

5 From *Mademoiselle* to *Ms* magazine: mainstreamers, continuity and premature liberationists

Others are catching up with my way of life.¹

No other single generation of women had its personal foundation so thoroughly jolted.²

There is sure to be a reaction which will emphasize once again that women are persons.³

Young college women of the 1950s and early 1960s began to sow the seeds of political action that the women's liberation movement would reap. The path was not always clear, however: the first steps hesitant. Interest did not initially focus on women. Political activity appeared dormant but issues such as civil rights, anti-apartheid, nuclear disarmament and a concern for peace animated many young people. Susan Borman Delattre, at Stanford in the mid-fifties, wrote to her parents on the nuclear issue: 'This is the crucial issue of my generation, and of your generation. You must save yourselves and we must save our children, and together we must stop the world from panicked self-destruction.'⁴ Borman was involved in an anti-nuclear demonstration, a 'very orderly rational demonstration' and wrote a paper against nuclear proliferation. These were vital issues for many in 1957 when the Russians launched their Sputnik and the ensuing space race seemed doomed to end in Armageddon. Borman's interests ran the gamut of

1 Yohalem, *The careers of professional women*, p. 180.

2 Howatt, 'Straddling two worlds (or) thank god we knew how to post', p. 11.

3 Marine Leland, letter to A.A. Cutler, 9 December 1953, in *Miscellaneous Correspondence*, Leland Collection, College Archives, Smith College.

4 Susan Borman Delattre papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

mid-fifties concerns and included idealism, pacifism, civil rights and, distinctively, Quakerism. She was very much of her times, often alluding to the popular culture of the era: listening to Odetta and Theodore Bikel, seeing New Wave films such as *Les quatre cents coups*. She read widely: Jung, Freud, Santayana and the transcendentalists. This was the time when at the University of Tasmania Suzanne Kemp ‘devoured works by the French existentialists – Camus, Sartre and de Beauvoir’, that Jill Ker Conway in Sydney discovered Jung.

At Melbourne University Wendy Poussard sought inspiration through her reading for social action and for spiritual formation. She found such spirit and friendships within the Newman Society and its ecumenism. ‘I remember being swept up by a Mass with trumpets in Newman chapel’, she wrote, ‘and I have a vivid memory of being in a big crowd of students on the platform of a railway station, coming home from a summer camp singing “These bones gonna rise again”’.⁵ Here then were values that young women of the time could live by. There were many who saw urgent social problems to be solved, political, social and spiritual work to be done. Some forged ahead without a woman’s movement, waiting for others to catch up.

In November 1957 one of the last issues of *The Radcliffe News* reported that representatives of *Mademoiselle* magazine had visited the college, seeking members for their college boards.⁶ *Mademoiselle* was a constant presence in American college students’ lives in the 1950s. An earlier item headlined simply ‘*Mademoiselle*’ explained some of the links in a profile of student Mary Lyon.

As Radcliffe’s member of *Mademoiselle*’s College Board, Mary left for the magazine’s New York office on a Monday last June ... She was assigned a story on college and ‘little magazines’ (which was published in the College issue of *Mlle*). The rest of her month as Guest Associate Editor was spent in ‘going to innumerable parties and meeting wonderful people’. She interviewed writer Jean

- 5 Wendy Poussard, ‘Remember the spirit’s roar’ in Val Noone with Terry Blake, Mary Doyle and Helen Praetz (eds), *Golden years. Grounds for hope: Father Golden and the Newman Society, 1950–1966*, Golden Project, Melbourne, 2008, p. 212.
- 6 ‘Magazine rep visits college’, *The Radcliffe News*, November 1957.

Stafford ... and spent most of her time reading manuscripts and doing occasional rewriting.⁷

Yet Mary Lyon had reservations about *Mademoiselle*. ‘Asked about permanent work on a magazine of the same type, Mary answered “this kind of work is not something you’d want to dedicate all your life to – their values are off”’.⁸

Off or not it was clearly a good prospect for a time as the next issue of *The Radcliffe News* noted: ‘This year’s Vogue “Prix de Paris” award has gone to Mary Lyon, giving her a three month trial training period in the fall’.⁹ A further item noted that ‘*Mlle* [sic] Opens Contest for 1950 Guest Editors; Twenty to be Chosen’.¹⁰ Twenty lucky students would be chosen from the College Board to guest edit the special college edition of *Mademoiselle*: they would gain experience, be paid for a month, meet people in their field, gain advice, enjoy field trips and much beside.

Such an offer appealed to many young women in the 1950s and early 60s, particularly in the United States. A career in writing, editing or publishing was a highly desired vocational choice. An interest in fashion was assumed to be part of the educated women’s repertoire but it was for the opportunity for more serious writing that *Mademoiselle* appealed. Sylvia Plath, at Smith College, wrote in her journal: ‘I want to write because I have the urge to excel in one medium of translation and expression of life’.¹¹ Again, triumphantly, in 1953 she recorded:

I am lucky: I am at Smith because I wanted it and I worked for it. I am going to be a Guest Editor on *Mlle* [Mademoiselle] in June because I wanted it and worked for it. I am being published in *Harper’s* because I wanted it and worked for it. Luckily I could translate wish to reality by the work.¹²

7 ‘*Mademoiselle*’, *The Radcliffe News*, September 1949.

8 Ibid.

9 *The Radcliffe News*, Commencement issue 1950, p. 2.

10 p. 6.

11 Kukil, *The unabridged journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. 184.

12 p. 183.

Plath's passion for writing went far beyond that of many of her contemporaries but the idea of a stint at *Mademoiselle* was just as welcome as to others. Plath too felt, however, that 'their values were off', as her ex-coriating fictionalized account in her novel *The bell jar*¹³ reveals.

