

A note on sources and method

Sources

I have consulted a wide range of sources for this book. As well as literary sources – histories, biographies, autobiographies, articles and personal papers – a wide range of other archival sources have proved invaluable. Some are listed below. My aim was not to cover all possible sources on this wide topic – such a task would have been impossible – but to gain a flavour of undergraduate life and life after college in both Australia and the US for women who attended institutions of higher education in the 1950s and early 1960s. Not surprisingly it was not always possible to find parallels in each country. For example the wonderful reunion questionnaires and printed reunion books that exist in several women’s colleges in the US (e.g. Smith College, Radcliffe College and Wellesley College) have no equivalent in Australia. I decided, however, to consult them for their particular insights, realizing that I would not have a similar set of ‘frozen in time’ records for Australian women.

I did, however, have much wider access to interviews with Australian women and I have drawn on this source more than on interviews with US graduates. So although there is no exact ‘equivalence’ in the manner of the social sciences I am satisfied that I have canvassed a wide range of views. This group of women was the object of wide social interest for a number of reasons explored in the text. Hence there were many surveys that purported to anatomize their lives. I have drawn on the surveys widely often as much for the questions asked as for the responses. The questions themselves present a picture of the period and its preoccupations. I see all these sources as ‘texts’ to be interpreted rather than as data in any scientific sense.

Surveys

Australia

Meg Rorke with the assistance of Professor Fred Schonnell and Dr I.G. Meddleton, *The vocational contribution of women graduates of the University of Queensland*, Research Publication no. 6 of the Faculty of Education, University of Queensland, 1958, Noel Butlin Archives, ANU, Canberra.

Canberra Association of Women Graduates: evidence submitted to the Committee of Enquiry into Commonwealth Public Service Recruitment (author not listed, nd c 1958), Noel Butlin Archives, ANU, Canberra.

Canberra Association of Women Graduates, Comment on the Boyer Report, in file 'The Public Service "marriage bar" and the Boyer Report', 1958–62, prepared by K. McDonald and H. Crisp, 1959. Noel Butlin Archives, ANU, Canberra.

Madge Dawson, *Graduate and married: a report on a survey of one thousand and seventy married women graduates of the University of Sydney*, Department of Adult Education, Sydney, 1965.

Alison Mackinnon, *Graduating in the fifties: women graduates' family formation study*, report on a survey and follow-up interview study of 200 women graduates of Adelaide and Melbourne universities.

United States

Henry A. Murray Research Center for the Study of Lives, Radcliffe Institute of Advanced Study, Harvard University.

Baruch and Barnett, *Women in the Middle Years, 1979–1980* (A621). (I selected only those cases with tertiary education from the larger sample.)

E. Lowell Kelly Longitudinal Study (1935–1955).

Kathleen Hulbert and Marilyn Schuster, *Women's lives through time* contains accounts of several longitudinal studies (e.g. Yohalem, Pacini and Brown, Sicherman).

Also many alumnae surveys for regular class reunions from Radcliffe College, Smith College and Wellesley College. These surveys, while far from scientific, offer an invaluable snapshot of a 'year group' as a cohort as it progresses through life after college.

Interviews

Australia

Approximately 30 interviews conducted by the author and research assistant Penny Gregory in Melbourne and Adelaide. Those interviewed were, in the main, respondents to the *Graduating in the fifties* questionnaire who had volunteered to be interviewed.

United States

Several interviews conducted by the author in Austin, Texas; Victoria, BC, Canada; and Boston.

Reunion books

From Smith College, Radcliffe College and Wellesley College. I consulted some Harvard reunion books for a comparison between the way in which men's colleges and women's colleges undertook their surveys and reporting. The Harvard publications had clearly had more money spent on them – they were glossy, substantial publications unlike those of the women's colleges.

University student publications

I consulted publications such as student newspapers, yearbooks and occasional publications from Melbourne and Adelaide universities; from Smith College, Radcliffe College, University of Texas at Austin, and University of California (Berkeley).

Method: collective biography, prosopography or memoir?

There is considerable debate about prosopography, the notion of collective but individual biography. Prosopography has been defined as a history that allows the political history of individuals and events to be combined with the hidden social history of long-term evolutionary processes. It has also been seen as the investigation of the common characteristics of a historical group by the means of a collective study of their lives. Thus prosopographical research attempts to uncover meaningful patterns of relationships and activities by collecting and analyzing statistically relevant quantities of biographical data about a well-defined group of individuals. It may then reveal the genesis of political action.

By these criteria this book might be seen as an example of the genre. It draws upon statistically relevant quantities of data from varied studies, rather than setting up a statistical study *de novo*. Certainly it is the study of biographical detail about individuals *in aggregate*. It aims to establish not a series of individual biographies but an aggregate understanding of the era – one that can illuminate the evolution of political action, in this case feminism, and the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. I see this group as part of an evolutionary process of change – one that has been attributed to a few key individuals: Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer, for example. Thus it situates those well-known women within a wider process of change, one that was already underway when their famous books caught the

imaginations of many women. But rather than use the little-known term prosopography I would prefer to describe it as a collective biography. The group described here can be seen as a cohort, a specific group whose exact historic context was different from those who came before and after. As I am part of that cohort inevitably there is a flavour too of memoir as I remember my younger self in this now distant era.

Margaret Rossiter has argued that some early collective biographies were ‘a muted form of vocational guidance, portraying the lives of women in science [for example] to inspire the young as well as inform the public’.¹ I have some such hopes for this volume; that ‘the young’ might read about the generation before them and take from them some reflections about how to combine a life of love and learning.

1 Rossiter, *Women scientists in America*, p. 534.

