turbulent times. How were those defining features to be played out in the lives of women students? They were clearly in for an interesting ride.

129 p. 246, original emphasis.