What did the young women graduating from Stanford, Radcliffe and Smith in the fifties see as their 'rendezvous with destiny'? And what values would they adopt? Did it go beyond a stint at *Mademoiselle*? David Riesman, author of *The lonely crowd*, dismissed these career choices as limited:

Even very gifted and creative young women are satisfied to assume that on graduation they will get underpaid ancillary positions, whether as a *Time-Life* researcher or United Nations guide or publisher's assistant or reader, where they are seldom likely to advance to real opportunity, whether in terms of status or freedom of choice in their work.¹⁴

How typical were those career choices, those values: of women's colleges, of co-educational universities, of the United States or of Australia? Could they lead to real careers? In particular how did young women see their role as women *vis-à-vis* men? Several commentators, as we shall see, were sure that feminism as such had disappeared. It certainly did not figure in my thinking. Typically I dreamed of life as a secretary to a famous world-travelling writer in whose fame I would bask. Plath realized that her desired choice of marriage would inevitably lead to losing some of her intellectual edge: 'Some day when I am stumbling up to cook eggs and feed milk to the baby', she wrote, 'and prepare dinner for my husband's friends, I shall pick up Bergson, or Kafka, or Joyce, and languish for the minds that are outleaping and outskipping mine'.¹⁵

Yet Radcliffe students did have the chance to consider values other than motherhood, fashion and the home. On 17 March 1950, *The Radcliffe News* reported, they could attend a Harvard Law School forum on 'Kitchen or career' – featuring Miss Lillian Hellman (a career

13 Sylvia Plath, *The bell jar*, William Heinemann, London, 1963.

14 David Riesman, 'Two generations', *Daedalus*, 93(2), 1964, p. 730.

15 Kukil, *The unabridged journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. 225.

woman), the head of Sarah Lawrence College (a man) and Dr Marynia Farnham, the co-author of the book *Modern woman: the lost sex*. The notice mentioned that Farnham's book,

a centre of controversy from the time of its publication ... attacks feminism as the desire of neurotic women to imitate men. Considered by some to be conservative or reactionary, the book advocates the education of women in feminine rather than masculine subjects.¹⁶

Other items at that time flesh out the picture of the classes of that decade and a focus on feminine subjects, which would have pleased Farnham. As we have seen, a considerable proportion of the students of the time were already married. Many women in the mid-fifties completed their degrees as married women, some whose young husbands were serving in the armed forces. By 1961, however, the numbers of those married at graduation had declined. In the Radcliffe class of 1961 twelve members of class were 'married and not working', six travelling and the majority of the class of 241 were either working or studying.¹⁷

Some students were already honing the skills that would propel them into politics – or an academic or journalistic life – at a later stage.

The single biggest time for me

Mademoiselle magazine was part of Gloria Steinem's life too: her papers include the booklet 'The young American in Europe 1956', reprinted from *Mademoiselle*, College and Career Department. In 1957 after graduation Steinem won a Chester Bowles Scholarship to India. In

16 *The Radcliffe News*, 17 March 1950.

17 *Radcliffe News from the College*, Summer 1961.

a letter describing that opportunity Steinem wrote: 'It gives me a start as a writer and journalist which is what I very much want to be'.¹⁸

The committee that appointed Steinem was thoroughly supportive of her plans. They wrote that they 'think of you often here at Smith, and are backing you all the way – and are really proud to have you represent us over in India: couldn't ask for a better "ambassador"'.¹⁹

The Indian trip was a radicalizing experience for Steinem, giving her a definite awareness of 'injustices and indignities of colonialism, poverty etc.' She wrote vividly of her time in India; from small personal details to larger political movements. On sari wearing, for example, she wrote, 'and when I go to villages or weddings and pull the end of my sari over my head as the other women do, you have no idea of the looking-out-at-the-world sense of security it brings'.²⁰

Like Plath and Lyon, Steinem was another fifties graduate keen to write for a range of magazines. After winning the Chester Bowles Scholarship she approached several journals, including *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Travel* and *Mademoiselle*. Before the Indian trip she wrote copious letters seeking publishers for articles during her time away, telling editors that she had graduated with a 'junior Phi Beta Kappa and magna cum laude in government with a minor in general literature', writing that her 'travel project concerns that in which the west is most interested, the communist party of India'. She revealed a keen sense of her market, informing editors: 'Furthermore, the idea of a twenty-two year old girl just out of Smith College and reasonably photogenic (once a model and dancer) spending a year in India might add to the basic interest of the subject matter'. These representations of an apparently assured self seem at odds with Steinem's much later autobiographical presentation of herself as deeply lacking in self-esteem.²¹

18 Gloria Steinem papers, General correspondence 1954–69, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

19 Ibid.

20 Gloria Steinem papers, General correspondence 1954–69.

21 Gloria Steinem, *Revolution from within: a book of self-esteem*, Little, Brown and Co, Boston, MA, 1992.

Steinem displayed early entrepreneurial skills in garnering support for her writing, for films and for selling and designing sandals.²² In the process she developed a wide range of international contacts. She noted that she was ‘writing pamphlets for TWA in return for my passage’, also acquiring a letter of support and introduction from them. Over the years she was to write for many journals. Defining herself as a freelancer she contributed to *Show*, *McCalls*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *Help*, *Esquire*, *Glamour*, even *Ladies Home Journal*.²³

In a personal letter from India Steinem described her involvement in a Gandhian protest:

At Gandhigram I met many of Gandhi’s followers and discovered that they were forming a ‘yatra’ to walk through the Ramnad area and try to stop the caste riots (was that in American newspapers? It should have been ... villages were burned, people shot, butchered, tortured ... all because of caste tensions and politicians who took advantage of them). They needed a woman to go along, to go into the women’s quarters and bring them out to the meetings, to be there so that other women would come. They said can you walk twenty-five miles a day with only one sari, a towel, a cup and a comb? Can you live on what the villagers give you and sleep on the ground? ‘Of course’ said I, not knowing? So we set out on foot, walking from 5 to eleven in the morning and four to eleven at night to sleep through the midday heat.²⁴

There follows an account of a speech Steinem developed, urging villagers to eschew revenge, to wait for land reforms, until a few days later blistered and infected feet cut short her crusade. ‘All together it was probably the single biggest time in India for me’, Steinem wrote, ‘a time of learning the most about this country and about what does and does not really matter ... in any country’.²⁵

These letters provide a fascinating insight into the construction of a self and of India as the site where that self could develop. Values far from those of *Mademoiselle* could be forged. We might wonder in

22 Steinem papers, General correspondence 1954–69.

23 Ibid.

24 Letter to David, 4 February 1958, p. 4, Steinem papers, Series 2, Correspondence.

25 Ibid.

hindsight at the implicit self-representation of Steinem as the gallant young adventurer from the west, bringing succour to the impoverished of India. But for a sheltered young American woman the experience was radicalizing. India was for Steinem an opportunity for developing an identity as a political activist, one she was to put to good effect later in life. In that context she experienced a sense of agency, of direct power, unimaginable to a young woman in America at the time.

Her writings reveal the emerging journalist and political activist. They show a growing awareness, an urgent sense of inquiry. Particularly interesting was a discussion of a Radical Humanist Study Camp, held at Mussoorie, where Steinem joined a group studying the ideas of the Indian humanist M.N. Roy. Steinem wrote an article for the journal *The Radical Humanist* on her impressions titled 'In the camp of the radical humanists'.²⁶ Aware of the colonial past, Steinem nevertheless was most interested in the future. 'The most informative part of my stay there', she wrote of the 10 eight-hour-a-day sessions, 'was listening to this group of some thirty Indians from all parts of the country discuss problems of their future'.²⁷ Steinem was intrigued by the humanist philosophy of the group – many of them former communists and independence fighters – but she despaired of their determination to oppose all political parties. It was, she felt,

a kind of hazy idealism in which every citizen is not only willing, but capable of deciding every issue, no matter how complex. This borders on Utopianism and makes them supremely critical of the compromises and half truths which seem so often the best that this struggling new Government can provide.²⁸

Not only did Steinem learn a great deal about India and about politics but she honed her skills in entrepreneurship, in writing and in the building of strong networks for her later career. Also, she wrote later,

26 Gloria Steinem, 'In the camp of the radical humanists', *The Radical Humanist*, 30 June 1957.

27 Chester Bowles Asian Fellowship Report No. 3, Steinem papers, p. 7.

28 p. 9.

I was made so aware of my own ignorance of our coloured problem through the questioning of Indian friends that I spent two summers working in a negro community center here in Washington so that I might better understand this problem which looms so large in Asian eyes.²⁹

This was not Steinem's first trip overseas: she had spent her junior year abroad in Geneva in 1955, a radicalizing experience as we saw from Alison Prentice's letters (Chapter 3). At the age of twenty-two Steinem was quite a veteran of international travel. It was not without insight that Patricia Glass, Associate Director in the Vocational Office at Smith College, invited her back to talk to students in 1958, suggesting as possible topics 'Using your imagination in achieving vocational goals' or 'Opportunities for the adventurous graduate student'.³⁰

While the student-focused *Radcliffe News* recorded details of destinations and fashion, commentators in the wider community worried about women students' narrow preoccupations, as we have seen (see Chapter 3). David Riesman, for instance, was concerned at the high attrition rates in women's colleges and the fact that so many married and followed their husbands.³¹ He overlooked the exceptions such as Gloria Steinem and Jill Ker Conway.

Dean Nancy Lewis of Pembroke was also concerned at the college girl's narrow aspirations. Anticipating Betty Friedan, Lewis located the problems in a society that expected high standards of housekeeping and mothering without providing help or mental stimulation, that devalued the jobs women valued and that did not help young women to define vocational ends. Colleges for women should capitalize on these issues and provide something different for women, she argued.

Instead of pretending that what we are doing will have commercial value ... let us devote ourselves ... to the fullest possible development of her intellectual and

29 Steinem papers, Sophia Smith Collection.

30 Letter from Patricia Glass, Associate Director, Vocational Office, 14 October 1956, Steinem papers, Correspondence, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

31 Riesman, 'Women', p. 78.

spiritual powers – offer her timeless experiences of the mind and spirit. Let us not be unduly disturbed if our graduates are not immediately comfortable and happy.³²

Lewis mentioned a *Fortune Magazine* study of a young suburban community made up of college graduates and overwhelmingly devoted to ‘conformity’. Here she betrays the fear of the grey conformity that worried so many professionals and intellectuals in the 1950s.

Concluding her address to a conference on trends in liberal arts education, Lewis referred to President Davis of Smith College who asked: can we expect them always easily to adjust – a vision of truth may ‘disturb their adjustment forever’. ‘Let us not be disturbed if our students find that they face problems after leaving our colleges. Let us only be profoundly shaken if we see no evidence that they have been exposed to a vision of the truth.’³³ In essence Lewis, like Riesman, argued against the goal of ‘adjustment’ so typical of the era to which so much psychological work was aimed.

A few years later, as concern about the place of women in the United States was reawakening, a special issue of *Daedalus* was devoted to ‘The woman in America’. The preface canvassed some of the same issues:

Mr Degler believes that the absence of an ideology legitimating such activity [women working and rearing children] has been a serious handicap. He suggests that the insistence of American women on viewing their advances in a non-ideological manner has contributed to blunting the effectiveness of the gains they have made.³⁴

In other words where was feminism when it was needed?

How then can we reconcile the idea of a generation of young educated women, many consumed with issues of fashion, of pending marriage and motherhood, with harbingers of an emerging revolution, one that was to burst forth in the late 1960s and 1970s? Clearly many did engage in serious reflection as we have seen and in paid work, often

32 Lewis, ‘College women and their proper spheres’, p. 212.

33 Ibid.

34 Stephen Graubard, ‘Preface’, *Daedalus*, 93(2), 1964, p. 580.

combining it with marriage in ways they had not anticipated. In what follows we trace their paths in their lives after college towards political engagement and a nascent feminism. We observe the differences between those who were studying in the 1950s and early 60s and those who were teaching them – and worrying about their strange lack of commitment.

But was feminism dead?

‘There are few Noras in contemporary American society’, Alice Rossi charged in her ‘immodest proposal’, ‘because women have deluded themselves that the doll’s house is large enough to find complete personal fulfilment within it’.³⁵ Rossi, who was teaching at the University of Chicago, declared feminism dead, laying the blame squarely on the conservatism of psychology and sociology in the postwar period. Linked with it and partly attributable to it was, she believed, the ‘pervasive permeation of psychoanalytic thinking throughout American society’.³⁶ Further, this psychoanalytic pervasiveness led to a

defensive and apologetic note of many older unmarried professional women, the guilt which troubles the working mother (which I suspect goes up in proportion to the degree to which she is familiar with psychoanalytic ideas), the restriction of the level of aspiration of the college women, the early plunge into marriage, the closed door of the doll’s house.³⁷

Here was an all-purpose scapegoat indeed.

Rossi’s analysis is full of telling barbs. Society, she argued, is so inundated with psychoanalytic thinking that any dissatisfaction or conflict can only be seen on an individual basis. This certainly seemed to

35 Rossi, ‘Equality between the sexes’, p. 608.

36 p. 612.

37 p. 613.

be so if the surveys of the time are taken into account. Strikingly she claimed that, for the first time in the history of any known society, motherhood had become a full-time occupation for adult women.³⁸ Rossi was far from alone in deploring the trend to early marriage and self-effacement for young women. The pervasiveness of expectations of domesticity in the 1950s worried exactly the type of older unmarried professional women she mentioned, women such as Marine Leland, teacher of French at Smith College, who had very different ideals. Leland was typical of that earlier generation of highly educated women, single but living within a woman-centred culture.³⁹ Writing to a friend in 1953 Leland observed:

As for me I am becoming Machiavellian on the subject [of marriage]. Since *married women* and mothers are in fashion just now, and [I] have resorted to stressing the legal disabilities of *married women* who cease being *persons* before the law by virtue of their marriage. My idea is to applaud the students' natural desire while stressing the need for all women – *especially the married ones* – to be on the alert in protecting the rights which previous generations gained for them and in correcting present injustices.

The present frenzy for marriage is surely a result of the war as well as a result of the growing emphasis on 'normalcy' and security. I noticed the advertising in the New Haven station last night. It is largely based on this Frenzy. The 'N. Y. Times', for instance, advertises 'Smart Young Couples read the Times', or 'the clever homemaker' (she is represented in the kitchen) 'reads the Times'. There is no point against trying to buck this trend, but I do think that it can be used in upholding Liberal Education for Women until such a time as women decide to become persons again.⁴⁰

She did not adopt a 'defensive and apologetic' tone: Leland was, after all, writing a private letter to a friend with sympathetic views. She did not make her points publicly. Her reference to 'normalcy' is telling. Was she feeling conscious, as she wrote to another single, professional

38 p. 615.

39 Patricia Palmieri, *This Adamless Eden: the community of women faculty at Wellesley*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1995; Mackinnon, *Love and freedom*.

40 Marine Leland, letter to A.A. Cutler, 9 December 1953, original emphasis. I am grateful to Alison Prentice for alerting me to these records.

woman, of the pervasive attempt to paint women-identified women as abnormal, a result of the Freudian focus on heterosexuality as the only form of 'normal' sexuality?

Earlier Leland wrote:

last week (or was it last night) the College paper, *The Sophian*, sponsored a symposium on the theme: *A Liberal Education as a preparation for motherhood*. As you may suspect the title is nauseating to me. Why not a symposium at Yale on *A Liberal Education as a preparation for fatherhood*?⁴¹

Leland's suggestion reminds us of Dean Nancy Lewis's complaint that people were endlessly worried about educating women for men's needs but not vice versa. Lewis cheekily suggested a reversal, as we have seen.⁴²

Many of the earlier generation of educated women, teaching in colleges and universities, and leading women's colleges, spoke out against the trend to early marriage and weak career aspiration. Rossi set out her desideratum, her ideal case scenario:

she will not marry before her adolescence and schooling are completed, but will be willing and able to view the college years as a 'moratorium' from deeply intense cross-sex commitments, a period of life during which her identity can be 'at large and open and various'.⁴³

In her inauguration as fifth president of Radcliffe College in August 1960, Mary Bunting challenged her audience:

Older societies made laws to prevent women from practicing medicine or attending learned institutions. Today the laws are repealed but American women seem somewhat like a dog I knew, who long after the front fence had been removed, ran down the road to the place where the gate used to be, before running into the yard.⁴⁴

41 Ibid.

42 Lewis, 'College women and their proper spheres', p. 207.

43 Rossi, 'Equality between the sexes', p. 647.

44 Mary Bunting, 'The fifth president speaks', *Radcliffe Quarterly*, August 1960, p. 18.

She did not entirely blame women: part of the problem was a ‘confusion of purpose’ in the United States. ‘No wonder that most of the talented youth in this country who fail to go on to college are girls’, she said. ‘No wonder that those who do so often drop out at the flick of a ring ... It is not so much a question of anti-feminism as anti-intellectualism.’⁴⁵

Older educated women did provide exemplars for a different way of living. Australian legal expert Roma (later Dame Roma) Mitchell offered a model to young legal graduates in Adelaide:

She was actually marvellous with any people who were students at the university. She encouraged them like mad ... She managed beautifully in an age where it was much more prejudiced than in my time ... she was so clever and brilliant at things, you know, she got on top of it all.⁴⁶

Carolyn Heilbrun claimed that status for Margaret Mead, noting that:

Despite the care she took not to offend the American cult of motherhood in the fifties – how outspoken revolutionary women can ever be is central to the question of female anxiety and ambivalence – she made new female destinies possible.⁴⁷

Unlike many of the earlier feminists whose women-identified lives appeared sexless or, worse, deviant to Freudian-influenced young women in the fifties, Mead had married, had led an exotic life and was a mother, her ambiguous sexual life well below the public radar.

Carl Degler doubted America’s ability to nurture feminism. He claimed:

American society in general, which includes women [sic], shuns like a disease any feminist ideology ... [a] reading of the past reminds us that in America the soil is thin and the climate uncongenial for the growth of any seedlings of ideology.⁴⁸

45 Ibid.

46 Interview with Pam Cleland, ‘Graduating in the fifties’ project.

47 Heilbrun, *Hamlet’s mother and other women*, p. 28.

48 Carl Degler, ‘Revolution without ideology: the changing place of women in America’, *Daedalus*, 93(2), 1964, p. 663.

Yet, as he wrote in 1964, the seeds were being sown and the older rhizomes were readying to burst into life anew. In California the free speech movement was erupting.

The mainstream, the continuity and the premature liberationists

The majority of women who left their institutions of higher learning in the 1950s and early 60s, in both Australia and America, pursued the fifties norm in the first instance. They might be called ‘the mainstream’. A small band remained single, or chose female partners, and pursued careers. Some did seek to define modern ideologies, modern sensibilities. Susan Sontag, author, teacher, critic and lecturer, and a forerunner in this genre, was one who sought to define the new sensibility of the age:

The modern sensibility is more involved with pleasure than ever – in a complex way. It demands less ‘content’ in art, and is more open to the pleasures of ‘form’ and style; it is also less snobbish, less moralistic – in that it does not demand that pleasure in art is necessarily associated with edification.⁴⁹

The pursuit of art, of dance and drama, and the pleasure of those forms, was central to many women of the time: creativity was viewed as a higher value than content. But as well as pleasure a concern for one’s society was also present as Susan Borman Delattre and Alison Prentice’s letters and Gloria Steinem’s work revealed. Many were aware of social and political issues and wished to ameliorate them through movements such as moral rearmament, peace activism, civil rights and the Student Christian Movement.

49 SS, ‘Opinion please’, first proof for *Mademoiselle*, 12 February 1965, Susan Sontag papers, Special Collections Library, UCLA.

Graduates from an earlier generation, such as Marine Leland, Margaret Mead, Mary Bunting, Alice Rossi and Roma Mitchell, continued to provide an example of engaged professional work, providing models for those who wanted to look beyond the kitchen and fashion. They might be described as ‘the continuity’, keeping the link, sometimes tenuous, with an earlier feminism. A small group moved into the workplace and tackled career and family issues from the outset, as had some highly educated women of the generation before. This group has been called ‘the anticipators’ but might also be named the proto-feminists or in Yohalem’s catchy term ‘premature liberationists’.⁵⁰

All groups contributed to the movement that was to erupt in the 1970s, although their contributions took very different forms.

The mainstream: ‘it was a simmer in there’

The majority of the young women who left colleges and universities in Australia and the United States at this time expected to marry and raise children as we have seen. They were the young women of whom Degler, Lewis, Riesman and Leland despaired. During their college years their preoccupations – intellectual, social and sexual – led them to that destination. They were the generation that followed the lost years of the war, turning back to the security of traditional pathways, or new consumer-defined, psychologically constrained versions of those pathways. Alice Gorton met her future husband George Hart in her final year at Smith and like so many of her cohort married straight after graduation. This solved the vocation dilemma for Alice: ‘George has the problem – what for vocation; but all I must do is follow him. I can do it and do it well ... Freud which I have since come to accept, if not to believe fully.’⁵¹ Yet beneath the apparent acquiescence many felt something was not right. A married lawyer recollects her dormant interest in women’s lives:

50 Yohalem, *The careers of professional women*, p. 195.

51 Alice Gorton Hart papers, 1953–54, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

I remember as a teenager and at university this thing about being a listener and the supporter and the amenable young woman. Those images of what it was to be ... even to be a good girl. Quite frankly, you know, just how oppressive I felt all that and how the things that I wanted to do naturally were considered not to be ladylike ... So there was always the feeling of resentment, and then when I started looking for work, as I said, those firms didn't take women ...

Yes, it was a summer in there, and of course when you practised matrimonial law you realized.⁵²

This was a woman who found that being at home with young children led to a feeling of constriction: 'Trapped is the word I'm looking for, the feeling that I had'. A young scientist had similar feelings: 'When I had my first child and I was at home alone with that child I can remember sitting down and weeping missing people, missing the discussions, the talk'.⁵³

Later the young Australian lawyer became an activist in the early days of the women's movement. Books were important in helping her identify the sources of her resentment: 'Betty Friedan, that's right, her book. That really reflected how I felt. I loved Gloria Steinem and the things that she would write. Germaine Greer – I find she's too dense, I can't focus.'

Countless numbers of women who wrote in their reunion surveys and other writings mentioned the critical importance of key books in their awakening: *The second sex*, *The feminine mystique*, *The female eunuch*, *The women's room* were all mentioned. The scientist dealt with her misery by joining a Housewives Club: 'we had speakers, we used to invite the people ... you took your child along and put it in the crèche and then you could go and talk to other people'. Later she too took a part-time job lecturing in biology. 'I am a feminist', she claimed, 'but I'm not an avid feminist. As I said I've always had equal pay. I have a partnership with my husband, no I don't mean literally on paper, so I've always felt liberated.'⁵⁴ This is one of the women

52 Interview for 'Graduating in the fifties' project.

53 Interview for 'Graduating in the fifties' project.

54 Interview for 'Graduating in the fifties' project.

who, looking back over her life, used those fateful words: 'I felt I had the best of all possible worlds'.

Alice Gorton Hart succumbed to the 'motherly breath of the suburbs'⁵⁵ like so many of her cohort. She found herself with considerable ground to make up when in the 1970s as a mother of two sons she discovered the women's movement. In its liberating embrace she found that many of the same old ghosts of twenty years earlier still haunted her: 'I'm going to one workshop at the USU [Utah State University] women's conference tomorrow – Body Image for Overweight Women'. Alice wrote later:

Body image. Yes – I really care for myself (must check blood pressure). Now I care about drawing and tennis, poetry and my friends ... Told George I've been a mother for 27 years and a wife for almost 30 and I'm sick of being both. I want to be companion, friend, playmate.⁵⁶

Hart's journal traced her reading and her dawning feminist consciousness. She was reading *Touchstones*:

something about a woman must pay her *debt* as a woman to husband, home and family before she does anything for her self 'submission of will' the whole thing is so revealing of *me*. I swallowed all that crap too. Tillie Olsen's *Silences* ... But the NOW [National Organization of Women] meeting is training to lead a consciousness raising group and that could really change the quality of my life a lot. If George can't or won't give me what I need, I find it elsewhere.⁵⁷

Hart was ready for the message of feminism.

It was not until many years after her graduation, challenged by feminism and reflecting on her decision to marry straight from college, that Alice Gorton Hart regretted the haste, the lost opportunities. Recognizing the value of her reflections she approached the Sophia Smith Collection in the 1980s. Their reply delighted her:

55 Plath, *The bell jar*, p. 119.

56 Alice Gorton Hart, Journal, July 1982 – October 1983, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

57 Ibid, original emphasis. For an overview of NOW see Rosen, *The world split open*.

Letter from Mary-Elizabeth Murdock, director of Sophia Smith Collection and she would be pleased indeed to accept my journals. I am relieved and delighted to be part of the archive, one of the two largest in the world, she says. Knowing this may be used to help other women is exciting, a tad of immortality ... and I don't think it will dry up my honesty.⁵⁸

It did not. Hart's honesty is compelling. Around her fifty-first birthday she wrote, 'Starved for good conversation. Where does one find new friends, new interests? I'll be a volunteer at the museum.' Tellingly she quoted former classmate Sylvia Plath: 'Winter is for women'. It was in this period that Hart approached the Smith Collection as a repository for her expanding collection of journals. An Australian contemporary echoes Hart's needs. 'Desperately wanted companionship of intellectuals', she wrote. 'Hid my knowledge, read and had a rich fantasy life.'⁵⁹

The premature liberationists

When Jill Ker began her historical research she chose as her subjects the first generation of American women who in the 1870s and '80s entered graduate study. She found her women subjects a welcome 'relief from the social attitudes and values of the 1950s'. In their enthusiastic contributions to public life and their progressive values they offered something new to the young scholar, a sense of herself seen through others. 'I was looking at myself *through the lens of history*', she wrote, 'something my male colleagues had always done'.⁶⁰ This epiphany prefigured the larger reversals of the next decade when feminism would encourage women to look at themselves kindly rather than critically. They would examine parts of their bodies that had been taboo or the domain of the male gynaecologist only. They would see themselves as actors in the historical landscape.

58 Alice Gorton Hart, Journal, July 1982 – October 1983, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

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

60 Conway, *True north*, p. 56, emphasis added.

With her research happily underway Jill Ker Conway took hold of her life. 'At thirty-three, about to be thirty-four, I saw myself as a scholar', she wrote. 'History was what I did and would do for the rest of my life'.⁶¹ She explained that thirty-three seems late for such a discovery but added 'but a woman develops her sense of her working self on a different trajectory from that of a man'.⁶² Within this trajectory if women could defer the decision to marry further heights were possible.

Germaine Greer set her sights on Cambridge, England, and found herself alone there:

When I came up to Cambridge my fellow students were showing their parents around their rooms, the lecture theatres, the Backs, posing for pictures in the family album. The families beamed with pleasure, shouted and ran about, gathering images of their successful children against the background of Erasmus's bridge and the Wren Library and the stone nougat of King's College. Nobody photographed me, not then, not when I knelt resplendent in medieval red and black with my hands joined in prayer within those of the Vice-Chancellor, Germaine Greer Doctoris Cantabrigiensis. I collected my degree by myself. There was no victory supper, no champagne. I had worked all my life for love, done my best to please everybody, kept on going till I reached the top, looked about and found I was all alone.⁶³

Is it significant that women such as Greer, Conway, Steinem and Plath, who in various ways plumbed the female condition, had lost their fathers, or felt alienated from them? Conway's father had urged her, before his death during her childhood, to 'Do something Jill. Don't just put in time on this earth.'⁶⁴ Plath too lost her authoritarian father in early childhood. Hunter Steiner claims the young Sylvia had wished him dead then, in the manner of children, was wracked with guilt at his passing.⁶⁵ I too lost my father as I began my university years. He had set me, an eldest child, an internal script – to see the mountain top and to keep climbing upwards. Such injunctions have

61 p. 149.

62 Ibid.

63 Greer, *Daddy, we hardly knew you*, p. 152.

64 Conway, *The road from Coorain*, p. 187.

65 Steiner, *A closer look at Ariel*.

lasting effects. It was not until I explored these issues many years later that I allowed myself to relax the search for an endless and ultimately impossible perfection. I'm sure I'm not alone in this.

Like the lawyer who felt uncomfortable with the prescriptions to be a good listener, acquiescent and amenable, some felt uncomfortable with injunctions that rankled but could not be expressed. Alison Prentice remembers her commencement address, presented by Adlai Stevenson:

I [absorbed] his awful prescription for our futures (we would be good mothers and educate our male children well) and, at some deep level, really resent[ed] it. W.H. Auden had said more or less the same thing, at his (compulsory for both him and his reluctant audience) 'chapel' address. We would read good books to our (presumably male) children – that's what I remember him saying, and that was the whole point of our superior education. Again, I wasn't good at articulating the rage I felt – it just simmered below the surface for a decade and a half – until I was rescued by feminism in the early 70s! Of course, maybe with Auden, who was a notorious alcoholic, as well as brilliant, maybe he was being ironic and sticking the knife in deliberately, hoping it might arouse some of us to revolt.⁶⁶

Jill Ker, travelling in England and Europe with her mother at the completion of her Australian degree, became aware of a sense of condescension on the part of the English towards 'colonials' from Australia. Further, in elite university circles 'I became outraged by the unmistakable undertones of studied rudeness to women'.⁶⁷ Ker modelled for a few months for a fashion designer, becoming totally disenchanted with designers and fashion photographers whom she felt did not like women. Such insights, and slights, sowed the seeds for later feminism.

While latent feminism 'simmered' below the surface, many young women became interested in broader social and political issues. Jill Ker deplored the British 'self-satisfied exploitation of colonial people which was clothed in comfortable rhetoric in peacetime and exposed as cold calculation in time of war'.⁶⁸ Prentice recalls of her Geneva year abroad that 'people I met were very religious and very

66 Interview with Alison Prentice, 'Graduating in the fifties' project.

67 Conway, *The road from Coorain*, p. 210.

68 p. 208.

concerned about social justice and stuff like that. So I became very interested in social justice issues and poverty, international relations and why the war had happened.’ Her visit to East Berlin was also fateful:

We ... met students in East Berlin and sat down in a café and talked with them and saw a Russian or a Communist propaganda film ... I’d seen an American propaganda film ... so this was pretty interesting, learning about propaganda. I guess it had me raising questions about everything by the time I’d got back.⁶⁹

Both Ker and Greer, of course, later wrote key feminist texts. Conway hoped to join the Australian Department of External Affairs after her graduation from the University of Sydney but found herself deemed unsuitable as a woman. Her rejection led her

to think what it meant that I was a woman, instead of acting unreflectingly as though I were a man, *bound to live out the script of a man’s life*. This one blow of fate made me identify with other women and prompted me, long before it was politically fashionable to do so, to try and understand their lives.⁷⁰

This rejection occurred at much the same time that Ruth Dobson, from the Department of External Affairs, challenged the Australian Federation of University Women to take a more significant role ‘in pursuits not necessarily the prerogative of women, but in fields where women *should* participate and *have* a contribution to make equal to that of men’.⁷¹ She felt that women, particularly university women, had a strong responsibility ‘to press for the rights and opportunities of all women in all fields’.

Later Jill Ker Conway wrote two major works on women’s history in the United States, and taught one of the first courses on women’s history in Canada, contributing to the opening up of the dis-

69 Interview with Alison Prentice, ‘Graduating in the fifties’ project.

70 Conway, *The road from Coorain*, p 193, emphasis added.

71 Ruth Dobson, ‘Role of women in public affairs in Australia’, AFUW 1960 conference report, pp. 46–47, S 195, Noel Butlin Archives, ANU, original emphasis.

cipline within North American universities.⁷² She became the first woman president of Smith College.

In 1971 Greer wrote the hugely influential, often reprinted, *The female eunuch*, a manifesto for the women's movement. She continues to contribute to feminist debate with controversial, powerful polemics, as well as maintaining a body of scholarly work on literature. Conway and Greer are exemplars of the many 1950s graduates who drew on their rigorous training and their experience as women to rewrite the scripts of women's lives in the following decades. Alison Prentice, inspired by early feminism, was a pioneer in women's history in Canada, becoming a distinguished university professor. In common with so many others these women had long and unanticipated careers within the academic sphere and beyond. Gloria Steinem co-founded the influential *Ms* magazine in 1972, an ironic counterpoint to the femininity of *Mademoiselle*. Genevieve Lloyd and Lynn Segal, whose lives were touched by the Sydney Push, went on to write significant feminist texts. Most had to leave Australia to find their voices, unlike their American sisters.

Teaching did not suit Sylvia Plath. Back at Smith to teach in 1957 she wrote in her journal: 'all my projected nostalgia for my students can't shake the conviction that teaching is a smiling public-service vampire that drinks blood and brain without a thank you'.⁷³ Plath did not play a part in the women's liberation movement, indeed she died before the movement began, at that critical age of thirty. But her short life and tragic death and her determination to combine a fully creative life, to see herself as a writer, a poet, and wife and mother, became iconic for many others.

72 Jill Ker Conway, *The female experience in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America: a guide to the history of American women*, Garland, New York, 1982.

73 Kukil, *The unabridged journals of Sylvia Plath*, p. 377.

Finding the new self: seeking a feminist consciousness

‘Early feminism was a moral argument’, wrote Susan Sontag, ‘A question of justice. Then, when it took hold in America, where moral arguments have been so hollowed out, it became a psychological argument ... a question of the cultivation of the self, the search for happiness.’⁷⁴ Certainly the search for a new self was recognized as a key goal of women’s liberation. Countless books have charted the histories of the women’s liberation movement and I do not intend to take that journey here.⁷⁵ What interests me is the contribution of highly educated women to that movement – and the impact it had on those educated women who came to it later. Forty years after their graduation women could look back and assess the changes they had undergone. Like Shelley Moorman Howatt they had often had their lives thoroughly jolted. Reunion books, interviews and surveys provide a wide range of individual and class responses to the revolution that changed lives in the 1970s. The Smith class of 1954, the Vasser classes of 1957 and 1958, and the Radcliffe class of 1964 all declared the women’s movement to have significantly changed – or influenced – their lives.⁷⁶

‘Did “the women’s movement” significantly affect your concept of yourself and your role at home and outside the home?’ ‘Where did you go with this new self?’ These questions challenged former students of Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, when they opened the questionnaire that was to be the basis of their fortieth reunion report.⁷⁷ The question of the ‘new self’ elicited a wide range of replies. ‘I began to live more comfortably in my old self’, wrote one.

74 Susan Sontag, *On women*, 1999, Susan Sontag papers, Special Collections Library, UCLA.

75 See for instance Rosen, *The world split open*.

76 Barbara Strauss Heller, ‘Class Profile’, 1954, Reunion Books, Smith College Archives; Brown and Pacini, ‘The Vasser classes of 1957 and 1958’, p. 187 and Stewart and Vandewater, ‘The Radcliffe class of 1964’, p. 244.

77 Radcliffe College, Class of ’56 40th reunion, 1996, compiled by yearbook committee, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America.

‘[I] was more frequently outrageous’, wrote another. ‘I have been in therapy for twenty years trying to find myself’, was another response, in contrast to a classmate who wrote: ‘not a new self, just a more confident self’. Another ‘gradually unglued her identity from being wife-mother-daughter’. In response to the question ‘where did you go with your new self’, one woman wrote, quite literally: ‘into some interesting beds in that exciting window of hedonism between the sexual revolution and the onset of herpes and AIDS ... I’m grateful for my lucky timing’.⁷⁸ The mainstream may have begun with the Very Easy Simplicity Pattern for women but they graduated to much more complex designs.

Where did fifties and early sixties Australian graduates see themselves in relation to women’s liberation when they looked back on that period? They did not unanimously endorse the women’s movement. Many felt they were there already, ahead of the game in fact. The one point on which nearly all could agree was the need for equal rights.

From ‘at last’ to zen

I asked the Australian women ‘Do you describe yourself as traditional, feminist, women’s liberationist or a supporter of equal opportunity?’ About three quarters of the respondents to my survey described themselves as supporters of equal opportunity.⁷⁹ About equal numbers described themselves as feminist and traditional, and an even smaller minority chose ‘women’s liberationist’. Two women declared they were all of these things.

One woman chose none of the categories, stating: ‘I grew up in an atmosphere where anyone could do what they wanted to do in life if they wished – gender didn’t come into it’. Other responses given to this question were ‘a modified traditionalist, adjusting to the times’, ‘a human being’, ‘individualist’, ‘supporter of people doing what they want

78 Ibid, anonymous excerpts from responses published in the reunion book.

79 ‘Graduating in the fifties’ project.

to do with their lives', 'a loner', 'an "individual" who is wary of seeing herself in terms of any of the above labels', 'a radical conservative', 'opposed to trite labels', 'a qualified feminist', 'intelligent human being', 'a scientist', 'eclectic', 'a rational feminist' and, finally, 'zen'.

Many of the respondents supported equal opportunity. This was non-negotiable. 'I do not fit the role of the banner waver whose job is to jolt the consciousness of society – but I am committed to equality of opportunity.' 'Men and women should have opportunity to develop to their full potential and each should respect the other.' Many added their opposition to affirmative action, which was often described as 'tokenism'. A number of respondents also expressed their support for men and women sharing equally in domestic duties and child rearing.

There were negative comments about feminism:

I have always found the rhetoric empty and egoistic. I have witnessed abused women being 'paraded' for the ends of this women's movement or that. I have witnessed the continuing abuse of the caring 'Oz' male and found it an abominable perversion of my own life experience ... I have been cared for and dreamed for etc by the males in my life. Maybe the poor bastards got it wrong a lot of the time but so did I about them.

'I do not think women should gain either just because they are women', claimed another. "'Positive discrimination" ... is ultimately demeaning to women.' 'I do not feel comfortable with radical feminists who denigrate a large proportion of the female population who find full satisfaction in a husband, children and a home.' 'Not interested in "isms". Do not support extremists.' 'I don't like pushy women any more than pushy men.' 'I heartily dislike the rabid feminists who demean womanly virtues and discourage manly chivalry.' 'Change with tolerance and reasonableness is more lasting than aggressive change.' "'Aggressive" feminism I find off-putting.' One was desperate: 'I believe the feminist movement is about to destroy the whole human race. I am trying to prevent this.' For many of these women it seems the style of the new movement as much as the substance was off-putting.

Many commented on the complementary roles of men and women: 'Passionate belief in role of family in society, and personal experience of "breeding and feeding" made me prepared to accept differences in gender roles as they offered advantages as well as disadvantages.' 'Women and men are made differently and we complement each other.' Women 'should not try to outdo men, or to be like men (i.e. they should retain their femininity)'. 'Vive la Différence!'

Some thought that feminism was either futile (nothing could change) or unnecessary (nothing more needed to change). 'I do not think we are likely to achieve equality because women are limited by their biological restrictions', one claimed. 'There are no real disadvantages to being a female in Australia', another lucky woman asserted. Another wrote that she did not need feminism because she was already employed and her husband shared the domestic work. A dentist was happy being 'one of the boys' in an all-male profession and did not want to be singled out.

One woman insisted that she was not oppressed as a woman in school or her workplace, though she was oppressed in her marriage. The following response was similar: 'I never felt the need for feminism in my career e.g. I was the "first female" in several jobs at my teaching hospital. Marriage made me a feminist!' Another wrote: 'I have never been oppressed by men! I realise that if one has had bad experiences of them, one's attitude would be very different.'

Some had mixed feelings about feminism: 'I believe one parent should be at home with pre-school children ... I feel women's movement probably made it easier for me to obtain positions of responsibility.' 'I think social expectations and definitions of roles are changing and that changes that allow women autonomy and expression of their abilities are of benefit to everyone. I don't identify with "blame patriarchy".' 'I did not have time to become involved, though I had resented, since 1948, the fact that I was paid less than a man for doing the same job, so was involved in discussions of equal pay for teachers.'

I grew up expecting and getting equality at work [claimed a pharmacist] therefore no reason to be a rabid feminist. I gnash my teeth with bank managers and

men's committees at my golf club, but I believe that a quiet and constant assumption that you are equal pays off.

I was too busy with young children, or with teaching, to notice much women's movement. Only 'educated' in this by my son's girlfriends. Too late and too upsetting to change much, by that age. Would be disappointed to find a young woman acting and thinking as I did.

Others felt unambiguously positively about feminism: 'the guilt has gone about being out of the home'. 'The women's movement gave me a chance to meet many women like myself.' The women's movement 'opened my eyes to just how much of our lives was patterned on old attitudes and expectations of male/female roles and not personal choice. Not anti-men as people – feel they need liberation too.' 'Betty Friedan changed my views utterly, or rather articulated my views of many years. Then women's movements confirmed my beliefs in women's equality and society's inequality.' 'The women's movement has affected me indirectly – I read Greer, Friedan et al, but only really understood much of it when my feminist daughters grew up.' 'Consider women have still enormous amount to contribute to humanity and running of the world and want men to develop same gifts.' 'I knew about the earlier feminist movement, so the 1960s/70s movement was more like "at last" than something new.' 'My career – the education of girls – has been driven by a commitment to the education of women leading to absolutely equal opportunity and an equal role in society.' 'I now feel stung by the injustices. The women's movement taught me to acknowledge those feelings.'

I was in the same Honours English tutorial group as Germaine Greer for 3 years [wrote one woman]. Although our ideas were different it was surprising years later to read 'The Female Eunuch' and discover so many areas of agreement. Marilyn French's 'The Women's Room' also influenced me.

One woman acknowledged that she was a feminist because of her 'mother's failure to use education outside the home and her narrower life as a result'. A religious sister stated that her religious community was 'dedicated to freeing women from all kinds of oppression'. Most

of the religious in the study identified as feminists or women's liberationists.⁸⁰

'It is difficult to tell whether the women's movement had really changed the thinking of these women or simply articulated what they really had felt all along about the meaning of their education and skills', wrote Brown and Pacini of their Vassar subjects.⁸¹ It is clear that many highly educated women felt that they had anticipated the women's movement and were waiting for others to catch up, particularly those who graduated early in the 50s. They felt that they had achieved their goals through their own efforts and initiative and did not need a movement to support them. This seemed particularly so of those in the professions – medical doctors and lawyers – who made their way unobtrusively and without fanfare, often overlooking what they felt were trivial slights. Many rejected what they called 'ideological' approaches while recognizing the value of specific changes such as equal pay. Others welcomed the new analyses of feminism, the struggles that resulted in clearer pathways for careers, for promotion and recognition.

Those who had completely accepted the domestic ideology of the times, had married early and devoted themselves to full-time home-making and a husband's career, were often the most bitter, felt most cheated. In the study of the Radcliffe class of 1964 women were divided into three groups post-graduation: those on 'the family clock', those on the 'career clock' and those who combined 'both family and career clocks'. At age 37 the women on the family clock alone had more regrets than any of the others. The authors concluded that the early exclusive commitment to one life project 'seems to have had more consequences for those pursuing the family clock'.⁸² Women such as those dedicated to the 'family clock', and later regretting lost opportunities, were part of the vast force behind the women's move-

80 All responses from the open-ended questions in Alison Mackinnon, 'Graduating in the fifties' survey.

81 Brown and Pacini, 'The Vassar classes of 1957 and 1958', p. 187.

82 Stewart and Vandewater, 'The Radcliffe class of 1964', p.252.

ment, the women for whom the writings of Friedan, Greer, Steinem and others came as a revelation, a call to action.

Dust on the mind ...

The struggle for equal rights, on which most women could agree, did not disappear throughout the period. An earlier generation, often dismissed by the young women of the time as unattractive, uninteresting and old hat, kept alive the onward march. 'Jay Cee wanted to teach me something, all the old ladies I ever knew wanted to teach me something, but I suddenly did not think they had anything to teach me', complained Sylvia Plath's character, typifying the attitude to earlier feminists.⁸³ As we have seen they looked with alarm at the early rush into domesticity and the abandonment of careers for jobs. Yet through organizations such as the American and Australian Associations of University Women, and the International Federation of University Women, linked with UNESCO and other international bodies, women quietly pushed forward.⁸⁴

The university women's associations surveyed married women who wanted to join the workforce, and dismissed links between women's work and juvenile delinquency or maladjustment. They pushed for more scholarships, fellowships – rare and highly valued – and career counselling. They commented wryly on the problem of husbands: 'The theory that it is better to have dust on the furniture than dust on the mind is apparently a sentiment most husbands would not subscribe to'.⁸⁵ They assessed what was available on a part-time basis for the increasing numbers of graduates who wanted to return to work part time when their children were at school. In Australia in 1960 market research and high school teaching were the only areas actively recruiting part-timers although some medical women and

83 Plath, *The bell jar*, p. 6.

84 See Eisenmann, 'A time of quiet activism'.

85 P. Morris, 'Changing attitudes to married women working outside the home', AFUW/NSW Symposium, September 1960, Noel Butlin Archives, ANU, p. 4.

dentists could negotiate part-time employment. In the US editing, publishing, journalism and freelance writing also offered significant opportunities. This was a less favoured option in Australia. But part-time work could also be demeaning for those who yearned to offer more. Alice Gorton Hart felt undervalued yet exhilarated by her casual university teaching:

I was in a bitter rage this morning over the injustice of it all – the last minute hiring, the key humiliation, the exclusion and separation – but then I thought it was good to stand alone and independent, went to the office and did a bang-on job on a Cummins paper preparation and then had a rather exciting class.⁸⁶

By the time women were writing in their fortieth reunion books, and responding to questionnaires, the world had ‘split open’, to use Ruth Rosen’s apt expression.⁸⁷ Many women had been forced to review their values, to rethink their priorities, to rework their ‘self’. Many from the mainstream joined the premature liberationists to swell the ranks of the women’s liberation movement. Hart wondered if she had married early ‘because of secret fear of ability to do anything else’. Days before her early death from cancer in 1987 her journals record the persistent questions that shaped her adult life. She had seen her life through the lens of a man, not through her own prism – and it had let her down. She was still agonizing over the relationship with her husband – ‘and independence issue, talked to counselor who spoke of central question: can you have a close loving relationship and be independent as well?’⁸⁸ This was the crucial question, one that was to concern not only the women of the classes of the 1950s and early 60s but those who were to follow.

86 Alice Gorton Hart, *Journal*, 1970–72.

87 Rosen, *The world split open*.

88 Alice Gorton Hart, *Journal*, July 1986 – June 1987.

